

Gramsci and the Twentieth Century

english edition by Donatella Di Benedetto

«It is impossible to conceive of life and the dissemination of a philosophy which, at one and same time, is not actual politics, closely bound to the predominant activity in the life of the popular classes, i. e. labour, and which does not therefore manifest itself, within certain limits, as necessarily connected to science».

(Notebook 10, § 41, I, Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 409)

This presentation is based on the catalogue of «Gramsci and the Twentieth Century», a show that the Gramsci Institute Foundation organized in 1997 to mark the sixtieth anniversary of Gramsci's death.

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This English-language version, somewhat different from the Italian, was planned and edited by Donatella Di Benedetto.

The Gramsci's texts selected in this booklet have been edited in the following volumes:

Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, 1971, Lawrence and Wishart, London.

Antonio Gramsci. Selections from Political Writings 1910-1920, selected and edited by Quintin Hoare, translated by John Mathews, 1977, Lawrence and Wishart, London.

Antonio Gramsci. Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926, translated and edited by Quintin Hoare, 1978, Lawrence and Wishart, London.

An Antonio Gramsci Reader. Selected Writings 1916-1935, edited by David Forgacs, 1988, Schocken Books, New York.

Letters from the Prison, edited by Frank Rosengarten, translated by Frank Rosenthal, 1994, Columbia University Press, New York.

Antonio Gramsci. Prison Notebooks, vol. I, edited with an Introduction by Joseph Buttigieg, 1992, Columbia University Press, New York.

Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, edited and translated by Derek Boothman, 1995, Lawrence and Wishart, London.

Antonio Gramsci. Prison Notebooks, vol. II, edited and translated by Joseph Buttigieg, 1996, Columbia University Press, New York.

Six decades after his death, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is among the most widely translated and closely studied Italian thinkers. Gramsci's reputation rests on his Prison Letters and Prison Notebooks. The Letters are a landmark of the Italian language and literature whose intellectual and moral value has been recognized ever since the first selection appeared in 1947. Today they are also vehicle for the transmission of Italian culture throughout the world. The Notebooks, perhaps even more widely translated, are a classic of twentieth-century political thought.

Gramsci was a political leader and combatant and remained one even during years of imprisonment by the Fascist regime, which broke his health and led to his premature death; he founded the most important strand of communism critical of Stalinism and alternative to Soviet Marxism. It is in political practice — action, struggle, thought — that the unity of his work lies. One cannot possibly read the Letters, much less understand the Prison Notebooks, except in the context of Gramsci's life and the political struggles that shaped it. Yet Gramsci's thought transcends his life, and with the passage of time his works have found a place within historical and cultural settings far removed from that in which they were conceived. Today his explorations are a "crossroads" of the major issues of the twentieth century — the distinction between "coercion" and "hegemony", the dilemmas of modernity, the subjectivity of peoples, the prospects of industrialism, the crisis of the nation-state, the new and arduous paths of democracy, the moral foundation of politics — and are thus contributing to the definition of an anticipatory programme of research that is vital for the reflection and commitment of men and women at the end of the millennium.

Giuseppe Vacca

Sardinia (1891-1913)

«My father is of recent Albanian origin (the family escaped from Epirus after or during the wars of 1821 and rapidly became italianized); my grandmother was a Gonzalez and descended from an Italo-spanish family from Southern Italy (like many who remained in Italy after the end of Spanish rule); my mother is Sardinian through both father and mother and Sardinia was united with Piedmont only in 1847 after having been a personal fief and patrimony of the Piedmontese princes [...]. nevertheless my culture is fundamentally Italian» (Letters from the Prison, 87).

«The Franco-Italian tariff war catapulted Southern Italy and the islands into a terrifying crisis [...]. The island of Sardinia was literally razed to the ground as if by a barbarian invasion; forests that regulated the climate and average rainfall were felled [...] and

it rained scavengers who corrupted political customs and moral life» (“Uomini, idee, giornali e quattrini”, *Avanti!*, Piedmont edition, 23 October 1918).

«What saved me from turning into a perfect starched rag? The instinct of rebellion, for when I was a child I was against the rich, because I couldn't study, I who had got top marks in every subject at elementary school, while the butcher's son, the pharmacist's, the clothier's, went ahead. It extended to all the rich who oppressed the Sardinian peasants, and I got to thinking that it was necessary to fight for the region's national independence: 'Drive the mainlanders into the sea'. Then I got to know the working class of an industrial city and I understood the real meaning of the things of Marx's that I had read earlier out of intellectual curiosity». (Letter to Giulia Schucht, 6 March 1924)

«I was an intrepid pioneer and I wouldn't leave the house unless I had in my pocket some grains of wheat and some matches wrapped in scraps of oilcloth for the eventuality that I might be flung on a desert island and be left on my own devices. I was also a daring builder boats and carts...» (Letters from the Prison, 276).

«I began to work when I was eleven, for the huge sum of nine lire a month (which actually meant a kilo of bread a day) for ten hours work daily, including Sunday morning, and I managed to move ledgers that weighed more than I did, and many nights I would cry silently because my body ached» (Letters from the Prison, p. 215).

«I would like to be able to understand whether Ghilarza [...] shows a tendency to become a city; whether there is more commerce, some industries, whether a part of the population has moved from traditional occupations to those of a different type, whether there is any real estate development» (Letters from the Prison, 286).

Turin (1913-1921)

The Epoch of Masses

The advent of the masses as full protagonists, wielders of power in social and political life, was a major preoccupation of European intellectuals of the time, from Ortega y Gasset to Max Weber and Karl Mannheim; the theme is central to Gramsci's analysis of the “organic crisis” of the liberal state and his reflection on the new relationships between the state, the economy and the political organization of the masses. «The discussion in question is the debate about the “philosophy of the epoch”, about the central theme in the lives of the various states in the post-war period» (Selections from the prison notebooks, p. 228).

«And the content is the crisis of the ruling class's hegemony, which occurs either because the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of broad masses (war, for example), or because huge masses (especially of peasants and petit-bourgeois intellectuals) have passed suddenly from a state of passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution. A “crisis of authority” is spoken of: this is precisely the crisis of hegemony, or general crisis of the State» (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 210. See too forward: Turi 11).

War and Revolution

Some events, however, shake people's souls and force them to depart from the old patterns, to break the tempo of “mechanical, outward continuity”. For Gramsci the First World War is such an event. It represents the radical break-up of an entire historical epoch. With a war « a whole series of questions which piled up individually before 1914 have precisely formed a “mound”, modifying the general structure of the previous process. It is enough to think of the importance which the trade-union phenomenon has assumed, a general term in which various problems and processes of development, of differing importance and significance, are lumped together (parliamentarianism, industrial organisation, democracy, liberalism, etc.), but which objectively reflects the fact that a new social force has been constituted, and has a weight which can no longer be ignored, etc.» (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 106).

«What industrialism had not brought about in its normal process of development was produced by the war. The war forced those nations which were less advanced in capitalistic terms, and hence less endowed with technological equipment, to enrol all available men and to oppose wave after wave of living flesh to the war instruments of the central powers. [...] Links of solidarity were forged which would have taken decades of historical experience and intermittent struggles to form» (An Antonio Gramsci Reader, p. 115).

Taylorism and Fordism

In 1914 Henry Ford makes a sensational announcement to the press: we are at the start of the greatest revolution in wages in the history of the industrial world. The basis of the Fordist revolution is Taylorism. “Scientific management” seeks to construct a labour process founded on the rational subdivision of the movements necessary to perform a given operation and on systematic time-and-motion study. The result is the standardization of the labour process, now liberated from every individual characterization. Gramsci turns the conventional interpretation of this immense process of rationalizing and decomposing the individual on its head.

«An increasingly perfect division of labour objectively reduces the position of the factory worker to increasingly “analytical” movements of detail, so that the complexity of the collective work passes the comprehension of the individual worker; in the latter's consciousness, his own contribution is devalued to the point where it seems easily replaceable at any moment. At the same time, work that is concerted and well organised gives a better “social” productivity, so that the entire work-force of a factory

should see itself as a “collective worker”. These were the premisses of the factory movement, which aimed to render “subjective” that which is given “objectively”. What does objective mean in this instance? For the individual worker, the junction between the requirements of technical development and the interests of the ruling class is “objective”. But this junction, this unity between technical development and the interests of the ruling class is only a historical phase of industrial development, and must be conceived of as transitory. The nexus can be dissolved; technical requirements can be conceived in concrete terms, not merely separately from the interests of the ruling class, but in relation to the interests of the class which is as yet still subaltern. A compelling proof that such a “split” and new synthesis is historically mature is constituted by the very fact that such a process is understood by the subaltern class – which precisely for that reason is no longer subaltern, or at least is demonstrably on the way to emerging from its subordinate position. The “collective worker” understands that this is what he is, not merely in each individual factory but in the broader spheres of the national and international division of labour. It is precisely in the organisms which represent the factory as a producer of real objects and not of profit that he gives an external, political demonstration of the consciousness he has acquired» (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 202).

The Workers of Turin

Beginning in 1912, and increasingly during the war, the introduction of Fordism in Italy, mass production and the extension of Taylorist work processes impress a very special quality on the Fiat works.

Gramsci discerns features of the situation in Turin that make the city the “historical forge of the Italian communist revolution”. “Turin represents in reduced scale a thoroughgoing state organism. All the energies are represented there, all the antithetical forces of a state are active. It is a modern city in the most genuinely historical sense of the word. [...] The integral, conscious class struggle that characterizes current history is perfectly individualized by now in Turin” (“Preludio”, *Avanti!*, Piedmont edition, 17 May 1916)

This is the central theme of *Americanism and Fordism*. From the structural point of view, the modern industrial city presents a “naturally” rationalized environment in which the struggle between the two fundamental classes takes place without the dead weight of the parasitic and laggard strata.

«A careful analysis of Italian history before 1922, or even up to 1926, which does not allow itself to be distracted by external trappings but manages to seize on the essential moments of the working-class struggle, must objectively come to the conclusion that it was precisely the workers who brought into being newer and more modern industrial requirements and in their own way upheld these strenuously. It could also be said that some industrialists understood this movement and tried to appropriate it to themselves. This explains Agnelli's attempt to absorb the *Ordine Nuovo* and its school into the fiat complex and thus to institute a school of workers and technicians qualified for industrial change and for work with "rationalised" systems» (selection from prison notebooks, financial autarky of industry p. 292).

The Factory Council

“The history of class struggle has entered a decisive phase following the concrete experiences of Russia: the international revolution has acquired shape and substance since the Russian proletariat invented (in the Bergsonian sense) the State of the Councils.” (“Maggioranza e minoranza nell'azione socialista”, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 15 May 1919)

The article “Democrazia operaia”, an authentic editorial coup conceived by Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti, launches the discussion of the factory council in *L'Ordine Nuovo*.

«How are the immense social forces unleashed by the war to be harnessed? How are they to be disciplined and given a political form?» (An Antonio Gramsci Reader, p. 79)

The Council is based on a strong concept of organization, reflecting a historical period in which a distinctive feature of the most advanced states is «the massive structure of modern democracies, both as State organisations, and as complexes of associations in civil society». They «constitute for the art of politics as it were the “trenches” and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position: they render merely “partial” the element of movement which before used to be “the whole” of war, etc.» (Selections from Prison Notebooks, p. 243).

It is during the occupation of the factories, in 1920, that the metaphor of military organization as a model extendible to production and the state first crops up in Gramsci's writings. With the workers at Fiat preparing to run production on their own, Gramsci reminds them of the way in which bourgeois hierarchies are set up and operate. In the various fields of organized society there is always the petty bourgeoisie, which, monopolizing the function of subordinate commands, mediates the relationship between the two fundamental classes.

«At the root of every production problem is the political problem, that is, the problem of social relations, of the organic functioning of society. In order to organize production seriously, it is necessary first or, better, simultaneously to organize all of society in relation to production, which is the most general and direct expression of society. Production is society's soul, its most comprehensive and immediate *symbol*». (*Produzione e politica*, «L'Ordine Nuovo», 24-31 January 1920)

«Integral» Journalism

From 1915 until his arrest, Gramsci is uninterruptedly occupied with journalism. The occasional and fragmentary nature of this output does not detract from the compactness and homogeneity of his political thought; up until his arrest his writings consist largely of newspaper articles in which the effort to link theory and political reportage is always evident. The reciprocity between

culture and politics — for Gramsci, the essence of the method of journalism — is applied to the relationship between the newspaper and its readers. Educating the masses in order to help forge a modern political consciousness is the fundamental aim of “integral journalism”. The formula that Gramsci proposes is an educational journalism that satisfies the reader’s needs but at the same time creates and develops them. Integral journalism is a programme of progressive political education that can transform the simple common sense of the masses into concrete political contents. *Il Grido del Popolo*, the Piedmont edition of *Avanti!* and the three series of *L’Ordine Nuovo* and *L’Unità* published between 1924 and 1926 are the instruments on which Gramsci’s integral journalism relies to link the party and the masses.

«In ten years of journalism I wrote enough lines to fill fifteen or twenty volumes of 400 pages each, but they were written for the day and, in my opinion, were supposed to die with the day» (Letters from the Prison,).

«I have never been a professional journalist [...]. I have always been an absolutely free journalist, I’ve always held only one opinion» (Letters from the Prison, p. 66).

“[Integral journalism]. The type of journalism considered in these notes is that which could be called “integral” [...], i.e. that which not only intends to satisfy all the needs (of a certain category) of its readership but intends to create and develop those needs and thus, in a certain sense, to call its own audience into being and steadily extend its area” (Notebook 24, § 1).

Any and every publishing initiative must appear as “the interpretation of a perceived and widespread need, never as the cold application of an intellectual construct.” (Letter to Togliatti, Vienna, 27 March 1924)

Isolation and fragmentation are a potential weakness of the working class. To mobilize the working masses through the press is to perform an effective coordinating and consciousness-raising function. “Our newspapers will publish, the workers will read and will know.” (Letter to Umberto Terracini, Vienna, 19 April 1924)

Livorno 1921

In 1920 the situation in Italy poses the problem of recasting political representation and developing a new model of revolutionary leadership: “The fundamental weaknesses of Italy’s traditional revolutionary movement are notorious [...]; Italy always lacked a strong, compact group of revolutionary leaders in close contact with the Socialist party’s proletarian nucleus. This utterly precluded any rapid decision that might have made it possible to draw all the consequences of the favourable circumstances for revolutionary action. [...] All the weaknesses inherent in the Italian socialist movement’s old structure were violently exposed after the war. Given the problems posed at the time, the plan to preserve the party’s unity until the revolution, just as it had been preserved through the conflagration of world war, was a disastrous illusion.” (“Il Compagno G.M. Serrati e le generazioni del socialismo italiano”, *L’Unità*, 14 May 1926)

The model of reference was the one developed by the Bolshevik party, translated and adapted to the Italian situation:

«The party must acquire its own precise and distinct character. from a petty-bourgeois parliamentary party it must become the party of the revolutionary proletariat in its struggle to achieve a communist society» (Political Writings 1910-1920, p. 194).

«The communist party is the instrument and historical form of the process of inner liberation through which the worker is transformed from executor to initiator, from mass to leader and guide, from brawn to brain and purpose» (Political Writings 1910-1920, p. 333).

Three Years Later

«[...] but we, for a whole series of reasons, did not determine our actions by what was happening in Italy: by the Italian events [...]. Instead, we limited ourselves to putting the emphasis on the formal questions, those of pure logic and pure consistency. And we were defeated, because the majority of the politically organized proletariat disagreed with us and did not come with us [...]. We were - it must be said - overtaken by events. Without wanting to be, we were an aspect of the general dislocation of Italian society, which had become a burning crucible in which all traditions, all historical formations, all prevailing ideas were melted down, sometimes leaving no trace» (Political Writings 1921-1926, p. 214).

Moscow 1922-1923

Now we see and sense that we are not so close to the goal of taking power and world revolution, observes Trotsky in his report to the Third Congress of the Communist International. In 1919 we thought it was only a matter of months; now we are saying it may be a matter of years.

East and West

The differences between East and West are not geopolitical but morphological: «Firstly, because the political conception of the Russian communists was formed on an international and not a national terrain. Secondly, because in Central and Western Europe the development of capitalism has not only determined the formation of the broad proletarian strata, but also - and as a consequence - has created the higher stratum, the labour aristocracy, with its appendages in the trade-union bureaucracy and the social-demographic groups» (Political Writings 1921-1926, p. 191; An Antonio Gramsci Reader, pp. 130-31).

«The determination, which in Russia was direct and drove the masses onto the streets for a revolutionary uprising, in Central and Western Europe is complicated by all these political superstructures, created by the greater development of capitalism. This makes the action of the masses slower and more prudent, and therefore requires of the revolutionary party a strategy and tactics altogether

more complex and long-term than those which were necessary for the bolsheviks in the period between March and November 1917» (Political Writings 1921-1926, p. 191 ; An Antonio Gramsci Reader, p. 131).

In the crisis of the international workers' movement, the prospect of proletarian revolution still appears to be universally valid in accordance with Leninist principles, but the possibility of carrying it out in the West depends on transferring the formation of the communist parties from the international to the national terrain:

“So far there has been no success in bringing into existence parties able to forge an autonomous, creative policy, one that is autonomously centralized in that it fits the general plans of action outlined by the congresses [...]. In any event, I am more and more of this conviction: that we have to work, in our country, to build a strong party, politically and organizationally well equipped and resilient, with a stock of general ideas that are very clear and firmly impressed in individuals' minds, so as to preclude all possibility of disintegration at each collision with the questions that will be every day more numerous and dangerous as the situation evolves and the revolutionary movement gathers strength.” (Letter to Umberto Terracini, 27 March 1924)

Giulia Schucht

In August 1922 Gramsci meets his future wife Julija (“Giulia”) Schucht in the Serebrjanyj Bor rest home where he has been admitted. They will have two sons, Delio and Giuliano.

“I waited three days for you. I didn't budge from my room, for fear that what happened last time might happen again. I was expecting you because I felt and still feel a bit tired and demoralized during the exasperating wait for departure and I would have been (and would be) so glad to see you again. You weren't in Moscow, were you? Surely you would have dropped in on me at least for a moment. Will you come soon? Will I be able to see you again? Am I right in remembering that you will be taking a leave for the month of September? I am waiting... I may stay on in Moscow another week, perhaps a fortnight, perhaps a month. Perhaps we can talk again for a few hours and take some long walks together. Write me. All your words do me enormous good and make me stronger (you see? I'm less strong than I thought and than I made others think).” (Letter to Giulia, August 1922)

“I love you and I am certain you love me. For years, it is true, I was accustomed to thinking it was absolutely, almost fatally impossible that I might be loved.” (Letter to Giulia Schucht [Moscow 1923])

“On 24 February you wrote mentioning your pregnancy. It filled me with joy. I ardently desired that you should become a mother [...]. Your love has strengthened me, it has truly made a man of me, or at least it has made me understand the meaning of being a man and having a personality.” (Letter to Giulia Schucht, 29 March 1924)

“We were together too little, and even that little we snatched from chance [...]. At bottom, we didn't have enough time to feel as husband and wife; we were only lovers on a honeymoon.” (Letter to Giulia Schucht, 16 April 1924)

L'Ordine Nuovo opened an important period in the life of the party born in Livorno. The first Communist daily, founded by Gramsci, was published in Turin from 1 January 1921 to 30 October 1922, but another 26 issues would be published underground after the March on Rome until the end of the year. In it we already find the basic themes of Communist publishing clearly outlined and developed: the function of mass orientation and political education, analysis of the problems of the Italian and international working class, commentary on the great issues of Italian society, popularization of the party's slogans.

Vienna 1923-1924

«You must come closer to Italy. You need very frequently to see comrades who have lived and still live in continuous contact with our reality. You need to be informed about everything better than is possible now. and we need your guidance to make itself widely felt once again». (p. 137)

Rebuilding the Party

Gramsci's activity in Vienna is wholly devoted to defining the party's political action in the Italian situation. «Amadeo approaches things from the viewpoint of an international minority, but we must approach things from the viewpoint of a national majority [...]. The future work of the party will have to be renewed both organizationally and politically».

His is a difficult attempt to apply Bolshevist organizational theories on a national terrain, to bridge the gap between those who lead and those who are led, to overcome the hardening of the attitude of the state and parties to great mass movements.

«The error of the party has been to have accorded priority in an abstract fashion to the problem of party organization, which in practice has simply meant creating an apparatus of functionaries who could be depended on for their orthodoxy towards the official view [...]. The party has not been seen as the result of a dialectical process, in which the spontaneous movement of the revolutionary masses and the organizing and directing will of the centre converge». (pp. 197-98)

The party needs to return to the field of concrete political action.

«All that exists is the concrete activity, the ceaseless work, the continuous contact with developing historical reality that give individuals and parties a position of preeminence, a role of guide and vanguard. [...] If our party did not find for today independent solutions of its own to the overall, Italian problems, the classes which are its natural base would turn en masse towards those political currents which give some solution to these problems that is not the fascist one».

Writing to Togliatti from Vienna on 27 March 1924, Gramsci delineated what were to be the nature and function of the third series of *Ordine Nuovo*: the presentation of the articles must itself have the nature of an immediate programme, offering at once both a political analysis and a documented review of the most topical political issues and the situation in the factories.

A new phase opened for the Communist press at the beginning of 1924. Togliatti's "Summary Report on the Party Press" to the Comintern gave news of negotiations under way in Rome for the fortnightly publication of the third series of *Ordine Nuovo*, which "Comrade Masci" (Gramsci) was to edit from Vienna, using the party's press office "to send and collect the material and for the technical part". It also announced the imminent appearance of the Naples weekly *Il Soviet*, "controlled by the centre" (a single issue, dated 27 January, would be published.) The report presented the plans — never to be realized — for a new trade-union weekly in Milan entitled *Il Sindacato operaio* to replace *Il Sindacato rosso*, for a publication of the Turin trade unions, for a political weekly in Rome and for a sports weekly in Milan. The effort to reconstitute a network of party newspapers nevertheless did produce interesting results: *Il Seme*, a fortnightly for peasants, appeared on 15 September 1924 and continued to be published sporadically under the editorship first of Ruggero Grieco and then of Felice Platone until 30 June 1925. Among the plans that never reached fruition was a project for a quarterly review, *Critica proletaria*, which Gramsci proposed to Terracini in a letter from Vienna in January 1924. The periodical was to be oriented to theory, treat Italian problems specifically and count 250 to 300 pages per issue.

Rome 1924-1926

"So Fascism has won, and the Mussolini government has emerged from the ballot box stronger at home and abroad [...]. The consequences will be manifold. The new Chamber will seek to transform itself into a Fascist constituent assembly, to create a Fascist legality, to abrogate the Statute [constitution] and democratic liberties. Rigorous measures against the opposition press are already being announced." (*La Correspondence internationale*, 17 April 1924)

The Fascism

«The characteristic feature of fascism consists in the fact that it has succeeded in creating a mass organization of the petty bourgeoisie. It is the first time in history that this has happened. The originality of fascism consists in having found the right form of organization for a social class which has always been incapable of having any cohesion or unitary ideology: this form of organization is the army in the field».

(Political Writings 1921-1926, p. 261).

"Italy's general crisis is the crisis of the middle classes; it is the crisis of the authority principle in subordinate social commands, precisely those commands that constitute the backbone of the bourgeois structure of the state" ("Reazione", *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 23 April 1921).

Hence the attempt to trace a descriptive model which, with variations, recurs in all of Gramsci's subsequent work.

«The bourgeois State builds its army upon three social strata: the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie and the working people. The people provides the military mass, the big property-owning bourgeoisie and the aristocracy provide the upper ranks of the officers, while the petty bourgeoisie provides the junior commands. The same organization emerges in the capitalistic army as in the capitalistic factory, where the class of proprietors (or those assimilated to them through financial interests) has despotic command, the proletariat is the passive infantry-mass and the petty bourgeoisie fills the subordinate command posts» (An Gramsci Reader, p. 98)

This line of reasoning foreshadows his future reflections on the state.

«[...] In the advanced capitalist countries, the ruling class possesses political and organizational reserves which it did not possess, for instance, in Russia. This means that even the most serious economic crises do not have immediate repercussions in the political sphere. Politics always lags behind economics, far behind. The State apparatus is far more resistant than is often possible to believe; and it succeeds, at moment of crisis, in organizing greater forces loyal to the regime than the depth of the crisis might lead one to suppose». (Report to the 2-3 August 1926 meeting of the Party's Executive Committee, pp. 408-09).

The assassination of Matteotti

«The repercussions of the postwar crisis were deeper and vaster in Italy than in the other capitalist countries, because of the very weakness of the bourgeois state in Italy. The working class found itself confronted with the problem of state power, for which it was unprepared. It suffered the Fascist reaction, which in Italy also took on the characteristic forms of brigandage, given the social relations of force and the historical formation of those relations. Thus, aside from its national manifestations, Fascism originates in the crisis of bourgeois rule». ("Alla base della crisi liberale", *L'Unità*, 3 October 1924)

The murder of the Socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti by Fascist hirelings in 1924 is woven into this analysis of the social relations of force: «The murder of Matteotti is the synthesis of the relations of force that have formed within Italian society following the defeat of the working class and the triumph of Fascism. In the last few years the working class has lost all freedom of assembly, of organization, of struggle [...]. With the relations of force between the capitalist class and the working class thus overturned, the latter having lost all chance of making its weight felt in the direction of the affairs of the state and the former having regained all its power, it was inevitable that the Fascist offensive would run the full gamut of crime, right up to the recent killing of Matteotti. This reversal of the relations of force between the classes in Italian society must be firmly kept in mind both to understand the murder of Matteotti and to prevent it from turning into just another judicial proceeding». ("Una bara pesante", *L'Unità*, 19 August 1924)

The crisis that followed the murder is a crisis of relations within the ruling class. The tendency of Fascism is to become a force for unification of the Italian bourgeoisie; that of the democratic opposition parties is to reach a compromise with it. «Will there be an armed conflict, then? A struggle in the grand style will be avoided by the opposition and Fascism alike. The inverse of the phenomenon of October 1922 will occur: then, the March on Rome was the choreographic representation of a molecular process whereby the real forces of the bourgeois state (the army, the magistracy, the police, the newspapers, the Vatican, the Freemasons) had gone over to the side of Fascism. If Fascism should attempt to resist, it would be destroyed by a protracted civil war in which the proletariat and the peasantry would inevitably take part. The opposition parties do not want a fight to the finish and will systematically avoid it. Fascism will retain an armed organizational base that it can deploy as soon as a new wave of revolutionary struggle looms, which is far from displeasing the likes of Amendola and Albertini, or even Treves and Turati». (Report to the Central Committee, 13-14 August 1924)

What the Communists propose is to forge a new organization of the Italian masses that balk at joining or identifying with the Communist Party. The proposal to create "workers' and peasants' committees" in which the masses can find an organic form of expression and discover "the germs of the new order that we want to create" embodies the thesis of a mass politics preparatory to the transcending of liberal democracy and the succession to the Fascist order.

The encounter with Stalin

«Today you are destroying your work. You are degrading, and run the risk of annihilating, the leading function which the CPSU won through Lenin's contribution. It seems to us that the violent passion of Russian affairs is causing you to lose sight of the international aspects of Russian affairs themselves; is causing you to forget that your duties as Russian militants can and must be carried out only within the framework of the interests of the international proletariat».

This letter to the Central Committee of the Soviet CP in mid-October 1926, in the name of the Political Office of the Communist Party of Italy, concisely summarizes Gramsci's conception of the relations between the Bolshevik Party and the other Communist parties and his analysis of the historical phase in the East and the West. His acknowledgment of the "special" position of the Russian party within the International is subject to that party's ability to coordinate the prospects of socialism in the Soviet Union with the development of the revolution in Western Europe. «[...] The working masses in general, but even the mass of members within our parties [...] do they accept freely and as historically necessary fact that the CPSU should be the leading party in the international» only because they «see, and wish to see, in the Republic of the Soviets and in the party which is in power there, a single combat unit that is working in the general perspective of socialism».

Notwithstanding the restoration of capitalist control over the forces of production and the world market, Gramsci considers revolution to be still on the agenda. "The broad working masses, though stratified politically in contradictory fashion, tend on the whole to unity. [...] One of the most forceful elements in this process of unification is the existence of the USSR, linked with the practical activity of the CPSU and with the widespread conviction that the Soviet Union is advancing on the road to socialism." The future of the Communist parties is bound up with this "activity" and this "conviction". What justifies their political action is no longer the "immediately revolutionary situation" in which they were founded but their ability, under conditions of capitalist restoration, to impart continuity to the revolutionary process. The "value of unity", which Gramsci holds up to the majority of the Russian party, derives from a conception of the party learned from Leninism; but this conception has been superseded by the historical and political evolution of the international communist movement and the Russian party.

«The Southern Question»

On 12 September 1923 Gramsci writes to the comrades of the Italian Party's executive committee from Moscow: the Comintern has decided that a working-class, Communist newspaper shall be founded in Italy, for which Third Internationalists expelled from the Socialist Party would also write.

«I propose the name *L'Unità* pure and simple; this will mean something to the workers, and will also have a more general meaning. For since the decision of the enlarged executive on the workers' and peasants' government, I think we must pay special attention to the Southern question - in which the problem of relations between workers and peasants is posed not simply as a problem of class relations, but also and especially as a territorial problem, i.e. as one of the aspects of the national question» (Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926, p. 162)

The letter for the foundation of the newspaper sets out, for the first time and in simple and concise terms, the political line that the Communist Party and *L'Unità*, its legal political daily newspaper, are to follow until Gramsci's arrest in Rome in 1926.

The "southern question" is a national question with a direct impact on the structure of the Italian state, its contradictions, its uneven development. The strategically critical element for the resolution of the Italian crisis is the unity of northern workers and southern peasants.

«The proletariat can become the leading [dirigente] and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of class alliances which allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois state. In Italy, in the real class relations which exist there, this means to the extent that it succeeds in gaining the consent of the broad peasant masses». (Some aspects of the Southern question, in Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926, p. 443)

«The South can be defined as a great social disintegration. The peasants, who make up the great majority of its population, have no cohesion among themselves [...]. Southern society is a great agrarian bloc, made up of three social layers: the great amorphous, disintegrated mass of the peasantry; the intellectuals of the petty and medium rural bourgeoisie; and the big landowners and great

intellectuals. the Southern peasants are in perpetual ferment. But as a mass they are incapable of giving a centralized expression to their aspirations and needs. The middle layer of intellectuals receives the impulses for its political and ideological activity from the peasant base. The big landowners in the political field and the great intellectuals in the ideological field centralize and dominate, in the last analysis, this whole complex of phenomena. naturally, it is in the ideological sphere that the centralization is most effective and precise. Giustino Fortunato and Benedetto Croce thus represent the keystones of the Southern system and, in a certain sense, are the two major figures of Italian reaction» (Some aspects of the Southern question, in Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926, p. 454).

Turi

The Prison

«This is something that is called politics [...]. You know what is done to little children who pee in their beds, don't you? They are threatened that they will be burned with hemp flaming at the end of a pitchfork. Well: just imagine that in Italy there is a very big child who continually threatens to pee in the bed of this grand genetrix of oats and heroes; and I and few others are the flaming hemp (or rag) that is waved about to threaten the impertinent one and prevent him from soiling the snow-white sheets» (Letters from the Prison, pp.102-03).

«You will have to get used to the thought that I will be sentenced and that I will of necessity have to spend a certain number of years in jail, which I hope will be brief, but that this is inevitable» (Letters from the Prison, p. 190).

Two people assisted Gramsci throughout his incarceration.

Tatiana Schucht

"I've met your sister Tatiana. Yesterday we were together from 4:00 in the afternoon until nearly midnight: we talked about many things, politics, her life here in Rome [...] I think we have already become fast friends. I was very glad to meet her: because she resembles you in a very special way; and because, politically, she is much closer to us than I had been led to believe." (Letter to Giulia Schucht, 2 February 1925)

"You know, your sister Tatiana is like an anticipation of your presence. She is very much like you in some of her features and gestures: the music of her voice is like an echo of yours [...] I visit her often." (Letter to Giulia Schucht, 7 February 1925)

"Dear Mamma [...], I can't wait either to come, either, and it will be very soon. Up to now the comrades have always asked me to do everything possible for Comrade Gramsci, to ameliorate his situation and maintain unbroken contact [...] since, as you know, I am the only one to have meetings with him [...]. For the time being he truly needs my visits and my presence; otherwise he would be totally isolated from the rest of the world. So together with my relations with him, the comrades have asked me to participate in helping him." (Letter from Tatiana Schucht to her family, 30 August 1928)

Piero Sraffa

«[...] he has never worked among workers, but he is certainly still a Marxist. It will only be necessary to keep in contact once again in order to resuscitate him and make him an active element of our party, to which he will be able to render much useful service today and in the future». (Selections from political writings, p. 218)

"He is a man who has worked in Turin indirectly, who has supplied *Ordine Nuovo* with a great deal of material on confidential matters, drawing on the files of his father, a bigwig in the Freemasons and the Banca Commerciale Italiana; his Communist views are unknown except to a small circle of acquaintances" ([Egidio Gennari], 29 March 1923).

.. "Then he went on to say that he could not attribute the writing of this letter merely to the imbecility of its author, because in this case his imbecility would pass all bounds. And there is no doubt that in the future, when this letter is taken from the archives, the person who wrote it or who had it written will find it very hard to justify; indeed, it is evident that he could never justify it. So if you want to help him [Gramsci], and he does not doubt that you do, you must absolutely follow these instructions of his to the letter: our Italian friends must absolutely not be informed of what we are trying to do; of these matters, absolutely nothing must be written." (Letter from Tatiana Schucht to Piero Sraffa, 11 December 1933)

«Our Sraffa has written me that he has opened an unlimited account on my behalf at a Milan bookshop, from which I will be able to request newspapers, magazines, and books; in addition he has offered me any help I might want». (Letters from Prison, p. 50)

«The "other" Prison»

«I'm subject to various prison regimes: there is the prison regime constituted by the four walls, the bars on the window, the spy hole on the door, etc. etc.; this had already been taken into account by me and as a subordinate probability, because the primary probability from 1921 to November 1926 was not prison but losing my life. What had not been included in my evaluation was the other prison, which is added to the first and is constituted by being cut off not only from social life but also from family life etc. etc. I could estimate the blows of my adversaries whom I was fighting, I could not foresee that blows would also come at me from other sides, from where I would least suspect them (metaphorical blows, of course, but the code also divides crimes into acts and omissions; that is, omissions too are faults or blows)» (Letters from the Prison, 331).

Giulia

«From your last letter it seems to me that you too feel that there is something wrong with this correspondence of ours without continuity, in stops and starts, with interruptions that last for months. [...] I believed that a certain communality in our lives would still be possible, that you would help me not to lose contact completely with the life of the world; at least with your life and that of the children. Yet it seems to me [...] that you have helped to intensify my isolation, making me feel it more bitterly. [...] It seems to me that in the course of these five years we have increasingly become phantoms, beings that are unreal for each other» (Letters from the Prison, p. 106).

At the Margins of the Party

«You remember that in 1928, when I was in judiciary prison awaiting trial in Milan, I received a letter from a “friend” who was abroad. You remember that I told you about this very “strange” letter and I said that the pretrial judge, after having handed it to me, added these very words: “Honorable Gramsci, you have friends who undoubtedly want you to remain in prison for quite some time” [...]. Was this a wicked act or an act of irresponsible superficiality? It is hard to say which, perhaps both at the same time; perhaps the person who wrote it was only irresponsibly stupid and someone else, less stupid, induced him to write. But there is no point in racking one’s brain over such question. There remains the objective fact that has its significance» (Letters from the Prison, pp. 237-38).

«My impression is that I am set aside, that I represent so to speak “a bureaucratic dossier” to be annotated and nothing more. [...] Although I live in jail, isolated from all sources of communication, direct or indirect, you mustn’t think that elements for judgement and reflection don’t still reach me. They reach me unsystematically, sporadically, at long intervals, as it inevitable, from the naive conversations of people I hear talking or I encourage to talk, and who from time to time carry the echo of other milieux, other voices, other opinions, etc. I have not yet lost all the skills of philological criticism; I know how to select, distinguish, tone down intentional exaggerations, integrate, etc. [...] The conclusion, to put it summarily, is this: I was sentenced on June 4, 1928 by the special tribunal, that is, by a specific collegium of men, which could nominally be indicated by name, address, and profession in civilian life. But this is a mistake. Those who sentenced me belong to a much vaster organism, of which the special tribunal was only the external and material expression, which compiled the legal documents for the sentence. I must say that among these “sentencers” there was also Julia, I believe, indeed I’m firmly convinced she was there unconsciously, and then there is a series of less unconscious people (Letters from the Prison, pp. 275-76).

«Passive Revolution»

"Passive revolution" characterizes an historical epoch marked by the fading of the expansive potential of 1917 and by the rising of «Americanism and Fordism derive from an inherent necessity to achieve the organization of a planned economy» (Selection from the prison notebooks, p. 279).

With the failure of the revolutionary movement in the West and with a «combination of progressive forces that were scanty and insufficient of themselves» (*Notebook* 10, § 61), the passive revolution or revolution-restoration is «the first policy whereby social struggles find sufficiently elastic frameworks to allow the bourgeoisie to gain power without dramatic upheavals» (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 115)

Gramsci analyzes Americanism and Fordism in terms of the concept of "passive revolution":

«which are certainly not revolutions, but which are not entirely reactionary either – at least in the sense that they shatter stifling and ossified State structures in the dominant camp as [...]. These movements too can have a relatively “progressive” content, in so far as they indicate that there were effective forces latent in the old society which the old leaders did not know how to exploit – perhaps even “marginal forces”. However, such forces cannot be absolutely progressive...» (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 223).

In the 1930s the Fascist regime seeks to bring American industrial methods to Italy through corporatism. «One could conceive things as follows. Passive revolution would be brought about through the fact of transforming the economic structure in a “reformist” fashion from an individualistic to a planned economy (a command economy). The creation of a economy “mid-way” between one of the pure individualist type and one that, in the full sense, functions according to a plan would allow the passage to more advanced political and cultural forms without radical and destructive cataclysms of an exterminatory kind. “Corporatism”, through its internal development, could either be or become this middle-ground economic form of a “passive” character» (Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 277).

«[...] that there is a passive revolution involved the fact that – through the legislative intervention of the State, and by means of the corporative organisation – relatively far-reaching modifications are being introduced into the country’s economic structure in order to accentuate the “plan of production” element; in other words, that socialisation and co-operation in the sphere of production are being increased, without however touching (or at least not going beyond the regulation and the control of) individual and group appropriation of profit» (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p.p. 119-20).

However, as Gramsci points out, «the demand for an “economy based on a plan”, not only on a national scale but on a world one, is interesting in itself, even if the justification for it is purely verbal: it is a “sign of the times”; it is the still “utopian” expression of the developing conditions that, as such, pose the need for an “economy based on a plan”» (Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 180)

However, in Gramsci's view it is the phenomenon of Americanism that constitutes the most advanced outpost for analysis of the passive revolution. Having posed the question «whether the type of industry and organisation of work and production of Ford is

rational; whether, that is, it can and should be generalised, or whether, on the other hand, we are not dealing with a malignant phenomenon which must be fought against through trade-union action and through legislation», Gramsci's answer is: «It seems possible to reply that the Ford method is rational, that is, that should be generalised». (Selection from the Prison Notebooks, p. 312)

What must be grasped, above all, is «objective import of American phenomenon, which is also the biggest collective effort to date to create, with unprecedented speed, and with a consciousness of purpose unmatched in history, a new type of worker and of man. On these bases, the point of departure for Gramsci's analysis is that by comparison with Europe, America is a "naturally" rationalized environment. The absence of " --- " (Notebook 22, §2). In another significant passage, however, Gramsci appears to overturn the relationship between America and Europe: «[...] the not existence of viscous parasitic sedimentations left behind by past phases of history [...]. Since these preliminary conditions existed, already rendered rational by historical evolution, it was relatively easy to rationalise production and labour[...]. Hegemony here is born in the factory and requires for its exercise only a minute quantity of professional political and ideological intermediaries». (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 285)

But there is another important passage that seems to reverse the relation between America and Europe: «In America rationalisation has determined the need to elaborate a new type of man suited to the new type of work and productive process [...]. It is still at the stage of psycho-physical adaptation to the new industrial structure, aimed for through high wages. Up to the present (until the 1929 crash) there has not been, except perhaps sporadically, any flowering of the "superstructure". In other words, the fundamental question of hegemony has not yet been posed». (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 286).

In passive revolution, "the state cannot avoid going through a stage of economic-corporative primitivism", with "planning" elements still scanty. The construction of socialism in the USSR under Stalin's direction does not appear to escape this rule.

«It is true that the state is seen as the organ of one particular group, destined to create favourable conditions for the latter's maximum expansion. But the development and expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the "national" energies. In other words, the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups, and the life of the state is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups - equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point, i.e. stopping short of narrowly corporate economic interest». (Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks , p. 182)

Internationalism

These thoughts are connected with the 1926 letter to the Central Committee of the CPSU. "

«[...] we are struck by the fact that the attitude of the opposition concerns the entire political line of the Central Committee, and touches the very heart of the leninist doctrine and the political action of our soviet party. It is the principle and practice of the proletariat's hegemony that are brought into question; the fundamental relations of alliance between workers and peasants that are disturbed and placed in danger. i. e. the pillars of the workers' state and the revolution.

Comrades, history has never seen a dominant class, in its entirety, experiencing conditions of living inferior to those of certain elements and strata of the dominant and subjected class. this unprecedented contradiction has been reserved by history as the destiny of the proletariat [...]. Yet the proletariat cannot become the dominant class if it does not overcome this contradiction through the sacrifice of its corporate interests. It cannot maintain its hegemony and its dictatorship if, even when it has become dominant, it does not sacrifice these immediate interests for the general and permanent interests of the class». (Letter from the Italian Party's Political Office to the Central Committee of the CPSU, Political writings, p. 431)

The same conceptual core is found in the only passage in the Prison Notebooks in which Gramsci refers explicitly to Stalin:

«The problem which seems to me to need further elaboration is the following: how, according to the philosophy of praxis (as it manifests itself politically) [...] the international situation should be considered in its national aspect. In reality, the internal relations of any nation are the result of a combination which is "original" and (in a certain sense) unique: these relations must be understood and conceived in their originality and uniqueness if one wishes to dominate them and direct them. To be sure, the line of development is towards internationalism, but the point of departure is "national" – and it is from this point of departure that one must begin. Yet the perspective is international and cannot be otherwise. Consequently, it is necessary to study accurately the combination of national forces which the international class [the proletariat] will have to lead and develop, in accordance with the international perspective and directives [i.e. those of Comintern]. The leading class is in fact only such if it accurately interprets this combination – of which it is itself a component and precisely as such is able to give the movement a certain direction, within certain perspectives» (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 240).

«Only today [1935], after the manifestations of brutality and unheard-of ignominy of German 'culture' under Hitler's dominion, have certain intellectuals noticed how fragile modern civilization is — in all its contradictory expressions, but necessary in their contradiction» (Notebook 28, §1).

On the worldwide scale, the response to the defeat of October is passive revolution, in which the adversary manages to contain the explosion of all the "questions" that "bunched up" during the Great War, holding it to no more than molecular change. The key fact is nevertheless the alteration of the "general structure of the preceding process", which confronts the "progressive groups" with the necessity of working out an appropriate form of "war of position". This is the sphere of hegemony, which represents the definitive superseding of the concept of "permanent revolution".

«That aspect of the modern crisis which is bemoaned as a “wave of materialism” is related to what is called the “crisis of authority”. If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer “leading” but only “dominant”, exercising force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear» (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, pp. 275-76).

«Civil Hegemony»

«The formula belongs to an historical period in which the great mass political parties and the great economic trade unions did not yet exist, and society was still, so to speak, in a state of fluidity from many points of view: greater backwardness of the countryside, and almost complete monopoly of political and State power by a few cities or even by a single one [...]; a relatively rudimentary State apparatus, and greater autonomy of civil society from State activity; a specific system of military forces and of national armed services; greater autonomy of the national economies from the economic relations of the world market, etc. In the period after 1870, with colonial expansion of Europe, all these elements change: the internal and international organisational relations of the State become more complex and massive, and the Forty-Eightist formula of “Permanent Revolution” is expanded and transcended in political science by the formula of “civil hegemony”. The same thing happens in military art: war of movement increasingly becomes war of position, and it can be said that a State will win a war in so far as it prepares for it minutely and technically in peacetime. The massive structures of the modern democracies, both as State organisations, and as associations in civil society, constitute for the art of politics as it were the “trenches” and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position: they render merely “partial” the element of movement which before used to be “the whole” of war, etc.» (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 243).

The Crisis

In the *Notebooks*, the crisis of 1929 is treated as no more than a more severe manifestation of a process of crisis whose salient features were already evident in the Great War and its aftermath.

«We might, then, say – and this would be more exact – that the ‘crisis’ is none other than the quantitative intensification of certain elements, neither new nor original, but in particular the intensification of certain phenomena, while others that were there before and operated simultaneously with the first, sterilising them, have now become inoperative or have completely disappeared».

«We may say that there is no starting date as such to the crisis, but simply the date of certain of the more striking ‘manifestations’ that have erroneously and tendentiously become identified with the crisis. The autumn of 1929, with the Wall Street crash, is the beginning of the crisis for some people, and this is understandable for those who wish to seek the origin and cause of the crisis in ‘Americanism’. But the events of the autumn of 1929 in America represent just one of the striking manifestations of the critical development, nothing more. The whole post-war period is one of crisis, accompanied by attempts to obviate it that from time to time have had some success in this or that country, nothing more. For some (and perhaps they are not mistaken) the war itself is a manifestation of crisis, even its first manifestation; the war was in fact the political and organisational reply of those who were responsible for the crisis» (Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks, pp. 219-20).

«One can already discern in the world of today a phenomenon which resembles the rift between “spiritual” and “temporal” in the Middle Ages – but a phenomenon that is far more complex than its predecessor, to the extent that modern life itself is more complex. To an ever-increasing extent, regressive and conservative social groupings are being reduced to their initial economic-corporate stage, while the progressive and innovatory groupings are still in their initial, precisely economic-corporate phase. The traditional intellectuals are detaching themselves from the social grouping to which they have hitherto given the highest and most comprehensive form – hence the most extensive and perfect consciousness of the modern State. In so doing, they are accomplishing an act of incalculable historical significance; they are marking and ratifying the crisis of the State in its decisive form [...]. Today, the “spiritual” which is detaching itself from the “temporal”, and distinguishing itself as autonomous of the latter, is something disorganic, lacking a centre, an unstable diaspora of great cultural personalities, “without a Pope” and without a territory» (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, pp. 270-71).

Benedetto Croce’s Liberalism

«It remains to be seen whether crocean historicism is not, in its own way, an ably disguised form of preconceptualised history, like all reformist conceptions». The synthesis preserves what is still vital in the thesis, but what is this part, one cannot – without being arbitrary – assert, as instead Croce seems to do into the entire corpus of his work. «[...] there would always remain the assertion that what is “vital” and inviolable is the liberal form of the state, i.e. the form that guarantees every political force the right to move and campaign freely. But how can this empirical fact be confused with the concept of liberty, that is to say of history? How can the contending forces be asked to “contain” the struggle within certain limits (the limits of conservation of the liberal state) without becoming arbitrary and falling into the preconceived pattern? In the struggle “blows are not exchanged by agreement” and every antithesis must of necessity present itself as the radical antagonist of the thesis, up to the point of proposing its complete destruction and complete substitution. to conceive historical development as a game with its referee and its pre-established norms to be respected loyally is a form of preconceptualised history, in which ideology has not political “content” but the form and method of struggle as its foundation. this is an ideology that tends to enervate the antithesis, to break it up into a long series of moments, i.e. to reduce the dialectic to a process of reformist “revolution-restoration” evolution, in which only the second term has

any validity, since it is a question of continually patching up “from outside” an organism which internally is unable to keep itself healthy» (Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks, pp. 376-77).

The «Religion of Freedom»

«For Croce a religion is any conception of the world that puts itself forward as an ethic. But has this happened for “liberty”? Liberty was a religion for limited number of intellectuals but amongst the masses it took on the appearance of one of the elements constituting an ideological meld or amalgam, whose main constituent was the old-style catholic religion and of which another important – if not decisive – element, from the secular point of view, was one’s ‘fatherland’. Nor should it be said that ‘fatherland’ was synonymous with ‘liberty’; ‘fatherland’ certainly was a synonym, but of state, i.e. of authority and not of ‘liberty’, an element of ‘conservation’, a source of persecutions and of a new holy office» (Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 352)

«One might say, in Crocean terminology, that the greatest heresy which has grown in the womb of the “religion of freedom” has itself too like orthodox religion degenerated, and has become disseminated as “superstition” – in other words, has combined with *laissez-faire* liberalism and produced economism. However, it remains to be seen whether – in contrast to orthodox religion, which has by now quite shrivelled up – this heretical superstition has not in fact always maintained a ferment which will cause it to be reborn as a higher form of religion; in other words, if the dross of superstition is not in fact easily got rid of» (Selections from Prison Notebooks, p. 162).

Gentile and the Fascism

«Croce’s influence, despite appearances to the contrary, is by far superior to Gentile’s. At the same time Gentile’s authority is anything but admitted even among his own political supporters [...]. To my way of thinking, Gentile’s philosophy, actualism, is more national only in the sense that it is closely linked to a primitive stage of the State, to the economic-corporative phase, when all cats seem grey. [...] Croce’s influence is stealthier than that of Gentile but it goes deeper and is better rooted; Croce is really a sort secular pope, but his overall ethical stance is too much that of the intellectuals, too much that of a Renaissance type such that it cannot become popular, while the pope and his doctrine influence countless masses of people through their maxims for conduct that refer even to the most elementary things» (Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks, pp. 474-75).

The Individual and the Masses

«The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding the world in so far as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. [...] Critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political “hegemonies” and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one’s own conception of reality. Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force (that is to say, political consciousness) is first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one» (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 333).

The «Modern Prince»

«The modern prince, the myth-prince, cannot be a real person, a concrete individual. It can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which a collective will, which has already been recognised and has to some extent asserted itself in action, begins to take concrete form. History has already provided this organism, and it is the political party - the first cell in which there come together germs of a collective will tending to become universal and total». (Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 129)

«Leaders cannot be formed in the absence of theoretical, doctrinal activity by the parties, in the absence of systematic inquiry and study on the *raison d’être* and development of the class that is represented. Hence scarcity of statesmen and government leaders, impoverishment of parliamentary life, the aptitude for disuniting the parties by corrupting them and absorbing their few indispensable individuals. Hence impoverishment of cultural life and the petty narrow-mindedness of high culture: sterile erudition in place of political history, superstition instead of religion, the daily newspaper and the scandal sheet instead of books and great periodicals. Ordinary everyday fractiousness and personal conflicts instead of serious politics» (Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, p. 106).

The «Intellectual and Moral Reform»

«An important part of modern prince will have to be devoted to the question of intellectual and moral reform, that is to the question of religion or world-view[...]. The modern prince must be and cannot but be the proclaimer and organiser of an intellectual and moral reform, which also means creating the terrain for a subsequent development of the national-popular collective will towards the realisation of a superior, total form of modern civilisation[...]. Can there be cultural reform, and can the position of the depressed strata of society be improved culturally, without a previous economic reform and a change in their position in the social and economic fields? Intellectual and moral reform has to be linked with a programme of economic reform - indeed the programme of economic reform is precisely the concrete form in which every intellectual and moral reform presents itself». (Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 132-33)

Past and Present

«This paragraph should be connected to some earlier observations about so-called “question of the young” – a question that arises of the “crisis of authority” of the old generation of leaders and because those capable of leadership are automatically berred from carrying out their mission» (Prison Notebooks, p. 33).

«A generation may be judged by the judgment which it itself passes on the previous generation; a historical era, by the way in which it considers the period that preceded it. A generation that devalues its predecessor, that fails to see the latter’s greatness and necessary significance, can itself only be mean, without self-confidence, even if it indulges in gladiatorial posturing and yearns for greatness» (Notebook 8 §17).

«The past is reproached for not having done the job of the present. How much easier it would be if the parents had already done their children’s work for them! In the denigration of the past there is an implicit justification of the worthlessness of the present [...].Is a garret on the ground floor any less a garret than one on the tenth or thirtieth storey? A generation capable of building nothing but garrets will complain that its forebears have not already constructed ten- or thirty-storey buildings. You say you can construct cathedrals, but all you can build is garrets». (Notebook 8, §17)

«...Concession to Modernity»

«But how does this modernity present itself? The hair will be bobbed, I imagine, and the songs will be about “Valencia” and the mantillas of the women of Madrid, but I am sure there will survive old-fashioned types like aunt Alene and Corroncu and my little tales will still find a suitable environment. Anyhow I don’t know if you remember: I always used to say, when I was a child, that I would have liked to see aunt Alene on the bicycle, which proves that we had fun comparing the troglodytes with the relative modernity of that time; even though it was beyond our immediate environment, this never ceased appealing to us and arousing pleasant sensations in us» (Letters from the Prison, 130).

World Editions

Togliatti first inspected Gramsci’s writings in late 1938 or early 1939, in Spain. His interest in rapid publication of Gramsci’s work is attested by a letter of his to Sraffa immediately after Gramsci’s death, asking for information on “the instructions left by Antonio for the possible publication of his writings, and in any case for their study and use”.

Writing to Dimitrov on 25 April 1941, Togliatti reported officially that Gramsci’s original manuscripts had been transferred to the archives of the Comintern. But Togliatti himself apprised Dimitrov of the problem of the photostatic copies of the notebooks, which in his view and that of a special committee on the matter it was inadvisable to leave with the family, because they “contain[ed] material that [could] be used only after careful editing and preparation”. If, Togliatti added, these papers — and above all “some parts” of them — were to be utilized unedited, they could prove to be “not useful to the party”. This letter, the first reference to the political problem involved in the publication of the *Prison Notebooks* without adequate preparation, is the logical premise to the thematic edition of the *Notebooks* in 1948.

The earliest plan for the *Notebooks*’ publication dates to 1943–44 and was the work of Togliatti; and over the next twenty years it would be Togliatti himself, the PCI secretary, to follow the publishing history of Gramsci’s works, behind the scenes.

On 12 May 1945 Giulio Einaudi presented the PCI leadership with a “draft agreement” for the publication of the works of Antonio Gramsci. Togliatti replied that he was “in perfect agreement” with the proposal to publish the complete works. The first volume of *Prison Letters* came out in 1947. The thematic edition of the *Prison Notebooks*, edited by Felice Platone, appeared in six volumes from 1948 to 1951.

In the early 1960s the Gramsci Institute began preparing the critical and chronological edition of the *Notebooks*. On 22 October 1962 Franco Ferri wrote to Einaudi: the new edition “will explode once and for all the myth that cuts of a diplomatic nature were made in Einaudi’s collection of Gramsci’s works”. The critical edition of the *Notebooks*, edited by Valentino Gerratana, was published by Einaudi in April 1975. In January 1990 the President of the Italian Republic conferred his “high patronage” on the plan to collect all the works of Gramsci in a “national edition”. The project for the unabridged critical edition developed by the Gramsci Institute Foundation calls for grouping Gramsci’s writings themselves into three parts: those of the years before his imprisonment (1913–1926), the *Prison Notebooks* themselves, and the letters. A fourth part will present the apparatus criticus for the entire edition.

Gramsci in the World

Antonio Gramsci is one of the 250 most frequently cited writers in the world’s social, political and historical literature. The interest in his work is attested by numerous traditions, mainly of the *Letters* and the *Notebooks*, published throughout the world since the end of the Second World War. Through 1975, when the critical edition of the *Notebooks* appeared, thirty foreign publishers had signed contracts with the Gramsci Institute and published works of Gramsci’s, including such leading houses as Gallimard in Paris, Lawrence & Wishart in London, Fisher in Frankfurt, and Harper & Row in New York, a good number of publishers in Eastern Europe, two Danish publishers and one Swedish house, and several publishers in Spanish and Catalan. In 1953 the Editions Sociales in France brought out selections of the letters as *Lettres de la prison*, with a preface by Togliatti. In the

sixties the Institute conducted protracted talks with Gallimard for the publication of Gramsci's *Ecrits politiques*, published between 1974 and 1980, and *Cahiers de prison*, which came out from 1975 to 1996. The first English translations of Gramsci appeared in the fifties and sixties. In the early seventies selections from the letters, the political writings and the notebooks began to appear simultaneously in Britain and the United States. The earliest German translations were brought out in East Germany in the mid-fifties. Not until the nineties did Argument, in Hamburg, begin work on the translation of the unabridged *Notebooks*; the first seven volumes are now available. During the long period of silence under the Franco dictatorship in Spain, the first Spanish-language version of the *Notebooks* came out in Argentina between 1958 and 1962. Another significant selection of Gramsci's works was published in Mexico in 1970. In Russia, after the selections published in the fifties and sixties, work is under way on an unabridged edition of the *Notebooks*, and in the United States, Columbia University Press has now begun publication of one in English. Translations into Chinese and Japanese have recently been begun, and there are plans for translations of selections from the *Notebooks* into several Indian languages, Arabic, Catalan and Portuguese.

«One cannot reconstruct history through mathematical calculations and no innovatory force, moreover, achieves immediate realisation; this force, rather, is always rationality and irrationality, free will and necessity, i.e. it is 'life' with all the weaknesses and strenghts of life, with all its contradictions and its antitheses».

(Notebook 10, § 41, XIV, Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 375)