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## Epistolario (Correspondence), 1: gennaio 1906-dicembre 1922

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## Epistolario (Correspondence), 1: gennaio 1906-dicembre 1922

### Abstract

This is the first volume of the Epistolario (Correspondence), forming part of the National Edition of Antonio Gramsci's Writings, includes letters both sent and received by Gramsci, nearly 160 of them, while others have come to light since this publication. The volume covers his period at school in Sardinia (Santu Lussurgiu and Cagliari), his university experiences and political – especially journalistic – activities in Turin, and the first part of his stay in Moscow as one of the representatives of the Italian Communist Party at the Third (Communist) International. There he was a member of the Comintern's Executive Committee and, up to its Fourth Congress in November-December 1922, of the more restricted Presidium of the International. Ill health caused his stay, on and off, in a sanatorium at Serebrjanyj Bor ("Silver Wood"), then outside, and now in a suburb of, Moscow. He met there a fellow-patient, Evgenija Schucht, with whom, it transpires, he had some kind of amorous relationship. Through her, he met her younger sister, Julija, who interpreted for him at factory meetings in the textile town, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, where she was working, 250 kilometres from Moscow. As one of the appendices, the volume includes drafts of letters of Julija's from this time, in the first stages of what became a partnership for life.

### Keywords

Gramsci, Correspondence, School in Sardinia, Turin, Communist International, Schucht sisters

# ***Gramsci: Epistolario (Correspondence), 1, January 1906-December 1922***<sup>1</sup>

Noemi Ghetti

This, the first volume in the series of Gramsci's collected correspondence (*Epistolario, 1*, of the *National Edition of Antonio Gramsci's Writings*), brings together the letters written in the years 1906-1922.

The correspondence in the strict sense, constituting the first section of the book, consists of the letters from and to Gramsci over the whole of this period. Two appendices then follow: *Appendix 1* contains 42 official letters which Gramsci received in copy either in a personal capacity or in that as a member of leading political bodies in the years 1921-1922; and *Appendix 2* consists of five drafts of a letter written by Julija Schucht to Gramsci in October 1922 and here published for the first time. Copious editorial notes form an indispensable instrument for reconstructing the background context to the letters. Five useful apparatuses complete the volume: a "Chronology of Antonio Gramsci's life from 1891 to 1922", "Congresses and Plenums", short "Biographical Notes", an "Index of Periodicals", and a "Name Index". Using this material, we proceed here to propose a brief reconstruction of this decisive time in Gramsci's life and formative years.

The 159 letters constituting the 1906-1922 correspondence have different origins and relate to three distinct phases in Gramsci's life: from 1906 we have the time in Sardinia, from the autumn of 1911 his life in Turin, and from June to December 1922 the first part of the period spent in Moscow, thus including the Fourth Congress of the Comintern.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Epistolario Vol.1*, gennaio 1906-dicembre 1922, pp. 547, of the *Edizione Nazionale degli scritti di Antonio Gramsci* (edited by David Bidussa, Francesco Giasi, Gadi Luzzatto Voghera and Maria Luisa Righi with the collaboration of Leonardo P. D'Alessandro, Benedetta Garzarelli, Eleonora Lattanzi, Luigi Manias and Francesco Ursini, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> The rest of his stay in Moscow up to his departure for Vienna in December 1923 is covered in the second volume of the *Correspondence*, reviewed by Lelio La Porta in *International Gramsci Journal*, 2 (4), 2018, 156-162 (Italian) and 163-170 (English).

The 1906-1911 letters, to the family living in Ghilarza and addressed in the main to his father Francesco, up to 1908 are written from Santu Lussurgiu where Gramsci was at middle high school, before he then transferred to the Dettori classical lycée in Cagliari, where he lodged with his brother Gennaro. Antonio's recurrent demands for financial help from his father are also accompanied by persistent requests for Francesco to send magazines and serial instalments, while at the same time Antonio promises to send on publications for his sisters. These include "Il giornalino della domenica", a Sunday publication for children, for his favourite sister, Teresina; and music magazines and scores for Grazietta and Emma, who played mandolin and guitar, evidence of his early liking for music. In July 1910, he received from Cagliari a letter from Raffa Garzia, editor of "L'Unione sarda" accompanied by his journalist's card; Gramsci's article on Aidomaggiore marks his début as a journalist (no. 26, p. 46).

Antonio's tone is affectionate in his rare letters to his mother, Peppina Marcias, especially in the one of January 1911 (no. 28, pp. 50-51) in which he reassures the family, which had received information from the police regarding the participation of his brother Gennaro, treasurer of the Chamber of Labour (Trades Council) in Cagliari, in a strike over the cost of living. He concludes the letter ironically "stay calm, just laugh in the face of the lieutenant and the whole flock of carabinieri, as has been my habit for some time. Poor fellows, basically you've got to sympathise with them, having to deal with socialists and anarchists [...] As long as they don't bring out the handcuffs they can ask as much as they like".<sup>3</sup>

As well as indicating the first sympathies for socialism, the letters from this period are evidence of an exchange with his school friends of cultural reviews such as "Il Marzocco" and the "Cronache Letterarie". This interest has recently been confirmed by the finding in a family attic in Ghilarza, by his sister Teresina's grandson, Luca Paulesu, of periodicals arranged in order, with an indexing of articles, a first demonstration of the research method that we see in the *Prison Notebooks*.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Antonio Gramsci (2014), *Pre-Prison Letters 1908-1926: A Great and Terrible World* (henceforward *GTW* in the text), London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 74-5.

His grades were sufficiently high to exempt him from sitting the leaving exams at the Dettori lycée and on 28 June 1911 he applied to take part in the public competition for a study grant for the university course in Letters at the Carlo Alberto Royal College of Turin (no. 30, p. 54). During the summer, he sent the necessary documents and did the preparatory work for the examination. On 2 September he received the invitation from the college secretary to come to Turin for the written part of the competition; there would be a modest reimbursement for his journey and stay there (no. 36, p. 63).

At the beginning of November he tells his father in two letters (nos. 40 and 42, pp. 69-75) of his success in obtaining the grant, of the costs for staying in Turin and the tuition fees. And to the list of documents and clothing necessary he adds a list of books to be sent from home. This marks the start of a period of hardship for him, at grips with continual delays and oversights that he attributed to his father. Letters, not stamped through lack of money, contain bitter accusations for not having sent the certificates essential for the waiving of fees and telling of his desperate economic situation: “but we know, you’re a boss, not a father. Yes, that’s what I’m saying, because I’m at the end of my tether, because it seems to me impossible that you can arrive at such a point of carelessness and indifference; I know I’m suffering, because I feel alone, really alone” (no. 45, p. 83). Unwholesome rented accommodation, meals in low-class trattorie, the lack of an overcoat for the harsh sub-Alpine winter and the continual scourge of poverty certainly were not conducive to Antonio’s precarious conditions of health and, at the end of 1911, gave rise to a state of ill health that he openly drew attention to (nos. 49 and 50, pp. 88-91).

His situation improved somewhat in 1912, thanks among other things to some financial help from his brother Gennaro and his mother, who in June informed him of a 1000 lire legacy, left him on a postal account by his aunt Grazia Delogu, on which Antonio could draw a certain sum each year (no. 58, p. 103). In the meantime he obtained partial exemption from tuition fees and attended lectures. During the summer vacation, spent in Ghilarza, letters exchanged with fellow students testify to his first interest in taking an active part in politics. In particular Angelo Tasca wrote to him to say that he had proposed at the congress of the young socialists in Piedmont the dissolution of the youth federation “in

order to reconstitute it with permanent cultural aims” (no. 63, pp. 108-9). In Tasca’s subsequent letter we learn that a prolonged silence from Gramsci was due to illness, to which Tasca adds the hope of cultivating a “friendship ... now potential, still in formation”.

When you are cured – wrote Tasca – I’ll send you a printed copy of my speech on youth culture, made at the congress- of the yng. socs. of the region, and I’ll have a long talk with you about an idea that is now in full fruition, and which will certainly attract all your sympathy. It will basically be a meeting point for study and art, in short for cultural preparation ... .

In the accompanying notes we read that the project met with strong objections from Bordiga who regarded it as “culturalism” (no. 64, pp. 110-12 e no. 66, p. 115). In Gaetano Salvemini’s “Unità” the accusation gave rise to a discussion, the prelude to a contraposition in the next decade between Gramsci and Bordiga on the need for a new cultural politics.

In the 1912 autumn session Gramsci could not take any exams for health reasons, and by letter asked the secretary for permission all the same to carry on receiving the grant from the college, despite not being having been able to sit the examinations (no. 70, p. 119). When lectures started up again, he asked his sister Teresina for information on certain terms used in one of the Sardinian dialects (nos. 69, p. 118 and 74, p. 125). This research was linked to Gramsci’s studies with the glottologist of renown Matteo Bartoli, who entrusted Gramsci with the task of redacting for use by students his 1912-1913 course.<sup>4</sup>

Antonio’s letters to his father are much less frequent in 1913, but the conflict over this latter’s culpable negligence was made still more dramatic by the prolongation of Antonio’s psychophysical crisis, the effect of which was that he had to interrupt his studies. However, during the summer break, spent in Ghilarza, a number of letters are evidence of the frequency of his relations with fellow-students at university. His commonality of views with Angelo Tasca continued to grow, and Tasca recounted to him how in the barracks where he was doing his military service, due to a police

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<sup>4</sup> A. Gramsci, *Documenti 1: Appunti di glottologia 1912-1913 (Notes on Glottology 1912-1913)*, part of the *Edizione nazionale degli scritti di Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Giancarlo Schirru, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2016.

report he has been denied permission to hold a course for semi-literate fellow soldiers, followed by refusal of his request to teach an course at the evening school organized by the “Women’s Union” in Turin (no. 82, pp. 141-2). A short time afterwards, Tasca again invited his friend Antonio to become a member of the Socialist Party, where he could exert his beneficial “corrosive spirit” to ease the troubles afflicting the organization (no. 84, p. 144). There had been an electoral campaign in Sardinia, with lively participation by the peasant masses, who however were unaware of their potentiality. On this subject, in October Tasca replied to Gramsci, who had been taken aback by this involvement, saying that political action could not be resolved without considering the question of theory, and underlining the fact that the union of theory and method is indispensable for the victory of socialism. Tasca was to recall later on that when Gramsci came back to Turin had developed his thinking on the electoral experience in Sardinia by himself in an original way: “It was this spectacle and the reflection on it that made Gramsci into a socialist” (no. 85 and note 1, pp. 146-8).

In April 1914, the year that the First World War broke out, the political climate became red-hot. A short letter to the Turin Nationalist Association testifies to Gramsci’s activity on behalf of the socialist students’ cultural group, which had been set up on Tasca’s initiative (no. 95, p. 160).

In this context on 14 October, from Turin Antonio sent his sister Teresina a picture postcard showing the title of the newspaper “Avanti!” and a photograph of Benito Mussolini (no. 99, p. 165).<sup>5</sup> For 1915, the year that Italy entered the war, there is no surviving correspondence. Gramsci, exempt from military service on health grounds, was ever more involved in journalistic activity, and in the autumn was taken on to the staff of “Avanti!”.

In a letter of 1916 written in reply to his sister Grazietta there is an anguished explanation of why communication with his family had broken down:

And I feel deeply saddened since I feel that you at home have lost confidence in me and have doubts that I may be dishonouring myself in some way. [...] I thought you knew and understood me better than that.[...] I should not have shut myself off from life in the way that I did. For two years I have

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<sup>5</sup> We point out here that the index assigns number 98 (p. 164) to this letter.

lived outside this world, in something of a dream. One by one, I have let all the threads that bound me to life and to people be severed. I have lived everything for the mind and nothing for the heart. [...] Perhaps in two years I have never laughed, just as I have never wept either. I have sought to overcome physical weakness by working, and I have weakened myself even further. For at least three years I have not lived a single day without a headache, without my head spinning, without a dizzy spell. But I have harmed no-one, except myself. I have never done anything for which I can reproach myself (no. 100, pp. 166-7; *GTW*, pp. 95-6).

Years later Andrea Viglongo was however to relate how young workers, who had been called to military service and often found themselves at a loss in Turin, would dare police checks to visit the offices of “*Avanti!*”. Here they would find an affectionate point of reference in Gramsci’s warm welcome (no. 101 and note, p. 168). It was precisely in this period, through Attilio Carena, that Gramsci met Carena’s elder sister Pia, a sensitive and reserved young woman of his own age, with whom he began an intense relationship which included common cultural and artistic interests; at the level of feelings, this meant a radical change for both of them.<sup>6</sup>

For the autumn of 1916 we have two postcards, signed jointly by Gramsci and others (in one case including Viglongo) to a friend called up for army service. After publication of this first volume of the *Collected Correspondence* there came to light an Easter greetings telegram of Antonio’s to his mother (April 8 1917) bearing simply the words “Most fervent wishes Stop Well Antonio Gramsci” (cf. *GTW*, p. 53, note 20).<sup>7</sup>

In 1917, the year of the Russian revolution, Turin was shaken by mass demonstrations against the war and for bread, with arrests and aggressions carried out against militants, together with assaults on newspaper offices. It was in this difficult climate that Gramsci took on the editorship of *Il Grido del popolo* (*The Cry of the People*), a post – the first form of his political involvement – that he would maintain up to 26 October 1918. On 22 October he invited the Sardinian journalist and intellectual Angelo Corsi to write an article on the political-economic movement of the island’s proletariat, of use to further its knowledge among and strengthen the united conscious-

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<sup>6</sup> I here refer readers to my book chapter in Noemi Ghetti: *Gramsci e le donne. Gli affetti, gli amori, le idee* (*Gramsci and Women. Feelings, Loves, Ideas*), Donzelli editore 2020, pp. 21-34.

<sup>7</sup> We thank Luca Paulesu, literary executor of the family in Italy, who was the source for this information.

ness of the Italian proletariat (no. 103, p. 170; *GTW*, pp. 97-8). On 29 December, on behalf of the editorial staff of “Avanti!” and the Socialist Party section in Turin, Gramsci wrote a letter of solidarity to Oddino Morgari for his speech in the Chamber of Deputies against the war and on the October Revolution. Morgari’s speech was the occasion for violent polemics in the Chamber and the press, which stimulated Gramsci to write an immediately censored article for “Il grido del popolo”, (no. 104 and note, p. 172).

In March 1918 there was an exchange of correspondence with the pedagogist Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, a review of whose booklet *Il concetto dell’educazione* (*The Concept of Education*) Gramsci had commissioned a review of by Andrea Viglongo (see above), a self-taught young seventeen-year-old and member of the group that had been spontaneously created around him as the *Club for Moral Life*. Lombardo Radice replied summarily, giving the “official socialists” short shrift for their bad faith and for having collaborated with the Germans blindly and abstractly. And claiming that it was no time for academic pedagogy but for action for the Fatherland, he closed with a panegyric to Mazzini (letters nos. 107-8, pp. 176-9: *GTW* pp. 107-8 for Gramsci’s letter). This was a lesson that Gramsci subsequently took to heart.

1919 marked the beginning of the “biennio rosso” (the “red two years”). This was pre-announced in a letter of Gramsci’s in which he informed the public administration, the offices and the various associations in Turin of the publication of the first number of the Piedmont edition of “Avanti!”, substituting the former page in the Turin edition. The editorial staff was widened to include Ottavio Pastore, Pia Carena, Leo Galetto and Alfonso Leonetti (no. 111 and note 1, pp. 182-3). But in February 1920, the first disagreements exploded in the leadership of the Socialist Party, testified to by an exchange of letters between Giacinto Menotti Serrati and Gramsci, in which among other matters Gramsci informed him of the visit of Bordiga to Turin “to bring back into the abstentionist fold the sheep led astray by ‘L’O[rdine] N[uovo]” (nos. 112 and 113, pp. 184-9; for Gramsci’s letter see *GTW*, pp. 102-4).

Daniel Riedel, a Bolshevik militant in the international propaganda field who in a mission to Italy the previous year had worked with Gramsci and Togliatti, in an important letter from Moscow to Gramsci, Terracini, Tasca and Togliatti wrote to say that Bordiga

had “fortunately” arrived there, but complained of “the absence of a delegate from the Turin organization”. In the theses of the Second Congress of the Third (Communist) International, attached to the letter, Lenin together with the Comintern Executive expressed “complete solidarity [...] with the activity of the Turin organization and its organ ‘L’Ordine nuovo””. The conflicts within the PSI were aggravated just when, as Riedel emphasized, “it would be the moment to unify the whole of the opposition in order to bring to an end the crisis in the party before the next congress” (no. 114, pp. 190-3).

In January 1921, on the eve of the Livorno congress, Gramsci asked for a report of the last Congress of the Swiss Social Democratic Party, held in Bern the previous month, and of “its consequences for the movement in Switzerland” (no. 115, p. 194; *GTW*, p. 104). Of the momentous year of the split giving birth to the PCd’I on 21 January, there is also a letter from Zinov’ev to Bordiga, the party leader, to Nicola Bombacci and to the members of the PCd’I not present at the Third Congress of the Comintern in Moscow (*Appendix 1*, no. 2, pp. 310-9). The document denounced Serrati, D’Aragona and Turati’s “treason” and invited “L’Ordine nuovo” to publish a pamphlet with the speeches by Lenin, Trotsky, Zetkin and others against Serrati, sending copies to all members of the PSI. Zinov’ev went on to add that “L’Ordine nuovo” was “too often theoretical and at times boring”. It had to give space to “workers, soldiers, coachmen, servant girls etc.”, not losing sight of the peasants, and to create “a new type of communist journalist who visits every place of work”. Zinov’ev wound up by encouraging Bordiga to write at least once a month assuring him that, notwithstanding the divergence of views that had emerged in June at the Congress of the International, the PCd’I remained Moscow’s “favourite son”.

At the beginning of June 1922 Gramsci arrived in Moscow with the delegation of the PCd’I led by Bordiga, as an invitee to the Enlarged Executive (Plenum) of the Communist International (June 7-11). While Bordiga went back to Italy immediately afterwards, Gramsci remained in Moscow as a member of the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. As the means to oppose fascism, the Comintern Executive supported the United Front policy while the PSI was internally split between the “third-internationalists” of Fabrizio Maffi, Serrati’s maximalists, and the

reformists who, until the autumn, were still in the party. It emerges from the dense series of letters that Gramsci, admitted to the sanatorium at Serebrjanyj Bor (“Silver Wood”), then outside – now in a suburb of – Moscow, sought to manoeuvre between Bordiga’s verbal intemperance and the strong pressure coming from Zinov’ev for fusion with the socialists, shorn of their reformist component, in order to avoid the conflict becoming irreparable.

To Bordiga’s continual charges that, given the dramatic nature of the situation in Italy, the Moscow delegation was being inert (nos. 126, pp. 221-2; and 128, pp. 224-5), Gramsci contraposed the acuteness and depth of his own analysis. While Turin was being rocked by protests and a mass strike, on 25 August Bordiga sent Gramsci “definitive instructions regarding the question of the PSI”, declaring that the PCd’I would negotiate “neither with the followers of Maffi nor with those of Serrati”.

In explaining the Italian situation to Zinov’ev, Gramsci wrote on 28 August that “the situation is very serious and full of unknowns”, such that in the Senate “there are repercussions in favour of a dictatorship” (no. 131, p. 233; *GTW* pp. 120-21).<sup>8</sup> And in a long letter of 3 September to the PCd’I Executive (no. 132, pp. 236-44) the signatory warned that “fascism is really a force of a social nature, a movement that is tending to become integral and not simply a mercenary army of the bourgeoisie, but it is the first armed Italian national bourgeoisie”,<sup>9</sup> and that the Comintern Presidium was in any case ruled by only a few leaders, who trusted solely in the information of their envoys sent to Italy. A case in point was Karl Radek, whom previously Gramsci had unsuccessfully tried to warn regarding the unreliability of Serrati.<sup>10</sup>

Inserted in this difficult context we find the letter of 8 September in which Gramsci replied to the questions raised by Lev Trotsky on Italian futurism. In this celebrated letter, published in Trotsky’s 1923 volume *Literatura i revoljucija*,<sup>11</sup> Gramsci recalls how, on 2 April,

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<sup>8</sup> Letter signed jointly by Gramsci and the other PCd’I representative in Moscow, Ersilio Ambrogi.

<sup>9</sup> The text was written and signed by Ambrogi, but had also been “seen and approved by Gramsci before he returned to the Sanatorium”.

<sup>10</sup> Letter of Gramsci to Radek of 22 July 1922 (no. 118, p. 200; *GTW* p. 111).

<sup>11</sup> Letter published under the title “A letter from Comrade Gramsci on Italian Futurism” by Trotsky in his *Literatura i revoljucija*, Moscow, Krasnaja Nov’, Glavpolitprosvet 1923, republished Moscow: Politizdat 1991, pp. 116-8; the letter is not in the English translation of Trotsky’s volume consulted, though it is in Frida Rubiner’s German translation of 1924.

the Turin section of Proletkul't had invited the futurist poet Filippo Marinetti to the international "futurist art exhibition [...] so that he could explain its significance to the working-class members of the organisation" (no. 135, pp. 248-51; *GTW* pp. 121-3). At the same time, Gramsci illustrated the rapid decline of a movement which, in post-First World War Italy had lost its initial revolutionary nature and opened up even to monarchists and fascists. But while the workers now ha[d] to fight for their freedom, weapons in hand", Gramsci concluded, in "the big industrial centres, the Poletkul't programme, which aimed at reawakening the creative spirit of the workers in the artistic and literary fields, is absorbing the energy of those who still have the will and the time to become involved in these problems" (*GTW, cit.*, p. 123). We recall here that the Proletkul't had been founded in 1917 by the medic and philosopher, Aleksandr Bogdanov, criticized by Lenin for being a "left Bolshevik" from the time of the Party's school in Capri. The Proletarian Culture Institute, the Turin section of Moscow's Proletkul't, had been inaugurated in January 1921 and, on 9 and 27 October, "L'Ordine nuovo" had published a two-part article *La poesia proletaria (Proletarian Poetry)* by Bogdanov.

On 8 October Bordiga informed Gramsci and Ambrogi of the decision that in Moscow they should support the thesis of non-fusion with the socialists, and state that the PCd'I did not share the general policy of the Comintern, maintaining the perspective of leaving the International. Meanwhile, despite Gramsci and Ambrogi's warning at a meeting of the Presidium of the Comintern Executive that the choice of the Hungarian communist Matyás Rákosi as representative in Italy was inappropriate, he was sent there. Following these events, the relations between the PCd'I and the International became even tenser (no. 140, pp. 262-4, note 1).<sup>12</sup>

But in Moscow it was not only politics that Gramsci was occupied with. In September in Serebrjanyj Bor, again from the previous month a patient in the sanatorium there, he met Julija (Jul'ka) Schucht, who had come to visit her sister Evgenija, who for quite some time had been a patient there. Antonio was fascinated by Jul'ka. In October he was sent for a series of meetings on cultural-educational topics in the factories of Ivanovo-Voznesensk, known as the "Russian Manchester", a city shaken by strikes, where

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<sup>12</sup> The information in this note is contained in Ambrogi's report to the PCd'I of 16 September.

Julija lived with her relatives, a family enjoying friendly relations with Lenin, and where she taught violin in the musical lycée. Charged with accompanying him as interpreter, while waiting for him to arrive on 10 or 11 October Julija wrote five drafts of a letter (*Appendix 2*, nos. 1-5, pp. 415-20) overflowing with emotion, mentioning the project of a joint translation of a “novel by Bogdanov” that Antonio had suggested to her. Probably what was meant is Aleksandr Bogdanov’s well-known *Red Star. A Utopian Novel*, written in 1908 and then recently republished with great success.<sup>13</sup>

Of the days that Gramsci spent in Ivanovo there remains just one document, a double postcard written together with Julija on the night of 16 October 1922 and sent in a single delivery to Evgenija, who in turn was courting Gramsci, with a message signed by both Julija and Antonio, rich with hints of a complex situation, as regards both politics and feelings. There is a curious drawing from the pen of Gramsci, entitled “Jul’ka’s Cross”, which shows a nineteen-legged bed fleeing laughingly from a woman who, with her long arms, is trying to stop it, shouting (in Italian) “Catch it, catch it, it’s a counter-revolutionary”. Lower down there are three pyramids and an Egyptian sphinx, all commented on in four-line futurist-style verses. The title appended to the sketch refers to a popular religious rhyme by Pietro Paolo Parzanese, mentioned in pencil in a note for Julija, perhaps written on the same occasion and mentioned in note (no. 145 and note 1, pp. 272-5).<sup>14</sup>

On his return to Moscow, on 25 October Gramsci had a private talk with Lenin, temporarily recovered before the incapacitation caused by the new stroke that he suffered on 16 December. From this conversation with the Bolshevik leader, who was asking for news on the situation in Italy, the only document on its contents that we have is the statement, then written up, made to Giuliano Gramsci in 1972 by Camilla Ravera, who had arrived in Moscow with Bordiga for the Fourth Congress of the International.<sup>15</sup> A year

<sup>13</sup> On the novel *Krasnaja Zvezda* (*Red Star*: translated over the last few decades into various languages) Umberto Terracini, in Moscow, said he would send Gramsci «the Russian novel whose translation you did, with the translation»: letter of Terracini to Gramsci of 13 April 1924. See my book *La cartolina di Gramsci. A Mosca, tra politica e amori, 1922-1924 (Gramsci’s Postcard. In Moscow between Politics and Loves 1922-1924)*, Roma, Donzelli 2016, pp. 99-123.

<sup>14</sup> On the parody contained in Jul’ka’s Cross, see *La cartolina di Gramsci* (cf. the note above), pp. 35-48 and note 9 for certain discrepancies in the transcription of the manuscript.

<sup>15</sup> A. Gramsci jr, *I miei nonni nella rivoluzione. Gli Schucht e Gramsci*, Edizioni Riformiste, Roma 2010, pp. 180-184.

after the talk with Giuliano, in her 1973 *Diary of Thirty Years* Ravera recalled this meeting and the joy of once again finding the wisdom and intelligence of Gramsci, together with Bordiga's short and difficult talk with Lenin, at which she was present, just a few days after the fascist "March on Rome".<sup>16</sup>

The letters from the months before the Fourth Congress of the International are evidence of Gramsci's extraordinary ability to mediate on a day-by-day basis, squeezed as he was between his two positions as a member of the PCd'I and also of the Comintern Presidium. The peremptory letter of 24 November, signed by Lenin, Zinov'ev, Trotsky, Radek and Bukharin, addressed to the PCd'I delegation to the Congress (*Appendix 1*, no. 42, p. 410), informed them that the Italian Commission had expressed itself unanimously in favour of the fusion between the P.C.I. and P.S.I. If the Italian communists insisted on speaking in the Congress Plenary session against fusion, it was added, this would reinforce the maximalists, it would be a spectacle "undesirable in the extreme", the P.C.I. "[would] be wholly isolated", the "political damage [would] be enormous" and the "error [would] be irreparable". The concluding categorical "advice" given by the Bolshevik leaders was that the Italian delegation could "make a brief statement that the majority [of the Italian delegation] was against fusion", but that it accepted the decision of the commission and would carry it out (no. 149, pp. 279-80; *GTW*, pp. 173-4). In the name of the Italian delegation, the next day (25 November) Gramsci listed to Zinov'ev, President of the Commission on the Italian question, the thirteen conditions posed by the Italian Communist Party for the fusion with the P.S.I. (no.149 pp. 279-82, *GTW* pp. 126-7), adding a fourteenth point the next day which, he wrote, had been omitted "due to an oversight" (note 3 to letter 149, p. 281; *GTW* p. 127).

Recalling that dramatic period in Moscow, on 1 March 1924, Gramsci wrote from Vienna to Togliatti and Mauro Scoccimarro

I realised that the majority of the delegation did not have a guideline of its own; it was sufficient to make even the vaguest comment to any of them regarding the situation for them immediately to give vent to their feelings and show themselves to be potentially minoritarian. It was a pitiable and politically disgusting affair.[...] The mere fact that Negri and I spoke with the comrades on these questions raised Amadeo's hackles and, if I am not mistaken – Negri

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<sup>16</sup> C. Ravera, *Diario di trent'anni, 1913-1943*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1973, pp. 123-127.

should remember this – he had some very strong things to say against us. What would have happened if I had not answered evasively, which is what unfortunately I had to do? The majority of the delegation would have been with me [...], and there would have been a crisis in the P[arty] at long range, with no agreement with you. Urbani (Terracini), Bruno (Fortichiari), Luigino (Repossi), Ruggero (Grieco), Amadeo (Bordiga) would have resigned, *the C[entral] C[ommittee], unused to working*, would have collapsed, and the minority, even less prepared than it was later on, would have taken hold of ... a will-o'-the-wisp".<sup>17</sup>

In December the dramatic letters from Italy written by Terracini and the Executive of the PCd'I testify to the fascist police clamp-down, the dismantling of trade-union organization and of the dispersal and arrest of newspaper journalistic staff in an imposing crescendo of bloody violence and assassinations.

At the close of this crucial year of 1922, we have a brief private parenthesis: in a short letter to Julija Schucht (n. 159, p. 306; *GTW* p. 128) Gramsci – who knew that she was passing through Moscow to reach her sister (“comrade Evgenija”) at the sanatorium, he suggested they go together by car and celebrate the New Year there:

Would you like that? Are you pleased?

Write to me immediately and let me know what I have to buy because, as regards these things, I have no spirit of initiative. For Serebrjanyj Bor, I've thought of something grand to do: baptise the cart! You will be godmother, comrade Evgenija will have the spirit of motion descend upon it, while, more modestly, I will be content to play the role of the stable boy. Can you too suggest something?

I await. Affectionately<sup>18</sup>

The cart, already mentioned in the message written on the post-card of 16 October (see above) is a scale model of a typical Sardinian cart, skilfully knife-cut by Gramsci at the end of summer for the amusement of the two women. It has come through a century of events of the “great and terrible world” incredibly unscathed and, a gift on the part of Antonio's younger son, Giuliano, is now on show at the Antonio Gramsci House-Museum in Ghilarza.

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<sup>17</sup> The entire letter is in Italian in *Lettere 1908-1926*, ed. Antonio A. Santucci, Torino: Einaudi 1992, pp. 253-65, and in English in *GTW*, pp. 236-46, here p. 245. In the *Epistolario* the words in italics were by an oversight omitted from note 3 to letter number 149, *cit.*

<sup>18</sup> By another oversight the word “comrade” before the name “Evgenija” is omitted in *GTW*.