Renewal and Tradition: Comparing Italian Far Left Parties through their Middle Level Elites

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Paper prepared for the Panel “Radical Left Parties and Civil Society in Southern Europe”


DRAFT VERSION
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Abstract

The paper analyzes the two current Italian Far Left parties – the Federation of the Left (FDS) and Left Ecology and Freedom (SEL) – to understand how they are similar, how they differ and why. The analysis is based on data from more than 600 interviews of party delegates conducted in 2010 at the first national conventions of the two parties. The paper i) reconstructs the complex origin of the two parties – both inheritors, on the one hand, of the end of the Italian Communist Party in 1991, and, on the other, of the devastating defeat of the Rainbow Left in 2008; ii) compares the organizational structures of the two parties; iii) compares their prevailing internal systems of beliefs; iv) analyzes the relationships between the two parties and organizations of civil society, in particular labor unions and social movements. With respect to the system of beliefs, the delegates of the two parties have many elements in common – especially regarding the emphasis given to issues such as soft drugs, new civil rights, pacifism and environmentalism –, although we have identified differences relating to the ties with their shared communist ideological roots. The characteristics of their leaderships and organizational models evidence, instead, major differences between the two parties. FDS appears as a niche party, tied to the model of a mass and movementist party. SEL, on the other hand, is the party of a charismatic leader, makes extensive use of the tools of the Web 2.0 and presents electoral-professional tendencies.

Keywords:
Italian Far Left Parties, Civil Society, System of Beliefs

1. Introduction

As was the case in other countries of southern Europe, with the end of the Cold War – and especially with the dissolution of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the transformations of the Italian political system as a whole –, the Italian Far Left underwent profound changes at an organizational, ideological and strategic level1. Over the past 15 years and amid split-offs and recomposition, it was in particular the most “orthodox” successors of the old PCI who changed in part their ideological reference points, broadened their political agendas, promoted new organizational tools and assumed direct governmental responsibilities in the years 1998 and 2006. The aim of this paper is to capture the new and old aspects that characterize today’s parties of the Italian Far Left – the Federation of the Left (FDS) and Left Ecology and Freedom (SEL)2 –, to understand how they are similar, how they differ and why. This will be done with reference to the prevailing systems of beliefs and to the channels that the parties under examination use to involve their electorate and, more generally, with civil society. And it will be done analyzing the orientations and attitudes of the middle level elite of the parties.

National party delegates represented a central segment of the organizational framework of a party for many years; the transformations of the last decades may have diminished somewhat the importance of this segment and modified its characteristics3, but it remains, nevertheless, a significant unit of analysis for the

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2 We indicate the two parties in an abbreviated form, the Italian acronym FED (Federazione della Sinistra) will be used for the Federation of Left, and the acronym SEL (Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà) for Left Ecology and Freedom. This criterion will be utilized for all Italian parties cited in the article.
3 Regarding the progressive marginalization of the role of members and, consequently, of their middle level elite – detected in the transformation of the prevailing party model from mass party, to catch-all party, to electoral-professional party and, lastly, to cartel party –, see among others Katz and Mair (1995) and Mulè (2007).
parties under consideration. And especially so, if one wants to examine more closely the linkage between parties and civil society, “participatory” and “policy-responsive” linkages (Lawson 1980, Merkl 2005).

National party delegates are, in fact, not merely members, but also activists with a long history of political militancy and, in many cases, with organizational or elected positions in politics and in associations at local and regional levels. In other words, they represent nodal elements of the civic and party community, capable of shedding light on the relationships between parties-society and between local party and central organization. Not only that, party delegates can be considered privileged witnesses who have experienced from within, the transformations of the parties induced from without. Their opinions, values and attitudes are, therefore, more elaborate and more stable than those of mere members. In many cases, moreover, they represent a bridge between the old and the new parties. Thus, by examining if the delegates of the newer parties are different than the delegates of the old parties, we can acquire valuable information that can shed light on the changes in progress. Middle level party elites, therefore, remain a crucial element of observation, especially in the historical context of party transformations of the past twenty years, in which split-offs, mergers and extinctions have been the rule (see Bordandini and Di Virgilio 2009 and Bordandini, Di Virgilio, Mulè 2011).

The article presents a preview of some results of 644 interviews conducted during the First National Convention of “Left Ecology and Freedom” (Florence, October 22-24, 2010) and the First National Convention of the “Federation of the Left” (Rome, November 20-21, 2010). These samples have a robust

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1 Although in a non-continuous fashion, party delegates have constituted a investigated field of research in the literature on political parties. In the case of Italian parties, however, the last comparative survey of this type dates back over thirty years ago. It was the EPPMLE (European Political Parties Middle Level Elites) Project, which involved 12 European countries and 68 parties, with surveys conducted mainly between 1978 and 1981 (see van Schuur 1984; Niedermayer 1986; Rohrschneider 1994). The research program was coordinated by the Institut für Politische Wissenschaft (Institute for Political Science) of the University of Heidelberg, Germany, and financed by the Volkswagen Foundation. For the Italian section, the research was directed by Gianfranco Pasquino – in collaboration with Piero Ignazi and Angelo Panebianco. Among the publications based on that data and related to Italian parties, we recall Pasquino and Rossi (1980), Ignazi, Mancini and Pasquino (1981), Ignazi and Pasquino (1982 e 1986), Mancini and Pasquino (1984). Since then, party delegates in Italy have been the subject only of sporadic studies on single parties (Ignazi 1992 and 1994, Baldini and Vignati 1996, Bellucci, Marazzi and Segatti 2000), whereas in more recent years, the research on parties has been mostly oriented towards members (Bardi e Ignazi 2006; Mulè 2007 e 2009) and voters (Campus 2000; Cornetta and Catellani 2006; Bellucci and Segatti 2011).

2 The research project from which the data base used in this article has been taken, actually gathered a total of 5714 interviews of national party delegates within the context of 21 National Conventions (of 18 different parties) that took place between 2004 and 2010. The surveys were coordinated by Paola Bordandini and Aldo Di Virgilio (Observatory on Party Transformations, Department of Political Science, University of Bologna) and financed by a multi-year PRIN project that involved the Universities of Bologna, Cosenza, Florence and Trieste. Data collection was carried out by means of a structured self-completion questionnaire and it was distributed – in almost all cases – during the conventions. The questionnaires consisted of a general part in common to all parties and of a specific part adapted to the characteristics of each party and to the context in which the convention took place. We were hosted in the following occasions: Third National Convention of the Party of Italian Communists – PDCI (Rimini, February 20-22, 2004); Second National Convention of Margherita-Democracy and Freedom – DL (Rimini, March 12-14, 2004); Third National Convention of the Italian Democratic Socialists – DSI (Fiuggi, April 2-4, 2004); Second National Convention of Onward Italy – FI (Milan, May 27-29, 2004); Fourth National Convention of the Social Movement Tricolor Flame – MSFT (Fiuggi, December 11-12, 2004); Fourth National Convention of the New Italian Socialist Party – NPSI (Rome, January 21-23, 2005); Third National Convention of the Democrats of the Left – DS (Rome, February 3-5, 2005); Second National Convention of the “Populars”-Union of European Democrats – UDEUR (Naples, February 18-20, 2005); Fourth National Convention of the Communist Refoundation Party – PRC (Venice, March 3-6, 2005); First National Convention of the Union of the Democratic Christians and of the Democrats of the Center – UDC (Rome, July
sample coverage – the 259 interviewees of FDS represent 43% of the total population of delegates sent to the First Convention, while the 385 respondents of SEL represent 44% of the total – and are easily comparable. Their distributions with respect to the main socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, education, area of residence, productive sector and profession) are actually rather balanced and this fact, besides highlighting the social homogeneity of the middle level elite of the two parties, makes it easier to analyze the data we will be presenting, since we can rely on the parameterization at the source of these structural variables.

The differences between the two samples are marginal and concern mainly the distributions of the delegate with respect to gender (the sample of SEL contains 35% of female delegates, compared to 26% of the FDS sample) and educational qualification (48% of the FDS delegates have a university degree, compared to 57% of the SEL delegates, but only just under 6% of the delegates of both parties ended their studies after the obligatory educational cycle). The average age, instead, is essentially the same (45 years old for FDS and 46 for SEL), as is the median one (47 years old for both parties). Of scant significance are the differences in the area of residence and professional distributions of the two groups of delegates. The only aspect to highlight, in terms of the differences between the two samples, is the higher percentage of party (or union) functionaries within FDS (12%) compared to SEL (5%) – and the correspondent greater presence of party officers in SEL (+7%) compared to FDS. Noteworthy is the coincidence in both samples of the percentage of delegates who work in the public sector (40%), of those who work in white-collar jobs (24%) and of those who work in blue-collar jobs (little more than 4%). Also the political experiences of the two groups of delegates are not very different, both in terms of previously-held elected offices and in terms of the positions occupied within former organizations of their party of affiliation. In the past, elected offices had been occupied by 39% of the FDS interviewees (of which 32% at a provincial or municipal level) and by 30% of the SEL delegates (of which 27% at a provincial or municipal level). Approximately 55% of the delegates in both parties stated that they had occupied executive party positions in the past, although FDS contains a higher percentage of delegates who held executive roles at a national level (16% of former regional officers and 15% of national officers in FDS, compared to 14% and 7% in SEL).

The paper is structured as follows. In the following paragraph, we will trace a brief historical profile of the two parties, in order to identify their direct and indirect kinship and the genetic link that remains with the old Italian Communist Party (PCI). In the third paragraph, we will present – by examining the statutes and founding documents of the two parties – the main organizational characteristics of the two parties and the opinions and attitudes of the interviewees with respect to their party and to the leadership that guides them. The fourth paragraph illustrates not only how each party mobilizes voters and supporters, but the link with social movements and organized civil society as well. Next, we will focus our attention (fifth
paragraph) on the system of beliefs of the two groups of delegates. We will highlight the traces of communist ideology still present, the ideological definitions given by the delegates to their party, the positions with respect to issues that have animated the political debates of the past ten years to a large extent (liberalization of soft drugs, abortion, rights for homosexual couples, death penalty) and the attitudes with regards to pacifism and the traditional State/Church, Equality/Freedom, Liberty/Security cleavages. The sixth and conclusive paragraph will be concerned with tracing a comparative profile of the two parties, highlighting their similarities and differences, their limitations and potentialities, and possible reference party models that can serve as starting points for more in-depth analyses.

2. Federation of the Left and Left Ecology and Freedom: their birth certificates

Though the two contemporary parties of the Italian Left\(^6\) share a common DNA, this does not authorize us to consider them simply as children, cousins or grandchildren of the old PCI. The path that led to their creation is so full of divisions, recompositions and annexations, that the complexity in defining their family relationships is akin to that of the Buendía family in *Cien años de soledad* by Gabriel García Márquez. Within each of the two parties, in fact, we find components that in just a few years passed from political harmony to harsh contrast concerning policy priorities, the position to hold against the government in power and the strategies of inter-party competition and alliances.

Thus, it is not easy to reconstruct the history of the two parties in a few lines. In any case, it is necessary to begin with the year 1989 and with the choice of the then general secretary of the PCI, Achille Occhetto, to dissolve the Italian Communist Party. Two parties arose from the ashes of the PCI: the Party of the Democrats of the Left (PDS) and the Communist Refoundation Party (PRC). Regarding the political path of the PDS, we will recall simply that it inherited, as eldest child of the PCI, a large part of the organization structure of its parent, putting immediately into motion, however, both a process of ideological de-radicalization and one of profound organizational metamorphosis\(^7\). Such transformations were sanctioned, also on a symbolic level, by the evolution of the symbol in 1998, with the migration from the PDS to the DS (Democrats of the Left)\(^8\), and in 2007, with the merger – along with the *Margherita*\(^9\) – into the Democratic Party (PD). In this latter passage, the DS suffered the split-off of the Democratic Left (SD).

The path of the PRC is no less articulated. It gathers several leaders and factions of the old PCI and of small radical leftist political groupings outside of the PCI, in the name of protecting a generic and differently conceived communist identity. The party leadership was diarchic right from the beginning. The President Armando Cossutta, who controlled the National Political Committee of the party, was the leader of the party-wing that was the guardian of the ideological and organizational orthodoxy of the PCI; the Secretary

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\(^6\) The positioning of FDS and SEL within the left-right dimension – besides being based on their name, on the statements found in their statutes and on the declarations of their leaders in this regard – has an empirical nature based on our data. The average values recorded among the delegates of the various parties who answered the question “Where would you position your party within the left-right dimension?” (1 = far left and 7 = far right), determined the following order among the parties currently present on the Italian political scene (and whose conventions we were able to attend): FDS (an average of 1.8), SEL (2.0), Greens (2.3), Radicals (2.6), Idv (2.9), Pd (3.0), Udeur (3.7), Udc (4.3), Forward Italy (4.7), An (5.5), the Right (6.0) and M5S (6.4).

\(^7\) For the transformation of the organizational and ideological structure of PCI/PDS/DS/PD, refer to the works of Ignazi 1992; Baccetti 1997; Bellucci, Maraffi and Segatti 2000; Mulè 2007; Bordandini, Di Virgilio, Raniolo 2008; Pasquino 2009 and 2010.

\(^8\) With the deletion from the symbol of the DS of the sickle and hammer and of the other references to the PCI.

\(^9\) Inheritor party of the left wing of the Christian Democratic Party (DC), officially dissolved in 1994.
Sergio Garavini, who controlled the National Direction, coalesced around himself the desire for renewal of the party. Amid internal and external challenges, the PRC would constantly be characterized by the presence of factions within its core that were polarized and divided not only with respect to the ideological-organizational orientation to promote, but with relation to the possibility to enter in the cabinet as well. In fact, it is on the decision whether or not to support the governments in office as an anti-Berlusconi device – that the two (parliamentary) split-offs of the PRC are played out in the 1990s. The first one in 1995 led to the establishment of the Unitary Communists (who later merged into the DS); the second one in 1998 led to the creation of an outright party, keeper of the memory of the PCI: the PDCI. In the following years, the PRC – pursuing the orientation to strengthen links with social movements of its leader, Fausto Bertinotti – began to emancipate itself from the old communist subcultural consensus. In 2006, the success of Bertinotti’s party was simultaneously electoral and political-institutional. It entered into the center-left coalition led by Prodi (The UNION), along with the PDCI and the Greens, and became a full member of the executive with one minister (Paolo Ferrero), and seven deputy ministers. The early elections of 2008, however, caught the entire Italian Far Left off guard, forcing it to “run alone” (since the PD had decided to do the same). This led to the creation, amid a thousand compromises, of an electoral cartel that united all movements of the Italian Left and Far left (Greens and former DS included): the “Rainbow Left” (SA) with Bertinotti as candidate for the premiership. The operation was carried out badly and not only for this reason, but also because of the strategic vote the PD was able to call, the defeat was disastrous. For the first time, the Italian Parliament would not comprise any representative of the organized Far Left. The defeat exacerbated the conflicts within the single parties, which convened furious conventions that produced break-ups, split-offs and recompositions. In the PRC, Bertinotti resigned from the party leadership and Nichi Vendola (his right hand) ran for the secretaryship of the party. At the National Convention of 2009, Vendola led the majority wing supported by over 43% of the national delegates. The alliance of the four minority factions, however, was able to block his election and impose the appointment of the orthodox Ferrero to the secretaryship. At this point, Vendola resigned from the PRC and founded the Movement for the Left (Mps). A similar break-up occurred in the PDCI with the departure of Unite the Left (UIS). At issue were strategic and organizational prospects: create from the ashes of SA a new leftist political movement open to groups and movements to the left of the PD (as maintained by Vendola and the political exiles of the PDCI), or give life to a new party founded principally on the unity of communists (as argued by Ferrero and the secretary of the PDCI, Oliviero Diliberto)? The diverging answers to this issue led to the formation, in view of the European parliamentary elections of 2009, of two different groupings: “Left and Freedom” and the “Anti-Capitalist Communist List”, which can be considered the precursors, respectively, of SEL and FDS. Figure 1 attempts to synthesize this complex path.

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10. For the political and the organizational history of the PRC, see Bertolino 2004 and Mùlè 2009; for an analysis of the PRC from a comparative viewpoint, see Bosco 2000 and 2001.
11. At stake in that occasion was the support of the transitional government headed by the centrist Lamberto Dini.
12. The birth of the new PD in autumn of 2007 was based on a political and strategic innovation: the prevention of political compromises and electoral arrangements with the Far Left.
13. All attention was focused within the coalition, which is to say towards the survival of the leadership of the four organizations (PRC, PDCI, SD and GREENS) that comprised the SA.
14. This was also done by the secretary he had imposed in 2005: Franco Giordano.
15. The “Anti-Capitalist Communist List” – that included the current members of FDS – obtained 3,39% of the votes, while the “Left and Ecology” list – that included, in addition to the current members of SEL, also the Federation of the Greens and the Italian Socialist Party – obtained 3,12% of the votes. Neither of the two groupings was able to top the electoral threshold of 4% and, consequently, the Italian Far Left was excluded from the European Parliament.
FDS was officially established as a federal political force on December 5, 2009. The Federation comprises four political entities: the PRC, the PDCI, Socialism 2000 (ex-DS)\textsuperscript{16} and the Association “March 23 Labor-Solidarity” (union component). Its leadership is collective. At the regional elections of 2010, FDS elected 17 regional councilors, coalescing with the center-left led by the PD in 13 regions, with the SEL in the Marche and running independently in Lombardy and Campania. At the end of 2010, it had approximately 65,000 members.

Left Ecology and Freedom (SEL) was established as a party on December 20, 2009, from the merger of four organizations: Democratic Left (ex-DS), the Movement for the Left (ex-PRC), Unite the Left (ex-PDCI) and the Association of Ecologists (ex-Greens)\textsuperscript{17}. Its undisputed leader is Nichi Vendola. At the regional elections of 2010, SEL elected 18 regional councilors and ran with its own lists in nine out of 13 regions (in the remaining four it ran with the PSI or the Greens), coalescing in almost every case with the center-left\textsuperscript{18}. Following the local election of 2011, SEL distinguished itself by winning, with the mayors Pisapia and Zedda, the municipalities of Milan and Cagliari. In both cases, the exponents of SEL came out ahead, at the expense of the representative of the PD, in the “coalition primaries”, adopted to choose the mayoral candidate of the center-left coalition. At the end of 2010, SEL had over 45,200 members.

\textit{Legend of Figure 1}

- The solid black lines connect the party of origin to the party grouping born after a split-off (or in the case of the DS/PDS/PD, after a name change or merger).
- The solid green lines indicate the parties that migrated into SEL.
- The solid blue lines indicate the parties that migrated into FDS.
- The dashed green lines indicate the parties that migrated into the “Left and Freedom” cartel, founded for the European elections of 2009.
- The dashed blue lines indicate the parties that migrated into the “Anti-capitalist Communist List” cartel, founded for the European elections of 2009.
- The dashed red lines indicate the parties that migrated into the “Rainbow Left” cartel, founded for the political elections of 2008.

\textsuperscript{16}This is an association born within the DS in 2000. It left the party in 2007, as a sign of opposition to the creation of the PD, to join Democratic Left. It abandoned Democratic Left in 2008.

\textsuperscript{17}Created from a split-off of the Federation of the Greens after the party decided not to adhere to SEL.

\textsuperscript{18}The sole exception was in the Marche, in which SEL had entered into a coalition with the FDS.
Fig. 1. The path towards the foundation of FDS and SEL. The year of split-off is indicated for each party or association (in the case of PDS/DS/PD, the year of foundation). The year of foundation is indicated for each cartel.
These are parties that revolve around a clearly identified project (communist unity for FDS and the creation of a new leftist party for SEL), but that are favorably disposed (also because conscious of the necessity of doing so) to coalitions with the center-left, as demonstrated in the latest local and regional elections. In the political and cultural path of the two main progenitors of FDS and of SEL – the PRC and the PDCI –, we can trace one constant: the eternal contrast between assuming the role of guardians of the history, the ideological orientation and the memory of the old PCI – in other words of the communist tradition of the 1900s –, and the drive (combined with disorientation) to establish a new post-communist party of the Left, able to discard the centrality of the capital-labor conflict and the myth of the old PCI.

Another contrast is apparent, often motivated by needs of a strategic nature: that between those ready to hold positions in government (“parties of struggle and of government”), and those supporting a permanent opposition (retracing the maximalism of the early PCI and the traditional rebelliousness of the Italian Far Left).

The various phases experienced by the PRC and the PDCI fueled a strong internal factionalism. The split-offs that took place in both cases did not just weaken the two parties on a membership level, but they failed to erase and resolve the internal conflicts of the 1990s as well. For example, after the separation of the PDCI from the PRC imposed by Cossutta in 1998, a “Cossuttian” faction constituted itself within the PRC. The same took place within the PRC, following the split-off of Vendola’s MdS. This point is particularly important, because it gives us a measure of the internal cohesion of both the Federation of the Left (FDS) and of Left Ecology and Freedom (SEL). Both are parties born through the aggregation of separate and distinct political organizations, who decided to merge in the name of a project that is not easily achieved.

FDS, harboring within itself two parties that have been on the Italian political scene for more than 10 (PDCI) and 20 (PRC) years, and despite being able to rely on a more strongly developed organization structure, is forced to deal with the burden of a deeply rooted multiple identity and with the inherent conflicts of a collective leadership.

SEL, on the other hand, can rely on a charismatic leader. In just a few years, Nichi Vendola has achieved both significant popularity on a national level and important successes as well, related primarily to the capacity of identifying winning candidates and imposing them on his allies19. This is a party that exerts a particular appeal among young people and which aims (by statute) to promote practices of participatory democracy based on the use of the Web, but which must also deal with a weak local organization that must be built up almost from scratch.

On paper, and based on the history and the statutes of the two parties, FDS and SEL differentiate themselves primarily with respect to the following points:

1) The presence of a strong leader in SEL and of a weak collective leadership in FDS
2) A more deeply rooted organization and more traditional party-member and party-voter relationships in FDS, compared to an innovative organizational perspective designed to exploit the Web in SEL
3) A system of beliefs more oriented towards Marxism and materialist values20 in FDS, compared to a more post-materialist vision of society and politics in SEL

19 Vendola himself prevailed two times (2005 and 2010) in the coalition primaries to choose the center-left candidate for the position of governor of Apulia and won the elections both times.
20 For the materialism/post-materialism dimension, see Inglehart (1977, 1990 and 1997) and Cartocci (2011).
3. Leadership e statutes: a comparison

The two main parties that constitute FDS – the PDCI and the PRC – brought in dowry deeply rooted organizational structures and this despite the losses sustained with the formation of MdS and UIS. The parties that merged into SEL, on the other hand, were created from recent split-offs and thus, rather than an outright organizational structure, brought with them a long-standing political experience, but patchy ties at a local party level. Despite this fact, SEL can nevertheless rely on the presence of a leader with a significant institutional position and high visibility in the media, capable of ensuring an assertive role in the political debate to the new party.

The Federation of the Left is an association of parties based on collective leadership. Indeed, its statute is strongly oriented towards protecting the parity of the associated components and towards keeping the internal equilibriums unchanged. By statute, the federated entities (PRC, PDCI, Socialism 2000 and the Association “March 23 Labor-Solidarity”) “are part of the governing bodies and... and as a rule appoint equally and directly 25% [of the members] of the political councils at all levels. The representatives of the federated entities are de jure members of the governing bodies of equivalent levels. As a rule, no federated organization can express an absolute majority of the components in the political councils” (Art. 4_f). At the central level, the structure comprises a Political Council (elected by the National Convention), a National Coordination (elected by the Political Council) and a Spokesperson (also elected by the Political Council). The Spokesperson’s task is to express “the political line of FDS as indicated by the Political Council” (Art. 14). The national spokespersons are substituted approximately every six months.

Starting with December of 2009, this position has been held by Paolo Ferrero (last Secretary of the PRC), Cesare Salvi (President of the Association Socialism 2000), Oliviero Diliberto (last Secretary of the PDCI) and, currently, by Massimo Rossi (former party officer of Proletarian Democracy, who migrated into the PRC in 1991). The decision-making procedures as well are geared towards safeguarding the rights of the various components of FDS. Any decision “regarding any act of FDS, at any organizational level, requires (as a rule) a qualified majority of ¾ of those voting... if it has been determined that it is not possible for the body to rule on a specific issue, the same can be submitted to the members by means of a referendum” (Art. 4_d).

The party organization is structured in an orthodox manner, with federations at provincial and regional levels, and with “Houses of the Left” and workers circles (aggregated on a company or inter-company level) at a local level. The local organizations are open to supporters (be they single individual, associations or movements), although the right to vote is substantially restricted to members in the case of the “Houses of the Left”. In this regard, the statute points out that “participation in the life of FDS is open to individuals and/or associations... who share its founding principles... even though they are not members of FDS, enriching its democratic life and the development of its political line... They will be awarded, by decision of the bodies of the relevant organizational level, the status of active supporters of FDS... It shall be the task of the bodies of FDS at the various levels to determine the manner in which active supporters may exercise their rights.” (Art. 14). It is, therefore, a party open to supporters, even if the exercise of their rights is subordinated case-by-case to the decisions of the party organization.

21 The statute provides for and promotes the openness of FDS towards other organized entities such as parties, collectives, committees, movements and associations.
22 The (de facto) rotation of the spokespersons is further evidence of the attempt of the federation to safeguard the internal equilibriums and to avoid the emergence of a single leader. And this despite the advantages that an identified leader could bring to the party.
The primacy of party officials with respect to elected ones, as well as the financial obligations of both elected and appointed officials with respect to FDS, is set in traditional terms: “All public administrators and all elected to institutions... of FDS are answerable for their mandate to the respective governing bodies of FDS and, at the moment of acceptance of the candidacy... undertake to pay the quota of any compensation for office and of any remuneration received due to the mandate itself, as established by an opposite Regulation... The failure to comply with the abovementioned subscription duty is punished with expulsion from FDS” (Art. 20). However, one cannot speak of FDS as a party that is hierarchical and centralized in its choice of candidates: “all decisions related to electoral issues require the favorable vote of 3/4 of those voting, provided the legal number is met. The approval of electoral lists regarding regions, provinces and provincial capital municipalities pertains to the related political councils” (Art. 4_1). Lastly, FDS promotes four forums that are always open to outside contributions: on labor, for democracy, for migrants and a generalist one.

The president (elected unanimously) of SEL, Nichi Vendola, has a long-standing political career, but it is in 2005 – with his upset victory as candidate of the PRC in the coalition primaries for the presidency of the Region of Apulia – that he becomes a national political leader. In 2009, he promoted the establishment of the “Factories of Nichi”, local electoral committees initially created to support his candidacy in the primaries and the regional elections of 2010, and which have transformed themselves over time into outright “online support circles”, crossing over regional boundaries 23. Today, he is the most cited Italian political leader on the Web. On Facebook, he currently counts 512.217 fans 24 and, according to recent analyses, he is the European politician with the most fans in the Old Continent 25.

With respect to the office of President, the statute of SEL states that the president “exercises his functions on the basis of the document approved at the moment of his election at the National Convention” (Art. 3). The National Convention also elects the National Assembly, which has jurisdiction in matters of the political orientation of the party, and, in turn, the National Assembly elects the National Presidency (another body of political orientation) and the National Coordination (with executive functions). As for the rest, the organization of SEL follows a traditional model with federations at provincial and regional levels and at the local level with “circles”. The activities of the circles are open to the voters of SEL, but they do not have the right to vote (without exceptions). With respect to the relationships between elected officials and the party organization, the differences with FDS are marginal.

There are two noteworthy items in the statute of SEL:

23 At present, there are more then 500, distributed all over Italy (see Cramarossa, 2011).
24 To give a measure of his popularity in the Web, it is useful to remember that the second most famous Italian political leader is the current Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, with 309.270 fans. The professional use of the Web and the popularity achieved within it, have earned Vendola the title of “Italian Obama”.
25 The political path of Nichi Vendola tells much of the current stances of his party, both in terms of organizational culture and of the proposed system of beliefs. A member of the FGCI (the Italian Communist Youth Federation) from an early age (1972), he is among the founders of Arcigay and LILA (Italian League for the Battle against AIDS) in the 1980s. After the end of the PCI, he immediately joined the Movement for Communist Refoundation and then the Communist Refoundation Party (PRC), leaving it only in 2009. Within the PRC, he sided right away against the orthodox positions of Armando Cossutta, supporting first Garavini and then Bertinotti. He can be considered as the heir of Bertinotti, both for his charismatic abilities and in terms of his political perspectives as well. As early as 1995, he adhered fully to the political vision of Bertinotti and his attempts to unbind the PRC from its identification with the communist tradition of the 1900s and to open it up to the issues of the feminist, pacifist, ecologist and anti-globalization movements. Since 2007, Vendola promotes, alongside Bertinotti, the project for the creation of a new party that can unite the Italian Left. A project, which will lead him to the creation of SEL.
1) the value attributed to the meetings (open to non-members) for producing political ideas and proposals, with study and research activities as well. For example, Article 1_6 of the statute states that SEL “promotes moments of collective training, such as seminars and study moments, for the collective elaboration of political and programmatic proposals and orientations” and for the development of its party governing groups. Not only that, the statute, in addition to promoting the establishment of thematic forums within the National Assembly open to non-members (provided for by the Statute of FDS as well), calls for the establishment of a Scientific Committee responsible for the production of cultural ideas and policies.

2) the emphasis given to the use of the Web, not only as a tool for the promotion of the party, but as a means of information and participation as well. The same Article 1 of the statute states further: “SEL guarantees information, transparency and participation. To this end, in addition to the direct participation of the members and the circles, it will exploit the Web Information System (Siw), also to test the new forms of digital democracy”. Moreover, the Federations of the party are obliged to establish websites and to use them to disseminate information on their activities, contact information, initiatives of the circles, political documents and press releases (Art. 8).

The leadership and the organizational structure of the two parties is supported and accepted by their middle level elites, in the sense that the national delegates who were interviewed declared themselves satisfied overall by the characteristics of their organizations.

For example, the SEL delegates were asked to indicate which among the following characteristics of their party they consider most important: a) Vendola’s charismatic leadership; b) the presence of various political and cultural areas within the party; c) Vendola’s ability in attracting media attention; d) the use of Internet for informational purposes; e) the ability in exploiting Internet to promote the political socialization of young people and f) the synergies between the local party organizations (circles) and “Nichi’s Factories”. 47% of the respondents chose the “charismatic leadership of Vendola” as the first trait and an additional 24% selected this response category as their second choice. The other characteristic most selected by the middle level elites of SEL is the “the presence of various political and cultural areas within the party” (31% prefers this as their first choice and an additional 25% as their second one). Moreover, it is noteworthy that a mere 15% of the middle level elites would like to transform SEL in a federation of parties and that, in answer to a different question, 61% said they agree that the success of SEL is due solely to Vendola.

Within FDS, on the contrary, 63% of the delegates are convinced that the presence of a collective leadership is a resource for the party, even though a similar percentage of the respondents (64%) would like to transform the Federation in an outright party. Noteworthy in this regard are also the opinions expressed by each of the two groups of delegates regarding the other party. Despite their openness towards the possibility of electoral alliances with the other party, supported by more than 50% of the two samples, 41% of the SEL middle level elite consider FDS as incapable of being truly attuned to the needs of society, while a similar percentage of FDS respondents think that SEL is an excessively personalized party.

The centralization of the candidacies is not considered as a very or a fairly significant issue by more than 55% of the SEL delegates and by approximately 60% of those of FDS. However, the question “What criterion should your party follow in choosing the candidates in the districts?”26 does reveal some dissatisfaction within Vendola’s party. If 56% of the respondents of FDS declare that the choice of the candidates in the districts should be entrusted to the “governing bodies of the party” (and a mere 37% prefer the primaries),

26 In a list of four answers: decision to be taken a) by the governing bodies of the party, b) by the governing bodies of the coalition, c) by primary elections restricted to members, d) by primary elections open to voters.
over 90% of the SEL delegates desire primaries (and of these, 54% aims at primaries open to the voters). Thus, we can detect among the delegates of Left Ecology and Freedom, the perception of a sort of inconsistency within the party. SEL was born thanks to the presence of a leader capable of emerging on the national political scene through his participation in primary coalition elections, but, despite the practices of participatory democracy promoted by the statute, the party does not provide for the establishment of primary elections. This seems curious. One could say that SEL gambles on the coalition primaries (in some way, on the “primaries of others”) and claims the use of this tool, “invented” by the PD, in a strategic fashion, that is to say without fully sharing its fundamental principles.

The greater propensity of the SEL delegates for a bottom-up logic in the choice of candidacies is also evident in the answers to the question: “At what level should the choice of the candidates in the districts take place?”. 58% of the SEL respondents (compared to 45% of those of FDS) answered at a local level, an additional 35% said at a regional level (compared to 30% of the FDS delegates) and a mere 7% chose the national level (compared to 25% of the FDS respondents).

Conversely, we find widespread satisfaction in both parties regarding the role of the national conventions. The national conventions are important (with percentages that vary between 60% and 80% of the delegates) for discussing the various positions within the parties, for settling internal conflicts, for putting party officials in touch with the base of the party and for renewing internal party positions.

Therefore, the SEL delegates aspire to a party with a strong charismatic leadership, yet deeply democratic within, whereas the FDS delegates are bound to the idea of a traditional party that rejects the personalization of politics, but with a strong structure capable of disentangling internal conflicts. This latter goal is not easily achieved in a federated (or better said, a confederated) context and in the presence of strong and differentiated identities.

4. Relations with social movements and organized civil society

As national party delegates, the interviewees of SEL and FDS are obviously very active not only in the more traditional forms of political participation (the delegates who do not participate in demonstrations, petitions, committees or strikes number less than 20 in all), but also in less conventional ones, such as occupying public buildings or boycotting27. Yet, it is mostly the delegates of SEL, who implement methods of political participation that could be called “of a new generation”, still rather rare in Italy to this day. We refer to, for example, operations of mail bombing (carried out by a third of the respondents of SEL and by little more than a quarter of those of FDS), but also to the involvement in more “creative” events such as, for example, flash mobs (attended at least once by almost a third of the younger delegates of SEL).

The age factor obviously influences the various methods of participation. It is mostly younger people who adopt the more expressive forms of participation not necessarily connected to the specific political agenda of the party, whereas people over 50 (and in particular the generation that during the 1968 protest movement was 20 years old) are more apt to participate in events aimed at resolving issues of a specific economic nature.

27 These latter forms of activism are more pronounced among the members of FDS compared to those of SEL. More than 65% of FDS delegates, as opposed to half of SEL delegates, have in fact participated in the occupation of a public building and in forms of boycott during their political experience.
In any case, regardless of the age of the interviewees and of the issues at hand, participation in traditional demonstrations is more pronounced among the delegates of FDS as compared to those of SEL. As shown in Table 1, the percentage differences between the two parties are always in favor of FDS. In the most recent events (the demonstrations in support of Fiom on October 16, 2010, or the No-Berlusconi Day on December 5, 2009), the percentage differences between the two parties with regards to participation reach 30-35%. Significant differences are recorded every time the demonstrations dealt with labor issues, with NATO and with the institution of international capitalism (G8, IMF, WTO). However, of note is the attachment of the delegates of FDS to this form of participation and their propensity to establish a direct experiential relation with those citizens (and potential voters) who support the issues championed by the party. But how much of this disposition is translated into a greater organized presence on the ground? And, most of all, in closer links with civil society and with social movements?

Compared to SEL, FDS has a local structure with deeper roots, not only because SEL is in every respect a party of recent formation, but also because the Federation of the Left (FDS) was born from the union of two associations (Labor and Solidarity and Association 2000) and two parties that have been present – and autonomous – in the Italian party system for 10 (PDCI) and 20 (PRC) years. Not only that. PRC and PDCI are, respectively, a direct child and a direct grandchild of the old PCI and, as such, they have inherited part of its organizational structure. This legacy (which in any case has nothing to do with the legacy received by the

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### Table 1. Participation in the demonstrations most attended by the Italian Left in recent years. Percentages of affirmative answers indicated by party affiliation and differences (%) in participation between delegates of FDS and of SEL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recent participation in:</th>
<th>% FDS</th>
<th>% SEL</th>
<th>Difference in % FDS-SEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protest rallies AGAINST WARS</td>
<td>94,6</td>
<td>87,8</td>
<td>6,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations in support of Fiom on Oct. 16, 2010</td>
<td>86,0</td>
<td>51,9</td>
<td>34,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest rallies AGAINST the G8, the WTO or the IMF</td>
<td>68,2</td>
<td>48,7</td>
<td>19,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-Berlusconi Day on Dec. 5, 2009</td>
<td>62,5</td>
<td>32,9</td>
<td>29,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest rallies against the expansion of the NATO base in Vicenza</td>
<td>57,1</td>
<td>21,3</td>
<td>35,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest rallies against MAFIA ORGANIZATIONS</td>
<td>53,1</td>
<td>44,7</td>
<td>8,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERUGIA-ASSISI MARCH</td>
<td>49,4</td>
<td>46,2</td>
<td>3,2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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28 In the list of demonstrations presented in Table 1, only the most significant protest events for the two parties were included. The criterion used was to insert in the list only those demonstrations that involved at least 49% of the delegates of one of the two parties.
29 FIOM is the labor union of the Italian metalworkers associated with the CGIL and has been, in recent years, at the center of significant union disputes.
30 The participation in demonstrations is, in fact, an important symbolic experience. Those who invest their own resources (time and money) to support their ideals and to share them with others enjoy a community experience.
31 When Communist Refoundation was founded in 1991, refusing first to adhere to the dissolution of the PCI and then to join the PDS, it was able – if not to enter into the ownership of the real estate structure of the old communist party (inherited almost entirely, along with the debts, by the PDS) – to obtain the right to use locales in the former local branches of the PCI (almost always on a rent-free basis) to hold meetings (the size of the room was often proportional to its electoral strength). In addition, since PRC was a party born out of a split-off, it was able to benefit right away not only from the resources deriving from the subscriptions of those members and elected officials at all levels.
PDS-DS, today’s PD) is certainly a primary resource for the survival of FDS, but it is also a limitation in terms of a drive towards an organizational innovation. At this level, what differentiates the two parties is the use of Internet. Websites and social networks are much more important in the organization of SEL as compared to that of FDS, and this constitutes a valuable potentiality and a fundamental means of organizational diversification. As shown in Table 2, 77% of the SEL delegates consider party websites important for the recruitment of members (the difference in opinion compared to the FDS delegates exceeds 50%); 85% consider them a crucial means of communication with the electorate (28 percentage points more than FDS); 94% consider them a necessary means for the dissemination of the political program (20 percentage points more than FDS); and 90% consider them fundamental for internal communication (17 points more than FDS). The results related to the use of social networks also do not differ very much. In this case, the differences between the two parties (still in favor of SEL) vary from 34 to 14 points and concern, in order, the use of social networks: to recruit members (very or fairly important for 65% of SEL delegates against 30% of FDS delegates); to communicate with the electorate (78% against 51%); to maintain relations with supporters (93% against 70%); to disseminate the political program (85% against 63%); to publicize party events (92% against 77%); and to raise awareness concerning specific issues (93 against 79%). It goes without saying, that the different relevance of the Web in the two parties for relations with the electorate can be linked to other traits of theirs. First of all, the presence in SEL of a charismatic leader; secondly, the different appeal that SEL and FDS exert on the younger, more “social-network-literate” generations. Indeed, the presence of a charismatic leader, one capable of drawing the attention of citizens through the media, makes it easier to attract the curiosity of the electorate, inducing it to gather and request information also using the Web. In addition, the political message of SEL, certainly more innovative than that of FDS, attracts by its very nature the younger generations, who are much more accustomed to using social networks as a means of interaction and for investigating certain issues (Sartori 2006).
Table 2. Degree of importance of websites and social networks in relation to a series of activities. Percentages of “very + fairly” important by party and percentage differences between FDS and SEL delegates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important are websites for your party for:</th>
<th>FDS % very + fairly important</th>
<th>SEL % very + fairly important</th>
<th>Difference in % FDS-SEL (very + fairly)</th>
<th>Difference in % FDS-SEL (very)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting members</td>
<td>26,8</td>
<td>77,3</td>
<td>-50,5</td>
<td>-26,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping contact with other European parties of the same family</td>
<td>39,2</td>
<td>47,9</td>
<td>-8,7</td>
<td>-5,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disseminating the political program</td>
<td>73,5</td>
<td>93,7</td>
<td>-20,2</td>
<td>-15,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal communication</td>
<td>72,9</td>
<td>89,7</td>
<td>-16,8</td>
<td>-19,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with the electorate</td>
<td>56,7</td>
<td>84,5</td>
<td>-27,8</td>
<td>-19,6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important are social networks for your party for:</th>
<th>FDS % very + fairly important</th>
<th>SEL % very + fairly important</th>
<th>Difference in % FDS-SEL (very + fairly)</th>
<th>Difference in % FDS-SEL (very)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting members</td>
<td>29,7</td>
<td>63,8</td>
<td>-34,1</td>
<td>-13,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with the electorate</td>
<td>51,1</td>
<td>77,7</td>
<td>-26,6</td>
<td>-18,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with supporters</td>
<td>69,9</td>
<td>92,6</td>
<td>-22,7</td>
<td>-22,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disseminating the political program</td>
<td>62,8</td>
<td>85,3</td>
<td>-22,5</td>
<td>-19,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicizing party events</td>
<td>77,2</td>
<td>92,4</td>
<td>-15,2</td>
<td>-20,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness campaigns on specific issues</td>
<td>78,5</td>
<td>92,7</td>
<td>-14,2</td>
<td>-17,3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, let us return to the methods of participation in the network of associations present in civil society. Up to the 1980s, the PCI possessed a deeply rooted organizational structure (there was at least a local branch of the party in almost every one of the more than 8000 Italian municipalities) connected, after the end of WWII, to a multi-faceted network of associations. It represented, above all in the “red zones”, the reference point of political and social life. The affiliation vote was passed on from generation to generation, guaranteeing it a stable political power and the network of associations to which it was linked, ensured an efficient management of local administration. The involvement in associations was also the means through which it conveyed its system of beliefs and strengthened social cohesion at a local level. Thus, the PCI placed itself at the center of a multifarious network of associations (recreational, sports, welfare, labor and professional), which it controlled more or less directly and to which it conferred identity and a sense of belonging. After its name was changed, the associations linked to the old PCI began the slow process of gaining their autonomy from its successors (in particular from the PDS-DS, which had taken on the functions of the PCI at the local political level), losing in part their role as agencies of political socialization for local communities. Recreational and cultural associations regained their function as circles for meetings and assemblies (increasingly for older people) with spaces to “lend” to left and center-left parties; labor unions – increasingly disoriented – strengthened their function as service agencies for members instead. After all, the inheritors of the PCI (particularly the PDS-DS), unable to distribute any further identity resources, within

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the network of associations could play only the role defined by their function: political interlocutor as representative of the local government.

In this framework, we should not be surprised by the widespread awareness within the two parties of the Left – in particular within the Federation of the Left – of the need to resume contact with the society. This is stated by 73% of the respondents of FDS and by 67% of those of SEL, declaring themselves very or fairly in agreement with the statement “the main problem of the party is it’s lack of local roots in the ‘territory’”. But let us look in detail at the degree of participation of SEL and FDS in a series of associations present in civil society (Table 3).

*Table 3. Membership and participation in a series of associations. Differences between the FDS and SEL in terms of members and active participants. Values in %.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you a member and do you participate in the following associations?</th>
<th>FDS Members</th>
<th>FDS % Members who participate actively</th>
<th>SEL Members</th>
<th>SEL % Members who participate actively</th>
<th>Difference in % FDS-SEL Members</th>
<th>Difference in % FDS-SEL Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labor and professional</td>
<td>74,0</td>
<td>51,0</td>
<td>60,2</td>
<td>39,8</td>
<td>13,7</td>
<td>11,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and recreational</td>
<td>79,3</td>
<td>54,3</td>
<td>78,7</td>
<td>54,3</td>
<td>0,6</td>
<td>0,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular volunteer</td>
<td>43,7</td>
<td>27,6</td>
<td>50,6</td>
<td>37,9</td>
<td>-6,9</td>
<td>-10,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious volunteer</td>
<td>3,6</td>
<td>2,4</td>
<td>4,8</td>
<td>3,6</td>
<td>-1,1</td>
<td>-1,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>41,9</td>
<td>25,6</td>
<td>52,3</td>
<td>30,7</td>
<td>-10,4</td>
<td>-5,1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participation in the network of cultural and recreational associations – which we could define as subcultural – does not reveal substantial differences between the two parties. It should be noted, however, that FDS has a greater presence in labor and professional organizations. This is a significant difference (the deviation of SEL is more than 13 points with respect to members and more than 11 with respect to active participants), given that both parties place labor issues at the center of their program. On the other hand, SEL differentiates itself from FDS for its greater contact with civil society through secular volunteer work (the difference compared to active members exceeds 10%) and involvement in environmental associations (SEL has among its delegates 10% more members than FDS).

Therefore, the FDS – as a Marxist party focused on labor issues – exhibits stronger ties with and a more active presence in labor unions33, whereas SEL, with its ideological orientation aimed at seeking a reconstitution of the system of beliefs of the Left, is more involved in associations that are not directly linked to economic issues. In this context, it is also interesting to note the answer of the delegates to the question “Should the party foster a privileged relationship with CGIL?”. 41% of the interviewees of FDS said they “strongly” agree, compared to 29% of the SEL delegates. Obviously, the percentages obtained by adding together “strongly and fairly strongly agree” increase substantially (89% against 71%), showing, however, a deviation of almost 20 points between the two parties. More than a privileged relationship with a specific labor union, SEL is oriented towards the recomposition of union unity34. This is expressed by 82%

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33 It is no coincidence that almost 85% of our sample of FDS delegates, as shown in Table 1, had participated in demonstrations in support of the most important labor union dispute of recent years: that of FIOM against Fiat in October of 2010

34 Italy traditionally has three labor unions: CGIL, identified in the past with the old PCI and today with the groupings of the left and the center-left; CISL, with a catholic orientation; UIL, with a centrist orientation.
of the SEL delegates, compared to 59% of those of the FDS. Thus, SEL delegates describe their party as an organization that is willing to overturn the logics of the classical radical Left, opting for a bond that is less identified with the left-wing union.

Table 4. Membership in networks and movements. Values in % FDS and SEL. Differences between FDS and SEL, percentage differences between the two main components of the FDS (PRC and PDCI) and SEL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you ever joined the following networks and movements?</th>
<th>FDS % yes</th>
<th>SEL % yes</th>
<th>Difference in % FDS-SEL</th>
<th>Difference in % PRC-SEL</th>
<th>Difference in % PDCI-SEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student movement</td>
<td>78,4</td>
<td>73,8</td>
<td>4,6</td>
<td>10,6</td>
<td>-4,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacifist movement</td>
<td>65,4</td>
<td>64,9</td>
<td>0,5</td>
<td>4,9</td>
<td>-8,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor movement</td>
<td>60,2</td>
<td>32,4</td>
<td>27,8</td>
<td>21,3</td>
<td>30,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-nuclear movement</td>
<td>54,4</td>
<td>45,5</td>
<td>8,9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist movement</td>
<td>26,9</td>
<td>22,7</td>
<td>4,2</td>
<td>11,4</td>
<td>-3,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-OGM movement</td>
<td>26,7</td>
<td>21,9</td>
<td>4,8</td>
<td>6,3</td>
<td>2,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay/lesbian movement</td>
<td>19,4</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>6,9</td>
<td>11,2</td>
<td>4,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Attac” Network</td>
<td>14,1</td>
<td>8,8</td>
<td>5,3</td>
<td>5,5</td>
<td>-0,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network of the Disobedient</td>
<td>12,9</td>
<td>7,5</td>
<td>5,4</td>
<td>15,4</td>
<td>-7,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joins the Network for Global Rights</td>
<td>11,8</td>
<td>10,6</td>
<td>1,2</td>
<td>9,4</td>
<td>-6,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilliput Network</td>
<td>4,3</td>
<td>11,9</td>
<td>-7,6</td>
<td>-6,2</td>
<td>-7,7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More complex is the position of the two parties with respect to movements. 84% of FDS and 94% of SEL delegates affirm that their party should establish a privileged relationship with movements. The positions with respect to movements are further divided within the two parties into those who believe that the party, with respect to movements, should “champion their issues” (46% of FDS and 48% of SEL), and those who believe the party should limit itself to “acknowledge some of their requests” (49% of FDS and 52% of SEL). Then there are 5% of the delegates of FDS, who are convinced that the party should consider the movements as “temporary protests”. Accordingly, in terms of attitudes towards the movements, we see towards them a clear openness in both parties, even though this is slightly greater in the party of Nichi Vendola. More complex, instead, is the behavioral context. With the exception of membership in the Lilliput Network, FDS has among its delegates a larger percentage of members in all the other movements and networks presented in the list in Table 4. This is not an exhaustive list; missing, for example, are the pro-or-contra referendum movements born in 2011 around the issues of nuclear power and the privatization of water service, but these findings are explained by the presence in FDS of the PRC component, which, as we have already seen – in contrast to the PDCI – had distinguished itself ever since the end of the 1990s and throughout the first decade of this century for having unfailingly supported the link with social movements. Limiting the comparison to PDCI and SEL, what emerges is the post-materialist trend of SEL. The PDCI is considerably more present within the labor movements (this is a percentage difference of approximately 31% with respect to SEL), whereas SEL records differences of a certain

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35 If we isolate the percentages of “strongly agree”, the values fall, respectively, to 34% and 23%, maintaining nevertheless a significant difference between the two parties.
significance with respect to participation in the pacifist movement, in the Network of the Disobedient, in the Network for Global Rights.

5. Belief systems: a comparison

With reference to the values, the myths and the programs for transforming society and the political visions proposed by FDS and by SEL, we can not speak of an actual ideology, if by ideology we mean a particular system of beliefs that is structured, coherent, stable, all-engaging and based on normative and positive contrapositions. Although their proposed interpretations of political reality are indebted in different forms to the ideology of the old PCI, it is in their case more appropriate – given also the vagueness of the concept of ideology\(^{36}\) – to speak of a proposed system of beliefs or of an ideological orientation\(^{37}\).

As mentioned in Section 2, both SEL and FDS are parties born through the aggregation of separate and distinct organizations, driven to join forces by a common project, which is to reconstitute the unity of communists for FDS and to create a new party of the Left for SEL.

Despite having two different projects, the two parties – and their national delegates – share part of their individual political paths. Six of the eight parties that gave life to SEL and FDS are descendants of the old PCI, and, of these, three emerged out of more or less recent internal split-offs. It is, therefore, not surprising to find significant common traits in the values, opinions and attitudes of their middle level elites. Given their long common path, in some cases it will only be possible to discover diversities in the system of beliefs proposed by the two parties, by highlighting differences that in other contexts would be considered marginal or secondary.

The guiding principles of SEL and FDS\(^{38}\) are essentially the same: the two parties were created to contribute to the transformation of society in the name of liberty, equality, ecology, culture, peace, labor rights, openness towards migrants and the free expression of sexual diversity.

The differences lie in the different emphasis given to these principles and in the manner in which they are expressed, and, of course, in the different party proposals.

At the end of the preamble of the Statute of the Federation of the Left stands that FED “was created to promote the union and the linkage of the struggle of all those women and men who wish to contribute to a real movement that can transform the present state of affairs, drawing on the highest points of the history of the labor movements, be they Italian, international, communist or socialist, and of the great mass movements of anti-fascism, of class unionism, feminists and civil rights, environmentalists, anti-racists, pacifists, internationalist and those engaged in the construction of another possible world”. Quite different are the language and the party definition proposed by the Manifesto of Left Ecology and Freedom: “The Left needs a people; the people need a New Left, one of equality, non dogmatic, free, plural and unitary...

We want a political entity, environmentalist and libertarian, specifically to build an alternative to modern capitalism, one that can start us on our journey, that can help us meet many women and men who like us, yet unlike us, are searching for the vocabulary of the Left of a new century... Left Ecology and Freedom

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\(^{37}\) We refer, namely, to the concept of ideology in the weak sense, that is to say to a «system of beliefs or values that is used in political struggles to influence the behavior of the masses, to orient them in one particular direction rather than another, to obtain consensus, and, lastly, to establish the legitimacy of power» (Bobbio 1996, 100).

\(^{38}\) As they are indicated in the guiding Principles of the statute of the Federation of the Left and in the Manifesto of Left Ecology and Freedom (Vendola 2010, 123-170).
wants to be the yeast and the salt in the creation of the subjectiveness of a great New Left. A Left of liberty and equality, of labor and environment” (Vendola 2010, 127-129 and 134).

For FED, the link with the classical communist tradition emerges above all from the definition of the party identity furnished by its delegates through their reactions to a series of adjectives that could define the ideological anchor of a party (Table 5). FED is, for almost all respondents (84-99%), a party that is (very or fairly) anti-fascist, secular, communist, egalitarian and progressive; for 60% it is also a socialist party and for not quite 40% reformist. Only 17% considers it also a social-democratic party. 85-99% of the SEL delegates also declare that their party is anti-fascist, secular, progressive and egalitarian, but only 58% also believes it to be very or fairly communist (if we consider only the response category “very communist”, the percentage falls to 13%, compared to 77% for the FDS delegates). For 70% of the middle level elite of SEL, their party is much more socialist and reformist than communist. Half of them perceive it as social-democratic as well. Both samples believe that it has little sense to define their parties as liberal-democratic, liberal, catholic, populist, conservative, traditionalist or anti-communist. The weight of Marxist tradition in the identity of delegates was examined more in-depth by asking a direct question regarding their stance on the concept of “class struggle”. Whereas more than 46% of the respondents of FDS declared that it is still valid in Marxian terms and 52% said that it should be recuperated, albeit in an adapted manner, only little over 29% of the SEL respondents felt that it still has validity today and almost 10% (compared to 2% of the FDS delegates) agreed on the fact that it made no more sense.

Table 5. Which of the following adjectives characterizes best your party today? Percentages agree strongly and agree fairly by party of affiliation and percentage differences between FDS and SEL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTY Identity</th>
<th>% strongly + fairly</th>
<th>Difference FDS-SEL (%) strongly</th>
<th>Difference FDS-SEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FDS</td>
<td>SEL</td>
<td>FDS-SEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-fascist</td>
<td>99,0</td>
<td>99,0</td>
<td>0,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>97,9</td>
<td>98,0</td>
<td>0,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>84,0</td>
<td>93,8</td>
<td>-9,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egalitarian</td>
<td>84,2</td>
<td>85,4</td>
<td>-1,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist</td>
<td>59,3</td>
<td>70,8</td>
<td>-11,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformist</td>
<td>39,1</td>
<td>70,8</td>
<td>-31,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist</td>
<td>97,0</td>
<td>58,3</td>
<td>38,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-democratic</td>
<td>17,4</td>
<td>51,6</td>
<td>-34,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal-democratic</td>
<td>7,6</td>
<td>23,4</td>
<td>-15,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>4,4</td>
<td>11,8</td>
<td>-7,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0,0</td>
<td>7,2</td>
<td>-7,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Populist</td>
<td>2,2</td>
<td>4,3</td>
<td>-2,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>3,3</td>
<td>2,1</td>
<td>1,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-communist</td>
<td>0,0</td>
<td>2,1</td>
<td>-2,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalist</td>
<td>10,9</td>
<td>1,1</td>
<td>9,8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

39 Each delegate interviewed was asked to define the identity of his party by attributing a certain degree of importance (not at all, slightly, fairly or very) to each of the following 14 adjectives: anti-fascist, secular, communist, egalitarian, progressive, socialist, reformist, social-democratic, traditionalist, liberal-democratic, liberal, conservative, populist, catholic, anti-communist.
The nostalgia of FDS for the old PCI and, more generally, for the institutional and ideological structures of the First Republic, emerges also from the answers of the interviewees to another question: “Was the collapse of the ‘First Republic’60 good for our country?” 69% of the delegates of FDS did not agree or agreed only a little, compared to 32% of the SEL delegates. Not being in agreement with this question has surely to do with the disappointment engendered by the events occurring in the past 20 years of Italian political history, but also with the regret for a system of parties structured around cleavages of an ideological background that pivoted on the K(ommunism)-Factor – and not on the B(erlusconi)-Factor as is the case in Italy today. An era in which the proportional electoral system, though it directed political competition towards the center and “froze” extreme stances, still involved the PCI in the parliamentary “dialectic” (Di Virgilio, 2006). An era in which the PCI enjoyed an organizational structure that was strong, cohesive and centralized, based on an ideology capable of interpreting reality with “certainty”.

Let us now turn to a crucial issue for both parties: the protection of workers and the relationship with the market. FDS’ view of capital-labor conflict is expressed in his statute as follows: “the FDS struggles to overcome capitalist and class supremacy... for the liberation of labor from exploitation, for labor rights and for the right to work... it struggles against the precariousness of the work and life of entire generations, the FDS struggles for the right to a job, to an income, to a future”. In its Manifesto, SEL affirms similar principles, without, however, binding itself to classical communist language and tradition: “Left Ecology Freedom fights to reduce all inequalities, against the precariousness of work and life, for decent and full employment... [it works to] unite three discourses that... must never again be seen as separate: the labor of women and men, natural cycles, a civilization based on the development of human responsibilities, capabilities and liberties” (pages 143 and 147).

Table 6 shows how these positions of principle – with respect to labor – evoked by the founding documents of the two parties can be found in their entirety in the positions expressed by their middle level elites. The interviewees show themselves strongly oriented towards the protection of workers, towards a search for an alternative economic model to the capitalist one and towards the promotion of public services (the percentages of agree strongly and fairly with these issues vary between 92% and 100%). To capture the differences between the two samples regarding these issues – and their ramifications – it was thus necessary to isolate the extreme positions of the delegates: those of the respondents who stated that they agreed “strongly”. FDS certainly emerges as more radical, compared to SEL. Indeed, for the middle level elite of FDS, the struggle of the party for the protection of workers and for the preservation of jobs at all costs tends to coincide: respectively, 86% and 83% of FDS delegates agree “strongly” with these two issues, compared to 68% and 72% of the SEL respondents. Along the same lines is the conviction that the party should pursue an alternative economic model to the capitalist one: 82% of the FDS delegates agree strongly, compared to 59% of SEL respondents. In considering solely the percentages of agree “strongly”, FDS emerges as much more State-oriented compared to SEL, not only with respect to the need to curb the privatization of public services (92% of FDS interviewees agree strongly, compared to 72% of SEL respondents), but also regarding the prohibition against direct or indirect state-financing of private schools (84% compared to 74% of the intermediate cadres of SEL). Indeed, in Vendola’s party, despite harsh criticism of the capitalist system, there is an ample percentage of delegates who agree with the statement “A free society cannot do without the market” (40% compared to 13% of FDS delegates).

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60 The expression “Second Republic”, in contrast to the First Republic, is currently used in Italy to indicate the new political system established between 1992 and 1994.
When we analyze the modes of socialization of the delegates, we note a significant difference with respect to those that traditionally characterized the middle level elite of the Italian Communist Party (Ignazi 1992). At that time, the privileged channels of socialization were family, party organizations, schools and unions. These are agents of socialization still significant for both parties to this day, but which have been outclassed by the role of the Social Movements. The delegates were asked to indicate the degree of importance of family, school, friends, local party organizations, work environment, university, unions and social movements in the formation of their political orientation. The following order emerged\(^\text{41}\):  

1) FDS: social movements (important for 73% of the respondents), local party sections (67%), family (66%), school (63%), university (57%), unions (55%) and friends (46%);  
2) SEL: social movements (important for 75% of the respondents), family (72%), school (69%), university (59%), party federations (57%) and unions (45%)\(^\text{42}\).  

Thus, social movements rank at the top of both classifications and this is not surprising. The issues proposed by the movements (from the protection of individual rights, to the preservation of the environment, to the promotion of peace and anti-globalization issues) have had profound influences on the political culture of the Italian Left in the past 15 years.

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\(^{41}\) Actually, the order is established based on the sum of the percentages of “very and fairly important”.  
\(^{42}\) Worthy of note in these two classifications, is the greater importance given by the delegates of SEL to friends, family and school – thus to organizations and groups not connected to the political sphere – compared to party federations and labor union organizations.
Table 7. Degree to which delegates agree with issues such as liberalization of soft drugs, abortion, relationship between science and ethics, death penalty, rights of homosexuals and environmentalism. Percentage values by party and percentage differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what degree to you agree with the following statements?</th>
<th>% agree strongly and agree fairly</th>
<th>% agree strongly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FDS</td>
<td>SEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) It is sufficient to recognize the civil rights of <em>de facto</em> couples</td>
<td>32,6</td>
<td>32,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) The law must guarantee the same rights to homosexual couples</td>
<td>97,0</td>
<td>99,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Soft drugs should be legalized</td>
<td>80,8</td>
<td>85,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Personal use of drugs must not be punished</td>
<td>85,6</td>
<td>82,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Scientific progress must not violate the boundaries of ethics</td>
<td>36,7</td>
<td>51,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) The human embryo is an &quot;unborn citizen&quot; and must be protected with the same rights as those of the mother</td>
<td>3,1</td>
<td>9,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) The most serious crimes should be punished with the death penalty</td>
<td>4,0</td>
<td>1,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Abortion must be made more difficult</td>
<td>3,1</td>
<td>6,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Economic development must be subordinated to environmental preservation</td>
<td>93,9</td>
<td>96,9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this perspective, Table 7 analyzes the degree to which the delegates agree with issues such as the liberalization of soft drugs, abortion, the relationship between science and ethics, the death penalty and the gay rights, the relationship between economic development and the environment. The picture that emerges is quite clear. The Italian political Left is by now culturally libertarian. Internally, especially if we focus our attention solely on the percentages of agree strongly, the convention delegates of SEL distinguish themselves through a greater radicalism with respect to these issues. This aspect is not surprising, given that individual liberties constitute an extensively developed theme in the Manifesto of Left Ecology and Freedom, which on this point states: “Left Ecology and Freedom considers anti-prohibition a decisive value in its battle for individual and collective liberties and a tool to turn upside down in favor of responsibility, a society imprisoned by fear and by control. We are convinced, moreover, that full respect of the constitutional values of liberty and dignity of the person are the only ones that must inspire any policy that restricts individual liberties” (Vendola 2010, 153-154).

Also with respect to the proposed political agenda (table 8), the differences between the two parties are not so marked. For both samples of delegates, it is above all necessary to act on unemployment,
temporary employment, tax evasion and education (the percentages of delegates who consider these issues “very” important vary between 87% and 98%). At this point, the order of priorities changes slightly. For FDS there come healthcare (74%), pluralism of information (68%), environmental pollution (65%), political corruption (59) and the backwardness of the Italian South (57%). For SEL, instead, there come environmental pollution (79%), political corruption (74%), pluralism of information (72%), healthcare (65%) and the backwardness of the Italian South (57%).

In the final positions, for FDS we find integration of Italy in Europe (a mere 15% of the delegates considers it an important problem compared to 24% of SEL delegates) and the inefficiency of the Public Administration (very important for 12% of FDS interviewees compared to 20% of the SEL delegates). For SEL, we note inflation (very important for 17% of the delegates) and immigration (20% of the interviewees compared to 24% of the FDS delegates).

Table 8. Significant political issues: order of importance indicated by SEL and FDS delegates (values in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important is each of the following issues for Italy?</th>
<th>FDS</th>
<th>SEL</th>
<th>Difference: FDS - SEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>98,0</td>
<td>96,9</td>
<td>1,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary employment</td>
<td>92,9</td>
<td>91,0</td>
<td>1,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax evasion</td>
<td>87,6</td>
<td>87,0</td>
<td>0,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>86,5</td>
<td>87,6</td>
<td>-1,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>73,5</td>
<td>64,6</td>
<td>8,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluralism of information</td>
<td>68,0</td>
<td>72,2</td>
<td>-4,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental pollution</td>
<td>65,3</td>
<td>78,8</td>
<td>-13,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political corruption</td>
<td>58,8</td>
<td>73,7</td>
<td>-15,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backwardness of the Italian South</td>
<td>57,1</td>
<td>59,2</td>
<td>-2,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>41,5</td>
<td>37,8</td>
<td>3,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>35,8</td>
<td>43,3</td>
<td>-7,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminality</td>
<td>33,0</td>
<td>38,1</td>
<td>-5,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>23,9</td>
<td>19,8</td>
<td>4,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation</td>
<td>20,0</td>
<td>17,3</td>
<td>2,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of Italy in Europe</td>
<td>14,7</td>
<td>23,5</td>
<td>-8,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inefficiency of the Public Administration</td>
<td>11,5</td>
<td>20,4</td>
<td>-8,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal reform of Italy</td>
<td>5,4</td>
<td>5,2</td>
<td>0,2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In conclusion, all that remains it to identify the positions of the interviewees with respect to pacifism and to the three traditional cleavages (State/Church, Freedom/Security and Equality/Freedom), which are all mentioned in some way in the statutes and the guiding principles of the two parties in terms of the promotion of secularism, equality and liberty.

pollution, political corruption, backwardness of the Italian South, taxes, justice, criminality, immigration, inflation, integration of Italy in Europe, inefficiency of the public administration, federal reform of Italy. There were four possible answers: “It is not really a problem”, “It is a secondary problem”, “It is a fairly important problem”, “It is an important problem”.

45 In addition to the federal reform of Italy considered important by a mere 5% of the delegates of both parties.
In principle, the differences between the two parties in terms of the promotion of peace are practically nonexistent. Along a six-position scale that measures the degree of pacifism (“peace must never be questioned”), 72% of FDS respondents and 78% of SEL interviewees place themselves in the most favorable position. Different is their position with respect to an Italian commitment in peacekeeping: whereas half of the SEL delegates consider it useful and appropriate to some extent, this percentage falls below 30% among the FDS delegates.

The two samples were then asked to express their preference – along a six-position segment – with respect to three pairs of roughly opposing statements that identify the three cleavages cited above: State/Church, Freedom/Security and Equality/Liberty. Both parties are in favor of a Church that refrains totally from entering into the political debate. However, a clearly more marked anti-clericalism is present in FDS when compared to SEL: FDS delegates who pen themselves into the most extreme positions are, in fact, almost 70% compared to 54% of SEL delegates. The differences between the two samples with respect to the Freedom/Security cleavage are marginal: a mere 7% in both parties placed itself in positions that tend to be in favor of security, while almost 50% choose the more extreme category on the “freedom” side of the cleavage.

With respect to the Equality/Liberty aspect as well, the percentages of those who are oriented towards liberty are similar: 26% for SEL and 23% for FDS. However, 35% of FDS delegates stated that they considered equality much more important than liberty compared to 20% of SEL delegates. In other words, SEL delegates orient themselves more easily towards intermediate positions regarding the preeminence of equality over liberty.

6. Conclusion: the future of the two parties

The paper’s objective was to analyze the two main parties of the Italian Left – with respect to the organizational structural suggested by their statutes, the methods they employ to keep in contact with voters and civil society and the proposed system of beliefs – in order to capture their similarities and differences. All this was done from the point of view of their middle level elites.

The Federation of the Left and Left Ecology and Freedom are two parties that are structured based on two distinct projects. The FED is a federation of parties that was formed to promote the unity of communists; SEL was born out of the drive to create a new party capable of uniting all forces of the Italian Left.

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46 The three pairs of opposing statements along a six-position segment were the following:
1) “The Catholic Church should never intervene in the political debate” versus “It is legitimate for the Catholic Church to enter into the political debate to indicate its positions on specific issues”;
2) “Both freedom and security are important, but having to choose, freedom is more important” versus “Both freedom and security are important, but having to choose, security is more important” and
3) “Both liberty and equality are important, but having to choose, equality is more important” versus “Both liberty and equality are important, but having to choose, liberty is more important”.

If the respondent was much more attracted by the first of the three pairs of statements offered (that is to say, those on the exclusion of the intervention of the Church in the political debate, on the preeminence of freedom over security and on the preeminence of equality over liberty), he was to place a cross in the boxes marked as 1. If the respondent was much more attracted by the second of the three pairs of statements offered (that is to say, those in favor of the intervention of the Church in politics, on the preeminence of security over freedom and on the preeminence of liberty over equality), he was to place a cross in the boxes marked as 6. The other boxes served to graduate the preference between the two statements.

47 Incidentally, this is the same percentage of delegates, who state that they have “no faith at all” in the Church.

48 Thus placing them in position 1 of the oriented segment.
At the organizational level, the *FDS* is founded on a collective leadership and on a traditionally local structure with provincial and regional federations, and with “Houses of the Left” and workers circles at a local level. Its statute (Art. 4) strongly protects the parity between the associated components (to such a point, that one could speak of a “confederation” rather than of a federation of parties), in order to leave free room for the identity of each single component, to maintain unchanged the internal balances and to prevent the emergence of a reference leader: indeed, so much so, that the spokespersons of *FDS* are changed every six months.

*SEL*, on the other hand, focuses its strength on the charismatic leadership of Nichi Vendola, on his ability to involve the younger generations, on the resonance he his able to arouse in the media and on the Web. His talent in exploiting the Web constitutes an important resource for the party and a very innovative aspect of his political action. Creating websites and keeping them updated are promoted by statute, as is the testing of forms of participatory and digital democracy. At a local level, however, *SEL* is also organized in “circles”. However, Nichi Vendola was able to position his own support circles – “Nichi’s Factories” – alongside the local party organizations. These “Factories”, established initially as electoral committees in Apulia, were then transformed, crossing over regional boundaries, into political promotion groups, especially online. It is no coincidence that *SEL* delegates consider party websites and social networks far more important than do *FDS* delegates. And this not only for the dissemination of the political program, but for internal and external communication (with voters, members and supporters) and for the recruitment of members as well.

Remaining within the context of the opinions, values and attitudes of the delegates of the two parties, it is interesting to highlight four further points:

1) The greater propensity of *SEL* delegates compared to *FDS* delegates for a bottom-up logic in the choice of the candidacies. If over 90% of *SEL* delegates desire primaries (not provided for in the party statute) for choosing candidates, 56% of the middle level elites of the *FDS* deem the party governing structures to be the most appropriate bodies for the choice of the candidates.

2) A more assiduous participation in demonstrations on the part of *FDS* delegates compared to *SEL* delegates. Again, the differences are significant and, in some cases, reach 35 percentage points. *FDS* delegates are more tied to the traditional forms of participation of the Left, aimed at establishing a direct experiential contact with their voters and, more in general, with all those citizens who share the party’s position on certain issues (in particular, those connected to workers rights, “anti-Berlusconism” or opposition to the international institutions of capitalism).

3) With respect to participation in the network of associations of citizens, the two groups of delegates are characterized by an assiduous involvement. However, *FDS* delegates are more active in unions, whereas the middle level elite of *SEL* is characterized by a greater participation of volunteers and in the environmental association movements. Membership in networks and movements is higher in *FDS* (and in particular, in its *PRC* component) than in *SEL*, and this is mainly related to its presence in workers movement. For both groups of delegates, however, social movements have been the main source of socialization for the formation of their political orientation.

4) Almost all *FDS* delegates use the following three adjectives to define their party: anti-fascist, secular and communist. Among *SEL* delegates, instead, the most important adjectives are anti-fascist, secular and progressive. And indeed, it is precisely in the ties with classical communist tradition that we find the major differences in the system of beliefs proposed by the two parties. For *FDS* delegates, the reference to the Marxist concept of “class struggle”, the capital-labor cleavage, the need to curb the privatization of public services and the opposition to the free market are all much more central aspects of their system of beliefs than for *SEL* delegates. Both parties of the Italian Left are further characterized by their wholehearted support for pacifist, environmentalist, secular, egalitarian and libertarian positions (especially with respect to soft drugs, rights for homosexual couples, abortion, relationship between science and ethics).
Out of this synthesis, we can offer, in addition to the profile of the two parties, some starting points for future analyses.

FDS appears as a last attempt to keep afloat a niche in order to revive a party model and a system of traditional beliefs that have led in recent years to the emergence of profound contradictions, electoral defeats and split-offs. In this perspective, FDS appears wrapped around itself, not only with respect to its electoral pool, but also in relation to its proposed organizational model. Its relationships and its forms of interaction with the civil society combine traditional modes of interaction, containing the classical references of the communist subculture, with more innovative ties to social movements. However, although the anti-globalization, pacifist, environmentalist and libertarian issues of movements have entered into its system of beliefs, FDS has, above all, one clear mission: to defend the communist identity. Its organizational structure (as proposed by the party statute) recalls that of the mass party, with one important distinguishing feature: the FDS is a federation of parties (ready to welcome new organizations, above all movements and their connected associations), structured to keep internal balances intact and to permit each of its components the opportunity of maintaining its identity. Thus, it is a party that attempts to unite a traditional organizational structure with an ideological project oriented towards the past, but that tends to incorporate social movement issues. One could speak of a mass and “movementist” party.

SEL proposes itself as a hypothesis for a new “thing” based essentially – in line with the many and diverse party experiences of the past 15 years – on the concept of the “personal party” (or, at least, a highly personalized one)\(^\text{49}\), which places at the center of its political discourse (in addition to workers rights) the issues of a new generation, which uses new communication tools (the Web, the figure of the leader and his visibility in the media circuit), which supports an open and pluralist vision of the center-left alignment and, consequently, receptive to the compromises required by membership in a coalition. In this manner, it has overcome many of the causes for the fractures that have involved the Italian far and center-left in the past (1998, 2008), since it no longer considers government as an inevitable evil. Not only, its ability in picking winning candidates in coalition primaries for local elections, has now been joined by a basic aspiration: to propose its own candidate (Nichi Vendola) as premier candidate of the center-left coalition in the next national elections. This is a Far Left party, therefore, that also considers itself an “electoral-professional” party; one whose leader has – with “Nichi’s Factories” – an organizational structure that is contiguous to, yet separate from, the party organization.

Before concluding, I would like to draw attention to the aspirations, which emerged indirectly from the analyzed data, of the two groups of national delegates with respect to the organizational structures of their parties.

SEL delegates desire a party with a strong charismatic leadership, yet profoundly democratic within, complaining in fact about the absence in their party of the institution of the primary elections (open also to non-members) for the selection of their candidates. FDS delegates, for their part, are bound by the idea of a party that rejects the personalization of politics, but they aim for a strong organizational structure capable of disentangling internal conflicts in the selection of candidacies.

If the “request” of the middle level elite of SEL, albeit a curious one – since it leads to the marginalization of members (and therefore of the middle level elites themselves) in favor of supporters – , finds an answer in a possible restructuring of SEL in a “professional-electoral” party (Panebianco 1988), the position of FDS delegates brings out a contradiction in the organizational structure of the party. The Federation of the Left is characterized, in fact, by a collective leadership coupled, however, to a weak apparatus, constrained to decision-making processes that are based (at all levels) on a ¾ majority.

\(^{49}\) For this point, see Calise 2010.
All this can cast doubts on the survival expectations of the Federation of the Left. The possibility of delegating the totality of the strategic and organizational decisions to the governing bodies of the party clashes, in fact, with two of the founding elements of FDS: the fact that it is a federation of small parties (which by itself brings about the existence of multiple identities and interests) and the lack of a strong, structured and unifying ideology capable of moving beyond the capital-labor cleavage.

The internal and external challenges facing FDS and SEL in the near future will allow us to understand better these overlaid contradictions and to describe more fittingly the strategic, organizational and programmatic opportunities of the two parties.
References


