

The crises of capitalism as political crises: from Tronti's workerism to Amable and Palombarini's neo-realism.

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Résumé

L'article a deux objectifs principaux : premièrement il s'agit de retracer l'interaction entre les concepts de « crise » et de « politique » dans la pensée ouvriériste italienne, en particulier dans la pensée de Mario Tronti pendant sa période aux « Quaderni Rossi » et « Classe Operaia ». La vision de Tronti de la crise du capitalisme comme crise politique « réelle » paraît être très utile pour l'explication de la crise présente. Cette utilité est confirmée par des travaux récents d'Amable et Palombarini et de leur approche dite néo-réaliste. Les différences entre ces deux modèles proposés par les auteurs susmentionnés seront analysées au fil de l'article pour aboutir à une partie conclusive qui ne visera pas tant à obtenir une synthèse, quant à ouvrir de nouvelles pistes de recherche, pour poursuivre le chemin de répolitisation de l'économie politique commencé par Amable et Palombarini.

Mots-Clés : crise, politique, ouvriérisme, classes sociales, blocs-sociaux

ABSTRACT

The following paper's aim is twofold. First, it wishes to retrace the interaction between the concepts of "crisis" and "political" within Italian workerism. According to Tronti, all crises of the Capitalist mode of production are the results of "real" political crisis, pointing at class conflict as the main source of change during the Capitalist era. This concept of crisis appears to be useful in explaining today's crisis. This statement is validated by recent works proposed by Amable and Palombarini and the interest raised by their neo-realist approach. The differences between these two models will be underlined over the article and will culminate in a final part that will not aim for an impossible synthesis, rather it will highlight new research paths, so as to keep open the work of repoliticisation of political economy started by Amable and Palombarini.

Keywords: crisis, politics, workerism, classes, social alliances

A. INTRODUCTION

Recently, some members of the Parisian *Ecole de la Régulation* have shown interest in the way the double crises of the economy and of the political system, intertwine together. In particular, two authors, Amable and Palombarini, proposed in 2005 what they called a *neo-realist approach*, that, starting from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of hegemonic blocs, tries to develop a new model of political economy. Yet in the history of Italian Marxism, Gramsci's idea of Hegemonic Bloc has been contested. Among those who disagreed with him, or at least on the official interpretation of his thought given by the PCI (Pozzi et al. 2005), we can find the group of the Operaisti which developed a different vision of how power relations were incorporated within the state apparatus. The aim of this article is to present a summary of these two different, and yet related, streams in order to underline similarities and differences, as well as limits and gains, of both the recent *regulationist* developments and early workerism.

With this work, I do not wish to achieve an impossible synthesis between two approaches that are opposite. Rather, my goal is to provide the reader with a larger view on the double nature of crisis in the capitalist mode of production as both a moment of economic restructuring and political recomposition/decomposition. This objective can be operationalized in two questions: a) what does "political" mean in neo-realist and workerist political economy? b) What features (and lessons) of workerism should be retained by the neo-realist approach?

In order to present the main ideas behind the two streams in analysis, I have decided to limit the discussion to some selected works and authors as examples of their own "schools". If this choice has almost no impact over the discussion on *neo-realist* approach due to its young age, I cannot honestly maintain the same for workerism.

The work is structured as follow. Each of the analysed stream (*Ecole de la Régulation*, workerism and then Negri, these two last streams separated mainly because of the importance of the latter) is divided in a theoretical and an empirical part. In the former, the reader will find the discussion on authors' key ideas and an explication of their terminology. The empirical part, instead, presents some examples of concrete applications pursued by either its main proponent or other authors. In the first section I will then present the Neo-realist approach and its Dominant Social Blocks framework, recently developed by Amable and Palombarini. These authors both belong to the Parisian stream of the *Ecole de la régulation* and propose their model as both an innovation and a restauration of the original spirit of the regulatory approach. Together with the model, the article also summarizes the main findings of its application to the Italian and French case. In the second section, the article briefly introduces some of the key features of Italian workerism, with a focus on Mario Tronti's passage from early workerism to the autonomy of the political, and ends discussing the works of Sergio Bologna and Romano Alquati. Antonio Negri's thought during the 1970s and the concrete case of the Historic compromise are the object of our third section. Finally, the last section will draw a comparison of all the features underlined in the rest of the article, thus highlighting the limits of these different streams, all united by a very *political* vision of political economy.

B. THE NEO-REALIST APPROACH AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF NEO-LIBERALISM

B.1 THE NEO-REALIST APPROACH AND THE DSB FRAMEWORK: INFLUENCES, FEATURES, OBJECTIVES.

Our point of departure is 2011 (the first, English, version) and 2012 (the final French version) works of Amable, Guillaud and Palombarini "The Political Economy of Neo-Liberalism in Italy and France". These texts are, in the case of Amable and Palombarini, the first comprehensive application of a framework unifying political and systemic crises that both have been developing during the last decade (see for example Palombarini 2003, and Amable and Palombarini 2009). What I labelled in this article as a "Dominant Social Blocs approach" is

intended to be part of a larger work of rethinking (heterodox) economics that goes under the name of “*neo-realist approach*” (Amable and Palombarini 2005). Goal of this approach is to develop a political economy rejecting the normative values of neo-classical economics (*ibid.*: p. 269) and having its focal points: a) in the social features characterizing the reality (*ibid.*: p. 247); b) in the way societies regulate conflict (*ibid.* : p.246). The point of departure is the critique of the *Public Choice* approach in political economy: this school has its merits having renewed an interest in the “political” that the economists have long lost. However, their cadre of analysis is judged poorly for a series of reasons: a) it is still much influenced by the neo-classical normative stance; b) it analyses the political in an institutional framework that is static and independent from politics c) it states the primacy of the “*economy*” over the “*political*”. (Palombarini 2000)

The neo-realist approach is different from the *Public Choice* School in many ways. First, it policies and institutions as one temporary way to regulate social conflict. As such, it separates itself from the *Public Choice School* in depicting a dynamic and bidirectional interaction between the political and the economy, where none of the two moments stands before the other. Second, it broadens the field of analysis taking into account the bloc building process, that is a political process able to produce institutional changes. Third, it does not dwell much on the, normative, ideas of distortion and economic equilibrium, privileging instead those of “*social change and co-evolution of the political and the economy*” (Palombarini 2000, p.3-4).

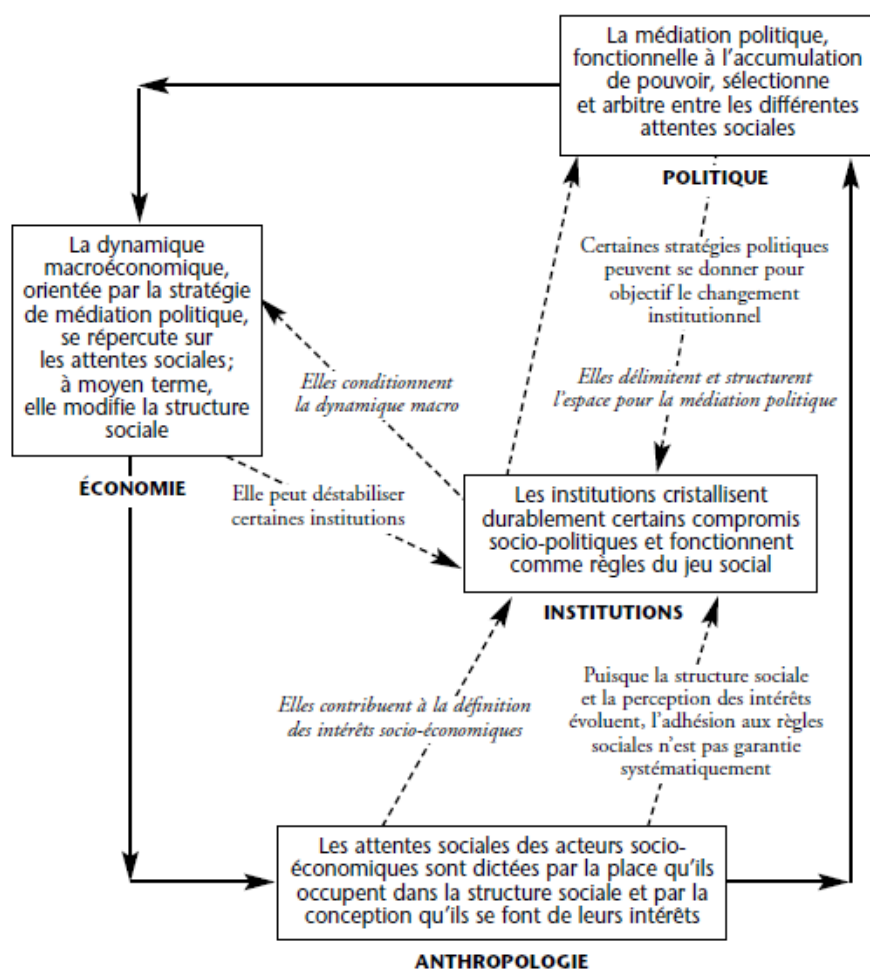


Fig. 1: The neo-realist framework. Source: Amable and Palombarini 2005, p. 268

In this general framework, this research is interested in the attention given to the relationship between social alliances and economic policies/institutions. In order to understand the scholars' reasoning, it is important to define a few key concepts. The first term we need to clarify is that of “Dominant Social Bloc” (DSB), defined as:

“the social alliance whose interests are protected by the public policy and which is sufficiently strong to politically validate such a policy” (ibid. : p.1169).

. If “*policy requires politics*” (Gourevitch 1986: 1), it is still important to define what is *politics* as well. In a neo-realist approach, politics is also the product of different social interests or, as the authors says “*from the viewpoint of the political economy of institutions, the stability of a model of capitalism depends on the stability of the social alliances that support the fundamental compromises on which the model rests*” (Amable et al 2012a : p.1169). The heterogeneity of the latter drives politics to a situation of conflict that each political system tries to regulate. Moreover, economic policies are linked back to the different social stratification present in each country, since the level of analysis is the nation-state, and the electoral behavior of each different stratum. Thus, the approach emphasizes the role of political parties/coalitions as the autonomous representatives of different social groups. Being autonomous from the social groups they wish to represent, political parties usually adopt strategies to widen the groups supporting them. As such, there is then a tension between the different agencies taken into account and the model underlines that it is not automatic for the actors involved to find a compromise.

The difficulties in finding a political equilibrium within these groups may lead to two different types of crises. A crisis is therefore either *political* or *systemic*. The first one is defined as “*a situation where there is no room for political mediation between social groups belonging to the dominant bloc within a given institutional structure*”, while the second identifies a situation “*in which political actors experience difficulties in finding some institutional change strategies in order to aggregate a social bloc that could become dominant*” respectively (Amable et al. 2011: p.6). This distinction, and especially latter definition, closely recalls Gramsci's organic crisis. It is important to clarify that for Amable and Palombarini the focus is more on institutions the limits they put in finding a viable social compromise. Differently, Italian Marxist thinker, by organic crisis, meant to identify a situation where the presence of features from the older (and almost dead) system was still able to postpone the birth of a new model (Burgio 2014: pp.253-254) and this can be . In both systemic and organic crises, however, the key factor is the difficulty to build a new hegemonic (for Gramsci) or dominant (for the Parisian *régulationnistes*) bloc. Together with social groups, institutions (either social or political) play an important role and can be at the same time a limit to the goals of a DSB or the goal itself. A limit since institutions, being the *rules of the game*, delimit the political space, define (if we include ideology as an institution) the way social actors see their interests and demands, and finally influence the economic cycle. However, in order to build a DSB, social groups may find themselves in the need to develop first a new institutional setting. This process of intersected bidirectional influences was summarized by Amable and Palombarini in a in Fig. 1.

B.2 A CONCRETE APPLICATION: THE CASE OF ITALY AND FRANCE

The DSB framework finds a first application in the study of both Italian and French crises. The scholars' goal is to explain the institutional changes the two countries have been experiencing in the last decade as the product of a political strategy aiming at aggregating a new Dominant Social Bloc on a neo-liberal program. In order to do so, the first step in the analysis must be the historic reconstruction Italian and French social blocs and social alliances in the timeframe preceding the political crisis of the early 1990s. It is important to underline that in this first part, socio-political groups composing the different social blocs are identified by their objective localization in social stratification, while in the second part the authors will opt for a different approach. Keeping that in mind, the authors describe the two different DSB and institutional framework present in Italy and France:

“In France there were two social blocs represented by two different political coalitions which held power in turn. There was, until the 1990s, only one bloc in Italy. The employees of the private sector occupied a central

position in France, particularly those employed in large firms. This group was excluded from the political exchange in Italy. ” (Amable et al. 2011: p.10)

These are not just descriptive features, however. The explosion of the Italian debt, in this framework, can be explained by the Italian DSB composition, mostly composed by *rentiers*. This social alliance became to increasingly rely on these rentiers as it kept a high-interest rates policy in place, losing little by little the support from self-employed and small entrepreneurs (*ibid.* : p.13) to the newly formed *Lega Nord*. A similar crisis of the DSB appeared in France as well where rifts cut the two blocs that have been rotating in power since 1978. Thus, both France and Italy have been facing a long political crisis since at least the end of 1980s, with political parties losing their traditional cores to new parties or to old “extremist” ones as in the French case. The failure of left-wing governments to rebuild a progressive DSB in the 1990s, with the defeats of Rutelli in 2001 and Jospin in 2002, paved the way to more neo-liberal reforms. These reforms respond to a precise “*strategy towards a new dominant social bloc*” (*Ibid.*: p.31) and have been possible only because of the crisis of the previous social compromise. Before proceeding, it is important to underline that the scholars slightly change the way they identify socio-political groups. Concerning the French case, the authors can build on previous quantitative (and qualitative) analysis carried out for a timeframe covering starting from 1978 (Palombarini and Guillard 2006). The same does not seem to be true in the Italian case, where the only source to identify social groups (and their social requests) was to rely on previous socio-political studies. Thanks to the availability of opinion polls and post-election data, the authors can now identify groups and the policies they support by the means of a latent class analysis.

The results of this analysis leave us with the new social blocs in formation in the two country. Italian 2008 elections saw entrepreneurs and the self-employed mainly supporting the center-right, while the center-left core was represented by intellectual professions and civil servants. The most peculiar thing of the Italian case is that workers seem to be equally divided among political coalitions, thus actually “disappearing” from the definition of a DSB since they simply melt in the entire political spectrum. In the French case, analyzed for 2007 elections, the rift between independents and private sector employees did not produce the end of the center-right bloc, as it was the case for both center-right and center-left in Italy. However, the tension between the demands of these two groups characterized Sarkozy's cabinet or as the authors say:

“The attempt to reconcile the contradictory expectations of the independents, who demand a strong liberalization of the labor market, and private sector employees, which expect to keep a reasonably high level of social protection and/or employment protection, explains the apparently schizophrenic character of Sarkozy's discourse.” (Amable et al. 2011: p.38)

However different the two cases are, the work's reasoning deals more with the similarities that one can find. In particular the fact that “*the social bloc strictly in favor of neo-liberal reforms is a minority in each country*” (*ibid.* : p.41). As such, this bloc needs to expand itself but it cannot do it without giving out part of its economic program. This task had been made even harder in France due to the economic crisis, while Berlusconi's government tried to use the crisis to make “*neo-liberal reforms indispensable*”, acting especially in the field of labor relations while not reacting to the crisis of public finances (*ibid.* : p.36), aiming at decreasing labor costs by dismantling the national contract. This policy is deemed to be accepted by the electoral core of center-right. Nevertheless, in 2011 and 2012 local elections, the Italian center-right faces some historical defeats (especially the loss of Milan, a symbol of *Berlusconismo*) and the growth of the Five Star Movement, a quite inter-classist party (Bordignon 2013), both seem to contradict scholars forecast.

In 2012 work there is also room for a first look at the link between the international context and the national, through the analysis of the role of the European Union. In both cases, the EU has a direct impact on the concrete possibility to build a leftist-bloc: in Italy, the limits imposed by Maastricht make impossible to recompose the leftist bloc on a common program, while in France the EU has become a major electoral cleavage within the leftist bloc itself.

B.3 THE NEO-REALIST APPROACH RECEPTION: BOYER ANALYSIS OF 2008 FINANCIAL CRISIS.

Amable and Palombarini approach influenced some recent works as well. It is worth citing the recognition given to the framework by Boyer (2012) who decided to borrow it, at least partially, to analyze the recent financial crisis. In particular, he underlines the importance of Hegemonic Blocs (thus actually borrowing the terminology from Gramsci rather than from the DSB framework). His view, the presence of a hegemonic bloc between different social groups is the missing link that can explain the viability of certain institutional forms. In his investigation of current financial crisis, Boyer focuses on the role of financial elites in building a social compromise favorable to financiarization. The social classes considered by Boyer appears to have higher level of organizations than Amable and Palombarini's social groups. According to the French scholar, alliances are built between stakeholders rather than out of individual expectations. The distribution of power among social classes helps to explain why Germany and the Nordic countries, where financial stability is considered as a public good, have both a different way to regulate financial markets than the US. Avoiding to focus on parties, it is safe to say that Boyer's application of the neo-realist approach social alliances are the key players in defining what kind of institutions will regulate the economy. To a certain degree, social blocs were more powerful than what we have seen in Amable and Palombarini for whom the autonomy of the political leaves parties with an important role of mediation to fulfill. A reasoning (and a terminology) similar to the one developed by the former workerist Mario Tronti.

C. MARIO TRONTI FROM WORKERISM TO THE AUTONOMY OF POLITICAL

C.1 MAIN FEATURES OF ITALIAN WORKERISM

Historically, the origins of workerism can be traced back to the publication of the *Quaderni Rossi* in 1961. As many other tales of the left wing, that of workerism is a story of splits and ruptures. This part does not mean to be a complete examination of workerist debates and history. For a comprehensive debate (and critique), please refer to Preve (1984) and Wright (2002). Among those who animated this area, Tronti is the one who focused more on the relationship between the political composition of the working class and the crisis of capitalism, or as he says of "*the relationship between the political movement of the workers and the economic crisis of capitalism*". Before analyzing the meaning of this relationship and the evolution of Tronti, it is important to underline a few key features of Italian workerism. Workerism identifies in the working class the active subject of history, in Tronti's own words:

"*The pressure of labor-power is able to force capital to modify its own internal composition*" (Tronti 1971: p.47)

Starting from these ideas, one of the approach declared goals is that of writing "*an internal history of the working class*" (*ibid.*: p.149). Workerism should not be reduced to the exaltation of industrial workers. The focus of Tronti and his comrades was actually on the "*social factory*", a term that identified the "*entire sociality of the relations of production and reproduction*" (Negri 1987: p.46) and occurred at the highest level of capitalist development, when:

"*The social relation becomes a moment of the relation of production, society as a whole becomes an articulation of production, that is the entire society lives as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domain on the whole society.*" (Tronti 1971.: p.48)

Being "*internal*" this history is also "*partisan*" and especially Tronti will be, at the beginning, a strong supporter of the importance of a "*ferrea logica di parte*" (*ibid.*: p.89). The whole experience had a strong political objective: to change/rebuild the Communist Party. In order to accomplish this goal, workerist researches mostly dealt with the new characteristics of Italian proletariat in at

the beginning of the 1960s. The massive migratory movement from the South and the progressive de-qualification of industrial labor through automation contributed to change Italian working class. Thus, the interest for analysis of its composition and recomposition (two terms that, we will see, are keys to all workerist authors presented in this paper). Within this new class composition, workerists were especially interested:

“Not in the old comrades, who survived more static times, but in the new up-and-coming generation of workers individually de-qualified and de-professionalized, neo-immigrants and freshly urbanized, but standardized (massificate) and socialized inside this heavily mechanized factory” (Alquati: p.19)

This new emerging figure, called *mass worker*, was for a certain time the main center of interest of the whole workerist movement, especially in the writings of Mario Tronti and Sergio Bologna (who nowadays claims to be the “inventor” of the term, Bologna 1996: p.49).

C.2 TRONTI: BETWEEN THE MASS WORKER AND THE AUTONOMY OF THE POLITICAL

One of workerist leading figures, the evolution of Mario Tronti actually allows us clearly distinguish between a workerist phase and a later phase where the key concept was what he calls “*the autonomy of the political*”. The common trait unifying both phases can be found in a rather “*politicalist*” approach that the author holds against the “*economist*” approach of the Italian Communist Party (Farris 2011). Diverging from PCI historicist approach, Tronti contested the idea that “*the political action starts where the relation of production ends*” (Tronti 1971: p.54): on the contrary, it was in the factory that one should understand the political composition of the working class. Moreover, according to Tronti the only real crisis capitalists fear was a political crisis, that is “*not a crisis in the government, but crisis of power and, thus, substantial change in the power relation between the two struggling classes*” (*ibid.*: p.107). This broad definition of *politics*, beyond parties and other form of political organization, will lead all workerists to give much importance to the question of workers passivity, considered just a form of laziness by the PCI while seen as “*a more radical form of struggle*” by Tronti (Trotta and Milana 2008: p.598). It is precisely this behaviour, this refusal to become part of capital (that will become the refusal of work in Negri’s and autonomist Marxism in the 1970s), that generates, as a reaction, a political crisis of the labour-capital relation (Tronti 1971: p. 86). Despite the refusal, by the “workers movement” (term Tronti uses to refer to the ensemble of political organizations wanting to represent working class interests), to accept this form of behaviours. It is important to underline that for Tronti this behaviour was from being a mature political position by the workers. Quite the opposite: “*it is not enough to recompose at the general social level the political pressure of the working class against the Capital*”. These theses will be further extended in “*Lenin in England*”, the column that Tronti wrote for the first number of *Classe Operaia*. Here Tronti analyses the Italian political situation of early 1960, with the birth of the first centre-left government, the encounter of “*capital and workers reformism*” (*ibid.* : p.116), and thus the division of the workers movement between a pro-government PSI and an ostracized PCI. Tronti foresaw in the centre-left government an end of the workers political support to reformism, thus imagining a new wave of conflicts that will shake Italian society. The wave was actually to come with 1968 social movements, but the effects of that season of struggle and the rather bizarre isolation in which Tronti found himself, despite having predicted it, will profoundly mark him.

The defeat of Italian social movements leads Tronti to a more pessimistic thinking in the years to follow, leaving *de-facto* workerism to work on a less *partisan* framework: the autonomy of the political. Introduced for the first time in 1972 during a conference (Farris 2013), this theory is closer to the DSB framework than the previous workerist stance. In particular, Tronti sees political and capital development as separated: there is room for an autonomy of the political cycle from the cycle of capital; it has its own specificity even though it is still linked to capital itself (this is the proper way to interpret the word *autonomy*). Tronti develops his reasoning looking at the Italian situation of early 1970: if, on the one hand, the economic system has been changing to produce new forms, the political apparatus was still the same, old, one that was

before the 1950 economic boom. Here Tronti's interpretation of the political moment clearly changes: if before *politics* was to be found in the workers behaviour inside the moment of production, the *locus* of the political is now identified with the state as the “*centre of mediation of the various relations between classes*”. The political is now defined by Tronti as holding “*together two things, the state plus the political class*” (Tronti quoted by Farris 2013: p.190). It is a deep shift from his previous workerist stance when he claimed that:

“*The process of unitary composition of capitalist society, imposed by the specific development of its own production, no longer tolerates the existence of political field even formally independent from the network of social relations*” (Tronti 1971: p.48)

Tronti now also criticizes the lack of a proper theory of the state in Marxism and the deterministic view of the base/superstructure-relation characterising Marxist political science (Farris 2011: p.43). Searching then for new foundations to his political science, Tronti changes the focus of his analyses as well. If in his early works the main political agent was the working class rather than the workers movement, now the Italian thinker is more interested in political elites and their behaviour. Parties and elites should be analysed in order to understand how to get the working class into power, since they hold the key to an *art* of politics that is now very technical and much less spontaneous than in early elaborations (Farris 2013: p.188). The political objective is still the same, the analytical framework and, thus, the way to realise this goal have changed. This change of position, as we will see in the following part, will be harshly criticized by many of his former fellows, especially by Antonio Negri who will propose a radically different scheme to interpret the role of the state, of politics and of civil society in the capitalist mode of production. The autonomy of the political will also mark the definitive end of Tronti's workerist phase with its reintegration within the ranks of the PCI.

C.3 ALQUATI AND BOLOGNA: THE SOCIOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL QUEST FOR THE MASS WORKER

Workerist theory was, since the beginning, backed by a redesign of both sociological and historiographic research. Alquati's studies using what he called *conricerca* are one of the examples of such efforts and their main result was probably the discovery of that workers passivity we have seen at the center of Tronti's reasoning for some time. Two articles are particularly important to our close examination: the Olivetti's analysis and the outline of Turin's political situation. These works (as well as those by Bologna that I will discuss further on) shall be considered as an “application” of the workerist framework, in the same way that the Amable, Guillaud and Palombarini work is an application of the DSB framework. Bologna's texts had a more historiographic outlook and deal with the relationship between class composition and capital's reaction at the national level, while Alquati's *conricerca* led him to focus on a rather local level of analysis, thus falling a bit far from the scopes of this article. It is however worthy to spend a few words on him to understand the importance of the *local* and *micro* level of analysis in workerist movement.

In his article about Olivetti's factory, Alquati retraced the hierarchy of positions within the labor force according to their role and their function to capital reproduction. Alquati described that the situation of Ivrea (where Olivetti is based) working class as “*political atomization*”: workers' struggles were unable to reach a superior level and appeared to be “*atoms struggles, blind struggles*” (Alquati 1975: p.83). In Alquati's analysis, workers parties represented one of the reasons for this atomization. By keeping themselves outside the factory, workers parties helped the process of political atomization, a result even increased by parties' control of trade unions. This situation had a concrete effect, in return, outside the factory as well: cutting themselves out of the moment of production in the main factory of the area, workers movement as a whole started to retrench in the whole *Canavese* (ibid.: p.86). However, the article's value should be found in the description of the internal power relations and workers behaviors within the *eporediese* productive site. While in the Olivetti, the focus was put on one factory, the analysis of Turin's political composition tried to broaden the debate to include the whole city. The choice of the city is rather simple to

explain: Turin was, at the time, the symbol of industrialization, in the author words: "*Turin is the factory-city*" (ibid.: p. 230). Retracing the history of three struggles that occurred in the area, Alquati analyses the progressive loss of connection between the PCI and the newly arrived workers. His analysis, however, did not go beyond the critique of the PCI and "*explored only the connections between different plants in the cycle of the metal industry*" (Wright 2002: p.80), a micro analysis that missed the chance to further analyze the Turin as a *social factory*.

Of those who joined the workerist experiment, Sergio Bologna was the one who dealt the most with the previously cited task of rewriting an internal history of the working class. The contributions presented in this paper both concern two historic defeats of the German working class: the defeat of the workers' council movement and Nazism. The workers council movement that characterized Germany at the beginning of the 20th century is particular important: here a section of the working class, identified with the highly specialized workers of the engineering industry, was able to achieve an important role in industrial relations due to their political unification in the workers council movement. Bologna underlined the importance of these workers within the German industrial system. While the whole country was facing a deep crisis, especially in textile and agriculture, "*Germany was producing the best agricultural and textile machinery in the world*" (Bologna 1972: p. 4). Bologna's article is a thorough discussion of both the political and technical composition of those highly specialized workers who were, together, with the Ruhr miners, the backbone of the German movement. This movement was not isolated on the international level and Bologna took good care in putting an international perspective to its analysis. It was the international nature of the movement that made it disastrous to early 20th Century capital, thus forcing a change in *capitalist* strategy:

"In 1911, Ford's ideas were the bright innovations of a single entrepreneur. It took the threat of a general overthrow of factory power relations, i.e., the threat of the workers-councils to collective capital, for them to become the strategy of collective capital, or the Keynesian "income revolution"." (Ibid.: p.7)

Although being politically advanced, the movement found itself shattered in different countries facing a diverse grade of development, thus leading Bologna to theorize the existence of two different cycles: on the one hand, the cycle of international labour struggles, that identifies the level of political advancement of the working class. On the other hand, the cycle of capitalist development. Germany immediately before and after the First World War fell backward in the cycle of capitalist development due to its system of middle-enterprises, while the workers movement, considered homogenous at the international level, was highly advanced. This led to a situation of political strength for both miners and technicians:

"In other words, the particular level of development of the two sectors posed very rigid limitations which severely conditioned the capitalists' freedom to manoeuvre. [...] This is very important because it shows how the rigidity of the German industrial system was one of the element which rendered the overall labour power an independent variable such as to constitute, through its mere objective permanence, serious threat to further capitalist development in Germany." (ibid. p.12).

The bottleneck of German capitalism will find its solution in three steps: the outbreak of the First World War, the 1918 repression led by the Social-Democratic Party and, finally, Nazism. The first two steps are linked since it is in SPD's choice to vote in favour of war credits that one can find the moment of separation between German working class (represented by the workers-councils) and the workers movement (represented by the SPD and social-democrats trade unions). On the international level, Germany's defeat allowed for a harsh restructuring of its economy (and thus its labour relations as well):

"The true revolutionary character of the workers-council phase in Germany lies in the workers' power to provoke the crisis and to freeze capitalist development. This was understood very well by the old foxes in Versailles. The imposition of "that" treaty on Germany was practically dictated by the need to deprive the working class of the material bases of its very existence." (ibid.: p.26).

Years later, Bologna will go back to the German workers at the beginning of 1990s, with an analysis of the relationship between Nazism and German working class. The text argues, against the “*historical revisionism*” of that age (Bologna 1996: p.5), that not only the German working class did not support the Nazi regime, but also it was its first victim. The Weimar’s Republic reorganisation of labour relations eventually led to the atomisation of the working class due to productive decentralisation, a strategy opposed to Fordist one but that would allow for a better political control of labour force (*ibid.*: p.12). Thus, while other countries were pursuing full employment policies by the means of mass production, Germany was experiencing raising unemployment that struck working class and its political organisations more than other parties. In particular, the Communist party was, at the time, mainly composed by unemployed people and had no access to the factories. Nevertheless, since the unemployed were around 30% of German active population, it had a role to play and Bologna retraces it as the “place” of conflict changes from the factory to the administration in charge of unemployment subsidies (*ibid.*: p.15-16). Thus, according to Bologna, there had been a resistance by (former) members of the working class, albeit shattered due to the high levels of unemployment, the political criteria behind unemployment subsidies and the division of the workers movement between communists and social democrats. These are the main factors that allowed Hitler to get into power: once again, the focus falls on the political and technical composition of the working class. This explains also the first Nazi industrial policies: the weight of German industrial workers and their political tradition were a possible obstacle in the realisation of a totalitarian state (*ibid.*: p.31). However, the atomisation previously outlined would open the way for an integration of German workers in a new system of relations, having its centre in the big factory instead of the small and middle enterprises characterising the pre-Nazi era. Fordist revolution was then achieved, with few important differences: the vast use of forced labour (*ibid.*: p.7) and the militarisation of the working place (*ibid.*: p.34). Many of the concepts analysed by Bologna, such as the role of workers council movement or the new nature of money, can also be found in the works of his contemporary, and for a long time political companion, Antonio Negri.

D. ANTONIO NEGRI AND THE CRISIS AS A MOMENT OF POLITICAL DISARTICULATION

D.1 NEGRI'S CRITIQUE OF THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE.

Let us turn now to Antonio Negri. While, at the beginning of 1970s, Tronti was moving away from workerism, Negri, as well as much of the others early workerist, were at the time developing workerism into autonomist Marxism. There is indeed not enough space to deal with the complexity of Negri's thought on the matter. I have therefore decided to focus primarily on his “*Proletarians and the state*” for two reasons: first, this 1975 article's theme, the so-called “historic compromise” between the PCI and the DC offers the possibility to draw a fruitful comparison with Amable, Guillaud and Palombarini work on neoliberal reforms in Italy and France. Secondly, the article is a rather direct critique of Tronti's “*autonomia del politico*” which has been previously discussed.

The “Historic Compromise”, object of Negri’s disapproval, was first proposed by then PCI Secretary Enrico Berlinguer who, in 1973, reflecting upon the Chilean crisis called for an accommodation between the two main Italian parties, the PCI and the DC, thus abandoning the idea of a possible left alternative to the christian-democrats. Negri's critique to this accommodation allows us to retrace his definition of politics (both institutional and not) and the state within the capitalist mode of production. According to Negri, the whole process of crisis and restructuring Italy and the world are experiencing must be seen as an offensive by Capital against the “*mass worker*” (which will soon be substituted with another figure, the “*social worker*”) :

“*The political goal of the process or restructuring, therefore, consists in destroying the image, constructed by*

the struggle of the mass worker, of the identity and generality of the particular interests of workers'. (Negri 2005: p.143)

The framework used by Negri was not particularly different from the one developed by Tronti (with whom he cooperated during the 1960s in both the *Quaderni Rossi* and *Classe Operaia* experience). To recall it, using his words:

"The working class now constituted an independent polarity within capitalist development. Capital development was now dependent on the political working-class behaviours." (Negri 1982: p.45)

D.2 NEGRI'S CRITIQUE OF TRONTI: THE AUTONOMY OF THE POLITICAL AS THE IDEOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE.

In his quarrel with Tronti over the autonomy of political, Negri shared with his former comrade the idea that Marxism lacks a theory of the state (Farris 2011: p.58). Apart from that, the rupture between the two was total. Negri reasoning on the state closely followed the one already laid out in 1971 *"The crisis of the planner-state"*. There was a time where the state was still *"subordinated in an overall sense to the innumerable contingencies of class confrontation"* (Negri 2005: p.10), but now *"the function of the state"* is subordinate to multinational enterprises. (*ibid.*: p.24). The state is therefore considered to be *"organic to capitalist development and its determinate disarticulations"* (*ibid.*: p.136). Among these disarticulations, Negri considers crises as well, that are actually undertaken by the State as a mean to either change the organic composition of capital or to stop the political recomposition of the working class around the new figure of the social worker. Here, as in other texts, Negri recalls the analysis of the relationship between Fordism and council movements made by Bologna and previously analysed. Each crisis (and the following restructuring) is but a moment of political disarticulation of a unifying working class, be it the *"the professional worker of the workers' council movement"* (*ibid.*: p.130) or the mass/social worker, with the help of the State. Thus, the critique of Tronti's idea of the autonomy of the political. This autonomy existed in the past, or, at least, 1975 Negri seems to be open to accept its past existence. Nevertheless, this was before, while:

"At this level of capitalist development - and the workers' struggles that determine it - civil society comes after the state, the autonomy of the political is thus only the ideological reproduction of a dead order. On the contrary the reality of the state is extolled, not as the site of impossible mediations; but rather as the centre of the total ascription of social action and as the moment of the predetermined characterization of this action." (Negri 2005: p.140)

It is too late to build any sort of political theory on the study of social alliances within the capitalist mode of production, as it was the case for Gramsci and, before him, for the Marx of the 18th of Brumaire. In addition, it is no longer the case for at least two reasons: one internal and one external. The former is that the block where the autonomy of the political was considered to be possible is now extinct: on the one hand civil society, defined as

"The domain within which the reproduction of capital was articulated with the density of bourgeois and proletarian interests that were not immediately reduced or even capable of being reduced to the rule of profit: interests derived from revenue (rendita) on the one side, poverty and proletarian industrial reserve army on the other."

is no longer. The nation-state level lacks now of a place where proletariat and bourgeoisie can encounter. On the other hand, the level has moved up since *"this interpenetration of the state and capital is not produced on the national level, but within the new dimensions of the world market."* Yet, Negri himself recognizes the importance of the internal legitimacy that the State had so far (Negri 2005: p.162) and it is specifically the decline of this legitimacy that, according to Negri, is one of the

main consequences of the cycle of struggles at the end of 1960s. The PCI, according to Negri, was then talking of a state form that is now radically different, to a civil society long gone and at a level that no longer had the power to realise PCI objectives (that include a new legitimacy for the state apparatus that is no longer to achieve) (*Ibid.*: p.140). Moreover, the crisis started in 1973 was a crisis both *of* and *in* the relationship, caused by “*the contradiction between the state-form and processes of proletarian self-valorisation*” (*Ibid.*: p.280). Consequently, the Historic Compromise was doomed to fail.

Negri focuses, as other workerist authors, on working class composition. Tronti, according to him, is seeking the proper level of mediation outside the class, just like Lenin before. However, it is the particular role played by the “*professional worker*” that required an external mediator (*ibid.*: p.159). The progressive end of a professional stratum and emergence of the mass worker call for a different approach. Negri’s critique of Tronti is paired with a larger definition of politics. If already Tronti and Alquati saw the “political” outside the “palace” where nowadays regulatory economist seem to privilege, Negri wishes to analyse the political characteristic of the new subject as both its behaviour and its *needs*. It is precisely the rise of those needs (that the Paduan thinker wishes to be at the centre of a new enquiry) that is at the centre of the crisis, opening a contradiction “between the collective processes of accumulation and the legitimisation of command” (*ibid.*: p.171). Negri, both in *Proletarians and the State* and in *Crisis of the Planner-State*, also underlines the importance of money, thus innovating once more on Tronti. The workerist debate on money, that included Sergio Bologna and other members of *Primo Maggio*, is too large to be summarised here, for a complete and short review, please refer to Wright (2013). The main idea developed by Negri is that money is no longer “*currency-money*”, it is now “*state-money*” and “*command-money*” (*ibid.*: p.128). The end of Bretton Woods meant the end of money as mediator in the marketplace, as a measure of value, thus becoming capital and imposing its command over labour, in Negri’s words money becomes “*an index of a symbolic relationship that organized hierarchical, disciplinary, and repressive procedures power*” (*ibid.*: p.xlvii). This part of the debate on money is particular rich to our discussion. There is a *political* role of money that goes beyond its role as simple measure or exchange catalyst: if on the one hand the use of money plays a selective role when it comes to the organic composition, it plays a destructive role “*with respect to the political composition of the proletariat*” (*ibid.*: p.127).

E. CONCLUSION

The main objective of this brief journey across Italian workerism and nowadays neo-realist *régulationnistes* was to underline what is the *political* of the political economy developed by these two streams. Having discussed both the theoretical moment and the concrete application to a few selected cases, we can now answer this first question. Since the beginning, workerism saw the *political* in the struggle and behaviours of the workers. Workerists studied labour as “the” active subject of capitalist development, sought to write the laws governing the development of the working class (Tronti 1971, p. 87), and were among the first to develop a historiography focusing on the composition of the working class rather than the internal debate of the workers movement (Wright 2002: p.176). In workerist literature, one can find analysis at different levels, from Alquati’s works on local productive systems to Negri’s analysis of the international system, with the quest for understanding a changing capitalism *through* a changing working class as common denominator. A quest that is political in the sense that it wished to be immediately applied to a political program, the socialist revolution, and refuses the idea of neutrality.

On the other hand, the neo-realist approach starts exactly from a critique of current mainstream economics as politically sided (Amable and Palombarini 2005). Criticising the many dogmas and axioms proposed by the Neo-classical, and the Public Choice School, these authors propose a comprehensive framework to analyse the interactions between social expectations, institutions and economic policies. The supporters of the Dominant Social Bloc model put a strong emphasis on parties thus focusing on the electoral moment as important turning point in

DSB formation. It is true that, while developing the framework, Palombarini and Amable warns about the fact that they do not wish to reduce politics to the party system. However, the concrete application of their framework strongly limits the agency to what happens in the triangle defined by parties' HQs, national parliament and government. There is not much room for the international system, albeit it is recognized its influence in the case of the European Union, nor for what happens below the national level, at least not for now.

As I said in the introduction and as it should now appear clear to the reader, a synthesis between these two cannot be found. The "workerist" Tronti would summarise in 1971 the main reason why DSB and workers subjectivity can hardly coexist: "*the Gramscian concept of historic bloc was just the observation of a particular stage, of a national moment, of the capitalist development*" (Tronti 1971: p.114). Alternatively, in Bologna's words: "The *Quaderni Rossi* hurled the hegemony under Mirafiori's presses" (Bologna 1974: p.2). The divide is even deeper when we take into account the rigid class division proposed by most of the workerist movement and confront it with the multi-faceted class structure proposed by neo-realist authors. In the former, one can find two struggling classes defined by their objective location within the relation of production. In the latter, many different classes, not *a priori* defined but built out of the subjective self-assessment of their preferences.

Nevertheless, the neo-realist approach can find useful insights in confronting with workerism. First, the necessity to integrate the international level not just as an exogenous factor, as it seems to be so far, but as an endogenous variable. Workerists have been quite able in their analyses, as a current, to link a theory going from the local to the global. Neo-realism still has to decide how to integrate international institutions in its framework. The most powerful example is the European integration. The construction of the EU is not just a form of external political pressure or constraint. Its political project, pursued by part of the former DSB and it is legitimate to question the nature of French and Italian political crises in the light of the passive acceptations of European dogmas by all parties having ruled the two countries during the last decades. This reasoning is recognized by Amable, Guillaud and Palombarini in their introduction (2012: p.17) as well, but in the analysis it is rather assumed as an exogenous factor. Second, workerist tradition on class composition/recomposition processes offers a wider methodology to enquiry social blocs' formation. Quantitative analyses are indeed powerful instruments, but a framework considering social expectations should aim at going always deeper in the description of the different subgroups composing the larger latent classes. Third, these subjective groups are still part of social-groups that can be objectively defined. The whole analysis carried out by Amable, Guillaud and Palombarini seemed afraid of using an "objective" class structure, probably since it would have infringed the non-normative stance held in 2005. In this way, power relations become mere numbers representing nothing more than the ballots one should expect to count the day of a national election. Workerism started from a different point of view, seeking for power in what others saw powerless and activity in passivity. Both intuitions would broaden the scope of neo-realist approach, particularly concerning power-relations between, and within, social groups as well as how to interpret their behaviour.

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