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Bureaucratic Caesarism

A Gramscian Outlook on the Crisis of Europe

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Abstract

In 2010, the Eurozone became the epicentre of the world crisis. The vulnerability of Europe appears to be linked to the specific institutional arrangement which organises monetary, financial and budgetary policies within the Eurozone. This article tries to understand the evolution of the EU during a short but decisive historical sequence (2007–12) in a theoretical framework that puts elements of Gramsci's reflections on the theme of crisis, and especially his notion of 'Caesarism', at its centre. It addresses the current debate concerning the relationships between democratic politics and neoliberalism, while focusing on how the radicalisation of the crisis put at stake the co-construction of capitalism and representative democracy in the Western world since WWII.

Keywords

crisis – Europe – Gramsci – capitalism – democracy – Caesarism

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A Caesarist solution can exist even without a Caesar

— ANTONIO GRAMSCI

Introduction

The crisis that began in 2007–8 with the fall of the subprimes market and the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers has now entered its eighth year. In its depth and its length, this crisis reminds us of the Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s, the last of the ‘great crises’ of capitalism of comparable magnitude. Among other similarities, these two crises have in common the fact of not being limited to the economic realm. They have affected all social spheres, including political institutions. The constitution of vast amounts of ‘sovereign debts’ in countries of the centre of the world economy is only one aspect of this ongoing transmission of the crisis from the economic to the political realm.

The Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s is the background to one of the greatest political works of the twentieth century: Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*. Written between 1929 and 1935, the more than 2000 pages of the *Quaderni del carcere* bear the mark of the context of profound destabilisation and reorganisation of capitalism in which they were written.

What makes Gramsci’s take on the crisis of capitalism so fruitful today is the way he conceptualises the link between economic and political crisis: how an economic crisis spills into the political (the state in particular), how a political crisis can have economic outcomes, and ultimately how crisis redefines the very realms of ‘the economic’ and ‘the political’. In a sense, this is what Gramsci’s concept of the state – the ‘integral state [*lo stato integrale*]’ – is all about: the shifting boundaries between the state, civil society and the economy under conditions of crisis. What Gramsci calls ‘organic crisis’, ‘crisis of hegemony’, or ‘general crisis of the state’ are inextricably economic and political forms of crisis. The *Prison Notebooks* might thus contain precisely the type of analytical framework required to interpret the crisis we find ourselves in.

The aim of this article is twofold. First, we will explore significant selected elements of Gramsci’s reflections on the question of crisis. Several authors have contributed to our understanding of the way Gramsci uses the concept of crisis in the *Prison Notebooks*.¹ Gramsci’s approach to economics, more generally, has been the object of recent studies.² Building on the existing literature, we will present what in our opinion are Gramsci’s most fruitful insights for an

1 For an overview, see Frosini 2009.

2 Krätke 2011.

understanding of the logic of capitalist crises. The concept we will concentrate on is ‘Caesarism’, which has also been the object of meticulous recent studies.³

Second, we aim at using Gramsci’s insights to elaborate an original interpretation of the current crisis. Our main focus will be the crisis of Europe. In 2010, the Eurozone became the epicentre of the world crisis while other regions managed – at least temporarily – to contain the depression. This vulnerability of Europe is linked to the specific institutional arrangement which organises monetary, financial and budgetary policies within the Eurozone. Over a decade since its creation, the euro as an ordoliberal project to discipline labour,⁴ and as an imperialist project of world money,⁵ has been relatively successful. However, this comes at a price: mounting internal financial and trade imbalances that prove too big to be dealt with within a monetary Union without a state.⁶ In the aftermath of the subprime crisis, European institutions proved unable to backstop the mounting uncertainties concerning the sustainability of the public debt of its peripheral countries. As a result, the pressures from financial markets have increased and encroached on core countries of the EU, putting in question the very existence of the euro itself.

The originality of our perspective is that it tries to understand the evolution of the EU during this short but decisive historical sequence (2007–12) in a theoretical framework that puts elements of Gramsci’s reflections on crisis at its centre. It addresses the current debate concerning the relationships between democratic politics and neoliberalism,⁷ while focusing on how the radicalisation and the politicisation of the crisis put at stake the co-construction of capitalism and representative democracy in the Western world since WWII. In particular, we will argue that the overall political dynamic within the EU since 2007 points to a retrenchment of democracy in face of the rise of an original feature of ‘authoritarianism’ that we shall call, paraphrasing Gramsci, *bureaucratic Caesarism*.

3 Burgio 2014; Fontana 2004; Liguori 2009.

4 With no exchange rates, or any substantial European budget and with a uniform monetary policy, labour remains the only variable through which the various national economies can adjust their differentiated dynamics and absorb any shocks (Mazier, Duwicquet and Saadaoui 2013; Sglio and Mazier 2004). This logic is plainly anticipated in the Delors Report (Delors 1989), which indicates that within the frame of the monetary union, ‘wage flexibility and labour mobility are necessary to eliminate the differences in competitiveness in different regions and countries of the Community’.

5 Carchedi 2001.

6 Lapavistas 2012a.

7 Krippner 2011; Streeck 2011.

1 Elements of Gramsci's Reflections on the Question of Crisis

There has been important neo-Gramscian theorising in recent years in the field of International Relations and, particularly, European Studies.⁸ The ongoing crisis of neoliberalism at the European level, more specifically, has been the focus of several analyses.⁹

As we will see, Gramsci makes various uses of the concept of crisis in the *Prison Notebooks*. Yet he did not have the time, nor perhaps the intention, to develop an integrated 'general theory of crisis'. Nonetheless, the omnipresence of this problematic in the *Prison Notebooks* as well as the current crisis of capitalism make the exploration of his reflections on the question of crisis analytically and politically meaningful, even urgent. In what follows, we will concentrate on a specific aspect of these reflections: the complex dialectic between organic crises and Caesarism.

1.1 *Organic Crisis*

Gramsci's approach to crisis is closely linked to his theory of hegemony. In advanced, 'Western', capitalism, economic crises rarely have immediate political consequences. The rapid transmission of crisis from the economic to the political is typical of 'Eastern' societies. In their case, an economic crisis can have dramatic political consequences – for instance regime change – within a short time. Gramsci terms 'catastrophic' the type of crisis that takes place in 'Eastern' societies.

In 'Western' societies on the other hand, economic crises are absorbed or softened by the 'trench-system' of civil society and the state.¹⁰ This trench-system prevents the contagion of the crisis from the economic to the political realm, thus protecting the social order from significant perils. In 'Western' societies, one finds between economic structures and political and cultural superstructures a set of mediations that constitute a 'historical bloc'. In the historical bloc, 'economic-social content and ethico-political form are concretely identified'.¹¹ It is defined by the dialectical unity between structures and

8 For a general presentation, see Bieler 2005.

9 Bieler 2011; Bruff 2014; Macartney 2009; Shields 2008.

10 Q 13, § 25 [1932–3]; Gramsci 1971, p. 235. We will refer to the *Prison Notebooks*, as is generally agreed in writings about Gramsci, by first quoting the notebook ('Q' for 'quaderno', i.e. notebook in Italian), the paragraph, the date of the individual note, and then the page in Hoare and Nowell-Smith's *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Gramsci 1971) for the English translation. The most up-to-date chronology of the notebooks is to be found in Cospito 2011.

11 Q 10, § 13 [1932]; Gramsci 1971, p. 367.

superstructures, in a nation-state, at a given moment of its development. In a situation of crisis, the function of the historical bloc is precisely to 'block' economic turbulence from provoking a breakdown of the political system.

A crisis tests the solidity of a historical bloc. Most of the time, the bloc resists. A historical bloc that could not withstand some degree of economic turbulence would not qualify as one. It would qualify as a 'morbid symptom', in the sense described in this famous passage of Notebook 3: 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.'¹² One way to look at these 'morbid symptoms' is to see them as stillborn or degenerate historical blocs, which are unable to resist crisis. What a real historical bloc is supposed to do is put an end to crisis, and resist the (inevitable) turbulences that arise during the time of its hegemony.

But, at this point, crises that Gramsci calls 'organic' occur. This happens when the economic crisis turns into a crisis of the historical bloc itself, and starts contaminating all social spheres: politics, culture, morality, sexuality . . . Gramsci also refers to organic crises as 'crises of hegemony', or 'general crises of the state', that is, crises of the 'integral state'. The 'integral state' is a crucial concept in the *Prison Notebooks*.¹³ One definition Gramsci gives of this concept is the following: 'State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion'.¹⁴ 'Political society' refers in this passage to the state as traditionally defined: administration, army, police, social services, courts of justice . . . 'State' refers to the unique combination of 'political society' and 'civil society' at a given time in a given country, that is, to the state in its 'integral' sense. What these great, organic crises of capitalism undo is thus the 'proper relation' between civil and political society that prevailed in the preceding historical cycle. In this sense, they always imply a disaggregation of the historical bloc.

What are the possible causes of such disaggregation? Here is Gramsci's answer:

In every country the process is different, although the content is the same. And the content is the crisis of the ruling class's hegemony, which occurs either because the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the broad masses (war, for example), or because huge masses (especially of

12 Q 3, § 34 [1930]; Gramsci 1971, p. 276.

13 Buci-Glucksmann 1975; Thomas 2009.

14 Q 6, § 88 [1931]; Gramsci 1971, p. 263.

peasants and petit-bourgeois intellectuals) have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution. A 'crisis of authority' is spoken of: this is precisely the crisis of hegemony, or general crisis of the State.¹⁵

Gramsci's approach to crisis, contrary to the determinism and economism of many Marxist theories of crisis of his time, underscores the complexity of such phenomena. The first possible cause of an organic crisis is located in the dominant classes. It occurs when a 'major political undertaking', for which these classes had obtained or extracted by force the consent of the subaltern classes, fails. A 'major political undertaking' is a project of general long-term reorganisation of society, imposed by the dominant classes. A case of such political undertaking, to which Gramsci pays much attention in the *Prison Notebooks*, is the emergence of Fordism. A second cause of disaggregation of a historical bloc is when the bloc starts melting 'from below', that is, when the subaltern classes who more or less willingly acquiesced to hegemony, cease doing so, and start mobilising. The first and second causes can of course combine in the downfall of a historical bloc.

On the basis of this dialectic of hegemony and crisis of hegemony, Gramsci further elaborates his conception of crisis. The question of the temporality of crisis is essential. Organic crises are crises of *longue durée*, sometimes decades. More precisely, they are spatio-temporally complex phenomena, where different spatial and temporal scales intersect, and enter into conflict. The entire 'postwar' period – our interwar period – can be considered as a crisis, says Gramsci. The history of capitalism as a whole could also be viewed as a 'continuous crisis':

The 'crisis' is nothing other than the quantitative intensification of certain elements, neither new nor original, but especially the intensification of certain phenomena, while others have been inoperative or have all together disappeared. . . . In sum, the development of capitalism has been a 'continuous crisis', i.e. a very rapid movement of elements which balance and check each other out.¹⁶

Capitalism continually engenders antagonistic forces that confront, neutralise, or transcend one another. Crisis, in this sense, is capitalism at its 'cruising

15 Q 13, § 23 [1932–3]; Gramsci 1971, p. 210.

16 Q 15, § 5 [1933]; Gramsci 1971, p. 428.

speed', it is a normal feature of capitalist development. A crisis in the strict sense consists in the exacerbation of this normal process. In times of crisis, as Gramsci points out, quantity becomes quality. It does not necessarily imply the appearance of new elements in the system, but it implies that the system is no longer able to manage the contradictions that underlie it.

The central theoretical argument put forward by Gramsci is that a crisis should not be thought of as an 'event', but as a 'development'. After all, October 1929 is only a date in a longer unfolding, and the same could be said of the fall of Lehman Brothers in September 2008. Even when the crisis begins with the collapse of a financial market, the period that precedes it and the one that follows are integral parts of its development, and analytically more important than the downfall that triggered it. This approach to crisis as 'development' supposes that crises are always political battlefields, and that the outcome of a crisis is never determined in advance. This idea is testimony to Gramsci's anti-determinism. According to him, crises are moments in the life of societies when determinisms of all sorts (economic, cultural, institutional) weaken, and of resurgence of contingency and political possibility.

1.2 *Caesarism as a Response to the Crisis*

According to Gramsci, during organic crises, institutions that are independent of the fluctuations of public opinion tend to reinforce themselves. Those that are directly subject to these fluctuations are on the contrary overshadowed. Organic crises thus '[reinforce] the relative power of the bureaucracy (civil and military), of high finance, of the Church, and generally of all bodies relatively independent of the fluctuations of public opinion.'¹⁷ In normal times, the system allows the more democratic institutions to run current affairs. But this risk can no longer be taken in a context of crisis. The reason for this is that during crises, the rhythm of politics accelerates, the contradictions inherent in democratic institutions deepen, hence preventing them from dealing with the crisis in due time. Furthermore, public opinion fluctuates considerably and brutally, threatening to destabilise the social order. It also tends to be receptive to the more radical solutions to the crisis, that is, to the revolutionary ones.

Hegemony according to Gramsci consists in a complex dialectic between 'force' and 'consent', the 'Machiavellian Centaur', in Gramsci's famous phrase in Notebook 13. In times of crisis, force tends to come to the fore, a process that can lead to the emergence of a 'dictatorship without hegemony'.¹⁸ Such dictatorship, however, is not necessarily military, even if it was mostly military

17 Q 13, § 23 [1932–3]; Gramsci 1971, p. 210.

18 Q 15, § 59 [1933]; Gramsci 1971, p. 106.

in the nineteenth century. It can be led by any of the above-mentioned non-democratic institutions, for example civil bureaucracy or high finance. It can also be led by a 'political coalition', or by 'functionaries' (Gramsci's terms) of parliamentary parties and economic organisations.

The reinforcement of non-democratic institutions in times of crisis leads to a crucial problematic of the *Prison Notebooks*: Caesarism. This problematic should be linked to the rich theories of 'Bonapartism' in the Marxist tradition. Gramsci himself establishes this link, as he uses several times the phrase 'Caesarism or Bonapartism' in the *Prison Notebooks*. The concept of Caesarism, however, introduces significant theoretical innovations into the Marxist tradition.¹⁹

The concept of Caesarism was in common use at the time among right-wing and left-wing intellectuals.²⁰ Max Weber for instance uses it in his political writings.²¹ In the *Prison Notebooks*, there are various references to Weber's *Parliament and Government in a Reconstructed Germany*,²² where Weber elaborates the concept of Caesarism. This concept is also present in Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*,²³ published in two parts at the end of the 1910s and the beginning of the 1920s.

Gramsci begins discussing the concept of Caesarism when he refers to the influence of the 'military element' in politics.²⁴ But he then enlarges the 'interpretative spectrum' of Caesarism.²⁵ He elaborates this concept further in notes 133 and 136 of Notebook 9, which are then merged into Q 13, § 27, which is entitled 'Il cesarismo'.

Here is one of Gramsci's definitions of 'Caesarism':

Caesarism can be said to express a situation in which the forces in conflict balance each other in a catastrophic manner; that is to say, they balance each other in such a way that a continuation of the conflict can only terminate in their reciprocal destruction. When the progressive force A struggles with the reactionary force B, not only may A defeat B or B defeat A, but it may happen that neither A nor B defeats the other – that they

19 Burgio 2014, Chapter 11; Fontana 2004.

20 Mosse 1971.

21 Weber 1994, see also Baehr 2004.

22 In Weber 1994, originally written in 1917.

23 Spengler 1991.

24 Q 4, § 66 [1930–2]; Gramsci 1971, p. 215.

25 Liguori 2009, p. 124.

bleed each other mutually and then a third force C intervenes from outside, subjugating what is left of both A and B.²⁶

A crisis often leads to a ‘catastrophic equilibrium of forces’. None of the two principal existing social forces is able to prevail, and the pursuit of the struggle threatens to lead to their mutual destruction. In such cases, a third force can appear, and win the day. This third force will tend to intervene, at least in appearance, from outside of the battlefield, that is to present itself as being ‘above’ the partisan divisions of the first two. This is the reason why it often originates in the non-democratic institutions we have just mentioned: army, finance, church, justice, bureaucracies . . .

Caesarism as defined by Gramsci has a ‘charismatic’ dimension. In the 1920s and 1930s, Gramsci could observe many examples of charismatic ‘Caesars’. However, he makes clear that in the absence of a ‘personal’ Caesar or Bonaparte, an organisation – a state bureaucracy, a private organisation, or a parliamentary coalition – can ‘become Bonaparte’. Thus, ‘A Caesarist solution can exist even without a Caesar, without any great, “heroic” and representative personality.’²⁷ In post-Risorgimento Italy, the state bureaucracy was for instance the only guarantor of national unity, the only force that could transcend the political and regional fragmentation of the country.

According to Gramsci, moreover, ‘Every coalition government is a first stage [*grado iniziale*] of Caesarism, which either may or may not develop to more significant stages (the common opinion of course is that coalition governments, on the contrary, are the most “solid bulwark” against Caesarism).’²⁸ From this perspective, Caesarism is a possibility that exists in the ‘normal’ functioning of modern political institutions, and not necessarily the consequence of an exogenous political event.

Furthermore, Caesarisms may be ‘progressive’ or ‘regressive’.²⁹ The Great Depression led to a form of regressive Caesarism, fascism, and to a form of progressive Caesarism, Roosevelt’s New Deal. Progressive Caesarism has a

26 Q 13, § 27 [1932–3]; Gramsci 1971, p. 219.

27 Q 13, § 133 [1932–3]; Gramsci 1971, p. 220. Caesarism is a particular mechanism that takes place in the context of a more general process: passive revolution. Since passive revolutions have already been the subject of Marxist analysis of neoliberalism and the crisis (see for instance Morton 2010 and the other articles included in the same volume of *Capital & Class*), we will leave this concept aside and focus on Caesarism as a specific aspect of passive revolutions.

28 Q 9, § 27 [1932–3]; Gramsci 1971, p. 220. See also Burgio 2014, pp. 280–2.

29 Gramsci further identifies an ‘objectively’ progressive form of Caesarism, but we will leave this point aside.

'quantitative-qualitative' dimension, i.e. it sometimes can result in the passage from one type of state to another. However, even when regressive, a Caesarism is never a restoration 'in toto' (Gramsci's expression), since in the 'historical movement' there is never a complete return to the past. In the modern world, Caesarism has a 'police-like [*poliziesco*]' dimension rather than a 'military' one,³⁰ 'police' referring here to the set of coercive means by which the ruling class organises its domination.

Gramsci's reflections on Caesarism lead us to formulate a concept of *bureaucratic Caesarism*. In our opinion, this is one of the major theoretical innovations, in the field of Marxist approaches to the political, that one can draw from reading Gramsci's reflections on the question of crisis. At first approximation, bureaucratic Caesarism manifests three features. First, it is non-democratic, i.e. it proceeds from the need of the capitalist system to – more or less gradually – insulate itself from democratic pressure in times of crisis. This non-democratic evolution of modern political institutions, as we have said, is a possibility inherent in them, it is not exogenous.

Second, bureaucratic Caesarism is non-personal or non-charismatic, i.e. it refers to cases where an organisation, or coalition of organisations (public and/or private), 'becomes Caesar'. According to Gramsci, these are the most frequent cases of Caesarism in the modern world. Third, whereas it is conceivable that progressive forms of bureaucratic Caesarism exist, the variant we will concentrate on, in the context of the current European crisis, is clearly regressive. This is not to say that it consists in a restoration 'in toto' of the previous stage of the system. It implies, however, that the forces susceptible to operating a passage to a new, 'progressive', stage are prevented from acting.

2 European Politics Racing after the Crisis

After having presented elements of Gramsci's reflections on the question of crisis, we now turn to the analysis of the present crisis. The aim of this section is to track the progressive displacement of the financial and economic disruptions resulting from the crisis toward the political sphere. It is, in other words, to understand the transformation of the economic crisis into an 'organic' crisis, and how bureaucratic Caesarism emerges from this context.

To do so, we will propose a periodisation of the short historical sequence which began in August 2007 and developed until early 2013, and summarise the significant institutional disjunctions that occurred during this period.

³⁰ Liguori 2009, p. 124.

The periodisation we propose is based on the observation of a close relation between financial-market movements and the transformation of the European political agenda divided into four phases from August 2007 to early 2013.

2.1 *Cloudy Sky over Financial Markets (August 2007 to August 2008)*

Between August 2007 and August 2008 the first phase of the crisis was characterised by a general liquidity strain. In Europe, it was handled by the ECB, which provided important amounts of liquidity to distressed banks, but without the need to reform significantly their procedures. However, at this moment, the inconsistency of the general European financial infrastructure was already a matter of concern.³¹ One of the achievements of the institutionalisation of the single market and the European Monetary Union (EMU) is European financial integration, with the rise of banking groups with significant cross-border activity. However, banking supervision still mostly relies on national bodies. When solvency problems arose during the crisis, national treasuries were the sole official bodies in line, since there is no euro-area pool of resources available for such a purpose. The fruit of previous experimentation in other fields, *'EU strategy had been to put market integration first and to build policy integration only as a response to market integration.'*³² These serious flaws were discussed in the October 2007 and June 2008 Economic and Financial Affairs Councils (ECOFIN), but to very little effect. Huge uncertainties remained concerning how a major transnational banking accident should be managed. Nevertheless, during this first phase of the crisis, banking problems were limited to less important institutions manageable at the national level, the most spectacular cases being Northern Rock in the UK, which was nationalised on 22 February 2008, and IKB in Germany.

2.2 *Unexpected Storm, Swift Intervention (September 2008 to November 2009)*

On 15 September 2008, the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, the fourth largest investment bank in the USA, put the world financial system on the edge of collapse. The huge credit crunch and destruction of financial value then threw the world economy into its first depression since WWII.

Facing such vital challenges, authorities had no room for shilly-shallying. Coordination occurred at the international level through G20 meetings and cooperation between the main central banks. In this phase, the adjustment of budgetary policies by national governments was not an important issue at the

31 Pisani-Ferry and Sapir 2010.

32 Pisani-Ferry and Sapir 2010, p. 350.

EU level; the 3 per cent limit for public deficit was temporarily relieved, as it was considered that a countercyclical reaction was needed.

The actions implemented are revealing of what the strong institutional bodies are: the ECB, national governments of big countries and the Directorate-General for Competition. They constitute in embryo the bureaucratic Caesarism that will radicalise itself in the course of the crisis. At the forefront stands the ECB. On September 4, just a few days before Lehman collapsed, the ECB announced its intention to increase the cost of using toxic-asset backed securities to obtain fresh euros.³³ However, in early October, events forced the institution to move swiftly in the opposite direction and to accept even more doubtful assets.

Almost simultaneously, in the *Paris Declaration* adopted by the European Council meeting of 15–16 October, governments committed to recapitalise banking institutions and to bring in public guarantees for bank borrowing. The total of all effectively-used measures between October 2008 and June 2009 amounted to nearly 12 per cent of GDP for the entire EU.³⁴ The European Commission's Directorate-General for Competition Policy was forced to make its enforcement practices on the control of state aid more flexible, but tried to preserve liberal market principles while attempting to maintain a level playing field between banks in different member states.³⁵

Extraordinary banking policies were successful to the extent that serious national banking crises did not evolve into a fully-blown European banking crisis. These measures have taken place without any substantial public or parliamentary debates; discussions have focused mainly on technical issues, involving only government officials, the Commission and bank insiders.³⁶ In sharp contrast, the cancellation of the participation of the heads of state in the EU Jobs Summit in Prague on 7 May 2009 left *'the impression that unemployment is a lower-order issue'*.³⁷

2.3 *Peripheral Sovereign Debt Crisis and the Turn toward Austerity (December 2009 to June 2011)*

On October 16, 2009, newly-elected Greek prime minister Georges Papandreou revised official debt figures, doubling to 12 per cent the previous government's estimate. A spiralling process of rising interest rates, an endless succession of

33 Davies, Atkins and Sakoui 2008.

34 European Commission 2009c.

35 European Commission 2009a, 2009b; Veron 2011.

36 Weber and Schmitz 2011.

37 *Financial Times* 2009.

austerity packages and economic depression was engaged. For the Eurozone, this was the first indication of a U-turn from short-lived countercyclical expansionary policies to austerity.³⁸

In this third phase of the crisis, the Eurozone became the epicentre of the global crisis, with mounting doubts about its political credibility. Why this European specificity?

Before the crisis, the Eurozone performed poorly in terms of growth, employment and inequalities.³⁹ But technically, the launch of the euro was a success. Politically, it has allowed monetary policies to be freed from democratic deliberation and has succeeded in masking the complex economic processes of redistributing the costs and the advantages amongst the population.⁴⁰ This de-politicisation provided conditions of possibility for the bureaucratic (i.e. non-democratic) Caesarism to come. From this perspective, the sources of the latter go back to the very origins of the monetary union.

However, with persistently diverging inflation rates, the 'one size fits all' monetary policy, a set of policies promoting cuts of unit labour costs in Germany and the elimination of the exchange-rate risk, unsustainable trade imbalances grew within the Eurozone along with a surge in (public and private) debt in the periphery.⁴¹ The EU's attempt to generate 'world money' was from the beginning fundamentally flawed.⁴² The EMU architecture was built on the assumption that the private market economy is spontaneously stable.⁴³ The emphasis was almost exclusively put on budget discipline, and no mechanism was planned to deal with the possibility that a member state may be pushed into a liquidity or solvency crisis by external economic disorders. Moreover, in contrast to the situation in the USA, the UK or in Japan, the absence of coincidence between state sovereignty and money management has led to the absence of an explicit central-bank guarantee on public debts, which let open the possibility of speculative attacks on sovereign bonds.

The philosophy of the treaties forbids other countries from assuming liability for the debts and commitments of fellow-members. However, because of the immediate destabilising effect that a disordered default by any member state would trigger, the philosophy had to change. On 2 May 2010, the first

38 Boyer 2012, p. 291.

39 Aglietta and Berrebi 2007; Bibow 2009.

40 Jones 2002, p. 12.

41 Koo 2011; Lapavitsas, Kaltenbrunner, Lindo, Michell, Paineira, Pires, Powell, Stenfors and Teles 2010; Laski and Podkaminer 2012; Saglio and Mazier 2004; Stockhammer 2011.

42 Lapavitsas 2012b.

43 Brender and Pisani 2007, pp. 64 and 90; Duménil and Lévy 2011, p. 17.

Greek bailout was agreed on the basis of bilateral and IMF loans at punitive rates. During the following week, the spreads of Ireland and Portugal bonds surged. The assertion that Greece was a special case was no longer credible. On 9 May 2010, EU governments were forced to announce the creation of a permanent mechanism to deal with the possibility of other sovereign debt crises within the Eurozone: the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF). A revision of the stability pacts was also announced. This move by the European Council was followed by the decision of the ECB to buy Greek bonds on the secondary markets, inaugurating a new buying policy of government bonds – the Securities Market Programme, a major shift of ECB policy.⁴⁴

The first round of institutional remodelling in response to the sovereign debt crisis revealed that the social force at the forefront of the political agenda is finance capital. Finance capital is the fraction of capital dedicated to making money out of money, i.e. without a direct involvement in production processes. It is constituted out of banks and other financial institutions as well as of financial departments of non-financial firms. This is the class fraction under whose leadership and on behalf of whose interests the restructuring of EU institutions in the context of the crisis mainly takes place. The centrality of finance capital – the most deterritorialised form of capital – in the course of the crisis favoured the emergence of bureaucratic Caesarism.

The case of Klaus Regling, the CEO of the EFSF, is telling in this regard.⁴⁵ Klaus Regling was an official at the IMF, the German finance ministry and the European Commission, but also had a career in the financial private sector: he worked as an economist for the German Bankers' Association in the early eighties, he was the managing director of a hedge fund in London (1999–2001), and before being appointed to the EFSF he was chairman of KR Economics, an economic and financial consultancy in Brussels. The process of building the European supervisory financial architecture is also revealing. The chairman of the high-level working group responsible for this new organisation was Jacques de Larosière, an ex-IMF general director and high-ranking official at the French treasury, who is also an advisor to BNP Paribas's CEO Michel Pebereau. Four of the eight members of the group are closely linked to giant financial corporations (Goldman Sachs, BNP, Lehman Brothers and Citigroup) and all of them have a background linked to financial liberalisation policies.⁴⁶

Austerity measures are a form of socialisation of the promises accumulated in the form of unsustainable public and private debt and, in the meantime, they

44 *The Economist* 2011.

45 See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klaus_Regling>.

46 Haar, Rowell and Vassalos 2009.

open the door to the buying-up of profitable assets at deflated prices following a logic of *accumulation by dispossession*.⁴⁷ This agenda has been mainly pushed by finance capital, with more discreet support from other business sectors.⁴⁸ On the side of trade unions, contrastingly, there has been mounting frustration expressed angrily in a letter from the European Trade Unions Confederation (ETUC) general secretary in January 2011: *'Diktats are being issued which are designed to lower living standards [...] the ETUC will find it impossible to support action by the EU along these lines, or proposals on economic governance, and any new treaty which contains them, which resemble in some aspects the reparation (punishment) provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, and reduce member states to quasi-colonial status.'*⁴⁹

2.4 *Siphon, Boomerang and Spiralling Political Effects (from July 2011 to March 2013)*

The fourth phase of the crisis is characterised by: (i) an intensification of the peripheral sovereign debt crisis and its latent extension towards larger European economies, (ii) a revival of the banking crisis because of a boomerang effect of the degradation of public bonds on their balance sheet, (iii) a degradation of the overall economic situation with a deepening of the depression in some peripheral economies, and a second recession for Europe as a whole as a consequence of the generalisation of austerity. In addition, there is a clear upgrading of the crisis from the economic and financial sphere towards politics, both at the level of individual countries and for the EU as a whole. This politicisation of the crisis also constitutes a phase where the Caesarist nature of the EU architecture manifests itself more clearly.

This phase began with an implicit acknowledgement that the policies implemented so far had failed to contain the sovereign debt crisis and to resolve the solvency problems of Greece. The July 2011 Euro Summit had to agree, together with the IMF, to support a second programme for Greece which accepted lowering the interest rates and an extension of the maturities of the first plan. In addition, a major taboo was broken with the agreement on the principle of a Private Sector Involvement (PSI). Three months later, on the eve of the 3–4 November 2011 G20 summit in Cannes, a new emergency Euro summit was called. The new set of measures was first of all dedicated to the resolution of

47 Glassman 2006; Harvey 2005.

48 *Le Monde* 2011; *Business Europe* 2010.

49 John Monk, Letter to Mr Olli Rehn, Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, Brussels, 11 January 2011. See <http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf/110111_Olli_Rehn.pdf>.

the Greek crisis with a new expansion of the bailout package and an increase in private-sector involvement, details of which were disclosed on 9 March 2012.

In between, the situation significantly deteriorated. Tim Geithner, the US Secretary of the Treasury, felt it necessary to warn European leaders of '*catastrophic risk*'⁵⁰ and the European Round Table⁵¹ made its first public statement about the Euro crisis, urging '*coordinated actions to reinforce EMU*'.⁵² Even worse, clear signs of contagion appeared: rising spreads for Italian bonds and, to a lesser extent, Spanish bonds forced the ECB to intensify its Securities Market Programme to prevent these countries from becoming insolvent because of skyrocketing interest rates.⁵³ Indications of a degradation of funding conditions also spread to other countries, including France, which finally saw its credit rating downgraded in early 2012.

During this period, the direct role played by the Institute of International Finance (IIF)⁵⁴ was spectacular. Its representatives not only had access to the highest government and EU officials, but some media reported their involvement in the negotiations up until the last minute at the October Eurozone summit.⁵⁵ One concrete example was the ability of this lobby to push the PSI scheme at the expense of an alternative proposal of a tax on the banking sector.⁵⁶ Moreover, the Troika's grip on Greek budgetary policy went one step further with the setting up by the Commission of a Task Force, which will bring 'close and continuous' technical assistance to the Greek authorities in order to ensure the implementation of the reform.

Unable to raise more fresh money, the EU governments also announced a risky leveraging of the resources of the EFSF⁵⁷ in an attempt to build up a fire-wall against further extension of speculative attacks. The possibility that big emerging economies could contribute to the fund was also mentioned. This proposal was politely rejected by the Brazilians, who explained that they prefer to intervene through the IMF. It has also received a less diplomatic response by

50 Chaffin, Barker and Hope 2011.

51 The European Roundtable of Industrialists is a big-business organisation consisting currently of 45 chief executives and chairmen of major multinational companies of European parentage. See <<http://www.ert.eu/default/en-us.aspx>>.

52 European Round Table of Industrialists 2011.

53 At the end of January 2012, this temporary programme shows no signs of ending even after €219bn of purchases. See Dobson 2012.

54 The IIF is a lobby group established in 1983 by the biggest banks and financial institutions in the world to deal with the question of sovereign debt.

55 Corporate Europe Observatory 2012.

56 Spiegel, Peel and Wilson 2011; Baker 2011.

57 The details of the mechanism are analysed in Münchau 2011.

Jin Liqun, the CEO of China Investment Corporation. Stating that *'the labour laws induce sloth and indolence rather than hard work'*,⁵⁸ he did not consider investing in the fund to be profitable.

The summit also agreed on measures concerning the banking sector⁵⁹ and made *'An unequivocal commitment to ensure fiscal discipline and accelerate structural reforms'*. It promised *'A significant strengthening of economic and fiscal coordination and surveillance'*, and for the first time since the beginning of the crisis officially mentioned *'the possibility of limited Treaty changes'* in order to strengthen the economic union.⁶⁰

The announcement by Greek prime minister Georges Papandreou on his way back to Athens that a referendum would be held on the new deal concluded cast doubt on the viability of the whole agreement, reanimating market turmoil and infuriating governments and EU officials on the eve of the G20 summit. The move by Papandreou was an attempt to regain some political room for manoeuvre in a context where street protests, strikes and civil disobedience dramatically intensified.⁶¹ It exposed abruptly to European public opinion how much European officials were afraid of democratic consultation. For the first time a European head of state talked openly about the possibility of Greek departure from the euro: *'The Greeks have to decide whether to continue the adventure with us or not'*, warned the French president Nicolas Sarkozy. Papandreou's forced resignation finally led to the nomination of a so-called 'Unity Government' led by Lucas Papademos, a former central banker in Athens and at the ECB in Frankfurt up to 2010. A few days later, Silvio Berlusconi was finally driven out of power by the joint pressure of financial markets, European fellow members and EU officials,⁶² leading to Mario Monti's nomination as the chief of a so-called 'technical government'. In line with Papademos, Draghi, de Larosière and Regling's profiles, Monti has been an EU commissioner and also has very strong connections with the corporate and financial sectors.

The inability of national governments to deal with mounting financial troubles within the constraints of the Eurozone led to an acceleration of European integration in the following months. But this acceleration rendered the EU less, not more, democratic, hence its 'regressive' character. The new Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance entered into force on 1 January 2013. It introduces a very strict *a priori* supervision of national fiscal policies by the

58 *AlJazeera* 2011.

59 European Council 2011.

60 *Ibid.*

61 Kouvelakis 2011.

62 D'Argenio 2011.

European Commission and the European Council. A new core principle is that 'sovereignty ends when solvency ends'⁶³ which *de facto* transforms countries under financial assistance into quasi-protectorates. On July 26, Mario Draghi managed to calm down the financial turmoil on sovereign-debt markets when he said: 'the ECB is ready to do whatever it takes to preserve the euro.'⁶⁴ For the first time the institution committed itself to unlimited purchases of bonds of countries under speculative strains. But this complete guarantee is qualified by an abdication of the sovereignty of national authorities to the Troika's requirements.⁶⁵

At the height of the Cyprus crisis, the ECB was again the decisive actor. Through a confused negotiation process between the Cyprus authorities, the Eurogroup and the IMF, the ECB delivered Cyprus an ultimatum on 21 March 2013 that gave it four days to come up with a deal.⁶⁶ The contrast between the weakness of national governments and an ECB becoming more and more assertive is striking. Although financial turbulence diminished in the second part of 2012, social and economic turbulence did not stop, as the continent sank further with a double-dip recession and political instability on the rise in the periphery.⁶⁷

3 Lineages of the European Crisis

This historical sketch of the European crisis from 2007 to early 2013 reveals not only deep structural weaknesses of the EU institutional architecture, but also a singular political dynamic that can be analysed with the help of the concept

63 Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa Group 2012.

64 Because of the key role played by the ECB during 2012, Mario Draghi earned the FT's vote as the 'Person of the Year': See <<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/8fca75b8-4535-11e2-838f-00144feabdco.html#axzzzKbYNHjU>>.

65 See Jones 2012.

66 Black 2013.

67 In Italy, the centrist alliance led by prime minister Mario Monti trailed fourth in the elections of February 2013 with only 10% of the votes; after these elections, no stable political majority was in sight. The PSOE in Spain obtained its worst electoral score since 1982 in November 2011 with just 28.7% of the votes, while the Socialist Party in Portugal lost the June 2011 elections with its worst score since 1987. In Greece, in June 2012, the right won the elections with 29.66% of the ballot against the coalition of the radical left, Syriza, which obtained 28.69%. The PASOK of the incumbent prime minister which had been the dominant political force since the end of the colonels' rule in 1974 was in disarray with just 12.28% of the votes.

of bureaucratic Caesarism. Demonstrating the theoretical fruitfulness of this concept is the task of this third section.

3.1 *A Weak and Shrinking Historical Bloc*

The lack of an endogenous dynamics is an original sin of the European integration process. In the context of the Cold War, its first steps were strongly encouraged by the US leadership and involved only a small layer of the European elites.⁶⁸ In the eighties, the driving forces behind the 'rebound' of the European project were transnational corporations. In particular, the action of the European Business Roundtable in favour of the single market was decisive. The EMU was also partly imposed by geopolitical considerations resulting from the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent reunification of Germany. Clearly, it would be an exaggeration to say that the European project has been built from the outside. But one should acknowledge a lack of endogeneity in the integration process. In September 2011 and then during the Cannes G20, the insistence of foreign powers, above all the US, on the need for European governments – especially Germany – to act more decisively was a reminder of this lack of internal leadership. This striking feature was already clear with the permanent involvement of the IMF in shaping responses to global turmoil among the weakest EU members.

This weak endogeneity explains the absence of a true historical bloc at the European level. It is characterised by a failure to firmly establish the legitimacy of European statehood. Drawing on Jacques Sapir's distinction between procedural and substantial regimes of legitimacy,⁶⁹ one can stress the lack of EU institutions because, on one hand, of the democratic deficit and, on the other, of the repeated incapacity of European integration to deliver on its promises in terms of growth and employment. The EU has failed to identify concretely, to recall Gramsci's terms, the 'economico-social' content and the 'ethico-political' form, that is, to construct a consistent historical bloc. The EU has been built with a strong bias towards the requirements of capital in its purest and least territorialised form – finance capital. Accordingly, it suffers from a spatio-temporal incoherence, due to its lack of policy integration. This is particularly clear when considering the regulation of banking activities, but also the narrowness of the EU budget and the lack of direct fiscal resources.

Furthermore, the subaltern classes have been almost completely excluded from the European integration process. Since the late 1990s, at a time when

68 van der Pijl 2012.

69 Sapir 2002.

Pierre Bourdieu was pleading in favour of a European social movement,⁷⁰ several grassroots organisations and radical currents have tried to build up European resistances from below, on issues such as unemployment, racism or ecology. However, if all of these movements have at one moment or other managed to influence national political agendas, they never found a way to make a breakthrough at the European level. Across the continent, the unions have adopted divergent positioning about the EMU, though most of them continued to reject neoliberal restructuring.⁷¹ Among them, many unions from transnational production sectors were heavily involved in European-level efforts to shape policies. The European Trade Unions Confederation (ETUC) has also received official attention, but few would deny its difficulty in influencing the European project, beyond mostly symbolic victories such as the 'social rights charter'.⁷² Broadly speaking, the search for the consent of the 'subalterns' has never really gone beyond the integration of the leaderships of the main trade unions, of formal negotiations, and of collaboration with NGOs dependent on European funding.

This narrowness of the social basis of the European historical bloc and its lack of socio-political substance has been exacerbated in the course of the crisis. Most of the political agenda of EU institutions since the crisis has been oriented toward financial stability. In spite of a deepening dramatic degradation of social conditions, the problems addressed by EU officials and inter-governmental bodies were mainly financial.

In contrast to this prominent role for finance, there was for the first time a formal dissociation of the ETUC from an important stage of European integration, with its rejection of the so-called 'fiscal compact' of March 2012 and a call for a European day of action. More importantly, in countries impacted by radical austerity and structural reforms, there was a wave of mass mobilisations through strikes and citizen demonstration (the so-called *indignados*) not seen for decades. Not surprisingly, Greece, which has been hit worst by the crisis and austerity measures, is the country where popular mobilisations have been the strongest, with 21 calls to inter-professional strikes between late 2009 and early 2013, numerous violent confrontations with the police and widespread disobedience by civil agents.

The ongoing crisis of capitalism is multi-layered. As Wolfgang Streeck has stressed,⁷³ this might well be a crisis of 'democratic capitalism' as a whole, that

70 Bourdieu 1999.

71 Bieler 2006.

72 Horn 2012.

73 Streeck 2011.

is, of the type of combination of capitalism and democracy – the best ‘shell’ for capitalism, as Lenin put it in *The State and Revolution* – that appeared in the first half of the twentieth century. Our analysis is focused on the supra-national level, but elements of organic crisis can also be found at the level of national formations. Indeed, the current balance of forces within the EU is in part due to the diverging economic and political trajectories of European countries in the past decades. Today, national and supranational political spaces should be seen as relatively continuous and interlocked.

3.2 *The Primacy of Non-democratic Institutions in Times of Crisis*

According to Gramsci, in the course of an organic crisis a rapid movement of insulation from popular pressure occurs. The evolution of EU politics since 2008 offers numerous symptoms of this Caesarist shift away from democratic procedures. One of the clearest examples of this is the successive hardening of coercive control over national budgetary procedures since 2010. This path has been followed with the famous euro convergence criteria included in the Maastricht Convergence Criteria and the Stability and Growth Pact. Control at the European level over national-government budgets and economic policies was reinforced with the ‘Euro Plus pact’, the ‘Six pack’ and the European Semester. They imply more automatic sanctions on recalcitrant countries, an explicit orientation in favour of pension reforms and the liberalisation of labour markets, and a new monitoring cycle of economic policies through an examination of national budgetary programmes in advance of their discussion by national parliaments.

The apogee of this major deprivation of national sovereignty was the adoption of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance on 1 March 2012. According to this new treaty, which was adopted in 2013, countries have to implement permanent legal dispositions – preferably at the constitutional level – which constrain the public structural deficit to reach a benchmark of 0.5 per cent of GDP under the supervision of independent bodies, presumably consisting of economists and legal experts, to discipline member-state governments. The European Court of Justice will be able to fine a country if any member state files a complaint on the implementation of the treaty in another signatory state. In addition, Article 11 explicitly rejects the ability of individual countries to experiment with any significant original economic policy of their own.

But the most spectacular symptom of this Caesarist trend is the rise of the political power of the ECB. The bank was at the forefront of the rescue of the financial system in 2008–9 and again in 2011–12, by mobilising huge financial resources in order to prevent a major disruption among distressed

financial institutions. But as a member of the Troika and because of its interventions on secondary bond markets, it became directly involved in the definition of reform programmes in peripheral countries. The new assertiveness of the ECB became clear under Draghi's rule, with its commitment to do 'whatever it takes' to save the Eurozone, and the public ultimatum to the government of Cyprus in March 2013. In addition, the ECB has seen its authority extended to the supervision of the banking system, since it is now in charge of the post of secretary of the European Systemic Risk board. This rise is all the more spectacular when compared to the incapacity of the only elected body in the EU governance system, the European parliament, to exert any significant control over crisis management. Its president, German SPD member Martin Schulz, has been active in trying to make the parliament's voice heard in the context of the crisis, but in vain (see *Le Monde*, 19 January 2012).

Another dimension of this trend is more specifically linked to the hybrid nature of the European Union, which is to some extent a 'proto-state', but which at the same time relies on various sets of relations between formally sovereign states.⁷⁴ At this level, we can observe a spatial differentiation occurring between democratic procedures in the different countries. The Greek case is paradigmatic. Neither the German proposal of direct control by a special EU commissioner on the Greek economy, nor Wolfgang Schäuble's suggestion to delay Greek polls and install a technocratic government⁷⁵ became concrete. However, they are revealing of a political will in Germany and other AAA countries to obtain strict and direct control over the Greek economy in exchange for their money.

Since the very first bailout in May 2010, there has been a mounting attempt to monitor the Greek economy by Troika representatives up to a point where we can consider Greece's sovereignty on economic issues to have been reduced almost to that of a protectorate. In February 2012, the Greek government was told in detail which measures in tax, spending and wage policies it must implement in a matter of days, if it wanted to receive the money of the second bailout. In fact, this plan ranges well beyond macro adjustment, running into so many areas that, according to an analyst quoted by the *Financial Times*, 'the programme is much, much more ambitious than economic reform. This is state building, as typically understood in traditional low-income contexts'.⁷⁶

74 Cohen 2014.

75 Hope and Spiegel 2012.

76 Spiegel, Wiesmann and Hope 2012.

The implementation of the programme is monitored by a permanent presence of the Commission's task force on the ground and the participation of Troika representatives on the board of the Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund, which is in charge of privatisation.

In the face of the huge shaking out of the crisis, the EU bureaucracy and specifically independent bodies such as the ECB appear to be the main unitary forces on the political scene. The reinforcement of judicial economic norms and the competence of non-elected European institutions on economic issues also participate in this move of de-embeddedness of economic policies from popular influence. This, of course, is a Caesarism without a 'charismatic' personality, the Caesarism of an organisation or a bureaucracy, a case explicitly taken into account by Gramsci, as we have seen.

When Gramsci spoke of Caesarism, he considered the way social classes, i.e. subaltern and dominant classes, neutralised themselves during struggle, thus opening up a space for the rise of a (personal or bureaucratic) Caesar. Yet the current European political field includes other types of forces, that maintain complex and often conflicting relationships with each other: classes and fractions of classes, but also nation-states and bureaucracies, that have an increasingly 'multiscalar' dimension; 'regionalist' political powers, such as Catalonia or Flanders, who try to take advantage of the crisis to obtain greater autonomy; foreign powers like the US or the BRICS, with their own agenda, international organisations like the IMF . . .

We are not claiming of course that subaltern and dominant classes are equally powerful and thus mutually-neutralising forces in Europe today. Overall, the subalterns are in retreat. However, the deterioration of the socio-economic situation, and the harshness of neoliberal policies, unleashed a significant wave of protests and political backlashes, especially in peripheral European countries.⁷⁷ These street demonstrations, strikes and electoral discontents could potentially produce disruptive chain reactions in the contemporary multi-scalar statehood. Thus, bureaucratic Caesarism in Europe today can be seen as a preemptive deprivation of democracy, accepted by dominant classes frightened by the potentially destabilising effects of popular anger, in a context of socio-economic regression.

77 Bieler 2011.

Conclusion

The core problem we have addressed is the interacting dynamics of financial, economic and political realms during the crisis. This is precisely what a framework derived from an engagement with some of Gramsci's central concepts permits. On such a basis, it is possible to move from the simple periodisation of this crucial historical sequence to a deeper understanding of the underlying processes which give the EU crisis its idiosyncratic characteristics.

The EU can be seen as a historically new type of 'coalition government'. The main European political forces, fractions of capital, and also significant sectors of the labour movement have supported the construction of the EU, with little political nuance. As Gramsci says, every coalition government is a 'first stage' of Caesarism. Contrary to common opinion, coalitions are not a protection, the most 'solid bulwark', against Caesarism, quite the contrary. This does not mean of course that every coalition government will inevitably lead to Caesarism. But it implies that this possibility exists in their very nature. And for reasons underlined above, the probability that this possibility will be realised increases in times of crisis. This argument about the Caesarist potential inherent in modern political institutions is where Gramsci parts ways with more mainstream concepts of 'authoritarianism'. The latter generally tend to consider authoritarianism as exogenous to representative democracy.

The European bureaucratic Caesarism we have described is clearly regressive. As we have shown, most measures adopted in the context of the crisis have been taken in the interests of finance capital. Finance is not only a form of economic dispossession, it is also a form of *political* dispossession, because it is the most deterritorialised form of capital, on which the grip of the subalterns is by definition weak. From this perspective, a Caesarism underlain by the interests of finance can be nothing other than profoundly regressive.

The *devenir* of Europe lies primarily in the way the subalterns will try to cope with Caesarist Europe. One option is that popular mobilisation could constrain the ruling elites to accept democratic concessions, thus leading to a burgeoning institutional densification at the European level. However, this is not the most plausible scenario. It is not self-evident that popular resistances and progressive politics would be more effective and more prone to develop at the EU level. We are inclined to think the contrary. In order to clarify this point, further research is needed to precisely assess the cumulative socio-political effects of the lack of articulation of accumulation regimes across the EU and of the underdevelopment of continental politics.

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