

GRAMSCI AND MARXISM

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WHEN Marx died in 1883 and Engels, less than twenty years before the Great War, in 1895, they left the outlines of a "Marxist" philosophy to be carried forward by disciples of their own like Kautsky, and by new men in new lands like Plekhanov and then Lenin in Russia, or Labriola in Italy. This Marxism held its ground against "revisionist" criticism in the international socialist movement before 1914, but more securely in appearance than in reality because most of its upholders were too much concerned to defend it as an established creed, too little to develop it and keep abreast of changing times. In 1914 war, in 1917 revolution, produced an immense cleavage in the socialist movement; from which time Marxism came to be identified with Lenin, Bolshevism and the U.S.S.R., while the Marxism of the non-Communist parties, with Kautsky at the outset for its exponent, faded away. It faded, or grew only very patchily, in the Communist camp too, under the weight of orthodoxy now reinforced by State power or, outside the U.S.S.R., by allegiance to Moscow leadership. Issues between the two factions were, or seemed, clear and straightforward, and were almost exclusively practical matters of strategy and tactics. Amid vituperative controversy over these, interest in refinements of Marxism as a theory of society and history at large fell very much into the background.

Meanwhile Marxism was spreading outside Europe, as earlier it had spread outside western Europe; but here still more one-sidedly as a guide to immediate political action, rather than a comprehensive philosophy. In India this narrowly practical—not to say philistine—bent has persisted all along, and can be seen to have done much practical harm. Never-ceasing demands of the struggle first against the British and then against native Indian reaction, in a land of crushing poverty, made anything like abstract thinking—impossible without a certain leisure and detachment—seem a superfluity, a mere luxury, as biochemical researches would seem to a patient with a broken leg waiting to be set. Even in China, Mao's grand extension of Marxism belonged to the realm of actual struggle, the management of class war and anti-foreign resistance in the conditions of a peasant society. It must not be forgotten too that, with all its universality of vision,

Marxist philosophy in conception and gestation was highly specific to western Europe, because many of the elements that entered into it—Judaism, western Christianity, Enlightenment, Hegel—had no counterparts anywhere else. The industrial revolution could reproduce itself elsewhere, but not this age-old intellectual and emotional travail, the *Via Sacra* or *Via Dolorosa* of the European mind.

Equally, Marxist theory originated in a specific social stratum, an intelligentsia, and has not yet travelled far outside it. It is too complex, it demands too wide a background of reference, to be reduced to popular comprehensibility without grave risk of dilution. Altogether, the very disparate growth of Communism as a political force in the world, and of Marxism as an intellectual force, has been striking, despite their never repudiated belief in the unity of thought and action. Latterly it has manifested itself in a new guise in the appearance of movements more revolutionary—redly or ostensibly—than Communism, but owing a general allegiance to Marxism. Theory and practice cannot be expected ever to be in perfect step with one another, but the gap separating them has too often been far too wide, and is still, on the whole, widening. Its reduction depends on more freedom of intercourse between Marxists in and out of the Communist countries, on new relationships between socialist intellectuals and workers, and on a new and more meaningful involvement of Western socialism with the undeveloped lands.

Antonio Gramsci, who died in 1937—he was born eight years after **Marx's** death—was, thanks to an intense absorption in and then forcible isolation from political life, a pioneer, the first outstanding one perhaps, of a new kind of **Marxism** or, more exactly, of fidelity in a new age to the spirit of early Marxism, enquiring and speculative as well as purposeful, truly catholic or world-embracing, after the great schism and the onset of its rigid disciplines. He can be looked back on as the first standard-bearer of what has come to be called "Western Marxism", but with broader and deeper implications than this title often suggests, and completely free from any tendency towards mere cloistered intellectualism. But ideas advance, like waves on an uneven beach, very irregularly. Gramsci's way forward for Marxism remained for long unknown. His prison writings on politics and history have only gradually been dawning on us since the end of the last War. How they might have influenced thinking if they had come earlier into circulation, one can only wonder. Possibly they would in any case have had to wait for a climate where they could be recognised as a contribution genuinely Marxist though often daringly novel, sometimes even eccentric. Now, at any rate, they are a treasure-trove for us to delve into, or a rediscovered missing link, a lost generation, in the evolution of Marxism. Gramsci is a voice from the past, from beyond

the tomb, and a summons to the future; he points us along one path towards a restored unity, or rather community, of socialist thinking, for Europe and the world.

When Gramsci was dying in 1937 he could not know whether anything would survive of his ten years' prison toil; a world of ideas hung by a thread, like Catullus's poems surviving for centuries in a single copy in a monastic vault. And what his sister-in-law Tatiana smuggled out of the clinic in thirty-three notebooks was a chaos of notes, sketches, jottings, resembling nothing so much as the learned Professor Teufelsdröckh's six huge bags of papers in *Sartor Resartus*. The editors of a new, large and splendid English anthology¹ are to be warmly congratulated on reaching successfully the end of what must have been a dauntingly difficult task. It is no fault of theirs if the reader must often find it hard to get at Gramsci's meaning. Apart from circumlocutions meant to baffle the prison censor (who however must have been a very gullible person), Gramsci employs special terms of his own, and does not always seem to give them the same significance. His thoughts often slide to and fro, from point to point: there is always a link, but it may be a subterranean one. He is a political leader thinking of strategy, and a student of the human record, at once; analysing the structure of his Italy he is seeking materials 'for building a "train" to move forward through history as fast as possible' (p. 98). Much in the Notebooks, the editors remark, has 'an organic continuity' with the situation he was wrestling with before his arrest in 1926,² and their long and very valuable introduction mainly covers in detail the brief period of his political activity.

Corsica astonished the world by producing Napoleon, and Sardinia with no Rousseau to prophesy produced Gramsci, whose thoughts were to move about Europe as Napoleon's armies did. James Connolly, banished from political activity by a firing-squad when Gramsci was just entering it, was born in the Cowgate of Edinburgh, another example of how enormous a leap an individual mind can make when caught up by a progressive historical movement. For Gramsci, removal to university life at Turin, the country's biggest manufacturing centre, was something like a Highlander of old days coming to Edinburgh. With his rustic background and his European culture he stood at a remarkable point of confluence of diverse epochs and social climates. Italy lay between Europe's eastern and western poles and partook of the character of both. It was itself a Europe in miniature, and every epoch that Europe has lived through was still alive on its soil, not merely buried beneath the pavements of its ancient cities. Gramsci's faculty for perceiving all kinds of social phenomena—religious, for example—as breathing realities was a reflex of this. Scottish sociology in the late 18th century benefited by standing at an analogous cross-

road, between Highland and Lowland, feudal and capitalist, Europe and the world.

Gramsci's curiosity about his own country and its complex fabric was insatiable, and his mind often turned to obscurities of its recent history, especially of the 19th-century Risorgimento and the kind of national unification and independence it led to. The Risorgimento left all Italy, not simply the few districts still in Austrian hands, an *irredenta*, a land unredeemed from misery and ignorance, so unready for national existence that the advent of fascism might seem no more than a logical conclusion. Gramsci found the fatal flaw in the cleavage between north and south, and he saw political life in his own day as still vitiated by this dichotomy of town and country, factory and plough, workman and peasant. Sardinia and Turin between them put him in a better position than almost any socialist of this century to combine an understanding of both realms, and his grand political formula was a mobilisation of the peasantry under the leadership of the working class. He once contrasted Lenin, 'profoundly national and profoundly European' at the same time, with the cosmopolitan, rootless Trotsky (pp. 236-7), and he himself had a similar double identity. Rooted very deeply in Italy and its history, he was a European thinker as well.

In his political life too Gramsci stood at a turning-point. He was one of the protagonists of a brief, possibly unique, interval of opportunity for socialist revolution in Europe; then, in prison, he was one of the pathfinders of the long endeavour to advance by other routes to which Europe condemned itself by its failure to seize opportunity. In the Italy of his campaigning years after the Great War, as in other countries, the Left was so full of the conviction of revolution round the corner that it quite failed to discover what was really preparing, counter-revolution. While communists and socialists and trade unionists wrangled, in October 1922 Fascism came to power and began stage by stage to erect its dictatorship. A streak of the hard-headed countryman in Gramsci, understanding that the correctest ideas had no weight by themselves, helped him to recognise later, if not fully at the time, that the theses his party rested on were infected by 'Byzantinism', 'scholasticism', divorce from reality (pp. 200-1). A sober realism was the keynote of the Notebooks, expressed in sober utilitarian language that contrasts startlingly with the many-coloured glow of his prison letters. While in Russia success hardened Bolshevik thinking into dogma, failure taught Gramsci to question, doubt, analyse over and over again. Some academy should undertake as a tribute to him the 'critical inventory' and bibliography which he envisaged of all problems that have come under debate in connection with Marxism (p. 414). Without 'scrupulous accuracy, scientific honesty', he wrote, it

would be impossible to work out the general character of Marx's ideas, from the master's scattered hints (p. 382). Here was a standard of intellectual probity which from the standpoint of Stalinism, or of Maoism at its cruder levels—the doctrine that "truth" is what serves the working class, in other words the party leadership—would have to be called academic.

Yet with him reasoning was never a bloodless, pedantic pursuit. While he warned himself of the need for 'critical equilibrium'—all scholars know, he remarks, how a theory studied with ardour takes possession of the mind (p. 383)—he recurred more than once to Giordano Bruno and the "heroic fury" of thought that brought him to the stake. In such ardour he recognised the afflatus of a progressive historical movement. Political thinking cannot be purely objective or detached, because human will enters as a component of prediction—which 'only means seeing the present and the past clearly as movement'. 'Only the man who wills something strongly can identify the elements which are necessary to the realisation of his will'; and 'strong passions are necessary to sharpen the intellect and help make intuition more penetrating' (pp. 170-1). All this is equally relevant to Marxist exploration of history or society or art, and much might be learned from it about how Marx or Lenin thought, or indeed about the psychology of thinking altogether.

How Gramsci's own mind worked we can often catch glimpses of, as we grope our way about the Notebooks amid a confusion of half-cut masonry and columns never reared; how his ideas took shape, what aims he was setting before himself. In a laborious dissection of some trivialities of a forgotten scribbler named Azzalini he pauses to remark—as if aside, to us—that the man is paltry, but 'I wanted to take all these notes, in order to try to disentangle his plot, and see if I could arrive at clear concepts for my own sake' (p. 251). Many of his sequences of thought had similar casual starting-points, like Diabelli variations; largely because his access to books was limited, but as he says in several of his letters he had a natural gift for extracting nourishment from any kind of mental pabulum or experience. Minds like his, or Marx's, can rove into the remotest-seeming realms without losing the guiding thread of purpose that distinguishes them from the pedant or dilettante.

He had found his own way to Marxism from out of a medley of contending theories, and could still take Sorel seriously enough to find in him 'flashes of profound intuition' (p. 395). This learning from scratch may have been necessary to form him into a creative Marxist: no intellectual tradition can easily be developed from within, because the adherent born and brought up to it, as Marxists have been in the Soviet Union, cannot have the same sense of its deficiencies or incom-

pletenesses. In prison Gramsci was doubly cut off, not only from other minds but from nearly all Marxist literature: condemned to think instead of to think and act, he was also forced to think for himself. Doubtless with more books at hand he would have been a better ballasted Marxist, not perhaps so original a one. His basis was an adequate though far from exhaustive knowledge of the Marxist classics, fertilised by a brief but intense season of political experience. This gives him a unique place among the major thinkers of the movement, as a pioneer, a scout, unencumbered with impedimenta, rather than a regular soldier. It has naturally exposed him to orthodox criticism from one side as well as anti-Marxist criticism from the other. Very often in the Notebooks he is raising questions, sketching projects of study, suggesting very tentative answers if any. If we have his ideas only in fragmentary form, the same is true (except for economic theory) of those of Marx, who as Gramsci stressed left no rounded philosophy but only a heap of solutions or suggestions strewn here and there over his numerous works (p. 382), mostly topical or else unfinished. It may in fact belong to the nature of Marxism, as not a system but a search, to function best in this apparently haphazard fashion, and never to arrive at codification, whatever Athanasiuses or Nicaean Councils may come and go. Gramsci risks a guess that the most significant views of any original mind should be looked for not in its direct pronouncements, but rather in its comments on extraneous issues (p. 403); a helpful idea for study of writers such as Balzac in whom professed opinion and inner feeling may be far apart, but also very possibly for approaching a mind like Marx's, too overflowing with discoveries to be able to arrange them symmetrically.

Gramsci had an awareness of the immense complexity of things, that would not come so readily to Marxists with the simpler traditional polities of Russia or China for background. One must look for answers 'within the contradictory conditions of modern society', he writes, full of anomalies and involutions (p. 279). Marxism represented to him 'the beginnings of a new civilisation' (p. 399), it opened up 'a completely new road' (p. 464), but in proportion to the magnitude of its tasks it seemed to him, as currently put forward hitherto, very unsophisticated. It had been chiefly engaged in combating religious superstitions or other crude errors, and this kept it within the confines of a banal materialism.³ He felt, as one must still feel today, that it was insufficiently developed for anyone to be able to sum it up in a popular treatise, like Bukharin's *Historical Materialism*: any such attempt must produce an illusory appearance of unity and finality.⁴ He himself might have written brilliantly the 'new *Anti-Dühring*' that once crossed his mind (p. 371), against the opponents of Marxism but also against its vulgarisers.

At times Gramsci's words point to an inclination to regard Marxism as, potentially if not actually, a self-sufficient whole. He defines Marxist orthodoxy, or emancipation from 'the old world' of ideas, as 'the fundamental concept that the philosophy of praxis (*sc. Marxism*) is "sufficient unto itself", that it contains in itself all the fundamental elements needed to construct a total and integral conception of the world . . . ' (p. 462). This sounds like a claim to monopoly of truth; it may be better understood as the more reasonable claim that Marxism, because it goes down to the deepest levels of the historical movement, has a unique capacity to amalgamate or co-ordinate what is valid in all other modes of thought; its self-sufficiency consists in this faculty of organic absorption—a very different thing from patchwork borrowing. It can mature this faculty only by wrestling with other philosophies, and learning from them. Gramsci argues strikingly that the Hegelian element in Marxism itself is not fully subsumed or resolved into it, but retains a vitality of its own, so that their relationship is 'a historical process still in motion in which the necessity for a philosophical cultural synthesis is being renewed' (p. 402). We might add the same claim on behalf of any other stream that has entered into socialism, including Christianity, which is still capable both of imparting a fresh stimulus to it and of itself putting forth new shoots.

Similarly in his frequent scrutinies of Croce he was not simply concerned to brush away metaphysical cobwebs: there was something to be learned from Croce as well, 'as a thinker whose work could be profited from in the struggle to renew Marxist thought . . . ' (p. xxiii). Marxism in other words cannot generate all its intellectual capital out of its own resources. One failing for which Gramsci took Bukharin to task was his dismissal of all earlier philosophies as mere nonsense (p. 470). The best thinker is one who discerns that there may be something in his opponent's case which it behoves him to learn and incorporate in his own—and sometimes one's adversary is the whole of past thought'; one thus escapes from 'the prison of ideologies in the bad sense of the word—that of blind ideological fanaticism' (p. 344). Marxist intolerance has always been fed by lurking self-doubt, morbid fear of eclecticism or heterodoxy, an anxiety like that of Ulysses when he tied himself to the mast for fear of being beguiled by the Sirens as his ship passed their rocks. Conversely, Gramsci notes, ruling-class thought has had to take over some features of Marxism, in a form obvious and avowed, as with Croce, or more covertly; Marxists ought not to shut their eyes to the fact that their ideas have sometimes had most effect by influencing or mingling with other streams of thought.⁹ It might indeed be asked whether ideas have ever existed in a state of chemical purity, and in complex modern societies they are less likely than ever to do so; ideas of all kinds may always have been

more potent when compounded, deliberately or not, with others.

Gramsci insists, none the less, that Marxism must learn to transcend both idealism, the fetishism of ideas, and crude materialism, the denial of ideas. He found these opposite systems of error embodied in two writers, Croce and Bukharin, who were important to him for partly accidental reasons. No one can be perfectly equidistant from the two poles, and it is not surprising that Gramsci has often seemed to his readers a man brought up in the watery realm of ideas and finding his way from it to the *terra firma* of economics, rather than the other way about. Prison made it in some degree harder to find this way. It would be absurd to deny that solitude and ill-health must have had some disturbing effects on his judgment, and it was only by an at times over-emphatic belief in the power of thought and of thinkers that he could compensate for his own practical impotence, and convince himself that what he could still do was worth doing, and life therefore worth living. He was ready to take some philosophical terms from non-Marxist writers like Bergson or Croce, evidently feeling that the standard Hegelian-Marxian terminology, or range of octaves, was not adequate for all purposes.⁶ It was characteristic of him to say that in developing historical materialism one should pay more attention to the first term than the second, 'which is of metaphysical origin' (p. 465). For Marxism it can only be beneficial to have disciples starting from different points of the intellectual globe and trying to meet at an equator.

Bukharin's book happened to be one of the few Marxist writings available to Gramsci in prison. He commented on it with uniform severity; it may be noted that while he admired Labriola, the introducer of Marxism into Italy, he censured Plekhanov, whom Lenin had extolled, for the same vice of 'vulgar materialism' as he objected to in Bukharin, and found in him positivist leanings and little historical insight (pp. 386-7). Bukharin he accused of stultifying Marxism through 'the baroque conviction that the more one goes back to "material" objects the more orthodox one must be' (p. 461). This 'attempt to reduce everything to a single ultimate or final cause' belonged to 'old-fashioned metaphysics', and was really an echo of the theologians' search for God (p. 437). To translate all happenings from one level to another, more elementary one, until nothing is left but the swirl of electronic patterns, would indeed be crass reductionism. But at what point, then, are we to stop, and in what way can we hold on to the "historical monism" which Plekhanov was trying to build, and without which history remains an incomprehensible play of independent variables? It seems only possible to say that within the sphere of human history the forces at work are multiple, and because of man's heavy pre-human inheritance are not all reducible to a

single source; but they are of unequal weight, and among them *one*—the collective activity of material production—is weighty enough to mould or moderate all the rest.

Gramsci did not set out to investigate the "mode of production" and its constituent parts, but he was haunted by the problem of base (or "structure") and superstructure and their association, intimate but elastic and subtle like that of body and mind. As usual we find in his pages no complete statement, but a cluster of approaches from various angles. Only by exploring their reciprocal workings can we gauge the pressures active in any epoch, he writes (p. 177); and again, material forces and men's thoughts belong to each other as inseparably as content and form (p. 377). 'The complex contradictory and discordant *ensemble* of the superstructure is the reflection of the *ensemble* of the social relations of production' (p. 366). Here is a salutary reminder that the ideas of an age—our *own*, for instance—reflect its manifold discords, not in any straightforward fashion the interests or outlook of a dominant class. Looking not at any single ideology, but at the whole jarring *mêlée* of ideas, we find 'manifestations of the intimate contradictions by which society is lacerated' (p. 404). And, it may be added, each philosophy by itself (not excluding Marxism) must be built on discords, many or fewer, because each class and social group (and sex), not only the social whole they belong to, suffers from disharmonies of its own, so that the individual cannot escape from its inner divisions by merging himself with any one of them. Because of this also every class, and increasingly in the measure of its energy and ambition, has a diversity of needs for beliefs or fantasies, and borrows these from a diversity of sources. Feudal Europe's ruling class was truly "Christian" as well as rootedly militaristic.

There is besides all this the common phenomenon of declining creeds being used so to speak as rubble to fill the interior of castle walls between a facing of new masonry. Gramsci's test of how far ideas are authentic expressions of a society is their ability to 'react back on that society and produce certain effects . . .' (p. 346). It may be objected that trivialities often seem to exert more influence than profounder thinking, for the time being at least. Nietzsche's worse ideas (more pedestrian as well as more unwholesome) made a greater stir than his more inspired ones. In such cases the mediocre idea, by whomever expressed, is an emanation of collective moods, themselves a fermentation of what men are already habitually doing, and serves to lend this a sanction. Nietzsche was welcomed as spreading a halo over an arms-race already being carried on by the militarists, Darwin as appearing to ratify the elimination of primitive peoples by colonialism.

Cases like these may be examples of what Gramsci on one occasion

calls, very remarkably, catharsis—meaning coming-to-consciousness, 'elaboration of the structure into superstructure in the minds of men' (p. 366). Here is a term too out of the way and striking to have been chosen (like some curious phrases of Gramsci) to baffle the prison censor. He may well have seen something akin to "purgation" or release in such inventions of ideas able to set at rest men's misgivings and self-reproaches about their own behaviour. But it is tempting to read a deeper significance into the word, and take it as also, or more properly, denoting an eruption into social consciousness of some deeply buried conflict—like the unearthing of a neurosis by Freudian analysis, but with the difference that men collectively may only be willing to face their fundamental maladies when a solution to these seems to have been found. Mankind made a profound discovery about itself and its condition when Marx pointed to the new working class as the ender of all class divisions—divisions it had for ages rubbed all kinds of religious unguents into its eyes in order not to have to see. In time of revolution, as in the mimic form of tragic drama, human self-discovery is most intense and swift; hence the appropriateness of Hazlitt's epithet for the French Revolution, of apocalyptic.

Gramsci was concerned to set Marxist theory apart from bourgeois sociology, a would-be science founded on 'vulgar evolutionism' and oblivious, in particular, of the change of quantity into quality.⁷ But the old question remains of whether Marxism is to be considered as itself a science or "philosophy", as something, that is, over and above its interpretation of history—as Althusser, prominently, has argued that it can and must be. Gramsci wanted it to be completely historical in spirit, but at times, if not always, he too seems to have wanted it to be something more than history. He could call it 'the science of dialectics and cognition', distinct from, though arising out of exploration of history.⁸ Bukharin failed in his view to counter the argument that Marxism 'can live only in concrete works of history', because he failed to derive from these a true historical methodology, 'the only concrete philosophy' (p.436). In another passage he called Marxism 'a doctrine of consciousness and the inner substance of society', not reducible to a system of logic for organising historical studies. Yet he went on to speak of history and philosophy as identical.⁹ To overcome this seeming discrepancy we may be obliged to take history not as the formal sequences of events, "movements", "waves", investigated in university departments, but as the sum total of human experience on every plane. In the meantime any adequate formulation of Marxism as a general "philosophy" seems still more remote than as a guide to history.

Most Marxist thinkers who have been also makers of history have written about history only with reference to events close to their own

time, leaving it to men like Kautsky, more scholar than man of action, to range over the ages. Marx and Engels wrote much on contemporary or recent events, and Engels occasionally went further back; Marx did so oftener, though only in unfinished speculations. Lenin when not busy with practical tasks turned more willingly to economics or philosophy than to history, and Trotsky's history of the Revolution was a polemic, though also far more. Gramsci sketched a good many programmes of historical study; he could carry none of them out. No one has laid more stress on history as the accompaniment or vehicle of all thinking about human affairs. Marxism was for him 'absolute "historicism" . . . an absolute humanism of history' (p.465). His word *humanism* is significant: he gave much more thought to man himself than Marxists content with facile phrases about "the broad masses"—always with a hint of Stalinist indifference to the individual human being—have often done. Between political history, the statistical study of mass behaviour, and social psychology, the study of how and why men behave as they do, he had exceptional endowments for tracing the links. Man is 'essentially "political"' because he realises his nature by influencing others (p. 360)—words akin to those of Shakespeare's Ulysses to Achilles. Individuality is important, but the individual is not the enclosed being portrayed by religion: he is 'a series of active relationships'.¹⁰ Human nature is not immutable, as again religion would have it, but is the sum of 'historically determined social relations', and alters with them (p.133). At this point Gramsci sees a question facing him. If man is 'the *ensemble* of social relations', how can a historian compare the men of one age with those of another (p.359)? To this the answer must surely be that social relations have nowhere changed out of recognition: mankind has performed numberless variations on a few primary themes, within a very small number of radically distinct modes of production. Between officer and soldier, mistress and maid, there must be some common attitudes whether in Carthage or in Prussia. If moreover we take account of what we have inherited from prehistoric and pre-human ages, we must expect to find more resistance to change, less ductility of conduct, than an optimistic earlier Marxism supposed.

Gramsci may have been an early "Western Marxist", but it would be wrong to bowdlerise him into a liberal. His belief in discipline was firm, and though he hoped to see this evolving into self-discipline, it might have to be imposed in the first place by external authority. This applied to education, and to industrialisation; and in the political context, thinking no doubt of the Soviet Union but also of Italy, he declares that for classes with no long 'cultural and moral development' of their own 'a period of statolatry is necessary and indeed opportune' (p.268). In other words dictatorship of the proletariat in a

backward country must mean respect for the State as a thing in itself, not only as an instrument, and the date for its withering away must be a distant one. But it was not the socialist State alone that he had in mind when he queried Lassalle's view of the State as a mere "night-watchman" or policeman, and credited it with a moral character (pp. 262-4). As a Sardinian, in his youthful days a separatist or home-ruler, Gramsci came to his own Italian State a stranger, with enquiring eyes; it is the more noteworthy that his estimate of the State in general came to be so high.

Authority ought, on the other hand, to be as little bureaucratic or "commandist" as possible. Occasionally he pondered on parliamentarism, about which he felt some puzzlement. Is a lively parliament 'a part of the State structure', or, if not, what is its real function (p. 253)? Its critics condemn it as a clog. But 'even allowing (as it must be allowed) that parliamentarism has become inefficient and even harmful', abandonment of it might lead backward, to something worse (p. 254); to the 'bureaucratic centralism' for instance that he noted in 19th-century Piedmont, growing from 'lack of initiative and responsibility at the bottom', from 'political immaturity' (p. 189). Gramsci thought often about bureaucratism, and about the recruitment of bureaucracies from particular social strata. This was a subject of obvious interest for an Italian- or Spaniard—because competition for State posts has been so heated in their retarded economies, by contrast with a country like England where officialdom was a late and slow growth. He thought of the middle and lower rural bourgeoisie as the groups most addicted to government service (p. 212), a classification more pertinent to southern Europe than to most of the continent. He noted that the transformation of politics since 1848 has included a proliferation of bureaucracies, unofficial ones of parties or trade unions as well as those of the State (p. 221). To these might be added the higher personnel of big corporations, and altogether they have not been given the place they deserve in political history. Very likely in each region the "private" hierarchies have formed their habits and mentality a good deal on the model of the regular civil service, and this has helped to promote a common climate, always more conservative than not.

Gramsci viewed the State as a highly complex phenomenon, and raised points about it which Marxists have too seldom considered; for example 'the organic relations between the domestic and foreign policies of a State', and the question of which determines the other in certain contexts (p. 264). As an illustration one might ask whether the absolute monarchies were chronically at war because of their intrinsic nature, or whether on the contrary absolutism arose because countries had serious grounds for being chronically at war. Gramsci warns us,

above all, against conceiving the historic State too mechanically in terms of class power. Remarking that the concept of the State has been impoverished by the growth of sociology and the delusion that society can be studied by the methods of the natural sciences, he goes on: 'the State is the complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules . . .' (p. 244). A ruling class holds sway by virtue of intelligence and character as well as by force (p. 57). A corollary must be that it is in jeopardy when it loses its moral ascendancy, as the French aristocracy lost it long before 1789 to the bourgeoisie.

It matters very much to a ruling class, Gramsci writes in another pregnant adage, that the State, which the public looks up to as an independent entity, 'should reflect back its prestige upon the class upon which it is based'. From this point of view it may be better for this class not to stand forward obtrusively, but to leave the sceptre in other hands: that of a monarchy, as in bourgeois Germany, or an aristocracy as in England (pp. 269-70). We may suppose that the German chimney-barons, with Bismarck for whipper-in, accepted this arrangement more willingly because they knew how smoothly it was working in England. When the French bourgeoisie ventured, or after 1870, was virtually compelled, to wield power directly, and this without the blessing of religion, it had to assert itself from time to time by violence, as in 1848 and 1871 and periodically in its colonies. It must be set in the other scale that a ruling class which hides behind the façade of another is bound to contract weaknesses, short-sightedness; these were very marked in the German bourgeoisie, which left far more real authority to the Hohenzollerns and Junkers than was entrusted to Tory landlords in Britain. In more recent times, with upper classes everywhere converging, the British plutocracy has preserved something of the aristocratic spirit, with the drawback of some inefficiency in industrial management. In countries where the ruling class lacks this spirit and is less self-reliant, it has often been nervously in haste to hand over the business of government to generals or dictators.

In the U.S.A. the State presented exceptional problems, Gramsci pointed out, because there the industrialists had succeeded in 'making the whole life of the nation revolve round production', and exercised their sway through the factory itself, with small need of 'professional political and ideological intermediaries' (p. 272). Since then salesmanship has been taking precedence over manufacturing, and the State too has had to "sell itself" to the public, vastly expanding its apparatus in order to keep the country in good humour even more than for purposes of coercion. Another case that Gramsci saw as

exceptional was old Russia. 'In Russia the State was everything, civil society primordial and gelatinous' (p. 238). This seems to overlook the far from indefinite relations between the landowners and the peasantry which they pushed down into serfdom; it was only on this foundation that the tsarist State could take its rise. One may dissent too from his aphorism, stimulating though—like so many of Gramsci's—it is, that a new class comes to power with some rough sense of a harmony of interests between itself and the masses, and conceives of its State as 'a continuous process' of eliminating disagreements (p. 182). He has in mind French history from 1789 to 1871; his words may seem more appropriate to England, where the modern bourgeoisie took over power by slow degrees and where consequently haggling and bargaining have been taken to be the essence of politics, than to France where revolutions were likelier to foster illusions of finality, of problems settled once and for all by the perfect Constitutions which first began to be drawn up in 1789.

Any class is an entity distinct from the sum of its members, evolving more freely than most of these, tied as they are in many ways to their prehistoric past, but less freely than the more gifted or mobile individuals among them. **O**f social classes, and their history and special features, in his own Italy most of all, Gramsci was a penetrating observer. It was one of his objections to vulgar historical materialism—the adulterated form in which as he said Marxism had chiefly circulated—that it takes account only of sordid self-regarding motives, 'in an immediate and "dirty-Jewish" sense', forgetting the wider motivation of class (pp.162-3). This fits into a thesis he advanced in the same passage, that economic forces are decisive only in an ultimate sense, and that men experience social conflict far more as a struggle of ideas or beliefs than directly as competition for shillings and pence. We may accept this as true for most of history, while wondering whether it still holds good of the advanced societies which in Gramsci's day were only entering on maturity. In Britain nowadays, or America—clearly not in Ireland—class struggle would seem to have resolved itself into a realistic, but well circumscribed, competition over "shares in the national cake", as we have been taught to think of it, a squabbling over shillings or dollars quite free from illusion or ideal. But through the long ages of triangular conflict among lords, townsmen, peasants, the antagonists were too far apart, too little combined by any collective rationality of production, to feel their disagreements in so unromantic a style, or reduce them to vulgar fractions. They fought instead over the succession to the early Caliphate, or the procession of the Holy Ghost. They could compete for material stakes only by combining into classes, but these classes had their own life and thoughts, along with much miscomprehension of themselves with

respect to other classes, and all this might overlay and obscure their essential nature. In nations—whose consciousness, varying from class to class, is an idealised (or inebriated) version of class-consciousness—we come on the same phenomenon, still further magnified: nations have continually fought wars whose ultimate purpose was gain, but they have seldom if ever done so confessedly or consciously. If they did, the secret that only a small minority of citizens are going to gain would soon come to light.

Gramsci places class and nation side by side when he speaks, very suggestively, of an 'educational relationship' between all hegemonic classes or nations and the rest (p.350). An obvious example would be France's intellectual leadership of 18th-century Europe. He puts valuable stress too on the part played by international influences, those of ideology among them, in the moulding of class-consciousness (p.182). This begins, he reminds us, at the social apex. Those lower down lack a clear sense of their collective identity, and 'can only achieve self-awareness via a series of negations', by contrasting themselves with the classes above them (p.273). It is in the minds of intellectuals that the idea of 'the People' takes shape, not in its own, and in the tug-of-war of classes the higher ones, if not too decadent, have the advantage of longer traditions and memories. As Gramsci notes, unmistakably with recent Italian events in view, in times of crisis and dislocation the ruling class adapts itself more promptly, while the masses are prone to falling under the spell of 'violent solutions' offered by ' "men of destiny" ' (p.210). We may indeed take failure by a ruling class to adjust itself to a novel quandary as proof of its obsolescence; such as that of the French nobility which in the two years before the Revolution so completely misconceived the situation facing it, and then for the most part collapsed so nervelessly, taking its seat unresistingly in the tumbrils or at best running away to beg for foreign help.

Gramsci stands as a classical exponent and philosopher of the party, that grand invention of modern Europe, its secular version of the old sect. Looked back on from a later day than ours the party, or its established forms at least, may seem to have been in his day on the verge of leaving its grand epoch behind. He saw from the inside a great deal of one party, and of others, including the Bolshevik during his year in Moscow, from not far away; and his bump of psychology as well as his political acumen helped to make him a discriminating, often a disconcerting, commentator. If his compass does not always seem to point unwaveringly to its true north, it is the fascination of the Notebooks that in them we wander over the whole range of the socialist movement of that volcanic time, listening to its doubts and mistakes as well as its hopes and inspirations.

That 'every party is only the nomenclature for a class' (p.152) must

seem too stringent a dictum, though we can more easily agree that at critical moments scattered political groupings will rally in a single class organization (p.157). It leaves parties in America as anomalous as the State. It leaves us to wonder also how many authentic parties there can be in any political bullring, since Gramsci regards all those of "radical" cut as having no single class foundation, but as being manned by the same miscellaneous petty-bourgeois elements that were turning in his day to fascism (p.156); while he considers the big bourgeoisie as usually employing no party of its own, but making use of others according to convenience (p.155). There is much force in this, and the more mature the ruling class, as in Britain or America, the more likely it is to be the case. Still more significant is Gramsci's conception of the party as standing in a sense above the class, as the class stands above the bulk of its members. 'Parties are not simply a mechanical and passive expression of these classes, but react energetically upon them . . . ' (p.227).

Leadership is to Gramsci a matter of the highest priority, and what he says about it has a bearing on past history as well as actual politics. He thinks of it constantly as depending on a correct interplay between leaders and rank and file, just as the party's health depends on an interplay between it and the class it rests on. Left to themselves leaders suffer a besetting temptation to rely on authoritarian methods. 'Parties may be said to have the task of forming capable leaders', through whom in turn classes can be 'transformed from turbulent chaos into an organically prepared political army' (p.191). 'The active politician is a creator, an initiator; but he neither creates from nothing nor does he move in the turbid void of his own desires and dreams' (p.172). Gramsci speaks more than once of 'the science and art of politics', though here as elsewhere we find him admonishing himself not to take his own phrases too literally: 'only by metaphor does one speak of the art of politics'. What does a leader's 'intuition' consist in? Not in 'knowledge of men', but in 'swiftness in connecting seemingly disparate facts, and in conceiving the means adequate to particular ends . . . ' (p.252). It would be interesting to study the affinities between practical reason, so understood, and abstract thought: the scholar or philosopher too is in quest of unnoticed connections, as the poet combines unlike things by imagery. 'Correct political leadership is necessary even with an army of professional mercenaries' In a prolonged struggle it requires great skill to hold the people together by playing on its 'very deepest aspirations and feelings' (p.88). It must surely be confessed that Hitler and Goebbels as well as Lenin and Stalin displayed this skill.

How high an estimate Gramsci sets on the qualities of leadership may be gathered from his epigram that the loss of an army is more easily

repaired than that of its generals (p.153). In prison he must have been preyed on by the thought that the party he helped to found and lead had, after all, disastrously failed. After every failure, he writes at one point, the responsibility of leaders must be rigorously scrutinised. Yet his conviction of their indispensability is unshaken, and if the other side of his thinking is left out he can sound quite an *élitist*. He defends democracy against the criticism that it reduces everything to mere counting of heads, by the unexpected argument that votes simply measure the persuasiveness of 'the opinions of a few individuals, the active minorities, the *éлитes*, the *avant-gardes*, etc.' (p.192). Here again it is likely to strike the reader that this could as well be said of a fascist as of a progressive movement. Gramsci tries to forestall such a comment by seeing the essence of a fascist movement not in any *klite* but in masses of people manipulated by hidden interests and 'kept happy by means of moralising sermons, emotional stimuli, and messianic myths of an awaited golden age' (p.150). It must surely be admitted that the leading cadres of the Nazi party (if not of Mussolini's) were an "*klite*" of a kind, and of remarkable if evil calibre: not all the "*chosen*" of history are chosen for good purposes. Gramsci is ready to acknowledge that progressive leadership may fall into some of the ways of its loathly opposite. One may be led astray by 'one's own baser and more immediate desires and passions . . . the demagogue is the first victim of his own demagogy' (p.179).

Gramsci and his generation were confronted more urgently than the authors of the Communist Manifesto with the question of how the working class was to succeed to the position of ruling class, and use it to remake society. Classes evolved only hesitantly, he saw, towards 'integral autonomy'—one of his *abracadabra* terms, signifying class consciousness and ripeness for intervention in politics. Ruling groups realise their unity through the State and its bonds with society, whereas subordinate groups 'cannot unite until they are able to become a "State" . . . ' (p.52). If so, how can any of them acquire sufficient unity and resolve to take over the State? Of a modern bourgeoisie, at the level it was attaining in 18th-century France, we may say that it is close enough to the levers of power to see them within its reach, and how they can be utilised for its benefit: it itches to supplant its predecessor. To a labouring class, rural or urban, such an aspiration will not come so naturally; its instincts are defensive. A peasantry thinks of liberation from feudal burdens, a proletariat at first of liberation from the factory, then of bettering its conditions inside the factory. It would never be likely to imagine a dictatorship of the proletariat by itself, and Marxism in planning this road may have been confusing its own "*subjective*" requirements with the objective power of the working class to build it.

Or if a working class really may be imbued with revolutionary instinct, contempt for niggling reform, it is perhaps only briefly, in an early phase of industrialism, when the windows have not yet all been shuttered and sunlight exchanged for electric lamps; and only in countries like Italy or Russia with still fresh legends of resistance to oppression. Gramsci in Turin was a fledgling intellectual and leader, throwing in his lot with a fledgling proletariat, to which the Fiat works served for *training-school* as the Putilov factory did to the workers of St. Petersburg. These men and women of Turin, as we see them through Gramsci's ardent young eyes, had the same romantic daring as those of St. Petersburg, as we see them through Isaac Deutscher's. In August 1917 during the War they attempted an insurrection, after the War they rejected the directors' proposal to turn the Fiat enterprise into a co-operative. Such a breed may not find it strange to think of its own strength, as young Marx thought of it, as the charmed sword, the Siegfried-weapon destined to destroy all monsters. Some touch of Quixotic idealism, thirst for a new earth and a new heaven, may be needed to kindle the revolutionary mood which no economic grievances by themselves can produce. In terms of money the Turin workers were so well off by *contrast* with the ordinary poverty of Italy that peasant conscripts could regard them as an upper class, and cheerfully obey orders to fire on them.¹¹

Gramsci was all the same well aware of the gap still to be crossed between the mass of the workers recognizing themselves as a class with common interests to defend, and their aspiring to take power and build socialism. He attached great value to the experience of industrial life in itself, to the rational factory organization promoting a sense of *participation* in collective effort: the Turin 'factory movement' he defines as an effort to bring this mutual reliance into consciousness (p.202). It would follow that capitalism can hardly help incubating the socialist mentality that is to bring it to an end. Experience unhappily shows that workers in a factory may soon come to view their manager or boss as taking part in the collective effort. A shining example of this for generations was the Krupp enterprise, and the Nazi doctrine of the boss as "leader" of his employees was only a theatrical rendering of it. In 1972 the most militant of Clydeside workers rejoice, not at their shipyards being socialised, but at American capitalists being bribed by the British tax-payer to come and take charge of them. So strong hitherto, nearly everywhere, has been the hunger for work, so weak the hunger for power, of the working class.

Gramsci had no thought of leaving it to history to do things by itself, however. Speculation about economic crisis or general strike conjuring up a tempest and transforming men's minds overnight he dismissed as 'out and out historical mysticism' (pp.233-4). Only Marxist

parties could perform the task, and for him it was axiomatic that their function was to crystallize a socialist feeling in the working class, and guide it towards power. They become necessary, he held, at the moment when in any country conditions are ripe for power to be taken over (p.152). The working class could come to power only by putting itself at the head of other sections of the people in need of change, in Italy primarily the peasantry. But it has everywhere found it hard to do this, or has baulked at the attempt almost as completely as at that of giving a lead to the masses in its country's colonies. In either case its assumption of leadership would probably require a certain abnegation or postponement of its own economic demands: it would be a matter of class consciousness having to learn—as national consciousness has never learned—to rise above self-asserting egotism.

Gramsci's great hope for Italy was of the northern working class banding round it the southern peasantry, but he recognized how much of colonialism there was in the relation between industrial north and agrarian south, and his grand alliance would have been a hard one to build, even if it cannot be ruled out — like an alliance of Lancashire weavers and Indian peasants — as an impossibility. A second point which arises is that Gramsci's concept of the mission of a Socialist party may seem to neglect an alternative, defensive function of protecting the working class, instead of leading it to power. This has been the real business of all left-wing forces in England since the Chartists, and increasingly in all the developed countries. Further progress may more likely follow roundabout courses than a straight line to outright victory. Even compelling capitalists to give us jobs may, over decades, force some appreciable change in capitalism. We shall at least be educating our masters.

For Gramsci the ultimate problem of history as well as of political strategy was the problem of change, and how it comes about, though he did not like many Marxists overlook history's too frequent failure to change. It is one of his list of complaints against Bukharin's manual that it does not come to grips with the question: 'how does the historical movement arise on the structural base?' (pp. 431-2) He himself supplies no systematic answer; he takes his stand repeatedly on the parallel sayings of Marx — he calls them 'the two fundamental principles of political science' (p.106) — that mankind only undertakes tasks for the solution of which the material conditions are already present; and that an old order does not perish before its productive potentiality is exhausted. Each of these laconic but far-reaching statements may be open to closer scrutiny than Gramsci subjects them to. Men and classes evolve so unevenly that the material conditions for change may be present (as they have now been for generations in western Europe for transition to socialism) without this

fact impinging on the majority mind. And many social structures have been put an end to from outside, while others, and modern capitalism above all, seem capable of protean adaptation, if allowed time. Taken together **Marx's** two contentions may almost verge on economic determinism, which to a certain degree he leaned towards when engrossed with pure economic phenomena, and leaned away from when he was exploring the far more intricate phenomena of history.

Gramsci even finds in them 'The scientific base for a morality of historical materialism': when a task is practicable, its performance becomes a duty (pp. 407-8). One may feel some further doubt about this, which seems to imply that it was a duty to work for abolition of slavery when, but not before, slave-plantations became economically superfluous. At what date this happened would be hard to say now, and would have been harder for a contemporary to know. Active campaigners against slavery had motives to which it was irrelevant; and just as bourgeois revolutions are not made by the bourgeoisie, good causes are not fought for by the economic interests which may ultimately benefit by them, as capitalists might do by the abolition of slavery or serfdom. Marx himself was trying to get rid of capitalism when it had, as we can see now, scarcely got into its stride.

However, Gramsci's emphasis is the reverse of determinist; it is on the fact that economic conditions hold out only a possibility of progress, not a guarantee. Progress only takes place when it is made to take place. He finds in the average man, long divorced from any real part in control of public affairs, a 'fetishistic' attitude towards all institutions, whether of State or party, a taking for granted that they will somehow go on functioning whether *he* does anything or not; and 'the passivity of the great popular masses' is the reason why 'a deterministic and mechanical conception of history is very widespread' (p. 187). (In the light of this remark historical determinism can be seen as, like nationalism and theology and most other ideologies, a formulation by philosophers of an inbred mode of thought of common people.) Gramsci finds this fatalistic tendency infecting Marxism itself, representing he thinks a lingering religious habit of mind. Because of the immaturity of the masses it has been for a certain time necessary, like a drug, but the time has come now to dispense with it.¹² This admission of illusion or error as a necessary ingredient in historical advance at certain stages is interesting, and is one of a number of issues on which Gramsci and Nietzsche can be heard saying the same thing. In any epoch some rays of light from the same source will make their way into even the most oppositely-facing minds.

To Marx or Lenin themselves, a conviction of the inevitable downfall of capitalism may have had something of the stimulating quality of a drug. Looking back to the age of religion, Gramsci observes

mechanical determinism, in the Calvinist guise of predestination, furnishing a movement on the defensive with 'a formidable power of moral resistance'¹³ But it may also lead to an obstinate, suicidal rejection of compromise. He might have taken an example of this from Scottish history, in the Covenanters. In his own Italy there was the defeat of a sectarian Left by fascism, one cause of which, he came to feel, was its being blinded by an obstinate belief that historical necessity was fighting on its side: this led men like the dogmatist Bordiga to assume that all that was required was to take up a theoretically "correct" position, confident that sooner or later the masses would come round to it, as the sun will rise at its appointed time in the east.

To assume in this spirit that History is always right was not much less fatuous than the fascist credo that 'Mussolini is always right'. Gramsci as a leader had been accused of "voluntarism", and he was careful to disclaim any notion, the antithetical error to determinism, that men can make events as they please, if they only want them to happen badly enough. But the bounds he sets to the operation of mankind's free will are far from narrow. He conceives of history as rising by steps from the plane of accident to that of choice, or from necessity to freedom. History-writing of the kind that can be done by statistical method, he observes, is valid only so long as the people remains inert.¹⁴ (For conservative historians the people is always inert, except for odd bursts of futile violence.) Revolutions are not made, in any immediate sense, by economic crisis: in support of this Gramsci argues that the general economic situation in France towards 1789 was good (p. 184), a view which may underrate the precipitating effect of bad harvests, hunger, trade depression just before 1789, and just before 1848. He is more clearly right in saying that nothing happens purely spontaneously: there are always leaders, initiators, though these may be nameless figures who leave no trace (p. 196).

His most exemplary of all leaders are the Jacobins, with their motto of audacity. We can identify them as the professional intelligentsia of a bourgeoisie made up of distinct strands not yet spliced together by industrialism; they could find common ground with the sansculottes of the urban democracy as well as with that politically dull herd of pachyderms, the financiers and manufacturers, who as in England and everywhere else had to be pushed and prodded into power. "Bourgeois revolution" is a phrase which obscures more than it illuminates. As Gramsci says, these Jacobins 'literally "imposed" themselves on the French bourgeoisie, leading it into a far more advanced position than the originally strongest bourgeois nuclei would have spontaneously wished to take up', even though in the end they could not transcend the limits of the bourgeois dispensation. He adds a sparkling comment

on the international factors that help to mould national tendencies: 'The Jacobin spirit, audacious, dauntless, is certainly related to the hegemony exercised for so long by France in Europe' (p. 84).

Seeking to calibrate history's two scales, one recording the accumulation of combustible materials, the other the human endeavour needed to supply the spark, Gramsci often turned to survey the Italian national movement. He might well have recalled in this context his remark about French hegemony and Jacobin daring. Italian artists and musicians dazzled Europe for centuries, but Italy—like Germany—was insignificant; whereas Jacobinism owed a great deal to its homeland's political and military, as well as intellectual pre-eminence. Without Louis XIV and Turenne and Fontenoy there would have been no Jacobins in France to chop off the head of Louis XIV's descendant, but only the sort of "ideologues" or armchair reformers whom Bismarck was able comfortably to despise in Germany, or Cavour in Italy, with a sprinkling of men like Mazzini brave enough to risk their own lives but not audacious enough to summon the people to arms. Or—to look back another century—there would have been no regicides to chop off Charles I's head if Elizabeth and her sea-captains and Britain's *terrible surges* had not routed the Invincible Armada.

Gramsci effectively criticises Mazzini and the party of action for failing to emulate the combination of urban and rural mass energies which he regards as central to Jacobin strategy, and which he thinks can be detected in Machiavelli's calculations too.¹⁵ At another point he writes, somewhat contradictorily, that no Jacobin party grew up in Italy because the bourgeoisie was economically unready—but also that the bourgeoisie 'could not for subjective rather than objective reasons' draw the masses behind it,—yet that 'action directed at the peasantry was certainly always possible' (p. 82). Cavour as spokesman of the bourgeoisie, and himself both capitalist and landowner, may have felt by an intuition correct at any rate with reference to the early stages of industrialism, that a poor, subjugated peasantry was preferable to an emancipated one like that of France. The Jacobins were not after all trying to build industrial capitalism, and this developed after their revolution only very haltingly. Still, the distinction between the objective and subjective capabilities of a class which becomes a candidate for hegemony is important. In France the bourgeoisie *could* have got rid of the monarchy far earlier, in Britain the working class *could* have got rid of capitalism long ago. It seems curious to find Gramsci saying that 'the so-called subjective conditions can never be missing when the objective conditions exist' (p. 113), which suggests the one mechanically accompanying the other. We are nearer to his true opinion when he writes that there are times when a certain

development may, but need not, occur, and the outcome 'depends to a great extent on the existence of individuals of exceptional will-power and of exceptional will' (p. 152). But we are left to ask whether these situations are common enough to make historical "laws" at best very approximate, and how the leader at the time or the historian later on can be sure that an opportunity has been missed or not.

At all events, any triumph is the outcome of subterranean changes long at work, or what Gramsci often dwells on as the *molecular* process going on in men's minds. We can only dig coal up because geology has slowly laid it down. Mazzini's insurrectionist tactics were bound to fail, in Gramsci's view, because they were not preceded by 'the "diffused" and capillary form of indirect pressure . . . long ideological and political preparation . . .' (p. 110). Transforming influences, operating slowly or less slowly but always obscurely, set limits, more directly than the material condition of society, to what action initiated by resolute groups can achieve. In communities which are pioneering a new path, as Britain was during its industrial revolution, conscious adjustment to a new epoch lags behind the material facts; in communities seeking to repeat what others have already done, as in Africa today, awareness may travel far ahead of them. In either case the task of speeding molecular change, in other words the teasing of ideas out of the tangle of experience, and the conversion to these ideas of other minds, is crucial; and it is impeded by manifold safety-devices that history has implanted in our minds to keep them from conscious recognition that the world is not as our elders and betters have told us.

History's great men appear to—or pretend to—bestride their narrow world and impose their own laws on it, Gramsci was elaborating one of Marx's ideas when he wrote of "Caesarism" as arising when political forces balance each other 'in a catastrophic manner'—in such a manner that further competition must destroy both. It was capable of some varying degree of progressiveness; Caesar and Napoleon were progressive, Napoleon III and Bismarck reactionary (p. 219). Gramsci does allow that Napoleon III represented some energies still latent within the existing order (pp. 221-2). Both he and Bismarck did much, in fact, to forward industrialisation; though with all this quartet their imperialistic proclivities have to be set on the debit side. Gramsci makes another significant point, that the rival forces held in check by Caesar or Napoleon were not too far apart to be able to amalgamate, 'after a molecular process', later on (p. 221). Here this phrase covers the development of common social and financial interests, promoted by intermarriage, between an old and a new ruling class, such as took place in England after the Restoration. It could happen the more easily because in Rome, England, France, there was always differentiation within the earlier ruling order between older and newer nobility,

blue-blooded aristocrat and parvenu; so that the gap between the old order and its successor was only one of degree.

Inclusion of a Ramsay Macdonald in the category of Caesarism (p. 220) is one of those odd-looking quirks that are to be found in the Notebooks. England's contemporary situation was a very different one, and Caesarism without a heroic or pseudo-heroic figure seems out of court. But our century has had many plausible aspirants, with Gramsci's antagonist Mussolini in the van. They have been imitators, approaching their hero Napoleon only in destructiveness, yet representing none the less a portentous new development. Claiming to stand above the contest of haves and have-nots, they were aping the Napoleonic pose, impartially above both aristocracy and bourgeoisie, while in reality exercising a dictatorship of the haves against the have-nots. Marxism was slow to take the measure of fascism after 1918, and has been slow ever since in providing a satisfactory analysis of it. Marxists have indeed seen the basic class situation, whereas most other historians have been obstinately unable to see the wood for the trees; but they have not on the whole seen very much else of a very complex phenomenon. As devious historical combinations are required to bring about regression as to produce progress.

Gramsci meditated in prison on fascism; his tentative reflections do not neglect the complexity of things, and still deserve attention. But the fascism he knew was only a fore-sketchn of the real thing, Nazism. In Italy the relative weight of archaic social elements was much greater, and hindered fascism from being either as innovatory and successful, or as monstrous, as in Germany. Gramsci was inclined to think that it was not the deliberate choice of the capitalists, who were seduced into it by their feudal landlord allies.¹⁸ They had to seek ways of restoring their ascendancy after the War, but they were not really confronted by any class capable of ousting them (p. 228). In Germany a decade later a bigger capitalist class faced a deeper economic crisis and a better-prepared (left-wing) challenge, with the now much stronger U.S.S.R. in the background. Here therefore the old ruling groups had to go much further in adapting themselves to the requirements of fascism as a torrential movement of demagoguery, and the outcome was a régime incomparably more potent.

Gramsci is thinking transparently of Mussolini when he writes that leadership by "inspired" individuals only suits times of emergency, when critical faculties are submerged: they can originate nothing with any 'long-term and organic character', their true function is to give the reigning powers a breathing-space, a period of 'restoration and reorganisation' (p. 130). Like others of his political concepts, Gramsci's idea-of "restoration" periods is subtle, and not always clear. It meant much to him because he thought of Italy as passing through such a

time. A crisis may last for decades, he says, while an *old* order strives to pull itself together, and in the end the necessity of its supersession will only be demonstrated 'if the forces of opposition triumph' (p. 178). This is another of his hard sayings. Was the right to survive of *Tsarism* vindicated by its overcoming the revolution of 1905? Or that of *Prussian militarism* by Bismarck's defeat of the Liberals? In any single arena the ratio of forces will depend on local circumstances, though what is at stake may have a far more than local importance. In Germany the forces of opposition have never triumphed. Yet the national structure has been vastly modified. Bismarckian Germany is indeed the classic example of how one type of "restoration" in Gramsci's sense works, providing 'sufficiently elastic frameworks to allow the bourgeoisie to gain power without dramatic upheavals' (p. 115). Despite Liberal timidity change went ahead, thanks to the novel factor introduced by industrialism, which has brought in technology as the fourth player at every table. Conservatism could not keep things standing still, if only because of the requirements of its own military machine. History advanced crabwise, or as they say on Wall Street *sideways*.

In a case like this "molecular change" is clearly involved. It is difficult not to associate it also with another recurrent theorem of Gramsci's, which sometimes appears along with it (e.g. p. 109)—that of "passive revolution". This it must be confessed is exceptionally puzzling, because he does not use the term regularly to denote what the words suggest: radical change brought about by indirect pressure of circumstances instead of by assault. Gramsci borrowed it from his early 19th-century countryman Cuoco, who meant by it something oddly different from this: an attempt at revolution as at Naples in 1799 by an *élite* group without local roots or means of winning mass support.¹⁷ For this some adjective like "exotic" seems more appropriate. Gramsci attaches the label of "passive revolution" to Gandhi's tactics in the Indian national movement (p. 107), but oftenest and most comprehensibly to those of Cavour in the Italian. (In Cuoco's sense it would better fit Mazzini's.) Tactics like Cavour's could obviously not be a model for socialists in any position. Yet their position now, as it appeared to Gramsci, had something in common with that of the Italian patriots blocked by the immovable obstacle of the Austrian army.

At some point quite soon after 1917 repetition of the Russian revolution further west became, in anything like the same form, an impossibility. Gramsci believed that Lenin before his death was coming to accept this as a fact, while Trotsky continued to be 'the political theorist of frontal attack in a period in which it only leads to defeats' (pp. 237-8). Gramsci was fond of discussing military matters, such as trench warfare in the Great War, and he did not forget that 'every

political struggle always has a military substratum'; though he reminded himself that political and military reasoning must not be jumbled up (pp. 230-1). But he may have been choosing words for the benefit of the censor when he spoke of the turn from revolutionism in the style of 1917 to something different as a transition from 'war of manoeuvre' to 'war of positions'. He looked upon it as 'the most important question of political theory that the post-war period has posed' (pp. 237-8). Also, of course, of political practice. Hoping against hope, it may well be, he tried to see the 'war of positions' not as relinquishment of revolutionary struggle but as its culminating and most intense phase, with the old order concentrating all its resources for a final desperate resistance (pp. 238-9). But this was to underestimate very gravely the solidity and permanence of fascism and the popular assent it could command. Neither in Italy nor anywhere else was it destined to be overthrown from within. Some painful inkling of this was bound to visit Gramsci's mind as the prison years came and went. He fell back on conjectures about fascism as a new type of "restoration", which might represent, in however distorted a manner, a kind of progress, — even a kind of "passive revolution".

It might not, he wrote, turn out to be 'entirely reactionary'; it was at least shaking up an ossified State (p. 223). He thought it implied some real turning against the old order 'with all its train of parasites', under compulsion of 'problems which are disturbing the old European bone-structure' (p. 287). Italy like Germany had been inducted into the capitalist era by foreign war instead of by class conflict, without any true bourgeois revolution; hence much lumber from the past still littered the ground, and we looking back may agree that it was part of the "mission" of fascism to clear away some of it, in order to carry out its main task of exorcising socialism, by seeming to provide an alternative path of reform. Gramsci expected the modernising tendency to include expansion of industry, urged on and directed by the State (p. 115). He counted on the weight of an America industrially as far ahead of Europe as intellectually it was behind, to help to compel Europe, and Italy in particular, 'to overturn its excessively antiquated economic and social basis' (p. 317). "Fordism" intrigued him because he saw it as an effort, inescapable for any modern society, 'to achieve the organisation of a planned society' (p. 279).

All this line of thought led towards an idea which Gramsci took from Vico, and frequently returned to: the idea of things sometimes happening through a "ruse of providence", a situation bringing about what has to be brought about despite the wishes of those who thought themselves its masters (e.g. p. 293). It is an idea well worth pondering in many connections, though patently it could lend itself, just as much as Bordiga's determinism, to a habit of waiting for history to do our

work for us like a robot. We may link it with another problematical question, that of *error*, to which makers of history have been as liable as its writers. That leaders fall into many mistakes can only be doubted, Gramsci declares, by mechanical materialism, which 'assumes that every political act is determined, immediately, by the structure . . .' (p. 408; cf. p. 399). We may be compelled to go further than this, and recollect the profound dictum of **Engels** that what emerges in history is something willed by none of the participants, but the product of all their conflicting wills. Error, it follows, is universal. Even when a goal is proposed and reached, those who reach it have only dimly been able to foresee the consequences of their success. Bismarck made history with more apparent success than almost any leader of modern times, but the Germany he created was not the Germany he desired. Lenin made his revolution in order to throw a torch into the powder-magazine of Europe, whose powder proved too damp to ignite. What he achieved, and the most that any drastic action can achieve whether in public or in private life, was to bring about a new situation, a new complex of relationships, in which a variety of new possibilities emerged. Mankind's sense of the tragic lies close to this disparity between intention and consequence. What makes tragedy is not failure in action, but the impossibility of foreseeing its results, so that every tragedy is a tragedy of errors; and if tragic drama ends on a note of acceptance, of turning away from past to future, this only epitomises human experience that through storms and stresses, the strife of wills and its unguessable outcome, new beginnings are at last reached.

In modern times what has hampered guidance of events in a progressive direction is not any omnipotence of material forces, but the reverse—their not being powerful enough to overcome the inertia of men's minds. They push modern man towards socialism, antiquated ideas hold him back. Gramsci expresses this by saying that 'mass ideological factors always lag behind mass economic phenomena', and act as a drag on their impetus (p. 168). It may seem to follow as a gloomy consequence that the time for radical social reconstruction never arrives, because when the material conditions are right the mood is not yet ready, and while it is getting ready the possessors of power are at leisure to prepare to deal with it. What is called for, then, is an acceleration of thought, a more rapid spread of ideas, enabling them to keep up with the facts of collective life instead of lagging behind them. Invention of printing brought about such an acceleration, and with it the Reformation, before conservatism had time to rub its eyes and get ready its **Index Librorum Prohibitorum** and all the rest of its entrenchments. Newspapers had a like influence at first, before they were brought firmly under conservative control, as all later means of communication have been from the start.

Gramsci fixed his hopes, in this regard, on the intelligentsia, but an intelligentsia of a new type. In all his vista of history the intellectual had a very important place. There are times when his estimate of leading thinkers, as well as of political leaders, almost makes him a subscriber to the 'Great Man' theory of history; when for instance he speaks of 'those thousands or hundreds or even dozens of scholars of the highest quality which are necessary to every civilisation' (p. 37). To intellectuals collectively he gives a stature which comes out in a casual remark that the working class cannot build socialism without enlisting the support of the majority of them and of the peasantry¹⁸—these two bracketed as equally indispensable. It is better, he writes, to start peasant movements through intellectuals than to let them start spontaneously (pp. 74-5). He wonders whether educated Negroes from the U.S.A. might go back to Africa and transform it (p. 21): this has not happened, but students returning to Africa from European colleges have done a great deal towards its transformation, as some are doing today through the revolutionary movements in the Portuguese colonies. He considers that for various reasons French intellectuals stand closer to the public, and make more effort to advise it, than in most countries (p. 421).

Intellectuals not anchored to any class, he observes, instinctively think of the State as an absolute (p. 117); and because they take part in so many of its activities, 'many intellectuals think that they *are* the State' (p. 16). But today they are detaching themselves from allegiance to the State they have helped to erect, and are thereby 'marking and ratifying the crisis of the State in its decisive form' (words at least as true now as then)—but they have no organisation of their own to fall back on, such as in the middle ages they possessed in the Church. He thinks therefore that the international union of intellectuals proposed by Croce at an Oxford meeting 'undeniably might become an important party, with a considerable role to play' (p. 270). He would expect Italians to respond to such a call, for he frequently discusses their traditionally cosmopolitan outlook, the result of Italy's political fragmentation, which in turn helped to perpetuate (e.g. pp. 17-8). One might say much the same of Germany, which became the homeland of modern philosophy and socialism. Gramsci notes that the Kantian ethic was 'linked to the philosophy of the intellectuals as a cosmopolitan stratum' (p. 374). That 18th-century mentality was in many ways superior to the nationalism which usurped its place, and socialism has had the duty of keeping it alive. By Gramsci's day intellectuals who were still identifying themselves with the nation-State were being dragged down with it in its decline, or its diseased hypertrophy, into pessimism, or fascism.

Gramsci has a wealth of instructive footnotes on the intelligentsia in

history, principally in Italy. 'Southern Italy is an area of extreme social disintegration', he tells us, and this stratifies the educated as well as the peasantry: there have been leaders of thought—individuals or groups—as there are big estates, but no 'average culture'.¹⁹ Referring to the conferences that helped to enrol men of letters in the Risorgimento, he remarks that 'through spirit of caste the lower grades of an intelligentsia tend to follow the lead of their superiors (p. 104)—which might be said also of a feudal hierarchy, or that of modern business where the petty trader takes his cue from the multi-director. There are frequent allusions to the religious species of scholar. Churches, notably the Roman Catholic, keep their intellectuals under watch and ward, for fear of their intellectualising the common people.²⁰ Following this hint we can account for the scholastic straw-threshing which has so largely occupied the clerisy of all religions, a harmless outlet for mental energies forbidden any serious use. All through history society has taken at least as many pains to prevent its intellectuals from thinking too much, as to train them to think.

Quite often Gramsci may be open to a charge of supposing that the hand that fills the inkpot rules the world. This would, all the same, be a travesty of his position, which is that ideas can be everything when fused with objective forces, nothing by themselves. Every philosophy, he surmises, has addressed itself in one way or other to the problem of theory and practice and how to combine them, most obsessively in periods of rapid change (pp. 364-5). Nowadays cerebration for its own sake has come to be seen as futile (p. 350). Abstract ideas are mere moonshine, 'typical of pure intellectuals (or pure asses)' (p. 189). They blossom in minds cut off from the universe of ordinary people, so that knowing is divorced from feeling: the intellectual can reach true 'understanding only when he enters into the problems of the people, and feels them as his own (p. 418). The identity, or the common roots, of authentic thinking and social feeling is a principle deeply ingrained in Gramsci, himself a born scholar yet also a man of action.

But if it is only morbid social arrangements that have pushed the two things apart, it must be admitted that not much has been done as yet towards reconciling them. Minerva's owl has continued to fly only after dark; action in history has been blindly emotional or instinctual—thought has been solitary, enabling individuals partially to understand what masses of men before them have done, not what men are doing now or why they themselves are thinking as they do. Gramsci's way out of this dilemma is the fusing or interweaving of the two processes which he calls 'creative philosophy', or purposeful thinking impelled by will—a rational, not an arbitrary will', bounded that is by objective conditions yet possessing a relative freedom by virtue of which

it 'modifies the way of feeling of the many and consequently reality itself' (pp. 345-6).

In all this range of comment Gramsci has been discussing the intelligentsia more or less as traditionally viewed, with prominence given to humane letters and philosophy, or any broad interests distinct from contracted specialism. This has been the mainstream of learning and thought of the less utilitarian cast, where concern over human destinies, or what might be called social eschatology, had been chiefly found. It is here too that most would look for the element of disequilibrium, the faculty of mutation, needed to start new currents. This traditional intelligentsia has been from several points of view a distinct "class" or "estate". What Gramsci says of its often cosmopolitan outlook, and its collective importance, seems to bear this out.

Yet when he comes to grapple with the practical issue of the progressive intellectual's place in the strife of present-day society, Gramsci draws a very different picture. He denies any corporate self to the intelligentsia, any continuity. Each fresh epoch, he asserts, throws up its own intellectuals. There has been more continuity than this allows, even though Gramsci is certainly right to expose the intellectuals' fond illusion of themselves as an uncommitted body, 'independent of the struggle of groups' (p. 113). He makes another acceptable statement when he says that those representing the most progressive class draw the others along with them, and so 'create a system of solidarity' among them all (p. 60). This is what took place in the Enlightenment of the 18th century: it has not yet taken place in the 20th, as Gramsci had hoped to see it doing, with Marxism in the lead. But on the contemporary scene Gramsci's emphasis is all on the fragmentation or dispersedness of intellectuals. Instead of their forming any sort of corporation, every section of a complex modern society necessarily develops a specialised intelligentsia of its own.¹¹

There is a great deal of obvious truth in this view. A Prussian staff officer was an intellectual in his way, suffering perhaps with all such artificial, inbred types from a streak of morbidity. On the other hand a technician helping to construct bombs is putting his mind to purely manipulative uses. A racing tipster lives by his wits, not his hands, and may qualify as an intellectual if the line is drawn liberally enough. Gramsci broadens the term to include some unexpected meanings. He regards the old aristocracies, kept on as political managers in England or Germany, as the 'intellectuals' of the bourgeoisie (p. 83). He includes bureaucrats, the swarm infesting southern Italy for instance, though down there his chief type of intellectual is 'the pettifogging lawyer', intermediary between peasantry and landlord or State. In the north he includes the factory technician or overseer (pp. 93-4). And all members of any party—paradox though this, as he

admits, must sound—are to be reckoned as intellectuals (p. 16). It is through their brains that a class thinks. We may acknowledge that, in so far as conservatism in England can be said to think, it is the Tory party through which it performs this uncongenial operation, and that even a Tory MP may shine mentally by comparison with most of those who sit on his constituency platforms.

On the Left, in his Italy, Gramsci saw a very practical need for a well-grown intelligentsia, as vital for engineering an alliance between working class and peasantry.²² It may always, in fact, be among its crucial functions to enable a working class to form alliances with other classes, and emerge from isolation. Intellectuals can or should be able to perform this, Gramsci holds, because the Marxist party enables them to ally themselves with the working class, and so escape from their own isolation. State service cannot bring them into genuine contact with the people; they find this through the party, where they merge with what Gramsci calls the organic intellectuals of the working class. The horizon he sets before them widely different from the old-fashioned duty of a progressive intellectual—to give the people good advice from his own higher level. It was in that older spirit that Shelley's Irish pamphlet of 1812 put out 'Proposals for an association' of men of liberal education and views who would join to give common folk the guidance they so sadly lacked during the French Revolution. As a latter-day caricature of this we have the story of Gramsci's humorous indignation at a young professor expatiating on his noble resolve to help, instruct, and direct the workers gratis.²³ Gramsci wants intellectuals to integrate themselves with the workers. They cannot do so, he sees, indiscriminately, with the whole mass, only with fellow-intellectuals from within its ranks. These are, in the first place, working-class members of the party. They should be more than merely honorary or *ex officio* intellectuals. They are to be 'cadres of intellectuals of a new type', with the responsibility of raising the mental activity of the entire class, 'giving personality to the amorphous element of the

But intellectuals who—like Gramsci himself—join them from outside will always, or for very long, be indispensable, because the formation of this 'new type' will be a very arduous undertaking. Peasants, he remarks, produce no intelligentsia of their own, though they supply many individual intellectuals to other classes,²⁴ and he appears to take for granted that they can never do so. Even in the most favourable conditions it is a hard enough thing to rear intellectuals: they 'develop slowly, much more slowly than any other social group, because of their own nature and historical rôle. . . .' For the proletariat, which he regards as 'poor in organising elements', the task will be very arduous.²⁵ It will have to learn to develop intellectuals of all levels,

'including those capable of the highest degree of specialisation', and it has not yet acquired the needful adaptation, mental and physical, to learning (p.43). With his own experience in mind Gramsci never under-rates the sheer grind of learning, and its rigours and strains. These rigours help indeed to explain why intellectual activity has always been so largely a hereditary profession, and why its practitioners have always been looked on by "normal" people as freaks. By comparison with these hurdles Gramsci seems to feel very few misgivings about whether working-class intellectuals are likely to keep their allegiance to their own class and its party, or will use their new wings to fly away to other perches.

Gramsci's vision—the birth of a labour intelligentsia, instead of (revealingly feudal English phrase) an *aristocracy* of labour—was a splendid one. That its realisation would be 'a long and difficult' task,²⁷ he saw more and more clearly; and this meant that the road leading to a socialist society would be also long and difficult, beyond the strength of a working class in its old shape with no more than elemental weight of numbers to rely on. Before becoming able to make a new society it must first set about remaking itself, and discovering its allies. Another four decades of west-European experience have confirmed the lesson. It was to this toilsome sluggishness of the historical movement that Gramsci was painfully accustoming his mind as he toiled on in his solitary cell, while Fascism covered Italy with the grandiose monuments whose grandiloquent inscriptions about the Sounding Wheels of History still vacuously confront the tourist.

NOTES

Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith: Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971; xcvi and 4-83 pp. Besides the long introduction the volume contains a wealth of explanatory notes. About eighty pages of the material, chiefly 'The Modern Prince', appeared in the English anthology translated by L. Marks in 1957. Page references in brackets in the body of this essay are to the new volume.

2. Editors' introduction, p. lxviii.
3. Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, trans. L. Marks, (London, 1957), pp. 83, 85. This volume is cited below as *The Modern Prince*.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
6. See editorial remarks by Hoare and Smith, pp. 321-2, 360.
7. *The Modern Prince*, pp. 92-3.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 96-7; cf. p.92.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

11. Ibid., pp. 12-13.
12. Ibid., pp. 69, 75.
13. Ibid., pp. 69-70.
14. Ibid., p. 95.
15. This comes out in much of the discussion on Machiavelli in *The Modern Prince*.
16. Hoare and Smith, editorial note on p. 214, No. 3.
17. Ditto, p. 59.
18. *The Modern Prince*, p. 36.
19. Ibid., p. 47.
20. Ibid., p. 65.
21. Ibid., pp. 123, 126.
22. Ibid., pp. 50-1.
23. Ibid., p. 15.
24. Ibid., p. 73.
25. Ibid., p. 119.
26. Ibid., p. 50.
27. Ibid., p. 67.

