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***The Strategy of Economic Development* by Albert Hirschman at its 60th Anniversary**

It is a great honor for me to be here – for at least three reasons:

- because I am received by a section of the UN – the embryo of a world government many people (including Eugenio Colorni and Albert Hirschman) have fought for. Actually, the participants to our Conference and I highly respect the UN, and would like to see it further strengthened;
- because I have the honor of opening up the Second Conference on Albert Hirschman Legacy in this prestigious location;
- and because I will do so after Sixty years from the publication of *The Strategy of Economic Development* by Albert Hirschman (1958) – a land-mark book for all of us.

As you know, in the Thirty Years Anniversary of that book, at a Conference in his honor, early in November 1989 in Buenos Aires, Hirschman came around with a text – “Against one thing at a time” – that was correcting a central theme of *The Strategy*; and, ipso facto, was inaugurating a line of thinking that brought him eventually to *A Propensity for Self-Subversion* (1995).

Contemporaneously, the Berlin Wall did fall. I was in the panel for an additional Laurea Honoris Causa to Hirschman at the University of Buenos Aires just the day in which the news of that surprising collapse shocked instantaneously the world over. Inevitably I opened my “laudatio” by saying that that day was a very special one for our “Laureandum”....

That is to say that, after other thirty years we cannot expect to live today, at this Conference, nothing comparable. Objectively and subjectively, we have to look for more modest outcomes.

True, the world has had a significant progress, some problems disappeared, some are less troubling now than before, but many others worsened, and numerous additional ones, previously unknown, came to the fore; and some worrying ones seem to come back. The rise of the radical, nationalist right-wing, normally labelled populist or “sovraniist”, in many countries is often oblivious of the tragedies of the past. A good reason – it seems to me – to remember them, and learn from them.

Moreover, the coming back of radical nationalism and of imperialism is often connected to shortcomings of the moderate right, of the center and of the left of the political spectrum. An obvious need for re-thinking and re-furbishing previous policies lies here.

Finally, an immense learning problem exist for the people at large – in the Global South and in the Global North alike. How to help and equip them to face difficult times ahead? A well-known architect says that people need knowledge and beauty. Should we not try and provide them both?

Therefore, in preparing the Second Conference on Albert Hirschman Legacy, we have asked (and then called in) a distinguished group of intellectuals and operatives of various parts of the world

(who share Albert inspiration of connecting the world and of working for improving it) to discuss numerous predicaments and solutions.

And to open up that Conference that (I hope) will be at the same time interesting, profound, stimulating and amusing I will do something simple: I will recall briefly a list of key, early events in the life of Albert upon which *The Strategy of Economic Development* historically emerged – a research field that has to be properly and thoroughly plowed yet.

- The time, the political choice and experience: Coser.
- The education, Economics, peregrination around European Univ., political activities (the Spanish Civil War, the Trieste period, the French Army, Marseille and Varian Fry), looking for a job.
- Learning of statistics and starting an economic journalist career.
- League of Nations, International trade and *National Power*: the political use of economics.
- Reversal vis-à-vis that use in the Marshall Plan: “follow events of France and Italy”.
- Second Marshall Plan assignment: schemes of European Payments and the struggle for Europe: key essays still unpublished in English.
- A letter to Rossi Doria (1951) and Colombia.
- On top and not on tap.
- Private consultant in Colombia.
- The half-truth: Reading and writing.

The Strategy, written after 4 years of full immersion in Colombia, was connecting Albert’s new experience in the South of the world with his previous ones from the North (Europe, Us).

And it embodied also a mid-point: Italy. Albert Hirschman came to Florence in October 2002 (seriously ill already), to receive his European Honoris Causa doctorate. He said in that occasion [I quote] “I cannot help but think that some of my basic insights expressed in the *Strategy of Economic Development* where acquired in the course of my first stay in Italy in 1937-38” in Trieste. “The close contact – he added – with Colorni and his thought was to be of major importance for me and for my future ideas”. Indeed a close examination of some of Albert papers on 1947-48 Italy show a surprising connection to *The Strategy* (Meldolesi 2013).

One should not overlook, moreover, the undeniable fact that post-war development economics was daughter and son of the Marshall Plan. In the sense that the success of the latter fuelled analogous expectations for dealing with the Third World problems. It was largely an illusion, but a benign one – as Albert was used to say and write. And the magic of *The Strategy* lies precisely here, in having participated to that beneficial rising tide in favor of development in the developing countries, but without cultivating any illusion, especially the one of a quick fix. I.e.: we celebrate *The Strategy* after 60 years *because* that chef-d’oeuvre was not at all illusory: its ideas continue to feed our commitment; to be a key aspect of our economic, social, political work around the world.

All this exemplifies our desire of re-visiting various aspects of Hirschman work to improve our intellectual and practical initiatives, always keeping in mind that “a society can begin to move forward *as it is, in spite of what it is and because of what it is*” (Hirschman 1963, p. 6). This is what we are going to do in this conference. Because I believe that renewing in time this exercise, we can

qualify and strength our contribution toward a collective incivilimento: i.e. toward more humane, prosperous, free, just and democratic world.

A Colorni-Hirschman approach provides us with an interesting point of view in the confusing (and confused) intellectual and operative world we live in. It offers numerous illuminating concepts to work with, and, therefore, a common language that cannot (and should not) be pigeon-holed in any discipline. It is a continuous source of inspiration for thinking and acting for the better. With its vast articulation always opened to new developments, it represents a precious set of instruments for continuous improvements, that can be fruitfully used to complement (and criticize) current literature.

And here, at last, my personal “Bias for Hope” comes in: to do the possible so that, thanks first of all to the younger generations, the 90th anniversary of *The Strategy* will be celebrated in “a much better world” vis-à-vis the one we have today.