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Machiavelli and Civic Revival

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The works of Niccolò Machiavelli have proven to be some of the most intriguing and difficult to position within the history of political thought. A common reading of Machiavelli, of course, is as a realist – concerned with a politics which eschews the inconveniences of personal or political morality. For instance, a vigorous appropriation by mainstream international relations scholarship represents Machiavelli as the founder of a systematic science of politics dealing with power and violence (Forde, 1995: 141-160; Waltz, 1954: 211-216; Wight, 1966: 19-34; Bull, 1969: 21). Such interpretations associate Machiavelli's writing to both new political realities and newly conceived political methods. This should hardly be surprising: authors within political theory have often taken the position that Machiavelli constituted a new mode of thought, an innovator of politics (Wolin, 1960: 201-237).

This paper questions the utility of interpretations which view Machiavelli outside of, or easily distinguishable from, the classical tradition. It argues that while Machiavelli is a unique historian and political thinker of his time, his political vision and theoretical method is extracted from the republican tradition of ancient Rome. Although his work points to possibilities for retrieving civic honour out of a seemingly hopeless contemporary situation in Northern Italy, it does not constitute a new approach to politics. To demonstrate this, the paper

begins with a discussion of Machiavelli's historical context, illustrating that the Northern Italy of his time was not characterised by fundamental change: it deserves neither its reputation as an area of proto-capitalism nor as an early incarnation of the modern nation-state system. There was, in other words, little historically which was likely to motivate Machiavelli towards any profoundly different method for understanding politics. Following this, the paper turns to the topic which most regularly depicts Machiavelli as the instrumental realist: his interest in military matters. It contextualises the theorist's interest with particular regional geo-strategic considerations, as well as his commitment to civic well-being. The third section considers Machiavelli's conception of popular politics and its place in the civic body. Here, he is seen most clearly in his *republican* form, rather than solely concerned with the vagaries of power. The paper closes with a discussion of Machiavelli's approach to history. It stresses, in particular, the author's continuity with an historical approach highly evident in the ancient Roman tradition.

Machiavelli's Italy

There is little doubt that the Northern Italy of Machiavelli's day exhibited a vibrant atmosphere of trade, exchange, political activity and cultural revival. In terms of the latter, the novelty of the Italian Renaissance, as well as its subsequent influence on European cultures, is undeniable. However, the influence and continuity of Italian art and literature should not be conflated with the

political character and dynamics of the region. And, here, Machiavelli's own intricate involvement with local and regional politics needs to be taken into account. Much of his work is premised on his own impressions of the political and economic world in which he was so gainfully employed (Hale, 1972). This is not to claim that texts of political theory evince no value without a full disclosure of the context in which they were written. However, setting the historical scene does, in my view, allow a more robust consideration of the determining motivations behind an author's work. In Machiavelli's case, it is certainly valuable to characterise the peculiar political and economic situation of the Italian city-states in the 15th and 16th centuries. Importantly, as special as they may have been, they did not constitute any precursor of later economic and political forms.

A unique characteristic of the North Italian communes, later city-republics, was their capacity to maintain relative autonomy despite minuscule territorial resources. Able to diminish their subjugation to Episcopal authority, as well as ultimately destabilise and undercut Hohenstaufen power in Italy in the 12th and 13th centuries, these cities demonstrated an acute ability to underwrite their own and others' military protection (Anderson, 1979: 9). This capacity to raise local and mercenary forces required abundant financial resources – much of the papal cause *vis-à-vis* the Empire would have been impossible without the fiscal presence of city republics such as Florence. In the context of European political and economic change, however, North Italian cities require some explanation as to the actual character

of their economic prowess. After all, if the dramatic rise of Italian exchange, trade and political interaction signals a break from the past, along the lines of an immature European capitalism and the development of proto-states, it would lend credibility to the notion that Machiavelli's thought may reflect the practical need to move beyond ancient modes of political philosophy.

Perry Anderson, in his depiction of Italian city-states as precociously mercantile, does not rule out capitalist production in Italy, only its *full* development. According to Anderson,

...the guild organization which set the Renaissance towns off from classical cities posed in its turn inherent restrictions to the development of capitalist industry in Italy. The craft corporations blocked the *full separation* of direct producers from the means of production that was the precondition of the capitalist mode of production... The woolen textile industry, in certain advanced centres such as Florence, achieved to some extent a proto-factory organization based on wage labor power... Manufacturing capital proper was thus held within a constricted space, with little possibility of enlarged reproduction: competition from freer, rurally-located industries abroad, with lower costs of production, would eventually ruin it. Mercantile capital flourished longer, because trade was subject to no such fetters (157-158).

Here, the capitalist market is imagined as a natural emergence which comes about at the first 'opportunity' (Wood, 1994: 14-40). Urban production grows up in Italian city-states because they started as market centres ruled by nobles, but rapidly grew into centres of urban production composed of "[m]erchants, bankers, manufacturers [and] lawyers [who] came to form the

patrician elite of the city-republics..." (Anderson, 1979: 151). The insinuation that an autonomous ruling class emerged from pure business interests against the old aristocracy stands, however, in marked contrast to Anderson's claim that "...the top stratum of guild-masters, notaries and merchants...coalesced with the urban nobility above them, to form a single municipal bloc of privilege and power..." (154). Indeed, this corresponds more soundly to the reality that many professions blended with each other, and that the notion of a pure noble, merchant or artisan, in the majority of cases, seems wholly unjustified (Waley, 1978: 9). To suggest the existence of an autonomous business class implies that Italian economic activity was, at least to some degree, no longer politically-constituted. But Anderson's mere assertion cannot sustain such a contention. Instead, Anderson's own evidence, as well as that presented by others (Procacci, 1968: 100-191), suggests that politically-constituted wealth was the backbone of North Italian economies, and political conflict arose not as a result of capitalist practices, but rather from intra-class competition for the economic spoils of political access (Brenner, 1993: postscript; Conninell, 1987).

Not surprisingly, Anderson is hardly alone in referring to the capitalist character of Italian trade and production. While admitting to the potential differentiation between a modern understanding of capitalism and Italian economic activity, Richard Goldthwaite's study of the Medici Bank nonetheless sets out "...to gain a better perspective on the history of capitalism in an earlier stage of its development" (1987: 4). In spite of this, throughout his study he makes

the point that the corporate wealth of the Medici bank (which was, in fact, not a bank in the contemporary sense) was entirely dependent on the will of governments. In fact, much of the Medicis' wealth was made possible through their special position managing papal finances. At a more general level, the profits of capital-heavy corporations were so dependent on financial services to government (exchange and credit), tax farming, short-term treasury activities and state financial operations, that it is difficult to see how such profits could be considered anything other than politically-constituted. Not surprisingly, "...business relations inevitably overlapped and reinforced social and political relations," and the network of 'relatives, friends and neighbours' which held the Florentine socio-political world together lacked any discussion of "...the business partner, associate and client" (24). Indeed, it is hardly coincidental that the decline of the widespread Medici financial organisation begins with the punitary measures taken by Sixtus IV following the Pazzi conspiracy of 1478, and is exacerbated by the chronic and enlarging indebtedness of the papacy (29).

Moreover, the weak sense of competition between Italian businesses was the result of what Goldthwaite refers to as an implicit trust between firms. While there was some competition for clients, it was "...not to the extent that they devised techniques for product variation and cost-cutting in their home industry and for underselling and market domination abroad..." (23). The above case of the Pazzi, a struggle over rights to papal expenditures, points to political access as the basis for the minimal

competition which did occur. In fact, even the notion of animosity between the aristocracy and the wealthier streams of the *populares* derives from competition for politically-derived wealth rather than any anti-aristocratic sentiment. In the case of Genoa, Paul Coles (1957: 17-47) notes that although the nobility used a heavy hand to maintain power over all three *popolo* classes, *grasso* (wealthy/merchant), *minuto* (guilds/artisan) and *cappette* (proletariat), its own motives were directly concerned with commerce and trade monopolies. It is true that in the context of an endangered economic position *vis-à-vis* privileged access to the facilitation of Spanish colonial trade, brought about by Genoese political capitulation to Louis XII of France, the wealthy *popolo grasso* pressed the wider *popolo* classes into social unrest. However, it is problematic to understand this as an autonomous bourgeois sentiment, expressing itself in opposition to nobility. As Coles points out, the concern of the *popolo grasso*,

...was neither to destroy the domestic political structure nor to challenge French suzerainty, but to deprive the aristocracy of their privileged position in relation to both. To achieve this they had incited the *popolo minuto* and the *cappette*. ...[M]any of the leading families of the *popolo grasso* remained, even while warring against the aristocracy, fundamentally sympathetic to the notion of an aristocratic society. Feeling themselves aristocrats already in talent, wealth and mode of life, they opposed the aristocracy chiefly from resentment at their own exclusion from the noble order: perhaps from a desire to force an entry into it (38).

Despite the fact that "the expansion and exploitation of [economic] gains depended on the goodwill of the Spanish

crown," the *grasso's* incitement of unrest was aimed largely at securing political privilege – a fact made evident by their rapidly ensuing reluctance to fight against the French regime (26). While the *minuto* and *cappette* ultimately exacerbated unrest based on their economic interests, this may be understood as a series of reactions to the diminishing markets for guild-produced goods and the local effects of lower trade activity.

Consequently, the production, labour and commercial activity of Northern Italy exhibit no capitalist characteristics, particularly the nominal separation between political and economic spheres (Wood, 1995: 19-48). Economic activity may have taken on some appearance of an autonomous commercial network, but it was consistently dependent on the development and interchange of European feudalism. As Justin Rosenberg points out, "[like] the circuits of mercantile capital with which they ringed Europe, the Italian cities remained crucially 'penned in the sphere of circulation', relying heavily on external trade for their material reproduction" (1993: 74). In a closely related sense, the notion of an autonomous political sphere – nominally detached from social relations – is conspicuously absent. The very idea of a fixed territorial state as the foundation and locus of political power – characteristic of the modern state system – was not easily applicable to North Italian cities. Indeed, according to Rosenberg, "...their real location, the site where they reproduced themselves, was athwart the flows of exchange which serviced European feudalism and which carried their citizens into every major town and court of the continent" (73). The suggestion that the material

existence of the city-state was 'nested' in the flows of feudal exchange is not to deny certain similarities with modern state forms, such as diplomacy. However, it is to say that their territorial integrity and administrative grasp was heavily reliant on both European commercial flow and the whims of greater continental powers, such as France and Spain. Consequently, any representation of the makeup and mutual interaction of city-republics as contiguous with a post-Westphalian, sovereignty-based system seriously misconstrues the character of Machiavelli's Italy. Ultimately, Rosenberg is correct to state that, following the resumption of major foreign intervention on the Italian peninsula, the waning republican character and decreased international sway of these cities "...proved a dead-end rather than the direct antecedent of the nation-state" (75).

This is not to deny any historical change in Machiavelli's era. However it is crucial to note the continuing trajectory under which Italy had progressed since the fall of ancient Rome. Over the course of time, personal, patron-based power of individuals had only been intensified. Since there was no reason for politically-constituted wealth accumulation to have been challenged, it was not. And, if anything, the notion of an abstract state, separable from political personalities, had lost resonance since ancient Rome. Indeed, much of the intervening years, particularly those associated with the Carolingian Empire, attest to a continuing sense of obligation to restore both the stability and vitality of ancient political structures. If there is a historical motivation in Machiavelli's writings, it is not the comprehension of a new

political reality. Rather, as we will see below, it aims at recovering the best elements of the past.

Machiavelli And War

If Machiavelli could not have been particularly influenced by the expression of any proto-state sovereignty or the need for a strict geopolitics, it is curious that his work exhibits a certain detached interest in war and the violent elements of politics. Here, it is crucial to follow up on Machiavelli's particular political and economic context. Referring specifically to the *secondary* importance of violent state practices, Rosenberg suggests that, "...although they were frequently at war, these wars were in general an adjunct to their commercial reproduction, fought to secure the conditions and expansion of trade. War was not, as it was for the feudal states, a primary mechanism of accumulation" (74). Moreover, he goes on to quote Anderson to the effect that "...competition in trade and manufactures...had become an economic purpose of the community in its own right: markets and loans were more important than prisoners, plunder was secondary to engrossment" (74). Even in the context of foreign intervention, an overwhelming concern of the era, military manoeuvres and strategic alliances were directed predominantly at the protection of commercial interests and activity at home and abroad, not so much the 'rational' game of power-extension.

Nonetheless, Machiavelli's writing makes considerable reference to issues of power and violence, in particular the manner in which it should be utilised.

Undoubtedly, the now seemingly natural association of this theme to Machiavelli comes in light of his most famous work, *The Prince*. In this work, Machiavelli devotes attention to the ways in which military conquest should proceed, how conquests should be held and, in particular, the kinds of military forces which should be used. He stresses that,

...without its own arms no principality is secure; indeed it is wholly obliged to fortune since it does not have virtue to defend itself...[and] that nothing is so infirm and unstable as the reputation of power not sustained by one's own force. And one's own arms are those which are composed of either subjects or citizens or your creatures: all others are either mercenary or auxiliary (1985: 57).

Machiavelli's emphasis on the importance of indigenously-rooted military forces need to be viewed in the context of his own diplomatic experiences and his personal interest in civic well-being.

On the issue of his diplomatic career, the end of which occasioned the writing of the *Prince*, the ramifications of Machiavelli's intensive civil service is typically underemphasised. It is crucial to situate Machiavelli's fascination with instruments of power as a direct complement to his frustration concerning Florence's seeming incapacity for political or military action. After the reemergence of the Medici family in 1512, and Machiavelli's subsequent dismissal and temporary incarceration, there can be little doubt about the latter's continuing preoccupation with the vagaries of Florentine diplomacy. This preoccupation is demonstrated through Machiavelli's ongoing discussions with, and appeals to, his only remaining ally in diplomatic circles: Francesco Vettori.

In them, the ex-diplomat remained largely taken with the issues in which he had been steeped for the last 12 years of his life: 1) the international designs of figures such as Louis XII, Pope Alexander VI, Cesare Borgia, Maximilian and Ferdinand; 2) the relentless efforts to retake Pisa by Florence; and 3) the challenge endorsed by his former boss, Piero Soderini, to successfully form a Florentine militia. Machiavelli's personal attention to each of these issues – but particularly his time in France – is said to have impressed upon him the weak perception of Florence among European powers. For instance, encapsulating both the source of the diplomat's frustration as well as the commercially-oriented priorities of Italian cities, Hale points out that,

[among] the criticisms of Florence made to Machiavelli by influential men at the court, two were especially galling because partly true: that Florence never won the game because she was always counting the cost, and that she could not be trusted because internal divisions made her irresolute. This was the price Florence paid for being a republic; it meant that to some extent internal liberty was bought at the cost of weakness in external affairs (1972: 39).

Usually entrusted with the task of making right Florentine *faux pas* in foreign courts, Machiavelli experienced, first-hand, the wider European ramifications of his own divided and corrupt civic body. Thus, after such long service, the thinker's abundant advice regarding war and conquest must be seen in light of the diplomacy made necessary by the particular political condition of Florence.

Closely related to this, Machiavelli's military interests reflect precisely his desire for civic enhancement. Even in the *Prince*, the reasoning which prompts discussion of

military matters should not be forgotten – namely, that "...there cannot be good laws where there are not good arms, and where there are good arms, there must be good laws" (Machiavelli, 1985: 48). This is the primary reason why Machiavelli places so much emphasis on the importance of a *native* military force. Besides avoiding the many problems of loyalty and scandal associated with auxiliary and mercenary arms, native arms are useful in that they render a more secure relationship between subjects and rulers. According to Machiavelli, when a new prince commits to arming his subjects,

...those arms become [his]; those whom [he] suspected become faithful, and those who were faithful remain so; and from subjects they are made [his] partisans. And because all subjects cannot be armed, if those whom you arm are benefited, one can act with more security toward the others (83).

Machiavelli searches for a way to make the political condition more conducive to civic well-being. The prominence of this concern reappears with the thinker's consideration of fortresses. While Machiavelli claims in the *Prince* that fortresses are only of use when the people are to be feared, in the *Discourses* such military instruments are entirely denounced. For Machiavelli, the central issue is not so much whether princes use the military fortress correctly, but rather he "blames anyone who, trusting fortresses, thinks little of being hated by the people" (87). Thus, although Machiavelli is attentive to the advantages and liabilities of particular military scenarios, his concern with their general effect on the body politic is equally notable.

Neal Wood (1990) has emphasised the importance for Machiavelli of military organisation in the constitution of a social body. Throughout Machiavelli's work, the military's quality is seen to reflect the general traits of the society in which it is situated. In a very meaningful sense, the maxims of military and political advice, for which Machiavelli has become so infamous, may have less to do with an interest in diplomatic and armed manoeuvres *per se*, and far more to do with re-imagining the citizen. Importantly, here, Machiavelli displays his unabashed admiration for the republican ideals of ancient Rome. For him, Rome's most effective use of the military was not in its capacity for conquest, but rather its particular use of the military for civic education. Wood stresses that,

...from the time of the Tarquins to the Gracchi – a period of over four hundred years – the continual internal conflict was never so serious as to necessitate the widespread infliction of penalties, either exile or execution, or fines against individual citizens. Social conflict, he claims, never degenerated into the factional menace to the public welfare that it did in many lesser states. Romans who served in the legions learned to be loyal, to love peace and order, and to fear the Gods. Respect for the law and authority, a spirit of self-sacrifice, and exceptional personal courage were other qualities acquired from the common military experience. Good military organization making for good civic discipline was, therefore, a decisive factor in the stability and grandeur of the republic. An important reason, Machiavelli believes for the serious decline of parental, religious, and civic authority in his own Italy is the lack of good military organization (1).

This approach to the utility of violence proves quite logical in the historical context referred to above. Rather than

intermittently shoring up forces to maintain the commercial and financial privileges to which Florentine ruling classes had grown accustomed, Machiavelli envisioned the availability of a military mechanism which, through its very constitution, would minimise its public necessity. Never conflating civic and military communities, Machiavelli may have challenged the military thinking of his time, but his viewpoint was as close to the ideal of ancient Rome as one can come. Indeed, the conception of citizen-soldier reaches back to the beginning of, and forms the foundation throughout, Rome's republican history. Ultimately, the construction of native armed forces and the reinvigoration of the city-state are two sides of the same process.

Machiavelli and Popular Politics

In addition to Machiavelli's interest in matters of power, it is equally crucial to understand the attention he accords citizens within the political community. Machiavelli's preferences for the maintenance of stability and order are never intended to *sacrifice* the interests of citizens for the benefit of the ruling class. Nonetheless, associating the rise of civic humanism with the commercial tides of the Florentine state, Marvin Becker suggests that Machiavelli "acknowledg[ed] the triumph of law and equality, [but] secretly grieved for a lost world of lawlessness and vitality" (1968: 139). This understanding of Machiavelli's work as prescriptions for the maintenance of power and self-aggrandisement disregards the *Discourses*, in which the thinker blatantly demonstrates his

partiality towards *republics* rather than *principalities*. Machiavelli makes evident his much stronger distaste for sustained principalities. In particular, he denounces occasions in which,

... there is a prince whose private interests are generally in opposition to those of the city, whilst the measures taken for the benefit of the city are seldom deemed personally advantageous by the prince. This state of things soon leads to a tyranny, the least evil of which is to check the advance of the city in its career of prosperity, so that it grows neither in power nor wealth, but on the contrary rather retrogrades (1950: 283).

Of course, this does not mean that Machiavelli was interested in simply restoring the mannerisms of pre-1512 Florentine republicanism. As John Langton points out, "...its constitution was not good and its citizens, elites as well as common people, generally lacked civic virtue in the sense that their propensity was to put their private interests before the general good" (1987: 1287). Nonetheless, Machiavelli provides multiple references which point to his strong republican sympathies. In particular, he makes note of the people's wisdom, stating that,

...people are more prudent and stable, and have better judgement than a prince... for we see popular opinion prognosticate events in such a wonderful manner that it would almost seem as if the people had some occult virtue, which enables them to foresee the good and the evil (1950: 263).

Additionally, Machiavelli expresses a further interest in keeping different classes in constant tension with each other. No one group should become predominant

because this inevitably degrades into the worst forms of government. In direct imitation of Cicero, the famous Roman legal specialist who also reached Consular rank, Machiavelli views ancient Rome – with its equilibrium between Consul, Senate and Tribunes – as the historical ideal. He judges Rome to have successfully maintained a delicate balance between social forces which "...tolerate[d] the differences that [arose] between Senate and the people as an unavoidable inconvenience in achieving greatness..." (130). In this sense, Machiavelli's distinction between two senses of conflict – 'corrupt' and 'ordered' – is indicative of his differentiation between Florentine and Roman republicanism (Wood, 1990: li). While the former is given to individual greed, factionalism and conspiracy, the latter aims for a common framework of law in which citizens fulfill their civic duties and cherish the opportunity to serve their civic community.

Machiavelli's praise for a certain amount of discord adheres closely to his interest in liberty. His political theory takes serious account of the 'people', who are judged to possess wisdom and decision making capacity. By liberty, however, Machiavelli is concerned with the general condition of the populace, not any modern sense of personal freedom. He advises strenuously against arousing bellicose sentiments among the populace, and suggests "...how useful and necessary it is for a republic to have laws that afford to the masses the opportunity of giving vent to the hatred they may have conceived against any citizen... [Otherwise] they will resort to illegal ones, which...produce much worse effects" (1950: 131). Ultimately, his admonitions concerning the general public

are related to his interest in societal security and continuity. Beyond the fifty or so citizens who are really fit to command, Machiavelli suggests that "...all the others, who constitute an immense majority, desire liberty so as to be able to live in greater security.... [They] are easily satisfied by institutions and laws that confirm at the same time the general security of the people and the power of the prince" (163-164).

This qualified notion of liberty remains important insofar as there is a danger in attributing too much democratic character to Machiavelli's work. While he is directly responsive to the possibilities for public expression, it is never past a point at which the social balance would be endangered. Again in line with Cicero and other Roman thinkers, he weighs more active forms of popular justice against their overall effect on the republican equilibrium. Machiavelli cannot help but make a judgement concerning the most famous ancient Roman case: the agrarian reform orchestrated by the Gracchi of Rome, whose

...intentions in this matter were more praiseworthy than their prudence. For to attempt to eradicate an abuse that has grown up in a republic by the enactment of retrospective laws, is a most inconsiderate proceeding, and only serves to accelerate the fatal results which the abuse tends to bring about (212).

Thus, Machiavelli's sense of popular politics – apparent in the *Prince* as well as the *Discourses* – stresses both stability and a deep continuity with the ancient Roman notion of *mos maiorum*, or heeding the established order of things. In his own practical experience, the obvious dissatisfaction of city-states' populations with the decline

in commercial fortune must have signalled their importance in political affairs. As Florentine commercial success waned, the state grew more encompassing and citizen resistance stronger. Becker refers to "...literally thousands of petitions...received by the Signory requesting a substantial reduction in...tax contribution" (1968: 137). Indeed, looking into records more closely, he claims that "...one finds an inordinate number of stratagems designed to minimize civic responsibility" (138). At the same time, high officials are guilty of fraud, tax evasion and avoidance of civic participation. Genoa's sense of civic unrest in the face of competing socio-economic interests between Spanish and French loyalties differs only in its outcome – general upheaval in 1506 and 1507. Machiavelli's political goal must have been, in large part, to restore this sense of civic balance, aiming at a flourishing Florentine Republic on more stable foundations. But while he would consider the role of popular expression, remaining within an ancient republic tradition implied strict limits on addressing imbalances between ruling and subordinate classes.

Machiavelli on History

The connection Machiavelli points to between military and civic *virtù*, personal courage and the requirements of citizenship in the political community all speak to the content of the ancient Roman tradition. However, his attempts to reawaken this tradition are apparent not only in what he says, but the manner in which he says it. Machiavelli's judgement of political affairs, based on an elaboration of historical tales, demonstrates the most

intense affinity with an ancient Roman understanding of the world. It is also classically Roman in style, both in its narrative and moralising elements. Crucially, the ancient versions of Republican Rome, such as Livy, Seutonius, or Tacitus, prove far less concerned with historical detail and more interested in a story of emblematic personalities which lead Rome through periods of ascendancy and decline. Comparing Livy with Machiavelli, one finds obvious similarities:

I invite the reader's attention to the much more serious consideration of the kinds of lives our ancestors lived, of who were the men and what the means both in politics and war by which Rome's power was first acquired and subsequently expanded; I would then have him trace the process of our moral decline, to watch, first, the sinking of the foundations of morality as the old teaching was allowed to lapse, then the rapidly increasing disintegration, then the final collapse of the whole edifice, and the dark dawning of our modern day when we can neither endure our vices nor face the remedies needed to cure them. The study of history is the best medicine for a sick mind; for in history you have a record of the infinite variety of human experience plainly set out for all to see; and in that record you can find for yourself and your country both examples and warnings; fine things to take as models, base things, rotten through and through, to avoid (Livy, 1960: 34).

Thus, like Machiavelli, the ancients understood political thought through a form of mimicry, following examples of greatness and avoiding the pitfalls of predecessors. It was quite a common attitude among Roman historians that circumstances, over time, got progressively worse. But there remained a tension between this historical disposition and a fierce concern for the present

generation. In relation to this ever-present concern, ancient history could be used, above all, to educate character, both civic and individual.

The Roman viewpoint on the conditions of historical change further sheds light on Machiavelli's perceptions of Florentine circumstances. Machiavelli states that, "...as a whole, the world remains very much in the same conditions, and the good in it always balances the evil; but the good and the evil change from one country to another" (1950: 273). Here *virtù* – demonstrated by different peoples at different times – is neither created nor destroyed; it merely finds itself sometimes in an aggregate (e.g. Rome), and sometimes scattered differentially across many nations. Given this, the thinker perceives history as a field in which vague patterns of cause and effect can be uncovered, affording the opportunity to both create useful maxims upon which knowledge about the political world can be organised. For Machiavelli, then, affecting the outcome of particular worldly events meant "...that it might be true that fortune is arbiter of half of our action, but...she leaves the other half, or close to it for us to govern." However, grappling with these elements on a political level does not signal the ushering in of any new (or, even less, scientific) political understanding. The historical fixation on personalities and narratives among Roman authors highlights parallel concerns. Sallust states boldly that

Men have no right to complain that they are naturally feeble and short lived, or that it is chance and not merit that decides their destiny... What guides and controls human life is man's soul. If it pursues glory by the path of virtue, it has all the resources and abilities it needs for winning fame, and independent of fortune, which can neither give any man

uprightness, energy, and other good qualities, nor deprive any man of them (Sallust, 1963: 35).

However Sallust differs from Machiavelli on the proportional weight of *virtù* and *fortuna* – and other ancient authors differ from Sallust – there remains a strikingly similar conception historical process. Thus, with their pedagogical value in mind, Machiavelli sets out to extract examples from history and "...boldly and openly say what [he] think[s] of the former times and of the present, so as to excite the minds of young men...to avoid the evils of the latter, and to prepare...to imitate the virtues of the former" (1950: 274). Since whoever is born in Italy "...has good reason to find fault with his own and praise olden times," Machiavelli switches between stories of ancient glories and, in particular, Florentine deficiencies (274). He decries Northern Italy's republics not for their inability to deal with a new historical reality, but rather for their passive acceptance of historical decline. Some of the major drawbacks attributable to Florence include its disarming by the Medici; attempts to purchase victories and peace; internal corruption; lack of decision-making power; weak use of education; and external arrogance. Machiavelli's historical approach simply implores men and republics, in unison, to pursue good things and, in the words of Sallust, "control events instead of being controlled by them, and...rise to such heights of greatness and glory that their mortality would put on immortality" (Sallust, 1963: 35).

Conclusion

R.B.J. Walker, in a direct challenge to 'realist' interpretations of Machiavelli, portrays the thinker as "an explorer, an interrogator, someone who poses questions about what politics can be under new historical and structural conditions" (Walker, 1992: 37). Unfortunately, the question remains: what are the 'new' historical and structural conditions to which he is referring? This paper has demonstrated that the political and economic conditions in which Machiavelli operated were not those which accompany narratives of Italy as the birthplace of capitalism and modern state politics. This suggests, historically, that Machiavelli had little motive to depart from a mode of political thought in operation since the early days of the Roman Republic. Instead, the resident forms of state corruption, government indecision and foreign vulnerability all signalled to him the sickness of the contemporary republican form. In this sense, his exhortations on the desperate situation of Italian city-republics imitate a distinctly Roman form of ancient political thought. In the midst of political decline, worldly dangers and limited individual and civic *virtù*, he adopts the mannerisms and thinking of ancient Roman pedagogical histories, and all that it offers in terms of military honour, civic participation and effective political equilibrium. In content and method, Machiavelli weighs anchor for the revival of authentic republican politics.

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Circles of Power: The Canadian Elite

Alexandra Romic

Traditional readings of nineteenth century Canadian history are rich with tales of robber barons, financiers and politicians who combined their predatory talents, often without regard to the appearance of impropriety, in the building of industry and empire. From the creation of utility monopolies to the building of the transcontinental railway, specific constellations of social forces combined to create a unique vision of Canada. The foundation of the country's mercantile system in the nineteenth century, for instance, rested on an alliance between the merchants, the colonial ruling class, the Church and the land-owning elite. The Family Compact of Upper Canada¹ and the Clique du Château of Lower Canada involved the co-operation and collusion of the provinces' top families in the regions' political and economic endeavours (Clement, 1975: 50). While the actions of such an elite have not been denied, there is a popular notion in Canada that we have managed to escape both the rigid class structure of Britain and the class and racially based inequality of the United States. Neither the wrenching poverty of many areas of the country nor the excesses of the nation's affluent seems to indicate to many Canadians that we have anything but a "middle class". The paucity of studies conducted of Canada's elite seems to confirm this popular mythology. The Family Compact may have disintegrated in the 1900s, but the model it provided for a cohesive