

Review: Franco Cassano *Il teorema democristiano* (The Christian Democratic Theorem) Bari: De Donato 1979.

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This book, available only in Italian, is one of numerous studies analysing the political power structure in Italy. Usually these studies are too involved and enmeshed in the well-known "Byzantine" world of Italian politics which is so difficult for non-Italians to understand. Cassano's book is an attempt to enlarge the perspective of these studies by looking to a broader theoretical framework to interpret Italian politics. The theory of the state, in particular the relationship between state apparatus and economic power, is the key used by Cassano to interpret the political history of Italy after World War II. One of the final results of this effort is to make the Italian political event more understandable and less "provincial" and thus more interesting for non-Italians.

After each political election, occurring too frequently in Italy, politicians, sociologists and other politically involved people try to explain why the Christian Democratic Party of Italy (DC) still maintains a relative majority. This party has ruled, alone or in coalition, since 1946, from the beginning of the parliamentary republic in Italy. The DC can be considered the party most responsible for the majority of the economic and social problems in Italy today. Inside this party we can find people strongly compromised by fascist terrorism, people whose only worth is to be linked to the biggest economic and religious trusts (mafia included). One can also mention the numerous scandals that periodically come to light, like widespread political corruption that have involved people of the DC or the party itself, which are never penalized only because the DC has open control of the biggest positions in the courts.

In a country like Italy where we find a high level of politicization and where the presence of left wing organizations in institutions and in social life is very strong, before each general election the left forecasts or at least supposes a defeat for the DC. After the ritual eve of election spent awaiting the results and the equally ritual disappointments to see that the DC is still the biggest party with almost 40% of the votes, the time of reflection begins. Most explanations for the outcome of the election are unable to go beyond superficial and simplistic interpretations: the connection with the Catholic Church, more financial backing, international support, the low cultural level of the Italian population, the mammoth conditioning from the mass media. Although these reasons certainly have meaning, they are not enough to clarify why the DC is not only the biggest party, but is always, in any political, economic and social condition, at the center of every Italian government. Actually

there is no lack of books and articles which attempt to analyse the nature of the DC, from historical and sociological points of view. Nevertheless unresolved issues exceed the certainties.

Cassano's book is one of these attempts to give a global explanation of how and why the DC has held power in the last thirty years of Italian history. Former analyses into the nature of the DC power structure have been carried out through the study of its personal or ideological connections with the centers of social and economic power. As a ruling and mass party the DC is related to multiple and contradictory social strata: centers of industrial and agrarian power and organizations of small farmers, strong Catholic blue-collar unions and small but numerous right wing white-collar unions (mainly bureaucrats and teachers), organizations of top hierarchy judges and the mafia, the Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy and professional and masonic organizations. It is obvious that with such a multitude of variables, without a clear methodology that is capable of objectively analyzing all these elements, political subjectivity easily dominates. Therefore frequently the political ideology of the author is the key most used to evaluate the nature of the DC.

Cassano utilizes, in my opinion with success, another approach: he places at the basis of his analysis the problem of the nature and function of the capitalist state. At the moment in Italy the discussion about the theory of the state is quite strong, but partly abstract and academic. In Cassano's book this discussion is utilized as a method of interpretation of the political events of the last thirty years in Italy.

Cassano starts by analyzing the two dominant political and theoretical positions on the nature of the DC that are present in the Italian left. The first widespread position considers the DC as a direct emanation of the interests of the pre-1960 industrial bourgeoisie and its allies: agrarians, small farmers, the middle class, etc. Even if strongly simplified this position is quite diffused inside the Marxist new left (in the Italian Communist Party (PCI) at least until the 1950s and hypothesizes that this interpretation is still at the basis of the politics of the PCI in its relations with the DC (the historical compromise). In my opinion this intriguing hypothesis has a basis of truth, at least regarding the wing of the PCI more aligned with the USSR and Stalinism, as opposed to the more recent part of the PCI made up of younger militants from the new left experience of the 1960s. According to Cassano a consideration of the DC as an instrument of the bourgeoisie is based upon an accepted theory of the capitalist state whose activity is limited to defending the direct and immediate concerns of the bourgeoisie against the struggles and the interest of the proletariat; the DC's margins of autonomy are relative only to its choice of the best instruments to realize the goals of the bourgeoisie.

A second analytical position considers the DC as a party concerned solely with conserving its own block of political power. This block of power is not representative of any particular social class, but is a defender of the interests of a political class which was born and grew during the post-war years, the so-called "new bourgeoisie of the state." The growth of this "state-bourgeoisie" caused the growth of active intervention in society and in the economy. The goal was to maintain and reinforce the political power of this class. In particular the enormous growth of public enterprises that occurred in Italy is interpreted as the intervention of bureaucratic power in the economic structure. All the literature related to this position emphasizes the contradiction between "clean and progressive" industrial capitalism and state activity: the former means more accumulation and more occupation, the latter means waste and parasitism for the benefit of the state bourgeoisie and its allies (public clerks, bosses and workers in public enterprises, public services workers, etc.). The theory of the state behind this position is, for Cassano, apparently in opposition to the former: the accent is placed on the complete autonomy of the state from the traditional social classes, such that he who rules the state tends to form class "in se" and "per se."

For Cassano both these positions, besides being hardly able to analyse reality, are wrong and misleading. In fact both have as a base "an *instrumentalist* conception of the state, for which the state is reduced to an organ for the realization and protection of its internal interests" (p. 25). On the contrary for Cassano the state acts to promote "the reproduction of the *general conditions* of capitalist production." Therefore the state's main activity is to defend "the *political interests* of the ruling classes, that do not necessarily coincide with maximizing the rate of profit, but with the reproduction of capitalist society on the whole" (pp. 7-8). From this conception of the nature of the state, Cassano deduces that the DC has and continues to function as a political apparatus that manages the state. For Cassano the starting point is the consideration that for a long time in Italy liberal institutions have been less capable of controlling the process of accumulation than the survival of the capitalist mode of production itself. This leads to an understanding of the intense and growing politicization of the economy and to the enormous extension of political power in respect to "pure" economic power. All this occurs in an institutional context "where the degree of 'diffusion of politics in the social,' and the degree of power of the state apparatus are directly proportional to the degree of the difficulties in reproducing the capitalist mode of production" (p. 28). According to Cassano specific structural conditions in Italy did not allow for the possibility of involving the working class in the management of the state because of the impossibility of promoting high wages. Thus the

structure of the Italian economy leaves only the DC with the function of directing the state. This monopolistic power from one side increases the power of the DC over the bourgeoisie, from the other side it necessitates that the DC embody a large number of elements which usually characterize the opposition (pp. 29–30).

After clarifying his theoretical approach, Cassano uses it to provide a short review of the politics of the DC in the last thirty years. His main purpose is to analyse the way in which the DC has organized its politics and ideologies for ruling the Italian state. Cassano analyzes the four stages in which the postwar period in Italy is usually divided: 1948/58 (reconstruction after the war, and industrial transformation); 1959/62 (extensive economic development); 1963/69 (economic crisis and industrial restructuring); 1970/today (stagflation and recurring economic crisis).

The first phase (1948/58) was characterized by the need of the structural transformations of the Italian economy and society. This process happened by means of direct management of the economic processes by the DC, placing the "pure economic needs" of the industrial bourgeoisie secondary to political action, not connected with the defense of the existing ruling class order. This order was transformed when it became contradictory with the organization of a social block able to cope with left mass movements (p. 41). Christian Democratic theorists in that period argued that economic laws should not rule society because of conflicts that could develop between social classes. In theory and practice, this period witnessed a self-serving (voluntaristic) conception of politics very much reflecting fascist corporatism and authoritarianism.

The second period (1958/62) was characterized by a state intervention according to a "laissez-faire" model. According to Cassano this change was needed because "if it is true that the backwardness of the Italian bourgeoisie needs a strong autonomy of the political mediation, it is also true that backwardness itself does not allow that this autonomy can be able to express a 'productivist' line" (p. 77). In other words the industrial bourgeoisie, more linked to the international market and to expanding economic sectors, after the DC provided a favorable political basis (mainly: weak unions, political repression of the left, big unemployment reserve), took the situation in hand and affirmed the supremacy of "economic laws" and of capital accumulation. This stage of temporarily "putting aside" the active political intervention of the DC was very short. The extensive development of the economy, without the usual political mediation of the DC, bore new and acute contradictions, without being able to alleviate the old ones (e.g., the huge social problems caused by the massive migration from the agricultural south to the industrialized north, the persistent unemployment and under-

employment, the wild exploitation in the factories; from the political point of view the strengthening of the left and the development of strong contradictions inside different strata of the bourgeoisie).

The third period (1963/69) is characterized by mass struggles resulting in economic and political crisis. The DC attempted to enlarge and redirect the political basis of the state apparatus: this enlargement took the form of a coalition from the Italian Socialist Party (PSI). The so-called political phase of "center-left" (centro-sinistra) began, whose slogan was "the politics of structural reforms of Italian society." Beside being hindered by a part of the DC itself, this coalition was not able to mediate and mitigate the strong mass movements that materialized in these years. These struggles in fact involved exactly the social strata (students and primary working class) that would have to be the mass basis for the politics of the reforms and for the creation of a unified social democratic party as the political alternative to the DC.

The last pages of Cassano's book concern the present crisis in Italy which began in 1970. It is a complex and long-term political crisis surrounded by an alternation of economic crisis and recoveries. This last phase is characterized by the Christian Democratic attempt to involve the PCI in the management of the contradictions and, only in small part, in the management of power. According to Cassano this attempt failed and yet he concludes his book with a quick exposition of the present contradictions which the DC faces today. The choices that the DC must deal with are the usual ones: left wing politics through an alliance with the industrial bourgeoisie and part of the working class; or right wing politics of political repression of social movements and the alliance with the conservative strata. In spite of this impasse the DC until now was able to maintain itself at the center of the state apparatus and to maintain strong popular support through a huge enlargement of public expenditure. According to Cassano this answer will not be sufficient to mitigate the political problems of the DC. On the contrary it seems that these problems have placed these crises for the first time, in the center of this party.

A book, like Cassano's, that copes with the function and role of the DC in a period of thirty years is liable to omit some important and meaningful problems. For instance, problems like the authoritarian nature of the DC expressed through the use of right wing terrorism and through numerous attempts at authoritarian institutional reform are omitted. Also Cassano omitted the international links between the DC and U.S. imperialism and the recent development of links between a part of the DC and new German imperialism. Obviously Cassano's goal is not to give a complete history of post-war politics in Italy, but is an attempt to exemplify a reading of political life in Italy through a vision of the nature of the capitalist state that differs from an instrumentalist

theory. Cassano exalts the possibility of the politically autonomous direction of the state. In the specific historical Italian conditions the state represented active political intervention without which "the ruling classes could not have sufficient mechanisms for integrating the dependent classes, mechanisms able to mitigate class conflict. These mechanisms must be constructed through a wide intervention of the state and therefore through the transfer of a big share of decisions in the hands of the political forces who are directing the government" (p. 45).

Actually the need for these political mechanisms not only pertains to the Italian situation but is true for almost all capitalist countries with a parliamentary democracy. More interesting is the attempt to use the discussion about the theory of the capitalist state as a key to reading a political process. The adaptation of these theoretical ideas to Italy seems to me positive, because it is able to find in a short synthesis the main events in understanding Italian political life in the last thirty years. This is positive especially because it is able to give good theoretical help in contesting the economic interpretation of Italian political history still prevalent inside the old and new left. Nevertheless, there is a danger in applying the interpretation of a "supremacy of politics" in the Italian situation. The duration of the Christian Democratic management of the state, its "unsuitability" in the management of power often bring about identification of the state with the DC. In my opinion there are grave dangers in doing this. Two examples of organizations which do this are: first, institutional, constituted by the PCI, the second anti-institutional: the Red Brigades (BR). Inside the PCI the position that identifies the DC with the capitalist state is a rather strong left wing interpretation of this conception. The final political result is that they identify state management by the PCI as the goal of socialism (this position is also present in the left wing of the PSI), where the defeat of the DC means the defeat of the capitalist state. On the anti-institutional side we have the Red Brigades whose slogan is "attack the heart of the state." This slogan has been made concrete in striking at outstanding Christian Democrat party members. The kidnapping and murdering of Moro is an example of this conception: Moro did not hold any institutional position in the state, he was only the chairman of the DC. During the long period of Moro's imprisonment the negotiations were made mainly with people of the DC, and it was quite clear that the goal of the BR was to be recognized by the DC as a political force in the war against the DC-state.

In conclusion, if the state has a large degree of autonomy from the bourgeoisie and from the ruling classes, it has even more autonomy from the political forces that from time to time control it. The only autonomy that the state cannot have is from the mode of production. Its institutions, its apparatus are in fact permeated in each level by the

laws of the capitalist mode of production. That does not mean obviously that, according to whom and the way in which the state is managed, it is not possible to find different contradictions. But each struggle for social change must have the capacity of having an impact on the institutions: namely its capacity of success is linked to the capacity of finding and facing the characteristic of the institution more affected by the capitalist mode of production. For this reason it is very important to separate, at least at the theoretical level, the analysis of the political management of the state from the analysis of the nature of its institutions in their historical evolution.

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