

FEDERICO SANGUINETTI  
**GRAMSCI E MACHIAVELLI**

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In the twentieth century, certainly more than in any other, the Machiavelli legacy has undergone intense interpretation and reevaluation. Early in the century political thinkers such as Francesco Ercole transformed Machiavelli into a theoretician of modern nationalism who could be used to justify and glorify the historical inevitability and political necessity of the Fascist state.<sup>1</sup> After the Second World War when the boom in Machiavelli research began, he attracted the diametrically opposed European Marxists, such as Antonio Gramsci, who viewed *The Prince* and its hero as a myth, an "anthropomorphic symbol" of a "collective will," a personification of the communist party itself, a modern revolutionary document rallying the communist party to action.<sup>2</sup>

Sanguinetti's illuminating monograph on the neglected aspects of Gramsci's symbolic and metaphoric interpretation of Machiavelli is based on the premise that Machiavelli's thought constitutes not only a pivotal point of reference for the evolution of Gramsci's political theories, but also represents a momentous shift in the history of Machiavelli's fortune. In clear, terse prose, perhaps sometimes too much so, Sanguinetti traces how Gramsci was the first to offer a marxist interpretation and a leninist utilization of Machiavelli, stressing two major points: 1) Machiavelli's affirmation of the separation of politics from religion and morality; 2) the symbolic view of the Prince as the image of the national-popular collective will, the Prince as the Party.

Basing his discussion mostly on a close reading of Gramsci's *Quaderni del carcere*, Sanguinetti begins his encapsulated analysis by showing how the historical figure of Caterina Sforza becomes for Gramsci the symbol of Machiavelli's *Weltanschauung*, the anthropomorphic symbol of History, the Prince, and the Party. In denouncing machiavellism, a distortion of the Florentine's thought, as a tool of imperialism, Gramsci carefully distinguish-

ed between the work of Machiavelli and the practical current of bourgeois machiavellism. Following a brief survey of Gramsci's dynamic concept of revolution, his assessment of the French and Russian Revolutions, and his view of the relationship between bourgeois revolution and proletariat revolution, Sanguinetti discusses Machiavelli as an early theorist of urban hegemony. Gramsci perceived in Machiavelli the need for every urban class wishing to realize its proper hegemony to ally itself with the masses of peasants. Machiavelli, in Gramsci's view, saw the limits of the communal structure of the state which could not develop itself into a large territorial power without the political intervention of the Prince who would terminate feudal political anarchy and economic elitism. Although Machiavelli would have preferred a republican form of government for the new state he envisioned, he realized that this ideal system could not resolve Italy's contemporary problems. Only through an absolute monarchy could Renaissance Italy become a politically unified, stable state, after which it might evolve into a republic. In this sense, then, in Machiavelli's recognition of the discrepancy between the real and the ideal, Gramsci perceived Machiavelli as a tragic figure. Machiavelli was perhaps the first political thinker in Gramsci's opinion to see that only through the advancement of the national State could authentic intellectual and moral reform - true cultural revolution — be effected.

In the concluding three chapters Sanguinetti considers Gramsci's comparative view of Machiavelli and Marx as philosophers of praxis who rejected transcendental elements in their political systems. In utilizing Machiavelli's *The Prince* within the context of the proletariat revolution, Gramsci referred often to Lenin's *Due tattiche* and his doctrine of the hegemony of the proletariat. In fact Gramsci saw Lenin as the actualized modern prince who exhorts the poor and oppressed masses to take up the revolutionary call. The final chapter of this monograph highlights Gramsci's interesting parallel, found in the *Quaderni del carcere*, between the dramatic form of Machiavelli's *The Prince* and the dramatic content of Dante's treatment of Cavalcanti in the tenth canto of the *Divine Comedy*. For Gramsci, Dante's Cavalcanti and Machiavelli's prince symbolized both the universal human drama of the revolution and Gramsci's intense personal drama of having lost the historical occasion for revolution.

The value of Sanguinetti's study resides in the way he has summarized Gramsci's allusive, at times non-reducible interpretation of Machiavelli's political implications for the communist revolution. Each chapter isolates and defines, based on Gramsci's own words and on relevant critical sources, one essential element in Gramsci's view, but as the chapters build they combine to offer a clearer understanding of how and why Machiavelli represented for Gramsci a powerful precursor of twentieth century historical dialecticism. The difficulty with his treatment is that in failing to provide more critical analysis and explanation it often remains as allusive and as symbolic as Gramsci's own words. The awkwardness one always senses with ideological interpretations of Machiavelli, whether Fascist or Marxist-

Leninist, is that they constrain his thought into a political mold for propaganda purposes. Purists may feel uncomfortable with the use of universally venerated figures in literary and political history to authenticate or give credibility to modern revolutionary movements. On the whole, however, Sanguinetti's book is an admirable attempt to establish how Gramsci's vision of the historical and political dilemma in which Machiavelli found himself functions also as a springboard for understanding the political theories of this important twentieth century revolutionary figure.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Francesco Ercole, *Politica di Machiavelli* (Roma: Anonima Romana Editoriale, 1926).

<sup>2</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1957).

<sup>3</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ *Note sul Machiavelli, sulla politica e sullo stato moderno (1932-34)* (Torino: Einaudi, 1949).