

# **Workerist Marxism: Interview with Antonio Negri**

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## Brief introduction to the interview

We want to give the readers of the following pages a few points of orientation in advance.

This interview with Antonio Negri, the Italian philosopher and militant, is unconventional in its form. As Negri pursued a creative way of answering the questions in non-linear manner, we decided to divide the interview into two parts: the first part will consist of the questions we have asked, and the second part will have the answers of Negri. In some occasions, he condensed two questions into one broad answer.

1. We want to begin our interview with the war in Ukraine. The war has been ongoing for months already and it does not look like it is going to end anytime soon. What do you expect the outcome of this war might be? What do you think its consequences, political and otherwise, will be? Can we say that the present global political situation - and certainly not only because of the war in Ukraine - is one determined by war?

2. Let's continue with a rather biographical question. You have been involved and been one of the key figures of *operaismo*, as you were one of the founders of the *potere operaio* and of the later *autonomia*... Tell us a little about what these theoretical and practical orientations and movements meant in their time and mean for you (for) now? We are also asking this as you have published your autobiography in several volumes. What is the function and significance of one's life for your thinking?

3. You wrote your PhD thesis on Hegel's state and the law. But later on, you distanced yourself from Hegel's political position and sided with that of Spinoza. But, especially with regard to the concept of the state and its function in politics, the debate between Spinoza and Hegel is quite charged. We could maybe most easily raise a question by asking you the following: *from what position* does one speak about politics? How do we identify what we call politics in the first place?

4. Some theorists within contemporary Marxists link the renewal of Marxism to a renewed appreciation of Marxist science, namely of the critique of political economy. You seem to make a similar, yet at the same time profoundly different move. You seem to conceive of science differently: it is neither what allows us to appropriate external nature nor a form of accumulation of knowledge which would provide us with a sovereign basis for our practices. Nor is it an ontology. You rather point to what you describe in line with Spinoza as a new science, a new science of collective appropriation of the potentialities that are created by the very collective that is appropriating them. Science is then the form in

which an ontologico-practical self-knowledge, a know-how is created, by inventing the very means of knowing what a collective body can do in the (re)production of this very collective. One could understand science then as a science of the ontological consequences of collective practice, as an ontological science of collective potency. Could you tell us more about your position and the role science plays in your take on Spinoza and in your conception of materialism?

5. Could we link this discussion with your approach to Marx's *Grundrisse*. At one level of analysis, there seems to be a main point of disagreement with Althusser and his followers: Althusser locates *Grundrisse* in the pre-epistemological break, you see it as a major theoretical achievement. Is it still pertinent for you for the rethinking of Marxism as a conceptual and political tool?

6. At one point you remarked "I became a communist before becoming a Marxist." How do you describe and think through this delay or this tension?

7. You claimed that the European Union is a cage and a mess. It has rendered the general struggle against European Capital problematic if not impossible. Some claim that the alternative to the EU is the return to the nation-state and national currency. Is this or is there another alternative to the EU? Is politics possible in Europe today? Or is it only possible outside and beyond Europe and the EU?

8. You had a brief engagement with Catholicism and once stated that it was in this period when you realized that there is a possibility to unite thought and action. In what sense does this unity find an important paradigm within the domain of religion? It seems clear that if politics is separated from thought, it regresses to being something else (maybe administration or technocracy) - does the religious paradigm allow for a renewal of what regressed and lost its political capacities?

9. Can one do philosophy without being (actively) engaged in political militancy? Today what could be the link between the two? Is it philosophy which should be the theoretical form of political engagement, or is it theory, sociology, etc?

10. Some contemporary thinkers on the so-called left argue that we no longer live in capitalism, but we have 'regressed' to techno-feudalism, or corporate feudalism, neo-feudalism etc. What do you make of this?

11. We would like to address the complicated issue of violence in politics. If, as some claim, the period of revolutions are "over" in a traditional

sense and it seems difficult to say what it means to conceive of the revolution today, instead of revolutionary violence we seem to be experiencing an increase of violence in all dominant modes of "politics." How do you see the relation between violence and politics in general and in our present conjuncture?

12. Quite a few on the contemporary so-called left by an attempt to reconstruct socialism, be it democratic or otherwise. Communism, on the other side, does seem to have less of an appeal, how do you conceive of the relation between the two today

### Answers by Antonio Negri

I will start by answering your second question, I prefer to keep the first for last. That second question touches on my biography - how I became an "operaista" and what operaismo could still mean for me. I'll take a rather short tour to answer that. As a high school teenager, growing up in a strongly Catholic environment (the Veneto of the '40-'50s), I was enamored with Giordano Bruno, whom I celebrated with an immanent impetus. If anybody asked me, what was my creed at that time, I answered: a pantheist. But when I was just a little bit older, after graduating, I happened to collide with the harsh reality of the society in which I lived in, I quickly forgot the cosmic optimism of renascimental pantheism and willingly yielded to the reasons of a materialistic and humanist reading of the world and of life. That was the spirit in the schools where I was educated - a small number of secular schools in mostly clerical Italy, critical and anti-fascist schools in a country that had only recently reopened to democracy. A vague socialism, nourished however by a first-hand experience of militancy and a strong adherence to the class struggle, qualified my thought. And all my life, ever since. In my early 20s, I had a very brief stint on a far-left kibbutz (MAPAM) in Israel - working and studying, political activity and struggle had to go hand in hand. Since those times, I have never separated thought and action; philosophy and politics - more precisely: what I came to think and what I came to live; reason and body; all together. My philosophical apprenticeship was developed within a biopolitical setting. A few years later, when I encountered *operaismo*, it immediately impacted me (even before it was structured as a grand reference figure), because it posed the prior necessity to explain the world, I was fighting against in such a way that would allow the build of another one in which people could live in freedom and justice. Subjectivity was the starting point, from which to read the reasoning of objectivity, the workers' struggle was the starting point, from which to understand the capitalist development, living work was the starting point from which to understand exploitation: in short,

Marx had to be brought back on his feet, after what Engels, the socialist economists, the Stalinist bureaucrats have done to him, little by little, by reshaping and embalming him into an economic doctrine, into a relentless objective narrative of reification and fetishism. That was not what we, *operaisti*, wanted. For us it was necessary to re-read that reified world, not like a mass of people dazing in the capital-fetish, but as a virtual plot of an activity of subversion, as a project of another possible world. Living work against dead work. We started to inquire in the factories, co-researching together with the exploited, an analysis and definition for the ever-renewed technical composition and political composition of the proletariat, for a criticism of the institutions of the workers and those of the constitution, for programs and objectives of workers' struggles, etc. etc.: this is how *operaismo* presented itself in the first phase. Then, over the years, the color palette became larger, and the new method ("only the workers' point of view reveals the structure of the capitalist command") was used to reconstruct the chain of command and to analyze the critical points which were open to subversion - from the factory to the civil society, and then up to global (imperial) order.

Amidst this *operaista* experience, I found myself locked in a maximum-security prison and accused of crimes of terrorism (including that of having kidnapped and killed the head of the government of a large North Atlantic country). Evidently, I had little to do with such accusations: but how should I pass the time until new clear skies? As often happens in great misfortunes, I sought refuge in the enthusiasms of adolescence and so I remembered the pantheistic passion, when I had embraced a new way of life. But now I was a communist who had gone through the class struggle which I read in terms of *operaismo*: how should I move in this new vital reality? What philosophical imprint, what imagination should I enact to understand the new situation? I started to read Spinoza again. What new things could he ever tell me, there, inside a prison where every year an increasing number of defeated comrades passed by an entire generation wiped out from the political and democratic scene? First of all, a "principle of hope" had to be rediscovered. And you went to search for it in Spinoza, one might ironically ask me? Yet it was precisely in Spinoza that we sought and found a principle of freedom that opened up the given being, our condition as defeated. It will not be "hope", but it looks like it. Spinoza told us that divine does not mean transcendence (but I already knew this), but rather a plural horizon of immanence, populated by infinite ways of existence, therefore with infinite capacity of singularities to build the world, not as solitary individualities but as multitudes of singular ways. My atheism then lost even the appearance of a subtle negation of transcendence: the Spinozian God was built from the bottom of ethics, in the work of singularities. Immanence was constructive freedom. I don't know if it could be called hope, it was certainly a perception of eternity. Beyond

defeat, beyond the time of prison, so was the eternal being built. It did not precede us: it would follow us when we built it. But the eternal is life, and life is made up of that living work from which I, as a communist, had planned the struggle for a better future - for myself, for all the comrades with whom and for whom I had fought. Now, even though in prison, we resisted - we showed that the Communist political commitment (which our ethics was at the time) in the resistance against prison and against the destruction of our lives, prepared the revolt for the years to come. It also helped us to reorganize our knowledge. The Spinozian ethics was transformed into a communist ontology.

By contrasting Gramsci's "pessimism of reason" with the Spinozist optimism of rational imagination, by contrasting the "optimism of the will" of socialist modernism with Spinoza's "prudence" in experimenting solidarity and building common institutions.

## B.

I will try to answer questions 3 and 4 together because to me they seem to revolve around the same problem: that of the definition of a realistic, effective political science that is adequate for our time.

Let's start with Hegel: from the dialectical method that leads to Science through negation / the revelation of the real that leads to Wisdom - to Satisfaction that is, in the absolute possession of History, for what history Effectively is. History and Value are here identified. *Operaism* too, is dialectical in its method. It proceeds through a critical adhesion to reality, through a succession of negations and re-compositions that articulate the surface of the real - but always in the light of a power of liberation. *Operaism* dissociates History and Value (identifying critically their paths of becoming) and placing freedom (in a biopolitical sense) as the key to movement, as a power to be. From which position, then, can we talk about politics? From below, from the point of view of the subjectivity in struggle. A material, corporeal, singular, and common subjectivity. The Spinozian plot of this proceeding is evident from what has already been said in the previous answer - but here it is also useful to refer to Foucault, to the last cycle of lectures he gave at the Collège.

Hence starts a dialectical journey with several episodes. The first is what some have called a "critique of political economy", where "political economy" means the Real of Power - its productive capacity (capitalism) and its order of command (sovereignty), - where by "criticism" we mean that "point of view from below" which offers power to subjectivity. But to which subjectivity? To that which is at the same time exploited by the Capitalist and alienated by the Sovereign - and which reacts by constituting itself in "class consciousness". Now, class consciousness is not an essence (rediscovered), but a historical modality in continuous transformation (constructed). The inquiry is the way by which it can be

defined and understood, from time to time. The inquiry (especially as co-research, that is action/knowledge conducted in common) is a production of conscience, on which every collective political process of liberation is founded. This process arises "spontaneously" in the various situations in which there are movements against capital and its political order. This process becomes collective as soon as we recognize the possessive nature, or rather, the figure of robbery and rape typical of capitalist appropriation, and the inimical (antagonist) abstraction of the sovereign value imposed on subjectivities. If it is necessary to give recognition here this ontological passage (of Hegelian memory), it is nonetheless valid only in an inverted manner, with respect to what Hegelianism dictates: this is not the recognition of an opposite (ideally surmountable = absorbed and transformed) but the recognition of a new strength, of a constructive power that the conscience brings to the class. This passage - like other concepts on which we will dwell - is also always subjected to criticism (to the inquiry): as we will soon see.

I therefore use the term recognition (*Anerkennung*) outside of any possible reference to its reading and use by Habermas and his school. Kojève's reading of the "recognition", that exalts its humanist and creative power... to the point of ironically projecting it towards the "end of times", has always seemed more correct to me. But if we do not want to caricature the Hegelian discovery in this way and go to find it (where it was born) in the "Jenenser Philosophie", we will be able to recognize the historical and productive (therefore dialectical) figure of subjectivity as a material basis - then neglected, worse idealized - of Hegelianism. I believe I still preserve a link to this process of subjectivation - starting with my doctoral studies, including an Italian translation of the ethical system of the Hegel from Jena.

Hence, a second episode. When the critique of political economy has detected the point from which the collective power of "living labor" (= class consciousness) arises, here the whole picture is set in motion. A "new science" becomes possible - not only in terms of a collective self-awareness of the collective - of the class, of the multitude... - but in practical-political terms: one learns to recognize "what the body can do". The Spinozian model resonates here, in the face of the materialist power in the subject / class. The entire phenomenology of organizational processes - from the various party figures to the different modes of movements, from the multiple forms of counter-power to insurrectional experiences, etc. - is intertwined here, in the space of this episode. Living work, presenting itself as "class consciousness", develops collective convergences, intersections, ever wider socializations and often also a certain capacity for institution.

A third episode of this tale of recognition will consist in the effort to build the common. Class consciousness emerges here as cupiditas. Desire to build a world, a society, a life, where the faculty of humans to

work together, the status of social cooperation, the way in which singular subjects are sometimes able to invent new figures of subjectivity and new forms of life, decline this word: “the common” – a new subjectivation, composite, multitudinous, coherent, and capable of endowing itself with new institutions. *Ubi societas ibi jus*: but in an open, pluralistic way, with different names and common purposes, where *jus* / institutions is the ontological product of a collective power.

Thus, we go back to the beginning - to the event of subjectivation that determines the place from which we talk about politics. The place where it is said what desire nourishes it, what power holds it up, and what objectives it proposes to itself.

### C.

With reference to question 5.

The “Grundrisse” have now been assumed, despite Althusser's reservations, as central to the contemporary reading of Marx. On the other hand, the first editors and commentators - Rosdolsky in the first place - left little room for subsequent critical positions à la Althusser. This from the philological point of view. Or, if you like, from that of the archeology of “The Capital”.

But my use of the “Grundrisse” (and that of other *operaisti* authors) is not simply philological. We met the “Grundrisse” not in books but in life, we found them through the analysis of “The Capital” applied to the contemporary world - in short, by moving the lighthouse of “Das Kapital” onto our horizon of struggle. In fact, the “Grundrisse” sets theoretical premises (and sometimes proposes definitive concepts) for understanding the current state of capitalist development, or rather where it got now, in the century and a half that distances us from the drafting of “The Capital”. The Marxian intuitions in the “Grundrisse” (the crisis of the law of value / measure; the end of the classical working day; the preeminence and hegemony of technology and cognitive work - the so-called General Intellect - in the processes of accumulation; the alternation in the succession of the accumulation of exploitation and extraction (dispossession) of value; the insistence on the new nature of cooperation - the so-called Social Individual - etc. etc.) have become figures of the capitalist production of contemporary society. *Operaismo*, by using these conceptual schemes, became able in the 70s to understand (simultaneously with its occurrence) the process of transformation of the mode of production (from Fordism to post-Fordism) which reinvested and renewed global capitalism; and again in the 80s and 90s, became able to grasp the birth and development of neoliberalism as an ideology of financial capital imposed on the rising trend of cognitive labor, to



reorganize the terrain of exploitation; and again in the 2000s, was able to understand the process of globalization of production and the markets, the new figure of networks and platforms, and the reconfiguration of the relations between reproduction and circulation (with respect to the categories of "The Capital"), etc.

But all this would only have theoretical importance if - within this analysis and anticipation of the trend - workerism did not offer the possibility of a (subversive) political attacking point of view, that is, if objective analysis did not bring with it the possibility to calibrate the working-class struggle within these processes, to move it as the engine of an antagonistic development in which it participates. The question is always: where is the point on which these transformations lead to capital crises? The answer lies in identifying a subjectivity which is able, time after time, to respond strongly to the crisis, to find insurrectional support in the crisis, to oppose command with political action, to constitute a new world. And it is in this co-measuring of the degrees of capitalist development (command) and the strength (power) of the class organization that lies the "doing politics" from the *operaista* point of view. It is in this light that the "Grundrisse" constitute an essential political weapon.

On the other hand, it is precisely by assuming the grid of the Marxian method of the "Grundrisse" that *operaismo* was able to proceed with the identification of the subject-in-struggle diversified in the various figures of capitalist development. The industrial working-class - whose technical composition Marx had begun to describe in *Capital* - is open to transformation in the "Grundrisse" - in the first place through the transformation of technologies, therefore of the different placement of living labor inside the constant capital; secondly, through the general and generic socialization of capital itself. In the first place, therefore, the technical composition of the working-class changes as cognitive function increases until it conquers hegemony in the production of value. Consequently, the political composition of the class will have to change, that is, the ways in which its antagonistic subjectivation becomes politically effective. The change in the technical composition affirms the possibility of the antagonistic transformation of the class, the political composition represents its new subjectivation.

Secondly – and we are now here, in the present - it will be a question of reconstructing the class dialectic in a situation where exploitation takes place through the "extraction" of value from the common (natural and human) - that is, from a multitude of singularities (cognitive and not) associated and precarious on the global terrain of financial command. It is within this chaotic world of common and constructed, continuous and alternative relationships that the *operaista* inquiry still moves on a global level.

I believe that Althusser, in the last period of his life and his research, came close to the same perception of the new composition of

the proletariat, understood precisely as a multitudinous set of precarious but productive existences and activities - and hence, of resistance.

D.

On question 7.

I have never considered the European Union as a cage for the working class. On the contrary, I have always thought (and acted, for example by declaring myself in favor of the referendums on the European Constitution against the opinion of most of the leftist forces) that European unity was the appropriate terrain for the working-class struggle in the age of globalization. I think even more so today, when we have entered a phase of relative (but effective) decline of the American hard (and/or soft) power (of the Washington consensus) on a global level - that is, the moment when a united Europe could play a formidable role of democratic alternative, where life forms are invented. I think that nationalist ideologies, even when they assert themselves in large patriotic movements, are always reactionary. To conclude: in the current period (of reorganization of American-dominated globalization) I think that the European Union must disengage from the NATO bond and present itself as the heir to anti-fascism and socialism of the twentieth century (exemplarily strengthening its welfare, its culture of rights, etc.).

E.

Here I will give an answer to questions 6 and 8.

Honestly, when I remember my participation in the Catholic activities, in the city of my youth, I don't feel about it as something that no longer belongs to me. It gave me an education in compassion and generosity, in the rational commitment to act, and in the concern to provide a collective operator to the action. These qualities I have transferred, such as they are, in my political action when I started to be a militant of the leftist parties. Why? I could answer that if there was a religious component in my youth (and there was, a profound one), that imprint was a participant in a sort of primitive communism, with the need to act together (all this was confirmed to me in the experience I mentioned, conducted in a communist kibbutz in Israel). Around the age of 30, all this moved into my adult consciousness, and it found its definitive habitat in Marxism. I still think that political action cannot be separated from a sort of religious breath, from a sort of ascetic élan: or better, that when politics is organized from below, from subjectivity in movement, and through massified and multiple subjectification processes, which are accompanied with desires, passions, practical purposes, and theoretical assumptions, a tension

towards the absolute is necessary. That this can be called religious, I emphasize again, I have no objection. However, I insist on the fact that, at the same time, here the absolute dissolves into theoretical knowledge and collective action: it recognizes itself as the engine that pushes us forward, towards the realization of our programs, predisposing the critical tension in the judgment of reality and in the evaluation of the means. I consider of this critical dimension an Enlightenment tradition not so much coming from French Jacobinism as from the Italian thought between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, between Vico and Leopardi - when the religious paradigm in its absoluteness is planted in history as something that must be transformed into true knowledge and political passion for liberation. It is evident that my passage through Spinoza is affected by this theoretical imprint. It amuses me to recognize that my materialism - which in my maturity has become a solid and compact habit - sometimes shines with these precious stones that religious experience has set in it. When in the proletariat I see that mass of the poor that the Franciscans wanted to organize through cooperation and solidarity in the liberation from poverty, I take on that task again in the ethical structure of the political. This attitude serves also to understand that the political project can never be detached from its movement and mass management, because politics is totally, absolutely immanent. The recognition of this confusion between politics and religion - and its subsequent dissolution - allows us to arrive at the affirmation of the immanence of the political. Through the most explicit and strong criticism of every form of transcendence (and/or transcendentality) of power, thus destroying all pre-eminence of the means over the end, of the coercion of the norm over the constituent power of social movements.

It is within this materialist horizon, which is absolutely immanent, extremist in the negation/destruction of all transcendence, that the religious inspiration is freed from any naturalistic and/or identitarian reference - that is, from any coercive envelope that may have regulatory tables and rules, mandatory for individuals and/or against the multitude. Our time is plagued by impetuous returns of reactionary normativity, against the civil rights (singular and/or collective) that the last hundred years of democratic and class struggles have conquered. This normative reaction has often been claimed as a restoration of nature and/or of norms in force in previous historical periods, considered as original. Now, nature and identity (especially considered as historical sources of norms and/or sovereignty) have become repressive devices that should be resisted and destroyed - and this can happen only if criticism and thought are accompanied by a subversive passion, in respecting the freedom of each one and the power of the multitude, in demystifying and therefore transforming nature and identity to the point of making them devices of cooperation and liberation - it is only on this condition that a warm pace of struggle for absolute democracy will still be possible.

F.

The answer for questions 10 and 11.

It seems to me that the answer to questions 10 and 11 can be constructed by following on the questions 6 and 8. Those questions pose as a problem the current conjuncture of capitalist domination, and the possibility of a revolutionary insurgency is questioned - and exactly in this regard the vexed question of political violence has been reopened.

Now, this series of problems can be grouped into a single knot, already present in previous conversations - and that is the current condition of democracy in the "West" (to use a term accustomed to reactionary thinking) and how a struggle for absolute democracy can be handled through bottom-up practices.

Let's start by asking ourselves how this current figure of the capitalist command could be configured and named. The terms "neo-feudalism", "techno" and/or "corporate feudalism" allude to the increasingly evident mixture of entrepreneurial and political-institutional power. However, these terms are not able to designate the fact that these neo-feudal figures are not given only to the structure of the productive society but have deeply penetrated the profound structure of the state and its articulations. Therefore we'd better keep the term of "political capitalism". "Political capitalism" means that we invest the entrepreneurial instances with sovereign characteristics. Here capital not only penetrates the sovereign structures but invests them entirely and rearticulates them according to financial and productivist logics. While this phenomenon partially concerns all the so-called nation-states, however, it completely involves only two or three pluri-national or imperial sovereign structures - USA, China, and a few others - which within globalization have now reached this level - because these are the only actors that we can say enjoy sovereignty in the full meaning of the term. As for the others we will speak of semi-sovereignty or, more specifically, of the degree of subjection in which they are placed in the global order. On this scale, the figures of "political capitalism" can be defined and indexes can be established, concerning its effectiveness and consistency - from a plus (+) of power granted to the conjunction of capital and state to a minus (-) which is not so much the sign for the intensity of the conjunction of power made from the fusion of entrepreneurship and political power, as for the placement in the hierarchy of global integration. A minimum of sovereignty therefore. The difficulties of the struggle for absolute democracy are multiplied by these dissymmetries of political capitalism in the global order, which prevent the repetition of internationalist slogans and make paths of global convergence impassable for the revolutionary forces. On the other hand, it is precisely in these niches of the global order that revolutionary struggles continue to take place. Violence always coexists with these struggles, not as their necessary presupposition and prefiguration, but as an elastic capacity to

react (to respond) to the repression, arrogance and provocations directed so frequently against the proletarians by the technical-bureaucratic elites which exalt themselves in political capitalism.

That said, to go back where we began, let us remember that resistance constitutes the normal condition of the citizen in the global political order - in the many forms in which the global capitalist order presents itself. To say politics is to say resistance - for as long as absolute democracy will be still lacking. It does not matter what is form in which the resistance, the counter-power present themselves: what matters is that they are there. It is resistance that gives heat to the political. Without resistance there is no politics. And with resistance there is always violence - which gets a higher temperature, degree after degree, by measuring itself against the degradation of democracy that is produced by political capitalism, at every level.

In the current conjuncture, that is, in the era of "political capitalism", the inherence of violence in government activity and in social life has become increasingly radical and invasive, so much so that the violence of the government (of the command) more and more often, overflows and stagnates in the society - everywhere: daily violence in the social sphere develops before, after and through the activities of government - and they both seem related to each-other - and in any case elusive and out of proportion. Amidst social disorder and misery and the generalized control of citizens' behavior/customs, amidst popular revolts and their repression up to "special operations", "wars on behalf of third parties", and then ... the glamour of nuclear war - amidst the so-called "civil society" and the state there is now only one thread, that of the violence of command. Are we to draw here a Hobbesian conclusion, the imperative to undergo a contract that constitutes the state as absolute sovereignty and the obligation to obey it? This question is not understandable - because the subjects have changed, they are irreducible to absolute command and to the mediations of a contractual democracy that wants to introduce them to the sovereign - even though they find themselves having to act in a time when structures and liberation movements are lacking, an ebbing time for democratic experiences, a time of melancholy and frustration. At the same time, the subjects express an exasperated singular demand for absolute democracy. The subject that appears in the era of political capitalism holds within itself a tension of resistance (in a latent way) and a potential for political rationality which, together, nourish and prepare (in an indefinite time) a boundless expression of political violence.

If the violence (which is in the society) cannot be removed, it becomes important to reason and to ask ourselves what is a legitimate measure of force that subjects can collectively express while practicing those actions of counterpower that allow them to live. The concept of legitimacy, which in other times is characterized by the democratic public

law as the right balance of state rule and civil consensus, is pulled from all sides in this contemporary period of the global order in crisis. The right balance, the measure of agreement between the figures of the global order and the actors of political capitalism is really difficult to find. Yet this is the condition in which we live. Whatever be the fog that obscures our progress and the fog that render opaque the right path that should be found, the fact persists (even made definitive, from the revolutions of the twentieth century) that we live in a society where power is dual, and consists of a relationship, always asymmetrical, never reducible to identity. Sovereignty opposes freedom, capital opposes the living labor. This double opposition, which includes various degrees of violence, must be experienced on the one hand and governed on the other. But if living in itself presents no problems and resistance can coexist with everyday life, governing is instead forced to impose his command, to seek a solution which will put it in control and allow it to overcome that now centuries-old condition of double power. But what is that solution? It cannot be an illusory peace (or the closure of the antagonistic relationship: which are what fascisms, on all continents, propose, namely violence against anyone who has their eyes fixed on absolute democracy).

The tableau now is open, dramatically open. We just have to conclude: let us advance with prudence and firmness in the direction of absolute democracy. Without fear, with hope, let us try to resolve the civil war to our advantage.

G.

I am answering here to question 9.

Here we are raising many issues. Putting them in order - in my order of understanding and constructing an adequate response - they can be summarized as follows: 1/ is the plot of political commitment perhaps traceable on the ground of sociological theory or on that of political theory? 2/ what link can exist between political philosophy and the concrete dimensions of the political phase (strategy and tactics...)? 3/ and finally, can we do politics without political militance?

To answer the first of these questions, to enter the matter in a non-bizarre way, it would be very useful, I think, to resort to some examples, that is to remember how, in the experience of politicians, every answer to the question whether in their activity prevails the reference to the political sociology or to theory, would be meaningless. Let's look at Lenin for example. During his pre-revolutionary subversive activity, he continually links the analysis of the development of capitalism in Russia to the phenomenological survey of the activities of revolutionary movements. The relationship is often contradictory, in other times the devices of knowledge and action work well together. Especially in the

post-revolutionary government activity, Lenin interprets and acts on the construction of socialism (or to put it better, on the transition to socialism) always standing on the limit between the objective conditions (economic, sociological ...) of the social and the subjective devices (tactical or strategic) that are determined by the clash between the counter-revolutionary forces. The political here is marked by a continuous ambivalence. Ambivalence as an openness and as a decision. It would not be appropriate to call it a dialectic - dialectic opens all doors, yes, it is a useful key but for that very reason often a false key, just a rhetoric one. The political is ambivalent, and even that which resolves it, what determines it, remains ambivalent. Max Weber (mainly on theoretical grounds) does not think differently when dealing with the political, even though he charges with romanticism the decision that breaks the phenomenological ambivalence of the political process - he still considers the decision homogeneous to the other analytical elements of the definition of the political. And we could give other examples. I like (in order to define the experience of the politician) to read the biography of the great politicians: Churchill, de Gaulle, Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi Minh - all are prisoners of the reality that they break: of course, they build another one, but that would still bear the signs, certainly satisfied by escaping the first difficulty - nevertheless always in contact with that very first one.

Hence the answer to the second question: what link between political philosophy and political reality is placed by the subject, by the political actor, by the base, within the political process? Political philosophy can certainly easily transform itself into political theory when - by pruning off every passion of the subjects - you consider political processes with the gaze of the botanist or the statistician. But it is a game that does not last long. Even when the political system seems stable in the long run, it is always shaken by unforeseen events and crossed by resistance: governing always means to invest in a level of political subjectivation, it always means giving a hand to the infrastructures and the constitutive relationships of command and obedience. To govern is always to exercise (in explicit or latent form) a constituent power. Now, the ambivalence of the subject and the object that the political process nourishes is always experienced and sometimes resolved by the political work of the subjects - that is, by the multitude of singularities. It can be resolved according to various measures that make the command or the conduct antagonistic to it prevail. However, the evaluation of the concrete constitutes the decisive element. And this is not only true when you must solve tactical problems, linked to the possibilities of the present, but also when you project the action into a strategic perspective. Where, for example, moving for the communist revolution can often mean advancing only one step on the very long road that the realization of an absolute democracy draws.



The answer to the third question (can one do political philosophy without political militancy?) will be short. Yes, if doing philosophy is an operation detached from the device of absolute democracy: this is what almost all departments of political philosophy do. Otherwise no: political militancy gives consistency to philosophical thought. On the other hand, when aiming at absolute democracy one does philosophy to destroy the existing politics, how can one think of destroying it without adequate practice? Without transforming resistance into counter-power? And in the thought that will execute all this?

#### H.

I have put together questions 11 and 12 because they bring us back to the present. To the present history. A very murky present: there is war again in Europe, "real socialism" is no longer there - and you may add that the Revolution has disappeared from the future - lost in the mists of the twentieth century. The anti-fascist democratic remnants of the constitutional systems invented at the end of the European Civil War of the Thirty Years (1914-1945) float in putrid waters: the social-democracy that had given up the class struggle in exchange for the promise of a progressive social democracy, has reached the end of its path, while the forces that refer to the bosses, to the financial power and of course to the principles of a reactionary government, are increasingly credited with a long-term legitimacy. Communism is now spoken of as a sinister tale of a non-renewable past. As for the present, it is disgusting when it is not deadly, while the past is unspeakable when it is not erased. If you accept this image of the present, you must lower your arms, surrender.

I am a 17th century scholar. I began by studying the birth of the modern state in the seventeenth century - then finding similar paths in Foucault. Then I worked in different periods on the political thought of Descartes and Spinoza. Of the first I emphasized the ability to keep alive a line of independence of thought and an experience of freedom viable in the face of the affirmation of the absolute sovereign state and the consolidation of the reaction against the humanist subversion of the medieval order. A compromise, a "reasonable ideology", those produced by Descartes against the renewed domination of theological thought and the terrorist projections provoked by the condemnation of Galileo - that is, the Renaissance renewal of science. In Spinoza, I learned the ability to build and keep alive a humanist project of "absolute democracy".

What could have happened, that characterizes a century so deeply and offer such a dramatic background to the thought of Descartes, but above all to the thought of Spinoza? A devastating war, also lasting thirty years, which halved the population of central Europe and which was accompanied by epidemics and ecological disasters, which ended with the defeat of that revolutionary movement in knowledge, religion



and in the construction of institutions in the name of freedom which had characterized at least the previous two centuries. The absolute state that asserted itself in France and Spain, the defeat of the revolt of the reformed cities, and on the other hand the Council of Trent and the Catholic Counter-Reformation which concluded with the victory of the "cujus regio, ejus religio", in the exaltation of theology as the legitimacy of the politician. The Baroque and its culture are the artistic and ideological seal of the era. And all this takes place on a planetary sphere, in a now global world - when the crisis imposed on the traditional powers of the European territories is resolved among other things (but in an increasingly evident way) by the enterprise and by the global expansion of command and exploitation, by the nascent colonialism after the discovery of the Americas.

Well, I have seen this fairy tale of the defeat of the humanist revolution renewed, through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: the defeated subject is now the proletarian, socialist revolution, the Commune. Here everything has been projected forward and made more exemplary by the enormous dimensions of the events, the communication techniques, and the standardization of the ideological impact. No longer Europe alone, but the entire planet was then the scene of the revolutionary movement, its power and subsequent defeat. And it is the set of linguistic and ideological parameters constituting the relations of power and class that are involved in this process. The realization of economic globalization (on unimaginable technological levels) finally brings this condition to perfection. Where the state of the first modernity could have been forced (through class struggles and a laborious evolution) towards the rule of law and sometimes to embody itself in the democratic nation-state, today, in the current situation, similar processes of transformation seem impossible or in any case irrelevant compared to the establishment of some large global sovereign formations, opposed to each other. Socialism was thus defeated, communism was swept away with violence, postmodernism (a true baroque language of the present) now constitutes the ideological framework of legitimation of a transcendental - global - restoration at this level of the capitalist power against which the struggle has risen, starting from the beginning of the nineteenth century.

I am a citizen of this catastrophe - I have experienced on my skin the defeat of the class-struggle, of the exploited, the poor, the excluded - a violence that has passed through my body. In the solitude of defeat, in jail already, when it was now difficult for me to breathe, the recognition of the enemy and the sense of a possible rebirth never left me. Today there is a war between the West and the East, between two powers equally incapable of producing freedom: well, let them hurt each other! May they shatter their strength in fighting each other, and against each other, and thus weaken - it will be born, from the grief, suffering and misery that provoke, perhaps,

a new strength which rejects war in a radical way, and thinks peace as the essential condition in which men are given life, more life.

You tell me that communism, in the form that we already tried, will no longer appear as a power in action. And who will ever want to see the Bolshevik Party's Politburo perform on Red Square again? But I continue to thank heaven that in the winter of 1942 the resistance of the Communist people to the Nazis in Stalingrad allowed the Red Army to follow the path that brought it to Berlin. And to those who ask me to reread Hegel to understand the present, I answer in the affirmative: on condition that I place Stalingrad rather than Jena at the center of the dialectic of the future. And to those who point out to me that eighty years have passed since Stalingrad and that that image has fatally tarnished, I remember that the oppressed have continued to revolt relentlessly - and that globalization has shown the convergence and interaction of postcolonial and of gender movements that want to change the world, but also the anxious and militant awakening of a humanity tired of seeing the nature massacred for the purpose of accumulation.

In short, I joined the party of "absolute democracy" and as I explained to you in the previous pages, as a militant I consider with interest every movement (and all the more every event) that in any way proposes to advance on that path for that project. Without any teleological pretense and without any prophetic impulse. On the other hand, I keep seeking, inquiring, moving in the co-research of movement, discovering tendencies of mass subjectivation and then keeping myself busy by trying to translate all of them into operational devices.

I am 90 years old, but I am not tired of doing this politics, of practicing this *Wissenschaft*.

Translated by Arbër Zaimi

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