

Abstract

This thesis has dealt with the thought of the German legal and political theorist Carl Schmitt and with the reception of his work by the intellectual Left. The main goals of the thesis were to find out which aspects of Schmitt's work are the most popular among left-wing authors and to search for the causes of this inspiration. Thus, it was necessary to reconstruct the historical context in which such a conservative thinker becomes a frequently quoted author within various branches of leftist thought. In Carl Schmitt's case, because of his shift towards Nazism in the 1930s, there is also a methodological problem of the possible separation of his work from his career and personality, the separation of a particular theoretical approach from the motives which led to this approach. Therefore, the attempt to use Schmitt's thought for progressive left-wing goals is not easily compatible with strictly contextual reading of his work.

Schmitt's work itself is described and analyzed especially in the first half of this thesis. The first chapter describes, in the historical context, some basic concepts which Schmitt deals with. The chapter is structured according to main targets of his critique: legal positivism; liberal democracy; quantitative total state, which is able to intervene in every part of society, but which is weak at the same time, because of the interest groups' influence; the concept of humanity with its primacy of ethics and economics over the political; universalism and unipolarism in the world order. The second chapter deals more in detail with the questions of Schmitt's disciplinary approach, especially with the clash of legal theory and theology. It also discusses continuity and discontinuity in his thought. It is difficult to find the so-called material core in Schmitt's work, since he wrote especially interventionist texts that reacted to the political tendencies of his time. However, trying to define Schmitt ideologically is quite useful, especially with regard to his specific conservatism which is aware of the importance of historical roots of institutions, but, at the same time, also searches for completely new forms of institutional order.

Since Schmitt tried to critically reveal particular interests behind the allegedly neutral and universalistic discourse, his career was full of rich and dynamic intellectual encounters with left-wing theorist, for example Otto Kirchheimer, Walter Benjamin, or Italian Marxists of the 1970s. So, the second half of this thesis studies the leftist reception of Schmitt's work. One of its main goals is to revive the concept of the political, since some authors on the Left pointed out the absence of properly political theory in both liberalism and Marxism.

Especially after his death in 1985, and even more after the end of the Cold War, Schmitt has finally become understood not only as a controversial character, but as a classical author of political thought. Contemporary Left uses his critical language in its attempts to challenge the neoliberal hegemony, but still, it also emphasizes that it is necessary to think “with Schmitt against Schmitt”. Indeed, conclusions of the left-wing critique of liberalism are different than those of Schmitt. As disputed questions, we can mention, for example, the possibility and intensity of political conflict, or the homogenization of political community. The study of the reception of Schmitt’s work also helped us to recognize various branches of contemporary left-wing political thought, represented by authors like Chantal Mouffe, Jürgen Habermas, or Giorgio Agamben, and some important differences among them. One part of this thesis has dealt also with Schmitt’s influence in the field of critical international relations theory, especially in the context of humanitarian interventions, American unipolarism, or the attempts to found the cosmopolitan order based on the idea of human rights.