

## GRAMSCI AND LENIN 1917–1922

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### I

ANTONIO GRAMSCI was twenty-six at the beginning of 1917.<sup>1</sup> The "sewer of his past" on whose seething resentments he had built a "sardist" view of the world ("Into the sea with the Italians") only showed in too many coffees and cigarettes and an enormous capacity for work. He had given up his "sardist" world-view for what he and a great many other educated Italians regarded as a satisfactory view of the world: "crocianism". Throughout 1917 Gramsci was still "crocian in his views",<sup>2</sup> although he had been a Socialist for over three years and was working full-time for the Socialist newspapers *Avanti* and *Grido del Popolo*, although his "crocian" friends of university days had gone to war, and although he had considerable contact with workers, who were always dropping in from the nearby Casa del Popolo to see him because he "had the great gift of knowing how to talk to everybody".<sup>3</sup>

Theoretically, he agreed with the views in Benedetto Croce's recent *Teoria della storia della storiografia*. In particular these were: 1) a rejection of positivism as inverted idealism; 2) a consequent rejection of any history which claimed to relate what truly happened once and for all; and therefore 3) a belief that all immanent world-views had been "thought up" in terms of the contemporary level of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> It followed that Gramsci believed that men were never the prisoners of their past in the sense that they could not free themselves through their own wilful actions, but only be freed by some structural conjunction of events. They could, of course, well be the prisoners of their understanding of that past, and therefore fail to comprehend the realities of their present situation. Gramsci's theoretical and emotional beliefs are summed up in words he wrote in early 1917: "For natural laws, the fatal progress of things of pseudo-scientists, has been substituted the tenacious will of men", and in rather more moralizing tones: "Some people whimper pitifully, others curse obscenely, but none, or few, ask themselves: if I had done my duty, if I had attempted to impose my will, my opinion, would what has happened have happened?—I hate the apathetic."<sup>5</sup>

This theoretical rejection of determinism was, however, only a "starting point" for Gramsci, who proceeded through the crocian view that contemporary levels of knowledge were based on contemporary needs, and through the theory of Giovanni Gentile of the "act", to that variety of marxism which best accorded with the notion that the revolution would not come automatically but would have to be made in a conscious wilful act by men who understood that the cause of their misery was capitalism. By 1917 he had found this in the interpretation of Antonio Labriola, who denied that marxism described the "apocalyptic" workings of history and claimed that it was a theory based on the historical need for socialism and marked a stage in men's understanding of their situation. Labriola typified this view overall as a "philosophy of praxis", thus stressing the affinity between his concerns and those of the early Croce, who had also written a *Philosophy of Practice*.<sup>6</sup> Influenced by Labriola's work, Gramsci, who had read by 1917 Marx's: *Holy Family*; *The Poverty of Philosophy*; *The Communist Manifesto*; *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany* and a *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, was even able to dub Engels' *Anti-Duhring* a humanist work, and within a year to endorse firmly Labriola's belief that *Capital* was "not the first great book of critical theory but the last great book of political economy".<sup>7</sup> From the Labriolan position that the revolution would take place only when men "understood and overcame"<sup>8</sup> (taken directly from Hegel), Gramsci had reached the ideological concerns which really interested him in 1917: how to make men "understand and overcome".

*Ideologically*, Gramsci was influenced by Charles Péguy and Romain Rolland, both of whom agreed with the proposition that "Fate is the excuse of men without wills" and who preached on a more practical level the same sort of views and morality as Croce. This amounted above all to the belief that it was the task of the intellectuals (and Gramsci defined himself as an intellectual) to tear the veil of misunderstanding from men's eyes and help build the "City of God".<sup>9</sup> Gramsci endorsed this notion, and consequently, that the main socialist task was education. After he got his first job on *Avanti* in 1916 he argued in a series of important articles that: "The problem of education is the most important class-problem" and that "... the first step in emancipating oneself from political and social slavery is that of freeing the mind". This education was necessary because it was clear from history that such freedom did not come according to a "fatal law" or spontaneous evolution. Man was "above all mind, historical creation and not nature" and all his knowledge of himself had been obtained as the result of "intelligent reflection" on the nature of social oppression, first by "a few men" and only later, after "an immense labour of criticism and cultural penetration", by the many, who initially resisted the new

ideas. Gramsci pointed to the enlightenment for proof of his proposition that revolutions only took place after this "immense labour"<sup>11</sup>—in Italy, Napoleon had found his way paved for him "by an invisible army of books, which had prepared men". The initial labour of education which Gramsci proposed was directed not to having men acquire masses of facts but to attaining that self-knowledge which would enable them to realize their "own historical value", their "own function in life", their "rights and duties".<sup>10</sup>

In 1917 he was still preaching these views forcefully through *Grido del Popolo* and in the single issue of Citta *Futura*, the journal of the Youth Federation of the Italian Socialist Party, but his attention was beginning to shift to the practical application of his educational programme as well.<sup>11</sup> This brought him to the crucial question of the method or mode of this educative process. His answer was the completely traditional, and idealist, method of indoctrination through the press, lectures and seminars.

Practically, he engaged in "cultural messianism" among the young members of the party. He lectured frequently to the Youth Federation and the workers of Turin, urging them to read Croce or even reflect on Marcus Aurelius's character (!). He ran study circles on Marx, and in December 1917 formed the Club di Vita Morale, whose activities he described in these terms: "At Turin we believe that preaching about the principles and moral maxims which should necessarily become established with the coming of a socialist civilization is not enough. We have tried to give this preaching an organized form; to give new examples (for Italy) of how to work together. So the Club de Vita Morale has recently emerged. Through it we propose to accustom young people in the socialist movement to dispassionate discussion about social and ethical problems. We want them to become used to research, to read in a methodical and disciplined fashion, to expound their convictions simply and with equanimity. It works out like this: I, who have had to accept the role of excubitor, because I began the association, assign a paper to some young person: a chapter of Croce's 'Cultura e Vita morale'; Salvemini's 'Problemi educativi e sociali' or his French Revolution or 'Cultura e laicita', the Communist Manifesto or the Commentary of Croce in *Critica* or something else, which, however, reflects the existing idealist movement: then I or someone else replies."<sup>12</sup>

This "cultural messianism"—the practical outcome of Gramsci's "crocian" "starting point"<sup>3</sup>—was completely against the current at the time. The Club lasted three meetings. The bulk of young socialists still preferred Mussolini's and Bordiga's view that "class-consciousness" came through struggle and not from any cultural policy. In 1912 Bordiga had proclaimed scornfully that: "The need for study should be proclaimed in a congress of school-teachers, not socialists. You don't

become a socialist through instruction but through experiencing the real needs of the class to which you belong", and Mussolini proclaimed even more bluntly that it would be good riddance if all the "brains" in the Socialist Party left.<sup>13</sup> Faced with continuous failure, Gramsci had started by 1918 tentatively to question "cultural messianism", in principle, if not in practice.<sup>14</sup> But in 1917 his views on the levels of theory, ideology and practice were still comparatively homogeneous. He was already a man with formed opinions when he first faced the implicit and explicit teachings of the Russian revolutions. He believed that men made revolutions in acts of collective will; that the main problem was to make them see that they could change the world, and he had therefore engaged in an activity of "moral re-education" which had, however, not gone much beyond a series of "didactic homilies" which workers found difficult to stomach and which they rejected.

## II

The news of the February revolution only gradually crept through the wartime censorship and not until April 1917 did Gramsci publish his first known commentary on its significance. He denied outright that it was a bourgeois revolution. "We are persuaded that the Russian revolution is proletarian in character, as it has been so far in its deeds, and that it will naturally result in a socialist régime."<sup>15</sup> We need not dwell on whether this was a correct assessment or not—perhaps Gramsci already perceived that the bourgeois February revolution would develop into the proletarian October revolution. However, it is clear that in one sense he quite misunderstood what was going on. Although he had heard of Lenin before 1917, he saw Chernov as the leading practical revolutionary of the Russian "maximalists". Lenin was the "... master of life, the stirrer of consciences, the awakener of sleeping souls. Chernov is the realizer, the man with the concrete programme to put into practice, an entirely socialist programme which permits no collaboration, which cannot be accepted by the bourgeoisie because it destroys the system of private property, because it finally begins the socialist revolution, the entry into world history of collectivist socialism".<sup>16</sup>

This misunderstanding was not his fault entirely, or that of the censorship. His major source of information at this time about the revolutions and Russia generally was *Avanti*, which had started to rely on the reports of an *émigré* Russian, Vassily Suchomlin, for its explanation of what was occurring in Russia. Suchomlin's loyalties were to the Social-Revolutionaries of that country and not only strongly biased in their favour, but also biased against Lenin.<sup>17</sup> Gramsci's

fundamental misunderstanding indicates, however, how little he knew about the history or contemporary developments of Russian socialism. Not only was a "crocian" facing the implications of the February revolution, but a "crocian" who knew very little about the men who were making the revolution. As if to make up for these errors of fact, Gramsci showed an enthusiastic preference for Lenin from July onwards, dubbing him the "tomorrow of the revolution" and ascribing to him the task of preventing any compromise between the "Idea" and the incubus of the past.<sup>18</sup>

It is important to note at this juncture that before he had any real idea about what was going on in Russia, he had already begun an interpretation of Lenin, identifying him in "crocian" terms as the bearer of the "Idea". He continued to find a Lenin who shared his views even in 1918 when the more reliable Balabanoff had replaced Suchomlin as Avanti's Russian correspondent. This Lenin was the "practical expression" of "our Marx", whom Gramsci described in May 1918 as "not a Messiah who left a string of parables laden with categorical imperatives and absolutely incontrovertible norms outside the categories of time and space. The only categorical imperative, the single norm, is 'workers of the world unite'."<sup>19</sup> The Bolsheviks, whom he had by now identified correctly as the practitioners of revolution, "live marxist thought, the part of it which cannot die, that part which is the continuation of German and Italian idealism, and which in Marx himself became contaminated by positivistic and naturalistic encrustations. And this thought considers not economic facts the main force in history, but man, the society of men, of men who are close to each other, who understand each other, and develop through these contacts [civilization] a social and collective will and understand, judge and order to their wishes these economic facts, so that their wishes become the motor of the economy." He summed up the theoretical conclusions he was drawing from the Bolshevik revolution in the title he gave to the article in which these words appeared: "The Revolt against *Capital*."<sup>20</sup> This view was again made clear in these lines of July 1918: "If you find Lenin a utopian, if you say that the attempt to set up the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia is a utopian effort, you cannot be a socialist, who is aware, and who builds up his culture by studying the doctrine of historical materialism: you are a Catholic, bogged down in the Syllabus: you are the only utopian really.

"Utopia consists precisely in not being able to see history as free development."

In sum, the main lesson he drew from the Bolshevik revolution, even in 1918, was that it showed that history was free development, and this lesson endorsed the educative policies he had been following in the Italian proletariat. He denied that much could be learnt from the

particular facts of the Bolshevik revolution, at least until some years had gone by and it could be the object of mature reflection.<sup>21</sup>

Yet at about the same time he decided that "what is happening in Russia shows us the way" and started to "seek for" the works of Lenin to discover how the Russian had educated the masses to a level where a socialist revolution could be conducted when "cultural messianism" alone obviously did not work. Why? Gramsci had apparently given up his belief that the revolution could be conducted only *after* a long, slow, cultural work of freeing minds and had decided that the revolution was actual given the conditions of Italy. By the beginning of 1918 he was supporting Bordiga's demand that the Socialist Party "act now" in terms which were earning him the undeserved reputation of "bergsonian voluntarist" among the more cautious maximalist leaders of the party.<sup>22</sup>

But, as Togliatti recalled, "matters were neither simple nor clear" in those early days<sup>23</sup> and Gramsci reputedly only saw a collection of Lenin's works for the first time in the middle of 1919, when they were shown to him by the ex-syndicalist Alfredo Polledro.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, there was practically nothing of Lenin translated into Italian in May 1920, when Gramsci bitterly criticized the Socialist Party for being so remiss and arranged for the publication of the first edition of Lenin's work in Italian. This was published in July 1920. So Gramsci had to turn to the newspapers in the only language which he read without difficulty: French. Leonetti recalls that "the source was always in French". And so it was that Gramsci obtained his view of the Revolution and its implicit theory and practice through the following newspapers and journals: *Communist International*, *La Vie Ouvrière* (1919-); *Le Phare* (1919-); *Demain* (1919-); *Nouvelle Internationale* (1919-); *Bulletin Communiste* (1920-); *Revue Communiste* (1920-); and *Clarté* (1920-).<sup>25</sup> Readers will note that because of the censorship none of these sources were available to him until 1919. The only writings of Lenin to appear in these newspapers in 1919 were his letter to "Our American Comrades"; a short article declaring that the Second International was finished, and a portion of the *Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, which appeared in *Nouvelle Internationale* on 30 April 1919.<sup>26</sup> However, a very definite picture of Lenin and Lenin's views was given in the reports of Arthur Ransome. Some indicative lines in "Conversations with Lenin" appeared in Gramsci's most important source, *La Vie Ouvrière*, on 20 August 1919. "He [Lenin] told me that he had read a comparison of his own theories with those of the American Daniel de Leon in an English socialist newspaper. He had immediately borrowed some of de Leon's pamphlets from Reinstein (who belongs to the party which de Leon founded in the United States) and had been struck by how much and how early the thought of de Leon had started following the same course as that of the Russians."<sup>27</sup> Small wonder

that the paper should claim that "our Russian comrades have carried out in practice the main theoretical objects of syndicalism", and that their main achievement had been the rejection of parliament in favour of direct action through the workers councils.<sup>28</sup>

If Gramsci knew no Lenin he certainly knew something about the theories of de Leon, whom his French sources suggested presented much the same theory as Lenin, since he and Togliatti had started to study IWW theory in 1916, and had, indeed, first learnt of Lenin through the *Liberator*, the IWW paper of Deleonite tendency. By mid-1919 he showed quite clearly that he had decided that the leninist theory of revolution was a theory of the primary role played by the soviets in raising revolutionary consciousness, or, in his terms, educating the masses. Given what he felt to be the great similarity between Russia and Italy—in both he isolated the war as the single most important catalyst for revolution because the bourgeoisie "had not been able to avoid giving a terrible practical lesson in revolutionary socialism" to the predominantly peasant population—he called on the Turinese workers to "create (their) own soviets within the limits allowed".<sup>30</sup> He and his friends set up the newspaper *Ordine Nuovo* a month later, after discussions with interested workers, mainly from the "rigid" minority of the Metalworkers' Federation (FIOM). At first this paper was no more than a renewed venture in "cultural messianism", because Angelo Tasca (another "crocian") had found the money for it and he was unable to envisage it as anything but "a ragbag anthology—a collection of abstract cultural items and a strong leaning towards nasty stories and well-intentioned wood-cuts".<sup>31</sup> But in July 1919, Gramsci, Togliatti and Umberto Terracini conducted the editorial *coup d'état* which led to the paper's conversion into a promoter of the transformation of the *commissioni interne*, or shop-stewards' committees, into "workers' councils" which would eventually become an alternative state power: "This state does not pop up by magic: the Bolsheviks worked for eight months to spread and make their slogans concrete: all power to the Soviets, and the Soviets were already known to the Russian workers in 1905. Italian communists must treasure the Russian experience and save on time and labour: the work of reconstruction alone will demand so much time and work that every act, every day must be directed towards it."<sup>32</sup> Gramsci made clear that the function of this self-organization was educatory in the sense in which he had understood education in 1916-17. It would "cause a radical transformation in working-class psychology, making the working-class better prepared to exercise power, and, through spontaneously generated common historical experience, spread an awareness of the rights and duties of comrades and workers".<sup>33</sup>

The first documents of the Communist International to be published

in Italy, and especially the manifesto drafted by Trotsky, must have encouraged Gramsci's belief that the way to power was through councils which educated men through a constant class-struggle at their place of work and allowed them both to understand and have the will to change the world. In the second half of 1919 and early 1920 he and his followers began an endless round of talks and agitation in the factories in favour of the establishment of workers' councils. They found the working-class contacts he had built up among the FIOM "rigids", like Giovanni Parodi, invaluable in obtaining *entrée* for them.<sup>34</sup> Together they and their audiences elaborated a complicated analysis of Italy's post-war problems and their solution which formed the basis of the articles in *Ordine Nuovo*. We may sum up this analysis as: 1) the problem of capitalist society was that it alienated men from one another, and thus destroyed the possibility of their uniting to overthrow it; 2) therefore, "associating men together can and must be assumed to be the essential fact of the proletarian revolution" and, 3) as the Russian, Hungarian, and German experience showed, the one effective way to do this was to form councils to unite men together and prepare them for a successful socialist revolution.<sup>35</sup> Gramsci wrote years later in a catalogue of the lessons of the factory council movement that "our actions always had an almost immediate and wide success, and seemed like the interpretation of a diffuse, deeply-felt need, never as the cold application of an intellectual schema . . ." because they "never took action without sounding out the opinion of the worker in various ways. . . ."<sup>36</sup>

In September 1919 the workers of Fiat Brevetti met to set up the first of the factory councils, starting a movement which had spread through the Turin factories by the end of 1919. It was not, at first, a movement dominated by the socialists of *Ordine Nuovo* although they worked hard to develop its revolutionary qualities and thus win it to their point of view through their School of Cultural and Social Propaganda.<sup>37</sup> It is worthwhile emphasizing the enormous effort Gramsci put into these endeavours. Tasca wrote: "We must note the intense activity of Gramsci. . . . Avanti, the Central Executive of the Party, *Ordine Nuovo*, *Sotto la Mole*, lectures for the factory councils . . . prodigious activity, a sickly body and a steely will . . . he is a leader."<sup>38</sup> These words remind us that revolutions do not make themselves, and that at the beginning of 1920 Gramsci was actively committed in a practical and organizational sense to a particular course of action. He could not therefore avoid the implications of this activity for his understanding of leninism when he began to become more acquainted with leninism in 1920.

By May 1920 his French sources had made available to him Lenin's work on the Problems of Soviet Power; The Heroes of the Borne International;

*The Third International and its Place in History* and some work on the economic and social problems of the transition to socialism. In June further articles by Lenin on the proposal to reconstruct the Berne International appeared, and in July *Bulletin Communiste* published Lenin's letter to Sylvia Pankhurst condemning her refusal to participate in parliamentary activity. In December the same journal carried the first two chapters of *Left-Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder*.<sup>39</sup> Nearly all of these writings stressed the bankruptcy of the Second International and its mechanical marxism and the importance of the Soviets, but, with the exception of *Left-Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder*, none are really important works of Lenin.

However, there was one account of Lenin and his theory which stood out among the rather lyrical accounts of Ransome, Goode, Sadoul and others, for whom Lenin's major discovery was still the soviets. This was Zinoviev's speech of 6 September 1918, made after the attempt on Lenin's life, which appeared in *Vie Ouvrière* on 16 April 1920. We do not know if Gramsci read it, but it was interesting because it contained the only account of *What is to be Done?* in these sources. The article stated that the first article in the *Spark* contained the "quintessence of bolshevism" and then gave a simple account of the contents of *What is to be Done?* making clear its stress not only on "conscious" activity being necessary on a political level if a revolution was to be made, but that it was all-important to organize a revolutionary party. Yet Zinoviev also negated this emphasis by suggesting that concern with the party was only an early development in Lenin's thought (he also skated over *Materialism and Emfirie-Criticism*) which proceeded to the crucial theoretical contribution of Lenin, the theory of the role of the soviets which he had supposedly developed since 1905, and his corresponding teaching on the State: "In Lenin the government of the soviets found not only its greatest political leader, a practitioner, an organizer, a fiery propagandist, a poet, but also its greatest theoretician, a Karl Marx." So even when the fundamental text for Lenin's teaching on the party was discussed, its importance was lost in the stress that Lenin's greatest contribution to marxism was his theory of the State.

It is clear that at this juncture Gramsci, too, still regarded the main teaching of Lenin to be that in the *State and Revolution*,<sup>40</sup> since he recommended it warmly as "useful to everybody".<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, his knowledge of this book ante-dated that of his French sources, which only translated it over a year later, when they were very enthusiastic about it.<sup>42</sup>

How important the role of the party was in leninist revolutionary theory only became more clear when the reports of the Second Congress of the Communist International began to be published in August and September 1920, in France and Italy. It is important to recall that the

emphasis on party politics at this congress, the first at which western revolutionary socialists were present in any numbers, was accompanied by a call for moderation in their anti-parliamentarism. Left-Wing Communism became available in French at about the same time as the Second Comintern Congress. There was a noticeable change in the attitudes of Gramsci's French sources towards Lenin. They gave *Left-Wing Communism* a mixed reception and tended to start lending more support to Trotsky than to Lenin, whose opinions had already been dubbed "rightist", or moderate, in tendency much earlier.<sup>43</sup>

It is not clear whether Gramsci shared their resistance to a party leninism rather than a "sovietist" or "syndicalist" leninism, but he certainly continued to regard Lenin as a "conciliar" theorist throughout 1920, equating the views of Lenin, Luxemburg and Pannekoek and writing in October 1920: "The syndicalist tendencies of *Ordine Nuovo* are also a myth: we simply make the mistake of believing that only the masses can make the revolution, that a party secretary or president cannot make it through decrees: it seems that this was the opinion of Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg, and the opinion of Lenin."<sup>44</sup> He also published a whole series of eyewitness accounts of the revolution which stressed the same view of Lenin. Moreover, in the only reference to *What is to be Done?* which appeared in *Ordine Nuovo* (in an account by Charles Rapaport), Gramsci's accompanying caption dismissed it as an "old thesis".<sup>45</sup>

If Lenin's theory of the party had not begun to affect Gramsci by the end of 1920, he had certainly begun to use the concept of imperialism more frequently. However, the fact that he did not realize that Lenin did not agree entirely with Hilferding, or Adler and Kautsky, suggests that he had not grasped the nuances of Lenin's theory, and was, as earlier writings indicate, developing the theory autonomously.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, he absolutely refused to regard such world-wide developments of capitalism as shifting the main locus of the class-struggle outside the factory.

At the end of 1920 accounts of Lenin's theory of the party had obviously not become sufficiently clear or predominant to make Gramsci reconsider his belief that the Russian's main contribution was a "conciliar" theory. It was still possible to have this view of leninism and the role accorded to a party in such a theory even late in 1920 because of ambivalences in the formulations of Lenin himself. For example, in his letter published in Italy in September 1920 condemning the Italian Socialist Party and supporting a Turinese demand that the party "renew" itself, Lenin suggested that the revolution started from below and that the task of the party was to "generalize, and give watchwords".<sup>47</sup> But Gramsci's own activity during that year pushed him ever more strongly in the direction of favouring a renewal of the

PSI and then, faute *de mieux*, a split from the PSI and the formation of a Communist Party. He was forced to consider the problem of a revolutionary party because his factory councils threatened the hegemony of the traditional union and PSI leaders in Turin. When they attacked him, and not before, he was compelled to embark on a critique, first of the unions, and then of the party. Both, he argued, were organized not to take power, but to come to agreements within the bourgeois State, and their policies and structures were therefore determined by capitalism. In the course of their dispute each side sought their allies where they could and Gramsci turned particularly to the anti-party workers, both anarchist and "abstentionist", whose leaders now controlled the FIOM. The rupture with the PSI took place after its leaders refused to lend national assistance to the Turinese workers, who were locked out in April 1920 by their employers, who had a much greater understanding of the revolutionary implications of the councils than the PSI's leaders.<sup>48</sup> In May Gramsci's bitter denunciation of the PSI was read at its Milan conference. He called upon the PSI to prepare for revolution through organization and education, since the contemporary period would mark either the success of a proletarian revolution or usher in "the most terrible of reactions". He claimed that the PSI leaders had failed to help the strikers because they did not live "immersed in the reality of the class-struggle", because the party was too bureaucratic. "The existence of a strongly disciplined and cohesive Communist Party, which through its nuclei in the factory, unions and co-operatives, coordinates and takes central control in its executive committee of all revolutionary actions of the proletariat is the fundamental and indispensable condition for attempting any Soviet experiment. . . ."<sup>49</sup>

The PSI rejected this critique, denying the possibility of any immediate revolution although they had committed themselves to its actuality when they joined the Comintern in December 1919. Lenin learnt of the exchange through intermediaries who favoured the Turinese and at the Second Congress of the Comintern in July-August 1920 made clear that "the II Congress of the Third International regards the criticism of the party, and the practical proposals put before the national congress of the Italian Socialist Party by the Turinese section of the party in *Ordine Nuovo* of 8 May 1920 as substantially correct. They correspond fully to the fundamental principles of the Third International."<sup>50</sup> The PSI delegation was flabbergasted, and it was made quite clear to Lenin that the Turinese were considered "syndicalist", and at least implicitly anti-party.<sup>51</sup> Lenin then withdrew his blanket approval of Gramsci's policies and limited his endorsement to the text of the document, not the intentions of its authors.<sup>52</sup>

What this amounts to is an endorsement by Lenin of Gramsci's

views on the PSI before he knew what they really meant and before Gramsci had read any of Lenin's views on the party. From the time of this refusal by Lenin to endorse any "syndicalist" interpretation of the role of the party we can observe a growing tension between Gramsci's and Lenin's views. For although Gramsci denied that he was a syndicalist he did continue to equate the Russian revolution with councils, and these with what was common in the writings of Marx, Lenin and de Leon.<sup>53</sup> Not without some justification.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, the Russian was making clear that the party would have primacy over the soviet both in theory and practice. By March 1921 *Clarté* had published *Right-wing Socialism and Counter-Revolution* which made clear the leading role of the party in Lenin's thought: "When people talk about the unity of the proletariat it is difficult to listen to them without smiling . . . we know through experience that the unity of the proletariat can only be ensured by a revolutionary marxist party, and only by a struggle without mercy by this party against the others."<sup>55</sup> Throughout early 1921 in the preparations for the Third Comintern Congress it was made clear that when the leninist theory of imperialism was put together with the democratic centralism of the twenty-one conditions of admission to the Communist International the result was a hierarchy of command in which the whole of the "world communist party" was obliged to obey the Comintern's Executive Committee in Moscow, no matter what the line laid down.

Although also pushed to consider the role of the party by the continuous failure of the PSI to lead, Gramsci was drawing very different conclusions in the second half of 1920. In July he wrote in a consideration of how the party should renew itself, that it should be: "a party of the masses who wish to free themselves through their own efforts, by themselves, from political and industrial slavery, through the organization of the social economy, and not a party which uses the masses to attempt heroic imitations of the French Jacobins."<sup>56</sup> He set to work not to replace the existing leaders of the PSI or to split away from it, as his co-editors wished and as the "abstentionists" in the factory councils also wished, but to organize education groups which "can offer the proletariat for its emancipation, neither communal councils nor union leaders, but work in the field of mass action; for communist groups in the factory and union, for the Workers' Council, for proletarian unity in the face of menace to its cohesion. . . ."<sup>57</sup> This activity he typified as one which escaped from the "magic circle" of concern with political leadership and, implicitly, saw the problem of the failure of the revolution to eventuate in the nature of the existing relationship between the party and the real organic life of the masses. But the correct relationship he proposed was one which did away with the leading role of the party, which was to become no more than the

"agent" of a process of revolution taking place on the factory floor. "The Party and the union ought not to consider themselves the tutors or ready-made superstructures of the [council]. . . . They must consider themselves the conscious agents of its liberation from the forces of oppression centred in the bourgeois state. They must organize the general (political) external conditions in which the process of revolution will develop its greatest speed and in which the liberated productive forces will find their greatest expansion."<sup>88</sup>

Gramsci's analysis of the role of the party did not stop at such "anti-Jacobin" formulations. New events caused him to elaborate further after July 1920. The great industrialists were determined by the second half of 1920 to smash the revolutionary pretensions of the workers once and for all. They adopted a completely uncompromising position in negotiations for better conditions. So the Metalworkers' trade union federation called on the workers to occupy their factories as a defensive move aimed at making the government intervene in favour of the workers. Gramsci considered the move ill-timed and likely to foster illusions. In September 1920 the workers started to occupy their factories throughout Italy, though especially in the North. Gramsci then warned that merely occupying a factory did not bring about a revolution. He penned an important article which revealed clearly that in denying a leading role to a party he was not denying that it played an important part in making a revolution. A revolution was only made (and here the influence of *State and Revolution* on him seems obvious) when the State power of the bourgeoisie was smashed, and to do this the proletariat needed an armed force to take power and coerce the reaction. He obviously did not feel that the PSI was able to take these initiatives, but he also obviously believed that nation-wide initiatives, and therefore a national party, was needed as it would have to lead the assault on the State.<sup>89</sup>

In this state of mind, knowing that a party was necessary for a revolution, and that councils alone could not make the revolution, he sat in factories with the workers and watched the PSI ("Barnum's circus") shilly-shally and fritter away its chances. The occupations, which had started as a defensive move, were obviously becoming more and more offensive in their nature. The trade union leaders who had sown the wind began nervously to watch the approaching whirlwind. Unity of purpose was rapidly lost among the leaders of the unions and the Socialist Party. While encouraging the belief that there could be a revolution through aggressive and demagogic sloganeering and manifestoes, they simultaneously engaged in negotiations with the industrialists and the government to prevent such an outcome. Gramsci commented wryly that the Socialist Party was "no different from the English Labour Party and revolutionary . . . only in its programme".

It was really a conglomerate of parties and had become as a result an organization to be exploited by adventurists and careerists, and incapable of showing any initiative and responsibility.<sup>60</sup> Small wonder that mutual distrust was obvious when Togliatti visited Milan to discuss policy with the trade union leaders, just as the crisis reached its peak. The trade union leaders asked whether the Turin workers would initiate the assault on the State by coming out into the streets. Togliatti saw in this proposal a plot to destroy the factory council movement once and for all and refused flatly: "... to do it a simultaneous action throughout the country is necessary, and above all a nation-wide action".<sup>61</sup>

The responsibility was too much for the leaders of both the unions and the Socialist party. Some offered to resign to avoid having to make the decision, others declared that since it was a "political matter" it did not really involve them, as they were union leaders. Finally, the problem was resolved, to the relief of the majority, by putting the issue of whether to extend the movement to a vote, that ultimate fetish of the irresolute. By a majority the "revolution was lost".

It was only after the revolution was lost that Gramsci started organizing to establish a new communist party, though he recognized that it was really too late to be useful since he himself had stated in May that either the revolution would triumph or there would begin the most "terrible of reactions". It was only in a situation which he characterized as the "chaos and collapse" of Italian socialism, when he felt himself "overwhelmed by events", that he agreed to split the PSI.<sup>62</sup> In the desperate scramble to retrieve something from the wreckage, Gramsci helped to create the sort of party he did not want, and the sort of party which neither Lenin, Trotsky nor the Comintern wanted.

### III

In 1958, at the first conference of Gramscian studies, Palmiro Togliatti, the secretary of the Italian Communist Party, stated the official orthodoxy about the relationship between Gramsci and Lenin. He affirmed that between 1919-22 Gramsci read: *What is to be Done?*; *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*; *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy*; *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*; *The State and Revolution*; *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*; *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* and *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*; that he accepted the theory in them and rejected his "crochianism"; and, in particular, that he accepted the leninist theory of the party.<sup>63</sup> We have shown that up to mid-1921 Gramsci could only have read some of the works on Togliatti's list; could, necessarily, only have accepted some of the theory in the *ensemble* of those works, and did not subscribe to the leninist

theory of a leading role party before the formation of the PCI in 1921. This is not to argue that Gramsci did not wish to become a leninist in 1917-21, or that he did not devour avidly what Lenin was available to him and spread Lenin's theory among his comrades, but merely that when we follow Cicerchia's suggestion and discover how Lenin's thought permeated through Eastern Europe to the West and how it was taken up, we are left, in Terracini's words, with the fact that Lenin ". . . was known more as a revolutionary than as a marxist theoretician".<sup>84</sup> Again, this is not to argue that he did not read those works of Lenin listed by Togliatti, after 1921, and espouse them, in part, or in their entirety.

It seems from a historical reconstruction that the leninism which Gramsci knew before 1921, and accepted, was a "sovietist" leninism (or, as critics would have it, a "syndicalist" deviation) which stressed that a revolution is made from below by masses of men learning in the practice of organizing themselves for united action. His Lenin was a man who never lost sight of "the mainspring of all political and economic activity: the class-struggle".<sup>85</sup> This class struggle—because it never lost sight of the "sole categorical imperative in Marx 'Workers of the World Unite' "<sup>86</sup>—took place in a special form—through workers' councils organized at the place of work.

Is this "sovietist" leninism—the "translation" of leninism into the West in 1919-21—really leninism? Many commentators say no. Spriano is blunt: "We cannot identify leninism with a conception of revolution from below, with a molecular process of the formation of the workers' State, which Gramsci places at the base of his theory of power. . . ."<sup>87</sup> Caracciolo, Soave and Berti more or less agree. They thus come into agreement with the extreme left students of Gramsci who maintain that Gramsci was not a leninist because he neglected or underestimated the role of the party.<sup>88</sup> Both groups of commentators, despite other abiding disagreements, share the view that Gramsci was not really a Leninist because they agree that the unifying problematic in Lenin's theory is the leading role a party must play in making a revolution. The nub of such a view of the relationship between the theory of Gramsci and that of Lenin must rest not on the claim that he ignored the role a party can play—we have shown that after April 1920 Gramsci clearly realized that a party is essential, not so much for raising consciousness as What is to be Done? argues, but for the co-ordination of national initiatives which begin at council level, and for the assault on the bourgeois State machine. In a whole series of articles Gramsci and his followers called for renewal of the PSI; that it be changed by "the communist groups in the factory" from an assembly expressing the "psychology of the crow" into an "association" based on the factory and composed of "delegates [from the factory]

with imperative mandates<sup>31</sup>.—Rather, such a view must rest on the claim that the problematic in Gramsci's theory denies *a leading role* to the party—that Gramsci takes an "anti-Jacobin" view of the revolution. It is difficult to disagree with the claim that Gramsci was an "anti-Jacobin" up to 1921. He not only wrote in 1918 that "Jacobinism was the substitution of one authoritarian régime for another", but he claimed that the Russian revolution could not be Jacobin because it was proletarian.<sup>32</sup> In other words, a proletarian revolution and Jacobin positions were mutually exclusive. Gramsci understood Jacobinism in a variety of senses, but the key sense was that in 1918 Jacobinism could be equated with "cultural messianism". "Cultural messianism" had the following qualities and logic, making it the opposite of revolutionary. It believed that "the majority of men were fundamentally honest and upright, but prey to and the victims of ignorance of their own real interests and the goals that they could more usefully aim for" and therefore, "cultural messianism" proposed a work of "discussion and propaganda" in which it had "infinite faith", particularly through a newspaper which would unite and clarify the diverse aims of men; but when its reason failed to unite men, it "saw the maleficent influence of perverse wills", which are finally identified with "the leaders", who it condemns to universal execration.<sup>33</sup>

Two points need to be made here. First, that it is easy to show that Lenin frequently asserted the identity of Jacobinism and the proletarian revolutionary. In *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* he wrote: "A Jacobin who wholly identifies himself with the *organization* of the proletariat—a proletariat *conscious* of its class interests—is a *revolutionary Social-Democrat*."<sup>34</sup> At the same time as Gramsci condemned Jacobinism and described him as an anti-Jacobin, Lenin wrote: "Bourgeois historians see Jacobinism as a decline. Proletarian historians see Jacobinism as one of the highest points reached by an oppressed class in the struggle for its emancipation. . . . It is a characteristic of the bourgeois class to execrate Jacobinism. It is a characteristic of the petty-bourgeoisie to fear it. Conscious workers and proletarians believe that power should pass to the revolutionary class, the oppressed, and that is where the essence of Jacobinism *lies*."<sup>35</sup> Second, it is easy to show that in 1902–4 Lenin meant by Jacobinism the "cultural messianism" Gramsci condemned. The dissimilarities between the contents of *What is to be Done?* and Gramsci's "cultural messianism" are too striking to be ignored. When we add *One Step Forward* we see that Lenin justified the purging of the party of "opportunists" by reference to the experience of Jacobinism. In sum, it is clear that in 1904 Lenin called himself a "present-day" Jacobin because he thought that the role of party leadership was all-important in making a revolution, and Gramsci was an "anti-Jacobin" because he did not.

A *prima facie* case exists for the claim that Gramsci was not a Leninist because of this fundamental difference of emphasis. It is a useful base on which to distinguish their theory as it directs attention to what is novel in Gramsci's views. Unlike Lenin, Gramsci never organized to split the party even when it needed to be renewed, because he did not consider the fundamental problem of the "conscious" revolution to be one of leadership, but one of the relationship between the leaders and the masses. Of him, the real weakness of the PSI as a revolutionary force was that its leaders did not live "immersed" in proletarian life, in the class struggle, and therefore "could not express the communist solution to contemporary problems: proletarian control of production and distribution, disarmament of mercenary armed forces, and control of the municipalities by the workers' organizations":<sup>72</sup> and that the workers were not united and disciplined enough to overcome their inability to see their problems on a national level, to overcome their tendency to "see everything rosy and to like songs and fanfares more than sacrifices"<sup>73</sup> and to seize power on a national level after organizing their own armed forces. Both sides need to step out of the "magic circle" where each blamed the other for their failures and saw the problem as either that of political leadership or mass consciousness, and instead to engage in the process of "mass work" in the factory and the union "for Workers' Council, for proletarian unity in the face of menace to its cohesion".

This displacement of the problem of revolution in the West from the party (theory) and the masses (practice) to the relations and links between them is what constitutes Gramsci's novelty and explains how and why he was already by 1922 advising a revolutionary strategy of replacing "a bourgeois personnel . . . by a communist personnel in all vital and dynamic functions organized in the State". Such suggestions precluded the concerns developed later in his Prison Notebooks, in particular the concern with the intellectuals as the real expression of the link between practice and theory.

Yet, while it is obviously useful to draw the distinction between Gramsci and Lenin—"anti-Jacobin" versus "Jacobin"—as it indicates the precise locus of Gramscian theory, it is useful to make a reservation about the blunt assertion that Gramsci was not a "Leninist" before 1921. This essay has been devoted to enquiring about the degree to which the ideas of Gramsci were dependent upon those of Lenin. Most other work on the relationship between the Russian and the Italian has been devoted, in one sense, to such inquiry. We have reached common conclusions that Gramsci's ideas were not dependent on those of Lenin and that in fundamental respects their views were different up to 1921. There is, however, another way of examining the relationship which has not been attempted here, because our object has been to demystify

the relationship by breaking away from the presupposition that all revolutionaries must be "leninists" (in the sense that their thought paraphrases that of the Russian) through using a *historical* method. The alternative way of examining their relationship should placate proponents of the view that Gramsci was a "leninist". It examines both theories from the point of view of the history of **marxist** theory as a whole, and takes as its starting point the **marxist** position that the meaning of **marxist** writings is determined by the *present* stage in the understanding of revolutionary **marxist** theory: it looks at them from the end-point in a historical development of which they form a part. In this enquiry the meaning of both theories is theoretically, but perhaps not practically, *outside them* and what is significant in their work is established not by *what they thought was significant*, nor by *what they directed most of their attention to*, but *by what our present revolutionary/practical understanding renders significant* in their work. This reading is an *implicit* reading in which our perspective renders *visible* what was *latent*.

To explicate to our own satisfaction what is involved in such *revolutionary* reading would involve writing a history of **marxism qua** theory of practice, **which** we cannot hope to do here. But some interesting implications for Lenin's rather than Gramsci's theory emerge from such a reading, which *practically* means reading the former in the light of the latter. We make this last assertion because we agree with A. M. Macciocchi in *Pour Gramsci* (Seuil, Paris, 1974) that Gramsci and Mao hold similar views and constitute the height of contemporary revolutionary theory, though each in their own environment, and with their own real objects. As an aside, we note that contemporary theory of a "structuralist" sort does not help us make a *social* revolution, whatever its contribution to philosophy. We also concede that it is theoretically inevitable that Gramsci himself will eventually have to be subjected to the same reduction in terms of future revolutionary theory, and thus our perspective on Lenin will change.

Reading Lenin from the point of view of contemporary revolutionary **marxist** thought, that is, from the point of view of Gramsci, shows that the significant development in his thought is a movement away from the positivist, fatalist views of the Second International towards a philosophy of praxis: towards the point where, if we may be permitted the image, he hands the baton on to Gramsci. In this sense his theory is a "revolt against *Capital*". This handing on of the baton is not understood simply as a filiation of ideas—we have already shown the **limitations** of such a *hegelian* view in practice—rather it is to be understood as the meeting of two separate revolutionary practices, in which the practice determines the validity of the theory. Moreover, the overall reading does not deny the established facts of Lenin's life: it re-orders them to render them comprehensible.

Briefly, Lenin's starting point should be seen as that of a man trying to make a revolution—where there was no real *alternative*—with the tools of understanding and action provided by the Second International. His theoretical paraphernalia, readers will recall, started with Capital and Plekhanov's *Our Differences*, which, when read in isolation, suggested that Marx's writings had already established how this world worked. Lenin, like most *marxists* of the Second International, not only read Marx backwards, but also did not read crucial sections of Marx until later, if he read them at all (The Parisian Manuscripts, the *Grundrisse*). Together these theoretical tools provided by the Second International contained an implicit logic, which was explicated by theoreticians like Bernstein and, later, Kautsky. This logic was that marxism was a fatalism which described the automatic development of capitalism into its own contradictory death, and led politically towards an evolutionary practice in its conclusions.

Lenin could not accept these political conclusions and rejected them in *Where to Begin?* and *What is to be Done?* in 1901-2. It is important to stress that it was the conclusions rather than their premises which he rejected, as in retaining the premises he retained a contradiction which would vitiate the practical action he took to make a revolution. As most readers of *Socialist Register* know, he proposed to create a revolutionary consciousness among the Russian workers through "combining all the activities of the local groups" of revolutionaries who had preceded him, and had been unsuccessful in their propaganda efforts because of their lack of *organization*. Since Lenin is often misunderstood as primarily an organizer, it is important to stress that the object of this organization of fragmented groups into a party was to facilitate the raising of a revolutionary consciousness among the Russian workers. This political intervention to make a revolution marks a step forward from the do-nothing politics of the Second International, but it failed in its object, which was to raise a revolutionary consciousness. There is not the space in this article to go into the history of this failure. What concerns us is why there was such a failure.

The crucial problem was not merely a matter of organization for revolution in the abstract, but how and where to organize. Lenin proposed to organize, and organized, on the political level first, to raise what seemed a perennial social revolt to the level of apolitical revolution. More lies behind this choice than the apparent realities of *Russia*—which were undoubtedly compellingly present. To explain the choice we must realize that Lenin was still working on the basis of the premises of the Second International's marxism on at least two levels: first, he still believed that conditions created class-consciousness, as distinct from a revolutionary consciousness and confined his critique of "spontaneity" to the Socialist notion that class-consciousness automatically

developed into revolutionary consciousness; second, and this partly explained his first limitation, he still thought that Marx's works contained a final description of how the world worked, and therefore, that the problem of raising a class-consciousness to a revolutionary consciousness was primarily a matter of transmission of Marx by those who knew the contents of those works to those who did not. His concept was naturally one of a revolution from above where "twelve wise men" were worth a "hundred fools" and where the immediate and crucial problem was one of leadership. Hence the over-all theme in Lenin's work up to 1905 was that theory preceded practice.

However, his political practice, and especially his observation of the 1905 revolution in Russia, called into question the belief that theory preceded practice, and hence led back to rejection of the notion that the crucial problem was that of leadership. The lesson he drew from 1905 was clear: "The proletariat sensed sooner than its leaders the change in the objective conditions of the struggle and the need for a transition from a strike to an uprising. As is always the case, practice marched ahead of theory."<sup>74</sup> This was a discovery of immense theoretical as well as practical importance, but Lenin only realized it practically at first. He refused to draw the conclusions implicit in it for marxist theory and therefore reaffirmed categorically a residual fatalism ". . . the idea of seeking the salvation of the working class in anything but the further development of capitalism is reactionary".<sup>75</sup> After 1905 Lenin still believed that objective conditions created class-consciousness, that is, that the process of the class-in-itself into the *class-for-itself* is automatic. So while he affirmed the limited historical relevance of the notions in *What is to be Done?* after 1905 and tended to devote more attention to the problem of galvanizing struggle by direct organizational activity in the working class than to the party, he simultaneously made clear his theoretical limitations to the positions of the Second International in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. What is important for his further development, which, of course, had its ups and downs, is that over-all his views were informed by the following sort of notion: "The real education of the masses can never be separated from their independent political and especially revolutionary struggle. Only struggle educates the exploited class."<sup>76</sup> There is an enormous wealth of nuance in such a notion, which combined started battering down the still-present vestiges of the elitist view that education (the creation of a revolutionary consciousness) comes from above, and the corresponding view that class-consciousness arises automatically. The whole problematic of automatic marxism is called into question.

Since the "educative struggle" took place in specific form, that of Soviets, Lenin became more and more a theoretician of the role of the Soviets, though first he only theorized their role practically. While

the Russian revolutionary movement remained revolutionary (up to circa 1921), this change in Lenin's concerns from the party to the Soviet was clearly recognized by the leaders of that movement (e.g. in Zinoviev's speech of 1918 cited on p. 133 of this article), but it was later clouded by a return to concern with the leading role of the party after 1921, and particularly under Stalin. Moreover, the more rapid realization by Trotsky of what role the Soviets played, obscured the fact that in a slower fashion Lenin, too, was revising his views of how a revolution was made.

Implicitly, after 1905, the problem of organization is seen in two ways by Lenin: organization must take place on 1) a political or party level, and 2) on a pre-political, or social and class level. The stress in *What is to be Done?* shifts as well. Instead of party organization being primarily important, and organization at the level of production being secondary, the emphasis changes. The real organization for revolution takes place at the level of the class qua producers and the role of the party shifts implicitly from that of the educator ("who knows") to that of agent of the working class, especially in its assault on the State. Indeed, when the issue of insurrection became paramount in 1917 it became clear that its role was primarily that of overthrowing the bourgeois State power. The important theoretical works of that year include not only *State and Revolution*, but apparently more practical works like *Marxism and Insurrection*. When insurrection became the order of the day, it also became clear that the development of class consciousness through the Soviets did not mean a corresponding readiness to overthrow the State in any concrete fashion: ". . . the majority of the soldiers sympathized with the Bolsheviks, voted for them, elected them, but also expected them to decide things". This real reaffirmation of the essentiality of the party, did not, however, prevent Lenin stating that the main lesson of 1917 was: "The history of the Russian revolution has shown precisely that no argument can convince the great masses of the working class, the peasants, the small employees, if they are not convinced by their own experience."<sup>77</sup> Did the implicit affirmation that men must change the world in order to know it—this "philosophy of practice"—mean an implicit or explicit realization by Lenin that theoretical marxism was yet to be written? Had he himself realized the theoretical implications of such statements? The answer probably depends on what status we are to accord to the criticism he made of all previous marxist theory, including his own, when he read Hegel's work. An affirmative answer, which we do not feel capable of supporting or denying, would have important implications for the relations between Lenin and Gramsci since it would situate a rupture in the understanding of marxism in Lenin's life as well as in Gramsci's.

We prefer to rest with the proposition that from the point of view of

the history of marxism, leninism at its end-point and gramscianism at its beginning are closely linked, and that Gramsci certainly developed many of the implications of a "philosophy of practice" from 1919 onwards. By this we mean that just as we have described leninism as a proving in practice of the limitations of the Second International's marxism, so we can understand gramscianism as the proving in practice and the exposition in theory of the relevance of the end-point of leninism. This very method, which allows us to see a strong convergence in 1917–21, as Lenin moves from a theory of the party to a theory of councils and **Gramsci** follows the reverse process, both for practical reasons rather than through the influence of the ideas of the first upon the second, also compels us to see Gramsci's thought as a development **away** from that point of convergence —once again the image of men in a relay race comes to mind. This movement **away** and **beyond** leninism is what allows Gramsci to give a much clearer theoretical formulation of his own practice than Lenin did, especially with regard to the creation of class consciousness through the reorganization of social life. Later it allowed him to write the invaluable Prison *Notes*, which clothe with concrete meaning, and political advice for Western revolutionaries, **Marx's** words: "The materialist doctrine that men are the products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are the products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. Hence, this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, one of which is superior to society (in Robert Owen, for example).

"The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionizing practice."

#### NOTES

1. This section of this essay is covered at much greater length in my *The Young Gramsci: Towards an Intellectual Biography* (forthcoming). Gramsci was born at Ales, Sardinia, on 23 January 1891. His father, Francesco, was a civil servant employed in the Land Registry. His mother, Giuseppina, was a member of a local land-owning family, the Corrias. Gramsci had a privileged life by **Sardinian** standards until he was injured in a fall at the age of four and started to develop a hunchback. Then his life became a cycle of **misery**: first his father was jailed in the course of a political feud; then, because he was a fallen member of the middle class in a society where the middle class had usually brutally oppressed the peasantry, he was mercilessly persecuted by his peasant school companions. He lived a life of physical and emotional deprivation—like a "bear" looking out of his lair, "convinced that no-one could love him". For compensation he turned to reading, and by the time he had finished high-school in Cagliari he had moved to the top of his class. In 1910 he won a scholarship to Turin University, where once again

he lived the life of a withdrawn scholar, whose brilliant potential was thwarted by starvation and a body racked by illness. His social outlook was affected by this life. As Garuglieri puts it "... being mocked at because of his deformity developed in him a great love for all those who suffer unjustly, and the need to give them succour, drove him to sacrifice himself generously in their cause". As a child he blamed the miseries of life on the Italian imperialism which exploited Sardinia, a view shared by many Sardinians, and he associated himself emotionally with the Sardinian nationalist movement known as **sardism**. But under the influence of his university teachers he was attracted to socialism, joined the Italian Socialist Party in 1913, and became a full-time journalist on the socialist newspapers *Avanti* and *Grido del Popolo*. This began a long career of revolutionary militancy, first as a Socialist, and then as a leader of the Communist Party of Italy formed in 1921. In his political practice he evolved the ideas which found their culmination in the now famous *Prison Notebooks*.

In 1916 Gramsci stated that the views in Croce's, *Teoria e storia della storiografia* constituted his "starting point", and in 1918 that they were still "undoubtedly right". *Sotto la Mole* (Einaudi, Turin, 1960, pp. 145, 365.

3. G. Amoretti, "Con Gramsci sotto la Mole" in *Gramsci, Scritti di Palmiro Togliatti ed altri* (Unita, Rome, 1945), p. 44.
4. For Gramsci's expression of these principles see *Sotto la Mole*, p. 365 where he wrote: "To be history, and not merely graphic marks, or source material, or aids to memory, past events must be thought up again, and this rethinking brings them up to date, since the evaluation or ordering of those facts necessarily depends on the 'contemporary' knowledge of the person rethinking the past event, about who makes history, and who made it in the past." It followed that Gramsci maintained that men were never the prisoners of their past in the sense that they could not fire themselves through their own wilful action. Indeed, he denied that men could only be freed by some structural conjunction of events.
5. *La Città futura*, 11 February 1917. See reprint in G. Ferrata and N. Gallo, eds., *Due mila pagine di Gramsci* (Il Saggiatore, Milan, 1964), I, pp. 233-5.
6. A. Labriola, *La concezione materialistica della storia* (Laterza, Bari, 1953), pp. 31, 151.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 73; *Sotto la Mole* (3 April 1916), pp. 101-2.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
9. See Al Leonetti, "Romain Rolland e Gramsci" in *Note su Gramsci* (Argalia, Urbino, 1971 (?)), pp. 209-21; Romain Rolland, *Jean-Christopher* (Michel, Paris, 1956), p. 22; *Au-dessus de la mêlée* (Michel, Paris, 1953), pp. 64, 80, 88, 124.
10. "Socialismo e cultura", *Il Grido del Popolo* (29 January 1916) in G. Ferrata and N. Gallo, I, pp. 189-93; *Avanti* (Turin) (9 December 1916) in S. Caprioglio, *Scritti 1915-1921* (Il Corpo, 1968), pp. 23-5.
11. P. Gobetti, "Storia dei comunisti torinesi scritto da un liberale", *Rivoluzione liberale*, IV, 2, 1922.
12. For the lectures and the strongly pro-crocean tone of the suggested reading see Amoretti, p. 45; for the club see the letter from Gramsci to Giuseppe Lombardo-Radice (March (?) 1918) in *Rinascita*, 7 March 1964; Leonetti, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-8.
13. See *Avanguardia*, 20 October 1912 for Bordiga's statement and L. Cortesi ed., *Il Socialismo italiano tra riforme e rivoluzione 1892-1921 Atti congressuali del PSI* (Laterza, Bari, 1969) for the full report of Mussolini's opinions at the 1914 Ancona conference of the PSI; for the attitude of young workers at that time see M. Montagnana, *Ricordi di un operaio torinese* (Rinascita, Rome, 1949), p. 28; A. Tasca in *Il Mondo*, 18 August 1953.
14. In 1918, in an article rejecting the positivism of his former hero, Gaetano Salvemini, which is also interesting for other reasons, Gramsci wrote: "Jacobinism is a messianic view of history: it always speaks in abstractions: evil/good; oppression/liberty; light/shade; which exist absolutely, generically, and not in

historical forms. Jacobin messianism is completed by cultural messianism, which is represented in Italy by Gaetano Salvemini and has given birth to idealist movements like that of *La Voce* in the past and *l'Unità* at the present time. . . . Even cultural messianism abstracts from the concrete forms of economic and political life, and proposes an absolute outside time and space . . . and ends up being utopian." See *Scritti giovanili* (Einaudi, Turin, 1958), pp. 271-3.

15. *Il Grido del Popolo* (29 April 1917) in Ferrata and Gallo, I, pp. 251-2.
16. *Ibid.*, (29 September 1917) in Caprioglio, *Scritti*, pp. 31-6. Victor Mikhailovitch Chernov (1876-1952)—one of the leaders and theoreticians of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. After the February 1917 revolution, he was Minister for Agriculture in the Provisional Government; organizer of severe repressive measures against peasants who seized landed estates. After the October Revolution, Chernov was one of the organizers of anti-Soviet revolts. In 1920, he emigrated and continued his anti-Soviet activities from abroad.
17. S. Caprioglio, "Un articolo di Gramsci alla vigilia di Ottobre", *Rinascita*, 13 October 1967; P. Spriano, *Torino operaia nella grande guerra 1914-1918* (Einaudi, Turin, 1960), p. 210.
18. *Il Grido del Popolo* (29 July 1917) in *Scritti giovanili*, pp. 122-4.
19. "Il Nostro Marx" in *Il Grido del popolo* (4 May 1918) in *Scrittigiovanili*, pp. 217-21.
20. "La rivoluzione contro il Capitale", *Avanti* (Milan) (24 November 1917) in *ibid.*, pp. 149-53.
21. "L'utopia russa", *Il Grido del Popolo* (27 July 1918) in Ferrata and Gallo, I, p. 317.
22. G. Germanetto, *Memoirs of a Barber* (Co-operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the USSR, Moscow-Leningrad, 1934), p. 138; P. Spriano, *Torino operaia*, pp. 286-7.
23. *Trent'anni di vita e lotte del PCI* (Quaderni di Rinascita, 11), p. 37; M. and M. Ferrara, *Conversando con Togliatti* (Edizioni di Cultura culturali, Rome, 1952), p. 43.
24. S. Caprioglio in *Rinascita*, 13 October 1967. Alfonso Leonetti casts doubt on this account in a letter to me dated 14 March 1974. He writes: "All relations between Gramsci and Polledro were broken off after the latter became a 'social-patriot', that is to say, in 1914. Perhaps you mean Gobetti, who took Russian lessons from Polledro's wife. That is possible."
25. A. Leonetti, Letter to *Rinascita*, 22 February 1964; *Note su Gramsci*, p. 109. The sources were also apparently sometimes in English and German, which Togliatti translated, but this was rarely so after 1919. The contents of Leonetti's anthology, which he claims in his letter to me of 14 March 1974 ". . . contains everything essentially important among Lenin's writings then known in Italy. . ." are: *The Third International; Bourgeois Democracy or Proletarian Democracy; The Victory of the Soviets; The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky; The Heroes of the Berne International; Can exploiters and exploited be equal?; Democracy and Dictatorship in Germany; To the Workers in the Field; The National and Colonial Question; The Young International; Voluntary and Obligatory Work; The Emancipation of Women; The Struggle for Bread; The Political and Economic Situation in the World and the Task of the Third International*. See Nicola Lenin, *Pagine scelte a cura di A. Leonetti* (Facchi, Milan, 1920), pp. 190.
26. I have been able to check the complete files of all these newspapers and journals for 1919, 1920 and 1921 mainly at the magnificent Bibliothéque de documentation internationale contemporaine at the University of Paris -X (Nanterre).
27. *La Vie Ouvrière*, 20 August 1919.
28. *Ibid.*, 2 July 1919.
29. *Ibid.*, also *ibid.*, 21 November 1919; *Clarté*, 2 November 1919.
30. The quotation is from an article by one of his close associates. See the "Dawn of Ordine Nuovo", *Avanguardia*, 9 March 1919.

31. "Il programma dell'Ordine Nuovo", *Ordine Nuovo* (Einaudi, Turin, 1955), p. 148.
32. See "Democrazia operaia" (21 June 1919), in *ibid.*, pp. 10-15.
33. *Ibid.* He also wrote that through the factory councils "began that education and that change in psychology, which, according to Karl Marx, must be considered the most promising symptom of the incipient realization of communism". Resoconto in *Avanti*, 25 June 1919, republished in A. Caracciolo, "Il movimento torinese dei consigli di fabbrica", *Mondo operaio*, 2 February 1958, pp. 16-27.
34. G. Parodi, "Gramsci con gli operai", in *Gramsci*, *op. cit.*, p. 67; U. Terracini, "I consigli di fabbrica: vicende e problemi dall'Inghilterra alla Russia, dalla Germania a Torino", *Almanacco socialista 1920*.
35. For a fuller account see my forthcoming essay in *Australian Left Review*.
36. Gramsci to Togliatti, 27 March 1924 in P. Togliatti ed., *La formazione del gruppo dirigente del PCI* (Riuniti, Rome, 1962), p. 255.
37. P. Spriano, *L'Ordine Nuovo* (Einaudi, Turin, 1963), p. 37, fn. 1.
38. Quoted in G. Berti, *I primi dieci anni vita del PCI. Documenti inediti dall'Archivio Tasca* (Feltrinelli, Milan, 1969), p. 67.
39. *Bulletin Communiste*, 23 December 1920.
40. "Per un rinnovamento del Partito Socialista italiano" (8 May 1920), *Ordine Nuovo*, pp. 117-21; Leonetti, p. 24.
41. "Per un rinnovamento. . .", *op. cit.*
42. *La Vie Ouvrière*, 25 November 1921.
43. See e.g. Clark, 29 November 1919: the association with Trotsky dated back many years in the case of *La Vie Ouvrière*. See Dolléans, *Histoire du Mouvement Ouvrier 1871-1920* (Colin, Paris, 1957), II, p. 234.
44. *Ordine Nuovo* (5 June 1920); (9 October 1920) in *Ordine Nuovo*, pp. 130, 489.
45. See *Ordine Nuovo*, 10 January 1920; L. Paggi, *Gramsci e il Moderno Principe* (Riuniti, Rome, 1970), I, p. 303, suggests that this indicates that Gramsci did not understand its significance in Lenin's thought at this time.
46. See *Ordine Nuovo*, pp. 130, 153, 490.
47. *Ibid.*; *Korrespondenz Internationale*, No. 13, 1920, col. 260.
48. See my article in *Australian Left Review*.
49. "Per un rinnovamento. . .", *op. cit.*
50. V. I. Lenin, *Sul Movimento Operaio Italiano* (Rinascita, Rome, 1952), p. 140; see *Communist International*, II, No. 15, August 1920, cols. 2487-2492 for the republication of the Turinese criticism.
51. *Il Soviet*, III, No. 24, October 1920, cited by P. Spriano, *Storia del Partito Comunista italiano* (Einaudi, Turin, 1967), I, p. 73.
52. *Ibid.*
53. "Il programma dell'Ordine Nuovo", *Ordine Nuovo*, pp. 146ff.; "La relazione Tasca e il congresso camerale di Torino", *Ordine Nuovo* (5 June 1920) in *Ordine Nuovo*, pp. 27ff.
54. *Korrespondenz internationale*, No. 13, 1920, col. 260.
55. Clark, 11 March 1921.
56. "Due Rivoluzioni" (3 July 1920) in *Ordine Nuovo*, p. 140.
57. *Avanti*, 12 August 1920 reprinted in F. Ferri, "La situazione interna della sezione socialista torinese nell'estate del 1920", *Rinascita*, April 1958.
58. "Il Consiglio di Fabbrica" (5 June 1920) in *Ordine Nuovo*, p. 127.
59. "L'Occupazione" (2 September 1920) in Caprioglio, *Scritti*, pp. 130-2.
60. "Il Partito comunista" (4 9 September 1920) in *Ordine Nuovo*, p. 161.
61. Cited in Paolo Spriano, *L'Occupazione delle fabbriche* (Einaudi, Turin, 1964), p. 103.
62. "Contro il pessimismo" (15 March 1924) in Spriano, *Gramsci Scritti politici* (Einaudi, Turin, 1967), p. 546.

63. P. Togliatti, "Il leninismo nel **pensiero** e nell'azione di A. Gramsci" in Studi gramsciani, *Atti del convegno tenuto a Roma nei giorni 11-13 gennaio 1958* (Riuniti, Rome, 1969), pp. 16-19.
64. U. Terracini, "Three Meetings with Lenin" in S. F. Bezveselny and D. Y. Grunberg, *They Knew Lenin* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1968), p. 211.
65. "L'Opera di Lenin" (14 September 1918) in *Scritti giovanili 1918-1919* (Einaudi, Turin, 1958), p. 308.
66. Spriano, *Storia del Partito Comunista Italiano*, I, p. 62.
67. See A. Caracciolo, "A proposito di Gramsci, la Russia, e il movimento bolscevico", in Studi *gramsciani*, pp. 95-105; E. Soave, "Appunti sulle **origini** teoriche e pratiche dei **consigli** di fabbrica a **Torino**", *Rivista storica del socialismo*, VII, No. 21, January-April 1964; Berti, *op. cit.* The best representative "left" article is A. de Clementi, "La **politica** del **partito comunista d'Italia** nel 1921-1922 e il **rapporto** Bordiga-Gramsci", *Rivista storica del socialismo*, No. 28, 1966.
68. "Note sulla rivoluzione **rusa**" (29 April 1917) in Scrittigiovanili, p. 106.
69. "La **Politica** del 'se' " (29 June 1918) in *ibid.*, pp. 272-3.
70. V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1967), I, p. 412.
71. Lenin, *Oeuvres complètes*, XXV, pp. 124-5.
72. "I **Gruppi comunisti**" (17 July 1920) in *Ordine Nuovo*, pp. 140-3; "Due rivoluzioni" (3 July 1920) in *ibid.*, pp. 135-40.
73. Letter to Zino **Zini** in *Rinascita*, XXI, p. 17, 25 April 1964; *Avanti*, 2 September 1920 in Caprioglio, pp. 130-2, 134.
74. Lenin, *Selected Works*, I, p. 579.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 486.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 792.
77. Lenin, *Sul movimento operaio*, p. 146.