

Social praxis, party, and class relations today

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Abstract

Today's political sociologists are once again interested in the study of the crisis of mass-based parties, anti-politics and anti-parliamentarism, crisis in the authority of the political class, prevailing corporate interests within republican institutions, and populism. Political sociology however, takes the party, as a construct of political sociology alone, without consideration upon its militancy and action, as the party, which objectifies the foundation of a State, and as a result the party becomes, simply an historical category.¹ We approach the problem of the modern state from many angles; analysing the nature of a political party as such; the ideological dangers of determinism and spontaneism which a party necessarily must struggle with; the type of non-administrative internal regime which is necessary for a party to be effective and so on.² The problem we seek to elaborate is the specific character of the collective action that makes possible the passage from a sectored, corporate and subordinate role of purely negative opposition, to a leading role of conscious action towards not merely a partial adjustment within the system, but posing the issue of the State in its entirety. In developing this theme – as a study of the real relations between the political party, the classes and the State – a two-fold consideration is devoted to the study of Machiavelli and Marx: first from the angle of the real relations between the two, as thinkers of revolutionary politics, of action; and secondly from a perspective which would derive from the Marxist doctrines an articulated system of contemporary politics, as found in *The Prince*.

Keywords: Machiavelli; Marxism; Party; Class; State; Collective Action; Praxis; Revolutionary; Social Reformation

Introduction

Machiavelli has never ceased to be a reference for Marxism and radical thought, influencing many great philosophers, political and intellectual writers, of the likes of Gramsci, Althusser, Kamenev, Bakunin, Lenin, Horkheimer, Macek, Lefort,

¹ The work of Lipset and Rokkan has spawned a substantial sociological literature bent on understanding the interests and sectors that supported each party, Lipset, S. M., and Rokkan, S. 1967. *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, New York: Free Press. For a recent summary of the literature see Caramani, D. 2004. *The Nationalization of Politics: The Formation of National Electorates and Party Systems in Western Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Please refer to the *bibliography* section for all full citations.

² Party, State and Class, in this view, are not to be understood in sociological fashion as a static, descriptive or geographical term applied to groups of individuals sharing common experiences or life-chances or workplace relations.

Merleau-Ponty, Arendt, and Weil.³ For each of these thinkers, and many others across the political spectrum Machiavelli opened the door to an uninhibited exploration of the core problems, of the new orders emerging from the crisis of liberal-conservative constitutionalism and the interstate system that had been based upon it.⁴ In the inter-war era, reading Machiavelli on the origins and fate of the European political world was a notable current in the establishment of political science as an academic discipline⁵, in a context redefined by the roughly simultaneous emergence of Bolshevik and Fascist states. Despite century's long history of controversial interpretation and the influential reason, offered for studying Machiavelli's texts, in that they provide an opportunity to reflect on alternative political orders, based upon different conceptions of human nature, on the other hand these texts may be, perhaps regarded by some, as memorabilia for our post-political situation. So given the controversy that Machiavelli's literature has accrued in the past and present in scholastic circles why then turning to Machiavelli's texts for determining a critical stance adequate to our situation? The writings of Machiavelli form an exceptional case within this history, for instead of a critical, essentially idealistic, discourse on the absence of legitimacy Machiavelli's insights offer a novel method for exploring the sheer potentiality of praxis: thinking through the inception, full scope and limits of the constituent power to construct new orders.

Louis Althusser sought to convey the philosophical significance of Machiavelli's fragmentary thoughts on the traumatic origins of new states.⁶ The point was not to offer a new interpretation of Machiavelli but rather, he reasoned, to recognize the impossibility of a definitive solution, as the creative statute of a new mode of political thought. We would like to think that a more concrete notion can be developed from Althusser's tentative starting point, one made up of two parts: Machiavelli's innovation was, firstly, to raise the distinctively modern problem of the actuality of the most radical projects of transformation; and secondly, to provide an attentive reader with a method of reflecting upon and generating effective practical stances with regard to continuing,

³ For Gramsci, Machiavelli is a "philosopher of praxis" who prefigured Marx's concerns with the relationship between thought and action and realizing thought (freedom) in the world. Althusser expands on this reading, by claiming that to follow his model of Rome, for Machiavelli a monarch must found the popular republic of the *Discourses*. James Miller, "Merleau-Ponty's Marxism: Between Phenomenology and the Hegelian Absolute", *History and Theory*, 15, 2, 1976, pp. 109-132. Claude Lefort's *Le Travail de L'oeuvre* is a major study of Machiavelli that employs the categories of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy; see also, *Writing: The Political Test*, trans. D. A. Curtis (Duke 2000). The only extended treatment of Machiavelli by a prominent Bolshevik intellectual known to me is in Kamenev's short-lived introduction to the Russian translation of *The Prince* (Moscow, 1934), reprinted in English as 'Preface to Machiavelli', *New Left Review* No 15 (May-June 1962), 39-42. Horkeimer, *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, (1973), pp98-9. Arendt, *On Revolution* London, (1965) pp30-31. MACEK, J. (1980). Machiavelli e il machiavellismo. Firenze, La Nuova Italia. Weil, Simone. *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, (1958), Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1958

⁴ John P. McCormick, *Subdue the Senate: Machiavelli's "Way of Freedom" or Path to Tyranny?"* The University of Chicago (May 2012), p26

⁵ Early 20th-century encounters with Machiavelli were the occasion for reflections on a horizon beyond liberalism. Forming an arc across the political map, Carl Schmitt, Wyndham Lewis, Leo Strauss, Benedetto Croce, Raymond Aron and Antonio Gramsci, from the late 20th Isaiah Berlin and Louis Althusser, etc.

⁶ Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us* (1972), ed. F. Matherson; trans. G. Elliott (Verso, 2001), p. 7.

renewing or abandoning such projects. In keeping within Nietzsche's aphorism⁷ on reinterpretation we suggest instead in taking ways of thinking, a conceptual array and set of relationships posited between thought and action, from Machiavelli, in order to attain a form of mastery over Machiavelli's thought, dislodging it from its initial context to serve our historical conjuncture and goals. Then, posing for our own times the question that earlier commentators considered to be the defining problem of the modern historical situation: what in the human condition can be changed through political praxis?

So in the first section of this essay we give consideration to *collective praxis*, thus asking the question in terms of: how subjects and subjectivities are created, addressing this issue by employing the intricate connection between the *material* and the *ideal*. Taking up the theme of collectivity we tend to explore some of the issues raised in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* on how the "feeling of community" is generated and how people acting in their relations with others transform the world that they live in.⁸ The positive conditions for awakening such a will are to be sought in the existence of the urban social groups that have an adequate development in the field of socio-economic production and a certain level of historico-political culture. Any development of the collective consciousness is impossible, without the involvement of the whole sections of the population concurrently into the political life. A true praxis is the collective expression of self-emancipation involving all mankind. This was the intension of Machiavelli's politics, a reaction that the Renaissance could not be a real one without the foundation of a national state, which was attained successfully by the Jacobins⁹ in the French Revolution.

In the second part we devote our task to the question of the conception of the world or world-view. Our starting point is that the twenty-first century equivalent to Machiavelli's Prince – the revolutionary party – must be the pro-claimer and organizer of a process of social reformation, which comes about as a result of the historical transformation of the economic class into a historical class that takes place dialectically between the mass population and the intellectuals; which also means creating the terrain for a subsequent development for the realization of a superior, total form of civilisation.¹⁰ These combinations of emphasis upon the formation of the collective will, of which

⁷ "whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends...all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation..." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, (ed), KEITH ANSELL-PEARSON, (trans), CAROL DIETHE, (1994-2007), Cambridge University Press, New York.

⁸ Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, New York 1963, pp. 123–24

⁹ Klosko, George. *Jacobins And Utopians* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p. 92, 14-15, 53.

¹⁰ The revolutionary party can be called as such, a party, which transcends the current representation and successfully moves beyond the existing political framework and actively promotes the surpassing of existing society and politics, thus it becomes the elaborator of new integral intelligentsias and the crucible where the unification of theory and practice understood as real historical processes takes place. In other words it refers to active intervention in the creation of a national consciousness, which could transform the consciousness and make possible the transcendence of the existing categories of society into a new type through the active and political work of the revolutionary organization.

the new type of party is at once and the same the organiser and the active, operative expression; and the process of social reformation, shall be the structure of this entire work. We attempt in this work to reconstruct a basis for a theory and praxis by a way of expanding the strategic phenomenology of collective action, leadership, and form in the political realm.

Collective Action and Political Praxis¹¹

The nineteenth century is tragically described in political science as a commonly hostile period and a turning away from politics, the state and collective action, a counterproductive consequence of the Jacobin terror of the French Revolution.¹² As far as politics was treated by theorists at all was as the expression of larger historical forces at play, and not convincingly as having its own distinct existence within a whole complexity of institutions and social relationships.¹³ Remarkably the aftermath of the Cold War period left behind a parallel with the nineteenth century, in that, theory continued to stress the primacy of the substructure to the exclusion of the superstructure. The proposition that the political itself is on the wane might be confusing, as there has obviously been no decrease in politics *per se*. What is meant is an eclipse of *high politics*, in which the structure of society is at stake. While not many intellectuals like to assent to the finality of this verdict, most public discourse more or less enthusiastically accepts the absence of any alternatives to liberal democracy and free-market capitalism. The claim that revolutionary praxis leads to totalitarian catastrophe enjoys the nearly universal assent of intellectual opinion. One would be hard-pressed to describe the last three decades as favourably disposed towards Marxism. In fact, if neo-liberal ideas have acquired an unquestionable political resonance it is because they have permitted the articulation of the resistances to

¹¹ I borrow these terms from the philosophical analysis of Richard J. Bernstein's in *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity*, (1999), Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, where he gives broad interpretations of the these terms and how they have impacted and influenced four major philosophical movements, *Marxism, existentialism, pragmatism, and analytical philosophy*. My understanding of these concepts however uses as a point of departure, notions contained in the historical materialism of Marx and his analysis of political conciseness and collective action. The point of departure for Marx's historicity was the ideas that through human action people enter into relations and act collectively in and on nature. In this sense history it is constituted by people acting collectively to reproduce and transform relations, institutions and practice. See further Marx's the *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859)*.

¹² For an excellent discussion of this dimension see Wolin, S. (1961), *Politics and Vision*, Little, Brown and Company, ch.9. See also R. R. Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled: The Year of the Terror in the French Revolution*, Princeton, 1941. Palmer's book especially is an outstanding contribution to the controversy over the nature of the Terror.

¹³ The rhetoric of political exhaustion dates from the nineteenth century see Tocqueville: "Will we never again see a fresh breeze of true political passions . . . , those passions which are the soul of the only parties that I understand and to which I would gladly give my time, my fortune, and my life"? Alexis de Tocqueville, letter to Corcelle, 19 Oct 1839, *Oeuvres complètes* xv, Paris 1951, p. 139.

the bureaucratization of social relations during Keynesian politics.¹⁴ The opponents of this ‘passive revolution’¹⁵ found upon Neoliberal triumphalism have been unable to account for its great successes, as so far it seems to possess the historically unique ability to invent the standards by which it is judged.¹⁶ The enervation of collective resistance under these conditions seems to signal the advent of an order of things in which praxis itself has become an enigma. It is difficult to weigh the possibilities of effective intellectual intervention in such an opaque historical situation.¹⁷ It could be that this contemporary closure of the political is merely a conjunctural, and thus reversible, effect of a quarter-century of sweeping victories for capital.¹⁸ Surely, as the beginning of the twenty-first century history would demonstrate in an opposite expression, and rescue back from post-modern theses, the primacy of *the political*.¹⁹ The rise of terrorism, the transformation of competitive capital into global, financial capitalism, and the appearance of the authoritarian regimes in the Third World and the challenge against them, call into question once again such approaches to politics. So from the perspective of the current times the real issue is how to make a case for the distinctly political as an idiom of communication, a mode of analysis, and an instrument of progressive change? It is this compelling question and interest in the political sphere that attracts my attention so much to Machiavelli’s theme of a unified political community, which inspired him to seek a solution in the widespread and collective potential of political authority.²⁰

¹⁴ The new conservatism succeeded in presenting its programme of dismantling the welfare state as a defence of individual liberty against the oppressor state. The conservative reaction seeks a profound transformation of the terms of political discourse and the creation of a new definition of reality, which under the cover of the defence of individual liberty legitimizes inequality and restored hierarchical relations. The dominant social practices and ideologies that explain and legitimize them are the foundation of the hegemonic order, as was the period 1945-65 of consensual neoliberal leadership. See further Kahler, M. in Maier, C. S. (1997), *Changing boundaries of the Political* Cambridge University Press p291-302.

¹⁵ See a very deep analyses of this nature “Class Formation, Resistance and the Transnational, Beyond Unthinking Materialism”, Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, in Andreas Bieler, Werner Bonefeld, Peter Burnham, Adam David Morton, (2006) *Global Restructuring, State, Capital and Labour: Contesting Neo-Gramscian Perspectives*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p198

¹⁶ Clarke, S. (2001) ‘Class Struggle and the Global Overaccumulation of Capital’, in R. Albritton, M. Itoh, R. Westra and A. Zuege (eds) *Phases of Capitalist Development: Booms, Crises and Globalisations* (London: Palgrave).

¹⁷ For an in-depth argument to the current conditions and resistance see my own work, Malo, E. “Antonio Gramsci’s role in Marxian thought and the contribution made to international relations by those using his ideas”, *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, (Issue 7/2013), p96.

¹⁸ Callinicos, Alex, and Chris Nineham, 2007, “At an Impasse: Anti-capitalism and Social Forums Today”, *International Socialism* 115 (summer 2007), p.93

¹⁹ In the 1990s the literacy of politics strongly emphasised the death of the social and of nation state, and what was to replace all of this was a more participatory kind of ordering, of human existence, *governance*, in which the individual and not social or national identity would matter, RHODES, R.A.W. (1997), *Understating Governance; Policy networks, Reflexivity and Accountability*, OPEN UNIVERSITY PRESS; KOOIMAN, J. 1993 *Modern Governance; New Government-Society Interactions*, SAGE PUBLICATION; PIERRE, J & PETERS, B.G. 2000 *Governance, Politics and the State* MACMILLAN. The dream of a post-political world dissolved by globalisation is now over, thus the meaning of the political today deserves a radical rethinking, Rosenau, and Czempiel in Held, D. McGrew, A. 2000 *The Global transformation: An introduction to the Globalization Debate*. Polity Press

²⁰ Marx’s thought on the other hand represented the quest for a common language of politics, able to uniting the fragmented working classes and prefiguring the basis for a common project of historical construction or praxis. See further in “History as a Continuous Processes” in *The German Ideology*, (1845), Part I - Marxists Internet Archive, www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german.../ch01a.htm

This is the context for a return to Machiavelli, a figure that comes into full force within a historical situation whose outlines and possibilities cannot be grasped within the existing terms of political thought, as a result of the increasingly problematic reality of praxis. We can refer to Machiavelli as a theorist of a kind, of seeking to combine historical understanding with a strong commitment to creating a new human community through political action.²¹ Thus thinking of Machiavelli as a theorist of relations of power, who is, fundamentally concerned with the emergence of the people, as a “mass”, as a political subject capable of making history, creating new modes and orders.²² Machiavelli’s ability for capturing the essence of politics – as the art of governing men and securing their consent – and recognising its special domain was his great contribution, since he was much less concerned with objective conditions, than with the mechanism for transforming politics; whereas the first leads to narrow static description of reality and immediate preoccupation, the second increases the potential for initiative, foresight, and long range vision.²³ For Machiavelli believed that the moment of the political was the only space where collective issues related to the popular will could be raised, politics embarked the essentiality for creating the sense of community where there existed major fragmentation.²⁴ Politics was the drive that enabled humanity to control nature as part of understanding it. The concrete meaning of politics for us, then, is its role in enlisting mass energies in the struggle for ideological domination and establishing a new progressive community out of the cleavages and crises of the current order. Politics constitutes the space of collective struggle which transcends the parochial interests of particular constituencies and imparts cohesion to the process of transformation. The end of the first stage of socialist revolutions, which has entrained what might be described as three decades of counter-revolution, along with extensive changes in the world, is throwing up monumental questions and tasks. It is posing world-historic challenges for the communist movement, and others who consider themselves broadly supportive of this project. Is Marxism still valid as a science? In the most fundamental sense, the question comes down to this: Can you make revolution in today’s world, a genuinely emancipating communist revolution— or is that no longer possible, or even desirable?²⁵

²¹ As above Wolin, *S. Politics and Vision*, ch.6.

²² Wolin, S. (1960), *Politics and Vision*.

²³ See John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge, 2011), ch3-5; See to De Caprariis, he thinks Machiavelli as positively visionary. In Eric W. Cochrane, ‘Machiavelli: 1940-1960’, *Journal of Modern History* 33 (1961), 113-36; p. 120, note 28.

²⁴ Sasso suggests that if Machiavelli’s *Prince* is viewed in its historical context, Machiavelli is a man of deep insight into the real historical (or super-historical) forces that mould men and transform their morality in favour of reason, political unity and centralisation; a genius who saw the need for uniting a chaotic collection of small and feeble principalities into a coherent whole, Gennaro Sasso, *Niccolo Machiavelli* (Naples, 1958). See also John P. McCormick, “Machiavelli and the Gracchi: Prudence, Violence and Redistribution,” *Global Crime* 10, no. 4, (November 2009) 298–305.

²⁵ Smith points that it is wrong to claim the Communist parties or Social Democrats for that matter are finished as vehicles for working class aspirations M. Smith, *The Broad Party, the Revolutionary Party and the United Front: A Reply to John Rees*, *International Socialism* 100 (autumn 2003), p.69.

The indispensable novelty introduced by Marxism into the political science and history is the demonstration that there is no abstract *human nature*,²⁶ unchanged and permanent, but that it is the totality of historically determined social relations, therefore an historical fact that can within certain limits, be realized with the methods of critical reading of literary history. As a result the science of politics, in so far as its tangible literature and logical formulation are emphasised, must be considered as an organism on perpetual movement rather than a rigid one. One has to note nonetheless Machiavelli's assertion in the *Prince* about the problem of politics that it exists, as an autonomous activity, independent with its own laws and philosophy.²⁷ How then can we interpret this view of Machiavelli, which for a great number of minds is rejected and questioned even in our reality and does not constitute a common sense?²⁸ The disparate reflections Machiavelli offers as a way of framing the

anterior problem of the plasticity of human nature do not form the basis of either conservative prudence or utopian desire, but rather act to constantly unsettle both.²⁹ Machiavelli asserts that politics embodies the role of the mindful, organised element over spontaneism, the emotive over value-free detachment, the common over the particular; it embodies the maturity of a revolutionary movement that transcends the limited and fragmented interests of a particular various groups and stimulates progressive change instead.³⁰ So what Machiavelli really offers is a form of revolutionary element that overcomes the pragmatism of the common sense and which opposes the general tendency of confining social aims to the realm of piecemeal reform.³¹ Thus for him politics ought to concern itself not only with arousing popular passions and set in motion popular consciousness but indeed also with discovering various forms of knowledge functioning primarily in transcending the existing order of things.³²

²⁶ Fromm, E. (1961), *Marx's Concept of Man*, (2nd ed), Continuum, London, ch.4; See also Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes, London: Penguin Classics, 1990, pp. 95-98.

²⁷ This interpretation for Benedetto Croce and the others who assumed this argument, this implied in seeing Machiavelli as an anguished humanist, a moralist who 'occasionally experienced moral nausea' in contemplating a world in which political ends can be achieved only by means that are morally evil, and thereby the man who divorced the province of politics from that of ethics. See above Cochrane in, p. 115, note 9.

²⁸ One of the best and liveliest accounts of the mass of conflicting theories about *The Prince* is provided by E. W. Cochrane in the article cited above, see also Felix Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini* (Princeton, 1965); Richard C. Clark, 'Machiavelli: Bibliographical Spectrum', *Review of National literature* 1(1970), pp 93-135.

²⁹ As Jameson elaborates the politico-epistemological problems Machiavelli confronted: 'Writers tend to organize the events they represent according to their own deeper schemas of what Action and Event seem to be; or . . . they project their own fantasies of interaction onto the screen of the Real'. Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, London 1998, p. 27

³⁰ One has only to note that advanced capitalism has brought the world a growing diversification of the working class, increased complexity, specialisation and atomisation of the oppressed people, to really understand the alienation and increased differentiation in wages, status, mode of existence, culture, and a variety of localised movements following their own dynamic.

³¹ Hannah Arendt ascribes a central place to Machiavelli as a thinker on revolution "the spiritual father"; see her excellent analysis, Arendt, H. (1965), *On Revolution*, London, Penguin Books, p37.

³² Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting Boundaries of the Political*, Ed. Seyla Benhabib. (Princeton, 1996) 31-45

Today, the real question that needs to be posed is, what ought to be the complex object of the modern revolutionary party that is perhaps often unfulfilled? The answer is the establishment of an integral *state*:³³ not a mere connotation into a government as the term would imply, but a State that has fully organised control and support in civil society and the people, of the nation and which strives towards creating a permanent stronghold.³⁴ For an historical parallel of the achievement of this object is the particular period of the French state produced by the Revolution of the Jacobin force.³⁵ One can single out the elitist and authoritarian aspects of the Jacobins, however, what one is bound to learn from this decisive force of the Revolution is a deeper conceptualisation of the nature of the modes of constitution, the rule of the bourgeoisie, which became more revolutionary and magnanimous at a point when it joisted on an organised, unified national consciousness or collective will.³⁶ A collective political will means, a conceived, organised and led collective activity, which intervenes in the historical process where objective reality calls for it. For the writing of *The Prince* represents indeed the development where such a collective will takes place, so in Machiavelli we recognise his emphasis for a popular basis for the foundation of the modern nation-state.³⁷ It is because of the nature of this development of positively educating the common layer of society and thus creating a collective will and founding a new *state* that in our times the form of the leadership, of the *Prince*, of the new *post-modern prince*³⁸, is precisely the revolutionary progressive party, not the *Third-Way* type as left Brits would have it, nor a charismatic figure of *Continental Social-Democracies*.³⁹ The activity of the third-way deviation of the Labourites' is necessary a passive phase, of negative and preliminary kind which did not envisage an active and constructive part of its own; on the other hand a single person, a leader, cannot bring about a revolutionary transformation of society because it will be impossible for the organisation of a new collective will on which a new state and social structures can

³³ See note 10 above for what we mean by integral.

³⁴ Israel, Jonathan, *A Revolution of the Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 230; further reading in Israel, Jonathan, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750-1790* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 897-99, 914.

³⁵ Hazareesingh, S. (2002), (eds), *The Jacobin legacy in Modern France*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, ch.1; Also see Slavoj Zizek. (2011), *Living in the End Times*, London: Verso. See the afterword section page 403 on the Jacobin spirit of national unity.

³⁶ Higonnet, P. (1998), *Goodness Beyond Virtue*, Cambridge, MA; See also Kennedy, M. (2000), *The Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution*, Vol.3, London.

³⁷ See the English collection of Chabod's essays on Machiavelli, *Machiavelli and the Renaissance*, trans. David Moore, introduction by A. P. d'Entreves (London, 1958) pp. 30-125

³⁸ My use of the term the *postmodern* to describe the new revolutionary party or its reorganization of socialism, must not be mistaken to signal a resemblance to the *post-modernism* or *post-structuralist* theoretical constructions, only to interpret the current epoch of our world, (see Harvey, D. 1990, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers). My description of the new post-modern prince echoes Machiavelli's *Prince* and more specifically Gramsci's "Modern Prince" and in similar vein we claim, in the name of the new formation of collective subject that, only by cohering into a unified identity and worldview can the dispersed left place itself in a position to respond positively to the post-modern condition.

³⁹ Sure, personalities have become more important as the political differences between the main bourgeois parties in the West have narrowed, though, whatever they like to pretend now, the Tories were never united behind Thatcher, New Labour behind Blair, etc.

be based, but could only act in an immediate sense, a limited way to restore the lost stability of an old system. It is the political party that symbolises the already partially in existence collective will and its potential of becoming universalised. The correlation of its remaining purely a potential and its becoming a real historical force depends on the ability of the party to rally round the workers, the poor and the other oppressed classes, to represent the interests of the whole society. The condition for the complete formation of this collective will is the realisation of a social reformation, a theme which we will discuss below in the next section. For now we can begin to think with a much clearer sense of the meaning of the collective will, as the potential of creating a new type of State and a new historical unity of social forces determined together by a widely extended authority, which is manifested in the underlying principal change in the people's conceptualisation of the world, their relationship to the State. The Jacobin forces successfully realised this⁴⁰, whereas Machiavelli tried, though, failed this objective. Machiavelli, in contrast to many theoreticians of political science sought the problematic of establishing a new political community rather than signifying the exact configuration of that political community.⁴¹ He focused on the problem of how to link the political initiative with the objective situation in order to change it. It is this political realism,⁴² the founding of politics in practical action and stances that provides a similar interest and the connection, between Machiavelli and the Jacobins.⁴³

Discussion on the need for a revolutionary party and its form of organisation is very important today, especially as many people regard themselves as 'anti-capitalist' and are interested in socialist ideas, but have a degree of mistrust towards political parties. This is hardly surprising given the bureaucratic and undemocratic methods of the main political parties and the attacks they make on living standards when in power. People can also be wary of organisation itself and of leadership bodies, sometimes because of their awareness of the past existence of the repressive and bureaucratic regimes, sometimes for other reasons such as an experience of the remote leaderships of many trade unions. As a result of factors like these, the masses can be driven towards the idea of spontaneous, 'unorganised' action and loose networks.⁴⁴

In terms of the relationship between the party and a class, how does a class becomes a symbol of and epitomises a party? As a starting point the term *party* embarks in

⁴⁰ Woloch, Isser, *Jacobin Legacy: The Democratic Movement Under the Directory*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.

⁴¹ On this point in worth consulting Meinecke, F., 1957, *The Doctrine of Raison d'État and Its Place in Modern History*, D. Scott (trans.), New Haven: Yale University Press. Further reading in Viroli, M., 1992, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics 1250-1600*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴² On this point Herder, presents Machiavelli as a figure exemplary of his age, and his work as that of a careful observer, describing the political practices of the Renaissance. See also See also E. Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (Garden City, 1955), p. 151.

⁴³ For an excellent reflection on this point more in Rees. E. A. (2004), *Political Thought from Machiavelli to Stalin: Revolutionary Machiavellism*, Palgrave Macmillan, chap. 4.

⁴⁴ Trotsky wrote that: "Without a guiding organisation, the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston box. But nevertheless, what moves things is not the piston or the box but the steam". In Leon Trotsky,(1980) , *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Monad Press: New York,

itself an array of denotations.⁴⁵ What we mean is that the new revolutionary type of party is that party which effectively pronounces a complete, whole political battle so that a new political community and then a new society is unified under the control and consent of the impoverished and fragmented classes.⁴⁶ And yet, one has to note and be cautious of the fact that divided section of parties, fractions, emerge upon many different facades, which means that the ability of a class to build a political community and carry a political activity is not necessary limited within the definitions of a solitary organisation alone.⁴⁷ In such a view we might see the big national media organisations and newspapers or simply academic journals, in carrying this function of representing a fraction of a party. It is true that a party represents a single class, though this statement implies a much more complex description since a large number of parties carry different functions for a class. This we can recognize by being aware that the course of action, of a party, at any time impartially correspond with the interest of a particular class. To a certain extent it might well correspond with a part of a class alone. Perhaps here we must make a distinction, as it is the case that the subaltern class is never in position to build up and organise its authority in the state apparatus narrowly understood, *independently*, as did the bourgeois class⁴⁸ in the feudal stage of development: its principal mechanism for developing organic leaders and organisers and its authority is through its party.⁴⁹ Thus the revolutionary party of our time has an enormous task and a potential to integrate towards the realisation of a new society and unite an entire spectrum of the people having different associative forms. This union must be achieved in a specific qualitative ground of a new understanding of democracy and transcending group-focused interests to form a new unitary consciousness or a collective will.⁵⁰ The party in this extended meaning presupposes the realisation of diversity. At the very moment of building the leadership and organisation of the subaltern and fragmented class, it transforms the relationship between them and the mass population so that when assuming the role in the already in place state machinery and civil society institutions, it finds it difficult to use them as

⁴⁵ Chris Harman "Party and Class" in Tony Cliff *et al.*, *Party & Class*, London 1971, An extremely useful introduction to the question of the party.

⁴⁶ "...Marx and Engels were the first socialist thinkers...to propose that, for the first time in the history of the world, the exploited bottom stratum of workers in society was in position to impress its own class character on a new social order", in Hal Draper *The Principle of Self-Emancipation in Marx and Engels*, (1971), Socialist Register, pp.81-109. See, especially K. Marx, *Introduction to The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, in T.B. Bottomore, Ed., *K. Marx, Early Writings* (London 1963), pp.58-9.

⁴⁷ Ernest Mandel, *The Leninist Theory of Organisation*, London 1971, ch. 2.

⁴⁸ "bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than socialist ideology, that it is more fully developed, and that it has at its disposal immeasurably more means of dissemination" See in Lenin, (1965), *Collected Works*, Vol. 5 Moscow: Progress Publishers, p. 386.

⁴⁹ As Trotsky stated, "The proletariat acquires an independent role only at that moment when, from a social class in itself, it becomes a political class for itself. This cannot take place otherwise than through the medium of a party. The party is that historical organ by means of which the class becomes class conscious". Trotsky, L. in *What Next?* Leon Trotsky: What Next (1932) - Marxists Internet Archive www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1932-ger/

⁵⁰ Ernest Mandel, *The Leninist Theory of Organisation*, London 1971, ch. 3.

the bourgeois parties have because the institutions too, ought to take on this change in order to express a new bond to the mass population.⁵¹

Perhaps a more direct question is how can we understand the diversity allegedly of the parties of the people, popular parties or parties for a fair society in that sense and so on? Are these parts or divisions of the new revolutionary party of the working class? In looking for such answers one shall transcend their presumed proclamations of standing for the majority, the less fed, the less educated, the less privileged. So the real difficulty arises when trying to distinguish⁵² for example when, as we have already stated above, a party is only the expression of a class: where does the Labour party of Britain or the continental Socialist and Social-Democratic parties fit, or precisely any other such party that has a mass popular following? Class representation by a party is a very tricky and complex issue not only for the left wing parties but also for the liberal or centre-right parties too. In order to avoid simplistic analyses most importantly we ought to consider the real impact and importance of a party, for the class interests, during the class struggle.⁵³ The real and existing implication for the different classes and their partitions, of the actions of any party during a given period, points the lead in which a party is to be appreciated, as expressing a class or a part of a class. Hence, the effectiveness of their role during a given moment in their policies is indicative of different parties having various aims for the different classes.⁵⁴ As far as the British Labour party, European Socialists and Social-Democratic parties are concerned, today; we can argue that they prop up the direct instantaneous interests of a part of the capitalist class, while at the same time, signifying the group-focused class interests of the atomised subaltern class on the political and not in the economic plain.⁵⁵ A party embodies the political aims of the subaltern class on the condition that it successfully upholds a new kind of body of politics, and a new kind of state founded on the central character and role of the people.⁵⁶ The revolutionary party of the current times can validate its claim to this reference and to the identification of durable political interest of the oppressed class, only if its project corresponds with the interests of other classes in society. It must consider the wider extent of the revolutionary struggle. The capacity of the oppressed people to establish its control is precisely distinguished by its capacity to demonstrate more than its own group focused interests in supporting an entire, common interest.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Again the analysis of Trotsky is food for thought on this argument, see further, Trotsky, L. *The Class, The Party and The Leadership*, Leon Trotsky: *The Class, the Party and the Leadership* (1940) www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1940/xx/party.htm

⁵² For the distinction between the party and class see more in, "The Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution", in *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the Communist International*, (London 1980), p.69.

⁵³ John Molyneux, *Marxism and the Party* (1978), Pluto Press, London, Ch. 7.

⁵⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Masses, Spontaneity, Party*, Socialist Register, 1970

⁵⁵ This is analogous to the modern capitalist phase whereby we nationalise debt, and privatise profit and the free market becomes state-subsidised racket at the expense of the working classes.

⁵⁶ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), p.87

⁵⁷ D. McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx*, London 1971, p. 177

The question of the conception of the world

It is not good enough to see that a party is necessary. It has to be the right sort of party, a party that develops within and unifies the movements, not one that holds them back by stifling their own energy and creativity. And that is precisely what certain widespread models of the party have tended to do. Instead of attracting the best fighters, they repel them, and in doing so reinforce autonomism and reformism. This, for example, has been the impact of some of the revolutionary organisations since the late 1960s, a trend which we still live on. The result is a blindness to the way in which the movement – like any mass struggle – is giving rise ‘spontaneously’ to debates which, whether people like it or not, have political parameters. And if revolutionaries do not provide an organised pole of attraction in these debates, then the argument will be won by default by those (the reformists) who offer a strategy of working within the existing system or those (the autonomists) who offer no strategy at all.

How can we judge the conceptualisation of the world-view? Can the practical attitude of the world be envisaged as autonomous, remote, and liable for the collective life? Or is this unattainable, and it must be conjured as an attitude, a practical action in progress, as an amalgamation to another stance, or practical world-view.⁵⁸ One of the most commonest beliefs held collectively, is about everything that exists, as god given or nature’s creation and so on, that it should exist and it cannot be otherwise, and that no matter how many times a person try’s and fails of reforming, life will not stop but go on and fulfil its course, a destiny, since god or the forces of nature will not stop operating and precisely life will keep going on.⁵⁹ The truth exists in this logic, though, only in partiality; it would be calamitous, if otherwise. With that in mind, beyond certain limits, this logic⁶⁰ becomes dangerous; however, in any case the decisive factor should subsist for a philosophical and historico-political judgement. Our mental conceptions of the world are not divorced from our material experiences, our central engagements with the world; therefore, they are not independent of those engagements. But there is an inevitable externalisation of an internal relation, so our mental conceptions move into an external relation to the material world we seek to reshape.⁶¹

It is for certain that certain parties, movements, organisations of the collective kind; position themselves only as marginal, presupposing in fact a major movement onto

⁵⁸ C. Harman, *A People’s History of the World* (London 1999), p.615.

⁵⁹ In recent years postmodernism, with its ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’ has been the dominant academic representative of this view, see J.F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Mimosa and Manchester 1984), p. xxiii. See also the Marxist autonomistic position of Cleaver, H. *Reading Capital Politically*, (Leeds: AK/Anti-Thesis, 2000),

⁶⁰ The common popular expressions, ‘after a rainy day the sun will come shining’ or ‘the worse the things get the better will be’.

⁶¹ Harvey, D. (2010), *A Companion to Marx’s Capital*, London: Verso, pp113-115, offers an inquiry into the matters now before us.

which they implant themselves to reform or cure certain imagined or real wrongs.⁶² In other words these types of movements are purely reformist in character. The political importance of this reasoning, is the demonstration that every class has its own party, at the decisive turning points, by the fact that various groupings that till then had presented themselves as autonomous, come together to form a united alliance. The large array of groupings which previously existed were simply reformist, meaning, they were concerned only with partial questions, but each part presupposed the other to the extent that when fundamental questions were confronted, the unity was formed. Therefore it must be stressed that when building a party is essential to give it an all inclusive character,⁶³ creating homogeneity between the leadership and followers. One may come to the conclusion that no real party becomes aware of its global character all at once but gradually, when it learns that nothing which exists is natural but rather exists because of certain conditions, which if they disappear, cannot do so without consequences. Hence, the party perfects itself, loses its randomness, mutual character and becomes really independent, so as to produce particular results, necessary for forming the basic preconditions.⁶⁴

The internal functioning of the party is directly linked with a non-automated view of history and its ability to relate continually to a changing reality. From this derives the real opportunity of concrete political involvement. This too, is the foundation for the role of the ordinary members within the party and their relationship to the leadership. The leadership function of the party is closely expressed by its ability to create a strategy, which is based on an organic relationship with the mass movement. This natural development, intrinsically between party and masses is principally related to the general political task of the party. It has nothing to do with an abstract schema of organisation unconnected with the ability of the party to analyse the conjuncture and create a natural efficient unity between intellectuals and the mass of the population. It is precisely the fact that parties detach themselves from reality that makes them incapable of maintaining their links with the people during severe political crisis.⁶⁵ The ability of parties to fulfil the purpose of their existence, hence, influencing the

⁶² See Holloway in a critique of Lenin's politics that shares common ground with anarchist and autonomist arguments, he suggests a link between Leninist, democratic centralist, forms of organisation and the claim that classical Marxists are state socialists. He argues that the problem with the "form of the party" is that it "presupposes an orientation towards the state" in a way that "impoverishes" the struggle itself. Taken as an account of reformist socialist political organisations Holloway's arguments are insightful: However, because he conflates reformist and Leninist parties, he too quickly slips from a critique of the former to a rejection of the latter. The obvious weakness with this argument is that it ignores the different content of these strategies: reformist parties aim to win the state while the Bolsheviks aimed to smash it. Holloway, John, 2002, *Change the World without Taking Power* (Pluto), pp.11-18.

⁶³ Lukács, Georg, 1971 [1923], *History and Class Consciousness* (Merlin), pp295-342; also Lenin, Vladimir 1961b [1901], "What is to be Done?", in Lenin, *Collected Works, vol 5* (Progress), p423, the revolutionary socialist should act not as a simple trade unionist but more generally as the "tribune of the people"

⁶⁴ Molyneux, John, 1986, *Marxism and the Party* (Bookmarks), p76.

⁶⁵ As Barker notes, particularly when workers' struggles are at low ebb there is tendency for organisations whose lifeblood is the struggle to degenerate into sectarianism. Barker, Colin, 2001, "Robert Michels and the 'Cruel Game'" in Colin Barker and others (eds), *Leadership and Social Movements* (Manchester University Press), p42.

situation at moments which are historically vital for the groups that they represent depends on their internal organisation. This series of reflections must relate to the leadership element and more specifically on the unity of the political will of that element. The leadership factor will be successful only in so far as it is able to organise the party along democratic lines and not bureaucratic ones.⁶⁶ It must be remembered and strongly emphasised, times and again that the party as an organisation does not transcend its individual members, if so this fetishist attitude to organisation has very real political consequences. The organisation falls into passivity as the activity of individual members is paralysed, since it would be deemed that the organisation exists despite the individual members, but also because many believe and fear that if there is a democratic debate the party would disintegrate.⁶⁷

So far we have considered the basis of a method of politics in terms of the relationship between the party and the rest of the population and in terms of the culture within the party itself. We now arrive at a theoretical argument for the need for an active preparation of all members as rational thinkers which can prevent the party from becoming anachronistic, and unable to perform its function. This function is defined in terms of its ability in enabling the subaltern strata in society to construct a new kind of state based on social reformation implying the transformation of politics itself.⁶⁸ This reform has its roots first and foremost within the party. This is fundamentally the vital part for constructing a democratic organisation in which all members are able to take an active part in discussion and carry out policy creatively, because this activity is intrinsically necessary to the role of the party. The active and direct participation and consent of individual members is essential and it can come only after full healthy debate whereby differences are brought to the table and resolved; this would suggest a new type of relationship between leaders and followers in society at large. The preparation and education of the mass population cannot be schematic since no such doctrinal formula of organisation exists. Thus the very unity of the party comes about by the active development and participation of all members who do not merely apply mechanical orders. All the same the political strategy of the party and its political line must be as the result of an analysis of the experience of its ordinary members. It is precisely these ordinary members who provide the connection with the electorate and with increasingly changing and contradictory reality. Again, we must stress the importance for the mass membership not to be connected to the leadership through a generic loyalty and being there simply to be manoeuvred without a role of their own. Thus the party must create a new kind of network of relationships which transcend those instituted between leaders and led in bourgeois and latter authoritarian Stalinist

⁶⁶ Löwy, Michael, 2005, "To Change the World We Need Revolutionary Democracy", *Capital and Class*, 85, p23

⁶⁷ As Marcuse comments, Marx looked not to the ending of authority but rather to its complete democratisation. In Marcuse, Herbert, (2008), *A Study on Authority* (Verso), p87.

⁶⁸ McKay, Ian, 2009, "The Many Deaths of Antonio Gramsci", *Capital and Class* 98.

societies or presently pseudo-democratic countries. To the extent that this has not taken place the moral and intellectual reform implicit in the founding of a new type of state has not been undertaken, and the old form of politics have been merely reproduced.⁶⁹ This is the context within which the need for unity and stability must be understood.

Debate is necessary in very real political terms to prevent the rise of bureaucracy and at the same time to provide the basis for the true unity of purpose.⁷⁰ Unity and stability are also necessary for practical reasons. Once a decision has been reached by the party it must be accepted, because noncompliance might cause more damage than a decision being partly a wrong one. Discussion is absolutely necessary to the party, but because the need for democracy is not a formalistic one, it must not result in the unity of action being broken.⁷¹ We need to be explicit about the nature of stability and political coherence within the party, which if it is to be effective, must never be merely formal.⁷² The need for a constant and permanent relationship between different levels of an organisation in order to achieve a collective will is the political basis for coherence which is connected to the role of the party. Democratic participation should be placed firmly within the concrete needs of the party to fulfil its role. So that the party must conduct itself in such a way as to provide the means for raising its members, political and cultural level relentlessly. So the argument goes beyond merely abstract democratic rights, since these rights, if are not put into concrete practice the organisation is not truly democratic.⁷³ A progressive strategy cannot be based in the differing conception of individual members but only in terms of particular analysis of the concrete social formation and of the conjuncture. A new concept of politics begins though within the party itself, in other words the party prefigures the new type of state⁷⁴ and society and transforms the way of life of the natural structure and leading forums of a class.

How can the voluntarist-mechanistic problematic be avoided when confronting the problem of the relationship between subjective and objective elements? With our previous discussion in mind, of the internal organisation of the party it is important to re-

⁶⁹ J. Molyneux, *Marxism and the Party* (London 1978), pp.36-96.

⁷⁰ See Harman "The Revolutionary Socialist Party" in Chris Harman, *How Marxism Works*, Bookmarks Publications, London, 1979, chap. 10.

⁷¹ Tony Cliff, *Marxism at the Millennium*, Bookmarks Publications London 2000, chap. 12-13.

⁷² 'The party is so big that absolute freedom of debate inside it is a necessity ... The greatest party in the land cannot exist without all shades of opinion in it making themselves fully felt.' Engels cited in Monty Johnstone, *Marx and Engels and the Concept of the Party*, Socialist Register, 1967, p157.

⁷³ See Trotsky's strategy of the united front, the policy of working within trade unions while recognising the limitations of trade unionism, and the defence of democratic rights while striving to go beyond bourgeois democracy, see further in John Molyneux, (1978), *Marxism and the Party*, Pluto Press, London, chap. 5

⁷⁴ In recognition of this difference Lukács called the new organs of workers' power an "anti-government"), they have a very different social content to the capitalist state. Lukács, Georg, 1970 [1924], *Lenin: A Study in the Unity of his Thought* (New Left Books), p63.

emphasise that it is the mass movement which has the central role in historical change.⁷⁵ Pure spontaneity does not exist.⁷⁶ This means a rejection of both the instrumental view of the masses and the mechanistic conception of the development of human history. This position rests on two arguments. First since the inevitable development of historical necessity is rejected, the concept that classes act instinctively, of their volition without any mindful leadership is also denied, because this would suggest that material conditions involuntarily produce historical movement. Secondly, when there seems to be no plain set of ideas directing a mass movement it simply means that the movement is in fact influenced by various ideas contained within a traditional stances of the world. It can then be said that ideas do not originate artlessly, and that those ideas most common in the population are the result of an historical process in which the current and potential forces conduct their struggle for power. So the question always is present whether the party can relate to the current ideological order of the various groups nationally, in order to influence them and decrease the influence of the dominant group, by giving a responsive leadership to spontaneous groups or movements and turn them into a positive political factor.⁷⁷ This unity between the two elements, of awareness and spontaneity is indeed the real political action of the suppressed classes, to that degree that this is really a mass politics and not simply a quest by elements claiming to represent the masses.⁷⁸ The full potential therefore of the objective material conditions can only be realised, accordingly, if subjective conditions do not arise as the result of chance, but are the work and activity of a mindful struggle by which an organisation acquires to become an effective political force. The party is the center-piece offering the ground for the formation of the organic leaders and organisers of the working class and its allies, where a collective will can

⁷⁵ Although bourgeois revolutions had an element of a progressive break with pre-capitalist hierarchies, they were characterised by the transfer of power from one ruling class to another and involved at best a contradictory relationship between their leadership and the mass of the population: e.g. bourgeois revolutions “from above” such as Bismarck’s unification of Germany involved no mass action at all, whereas bourgeois revolutions “from below” in England, America and France were won through the involvement of the lower classes but ended similarly with the exclusion of the poor from power. Proletarian revolutions, by contrast, because they are made for and by the working class—“the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves” Marx, Karl, 1974a [1867], “Provisional Rules of the International” in Marx, *The First International and After* (Penguin), p82.

⁷⁶ Lenin argued that within the mass movement anarchism therefore, in a way that paralleled reformist trade unionism, led to the “subordination of the working class to *bourgeois* politics in the guise of negation of politics”. It was to counter this tendency that he stressed to build a national *political* party that aimed to link together all the local struggles across Russia into a general offensive against the state. In Lenin, Vladimir, 1961 [1901], “Anarchism and Socialism”, Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 5, (Progress), p328

⁷⁷ Contrary to Franks who gives an unfortunately caricatured list of what are best understood as sectarian tendencies within revolutionary parties—it is rather that these problems are a necessary feature of socialist activity, and they are shared to a greater or lesser degree by *any* form of radical political organisation, including anarchist and autonomist organisations, Franks, Benjamin, 2006, *Rebel Alliances* (AK Press), p212.

⁷⁸ Jo Freeman in *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* comments on this point on the ability of the most articulate (usually middle class) members of structureless groups to hold de facto power within them. Freeman, Jo, 1970, *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*, <http://struggle.ws/pdfs/tyranny.pdf>.

be forged, around which the masses can unite and transform their world.⁷⁹ Just as democracy within the party is the only guarantee against bureaucracy, the political activity of the organisation itself is the real basis for preventing a fetishist attitude to the party or its leader.⁸⁰

The very object of political science consists in the ability of the party to relate to the concrete situation, which depends on its having accurate knowledge of the historical moment in which it is working. Fundamental to our conception of the world is an emphasis on the complexity of any moment, which makes impossible any cause and effect relationship between the economic and the other levels of the societal structure. It is in the historical peak of this complexity that the party must intervene and a number of points must be stressed when considering such an intervention into a concrete situation. The very existence or not of the subjective factor is one element in the situation, hence, any analysis in relation to predicting the possible development, which leaves out the analyser himself and his knowledge as external to the prediction, will most certainly lead to a mutilation of reality itself.⁸¹ Implicit here is the fact that the analysis of society depends on a method and tools that are very different of those used by natural science, or positivist methodology.⁸² The fundamental philosophical split between the analyser (subject), and the analyse (object), between the party and the concrete situation is an integral part of the very comprehension of reality.⁸³

In order to intervene effectively, to change a given reality, the relation of forces must be understood correctly, both in terms of the subjective factor of the party and in terms of the opposition. Understanding the antagonistic class is fundamental, if the oppressed class is to assume an autonomous political role and to win under its influence those sectors of society currently under the dominance of the opponent.⁸⁴ An understanding of the state and non-state devices, cultural and political organisations and activities

⁷⁹ Whereas neo-liberalism and anarchism find it difficult to imagine the social aspect of humanity except as the alien form of the state, Marx argued that because workers are able to free themselves only through collective organisation their solidarity points towards a concrete democratic alternative to their alienation. Thus Engels comments, while agreeing on the waning down of the political state, together with political authority, this would not mean the end of social organisation. Rather, he insisted, under socialism, society would lose its (alienated) political character to take instead the form of the democratic control of administrative functions. See further Engels, Frederick, 1988 [1872], "On Authority", in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 23 (Progress), p425,

⁸⁰ See as above Barker, C. (2001)

⁸¹ Today when the word 'hypothesis' is used to describe a scientific concept as in evolutionary terms many tend to mentally make the pejorative connections as *mere hypothesis*. Eighteen-century scientist working in a very different intellectual framework, used 'hypotheses' in a very different way. They generally viewed science as geometric rather than physical, and the hypotheses were the geometric arrangements to explain natural phenomena. My reservations about the physical reality of positivist arrangements – even while accepting that it was the best explanation for natural phenomena – are held in the belief that is inappropriate dragging fixity into physical history: that is the extent, by which social science can be studied in the same way as natural science.

⁸² See the second of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*. For an expanded version of this argument, with the necessary examples from the history of science, see Peter Binns, *What are the tasks of Marxism in philosophy?* in *International Socialism* 2:17

⁸³ See Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (London 1971), pp. 445–6.

⁸⁴ The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. See Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, London 1965, p61

and all aspects of the dominance of the ruling class, will allow the party to find where the strength and weaknesses of the enemy are and how to direct its strategy in response. Simplifications and straightforward assumptions about the ground where the party has to work could only be misleading and calamitous, thus the distortion of a deductive interpretation of historical development must be avoided at all cost.⁸⁵ The consequence of this type of analysis is to revalue the moment of *the political* in terms of its influence on the actual outcome of the struggle. Since the party is said to intervene most effectively on the political arena, its existence, actions and conduct become crucial. If it is not to be distorted the discussion must be placed within the context of the problematic, of the nature of the relationship of the structure and superstructure.⁸⁶ With regards of the strategy of the party this problematic becomes one of distinction, between long-term or *permanent* movements and *occasional* or immediate movements.⁸⁷ A crisis of lengthy-periods going on possibly for decades will generally be translated into irresolvable contradictions in the structure, which are organic. The attempts of the various forces to preserve the current economic structure by overcoming these contradictions form the ground of the conjunctural. The political battlefield then takes place in the ground of the occasional and is expressed in political forms, ideological polemics, religious and philosophical debates. Realising that there is a dialectical relationship between long term contradictions at the structure and the political and ideological struggle in the superstructure is therefore the correct understanding of the relationship between structure and superstructure, and the only way of defining the status of the political.

The historical mission of the party originates in the fact that the material conditions already exist for a transformation of the mode of existence.⁸⁸ These conditions stem from the maturity of the structural contradictions at the base. So without transforming society's mode of existence those contradictions cannot be brought to resolution. This would mean that the inability of the forces of change to provide a solution through the struggle politically, increases the level of disorder and worse still, it allows the ground

⁸⁵ Unlike the bourgeoisie, the proletariat cannot steadily accumulate strength until it is economically, politically and culturally more powerful than its adversary. Its situation as a toiling, exploited and propertyless class means that a situation of 'balance' is the best and the highest position that the proletariat can achieve under capitalism. If that 'moment' is lost the power of the bourgeoisie and capital will inevitably reassert itself. See J. Molyneux, *Leon Trotsky's Theory of Revolution*, (Brighton 1981), pp. 64–65.

⁸⁶ As Clarke, in a pivotal contribution, clarifies, it is the concept of class relations as being analytically prior to the political, economic and ideological forms taken by those relations (even though class relations have no existence independently of those forms) that makes it possible for a Marxist analysis to conceptualize the complexity of the relations between the economic and the political, and their interconnections as complementary forms of the fundamental class relation, without abandoning the theory for a pragmatic pluralism. Clarke, S. (1978) 'Capital, Fractions of Capital and the State: Neo-Marxist Analysis of the South African State', *Capital & Class*, 5: 32–77, p42.

Class relations, in this sense, are of course antagonistic relations.

⁸⁷ Sassoon, D. (May, 1975), An Introduction to Luporini, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 2.

⁸⁸ "...mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will be always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation." Marx, preface to "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton and Company, 1978)

clear to traditional forces to gain more favourable outcomes; in other words while the forces in favour of progressive change lose their battle, the conservative ruling class which are incapable of providing a solution to the crisis of long-duration, become victorious. The fallacy of many political subjects even today lies in the fact of giving utmost importance to economic crisis for the demise of the capitalist system and the succession of progressive politics.⁸⁹ Wrong, the manifestation of the contradictions at the level of the political, mentioned above, have their own reality and specificity.⁹⁰ One cannot negate and reduce them to the economic level, and neither is this manifestation absolutely self-governing between the two levels, a dialectical, uneven relationship exists.⁹¹ The party must intervene on the basis of an understanding of the objective features (structural), of a situation related to the potential subjective factors, (superstructures).⁹² The fact that a crisis in the life of a nation relates to but is not necessarily determined primarily by economic factors, opens up a wide front of the struggle for the party, which is in the political and ideological field.

Although the party may claim to have a progressive, revolutionary view of the world, the possibilities however, of falling within an economistic interpretation of the situation, are never short. Evidently its inability to undertake effective political initiatives is proof of this, as is other phenomena of political abstentionism and inflexibility, in hope that the events will mature in favour of them without their active intervention.⁹³ The party is in this way entrapped onto a state of impotence, waiting for the situation to take its turn. It could be argued that this wait and see arrangement, at times accompanied by a militant rhetoric, is a certain tendency of the limits of the second *International* problematic, to the extent that any party falls into this type of approach, whatever the point in time, it remains within this problematic. The ideological realm cannot without

⁸⁹ There is a revolutionary mirror image of this view. It was the domination of this view in the social democratic party that led to passivity in the face of revolutionary upsurges, like the Italian occupation of the factories in 1920. The working class would not in its entirety vote for revolution, so revolution was not possible. P. Spriano, *The Occupation of the Factories*, (London, 1975), provides an excellent account of this argument.

⁹⁰ Otherwise as Pashukanis thoughtfully asked, 'Why does class rule not remain what it is, the factual subjugation of one section of the population by the other? ... Why does the machinery of state coercion... detach itself from the ruling class and take on the form of an impersonal apparatus of public power, separate from society? Pashukanis, E. (1978) *Law and Marxism* (London: Pluto Press), p139.

⁹¹ It is not simply a case of arguing in Weberian fashion that each of these relations exercise reciprocal and causative influence. Rather, Marx is at pains to stress that antagonistic class relations are always manifest in economic, political and legal forms. In this way 'economics' rests as firmly on 'politics' and 'law' as vice versa. Meikins Wood, E. (1981) 'The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism', *New Left Review*, 127: 66–95.

⁹² Some modern *autonomists* marxists believe that the intervention of parties means a hierarchical approach in which the party subordinates the movement to its dictates. See the model of the party in the writings of Lenin for a contrasting view. *What is to be Done*.

⁹³ At different points in time both passive determinist and highly voluntarist interpretations of Marxism have flourished. The most important example of the determinist trend was the version of Marxism developed by Karl Kautsky which dominated German Social Democracy and the Second International in the period leading up to the First World War. In Kautsky's view the economic laws of capitalism guaranteed the growth in numbers and consciousness of the working class to the point where power would 'automatically' fall into its hands. All that was required of the socialist movement was that it builds up its organisations, strengthen its vote and avoid adventures while patiently waiting for economic development to do its work. For a fuller analysis of Kautskysim, see J. Molyneux, *What is the Real Marxist Tradition?* (London 1985).

consequences be simplified to the point of an immediate reflection of the structure. The consequences thereby are of not connecting directly the ideological ground and any area of social reality, to a very intently defined interest of the oppressed class and leaving it in the hands of its opponents. It makes it impossible for the party to relate to a concrete situation because it reduces the casual relationship in the political arena to the most immediate group-focused interest of the different social forces, and cannot see the complexity of the dynamic of any social formation. This further diminishes the capability of the party to analyse by taking into account this complexity, since the issue it raises, who is immediately served by a particular initiative, cannot have as its object a complex causality. An example of this phenomenon which could not be understood by this approach is the rise of the *Golden Dawn* solution to the crisis in Greece, or extremist nationalism and *right-wing* politics generally across Europe. The aspects of such a phenomenon are multiple and complex and a range of analysis of the social roots of the movement and its significance in a particular conjuncture, as well as the leadership character, cannot be explained by any immediate interest of the participants.

In general by reducing all aspects of political action to an immediate change or need in the structure, a total, various phenomena are prone to misunderstanding and a general confusion can arise. This has consequences both for an analysis of the position of various parties and individuals in the Anglo-Saxon societies and for the kinds of debates and mistakes which arise in societies developing or undertaking the construction of progressive socialist politics. One aspect of the European-*left* has been its rhetorical militancy posturing but unrelated to an effective strategy.⁹⁴ This has often resulted in a dogmatism which has produced as one of its consequences an objection to any kind of compromise on principle. This kind of inflexibility and stubbornness in fact has resulted in passivity and impotence for many years and a position which assumed that since history unfolded with the regularity of positivist laws, intervention by the subjective factor could necessary produce little of any value. The only task assigned to the subjective factor within this representation is thereby force to destroy the old order, once history – envisioned of unconsciously – has created a crisis. The possibility of positive political intervention to destroy the current order by forming an alternative, a new historical alternative is unimaginable within this inflexible framework, which maintains that conscious intervention is just good for destroying the system but not for its reconstruction. Not only is history not determined in any sense by a development of the productive forces and the superstructure is not a mere reflection of the economic structure, but that the political and ideological levels lack development in comparison to the economic field.⁹⁵ Because the party must be able to form an alternative and thus intervene ideologically and politically to promote a

⁹⁴ See the pamphlet by M. Smith, *The Awkward Squad* (London 2003).

⁹⁵ These apparent dichotomies are simply different expressions, different forms, of the same configuration of social relations.

development of the superstructure in keeping with the potential for the development in the economic structure – a totally different proposition from relying in the superstructural development to take place spontaneously, regardless when coming to power or after – its ability to know the type of compromises necessary to create such an alternative is fundamentally necessary in it fulfilling its task.⁹⁶ Far from a dogmatic refusal to enter into such compromises being a guarantee of the progressive character of the party, this refusal on principle is one more aspect of resigning the party to submissiveness and further impotence.⁹⁷

Conclusion

The epochal problem for deciphering in this work has been the Marxist revolution that failed to materialize. This is no arbitrary projection: the decline of urban republics that Machiavelli confronted is indeed a plausible precedent to our own effort to think through the catastrophic defeat of the working classes in the age of Neoliberalism and Globalisation. For us, Machiavelli provides the intellectual model of how to conduct a harsh strategic reckoning in the midst of this devastation, as preparation for a very

long term reconstitution of *praxis* through intellectual and material rearmament. The present inability and unwillingness to consider a transcendence of the dominant form of state and society is potentially a very perilous situation. The problem Machiavelli raises is that discovering the effectual truth of our historical situation requires a radical engagement. The transformability of human conditions cannot be gauged without interrogating the subject that is the imputed bearer of this project. Thus, building an integral *state* for the workers and other oppressed classes, unlike previous ruling classes, is itself a question of expanding the area of authority and consent until the element of force eventually disappears. But even more importantly the very activity of politics, of state activity more broadly is no longer separated from society but becomes an aspect of the lives of the all people. The building of authority, the gaining of extensive support and a democratisation of the practice of politics is an integral part of the new revolution in our conception.

The party develops into the state, although envisaged of in the wider sense whereby the party tends to encompass a very broad area of society, whereas the state is an integral state. Thereby we forcefully dismiss any identification of a narrowly understood party with the governmental apparatus. Anyone familiar with eastern European communism would recognise that the concentration in the hands of the state of all political and cultural activities and the merger between state and party is a

⁹⁶ What we have argued all alone, namely: the founding of a new state, a restructuring pushed by, and based on, domestic social groups, forming a majority alliance around a hegemonic project that is capable of bringing these groups together into a coherent programme consisting of economic interests as well as cultural ideas, identities, moral values, etc.

⁹⁷ Chris Harman, (2007), *Revolution in the 21st century*, London: Bookmarks Publications, pp76-86

symptom of a limited support in which the function of the party degenerates with pace towards propaganda, order, moral and cultural influence. Indeed it is the opposite of this attempt – the Stalinist notion of state reinforcement – to lure civil society into political society, meaning, it is the expansion of civil society by drawing in the political realm in which society and state become dialectically one. Yet this relationship is not formal or recognised in constitution, though is rooted in a new concept of politics based on a changing reality in which the whole population gets involved in political activity. Unlike the *neoliberal state* that aims to a balance of consent and force but never removes the element of force the new socialist state must exist for unique purposes, for eliminating class differences, transforming the mode of production, and a social reformation, a change in the superstructure which does not develop out of the economic sphere. The qualitatively new aspects of the socialist state are not simply rooted in the revolutionary vocation of the leading party, but in a fundamentally new concept of politics and political participation.

As we have suggested above the *post-modern Prince* must be understood in terms of its task, namely, to found an integral state based on a broad consent, deriving from a collective consciousness and reflecting a social reformation. The lack of specific indication about both party and state organisational rules must be read in terms of a specific notion of politics, which is adequate to the historical potential of the postmodern epoch, when the mass of the population becomes organised in a variety of forms and therefore acquires the potential to intervene in politics, to become the central character in history. That party whose aim is to found a new state must itself be a new party, and its internal organisation must relate to the way in which the basic problem of political science is raised: that there is a division between those in position of power and those obeying that authority. How can this gap be overcome? How can a democratic, a positive consensual relationship between this split be established? How can a concrete social unity be forged in the period of the potential historical central character of the masses? A true collective consciousness in the party and in the whole nation, united around a new project for society cannot be established through the imposition of a unity based on a passive relationship between leaders and followers. First of all, for us a democratic relationship cannot be defined by a formalistic set of rules but only by a mode of conducting politics based on creating the conditions for active political intervention by the mass of the population, which aims at the elimination of the division between leaders and led. If this is to be accomplished then links between individuals and the state founded on the division of intellectual labour are necessary if the divisions which exist are in fact to be overcome. If the real problems of creating the possibility for the vast majority of people in society to appropriate reality and to participate in politics are not posed than the appeal to the people is pure use of popular prejudices and false claims and promises in order to gain power, whether this appeal is by far-right parties or anyone else.

In fact, we have maintained that the attempt to have a set of ideas gain acceptance by the majority of society is a feature of all parties. In competition with other ideas any political factor seeks the greatest support it can gather. At the same time there is nothing which can guarantee the prevention of the failure of a political force, which no longer represents the needs of an historical epoch or whose popular base ceases to give it support. The case of the New Labour is relevant here. The Third Way was an ineffective instrument for a fundamental change in society because it reproduced the Thatcherite mode of politics, in particular the split between economics and politics. Its internal organisation provided for debate, yes, but not a true democracy or unity of action. The lack of a theoretical discussion prevented it from understanding concrete reality. A fundamental split between those in power and those led remained in its ranks and no effort was made to go beyond a formal definition of citizens unrelated to their socio-economic position. Attempting to overcome the limitations of his predecessors, Blair's solution merely duplicated these features. His concept organisation in fact resulted in a lack of effective cohesion and reproduced the division between human subjects and reality. It is in this context that the Labour party itself was abstracted from the historical process, a philosophy of history which in fact could not conceptualise the central character of the masses. Indeed this deterministic view of history became the common theoretical foundation underlying its organisation, a view shared with the bourgeois thought. Organisation appeared to exist and events seemed to take place without the active intervention of the human subjects, and the party, as the state, appeared as mystical creation separated from the activity of individual members. As a way of conclusion, one can indeed take this as pointing towards a criticism of the quality of and the limits of democracy in countries like the Great Britain and the USA where the rules are undoubtedly democratic in the formal sense. Towards the transformability of society, if the mass of the population becomes organised politically, a multitude of possible forms of pluralism may manifest themselves as the problems of neoliberalism and neo-conservatism are revealed and their limits are constantly being challenged.

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