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## The Passion for Liberty. Liberty and Competitive Inclusion in Luigi Sturzo's Thought

Flavio Felice\*

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**Abstract.** *This article analyses Italian Catholic and anti-fascist political theorist Luigi Sturzo's (1871-1959) notion of liberty and competitive inclusion within the tradition of political culture called popularism, one of the roots of European integration experiment started after the Second World War. Sturzian popularism, close to German Ordoliberal theory, questions the notion of people considered as a single undifferentiated mass in order to consider them in their plurality as individuals. Such pluralism safeguards the "virtuous circle of inclusive institutions", using social scientists Daron Acemoglu's and James A. Robinson's terminology, and presupposes the value of individual consciences as the basis for competitive inclusive institutions.*

**Keywords:** *Sturzo; Liberty; Competitive Inclusion*

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«I have admired Fr. Sturzo as one of the great politicians who, out of a deeply felt sense of Christian responsibility, worked in every sense to build a new Europe after the chaos of the last war. I hope so much that the prayers of Fr. Sturzo will help me, in turn, to cooperate with the spirit that animated his intent, to solve the problems that will arise for the Christian West»

*Konrad Adenauer*

«I began reading Fr. Sturzo's speech, but, from the very first lines, I was amazed by the certainty of the doctrines and by the science, in the proper sense of that term, which manifests itself in them, and, going further, I was convinced that there were many things to consider excellent, or good, few to be countered or reckoned to be missing »

*Vilfredo Pareto*

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## 1. Introduction

This article is divided into four parts. The first is a brief presentation of the *life and works* of Luigi Sturzo. Sturzo was a Catholic priest, founder of the Popular Party, anti-fascist exile, father of the process of European unification and indomitable scourge of “statism,” “party politics” and the “waste of public money,” described by Sturzo himself as the “three evil beasts” of democracy. The second part is devoted to what has been called the *virtuous circle of liberty*<sup>1</sup>. The great enemy of democracy, denounced by Sturzo, following in the wake of Alexis de Tocqueville’s work, is the absence of political, economic and institutional mobility. With particular reference to Sturzo, translates into a theoretical proposal which is decidedly contrary to traditional organicism, including the Catholic brand, and which combines the Sturzian notion of “organic society” with Popper’s notion of “open society” (Suppa, 2004, p. 727). The third part focuses on the issue of elites in the democratic regime. In democracy, when the ideal of liberty is implemented adequately to express social pluralism and in accordance with each person’s expectation of improving their condition, elites present themselves as groups open to all classes, to all categories and groups of citizens; all those, in short, who make a contribution to public discourse through critical participation. The fourth and final part is entitled *guarding against the “slumbering” of liberty* and emphasizes the belief of the Italian political scientist that the daily regaining of political liberty is achieved by constant vigilance against that slumbering of liberty which is always lurking. Sturzo himself uses this expression, meaning the relaxation of the ideal force that should push each individual to defend and promote the share of freedom for which he is personally responsible. In Karl Popper’s words: «Institutions are like fortresses. They must be well designed and manned» (Popper, 1966, p. 131); (Felice, 2018, p. 96). These very dangerous bouts of drowsiness that stricke the population of a country when, in a democracy, it tolerates *uniformity, centralization, rigid elites and bureaucratized parties*. «Those who value liberty only for their own sake have never preserved it long» (Tocqueville, 1856, p. 204). With these words, Tocqueville, in *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, expresses his idea of liberty in a dry and categorical way. Liberty is something that should be sought, promoted and defended for

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<sup>1</sup> I have borrowed this expression from Acemoglu’s and Robinson’s “virtuous circle of inclusive institutions”; (Acemoglu, Robinson, 2013), see also (Acemoglu, Robinson, 2019).

its own sake. Tocqueville's liberty is an essential condition for being able to experience the joy of thinking, speaking, acting and even "breathing" without any coercion except that of "God" and the "laws".

Luigi Sturzo's perspective is not very distant. Priest, political theorist, historian of political thought, party founder, organizer of trade-unions, workers cooperatives and rural banks, at the beginning of the XX Century, Sturzo fought the oligarchical organization of the Italian feudal system. Then, he clashed with the totalitarian regime during the twenty years of Fascism, going into exile for twenty-two years (1924-1946). At the end, after the Second World War, he faced the "three evil beasts" of democracy: "statism," "party politics" and the "waste of public money". For him, «liberty is like air: you live in the air; if the air is polluted, people suffer; if the air is insufficient, it suffocates; if the air is missing, you die. Liberty is like life: life is present in all acts, in every moment. If it is not present, it is death. Liberty is dynamism that is carried out and renewed; if this implementation and renewal cease, dynamism is lost. [...] liberty is exercised every day, defends itself every day, regains itself every day» (Sturzo, 2003b, p. 165)<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, liberty is seen as a precondition for democracy and of the civil life which is worthy of the human being. It becomes something concrete in the human affairs of each of us by promoting and defending the human disposition to respond to the statement that *someone decides for themselves*.

Following the teaching of Sturzo and Tocqueville, we should distinguish between those who profess themselves lovers of liberty through deep conviction from those who, by contrast, say they love it, but only in words. The difference between these two categories of people is enormous and substantial. For the former, liberty "remedies the evils it can produce", since it arouses the production of "new energies" and promotes the formation of free associations, as well provoking that healthy political and social conflict from which, Sturzo writes, "the necessary adjustments derive." For the latter, however, liberty is something dangerous, to be simulated for reasons of convenience, while disguising the true intentions that reside in the maintenance of established power; something to be limited and protected solely to prevent risks. The risk run in recognizing liberty is that someone

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<sup>2</sup> Compare Sturzo's position with the following passage from Tocqueville: «When you pass from a free country into another that is not free, you are struck by a very extraordinary spectacle: there, everything is activity and movement; here, everything seems calm and immobile» (Tocqueville, 2012, p. 395).

could challenge and question authority, perhaps contend for its power, aspire to innovative solutions envisaging the reduction of the advantages to positions acquired and consolidated over time and breaking the “vicious circle of extractive institutions”<sup>3</sup>. For Sturzo, this is the great fear that liberty arouses in oligarchies of all kinds, be they political, ecclesiastical or economic.

Like Tocqueville, who, according to our author, was able to explain to the French bourgeoisie that the democratic process was compatible with a regime of liberty, Sturzo seemed to understand, better and more than other Catholic intellectuals of his time, that democracy is a “product of modern times.” His original approach allowed him to deal on equal terms with democratic thought, both in its liberal and socialist versions, grasping the mutual historical influence between Christianity and democracy.

He proposed an original lexicon for understanding democratic processes, using, for example, such words as *diarchy*, *plurarchy*, *popularism*, *organicity* – which he contrasted to *organicism* - and *individual conscience*. These are notions that allowed the Italian thinker to reconsider some fundamental political categories: *people*, *sovereignty*, *social struggle*, *democracy*, *power* and so on (Cappellano, 2013). Sturzo's is an organic-pluralistic vision of the relativity of social forms insofar as they are historical and, therefore, contingent and disruptive. This relativism, which is expressed through the action of the *social constant* called *liberty*, makes any determinism impossible. This allowed Sturzo to remain open to innovation and, therefore, to experimentation, without, however, compromising the integrity of his ideas (Di Lascia, 1981). Further, as regards *organicity*, it introduced Sturzian political theory into the category of “relational sociology” (Donati, 2010), or, according to the definition of Sturzo himself, of “social anthropology” (Sturzo, 1944, p. xvii).

In examining the origin of power, in his essay, *Democracy, Authority and Liberty*, Sturzo, observed how this issue referred to the very root of democracy: to its limit, the only possible common matrix, one common to the various democratic experiences (Cappellano, 2013). It is hardly necessary to recall how, for our author, there is no unique idea of democracy that can be shared, *erga omnes*, even

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<sup>3</sup> Here, I am using the concepts and terminology of Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson. Acemoglu and Robinson affirm that the reciprocal interference between extractive (oligarchical) political institutions and extractive economic institutions is at the origin of a “vicious circle”. Just as extractive institutions are the reciprocal of inclusive institutions, so the “vicious circle” is nothing other than the reciprocal of the so-called “virtuous circle” of inclusive institutions (Acemoglu, Robinson, 2013, pp. 88-90). See (Felice, 2016, pp. 114-16).

from a formal point of view, since democracy is an experience of social life and, as such, it is historicized in different historical realities as well as in the plurality of nuclei and social forces<sup>4</sup>. In concrete terms, in every single state, Sturzo says, there is no democracy in general, but *that* particular democracy, *that* democratic political regime, which is crystallized in certain historical institutions. Although scholars do their best to systematize ethical, philosophical and legal principles, and catalogue the political orientations that enclose the central core of the notion of democracy, no one can put the democracy of Athens and that of the Republic of Rome, the “medieval and modern democracies”, in the same categories; just as modern thinkers confuse “British democracy” with the “American” and both with “French” variety (Sturzo, 1938).

## 2. Luigi Sturzo: life and works

Luigi Sturzo was born in Caltagirone (Sicily, Italy) on November 26th 1871. Because of his studies and for health reasons, he attended several seminaries: those of Acireale, Noto and Caltagirone where he graduated in 1888. In 1894, he was ordained priest. He moved to Rome where, in 1898, he graduated in philosophy from the Pontifical Gregorian University<sup>5</sup>. It was to be in Rome that his “political vocation” matured. It is Sturzo himself who tells us that, on Holy Saturday in 1895, during the blessing of the houses in Rome’s ghetto, he realized the misery in which so many people lived. Under these circumstances, he decided to devote himself to social questions.

On returning to Caltagirone, alongside his teaching of philosophy, his religious and social commitment took shape. He founded a diocesan and inter-parochial committee, opened a workers’ section and one for farmers. He created a rural bank to combat usury and a newspaper - *The Cross of Constantine* - to spread the ideas contained in Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum*:

In 1902, he led the Catholics of Caltagirone in the local elections. In 1905, he won the Caltagirone elections and became *deputy mayor*, a position he would hold until 1920. In 1905, on Christmas Eve, he delivered his Speech at Caltagirone on *The problems of the national life of Catholics*, which acted as

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<sup>4</sup> See Manent (1996, p. xii).

<sup>5</sup> According to biographical information, see De Rosa (1977); De Rosa (1982); Guccione (2018).

a political and organizational platform for the establishment of a Christian-inspired party which, overcoming the *non-expedit* of Pius IX, brought Catholics back on to the scene of national politics. In 1915, he was elected vice president of the National Association of Municipalities of Italy.

On January 18th 1919, there occurred what appeared to many to be the most significant political event since the unification of Italy (Chabod 1961). From the Santa Chiara hotel in Rome, Fr. Sturzo launched the "Appeal to the Free and Strong," the charter establishing the Italian Popular Party: «*We appeal to all free and strong men who in this grave time feel the duty to cooperate for the greater ends of the Fatherland, without prejudice or preconceptions because, united together, they support the ideals of justice and liberty in their entirety*» (Sturzo 2003a: 67).

The characteristic feature of Sturzo's Appeal lies in the belief that a fair competitive system, which takes into account the contingency and limitation that characterize the physical and moral constitution of the person, is preferable to the command, centralist and monopolist processes of the state. He looks to a new order at the centre of which, in harmony with the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, the spontaneous and creative work of civil society (people, families, associations, businesses) takes prominence, capable of increasing the possibilities of choice by individuals and associations. This is aimed at obtaining a more effective response to the real needs of citizens and greater respect for the liberty, dignity and responsibility of the person.

In April 1923, at the Turin National Congress of the Popular Party, Sturzo denounced Mussolini and fascism. From that moment on, the Italian dictator was to denounce him as the "main enemy of fascism". He intervened with the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, to force Fr. Sturzo first to resign from the party and then to leave Italy. Sturzo's exile was to last 22 years. Passing through Paris, he lived in London until September 1940 and then in the United States of America until September 5th 1946, when he returned to Italy, landing in Naples.

His main works on political theory saw the light during the hard time of his exile: *Italy and Fascism* (1926); *The International Community and the Right of Law* (1928); *The Inner Laws of Society. A New Sociology* (1935); *Politics and Morality* (1938); *Church and State* (1939); *The True Life: Sociology of the Supernatural* (1943); *Italy and the New World Order* (1944); *Spiritual Problems of our Times* (1945); *Nationalism and Internationalism* (1946). Among the books published on his return to Italy we recall *La regione nella nazione* (*The*



*Region in the Nation*) (1949) and *Del metodo sociologico* (*On the Sociological Method*) (1950). In London, he inspired various political groups of exiled Italian and European Catholics, and, in 1936, he founded the *People and Freedom Group*. This is what Sturzo wrote in the letter of introduction: «*People and Freedom* is Savonarola's motto: *People* means not only the working class but the totality of citizens because all are to enjoy liberty and participate in government. *People* also means democracy; but democracy without freedom would be tyranny, just as freedom without democracy would become liberty only for some privileged class, never for the whole people» (Sturzo, 1946, p. 125). Following this political strategy of resistance to fascism from the exile, while in the US, he established relationships with Carlo Sforza, Lionello Venturi, Mario Einaudi and Gaetano Salvemini, the non-believing friend who defined the Sicilian exile as a "Himalaya of certainty and will."

On his return to Italy, after the referendum on the Republic and the elections for the Constituent Assembly, he did not join the Christian Democracy party but declared himself "head of a dissolved party." Nevertheless, with his speeches, articles in newspapers, publications in journals and books, Sturzo undertook his last battle, for a Constitution that was more inspired by liberty. That is to say, one that accepted the principle of subsidiarity and reformulated it on the basis of his sociological theory: "the sociology of the concrete," and of the social market economy that brought him closer to the German post-war theorists and politicians such as, among others, Wilhelm Röpke, Ludwig Erhard and Konrad Adenauer. Against any form of methodological holism, which ends up glorifying the state as a "stand-alone reality, a living hypostasis," Sturzo defended and promoted a socio-economic structure that recognized the primacy of the person and the fundamental role of civil society: the family and free associations, including parties, trade unions, and churches. He committed himself to promoting the liberty of teaching and educational choice, the defense of private property, savings, free enterprise and worker participation in corporate capital. This was to lead him to write pages of great theoretical depth and political impact against the so-called "three evil beasts." Sturzo denounced "statism," as a traditional remnant of the secularist-*Risorgimento* and of the fascist brand and, in its new version, in post-war Italy, as a way to state socialism; he accused "party politics" of being the illegitimate control of institutions by clientelist systems; and, finally, as a corollary, he denounced the recurring "abuse of public money" as an instrument of the illicit management of public power (Sturzo, 1959, pp. 467-470).

In December 1952 he was appointed senator for life by the President of the Republic, Luigi Einaudi.

Fr. Sturzo died on August 8<sup>th</sup> 1959 in Rome and is buried in the Church of *Santissimo Salvatore* in Caltagirone. He left us a very rich legacy both through his development of political theory and through his political action lived as a high form of Christian charity. In his words: "Politics is a civic duty, an act of charity towards others."

### *3. The virtuous circle of liberty*

Sturzo's developed theory continually deals with the real. He is the theorist of the "sociology of the concrete", with its crystallization in institutional forms of the political, economic and cultural concepts that Sturzo developed and always argued for rigorously. This is constantly provisional because it is perfect (Demant, 1936, pp. 533-535).

In order to describe what the "circle virtuous of liberty" is for Sturzo, we can use the political category of "extractive institutions." By "virtuous circle of liberty," we mean a line of thought that starts from classical elitists such as Robert Michels, Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, and ends up with the already-quoted work of Acemoglu and Robinson. It aims at analysing the process of political and economic development, showing how the vicious circle of extractive institutions, which produces "castes" and "oligarchies" in a rigid and continuous manner and which makes the majority of the population poor to serve the wellbeing and power of the few (Michels, 1915), can be broken and replaced by the virtuous circle of inclusive institutions, promoting the Schumpeterian method of "creative destruction" and the evolutive-incremental process (Hayek, 1978, pp. 73) of authors like Carl Menger, Friedrich August von Hayek, Karl Popper, Wilhelm Röpke and Luigi Einaudi.

At this point in the discussion, we can affirm that the reciprocal interference between extractive political institutions and extractive economic institutions is at the origin of that "vicious circle" through which a given institutional political system offers the power-holding elite the instruments with which to model the economic institutions for their own use and consumption. In short, we are dealing with a political class that feeds on an institutional system that sets no limits to its will to power and that, in this way, mortgages its own future, defines itself as necessary and ends up being immovable. As the

political oligarchy has shaped the economic institutions in its own image and likeness, for its own use and consumption, this causes the extractive economic institutions to enrich the political oligarchy that has made them possible, thus allowing it to consolidate its own political power, thanks to the economic resources coming from those extractive economic institutions. Just as extractive institutions are the reciprocal of inclusive institutions, so the “vicious circle” just described is nothing other than the reciprocal of the so-called “virtuous circle” of inclusive institutions. Thus, the virtuous circle of liberty - which might more properly be called *the method of liberty* – is always and in every case triggered as soon as the minimum inalienable right of the person is recognized. That is, the personality of each individual is recognized as distinct and independent from the mass and from the same political authority whose existence, as a legitimate power, depends on the degree of legitimacy it demonstrates it can deserve from the people as subjects, individuals and organized in groups and social nuclei.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, Sturzian theory emphasizes “programmatically synthesis” instead of contractualism and merely procedural logic, without, however, yielding to the substantive temptation that binds the state to the achievement of certain social ends, predetermined by the constitution (Antonetti, 1998). Above all, for Sturzo, the party does not express rigid demands. It is not a source of truth but an instrument to resolve contingent problems and, for this reason, in taking on the direction of the government, party leaders are not be invested with a particular mandate from all their sympathizers and voters. The fact that there are political parties and leaders whose political activity is inspired by such a claim is the cause of that “catastrophic populism” that our author identifies with the Rousseauian inspiration of democracy, the cornerstone of the worst kind of “*party politics*”: «French democracy, which gave the majorities a kind of investiture of presumed totality which does not take into account the rights and needs of the dissident minorities [...] arose [...] between the alternatives of reaction and revolution» (Sturzo, 2003c, p. 248).

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<sup>6</sup> See Tocqueville: «In democratic countries, the science of association is the mother science; the progress of all the others depends on the progress of the former. Among the laws that govern human societies, there is one that seems more definitive and clearer than all the others. For men to remain civilized or to become so, the art of associating must become developed among them and be perfected in the same proportion as equality of conditions grows» (Tocqueville, 2012, p. 902). On this aspect, see also (Matteucci, 1984, p. 205).

This virtuous circle gets stuck «whenever there prevails a system of oligarchies» (Sturzo 1946: 308-309) whose existence depends on the restriction of the perimeter of personal liberty and the consequent formation of a «closed social circle, sealed by a pseudo-religious conception, that denies free will and individual responsibility» (Sturzo, 1972, p. 347). The social dynamism, characteristic of the virtuous circle of liberty and democracy which is *inclusive* and necessarily competitive, is interrupted, and, in its place, a static and *extractive* social model is consolidated.<sup>7</sup> This is a vicious circle that abhors competition and promotes profiteering, preferring corporatist, consociational, familistic and, ultimately, unlawful solutions. In order that the virtuous circle of democracy and liberty can regain ground and be revived, a *moral start* is needed.

In addition to *individual responsibility* as its bulwark, Sturzo's reasoning regarding the virtuous circle of *liberty* takes into account the *law* as an expression of *justice* and *morality* that arise from the "social and moral nature of man." For this reason, the *law* is not a creation of authority which, rather, has the task of recognizing it, formulating it, adapting it, and implementing it but not inventing it. Therefore, when we move from the notion of *law*, taken in its abstractness, to its analysis in its concreteness, it is necessary that both the negative and the positive dimensions are translated by the political authority and are visible in their *legislative*, *administrative*, and *judicial* wording. For this reason, human society is the result of *authority* and *liberty*. Only in the presence of a balance between these two elements is it possible to obtain order: in the event of a lack or alteration of authority, we would have license and, if liberty were to disappear or be altered, we would obtain tyranny. This is a second aspect of the ontological matrix of Sturzo's democratic vision where he grasps the correlation between the "liberty to participate in power" and "authority" as legitimate power, a further variation of the *democratic spirit* which outlines a form of participation that introduces the notion of *polyarchy*, in which the many are the source of power.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Acemoglu and Robinson claim that extractive economic institutions are nothing but the natural completion of extractive political systems which use the economic institutions too for their own political survival. Instead, inclusive political institutions, whose purpose is to distribute power, tend to make life difficult for extractive economic institutions, which, on the contrary, have as their sole aim the expropriation of the majority of the population, the setting of entrance barriers in the markets and the distortion of their functioning to the advantage of the few; see (Acemoglu, Robinson 2013, p. 96); (Felice, 2018b, p. 173).

<sup>8</sup> On the concept of polyarchy, see Dahl, Lindblom (1953); Dahl (1956). The term polyarchy was already employed in the first half of the nineteenth century by Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio, who distinguishes the

Democracy is meant to create a similar balance between *authority* and *liberty* within an order in which everyone is invited to participate with the sole exclusion of those who, for reasons of health or disqualification, are not considered able. It is *liberty under the law*, the regulatory instrument which enables the avoiding of a high-handed and uncontrolled takeover of power as far as possible (Sartori, 1987)<sup>9</sup>. However, notes Sturzo, the democratic solution is nothing more than a possible historical trend. There is nothing necessary about it; it is not the expression of a *law of fate*. Being, therefore, the possible outcome of a “moral acceptance,” it expresses a “fact of conscience” that cannot fully materialize until the generality of people, or in any case the vast majority, feel the need for it; namely, that “they will accept its assumptions” (Sturzo, 1972, p. 348). The reason why Sturzo deems certain preliminary conditions to be indispensable for a given social organization to reach the democratic solution, lies in the assumption that the *essence* of democracy results from the awareness by the *people* and its *bodies* of the value of rights and the corresponding individual and associative duties and the need for them to be coordinated and disciplined (Cappellano, 2012). Although “the choice and the political decision” belong to the technical organs of State, Sturzo concludes, in democracy, “the value judgment is a popular judgment”: «In every other case, popular election is the basis of all true democracy. The election is an act of authority based on liberty; it is the first and most basic synthesis of the two terms, a synthesis that we shall find in all stages of democratic organization» (Sturzo, 1972, p. 349). This is a focal point in Sturzo’s theoretical work: he reconciles the dialectic between substantial democracy and procedural democracy (Serio, 2012).

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“monarchical” and “polyarchic” political forms: “There are therefore two species of governments essentially and not numerically different: the government of one ordering mind, the government of the consent of the many; that is, monarchy and polyarchy”; (Taparelli d’Azeglio, 1855, p. 720). “Everyone sees that, in monarchy, the center of unique operation resembles the center of vitality in perfect animals; in polyarchy, on the other hand, as in certain molluscs, vitality is spread throughout the body. There are animals in which a single organ is worth two or three, as there are societies in which a single body or individual embraces two or three functions; in others, on the other hand, only one function is divided among many, as in man the sight with two eyes, the hearing with two ears”; *ibid*, 75-76. At the end of the same century, the constitutionalist, Alberto Morelli, defines polyarchies as “governments where the majority rule,” adding that “democracies, thus, in fact, like aristocracies, are polyarchic forms” (Morelli, 1899, pp. 20-21).

<sup>9</sup> See Tocqueville (2012, p. 189): «After the general idea of virtue, I do not know any more beautiful than that of rights, or rather, these two ideas merge. The idea of rights is nothing more than the idea of virtue introduced into the political world. With the idea of rights, men have defined what license and tyranny were»

According to him, the conflict between rules and values is not irremediable, and society is not destined to oscillate between anarchy and despotism because, from time to time, the balance is provided by the exercise of representation (an element that limits “popular” pressure) and the method/practice of constitutional freedom (an element that defines the limits and prerogatives of sovereignty). In the populist state, the first element engulfs the other until institutional mediation is irrelevant; in the ethical / totalitarian state, the second element is in slavery to the ideological / political project of the majority, so that representation becomes only an *instrumentum regni* for an increasing broadening of the sovereign’s prerogatives (Felice, 2020).

Classical liberalism is prevented from reaching this reconciliation because it doesn’t seem to “see” the relationships in which individuals are fundamentally immersed (Serio 2011). In Sturzo, the responsibility and imputability of human action always remains individual, but its effects, intentional and unintentional, fall on society as a whole. For this, a political and economic constitution is needed which, similarly to ordoliberalism tradition, allows the various social spheres to develop without interfering with one another and to produce their particular type of common good – the European integration experiment, with all its problems, and its implementation in a new set of political authorities, irreducible to the classical nation-State, might represent a challenge for Sturzian *populism*, one hundred years later (Velo, 2018, p. 75; Gil-Robles, Quadros, Velo, 2014; Bruzzi, 2020).

Even if all that may appear a trivial thing for a Tocquevillian scholar, however, within the perspective of Continental liberalism, it is almost a conceptual revolution – as it is demonstrated by the constant opposition (or subtle prejudice) towards Sturzo’s political thought, coming from Italian scholars, both on the corporatist and communist Catholic and on the secularist side (Felice, 2020, pp. 361-367).

#### 4. *The issue of elites in the democratic regime*

It is at this point in the discussion that the father of populism considers it necessary to raise the problem of the so-called *political classes*, also called *elites* or *ruling groups* (Sturzo, 1957, pp. 227-238); in short, those who take over the *direction of and responsibility for the government* and also gain *immediate benefits*. The Italian philosopher, Felice Battaglia, points out that Sturzo knew

the work of both Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto well, having even made an in-depth study of the former. In particular, according to Mosca, Sturzo values the recognition of some “constant tendencies of social life” and the discovery of the so-called “law of the political class,” a minority that, in various social developments and phases, finds itself to be a ruling class, having at its disposal the complex of moral, religious, economic and organizational powers (Battaglia, 1981, p. XVIII)<sup>10</sup>.

If we consider Rousseau’s “egalitarian conception” of society, Sturzo maintains, there should be no ruling classes: «just as all are equal before the law so all are equal also in politics. Communists (or even orthodox socialists) would add: so equal also in the economy» (Sturzo 1972: 350). In this case, the principle of equality would lead to a levelling of society that would prevent its dynamism through the *transposition* of liberty into authority in order to prevent “any differentiation of classes, groups and individuals.” All this would end up representing the very negation of society, since this is defined as starting out from the dynamism of people who are different from one another. We are faced with *individuals* and *groups* that *complement* one another, precisely because they are imperfect, limited, and fallible. For this reason, Sturzo says that an *egalitarian democracy* would be a tyranny since there would be no room for liberty, and «all the effort of the governing bodies would be to suppress any attempt at differentiation» (Sturzo, 1972, p. 350).

On the other hand, Sturzo sees *popularism* as the theoretical perspective that holds up the ideal of liberty and, in doing so, admits a complex social structure that also contemplates the formation of *ruling elites*. In a passage of his work, *Italy and Fascism*, Sturzo offers us the distinction between a democratic, liberal, and inclusive political order and an oligarchic, illiberal and extractive one, identifying precisely in the degree of inclusiveness the form that connotes regimes of the first type: «Whether the form of government be absolute or representative, tyrannical or demagogic, there is always, according to this theory, a dominant political class. If it becomes fossilized as a ruling caste, society becomes fossilized likewise; if, on the contrary, it has a flexible

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<sup>10</sup> Di Lascia writes: «The dialectical use that Sturzo makes of Gaetano Mosca’s *The Elements of the Science of Politics* is representative of his methodology in that (*in nuce*) he manifests the substance of his historical relativism and (*in fieri*) manifests his phenomenal practice in a substantial-methodological fusion that Robert Pollock has rightly called “dialectical realism”» Di Lascia (1981, p. 36); see Pollock (1950, pp. 182-191).

structure and power of assimilation, the development of society goes forward more swiftly» (Sturzo, 1926, p. 59).

The political theory of *populism* presupposes that *liberty* and *democracy* coexist and support each other to the degree that any form of liberty that is not comprehensible within a democratic regime would mean liberty for some people only. The same reasoning goes for democracy. A democracy that was not based on liberty would mean domination or tyranny of the majority, and a non-continuous majority-minority dialectic, mediated by the institutions and the constant intersection of primary and secondary social forms (Sturzo, 1946). From this, it follows that Sturzian democracy is necessarily liberal, just as it is inclusive in competitive terms<sup>11</sup>, and that Sturzian democratic liberty does not deny the presence of elites but rather their crystallization into a class (Sturzo 1970). In fact, in democracy, they are not “fixed by birth,” as happens in aristocratic regimes; they do not depend on *wealth*, as in the “merchant bourgeoisies”; they are not even the product of *military value*, as in “military communities”, and so on. In democracy, when the ideal of liberty is implemented adequately to express social pluralism and in accordance with each person’s expectation of improving their social and existential condition, *elites* present themselves as groups open to all *classes*, to all *categories* and *groups of citizens*, and to all “individuals who emerge from the collective media;” all those, in short, who make a contribution to public discourse through critical participation.

The very fact that, in a democratic regime, the formation of political elites does not depend on external factors, such as class, wealth, military rank or something other, and cannot be considered acquired once and for all, raises the question of their continued selection in the name of competence and responsibility (Tocqueville, 2012, pp. 1012-1014). The selection takes place through a competitive process where different ideals, perspectives and conflicting interests are confronted, even in a strident way. At the same time, those who put themselves forward to solve the problems deemed relevant by the majority of the population will be asked to answer directly for the consequences of their actions before the institutions and the country. In other words, what

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<sup>11</sup> Aron writes: «On peut donc dire que le système de compétition électorale est dans la ligne d’une évolution qui tend à l’élargissement des garanties que réclament les gouvernés de la part des gouvernants, ou encore à la substitution progressive des représentants des gouvernés à un pouvoir exécutif d’origine différente» (Aron, 1997, p. 60).



Sturzo wants to underline is the essential nature of the answerability – Sartori speaks of *responsiveness* – of the political classes to the voters, thus emphasizing one of the main characteristics of the liberal democratic theory (Sartori, 1995, p. 108). From this point of view, there would be no limit to the possibility that any person could aspire to become part of the political elite: “All the people are potentially a limit”, and the political party represents the instrument through which the people assume organized political form, so that its activity is articulated, recognizable, and held responsible by those who have the task of selecting the political class. In Bobbio’s words, this is an incarnation of «the most characteristic and, at the same time, the most sensational phenomenon of modern democracies» (Bobbio, 1946).

### 5. *Keeping watch over the “slumbering” of liberty*

The liberty of Sturzian democracy is, therefore, a means that becomes an end. If, for the founder of popularism, there is no doubt that liberty is a spiritual gift, and so a “good in itself,” it is equally true that, taking it as a starting point, we are in a position to seek even higher spiritual goods. The same argument also applies to liberty, not understood as a “spiritual value in itself,” but as a possible variation in the civil field and, therefore, “effective social liberty.” This is the case with the so-called conditions that act as a *guarantee* of liberty, such as political, press and religious liberty along with freedom of thought and speech<sup>12</sup>. Should these guarantees fail, the demands for liberty would lead to revolutionary results. For this reason, there would be no other means of preserving *liberty in itself*, as a spiritual value, than “reliving it in its fundamental originality”. «La liberté - Sturzo tells us in one of the most powerful passages of his Paris speech of 1925 at the Comité National d’Étude Sociales et Politiques – est comme la vérité: l’ayant conquise, il faut la reconquérir pour la conserver, et lorsque les événement changent, que les institutions évolvent, il faut le reconquérir encore afin de l’adapter. Et le peuples qui n’ont

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<sup>12</sup> According to the idea of “effective social liberty”, it is interesting to compare Sturzo’s position with the following statement of Tocqueville: «Since no one then differs from his fellows, no one will be able to exercise a tyrannical power; men will be perfectly free, because they will all be entirely equal; and they will all be perfectly equal, because they will be entirely free. Democratic peoples tend toward this ideal» (Tocqueville, 2012, p. 874). A perspective that we find again in Acemoglu’s and Robinson’s work *The Narrow Corridor*.

pas suffisamment apprécié la liberté pour la défendre, ou qui n'ont pas su en user, la voient s'user et périr» (Sturzo, 1925, p. 34). Our daily regaining of political liberty, Sturzo tells us, takes place through eternal vigilance against its slumbering, a threat that is always lying in ambush. He mentions those very dangerous moments of drowsiness that hit the population of a country when, in a democracy, there is a tolerance of *uniformity, centralization, ankylosed elites* and *bureaucratized parties*. All of this represents a brake on the exercise of civil liberties and prevents us from keeping up the surveillance that allows us to make the *method of liberty* a spiritual aim that renews institutions which have become “aged by the political machine”.

What has been said about liberty, democracy, and the formation of elites enables Sturzo to conclude that his notion of liberty is, *in its essence*, participation in power and that, in democracy, liberty is organized in authority: “authority is organized freedom” (Sturzo, 1972, p. 356). This means that the *electoral body* is free to choose its representatives and, in the act of choosing them, performs an act of *authority*; in the same way, the parliament deliberates freely and, in doing so, exercises its *authority*. The same argument evidently applies to the government and to any other political institution recognized as having a *certain, therefore limited, authority*. The fact that each institution exercises a share of authority and that this exercise, precisely as free, influences and limits the exercise of the authority of other institutions, implies that the notions of authority and liberty are inseparable and that the task of a true *governing democracy* (Bobbio, 1984) will be to extend this principle of interference from the civil spheres alone to the political and economic ones (Traniello, 2004, pp. 56-57).

## 6. Conclusions

The theoretical revision that Sturzo proposes directly affects the political problem of Catholics who are faced with the “continuous push towards the deification of the state,” which, for the reasons just explained, legitimizes political parties in order to *deify* their ends: the nation for the nationalists, race for the Nazis, class for the communists. Sturzo's political realism leads him to affirm that one cannot speak of morality in public life, much less of political charity, as long as «the modern State is regarded in its true colours as a Moloch to which all to-day burn constitutional incense», as long as «the parties make into ends the State – or surrogates of the State such as nation,

class, or race», and as long as even Catholics give in to the temptation «of going astray and setting our grain of incense before these new, and at the same time ancient, divinities» (Sturzo, 1938, p. 100).

It was precisely this intention which moved Sturzo's popular Catholics to launch the Appeal "To all free and strong men" on January 18th, 1919, with the intention of portraying an idea of the state theoretically alternative to the one widespread among the secular and Catholic ruling classes of his time. The theoretical perspective, which Sturzo himself defines as a *popular state* to distinguish it from a *centralizing state*<sup>13</sup>, which became totalitarian in the twentieth century, is based *on liberty* and, specifically, on the *method of liberty*, understood as a requirement of both politics and morality. Only if we consider the *method of liberty* as a prerequisite for the political order, will we be in a position to defend ourselves from *statolatry*, or from the state's omnivorous tendency to become a Leviathan and to determine all moral and social values in itself. Only in the name of *liberty*, only through its method, can we prevent statolatrous doctrine from being translated into practice and the person reduced to the means for the pursuit of an end which is not his. For Sturzo, this would be a claim that, in the name of an alleged end or meaning of the state, would be nothing else than the result of the combination of the interests of the ruling classes.

The problem posed by Sturzo to the Catholics of his time, reduced to the essential, is not so far from the political problem of all times, and so even that of today. It concerns the question of whether, in all conscience, Catholics should *accept* or perhaps *promote* a political regime that denies political, economic and civil liberties in exchange for privileges, for a simple quiet life, thereby failing to nourish the soil from which to draw the resources necessary to defend and promote the values that should be dear to them<sup>14</sup>. Inevitably, for Sturzo, such a failure would compromise the availability of the antidotes

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<sup>13</sup> Sturzo adopts the lesson of Tocqueville: «A central power, as enlightened, as skillful as can be imagined, cannot by itself encompass all the details of the life of a great people. It cannot, because such a task exceeds human power. When, with its own resources, it wants to create and put into operation so many different mechanisms, it either contents itself with a very incomplete result or exhausts itself in useless efforts» (Tocqueville, 2012, p. 154).

<sup>14</sup> After the human, moral and institutional disasters of the Second World War, working on Tocqueville and inviting Italian people to read Sturzo, in order to have a better understanding of the Italian and international political, economic and cultural situations, Professor Lorenzo Caboara held: «The function performed by religious sentiment, particularly in democracies, is to teach men the "art of being free"» (Caboara, 1946, p. 48).

against political violence and economic abuse as well as the ability to oppose the cultural arrogance of those who, having conquered the "State", will be in a position to determine the life, ideals, and interests of individuals.

Sturzo sinks his blade into the open wound, into the soft underbelly of a certain Catholic world that does not seem to realize that within the inventory of political forms, the option presented to Catholics is not between a "state that claims to be Christian (Catholic)" – something which, according to Sturzo, simply does not exist - and a "liberal state that is said to be agnostic". The option is not even between the "bourgeois state" and the "Bolshevik state," but, more correctly, between the *regime of law and opinion* and *regimes of dictatorship*, regardless of whether the latter take on the characteristics of left or right. Sturzo is aware of the fact that both democratic and dictatorial states can be based on the *monistic principle*, which, in the name of the *principle of plurarchy*, he cannot fail to reject.

However, precisely because Sturzo is a realist and does not take refuge in hypothetical and exotic parallel worlds, in distinguishing between *democratic regimes* and *dictatorial regimes*, he outlines a series of conditions which, if systematized, can, we believe, assume the role of a model through which to measure the *degree of democracy* of a given political order. 1. Sturzo recognizes that, while the democratic regimes allow people to carry out their tasks, to associate and freely express their opinions, the dictatorial admit only "applause" and "flattery;" 2. While, in the former regimes, it is still possible to "organize nuclei of resistance," in dictatorial regimes this is now completely impossible; 3. While in the former, through the pluralism of political participation, it is possible to gain power and become the government of the country, «in the latter, one can do nothing but offer one's personal sacrifice for the sake of the future not yet in sight» (Sturzo, 1938, p. 102).

2019 was a Sturzian year when we celebrated the centenary of the appeal "To all free and strong men," and the consequent foundation of the Popular Party (18th January 1919), as well as commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the death of the Sicilian priest (8th August 1959). Anniversaries can be useless commemorations, processions of ghosts, dinosaurs in search of renewed fame, feasts of rhetoric, animated by the attention-seeking anxiety of veterans of a world that has now disappeared. On the other hand, they can be occasions for relaunching a project, remembering an experience that is still current.

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