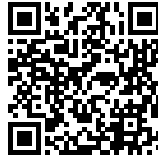


THE POLITICAL CLASS

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An expression of society, in the sense of Georg Simmel's "forms of socialization," the articulation: oligarchy-the masses, the ruling class-the people, the rulers-the governed or the elite-the masses constitutes a constant historical regularity or factor, like the sacred-profane, friend-enemy, command-obedience or community-society polarities. There is no historical epoch that escapes the dynamics of oligarchies. It leaves its mark on social institutions, but also on the creations of the spirit, from urban planning and architecture to literature and even cinema. Giuseppe T. di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, Jean Renoir's *Rules of the Game* and other such masterpieces unintentionally transcend their time, for they contain a universal lesson, a superior and forgotten banality: the persistence of a political class—beyond men and their rhetoric.

But the discovery of the "political class" and its empirical analysis are relatively recent. It is a phenomenon that is barely registered in the sociological literature from the twentieth century onwards. It is true that there is already an acute awareness of it in Greece and Rome, even for its effects on the government of the city. It is no accident that classical political philosophy—the Western one for us, although there are other comparable traditions—has only been possible once life as freedom—primarily external (freedom of movement) and deployed in public space, in the agora and the forum—was discovered, and how it could be disturbed by the oligarchic dynamics inherent in the political cycle. At the equinoxes of the cycle, between the concentration of power (monocracy) and its disintegration (pluralism), there have always been opposing processes of oligarchization and desoligarchization of government, of construction, destruction and reconstruction of the political class. A Spanish singularity, conditioned by the weakness of the State and by our inextinguishable 19th century, is the absence of a solid political class.

There was already, in a way, an implicit sociology or theory of the political class in the great historians of antiquity, who described these cyclical processes with the greatest naturalness. There is also, no doubt, in the brilliant Tingitan Moor, Ibn Khaldun, anticipator in the 14th century of the Paretian theory of the circulation of the elites, with his meditation on the "esprit de corps" (*asabiyyah*), which animates the ruling class until its decline, impossible to contain, in the span of four generations.

From the 19th century onwards, examples of a sociology of the political class, latent and rarely expressed as such, abound, from Saint-Simon ("*Parable of the Industrialists*") to *Joaquin Costa* (*Oligarquía y caciquismo—Oligarchy and Caciquism*), passing through *Lorenz von Stein* (social movements and monarchy), for whom the conflictive dynamics between the established power (political class or elite), the insurgent power (counter-elite) and the people (dependent and politically

null masses) is the key to the laws of social movement and, particularly, of the general subversion triggered by the French Revolution. A more polemical coloration has the diffuse perception of the phenomenon of the power elite, besides Karl Marx, in [Franz Oppenheimer](#) and his anti-political critique of the predatory state and its ruling class, and in Thorstein Veblen and his study of the idle class.

But the great moment of the theory of the political class is in the early years of the last century, previously conditioned by the understanding of the phenomenon of contemporary crowds ([Gabriel Tarde](#), [Gustave Le Bon](#) and, later, José Ortega y Gasset). Leaving aside the studies on political parties by James Bryce (*The American Commonwealth*) and Moisey Ostrogorsky (*Democracy And The Organization Of Political Parties*), the sociological doctrine of elites is forever fixed in the work of the neo-Machiavellian masters: Vilfredo Pareto (*Treatise on Sociology*), Gaetano Mosca (*Elements of Political Science*) and Robert Michels (*Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchial Tendencies of Modern Democracy*). In these books, the iron law of oligarchy is reinvented rather than invented.

The "elite school" of sociology textbooks, after World War II, saw very different developments on the two sides of the Atlantic. In the political sociology of Harold D. Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan (*Power and Society*), Charles Wright Mills (*The Power Elite*) and Robert A. Dahl (*Polyarchy*), focused on the expression of real and apparent power in pluralistic democratic societies. And in the metapolitics with polemical overtones cultivated by Giuseppe Maranini (*Gobierno parlamentario y partidocracia*) and Gonzalo Fernández de la Mora (*La partidocracia*), for whom there have never ever been non-oligarchic governments. Christopher Lasch's critique of contemporary elites and their "betrayal of democracy" (*La rebelión de las elites*) deserves special mention.

The fundamental social dichotomy is, according to Pareto, that which separates the population into a "lower layer, the non-elite class" and an "upper layer," divided in turn into a "governmental elite," the political class in the strict sense, and a "non-governmental elite." On the other hand, as Mosca points out, the struggle for power does not pit the ruling class against the people. This is a self-serving illusion maintained by all aspirants to power. The competition for power is in reality a family affair: a struggle between the ruling class and its opponent, who struggles to assert itself at all costs. Or between the *de iure* political class and the *de facto* ruling class, which brings together what Carl Schmitt has called "indirect powers" (*potestas indirecta, indirekte Mächte*).

Nothing of what has been said prevents a "molecular renovation" of the political class, incorporating elements of the rival class or of the lower classes. This is, according to Pareto, the "circulation of the

elites" or, rather, as Michels corrects him, the "amalgamation" of these with the lower classes. There is, then, in the dynamics of the elite, a "continuous endosmosis and exosmosis between the upper class and some fractions of the lower class" (Mosca), a variable dose of unpremeditated gatopardism. In this sense, the major quarrels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the constitutional question, the social question and the cultural question—are an expression of the process of renewal and replacement of the elites to which the people attend, by force, as spectators. The reactivation in the 21st century, on a maximum scale, of an equivalent conflict over identity and roots, does not leave the people any more room for maneuver. For the ruling elite advocates revolution from above, while those who aspire to power advocate revolution from below.

The transformation of the political class is a process that has a surprising endogenous cause, since the prolongation in time of a leadership depends only on its faith in the legitimate acquisition of its right to rule. Effective power, what can we do, has impure sources. Whoever has lost this kind of certainty is politically hopeless.

The historical materialism of the Left, faced with the failure of Marxist eschatological forecasts about the revolution, resorted, with the forced footing of an elusive final victory, to the issuing forth of cultural hegemony (Gramsci) to correct the course of events. The Paris Commune has long overshadowed revolutionary history, much more so, if possible, when comparing France with the success of the October Revolution, for it makes one think that something like that, that of Moscow, could not come to fruition west of the Vistula.

With time, the New Right of the 1970s also acquired this business of hegemonies, with ephemeral enthusiasm, transferring it later, in the 1990s, with its deserters, to the systemic, liberal and conservative Right. The latter, without a long-term political strategy, leverage on Gramscism and its moderate variant of the Kulturkampf, the "cultural war," not of every day, but of the great occasions, rarely shows its face, waiting perhaps for its turn. In Spain it is like that.

From the perspective of the circulation of the elites, Gramscism, Left or Right, is a pure hallucination, a gimmicky but inane gesture. It never bears the promised fruits, that sort of "infant colic" in which ends, as Carlo Gambescia usually says, the folklore of the "politics of culture," both of the Left and of the Right, but mostly of the latter.

Since the end of World War II, what has been truly profitable for the Left is "psychological warfare,"

generalized in the West by Marxism-Leninism—and today also exploited to the full, but in a different way, by various ideological substitutes. At its height, during the Cold War, psychological warfare, according to the original definition of Jules Monnerot, inventor of the term, "aimed to destroy the adversary as an organized force," but also, and this is decisive, "to strip him of all his reasons for living and hoping" (The war in question). The Gramscist policy is a decoy that hides the real objective of the attack—to raise bad conscience in the political class, to laminate its sense of legitimacy and to make it believe that everything is already lost beforehand. The remorse of the ruling class, often imaginary and motivated by fatigue or fear, together with the instinct of survival, shed light on unheard-of, seemingly inexplicable cessions and twists—the "controlled blowing up" of the State of Fundamental Laws (a suicide of the old political class assisted by the new political class) or Wokism (mostly a strategic diversion practiced by an insidious enemy to morally disarm our capacity of resistance).

The elite, whether political or economic, can compromise the success of democratic regimes, particularly their representativeness, which is often the principle that suffers most from the iron law of oligarchies. Faced with the inexorable rigor of this sociological law, which transforms democratic representativeness into co-optation (even conjugal) or hereditary succession, all kinds of countermeasures have been devised: the imperative mandate; the plebiscite and other institutions of "direct democracy;" the Party, it is understood to be communist; the (futile) renunciation by the ruling class of its privileges; and (tedious) "citizen participation," which tends to politicize everything. The "countermeasures" or "political formulas" (Mosca) prop up an elite that has lost almost all its civic virtues and needs new sources of legitimization: French resistentialism or Italian liberationism of the second postwar period or Spanish anti-Francoism. The formula may change, but not its stabilizing political function in a period of transformation, in which the loss of the elites' sense of reality is accentuated.

Unaccustomed to effective command—since their governance is often vicarious—or reluctant to deal with inferiors, with the "retarded of history" ([Chantal Delsol](#)), perhaps sick with sentimentality, perhaps frivolous, the declining elites are characterized today by their paradoxical conformity with subversive models. Enduring them has become exhausting for the citizen, particularly in his facet of subject or fiscal subject.

There is a generalized political weariness. Mass, plebeian politics—mass political parties, mass media, mass-man, vulgarized "political science" and, simplifying, populism—has sunk intelligence to abyssal levels. The European "political class," not to mention the Spanish one, has been coming, for too many years now, from cultural nothingness—for it, a provisional guarantee of adaptation and success. The

reverse selection of the elite, a democratically exploited process, is the delayed and unexpected effect of universal suffrage (Monnerot, a reader of Maurras).

Notwithstanding their usefulness, subtle fools flourish in the leadership—the "pure positive stupid" as described by Julio Camba: individuals in whom stupidity "is not a limitation of intelligence, but a substitution of it. The positive stupid reasons with stupidity. Stupidity is his form of intelligence" (*Alemania. Impresiones de un español—Germany. Impressions of a Spaniard*). Although it can be more diabolical than stupid, a good example of this is the "Sado-Leninist," a human type of little substance who emerges from the inexhaustible quarries of "post-structuralist theory," and at whom Aquilino Duque fired some of his darts, with curare, and more current today than in 1975 (*La estupidez de la inteligencia*).

With the hierarchical and implacable logic of merit, the current Spanish political leadership—present until the general elections—a band of rogues determined to live off the political cattle, to avoid being depredated themselves, could occupy, with luck, socially subaltern positions. However, no matter how much the political flood of stupidity rises, it has to go down, and it will go down, to normal and functional percentages for the regime.

The electoral polls are clamoring away. And also the drawing up of the lists, a touchstone for the reconfiguration of the demo-liberal political class. Exposed once again to the big game—any serious political theory is the scholium of a primordial political hunting—the Hobbesian state of nature must be, in comparison, like spending the afternoon in kindergarten. No one escapes Pareto's curse: the circulation of elites. What will become of all those dullards and second-timers who hope to cling to a general directorate, a section chief or a councilor's office, a small seat, a miraculous bush in the ravine of politics, when the waters recede? For their personal drama, glimpses of our electoral cycle, they would deserve that, at least, their name be attached to the monument of the unknown dismissed. A consolation prize for those who remain in the stream and will no longer have the opportunity to take root in the passive classes.

The inexorable renewal of the power elite, more or less rapid, that is what matters, has an impact on the social structure, since it also has its modest demographic facet. Arrivals and departures move up and down the social ladder—and the administrative ladders—and can arrive, like barbarians, to camp out in tribes or families, even by parity vouples, vulgo connubio, in the heart of the State or outside, in its periphery, occupying more imaginative or more discreet positions.

It will be seen at last, perhaps, that neither the political bosses—now macho-alphism, a "sexualized" and banal expression, but obedient to the biopolitical logic of the supreme art of vengeance—nor the dynasty—now caste—nor the entourage—now rabble and, again, after so much Wolf-Ravine disaster, mob—are outdated political categories. Much less will they be Francoist... except for those who, without realizing it, by associating "Francoism" and "regularities of the political," transform the accidentalism of a "constituent dictatorship of development" (Rodrigo Fernández-Carvajal) into a superstring theory of politics to which is attributed the quality of explaining everything. Senile memory (Aquilino Duque) has unprecedented returns: Franco and Francology, the beginning of everything!

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[Featured](#): *The Red Tower*, by Giorgio de Chirico; painted in 1913.
