

Gaetano Mosca's Political Theories: a Key to Interpret the Dynamics of the Power

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Abstract: Gaetano Mosca is generally regarded as one of the founders of the Political science. His thought has been analysed, exalted and also criticised, for over a century now, by a lot of researchers in the world. And nevertheless the challenges that modernity poses to those who engage in the study of political processes may perhaps give meaning to the attempt to reread that theoretical framework, both to establish the current soundness and to measure the prospective usefulness in order to understand better and face these challenges. There is no doubt that many democratic systems present great difficulties in finding the right mechanism of selection of the political classes and, more in general, the correct relationship between governors and governed. Mosca's disenchanted, realistic and relativist views of democracy can be used as a useful guide to understand the problems of this political system and even as a good antidote against any populist regression, a recurrent temptation for many political classes. This article tries to analyse how power is at the centre of Mosca's thought: the formation, organisation and consequences of power. Of course, even in Mosca's work, like that of any social science scholar, there are some gaps, weak points and aspects which have been surpassed with the passing of time. So, the most important target of this article is to separate as much as possible the aspects which still are of considerable significance today, from those that are inevitably and irremediably covered by the patina of age.

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Gaetano Mosca's Political Theories: a Key to Interpret the Dynamics of the Power

Claudio Martinelli *

I. *Short Biographical Notes*

Gaetano Mosca is not only one of the leaders of his philosophy but he is generally proclaimed to be the founder, at least as far as Italian doctrine is concerned, of a whole discipline: political science¹. First with the *Teorica dei governi e governo parlamentare* (*Theoretics of Governments and Parliamentary Government*) in 1884² and subsequently with the three editions of the *Elementi di Scienza politica* (*Elements of Political Science*) in 1896, 1923 and 1939³, he proposed a new, valuable range of ideas through which political phenomena could be interpreted, using an approach and with objectives which were different from those of both the jurist and the historian⁴. This intellectual Sicilian, university professor in Turin and then in Rome, Member of Parliament and Senator of the Kingdom⁵, is one of the few examples of Italian scholars of social sciences

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¹ For an analysis of Mosca's work regarding the birth of modern political Science in Italy see. A. Lombardo, *Sociologia e scienza politica in Gaetano Mosca*, in *Riv. It. sc. Pol.*, n. 2/1971, 297-323.

² See G. Mosca, *Teorica dei governi e governo parlamentare*, now in G. Sola (edited by), *Scritti politici di Gaetano Mosca*, Vol. I, UTET, Turin, 1982.

³ See. G. Mosca, *Elementi di Scienza Politica*, now in G. Sola (edited by), *Scritti politici di Gaetano Mosca*, Vol. 2, UTET, Turin, 1982.

⁴ On the relationship between politological, historical and juridical studies see the exhaustive opinions of N. Bobbio, *Saggi sulla scienza politica in Italia*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 1996, 3-13.

⁵ Extensive biographical notes regarding Gaetano Mosca are provided by E. A. Albertoni, *Gaetano Mosca. Storia di una dottrina politica. Formazione e interpretazione*, Giuffrè, Milan, 1978, 3, as well as in G. Sola, *Gaetano Mosca. Profilo biografico*, in AA.VV., *La dottrina della classe politica ed i suoi sviluppi internazionali. Primo seminario internazionale Gaetano Mosca. Palermo 27-29 November 1980*, Giuffrè - Società Siciliana per la storia Patria di Palermo, Palermo, 1982, 17-52. For an accurate bibliography of Mosca's work and about Mosca, see G. Sola, *Nota bibliografica*, in G. Sola (edited by), *Scritti politici di Gaetano Mosca*, Vol. 1, cit., 93-173.

whose work is known and discussed all over the world⁶. His influence is found clearly in the scientific production of numerous authors, as is typical of those who are defined, with good reason, as being among the classics of a particular discipline.

Born in Palermo, April first, 1858, Gaetano Mosca belonged to a middle class wealthy family. Since he was a young boy he set his life looking for firm cultural basis; he matured a great passion for reading and as a young man he opted for historical and juridical studies. He attended profitably the Faculty of Law in his town (together with his friend Vittorio Emanuele Orlando) and he graduated in 1881 with distinction. Immediately after his graduation, in order to gain his economic independence, he started teaching History and Geography in a high school in Palermo and in the mean time he started his academic career which brought, in a few years, to obtain the chair in Constitutional Law at the Universities in Palermo and Rome, where he moved in 1887 to work as the particular secretary and political advisor of the Mps' Di Rudinì (who was Sicilian himself and became Head of the Government later). At the end of 1896 he moved to Turin (together with his wife and their three children), where he was appointed Associate Professor in Constitutional Law at the Faculty of Law. This University had just established some Social Sciences courses and Mosca taught for many years History of Political Sciences. The following years, besides winning the open competition to become Professor, he embedded himself in the Italian cultural and academic world: he established firm relationships with the most important academics of his time, as Einaudi, Ferrero, Lombroso and Michels. He also held important conferences and presided over various cultural associations. Since 1901 he even increased his influence on the Italian political debate, thanks to his regular collaboration with Luigi Alberini's *Corriere della Sera*. In 1902 he was appointed Professor in Constitutional and Administrative Law in the new-born Bocconi University in Milan. He kept this chair until 1918 when he accepted to teach Political Science. In 1909 he was elected in a Sicilian constituency. Being a Member of the elective House of the Parliament, where he collocates himself with the Right in a liberal-conservative position, plus thanks

⁶ To fully appreciate the international dimension of the awareness and diffusion of his works see AA.VV., *La dottrina della classe politica e la sua diffusione internazionale. Orientamenti informativi e temi di riflessione critica*, in AA.VV., *La dottrina della classe politica ed i suoi sviluppi internazionali*, cit., 189-283, AA.VV., *Documentazione internazionale*, in E. A. Albertoni (edited by), *Governo e governabilità nel sistema politico e giuridico di Gaetano Mosca*, Giuffrè, Milan, 1983, 391-493, as well as W. Abbondanti, *La fortuna nel mondo anglofono*, and R. Ghiringhelli, *Mosca transalpino*, in E. A. Albertoni, *Gaetano Mosca. Storia di una dottrina politica*, cit., respectively and 511-535.

to his work at *Corriere*, he led passionate debates, often clearly contrasting Giolitti's positions, against both the universal suffrage and the introduction of the proportional electoral law. In 1914 he joined Salandra's government in the role of parliamentary secretary of the Colonies. In 1919 he was nominated Senator of the Kingdom thanks to his work as a Member of the Parliament in the last two terms and as a Member of the Public Instruction Superior Council (qualifications expressly foreseen at the Art. 33 of the Albertine Statue). As a Senator he mostly took care both of the agricultural and alimentation issue and the colony and emigration problem. In 1924 he went back to Rome where the Faculty of Law appointed him Professor of Internal Public Law, a chair that had been previously held by his friend Vittorio Emanuele Orlando who became Professor in Constitutional Law. When Mosca left the University of Turin, Piero Gobetti highlighted Mosca's love for both research and a free way of thinking. In 1925 he signed Benedetto Croce's antifascist manifesto and joined the Liberal Party established by Croce himself together with Giolitti, Orlando, Ruffini and Fortunato. At the end of the same year, he made the most important and well known speech of his parliamentary life against the bill, imposed by Mussolini, about the attributions and the prerogatives to the Head of the Government. In the following years he edited a number of other important publications (including the last edition of *Elementi*) and was awarded several honorary degrees, as well as the nomination at the Accademia dei Lincei as a national member. He died in Rome, November 8, 1941.

So, it may seem quite pleonastic to return to contemplate the thought of this Maestro, who has been analysed, exalted and also criticised, for over a century now, by a vast literature. And nevertheless the challenges that modernity poses to those who engage in the study of political processes, from the crisis of the Nation State to the multifarious problems that democratic systems are called upon to face as regards political representation, the relationship between pluralism and decision-making, the authenticity of consensus, right up to the changes ensuing from new technology may perhaps give meaning to the attempt to reread that theoretical framework, both to establish the current soundness and to measure the prospective usefulness in order to understand better and face these challenges. Of course, the quest is to separate as much as possible the aspects which still are of considerable significance today, from those that are inevitably and irremediably covered by the patina of age.

II. *The Theory of the Political Class*

At the centre of Mosca's analysis there is the Power: in point of fact who holds it, for what reasons, on the basis of which mechanisms of justification and the end to which it is wielded. To all intents and purposes, we could say, the formation, organisation and consequences of Power⁷.

The theory of the political class is traditionally considered the major contribution brought by Gaetano Mosca to the theory of the élites⁸.

Contrary to what is commonly believed, élitism is not a trend that can be traced back exclusively to a handful of authors whose scientific production is collocated at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries: Mosca, Pareto, Michels and Weber. There were 18th and 19th century precursors like Saint-Simon, Comte, Tocqueville and Taine, who often in their respective socio-political and historic-political analyses had the occasion to use the concepts of élites and managerial classes as an indispensable key for interpreting epoch-making phenomena such as revolutions and the attempts for restoration, the imposition of the bourgeoisie and the class struggle⁹. There are also those authors who continue to use the contribution provided by the classic élitistes to enhance their own analyses. Suffice to think of, among others, Ortega y Gasset, Schumpeter, Aron e Dahrendorf.

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the theory of the élites finds a definition and organic systemisation thanks to the work of those exponents of Italian and German sociology and politology. What their theories have in

⁷ See N. Bobbio, *Saggi sulla scienza politica in Italia*, cit., p. 168.

⁸ International literature that has thoroughly dissected the theory of the élites is so full and composite that it would be impossible to point to even one single part of those works. Among the most important contributions of the last thirty years recommended reading could be A. Zuckerman, *The Concept "Political Elite": Lessons from Mosca and Pareto*, in *The Journal of Politics*, n. 2/1977, 324-344; L. Hamon, *A propos de la théorie des élites: les formes de la prépondérance et leurs variations*, in *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, 1985, 77-90; G. Busino, *Elites et bureaucratie*, Droz, Genève, 1988; S. J. Eldersveld, *Political Elites in Modern Societies*, University of Michigan Press, 1989; P. Cammack, *A critical assessment of the New Elite Paradigm*, in *American Sociological Review*, 1990, 415-420 and J. Higley, M. G. Burton, L. G. Field, *In Defence of Elite Paradigm: a Replay to Cammack*, in *American Sociological Review*, 1990, 421-426. As far as Italian literature is concerned apart from the by now superseded AA.VV., *Le élites politiche*, Laterza, Bari, 1961, which collects the acts of an important congress that was held between Milan and Stresa in September 1959, the IVth World Congress of Sociology, and the classic E. Ripepe, *Gli elitisti italiani, I, Mosca - Pareto - Michels*, Pacini, Pisa, 1974, the more recent G. Sola, *La teoria delle élites*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2000, is recommended probably being the most complete and organic contribution on the history of world elitist thought that has ever appeared in Italy.

⁹ See G. Sola, *La teoria delle élites*, cit., 48.

common, in many ways different and not overlapping at all¹⁰, is the realistic acknowledgement that irrespective of the form of state that characterises a particular historical period and the form of government expressed by the legal system, in any national society there will always be the presence of a more or less restricted organised elite holding and wielding power. There will be a majority of subjects who will see their own existence conditioned by the practical methods with which this power is exerted by the élite in command. To all extents and purposes, every political régime is governed by organised minorities (as Mosca wrote in the passage quoted in the introduction), to the detriment or on behalf of a disorganised majority.

In this scenario the significance taken on by Mosca's scientific contribution is due not only to the possibility of laying claim to primogeniture over the other exponents of this doctrine¹¹, but above all to the fact that it gave form and substance to some concepts, such as for example "political class", which other authors had already used in the past (his forerunners) but without ever making them rise to the level of systematic interpretation of the dynamics of power. Mosca's specific theory on the élites should be sought in his capacity to subject the traditional methods by which the political systems had been classified since Aristotle's day¹² and in the incisive way with which the decisive importance that the subject of organisation assumes is underlined, this being the real tool of justification for the élites in command¹³.

In Mosca's élitism the "political class" assumes a central role. What does it consist of exactly? It is a concept of apparently simple intuition, but is in fact difficult to define with precise outlines. Mosca himself many a time comes up against hurdles in his definitive work, as bears witness a certain imprecise terminology which compromises the explanatory quality¹⁴. His attempt to

¹⁰ On the controversial interweaving relationships between the classical elitists see. G. Eisermann, *Nuovi elementi sulle relazioni tra Mosca, Pareto e Max Weber*, in *Prassi e teoria*, n. 2/1977, 207-221; G. Sola, *La teoria delle élites*, cit., 65-67; D. Fiorot, *Potere, governo e governabilità in Mosca e Pareto*, in E. A. Albertoni (edited by), *Governo e governabilità nel sistema politico e giuridico di Gaetano Mosca*, cit., 79-102, not to mention S. Segre, *Mosca e Weber: rapporti intellettuali ed analisi comparata delle sociologie politiche*, *Idem.*, 103-120. We shall see all these topics deeper later on.

¹¹ At the beginning of the twentieth century there was a famous controversy with Vilfredo Pareto on which of them had theorized first on the principle of the organised minorities. The details of this diatribe are described well by D. Fiorot, *Potere, governo e governabilità in Mosca e Pareto*, cit., 87-92.

¹² See R. Sereno, *The Anti-Aristotelianism of Gaetano Mosca and its Fate*, in *Ethics*, n. 4/1938, 509-518.

¹³ See G. Sola, *La teoria delle élites*, cit., 65-66.

¹⁴ As shown by G. Sola, *La teoria delle élites*, cit., p. 18 and E. Ripepe, *Intellettuali, classe-politica e consenso nel pensiero di Gaetano Mosca*, in *Il Politico*, 1981, 550-552. The term *élite* is

formulate an organic interpretation of the political class derives from the assumption that “in every properly established government the effective distribution of political power does not always tally with the power of law”¹⁵. In other words, this means that alongside the holders of institutional roles expressly foreseen by the public law (the Crown, Republican President, Heads of government, members of the cabinet, members of the elected assemblies, besides the uppermost positions in the bureaucratic and judicial systems and those responsible for public order and defence), those who exert formal power endorsed by constitutional and legislative rules, there are the holders of a social power no less important than those who hold legal power, prerogative of all those who have significant positions from an economic point of view (industrialists, bankers, financiers), in the world of the professions, intellectuals and even in the religious field (ecclesiastical hierarchies). In short, all those who, while not holding offices foreseen by the order, have a significant ability to influence the course of public life and so the conditions in the existence of individuals belonging to a particular society. Mosca tends to define the first category of people as the *political class* in the strict or special sense of the term, while the group of all those who hold formal or “social” power he calls the *managerial class*, consisting of a sum of all the holders of *effective* power as regards the management of a country. So, the managerial class of a nation, the one that has the ability to take the various kinds of decisions in order to lead it, has a heterogeneous structure and it is possible to distinguish the component called upon to take on a strictly political definition, precisely *political class*, as opposed to those economic, cultural and religious, which are no less important as regards the reality of power.

Once the political class has been defined, even if not completely satisfactory from the lexical point of view, Mosca questions the reasons for the legitimation of power by the political class. Indeed, it is not a concern that takes up too much of his time. He does in fact only dedicate a few pages of his works to this topic, preferring to concentrate, as we will see, on the processes of development and organisational methods of the political class which, consistent with his own pragmatic and realistic attitude, he considered to be a priority to

analysed thoroughly in AA.VV., *Le élites politiche*, cit., in particular in the contributions by G.E.G. Catlin, *Le élites politiche*,. 59-67; G. Lavau, *Nota sulle élites politiche*, 80-87; G. Sartori, *I significati del termine élites*, 94-99.

¹⁵ See *Teorica dei governi*, cit., 365-366.

explain the relationships of power within a national society¹⁶. However, he does not evade the need to identify the general principles on the basis of which an organised minority legitimates its power in the eyes of those being governed. To this end he defines *political formula* those abstract principles through which the political élite justifies its own power¹⁷, building around it a moral and legal structure¹⁸. Two examples, while opposites from the rational point of view, of political formulas that have contributed to guaranteeing and consolidating the power of a political class are the divine right of Kings and the principle of popular sovereignty. According to Mosca these formulas carry out their function of consolidating the echelons of the system and social cohesion, independent of the degree of plausibility and reasonableness that is encapsulated within, but simply to the extent to which they are perceived as real and acceptable by those who are not part of the political class or, more extensively, the managerial class. The existence of a political formula is necessary from the point of view of social psychology¹⁹, since the need to obey great principles is inherent in human nature, rather than to individuals or groups that hold virtual power²⁰. Following this line of thought, Mosca adds that “it is not the political formula that determines the way the political class is structured. On the contrary, it is the latter that always adopts the formula that suits it best”²¹. This statement is so radical and disillusioned as regards any political ideal as to border on cynicism and exaggeration, but it perhaps contributes to

¹⁶ See F. Mancuso, *Gaetano Mosca e la tradizione del costituzionalismo*, ESI, Naples, 1999, 118.

¹⁷ See *Teorica dei governi*, cit., 226-229.

¹⁸ On the concept of *political formula* see also par. I, chap. III, Parte Prima, of *Elementi di Scienza Politica*, cit., 633-635, as well as *Storia delle dottrine politiche*, Laterza, Bari, IV ed., 1945,

341-342. For an analysis of this subject of Mosca's see M. Delle Piane, *Gaetano Mosca. Classe politica e liberalismo*, ESI, Naples, 1952, 194 and following. In Aldo Bardusco's opinion “Basically Gaetano Mosca seems to claim that the legitimation of power is a political operation where the class or élite that succeeds best is the one that upholds those values that are most suitable to founding the power of that same class” (See A. Bardusco, *Legittimazione del potere e partiti politici nel pensiero di Gaetano Mosca e Guglielmo Ferrero*, in *Dir. Soc.*, n. 3/1982, 540).

¹⁹ For an analysis of the relationship between psychology and politics in Mosca's work see F. Mancuso, *Gaetano Mosca e la tradizione del costituzionalismo*, cit., 74 ff.

²⁰ A deep alarm for the devastating consequences that the disappearance of ideologies and also any form of idealism in the political struggle, to the benefit of a pragmatism incapable of defining a cultural horizon towards which public power could aim, has recently been raised by N. Irti, *La tenaglia. In difesa dell'ideologia politica*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2008. Also interesting, even if short, are the considerations on the study of “political ideology” in twentieth century political science and on how these studies were influenced by the works of the founders of the discipline like, for example, Mosca, are found in G. Miglio, *Mosca e la scienza politica*, in E. A. Albertoni (edited by), *Governo e governabilità nel sistema politico e giuridico di Gaetano Mosca*, cit., 15-17.

²¹ See *Teorica dei governi*, cit., 227.

clarify the reasons for which in the course of History there have often been changes contemporarily in the structure of the managerial class and in the ideal reasons that justify the holding of power on the part of the new groups. The relationship of cause and effect between these two elements in many cases cannot be described so calmly, only from the point of view of strict principles; suffice to think of the destiny of many revolutionary regimes which became quickly authoritarian and despotic. Or, on the contrary, it helps to understand the reasons why an élite manages to hold on to political power for a long time despite the fact that it has lost, or is losing its real social supremacy²².

III. *Forms of Government and Mixed Government*

From the theory of the political class and in particular of the role played by the political formula, it is not acceptable to draw the impression that Mosca is inspired by an attitude of indifference as regards the good nature or not of a political regime. The fact that any political system is characterised by the presence of a political class that wields power and legitimates this by means of a series of principles functional to its own existence, does not mean for Mosca that all regimes are equal. Far from it. The whole formulation of the theory of the political class shows how he refuses a conception of politics based on mere power²³. His attitude is, if anything, yet again the need for the scientist to make the realism of experience prevail over the idealism of the spirit, in order to propound an analysis of phenomena that corresponds better to reality or, at least is closest to it. Of course, the simple call for healthy realism does not imply a reduction in the level of disputableness of Mosca's reconstructions, given that the themes dealt with do not constitute proper subject-matter for one of the "exact" sciences and that by their nature lend themselves to continual subjective and relative interpretation. Despite this, the effort that Mosca makes every time he takes on one of the cardinal points in his own theory of power takes him beyond the facade or commonplaces, in order to search for the dynamics that *really* manage to explain political phenomena, above all the less obvious ones. It is, however, acceptable to claim that in some cases this attempt has misfired as is perhaps inevitable for any social scientist.

²² As G. Sola suitably points out in *La teoria delle élites*, cit., 76 "is the exemplification of the rise to power of the bourgeoisie and the persistence of the political formula of the Ancien Régime".

²³ See note N. Bobbio, *Introduzione*, cit., XX.

This is the thread that ties Mosca's whole work together, both in the domain of an internal evolution and on particular subjects that we will see are quite noticeable. It was inevitable that this stance would condition also his own interpretation, or rather his critical re-reading of the traditional classifications of forms of government.

In the history of Western thought there are basically three traditional classifications that have conditioned the theory of the forms of government (understood, just, in this vast meaning): those of Aristotle, Machiavelli and Montesquieu²⁴.

According to Gaetano Mosca none of these classifications captures in full the essence of the phenomena because of their formalism, all being based exclusively on the criteria of the number of those who hold power, and so they were not able to describe the reality thoroughly, remaining only on the surface of what can be seen, that is, the number of governors. However, for the theoretician of the political class all regimes cannot be anything but oligarchic (or aristocratic, if one wishes to assign the term a more positive connotation), since in all of them there is an élite in command, more or less widespread and organised, and a majority of governed. From this perspective it is obvious that numeric distinction is insufficient and in the final analysis deceptive. The approach to these themes should be different and there should be other criteria to distinguish and classify political regimes.

So, he proposes a classification model based on completely different logic and parameters.

Keeping firmly at the centre of his analysis the political class, the only interesting key for interpretation to describe and judge political systems, he highlights two concepts tied to them which he calls respectively the *organisation* and *formation* of the political class²⁵.

On the one hand he claims that the types of organisation of the political class can be limited to two: the one in which authority is transmitted from the top to the bottom²⁶, which he calls *autocratic*, and the one in which there is the

²⁴ Discussed by N. Bobbio, *Stato, governo, società. Frammenti di un dizionario politico*, Einaudi, Turin, 95 and following.

²⁵ For a thorough analysis of these two concepts see G. Sola, *Introduzione*, G. Sola (edited by), *Scritti politici di Gaetano Mosca*, Vol. primo, cit., 66-75.

²⁶ "... in such a way as to leave the choice of the lower-ranking functionary to his superior, until the top hierarch is reached who chooses his immediate assistants, as should happen in the typical absolute monarchy" (See par. I, chapt. IV, Part 2 of *Elementi di Scienza Politica*, cit., 1003-1004).

opposite transmission of delegation of power from the bottom to the top, which he calls *liberal*.²⁷

As regards the latter, he believes that it is expedient to distinguish between two opposite trends: that of the renewal of the existing political class in a particular moment through the total substitution by elements coming from the classes which up until that moment had been governed or, at least its completion thanks to the contribution of these elements which he defines *democratic*; the second trend aims at the crystallisation of the social management through the hereditary transmission of power and this he calls *aristocratic*.

As can be seen, while using terminology which is by and large traditional, Mosca shuffles the cards completely creating a quadrille of concepts that he needs as a starting block in order to analyse the different political systems that have historically been created in function of the co-presence, or not, of all these elements²⁸.

Accordingly, the spectrum of these combinations will bring forth four possible forms of government: 1) aristocratic-autocratic; 2) aristocratic-liberal; 3) democratic-autocratic; 4) democratic-liberal²⁹. In Mosca's opinion it is only through the use of these new categories, which are able to identify the really crucial points that act as a watershed, that the observer of political phenomena is able to understand completely the characteristics of the different regimes, of their ability to organise themselves, of real relationships that are established between the subjects that hold the interest.

The judgement on a particular political system, on its capacity for self conservation and at the same time to make itself accepted calmly by those who are governed, in Mosca's construction would not be complete if a further notion that he develops were not considered: *juridical defence*.

By this expression, which is in fact rather cryptic, Mosca means the complex of the "social mechanisms that regulate this discipline in the moral

²⁷ Explaining that this name "seems so much more appropriate in that the use of believing that those peoples are free prevails, where the governors should be chosen by all or even by a part of those governed and the law itself should be an enactment of the general will (*idem*, 1004).

²⁸ "...bearing in mind that it is extremely difficult to find a political regime in which it can be claimed there is the absolute exclusion of one of the two principles, or of one of the two tendencies, it seems certain that the strong predominance of autocracy or liberalism, of aristocratic or democratic tendencies can provide an unfailing and crucial criteria to determine the type of political organisation of a given people in a given period" (*idem*, 1005).

²⁹ On the importance in Mosca's work of this combination of elements see N. Bobbio, *Introduzione*, cit., XVII; G. Sola, *Introduzione*, cit., 68; A. Panebianco, *Gaetano Mosca, studioso e uomo politico*, in Gaetano Mosca, *Discorsi parlamentari*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2003, 17.

sense"³⁰. As can be seen, a definition that has nothing juridical about it is of little use to understand the real meaning of the concept. By analysing the chapter from *Elementi di Scienza Politica* which is dedicated to this, it is understood, however, that with this element Mosca intends to highlight the importance for political systems to put a check on individual or collective instincts which are able to threaten the foundations. In order to face these dangers it is necessary that a moral sense is developed and consolidated in the associates of the group; we could say in contemporary language, that a *public ethic* is consolidated which is able to put checks on deviant behaviour. So this constitutes an essential parameter to judge the effectiveness or not of a form of government. Without wishing to make any a priori judgement or judgement based on an abstract conception of good and evil, right and wrong, he tends to evaluate political systems on the basis of their capacity to nourish mainly these ethical antibodies aimed at avoiding the bullying of one social group over others and thus, in the final analysis, aimed at pursuing a basic harmony in the social body upon which the life of a state is founded.

To this end, the best guarantee against destructive alterations of the delicate balance on which public life rests is that the social groups that are the bearers of legitimate interest, strong and worthy of protection, are the most numerical possible, so as to create a beneficial dialectic between social forces whose strength tends to correspond and thus leads to cancelling out the elements which are potentially destructive. It is perfectly obvious how in these steps the teaching of the classics of liberalism emerges forcefully in Mosca's thought and in particular Montesquieu's thoughts, even if, yet again, he leads the discussion from a strictly institutional level to one which is more concerned with the concrete social dynamics that lie under the grid of reciprocal relationships between the constitutional organs³¹. An obvious consequence from all these considerations is his declared liking for those forms of mixed government in which there is neither the predominant presence of one type of organisation nor the trend around the processes of formation of the political class³², but rather that prove to be more capable of tempering principles and

³⁰ See par. III, cap. V, Part 1, in *Elementi di Scienza Politica*, cit., 679.

³¹ See F. Mancuso, *Gaetano Mosca e la tradizione del costituzionalismo*, cit., 155. For a historical and theoretical *excursus* on European liberal constitutionalism see E. Di Salvatore, *Appunti per uno studio sulla libertà nella tradizione costituzionale europea*, in *Teoria del Diritto e dello Stato*, n. 1-2-3 of 2006, 85-147.

³² For a survey of the features of mixed government in Mosca's thought, and a comparison with Montesquieu's doctrine on the separation of powers, see N. Bobbio, *Saggi sulla scienza politica in Italia*, cit., 210-219.

different tendencies³³. Only mixed governments are able to temper liberty and authority, continuity and renewal, stability of power but also the capacity to adapt to the changing times without the risk of running into destructive crises or dangerous revolutionary directions.

IV. *Representative Democracy and Parliamentarianism*

Can Gaetano Mosca be defined an anti-democratic author? Can his works be laid alongside those of the classic reactionary thinker, first and foremost Joseph De Maistre? Perhaps after a first superficial reading of some passage or other, above all from the *Theoretics of Government*, the answer may be quietly affirmative. A more thorough analysis of his thoughts, however, cannot but lead us to doubt the collocation of him within those categories and to highlight also a considerable evolution in his thought as regards subjects like representative democracy and parliamentarianism³⁴, an evolution demonstrated also by his taking a stand when called upon to carry out political-parliamentarian positions.

But what is democracy for Mosca and what are his opinions about this political regime? Mosca dedicates many pages to democracy right from his very first work. The analysis that he carries out in the *Theoretics* is extremely polemic and ruthless. He sees in the democratic idea an illusion and an internal contradiction. The illusion consists of the belief and claim that with the application of the democratic idea the people governs itself. The political decisions, that is, are made by the people. The role of the political class loses its distinctive features of organised minority holding the *leadership* of the political system taking on the role of pure interpreter of the collective interest to be translated into juridical measures. To all intents and purposes, the governors and the governed would, for the first time in history, overlap, basically putting nowhere the function that the traditionally political elites have played in other regimes. The contradiction would be a logical consequence of this inaccurate formulation: the mechanisms of parliamentary representation and the application of the majority principle can only lead to the practical negation of

³³ See par. VII, cap. IV, Part 2 in *Elementi di Scienza Politica*, cit., 1041.

³⁴ On the main elements that show Mosca's thought process see G. Sola, *Introduzione*, cit., 70 and following; S. Sicardi, *Il regime parlamentare: Gaetano Mosca davanti ai costituzionalisti del suo tempo*, in *Politica del diritto*, n. 4/1998, 570-572, as well as F. Mancuso, *Gaetano Mosca e la tradizione del costituzionalismo*, cit., 83 and following.

the utopian identity between popular will and the entitlement to make decisions. The élites come powerfully into the game again in the concrete institutional mechanisms through which consensus is aggregated and decisions are made.

It is clear that his basic target is essentially a particular vision of democracy, that is the theories of “pure democracy” or “radical democracy”, void of mediation and co-mingling with other tendencies which, in the perspective of a mixed government know how to stem potential keeling. In short, it is Rousseau’s conception of democracy which, being founded on the belief of an abstract and mythical (and so, in reality, non-existent) *volonté générale* inevitably ends up turning into its opposite, and that is into a non-egalitarian and illiberal regression, as would demonstrate, in Mosca’s opinion, the complex parable of the French Revolution³⁵.

Nevertheless, his initial aversion towards democracy is so radical that it ends up ruining not only that resolute vision that can be traced back to the thinker from Geneva, but in general democratic systems that have been created,

³⁵ On Rousseau’s role in the formulation of democratic theory, which Mosca considered the foundation for the degeneration of the French Revolution, he was fiercely criticised by his friend Guglielmo Ferrero who, generally, accused him of highlighting excessively the importance of the doctrine on the course of History and, more specifically, of magnifying disproportionately Rousseau’s influence on the French Revolution. On this point see F. Mancuso, *Gaetano Mosca e la tradizione del costituzionalismo*, cit., 85, note 190. For a comparison between Mosca and Ferrero on the question of the legitimation of power see A. Bardusco, *Legittimazione del potere e partiti politici nel pensiero di Gaetano Mosca and Guglielmo Ferrero*, cit., 536-547. On the relationship of intellectual exchange and personal habit between the two authors see G. Ferrero – G. Mosca, *Carteggio*, Giuffrè, Milan, 1980.

This disliking, for these aspects, permits Mosca’s thoughts to be laid alongside the basic canons that have characterised the works of different exponents of the Austrian School, like Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich A. von Hayek. To give an example, some of the most ferocious pages against social constructivism written by Hayek can be seen in F. A. von Hayek, *The Mistakes of Constructivism*, in Id., *New studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas*, Armando, 1988., 11 and following, and a reconstruction of the criticisms raised by Mises of the mathematical and econometric methods used often in the economic analysis of human action in M. N. Rothbard, *The fundamental contribution of Ludwig von Mises*, in L. von Mises, *Libertà e proprietà*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli – Treviglio, 2007, 93 ff. The typical concepts on which Rousseau’s theoretical ideas are based like the social contract, general will or the representation of the nation could not find refuge in Mosca’s vision of things. The same can be said for the conception of human nature. On this point the contrast between the two authors could not be more obvious: “[<the reader will have noticed that our way of thinking is contrary to that of Rousseau, i.e. that man, is naturally good but that society makes him bad and perverse. We, however, believe that social organisation having as a consequence the reciprocal brake of human individuals, improves them, not by destroying the evil instincts but by making the individual master them” (see paragraph III, cap.V, Part 1, note h, of the *Elementi di Scienza Politica*, cit., 681). On the other hand, from reading G. Mosca, *Storia delle dottrine politiche*, cit., 222-236 it can be seen how aware Mosca was of the life and works of Rousseau and the importance that he attributed to it, albeit holding a contrasting opinion in the history of Western political thought.

even if of different inspiration, and consequently a large part of the institutions that animate life, beginning with Parliament.

He describes almost entirely negatively the course of representative democracy. The nucleus around which the parliamentary system rotates consists of the close relationship between Cabinet and the elective chamber³⁶. These two bodies have progressively eroded the political role of the King and the Upper Chamber.

It must be acknowledged that from the writings of this “*tenacious, stubborn and incorrigible conservative*”³⁷, even from those more heavily soaked with youthful controversy, such as in the *Theoretics of Governments*, there is never an inkling of nostalgia for an epoch in which the Monarch, vested with authority by divine right, incarnated power on the basis of a principle which was purely authoritarian. Mosca limits himself to take cognizance of the irreversible sunset of that concept which had already exhausted its historical function of aggregation in the great Nation States. The liberal states that kept the monarchic form had undoubtedly some reckoning to do, above all from the point of view of logical coherence, with the new means of legitimation of the figure of the sovereign. Formulas like “*by the grace of God and the will of the Nation, King of Italy*”³⁸ were laden with obscurity and vagueness³⁹. Nevertheless, Mosca himself recognises that this potential aporia in the order does not necessarily bring with it excessively negative consequences from the practical point of view, precisely because the essence of power has passed to other constitutional bodies and the King can at the most carry out a role of what we would call today *moral suasion*, played not so much on the use of powers that the Charters still formally attribute to the Sovereign, rather than on the specific qualities of the individual who sits on the throne⁴⁰.

The new architrave in the political system is, thus, made up of the binominal parliamentary majority – Government. Which dynamics determine the centrality of the binomial and what are the features that distinguish the action? Here Mosca identifies a large part of the criticality of the parliamentary system. He reveals that normally the leader of the parliamentary majority is

³⁶ See *Teorica dei governi*, cit., 373.

³⁷ As defined by N. Bobbio, *Introduzione*, cit., XXV.

³⁸ This formulation was contained in the law on the headings of government acts approved by Parliament in 1861.

³⁹ “but this constant union of divine grace and popular will, that converge on one sole individual, is a thing that in the times like these where faith is in short supply, it is hard to believe and no-one knows how to understand” (See *Teorica dei governi*, cit., 368).

⁴⁰ See *Teorica dei governi*, cit., 370.

called upon to hold the office of head of Government; the choice of the ministers and the government's programme depend on the internal balance within the parliamentary majority; the designation of certain forces like the parliamentary majority depends on the free expression of the consensus by the electorate. Accordingly, in the theoretical construction of representative democracy, the source of legitimation of the power of the Executive depends on the choice of the representatives determined by those represented. In Mosca's opinion this reconstruction smacks of formalism and does not consider the concrete reality of things. Faithful to his attitude whereby there is always an exclusive organised élite determining the will of the disorganised majority and not the other way round, he contests radically that political representation really has those characteristics. The choice of a member of parliament does not depend at all on the free expression of an electoral preference on the part of the individual voter, but rather on the organisational capacity with which a political force or an electoral committee are able to assert themselves on the electoral market⁴¹. It is pointless to be under the delusion as to the political sovereignty of the voter: his freedom of choice is limited to a confined field prepared by the organised minority who select the candidates not on the basis of criteria attentive to the greatest representative capacity of the electorate, but rather according to the guarantees that he offers regarding the consolidation of power at the head of the same minority that has put him forward as a candidate. There is a famous, apparently paradoxical passage that expresses perfectly Mosca's thoughts on this point: *"Whoever has witnessed an election knows full well that it is not the voters who elect the Members but the candidate who gets himself elected by the electorate: if this is not to our liking we could replace it with the other one which is that it is his friends who get him elected. In any case it is sure that a candidature is always the work of a group of people joined together for a common purpose, an organised minority which, as always, fatally and necessarily imposes itself on the disorganised majority"*⁴². Now, since the whole rising stage of the system is founded on a utopian ideal that does not take into consideration the decisive role of some constant factors in the political classes in every political regime, the goodness of the whole democratic structure can only prove to be invalidated and suffer from irremediable defects. On one hand the Government will be embroiled in an exhausting job of mediation between the parliamentary forces

⁴¹ "Now the elements that in Italy ordinarily direct the elections and members of parliament can be classified so: 1) prefects; 2) large isolated voters; 3) political and workers' associations in all their myriad subdivisions and varieties (see *Teorica dei governi*, cit., 479).

⁴² See *Teorica dei governi*, cit., 476.

that support it. The members of the Government in order to respond to these strains and remain in power are obliged to succumb to "*favouritism and arbitrary acts*"⁴³, to the great advantage of the most influential social groups and to the detriment of those who cannot count on the necessary support and protection. He underlines that this crookedness does not depend on the degree of personal morality of those that hold certain positions, such as Ministers, rather than the way the political system is set up⁴⁴. On the other hand, if the Government, managing wisely this symmetry, is able to equip itself with a firm stability, it inevitably manages to gather into its own hands a considerable amount of power (defined in fact as "*indeterminate and monstrous accumulation of power*"⁴⁵), creating an imbalance which the system attempts to remedy with the possibility for Parliament to induce the end of the Government's life, maybe even with one single majority vote: this is a measure that he deems much too drastic and arbitrary⁴⁶.

It is interesting to note that these accusatory statements regarding the parliamentary system were developed in the 1880s when the evolution of the form of government had not yet produced either an acceptable stability of the Cabinet, nor had there been the emergence of the institutional figure of the Premier as undisputed leader of the parliamentary majority for the whole duration of the legislature. Elements which were already part of the heritage of other more consolidated democracies like, for example, in Great Britain. Besides, the political life in the first decades of life of the Italian State is remembered for its continual periods of agitation and moments of instability caused also by the basic absence of well-rooted and well-organised political parties; their role was played by what goes down in history as the system of the notables. If this is true for the years of supremacy of the historical Right, it is all the more true for the balance that emerged after the electoral victory of the historical Left in 1876, with the establishment of the practice of shifting parliamentary alliances to carry on workable policies (a practice named *trasformismo*) as a tool to create parliamentary majorities, maybe hotchpotch and

⁴³ See *Teorica dei governi*, cit., 378.

⁴⁴ See *Teorica dei governi*, cit., 379.

⁴⁵ See G. Mosca, *Le Costituzioni moderne*, Amenta, Palermo, 1887, now in Id., *Ciò che la storia potrebbe insegnare. Scritti di scienza politica*, Giuffrè, Milan, 1958, 481.

⁴⁶ So much so that Mosca compares the vote of confidence as a deterrent for the omnipotence of the Executive to the regicide of the Sovereign: worse remedies than the evils against which they are struggling.

heterogeneous⁴⁷, able to ensure votes for the support of the government. But in those years the same figure of the King had not totally lost all importance of a political nature, something which maybe will never happen in the whole duration of the Italian liberal State, and which is thus difficult to see as an entity of solely symbolic value, totally estranged from the internal games between the Lower House and the Cabinet.

Nevertheless, it is at this point that we glimpse a detail in Mosca's thought and that is the fact that some forced interpretations in the analyses of the conditions of the parliamentary system that catalysed his interest in particular, that is, in Italy, permit him to anticipate some trends and problematic areas of parliamentarianism which will subsequently be found in the Twentieth century democracies, when the large parties of the masses play a determining role: the predominance of the Executive over legislature, but also policies of favouritism and party-hegemony.

This consideration allows us to interpret Mosca's antiparliamentarianism and anti-democraticism from a more complete and current point of view. It has been written that it could be argued with sound reasons that "*parliamentarianism, the ills of which are denounced by Mosca, was to the statutory representative of the regime, as partitocracy was to the Constitution of the Republic*"⁴⁸. The comparison may seem audacious but probably catches effectively the need to separate in the interpretation of Mosca's thinking the criticism of a false idealisation of Parliament as a place where the range of interests, aspirations and legitimate requests coming from the electorate are genuinely represented, from a negation which was never substantiated for the necessity that a well-balanced political system must equip itself with a legislative assembly⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ For an original reassessment of transformism as a practice on which Italian politics has historically been based, and perhaps on which it continues to be based see G. Sabbatucci, *Il trasformismo come sistema*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2003.

⁴⁸ See L. Borsi, *Classe politica e costituzionalismo. Mosca Arcoleo Maranini*, Giuffrè, Milan, 2000, 45.

⁴⁹ Far more modest and of poor efficacy compared to the pregnancy of the analysis is what may be defined the *pars construens* of Mosca's thought as regards parliamentarianism. In some parts of his works he tries to identify some hypothetical remedies for the defects and distortions of the parliamentary system. For example, by predicting that ministers would come from technocratic rather than political origin, or else claiming that "*the Senate should be chosen by a class of officials independent of government nomination and popular election, and it should comprise the most highly educated and independent components of the nation; this group should at the same time be entrusted with all provincial administration and play an important role in provincial bureaucracy*" (See *Teorica dei governi*, cit., 493). As can be seen, they are rather vague proposals but above all, they are outdated, as observed appropriately by R. Salvo, in AA.VV., *La dottrina della classe politica ed i suoi sviluppi internazionali*, cit., 346. On the *pars construens* of Mosca's theories see also F. Cammarano, *Storia politica dell'Italia liberale. 1861-1901*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 1999, 421.

Mosca's idea summons us to reflect on the delicacy of the idea of political representation too often turned into a myth and thus distorted. Popular participation in political life, even if with limited suffrage, is never fully aware and free as the theoreticians of radical democracy would like to make us believe, but it always and inevitably collides with the supremacy of the interests of the organised minority⁵⁰. In consequence, the representative mandate in politics can never be assimilated to that disciplined by private law. In private relationships, "*the delegation of power and entitlement always presupposes the widest form of freedom in the mandate and in the choice of the mandatary. Now, indeed, this freedom of choice, considered very broad in theory, necessarily becomes almost non-existent and irrelevant in the practice of political elections*"⁵¹.

If all these observations are considered with due attention, it is perhaps easier to face the subject of Mosca's universally-renowned aversion towards the principle of universal suffrage and towards any legislation which in statutory Italy may be proposed to extend the right to vote⁵², both to the less well-off classes and to women⁵³.

If, in Mosca's view, the moment of elections does not record the will of the disorganised majority, but rather sanctions the dominion of the organised minorities, the renunciation of limited suffrage on the basis of census would result in the concession of the participation to vote not so much to citizens belonging to classes and social ranks which up until now were excluded from determining national politics, maybe even through electoral success of political parties bringing new interests, aspirations and ideals, but rather to those citizens who are lacking the necessary cultural or economic tools to make conscious and discerning choices. Mosca expresses his fear that in the backward, farming Italy of the era, extending suffrage would only result in

⁵⁰ For these remarks, see L. Gambino, *Introduzione*, in L. Gambino (edited by), *Il realismo politico di Gaetano Mosca. Critica del sistema parlamentare e teoria della classe politica*, Giappichelli, Turin, 2005, XVI.

⁵¹ See Mosca's *Elementi di Scienza Politica*, cit., 712.

⁵² On the development of electoral legislation in statutory Italy see A. Colombo, Zanardelli, *La riforma elettorale e la lunga marcia della democrazia italiana*, in *Il Politico*, n. 4/1982, 649-659.

⁵³ See the speeches made by Mosca to the Lower House on 7 and 14 May 1912 in the discussion on the bill regarding the "Reform of the political electoral law", republished now in *Gaetano Mosca, studioso e uomo politico*, cit., 89-102. The subject of the right to vote in Mosca's thought is dealt with, among others, in C. Pinelli, *La questione del diritto di voto in Gaetano Mosca e nei costituzionalisti italiani*, in *Materiali per una storia della cultura giuridica*, n. 2/1998, 433-454, as well as Id., "*Un errore quasi necessario*". *Il suffragio universale nel pensiero di Gaetano Mosca*, in *Quad. cost.*, n. 1/2001, 155-166. On the question of women's suffrage see, instead, M. T. Sillano, in AA.VV., *La dottrina della classe politica ed i suoi sviluppi internazionali*, cit., 503-516.

increasing the number of easily manipulated, impressionable people. So, paradoxically, the vote which is easily manoeuvrable by the organised élites would end up crystallising even further the already existing relationships of power and on the contrary would supply the dominant political classes with a further reason for legitimising their own power. If we concur that this worry is genuine and not instrumental, Mosca's proverbial dislike for universal suffrage is not traced back to blindly conservative motivations regarding the privileges of the dominating class in the liberal state, but rather to a reasoning of systematic logic, in the sense that only preserving the principle of limited suffrage, those defects, however rooted in the parliamentary system would not unfurl the effects that would be even more devastating as regards the correct management of the "public thing". Any opening in that direction would have to follow and not precede a social development, albeit slow and gradual, thanks to which extensive levels of the population would be able to acquire the political awareness necessary to thus avoid becoming the tools for the interests of others⁵⁴.

It is necessary to give due attention to the fact that the juridical culture of the time tended to match the argument of the vote as an innate right (we would say today perhaps as a basic human right) to universal suffrage and that of the vote not as a right but as a public function to limited suffrage⁵⁵. Consistent with his own arguments, Mosca sides with the second view, since it seems to him the only way that respects the need for a free awareness of the expression of the vote as the only way to execute the public function.

In truth, this subject of juridical nature regarding the right to vote is enlightening in order to see the differences that exist between a mature and solid liberal state that is on the way to becoming a modern liberal democracy,

⁵⁴ In the pages dedicated specifically to the aversion towards conceding the right to vote to women, he lets himself wander into almost "anthropological" considerations on the fact that women are naturally led to take care of other things rather than the affairs of the state and so they are far more impressionable in their prospective expressions of vote because they are unable to evaluate their own critical opinion of political events. These are ideas that when read today can only seem extremely irritating which, however, in the context of the time in which they were written may be considered less astonishing. On these topics see G. Mosca, *Il suffragio femminile in Italia*, in *Il corriere della Sera* of 18 March 1907, 3, as well as Id., *Effetti pratici del suffragio universale in Italia*, in *Il corriere della Sera* of 16 June 1911, 1. Follow the main features of Mosca's co-operation with the big daily Milanese newspaper in A. Colombo, *L'intellettuale Mosca e la classe politica dalla tribuna del <<Corriere della Sera>>*, in E. A. Albertoni (edited by), *Governo e governabilità nel sistema politico e giuridico di Gaetano Mosca*, cit., 183-208.

⁵⁵ As reminded by C. Pinelli, *La questione del diritto di voto in Gaetano Mosca e nei costituzionalisti italiani*, cit., 442. On the subject of the juridical nature of the right to vote see G. Mosca, *Il suffragio femminile in Italia*, cit.

and a state that is perpetually poised between democratic openings and conservative regression. While in Italy the functionalist argument supplies a theoretical basis for limited suffrage, in the United Kingdom John Stuart Mill fights the argument of the public function of the vote precisely to encourage the opening to suffrage⁵⁶, in the sense that to confer layers of the population with this function, which had up to that moment been excluded, would have an educative and inclusive effect, thus contributing to strengthening the foundations of the State. For the Italian, on the contrary, the fear prevails that in the long term this prospect would end up undermining the strength of the institutions. It was certainly a short-sighted attitude highlighted in remorseless comparison, but perhaps contains great foresight if we think *mutatis mutandis* of the significance that the conditioning of opinions and the manipulation of political consensus by means of an unscrupulous use of the means of mass communication has assumed in the current debate on the crisis of democracy; the more effective the method, the less well-equipped culturally the subjects that are submit to it.

V. *The Role of Political Parties in the Constitutional System*

As is obvious in this mixture of analyses and criticisms on parliamentary democracy proposed by Mosca, there is no particular underlining of an element that is to characterise a large part of political science in the second half of the twentieth century: the role of the political parties⁵⁷.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ See C. Pinelli, *La questione del diritto di voto in Gaetano Mosca e nei costituzionalisti italiani*, cit., 444.

⁵⁷ On the subject see G. Sola, *L'analisi dei partiti politici in Gaetano Mosca*, G. Galli, *Gaetano Mosca ed il sistema dei partiti*, L. Compagna, *Il costituzionalismo senza partiti di Gaetano Mosca*, found in E. A. Albertoni (edited by), *Governo e governabilità nel sistema politico e giuridico di Gaetano Mosca*, cit., respectively. 271-295., 297-313, 315-330; as well as S. Sicardi, *Il regime parlamentare: Gaetano Mosca davanti ai costituzionalisti del suo tempo*, cit., 569-570 e F. Mancuso, *Gaetano Mosca e la tradizione del costituzionalismo*, cit., 227-254.

⁵⁸ If the function of the parties in the democratic system is so underestimated, that of the trade unions is viewed with great fear, not because he has an aversion in principle towards the fact that the defence of the workers' interests, in particular factory workers, would require the establishment of associations with this sole aim, but because he dreaded the transformation of the trade unions into political elements able to transform the State from a "Constitutional" to a "unionised State", as noted by A. Panebianco, *Gaetano Mosca, studioso e uomo politico*, cit., 18. On this no less trivial idea of Mosca's see G. Cavallari, *Gaetano Mosca e il sindacalismo rivoluzionario*, in E. A. Albertoni (edited by), *Governo e governabilità nel sistema politico e giuridico di Gaetano Mosca*, cit., 225 and following; M. Ortolani, *Gaetano Mosca and an analysis of the trade union*

Mosca does not go as far as to negate or fail to acknowledge their function⁵⁹, but there is no doubt that the parties do not play a central role in his reconstruction of the mechanisms that govern the democratic game. There are numerous reasons for this undervaluation and they help to explain what would seem to be an obvious contradiction to the tendency towards the “Party State” that some institutional realities, like the British one, had already highlighted and contemporary authors of his were preparing to study, making it the central point of their analyses⁶⁰.

The first perhaps needs to be sought in the peculiarity of the Italian liberal State⁶¹. As has been said, the limitedness of suffrage, the basic ideological homogeneity of all the post-unitary parliamentary managerial classes, not to mention the evolutionary predisposition of the internal dynamics of the elected Chamber, had certainly not encouraged stable formations to take root both from the organisational and ideal points of view; on the contrary they had contributed to encouraging the emergence of the role of a few notables, around whose prestige the choices of the electorate and the elected rotated. Mosca sets about analysing parliamentary democracy from its foundations and its rules which were tendentially valid in all the systems that had adopted it. Despite this, there is no doubt that the peculiarities of the Italian case were the most important benchmarks for him and his speculations and it was perhaps inevitable that these speculations showed the consequences of these intrinsic characteristics in the political situation of statutory Italy, even if in this way his thoughts end up suffering from some inaccuracies and inadequacies in the diagnosis of those systems in which the role of the parties had already been greatly consolidated⁶².

phenomenon, in AA.VV., *La dottrina della classe politica ed i suoi sviluppi internazionali*, cit., 517- 522, as well as G. Sola, *Introduzione*, cit., 72 and following.

⁵⁹ As recalled by S. Sicardi, *Il regime parlamentare: Gaetano Mosca davanti ai costituzionalisti del suo tempo*, cit., 569.

⁶⁰ Suffice to think of *Sociologia del partito politico* by Robert Michels in 1911. See D. Fisichella, *Robert Michels, il partito di massa e il problema della democrazia*, in *Dilemmi della modernità nel pensiero sociale*, Bologna, 1993, cit., 49-58 and F. J. Cook, *Robert Michels's Political Parties in Perspective*, in *The Journal of Politics*, n. 3/1971, 773-796.

⁶¹ For an analysis of the historical context in which Mosca's “anti-party” ideas mature see, among others, M. Delle Piane, *Liberalismo e parlamentarismo*, Macri, Bari, 1946; E. Cuomo, *Critica e crisi del parlamentarismo*, Giappichelli, Turin, 1996; F. Rossi, *Saggio sul sistema politico dell'Italia liberale*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2001, as well as F. Cammarano, *Storia politica dell'Italia liberale. 1861-1901*, cit.

⁶² S. Sicardi, *Il regime parlamentare: Gaetano Mosca davanti ai costituzionalisti del suo tempo*, cit., 569.

It is likely that there is something more profound to explain Mosca's attitude towards the parties, something that can be traced back yet again to an underlying mistrust of those phenomena that put themselves forward with certain qualities but which, in his eyes, hide very different features. So, in Mosca's view parties are none other than the modern representation of medieval factions, whose constitutive reasons do not derive from a free manifestation of associative spirit in order to seek and strive for the good of the State, but from an instinct of reciprocal confrontation, tools to make one élite prevail over another in the fight for Power. Mosca will never see in the "party" an element that is indispensable of political representation, above all in an era in which the masses are facing democratic sharing in the management of the State. In this regard it is symptomatic that in the *Elementi di Scienza Politica* he deals with political parties in the same chapter dedicated to the historical analysis of the role of the Church and sects⁶³, as if the distortions of the associative phenomenon were constant factors which in the course of history represent themselves with partially different characters, but still risky for the interests of the State. Because of their nature, exactly like the old factions of medieval times, they cannot be but dominated by cliques committed to the pursuit of particular interests, and as such always inclined to occupy the fundamental positions in the life of the State for the prime interest of the perpetuation of his own influence in the management of collective affairs. It is clear how such a pessimistic vision as this can be linked so logically to Mosca's mistrust in the formulation of ideologies. We have already seen how he overturns the relationship between political formula and the representation of interests. Normally one is led to believe that the division into parties depends, more or less directly, on a different *Weltanschauung* of the relationship between State and citizen, socio-economic relations, the structure and the ends of the State etc. With Mosca, however, the disenchantment towards abstract and doctrinaire constructions leads him to deem these aspects instrumental for the acquisition and conservation of power on the part of the organised minorities. From this standpoint it was inevitable that a radical mistrust would set in, a mistrust in the capacity of the parties to make themselves the champions of the common good and so represent a fundamental junction in a decent constitutional system.

⁶³ Chapter 7, Part 1, degli *Elementi di Scienza Politica*, cit., 738-776, entitled *Chiese, partiti e sette*.

Is this “constitutionalism without parties”⁶⁴ a distinguishing trait and unavoidable by any liberal constitutionalism? Of course not, and this can be seen even more clearly yet again in the comparison between Mosca’s view and those of some stalwarts of British constitutionalism. Some of these had, on the other hand, been instrumental in his intellectual development, such as Burke, Hume and Tocqueville. In the liberalism of these authors the political party assumes the character and the function of a modern tool to gain consensus, indispensable for the workings of constitutional systems in virtue of the elements of patchiness that it shows as regards the old factions. It also substitutes the role that the Church used to have in other eras in the management of public life. Mosca does not challenge the fact that in other forms of government, like in Britain or America, the parties may take on these functions, despite the intrinsic defects that even in these contexts could be expected to be found due to the nature of parties, but since he claims that a form of government is not exportable because of the particular historical implications that have contributed to establishing it, so he also believes that parties cannot take on the same role in those realities where the tendency towards cliques and factionalism is more pronounced, as in, for example, Italy.

Perhaps this position of Mosca’s on the impossibility of the entrenchment of a unitary spirit can be repeated regarding what was said before on universal suffrage. His vision of things is so disenchanting as to prevent him from grasping fully the spirit of the times that loomed ahead. The invasion, so feared by him, of the masses in the political battlefield could not but take place if not through the tool of the party, the only element able to organise and channel the drive and aspirations, even those which were potentially subversive within the system, as, indeed, a skilled and far-seeing statesman like Giolitti had understood. If the liberal State wanted to safeguard its structures and its deepest aspirations, from a certain moment on, more or less coinciding with the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, it would have to reckon with the new actors that were arriving on the Italian and international political stage: the popular masses and their parties of reference. Mosca even this time tends to see first of all the degeneration of the processes rather than the reasons for their establishment, to highlight the dangers without pausing to consider the needs. And, however, yet again, this position leads him to anticipate some criticisms of

⁶⁴ Discussed by L. Compagna, *Il costituzionalismo senza partiti di Gaetano Mosca*, cit.

the distortions of the “Party State” that influence a not insignificant part of the Italian doctrine in the second half of the 20th century⁶⁵.

VI. *Evolutionary Directions in Mosca's Thought*

All these aspects in Mosca's thought concerning parliamentary democracy and political parties are at the root of his theoretical development. His disliking for ideological abstractions, the deceit inherent in radical democracy (*in primis* the principle of universal suffrage), the defects of parliamentarianism and the fear of subversive and destabilising impulses in favour of one power group and the subsequent imbalance of the institutions that aim to preserve the *juridical defence*, will always be the guidelines for his way of being realistic and diffident.

Nevertheless, an analysis of Mosca's thought would be incomplete if it did not properly reveal the development that this thinking was subjected to over the decades and what Mosca achieved (when his own parable of scholar and politician was drawing to an end) both as regards a greater capacity of being topical in his interpretation of phenomena, and as regards the curbing of the *juvenile vis polemica*, to the advantage of the effectiveness of the evaluation of the controversial aspects that characterise any political system. This is true above all as regards his reflections on the parliamentary system⁶⁶. While unwavering in his perplexity regarding the lack of relationship between theoretical formulations and the concrete fulfilment of this system of government, the more mature Mosca, in particular the one of the second edition of *Elementi di Scienza Politica* (1923), perceives and underlines its strong points and the functional elements which up until that moment he had left in the shade. In this phase he acknowledges that only a system founded on the principles of parliamentary democracy is able, in the modern era, to generate

⁶⁵ The reference is obviously primarily to Giuseppe Maranini, to whom we owe term “partitocracy” along with his criticisms of the party system in post-war Italy. A comprehensive intellectual profile is laid out by L. Borsi, *Classe politica e costituzionalismo. Mosca Arcoleo Maranini*, cit., 347-487.

⁶⁶ The need to assess fully the importance of Mosca's development of thought as inescapable in order to make a correct reproduction and interpretation is underlined by G. Bedeschi, *Storia del pensiero liberale*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 1999, pp. 303 and following. He speaks of a reassessment, in softer terms, of the criticisms against parliamentarianism T. E. Frosini, *L'antiparlamentarismo e suoi interpreti*, in a speech held at the “Day of Rights and Constitutional History”, on 4 July 2008, at the University of Teramo, now published in www.associazionedeicostituzionalisti.it, 6 October 2008, 6-7.

the antibodies and counterweights capable of preserving precisely those values that he concealed in the expression *juridical defence*, otherwise at the mercy of more anachronistic and tribal forms in the struggle for power. Basically, he understands that the only form of “mixed government” that is realistically feasible is indeed that so contemptible democracy⁶⁷, of course not of the Jacobin and radical kind, but a liberal democracy able through the tool of parliamentary discussion at the institutional level and the free game of interests at the socio-political level to settle the multifarious conflicts that inevitably agitate contemporary societies, which are ever increasingly complex and fragmented⁶⁸. Mosca recognises how a system founded on a theory which in many ways is erroneous can in any case produce results the advantages of which outweigh the disadvantages. That is, a system in which the opportunities are preferable to the criticisms no matter how obvious. He acknowledges the superiority of democracy as regards the formation and turnover of the political class, with the subsequent reduction of the risk of an entrenchment of power on the part of one sole political force, an expression of the same social interests. And he admits the advantages also as regards the controlling of power, both by means of the tendential respect of its division, and through the freedom of expression of thought first and foremost as regards those that govern⁶⁹.

As Luigi Einaudi wrote: “*Forty years of observation and experience of the defects of human nature have persuaded the author that perfection is not attainable in the subject of politics and that the representative government perhaps offers the continuation which is feasibly better in a system of counterweights and compromise, so that supreme power is not free to act in its place, but there are many powers each one of which controls and limits the others and the better it controls and limits them, the more the different powers will represent different and opposing factions of the political class*”⁷⁰. Thus, it can be observed that the same realism that had animated Mosca’s most critical pages on the theoretical structure of democracy and the role of parliament, will later on permit the author to see the concrete advantages tied to that form of government and, with clear intellectual honesty, to highlight them even at the cost of partially contradicting some previous statements of his own.

⁶⁷ See N. Bobbio, *Introduzione*, cit., XXVII

⁶⁸ See G. Mosca, *Le Costituzioni moderne*, 482-483.

⁶⁹ See G. Sola, *Introduzione*, 70-71.

⁷⁰ See L. Einaudi, *Parlamenti e classe politica*, in *Cronache economiche e politiche di un trentennio*, Einaudi, Turin, 1965, 266.

So, in the final part of his intellectual and political journey he acknowledges that while the basically deceitful nature of the democratic formula holds true, the “practical effects”⁷¹ of mature democracies regarding juridical defence cannot be ignored and despised, above all the comparisons with the negations of freedom and the pernicious centralisation of power by regimes founded exclusively on the authoritarian principle⁷².

The greatest demonstration of this evolution can be seen in the famous speech given to the Senate on 19th December 1925⁷³ against the bill desired by Mussolini regarding the strengthening of the powers of the Head of Government, one of the most significant blows from the symbolic and concrete points of view struck by Fascism that led to the destruction of the liberal-democratic State. Well, Mosca’s speech immediately seems to be a sort of political testament of that form of state ⁷⁴, a testimony given (and it does not seem paradoxical) by he who had not skimmed with his quite ferocious criticisms of that system, but who, in the face of the barbarianism of dictatorship, takes up the cause of a dying democracy and a constitutional order which are about to be substituted by a political regime that will destroy all aspirations for a sharing of power, a mixed government and the balance of the socio-political trends, the pursuit of which Mosca had dedicated his long lifetime’s work of academic. Here are some particularly important passages⁷⁵: “*I have already hinted that this time I am speaking with a certain amount of emotion, since we are witnessing, let’s be frank, the funeral rites of a form of government; I would never have believed that I would be the only one to give a funeral oration of the parliamentary regime [...] I who have always been severely critical of the parliamentary government must now almost mourn for its fall. [...] To judge a form of government there is but one possible system and that is to compare it to the form of government that precedes or follows it. It would be premature today to make use of the second form of*

⁷¹ This eloquent expression used by F. Mancuso, *Gaetano Mosca e la tradizione del costituzionalismo*, cit., 86.

⁷² See *Elementi di Scienza Politica*, cit., 1105 and following, where Mosca reviews the features of possible alternative regimes to the parliamentary democracy (proletarian dictatorship, bureaucratic absolutism and trade unionism), that is the substitution in the structure of the legislative assemblies of individual representation with that of class, explaining the reasons why they would be far worse than the system they were substituting.

⁷³ For a profile of Mosca the parliamentarian and politician see E. A. Albertoni, *Gaetano Mosca. Storia di una dottrina politica*, cit., 107-206, as well as A. Panebianco, *Gaetano Mosca, studioso e uomo politico*, cit., pp. 18-28 and the subsequent note, 29-30.

⁷⁴ A. Panebianco, cit., 28.

⁷⁵ The speech is published in its entirety in G. Mosca, *Discorsi parlamentari*, cit., 359-363 and in C. Ocone and N. Urbinati (edited by), *La libertà e i suoi limiti. Antologia del pensiero liberale da Filangeri a Bobbio*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2006., 48-53.

comparison, but as regards the first, the forms of government immediately preceding the parliamentary regime were such that frankly it must be said that this system was better than those [...] But let us think of the journey that was made between 1848 and 1914, the eve of war and we see a little of what was Italy in 1948 and what it was in 1914 and so we should recognise the enormous progress made by the country in that period. It will be said that it is not only the form of government but also other circumstances that contributed to this progress mentioned. Yes, but a form of government is meritorious, when it does not hinder the development and progress of a nation, this is enough to be able to affirm that the moment has not yet come for its radical transformation.. [...] These are the good wishes that the old generation give to the new, but at the same time we aged have the duty to warn and not to approve those changes that we deem inopportune. On my part, if they approved them I would vote against my conscience, against my inner convictions, and so I am obliged to vote against the proposals that are brought before us”.

VII. *Mosca and the Other Elitists*

In the light of this analysis of the organisation of power in Gaetano Mosca’s thought, an attempt can be made to express an opinion on the importance that this author has had in the political-juridical culture of the time, and not exclusively in Italy.

First of all, in order to comprehend the cultural context in which Mosca’s theories were born, it is necessary to understand his relationships with the other scholars and in particular with those have been described as the classic elitists⁷⁶. This definition comes from the fact that they all analyzed, from similar point of views, the correlation between society and political power. Those conceptual bases will represent a challenge for those who wanted to engage the same subject, even just to confute those theories from a scientific point of view.

It is also essential to understand why such important studies arose at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. As seen before, there have been other scholars, forerunners of the classic *élitistes*, who faced the social analysis giving grand relevance to the managerial classes, but it was only later that this attitude will gain a descriptive strength, able to interpret the dynamics of the power through the individuation of “constant laws” irrespective of the specific quality

⁷⁶ G. Sola, *La teoria delle élites*, cit., 65 and following uses this expression to qualify Mosca, Pareto, Michels and Weber as the founders of this research trend.

of the contexts involved⁷⁷. The cultural context, pushed by the incredible strength of the scientific positivism⁷⁸, was for sure the key factor which allowed this acceleration. Analyzing the classic elitists' works their will to build theories with an intrinsic value is undoubtedly detectable, theories able to resist experimental tests and to describe phenomena as evaluative as possible. All that, in the human sciences realm, which for its own nature can neither be as objective as the "exact" Sciences, nor as verifiable as knowledge based on reproducible experimentation. Nevertheless, the idea more or less declared, was indeed to supply a systematic and rational contribution based on the explanation of how the relationships of power represent, somehow, the formation and organization of the States⁷⁹.

In this field we can without doubt assert that the first and more relevant term of comparison with Mosca's theory is Vilfredo Pareto's work.

Foremost, we should confirm that the personal relationships between these two scholars were not good at all, as they blame each other for unfair competition. As a matter of fact, during the opening relation (which was *Il principio aristocratico ed il democratico nel passato e nell'avvenire*) of the academic year 1902-1903 at the University of Turin, Mosca claimed that in Pareto's work *Systèmes socialistes* the author didn't recognize Mosca the primogeniture of the political class theory⁸⁰. Pareto on the other hand, affirmed many times, as for example in the edition of 1906 of his well-know work *Manuale di economia politica con un'introduzione alla scienza sociale*, that Mosca's theory wasn't actually

⁷⁷ According to G. Sola, Mosca had "the ambition not only to formulate a general theory about the distribution of the power in the society, but also to found a new political science able to explain how the States arises, consolidate, develop and die" (see G. Sola, *La teoria delle élites*, cit. 65).

⁷⁸ Mosca's positivism consisted in his declared awareness that social sciences, in order to achieve real and useful results, should have made treasure of the methodological rigour used by the natural sciences since they have already demonstrated to be able to achieve excellent results in the comprehension of natural phenomena, even thanks to their scientific precision. As Norberto Bobbio explains "When we talk about positivism in the social sciences, we never distinguish enough between the more rigorous methodology used by the social sciences - which has already demonstrated to be fertile - and the a-critical extension of theories formulated only to explain phenomena belonging to the natural world to the society, as social Darwinism did. Mosca was a positivist in the former sense, not in the latter." (cit. N. Bobbio, *Introduzione*, XI).

⁷⁹ Mosca's methodological rigour consisted in his opinion that only a deep knowledge of the historical subjects (ancient, modern and contemporary history plus the political disciplines) allowed the political studies to become science in the fullest sense of the term, that is a theory which face the facts from which it draws confirmations, confutations, or modifications. See cit. by D. Fisichella, in *Gaetano Mosca epistemologo*, in *Dilemmi della modernità nel pensiero sociale*, 28.

⁸⁰ See G. Sola, *Gaetano Mosca. Profilo biografico*, in AA.VV., *La dottrina della classe politica ed i suoi sviluppi internazionali*, cit., 29.

unique in the scenery of the elites studies⁸¹. The diatribe carried on many years after that; nevertheless what is actually significant is to ask ourselves whether that was just a personal disputation or it veiled something else, something more intellectually relevant. According both to those who deeply studied this fact and to those who outlined a scientific comparison between Mosca and Pareto, the quarrel hid their different attitude, on a doctrinaire level, towards the élite theory⁸². We already saw how Mosca's theories arose from historical-political analysis which weld themselves with assessments on the juridical-institutional level. And it was in this context that he placed the élitarian phenomenon. On the contrary, Pareto underlined the importance of the sociological elements and in particular the function of the social utility. And it's indeed starting from this point that he built up and described the élite role in the social and political realm. However, a part from contrasts and different attitudes, we're clearly investigating two scholars whose contributions highlighted the reasons and the mechanism why the organized minorities are actually the ones who impose the way the social and the political power must work.

We can spot the same historical function in Robert Michels', with whom Mosca had instead a relationship based on mutual respect and esteem⁸³. Michels published the original edition of his main work *Sociologia del partito politico*, only in 1911 (it will be translated in Italian in 1912) that is when Mosca is already considered a reliable author. Moreover, Michels acknowledged that

⁸¹ See D. Fiorot, *Potere, governo e governabilità in Mosca e Pareto*, in E. A. Albertoni (edited by), *Governo e governabilità nel sistema politico e giuridico di Gaetano Mosca*, cit., 89-90.

⁸² D. Fiorot, *op. cit.*, 92: "If we want to compare these two theories about the minorities organization, we should confirm what has been said elsewhere. These are two different theories, even though they share the same object. Mosca's theory bases itself essentially on both juridical-constitutional and historical-political considerations; on the contrary, Pareto's theory founds on an original sociological context, not concerning Mosca's cultural interests; two different attitudes which lead one to look at the same things from different viewpoints. Because of their touchy way to behave they could not or better didn't want to face arguments that could be interesting for both of them, but also for the development of the studies." According to E. A. Albertoni, *Il pensiero politico di Gaetano Mosca*, Cisalpino-Goliardica, Milan, 1973, 156-157, an evaluation as a whole of their works highlights the differences: Mosca's interests about the political and constitutional world led him to formulate a politological theory of the political class. On the contrary, in Pareto the philosophical and economics interests prevail and drive him to reflect about the danger coming from the middle class's decline to the advantage of other social actors. N. Bobbio, *Saggi sulla scienza politica in Italia*, cit., 276: "[...] Mosca and Pareto's approach were totally different: the former made the political class the centre of his analysis; the latter was more attracted by the elected classes, including each person that in his/her field had achieved the top. Mosca's interest about the political class concerned more the reason of its power and the way to exert it while Pareto wanted to identify the necessary qualities to be part of it (the theory of "residues") and the causes that bring to its development and decline (the theory of the circulation of Elites)".

⁸³ As observed by E. A. Albertoni, *Il pensiero politico di Gaetano Mosca*, cit., 153.

the Sicilian Maestro was the founder of the doctrine Michels himself was giving a precious contribution to. And furthermore, a part from the good personal relation they had (they actually had the chance to meet each other quite often in the cultural cafés in Turin) there is another and more important reason which explains why Mosca had a completely different relationship with Michels compared with the one he had with Pareto. Michels made the political party the centre of his interests. Through what he called *legge ferrea dell'oligarchia*⁸⁴, Michels showed how oligarchies, in order to enhance their own organization and maintain the power inside the party, tend to turn the leadership into an oligarchy which found in itself its own references. This idea is to be considered particularly important in the scenario of the theory of the elites since starting from the German social-democratic features, Michels laid the foundations to interpret the political parties internal dynamics, which will have great importance in the second half of 20th century. Nevertheless, as we have already seen, Mosca's analysis of the role of the political parties in the democratic systems is not that relevant, therefore there was no risk of overlapping or concurrency between their ideas. Suffice to think that Mosca himself reviewed Michels' work of 1912, granting with pleasure his ideas.

As we have seen, Mosca's relations with Pareto and Michels are easy to reconstruct while his relationship with Weber is subjected to historical disputations and the hypothesis that have been suggested are very complicated to verify⁸⁵. What we know for sure is that they could never meet each other but since 1909 Weber had the chance to read Mosca's *Elementi* and thanks to Michels we also know that among Italian politologists Mosca was the one Weber studied and indeed respected. Nevertheless, it is difficult to outline mutual influences in their works, since they didn't explicitly quote each other⁸⁶ and plus Mosca didn't know the German language so that it seems possible that Mosca had a few notions about Weber's work just thanks to his friendship with Michels. In this scenario, it is clear that it is only possible to verify whether in Weber's works there is any echo of Mosca's theories. This operation is not that simple since, as we have already said, not only are there no express quotations, but it is also difficult to verify the nature of the notions we can find in Weber's

⁸⁴ See G. Sola, *La teoria delle élites*, cit., 95-101.

⁸⁵ According to G. Eisermann, *Nuovi elementi sulle relazioni tra Mosca, Pareto e Max Weber*, cit., Weber was influenced by Mosca's works while S. Segre, in *Mosca e Weber: rapporti intellettuali ed analisi comparata delle sociologie politiche*, cit., affirms that there is no biographical information able to support this argument.

⁸⁶ As S. Segre himself affirms, *op. cit.*, 105-106.

works and which are certainly drawn by Mosca's theories. As a matter of fact they could either be the result of a specific intellectual influence (as for ex. the notion of organized minority)⁸⁷ or more in general, the elaboration of notions that were already part of the cultural context in which Weber worked. In addition, we should forget that Weber was interested in discovering how the social and political power legitimize itself more than in how the authority exerts this power. The relationship between governed and governors, which is a main aspect also in Weber's theories, is studied looking how these two fundamental social actors legitimize their power relationship: a very different prospective, as it is clear, compared to Mosca's one.

VIII. *Mosca and the Most Important Italian Jurists of his Time*

In order to deeply understand how Mosca gained such an important role in the foundation of the Political Sciences we should also consider his relationship with the Italian jurists of his time.

In particular it is interesting to see the relationship that is outlined with the most neighbouring juridical discipline that is constitutional law⁸⁸. This proximity is so close that in one of his first works *Studi ausiliari del diritto costituzionale* (1886)⁸⁹ political science tends to overlap with constitutional law, the latter being attributed the functions that should be attributed to the former⁹⁰. Subsequently, however, the different realms will take on greater clarity, as does the conviction that the two subjects must interact in order to explain political phenomena in a comprehensive way. Because it is true that these two worlds are observed from two very different points of view⁹¹, but here "difference" means, to a great extent complementariness and reciprocal enhancement. Indeed, it can be said that the young Mosca, inspired by sound juridical studies, dedicates himself to the study of political processes seen from the angle of social relationships, since he detects a certain insufficiency in the institutionalism and juridical formalism that were prevalent at the turn of the

⁸⁷ Called by Weber as *superiorità del piccolo numero* (see M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 1922, It. transl. *Economia e società*, Ed. di Comunità, Milan, 1974, vol. II, 257).

⁸⁸ On this subject see G. Negri, *Gaetano Mosca e il diritto costituzionale*, in *St. Parl. Pol. Cost.*, 1991, n. 92-93, 5-11.

⁸⁹ Now published in G. Mosca, *Ciò che la Storia potrebbe insegnare. Scritti di scienza politica*, cit., 1958.

⁹⁰ As observed by N. Bobbio, *Introduzione*, IX.

⁹¹ See N. Bobbio, *Saggi sulla scienza politica in Italia*, cit., 8.

19th and 20th centuries in the Italian doctrine, above all due to the authoritativeness of V. E. Orlando and Santi Romano.

As we have already seen, Mosca and V. E. Orlando were very good friends; a relationship that it is not just due to their Palermitan common origins: in fact it is possible to trace this friendship back since the second elementary school days⁹². As far as Santi Romano, Orlando's pupil, is concerned, their relationship was based on mutual esteem. Yet, Mosca's personal relations with the two most important jurists of his time, balanced, since the beginning, their different approach to the analysis of the problems concerning the State⁹³.

Since Mosca graduated in Law, his formation was juridical. He dedicated himself to the unitarian State analysis and his scientific studies logically addressed the Constitutional Law. At the time the Italian constitutionalists faced a schism: those who considered that this discipline should embed to mere juridical canons, suggesting a technical-formal way of studying the structures of the State versus those who suggested a historical-political approach⁹⁴, focused on the relationship between the law and the social conditions which creates it and assure its efficiency⁹⁵. Mosca noticeably supported the latter of these positions, while Orlando in the same years was laying the basis of the methodological formalism, which led him to gain quickly the role of Master of public law disciplines⁹⁶. Since then, an irretrievable distance was created:

⁹² According to G. Sola, *Gaetano Mosca. Profilo biografico*, in AA.VV., *La dottrina della classe politica ed i suoi sviluppi internazionali*, cit., 18, we could say that between Mosca and Orlando there was a "peculiar symmetry of life, scholastic before and intellectual, political and spiritual then".

⁹³ As observed by M. Fioravanti, *Gaetano Mosca e Vittorio Emanuele Orlando: due itinerari paralleli (1881-1897)*, in AA.VV., *La dottrina della classe politica ed i suoi sviluppi internazionali*, cit., 350, analyzing Mosca and Orlando's works, on a scientific level "it is possible to affirm that it existed a state of mutual incomprehension or maybe even a latent conflict". This opinion is shared by E. A. Albertoni, *Gaetano Mosca. Storia di una dottrina politica. Formazione e interpretazione*, cit., 66. On the same topic see also the articulate opinions of F. Mancuso, *Gaetano Mosca e la tradizione del costituzionalismo*, cit., pp. 129 and following.

⁹⁴ As shown by S. Sicardi, *La scienza costituzionalistica italiana nella seconda metà del XIX secolo*, in *Diritto e società*, n. 4/1999, 648-654.

⁹⁵ Mosca himself tent to consider these differences as an abstract and theoretical elaboration more than as an approach which could be taught in Constitutional Law. As affirmed by M. Galizia, *Diritto costituzionale (profili storici)*, in *Enc. Dir.*, 973 and by S. Sicardi, *La scienza costituzionalistica italiana nella seconda metà del XIX secolo*, cit., 655-656, Mosca thought that basis of the Constitutional Law were commun in all the different approaches.

⁹⁶ For a résumé of Orlando's speech about the "juridical method" see M. Galizia, *Profili storico-comparativi della scienza del diritto costituzionale*, Società tip. modenese, Modena, 1963, pp. 84-89. The same considerations about the great distance between Mosca and Orlando's theories can be done about Santi Romano's institutionalist theory of the juridical rules which is more careful in considering the importance of the social conflict but it is still close to the idea of the State-person as the subject of sovereignty, as in Orlando's hypothesis. This aspect is highlighted

Mosca stressed always more his detachment from a discipline he didn't consider as independent. Accordingly to him, the Constitutional Law to accomplish its task should open up to social dynamics analysis, which held power relationships, as the basis of the institutions. This approach led him to found a brand new discipline, which was closer to political phenomena: the Political Science, indeed⁹⁷. This position shouldn't be considered as his reaction to Orlando's approach but rather an attempt to explore new paths which allow for study of the structures of the State and the basis of the power from a different point of view compared to the mere technical-juridical one. That's why Mosca can't be considered as a constitutionalist in the strict meaning of the term, even though in his scientific production we can appreciate many precious works in this field⁹⁸. Mosca is, if anything, a scholar with a sound juridical base (besides then historical) who exploited this knowledge to launch a brand new scientific trend. Accordingly, trying to homologate him with the juridical science tout court would just reduce his role as the founder of an independent discipline: political science. So, the fact that he taught Public and Constitutional Law for many years shouldn't be misunderstood: it was just a natural and inevitable opening since the object of the analysis is the same: the State and the power. We should also remember that it was only in that period, thanks to Mosca's works indeed, that Political Science was winning an independent scientific dignity.

by C. Magnani, *Stato e rappresentanza politica nel pensiero giuridico di Orlando e Romano*, in *Materiali per uno studio della cultura giuridica*, n. 2/2000, 349-386. More in general, to see a synthesis of S. Romano's contribution to the Italian Public Law and his thought of the crisis of the Liberal State see A. Romano, *Santi Romano, la giuspubblicistica italiana: temi e tendenze*, in *Diritto e società*, n. 1/2004, 7-36 e R. Ruffilli, *Santi Romano e la "crisi dello Stato" agli inizi dell'età contemporanea*, in *Riv. Trim. Dir. Pubbl.*, n. 1/1977, 311-325.

⁹⁷ According to M. Fioravanti, *op. cit.*, 352-353, the conflict between "Mosca and Orlando could be drawn through the following general terms: Gaetano Mosca's realism of the <<political science>> versus Orlando's formalism of the <<juridical method>>. From this point of view –which is the more interesting for us –the history of the relationship between these two scholars becomes a piece of the Italian history. And in particular, their theoretical path from the beginning of the '80 until the end of the century, could be described as on one side the progressive acquisition of a mere juridical prospective and therefore "formalistic" and the study of the structures of the political power – as much as Orlando is concerned –, and on the other side Mosca's brave attempt to cut loose by the *scientia juris* logics, so much as to increase to a "realistic" prospective of investigation: from the public law science to the political science".

⁹⁸ As *Appunti di diritto costituzionale, Le Costituzioni moderne or Questioni di diritto costituzionale*, collected today in G. Mosca, *Ciò che la Storia potrebbe insegnare. Scritti di scienza politica*, cit., texts (specifically the first one) which, according to P. Biscaretti di Ruffia, *Gaetano Mosca docente di diritto costituzionale*, in E. A. Albertoni (edited by), *Governo e governabilità nel sistema politico e giuridico di Gaetano Mosca*, cit., 130-131, is to be recommended "because of its clarity, fluency and its ability to face in a few pages very complex problems".

Moreover, Orlando and Romano themselves recognized this distinction between political science and juridical science: consequently we can say they agreed about the distinction between Mosca and the other jurists. Romano, while commemorating Mosca as an eminent scholar in 1942, at the Italian Royal Academy, declared that Orlando and Mosca had “*cultivated not the same science with different approaches but two different sciences which while being strictly correlated, deeply different from one another*”⁹⁹, thus rejecting the chance to identify a Sicilian school (Arcoleo, Scaduto, Majorana, and Romano himself would be hypothetically part of this school). As a matter of fact, even though they came from the same region, their approaches were totally different¹⁰⁰.

For decades, this divergence, that was at the border with a sort of scientific incommunicability, played an important role in the development of these two disciplines, restricting their potentialities¹⁰¹.

Nevertheless, we have to remember that some great masters of Italian constitutional law from the subsequent generation to that of the two prominent figures in the first part of the century, the 1930s and 40s (Mortati and Esposito, but also, among others, Crisafulli, Pierandrei, Chiarelli and Giannini), began to reassess the importance of the pre-juridical factor, dwelling “*on the importance of the political powers, on one hand, and the principles of value brought forward by these forces on the other*”¹⁰². Moreover, the most obvious demonstration of this necessary permeation will only reveal itself with one of the most important contributions offered by the Italian juridical culture to the international debate on the nature of constitutional regulations: the Theory of the material Constitution by Costantino Mortati¹⁰³. The tribute that this work owes to the work of the founder of Italian political science is obvious from its approach and in its own interpretation of the Constitution, and it can be usefully summarised in this quotation from Mortati himself: “[...] *the jurist cannot consider the examination regarding the unwritten constitution irrelevant to his own task, considering not only the function that he carries out, as regards sources and guarantees, which we have already seen, but also because of the fact that this selfsame constitution provides the necessary elements to interpret and integrate the system of laws systematically, both to identify the form of the State and establish together the limits within which it is possible to make modifications to the constitution, without the*

⁹⁹ Quotation drawn from G. Negri, *Gaetano Mosca e il diritto costituzionale*, cit., 9-10.

¹⁰⁰ As underlined by M. Fioravanti, *op. cit.*, 349-350.

¹⁰¹ As claimed by N. Bobbio, *Saggi sulla scienza politica in Italia*, cit., 257.

¹⁰² As claimed recently remembering the figure of Leopoldo Elia by F. Lanchester, *Il legato di Leopoldo Elia*, in *federalismi.it*, n. 19/2008, 2.

¹⁰³ See G. Negri, *Gaetano Mosca e il diritto costituzionale*, cit., 7.

essential structure being altered. Fulfilling this task, the jurist is not a sociologist because he does not search for the factors that have determined the source of the strength and ideologies that lie at the basis of the State, nor does he pass judgement on the selfsame; but rather, returning to the characteristics necessary in order to confer legality to behaviour and social relationships, enucleates from the facts that emerged from the observation of the effective unfurling of the relationships themselves in a given order, those that are to be considered part of the real constitution " ¹⁰⁴.

IX. Mosca as a Liberal Thinker

Mosca's elitism was born within liberal thinking. There are various confirmations in his work of the crucial influence that the great classics of liberalism played on his development. The socio-political themes that are to be the subjects of his studies and purpose that the State in his opinion should be called upon to pursue, show how his cultural perspective has always been liberalism, moderate in its methods and conservative as regards the defence of certain values that he considered essential for proper social organisation¹⁰⁵. His conviction that only healthy capitalism of the bourgeois kind founded on the work ethic, on free competition and on the tendential abstention of the State¹⁰⁶, could guarantee a balanced economic development able in due time to extend a dignified level of wellbeing also to the less well-off classes. His disliking for all hasty changes both from the point of view of economic and institutional structure. The necessary divisions of individual levels, both social and state, for which the state structures should operate with the necessary detachment as regards the particular interests of individuals or groups, and thus the law should preserve those characteristics of generalisation and abstract nature which, until the early years in which he was writing had begun to be threatened

¹⁰⁴ See C. Mortati, *Costituzione*, in *Enc. Dir.*, 1962; now also in C. Mortati, *"una e indivisibile"*, Giuffrè, Milan, 2007, 128.

¹⁰⁵ On the particular features of Mosca's conservatism see the sharp comments, in many ways against the mainstream literature that would like to reduce Mosca to the role of a custodian of the constituted order and in defence of determined privileges see P. Pastori, *Aspetti del conservatorismo politico di Gaetano Mosca*, in E. A. Albertoni (edited by), *Governo e governabilità nel sistema politico e giuridico di Gaetano Mosca*, cit., 365-377, according to whom *"the targets of his criticism are [...] the utilitarianism of the most aggressive bourgeois classes, that introduce unbridgeable and unjust inequalities, and revolutionary radicalism, an inexhausted source of collectivist illusion, for which along with the unjust differences in the possession of wealth, also eliminate the capacity to fight against the natural shortage of material goods and political tyranny"* (See 366-367).

¹⁰⁶ Even if he never in ideologically liberal positions, acknowledging the need for State intervention when the situations request it.

by the multifarious requests to which the legislator was subjected. As well as the necessary separation of Church and State, the cornerstone of a laity that allows for anyone to profess freely his own belief without undue mingling with the State structures. And again his defence for legality as a necessary condition to strive for the common good, contrasting all those attempts to crush and substitute it¹⁰⁷.

All these principles along with other traditional formulations of liberal thought that he makes his own are practical, in Mosca's view, in order to pursue the objective of defending individual freedom in the scenario of a social unity that preserves order and maintains a balance between the powers at be, whose interests are always potentially conflictual and so harbingers of danger for the stability of the institutions.

If this is Mosca's cultural horizon, where does his position differ or, at least, where do his theories lead in the long and composite train of liberal thought to which he belongs?

It could be said that his works are born from a deep feeling of dissatisfaction. In order to reach those objectives, to build that kind of society, to preserve that kind of State from risks, the classical recipes of liberal constitutionalism are not enough, which he claims are not sufficient because they are so awash with excessive formalism and optimism. Locke and Montesquieu, who place an excessive trust in the salvific virtues of the division of powers, are not enough for him; Tocqueville, who describes the virtues of a democracy like that in America, which is too conditioned by its own specific history to be an exportable and valid model elsewhere, is not enough for him, and in the same way Burke and Hume, whose institutional analyses are too tied to the peculiarities of British history are not enough for him.

So, Mosca tries to impose an interpretation of the political phenomena that goes beyond juridical-institutional formalism and the particularities tied to the different traditions of different peoples. In some ways he tries to change the observation point searching for the constant factors that characterise the formation of power, its conduction and its real possession. That is why before

¹⁰⁷ In this regard a lecture on the "mafia" given at a conference held at the beginning of the twentieth century in Turin and Milan and published in *Giornale degli economisti* can be considered important even today. Recently the text from the conference was published again in G. Mosca, *Che cosa è la mafia*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2002, accompanied by an introductory essay by G. C. Caselli and A. Ingroia, *Mafia di ieri, mafia di oggi: ovvero cambia, ma si ripete...*, V-XLII. On the same subject see also V. Frosini, *Mafia e politica nel pensiero di Gaetano Mosca*, in E. A. Albertoni (edited by), *Governo e governabilità nel sistema politico e giuridico di Gaetano Mosca*, cit., 333 ff.

reasoning around the mechanisms thanks to which the limitation of power is possible, the great cornerstone of liberal constitutionalism, he reminds us of the need to consider that power is always managed by an organised minority, no matter what political regime it may be, including those regimes like democracy that propose to create a system of government in which this constant evidence ceases to exist.

Mosca's real characteristic does not lie in any way in his being a champion of a narrow-minded, conservative, if not reactionary, thinking all aimed at supplying a theory upon which to found the conservation of the economic and political power in the hands of the political class which held it at the time, as is claimed by some theoreticians of democracy of the twentieth century¹⁰⁸. If his statements are kept at face value and are not examined in more depth separating the vehemence of his contentious reasoning from the incessant search for the real reasons which, to his mind, lie underneath the workings of power, it is impossible to capture that original contribution to the analysis of political phenomena that he brings to the attention of scholars of this subject.

It is possible to summarise this contribution with his continual reminder of the need for the scholar to investigate into the concrete mechanisms that characterise the relationships of power, to a constant search for the effective balances and counterbalances above and beyond all formalism and all appearances.

Moreover, the fact that Mosca's thoughts cannot be classified simply as an insignificant defence of a time which was irretrievably lost can be seen by the great influence that he in turn has had on many political thinkers who, in the twentieth century, had great influence themselves. The tribute that authors such as J. Schumpeter¹⁰⁹, J. Ortega y Gasset¹¹⁰, R. Aronand¹¹¹ R. Dahrendorf¹¹² owe to the theoretical and methodological position of Mosca is obvious from

¹⁰⁸ Like R. Dahl, *La democrazia e i suoi critici*, Editori Riuniti, Rome, 1990, or A. O. Hirschman, *Retoriche dell'intransigenza. Perversità, futilità, messa a repentaglio*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1991, according for whom Mosca is the champion of the tesi of the "futility" of democracy because he claims, in this author's opinion, that every attempt to change society would be in vain.

¹⁰⁹ See M. Stoppino, *Democrazia e classe politica*, in *Studi in onore di Carlo Emilio Ferri*, vol. I, Giuffrè, Milan, 1973, 560; G. Sola, *La teoria delle élites*, cit., 142-147.

¹¹⁰ See M. Maldonado-Denis, *Ortega y Gasset and the Theory of the Masses*, in *The Western Political Quarterly*, n. 3/1961, 676-690.

¹¹¹ See G. Sola, *La teoria delle élites*, cit., 168-171.

¹¹² See A. Lombardo, *Sociologia e scienza politica in Gaetano Mosca*, cit., 297-302; G. Sola, *La teoria delle élites*, cit., 172-174.

the interpretation of their works. But to limit ourselves to Italian culture, the link between some purely and typically Moschian ideas is very strong and some certainly non-conservative currents that are to play an important part in the democratic rebirth of the country and the compilation of the Constitution¹¹³. From this point of view it is interesting to observe how an intellectual who sided with progressive and optimistic liberalism like Gobetti, despite his different opinions, praises Mosca's inclination towards realism in his political analysis¹¹⁴, an indispensable tool to avoid falling into the trap of the irrelevancy of pure abstraction and to enter effectively into the quick of the socio-political systems with the aim to transform them¹¹⁵. In the same way also other authors traceable to the current of the liberal Left like Gaetano Salvemini, Ernesto Rossi¹¹⁶, Guido Dorso or Filippo Burzio have often acknowledged the possibility of interpreting the theory of the *élites* from the democratic viewpoint, above all because it had the advantage of supplying the theoretical structure thanks to which a new political class could be identified (compared, of course, to the one that had imposed the authoritarian state, but also compared to the one that had not known how to oppose it effectively), that made its "moral superiority" the guide with which to bring the nation to recover the dignity that had been lost with Fascism¹¹⁷. Mosca's positions have always made a great impact on other exponents of the multifarious galaxy of liberal intellectuals in post-war Italy. The echo of Mosca's criticisms can be heard clearly in the pages against the degeneration of the party system written by Giuseppe Maranini and Panfilo Gentile¹¹⁸. And a philosopher, in many ways in

¹¹³ As underlined by N. Bobbio, *La teoria della classe politica negli scrittori democratici in Italia*, in AA.VV., *Le élites politiche*, cit., 54-58.

¹¹⁴ See G. Lombardi, *Costituzione e diritto costituzionale nel pensiero di Piero Gobetti*, in *Dir. soc.*, n. 2/1984, 198.

¹¹⁵ See P. Gobetti, *La Rivoluzione Liberale. Saggi sulla lotta politica in Italia*, Einaudi, Turin, 1995 (as is known the first edition dates back to 1924).

¹¹⁶ See A. Giordano, *Elites, Mercato e democrazia: la teoria politica di Panfilo Gentile*, in *Quaderni di Scienza Politica*, Terza serie, I - n. 3, dicembre 2007, 424.

¹¹⁷ See E. Rippepe, *Gli elitisti italiani. Gobetti, Burzio, Dorso*, II vol., Pacini, Pisa, 1974; G. Sola, *Introduzione*, cit., 58-59; F. Invernici, *Mosca e il socialismo liberale*, in E. A. Albertoni (edited by), *Governo e governabilità nel sistema politico e giuridico di Gaetano Mosca*, cit., 249-268, even if this search for moral superiority is to be the main reason for the *élitism* of the Party of Action, his main weak point, which is shortly to be the cause of its disappearance, despite the fundamental role played by the Resistance and in the history of Nazi-Fascism.

¹¹⁸ See P. Gentile, *L'idea liberale*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2002 (the first edition dates back to 1955 and was published by Garzanti), not to mention Id., *Democrazie mafiose*, Ponte alle Grazie, Milan, 2005 (first edition 1969), including a remarkable essay about this author by Sergio Romano. Panfilo Gentile's political thinking is pieced together by A. Giordano, *Elites, Mercato e democrazia: la teoria politica di Panfilo Gentile*, cit., 419-451.

the antipodes ideologically speaking compared to Mosca, like Antonio Gramsci, while criticising him harshly, cannot, however, avoid calculating the conceptual and methodological tools of his adversary, recognising his importance more or less explicitly¹¹⁹.

The most interesting comparison in the Italian arena is certainly the one with Luigi Einaudi. Einaudi agrees with Mosca on the importance of the role of the political class and on the need to overcome the myth of the majority. He provides, however, an interpretation in the liberal-democratic meaning of the theory of the élites, in the sense that for this great Italian economist the legitimation of a modern political class cannot come from any other channel of legitimation if not through popular vote. Popular sovereignty certainly is a myth, but it is just as sure that it is a necessary myth. What counts to prevent this myth from being revealed as the harbinger of danger and culminating in the destruction of liberty is that it is supported and balanced by counterweights and social ties¹²⁰. So, it can be said that Einaudi's opinions are the natural adaptation of Mosca's élitism to the conditions and epoch-making events of the second half of the twentieth century, a development in the liberal-democratic sense, better able to reconcile some basic elements of the elitist theory with the evolution towards the participation of the masses in the life of democratic states.

But Mosca's same anti-democraticism takes on more defined contours if it is compared with Carl Schmitt's. We find ourselves faced with two conceptions that seem to be based on the same kind of criticism of democracy but which, in fact, correspond to very different if not opposing logic and objectives.

Schmitt's real contention is not democracy but liberalism, of which liberal democracy is just the legitimate child. His real enemy is liberalism because this doctrine, through the tools of representative democracy, intends to anaesthetize politics, directing the conflicts between the confines of dialectics and not confrontation¹²¹. In order to regain the essence of politics it is necessary to substitute liberal democracy with forms of *identitarian* democracy, in which

¹¹⁹ As observed by M. A. Finocchiaro, *Gramsci, Mosca, e la Massoneria*, in *Teoria politica*, n. 2/1993, 135-161, who also highlights the similar opinions that the two authors had on a perhaps marginal, but no less important, question: the aversion for the law on the massonic associationism wanted by Fascism at the beginning of 1925.

¹²⁰ See A. Giordano, *Il mito della sovranità popolare. Luigi Einaudi, la democrazia e la teoria della classe politica*, in *Materiali per una storia della cultura giuridica*, n. 1/2004, 139-141.

¹²¹ See D. Fisichella, *Carl Schmitt: Politica e liberalismo tra amicizia e inimicizia*, in *Dilemmi della modernità nel pensiero sociale*, cit., 59-72.

there is a sort of identification of the people in the figure of the decision-maker, precisely because the function of the State is to preserve the political unity of the people¹²². As is obvious this perspective echoes some aspects of integral democracy of the Rousseau kind and of other philosophical currents of various natures, but all associated with a statist and organicist idea of power¹²³. It clearly contrasts at bottom with Mosca's position. Indeed, it could be said that Schmitt attacks liberalism exactly on the terrain that induces Mosca to extol it, that is, for the capacity to build rules and balances that are able to institutionalise conflicts¹²⁴.

X. *Final Remarks*

On the basis of this assessment it would seem that Gaetano Mosca's theory that the political class is intrinsically a conservative doctrine can be excluded. The fact that it was formulated by an intellectual whose ideals were awash with strongly conservative notions, in the meaning and limits outlined here, need not hamper an evaluation of the results of his studies which are certainly full of light and shade, in the most objective way possible. As a beacon of Italian progressive culture in the second half of the twentieth century like Norberto Bobbio has done, indeed, even quite recently he wrote: *"It is an illusion that the spreading of direct democracy, made possible by the improvement in the various forms of long distance communication, reduces the power of the political class,*

¹²² See G. Azzariti, *Critica della democrazia identitaria*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2005, 22-24 e L. Albanese, *Schmitt*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 1996, 5, According to whom *"The organic community, according to Schmitt, is the nucleus of the <<real>> democracy, which should not be mistaken for that hybrid represented by liberal democracy, whose main characteristic is parliamentarianism. The democracy of Gemeinschaft and the clear distinction between liberalism are the pieces de résistance in Schmitt's political thought, and explain his success not only on the Right but also on the Left"*.

¹²³ As claimed by L. Albanese, in Schmitt's thought the concept of Gemeinschaft is central and completely absorbs the individual. *"This notion originates from different sources: Rousseau, the corporative tradition of the Stande [classes, states in the sense of <<third state>>], present both in Hegel and in the Catholic thinking of the Restoration, and finally some not unimportant tendencies of the <<conservative revolution>> that is of the political culture and movements of the Right which in post-war Germany elaborate an ideology which radically opposes Marxism, but which is, in many ways, similar"* (See L. Albanese, *Schmitt*, cit., 4).

¹²⁴ Also by virtue of these considerations those attempts that were made by a certain publicist in the Fascist era to liken Mosca's doctrine with the ideological structure of the authoritarian state, seem totally outdated nowadays, as did, for example, R. De Mattei, *La dottrina della classe politica e il fascismo*, in *Educazione fascista*, n. 8/1931, 675-686. Just as the opinions of those who defined the theory of the political class *the reactionary concept par excellence*" appear irremediably outdated and isolated, in the light of the most recent research on his work like P. Biondi, *Potere e classe politica*, in *Studi politici*, n. 1/1952, 13.

or even eliminates it. Direct democracy increases the power of the individual citizens to take decisions that concern him, but it will always be a group of professionals from politics who will have the prime task of articulating the proposals"¹²⁵.

Of course, even in Mosca's work, like that of any social science scholar, there are some gaps, weak points and aspects which have been surpassed with the passing of time.

Among the most obvious shortcomings that have emerged from our analysis perhaps two stand out most conspicuously.

From the methodological point of view he is inspired by an excessive faith in the applicative power of political science. Basically, he claimed that politology founded on analytical criteria which was scientifically valid would in the future be the decisive tool available to statesmen and politicians in general, to guide their choices and prevent them from making the mistakes that History has often highlighted. Indeed, this was a glaring mistake both because of the overestimation of the possibility to found a humanistic science that held the criteria of an "exact" science, and as regards the educational point of view for those who are called upon to exercise politics in a concrete way as unfortunately the whole history of the twentieth century takes it upon itself to prove. A contradictory optimism in the power of discipline, to the point of transgressing into an inapt determinism: a misinterpretation that would be understandably unexpected from a realist of such pessimistic nature as Mosca.

From the point of view of content, there is no doubt that the biggest shortcoming in his theoretical production lies in the sin Mosca commits in underestimating the subject of political representation. That is, he does not perceive the basic importance of the citizen's impression that he is represented in a modern, advanced society, such as those that had been founded on more dynamic socio-economic systems were already heading for at the end of the XIX century.

Mosca puts a utopia into crisis at exactly the right moment, the utopia of parliamentary representation, often founded on misleading mechanisms, we could even say on a sham, the one innate in the electoral mandate. And, nevertheless he does not realise that beyond the authenticity of the collection of electoral consensus, the division into political parties, the exploitation with which the political class tries to remain in power instead of thinking of the common good, political representation offers the citizen the "feeling" that he is part of a process that leads to political decision-making. There is the feeling of

¹²⁵ See N. Bobbio, *Saggi sulla scienza politica in Italia*, cit., IX.

belonging, perhaps even mistaken or overestimated, that disregards the authenticity of the relationship of representation. The inclusive value of this feeling is far more relevant than the undoubted defects that democracy founded on universal suffrage suffers from, and indeed, precisely when this perception of being part *pro quota* of the political decision-making dies, when the division between governors and governed is too pronounced, far worse problems emerge than those generated by typical defects of democratic representation as regards the internal balances in the political classes and the mechanisms of conservation of the *juridical defence*.

And despite this, Gaetano Mosca still has something to say to us¹²⁶. His disenchanted, realistic and relativist views of Democracy can be used as a useful antidote against any populist regression, a recurrent temptation for many political classes.

Suffice to think of the changing of the political class. An impartial look at the Italian reality leads necessarily to the idea that the Parliament is going through an evident decline. This situation is made worst by the recent electoral law which was created with the purpose of giving the leaders of the political parties the power to decide about the changing of the Members of the Parliament. In this way the quality of the Parliament is humiliated as well as its authority weakened. This state of emergency seems so obvious that it is fair to ask ourselves whether our Chambers are still representative Assemblies or have they turned into easily manageable ratification centers of decisions taken somewhere else. The doubt is legitimate since the only activities our Parliament seems to be engaged in are the conversions of decree-laws, in voting the confidence to the Government and giving proxy laws almost always demanded by the government itself. Can a democratic system do without a representative and weighty Parliament? A great democracy like France acknowledged a deficit of its Parliament's role and made an attempt, through a constitutional reform (maybe incomplete) to find a countermeasure. This should persuade us to start a reform path which could give back reliability to our Representative Assemblies. It would worth it also in order to avoid that governed people lose what is left of their feeling that they are part of a process through which political decisions are taken.

¹²⁶ According to P. Serra, *Diritto costituzionale e scienza politica*, in *Dem. Dir.*, n. 1/1999, 252 "Indeed, only today does Gaetano Mosca's work become fully comprehensible to us, and enlightens decisive features in our difficult and extremely complicated present".

There is no doubt that our difficulties in finding the right mechanism of selection of the political classes are even more evident if we think about the capability of other forms of government to transfer from their managing classes to the political class people able to suggest ideas, enthusiasm and representativeness as just happened in the last U.S. election.