



UNIVERSITY  
OF WOLLONGONG  
AUSTRALIA

---

Volume 2

Issue 4 *Readings and Applications of Gramsci / The  
National Edition of Gramsci's Writings*

Article 7

---

2018

Scritti [Writings] (1910-1926). Vol. 2, Scritti  
[Writings] 1917, Leonardo Rapone (ed.) (in  
English)

Giovanna Savant

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci>

---

### Recommended Citation

Savant, Giovanna, Scritti [Writings] (1910-1926). Vol. 2, Scritti [Writings] 1917, Leonardo Rapone (ed.) (in English), *International Gramsci Journal*, 2(4), 2018, 116-150.

Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci/vol2/iss4/7>

---

Scritti [Writings] (1910-1926). Vol. 2, Scritti [Writings] 1917, Leonardo Rapone (ed.) (in English)

**Abstract**

In this editorial presentation of Giovanna Savant's review article and her detailed reconstruction of the historical context to Gramsci's journalistic output in 1917, notes to page numbers where not otherwise specified are to the volume of the National Edition edited by Leonardo Rapone. Cross references are included to aid readers in finding articles included in the earlier publications of Gramsci's pre-prison writings; the English-language version of her article also includes references to standard English translations, where available. It should be borne in mind that Gramsci's various newspaper articles were at times heavily censored and a great merit of Rapone's volume, apart from its more authoritative attribution of authorship, is to have often found the censored passages in archives or outlying areas where the censorship was less rigid and reinstated them. Readers should therefore realize that words quoted in the text of Savant's contribution are not always to be found in the standard Italian collections of Gramsci's writings, but sometimes only in the volume which she here discusses.

**Keywords**

Journalism 1917; new attributions; situation in Turin; nationalism; critique of socialists; Russian revolutions

**Antonio Gramsci:**  
**Scritti / Writings (1910-1926) Vol. 2:**  
**Writings 1917\***

Giovanna Savant

1. As part of the *National Edition* of Gramsci's writings, the volume edited by Leonardo Rapone is the first one to be devoted to his journalistic activities before he was arrested. Gramsci began to write regularly for the socialist press in October 1915, collaborating with the Turin daily "Grido del Popolo", and then as from December of that year, through the *Cronache torinesi*, the page devoted each day to Turin by the Milanese edition of "Avanti!", in which he devoted special attention to the column *Sotto la mole* and to theatre criticism.<sup>1</sup>

The volume comprises all Gramsci's articles of 1917, including those in the "Grido del Popolo" which were deleted by the censorship but whose drafts are in Turin's State Archive. At the beginning of the 1980s, they were first brought to light there by Sergio Caprioglio, who edited them for the Einaudi publishing house as the last selection of the pre-prison writings (letters excluded) before the present *National Edition*. The greater part of these articles are not signed, as established by a norm introduced by the leadership of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) in the autumn of 1914, so that no one could make use of a proletarian journal for personal ends.<sup>2</sup> One of Rapone's main problems has therefore been to single out, to the greatest possible extent of certainty, which texts may effectively be attributed to Gramsci.

---

\* Antonio Gramsci *Scritti 1917*, ed. Leonardo Rapone with the collaboration of Maria Luisa Righi and the contribution of Benedetta Garzarelli. Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2015, pp. 810.

<sup>1</sup> See M.L. Righi, *Gli esordi di Gramsci al "Grido del Popolo e all'"Avanti!" (1915-1916)* [Gramsci's beginnings at the "Grido del Popolo" and "Avanti!" (1915-1916)] in "Studi Storici", LV (2014), no. 3, pp. 725-57.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. G.M. Serrati, *Per un cassetto personale (For a small personal case)*, "Avanti!", 13 September 1916 and A.G. *Un giornale in liquidazione. Un partito alla deriva. Intermezzo semiserio (A newspaper in liquidation. A party that is drifting. A semi-serious intervention)*, "L'Unità", 16 September 1925, in A Gramsci, *La costruzione del Partito comunista. 1923-1926*, Torino, Einaudi, 1971, pp. 405-9.

The point of departure for this work was a critical analysis of the previous editions of the journalistic writings, an analysis which led to the exclusion of a group of 22 articles which up to now had been considered to be by Gramsci. This exclusion was made on the basis that these texts were either subject to excessive mutilation by the censorship, leading to the impossibility of establishing authorship with certainty, or that stylistic usages are present which are quite different from those contained in articles that, with certainty, can be ascribed to Gramsci. Following the same reasoning, the few articles of uncertain attribution dating to 1917, included in Caprioglio's anthology *La Città futura*, have also here been excluded.<sup>3</sup> As compared with these exclusions, the volume does include a group of 25 new articles, which, on the basis of reasoning explained in his *Notes on the text*, Rapone here for the first time attributes to Gramsci. Among these are five music reviews (of operas and piano concerts) which testify to Gramsci's interest in these forms of artistic expression.<sup>4</sup>

The texts are ordered chronologically, with no separation between theatre reviews and other articles. Gramsci's thought in 1917, and in general in the years of the Great War, was still in the process of being formed and, as the editor correctly notes, is best understood "only by embracing it its overall perspective and following it, step by step, in all its expressions".<sup>5</sup>

From a reading of the almost 300 articles collected together in the volume, one gains the impression of a militant journalist who, different from the majority of his colleagues, is not seeking to reassure readers with the usual clichés of low level propaganda, but is attempting to drive them towards a reflection, following an educational instinct that was to characterize his entire political activity. One example of this is "La Città futura", the single, one-off propaganda publication, which

---

<sup>3</sup> A. Gramsci, *La Città futura. 1917-1918 (The Future City. 1917-1918)*, ed. S. Caprioglio, Torino, Einaudi, 1982 (hereafter *CF* 1982).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Rapone, *Nota al testo*, pp. XXIX-XXX. In the notes to each article of music criticism, the editor cites the judgment passed by other Turin newspapers on the same performances, thereby in many cases showing the originality of Gramsci's position.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XXXI. The volume contains three appendices: a pocket Biography, containing information on the people quoted in Gramsci's articles, excluding the most well-known historical figures, but including all others contemporary with Gramsci; a Periodicals index, which includes all the journals cited in Gramsci's articles; and a name index.

came out on 11 February 1917 at the behest of the Piedmontese youth federation and which was prepared in its entirety by Gramsci. Its intended readership was in the main the young people who attended the evening schools and who, in Gramsci's view, could be brought towards socialism if they understood that, in the youth movement, they could find the means for raising their cultural training.<sup>6</sup> However, it was just the high cultural tone characterizing the articles that ensured that this one-off number was received with some controversy within the youth organization and attracted the criticism that it was comprehensible only to a restricted élite of militants.<sup>7</sup>

Overall, "La Città futura" constitutes a clear and effective synthesis of the various elements comprising Gramsci's political thought after over three years of membership of the PSI, namely a revolutionary and anti-dogmatic Marxism, a critique of socialist reformism, and the importance of culture for the development of class consciousness in the proletariat.<sup>8</sup> The single number also reveals the variety of interests characterizing Gramsci's intellectual background: as well as a core consisting of articles and his own brief interventions, one finds a passage from Gaetano Salvemini on culture, and two reflections on religion and the sense of life by, respectively, Benedetto Croce, defined as "the greatest thinker in Europe at this moment in time", and the philosopher Armando Carlini, a follower of Giovanni Gentile.<sup>9</sup> As Gramsci would recall some years later, in one of his prison notes, at that time he "was tendentially somewhat Crocean" and his purpose was to use neoidealist philosophy as a means for the restoration of

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the Regional Committee of the Piedmontese Youth Federation, *Concludendo una discussione utile (Concluding a Useful Discussion)* in "L'Avanguardia", XI, 485, 1 April 1917, pp. 209-10.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. N. Cilla, *Nella nostra famiglia. Discussioni utili (Within our Family. Useful Discussions)*, cit., 481-2, 4-11 March 1917.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Leonardo Paggi, *Gramsci e il moderno principe. I. Nella crisi del socialismo italiano (Gramsci and the Modern Prince. I In the Crisis of Italian Socialism)*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 2 volumes, pp. 8-9, where he claims that the one-off number took on the nature of "a sort of early work".

<sup>9</sup> *Due inviti alla meditazione (Two invitations to meditate on)*, "La Città futura", 11 February 1917, pp. 101-3. Readers are referred to the notes on pp. 101-2 for the description of the passages from Salvemini, Croce and Carlini and for the relevant bibliographical references (See also *CF* 1982, cit., pp. 21-2).

Marxism in the younger generation, just as Hegelianism had been the premise for historical materialism in the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

In announcing publication of the sheet, Gramsci declared that the war had “scythed down the youth”, descending on their movement like a battle axe, albeit without succeeding in disabling it, since the socialists whose lives had been sacrificed had been replaced by others who previously had been extraneous to the political struggle. It was as if the conflict, “like a gust of wind, ha[d] shaken the indifferent”, making them fulfil their duty.<sup>11</sup> Condemnation of indifference is among the main themes of “La Città futura”:

Indifference is at work powerfully in history. It is at work passively but it is at work. It is fateful; it represents what you cannot rely on; it is what upsets programmes, what overturns the best laid plans; it is the raw material that rebels against intelligence and throttles it. What succeeds, the evil that descends over everything, the possible good that a heroic act (of universal value) may generate, is not due so much to the initiatives of the few as to the indifference, the absenteeism of the many.

What happens in history takes place because the masses let it happen, allowing the will of small groups to impose itself, thereby sealing the fate of an entire era. In Gramsci’s view, such attitudes must be replaced by a new sensitivity, which makes everyone feel the sense of their own historical responsibility, “which does not allow for any sort of agnosticism and indifference”.<sup>12</sup>

Repudiation of passivity, however, is not enough. In order to be really socialist, it is necessary to carry out a further operation, in other words, one must get rid of all forms of sentimentalism as the main-spring of action. Gramsci had occasion to explain this a few days after the issue of “La Città futura”, when two representatives of the Belgian government, Alphonse Gaspar and Vincent Volckaert (a socialist worker and a Member of Parliament respectively), came on an official

---

<sup>10</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, Q10, part I, §11, p. 1233 of the critical edition, ed. Valentino Gerratana, Torino, Einaudi, 1975, p. 1233. [In English, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Derek Boothman, London Lawrence and Wishart, 1995, pp. 355.]

<sup>11</sup> “La Città futura”, “Il Grido del popolo”, XXII, no. 655, 11 February 1917, and “Avanti!”, 12 February 1917, pp. 80-3. (See *CF* 1982, cit., pp. 3 and 13.)

<sup>12</sup> *Indifferenti*, “La Città futura”, 11 February 1917, pp. 93-4. (See *CF* 1982, cit., pp. 13-15.)

visit to Turin. As had happened in other Italian cities, the two envoys told the press of the devastations their country had undergone as a result of the German invasion, claiming that they did not understand why the leaders of the Italian working-class movement had not responded to the call by the people of Belgium.<sup>13</sup> A year before this, Gramsci had written that socialists could not but “feel anguish for the crushed little country of Belgium” but this anguish was an “austere” one, which did not induce them to merge and become one with the general expressions of emotion.<sup>14</sup> On the basis of this conviction the error that he imputes to the two Belgian government envoys was that of attempting to transform emotion into a political weapon and, as such, the Italian socialists were right to refuse to take part in the game: their natural context was that of the class struggle and, from that point of view, there was nothing they could do for Belgium.<sup>15</sup>

Gramsci insisted on the question of character in order to emphasize the difference between the socialists and the bourgeois parties. These latter were formed by men who, immediately after the unification of Italy, had abandoned the Mazzinian and radical ideas that had inspired them in favour of order:

They were converted by sentimentalism or by the spirit of adaptation. Sentimentalism thus became the political principle that constructed Italian public life. This was a sentimentalism that destroys character, that hinders the formation of character. It substitutes confusion for logic, and the indistinct and the chaotic for the distinct. It negates any concrete programme, because it is prone to modifying itself according to those contingencies created by chance.<sup>16</sup>

Since the opponents of the working-class movement had a mentality “formed through transformism”, they led a day-to-day existence and were “idolaters of the single, isolated fact” which

---

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, *Gaspar narra le sofferenze del popolo belga, suscitando una manifestazione di commossa solidarietà* (Gaspar tells of the sufferings of the Belgian people, evoking a manifestation of moving solidarity), “Gazzetta del popolo”, 26 February 1917.

<sup>14</sup> *La commemorazione di Miss Cavell*, “Avanti!” 17 January 1916; in Gramsci, *Cronache torinesi 1913-1917*, ed. Sergio Caprioglio, Torino, 1980 (hereafter CT 1980), pp. 76-9.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *I monaci di Pascal* (Pascal's monks), “Avanti!”, 26 February 1917, pp. 136-40. (See CF 1982, cit., pp. 56-9.)

<sup>16</sup> Alfa Gamma, *Carattere*, “Il Grido del Popolo”, XXII, no. 658, 3 March 1917, pp. 150-3. (See CF 1982, cit., pp. 69-72.)

became the sole criterion of judgment, while the socialists saw above all continuity and dynamism.<sup>17</sup> On this account, the militants of the PSI had become exponents of a new type of humanity which, turning its back on openheartedness and sentimentalist impulses – considered “lower forms of spiritual life” – did not fall into facile illusions. One of the principal merits of Italian socialism was therefore to have given something to the country that it had always lacked: a concrete example of the nature of its “adamantine character, fiercely proud of itself”.<sup>18</sup>

The rejection of openheartedness indicates the distancing that Gramsci took from the conviction, widespread among the intransigents of the Turin section, that sentiment was the principal reason for joining the workers’ movement.<sup>19</sup> But it also reveals the influence was being exerted on Gramsci’s thought by a number of cultural reviews that he read attentively, such as “Leonardo” and “La Voce”; these were publications which, from the beginning of the century had been fighting for a moral regeneration of the country, to be realized through the development of certain qualities in the characters of the Italians. The main differences between Gramsci and such avant-garde groupings lay in the fact that, while the majority of intellectuals that composed them supported the cause of the Entente, considering the Great War the main instrument of the spiritual reform that was necessary, Gramsci on the other hand upheld opposition to the conflict as the founding element of the new human type.<sup>20</sup>

In Gramsci’s view one of the main contributions toward enfeebling the character of the Italians came from religion; as long ago as 1916, he noted how it urged individuals to put their will in the hands of God and God’s ministers on earth, beginning to “manipulate” them from

---

<sup>17</sup> *Il bozzacchione* (*The failure*), “Avanti!”, 5 June 1917, pp. 310-12. (See *CF* 1982, cit., pp. 187-8.)

<sup>18</sup> *Carattere*, cit.

<sup>19</sup> Amedeo Bordiga, as long ago as the youth Congress at Bologna in 1912, had expressed the conviction that sentiment was sufficient for adhering to socialism. Cf. Giovanna Savant, *Bordiga, Gramsci e la Grande Guerra (1914-1920)*, (*Bordiga, Gramsci and the Great War (1914-1920)*), Napoli, La Città del Sole, 2016, pp. 35-6.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Leonardo Rapone, *Cinque anni che paiono secoli. Antonio Gramsci dal socialismo al comunismo (1914-1919)* (*Five Years that Seem Centuries. Antonio Gramsci from Socialism to Communism (1914-1919)*), Roma, Carocci, 2011, p. 108 and pp. 109-29, for a reconstruction of the debate on the character of the Italians from Unification to the Great War.



childhood, in the schools and parish social centres.<sup>21</sup> These are subjects that he took up again in 1917, adding that through religious education, giving rise to a dogmatic and intolerant mentality, the Italian people lacked the love for free discussion and the desire to seek truth “through solely human means”.<sup>22</sup> Even the Italian scout organization sprang up on a clearly confessional basis; while in Britain its scope was to educate and develop a sense of personal responsibility in children “to get each one used to act by themselves in the difficulty of action”, in Italy it became a “gymnasium of religious roles”, from which there emerged entire “battalions of narrow-minded and intolerant sanfedisti”.<sup>23</sup>

Within the vast ecclesiastical organization, Gramsci singled out the Jesuits as the main contributors to the work of “destroying character”; because of their excellent organization and strong discipline, he likened them to big industry while, in comparison, the parish priests were mere artisans. The Company of Jesus represented “a form of clerical freemasonry” prone to act in the shadows, powerful and well-structured like the traditional freemasons. Gramsci considered such organizations to be fundamentally similar: as a weapon of propaganda, both used “deception, unbridled trickery, with no possible control on the part of public opinion” and for this reason had to be opposed by socialists.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout 1917, Gramsci followed the Jesuits’ attempts to install themselves once more in Turin, where they tried to take over the Church of the Holy Martyrs from the secular clergy, and called for the application of the Pinelli law, which forbade them to have any residence in Italy. Socialists had never to tire in the struggle against the masonic and Jesuit mentality, but more in general in the consciousness of the people, they should seek to replace the transcendental God of

---

<sup>21</sup> *L'appello ai pargoli* (*The call to the children*), “Avanti!”, 31 July 1916. (See *CT* 1980, *cit.*, pp. 459-60.)

<sup>22</sup> *Per un'Associazione di cultura* (*For a cultural association*), *ibid.*, 18 December 1917, pp. 660-62 (See *CF* 1982, *cit.*, pp. 497-500.)

<sup>23</sup> *Bilancio* (*A balance sheet*), *ibid.*, 4 September 1917, pp. 448-9. (See *CF* 1982, *cit.*, p. 309; ca. fifty lines of this article were censored.) [The “sanfedisti” – meaning the proponents of the “holy faith” (“santa fede”) – were the southern Italian followers of Cardinal Ruffo in the attempt, backed by the British, to overthrow the neo-Jacobin and democratic Neapolitan Republic of 1799 – tr. note.]

<sup>24</sup> *La rinascita gesuitica* (*The Jesuitic rebirth*), *ibid.*, 15 January 1917, pp. 29-33. (See *CT* 1980, *cit.*, pp. 701-4.)

the catholics with confidence in humankind and in its best forces as the sole spiritual reality.<sup>25</sup>

This aim lay at the base of the harsh polemic which, in the Spring of 1917, involved Gramsci against the Turin catholic daily, “Momento”, on the occasion of the beatification of Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo, from the nearby province of Cuneo. Basing himself on a book by a Salesian priest, Gramsci accused the ecclesiastical hierarchy of having constantly attempted to put obstacles in the way of the various activities of the saint in favour of the poor, so that the beatification became a vulgar speculation aimed at exploiting his work and popularity for its own “sectarian goals”.<sup>26</sup> Cottolengo was considered a just man, who would have carried out the same work had he been a Buddhist or a Muslim, since he drew the necessary moral energy from a “far different source from Christian mythology”. As a catholic, he ought to have complied with the orders of his superiors, but he was a “man of character, more than a man of faith” and therefore disobeyed.<sup>27</sup> The demonstration that ethical behaviour did not have transcendental faith as a necessary presupposition assumed great importance for Gramsci, since it proved the possibility of socialism:

The problem of social initiative is the greatest problem of socialism. Our criticism tends to prove that one can have production even without the stimulus of private property, of privilege even without the mirage of individual overbearingness being within reach. And it is always the same problem. Against the conservatives, we deny the need for economic privilege for the production of wealth, as we deny, against the catholics, the need for religion for the production of good, of truth, of moral life.<sup>28</sup>

Religion was not the only force to mar the character of individuals. Gramsci maintained that many defects inherent in the habits of the Italians derive from the fact that although “luminaries of science, of politics, of moral life and culture” had been born in the country, there

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>26</sup> *Il Cottolengo e i clericali (Cottolengo and the Clericals)*, “Avanti!”, 30 April 1917, pp. 260-61. (See *CF* 1982, cit., pp. 147-8.)

<sup>27</sup> *Il Cottolengo e i clericali*, *ibid.*, 5 May 1917, pp. 264-68. (See *CF* 1982, cit., pp. 149-52.)

<sup>28</sup> *Rispondiamo a Crispolti (Let us reply to Crispolti)*, *ibid.*, 19 June 1917, pp. 337-39. (see *CF* 1982, cit., pp. 214-6.)

had never been formed around them even a small group of pupils to carry out their teachings and principles. Citing the verses of a poem by Giuseppe Giusti, he claimed that “every Machiavelli” has always been surrounded by “a host of Stenterellos”, i.e. mediocre individuals who “shout and yell”, upholding the virtue of the Italians but do not work, and produce neither ideas, nor facts, because they do not know how “to adapt to a task that is modest but bears the fruit of the anonymous collectivity”.<sup>29</sup>

War favoured the spread of Stenterellos, a category in which Gramsci included the interventionist intellectuals, the greater part of whom tried to transpose the conflict from the politico-military level to the spiritual one, exalting the spirit of the Latin peoples over the Germanic ones and representing the conflagration in progress as a conflict between civilization and barbarism. To their empty chatter against German science and culture, Gramsci contraposed a custom consisting of seriousness and work “which tempers individuals and which makes genuine personality emerge into the light of the sun”.<sup>30</sup>

Gramsci’s criticisms refer in particular to the Anti-German League of Action, founded in Turin in June 1916, immediately after the *Strafexpedition*, with the aim of fulfilling a role of civil policing against external enemies (spies, infiltrators, but more generally all German citizens) and internal ones (opponents of the war and especially socialists), the target of continual, virulent attacks. In the words of its president, Professor Pietro Romano, its declared aim was to oppose the “damaging German penetration” of every sector of public life, in order to reach complete emancipation “from any Teutonic hegemony”.<sup>31</sup>

Members of the League, which numbered several of the teaching staff of Turin University, had a conception of the nation based on the

---

<sup>29</sup> *Stenterello*, *ibid.*, 10 March 1917, pp. 171-4. Giusti’s poem is *Il Memento*. (See *CF* 1982, cit., pp. 84-6.)

<sup>30</sup> *Demagogia artistica*, *ibid.*, 15 January 1917, pp. 34-37. (*CF* 1980, cit., pp. 705-7.)

<sup>31</sup> P. Romano, *Note sull’interventismo torinese e il ventennale della vittoria (1914-1918)* (*Notes on interventionism in Turin and the twentieth anniversary of victory (1914-1918)*), Torino, Associazione torinese P. Micca, 1939. [The *Strafexpedition* is the name often given in Italy to what is also known as the Battle of the Altopiani {Battaglia degli Altipiani}, or the *Frühjahrs offensive*, between the Italian and Austro-Hungarian armies from mid-May to near the end of June 1916, which left 230,000 dead, injured, missing or taken prisoner – tr. note.]

*jus sanguinis* [nationality defined by parentage]: one has rights only in so far as one's roots are firmly planted not only in the soil but in the blood of the country, with a dangerous slippage towards a conception of belonging to the nation that, if not racist, is to say the least exclusiveist. This aspect did not escape Gramsci and when, in March 1917, the League produced a single-number publication "La Riscossa italica", he pointed to a curious incongruity: the adjective "Italic" has a value "essentially of race", with a meaning that is different from "Italian". The Romans were "Italic", as were the Oscans and the Umbrians, but the Celts were not and neither were the Jews; but many of the members of the League were instead Semitic, and by exalting the virtues of the Italic lineage, became ridiculous, since if Italy were still only Italic, in other words under Roman domination, they would be slaves with no rights.<sup>32</sup>

Among the authors of the League's single-number issue was a Lycée teacher, Arnaldo Monti, who in summer 1917 would create a student organization in favour of the war and the national idea, in practice authorizing middle-school students to rebel against those whom, of their teachers, they considered pro-German. Gramsci's criticism was that, in this way, school life would be reduced to a continual abuse of power, with the institution of a veritable tyranny of the worst elements, who would be able to justify their laziness because of the evil nature of the textbooks. The Italian school would be "stenterellized" and cease to be an intelligent collaboration between youth and adults.<sup>33</sup>

It did not escape his notice that, behind the League's claim to represent "the most genuine Italian tradition", there often lurked an economic interest:

[...] the anti-Germanism of these Stenterellos has special characteristics, special tendencies which pay more attention to solid factors than their nature of airy-fairy poets would suggest: they want economic measures that would allow traders of all types to obtain a generous protectionist recompense for the cheap

---

<sup>32</sup> *Stenterello risponde (Stenterello replies)*, "Avanti!", 14 march 1917, pp. 183-4. (See *CF* 1982, cit., pp. 89-90.)

<sup>33</sup> *La scuola di Stenterello (The School of Stenterello)*, *ibid.*, 15 June 1917, pp. 330-34. New attribution.

sales goods with which they are pretending to play their part in the blood tribute that the proletarian soldiers are forced into paying to the fatherland.<sup>34</sup>

To obtain a similar goal, it was necessary to instil into Italians the conviction that the Germans are a people of abject individuals, who deserve to be banished from humankind, closed up “behind a barrier of fire and tariff walls so that they will end up by tearing themselves to pieces”. The denunciation of these machinations becomes “a moral question”.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, for Gramsci those who “stuff your brain” forget to say that Italy is a poor country, where the consumers have little purchasing power, but in any case they have to buy for the necessities of modern life. It was, therefore, useful that there were nations such as Germany, specialized in the production of cheap goods: commercial relations were convenient both for the Italians and for the Germans since, economically speaking, the good and the bad are “profit and loss” and we are dealing with “concepts in economics, not in sentiments”.<sup>36</sup>

The question again came back, in the polemic against the League, of the nature and condemnation of sentimentalism as the moving force for action. The interventionists introduced into economic questions elements of sentiment that gave rise to upheavals, bringing individuals to “that pitch of frenetic nationalism and mental confusion necessary for self-enslavement”.<sup>37</sup> Even tourism was considered shameful: Italians had to feel humiliated through the arrival every year of crowds of foreign visitors admiring the natural and artistic beauties of the country, leaving their money as “an alms”. But the truth was that this was a form of reverse exportation: instead of buying Italian goods in their own country, foreigners came directly to Italy to consume them. In the limit, the shame consisted in the servile way in which visitors were treated. This servile attitude was however “not an economic, but a moral fact”, and could be overcome by teaching the

---

<sup>34</sup> *Stenterello frigna* (*Stenterello Snivels*), *ibid.*, 20 March 1917, pp. 189-91 . (See *CF* 1982, *cit.*, pp. 94-6 for previously published version, not however containing these lines.)

<sup>35</sup> *Spezzatino di asino e contorno* (*Donkey Stew with Vegetables*), *ibid.*, 24 April 1917, pp. 248-50. (See *CF* 1982, *cit.*, pp. 143-6.)

<sup>36</sup> Argiropulo, *Il perfido straniero* [*The Perfidious Foreigner*], “Il Grido del popolo”, XXII, no. 672, 9 June 1917, pp. 321-3. (See *CF* 1982, *cit.*, pp. 195-7.)

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

Italians that they were necessary to foreigners and vice versa “the dignity of each is formed by this mutual necessity”.<sup>38</sup>

While the interventionists were free to organize public lectures, socialists could only come together in private meetings, with a restricted number of listeners, often interrupted by the “police officer”, who became the “supreme judge” of public life in Italy, and whose harassment Gramsci never tired of denouncing during the entire period of the war.<sup>39</sup> If the forces of order hindered the freedom of movement and the censorship struck at that of thought, this did not mean that the working-class movement did not carry on developing, as its class adversaries hoped. On the contrary, events that do not leave any direct evidence of themselves “have the best possible evidence when they flow out manifestly in a supreme effect and realize themselves in this effect”.<sup>40</sup>

Patriotic rhetoric affected even the theatre. In his role as critic for “Avanti!”, Gramsci followed various plays in which the world conflict became the instrument for moral redemption of characters who, in the blood of the trenches finally learn the meaning of courage and altruism. In actual fact

War, morally, does not lead one to becoming generous, or villainous, since it may lead to one or the other, and it is not yet decided which will be more numerous of these products, not of the war, but of reflections, judgments, exasperations, enthusiasms that the war has helped to strengthen or liquefy, according to men, to their moral preparation, to their human preparation.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, in Turin vaudeville shows were more and more frequent, intended to provide spectators with mere popular entertainment, at the expense of more serious and elaborated-on works “useful for the esthetic education” of the public. Gramsci maintained

---

<sup>38</sup> *L'industria del forestiero* [*The Tourist Industry*], “Il Grido del popolo”, XXII, no. 675, 29 June 1917, pp. 353-54. (See *CF* 1982, cit., pp. 230-1.)

<sup>39</sup> “Umanitari” (“Humanitarians”), “Avanti!”, 27 March 1917, pp. 203-4. (See *CF* 1982, cit., pp. 99-101.)

<sup>40</sup> *La maschera e il volto* (*The Mask and the Face*), *ibid.*, 14 January 1917, pp. 27-28. (See *CT* 1980, cit., pp. 699-700.)

<sup>41</sup> “L’elevazione” di E. Bernstein all’Alfieri [*The Consecration*] of E[meric] {Henri} Bernstein at the Alfieri Theatre, *ibid.*, 28 November 1917, pp. 609-10. (See *CT* 1982, cit., pp. 948-9.)

that this phenomenon could be traced to the Chiarella brothers' Trust, formed with the sole scope of ensuring box-office takings in the many theatres that they controlled.<sup>42</sup> Thus it happened that where "the most vulgar smuttiness" was served up, the public flocked in, while for a concert of the talented Polish pianist Helena Morsztyn [Morsztyn-ówna], who played pieces by Beethoven and Chopin, managing to translate "the beauty, power and authority, the pain" of their works, the concert hall was deserted. Gramsci was convinced that while the bourgeoisie snubbed these two great composers because their music was "like a tempest sweeping aside and overwhelming all baseness of the soul", if the proletarians had the money to spend on a concert, they would know how to appreciate and follow "faithfully and passionately" such a good interpreter as Morsztyn.<sup>43</sup>

2. In 1917, Gramsci continued to use the column "*Sotto la mole*" to analyse the changes that the war had brought about in the economic, social and moral life of the country, filtering them through the lenses of Turin. Many of his often ferociously sarcastic articles, were directed against the representatives of the liberal majority on the city council, led by the mayor, Teofilo Rossi, of Rossi Vermouth fame, which showed itself to be insensitive to the sufferings that the working population had been undergoing since the start of the war.

One of Gramsci's favourite targets was Costanzo Rinaudo, the council executive member in charge of finances, one of whose tasks was to ensure that the rich Turin bourgeoisie paid into the municipal coffers the family tax introduced in November 1915 to take account of the increased city expenditure after Italian intervention in the war.<sup>44</sup> On obtaining the documentation on the amount paid by Rinaudo himself, Gramsci was surprised by the paucity of the sum, given that Rinaudo had several incomes, and therefore held that the suspicion that "the magistrate who ought to have been the guardian of the

---

<sup>42</sup> *L'industria teatrale*, *ibid.*, 28 June 1917, pp. 348-50. (CF 1982, *cit.*, pp. 911-3.)

<sup>43</sup> Helena Morsztyn, *ibid.*, pp. 161-4. New Attribution.

<sup>44</sup> See *ASCT, Atti Municipali (Turin Commune Historical Archive, Municipal Legislation)*, 26 November 1915 session.

municipal assets, is in actual fact their chief robber” was in fact well-founded. The far-from-slight consequence stemming from this was that, in violating the law, Rinaudo was compelled to allow others, too, to ignore it. Gramsci accused the Turin bourgeoisie of not being conscious of its own duties; the sums not paid each year as local taxes were recouped by making the “humble citizens” pay who thus had to “make sacrifices and give up the necessities”.<sup>45</sup> In addition, despite higher interests and the exceptional nature of the situation, highlighted with insistent rhetoric, the Council executive did not shine for rapidity in the collection of local taxes, fearful of losing support in the small business sector, whose vote had been decisive for its electoral victory in June 1914. Beyond doubt, the Commune was working in a difficult context, marked by a rapid rise in population due to the arrival of immigrants from other parts of Italy for employment in the war industries, as well as the presence of refugees, wounded soldiers, and military personnel passing through. The end result was that the demand for goods of prime necessity was greater than the supply, leading to a sharp price rise, but the Rossi Executive long delayed any market regulation, introducing price restrictions on foodstuffs only at the end of 1916.<sup>46</sup>

Gramsci commented that their effectiveness was however limited, since for the most part the small business people tended in all ways to evade it. He went on to say that there had been repeated cases in which proletarian women, who had gone to the carabinieri to lodge a complaint against shopkeepers who were refusing to sell them a price-capped good unless they also bought something else, were brutally thrown out and their protest ignored.<sup>47</sup>

In June 1917 the shopkeepers, on their side, formed a limited company which quickly grew to a thousand members so as to defend the interests of their category.<sup>48</sup> Those who suffered most were the

---

<sup>45</sup> *Per un omaggio al Prof. Costanzo Rinaudo (A Tribute to Prof. Costanzo Rinaudo)*, “Avanti!”, 26 January 1917, p. 56.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. R. Rugafiori, *Nella Grande Guerra*, in *Storia di Torino. VIII. Dalla Grande Guerra alla Liberazione (1914-1945)* (*In the Great War, in History of Turin. VIII. From the Great War to the Liberation (1914-1945)*), Torino, Einaudi, 9 vols., pp. 7-104 (esp. pp. 42-43).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Tutti fanno il loro dovere (Everyone does their duty)*, “Avanti!”, 22 February 1917, p. 131. (CF 1982, pp. 49-50.)

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Rugafiori, cit., p. 46.



small shopkeepers, forced to take account both with the price-caps and with the pressure to raise prices coming from the wholesalers. Gramsci effectively grasped the unease of the retailers, the “*Monssù Botegari*”, who wanted to retain a profit margin necessary for keeping a family and declared that this figure represented “one of the wreckages” left behind by history, and that this role could be better fulfilled in the general interest by other social bodies such as the cooperatives.<sup>49</sup> In Turin in particular the Cooperative Alliance represented “a colossal instrument of economic emancipation”, showing that it could fulfill just such a collective initiative even under a bourgeois regime. Though immersed in a hostile environment, it could become a “factor of history” and be directed towards higher aims of political struggle.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, already in 1916, Gramsci had compared the cooperatives to the first capitalist aggregations that had caused a rent in feudalism. They did therefore have a revolutionary value and by increasing in number and size, they constituted weapons against the bourgeois regime; the more numerous they were, the easier it was to overcome “the terrible crisis” that would accompany the passage from one social order to the other.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the fact that the socialist cooperatives were working well, even in Turin the food situation tended to worsen in the course of 1917: while the population continued to increase, there was a heavy reduction of consumption, with serious problems for the weaker sectors. It became necessary to introduce ration cards for some goods, and yet again Gramsci denounced the delay in the city administration’s action: in the case of sugar, the ration card was introduced in February 1917 after two years of continual rises in price of this commodity, thereby bringing about a polarization in consumption in favour of the rich classes, for whom the cost of a good is “a secondary factor”. They had, at their ease, been able to stock up on precious foodstuffs and the

---

<sup>49</sup> Raksha, *Monssù Botegari* [*M’sieur Shopkeeper*], “Il Grido del popolo”, XXII, n. 651, 13 January 1917, pp. 24-26. (CT 1980, cit., pp. 696-8.)

<sup>50</sup> *La prova* (*The proof*), “Avanti!”, 29 September 1917 and “Il Grido del Popolo”, XXII, n. 688, 29 September 1917, pp. 499-500.

<sup>51</sup> Alfa Gamma, *Socialismo e cooperazione*, “L’Alleanza Cooperativa”, X, n. 116, 30 October 1916. (CT 1980, cit., pp. 600-3.)

introduction of rationing was of no worry in any way.<sup>52</sup> Gramsci further accused Rossi of having used his position as mayor to guarantee the quantity of sugar necessary for his firm's alcoholic drinks production and of having transformed Turin "into a money-spinning fiefdom of his family", indicating it to be a veritable "model of character perversion", on which all who wished for a better Italy should reflect.<sup>53</sup>

However, in June 1917, even an experienced politician such as this vermouth industrialist was, made a mistake. During a public demonstration, giving vent to his feelings and saying he was tired of the war, he exclaimed that Giolitti was more than ever in the hearts of the Italians, and attacked all the interventionist sectors, and was forced to resign. He was succeeded by the senior member of the Executive, Leopoldo Usseglio, who administered the city with the same lack of diligence as his predecessor as regards local taxes, but at the end of July the situation took a sudden turn for the worse, due to the worst grain shortage since the beginning of the war. For two successive weeks the women were forced to run from one shop to another forming long queues in front of the bakeries in their search for bread. On 22 August, the consumers were so exasperated that veritable riots broke out: the upheaval quickly turned into a violent protest against the world war, going on for several days and when the movement died down the balance sheet was fifty dead, hundreds of wounded and thousands of demonstrators arrested.<sup>54</sup> Even if here it was a case of spontaneous agitation, arrest warrants were issued against almost all the local socialist leaders. Gramsci became a member of the provisional committee that took over leadership of the Turin section and became the de facto editor of the "Grido del Popolo".<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> *Le tessere e la favola del furbo* (Ration Cards and the Rogue's Tale), "Avanti!", 28 February 1917, pp. 144-46. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 62-5.) [Gramsci refers in this article to *Der Gescheite Hans* {Clever Hans}, the tale collected by the Brothers Grimm which he later translated in prison: cf. the review article by Birgit Wagner in this number of the IGJ – editorial note.]

<sup>53</sup> *De profundis, ibid.*, 12 June 1917, pp. 327-9. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 205-6.)

<sup>54</sup> Cf. A. Monticone, *Gli italiani in uniforme. 1915-1918. Intellettuali, borghesi e disertatori* [Italians in Uniform. 1915-1918. Intellectuals, Civilians and Deserters], Bari, Laterza, 1972, pp. 89-144.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Paolo Spriano, *Storia di Torino operaio e socialista. Da De Amicis a Gramsci* [History of Working-class and Socialist Turin. From De Amicis to Gramsci], Torino, Einaudi, 1958, pp. 416-31.

The interventionist press was at one in considering socialist propaganda as the real cause of the insurrection and Gramsci forcefully defended the workers who had gone out into the streets. Enemy slanders could not attack “moral purity”, and they proudly proceeded along their path of suffering and sacrifices.<sup>56</sup> Rather, by rejecting the accusations of anti-patriotism, he declared that if a seed of national consciousness existed among the popular strata, the merit belonged precisely to socialism: after unification of the country, Italy was composed of millions of individuals who lived scattered over the national territory and whose world was restricted to the bell tower of their own village. This localism had been overcome thanks to socialist propaganda: the proletarians had developed a solidarity with other men who found themselves in the same conditions, for which learning to read and write in the same language had become a vital need for exchanging ideas and hopes. The birth and growth of the PSI had marked for Italy a “new Renaissance”, that of the poorest strata: no other group had given rise to a similar phenomenon rather, on the contrary, the liberal rulers had “cut” the country up “piecemeal” into many areas, at loggerheads with one another, and created artificial antagonisms through protectionist policies.<sup>57</sup>

An immediate criticism of the conduct of the Turin socialists came from leaders of the right in the PSI, such as Claudio Treves, who launched into a veritable harangue against the revolutionaries. Tracing an analogy between the war and the class struggle, he claimed that in both cases it was possible to adopt different strategies: either attack the enemy or wait on the defensive for the enemies to wear themselves out. The reformists were for the second solution “and the sterility” of the Turin revolts showed that it was not possible to obtain appreciable results through different systems. For the revolutionaries, instead, what counted was “to act *in order to do something*”; they were under the illusion that an active minority could “dictate law to the world” but, in

---

<sup>56</sup> *Il signor Conte Delfino Orsi*, *ibid.*, pp. 423-6.

<sup>57</sup> *Il socialismo e l'Italia*, “Il Grido del Popolo”, XXII, n. 687, 22 September 1917, pp. 481-4. (CF 1982, *cit.*, pp. 349-52.)

actual fact, insurrections served no purpose other than to sow struggle and sacrifice to no avail the most willing.<sup>58</sup>

Gramsci's reply revealed a conception of the party and its relation with the masses that is totally different. He distanced himself from Treves's vision, in which men's lives become a huge chessboard on which the pieces are moved according to a precise strategy, "sure in advance of success or lack of it", and where will is considered positively when it gives up, while it has negative connotations if it assumes the initiative. The reformist Treves had constructed the image of a proletarian army composed of private soldiers and a restricted number of officers and non-commissioned officers who constitute the party. Even if in the situation after the war, Gramsci himself, in referring to working-class organization, frequently made a comparison with the army, at this time he refused the idea of a real hierarchy between leaders and the masses:

The socialists are not the officers of the proletarian army, they are part of the proletariat itself, they are perhaps its consciousness, but as a consciousness cannot be severed from an individual, so the socialists cannot be put in a dual relationship with the proletariat. They are one, always one, and do not command, but live with the proletariat, like the blood circulates and moves within the veins of a body and cannot be made to live and move within rubber tubes rolled up around a corpse.

In the conditions created by the war, the greatest success that the proletariat could reach is that of the "demonstration of its existence".<sup>59</sup>

Gramsci in his turn accused the reformists of having reduced class solidarity to a spirit "of corporation and locality", neglecting the fact that the well-being conquered by restricted working-class aristocracies was translated into poverty "for an enormous majority" of poor proletarians. Thus, if a comparison is made between the reformists' mode of action and that of the revolutionaries, it is the former who emerge defeated: revolutionism overcomes particularisms and is "an integral consciousness of all of life's problems, the current ones, the

---

<sup>58</sup> Claudio Treves, *Antica predica* [*Ancient Sermon*], "Critica Sociale", XXVII, n. 17, 1-15 September 1917, pp. 217-9.

<sup>59</sup> *Analogie e metafore*, "Il Grido del Popolo", XXII, n. 686, 15 September 1917, pp. 464-6. (CF 182, cit., pp. 331-3.)

immediate ones and those of the future”. It cannot consider the mass as a “pupil”, but as the maker of its history, “itself a judge” of the means through which it attains its goals.<sup>60</sup>

The reaction that followed the actions in Turin, declared a “war zone” on 18 September,<sup>61</sup> more and more convinced the reformists of the necessity to support a moderate government, near to the needs of the people. They thought in particular of the return to power of Giolitti who, a few days before the Turin uprising, had made a speech with very advanced contents, declaring that the soldiers and workers, after all their sufferings in the war, had the right to demand measures imbued with greater social justice and the ruling classes had the duty to meet these demands.<sup>62</sup>

In Gramsci’s view, the old liberal leader was simply exploiting the climate of confusion and expectation generated by the world conflagration in order to return to being a protagonist of political life.<sup>63</sup> In reality, it was he who had given the country its “most fraudulent” governments and a collaborationist attitude would alienate the sympathy of a very great number of Italians, who had now come to consider the PSI a “spiritual centre”. The socialists were going through a crucial moment, because they could become everything, just as they could become nothing: “Giolitti too is an adversary, perhaps at this moment the adversary most to be feared”.<sup>64</sup>

3. Among the first initiatives that Gramsci undertook after having become editor of the “Grido del Popolo” was the publication in October of a special number on protectionism, in which he claimed that the struggle against tariffs was “a reaction against the causes that have contributed to bring about the war” and represented “the assertion of an desire for human solidarity”, aiming at abolishing

---

<sup>60</sup> La “Giustizia” (“Justice”), *ibid.*, n. 690, 13 October 1917, pp. 536-8. (CF 1982, *cit.*, pp. 390-2.)

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Paolo Spriano, *History of Working-class Turin*, *cit.*, p. 442.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. G. Giolitti, *Discorsi extraparlamentari (Speeches outside Parliament)*, with an introductory essay by N. Valeri, Torino, Einaudi, 1952, pp. 289-91.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *Assicurazione alla vita (Life insurance)*, “Avanti!”, 16 August 1917. (CF 1982, *cit.*, pp. 278-80.)

<sup>64</sup> *I fatti di Torino al Parlamento nel discorso dell'onorevole Casalini (The actions in Turin before Parliament in the Speech of the Hon. Casalini)*, “Il Grido del Popolo”, XXII, n. 692, 27 October 1917, pp. 563-4. (CF 1982, *cit.*, pp. 410-12.)

hatred among peoples, and favouring the advent of “of a broader and deeper brotherhood among nations”.<sup>65</sup>

A few weeks before this, reflecting on the causes that bring about conflicts, he noted how they were linked to the capitalist system of production, such that they could be considered a “bourgeois fatefulness”, an expression that is not however to be understood literally – since otherwise there would be a permanent state of war between nations – but “in the idealistic sense”, as the interpretation of a necessity. War exists as a potentiality, but becomes concrete when a bourgeois group decides that the moment has come to unleash one, in order to win or defend a privilege. Gramsci emphasized the fact that the real problem is the indifference of the many, since those who take it upon themselves “not to allow knots to accumulate, which then need a sword to cut through them” are few. Indeed there are those who continually work to create conflicts: these are the “professionals of war”, the ones who veritably “sow the seeds of panic”, who seek to stir up hatred among nations since, in a war there are always those who obtain huge rewards, while for the collectivity there is only the loss of loved ones and ruin. He recalled that before 1914, it frequently happened that in all countries, the newspapers that were linked to the armament manufacturers published news of war projects on the part of rival powers and demanded adequate counter-measures. In Britain the talk was of German zeppelins flying over the eastern cities, and it was the same case in Germany right up to the news, completely fake, that Nuremberg had been bombed by the French, in this way gaining popular support for the war. Socialists had to try and expand their movement, in order as soon as possible to replace the dominant class in power and at the same time they had the task of exercising control over those bourgeois groups “who create the decisive hours”:

The second task integrates the first one: it is not enough to be against war in general, just as it is not enough to declare oneself generically socialist. One must try to avoid war concretely thwarting all the tricks, thwarting all the plots of the panic mongers, of the paid hacks of the war industry, of the hacks who are demanding tariff barriers for the economic war. Since it is even necessary for war

---

<sup>65</sup> *I socialisti per la libertà doganale* (*The socialists for freedom from tariffs*), *ibid.*, 20 October 1917, pp. 552-54. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 402-5.)

to break out at a certain moment, what one must do is ensure that this moment never arrives.

The majority of the people, still extraneous to the ideals of socialism, easily let themselves be deceived by the “sirens”: it was the task of the PSI to “throw over bourgeois society the net of their control” to stop in future another, and such an enormous, destruction of lives and riches.<sup>66</sup>

Gramsci considered that it was especially in the sphere of international economic relations that socialists should undertake such an action of control, fighting to obtain policies that reduced the reasons for conflict to a minimum. For this reason it was decided to publish a special number against protectionism, using again some of the arguments in favour of economic liberalism that had already been expressed in the summer of 1916.<sup>67</sup> However, while at this time, he had supported the economic and moral reasons that free traders and socialists could share, now he was underlining the fact that the PSI was pursuing its own ends in this fight, bound up with the realization of its maximum programme:

On the way in which [the tariff problem] is resolved depends the possibility or not of developing the spontaneous forces of production possessed by each country and therefore of hastening or delaying that economic maturity which is an essential basis for the advent of socialism; on this depends the sharpening of the rivalry that today is keeping various nations divided or the creation of more intimate relations that will bring about the passage from the national to the international.

The main reason for which the proletarians had to challenge protectionism was that, as well as fomenting wars, it delayed the attainment of the economic conditions necessary for the advent of the revolution.<sup>68</sup> In consequence, Gramsci opposed any attempt to change

---

<sup>66</sup> A. G., *Il canto delle sirene (The Sirens' Song)*, *ibid.*, n. 688, 6 October 1917 and “Avanti!”, 10 October 1917, pp. 521-7. (CF 1982, *cit.*, pp. 382-7.)

<sup>67</sup> See *Contro il feudalismo economico (Against Economic Feudalism)*, “Il Grido del Popolo”, XXI, n. 628, 5 August 1916; Argiropulos, *Contro il feudalismo economico, ibid.*, 12 August 1916; *Contro il feudalismo economico, Perché il libero scambio non è popolare (Against Economic Feudalism. Why Free Trade is not Popular)*, *ibid.*, n. 630, 19 August 1916. (See CF 1982, *cit.*, pp. 471, 480-2 and 497-8 respectively.)

<sup>68</sup> *The socialists for freedom from tariffs*, *cit.*

that law of free competition that characterized the private property regime and whose full application favoured the attainment of the most developed form of capitalism. His economic liberalism was not, then, a form of condescension towards models of bourgeois culture – an accusation launched at him at that time by some comrades of the socialist section and later taken up by some historians – but together with intransigence was part and parcel of a strategy aiming at radicalizing class antagonism.<sup>69</sup>

He was therefore in opposition not only to protectionism but also to public intervention in the economy. Already in “La Città futura” he had made a number of observations regarding state interference on the part of the two main belligerents, Britain and Germany, shortly before the war. In 1909 Lloyd George had proposed a draft land reform bill that attacked big land ownership, redistributing the land if it were badly cultivated; in the German empire in 1913 the majority of the socialists had voted in for an increase in military spending, since the costs would be covered by a tax on big incomes. In Gramsci’s view, these measures represented a form of “bourgeois state socialism” which, far from attacking the power of the bourgeoisie, increased it since they ensured that in those countries, the proletariat would conduct the class struggle without going to excess, since it would feel itself protected by the government.<sup>70</sup>

However, with the protraction of the war, the Italian state, too, grew and expanded its functions through a congeries of committees and offices that intervened directly in economic and financial activity, leading to a partial suspension of market dynamics. A number of the reformists followed the development of this phenomenon with interest: Treves observed that forms of a collectivist order were being created, which represented an “incontrovertible documentation of the bankruptcy of individualism” and were of value as examples, “albeit

---

<sup>69</sup> Among the main supporters of the existence of a liberal phase in Gramsci are to be found Giuseppe Bergami, *Il giovane Gramsci e il marxismo. 1911-1918* (*The Young Gramsci and Marxism. 1911-1918*), Milano, Feltrinelli 1977; and Domenico Losurdo, *Antonio Gramsci dal liberalismo al comunismo critico* (*Antonio Gramsci from Liberalism to Critical Communism*), Roma, Gamberetti, 1997.

<sup>70</sup> *Tre principi, tre ordini* (*Three Principles, Three Orders*), “La Città futura”, 11 February 1917, pp. 84-92. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 5-12.)



material and rough-and-ready” ones, of the exercise of a communist economy.<sup>71</sup>

Gramsci distanced himself from similar positions, maintaining that in Italy, since unification, the State represented “the citizens’ main enemy”: any growth in its powers coincided with a rise in the poverty of individuals and brought about “a general lowering of public, economic and moral living standards”. The monopolies, introduced during the war, served only to “maintain intact the privilege of restricted categories of which the State is a prisoner”.<sup>72</sup>

The young revolutionary did not limit himself to denouncing the weaknesses and the anomalies present in the State apparatus, but attempted to draw attention to the main reasons for its backwardness. In his view these stemmed from the process of national unification for which he had already, by 1917, begun to sketch out a critical approach, with reference to Engels’ distinction between an economic class and a historical one: an economic class is transformed into a historical one when it passes from the terrain of production to the political one of the superstructure, in other words the path that a class must follow in order to become the organizing element of a society. The Italian bourgeoisie subtracted itself from this law, and created a State without having reached an adequate economic development over the whole of the national territory. The absence of clear and rectilinear programmes in the various political parties of the dominant class depended on the fact that this class had never been a real class of producers, but an “assembly of shabby politicians”.<sup>73</sup>

Things began to change with the advent of the nationalist movement. In late 1917 Gramsci realized that the arguments put forward by Corradini and his allies found a correspondence in the interests of certain capitalist strata, who saw in nationalism their political party, “the theoretician of their needs and their aspirations”.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Claudio Treves, *Maggio nel sangue (May in the Blood)*, “Critica sociale”, XXV, n. 9, 1-15 May 1915, pp. 129-31.

<sup>72</sup> *Lo Stato e l’utile dei cittadini (The State and the Citizens’ Assets)*, “Avanti!”, 8 April 1917, pp. 225-7. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 118-24.)

<sup>73</sup> *Per chiarire le idee sul riformismo borghese (To Clarify Ideas on the Reformism of the Bourgeoisie)*, *ibid.*, 11 December 1917, pp. 642-64. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 481-3.)

<sup>74</sup> *Il riformismo borghese (The Reformism of the Bourgeoisie)*, *ibid.*, 5 December 1917, pp. 629-31. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 470-2.)

The aggregation of individual categories of producers on a clear and concrete programme constituted the rise of the bourgeoisie “as a combative and conscious body”. Since, however, this process was only at the beginning, Gramsci considered that it was normal for the bourgeoisie to embrace the nationalist economic programme, in practice meaning protectionism, aimed at safeguarding particular interests, and established an affinity between nationalist ideology and socialist reformism, considering that the two doctrines were immature and retrograde, typical of a stage of development that had halted at the level of corporativism. The nationalists were “the paladins of the ‘rights’ of the bourgeois corporations”, just as many reformists identified a single category of workers with the whole of the proletariat, for whom they tried to obtain benefits. When the bourgeoisie went beyond the corporative stage, it would realize that liberalism was the real class doctrine, the only one that would tend to a welding together of the various national bourgeoisies and would lead to a growth of global capitalist wealth through free trade.<sup>75</sup>

Analogously, the real doctrine of the proletariat was not reformism, but revolutionary socialism, destined to grow rapidly, because with the prolongation of the war favoured the reawakening from indifference of the great masses, those who had always remained at the margins of political struggle and essentially extraneous to Marxist propaganda. These multitudes felt a vivid desire to put an end to a regime that had made possible such a long and bloody conflict as the one then taking place: in the days before the Turin uprisings, Gramsci had observed the long queues of women in front of the bakers’ shops, and written that the unease was corroding “the instinctive and sheep-like confidence of the indifferent”, and that the reawakening regarded the deepest strata of social passivity.<sup>76</sup> During the rout at Caporetto, he emphasized that the entry of the masses into history represented the most important new factor produced by the conflict and that the phenomenon was irreversible:

---

<sup>75</sup> *Per chiarire le idee sul riformismo borghese*, cit.

<sup>76</sup> *L’orologiaio* (*The Watchmaker*), “Avanti!”, 13 August 1917 and “Il Grido del Popolo”, XXII, n. 682, 18 August 1917, pp. 410-12. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 281-3.)

Three years of war have produced the effect that the supporters of war were very far from having seen. They have shifted a whole number of men who before the war were distant from the political struggle, distant from social life. These men now feel needs that before they did not feel, vague and indistinct needs, not made concrete in a programme.<sup>77</sup>

In the post-WWI period, the thought of how to manage and insert these multitudes into a socialist organization was to become Gramsci's overriding preoccupation.

Meanwhile, the rout and invasion of the national territory decreed the end of the Boselli government and led to the formation of a new ministry under Vittorio Emanuele Orlando. In those days of tension and expectation, with the fear that the enemy might shortly arrive in Milan, Turati and Treves convinced themselves of the need to infuse the soldiers with a sense of confidence, so as to take up the combat again. The efforts of the two culminated in the article *Proletariato e Resistenza*, in which they argued that when the fatherland is oppressed, everyone felt "the firm will to fight, to resist to the utmost" since, with the advance of the enemy, at stake were the institutions of democracy and the freedoms that were of use to the proletariat "still more than to the bourgeoisie".<sup>78</sup> A few days later, on 14 November, the parliamentary socialist group, composed in the main by reformists, voted in agreement with the rest of the Chamber in favour of a motion which proclaimed national concord and the fusion of all possible energies to oppose foreign occupation.<sup>79</sup>

Dissenting voices from the revolutionary wing of the PSI were regularly suppressed by the censorship and since the official party congress was cancelled, the intransigent fraction decided to organize a clandestine meeting in Florence on 18 November. Costantino Lazzari and Giacinto Menotti Serrati took part for the party Leadership together with around forty delegates from the most important

---

<sup>77</sup> *Di chi è la colpa? (Who is to Blame?)*, "Il Grido del Popolo", XXII, n. 695, 17 November 1917, pp. 588-90. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 444-5.)

<sup>78</sup> Filippo Turati – Claudio Treves, *Proletariato e Resistenza (Proletariat and Resistance)*, "Critica sociale" XXVII, n. 21, 1-15 November, 1917, p. 265.

<sup>79</sup> See L. Ambrosoli, *Né aderire, né sabotare (Neither support nor sabotage)*, Milano, Edizioni Avanti!, 1961, pp. 254-6.

sections, amongst whom there were Bordiga and Gramsci.<sup>80</sup> In the course of the meeting it was emphasized that socialism must aim at the revolutionary overthrow of bourgeois society, without however providing any concrete guideline to the proletariat: simply, the manifestations of solidarity expressed by the reformists were condemned. Bordiga's advice was to act immediately, because the proletariat was armed and the State disorganized, but the majority of those present, including Lazzari and Serrati, preferred to remain anchored to the line that had been established in May 1915, summarized in the "neither support not sabotage" formula, maintaining that the Party's attitude could not depend on fluctuating military outcomes.<sup>81</sup>

In Florence, Gramsci was in agreement with Bordiga's thesis regarding the opportunity of an active intervention by the proletariat in the crisis and, like his young Neapolitan comrade, felt disappointed by the insufficiency of the leading group.<sup>82</sup> However, Gramsci was not yet thinking of a conquest of power in the short run: indeed, a few days before the meeting in Florence, he wrote an article in favour of a Constituent Assembly, an idea launched by the democratic interventionists after the military rout, with the aim of obtaining mass consensus for the war. He claimed that convening a Constituent Assembly would allow the political and economic freedoms that typified a bourgeois regime, but which in Italy were still absent, and would favour the realization of a "precise definition of the social forces" that had come into being in the previous three years. In their turn, these would give a measure of the conditions under which the class struggle could be waged, "until the moment when economic reality has become such as to allow the advent of socialism".<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Paolo Spriano, *Storia del partito Comunista. I. Da Bordiga a Gramsci (History of the Communist Party. I. From Bordigs to Gramsci)*, Torino, Einaudi, 1967, 5 vols., p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> See: Giovanni Germanetto, *Souvenirs d'un parruquier*, Paris, Bureau d'éditions, 1931, p. 113 [in English *Memoirs of a barber*, New York, International Publishers, trans. Edmund Stevens, no date but 1931, pp. 131-43 for the conference and p. 136 for the mention of Bordiga's speech], and *Intervento all'Esecutivo allargato dell'Esecutivo dell'Internazionale comunista del novembre 1922* in A. Gramsci, *Socialismo e fascismo. L'Ordine Nuovo 1921-1922*, Torino, Einaudi, 1978, p. 449.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Paolo Spriano, *History of the Communist Party*, cit., p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> *Who is to Blame?*, cit.

Once he had returned to Turin, Gramsci wrote a long piece on the weaknesses he saw in the Socialist Party. His criticism was directed against the reformists, but also involved the revolutionaries, equally unable to foresee the course of events: “either they were giving too much importance to the current situation, to the facts, or they paid no attention to them”. One could not proceed in the same way as before, since now “the enormous multitude” that the war had brought to the light of history, expected a new order from socialism. He therefore argued that it was necessary to begin a work of “intensification of moral life”, judging the proposal advanced in “Avanguardia” by Bordiga for a revision in theory of the methods and programmes of the party to be insufficient, since the errors committed did not in fact depend on the formulas, but on the fact that these formulas had remained as something inanimate, not experienced internally. It was therefore “necessary that we ourselves should change, that our method of action should change ” and with this aim he considered it useful to create a new institution, an organ of culture that could promote and intensify discussions “outside any political and economic contingency”.<sup>84</sup> The new association was to deal with “everything that interests or could one day interest the proletarian movement”, even dealing with philosophical, religious and ethical problems, in the conviction that socialism is “an integral vision of life”, with its own philosophy and its own morals. On the one hand, it was to provide a solution to the problem of the intellectuals, who within the movement were not fulfilling a task that was adequate to their abilities; on the other hand, it would resolve the problem of having to take decisions in haste, with the result that militants ended by accepting choices not through inner conviction but on the basis of confidence in their leaders.<sup>85</sup>

Gramsci’s aim was to introduce greater democracy inside the party, so as to help make good the structural weaknesses of the socialist apparatus, much more marked than when the reformists handed the helm over to the revolutionaries in 1912. From that point, there had

---

<sup>84</sup> A.G., *Lecture (Readings)*, “Il Grido del Popolo”, XXII, n. 696, 24 November 1917, pp. 593-6 (CF 1982, cit., pp. 452-5). For Bordiga’s position on a renewal of the PSI, see Giovanna Savant, *Bordiga, Gramsci e la Grande Guerra*, cit., pp. 175-6.

<sup>85</sup> *Per un’associazione di cultura*, cit. “Avanti!”, 18 December 1917.

been a series of episodes of “Bonapartism”, the last of which was that of Mussolini, in whom the relation between the masses and the leaders was of a charismatic type, based on the authority and prestige of the chief.<sup>86</sup>

The proposal to create a cultural organ gave rise to a wide-ranging debate in the columns of “Avanti!”, but while it obtained the approval of a number of workers, it did not in actual practice find any following. Gramsci noted that those who were opposed to the project had a mistaken conception of culture, and were of the opinion that it meant simply “knowing something of everything”, while it was instead “thinking well, whatever one thinks, and therefore work well, whatever one does”. What counted was not the master’s speech to the disciples, as in the case of the Popular University, but “the minute work of discussion of investigation into problems, in which all take part”, everyone making a contribution and in which all were, at the same time, masters and disciples.<sup>87</sup>

In the name of this Socratic concept of culture, at the end of 1917 together with some of the comrades of the Turin section, Gramsci created a Club for Moral Life, whose aim was to accustom young militants to the disinterested discussion of ethical and social problems. In turn members were asked in preparation to read an essay and then outline their thoughts on it to the group, giving rise to a debate that was closed only when everyone present had been able to understand the results of their joint labours. And in addition not only that: each member was invited to make a public pronouncement and be advised by the comrades present, in order to establish an “intellectual and moral communion of everyone”.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Leonardo Paggi, *Gramsci e il moderno principe*, cit., pp. 130-6.

<sup>87</sup> *Filantropia, buona volontà e organizzazione (Philanthropy, Good Will and Organization)*, “Avanti!”, 24 December 1917, pp. 673-6. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 518-23.)

<sup>88</sup> Letter to Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, March 1918; in *Edizione nazionale degli scritti di Antonio Gramsci. III. Epistolario. Primo tomo, gennaio 1906-dicembre 1922*, ed. D. Bidussa, F. Giasi, G. Luzzatto Voghera and Maria Luisa Righi, Roma, Istituto dell’Enciclopedia italiana, 2009. (*National Edition of the Writings of Antonio Gramsci. III. Correspondence. Volume One. January 1906-December 1922*). [In English see, e.g., A. Gramsci, *A Great and Terrible World. The Pre-prison Letters*, ed. and trans. Derek Boothman, London, Lawrence and Wishart 2014, pp. 100-101 and notes.] With the departure for the front of some of the members, the group dissolved after a few months.

In the meantime, the conflict within the PSI went on apace, since after the rout at Caporetto, the reformist deputies more than once announced their intention to collaborate with the government. Gramsci intervened in defence of the principle of intransigence, arguing that under no circumstances, however exceptional, should the class struggle be halted:

It is not the proletariat that wants the class struggle, it is a condition of its life, a biological necessity of its life. To give up the class struggle would mean the death of the proletariat, in the absolute sense of the word, because the general conditions of social life are such that no human will can abolish them, except by means of a general suicide.<sup>89</sup>

As regards the problem of discipline, Gramsci noted that since the PSI was composed of many individuals, it was essential that everyone should agree on the end to be attained and the means to be utilized, so that everyone could be asked to observe the rules laid down. Intransigence in action presupposed “tolerance in discussion as natural and necessary”: in the debate there had to be “a fusion of souls and wills”, so that at the moment of action there would be the solidarity and agreement of everyone. Naturally there could be no tolerance of “errors and grave mistakes”. Those who avoided discussion, such as the reformist leaders, irresponsibly put obstacles in the way of establishing norms that were binding for all, and produced uncertain and faltering attitudes, elements which in the long run led to the disintegration of even the most solid social body.<sup>90</sup>

The conflict inside the party reopened the debate on the possibility of an agreement with the anarchists: in the opinion of some of the militants, the new International had also to include the libertarians who, since they shared the principles of internationalism and intransigence, were closer to the revolutionaries than the reformists were.<sup>91</sup> Gramsci, supported by Serrati, forcefully opposed such a possibility:

---

<sup>89</sup> *La lotta di classe* (*The Class Struggle*), “Il Grido del popolo”, XXII, n. 697, 1 December 1917, p. 626. (CF 1982, cit., p. 462.)

<sup>90</sup> A. G., *Intransigenza-tolleranza, intolleranza-transigenza*, *ibid.*, n. 698, 8 December 1917, pp. 637-9. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 480-2.)

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Vezio (Spartaco Lavagnini), *La nuova internazionale* (*The New International*), “La Difesa”, XIX, n. 48, 1 December 1917.

the separation between socialists and anarchists lay not only in anti-parliamentarism, but in the type of mentality since “our realistic criticism will never agree with the adamant ahistoricism of the anarchists”. The reformists leave the party for practical divergences, but to come closer to the libertarians would mean “greater and more dangerous confusion”, such as to lead to the disintegration of the PSI itself.<sup>92</sup>

4. The main event that characterized 1917, destined to change the future of the world in the succeeding decades, was the fall of the autocracy in Russia with the two revolutions of February and October, up to the Bolsheviks’ coming to power. Gramsci followed the unfolding of events attentively and, right from the start, declared that the process underway would proceed up to the realization of socialism. In “La Città futura” he had already claimed that the revolution would find fewer obstacles in those States where bourgeois society was most backward: in the nations where street conflicts do not take place and basic laws are respected, revolutionary spirit “wilts” and social change seems less likely.<sup>93</sup>

In Gramsci’s view, the former tsarist Empire represented the first country where the socialists “if they are not yet everything, are at least something important” and could become the arbiters of the international situation.<sup>94</sup> He rejected the parallel, drawn in one part of the bourgeois press and by the PSI reformists, with the French Revolution. In Russia, there was no Jacobinism, a term that he was using in this period with highly negative connotations, considering it “a purely bourgeois phenomenon”. The Jacobins had particularist ends, and for the authoritarian regime of the aristocracy they substituted a new order that was equally oppressive for the masses. The Russian socialists, on

---

<sup>92</sup> *Per La nuova internazionale (Towards the New International)*, “Il Grido del popolo”, n. 698, 8 December 1917, and “La Difesa”, XIX, n. 50, 15 December 1917, pp. 632-36. (CF, 1982, *cit.*, pp. 473-7.) Serrati stated his agreement with Gramsci’s theses: see G.M. Serrati, *Per la terza Internazionale? (Towards the Third International?)*, “Avanti!”, 6 January 1918.

<sup>93</sup> *Three principles, three orders*, *cit.*

<sup>94</sup> *Morgari in Russia*, “Avanti!”, 20 April 1917, and “Il Grido del popolo”, XXII, n. 666, 29 April 1917, pp. 22-45. (CF 1982, *cit.*, pp. 131-3.)



the other hand, substituted universal male and female suffrage for the tsarist autocracy, since they were certain that the ideal that they embodied was “shared by the majority of the people”. He argued that the Russian revolution represented a “proletarian act” not because it was carried out by the masses – in such a case there would have been a war – but because certain “spiritual factors” had intervened, which had produced a change at the moral level, for which reason the revolution “must naturally lead to a socialist regime”. In order to demonstrate this assertion, he reported the news of a fact that had actually occurred in the city of Odessa: the revolutionaries freed not only the political prisoners but also the common criminals. This notwithstanding, some of the latter decided to stay in prison and continue to serve their sentence right to the end; for socialists “this news has more importance even than that of the dismissal of the tsar being”, since it indicated that the revolution had not only substituted one power for another, “has replaced one way of life by another”, thereby installing authentic spiritual freedom.<sup>95</sup>

From these assertions, one evinces the prediction that arriving at socialism does not stem from an analysis of the real forces acting on the scene, an analysis that made difficult by the fragmentary nature and limited reliability of the news arriving from the ex-tsarist Empire, but from a series of deductions of an intellectual type, such as the fact that Jacobinism had been avoided and above all that renewal of moral life was being undertaken, essential aspects within Gramsci’s revolutionary perspective.<sup>96</sup>

In July, for the first time he expressed his support for the Bolsheviks: a new wave of popular uprisings had just led to the formation of a government under the leadership of the social-revolutionary Kerenskij, while Lenin and various members of his party, regarded as responsible for the insurrection, had been forced to flee. Gramsci praised the activity that the Bolsheviks had undertaken up to that moment and said he was certain that, even if they had been swept

---

<sup>95</sup> A. G., *Note sulla rivoluzione russa (Notes on the Russian Revolution)*, “Il Grido del popolo”, XXII, n. 666, 29 April 1917, pp. 255-9. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 138-42). [In English, Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings (1910-1920)*, trans. John Mathews and ed. Quintin Hoare, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1977, pp. 28-30.]

<sup>96</sup> Leonardo Rapone, *Cinque anni che paiono secoli*, cit., pp. 367-8.

aside, their followers, by now “too numerous” would not disappear. The maximalists were “the Russian revolution itself”, and wanted to bring about “socialism *in its entirety*”, making sure that the process underway would not be halted and be left half-way. Their will was embodied in millions of individuals, continually producing new energies, by which social aggregations were being formed and reformed without pause, ensuring that men were finally “the makers of their own destiny”.<sup>97</sup>

August saw the arrival in Italy of four delegates from the Petrograd Soviet, the Soldiers’ and Workers’ Council that a month before had approved the warrant for the arrest of the Bolsheviks. They sought to obtain the PSI’s support for an international Conference to be held in Stockholm in order to reach a general, equal and just, peace as soon as possible. However in the various cities they visited, the crowds welcomed them with cries of support for Lenin, who was more and more considered the real leader of the revolution and who was animated by the wish to go right to the end, refusing any compromise solution with the class enemies.<sup>98</sup>

On 13 August, two delegates, Gol’denberg and Smirnov, arrived in Turin and gave spoke to a crowd of more than thirty thousand workers. Gramsci enthused that the Russian revolution had constituted a new life for all,<sup>99</sup> but, influenced by the judgments in “Avanti!”, his preference went to Černov, the leader of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, who as from March had attracted the sympathies of Serrati’s paper. He asserted indeed that Lenin is “the mentor, who stimulated consciousness, who awakened dormant souls”, while Černov was the person to put projects “into practice”, to lead the proletariat to the conquest of power. The revolution absolutely could not stop at the democratic phase represented by Kerenskij: the Russian peasants and workers had matured rapidly over the past few months and now

---

<sup>97</sup> A.G. *I massimalisti russi*, “Il Grido del popolo”, XXII, n. 679, 28 July 1917, and “L’Avanguardia”, XI, n. 501, 12 August 1917, pp. 397-400. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 265-7) [In English, *The Russian Maximalists* in Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings (1910-1920)*, cit., pp. 31-3.]

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Stefano Caretti, *La rivoluzione russa e il socialismo italiano (1917-1921)*, Pisa, Nistri-Lischi, 1974, pp. 71-4. The delegates were Gol’denberg, Ehrlich, Rusanov and Smirnov, belonging to various socialist tendencies, the Bolsheviks excluded.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. *Il compito della rivoluzione (The Task of the Russian Revolution)*, “Avanti!”, 15 August 1917, pp. 413-7. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 274-7.)

wanted the freedom to begin in concrete terms “the transformation of the economic and social world of the old Russia of the tsars”.<sup>100</sup>

In November, the Party which led the proletariat to the conquest of power was not however that of Černov, but the Bolshevik Party. At the beginning of December, when the position of Lenin and his comrades seemed decidedly more stable, Gramsci wrote an article for “Il Grido del Popolo” on the most recent events in Russia, but it was suppressed by the censorship. A few weeks later, Serrati published it as an editorial in the most important socialist organ, thereby contributing to rekindle the debate on the possibility of realizing communism in an economically backward country such as Russia.

The article clearly shows the distance between Gramsci and any deterministic interpretation of Marxism, of the left as much as of the right. Already four months earlier, in speaking of the Bolsheviks, he had argued that they held it possible to realize socialism at any moment, given that they were revolutionaries and not evolutionists:

And revolutionary thought does not see time as a progressive factor. It denies that all intermediate stages between the conception of socialism and its achievement should have an absolute and integral confirmation in time and place. It holds that it is enough that these stages be realized in thought for the revolution to be able to proceed beyond them.<sup>101</sup>

These statements were taken up again and developed in the long editorial in December in which Gramsci provocatively defined the Bolshevik revolution as “the revolution against *Capital*”, Marx’s book which in Russia was read above all by the bourgeois, since it was the demonstration of “the fatal necessity” that, there too, a capitalist civilization should be formed before the proletariat began to think of its own redemption. Facts had instead demonstrated that the canons of historical materialism were not so rigid as was theorized by a certain positivist and evolutionist reading of Marx’s theory. The Bolsheviks

---

<sup>100</sup> *Kerensky-Cernof*, “Il Grido del popolo”, XXII, n. 688, 209 September 1917, pp. 496-8. (CF 1982, cit., pp. 358-60.)

<sup>101</sup> A.G., *The Russian Maximalists*, cit. [trans. slightly modified to read “should” rather than “must” to take account of the subjunctive mood of the Italian verb – tr. note.]

“live Marxist thought – that thought which is eternal” since they continue the tradition of Italian and German idealist thought, which even in Marx’s philosophy “was contaminated by positivist and naturalist encrustations”. In actual fact, the greatest factor in history forever remained man or, more preferably, “men in societies” who develop a collective will, which in its turn “moulds objective reality”:

Marx foresaw the foreseeable. But he could not foresee the European war, or rather he could not foresee that the war would last as long as it has or have the effects it has had. He could not foresee that in the space of three years of unspeakable suffering and miseries, this war would have aroused in Russia the collective popular will that it has aroused. *In normal times* a lengthy process of gradual diffusion through society is needed for such a collective will to form; a wide range of class experience is necessary.

In peacetime conditions, the proletarians organize slowly, starting by creating leagues and mutual help societies, in a crescendo of pressures exerted on the bourgeoisie to improve their position. This explains why “*under normal conditions* the canons of historical criticism of materialism grasp reality”: the class struggle develops progressively, rising in intensity with the passage of time. When however the rhythm of facts is altered by an unforeseeable event such as a war, at that point the social dynamics can undergo a brusque change:

But in Russia the war galvanized the people’s will. As a result of the sufferings accumulated over three years, their will became as one overnight. Famine was imminent, and hunger, death from hunger could claim anyone, could crush tens of millions of men at one stroke. Mechanically at first, then actively and consciously after the first revolution, the people’s will became as one.

The world conflict had overthrown pre-established schemes: it was “socialist propaganda that forged the will of the Russian people”, enabling the passage to the new order. Certainly, it was “at first [to] be a collectivism of poverty and suffering”, but the very difficulties which the socialists had to face were also those which would have had to be overcome by the bourgeois, who would have found themselves faced with a proletariat unable to bear for others the sacrifices that economic development would involve. Socialism, therefore finds its justification

from a human point of view and the maximalists became “spontaneous expression of a *biological* necessity – that they had to take power if Russian humanity were not to fall prey to a horrible calamity”, but be able to build a better society.<sup>102</sup>

War had therefore functioned as a formidable accelerator of the class struggle in Russia, but as regards Italy and the West, for the whole of 1918 Gramsci still remained anchored to a vision of the revolution that would come about when the capitalist regime had reached its highest level of development. Even the main lesson of the Bolsheviks, namely the creation of a new form of State based on the system of Soviets, was brought to fruition by Gramsci only in the Spring of 1919, when with a group of intellectuals and workers grouped around the review “L’Ordine Nuovo” gave birth to the factory council movement in Turin. The new proletarian institutions were based on the self-organization of the worker-producers and, while not constituting a rigid Italian translation of the “Soviets”, with all their limits they probably represented the sole concrete attempt before the advent of fascism to apply the lessons of Lenin to Italy.

---

<sup>102</sup> A.G., *La rivoluzione contro “Il Capitale”*, “Il Grido del Popolo”, XXII, n. 697 and “Avanti!”, 22 December 1917 (Rome edition) and 24 December 1917 (Milan edition), *CF* 1982, cit., pp. 513-7. [In English *The Revolution Against ‘Capital’* in *Selections from Political Writings (1910-1920)*, cit., pp. 34-7; here “humanity” {“umanità” in the original} replaces “people” on p. 37 – tr. note.]