

Dear Colleague,

As you can see from the attached, tentative (but almost complete) program, there will take place in the cities of **Vercelli and Torino, Italy on May 23-24, 2008 the international conference The Two Wests: Democracy, Citizenship and Social Rights in the United States and in Europe (1918-2007)**

The conference is organized by the **University of Eastern Piedmont, the Department of History at Columbia University and the Interuniversity Consortium for the Study of European-American Politics and History (CISPEA)** encompassing Americanists from the Universities of Bologna, Florence, Trieste and Eastern Piedmont. Thanks to an Agreement of Cultural Cooperation, these institutions have in the last few years engaged in a series of conversations around the history of social rights in a transatlantic perspective, with international conferences taking place in both New York and Italy.

We hope here to explore the relationship between **notions of social citizenship and the constitutional and political arrangements of liberal democracy**. In the twentieth century world, a chain of constitutional statements has affirmed socio-economic rights as a fundamental feature of modern democratic citizenship. These have ranged from the Weimar Constitution of 1919 to declarations of international organizations in the war and postwar's years and multiple statements in national constitutions. But the achievement of socio-economic rights has been far from unanimous or uninterrupted in the history of western liberal democracies in Europe and the United States. Measures of social security have often been conceived as paternalistic benefits given by dominant elites to insure social stability and the continuity of capitalist production. Also, social security has not always been conceived as universal rights belonging to each individual citizen, but as "safety nets", "measures of last resort" to support the utterly destitute. Finally, a powerful strain of public thought and practice, more so in the United States, but in Europe as well, has affirmed that it was for the market to allocate benefits and earnings, and resisted public measures of social support on the grounds that they would stifle individual creativity, create dependency, obstruct the smooth working of market mechanisms and encourage government interference into private economic practices. **The result is that in the "Two Wests", the place of socio-economic rights as a fundamental component in the definition of democracy has been a fluctuating, embattled feature in both the United States and Europe, often in different terms, but both dealing with similar problems.**

### **Special Offer to Conference "Participants"**

At the end of the attached program you can see the entry "Participants" where we list young or established, Italian or non-Italian interested scholars who make the commitment of participating in at least two of the four sessions of the conference. "Participants" are not asked for any paper but for questions and comments from the floor, if they feel like, in the wide room for discussion allowed by the conference format. Participants' names are officially listed in the on-line and paper programs.

**Organizers will take financial responsibility for room and board expenses during the days of the conference (beginning with dinner of May,22, ending with breakfast of May 25) for 15 "participants", who will however have to personally meet the cost of their travel expenses.** Applications will be screened by the organizers' committee on a competitive basis, following such criteria as congruity of scholarly interests with the conference subject, length of attendance (not less than two sessions), and balance between young (beginning with doctoral candidates) and established scholars, Italians and non-Italians, women and men and the like. **The selection will take place on Monday, April 21 and results will immediately be forwarded to applicants.**

**By April 20 (but the sooner the better) the applicant should send to [centro.bairati@unito.it](mailto:centro.bairati@unito.it) an email detailing the reasons for his/her interest in the conference, dates of arrival and departure, place of provenance, and should attach a curriculum vitae.**

Applicants residing in the area comprised within the cities of Milano, Torino and Genova will only be supported for the cost of meals.

**Please, feel free to forward this offer to whoever you think might be interested.**

It is the organizers' hope that this may be of interest to many Colleagues and will make the conference lively and enriching.

On behalf of Prof. Alice Kessler-Harris and myself, we send our best wishes.

Maurizio Vaudagna

PS. The text of this letter has been written by Maurizio Vaudagna only, who apologizes for errors in English.