

Over the past 20 years, the Anglo-Saxon model has been exalted by most politicians and commentators in Italy, as the living promise of a society both free and fair where the conflict between capital and labour, State and market could finally find a settlement. The Italian left and the Italian right were unanimous in the apology of the Anglo-Saxon model, though inconsistent in its concrete implementation. It was therefore of the greatest interest for us to discover the work of Phillip Blond, who dared lift the veil of conservative orthodoxy over the debris left behind in British economy, society and politics by 30 years of neoliberal policies, with no real cleavage in his view between Thatcherism and New Labour. He conducts an unmerciful analysis of the British political and economic system, which he outspokenly defines as a broken one: monopolistic concentrations, rising inequality, concentrated bureaucratic power, democracy undermined by the privileged relation between big private interests and the State. He tries to get at the

root of a failed and unfair economic policy, pointing at a certain way of interpreting liberalism, shared by the left and the right. A liberalism, we would add, that betrayed itself, since it failed to keep consistent with its original goal of protecting citizens from abuses of power, and supported power concentration, in either public and private, economic and political forms. As a result, what Blond sees is not an open society at all, but a new oligarchy of vested interests. So what's the remedy? Empowering communities, undermined by both private monopolies and the Welfare State. Blond and his think tank, *ResPublica*, are among the main inspirers of David Cameron's *Big Society* project and gave a crucial contribution to shape the programme of a new right (Red Toryism) replacing individualism with a revival of communitarian traditions. How? As an example, by encouraging local communities to take the initiative of urban requalification through the *Community Right to Bid*, introduced by means of the 2011 *Localism*

Act and inspired by *ResPublica*. Blond has a strong sense of the profound link between concentrated power and individuals lost in insignificance in a society which is increasingly lacking occasions for community involvement. It seems to us that his political intuition, which he defines as *post-liberal*, has the ambition of reminding us that genuine liberalism may only be recovered when it is nourished by Christian humanism, notably by the awareness that there is no salvation for men in individual emancipation, but only in the progress of the whole community to which they belong. A strong and noble warning: society does exist, and it does matter. With these words of hope, Telos wishes you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Mariella Palazzolo

Telos is a member of the FIPRA network

BLOND

## BEYOND STATE AND MARKET: RES PUBLICA.

“We are creating a sense that our political systems are broken but there is not much to do to fix them. The political élite has lost credibility and yet it is still in power: that's not a good recipe!”

**Telos:** Where did you draw the inspiration for the non-partisan think tank *ResPublica* from, and could you outline the achievements *ResPublica* has accomplished? Is the success of independent think tanks linked to the perception that traditional party politics has failed in addressing the problems of our time? And to what extent is the decline of political parties dangerous for the stability of liberal democracy?

**Phillip Blond:** *ResPublica* stems from the intuition that left-wing and right-wing policies both ended up with an increasing concentration of power.

Collectivism empowers State *apparatchiks* at the expense of democracy and the majority. Free market philosophy promises distribution of wealth and power to everybody, creating a plural world where everybody has agency. But the reality of how this free market approach has been practiced is that it concentrated economic power, empowering vested rather than general interest.

What was striking to me is the absolutely symbiotic relationship between the two approaches. This was particularly evident at the time of the New Labour, when concentrated State power supported, licensed, and expanded concentrated market power, and then collected taxation from that concentration of market power. Inequality was rising and democracy itself was being undermined by a massive creation of vested interest in both public and private forms.

From a philosophical perspective, collectivism and individualism are both the legacy of that type of liberalism that has gone through Rousseau, Bentham, Marx and Hayek.

*ResPublica* responded to a post-liberal intuition, an idea that a certain form of liberalism is what is really governing and damaging the West. In a book called *Red Tory*, I argued in favour of a new course in right politics, and a similar tendency is now showing on the left in the form of Blue Labour, which I welcome. We are non-partisan in the sense that we are not trading on the ground that has failed us: instead, what *ResPublica* tries to do is to look ahead, to scan the future, see the trends that are coming and derive policy helping to deliver a response to those trends.

We have had remarkable achievements both nationally and internationally.

On a national basis, roughly 85-90% of our ideas have found their way into British law. As an example, the *Localism Act*, calling for public procurement to have social, local and environmental impact, was inspired by my own work.

Internationally, we are one of the top ten new think tanks in the world and one of the few British think tanks having an international reach. Our ideas and proposals are discussed on and practiced by Governments across the world.



**Phillip Blond** is an internationally recognised political thinker and social and economic commentator. In 2009 he founded [ResPublica](#), an independent, non-partisan UK think tank. Blond is an academic, journalist and author. Prior to entering politics and public policy he was a senior lecturer in theology and philosophy – teaching at the Universities of Exeter and Cumbria. He gained prominence from a cover story in *Prospect* magazine in the February 2009 edition with his essay on Red Toryism, which proposed a radical communitarian traditionalist conservatism that inveighed against both State and Market monopoly. He is the author of *Red Tory* (2010) which sought to redefine the centre ground of British politics around the ideas of civil association, mutual ownership and social enterprise. His ideas have influenced the agenda around the Big Society and civil renewal and have helped to redefine British and international politics. Papers he has authored and co-authored while at *ResPublica* include *Asset Building for Children* (2010), *To Buy, To Bid, To Build: Community Rights for an Asset Owning Democracy* (2010) and *The Ownership State* (2009). He has written extensively in the British and foreign press including *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Observer*, *The Financial Times*, *Prospect* the *New Statesman* and *The International Herald Tribune*. As a renowned speaker and communicator, Blond is a frequent broadcaster – appearing on the BBC and Sky as well as foreign media. Through both his writing and speaking Blond argues for a new economic and social politics based around free association and group formation.

As for political parties, I am not quite sure they are in trouble in the sense that people think they are. On the one hand, they have never been so unpopular, but on the other hand they still dominate the way the overwhelming majority of citizens vote.

From another perspective, we are creating a sense that our political systems are broken but there is not much to do to fix them. I do worry about that because, as we know from European history, this kind of perception opens the doors to extremism, possibly to a genuine systemic collapse. The political élite has lost credibility and yet it is still in power: that's not a good recipe!

**You have claimed that both welfare redistribution and free market policies have failed in giving a response to economic inequality. Do you think that the austerity agenda being implemented in the EU may further aggravate such a threat?**

In the period between 1945 and the oil shock in Europe we ran a system of public Keynesianism, funding hard and soft infrastructures through public debt. The change of paradigm that came with Thatcher and Reagan resulted in the privatisation of the debt demand function: the State ceased to be the source of capital, and the demand was maintained through private debt accrued by individuals and corporations.

Now, the reason behind the accumulation of public and private debt is the decline of Europe's productivity and innovation: we are actually in the situation where we don't produce enough to pay for the type of entitlements in the light of the society we want.

Austerity may be an understandable response to the crisis, but not an appropriate one in my view, because it is not dealing with the fundamentals of the crisis, i.e. with the fact that we built the debt because of productivity gaps.

**A vast front in Italy tends to assume the Anglo-Saxon social model as the one providing people with the highest chances of improving their social position. Yet, according to a 2010 OECD survey where Italy was ranked as the second most socially immobile society, the UK was in first place and the US in third. How come the external perception of Anglo-Saxon societies was so badly misled?**

I think that the reason for the misunderstanding about the Anglo-Saxon model lies in the wild claims made for it. If a whole system is based on a certain assumption, and if a whole ideology is divulged to support that assumption, people tend to believe it! The reality is that Britain and the US are in many ways the worst places to live if you are poor.

Anglo-Saxon societies can be put in comparison with Italy, in the sense that both the models conspire against social advancement. The Anglo-Saxon economies recreated a new form of vested interests, while Italy has always had an old form of vested interests and has never been able to produce an open society whereby people could advance without being affiliated to a group.

I think there is also something problematic about the notion itself of *social mobility*, which suggests that, if living in the bottom echelon is awful, then it is fair for the individual to escape from the community he belongs to. An extremely individualistic concept indeed, identifying *freedom* with the *freedom to escape*.

**It's impressive how decisive the votes of the (once called) ethnic minorities were in influencing the outcome of the US Presidential election. What is your view on this phenomenon?**

There's no *a priori* assumption that ethnic minorities are left wing: actually migrants tend to be far more conservative than the countries they move into, and to have more conservative values, related to family, religion, taxation and so on. So really, Hispanics should be natural territory for the Republicans. But since migrants are most often at the bottom layer of the social pyramid, there is no room in the economic vision of the Republicans of a future they can also enjoy. Indeed, why would anybody who is poor vote Republican? As a result, the only vision appealing to them is that offered by welfare programmes.

The real threat for the American right is that migrants become a cohesive voting bloc like African-Americans already are. But this threat has no cultural reasons: it originates from the fact that Republicans have allowed themselves to be associated to some sort of racism. As a consequence, the Democrats have now the chance to effectively capture the migrants' vote: if they do that, it is doubtful that we will ever see a Republican majority again!