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ADOLF BIBIČ'S INNOVATIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE MARXIST CONCEPTUALISATION OF POLITICS**

Abstract. The article analyses the innovative Marxist conceptualisation of politics proposed by the Slovenian political scientist Adolf Bibič. The latter built on the contributions of Heglo-Marxists and Gramsci to political theory. At the core of his theory, he placed the question of the political power–class exploitation relationship. He distinguished political politics from self-managing politics, and problematised the dominant Western understandings of politics as well as the theories of elitism and pluralism. Moving away from such theories and dogmatic Marxist notions about the withering away of politics, he formulated his project of humanising politics beyond class exploitation and capitalist relations of production. This project assumed a necessary transformation of political practice in terms of the dialectical process of the socialisation of politics and the politicisation of society.

Keywords: Adolf Bibič, politics, political science, class relations, economic exploitation.

INTRODUCTION

Although the study of politics dates back at least to ancient Greece, political science departments at universities around the world and the institutionalisation of studying politics only emerged after the Second World War (Bibič 1972; Meiksins Wood 2016; 2017; Hočevar 2022; Lukšič 2022).¹ This was also the period when a similar project was being gradually attempted by Yugoslav and Slovenian society and politics (Pikalo 2022).² If political science were to achieve

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¹ Lukšič claims that political science is “a young science if measured looking at programmes of modern universities, but at the same time among the oldest if its age is measured considering the works of ancient political thinkers ...” (Lukšič 2022, 196).

² For an analysis of political theory in Slovenia, see Pikalo (2022). For a historical reflection on the role and development of the Slovenian Political Science Association (established in 1968), see Toplak (2022).

independence as an individual scientific discipline, the field of study had to be clearly defined. The first political scientists abroad began establishing the core of studying politics in much the same way as the scientists in Yugoslavia and Slovenia. In this region, the pioneering work of making political science a scientific discipline in its own right was done by Adolf Bibič who in the 1960s started to research and establish an independent study of political science. Yet, in this process, he encountered an important challenge. For political science to become separate from sociology, history, law and economy, he needed to define the object of study of political science extremely well. A separate object of study is namely what legitimises each science relative to the other sciences. However, the question of what politics is has caused intense debate ever since.

Bibič's understanding of politics was strongly influenced by various Marxist classics and the Yugoslav self-management experience. Always in the core of his political research project, the relationship between the state and (civil) society was most explicitly addressed in *Zasebništvu in skupnost: »civilna družba« in država pri Heglu in Marxu* (The private sphere and the community: "civil society" and the state in Hegel and Marx), where he focused on the relationship and dialectic between the state and society, not merely the class-state relationship (Bibič 1972, 9). His research on the relationship between civil society and the state in Hegel and Marx moved to researching the political theory advocated by the Italian Marxist theorist and practitioner Antonio Gramsci. Another especially interesting and important influence on his research was the work by Rosa Luxemburg, an often overlooked Marxist theorist and revolutionary who, in the early 20th century, was considered one of the most original Marxist theorists of all times. A further key influence was the work by Edvard Kardelj and his concept of self-management (Bibič 1979a; 1979b; 1980), which formed the basis of Bibič's more theoretical and Marxist explanation of the political in self-management socialism. Bibič understood politics in a historical context and with a rich theoretical background. His Marxist conceptualisation of politics is characterised by two different forms of politics: 1) politics in a capitalist class society; and 2) politics in a self-management system, where it was anticipated that class conflict would gradually dissipate.³ For Bibič, the double nature of politics in two distinct modes of production opened the space not only for a critical analysis of politics based on class conflict, but also for affirming politics in a society committed to the gradual abolition of classes and the withering away of the state.

The goal of this article is to analyse Bibič's oeuvre and reflect on his contribution to Marxist political theory and understanding of politics. The article initially delineates Bibič's early research concerning the question of what politics

³ Bibič himself admitted that Yugoslav society did not reach the level of a classless society. It was, however, founded on the political and economic emancipation of the working class and held the potential to develop a type of mode of production different from capitalism and Soviet socialism. The concepts of self-management and social ownership were the great theoretical and practical innovation that democratised the process of production (Samary 2017; Kržan 2017).

is, namely, his central focus in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Then, his double conceptualisation of politics in the capitalist system and in the self-management system is explained. The following section analyses Bibič's critique and his rejection of elitist and pluralist conceptions of politics. Finally, the concluding part reflects on the importance of Bibič's Marxist understanding of politics in the 21st century under the hegemony of the capitalist mode of production and its neoliberal incarnations.

ESTABLISHING A NEW SCIENCE: POLITICS AS THE OBJECT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

In the most general sense, Bibič separated the narrow and wide understandings of politics. In the narrow sense, politics relates to the state and authority; it is also connected to the influence exerted from the level of the state onto society and from the level of society to the level of the state. In the wide sense, politics encompasses the dialectic relationship between the state and society, "any governance of the society or its parts that is based on conflicts of interest and the harmonisation of parts with the whole of society" (Bibič 1985, 789). While Bibič stresses that politics is "on the one hand even narrower than state activities (it does not involve the routine carrying out of state affairs)", simultaneously, in its wide sense, it encompasses the effects that various social elements have on the authorities together with the specific relations between different elements of the society, organising coexistence, conflict or consensus (Bibič [1969] 2021, 35–36). By expanding his definition, Bibič anticipates Foucault's gesture of cutting the king's head off (Foucault 2015) yet remains aware of the meaning of public authorities and emphasises that in the study of politics, the state and the state apparatus must be expanded and amended with elements that are not political in a narrow sense or not tied to the state and governance in the strict sense of the word.

Bibič divided politics into four interconnected elements: 1) the social division of work and class structure of society; 2) subjects active in society or in an international arena; 3) the political ideologies or aims of political activity; and 4) political action. He wrote, "[p]olitical subjects work in given objective conditions and from them; they consciously realise certain aims with political action, which – in historically furthest reaches – leads the socialisation of politics into negating its own assumptions" (Bibič [1969] 2021, 38).

In another text, Bibič defined politics as a "dynamic disentanglement between the objective and the subjective, a dialectic of 'social forces' and 'political forces'". He also held the Gramscian conviction that politics is a "flow of structures into superstructures and a flow of superstructures into structures" and a Hegelian belief that politics is an action of political liberation in a dialectic relationship and fight "between the master and the slave, in which the slave is realising that it is his work that is enabling the master and that work is what is liberating the slave and society" (Bibič 1978, 6). Bibič added that politics is "a dialectic

historical process of fighting, of conflicts of interest, but also of their surpassing, coordination, unification” and that politics – much like democracy or freedom – cannot be defined in general. Politics “in general is neither good nor bad, but quite simply empty and undefined” (Bibič 1978, 5).

These general definitions of politics do not, however, contain the fundamental elements of Bibič’s thinking. These were closely connected to his definition of the tasks and the goals of political science. Bibič believed that the task of political science is to discover and help bring an end to the exploitation and unequal power relations in society. This is why he, as he claimed, had founded a “humanist political science”⁴ (Bibič 1978; [1969] 2021). In this regard, he faced a dual task: while he defined the specifics of political science in relation to other disciplines, he had to explain what makes the object of political science so special and what is so important in studying politics that political science can contribute to the humanist goals of all of humankind. Along these lines, he took on the task of developing not only Marxist political science but, in turn, also a Marxist understanding of politics.

POLITICS AND THE CAPITALIST MODE OF PRODUCTION

Drawing on Hegel and Marx, Bibič posited the contradictory relationship between state and society along with the relationship between “social structures and political processes” as the fundamental problem of politics in capitalist societies (Bibič 1978, 26; Bibič 1985; [1969] 2021). In a different text, he stated that the core of understanding politics is the conflict between particular and universal interests, which lies at the heart of the capitalist class conflict (Bibič 1972, 14). The dialectic between the particular and the universal and the state–society dialectics are specific to capitalism and the capitalist mode of production or the social and political order based on class exploitation. Following this line of thought in his work *Kaj je politična znanost?* (What is political science?), Bibič defined politics as a

social activity based on social division of labour and the social structure based on it (in a class society, mainly on classes); it is an activity relating to the regulation of the human condition and the structural elements of society (in a class society, many of classes) in their fundamental relations of production and work in general, as well as to making decisions about the general affairs of a given society or international community. (Bibič [1969] 2021, 35)

⁴ Political science should help a person “experience themselves more and more as a community, while the community would feel itself as a part of the person; that a person would become less a meaning and more the goal to another person; and that group, national, racial, economical and other particularistic egoisms would be replaced by interpersonal collaboration in a human community, where there would be no more differences between the rulers and the ruled” (Bibič 1978, 45).

The key aspect of this definition is Bibič's specific gesture of making class conflict the core of politics. Bibič believed that the issue of class – i.e., the issue of class exploitation and abolishing it – was a political issue and the heart of politics in capitalist societies. He highlighted that politics in capitalism – the functioning of government and state structures – cannot be understood without accounting for class conflict and the class nature of society (Bibič 1981; [1969] 2021).

At this point, it should be stressed that Bibič rejected the reductionist and instrumentalist understanding of the state as a mere tool of the ruling class(es) (Bibič 1972; 1981). Drawing on and following Hegel and Marx, he saw the class structure of society as the basis for the separation of state and society (Bibič [1969] 2021) or for the political form of capitalist rule itself.⁵ He saw the centre of political science as lying in the study of the relationship between the state and civil society as this dualism is highly specific for capitalist class societies (Bibič 1972). He clearly defined that “it would not be an exaggeration to argue that a clear awareness of the origins and development of the distinction between ‘civil society’ and the state is a necessary prelude to the modern, sociological and philosophical study of politics”⁶ (Bibič 1972, 11).

Capitalism is marked by a typical separation of political authority from direct economic exploitation, which is only possible when the property of the means of production is concentrated in the hands of a minority. In contrast to feudalism, direct political authority is no longer needed to ensure exploitation, which means the minority can let go of it. Thus, the change in property relations – the concentration of capital in the hands of a minority and the pauperisation of workers with no property or wealth who are forced to sell their labour power on the market – has also been translated into the form of exploitation and the relationship between political authority and exploitation, which is seemingly most evident in the field of economics, but is actually embedded in the entire social and political reproduction of capitalism.⁷ In the “dualism of state and society”, Bibič saw an “accompanying and forming phenomenon of emerging modern bourgeois epoch” (Bibič 1981, 17).

He carefully pointed out that class conflict overdetermines all other social conflicts and is as such the key to understanding politics.⁸ Bibič did not propose

⁵ The first to translate James Madison's *Federalist Papers No. 10*, Bibič understood the origins of party democracy and the conflicts between different parities extremely well. He clearly delineated the fundamental point of federalist political thinking: differing amounts of wealth are a permanent source of social conflict, whereby Federalists never fought for these differences to be abolished but to be mitigated (Bibič 1992).

⁶ In another text, he wrote: “It was not until the emerging bourgeois society in the more developed countries of West Europe began re-establishing (this time with important consequences) the commodity economy, in which feudal political institutions are nothing but an obstacle that needs to be overcome /.../, that the heads of the most enlightened thinkers began conceiving political sphere as a field that is not equal to socio-economic life” (Bibič [1969] 2021, 17).

⁷ Bibič stated that the differentiation between the civil society and the state was the outcome of the capitalist market economy (the separation of economic exploitation and political dominance) and the French Revolution, which established the “principle of ‘pure’ politics” (Bibič 1981, 55).

⁸ In doing so, Bibič also explicitly rejected pluralist and elitist theories. For more on this, see below.

a vulgar mechanism in the relation between the state and the ruling class, but a wider understanding of politics. Instead of presupposing a uniformity of interests, he insisted that it is vital to understand the “dialectic between the components of the state itself on the one hand, and the dialectic between the state and the society on the other” (Bibič 1972, 260). Such conceptualisation of politics opens the door to understanding the frequently heterogenous interests of the ruling class and the ruled classes and allows for the possibility of understanding the state with reference to the crystallisation point of the class relationships of power.⁹

POLITICS IN SOCIALIST SOCIETY

One of Bibič’s biggest contributions to the Marxist conceptualisation of politics is his reflection on politics in socialist self-management. The fundamental assumption of vulgar Marxism was that politics itself would wither away with the abolition of capitalism. Bibič therefore wondered whether “socialist self-management, and thus the ‘withering away’ of the state, does not also mean that the specific object of political science, politics itself, is withering away?” (Bibič 1985, 789).

Bibič did not agree with a simplified understanding of Marxist thought and observed, from the self-management practice itself, that politics is not disappearing. In his attempt to explain the specific features of politics in socialist society, he followed his initial narrow and wide definitions of politics to roughly distinguish political politics from self-management politics. While political politics was the classic, narrowly defined politics in the sense of the organisation and activities of public authorities, self-management politics meant the entire broad sphere that had opened with the introduction of self-management and had gradually brought economic and political self-management together (Bibič 1978; 1981). Bibič underscored that three elements were particularly noteworthy for the understanding of politics in self-management.

First, Bibič claimed that self-management by itself does not mean that “all elements of class society have been overcome”; although they are “as a rule [...] of secondary meaning, they might acquire larger power in special circumstances” (Bibič [1969] 2021, 72). This of course means that politics as such is not disappearing (in neither the wide or narrow sense), inasmuch as the existence of classes results in class conflict and the existence of the state as an institution that is separated from every class and regulates different class interests and relations.

Second, the element of conflict between various social groups can also be seen in self-management: “The social division of labour is becoming an increasingly more direct and essential factor of social differentiation, while conflicts of interest and conflicts between social groups, based primarily on social division

⁹ With his definition of politics and the relationship between the state and the civil society, Bibič followed in the footsteps of the renowned Marxist theoretician Nicos Poulantzas, who defined the capitalist state as “a specific material condensation of forces, which is itself a class relation” (Poulantzas 2014, 129).

of labour, are becoming more and more central to professional decision-making” (Bibič [1969] 2021, 72). If the conflict of interest is the essential assumption in the existence of the state (politics in the narrow sense of the word) as well as the consequential existence of various ways of influencing public authorities (politics in the wider sense of the word), then it becomes clear that politics is not disappearing.

Third, international relations and international circumstances have thus far always been such – the Cold War – that even a society which pursues “self-management politics” had to “preserve certain functions to safeguard national political integrity” (Bibič [1969] 2021, 72). However rarely Bibič mentions it, this third element is therefore the positioning of societies in global political and economic flows. With no state, i.e., with no state protection of borders, socialist self-management would hardly have survived the strong pressures from both the West and the East (the USA vs. the USSR) to change the mode of production in Yugoslavia.¹⁰

In this context, Bibič linked self-management politics to greater democratisation and democracy. He envisioned the concept of socialist self-management as a phase of the socialisation of politics and the politisation of society, and not as the negation of politics in general or negation of the political’ politics, i.e., the politics that is narrowly linked to government and state. On the other hand, he saw a tendency in self-management politics to abolish the dualism of the state and society or the state and the economy, which is the crucial element of capitalist rule: “Self-management democracy is mass democracy by its nature and direct democracy by its essential tendency. As an openly class conception of democracy, it is principally oriented towards overcoming the class nature of society and politics and towards revealing and establishing an authentic pluralist nature of socialist society and politics (‘pluralism of self-management interests’) while overcoming class society” (Bibič 1985, 806). Bibič believed that the withering away of the state was synonymous with self-management and defined it as a possibility for overcoming political alienation as this process gave the option of political decisions back to individuals and the community. The socialisation of politics was a key element of self-management and the politisation of society (Bibič 1981, 273).

Bibič was one of those Marxist theoreticians who did not see self-management and the historical tendency towards the abolition of class exploitation through the various forms of socialist socialisation as the demise of politics (and, hence, of political science). Instead, he emphasised that the decline of liberal politics

¹⁰ This emphasis given by Bibič raises numerous questions about the very nature of the SFRY and the possibility of developing self-management as a different stage of the socialist mode of production. What he slightly overlooked is the positioning of Yugoslavia in a bipolar Cold-War order and the specific relationship between the SFRY and the USA or the West, as well as the importance of cooperation and the credit that came to Yugoslavia and was crucial for the establishment of self-management. For more on this, see Jakovina (2011).

does not mean the decline of politics as such. Where there is a tendency to abolish class exploitation, there is space for new forms of political action and participation. Even if class society and the state–society dualism were to be completely abolished, Bibič did not believe this was the road to the demise of politics but instead a space for affirming politics beyond the alienation of political authority and class exploitation. From this premise, he argued that, after the introduction of self-management, the space for political action was not shrinking but expanding because self-management had opened a space for the masses to enter politics, for the sphere of production to be politicised and, with it, for the possibility of people being emancipated beyond class exploitation (Bibič, 1981; 1969/2021).

BIBIČ'S CRITIQUE OF ELITISM AND PLURALISM

A Marxist understanding of politics and the stress on class conflict as the basis of politics led Bibič to critically reflect on political science in Western bourgeois socio-political contexts. He identified two fundamental and prevailing theories of how politics, political relations, structures, institutions and actions are conceived: elitist theories and interest group theories (pluralism). Given that these reflections were made in the late 1960s, one might expect them to be anachronistic and interesting especially from the perspective of political ideas present in the specific historical moment of the Yugoslav and Slovenian context. To rephrase: one might expect Bibič's insights not to be relevant for a contemporary, seemingly much more complex, heterogenous, multilayered and ambivalent political (politico-economic) context of globalised capitalist liberal democratic societies. Yet, Bibič's critical thinking on elitist theories and the theories of interest groups (pluralism) from that period¹¹ proves not only to be extremely lucid in itself, but also and especially useful for critically reflecting on trends in political science today.¹²

Bibič ([1969] 2021, 40) claimed that elitist theories derive from the supposedly empirical fact of the transhistorical existence of the rulers and the ruled in organised societies.¹³ The fundamental assumption of both older and more contemporary elitist theories is that the ruler–ruled relationship is inevitable.¹⁴

¹¹ His further theoretical development notwithstanding, the basic coordinates of his critique in this period were retained in Bibič's later dealing with the question of pluralism in the West (Bibič 1989).

¹² Far from these theoretical topics having given way to radically different frameworks in contemporary thinking and analysis of political reality; on the contrary, as contemporary political science analyses show, these two sets of theories are still extremely important, if not dominant, in the analysis of contemporary politics. For example, one of the most influential and cited political science articles of the last 10 years, *Testing Theories of American politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizen* by Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page (2014), defines elitist theories and theories of pluralism (interest groups) as two of the prevalent theories of politics.

¹³ He never doubted the empirical fact of this starting point – which is very questionable or factually incorrect in the light of modern anthropological findings (see Graeber and Wengrow 2021) – but his acceptance of this non-fact does not make his critique of elitist theories any less valid: he is initially problematising the controversial conclusions that elitist theories draw from this very non-fact.

¹⁴ Older elitist theories assumed that this relationship is tied to the nature of people itself: to their natural characteristic (be it moral, intellectual and/or physical) that inevitably lead to the mentioned du-

Bibič ([1969] 2021, 40) stressed that the emergence of contemporary elitist theories is inextricably linked to the emergence of capitalist society, which established the political sphere as a relatively autonomous sphere, closely connected to the sphere of production yet formally separate in the sense of the creation and functioning of specific elites pursuing particular interests linked to the public good and thus to wider social reproduction.

The development of bourgeois (capitalist) society produced large bureaucratic organisations led by elites. These organisations were formed in the framework of the state as a series of state apparatuses, in the context of the economy as a series of central oligopolist corporations, and in the context of political mediation in the form of numerous parties and their extensive bureaucracies. Bibič contended that the consolidation of bourgeois society was defined by general bureaucratisation and nationalisation, which have subverted the pre-existing dualism of state–civil society into a bureaucratic-institutional subordination of civil society to the state. The leaderships of bureaucratic institutions in all fundamental spheres of society have thus acquired power over the community that was unattainable in previous eras (Bibič 2021, 41). However, this fact led the elitist theoreticians to wrongly assume that formal politics is not only relatively, but absolutely, autonomous, and that political elites are free from fundamental social (class) contradictions and the relations of social forces. To demonstrate the indicators of this trend of thought, Bibič uses concepts that remain popular nowadays: mass society, managerial revolution, oligarchisation, bureaucratisation and technocratisation (Bibič [1969] 2021, 42).

The starting point of Bibič's analysis is the critique of the determinism of elitist theories. This determinism rearticulates certain facts of a given historical socio-political context as inevitable and never changing, as unalterable basic coordinates of modern-society and state activities: that an organised minority is always already dominating the unorganised majority of society and that this organised minority is always already ruling due to its larger inherent capacity, more expansive knowledge, higher intelligence, and ingenuity. Such a position consequently both disables the imagining of resistance and delegitimises the practice of resistance, the latter always already being understood not only as meaningless, but actually utopistic since there is no escaping from the shackles of this dualism.

As Bibič ([1969] 2021, 42–43) caustically remarked, elitist theories set a specific political programme that declares a certain historical-empirical political relation to be a trans-historical fact, while overlooking the specificity of the

alism. Contemporary elitist theories, in contrast, contribute the inevitability of this relationship to technical and organisational reasons, which propagate and deepen the distance between the elites and the masses in the same way of not more. For classic elitist theories see Gaetano Mosca *The Ruling Class* (1939), Vilfredo Pareto *The Mind and Society: A Treatise on General Sociology* (1935) and Robert Michels *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (1915).

capitalist political form – the dualism of state–(civil) society – and understanding it as always existing. The problem here, of course, is that such a conception of politics, such a political programme, emerges and is popularised within political science precisely in the context of the “penetration of the masses onto the scene of history” (Bibič 2021, 43), especially in the form of an organised labour movement. Beyond the Western context and in the context of colonialism, such a programme is popularised when the anti-colonial struggles begin and intensify. What is fundamental in both contexts is that elitist theory is a weapon of the forces that wish to preserve the *status quo* as it ‘assumes’ that the final results of both movements will be new elites and that they will continue (potentially in an even stricter way) with the radical division between the rulers and the ruled. This would, in turn, quash any hopes of the basic coordinates of this dualism being abolished.

Similar to his structured critique of elitist theories, Bibič ([1969] 2021, 46–53) systematically launched a critical reflection on the theories of interest groups (pluralism) as the second fundamental or prevailing set of theories that constitute a framework for understanding and acting in politics in liberal-democratic capitalist regimes. He initially conceptualised interest group theories (pluralism) as theories that refer to a specific political dimension of the liberal-democratic capitalist order.¹⁵ Originally, interest group theories refer to the existence of various social interests that encourage the formation of different interest groups. These are the basic unit of analysis because they are conceived as the factor that defines, forms and directs political processes in liberal-democratic capitalist regimes.

Interest group theories assume that the political reality is defined by the struggle or competition among various interest groups that try to apply pressure on political decision-makers to assert their particular interests. Bibič ([1969] 2021, 47) asserts that the basic unit of analysing and understanding political reality is therefore no longer a liberal autonomous individual of classical liberalism, who is on their own the main source of political power (in both direct and representative forms). In contrast to classical liberalism, interest group theories do not problematise but valorise the aggregation of individual interests into groups that then mediate between the individual and the state authorities. Bibič ([1969] 2021, 48) believes that this epistemological shift from an individualistic to a collectivistic understanding of politics follows the ontological transformations of liberal capitalist societies, in which various processes (e.g., workers’ struggle, the intensification of the division of labour, the emergence of large corporations and workers’ organisations, the multiplication of state functions, and the diversification of state bureaucracy and its power of intervention) have transcended the strictly individualist conceptions of politics. Here, it must be noted that interest

¹⁵ Bibič claims ([1969] 2021, 46) that the theory of interest groups (pluralism) refers to the horizontal dimension, while elitist theories refer to the vertical structure of political relationships and processes.

group theories (pluralism) can be traced back to the period when modern liberal-democratic representative systems were formed, as they can be found as early as James Madison's *Federalist Papers: No. 10*, where he analyses politics through the concept of factions (see Madison 1992). These theories, however, reach their theoretic maturity with Arthur Bentley's *The Process of Government* (1908) and David Truman's *The Governmental Process* (1951).

Bibič ([1969] 2021, 48) claims that, from the perspective of numerous social groups organised to influence direct or indirect political decision-makers, the theory is realistic – it reflects political reality. At the same time, it is relevant from the perspective of analysing a concrete political situation as it points to polyvalence and the need to focus on the multilayered and complex “relationship of powers” as the fundamental assumption of real political action in any society. Rather than a static perception of political reality, it is a basic assumption regarding its dynamics and changeability in terms of constantly (dis)appearing and changing interest groups or interest structure, which is inextricably linked to new divisions of labour in capitalist liberal-democratic regimes. Like in the case of elitist theories, an integral understanding of politics therefore needs to address and integrate the mentioned central insights and emphases of interest group theories in its critical analytical apparatus.

On the other hand, the theory of interest groups is problematic mostly from the perspective of its real political or political reality establishing implications. These theories are no mere cameras but machines to produce particular realities. They are not just a description of a political structure but have become integral parts of political visions and ‘interests’ that they were only supposed to interpret. Bibič claims that pluralist theories assume that

at least the potential power of various, especially the fundamental social groups in a class society is about the same and that, consequently, any effort to change the structural bases of the existing society and politics is anachronistic: the essence of politics is not a transformation of the world, but a balance between various interest and the search for a compromise between them.

(Bibič [1969] 2021, 50)

Pluralism accordingly falls into a vulgar empiricism of aggregating individual and collective interests based on the assumption that all interests have the same influence and the same power (Dahl 1963). This is in complete contrast with the reality of the capitalist mode of production where the state or the authorities might not just be the tool of one capitalist class fraction or the other but is most certainly the tool of the entire capitalist class, where it always works to preserve the integrity of the system or, as Engels (1987, 222) claimed, the state often functions as an “ideal collective capitalist”. The main task of the capitalist state is to ensure the reproduction of capitalist society as a whole, while sometimes directly pursuing the interests of individual capitalist blocs and sometimes giving the

appearance of working primarily for the interests of the exploited. This does not mean that every interest carries equal weight or equal power, but that the state can sometimes pursue heterogeneous interests precisely because it is concerned with the reproduction of capitalism as a whole and due to the historically particular constellation of class power relations.

Bibič's critique of the two prevalent political theories in the West in the 1960s and 1970s is hence fundamentally connected to his understanding of politics through the prism of class struggle and capitalist exploitation as well as the humanisation of politics. Elitist theory is directed against true democratic politics and especially against a socialist vision of politics – the socialisation of politics and the elimination of the state–society dualism through abolishing economic exploitation and the private property of the means of production – while implicitly defending the 'natural' fundamental transformations of capitalist liberal-democratic societies, which have helped reinforce and increase the gap between the rulers and the ruled.¹⁶ Pluralist theories, on the other hand, are practically blind to the problems of exploitation, inequality and the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. This blindness of pluralism is at the service of consolidating an unjust and exploitative order. Pluralist theories thus propagate the delusion of equality in capitalism, which does not exist. At the same time, they attribute the failure to promote those public interests that oppose the interests of the concentration of capital to the subjective weaknesses of politics that is unable to compromise while losing focus on the structural radical asymmetry in the power of interests on both the local/national and global levels.

CONCLUSION: POLITICS IN NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM AND THE RELEVANCE OF BIBIČ'S MARXIST POLITICAL THEORY

Bibič's scientific project was closely linked to the humanisation of society and politics, which in essence meant tackling inequalities and class exploitation. The basis of his research of politics was tied to a social vision that "tries to diminish and eliminate the gap between those who 'rule' and those who are 'ruled'; [there is] an understandable intimate need for the structural laws between the state and the society – and in politics in general – to be defined and researched. Those are the core interests of political science" (Bibič 1978, 26–27). This explains why he founded a new scientific discipline and introduced something new to Marxist political theory: along with the critique of politics and exploitation in capitalism, Bibič sought to affirm politics as a social activity aimed at abolishing classes. Simultaneously, this led him to critique two of the most established political

¹⁶ Bibič ([1969] 2021, 45) nevertheless also stresses the positive sides of elitist theories: directing attention to those dimensions of politics that used to be or still are neglected by other prevalent theories of politics but are important to shape a more integral class understanding of politics. Among others, he stresses the questions related to the reproduction of political elites and class representation, to the procedural and formal dimension of political mandates, to the relationships between various political elites pertaining to various political institutions and to the range of techniques or instruments of power that those elites can access.

science approaches of the time: he rejected pluralism and elitism because they naturalised exploitation and were blind to the inequalities that act as the foundation of capitalism.

With the end of the Cold War and the domination of liberal-democratic capitalist political and economic order, but mostly with the transition from a socialist to a capitalist order and the concurrent deepening of the integration into regional and global political and economic structures, the possibilities for the critique of the dominant understanding and acting in politics were drastically narrowed. It could be said that the integral critique of politics pertinent to the liberal-democratic capitalist order gave way to a more or less explicit reproduction of elitist and pluralistic understandings of politics – which, of course, also led to the preservation of the established inequality of political, economic and wider social relations (including gender, religion and ethnicity).

Bibič pointed out that, despite the changes in the world which call for the questioning and re-analysing of both the Marxist theoretical premises of politics and the practice of politics itself, certain fundamental features of the contemporary world still determine politics itself:

*Above all, there is still class conflict as a factor of social development and the determinant of the social content in political structures, especially the state /.../ Including the theoretical and methodological contribution of Marxist critique of political economy is therefore the fundamental condition of analysing the state and politics.*¹⁷ (Bibič 1981, 389)

It should be emphasised that focusing on class conflict in no way flattens political-science research or makes it uniform, nor does it cling to old concepts that hold no analytical or practical value in the new material reality. Quite the opposite: it is only by placing class conflict in the centre of political science that can we attempt a true theoretically and empirically rich research of political phenomena. Only such political science can really reveal the fundamental contradictions in society, connecting them to other phenomena related to class exploitation (e.g., racism, sexism, patriarchy). This is the framework that requires epistemological and methodological innovation as the modalities of class relations in capitalism are ever changing, while the more radical patterns of class exploitation are being replaced by more subtle ones.

Bibič's research project that positions class relations as the fundamental element of politics, political community and political action in the project of humanising politics creates the possibility for political science to escape from its own entrapment in the shackles of vulgar empiricism, liberal-mechanical

¹⁷ Bibič rarely explicitly defined himself as Marxist even though it is clear that he was one. As we have demonstrated in the article, he grounded his theory of politics and the definition of political science in Marx's critique of political economy, placing class conflict in the centre of politics and its research.

assumptions and the 'supra-ideological' common-sense market consciousness. As Bibič explained, this is the only way for political science to move away from "new mythology, which is, in the micrology of details, losing its sense of the large issues of the political cosmopolis" (Bibič 1972, 260). In this context, it is also true today that, if political science wishes to contribute to the humanisation and emancipation of society and politics, and thereby remain a critical science, then it must once again place at the centre of its analysis the unequal distribution of property and wealth and the resulting class conflict, which is the most fundamental conflict in society and in the political cosmopolis of the 21st century.

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