

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

**FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES**

School of Social Sciences

**The Role of Educative thought in the Life and Work of Antonio Gramsci**

by

**Jenifer Margaret Nicholson**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

## ABSTRACT

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy

THE ROLE OF EDUCATIVE THOUGHT IN THE LIFE AND WORK OF ANTONIO  
GRAMSCI

By Jenifer Margaret Nicholson

Many philosophers have propounded a vision of an improved society, what distinguishes Antonio Gramsci is his continuous effort to make it happen by understanding the process in order to put into practice. Gramsci's conviction about the importance of educative development came from both theory and experience. While there has been considerable examination of Gramsci's work in relation to the *Prison Notebooks*, this study will seek to address a lacuna in Gramsci scholarship. Using Gramsci's philological method, I analyse Gramsci's pre-prison activity; his pre-prison articles and letters, which, together with his letters from prison, formed part of his educative mission. This educative process was necessary, in order to construct a new party which would develop a collective will, collaboratively, with the masses.

In this study therefore, I explore the contexts and formative experiences of the first part of his life together with the intellectual sources from which Gramsci developed his later theories, making central hitherto underemphasised connections between them which informed his writing and ideas. I intend to illustrate that Gramsci's underlying purpose in his writing, and political activity, was not only practical, on how to create a new socialist ruling class, but also educative in forming the mindset and values of his comrades. So that in addition to outlining his vision of a new order, he implicitly guided or explicitly explained the processes by which the necessary changes in social relations and moral climate could be made in order to achieve it. Each person had to engage with the values of the new order so that each could contribute to the construction of a new robust state. It was essential to build a hegemony at the most profound level, one which was dependent on collective understandings and a collective will.

## Content

Abstract	
Content.....	
Table of Figures.....	
Academic Thesis: Declaration Of Authorship .....	
Acknowledgements .....	
Abbreviations.....	
Antonio Gramsci: a brief chronology .....	
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: The Sardinian Context.....	12
Chapter Three: The Issue of a Single Language for Italy .....	25
Chapter Four: Language Theory, Hegemony, and the Intellectuals. ....	47
Chapter:Five Preparing for Power, Words into Action.....	65
Chapter Six: Leadership and the Communist Party of Italy.....	90
Chapter Seven: Prisoner 7047 .....	123
Chapter Eight: Conclusion .....	152
References .....	156

## Table of Figures

Figure 1 Gramsci's Room .....	19
Figure 2 Photo of 15 year old Gramsci (Colombo 1977:20) .....	21
Figure 3 Gramsci's first journalists' card (Colombo 1977:23).....	22
Figure 4 Main dialect regions (Mosca: 1986:94) .....	30
Figure 5 Sardinian Conscripts in traditional dress in late 1800's (Colombo 1977:10) .....	35
Figure 6 Sardinian bandits captured by the Carabinieri in early 1900's (Colombo 1977:12).....	40
Figure 7 "Sotto la mole " column <i>Avanti</i> , January 31, 1916. ....	71
Figure 8 La citta futura pamphlet .....	73
Figure 9 Diagram of the three fields of education .....	103

**:Academic Thesis: Declaration Of Authorship**

I, Jenifer Margaret  
Nicholson.....  
[please print name]

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

[title of thesis] ...The role of educative thought in the life and work of Antonio Gramsci.....  
.....

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. ~~Either none of this work has been published before submission~~, or parts of this work have been published as: [please list references below]:

Nicholson, J. (2007) "Private or Public, Political or Personal? The role of the letters from prison of Antonio Gramsci", in A.C Sparkes (Ed.) *Auto/Biography Year Book 2007*.(117-130)

Signed:  
.....  
.....

Date:  
.....  
.....

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the *Fondazione Istituto Gramsci* in Rome for the use of their extensive library and for access to the Gramsci Archive from which I was able to study original Italian unpublished documents. I had been in correspondence with the then Archivist Donatella di Benedetto since 1992 during the completion of my MA before I first visited the institute in Rome in 2000, and I am sincerely grateful for the way in which she and subsequent colleagues at the Institute, Francesco Giasi, the present Archivist, and Giovanna Bosman have made time for discussion and for their interest and helpful suggestions. I am grateful to the *Biblioteca Comunale di Castiglione del Lago (PG)* for study space and the extended loan of some essential texts which were not available in England.

I first began writing about Gramsci for my MA and it was the inimitable Michael Erben, my tutor and *egregio professore* who encouraged me to continue my research and to bring it to fruition in a Ph.D. I thank him for driving me on, for his patience, critical observations, faith in my project and remarkable knowledge of things *Marxisant*.

I am also grateful to my sisters Cindy and Ronni for patiently proof-reading with such care and for pruning my peculiar punctuation. I also thank David, Eveleigh and Ian for spurring me on through the whole process.

Ringrazio in modo particolare la Fondazione Istituto Gramsci di Roma per l'accesso alla loro biblioteca, così importante per chi si occupa di Gramsci, ed al loro archivio, e soprattutto per avermi lasciato consultare testi originali ed inediti presenti nel Fondo Gramsci. Son rimasta in contatto con Donatella di Benedetto, allora archivista, fin dal 1992, quando ho conseguito il mio MA, e sono sinceramente grata a lei, a Francesco Giasi, l'archivista attuale, ed a Giovanna Bosman, nonché a tutti i loro colleghi dell'Istituto per la generosità con cui son stata accolta e per i suggerimenti a l'aiuto prezioso che mi hanno offerto.

Sono grata anche alla Biblioteca Comunale di Castiglione del Lago per il prestito prolungato di libri che sono stati importantissimi per il mio studio.

## Abbreviations

*Abbreviations: the following are used throughout the text to denote frequently used collections of Gramsci's writings. Where works are listed in Italian they have been translated by the author.*

(ON) Gramsci, A. (1955) *L'Ordine Nuovo 1919-1920*. Torino: Einaudi.

(SG) Gramsci, A. (1958) *Gli Scritti Giovanili*. Torino: Einaudi.

(CPC) Gramsci, A. (1971) *La Costruzione del Partito comunista 1923-1926*. Edited by E.Fubini. Torino:Einaudi.

(SPN) Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Translated and edited by Q.Hoare and G. Nowell Smith. London: Lawrence and Wishart

(SP.1) Gramsci, A. (1973) *Scritti Politici 1 (1916-1919)*. Edited by P. Spriano. Roma:Editori Riuniti.

(SP.2) Gramsci, A. (1973) *Scritti Politici 2 (1919-1921)*. Edited by P. Spriano. Roma: Editori Riuniti.

(SP.3) Gramsci, A. (1973) *Scritti Politici 3 (1921-1926)*. Edited by P.Spriano Roma: Editori Riuniti.

(QM) Gramsci, A. (1974) *La Questione Meridionale*. Roma : Edited by F de Felice and V. Parlato. Roma:Editori Rinuniti.

(Q) Gramsci, A. (1975) *Quaderni del Carcere*. (4 Vols) Edited by V. Gerratana. Torino: Einaudi.

(SLM) Gramsci, A. (1975) *Sotto la Mole, 1916-1920*. Torino:Einaudi

(SPWI) Gramsci, A. (1977) *Selections from Political Writings 1910-1920*. Edited and translated by Q.Hoare. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

(SPWII) Gramsci, A. (1978) *Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926*. Edited and translated by Q Hoare,. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

(SCW) Gramsci, A. (1985) *Selections from the Cultural Writings of Antonio Gramsci*. Edited and translated by Forgacs, D. Nowell Smith, G. (Editors) London: Lawrence and Wishart.

(EL) Gramsci, A. (1992) *Lettere 1908-1926*. Edited by A. Santucci. Torino: Einaudi.

(LP 1) Gramsci, A. (1994) *Letters from Prison. Vol. 1*. Edited by F. Rosengarten, translated by R. Rosenthal New York: Columbia University Press

(LP 2) Gramsci, A. (1994) *Letters from Prison, Vol. 2*. Edited by F. Rosengarten, translated by R. Rosenthal. New York: Columbia University Press

(AT) Gramsci, A. Schucht, T. (1997) *Lettere 1926-1935*. Edited by A. Natoli and C. Daniele. Torino: Einaudi

(CF) Gramsci, A. (2004) *Antonio Gramsci La nostra città futura, Scritti torinese (1911-1922)*. Edited by A. D'Orsi Roma: Carocci



## Antonio Gramsci: a brief chronology

1891 - Born in Ales, Sardinia; fourth child of low-ranking civil servant from the mainland and a middle class Sardinian woman **Peppina Marcias**. His siblings were **Gennaro, Grazietta, Emma, Marco, Teresina** his favourite, and **Carlo**.

1897 - Father, **Francesco Gramsci**, arrested and subsequently imprisoned for five years. The family is left destitute and forced to move to Ghilarza.

1911 - Antonio wins scholarship to the University of Turin. Studies Linguistics.

1912 - His tutor **Bartoli** asks him to write out a copy of the course notes for distribution to all students (known as *le dispense or gli appunti*). Barely survives on a pittance.

1914 - Starts to write for *Il Grido del Popolo* while continuing to live in poor conditions.

1915 - Poor health and increasing commitment to journalism cause him to break off university studies.

1916 - Begins to write regularly for *Avanti*, the main Socialist Party newspaper, as well as *Il Grido del Popolo*.

1917 - Witnesses the Bread Riots in Turin and becomes a leading figure in the Turin branch of the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI). Writes *La Citta Futura* pamphlet.

1919 - Co-founder and editor of *L'Ordine Nuovo*. Becomes active in the Turin Factory Council movement.

1920 - Factory Council movement defeated after the occupation of the factories was abandoned by the PSI and crushed by employers and central government.

1921 - Finally gives his support to Bordiga for the formation of a separate Italian Communist Party (PC d'I). Becomes a member of the Central Committee of the new party, after its bitter split from the PSI, at Livorno in January.

1922 – May; sent to Moscow as Italian Party representative to the Comintern. Becomes gravely ill and, whilst recovering in a sanatorium, meets **Eugenia Schucht**, whose sister **Giulia** he later marries.

1923 - Spends year in negotiation between Italian Communist Party and the PSI, in order to meet the requirements of the Comintern for unity. December; is sent to Vienna by the Comintern. By letter endeavours to revive and redirect the Italian Communist Party, which is divided over the "United Front" Policy imposed by the Comintern. First son, **Delio**, born in his absence.

1924 – May; returns to Italy after being elected as Parliamentary Deputy for the Veneto region. Becomes Secretary General of the PC d'I, although Bordiga and his faction are still influential and are not in agreement with him.

1925 - Pulls the Party into shape and really becomes its leader. Holds a Party Conference at Lyons and spells out his policies and strategies (*Le tesi di Lione*)

1926 - November; Arrested by the Fascist Regime and sent into internal exile for five years on the island of Ustica. **Piero Sraffa**, a friend, opens an account for him at a Milan bookshop and pays for all the books and journals he uses in prison. Gramsci's second son, **Giuliano**, is born in Moscow in the autumn. Father and son will never meet.

1927 - January; re-arrested by the regime and taken to Milan. **Tatiana Schucht (Tania)**, becomes his supporter, visitor and link to the Party.

1928 - June; condemned to twenty years imprisonment and sent to Turi, a prison with medical care for the physically impaired.

1931 - 35 Health deteriorates under lack of medical of care and medical incompetence.

1934 - International pressure and fears for his life force a move to the Cusumano clinic at Formia, which unfortunately turns out to be unhygienic and incompetent.

1935 - Finally transferred to the Quisisana clinic in Rome for treatment. Obtains "conditional freedom" and is able to go outside for carriage rides with **Tania**.

1937 - "Freed" on April 21<sup>st</sup>, but remained at the clinic under guard. On April 27<sup>th</sup> he died of a brain haemorrhage, on the day he was due to travel to Sardinia. His body was cremated the following day. Only **Tania**, his sister in law and **Carlo**, his youngest brother, accompanied his ashes to the Protestant Cemetery, through streets lined with police.

## Chapter One: Introduction

Man passes his time building the mechanisms, of which he will, more or less willingly become the prisoner. Marc Bloch (cited Daniele 1997:vii).

The life of Antonio Gramsci can be viewed as a classical tragedy; as the rise of a hero from obscurity, to contend unsuccessfully with the forces of evil followed by his inevitable early demise in the hands of the enemy. This tragedy, however, was not just a personal one for one man and his loved ones, nor even for one nation which then, as now, was too fragmented to collect itself into a single voice to oppose a corrupt state; his fate affected the fate of nations. Gramsci, after having considered the respective difficulties and value of a top down or a bottom up approach to government of a state, had grappled with, and had only begun to evolve, ideas about how to develop both a leading cadre and a state of ruling readiness in the masses. He left us with the unresolved contradiction of Marxism, that it cannot sort out either of those two positions; top down or bottom up, to its own satisfaction.

Much has been written, rightly, in terms of Antonio Gramsci's contribution to socialism, political science and communism in Italy. He is "by far the most original Marxist thinker of the twentieth century" (Hobsbawm 2010:23). His ideas have influenced politics and education worldwide, across societies of differing political views and structures. It is not my intention in this study, however, to explore in depth the development of Marxist theory in Gramsci and his place in the continuum of Western Marxism. Nor will I chronicle in detail the history of dysfunctional socialism in Italy and the birth of the *Partito Comunista d'Italia*. These will be used as theoretical background and historical context to his life and work. While there has been extensive examination of his writings, particularly of the *Prison Notebooks*, the present study will seek to address a lacuna in Gramsci scholarship, that of the importance he placed on the role of the educative in the generation of a collective will and ultimately the construction of a new state.

### **Methodology**

To examine the ideas and the man, I have followed the guidelines written by Gramsci himself. He wrote the guidelines twice, once in 1932, in the notebook 4 and then in a much longer, elaborated version between 1933 and 1934, in the notebook 16. He considers how to construct the biography of an idea and its author as truthfully and accurately as possible. In this note, which is too long to quote in its entirety, he says that, particularly when dealing with an author whose coherence is to be sought, not in each individual piece of work but in the development of his/her thought through the whole

range of work produced in many forms over a lifetime, one must start by intensive philological research (SPN:382-6). This is to be done in order to “reconstruct the process of the intellectual development of the thinker...in order to identify those elements which were to become stable and “permanent” and which become absorbed and developed as part of the thinker’s own theory. This, he says, is particularly true when,

the given thinker is rather passionate, and of a polemic nature, not really a systematic soul, when one is dealing with a personality in which theoretical and practical activities are indissolubly intertwined, of an intellect which is continually creating and in perpetual motion, which feels self-criticism in the most pitiless and consequential way (SPN:382-5).

The biographer must reconstruct the thinker’s biography, not only in terms of his “practical activity”, but “also and above all as regards his intellectual activity”. Next, the biographer must catalogue (and, by implication, study) all the thinker’s works *chronologically* dividing them by “intrinsic criteria”, including “application of the new way of thinking and conceiving life and the world”. This is in order to find a “leitmotiv” and a rhythm in the developing thought which is more important than isolated quotes (ibid).

In the second part of the long note, Gramsci adds that, furthermore, the biographer must distinguish between those works published “under direct responsibility of the author” and those which remained unfinished or were published posthumously, particularly if the author spent a long time writing them, since s/he might have “deemed them unsatisfactory and repudiated them”. He then goes on to say that, in the case of Marx, and by inference himself, works considered “under direct responsibility of the author”, should include “all those (works) “published” or put into circulation in any way by the author, things like letters and circulars” (ibid).

For works printed not under the direct responsibility of the author, Gramsci considers that a complete original text is best or a minute description of it. Both groups of texts should be studied chronologically so that any changes can be noted and interpreted (ibid). Indeed this long note as it appears in the *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* can be used as a case in point. There is no indication in the footnotes that this is a revised version, not only in wording but in context, that it is no longer with “Notes on philosophy, materialism and idealism”, but part of “Discussions on culture”. Nor that, in the intervening time, Gramsci had undergone very severe health crises which had affected his intellectual and emotional state too and which might shed light on the changes. Gerratana, however, by using the philological approach to establish the details of context, ideas, words and biography, followed by chronological placing and

interpretation, concludes that this whole note is autobiographical in terms of its description of the author (Gerratana 1997:5). It clearly also contains instructions about how the *Prison Notebooks* should be regarded in his absence, and how *not* to use them. According to Buttegeig these have been largely ignored (Buttigieg 1992).

Togliatti, who was himself trained in the philological method, said that in order to understand Gramsci, it was necessary to look at his real activity from his youth to his death, in order to find the unifying elements (Togliatti 1949). I went back, therefore, to look at the period of his life in which Gramsci was struggling to change the political consciousness and structure of Italy, to examine what was so powerful about his work.

On the day that news of his death reached the outside world, a grief-stricken Montagnana, a friend and protégé from the Turin years, wrote to Togliatti to the effect that few would understand the seriousness of the loss to the Party and to the country.

The reason for this is that Antonio revealed his greatness, his enormous political, intellectual and moral gifts primarily in conversation, in ordinary everyday life. Still I was struck when a young comrade who did not even know Antonio told me that the most tragic and painful aspect of Antonio's death is the fact that his genius has been largely...unused and thus unknown (Montagnana cited Buttigieg 1992:2)

Montagnana knew nothing of the *Prison Notebooks*, indeed, in 1937, even Togliatti only knew simply that they existed. How then, before prison, had Gramsci's political genius been manifested? He wrote no books. He made no speeches. Apart from the Lyons Theses, written with Togliatti and the long essay on the Southern Question, which he had just drafted before his arrest, there are very few pieces of writing, more than a couple of pages long. Furthermore, many of his articles were not even signed. He said himself that most of his writings were, born with the day and should die with it (LP2:66). There is very little detail available about his daily living; his relationships. He was not, in fact, very well known personally. His life and work seem more ephemeral than most political figures.

For this reason I have chosen to focus on his life as an activist, on the part of his practice, the pre-prison writings and his letters, both before and during his imprisonment, which was immediately concerned with his mission to change the political face of Italy. Working chronologically, as well as interpretatively through his writings, I have explored the method by which he attempted this change. The pre-prison writings, in particular,

have been neglected in part, because so few are available in English, so for this reason the study includes original descriptive research and analysis. I have not referred to the *Prison Notebooks* extensively, using them mainly as evidence of a lifelong interest, or train of thought.

Gramsci's method is congruent with those described by later theorists, such as Denzin and Polkinghorne. The process is described by Polkinghorne as inducting a theme from the mass of data "...involving recursive movements from the data to an emerging thematic plot" (Polkinghorne 1995:16), "until a whole is generated that fits and gives sense to the parts" (Polkinghorne 2005:11). The alternative process, that of approaching data armed with a proposal, and then finding data to justify it, is one which Gramsci himself viewed with caution, since it might lead the researcher to "*sollicitare i testi*", a phrase which conveys the meaning of "badgering" texts, to make them say more than they really do (Q 6 §198: 838). Using these historical and biographical protocols for analysis of his pre-prison writings, prison correspondence, biographies and collected reminiscences of his contemporaries, a perception of Gramsci emerges of a man driven by the notion and process of political change. Themes emerged, which form part of "the underlying coherence" of his pre-prison writings, which Fiori notes but does not specify (Fiori 1990:102). In the same way Garin, in 1958, noted that the coherence of Gramsci's work in the *Prison Notebooks* "is to be found in the recurrence of certain themes, issues and preoccupations rather than in some underlying or overarching explanatory system" (cited Buttigieg 2006:40).

The first theme is the creation of a new moral and political consciousness for the masses. This, in turn, must produce a collective will on which a new hegemony will depend. The second theme is the importance of the educative in this process of changing minds and hearts. I propose that his writing, in particular his letters, contain layers of meaning and purpose, educative messages to bring about that change.

### ***Educative in Gramsci***

Autobiographies and biographies are studies in morality, as well as personal and political power, fate and social control (Denzin 1989:29).

Educative, in English, is a relatively modern word having two meanings, the first is synonymous with the word educational and the second "has reference to the conditions within which moral reasoning can be performed...the educative relates to a conception of personal identity originating in moral choices" (Erben 1999:78). In English, "to educate", the root verb, is primarily perceived as having the function of instructing and

communicating knowledge before that of imparting moral guidance. In Italian, however, the senses are reversed in importance. In a recommended standard Italian dictionary, the definitions of *educare*, noted as derived from the Latin *educere*, to draw forth or to rear, are given as: to bring to a proper level of maturity on the *moral* and intellectual planes: to lead to a *determinate moral* habit: to develop or refine by teaching and practice: to rear, make something new (Devoto-Oli 2000/2001). Three of those definitions retain that guiding and nurturing nuance from the Latin. An *educatore*, in the same dictionary, is defined as a master of knowledge *and virtue*, a teacher, a *spiritual guide*. Similarly, the commonly used idioms *beneducato*, or *maleducato*, do not mean well or poorly educated, they mean well brought up and *civilised*, or crude and *uncivilised*; carrying all the additional implications of conforming to shared values, rather than simply describing individual refinement and accomplishment. Gramsci, indeed, in the *Prison Notebooks*, defines “scholastic” as the process by which the young learn, not the skills or knowledge which would be the focus in English, but, “as absorbing experience and historically necessary values, (from contact with older people), maturing and developing their own historically and culturally superior personalities” (Q10 §44:1331). So the words which Gramsci uses in Italian, for education, educator, to educate, are imbued with the notions of ethical and moral development in both a personal and a social context, as well as the knowledge and instructional content which it shares with the English meaning. To what extent then can we infer the development of this personal identity, based on moral and ethical reasoning in Gramsci? I suggest that the path which led him to imprisonment and death, owe much to that moral and ethical reasoning. Physically, because he could have gone into exile before arrest and could certainly have ameliorated his conditions, or been given amnesty during his sentence by asking for mercy. This he utterly and repeatedly refused to do. He recognised, says Liquori, “a higher duty” (than those of family), which “belonged to the sphere of public ethics ...for this, Gramsci was killed by imprisonment, when he could have saved himself, by his sense of duty, by the ethical dimension intrinsic to his politics” (Liquori 2006:90). Intellectually, because Mussolini’s regime, and arguably the Duce himself, were threatened by the intellectual and moral power of Gramsci’s writing.

Gramsci was convinced of the value of the educative in the development of a new order, because of his life experience, his study of Marx, and his perception of the history and linguistic complexity of Italy. Since before the Risorgimento, Italian political reformers had attributed the fact that Italy was, in Williams’ scathing phrase, “politically invertebrate”, to a lack both of moral fibre and of basic and political education among Italians (Williams 1975b:11, Duggan 2007:317). One of Gramsci’s fiercest opponents in the Socialist party, Turati, in his early career had advocated education of the masses

(Duggan 2007:359-61). However, there is always a sense of superiority in these calls for improvement. What is different about Gramsci's approach is that, since he personally had to struggle to change his life and his consciousness, he understood the difficulties which workers would have to face, in order to prepare for the new order. He too paid the human cost it demanded. What is also different about Antonio Gramsci's approach is that he found, in his linguistic study, not only an additional, theoretical justification for *educazione*, but the basis of the method to make intellectual and moral renewal, *educazione*, an integral part of his politics and his practice. The educative was the method which supported and delivered linguistic hegemony. It could also be used for the construction of a communist state, because it engaged both the intellectual as cadre and also Everyman for the contribution that s/he makes through common sense and folklore to the social ethical capital. "...his, (Gramsci's), advocacy of something is never separate from his attention to how it is to be achieved" (Ives 2004:32).

In order to construct his new order, Gramsci thought that the old one needed to be thoroughly analysed, often by a dialectic process, so that new codes and new modes of being should avoid the old mistakes. Then, and crucially, he thought that, if a new kind of socialist society was to be constructed, it would have to be based on a different set of values which were actively shared by the people. As early as 1916, he had perceived that, "changing the formulas is meaningless, we have to change ourselves" (CF:151). In order for that to be achieved, the people would have to engage with the process of formulation of those values, so that they might understand and support the moral choices implicit in the new vision of society. Ives notes that Gramsci clearly understood that the creation of the popular will was simultaneously a linguistic, ethical and political issue, which had to be resolved holistically (Ives 2004). Gerratana too says that one of the premises of his thought is ethical-political (Gerratana 1997:76). *Educazione* was the foundation on which a new, powerful, all-encompassing, world view, a new hegemony, which would shape and govern the new state, would be constructed.

In his educative mission, Gramsci wrote articles; conducted discussion groups; started education classes and a Prolet'Kult style adult education centre; founded the Factory Council movement in Italy and guided and educated colleagues, at the vanguard of the communist movement, into a more flexible and democratic mode, even from prison. He organised a Party school for the cadre, based on distance learning and wrote teaching notes for learners. He reiterated, in his policy and strategy document at the Lyons Conference, that the Party's primary mission was to educate the masses and the cadre, and finally attempted to supervise, by letter, the upbringing, as well as the instruction, of the children in his two families, and to educate the leaders of the party.



## Sources

I have not provided a formal chapter of literature review, but I survey all relevant literature throughout the thesis and supply congruence between commentaries of Gramsci's writing and my own research. Many of the English translations of Gramsci's works are now dated, in that they are based on selections made before Gerratana's critical edition of the *Prison Notebooks*. There is a growing gap, it seems to me, between the detailed philological and interpretive research, which relates directly to Gramsci's texts, which has now had a revival in Italy and the work by English speaking writers, which is based on the publications in English of the 1970's and '80s. For this reason, and for methodological reasons based on Gramsci's method, I have gone back to Gramsci's texts, or I have used contemporary critical Italian writing on Gramsci, which is not available in English and indeed difficult to find in England. This has been accomplished by using the reference library of the *Fondazione Istituto Gramsci* in Rome and the *Biblioteca Comunale di Castiglione del Lago*. In addition, I have found contemporary newspaper articles and discussion of the International Gramsci Society very helpful.

I have used the most recent English edition of the *Letters from Prison*, edited by Rosengarten and translated by Rosenthal, which contains all of the letters which had been found at that time (LP1, LP2, 1994). Since then, one more, an official complaint from Gramsci in prison, has been published in *Unita*. Antonio Gramsci jr told me that there is more correspondence which he found at his home in Moscow, but this is still being prepared for publication. I have continued to use the critical edition of the *Quaderni del Carcere* (Q 1975), since almost all the works written about Gramsci refer to this edition. I have referred to Gramsci's own letters from 1905 to 1926 (EL), published in Italian. Tatiana's letters to Gramsci in prison have now also been published, although again, only in Italian (AT). The parallel correspondences, Spriano to Tatiana, (but not her replies); Tatiana's letters to her family, are published in Italian and have also been useful.

In addition, until June 2009, I was able to use primary sources; unpublished correspondence; lecture notes and early essays from the "*Archivio Fondo Gramsci*" at the *Fondazione Istituto Gramsci*, in Rome. By appointment with the archivist it was possible to study the only existing Photostat copy of the "*le Dispense*" (also known as *gli Appunti*), the lecture notes and booklist for the glottology course, prepared by Gramsci at the request of his tutor. I was also able to study the unpublished letters to Gramsci, held

in the archive *Epistolario 1908-1937*. This contained the family correspondence from Sardinia, which seemed to be remarkably complete from teenage years to his death. It contains letters to the young Gramsci from school friends, who all complain that he has not replied, and also any letters from fellow prisoners to Gramsci which have been found.

Much of the correspondence sent to Gramsci is present in the original. It includes money orders, envelopes and postcards, which were obviously a favoured method of communication, both by Gramsci and by his correspondents. The illustrated cards offer incidental insights. Gramsci for instance, was sufficiently impressed by Mussolini in 1912, as the then editor of *Avanti*, to send his sister a postcard featuring his photograph. The correspondence during the pre-trial detention, where Gramsci wrote and received messages from his friends in Ustica, or from other prisons, is often on postcards featuring pretty girls.

The inter-prison postal system was erratic and letters were not always kept by the recipients, so that although Gramsci's discovered letters have all been published, it is clear there were other letters from Gramsci to fellow prisoners which have not survived. We know that they were written, because the letters of response to Gramsci have been preserved. For example, one of Gramsci's most famous and quoted letters, the "*fur ewig*" letter, setting out his plan of research and writing, addressed to Tania, on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 1927 (LP1:83), was obviously replicated to his colleagues on Ustica. I found the reply to it, appropriately dated, from Amadeo Bordiga, from Ustica, saying that he would be happy to be "devil's advocate" and giving his encouragement to the idea that Gramsci should indeed write a history of intellectuals in Italy (Bordiga 1927). In the same way, Gramsci's letters to young friends in his school and student days have not been found, although their letters to him are preserved in the Archive.

The handwritten correspondence is difficult to read, partly because of the style of the script and partly because the ink has either faded or spread, on poor quality paper. One or two of the letters from Gramsci's mother Peppina, are heart-rending as they appear to be shaky with emotion and sometimes to be blotched by tears. The letters from Giulia are sparse, evenly written, whatever her mental state, but always in pencil and on odd pieces of paper. The pencilled writing is beginning to fade. I have found no letters from Giulia to Gramsci, from the years before prison, although study of the references to her letters in his replies, make it clear that their correspondence was equal in terms of letters sent each to the other. It is likely that Giulia's letters have disappeared as a result of police searches of his rooms, when they sequestered documents.

This correspondence archive has now been withdrawn, in order to be re-catalogued and the correspondence put on-line. It is not clear whether all the correspondence will be so transcribed, or if original documents, which are not on-line, will still be available for study. Since Giulia's letters are largely unpublished and those from his mother completely unpublished, this means that half of the dialogue is, at present, silent. Furthermore, although being published on-line will make the letters widely accessible, for the first time, and much easier to read, the form and "feel" will be lost (Stanley 2004).

The letters written by Gramsci in the files, both before and during the prison years, are mainly typed transcriptions, although there are a few photostat copies. Those which have been found so far, have all been published. Material has recently been discovered in the Schucht home in Moscow and this is currently being prepared for publication by Antonio Gramsci jr, in conjunction with Silvio Pons of the *Fondazione Istituto Gramsci*. The originals of Gramsci's letters have been conserved in a vault for many years and are not available for study. However, in June 2009, I was offered the privilege of looking through the original letters from 1932 to 33, whilst they were being re-catalogued for the new on-line edition.

Gramsci's letters from prison, are on coarse off-white paper of sufficient quality to allow writing in black ink on both sides. They each bear the prison stamp and the governor's signature, in addition to the blue scribble marks of the censor. These were all added without regard to anything they might obscure. The single, A4 sheet allowed, is folded and the letter is arranged as four pages. Gramsci's own writing is small (it grew smaller and less ornate as the years passed), regular, well spaced and well formed. Remarkably, the letters are written without a single mistake or crossing out. Only one had a small blotch where the steel, dip pen (fountain pens were forbidden), hit a flaw in the paper. It was very moving to read and handle these letters. Gramsci was desperately ill and felt himself to be abandoned. The letters are heavy with the weight of anguish they contain. Holding them, I was reminded that Gramsci thought that the physical letter was important.

He wrote to Giulia in 1937,

I read your letters many times; at first letters from those dear to us are read "disinterestedly", that is, only with the interest of my tenderness for you; then I reread them "critically", to try to guess how you felt on the days when you were able to write etc. I also examine the handwriting, the greater or lesser assurance of the strokes etc. In short I try to extract from your letter all possible indications and meanings (LP2:375).

Even in communication with the love of his life, it seems he engaged the philological method.

Set in the context of state, which was itself still trying to find coherence and unity as a nation, Gramsci's life was an uphill struggle of personal, intellectual, political and sentimental development, climbing to a very short period of political leadership and private fulfilment. This was followed by an heroic attempt, after his arrest, to continue to work for change, whether at the level of the direction of the Party, or at the level of the individual and the family. He continued his work, to influence the construction of a communist state and to protect the self he had constructed against the erosion of prison existence.

### ***The Sections of the Thesis***

The study is in two sections. The first part outlines the biographical influences, the socio-linguistic context and the intellectual formation, on which Gramsci drew to support his conviction and inform his practice. Following Bruner's assertion that, "narrative seeks reasons not causes" (Bruner 2005, 28). I focus on the formative process which influenced his political and moral stance. I shall examine, in particular, his philological studies and their relationship, both to the linguistic and political context, of contemporary Italy and to the concept of hegemony. I shall examine how this training, and in addition his study of dialectic, informed his practice as he endeavoured to bring into being the new order, by working first as a journalist with a political message, and then as a politician, emplotting these parts of his life, so that "they are understood from the perspective of their contribution and influence on the specified outcome" (Polkinghorne 1995:5). In doing so, I have tried to avoid "retrospective teleology" (Brockmeier 2000:60), or indeed "badgering the texts". The study then goes on to examine how he incorporated the educative into his practice, in his struggle to construct the party, which could achieve the establishment of a lasting socialist state and later embedded it in the policies of the Communist Party of Italy.

Chapter Two relates his early life in Sardinia, the significance of that setting, both personally and politically, and the difficulties which shaped his character.

Chapter Three explores the issue of a single language for Italy and its relevance to Gramsci's political and theoretical formation.

Chapter Four examines how the issue of a single language led to the development of Gramsci's concepts, through the research and the theories of the neo-linguist school of glottology; of the role of the intellectual; of hegemony and of the importance of the educative process for the development of a new hegemony.

Chapter Five analyses his writings and how he attempted to change the political and moral climate of the Socialist party and of the workers.

Chapter Six traces the development of his theories and practice to the apogee of his private /public life in 1925 - 1926. It relates how Gramsci struggled to construct a new type of party, using educative methods for both leadership and workers, and how the educative drive became part of the Party policy.

Chapter Seven looks at the change in practice forced on him by imprisonment. It explores how the letters enable his continuing political action, to the family and indirectly to the party, private letters serving a political purpose.

Chapter Eight reflects on Gramsci's purpose and methods for "changing ideas into practical forces". Gramsci was aiming not just to put a different group of people into power, rather to create a different kind of government. This would be supported by a new hegemony which was formed by the new relations and values of a fair and just society led by the proletariat. He realised that this required a huge educative process to prepare the party as well as the people before they could take power.

## **Chapter Two: The Sardinian Context**

All beginnings lie in darkness, and what is more, they can be illuminated only in the light of what came later and from the perspective of what followed (Gadamer cited Polkinghorne 2005).

### ***Introduction***

This chapter outlines briefly the condition of Sardinia during Gramsci's childhood and the historical reasons for the poverty and isolation of that island. It gives a brief account of Gramsci's early life to show how the privations he suffered and witnessed daily influenced his character and ambition. He and his family had to make sacrifices to afford the secondary education, which he had earned by academic achievement, and for which others less able, could simply pay. This was an injustice which, even at twelve, he recognised and resented. Without widespread education Sardinians would never emerge from their world of subjugation, superstition and political silence. But without education Antonio Gramsci would have no means to ensure survival in adulthood.

### ***The Southern Question***

Antonio Gramsci was born in 1891, thirty years after the birth of the united Italian state, and in the same year as the foundation of the Italian Socialist party. The new Italy had been born, not of popular desire for unification, but of the dreams of an idealistic few and the ambitions of the House of Savoy in Piedmont. Both were realised through the political perspicacity and chicanery of the prime minister of Piedmont, the Count of Cavour. It had been, in effect, an occupation of the rest of Italy by the liberals of the north and was widely perceived as such, particularly in the south (Urbinati 1998). While political unification was finally completed by the addition of the Papal States in 1871, in reality the Italian peninsula and its peoples remained divided by geography, by the separate and often inimical histories of the regions, and by the multiplicity of languages which these peoples spoke. The only unifying institution was the Catholic Church which had picked up its skirts and swept back to self-imposed exile in the Vatican City, eschewing, and requiring the faithful to eschew any dialogue with the new government.

The new government, in fact, required very little dialogue with its new citizens. It was unable to live up to its liberal ideals and was as "rudely arrogant with the powerless as

it was servile with the powerful" (Urbinati 1998:371). In addition, the new state was organised in a highly centralised way both politically and administratively. It was divided into prefectures which were governed by men who were appointed by central government and who often had no local knowledge or contacts. They were given wide powers to control and direct every aspect of the lives of the inhabitants through the administration, the law, the police (and if necessary the army), the schools and public health bodies (Urbinati 1998). The estrangement between rulers and ruled created by this rigid centralisation was aggravated by the new laws on franchise which restricted the vote to the literate. Since the level of literacy was low, particularly in the south (this term includes the islands of Sicily and Sardinia), this meant that the electoral base was not only extremely small but was geographically and socially unbalanced. Voters were mainly northern town dwellers, businessmen, and the far fewer southern voters were landowners, and the well-off. This imbalance in the vote led to the lack of political power or influence emanating from the south, and consequent lack of basic knowledge about the area.

The new government realised that Italy was backward and was not moving forward fast enough. Under the influence of the powerful industrialists of the north, it put into place protectionist policies, starting with manufactured goods. All development and capital investment was centred on industry so that the taxes and profits extracted from the whole of Italy, on staple goods and basic services, were spent in Turin and Milan (Colombo 1977). Even the landowners of the south invested their profits in northern businesses, preferring a faster and more secure return than a riskier and more long-term investment in improvements to the land or modernisation of farming methods (Colombo 1977). In this way the majority paid for the progress and profit of the minority. Thus what came to be known as "the Southern Question", the problems of the poverty-stricken south, was caused from the very beginning by the first governments (QM).

This exploitation of the southern and rural areas to privilege the northern industries was all happening without the consent, or even the knowledge, of most of the people of Italy. They were, says Gramsci "disorganised in all senses, ...indifferent to every ideal, estranged from every collective activity, and who refused every responsibility because they were outside of every enterprise" (SG:181). Their rulers had changed, but not the attitude to the people. Taxes had changed and were higher, but for most people a new society or political consciousness had yet to be constructed. Outside of the governing circles, Italy was inchoate. The modern concept of the nation state of Italy was barely recognised outside the major cities (Mack Smith 1974). On the other hand, the natal town, or region, was and indeed remains, deeply significant to those born

on the Italian peninsula. One of the keys to Antonio Gramsci's self and life-history is his nationality: he was born a Sard. To be born in Sardinia of a Sardinian family was more than usually significant. In addition to being regarded (by those living north of Florence) as just as primitive, ignorant, poor, feckless and criminally inclined as the rest of the inhabitants of the south of Italy, being Sard identified a person as racially inferior (Sergi Niceforo cited *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1926:SLM).

### **Sardinia**

He was...a product of the West's most remote periphery, and of conditions which, half a century later, it would be fashionable to call 'Third World'. No comparable western intellectual came from such a background. He was the barbed gift of the backwoods to the metropolis and some aspects of his originality always reflected this distance (Nairn 1982).

Sardinia was indeed amongst the poorest and most primitive places in Italy. Apart from five hundred years of autonomous rule as part of the Byzantine Empire, the island had been simultaneously despised and exploited by the Romans, Pisans, Genovese, Aragonese and Austrians. During its long subjugation to a succession of overlords from the Roman Empire to the Holy Roman Empire its opencast mines had been stripped of the most easily accessible silver and lead, its fertile plains over-farmed for grain to the point of sterility, and its population forced into the feudal system by the Spanish and reduced to penury by taxation. Finally, the island was exchanged for Sicily in 1720 to come under the rule of the house of Savoy in Piedmont.

The house of Savoy instituted reforms according to the best liberal principles, especially the economic ones (Fiori 1990). That is to say they tried to replicate the modern, town based, commercial society they knew, without thinking about what effect that must have on an agrarian society so under-developed that the population still bartered rather than used money. Thus they built roads and schools, which naturally had to be paid for, and grandly abolished feudalism, but without safeguarding the rights or livelihoods of the peasants. They encouraged immigration from the mainland to populate the "empty land" because they did not understand that these were, in fact, the pastures for the nomadic shepherds and flocks. Furthermore, this immigration took no account of the thousands of landless labourers who already existed on the island (Fiori 1990). In 1835 the feudal estates had been confiscated and broken up. However the peasants did not benefit since they could not afford to buy the land on which they had toiled for generations. Instead the ownership passed to the highest bidder who had no longer any responsibilities toward them as the feudal lords had once had, and sometimes, as a



mainland absentee landlord or company, no knowledge at all of the people who existed on the land they had bought (Davidson 1977). Worse, a generation after the original sequestration, the common land which had been taken by the state, was also sold in 1865, so that the peasants lost their grazing, water and woodcutting rights. Worst of all, the new owners asset-stripped the land, burning the forests for potash, so that not only the right but even the possibility of collecting wood or grazing animals, even if illegally, was taken away. The resultant bare hillsides soon lost what little soil there was to erosion, and the mud carried down to the plains increased the swamps, and with them the problems of disease. After unification, matters did not improve for Sardinia, taxes went up again to bring them to the same level as mainland Italy, then after 1886, the economy of the island was driven even lower when phylloxera destroyed the vines and when the banks collapsed following the trade embargo with France. The collapse of the banks had favoured the holders of the mineral rights and of the landowners who had acquired the old feudal estates who, as they became richer, became ever more rapacious, whilst reinvesting nothing in the land (Fiori 1990).

At the best of times Sardinia agriculture barely survived between the myriad small plots of land owned by peasants, which were too small for rationalisation of either crops or labour, and the huge *latifondi* owned by absentee landlords, run by local managers and worked by hired day-labourers using archaic methods which were not very productive. Both the smallholders and the *latifondi* faced ruin in 1886, when, in an effort to achieve political and social balance the protectionist policies were applied to agriculture as well as industry. This cut the Sardinian commercial lifeline with France, which was the longstanding market for Sardinian olive oil and farm animals (Fiori 1990). The scene was thus set for further rampant capitalism. As milk could no longer be sold in France there was a surplus and the price fell. Mainland entrepreneurs arrived and set up production of cheese and the price of milk rose again, so peasants ripped out traditional crops and invested in animals. After a while the price of milk fell as production increased, and was artificially kept down by the manufacturers' cartel, leaving the peasants with little income, and no other crops to sell or even to eat. Their misery of the peasants was complete (Fiori 1990).

For the working classes in the towns the living conditions were increasingly insupportable. As the peasants stopped growing the staple foods, vegetables, fruit, grain and olives, there were increasing shortages and steep price rises. This resulted in rioting in Cagliari which was put down by the army (Colombo 1977). The only industry on the island was that of mining for silver, zinc, lead and coal in the Inglesias basin. The mines were mainly owned by foreign, including British companies and it was to these mines that

the thousands of ruined smallholders, landless day-labourers and shepherds came to find work. The living and working conditions were subhuman. The men worked destructively long shifts without rest periods or holidays; pay was continually being cut without warning or excuse, or delayed so that the men had to buy on credit at inflated prices at the company stores. The housing was abysmal and the workers feared sacking if they became ill either from malaria, tuberculosis or industrial accident (Fiori 1990).

Thus Sardinia shared, in even starker reality, given its backwardness and isolation, the fate of the rest of the south. As a result of centuries of neglect and of more recent exploitation and myopic government, the native Sardinians were amongst the poorest people in Italy. Few owned land or businesses, or were in the professions. Barter was the common method of exchange, and only the ruling class or government employees, had money on a regular basis. Most Sardinians were day-labourers in the mines or on the land, or were tenant farmers or shepherds high in the hills. All subject to the vagaries of weather, pestilence or the marketplace, sometimes with terrible consequences. Gramsci remembered children wandering and searching for grass to eat in the drought of 1896-7, a year in which many died of starvation (Mack Smith 1959, cited Davidson 1977). Sardinia was an unhealthy place to live; malaria was widespread, exacerbated by increasing swamps. Life expectancy was short and when labourers in poor health were unable to work, their children suffered from malnutrition, pellagra and rickets (Davidson 1977).

One perception held by northerners was justified: Sardinians were ignorant. In 1871 illiteracy had been measured as 86.1 per cent. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1926 reports that in 1901 only 59.09 children per thousand were registered in elementary schools and Clark says that truancy in Southern Italy, which includes Sardinia, was often as high as 80 per cent (Clark 1984:37 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1926:vol.23:213). It seems likely that the rate of improvement in literacy was very slow. Banfield notes that by 1955 illiteracy was still at 44 per cent in isolated rural areas and that non-attendance was still high for rural pupils, and indeed for teachers (Banfield 1967). Illiteracy meant that Sardinians were disenfranchised because literacy itself was a qualification for the vote. Furthermore since their political masters from the Pisans to the house of Savoy had excluded Sardinians from as many of the posts in government as they possibly could, even those at the lowliest administrative or bureaucratic level, their political consciousness was negligible (Davidson 1964). Their subordination and isolation meant that the political ideas which had been talked of in the rest of Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century had hardly reached them. Political life in Sardinia was conducted at the level of playground gangs, power and influence rather than theory or ideals being the

imperatives (Bellieni Serra cited Fiori 1990). This then was the society from which Antonio Gramsci emerged. One which had “no unifying institutions and one in which disease, extreme poverty, ignorance and superstition were endemic” (Davidson 1964:4). Sixty years later Banfield, having studied a remote southern village in 1955 categorises the prevailing attitude to the world as “amoral familism” (Banfield 1967:83).

### **Antonio**

It should be noted, however, that Antonio Gramsci was not *born* to any of these degraded circumstances. Fourth of seven children, he was born in Ales in 1891. His father, a mainlander of Albanian and Spanish descent, was middle-class and had gained his government post in Sardinia by competitive examination. His mother, Giuseppina Marcias, (Peppina) was from a land-owning family. Orphaned at an early age she had been brought up by her uncle, a pharmacist, and had attended school. She knew both how to speak and read Italian which was very unusual. So both his parents had been educated and, unusually, both spoke Italian, an important advantage at that time. There had been strong opposition from Francesco Gramsci’s mother to her son’s marriage with a socially and racially inferior and poor Sardinian, but the couple were happy and the early years of the marriage were comfortable. The Gramsci’s were bourgeois, comfortably off, possessing both land and a regular cash income. They could afford a maid, and the children, especially Antonio were indulged and he attended a fee-paying convent kindergarten because he was in fragile health (Fiori 1990).

Antonio had been a bonny baby, blue-eyed, blond, and sturdy until he was about eighteen months old, when he started to develop a lump on his spine. The family decided that the misfortune was due to him having been dropped by his nursemaid when a baby, but in fact he was showing the first signs of Potts disease, tuberculosis of the spine. He had fevers and the lump became bigger. His father took him to see doctors firstly at Oristano and then to Gaeta on the mainland but, according to Teresina, they either did not have the diagnostic tools, or perhaps the knowledge to recognise the early signs of this rare form of tuberculosis and the condition remained undiagnosed (Paulesu Quercioli 1991). At four years he haemorrhaged so badly that no-one expected him to live (Fiori 1990). Years later, in 1933, Tatiana, his sister-in-law, was told by a consultant, summoned to the prison to establish Gramsci’s condition, that this disease was curable if treated early and with care, but it is unlikely that this would have been possible in nineteenth century Sardinia (AT:1259n). Strangely, Gramsci, like his mother, clung stubbornly to the fall theory. Gramsci’s favourite sibling Teresina said her mother could not face the guilt either of having exposed him, however unwittingly, to disease, or of the

disease somehow being part of the family (Paulesu Quercioli 1991). In the latter case her conviction about the fall served as protection. In the primitive society of rural Sardinia, unexplained deformity might have drawn down on Antonio and on the family the suspicion of the evil eye, or the hunchback himself might be seen as a sorcerer and the family would be shunned or persecuted. To an extent their respectability and relatively high social position protected them, but this was not to last.

When Antonio was seven, disaster struck the family. His father, having supported a political leader who had lost power, was accused of “irregularities” at his office and was first suspended without pay and then eventually imprisoned for five years. Overnight the family lost its income and status. Eventually his mother Peppina was left penniless after having sold land to pay for her husband’s defence. Peppina, out of pride, refused to ask for help from the Gramsci relations on the mainland who were all prosperous. The family moved to Ghilarza, where Peppina’s half-sister Grazia took them into her house, so that at least they had a roof over their heads. They had no money at all, so they all had to work where they could. The older girls crocheted lace, and knitted socks which only earned a pittance. His mother made shirts, took in a lodger, cooked meals for other people, and took in washing, ironing late into the night with an iron filled with charcoal. Gennaro left school and went to work in the land registry which had just opened an office in Ghilarza (Fiori 1990). The little ones, Carlo, Marco, Antonio and Teresina could not help. Antonio now had to attend the local school, in a huge class, where at least his knowledge of Italian gave him an advantage. When he was ten, however, he went to the land registry to work with Gennaro during his summer holidays. His job was to carry around the land registers, which were heavy and almost as big as he was, for ten hours a day, six days a week and on Sunday mornings. He was in such pain by the end of each day that it was difficult for him to sleep. Long after he was to describe his feelings about this period to Giulia. He felt himself to be an outsider, a burden on the family, and doubted that he could ever be loved (EL:108).

Yet this period looks rather different when seen through the eyes of his favourite sibling, Teresina, as recounted to her daughter Mimma Paulesu Quercioli. The registry work paid nine lira a month – enough to buy a kilo of bread per day for the household. Nino, as Gramsci was known in the family, was, if not his mother’s favourite child, certainly the one on whom she spent the most time and care. She and her other children made sacrifices for him. Nino and she had their breakfast together in the bakehouse, while the other children gathered in the kitchen. Breakfast for the others was a cup of hot, black barley water with a hint of coffee and a piece of black bread. Nino, on the other hand, had an egg beaten up in marsala whenever it could be afforded, and white bread instead

of black. The other children, says Teresina, understood that he needed the best food in order to survive and that no-one complained (Paulesu Quercioli 1991:60).



**Figure 1 Gramsci's Room**

He had the best room, sunny and overlooking the street, and the best bed. His mother found the time to help him with his schoolwork to avoid him over-tiring himself (Paulesu Quercioli 1991). Later she would insist that somehow the means must be found so that he could go to school. Nino accepted the extra food and the other comforts, apparently with tranquillity, "rather egotistical, Master Gramsci", concludes his sister fondly (Paulesu Quercioli 1991:61). It seems from Gramsci's own perception that, far from being complacent, he saw himself to be a burden and brazened it out, accepting the preferential treatment whilst perhaps forever fearing the expression of bad feeling which, according to Teresina, was never made. In a household in which everyone was constantly hungry and in which the younger children were bribed, with a centesimo to go to bed without supper (the coin later disappearing), he must surely have been aware of eyes watching every extra mouthful. He certainly was often withdrawn. Well into young manhood he was very self-conscious and unhappy about his physical appearance, differentiated as he was by his shape and small size and his shabby clothes. He was also often solitary, excluded from the rough playground games, and given a wide berth by the superstitious because of his deformity. He was tormented as a freak by his classmates until he fought back. His sharp tongue and obvious aptitude for schoolwork did not endear him to the other children.

Sometimes, however, he chose isolation; his mother had kept secret his father's "shame", only Gennaro had been told he was in prison. Antonio found out by rumour, insinuation and insult and overheard snippets and was, by his own admission deeply affected. He would always feel that his childhood had been poisoned by this concealment (LP1:370). Just as his mother never left the house, if she could help it, for five years unless at night, in order to avoid the neighbours' scorn or pity; and just as his father would remain indoors for a long time after he returned, so Antonio too chose to withdraw into himself. Some of his isolation, however, could be termed normal

naughtiness. When he realised he was well ahead of his class in schoolwork, he played truant, walking the countryside with his dog, imagining adventures modelled on those of Robinson Crusoe. Here was a character which appealed to Antonio. They were each marooned in a hostile environment, in Antonio's case doubly so, the first being his own body, and the second village society. Robinson Crusoe was physically strong which Antonio could imagine himself to be. Crusoe was also resourceful, solving the problems of daily existence by ingenious plans and gadgets which he made. This was very much to Antonio's taste and within his capabilities. He was very dextrous and enjoyed inventing and constructing functional household items as well as toys and models (Fiori 1990). Crusoe learnt to survive the pain of mental and emotional isolation as did Antonio (EL:271). The other inhabitants of Crusoe's world turned out to be savages, not all of whom were friendly. Antonio too lived in a savage world. Once, at about ten years old, he was made aware, in an act of casual cruelty, how close he stood to exclusion, not only from village society but from any human contact. He had been sent to deliver clean laundry to the wife of one of the village headmen. She invited him to accompany her on an errand on her way to church. She proceeded, decked in her Sunday best, to deliver scraps to a naked young man, streaked with his own ordure, who was kept chained in a windowless pig-sty. This unfortunate was her son who had been born with some abnormality. The memory of this frightening and degraded prisoner haunted Gramsci. He was as revolted by the exhibition of respectable hypocrisy as he was appalled by its inhumanity, and shocked too by the recognition that he could have had a similar fate (LP2:261).

When his father was released from prison the situation was both better and worse. Better, in that the family was complete again and was comforted, worse from Nino's situation since, quite basically, like the other members of the family, he would get less food. In addition he was no longer the centre of his mother's concern. Thin and subdued, Francesco Gramsci was home, but he was unemployed, ineligible for government employment, and unsuited to manual labour. He was, therefore, another mouth to feed and another soul to support since he was depressed and ashamed, so spent every day sitting in the best room, silent. Gennaro was doing his military service in Turin, and could no longer help. For a while then, far from being a burden, little Nino at thirteen was forced to lug registers, as he was, literally, the breadwinner. He was very bitter about being too poor to continue his education even though he had passed his primary school certificate. For him education was more than opportunity, it was a matter of life and death, with his disability he would be unemployable as an adult without it.

Francesco Gramsci eventually found odds and ends of work and enough money was scraped together to send Antonio back to school. It was too far away to walk daily so Antonio boarded during the week with a peasant, taking his food with him. He was always in trouble with his mother when he came home at weekends because he regularly had sold some of it to buy books. Like Marx before him, he was largely indifferent to the niceties or even the normalities of life when he was focused on study. Another source of information and also family dissension came from Gennaro, his elder brother who was doing his military service in Turin and had become interested in Socialism. He sent home leaflets and articles. Antonio became interested too, so that Socialist ideas from the mainland became a topic of conversation for the older, remaining siblings. Francesco Gramsci was horrified, threw away the articles and forbade any further reading of them. Antonio circumvented the order by suborning the postman. After three years, despite the many short-comings of the school, Antonio passed the exams to qualify him for the *Liceo Dettori* (sixth form college) in Cagliari.



**Figure 2 Photo of 15 year old Gramsci (Colombo 1977:20)**

Gennaro was now living and working in Cagliari and he offered to support Antonio, so Antonio went to live with him. Money was very tight: Gennaro managed to pay for squalid lodgings and basic food, but he could not be expected to pay the various fees required by the Liceo, or to clothe his brother. Antonio, at eighteen, was not anti-social but he did not feel able to join in with many of activities of his classmates. He felt humiliated by the dreadful state of his clothes, and his pride would not allow him to go out with the group when he could not pay for anything. He could, however, be very good company and would crack jokes and enjoy traditional Sard songs and dances (Paulesu Quercioli 1977). In February 1910 he wrote home twice, on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, begging for some cash so that he could wear something decent when he went on a field trip to the mines (EL:32,34).

This visit revealed Antonio's emerging interest in social conditions. According to one of his contemporaries, Renato Figaru, although his classmates regarded the visit as a pleasure trip, Antonio took the opportunity to question the miners about their working lives and to find out about their living conditions (Paulesu Quercioli 1977). Despite the poverty of his own existence, he must have been struck by the absolute hopelessness and degradation of that of the miners, subject as they were to the most brutal and corrupt form of capitalism, intent on keeping down the cost of employing a miner to less than that of keeping a slave (Fiori 1990).

1910 was also the year in which there were political protests in Cagliari; about the failures and corruption of central government, about the Sards' perception that they were always at the end of the queue; about the inaction of the Prefect in the face of the meningitis epidemic, as opposed to his sudden surge of energy and watchfulness when the local labour association held a meeting to discuss possible action in the face of rising prices. This was the year in which Gramsci started to read Marx, and in which he wrote his first newspaper article. He was encouraged and indeed accredited as a journalist, by one of his teachers, Garzia who was also the editor of the newspaper *L'Unione Sarda* which was railing against the central government.



**Figure 3 Gramsci's first journalists' card (Colombo 1977:23)**

He wrote the article, a brief, clear, and humorous account of the election in a remote village, where the rumour that the franchise might be extended and political ideas might be broached was enough to trigger a disproportionate repressive response from the authorities. Garzia recognised his analytic abilities and his burgeoning grasp of political and cultural issues (Davidson:1977).



He finished at the *Liceo Dettori* in 1911. He was now twenty and he and Gennaro were now struggling to survive on one salary. He wrote home repeatedly for help but there was little response. There was, however, a prompt reaction to the news which reached Ghilarza that Gennaro had been elected to the executive of the chamber of Labour and that as a result the police were making routine enquiries about both the Gramsci brothers, since Antonio too attended Socialist party meetings with Gennaro. Given both his background, which was staunch royalist, and his unfortunate experience with the law, their father was understandably anxious and upset. Antonio wrote to his mother to calm her and begged her to restrain Francesco from any sort of action. He advised them to laugh at the police as he did himself and provided a rare glimpse of himself at the theatre, so long-haired police thought he was a girl, behaving as a rowdy and frivolous student and baiting the carabinieri (EL:42). His burgeoning interest in social justice and in political ideas was clear in one of his final essays at the *Liceo Dettori*. This was entitled "The oppressor and the oppressed" and revealed some ideas influenced by socialism.

The battle that men have fought since time immemorial is truly marvellous; an unceasing struggle in which they try to tear up or tear off all the chains which the lust for power of an individual or a class or even a whole nation tries to impose on them...The French Revolution brought down many of the highest people and raised up many of the oppressed; but it only substituted one group of oppressors for another. However it left us with a great lesson, that privilege since it is the product of a society, and not part of the natural order, can be overthrown ( cited Colombo1977:21).

Cagliari was the preparation for university, not academically, because he discovered that he had been poorly prepared for the scholarship examination, rather it was preparation for the difficulties and privations of living on a shoestring at university and the frustration of trying to communicate the realities of city life to his parents. For example, that if one needed bread one actually had to pay for it, up-front, with cash (EL:38). Then there were priorities, which were not understood or shared by his father, for documentation, which had to be precisely as specified and to arrive by a set time. Equally, those at home dreaded the arrival of what Teresina calls "the nightmare letters", the endless demands for money which were impossible for them to meet and which caused his mother such anguish because she could not bear the thought of Nino becoming ill (Paulesu Quercioli 1977:17).

It was not possible for Antonio to go to University in Cagliari. Gennaro could not be expected to support him further, since he might himself need to move to get a better job. The family could not support Antonio; his only hope of university was to win a scholarship. There were bursaries, however, at the University of Turin provided by the

Piedmontese, for poor Sard students. He would have to travel to Turin, the birthplace of northern centralisation and the heartland of capitalism in Italy in order to study. So Gramsci left Sardinia for a new life which he expected to forge through education. He was eager to explore the new spirit and the new perspective of the world which he had glimpsed through Socialist tracts and the chamber of Labour. He left behind stagnation, superstition and parochialism. He took with him to Turin a new tailor-made suit, his mother's shawl, what seemed, to the family at least, to be a fortune in cash, and a mixture of hope and trepidation. He also took his self-sufficiency or at least the defensive carapace he had acquired over the years. He took his Sardinian identity and heritage. He took the example of his mother's strength and pride in the face of adversity. He took an obsession with facing the truth, utterly rejecting the need to conceal it, however unpalatable. He took his fellow feeling, born of his own exclusion, with the oppressed and the marginalised and his spirit of rebellion against the established order.

But the pattern for the coming years had been set in Cagliari. For the family in Sardinia, there would be constant worry, hunger, borrowing, painful misunderstanding and estrangement. For Antonio in Turin, there would be a determination to succeed despite cold, illness, malnutrition, lack of books or perceived support from home. His future was on the mainland. He would never live in Sardinia again.

...A few words  
 about that boy who ran away one night in a skimpy cloak  
 and a couple of lines of verse in his pocket. Poor lad, such an eager heart  
 Someday, somewhere, they'll kill him.  
 Letter to my mother (Quasimodo 1960:413)

## Chapter Three: The Issue of a Single Language for Italy

“Speech and language are the ruler and guide of all things” (Socrates, cited Boothman 2008:211)

### ***Introduction***

This chapter examines the issue of a single or national language for Italy in some detail. It was a neglected factor in the political context of re-unified Italy which affected the growth and change of the nation state and the political scene. Gramsci once described Italy as “the babel of socialism”. He was referring to the plethora of political opinions but the phrase also describes the linguistic problem. Through the issue of a single national language Gramsci considered both the role of intellectuals in Italy in the past and then began to envisage a function for them in the evolution of language and of ideas in the future. This process would need to be an educative one as both the intellectuals and the masses began to develop new attitudes and values for a new kind of society.

### ***Glottology***

Gramsci’s early years in Turin laid the foundations for his journalistic and political career. It was in Turin that he first wrote professionally; in Turin that he became not only an active Socialist but a Socialist activist. It is also the site of his intellectual formation, of his formal introduction to Marx and Hegel (Fiori 1990). But apart from the introduction to Marx, and the consideration of dialectic as an analytical tool, Gramsci’s studies at the University of Turin are not usually regarded as a part of his political formation. In fact there was another important dimension to his studies, both in terms of training and ideas, which has been overlooked or indeed obscured. This neglected dimension is the study of the comparative history and development of classical and neo-classical languages known at the time by the term glottology. Closer examination of this neglected area of his life reveals aspects of these studies which shaped the development of his intellectual habits and preferred processes. Furthermore, they also provided the germs of ideas which would be extended and developed by his subsequent studies and experience to form part of his political theory. These studies contributed significantly to the development of key ideas such as the role of the intellectual, the concept of hegemony and the process of change. Early post-war tributes from his friends and contemporaries, such as Palmiro Togliatti acknowledge the importance of this part of his development where later biographies ignore or dismiss it (Togliatti 1949; Cammett 1967; Davidson 1977; Fiori 1990). Gramsci studied glottology for five years, both formally as part of his

intended degree and informally, assisting Bartoli with his research. We know it was important to him because one of his lasting regrets, he said in prison, was that he had disappointed his tutor by not pursuing glottology as an academic career. In this, the much quoted “*fur ewig*” letter to Tania of March 1927, Gramsci also lists as the first two items, a study of the intellectuals and a study of comparative linguistics (LP 1:83). He devoted considerable effort to the study of glottology judging by his results in the examination, he achieved full marks, and by the fact that he was entrusted by Bartoli, his tutor, with the production of a full set of lecture notes for the glottology course which were lithographed for circulation at the university (Bartoli 1912).

There is one remaining copy of these notes held in the archives of the *Fondazione Istituto Gramsci* in Rome, available by permission of the archivist. These notes, known as *le Dispense* consist of two parts; the first lists bibliographies, gallo-roman morphology, an introduction and a section on verbal flexions. The second part entitled “Ethnography of the Balkans” includes a second bibliography and chapters such as “Toponymy”, which details changes in usage within individual languages due to social change or development. The two hundred and thirteen closely written pages in Gramsci’s small, regular handwriting must have taken considerable effort and intense concentration to produce. Apart from the length of the document, which itself indicates hours of writing, it was a peculiarly challenging task because of the nature of Bartoli’s research. Neo-linguist glottology entailed a methodology of meticulous tracking of minute historical changes or geographical variations in language. These minute progressions whether in pronunciation, spelling and meaning, or in syntax and grammatical structure, had to be detailed accurately, like mathematical formulae and calculations. After these were detailed, Bartoli proceeded to outline hypotheses for possible reasons for the changes – moving, as described by Meillet “from detail to abstraction” (Meillet 1948:7). This is a phrase echoed by Buttigieg in the preface to his translation of the Prison Notebooks, when describing Gramsci’s approach to conceptualising and writing (Buttigieg 1992).

De Felice dismisses *le Dispense* saying that they only “represent faithfully Bartoli’s thoughts without any discernible contribution from Gramsci” (De Felice 1964:221). This is true, but not the whole truth. They set out clearly the disciplined methodology required of anyone who wished to undertake serious glottological research and, therefore, are evidence of the intellectual habits which Gramsci acquired and on which he would depend for the rest of his life. Anderson notes that one of the strengths of Gramsci’s writing is that it is based on “empirical historical research” (Anderson 1976:80). Besides the methodological element of Bartoli’s course, *le Dispense* list some of the theoretical sources for important themes within Gramsci’s writings, both in his early journalism and

later in the prison years. So that while *le Dispense* may not, at first glance, seem connected to the practice of politics, I argue that one of the ways in which first Gramsci looked at and understood society and the way it accepted new ideas, was in terms of language. When he considered the Italy of his time, the only established common language, written literary Italian, was symbolic of stasis. It provided the example of an obstacle, a way of thinking that had to be changed. His study of linguistics suggested a theoretical process by which language, and by analogy, society, could be changed. The theories suggested that a change in values, in aspirations, must be attempted in order to change both language and society and that these could not be achieved without guidance and leadership. From the commencement of his intellectual life, therefore, he was engaged in the study of the process of change.

The study of the history of language offered insights as to why the linguistic situation in Italy, like the political one, was anachronistic. The juxtaposition of linguistic theory and political activity in the years between 1913 and 1920 is crucial to these considerations. His studies and his experience particularly at this point have a synergy. He brings to language theory his experience of being a subaltern immersed in dialectal world, an outsider. Then he takes the language theory, together with his growing experience of political activism and merges them into something different.

...for Gramsci, study could never be something separate from action. Study and life had led him to discover and make contact with a social force which would redeem and renew the world and itself. Study and life would make this contact ever more close (Togliatti 1949:120).

The construction of a hegemonic state and also the role that the intellectual should play in changing social relations, are ideas which begin in his glottological reading list. Of course, linguistics is not the only source for his political ideas; like Marx, his sources were wide and deeply studied. Also like the young Marx, his thought has a basis in the experience of trying, personally, to make change happen both in a militantly revolutionary situation and in political and cultural thinking

### ***Plurilingualism in Italy***

At unification... only a tiny minority of people seriously believed that Italy was a nation ...and neither history or language really supported their case (Duggan 1994:xiv).

If language is indeed the paradigm for the shape of Italian society and the way to change it then, before examining the linguistic themes in Gramsci's writings, it is useful to consider briefly the history of the peninsular and to outline the peculiar linguistic situation in Italy which lingered into the twentieth century. In addition, it is necessary to examine the effect of the language situation on political life and social life, and to review the solutions to the problem which had been proposed.

Before 1861 there was no history of Italy, there was only a collection of histories of the various regions, states, duchies or dynasties which ruled parts of the peninsular. Led by the state of Piedmont, its Prime Minister Cavour and Garibaldi and his thousand, Italy finally became a single independent state by unification of the various regions in 1861. Before then Italy had not been a political entity since the fall of the Roman Empire. During the intervening centuries, the peninsular had been invaded by the barbarians, the Arabs, the Normans, the Hohenstaufens and the Angevins. There was then a brief period in which it became a jigsaw of small, brilliant, but belligerent, city states. These did not survive long and by 1500 they all had been subsumed into ten larger states as various regions had been conquered by different dynasties, "the more successful and unscrupulous of the local tyrants" (Mack Smith 1997:7). Numbered among these were the Medici, the D'Este, the Sforza, the Popes and the oligarchy which ruled the Republic of Venice. Parts of the peninsular were then won, exchanged or ceded as a result of war, marriage or treaty so that in 1858 before the treaty of Villafranca, it was still divided into eight states. Six of these were either ruled or "protected" by Austria, the seventh was the kingdom of the two Sicilies which had been retrieved from Napoleon's brother and was ruled once more by the Spanish Bourbons whilst the eighth, known as the Kingdom of Sardinia, but which was in fact, Piedmont, was independent.

Add to this historical disunity, the geographical formation of the country, which divides east from west by the Appenines; where the mountains come down to the sea at intervals, making longitudinal journeys difficult, and where inland the hilly terrain isolates one village from the next, and it is easy to understand why ancient languages survived. Also why, at unification, there was no common spoken language, and to most inhabitants the word 'Italy', was meaningless (Mack Smith 1974). At unification, the vast majority of the inhabitants of the peninsular thought of themselves not as Italian, indeed Mack Smith says they had no idea what the term meant, but as Genoese, Neapolitan or Bergomasque (Mack Smith 1997:37). If they did understand the term, then it was not necessarily a welcome one. Luigi Farini, Governor of Naples, said in 1860 "In seven million inhabitants (of the South) there are not one hundred who want a united Italy" (Duggan1994:137).

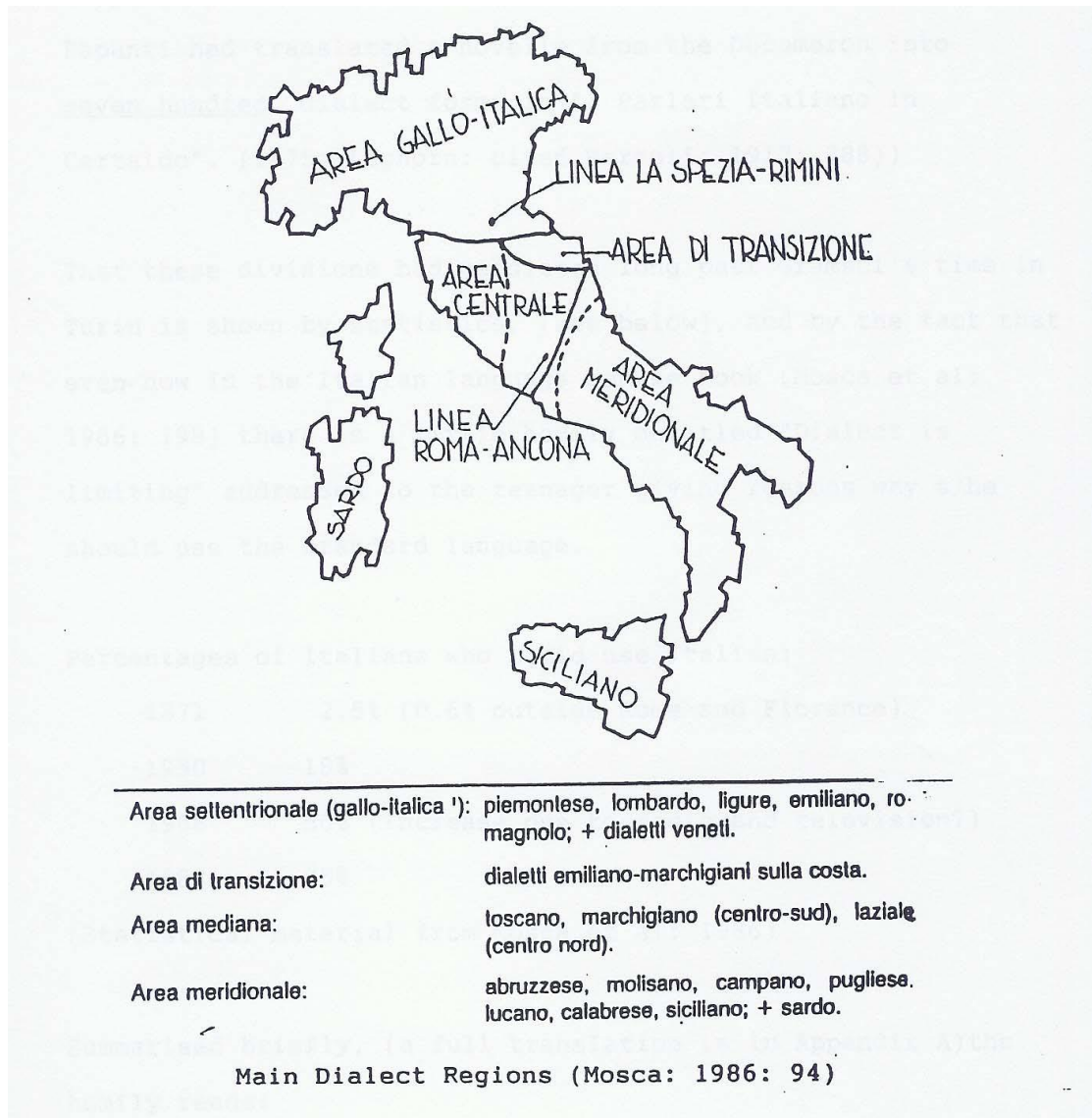
D'Azeglio was not overstating the case when he said at unification "Italy is made, now we must make Italians" (cited Absalom 1995:44). Gramsci himself was contemptuous of the mental contortions performed by writers trying to invent an historical sense of identity in the Italian people. Urbinati says that Gramsci saw that "it was a nation that existed simply as a figure of speech used by the rulers to manipulate popular sentiment and to justify their oppressive policies" (Urbinati 1998:377).

Gramsci's view was that the issue of a single national language was linked to the history of the peninsula. This view was shared by the neo-linguist school of glottologists whose theories will be examined in the next chapter. At unification in 1861, De Mauro estimates that only 2.5 percent of the population spoke Italian and that, furthermore, if the populations of Florence and Rome were discounted, then the percentage fell to 0.6 percent (De Mauro cited Clark 1984:35). Even the notion of "speaking Italian" is problematic since Italian was then mainly a written literary language and was spoken only on very formal occasions. From King Vittorio Emanuele of Piedmont down, for most Italians every facet of everyday social life, even the law was conducted in dialect. The difficulty was that, as a result of both geography and history, it was not just one dialect but many different ones (Duggan 2007).

There are still thirty seven main dialect groups (Figure 4), each with its own subdivisions, sometimes from town to town. In Sardinia alone, as late as 1993, five languages were spoken; three native Sardinian dialects, plus Catalan and Corsican (Jones 1995). Dialect varies sometimes even within a town, for example the separate dialects spoken in different quarters in Rome and in Venice. This everyday reality of life in Italy has been ignored or, as De Mauro accuses, actively concealed by successive Italian governments until the present day (De Mauro 1994a:61). Scholars of linguistics point out that the term "dialect" has a specific meaning in the context of Italy (De Mauro 1994a; Maiden 1995; Lepschy and Lepschy 1977). Italian dialects should be considered rather as separate languages.<sup>1</sup> Many of these dialects had not only had a considerable oral literature, but also a written one. Goldoni, for example wrote comedies in both Italian and Venetian. Manzoni's first edition of "The Betrothed" was written in Milanese. He only subsequently translated it into Florentine Italian.

---

<sup>1</sup> One can study Friulani, the language of the Friuli region, at University level for example.



**Figure 4 Main dialect regions (Mosca: 1986:94)**

In 1992, a hundred years after Gramsci's birth, of the twenty eight minority languages so designated by the European Parliament, thirteen were spoken in Italy. Twelve minority languages, which include Ladin, Sardinian and Friuliano were protected by Italian law (E482/1999). In 2006 the Summer Institute of Linguist survey (SIL) for that year lists 32 languages for Italy seven of which are dialects, and the minority languages themselves have dialects. Coluzzi argues that there are at least eight more dialects which come directly from Latin and are not listed.(Coluzzi 2009). Certainly, there were more dialectal variations and less use of Italian in Gramsci's time. In 1875, Papanti's *I Parlari Italiani in Certaldo etc.* set out a story from the *Decameron* translated into *seven hundred* dialect forms. The differences between the major dialects were, and are, as great as the differences between the major European languages. Accounts of incomprehension between dialect speakers from different parts of Italy have been well documented over the years (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1911b, Lepschy and Lepschy 1977, Mack Smith



1997; Maiden 1995; Duggan 2007). As well as the differences between dialects, the difference between standard Italian and some dialects was, and is, just as great as that between Italian and English.

### ***The issue of a national language for Italy***

Cavour “je suis italien avant tout” (cited Bosworth 2006:17)

“Italian” at unification existed as a written literary language rather than as a spoken one for everyday use. The written language of Italian was based on fifteenth century Florentine dialect, which had been accepted by scholars in the sixteenth century as the model for Italian. In fact, this form of the language had already been out of date when it was promulgated by Bembo, the Academician, in the sixteenth century, as the basis for the “official” single language of Italian (Maiden 1995). As a result of its lack of currency there was very little widespread interaction with contemporary spoken language, so there was little stimulus and innovation and it gradually became even less like normal speech. Moreover, the academics imposed rules directing that only words found in the “official” dictionary, compiled by Crusca in 1612, were correct and permissible so that the language quickly became restricted to academic circles. It became stultified, the writers preoccupied with elegance and it was used almost entirely in the written form.

By the nineteenth century it was so stylised and archaic as to be almost incomprehensible outside academic or literary circles; the intellectuals (Bonghi 1855, cited Lo Piparo 1979, De Mauro 1994b). Manzoni and Foscolo complained that it had drifted so far from normal speech as to become almost a dead language (Duggan 2007). In fact it performed the same function as Latin had in medieval Europe; it allowed scholars and intellectuals to communicate via the written word instead of in their native language or dialect. Gramsci likened it to the Chinese written system of ideograms, common across China whatever the language spoken. Maiden calls it “structurally and functionally remote” (Maiden 1995:8). Remote, not only from daily life, but from contemporary thought. In some ways the strictures that Gramsci was later to apply to the parochialism of dialect speakers; the narrowness of their vision; the boundaries to thought imposed by limited vocabulary were equally true of the intellectuals of the literary and academic circles.

Partly because of their political subjugation to foreign rulers for centuries and partly due to their preoccupation with form, “*la lingua bella*”, rather than content, the intellectuals of

Italy had not taken part in the intellectual and political debates which had swept across Europe from the sixteenth century onwards. They had allowed themselves to be kept on the sidelines, “still in swaddling bands, they did not participate in the religious and political agitation of the sixteenth century” (Bonghi cited Lo Piparo 1979:22). They had gradually separated themselves from the people, first by language and then by social class, so that what few ideas they had remained within the literary circle (Bonghi; Manzoni cited Lo Piparo 1979:21). As Gramsci noted they had become a barrier to change, rather than agents of it. If the educated and literate had been unaware of many of the new ideas, then how much more ignorant were the illiterate non-Italian speaking masses? In 1836, Sir John Bowring described to the British parliament a visit to a Tuscan farmhouse where four generations were present and “the last had not added one particle of knowledge to the ignorance of the first” (cited Snowden 1979:147). This was because, apart from the dearth of new ideas, the educated could only communicate with the uneducated in a spoken mutual local dialect. There were no methods of mass communication apart from a very few regional newspapers and since these were written in literary Italian they were inaccessible to most people.

There is no more impressive index of how “regional” Italy was in 1871, of how few economic, social or political links had been created throughout the centuries. Many aspects of late nineteenth century Italian history – the slowness to eradicate illiteracy, the low circulation of newspapers and journals...become more comprehensible if one remembers that Italians did not normally speak the same language and could not communicate with each other (Clark 1984:35).

The whole issue of the lack of a single national language that everyone spoke and understood was, as Mack Smith puts it, “the unmentionable fact” and only the persistence of one man transformed it from “being an argument amongst literati to being a social problem which affected the whole nation” (Migliorini cited Lo Piparo 1979:20). Alessandro Manzoni, the author of *The Betrothed*, the first modern Italian novel had, by dint of many letters and articles, prevailed upon the government to admit the problem and to do something about it.

### ***Manzoni's recommendations***

The first administration had recognised there were problems in communication since particularly in remote rural areas it had difficulty in imposing order on its reluctant new citizens (Duggan 1994). Disorder, combined with the Manzonian polemic, moved the administration to commission a Parliamentary report. Manzoni himself was asked to lead the research and to write it. In this report to the minister Broglio in 1869, as in his

writings and theories on language, Manzoni describes the problem, explains the reasons for its existence and recommends actions to be taken (Lo Piparo 1979).

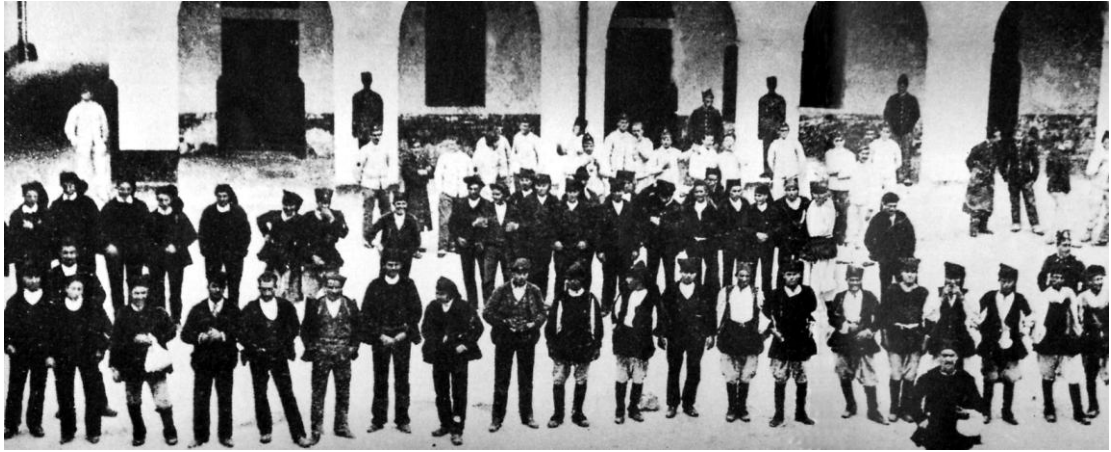
His suggested actions are interesting from two points of view; firstly, because of their effect on the social life of Italy, on education in particular and secondly, because Manzoni's writings on language have an important place in the development of Gramsci's ideas. Manzoni's view, based on his own theories of language, was that, since Italy needed a single language, the simplest thing to do was to choose a complete established language from those already existing in Italy, and then impose it on everyone. It was not surprising, given its historical pre-eminence, that he chose Florentine Tuscan to become the single spoken national language, just as its archaic form had been used, and was still used at the time, as written literary Italian. Florentine Tuscan was swiftly promoted by decree to be the official language of "Italian" for government and state transactions. It became the official language of the army, the Carabinieri, the bureaucracy and the law. Next, this new Italian was not only to be taught in schools but was to become the *sole teaching medium*. Lastly, the government in 1869 further suggested that a new dictionary should be written, using only the Florentine form of words, which would henceforth be the standard usage. Following these recommendations there would have been created, at least on paper, a common language. That precisely was its problem. Italian remained essentially a paper language whilst Italians, on the whole, continued to speak dialect. The recommendations carried the seeds of their own failure (Green and Ives 2009). Some, for practical reasons and some, as Gramsci's analysis will later show, for initial theoretical weakness.

The policies surrounding the army are a useful illustration of the government's ambivalent, or perhaps just incoherent, response to the issue of a common language. Manzoni had proposed that, since Italian was the state language, conscripts to the army should be taught Italian, along with the use of soap and knives and forks. This was quite successful whilst there was high conscription and while recruits stayed for three years, for the literacy rate went up by thirty six per cent (Clark 1984:35). The Army remained the most successful agent in spreading basic Italian. Conversely, however, the structure and tactics of the army exploited dialectic differences and regional divisions to divide and rule, reflecting the governments' attitude. Regiments were raised from two regions and based in a third and were then moved up and down the peninsula to maintain order. Because of this recruiting policy this usually meant the regiment arrived to maintain order in places where, not only did the soldiers have no local ties, but they were unlikely to understand the local dialect. Finally, no regiment stayed in one place for longer than four years; this meant there was little time, or incentive, to learn the local dialect above the

level required for transaction and recreation. This movement of regiments; “was to discourage contacts between the local populace and the barracks, so that the regiment might not be deflected from its task of repression” (Clark 1984:131).

During the Turin bread riots of 1917, the troops sent to reinforce the garrison were the *Alpini*; Italy’s crack troops. Unusually, the *Alpini* regiment was raised from one area and that area was Piedmont, the area around Turin. In theory it might have been expected that a local regiment would be able to talk to the workers but this may not have been the case. A study in 1916 by Albert Trauzzi detailed the extreme differences in language both between towns and villages in Piedmont and between village and village (Bartoli,1917). It is likely, therefore, that both the workers who had moved to work in the factories, and the soldiers recruited from all over the Piedmont area, would have spoken different dialects. Cammett says of the suppression of the Turin Bread uprising that, amongst the reasons for its failure, was “the inability of the insurgents to win over the soldiers” (Cammett 1967:53). According to one source, the locals were only able to persuade one platoon of *Alpini* to hand over its arms to the workers (Fiori 1990). I believe this was possible because, by linguistic coincidence, one group of workers was able to explain its position to one group of soldiers, who shared their local dialect. Indeed this linguistic and political success was not repeated in other areas of the city. Another reason for failure, in Cammett’s view, was “the complete lack of leadership” (Cammett 1967:53). Both lessons were learnt by the young Gramsci who, two years later, organised teams of Sardinians from the factories to talk to the soldiers of the Sassari brigade who had been sent to Turin in advance of the planned general strike.

The Sassari brigade recruited illiterate peasants from the different areas of Sardinia. All of these areas were very backward and families lived at subsistence level. The brigade was well known for the basic ignorance of its soldiers and its efficiency (brutality) in maintaining order on the mainland and was chosen for precisely those reasons. Moreover, Sardinian dialects are as different from Piedmontese dialects as it is possible to be. Gramsci reports the conversations one Sardinian factory worker had with the soldiers. The soldiers reported being sent to Turin “to shoot at gentlemen who are going on strike.” When they were told that it was in fact poor factory workers they had been sent to shoot, they still regarded the poorest factory worker as immeasurably more privileged than they were themselves (CF:195). The conversations continued however and the workers and the soldiers came to respect each other. Indeed they began to be politicised.



**Figure 5 Sardinian Conscripts in traditional dress in late 1800's (Colombo 1977:10)**

In 1919 while an officer spoke to the soldiers of the Brigade who were to be used to repress the workers, one of the soldiers, braver than the others, interrupted him saying ' but if the workers are fighting for higher wages this will be good for us too when we go home'. This intervention had such an effect among the soldiers that they had to be sent away from Turin in a hurry. (Gustavo Comollo cited Colombo 1977:41)

The Sassari Brigade was moved on at two o'clock one morning without firing a shot.

Attitudes and perceptions could be changed, but only when a real and conscious effort had been made to bridge the language divide. Language was key to bridging both the worker/ peasant and town/country divides and to political change. Conscription and active service in World War One had brought Italians together physically and made Italian more current, but progress was slow. By the 1950s, statistics show only 10 to 20 percent of the population was capable of active and habitual use of Italian. Italian did not really begin to be the national language, in terms of widespread usage, until the late sixties, arguably as a result of television. Even so, De Mauro's research in 1993 shows that still only 38 percent of Italians actually spoke Italian all the time. Of the remaining 62 percent who habitually used dialect or one of the minority languages at home and at work, 23 percent only speak dialect. These mostly did not know how to speak Italian at all or did not feel confident speaking it (De Mauro 1994a:6).

Why did the spread of Italian take so long? It was a major cultural failure of successive governments (Lepschy and Lepschy 1977:30). There were some obvious reasons: if, on the one hand, in spite of the Parliamentary commission, the problem of plurilingualism with no real common language was "the unmentionable fact," on the other the situation was exploited quite cynically. There were positive aspects for the authorities to having a

population too fragmented, too separated by language, too politically ignorant to mount organised opposition. Whilst incomprehension of government's policies resulted in desultory rioting, mutual incomprehension between regions meant that a concerted national response was unlikely and maintaining order was easier. Public security was less threatened and this was, as Sir John Bowing reported to the British parliament, "...a gain for public security: but it is tranquillity purchased at a terrible price- at the price of a stationary and backward civilisation" (cited Snowden 1979:147). In addition, education was chronically underfunded. In the 1880s, still only 2.4 percent of the national reserve was spent, in total, on education. Although, according to the system devised by Casati in 1859, elementary education was to be compulsory and free, little central state funding had been provided in order to make it so. Communes were supposed to be responsible for providing their own elementary schools but many rural communes were too poor to afford them (Tannenbaum 1974:234). Poor families needed the children to work so that, even where schools existed, pupils failed to attend and no one compelled them to do so.

Legal compulsion was a fiction. In the South (this definition includes Sardinia), truancy was often well over 80%. Nobody seriously tried to enforce attendance and, in any case, children left school quite legally at the age of eight or nine. Local councils were indifferent, the teachers were demoralised, the parents uncooperative and the local clergy were actively hostile (Clark 1984:37)

There was little incentive to go to school. Accommodation was poor and six thousand of the state school teachers lacked any sort of training. Furthermore, after 1869, lessons were conducted in a language which was unknown to the pupils and often unfamiliar to the teachers. Manzoni's final recommendation to the government, designed to accomplish the growth of a common language had, in reality, slowed it down. The recommendation that, by regulation, the only language to be spoken in schools should be Italian,<sup>2</sup> i.e Florentine Tuscan, and that every subject would be taught in Italian, in effect disadvantaged any child who entered school unable to speak Italian already. At a stroke of the pen, 98 percent of Italian children had become foreigners in their own schools. The Gentile reforms of 1923, which Gramsci opposed, would make the language learning situation even worse. One of Gramsci's objections was that, whilst elementary education was supposed to become less structured, less "formal", putting less emphasis on grammar and learning by rote, that this, given the huge classes, no resources and largely untrained teachers, would make second language, i.e Italian, learning more difficult. Not learning good Italian had long term consequences. Entry to any form of secondary education was dependent on achievement of the primary

---

<sup>2</sup> Manzoni suggested that all teachers should be from Tuscany but this proved to be impractical since Tuscany had a high number of illiterates and barely enough teachers to fill its own schools

certificate which, in turn, required a certain standard of written and spoken Italian, so that dialect-speaking children were automatically disadvantaged and likely to be disqualified from entry. That his concerns were justified is shown by a study conducted by Yarnit almost sixty years later. Yarnit reported that Italian schools were “selective and class-biased” and that the system still “consigns the children of poor, peasant, dialect speaking families to almost instant failure” (Yarnit 1980:193). Gramsci argued,

if grammar is excluded from education and is not ‘written’ it cannot thereby be excluded from ‘real life’. The only thing excluded is the unitarily organised intervention in the process of learning the language. In practice the national-popular mass is excluded from learning the educated language... In Gentile’s attitude there is much more politics than one thinks and a great deal of unconscious reactionary thought (GR:189).

The education system appeared to be designed to exclude the masses from progress, from having a choice personally, vocationally and politically.

### ***Language and political change.***

No-one then can very well talk to anybody who does not understand the language he speaks (Della Casa 1551).

Gramsci’s experience in Turin had shown him that, in order to recruit the masses to the communist cause, one needed to be able to explain it. The difficulty was that the only existing common versions of Italian were either the new standard Italian which hardly anyone spoke or the written literary form. Written Italian was inaccessible to the illiterate and was difficult and restrictive even for the literate educated classes (Bonghi 1855 cited Lo Piparo 1979:20). “Gramsci” as Anderson points out “often had to produce his concepts within the archaic and inadequate apparatus of Croce and Machiavelli” (Anderson 1977:6). In itself this archaic language was a symptom of a society which had little initial knowledge or experience of democracy, “indeed the whole of Italy today is nothing but an extension of the Middle Ages” (Stendhal cited Duggan 2007:110). Those who only spoke dialect naturally remained even less politically aware than the educated classes, since dialects were even less capable than literary Italian of expressing new concepts. Little wonder that Italians remained locked into outmoded structures of thought and society.

Even by 1950, use of Italian did not mean effective use for the exchange of ideas (De Mauro 1994b). Indeed as late as 1986 authors of an Italian language course book for Italian secondary school pupils, found it necessary to emphasise the importance of

speaking Italian. In a chapter on speaking Italian they explain that while dialect is fine for family life or socialising, “it is not capable of use for discussions on science, history, economics or philosophy,” moreover, the national language is indispensable if one wishes to take part in social life at all levels, political, economical, cultural” (Mosca *et al*, 1986:198 ) The chapter reproduces almost exactly the arguments put forward by Gramsci in an early article on illiteracy sixty years earlier and to which he returns in the *Prison Notebooks* (SG:81). I reiterate here that use of the national language was closely linked to literacy. There were no newspapers or journals written in dialect.

As long as “Italian” remained only a written language, to be illiterate was to be ignorant of Italian. Conversely, since school readers and textbooks were written in Italian, and since the medium of instruction in schools was supposed to be Italian, to be ignorant of Italian was to be, and remain illiterate (Clark 1984:35).

Thus, at unification, and for at least the next seventy years, most of the nation remained as ignorant of political and social ideas as it had always been. The Calabria of 1935 which Levi described was an archaic society:

Christ didn’t stop at Eboli. He never arrived, nor did time ever arrive,...nor hope, nor the link between cause and effect, nor reason, nor history...we speak a different language here, our own language (Italian) is incomprehensible (Levi 1965:41).

Commentators, besides Bowing, have since noted the profound ignorance of the Italian peasant (Banfield 1967; Davidson 1977; Duggan 1994; Absalom 1995). Not only illiterate and ignorant but, as Gramsci outlined, sequestered and, in addition, until 1913, disenfranchised. Men who had remained illiterate were, until 1913, unable to vote. Consequently since they had hitherto been politically unimportant they had also remained politically uneducated. Gramsci himself records the difficulty of trying to explain not only what communism was to Sardinian shepherds but also the basics of the parliamentary system (Fiori 1990). In fact, according to Davidson, the masses had no conception of cooperative social or political activity at all on which to base the new ideas.

Hundreds of years ... had resulted in the emergence of certain cultural patterns among the people of the south and of the islands. First of all the individual’s object was to have his immediate family survive. Morality, social conscience, class unity, political affiliations were subordinate to this...In such a society nobody trusted anybody else, and, except for these criminal institutions (Mafia and Camorra) there are no unifying institutions. There were no political parties among the peasants. Even the church was not to be trusted (Davidson:1964:4).



In 1913, the year in which he had written out *Le Dispense*, which outline not only the processes of change in a language but the importance of leadership in such change, Gramsci went home to Sardinia for a visit. This coincided with the first election after Franchise reform (Fiori 1990:85). The number of voters had risen from 42,000 to 178,000 and there was wide expectation among the populace that everything would change. In reality however, following repressive measures, there was no longer a socialist group in existence, and no clear policies at all.

“this total vacuum, where until the very eve of the election there was no organisation whatever, where no *nucleus of political educators* had been spreading the new ideas among the illiterate masses the task of the few enthusiasts who tried to put things right ...was both difficult and complicated” (Fiori 1990:85, my emphasis).

The masses, through no fault of their own, had no understanding of the process of change, or of the issues or the possibilities. “Ninety workers out of a hundred listen to us without the faintest understanding of the message” said the *Il Risveglio dell’Isola*, the local proletarian weekly (Fiori 1990:85). It is not surprising, therefore, that very little of the change they hoped for took place.

There was, however, one unwelcome change. The landowners of the island had previously been almost as politically ignorant and unfocused as their workers. Now, under the threat of a powerful worker vote, fear came into play. All previous disagreements between the establishment on the island and central government were forgotten, and the squabbles between the factions of those presently in power in Sardinia subsided as they closed ranks. Then, in a foreshadowing of the tactics of Fascism, the Sardinian ruling group, capital and government together used the law, the police and the fear of sacking or eviction, against any worker or group who showed the least sign of opposition or complaint. Gramsci recalled seeing peasants going to vote with their pockets sewn up so that police could not plant knives on them in order to have a pretext for arrest (Togliatti 1949:21). The employers and landlords were even backed by the church, which rescinded the papal directive not to vote in favour of a conservative candidate, previously considered *non grata*, since he was an anti-clerical politician.

Gramsci saw clearly for the first time that separatism was not the answer. Sardinia’s problems were not wholly the fault of mainlanders and central government. They were the fault of rapacious and unethical employers and landlords. They were the fault of an unjust system in which profit was all important and that this was indigenous to Sardinia, as much as imposed from the outside. The experience and his reflections on it were

decisive, according to Tasca, and turned him into an active Socialist (Fiori 1990). What Gramsci saw in Sardinia, as he had seen in Turin that same year, was that the hunger for change, the realisation of exploitation, the latent power of the people was not enough to effect change. As a boy Gramsci had witnessed the violence of frustration and political impotence in Sardinia. When he wrote in 1919 about peasants, he was obviously recalling the situation in Sardinia. “The class struggle used to be all mixed up with banditry...It was a kind of primitive terrorism, with no lasting or effective results” (cited Fiori 1990:31). The people needed to be engaged and organised; they needed leadership and clear aims, but first they needed to be politically educated before either could be effective.



**Figure 6 Sardinian bandits captured by the Carabinieri in early 1900's (Colombo 1977:12)**

He came to realise that the greatest challenge facing any new political party would be the communication of its ideas not only to the working class of all the towns across the dialectal regions, but more importantly to the peasants, smallholders, day-labourers, latifundi tenants as well, so that they could and would join together with each other and the proletariat in a common purpose.

The first concern of Gramsci...retains all its validity today. The imperative need remains to win the working class before there can be any talk of winning power. The means of achieving this conquest – not of the institutions of the state but of the convictions of the workers...are the prime agenda of any real socialist strategy today (Anderson 1977:78).

Gramsci himself said in November 1925, “if we succeed in organising the Southern peasants we will have won the revolution” (cited Adamson 1980:71). He said that it is necessary for the proletariat in any country to form alliances in order to gain power and that since the Italian proletariat had particular difficulties as a geographically widespread minority, it would not succeed “unless it resolved very precisely the problem of its relation to the peasant class” (SPWII:316). The proletariat and the peasantry, however, besides

being geographically separated, could not communicate through their dialect “walls“, except with immediate neighbours. Clark notes the isolation of the cities both from the rural areas and from each other so that this essential building of relations was difficult (Clark 1977). Whilst it is true that workers from an individual town and its hinterland could talk to each other and did indeed join forces to protest, the early years of the Italian state are littered with insurrections, these never spread widely. This sporadic rioting never achieved much and it did not denote political awareness.

So Gramsci’s interest in language was political as well as academic, because he recognised that the question of a single language for Italy, spoken as well as written, was a practical problem for any new political party. Gramsci had recognised at an early age that language was part of a limiting structure. Italians lived in “boxes”. Both his analysis and Manzoni’s highlighted that the educated classes, the intellectuals, had chosen to live and communicate ideas only to each other within their own, rather elegant, box. There was dialogue upwards to the seats of power and they could communicate across Italy, but they had no dialogue with the masses and no innovative educative function. They issued orders to the lower classes and were organs of the existing power structure. The masses lived in much smaller boxes, separated vertically from each other, as it were, by walls of mutually incomprehensible dialect. In addition, they were kept down under the invisible lid formed by the official language. Without Italian they could not achieve the elementary school-leaving certificate and so were unable to go up the educational ladder, or be unlikely to go out from the traditional occupations of their family to do a more skilled job: without Italian they remained out of reach of any new ideas which might filter down. Even more importantly, it was extremely difficult for new ideas to be spread across the barriers of dialect and the town/country suspicion. The masses could not discuss issues and ideas which were important to them and develop their own response and strategy to regional and national issues.

Politicisation and political change were dependent on effective use of a common language. Choice needs discussion, where coercion does not. The government’s policies for the promulgation of a single language were not working, or at least not fast enough for the exigencies of a new political party. Despite the limiting factor of the monolingual use of dialect there was no real enthusiasm for learning Italian. Duggan says the attitude of the people towards it was “ambivalent”, and that it was “alien” and actually operated “less as an instrument of integration and more as a wedge” (Duggan 1994:30). Some reasons for this are obvious such as the failure of the education system. Then, since all legal and official dealings were to be conducted, at least in theory, in Italian, the populace’s relationship with the government at all levels became

even more difficult than before. Absalom describes the political tradition and culture as “compromise and corruption at the top and coercion at the base” so it is not surprising that avoidance of the State was more likely than engagement with it (Absalom 1995:88). Gramsci’s experience of remote village life made him aware of the peoples’ views and this insight, together with his study both of neo-linguistic theories of language, and of Manzoni’s theories, would be combined, firstly to explain this reluctance further and then to find ways of engaging the people. In Gramsci’s view the slow growth of the use of the national language was due only in part to its low priority for past and existing administrations. From his perspective as a neo-linguist he thought that it was also because Manzoni’s recommendations were based on unsound premises.

***Manzoni, the top down model of language imposition.***

Manzoni thought that, in order for a manner of speaking to be considered to be a language, it must first establish a “Usage”. This requires that it is used systematically every day by a community of speakers to express everything that they need to say, “the means by which they say what they say whether that be a little or a lot” (Manzoni 1847: cited Lo Piparo 1979:27). There is no distinction between a dialect and a language since both are validated by use. Next, to be a language, a manner of speaking must be a homogeneous synchronic package, that is to say it is functionally complete and harmonious in a single version, and has all the structural elements it needs in order to express the ideas of all the classes and groups who use it.

In Florence there are all the facts and knowledge, all the opinions, all the concepts of every kind that there can possibly be in any city in Italy, not as a prerogative of that city but just as there are in Naples, in Turin, in Genoa...We are all saying the same things, we are just saying them in different ways. Saying the same things attests to the possibility of substituting a single language in place of all of the others: saying them in different ways attests to the fact that we need this single language (Manzoni 1868, cited Lo Piparo 1979:31).

For Manzoni there is no qualitative difference between a dialect and a language, or between one language and another; they are all simply methods of transmission of meaning. Lastly, and most importantly in terms of Gramsci and the neo-linguists’ theories of language, for Manzoni, language and culture are quite separate. Manzoni perceives language as a series of signs and sounds which are used to label things and to transmit ideas and concepts which have somehow been generated independently of the language. Given that there is no intrinsic cultural or creative element in a language, or any qualitative criterion, then a language is simply a commodity and one language may be substituted for another without trauma. Manzoni had laid the blame for the

slowness and difficulty of the Reunification of Italy on the lack of a single language. In Manzoni's analysis, culture is pre-existing and separate from language. Furthermore, he implied the people already shared a culture "we all say the same things, we just say them in different ways" they were divided only by language. Therefore, if the people can be made to speak the same language then Italy will automatically become a nation, there is little suggestion in Manzoni that there needs to be a meeting of minds. It is entirely logical, therefore, that all that needed to be done for Italy was to choose a complete well-formed language which displayed the required "Usage" and to require everyone to use it, either as well as, or to replace, his existing speech. Manzoni selected Florentine Tuscan from the languages/dialects of the various regions. In doing so he contradicted his own theory that all languages were equal and that culture was extrinsic to them. Indeed his choice illustrates that he was himself subject to the kind of historical and cultural influence described by neo-linguist theory, which will be explored in the next chapter, since arguably his native Milanese was the speech of the more modern and dynamic city.

As an extension to his notion that language and culture are separate, the educated classes or the intellectuals, do not *produce* language. Their function is to speak it correctly, and to write in it, thus stabilising it, and to disseminate it in the accepted form from the new dictionary. It does not appear to have occurred to Manzoni that this was largely a repetition of Bembo's unsuccessful strategy of two hundred years before. The language was to be delivered to the people by the intellectuals; usually in Manzoni this meant teachers, who would be state functionaries with the coercive power of the state behind them. However, since neither the intellectuals nor the people would produce language, the formation and spread of the single language was not going to be interactive or innovative. Nor would it be part of the growth of a popular culture or of a conception of nationhood generated by its citizens. Manzoni's model is instrumental: this model was what the holders of the existing power structure needed. The social system was hierarchical and centralised. What the government, the employers, the army and indeed the church wanted was a language in which to issue instructions and to transmit their own world view. They were in no particular hurry to invite debate or to encourage the populace to formulate and exchange their own ideas.

The dominant group does not supply the common man with the conceptual tools with which to confront the 'official view'. For it has control over the national language which dialects cannot combat and *what words you have can determine what ideas you have, as much as the contrary* ( Gramsci cited Davidson 1964:48, my emphasis).

The populace as a whole had no national medium through which it could create or express itself, share and comment on its own regional or national concerns. Gramsci saw that the people were caught in a loop. If they could only speak dialect their world view remained anachronistic and limited to their localities. But if the people did not come into contact with new ideas and were unable to have a wider perspective, then they remained within their original boundaries and they needed only dialect. The disunity continued and the old order survived, not by consensus but by default

Someone who only speaks dialect, or who understands the national language incompletely, necessarily has an intuition of the world which is more or less limited and provincial, which is fossilised and anachronistic in relation to the currents of thought which dominate world history (SG:81).

The circle had to be broken, a new language, new ideas, social perspectives and values had to be generated together by the populace as a whole.

### ***The historical role of the intellectuals***

Intellectuals and language are firmly linked in Manzoni, Ascoli and later Gramsci because the lack of a single spoken language highlights the function and position of the intellectuals. Although Gramsci's theories of language and the function of the intellectuals differ from those of Manzoni, nevertheless the material context, such as the analysis of the use of language in the Middle Ages, form the background for Gramsci's work and for the debate on language. Manzoni's recognition of the part which intellectuals play in language and in society and his theories of language acted as a sounding board for Gramsci's own thoughts. Manzoni had pinpointed clearly that the separation between spoken and written language had happened in Italy, as in the rest of Europe when the church and the highest echelons of the various states had continued to use Latin as the language of government, both in spoken and written forms, while the people continued to use their own languages. This opinion was not contentious; Ascoli, Meillet, and Meyer Lubke, whose work, *Grammaire des Langues Romanes* 1890, is quoted in *le Dispense*, concur. "From the moment when Latin became the literary language there was a divergence, slight to begin with but which grew from day to day; between the language of the common people and that of the educated class" (Meyer Lubke, cited Lo Piparo 1977:25). In the rest of Europe, however, this divide had been bridged gradually until the written and spoken languages melded into a common form. In Italy, however, as we have seen, the separation remained and became wider because the linguistic separation of the educated, the intellectuals, had become a social

separation, the intellectuals had formed themselves into a separate caste (Bonghi, cited Lo Piparo, 1977). Manzoni and Bonghi, his follower; Bartoli, Meyer Lubke, Meillet and finally Gramsci himself, all agree the linguistic gap reflected this separation.

There had been another factor which had contributed to the lasting disjunction. In order to be recognised, both intellectually and financially, Italian intellectuals had worked, and established reputation, outside Italy. “They developed and led not native legions but foreign ones” (Ascoli 1975:31). They were, and had always been, what Gramsci termed “cosmopolitan”. That is they followed the pattern established by the Romans who imported Greek slaves to bring them culture. Later, the Catholic church, from mediaeval times onwards, encouraged intellectuals to focus on ideas outside of their own communities. Historically, Italian intellectuals had rarely concerned themselves with local or national issues. As Gramsci explained to Tania, “the character of the Italian intellectuals was not national-popular but rather cosmopolitan, patterned after the Church, so Leonardo had no feelings one way or the other about selling the plans of Florence’s fortifications to Duke Valentino (LP 2:67).

As the rift between the intellectuals and the masses became greater, the intellectuals had only themselves to write for. Owing to the low percentage of Italian speakers and the high rate of illiteracy there was no mass market for anything written. Hence there were few newspapers and journals; no children’s literature; no popular literature; no novels by instalment, such as were popular in Britain and France. When Gramsci reflected years later of the lack of use of a single language in “National and Popular”, when he examined the reasons why there was so little indigenous popular literature, or children’s literature, his conclusion was quite different from that of Manzoni. In an echo of the analysis made by Ascoli he says that, rather than language being the reason for the slowness of the reunification of Italy, that instead, both linguistic and political lack of progress was due to the detachment “of the entire educated class” from the “people – nation” (Q21 §5:2116). He went on to say that while Manzoni reflected this problem as “the moral and intellectual unity of the nation sought in the unity of the language” this was in effect the wrong way round. Gramsci thought the lack of a single language was an effect of disunity and not a cause: Italians needed to speak the same language literally and figuratively.

## **Conclusion**

Language does not only represent reality but also creates it; it not only reflects experience but also brings it into reality (Brockmeier 2000:57)

What Gramsci and the new party needed was not simply that everyone in every city should say the same things and in future say them in the same way; not just to understand and obey instructions, but that the populace should be able to think and have their own view of the world and say new things (Dickinson and Erben 1981). What Gramsci wanted was not merely transactional Italian, but comprehension and use of language at a level which would facilitate critical discourse for as many people as possible. As Gouldner explains "To participate in the culture of critical discourse,...is itself a political act" (Gouldner 1979:59) If a new socialist order was to be built it would require workers to talk to each other, to analyse, discuss, formulate strategies, understand concepts and agree new values and different relations.

How then was this translation of ideas, this different discourse to be achieved? How could the linguistic and social situation be changed? The existing official system was failing, it would need a different approach, a different method to persuade Italians to create and use a common way of speaking, to rethink their political and person ethos. "The creation of a truly common language requires the interaction and creative engagement among those who speak the diverse dialects, the elements of which will be transformed into a new language and world view" (Green and Ives 2009:20). The beginnings of the answer were to be found in the theories of Ascoli. The process of creating this new national language and a new world view would have roots in a different perception of language and a different role for the intellectual which were part of neo-linguist theory. The function of the intellectual in future would be productive and educative.



## Chapter Four: Language Theory, Hegemony, and the Intellectuals.

Gramsci's unambiguous position is that linguistic dynamics can be used as metaphors for political relations (Ives 2005:462).

### ***Introduction***

The Neo-linguist theory which Gramsci studied was one of the layers of input into his intellectual formation, part of the powerful conjunction for change of theory, research and practice, which later would inform the layers of meaning and purpose in his writing. The theory was rooted in glottology as well as political theory. The research too was mainly in detailed linguistic studies, whilst the practice was in the streets and factories of Turin. Turin was the destination of massive internal immigration from all over Italy with the resultant plethora of dialects and concomitant difficulties (Boothman 2008). Gramsci saw lack of cohesion and leadership within the state, the Socialist Party and the people-nation. There was no set of guiding principles in government which had been translated into policies and actions which the people understood and wanted to follow. Theory and practice together convinced him that both language and political and social change were faster and more effective if people were engaged in change, rather than merely subject to pressure. "Such approaches exacerbate one of the key elements of subalternity; the dissonance between the imposed world view and the conditions and understandings of those who are supposed to accept it" (Green and Ives 2009:15). The masses needed to be *participants in* rather than just *recipients of* the development of the language and culture and society. Engagement, however, would require both thought and understanding from the masses and impetus and guidance from a group which could inspire them and draw them together.

### ***Neo-linguists and neo-grammarians***

At the time that Gramsci studied in Turin a new language theory was challenging the existing one, neo-grammarianism. Gramsci's tutor Matteo Bartoli had named the new theory neo-lingualism and his course was based on it. The neo-linguist approach to language, as explained by Ascoli and Croce, posited language change as a product of man's agency: of the history and culture of a society. This concept was in opposition to the theories of the neo-grammarians. The neo-grammarian theories are important, although they were opposed by Bartoli, because they crystallise a negative for Gramsci. Neo-grammarians had rigid ideas on formation and change in sounds, but were not concerned with meaning or usage. Change was internal and happened in accordance

with phonetic “laws” which applied to any language. It was, therefore, unavoidable and inexorable. Interestingly, there are similarities in the pattern of thought between the neo-grammarians and the positivist Marxism of the Second Internationale. The neo-grammarians thought that phonetic decay and change was independent of the will and the cultural relationships of the speakers. It was not influenced by ideas, events, social factors or history but was simply inevitable. The Positivists stated that the fall of capitalism was inevitable because of the iron internal rules which rule bourgeois society, and thus the proletariat need only wait for it to happen. Indeed the Italian Socialist party was “devoted to an ‘economistic’ interpretation of Marx and a fatalistic reading of the Socialist transformation. It regarded, “...socialism as a natural and fatal process, requiring neither a political strategy nor a cultural shift” (Urbinati 1998:327). Both for the neo-grammarians and for the Second Internationale, change was determined and guided by laws entirely outside society’s control or intervention. In his early writings, Gramsci accused the Positivists of sterilising Marx, of reducing his thought to an “external framework” which negated man’s will and ignored both his actions and the social context which prompted them (SG:154).

For them, society is a natural organism, governed through its evolution by fixed, definable laws which are precisely and rigidly drawn up by the positivist experimental method (SG:327).

These similarities were highlighted by Bartoli, who linked ideas about language with those of politics throughout his course. He called the neo-grammarians “the materialists of linguistics”. Inevitable, inexorable, rigid, are ideas which Gramsci fought all his life, so that from the beginning neo-linguistic theory supported Gramsci’s growing leaning towards engagement in society rather than passivity. In *la Citta Futura*, the single edition newspaper written entirely by Gramsci in 1917, there is an article called “Indifferent people” in which he rails against apathy. He quotes Hebbel “to live means to take sides” and explains that when things go wrong it is because men have allowed such things to happen, they have abdicated their will.

The inevitability which seems to dominate history is none other than the illusory presence of indifference, of abstention...in the city of the future...everything that happens will not be a result of chance or of fate but of the work and thought of its citizens. No-one there will stand in the window and watch... (CF:134,135).

***Ascoli, forerunner of the neo-linguists***

In response to Manzoni, in particular to the publication of the “official” Italian dictionary, which sought to impose Florentine vocabulary over all Italy, Graziadio Isaia Ascoli wrote an article called “*il Proemio*”. This was the introduction to the linguistic journal which he had founded in 1873 called *L’Archivio Glottologico Italiano*. The article expressed a different concept of how language develops, and how all members of a society should contribute to this development. Both ideas are seminal for Gramsci. Ascoli’s theory of language resonated with Gramsci’s experience and his perception of contemporary society and politics. In the article on Esperanto in 1918 Gramsci describes “*Il Proemio*” as having “in thirty or so pages, as opposed to the hundreds written by Manzoni, demonstrated that a national language cannot be produced artificially by state imposition”(SCW:28). Ascoli had examined the development of a single language in France, Germany and Italy. From that analysis and comparison he proposed a theory of language and, by implication, a role for the intellectuals. These were based, in antithesis to Manzoni, on productivity and the inter-relationship between language and all the activities of society. Ascoli explored how ideas were used to spread a common language and a national consciousness. He shows that this was how they were both developed in France from a single geographical location “the words came from Paris because the things came from Paris”. He says “in France (language) was established or created from the conversation and letters of that city (Paris) in which all civil movement of the nation was centred” (Ascoli 1975:11). There had been a different stimulus in Germany. He explained that Germany, like Italy, had also been divided through much of its history into separate statelings with different dialects. It had also had a more deeply divided class system. Nevertheless it had created for itself a solid language used by everyone. In Germany’s case there was no identifiable *geographical core*, instead he cites Luther as the initiator of modern German:

The genius of Luther commanding a stilted, unstable and unrefined idiom moulds it into that miraculous version of the bible which shattered the unity of the faith and created the unity of a nation (Ascoli 1975:15).

Development did not stop there, however, nor, importantly, did it remain with the educated. What made the German language a reality was the *operosità infinita*, the endless productive energy of the German people as a whole; scholars, craftsmen and workers, all contributing to the new form.

So that every study (by scholars) of the true and the useful swiftly reached across the whole nation and determined such a movement in every civil activity, such harmony in every industry between hand and brain, ... and the language of the

factory floor, like that of the philosopher, underwent the natural or rational process of selection and consensus...(Ascoli, 1975:16).

One of the ideas in this passage, which Gramsci will develop in the *Prison Notebooks*, is that the workman, as well as the educated man, can produce language and ideas in the process of producing something concrete (SPN:8,9). New language is produced by new thoughts, and these in turn may be produced by different groups of thinking people within a society. If a thinker can be termed an intellectual, then Ascoli's worker conversing on the shop floor and praying in his reformed church, producing, modifying language and ideas is a forerunner of Gramsci's organic intellectual.

Ascoli posits three moments in language which, though separate, are interdependent and may happen simultaneously. They are productivity, legitimisation and irradiation/diffusion. The intellectuals in a dynamic society produce ideas and concrete things, a culture, and therefore language, which are legitimised and derive authority not from the power of the state but by virtue of their own continuous creative energy. Indeed Ascoli says that legitimate authority *lies* in productive energy and by its recognition by the people. Simultaneously, this recognition leads to diffusion (irradiation is Ascoli's word) of their ideas with and through the medium of a changing language. In the case of both France and Germany, cultural energy is simultaneously the instrument of productivity, legitimisation and radiation of new language.

Ascoli's theory, therefore, links concrete work as well as intellectual production to changes in language and society. He says that an active society, one which has high production levels of things whether objects, processes or books, is a society which is also producing ideas and therefore new forms of language. In 1915 in an article on a single language and Esperanto, Gramsci picks up threads from Ascoli, as well as Bartoli and Meillet in his argument against Esperanto. Using the idea of productivity, which covers things, books and ideas, he says,

The spread of a particular language is due to the *productive activity* of the writings, trade and commerce of the people who speak that particular language. In the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries Tuscany had writers like Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, Machiavelli and Guicciardini who spread the Tuscan language. It had bankers, craftsmen and manufacturers who carried Tuscan products and the names of these products throughout Italy. Later, it reduced its productivity of goods *and books* and thus its linguistic productivity as well (SCW: 28 [my emphasis]).

Language, concrete production, thought and culture then, are inseparable for Ascoli. The process begins with the intellectuals; their study of "the true and the useful", but the

language is modified equally on the factory floor, the thought of the worker has equal impact and validity. They all have to produce in order to construct a common language because says Ascoli, a language is *not* “like a sleeve which can be pulled on”, but rather “like a skin which is the product of the whole national organism” (Ascoli 1975:21). This is in direct contradiction to Manzoni for whom language is something you wrap round thought; so that any language can be wrapped round any thought. In Ascoli the development of language is the result of political, social and cultural developments within the life of the nation which speaks it. It is, therefore, the result of a collective impetus, and the product, not of the minds of an elite few, but of the many minds engaged across all the layers of a dynamic society.

The problem for Italy, in Ascoli’s view, was that there were too few minds involved, too few craftsmen, workmen and scholars engaging in joint production or mutual discussion. Italy had produced geniuses in several fields but was, unfortunately, without a spread of moderately well educated people speaking a common language. Consequently, unlike Germany, it was difficult for new ideas, whether political, religious or cultural, to move across the dialect boundaries around the peninsular. The dislocation between the intellectuals and the people hampered discussion, expansion and interchange of ideas upwards and downwards between different levels of society. There was effectively too little to fill the gap, few middle-ranking intellectuals, few minor writers, too thin a layer of culture.

Thus in Italy, the reason for the lack of a national language is to be found in the dearth of concerted movement of many minds, which is simultaneously both effect and cause of knowledge being concentrated amongst the few, together with the pernicky exigencies of the precious, unstable and unending insistence on form, one has...the whole and satisfactory reason why Italy still has not a prose or syntax or a stable and secure language...(Ascoli 1975:31).

Ascoli points out that, while Italy has always produced great minds, their effect has always been diminished by “this lack of a flock of true disciples” to reinforce and reiterate the ideas. Thus instead of culture providing, as it were, steady illumination, by the mass of lesser luminaries; the competent craftsmen; the school of followers, spreading the light across time and different layers of society, the great men stood alone, “they are like bright lights which sparkle alone and are often out of line” (Ascoli 1975:30). This isolated brilliance was exacerbated by what Ascoli called the disdain for mediocrity. “It seems that Italy is disdainful of mediocrity and declares to History, I’ll produce a sublime work or I’ll do nothing at all” (ibid:31). Gramsci expanded on the theme in a piece in 1917 “//

*Stenterello.*” (*Il Stenterello* is a character from the *Commedia dell’arte*, a hanger-on who chatters and postures but does not actually produce anything.)

There are born and bred in Italy, some of the greatest geniuses, truly creative spirits, but they have not been able to form a school, to be surrounded by even a small number of followers who understood them and followed their teaching and principles (CF:136).

Later in his essay on the Southern question, Gramsci would restate the position more clearly “in the south...there are large accumulations of intellect and culture in individuals or restricted groups of great intellectuals, while organisation of a moderate level of culture does not exist” (QM:156). If a language was to be created, or a new political hegemony to be established, it was essential, as Ascoli had said, to “stir up that wide spiral of civil activity which must sweep all the peoples of Italy to a firm unity of thought and speech” (Ascoli1975:29). What Italy needed in order that most of its people should learn to speak a different, single language, was a large number of people and intellectuals or activists, a critical mass, spreading language and ideas and expressing the *collective* will. This is implied in Ascoli “...in both cases unity of language spreads in relation to the extent that it contains the absolute force of the collective thought or the imperatives of the national intellect, which is incarnate in the language itself...” (Ascoli 1975:27). The idea is stated with increasing clarity in Gramsci, from “*Il Stenterello*” (CF:136) in 1917 to the essay of the “Southern Question” 1926 (QM:159).

In his analysis of development of language in Germany, Ascoli makes it clear that in the process of unifying a language the world view of everyone changed, “such unity of intent and feeling that there remained so insignificant a distance separating German from German that they all became citizens of the same metaphorical city” (Ascoli, 1975:16). The implication is, therefore, that in the process of sharing and creating things and thought and language, the nation itself is created, “...between dialect and the national literary language something changes: precisely the cultural politico-moral-emotional environment” (Q6 §71:738). The requirement and process for the spread of a different political perspective would be the same as that for the spread of a different language. It would depend not on overt coercion or undirected enthusiasm, but on leadership and the power and prestige of the new idea. Such a change, involving acceptance of new ideas and culture, was called in neo-linguist theory, hegemony. There would need to be a focused educative drive to change both the political and the linguistic perspective of Italians.

## **Hegemony**

The linguistic struggle is a symbol of the struggle for power (Meillet).

By 1916, the word hegemony itself was “in current use” by Italian socialists of that period to discuss problems of Italian control of the north and east Adriatic. It would be used freely in Bolshevik circles in Moscow when Gramsci was there in 1922, in the context of the relationship between proletariat and peasantry (Boothman 2008). What is important here is that Gramsci first met the word in 1911, in the context of change. The idea and the word “hegemony” were important parts of neo-linguist theory on *how* and *why* change occurs; both a stage and a process in the continuum of a language. In particular, they theorised on how one language comes to be substituted for another. The theory had relevance for Gramsci, both in terms of a single language, and in terms of changing the political colour of Italy. The three main ideas which derive from Ascoli and are expanded by other neo-linguist are these: the history of a language should be perceived as part of the history of the people who speak it. When two languages meet, therefore, so do the cultures they convey. Next the meeting of idioms is always seen as a conflict from which one language and culture emerges as the victor. This is, however a dialectic struggle, and so the losing idiom is not totally wiped out, it becomes what Ascoli calls a “substratum” language and influences and changes the dominant language so that in effect new language, a synthesis emerges. Lastly implicit in the argument is the notion that some languages and cultures have a “secret ingredient”, some prestige or fascination or glamour which helps them to win. So for neo-linguists language change is not natural and inevitable rather it is the result of social action and change, indeed of choice.

That Gramsci accepted the first idea is beyond doubt, “Every language is a conception of an integral world (Q5§ 23:557). It is the second and third ideas, those of language and cultures meeting and doing battle, of some being more prestigious than others, of language and power being entwined, which seem to me to have been developed within his concept of hegemony. In 1912, just as he was making his first forays into Turin’s Socialist groups he wrote out the notes which include the word hegemony in the context of cultural as well as linguistic domination. The circumstances under which change is embraced are outlined in *le Dispense*, in Gramsci’s elegant script:

We are presented again with a problem that we have already partly discussed, on what does linguistic influence depend? Usually the answer is on the power of a people, whether cultural or based on wealth, and it is usually pointed out that

Rome, because of its inferior culture, did not succeed in Romanising Greece. But was Rome more civilised than Etruria? Yet in Italy it destroyed the old nationalities and the old languages and imposed its own hegemony over all intellectual activity. In the same way, are Rumanians more civilised than Hungarians? Surely not, yet a Rumanian succeeds more easily in imposing his language on a Hungarian than vice versa. Similarly, the Germans almost never succeed in “germanising” conquered peoples, or have less success than Slavs, who have, in their turn, less success than Italians. The fact is that it appears that certain peoples may possess a certain power, a fascination peculiar to them by which their language succeeds in spreading more easily; but it could also be that the superiority of a people does not exactly consist of what we commonly mean by civilisation (culture, etc, etc) (Bartoli 1913:47).

Meillet takes the idea a step further and uses the word “prestige”, “prestigious” to denote languages or forms of language which have the potential for domination. The word moves into Bartoli’s work in place of “fascino”. Furthermore, it should be noted;

that from the second half of the eighteenth century in writings on the question of language prestige, dictatorship and hegemony are *semantically equivalent* terms used to indicate the idiom and/or the socio-cultural centre which are or ought to be acknowledged by the rest of the nation (Lo Piparo 1979:106 [my emphasis]).

The concept of glamour/prestige is, above all, cultural. In Ascoli, powerful cultural centres are also powerful linguistic ones. By cultural, Ascoli also means productive, the “operosita infinita” he so admires. Paris was a very powerful cultural as well as political centre hence the reason for France’s single language. Italy however, had no such centre and consequently no single language.

Modern Italy did not have a centre in which the life of the whole nation seethed and bubbled over into a continuous stream of thought or a collective and absorbent language. Florence was not Paris (Ascoli, cited Lo Piparo:1979).

Meillet develops the idea of cultural prestige as a reason why and how some languages move and expand.

For a language to expand it does not need to have conquered by force of arms; nor indeed would that be enough. Aramaic spread without conquest or political domination, simply because it was the language of business and administration. For a language to spread it is both essential and sufficient that it supports a civilisation (Meillet 1948:118).



Bartoli himself never advanced a firm theory as to why change happens, but other neo-linguists did. Amongst those whose theories Bartoli studied with his students were neo-linguists of the French School, in particular Gillieron and Meillet. Gillieron, was much admired by Bartoli and was mentioned by Gramsci in early writing (SG 1958:148). Gillieron makes the initial point that, just as a foreign language can gain ascendance over an existing one, so within a language area certain modes are more desirable than others. He goes on to say that men reform models and imitate language in order to achieve an idea and that “languages which can no longer exist independently find a model and refashion their despised personality into the image of the one they admire” (Gillieron 1912,cited Lo Piparo 1979:95).

Meillet too had moved on to show how the desire to model oneself on an ideal plays its part within the expansion of a language. In “Differentiation and unification in language” written in 1913 he explains,

It is inevitable that amongst the ways of speaking in use, there should be one which belongs to the most culturally superior groups, who possess the highest prestige for whatever reason. Their way of speech becomes a model for others; people aim to approach it, if not to speak it exactly, in the relations between groups. This is the beginning of the *evolution which leads to the creation of a common language* on the base of one of the speech patterns and the elimination of all or part of the local variations (Meillet: 1948: 122 [my emphasis]).

Bartoli makes the same point;

More precisely, instead of foreign languages one ought to say: languages spoken by people who have greater prestige, who exercise great influence over their imitators, so that,... one can say that the causes of language change stem, in the last analysis, from the *imitation of other languages which have greater prestige*. (Bartoli: 1928: cited Lo Piparo: 1979: 92 [my emphasis])

In other words, people can be inspired and persuaded to change their language and their culture, *their world-view* under the influence of other people whom they perceive as leaders or of possessing “prestige”. These people did not need to be foreign to the group, they could be internal, in either case it was the power of their ideas which was important. Also in this passage, as in the one already cited on linguistic influence, there is a clue as to why people choose *not* to change. If the ruling group in power offers them nothing to aspire to, nothing which engages them, no form of equal dialogue, they will resist change, as had happened in Italy.

It is no accident, in a country where most citizens only encountered the state in the form of a tax collector or a recruiting sergeant that it developed a specific antagonism to the concept and practice of national unity (Absalom 1995:66).

The word prestige does not appear much in Gramsci's early writings, but some of the themes associated with it do. A new language is adopted by spontaneous agreement of the speakers, he said in the letter to Galetto (EL:90), and in an article in *Avanti*, "Against Prejudice", (cited Lo Piparo, 1978:113). Gramsci argued that the authority of socialism will be accepted in the same way. The idea that the "spreading power" of a language is proportional to the energy and dynamism of the culture/civilisation it carries is present In "Men or Machines?", where Gramsci says the drop in illiteracy is not so much due to compulsory education as to socialist propaganda which has made the Italian working classes aware that they have an intellectual life and that their inner selves have certain determinate needs (SG:57-59). He makes the same point in "Esperanto" (SCW: 30) and "Illiteracy", (SG: 81). Lastly, that the interdependence between productivity, legitimisation and spreading-power (radiation) is not only true of language but also of political ideas.

Every revolution has been preceded by intense activity in criticism, cultural penetration and permeation of ideas. Napoleon's bayonets found their path already smoothed by *an invisible army of books and pamphlets* which had swarmed out from Paris for the first half of the eighteenth century and had prepared men and institutions for the necessary innovations (CF:121 [my emphasis]).

Where the traditional intellectuals had the function of legitimising and maintaining the status quo, the new, organic intellectuals will produce, legitimise and broadcast ideas for change.

New and ever-superior needs are created by new living conditions. New moral and intellectual curiosities goad the spirit and compel it to renew itself, to improve itself, to change the linguistic forms of expression by taking them from foreign languages, by reviving dead forms and by changing meanings and grammatical functions (SCW:31).

The people and the intellectuals will not just be acquiring new labels for things; they will be creating meanings and different viewpoints and standards. What is striking is the similarity in *process* between acquisition of a new language and the growth of a new hegemony.

Meillet said,

Force of arms is not necessary, what is necessary is a civilisation gifted with prestige. If there is one, then men will abandon old ways of speech, they will *choose* to speak the new language (cited Lo Piparo:1979:98).

Are not all these descriptions of a set of language speakers and their culture coming to dominate another set, precisely what Gramsci had in mind when he formulated the concept of hegemony? As Urbinati remarks (1998:388) “ The relational and communicative character of Gramsci’s notion of hegemony looks very much the same as the conflicting yet always open connection between a local dialect and a national language” In one of his early writings in 1917 he describes the state of hegemony using many of the key words from linguistic studies.

The Party exercises the most efficient of dictatorships, that which is born of *prestige* and which is the conscious and *spontaneous acceptance* of its authority recognised as being essential for a successful outcome of the enterprise (ON: 69-70 [my emphasis]).

He understood that the process of acquiring and modifying a language and the process of building hegemony are isomorphic. Here is the opening quote from *le Dispense*, in Gramsci’s hand:

What do we mean when we say one people conquers another? We mean that the victor imposes, either by force of arms or by the *magnetism of his spiritual superiority*, his customs and ways of thinking, from which we cannot possibly detach *the way of speaking*, or the words which serve to indicate those institutions, those *customs and those ideas* (Bartoli 1913:13 [my emphasis]).

Compare it with the mature Gramsci writing about the function of the intellectuals:

However, the intellectuals of the historically (and concretely) progressive class, in the given conditions, exercise such a power of attraction that, in the last analysis, they end up by subjugating the intellectuals of the other social groups (SPN: 60).

There are clear similarities; force can be used, but leading or attraction is more effective. Lo Piparo says that for Gramsci, language was not a peripheral social issue, but an essential element of the move towards a “collective, national consciousness”. (Lo Piparo:1979:245). Femia notes that language itself has “a hegemonic function” in the way it helps to set ideas within words and phrases so that they become “conventional

assumptions” and make it difficult for them to be used in a different way to challenge the status quo (Femia 1981:44).

Hegemony for Gramsci is not simply about one group becoming dominant, by whatever means and holding power by using the state institutions with the support of civil institutions and economic relations, although that is necessary. It is also and much more urgently about creating a collective will, the active consent and engagement of the majority with the hegemonic vision, rather than the apathetic non-opposition born of an inability to imagine any other way of being.

The methodological criterion on which our own study must be based is the following; that the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as “domination” and as “intellectual and moral leadership”. A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to “liquidate”, or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise “leadership” before winning governmental power, this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power; it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to “lead” as well (SPN:57- 58).

Leading and active consent have to be based on understanding, which in turn relies on shared meanings, on a shared language. “...unified national language is both a metaphor and a literal component of the hegemony that he urged the Communist Party to create” (Ives 2004:54). Years later, Gramsci would still be convinced, not only of the importance of the single language, but of its centrality to the revolutionary task.

An historical act can only be performed by “collective man” and this pre-supposes the attainment of a “cultural social” unity through which a multiplicity of dispersed wills, with heterogeneous aims, are welded together with a single aim, on the basis of a common conception of the world which is both general and particular; operating in short bursts (in emotional way) or permanently (where the intellectual base is so well rooted, assimilated and experienced that it becomes a passion). Since this is the way things come to pass, great importance is assumed by the general question of language, that is, the question of collectively attaining a single cultural “climate” (SPN:349).

### ***Educating for a collective will***

In reality, every political movement creates a language of its own (Q1 §43:31).

Theory, in Gramsci’s eyes, was useless unless it informed action. One of his tutors, Pastore said that that he was most interested in how ideas became action (Fiori 1990). What is indisputable is that Gramsci deliberately set about the task of raising the cultural

and political consciousness of Turin. From 1916 onward, in his work as a journalist and as a self appointed missionary, Gramsci started to educate a much larger group of people to be new-style organic intellectuals. He wrote prolifically, amusingly, incisively and seriously on theatre, art, education, local luminaries, the conduct of the war, home life and industrial life and local issues. Whatever the subject of the piece which he had written, there was always a second layer of meaning or purpose underneath. As Fiori, says, "His underlying coherence was such that the reader easily saw the link between different topics apparently remote from each other, and how they fitted into a continuing argument" (Fiori 1990:102).

He was asking his readers to look critically at their daily lives, to review the way in which it was framed, the "givens" which could be changed if they wished, the taken for granted social relations which were governed by class and wealth. He wanted them to think about the values they held and would pass on to their children, the values and ethical basis they wanted for a new order. In an article, already cited, in which Gramsci uses Ascoli's concept of how "books and words from Paris" made language change across France, to explain how political ideas are supported and spread by culture, he makes the first statement of what he means by culture, that is organisation, self-discipline, being true to oneself, possessing a higher consciousness so that one understands one's historical value, one's own contribution and function in life and one's rights and responsibilities, and the ability to think critically.

Besides writing he was also teaching in study circles. He gave a series of lectures in 1916 in various parts of the city, on the French Revolution, the Paris Commune and the work of Romain Rolland. These sessions were probably more like seminars, since formal lecturing was not his style. Fiori says he was developing the Socratic or obstetric style in which participants were encouraged to ask questions and give opinions, defend their arguments, to be active rather than passive (Fiori 1990:102).

In January 1917 he started the "Club di vita morale" for socialists. Gramsci describes the groups and his method of education in a letter to Lombardo-Radice in March 1918. He says that he starts with their language and is trying to get them used,

to disinterested debate on ethical and social problems. We want to get them accustomed to research, to reading in a methodical and disciplined way and to being able to give a calm and simple exposition of their convictions (EL:92).

The club then was about improving their language skills and encouraging critical thinking but it was even more than that. Gramsci, right from this early stage in his life, was

working to win minds as well as hearts, to move people to adopt new ideas with a new language, so that hegemony should be an active collective will expressing a common vision, rather than a passive acceptance of a more attractive new idea and a set of mutual compromises. He was, in effect, creating a vanguard, indeed some of the members of the club, like Viglongo, Carena and Boccardo would remain activists and Gramsci's supporters all their lives. They were the prototype, new, organic intellectuals, without that label, because at the time Gramsci was still suspicious of intellectuals. The educative idea and method in 1918 is clear,

the Club for moral life has as its aim the acceptance of reciprocal control on and by everyone in their daily lives , in the family, at work, in civil life. We want everyone to have the courage and the moral energy to confess his shortcomings publicly, accepting that his friends should advise and check him: *we wish to create mutual trust, an intellectual and moral communion of everybody* (EL:93 [my emphasis]).

The public confession does not survive, but the idea of intellectual and moral communion does, as does its interdependence with language and culture.

Only by understanding Gramsci's background in linguistics, his attacks on Esperanto and Manzoni, and his concern with illiteracy can we really comprehend how his concept of hegemony is not only sociological but also moral and ethical (Ives 2004:19).

There are some tensions, however, between structure and movement, both linguistically and politically. Whilst it is true that language changes all the time, (Meillet 1948), and indeed its function is to change in order to meet the changing needs of its community; equally, if there is not a stable core of structures and accepted forms of utterance shared by a group of people, then the mode of speech is not a language at all because language is a collective construction. There are rules of grammar and an agreed vocabulary with agreed meanings. The conflict is evident in a letter which he wrote to Leo Galetto in 1918

...purism is a mechanistic and rigid form of linguistics, ...I am a revolutionary, a student of history and I affirm that the only useful and rational forms of social activity, whether linguistic, political or economic, are those which arise spontaneously and are realised through the action and energy of free social forces (EL:90).

He goes on to say "down with all definitive formats". At the same time he wrote extensively about the importance and use of language, about grammar, because it was politically imperative that he and his colleagues should be able to talk to the workers about complex ideas.

when talking to workers and peasants about things which closely concern them, like the organisation of their own community, that there should be any reason for lowering of the level of the discussion, it should be equal to the importance and complexity of the topic" (CF:203).

So that, while wishing the populace as a whole to be engaged in changing and creating the single form of Italian, and encouraging them to write to the papers, at the same time Gramsci spent hours reading and correcting articles from workers, so that they could be used and coaching workers to improve their Italian. He would not tolerate sloppy writing and so he clearly directed change. Similarly, his experience in Turin showed him that, while the masses needed to contribute to the new language as they would to a new order; that while they would be the ruling group of the future, at present they were so fragmented by their historical separation and indeed by the relations of industrial life, organisation and leadership was necessary. Gramsci recognised that a change in their perception and values could not be achieved at present by the masses on their own; they would need educative stimulus, and dialogue with individuals and groups which were more politically and intellectually developed. A group with prestige was needed, one which would work within the masses. Later in his writing, Gramsci would call this group the organic or new intellectuals. This group in its turn needed to exchange ideas with the masses in order to ground and inform their own ideas. It would involve an educative effort to change personal and social values at all levels of society. Eventually the masses would produce their own leaders and thinkers who would express their political ideas and form their political consciousness.

### ***A new leading group***

Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways  
whereas the whole point is to change it. (Marx cited Finocchiaro  
1988:18)

The new role of the intellectual in Gramsci's view was to change the consciousness of the masses. In some ways they would have the same task as Manzoni's intellectuals, they would be mentors and facilitators, and Showstack Sassoon says Gramsci sees them as agents of the state (Showstack Sassoon 1987:37).

By intellectuals I mean not only those who are generally recognised to be in that category, but also the whole mass of people in society who, in a broad sense, exercise an organizational function, whether that be in the field of production, or culture, or political administration...(Q1§43:37).

How then are they different, how will they be avoid being functionaries of something which solidifies? The answer is in the insistence on critical discourse. "This

fragmentation cannot be dealt with by the imposition of coherence....Rather it must be actively grappled with, sifted through, understood and sorted out by the very users of language and the holders of common sense” (Green and Ives 2009:20). The intellectuals are not just a cadre to be created for the imposition of new ideas and the solution of problems as perceived from the outside, rather they would be part of a continuing evolution, a channel of communication so that the opinions and aspirations of the masses are understood by the leader(s) and could be incorporated into any new order of society. Gramsci will describe their function as a “living philology” (Q.11§25: 1430).

This concept of the role of the intellectual as dynamic, revolutionary and a means of change, both linguistically and politically, rather than as a supporter, disseminator and consolidator of bourgeois power relations was, in itself, a change in perception in the Italian context. The word “intellectual” was used by the socialist party almost as a pejorative term in the early part of the twentieth century. It was normally used to mean the rural petty bourgeoisie, the lower echelons of the state bureaucracy, like Gramsci’s father, the most conservative group, the very people whom Manzoni envisaged as imposing his single language. Indeed this group would become Mussolini’s recruits. Gramsci was suspicious of the existing group of traditional intellectuals and the word “intellectual” does not appear in Gramsci in a positive way as playing a part in revolution until 1922 (Davidson 1977:161) If, as Vacca says, the theory of the intellectual is the central theme in Gramsci’s political writings (Vacca 1982:38) then it began here in Turin, in his early activism combined with neo-linguist theory.

Apart from the importance of the role of the intellectual in the growth of language and political and national consciousness, and in the development of “the collective will”, there is another reason for the centrality and vividness of the concept of the intellectual. It is a concept embodied by Gramsci himself. It is the story of his own development from being, as he called himself, the quadruple provincial. His office had become a meeting point, advice bureau and debating chamber for young intellectuals and workmen alike. He was an inspiring teacher. He was also willing to discuss ideas with all sorts of groups, like young Catholics, whom more blinkered socialists normally ignored (Fiori 1990). When Gramsci describes the organic intellectual, talks of the need for the intellectual to centre, focus, clarify, organise and direct the masses; he is drawing from his own experience and describing himself. He was the “new/organic” intellectual just as his father had been an “old/traditional” one.



## **Conclusion**

Every time that the question of language crops up, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems is also imposing itself: the formation and the broadening of the ruling class, the necessity of establishing stronger and closer links between the ruling groups and the masses, in short, the reorganisation of the cultural hegemony (Gramsci: Q 29§3:2346).

The method of working which he learnt at university, which he practised, respected and whose name he would ever after use as a term to indicate serious research, was the philological method. This focuses in on an issue, minutely and accurately, collecting historic and current information down to individual specific details. Only from this foundation of the certain could a thinker then move outwards to generalise, theorise, establish a truth or create strategies.

...he listened to us. Even insignificant things which did not seem important to us were useful and necessary elements to him... actually for an elaboration in depth of the whole problem of the Internal Commission and its function (Battista Santhia, metalworker, in Paulesu Quercioli 1977:96).

Both from Moscow and from prison he would refuse to issue specific plans for actions or political decisions when he felt that he had insufficient accurate and current information on which to base them.

Other interesting ideas flow from the university years into the rest of his life. Many of them express a duality. They are two-directional, dialectic; apparently in opposition. Very often, in his subsequent writing, for example, there is the sense that movement for change is coming from two directions; from the hub of the party out and from the wishes of the masses in. His method of analysis uses a controlled collision of thesis and antithesis to provide a better synthesis and solution of a problem than compromise. Culture does not mean possessing a vast number of facts but being able to think critically, so that in his educative practice discussion and dialogue is more productive than a one-way lecture. Even the apparently incomplete *Prison Notebooks* are designed to be so, according to Said and Buttigieg because Gramsci wished them to be open for discussion rather than definitive tablets of stone (Said 2000, cited Buttigieg 2006:41).

He wanted a party which had impetus and ideas from the bottom up, but recognised that, at least to start with, it might need some direction from the top down. From linguistics and his experience of the Trade Unions and the Socialist party came the unwillingness to set up static structures, whether they be institutions or normative grammars. In his view

both language and institutions, and the people who work in them, needed to adapt and develop to meet changing circumstances. Yet simultaneously, there was a need for some kind of framework; there had to be a central core of agreed understandings; workers needed to talk and write coherently and comprehensibly. Furthermore, by the time Gramsci writes the Lyons Theses, however, it is clear that discussions will have boundaries set by the party.

There are ideas and nuances around the idea of consent. Femia notes the traditional dichotomy of Italian politics, from Machiavelli onwards between force and consent which Gramsci will categorise as the difference between domination and leadership. Femia points out that these are both forms of social control; external by use of carrot or stick or internal “by moulding personal convictions” to conform to the hegemonic norm (Femia 1981:24). Consent is essential to Gramsci’s notion of hegemony but it is not an affective belonging feeling, nor is it conformity (Femia 1981). “...consent, like coercion is created” says Ives and there is some coercion in the imperative for consent (Ives 2004:11). The people may be pulled rather than pushed. There are ideas about creating the need, so that the people want what it is you offer, a circular argument which reappears in his concept of the intellectuals working with the masses to inspire aspirations along party lines, as well as to keep the party informed about the needs of the masses. It is better to magnetise the masses, a subtle force, so that they head in the right direction, than to hedge them in with regulations or knock them into shape.

The reflections on language, hegemony and the formation and function of the intellectuals in the *Prison Notebooks* are the distillation of the neo-linguist language theories together with his practical experience. Linguistics gave him not just an accurate research method, the concept of hegemony and the importance of the intellectual but the *process* by which hegemony could be achieved. He drew from his recollection of concerted activity when working towards a new vision of society, from the factory floor, from guiding the executive committee and from the meetings with students and activists. Theory and practice together had eventually not only constructed a new party but had created a new stratum of committed, competent and politically conscious Italians who spoke the same language: literally and politically, the new, organic intellectuals.

Each man...participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct and therefore contributes to sustain the world and to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought (SPN:8,9).

Journalism in Turin was the first step in the educative process.

## Chapter 5: Preparing for Power, Words into Action.

Educate yourselves, because we shall need all your intelligence.  
 Fire yourselves up, because we shall need all your enthusiasm.  
 Organize yourselves, because we shall need all your strength”  
 (*L'Ordine Nuovo* 1919-1920, all issues).

### **Introduction**

For Gramsci, the various threads of context come together in Turin; from Sardinia poverty, social exclusion and the consciousness of exploitation; from his lifelong study of history, his recognition of how the succession of rulers and separate states within the peninsula had resulted in plurilingualism and the peoples' adherence to local rather than a national consciousness; from university the linguistic concepts and intellectual training and, and in the streets and factories of Turin, his increasing engagement with the Socialist Party and with industrial workers. By 1915 then Gramsci had assimilated these experiences and influences which formed him into a revolutionary bourgeois, in the same mould as Mazzini and Alfieri before him and the many Western Marxist thinkers who would follow him, both in Italy and elsewhere. The notion that Italians in particular needed education, whether as basic instruction or moral and ethical development, was, in itself, not new. Mazzini, Foscolo, Cuoco and Crispi, had all recognised that the Italian peninsula was fragmented, that its people had declined from the glories of the Romans and the Etruscans and had decided that Italians inability to get their act together was due to their ignorance, their apathy and their decadence (Duggan 2007). Various solutions had been suggested, but Gramsci was the first to embark on a sustained and systematic campaign, to do something about it himself and to adapt processes to the Italian context.

What the Turin years would provide was unique hard experience to inform both theory and strategy. Battista Santhia, who was a young factory worker and activist at the time, remembers Gramsci saying “The workers of Turin were my school” (Bermani 1987:105). Spriano says that during the war years, in particular, when most of the young potential leaders went off to fight, Gramsci underwent “a tough apprenticeship” in industrial and political struggle, and street demonstrations and through that experience he came to know the potential of the workers and to understand what motivated them. He was, therefore, more of a seasoned campaigner on the home front of Turin than his colleagues, among them Togliatti, Tasca and Terracini who had gone off to war (Spriano 1971:19).

Antonio Gramsci spent eleven years, from 1915 to 1926 working as a journalist, whilst simultaneously becoming a political activist and then a political leader. This transition is marked within the pattern of his writing as well as in its content. For the purposes of exploring the balance between different forms of writing in relation to his life experience, I have divided the writing into two sections. This chapter examines Gramsci's writing from 1915 to 1921.

### ***The Turin years, words into action***

A language which has the force to expand will necessarily be the idiom of a group of dynamic men, who feeling their power, translate the consciousness of their strength into a literature...this literature is itself a means of action (Meillet, cited Lo Piparo: 1979:96).

The Turin years were significant, not only for Gramsci's study and research into Language and for his experience of the difficulties which plurilingualism posed for politicisation and political change in Italy, they are also significant because, despite these limitations, Gramsci chose and developed the written word as his form of political action. Gramsci was a political writer and a political thinker before becoming employed as a politician. Unlike many politicians, therefore, whose account of the development of their personal beliefs and the rationale for policies are often delivered after the fact, it is possible, through Gramsci's writings, to trace the journey from student pamphleteer to political leader in waiting. His main task would always be to clarify ideas so that they could be turned into action and indeed become action in their own right. Throughout his writing in these articles, a mood and direction is discernible, which is educative and educational and, as both Levy and Togliatti noted, embedded the academic training he received at Turin University (Togliatti 1949; Levy 2007).

It seems to me that he drew his methods from two sources, firstly from language theory and secondly from the Church. Neo-linguistic theory had shown that there was a strong link between language, thought and culture. Gramsci was clearly influenced by this in the seminal article "Socialism and Culture" which he wrote in 1916 (CF:119). He talks of the necessity of preparing a people for change by a barrage of books and ideas before political change can happen and how language both influences and mirrors an emergent powerful culture. His work then is to provide this influence so that the new Socialist ideal becomes achievable in the mind of the proletariat. He had to create a prestigious group and seeds of ideas. He was aided in this by the fact that he had an entirely free hand. He owed allegiance to no-one; he had no proprietor, no editor, no organisation, no religious belief or hierarchy to curb his writing. For the first series of *L'Ordine Nuovo* the

paper did not even need to take account of the commercial susceptibilities of advertisers, it was supported by subscription and fund-raising. When he left Italy in 1922 his daily newspaper, *L'Ordine Nuovo* (series 2) even though it was no longer the journal of political culture it had been and although it was still "provincial", had become so influential that it was the very first newspaper to be liquidated by order of the Fascist Government. The day after the March on Rome it was not just closed down, but destroyed, the offices and print shop were wrecked, and the workers intimidated, beaten and scattered. His opponents had no doubt at all that in Gramsci's hands the word was a form of action.

In October 1915, exactly a year after his first disastrous foray into journalism in Turin, with an article questioning the "absolute neutrality" stance of the Socialist party, his initials appear once again in the columns of *Il Grido del Popolo* and in the Socialist Party newspaper *Avanti*. By December of that year he is a member of the editorial staff of the new Turin edition of *Avanti*. From this point onwards his political convictions and his growing practical experience interlink. As a result, he produces an increasingly informed, concrete and impressive body of work which has, from the beginning, currents of thought which promote the educative and the educational as integral to political change. His is not a rabble rousing and emotional message, it is about change in the culture of a society, starting with the individual and growing to change the understandings and beliefs of the masses, in order to achieve a collective will for political change. His chosen medium and style reminded his audience that each of them was a thoughtful being who needed to be in control of his/her own personality; to have self-discipline; to have a true consciousness in order to understand his/her historical value and place in society and his/her rights and duties. The proletariat should be able to examine bourgeois civilisation critically, because being cultured means being able to think critically. That is how he first defines culture in 1916 (op. cit)

During the period 1916-20 he set out ideas which were to be reiterated throughout his life. These include; the need for ethical and moral change, both individual and as a society; leadership by the Party and within the Party; commitment; education, meaning the need for a higher cultural level for everyone; including an understanding of what culture means, and a redesigning of formal education to meet the needs of the people in a new society, and finally the necessary alliance between workers and peasants which is linked to the North-South divide. These concerns had become clearly articulated by 1922 and for these he will begin to form political strategies (CF, QM). Gilks identifies these as "the problem of Italy's historical identity, the division of the state from civil society, the cultural, linguistic and economic divisions between regions, the tension between 'legal'

and ‘real’ Italy and the Southern Question” (Gilks 2007:288). To this list I would add the issue of leadership, and the drive toward the disciplined but bottom-up development of the party, both in terms of vision and of structure, which will be treated in more detail in the next chapter. In addition to these lifelong concerns, the *L’Ordine Nuovo* journal promoted the concept of the Soviet action group, translated into the Italian context as the Factory Council, which Gramsci envisaged as a first step to a different form of society, a new order.

During the period in Turin from 1915, when he first began writing for newspapers, to 1922 when he became a professional politician, when he was sent to Moscow to represent the Italian Communist Party, he produced a plethora of articles and reports which have been collected as *Youthful Writings 1914-18* (1975); *From the Foot of the Tower 1916-1920* (1975); *The New Order, 1919-1920* (1975), *Socialism and Fascism. The New Order 1921-1922* (1974) and *The Construction of the Communist Party 1923-1926* (1971). There is an underlying set of educative assumptions or a tone to his writing which he calls *serietà*; taking responsibility, meaning a committed and total approach to politics rather than a haphazard one, an insistence on philological method, on personal responsibility, on self-discipline, on total honesty, and on leadership. Whilst this underlying moral ethical *tone* is rather puritanical and austere it is, however, often expressed, particularly in the earliest writings, with irony and humour. In his writing Gramsci uses didactic methods, specifically; accurate information and analysis, narrative, homilies, humour and coruscating language to make his points.

### ***Humour and Language***

Gramsci knew that his language, formal Italian, was not immediately accessible to a very high proportion of the people across Italy as a whole, whom the Communist movement would need to reach. It was, however, the only form of Italian common to all literate Italians. It also contained the vocabulary, albeit anachronistic, for philosophical and political concepts. Furthermore, whatever its important shortcomings as a tool for mass communication, in Meillet’s words, the written word was more stable and less ephemeral, less vulnerable, therefore, to mutation and distortion than was the spoken word (Meillet 1948:79). The written word could be circulated and be carried intact across Italy. In many cases it would have to be translated into dialect orally, but the printed original would remain for reference as a more durable and accurate record of Gramsci’s thought than remembered speech could be. So, although Gramsci recognised the limits to the effectiveness and immediacy of the written word, imposed by illiteracy and the plurilingual context in Italy, he had to start somewhere. In 1918, in an article

called “culture and the class war”, he replies to an article in a rival journal “Justice”. The article had said that it could not even precis one of Gramsci’s pieces (even though, it says, Gramsci’s newspaper is supposed to be the interpreter of the proletariat) because the readers of “Justice” are not sufficiently well educated to understand the language. We have no record of the reaction of the readers of “Justice” to this assertion. Gramsci, however, defends his stance by saying that, since he was himself commenting on an article with a particular philosophical slant, he therefore had to use appropriate language,

to make it easy we would have had to alter its nature , to impoverish a debate which ranged over concepts of maximum importance...To do this is not making things easy – it’s fraud, like watered down wine. A concept which is itself difficult cannot be expressed in easy terms without vulgarising it, and then to pretend that this crude reduction is still the original concept is the work of the basest demagogue, of the muddlers of logic, of propaganda (CF: 169,170).

We come back, once again to a major concern, language, and the level of fluency and comprehension in the national language that was necessary for the creation of a new mode of living. Turin had the most modern industries in Italy and the most advanced proletariat society so, within his local region at least, the proletariat was sufficiently well-educated and politically conscious to ensure a healthy and growing circulation for the newspapers for which he wrote. He may not have had a commercial imperative to keep up the circulation, but he did need to engage and increase his audience and to stimulate a response, so his language and his approach are lively and piquant.

His language in the 1915 -1919 period is full of energy and exaggeration. In Italian it is possible to potentiate the meaning of an adjective or noun to an extreme form by the addition of a suffix. Thus a person or thing can become more attractively or ironically adjectival by the addition of the diminutives *-ino*, *-etto*, *-ello*. He uses this technique in an article called “a porcino mushroom”, in October 1919. In it he exposes the absurdity of ten local worthies. These gentlemen, being the only ones who signed up to the liberal monarchist group are, “tortured by the thought”, says Gramsci, that amongst a long comic list of action groups, leagues, working parties, consultative groups and so on, no-one would be able to find them *un posticino*, a teeny little job, *una carichina* a nice little task, or *un titolino* a dinky little title to put on the visiting card. They are forced therefore to set up a useless steering council with a president, vice-president and eight counsellors, in order to award themselves such titles. Since, says Gramsci, they are not “cravenly subject to the discipline of ideas”, they are able to write themselves a meaningless remit entirely to their own satisfaction (CF:196).

In Italian adjectives can become *very, very* adjectival by saying the adjective twice or by adding the suffix *-issimo*. An adjective or noun can also become a pejorative version of itself by the addition of *-astro*, *-aggio*, or *-accio*, he describes Cian as having a *cervellaccio*, a nasty little brain (SLM:143). In these early writings Gramsci uses this device repeatedly, and indeed uses adjectives a lot. This is in contradiction to his own advice, that, following the strictures of De Sanctis, the over-use of adjectives often denotes lack of understanding of the main point.

The overriding impression from the earliest articles, 1913 - 1917 is of vigour, impatience and cutting humour. He says of himself that he likes being “the corrosive acid which bites through imbecility” (CF:145). In terms of content, the articles in the volumes *Youthful Writings*, and *From the Foot of the Tower* can be described as a motley collection. “From the Foot of the Tower” was a daily column, so the articles are usually short. Gramsci himself considered these articles were not worth collection and commentary; they were, he said, “born of the day and should die with the day” and in 1921 he refused to give permission for Gobetti to edit and publish them (LP2:66). It is true that many of the articles dealt with very local issues and personalities which no longer have immediacy for a wider audience. The *Sotto la Mole* column, pokes fun at the Mayor of Turin, for his obsequious hospitality to visiting political leaders, in the hope, Gramsci says, that he will be awarded even more feathers and medals for his splendid uniforms. However, there are also articles which focus on a facet of city life and extrapolate from it to analyse and comment on the underlying social structures and accepted assumptions. An early piece, 10 January 1916, commented on the fact that in Turin, which regarded itself as modern and enlightened, both racially and intellectually superior to the superstitious and inferior South, had no Number 13 bus (SLM:9). There is a piece commenting on signs in shops exhorting customers to “Buy national products, buy Italian”, and asserting that customers will do more of a service to Italian industry by forcing it to improve by choosing to buy foreign products, when they are better quality and cheaper (SLM:110). There is a piece from 1918 complaining that Italians would rather play *Scopone* (a card-game) than football, and arguing that choices in activity reflect the political economy of States. *Scopone*, he avers, is a choice that reflects a society which is economically, politically and spiritually backward, a society of undercover policemen, anonymous letters, and a culture of incompetence and cronyism. Sport, in contrast, generates an attitude of fair play and is widespread in capitalist countries which have spiritual as well as economic and political liberty, and a tolerance of opposition views (SLM:433).





Figure 7 Sotto la mole column in *Avanti*

The articles include numerous excoriating, and humorous, personal attacks on the Turinese personalities, whether civic or members of the academic hierarchy, who were the focus of Gramsci's opprobrium. The people are either named or referred to by nickname. "Mountain Air" is the nickname for the Mayor of Turin, but Vittorio Cian, from the University, Achille Loria, an ex-Academic and in Gramsci's view an ex-thinker, Delfino Orsi, (the editor of *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, a nationalist pro-war newspaper) and Bevione, (a leading journalist for *la Stampa*, who changed sides and went to *La Gazzetta*

*del Popolo*, which was anti-war and anti-Giolitti), for example, are undisguised. He has great fun with *Delfino*, which also means dolphin. In an article in 1916 called "Amphibian" he explains that Orsi is well named since he has ice-cold blood like a fish and the brain of a hippo, and goes on to expose his sharp practice as director of the paper (SLM:79). He uses humour and irony in "A letter from a vandal" complaining that he dare not break windows any more since he might now be accused of being employed to do so on behalf of a businessman who wants new windows paid for by insurance (CF:147).

In these early articles, what Gramsci attacked, particularly in his bitterly ironic exposure of the leading citizens such as Vittorio Cian, was their lack of integrity, of principles, of clarity of thought, or their hypocrisy. So he exposes Vittorio Cian to be a person of no integrity, an exploitative landlord in private, who ignores war-time guidelines on rents designed to help munition workers, whilst publicly urging citizens to support the war effort. Cian, he said, was a lack-lustre academic, who had not produced any significant contribution to literature or research, but who achieved an academic chair by disposing of the opposition on grounds of nationality or lack of patriotic fervour. When he castigated Bevione, a journalist with a reputation for being an expert on foreign affairs, it is not just on the basis that he disagreed with his stance but that Bevione has written articles which are not based on rigorous research from a variety of authentic and verifiable sources, but are simply a recycling of second hand or third hand materials; that they are shoddy. When he attacks Achille Loria for his peculiar pronouncements on the biology of pity, or the deserved demise of Marxism, again he attacks the lack of integrity and respect for the audience demonstrated by a disregard for intellectual rigour, for authentic research or logical conclusions. He is, in these articles, measuring these men against the standards of conduct and thought which he believes to be essential to leaders in the community. He is, in the "negative space" as it were, of the picture he paints, setting out standards that his readers should expect of themselves and their leaders (SLM).

### ***Didactic homilies***

What he argued for positively, was an active and critical response to everyday assumptions and habits and to accepted structures within society. A pattern of thought, which he develops and which he will continue to use, is from the small detail to wider thought. He writes straightforwardly reflective and didactic articles. In 1917 in "Reading", in which he talks of people's dissatisfaction and restlessness and desire for something different, he first suggests that the Socialist movement needs a journal which will start the great task of intensifying its moral life. He says, "changing (political)

formulas doesn't mean a thing, we need to change ourselves" (CF:150). He suggests repeatedly that, if his readers make small changes to their attitudes and behaviours, these will eventually make large changes in society. In "Cocaine" he says, "Morality only consists in making the relationship between the smallest action and the greatest good, and for that reason very small actions are important, an infinite rosary of small actions which trickle through each day" (SLM:399). His first article for the column, "Sotto la mole" in *Avanti* on the first of January 1916 entitled "New Year's Day", is a little homily on the virtue of renewing one's resolution every day, whatever the date, with a secondary thrust at outmoded and mechanical traditions. Gramsci is thus promulgating personal responsibility, personal commitment, calling readers to engage with the struggle every day and at the same time suggesting that the new society will have more meaningful observances of its own which will reinforce its message - and reward citizens with a day off (SLM:3). "Seriousness" is a piece denouncing all the fathers who, whilst eschewing religion themselves, allow their children to go through first communion and to be brainwashed by priests, just because they do not want to argue with their mothers and wives, and exhorting them to take responsibility themselves for their children's education (SLM:303). He draws his reader from the particular to the general, coming to conclusions on the basis of evidence. In 1920 he contrasts two items from the local newspapers. One about a man shot and fatally wounded when seen loitering in a rich man's garden, and one about a man who strangles his wife's lover. The latter story stirs up futile discussion in the papers he says, passing judgement, bandying about words and phrases like love, psychological motives, hysteria in women and honour. That a house owner can calmly kill a man he *presumes* to be a thief, however, does not disturb anyone's conscience. Even though Italy has no death penalty, says Gramsci, the bourgeoisie are allowed, with impunity, to apply their own penalties in defence of their property, their home, their goods, their digestion, and a good night's sleep (SLM:492).



Figure 7 La Citta Futura

In 1917 he undertook the production of a single edition of a pamphlet called *La Citta Futura* for the Young Socialists Federation. It contained extracts from Croce, Salvemini and Carlini, together with several key articles written by Gramsci himself. These clearly illustrate the focus of his thought in the early part of his life in Turin. They include “Three principles and three Orders”; “Indifference”; “Discipline and Freedom” and “Margins” (Spriano 1971:91,101). These articles are startling in their clarity and breadth of vision. In them he began to discuss ideas and themes which he would revisit and reflect on more profoundly, either in the period of his leadership of the party between 1924 and 1926, or later during his imprisonment. These were the relationship of the party to the individual; the importance of engaging with the peasants and small landowners and the relationship between the peasantry and the main industrial worker membership – the proletariat; critical thinking and a scientific approach versus folklore and superstition; the necessity of an historical perspective and context in order to move forward in the right direction; the potential within each person to be an intellectual; the recognition of thought and study not only as work, but as essential work. They were conceptual, visionary but rather vague in terms of practical application. In contrast, by 1919 the direction which he addresses to the members of Factory Councils is much more concrete and explicit (Gramsci 1988:125).

### ***Narrative***

He uses narrative repeatedly, by which I mean stories. Sardinia has an oral tradition and he was brought up on folk-tales and stories and songs recounting Sardinian history. He uses the stories to make political points and, as Ricoeur was later to note, for implicit moral reflection and educative purpose. He calls one article in 1916 “A film of the Vets visit”. Cinema was in its infancy but was overtaking theatre in popularity in Turin, and he borrows from it to dramatise an everyday routine. He describes with fury and disgust the charade of the doctor’s visit to the factory, to treat the workers or to certify them as sick. His writing is very visual, and the story proceeds in a number of short scenes. He contrasts the doctor, well fed, well dressed, fit, with the poor and ailing workers. He slips in the shabby tricks the management uses to dissuade workers from reporting sick. There are fines for being away from the bench, the doctor is always late and arrives as the lunch break sounds, so that workers who live some distance away and will need to be back on time, find it difficult to wait, so the queue thins. The doctor roughly gouges out a splinter from a worker’s eye, the worker is in pain but that is no excuse, he must report back in the afternoon. The Doctor casts a cursory glance at everyone else and announces that they are all, whatever the symptoms, fit for the

thirteen hour shift. The doctor then sweeps off in his limousine. Anyone who protests is fined, and his name noted by the security guard. The worker is a machine and, by Jove, he must produce: tiredness and illness are symptoms of indiscipline and subversiveness. The doctor is called “the vet” because he does not treat the workers as people. Gramsci remarks that, if the workers were indeed horses, the vet would suddenly become a doctor, horses cost money (SLM: 216). In another story he tells of a plumber sent to an apartment to do a repair. The owner, having slept sweetly and had breakfast is feeling clear-headed and is delighted to have a real workman in his workman’s shirtsleeves to put right, so, much against his will, the plumber is drawn into political discussion about the war, peace, rights and duties. The plumber was able to refute the client’s assertions very easily and eventually to make him admit that his arguments are lightweight and not based on any real knowledge or understanding, either about the socialists or about the war itself. Oh dear! The house owner began to realise that this was not real workman because a real workman would have agreed with him as real workmen cannot discuss anything. The next morning the workman was sacked. It is alright for owners to argue but real workmen must always say yes. That, says Gramsci, is how you promote liberty, equality and fraternity (SLM:432).

### ***A new standard of reporting***

I have never been a professional journalist, who sells his pen to whomever pays him the most and must therefore lie all the time because lying falls within his professional qualifications. I have always been an absolutely free journalist, I’ve always held only one opinion and I’ve never had to hide my deep convictions to please bosses or their underlings (LC2:84).

Gramsci set a new standard for journalism with articles which were no longer empty propaganda, but were reasoned analysis based on primary sources and valid evidence and were focused on the development of critical thinking in his audience. He is committed, but able to stand back and analyse and criticise dispassionately, he is *disinteressato* in the sense of critical distance. His writing is militant and polemic, but not at the expense of scholarship. He calls this *giornalismo integrale*; holistic journalism. He reminds the Turinese workers, as the cotton workers strike, about why they do so, and why they should commemorate the strike of cotton workers in 1906. He assembles statistics for the years 1899 to 1903, showing that the death rate of female cotton workers from lung complaints was twice that of the rest of the female populace. He details the pittance they earned for pitiless hours. He reminds readers of one woman’s story, how she was dismissed for campaigning, without reference, because she did not show “proper deference”; how when the women were driven finally to take to the streets

they were met with extreme violence from the police and army, how the elderly and children were beaten and some were shot (SPW 1:19). This is not sentimental reminiscence, the cotton workers revolt was entirely justified and the authorities' response was, literally, overkill. Now, he says, when the workers strike they are much stronger, more prepared and organised because they understand their history and its implications for them. In "Men and Machines" he meticulously reports a town council meeting about education and then draws from it a critique of the Socialist's party action on education. True the Socialist Party campaigned for more education for the working class but, complained Gramsci, without any analysis of the existing system or of what sort of system of education was really needed for both children and adults (SPW 1:25). In 1920 and 1921 when writing about the defeat of the "clock-hand strike" and subsequent lockout by employers in Turin and then, later in the same year, about the defeat of the national occupation of the factories; his analysis both of the failure of the Socialist party and of what the future held for Italy was masterly and prophetic (SPW 1: 190-196, 356-359).

### ***Organising the new "religion"***

The second source for Gramsci's change strategy was organised religion. Like Mazzini, one of the leaders of the Risorgimento before him, Gramsci recognised that the only coherent and unified institution on the Italian peninsula was the Catholic Church. Mazzini, in taking the Catholic Church as a model, had borrowed emotive symbols from it; faith, blood, sacrifice (Duggan 2007). Gramsci too uses religious imagery to emphasise the importance of this new way of being. He talks of "the flame of faith", of "establishing doctrines", of "telling a rosary", of small life changes. He uses church festivals and observances as titles of articles to grab his readers' attention and starting points for reflection. Principally, however, he saw in religion the methods and organisation by which firstly, a world view can be changed, and then the changes consolidated into society. Gramsci, therefore, modelled his educative strategy, in part, on the way in which the great intellectual movements like religion, in particular Christianity, had become powerful. He saw in the established Catholic Church a structure and discipline and, in the Reformation, a model of dynamic organisation. The way in which the Reformation attracted its followers is outlined by Ascoli in his analysis of the development of a single language in Germany. This is not to say that Gramsci was himself religious, indeed he regarded religion as a stage in mankind's development which would be soon outgrown, but he observed himself how much communism resembled a new religion of the masses (SPW 1:333). There are many ways in which the process he envisaged mirrored that of the early church.

There needed to be a vision of society expounded by a central body, in this case Lenin or the Party. Then there is a vanguard and a cadre of committed disciples, who have two important functions (SPW). They will be engaged, to a certain extent, in developing the central ideology themselves and translating it into practice and protocols and will, therefore, have a personal stake in the way the movement is run: this is the reformation and early church model. Next, the vanguard's job is to train a cadre who will help them to spread the word and to persuade the masses to accept both the conceptual basis, the authority and the discipline of the movement, "in whose service is perfect freedom", through the mediation of the vanguard and the cadre, and through dialogue. The vision of a new society, with its new values and ethics, relations and responsibilities will be realised through the change and moral growth of its citizens. He admired the Reformation, seeing it as a movement which had moved Western Europe forward into a more progressive society while Italy had remained within the structures and intellectual and emotional confines of the Catholic Church (Gilks 2007). His personal approach to recruiting new followers was by dialogue, so that they both understood and contributed ideas to the party they were joining, which echoed how Ascoli had described the engagement of the Lutheran congregations (Ascoli 1975:16). However, the Reformation model had a disadvantage. In it each individual makes his own covenant with his perceived God and acts on the resultant moral values and according to his conscience. This eventually led to a plethora of versions of the Christian faith so that the reformed protestant religion is not a single organisation with a single world view, capable of agreeing a single aim quickly and working towards it as a body.

Although intellectually and by inclination he preferred the dialogic aspects of the reformation model, he did not like its individualistic emphases. After his experiences of strikes and the struggle against the employers and the government, Gramsci came to realise that a more centralised, and disciplined approach, regulated by faith in the style of the Catholic church, or indeed an army, was needed to achieve coherent strategies and prompt, concerted action. Gramsci, in fact, wanted to use elements of the two types of organisation. He wanted each individual to be actively engaged but without an individualistic approach: there should be clear guidelines and orders from the top, and discipline within the ranks, but at the same time individuals should retain autonomy of thought and conscience as he described in "Discipline" (CF:160). There are, therefore, two strands to the moral growth which support the two models. The new society will have a new set of relations and a political stance which express and adhere to its new moral and ethical values, and citizens will be expected to conform to these new values and to the consequent modes of living. However, it is also clear, right from the earliest

articles, that, in order to gain political and moral ascendancy, each individual must take responsibility for his/her own moral attitudes and actions. He or she also had to participate, both as an individual and, importantly, as a disciplined member of a group, in the development and promulgation of the new values and in the political struggle. Levy says that he “Preached a form of organised spontaneity, pedagogic enlightenment and ...a good deal of authoritarianism” (Levy 2007:149).

Bernstein, much later, was to analyse these two types of organisational models within educational settings, which has some relevance to Gramsci (Bernstein 1973). In his theory, the strongly classified and framed “collection” method of organising learning keeps knowledge and people in separate boxes, strongly directed from the top. Neither cadre nor workers have significant influence or control over the process and there is little contact horizontally between groups. People who do not or cannot achieve the expected outputs are excluded or alienated. On the other hand, the organisation can function even if its cadres are merely competent, rather than well trained and committed. In addition, some different methods of working can be tolerated inside the individual boxes since they are contained and will not influence others. In an organisation which uses a weakly classified method of organising learning, the control from top to bottom is less direct, but the links between people working on the different strata of the organisation are strong and this method of working can accommodate and use a much wider range of abilities and cope with difficulties. However, in order for this organisation to work, the ideology on which it is based must be clearly articulated so that there are some fixed ideas, with their contingent ethos and values, which are accepted by all the management strata, leaders, vanguard and cadre and communicated clearly to the workers. The cadres and vanguard will then need to negotiate some common working practices and conform to them so that they are “singing from the same hymn sheet”. In this model the cadres need to be more skilled, more committed to the organisation, both evangelical and able to engage the workers whilst remaining adamant on the non-negotiable elements of the new creed. This is the type of organisation and of teaching which Gramsci preferred and practised in the build up of the factory movement. Although in the *melée* of 1920-21 his emphasis moved toward explicit structure, direction and discipline.

The final essential element to the educative and educational process was the figure of the guide or mentor who would help, teach, guide, engage the masses so that they head in the right direction. This role would evolve so that, in addition to their work as thinkers, this group would have a dynamic relationship and dialogue with the masses, instead of merely disseminating the new doctrines. This is what the intellectuals of the renaissance and onwards had signally failed to do.



Gramsci uses the word *dirigente* which means leading or directing, to describe the role both for this group and later for the way in which the party itself should govern, but he is ambivalent about the role of “Leaders”. He actually uses the English word leaders in this period, in the context of Trade Unions and the Socialist Party. “Leaders” is always a pejorative term however, denoting a group of people who have reached the highest level in the organisation, but who are more concerned with their positions in the hierarchy and the structures of the unions or the party, than with the wishes and needs of the workers. In the aftermath of the defeat of the Factory councils Gramsci recognised that the Socialist movement lacked the will and the people to truly lead. The occupation of the factories too had been premature from an organisational point of view, the workers had not had time to set up a system to direct or co-ordinate action between factories.

At this stage he wanted both democratic worker control, based on the educative development led by mentors who are able to lead and direct, and, at the same time, he required a timely and disciplined response to directives from the leading executive group of the party. In order to achieve this there would need to be a highly committed and disciplined vanguard, for whom in the early stages in Turin he has no particular name, but who will later emerge, I would argue as “the intellectuals”. The task of this group of disciples/cadre would be to direct and to execute orders, as well as to guide and mentor the masses but the process is not finally worked out and there is always a tension between the two models of their task. “A radical model of bottom–up democracy, it was nonetheless hierarchically organised and the relationship between the different levels was never fully clarified” (Bellamy 1994:xxi).

### ***Only Nine Letters?***

Everything of Antonio Gramsci’s work, which had been found by 2006<sup>3</sup>, has been published. From analysis of his writings, by matching content, format and register to the intended audience, a pattern can be established of what type of writing format he used, (article, report, or letter) for what purpose, (political or personal) and the balance, in terms of volume between them. In other periods of his life his letters are significant both in volume and content but in this central period of his life, the years in Turin, there are very few letters; only nine have been found for the period between 1915 and his arrival in Moscow in June 1922.

---

<sup>3</sup> New letters from prison were found in 2007, some of which have not yet been published.

Not surprisingly it is also the period for which there is no defined or known group of correspondents, beside his family, likely to preserve his letters, as his family had always done. Nor indeed is there much evidence of correspondence to him, since there is little material in the archives. The originals of the official Italian Communist Party documents, including correspondence, which start from the foundation of the Party in 1921, are still held in the State Archives in Moscow, although there are now copies of most of the important documents held in Italy. The *Fondazione Istituto Gramsci* in Rome holds correspondence files in the archive *Fondo Gramsci* which I have studied extensively. Although he had never been a prolific letter writer, there are by contrast 44 letters covering the five years November 1908 to November 1913, and there will be 144 to colleagues, his wife and his Sardinian family in the period from June 1922 to November 1926 when he was arrested. So it could be seen as strange that there should be so few.

In my view, his mode of communication is dictated by his work. From 1914 to 1922, Gramsci wrote an enormous number of articles. It could be argued that, since his discussion and arguments were being published daily, there was no need for individual correspondence. Therefore, is the almost complete absence of letters surprising, in this, the frenetic period of the “*biennale rosso*”, the two red years in Italy? There must certainly have been intense communication between the *Ordine Nuovo* group, the leaders in the Factory Councils, the socialist press offices, the Socialist Party locally and nationally, but was it written in the form of letters? Nothing written, in terms of letters or messages, has been recorded or found but we have detailed witness accounts of how involved Gramsci was in the physical organisation and conduct of the strikes and the occupation of the factories. Of course the Socialist leaders were under surveillance so it is possible that all messages and reports were verbal, or if written, instantly destroyed. It is also possible that the activists used the telephone. London had its first telephone system by 1911 and Turin, having been the capital of Italy and remaining its industrial leader would also have had at least as developed a system as Rome and Milan. These systems, however, were very much smaller than those of other European countries<sup>4</sup>. They were organised and run by several private companies and access and use was correspondingly restricted. They would certainly also have been tapped. Spriano, in his history of the occupation of the factories, includes transcripts from the State archives of important telephone conversations between employer leaders; between politicians; between politicians and employers and between Trade Union and Socialist party leaders and the government (Spriano 1975).

---

<sup>4</sup> Even by 1953 Italy still had four hundred thousand fewer telephones than France and four million fewer than the UK

It is true that Gramsci liked to be in control and often gave very detailed instructions for what he wanted done, so that the lack of written evidence is apparently strange.

Santucci in his introduction to *Letters 1908 -1926*, remarks that it is,

unreasonable to suppose that in the course of editing a journal, the organisation of the Factory Council movement and of the occupation of the factories, intense work dense with unrepeatable experiences, Gramsci should only have written one letter ...to Serrati (Santucci 1992:viii).

On examination of that opinion, I would argue that precisely because this period was so intense there may not have been time for letters. In addition, although Santucci has focused on one letter only as worthy of note, I think that letters are important in Gramsci's work as a whole and that; therefore, these are worth some consideration. If indeed there should be many letters is there a reason why these nine have survived? Six were sent outside Turin and this may explain why they escaped the Fascist purges. However, of these, the letter to Galetto, a colleague and that to Serrati, Gramsci's first editor and mentor, were sent to the Avanti offices, the former to Milan and the latter to offices in Turin. It may be sheer chance, therefore, that these two letters survived the attentions of the Fascist squads in both cities. Two letters were sent to a well established Turinese local politician, Morgari, who was not part of the radical left wing and these survived in his papers. However the nine letters are interesting in that they, together with the memories of close associates from those years, suggest a different interpretation for the lack of correspondence.

Consideration of the nine letters, taken together with the testimony of his co-workers, and his published writings suggests, I think, that there may not have been as many letters written as Santucci expects. Letters are person to person communication, when the people concerned are distanced, which may or may not also be personal. By personal, I mean conveying meanings and understandings *specific or peculiar to the correspondents*. Such letters might be chatty about inconsequential things in order to keep in touch and to share a life, or intimate in order to share thoughts or feelings, or in Gramsci's case, instrumental letters to convey or ask for information, to set out his opinion or to give instructions, commands or advice. However, with the exception of parts of his letters to Giulia, before the prison years, Gramsci did not write about inconsequential things. I think in this period Gramsci would only have spent time on letters which needed to come from him personally, and which fulfilled his purpose.

Of the nine letters which we have, eight have this "personal" feel, that is conveying something particular to Gramsci and the recipient, and could only be written by Gramsci

himself. Only the ninth is a formal business letter. Two letters are to his family; the first to Grazietta, his sister, in 1916 in response to concerns expressed by the family about his life and circumstances. He expresses hurt that they could believe he is letting them down and admits that he had withdrawn from ordinary social life for two years and had worked too hard. He says that he will stay in touch and respond to letters, in fact there are no further letters to the family in Ghilarza for eight years (EL:84). The second is to Carlo, his brother, in November 1918 on his promotion to lieutenant. This letter includes congratulations together with a little sermon on his increased responsibilities and obligations to secure the safety of his men, "everything that we undertake to do in life we must try to accomplish as perfectly as possible" (EL: 97). The family in Ghilarza meticulously preserved all his letters, but it is possible that he wrote to his brothers Carlo and Gennaro and that these letters were not preserved. There must certainly have been at least one letter to Gennaro, since Gramsci persuaded him to leave his post in Cagliari in August 1920 to come to Turin as administrator for *L'Ordine Nuovo*. However, he writes to Carlo individually only 22 times over the ten prison years and never to either Gennaro or Mario. From 1906 to 1913 his earlier letters to the family have been largely transactional; he wanted things. Now, frankly that stimulus has gone. Now he can support himself materially and is supported by his group of colleagues and friends emotionally and intellectually so there is no longer a need to write letters to the family.

There are two editorial letters, one in 1917 to Corsi, at the time mayor of Iglesias and provincial councillor in Sardinia and erstwhile colleague of Salvemini in the Antiprotectionist league in Florence. Its date is significant: Gramsci had been director of *Il Grido del Popolo* for only a month, appointed to hold the fort while the existing editor was in prison, so that he was eager to imprint his view on the paper and to bring in new contributors. Corsi was a working journalist and Socialist politician in Sardinia, and had been recommended to Gramsci by a fellow Sardinian. He was known to Gramsci through his articles in *Avanti* and in Salvemini's cultural journal *La Voce*. There is, therefore, a reason for a personal approach and the letter is not a simple transactional request to a known writer for a given number of words by a deadline, which could have been written by anyone on the editorial staff. It is an elaborated and friendly (written in the informal *tu* form although they have never met) invitation to a fellow socialist, whom Gramsci does not know personally, to write a single article for *Il Grido del Popolo*. Gramsci asks him to write about the political and economical movement of the Sardinian working class in order "to inform Northern Italy about the new Sardinia and it is equally essential ...to reinforce the consciousness of unity in the Italian working class" (EL:87). This is a continuation of an important educational task which he identified in 1917, which was to

raise consciousness between the proletariat of the North and the largely agrarian South of both their separate problems as well as their mutual ones and of their joint mission.

The two letters to Morgari are interesting because they were sent and survived in Turin. Morgari was a longstanding Socialist politician of the Reformist faction in Turin local government, which might explain why the correspondence survived (Levy 1999:22). He would seem to represent all that Gramsci would come to despise by 1919. At this stage, however, their style is cordial, to someone he knows well, or at least is acknowledging as a colleague at some level since Gramsci uses the informal *tu* form of *you*. The first letter, dated December 1917 is a brief informal expression of congratulation and solidarity on behalf of the Education group and the reporters from the Turin edition of *Avanti*, (that is Gramsci himself and his close friends), on a speech made by Morgari in support of the Russian revolution (EL:89). The second, dated April 1918, again on behalf of the executive group, is an equally brief, informal and this time, confidential request for written details about some rather “shady overtures” made by Biolato, a party member, to Morgari himself. Gramsci will then use this report in a forthcoming disciplinary hearing in order to silence or even expel Biolato. This kind of request could not be delegated and it implies, I think, a degree of professional trust (EL:95).

There are two more personal letters which are linked to the newspaper, one to an ex-colleague, Leo Galetto, in 1918, while Gramsci is still relatively new in command at *Il Grido del Popolo*, enclosing an unspecified manuscript which Galetto had requested (EL:90). The letter bounces with energy and good-humour, “no point asking you how you are” he begins, “you’re obviously well because you’re in a good mood”. Then, although he asks for opinions and criticism, he is obviously feeling confident. When asking for Galetto’s opinion (and that of Serrati) on how *Il Grido del Popolo* is developing and what else he needs to do, he asks them to take into account, while making their judgements, that Gramsci and Pastore are overwhelmed by work and that their work is unavoidably disjointed, not least by the rationing of electricity, so that the copy is put together in “a hasty and inorganic way”. As a postscript, there is a continuation of a debate which has been going on in *Avanti* and to which both Gramsci and Serrati have contributed. In a light-hearted request to Serrati that he should retract the epithets of “grammarian and purist”, Gramsci reiterates his belief that the only forms of action which he considers to be useful and rational are those, whether linguistic, political or economic, which arise spontaneously and are realised by free social actions. He then repeats his opposition to all forms of privilege, all modes of thinking and acting which make life mechanical and rigid, “all the corpses which corrode and infect the new life we are creating” so that even a simple response to a request has been turned into a

personal polemic. He finishes with warm wishes to them both and a snatch of Greek with his own translation “Everything is changing” marked (Trans.) Gramsci. This is a playfully self-important touch since normally he follows Serrati’s instruction not to add his name to any piece (ibid.).

The second, much later letter, dated February 1920 is to Serrati himself. This letter is interesting in that it foreshadows the prison letters in communicating at two levels. At one level it is clearing up a misunderstanding. It is a rebuttal of the charge in Serrati’s column of ignoring friends, i.e not writing for *Avanti*, in favour of buttering up class enemies, the bourgeois newspapers, by giving them an interview on the issue of the Factory Councils instead of doing so for *Avanti*. Gramsci also informs Serrati of his present difficult position, in that he is no longer director at *L’Ordine Nuovo*, so no longer has the authority to bin contributions from colleagues who are not toeing his line. In addition, he spells out the position of *L’Ordine Nuovo* in relation to the Factory Council movement. He says, importantly, that *L’Ordine Nuovo* takes neither praise nor responsibility for the Factory Council movement. They have worked very hard, he says, to make the local Socialist party and the Chamber of Labour the initiators and guides of the factory movement. The only responsibilities *L’Ordine Nuovo* can assume are intellectual, to defend the movement against opposition, and political to support it within the wider party. On another level, this letter is a reiteration of the respect and affection. In 1920 Serrati has made an heroic effort and has succeeded in holding together the Socialist party (Williams 1964). He is a reformist and his political path is, at this point, diverging from that of Gramsci and the communist group. Indeed Bordiga wrote to Lenin in 1920, typically without consulting colleagues, denouncing Serrati, rather than Turati, as the centrist. Gramsci, however, in this letter, is implicitly telling him that he values insight, integrity and frankness more than an exact shade of red. He finishes,

Dear Serrati, if I have offended in some way don’t hesitate to tell me so openly and read me a lecture. I have a lot, too much to learn (and I am not being modest because I couldn’t care less about modesty) and your advice and your opinion from a loyal and unprejudiced companion will guide me (EL:99).

The most interesting letter, from a directly educative point of view, is that sent to Giuseppe Lombardo–Radice who, at that time in March 1918, was serving at the front. In this letter he has enclosed an article, commenting on a paper written by Lombardi–Radice himself, on how to revitalise the spiritual life of young Italians. It is an unusually formal and uncharacteristically humble letter, both in content and because Gramsci uses the extremely polite, and grammatically subservient, *Lei* form for *you*. In it Gramsci gives a description of his “Club for Moral Life” and its participants, explaining its aims and his

teaching methods. The article he encloses has been written by a group member after one of the sessions. Whilst it is clear that education is a means to a political end, Gramsci is also asking for a critical appraisal of, and suggestions for, development of the mode of delivery and the teaching techniques as well. This is obviously something which he is passionate about and wishes this educational project to flourish and improve and it therefore warrants a personal letter (EL:91). Lombardi-Radice snubs him (EL:fn 94).

Eight of the nine letters are written by Gramsci himself, because they express purposes, political or educative, which are important to him and which could not be delegated elsewhere. According to his colleagues Gramsci was not a good administrator (Fiori 1970; Bermani 1987). It seems likely, therefore, that many simpler requests for copy and other administrative correspondence would have been sent by Pia Carena, his secretary and companion, or in later years by Togliatti, or even later at *L'Ordine Nuovo* by Gennaro Gramsci. The ninth letter, in my view, is the anomaly as it is a routine formal business letter requesting back copies of another newspaper.

As far as the editorial tasks were concerned, the typesetting and printing was done in the same building as the editorial staff offices and it is quite clear from accounts from colleagues and visitors that there was constant to-ing and fro-ing from print shop to office and vice-versa. The writers were much the same team; Pastore, Terracini, Tasca, latterly Vigalongo and Togliatti who worked for *Avanti*, and *Grido del Popolo* and finally *L'Ordine Nuovo*. According to Gramsci's own account, direction, and editing took place in frequent meetings which he saw as developmental and educational (Paulesu Quercioli 1977; Bermani 1987). He himself had to be nagged to produce any writing at all and regularly delayed until the last possible moment, driving the printing staff to distraction and imprecations (Bermani 1987). Certainly his co-workers Pia Carena, Alfonso Leonetti and Vigalongo when specifically asked about letters from Gramsci, in the interviews by Bermani, all state that he was a very poor correspondent, not known for letter-writing until the prison years: only Pia, with whom he had had a brief liaison, said that she had received one or two notes (Bermani 1987). If a rough average is done of his letter writing before prison, this seems to be true. As an adolescent and then as a student, the average is one letter every six weeks. When writing to Giulia at the height of his passion he sometimes went for three weeks without writing to her, even from Vienna where he complained that he was bored and lonely.

I would argue that in the Turin period the usual functions served by letters are performed elsewhere. Although later in life he will develop the letter form, because he has to, at this point to whom would he write? Gramsci had a new "family". There is repeated testimony

from his colleagues that during these years he worked, argued, ate, joked, went out with the journalists and other workers from the newspapers he worked for from 2pm one day to 3am the next, seven days a week, parting from the group only to sleep; he did not need to write to them. Both Vigalongo and Leonetti remark that he had “no private life” (Bermani, 1987:104). It is my view that some of Gramsci’s articles, particularly in “*Sotto La Mole*”, served as open letters: they fulfil many of the criteria set out by Stanley.

Like the biblical New Testament Epistles, open letters are usually didactic, written by someone with a high status, if not a pre-eminent position, in relation to a particular community, with the community collectively being addressed. Open letters trade on values and meanings shared in common (Stanley 2004:207).

They are personal reflections on local events, like the radio essays, “Letters from America”. It is this informal reflective tone, looking at ordinary things from a different angle, finding “sermons in stones” which makes them educative and fresh. One or two articles even begin “Dear Friends,” “Dear Avanti” addressing the readers. The workers certainly regarded them as personal messages and they responded by letter or in person. He conducted exchanges of views in *Avanti*, *Il Grido del Popolo* and in both the weekly and then the daily *L’Ordine Nuovo*, and these exchanges drew in worker letters as well as responses from other journalists or leading socialists.

As far as the communication with the Factory Councils and workers during industrial action is concerned, two things emerge from the testimony of his newspaper colleagues and from factory workers in the occupation and in the strikes. On one hand Santhia says that the occupation and the power of the Factory Councils was the result of two years of patient education in the factories, but on the other, Vigalongo, a reporter for *L’Ordine Nuovo*, says the movement was overtaken by events and that there was nothing planned to co-ordinate the action of the Factory Councils so that no system for communicating either between worker groups in different factories or between factory groups and *L’Ordine Nuovo* or the Socialist Party had been set up (Bermani 1987). According to the testimony of workers and activists, since *L’Ordine Nuovo* closed down during the occupation of the factories, Gramsci and his staff spent their time, day and night, inside the factories, giving support and guidance to the workers, sorting out quarrels, and keeping them in touch with what was happening, locally and nationally (Spriano 1971; Bermani 1987). In my view, therefore, reports and the instructions would have been verbal. Since Gramsci had suspended publication of *L’Ordine Nuovo*, there was no need for any editorial or administrative correspondence.



Santucci's judgement that correspondence was lost due to lack of foresight and carelessness of the recipients is rather severe. Documentation in newspapers, trades union offices and any offices belonging to workers' organisations was removed as evidence of sedition during police raids, or destroyed during the uncontrolled thuggery of Fascist raids from 1918 onwards, in particular in Turin in 1921 - 1923. Terracini, writing on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1923, described the raids and the seizure of 5000 party workers and all the archives and documents of all labour/socialist organisations, which were then used as evidence to hunt and accuse more people (Vacca 1999:fnviii). Subsequently, documentation was hidden, destroyed or sent to Moscow. Pia Carena, who alone of all the close colleagues said that she had received two or three letters from Gramsci, said that she tore them up and burnt them herself during the Fascist purges (Bermani 1987).

If there is a strange absence, it is the lack of correspondence to Serrati, Bordiga and other leaders. However, Gramsci and Bordiga met in Turin at least once to discuss their relative political positions and beliefs in person, and also met and debated at the Socialist conferences, as well as conducting campaigns in the newspapers. After the *Avanti* offices in Milan were burnt out in 1919, Serrati moved to Turin. He and Gramsci corresponded through the columns of their respective newspapers on political topics (EL:90). The leaders of the established Socialist party cannot have been in any doubt about either Gramsci's view of their shortcomings, or the strategies which they ought to adopt in the future, because these were clearly set out in Gramsci's articles and submissions to conferences and meetings. Gramsci was, at this point a marginal person and may not have had personal correspondence with individual Socialist politicians (Williams 1964). In my view then, there was indeed correspondence between Gramsci and the people important to him in his new order, the industrial workers. This was conducted by open letter on his part and by letters and reports addressed by the workers to the journals of which Gramsci himself was editor. Indeed, Gramsci delighted in the notion that the workers regarded the paper as their own. Spriano in his book on *L'Ordine Nuovo* and the Factory Council Movement included reports from factory workers to the journal explaining their situation and suggesting ways forward (Spriano 1971).

### **Conclusion**

In Gramsci it is clear that revolution, rather than a single act, constitutes a process; and that as a basis of this process there needs to be the drive by the working class to acquire political understanding and consequently a cultural foundation (D'Orsi 2004:68).

The Turin years are characterised by a strong educative drive. What was original in Gramsci's drive to improve Italians was that he thought there should be an education system which was socialist in aims, content and method. It should be designed in both content and mode of delivery to meet the present needs of the workers and would, at the same time, prepare them for the future needs of a new industrialised world, as well as for a new Socialist state. It begins with the young socialists and socialism and culture and progresses to the education of the existing leadership and of the future leadership from the shop floor to the executive committee. Gramsci set up educative groups, led the dialogue in them, and promoted the Factory Councils, not just as foundation unit of a new society, but as the ideal mode for individual worker education and for the intellectual, moral and political development of the proletariat as a whole. He learnt, bitterly, from the Factory Council experiment, how much more leadership and discipline was needed, at the very top rather more than at the shop floor. Spriano says that Gramsci viewed the Factory Council movement to some extent as a pilot experiment in worker power from which the party would learn (Spriano 1971). The group he set up to continue his political vision in the wake of the defeats of 1920 and 1921 and the disintegration of the first *Ordine Nuovo* group, was not an armed group nor an inner cabal of activists but the Communist Education Group. The writing of the final years in Turin is analytical, prophetic and always underlines his belief that only an educated and moral proletariat will be capable of creating and continuing to govern a new state (Spriano 1971).

The written word embodies an aspect of the tension which was one of Gramsci's major preoccupations. He needed to set out complex ideas and he said that their meaning and import would be distorted by reduction to spoken "everyday language". It was essential that both the vision of a future society and the means necessary to achieve it should be unequivocally clear. At the same time he knew that, not only was the written word inaccessible to many of the people he needed to convince, but that the difficult philosophical and political vocabulary which exactly conveyed his message was beyond the understanding of many of those who could read.

In the same vein, he considered the opposite approaches either of the subordination of the masses to discipline, and the will of the leaders, in order to achieve a change in the structure of society or the path by which society would be transformed by virtue of a directed change in moral, ethics and the world view of a majority of citizens who then will choose a new way of being. The latter is the path which he selects, the educative and educational as an essential and integral part of political policy. He clearly never fully resolved the issue of the relative importance of, and the relationship between Party

discipline and the enthusiasm of individuals; the need to engage every single individual versus the imperative to drive forward in a single direction and the underlying contradiction between the public statements of the non-negotiable destination and the recognition that on the journey towards it negotiation of obstacles would be necessary. In addition there is a conflict between organised spontaneity and his increasing authoritarianism: this is an unresolved tension in concrete terms.

His writing develops over the Turin years to feed into the leadership of the party from 1921-26. Many of the subjects which he writes about in the Turin years will be written about and elaborated in the Prison notebooks so it cannot be said that the *Prison Notebooks* are “stand alone”. Equally, however, it is a mistake to view the writings of the Turin years as “forerunners of the *Prison Notebooks*”. Rather they are a body of work in their own right, a solid foundation on which the *Prison Notebooks* are built or indeed replicate “as startling photographic reproductions of arguments Gramsci penned nearly 20 years earlier”( Levy 2007:149). From 1915 to 1922, Gramsci was not preparing for the *Prison Notebooks*; he was preparing both himself and the proletariat for power.

## Chapter Six: Leadership and the Communist Party of Italy.

The other dangers...can be overcome, gradually by the formation of a strong central nucleus to the party which is homogenous and united and by the real political struggle that this nucleus will succeed in leading. There are no universal panaceas. In the revolutionary battle all theories are implacably destroyed by the fire of the events themselves. Antonio Gramsci, 19.04.1924 (EL:329).

### *Introduction*

1920 was the year in which Gramsci began to think about the party as an entity, in terms of its role and function. It began as a year of some progress and success for Gramsci and the Factory Council movement and ended in defeat, both for the workers and for Gramsci himself. It also signalled the decline of both the Socialist Party (PSI) and the Trades Unions Council (CGL). His reflections on the successes and his analysis of the failures and decline were to shape his ideas on the role, the form and the tasks of a future communist party. These ideas were expressed piecemeal in 1920 and at the beginning of 1921; as criticism of the existing Socialist Party; as suggestions for moving forward; as directions for workers. During 1920 he had moved the focus of his educative drive from being concentrated solely on the factory floor. He recognised, as he was to admit in 1924, that it had been a mistake for the *Ordine Nuovo* group (the *Ordinovisti*) to have concentrated its efforts exclusively on the movement, that is on the educative and political training of workers to form a broad motive base (CPC:70). The priority had to shift in order to encompass the form and needs of a future political party and to focus in particular on the training and moral preparation of the people who would lead and guide the party and the masses. He realised that the party needed to change the way in which the various intersecting relationships between the leading central group; the party; the proletariat class, the working class as a whole and finally, the rest of society should be conceptualised, developed and led. After the formation of the Communist Party in the Bordigean mould, Gramsci was constrained by the new party line and he wrote little about the party from February 1921 to May 1922. However, the ideas from the articles in 1920-21 form the foundation of his campaign for a change of heart and mind and direction in the party and as the basis for change of leadership from Bordiga to himself in 1924.

The second section of the chapter, therefore, deals with this change of priority in Gramsci's educative thinking. His letters and newspaper articles represent different approaches to the different sectors of the educative drive which were the leading group and the movement. From 1923 he began to write in a more concentrated, targeted and

personal form by letter to a restricted audience of his allies, to influence them to accept his vision of a different style of party to that of Bordiga. He also began to exert his authority by letter on the existing party executive committee in Italy. There are subtle layers of meaning and purpose in these letters. Then in spring 1924 he resumed writing newspaper articles to keep the movement growing, asking for opinions and ideas from party members and workers, creating a dialogue. I have focused on the letters since they give a concentrated version of his policy and thought, particularly with regard to the educative tasks ahead for the new party. I have linked the letters to newspaper articles or his speeches to the party conferences as evidence that Gramsci did what he said he would.

### ***The Party***

In the early part of 1920 he began to criticise the PSI and the CGL and to make suggestions for improvement. In January 1920, he wrote an article critical of the PSI, "First, renew the Party" (SPWI:154). He said that it was not fulfilling its historic task of using the tools provided by mass support to construct permanent and solid structures. It had failed to make strategies, to make decisions, or to support general strikes which could have toppled the government. He ascribed this failure to the disintegration of its internal discipline and its increasing loss of contact with its constituents. The PSI had become a debating group on theoretical questions but had failed to organise the movement or direct its actions. His positive suggestions were that the party should implement, forthwith, the terms of the Third International. Next, as a first step to a worker state, workers needed to organise and educate themselves to become a ruling class within their own institutions. In addition therefore, he advocated that workers needed to take ownership of their fighting organisations in order to make them active and responsive (SPWI:154,7).

At the end of February 1920, he outlined what the party ought to be doing in two short pieces, "Governing Party" and "Governing class" (SPWI:167). In these articles he was still addressing criticism and ideas to the PSI, hoping to galvanise it into action. These pieces are, however, clearly an early version of his ideas on how a revolutionary party should operate. In them he says that the Socialist Party will only become a revolutionary governing party when it sets out *concrete* aims for the revolution which solve *specific* issues. The overthrow of power itself is the minor, though vital, issue. The big issue for the PSI programme is to indicate the forms and the method by which the working class, using "its ordered and methodical proletarian exertions", will overcome the inevitable antagonism and conflict to found a stable worker state (SPWI:169). Later in the article

he comes back to his conviction that *worker based* education is the key. There cannot be a worker rule unless the workers are capable of becoming the executive power of a worker State. Therefore, the working class must acquire skills; must educate itself to take on management of society as a whole and must acquire the culture and psychology of a ruling class. It will have to do so by its own means and systems, by reciprocal education. "The Factory Councils", he says, "have been the initial expression of these historical experiences on the part of the working class as it moves towards self-government in a workers' state" (SPWI:171). Here he has moved a step forward from the description of the Factory Councils, which he wrote about in 1919, as ideal forms of adult learning. Now they are the ideal form for adults learning to rule - and learning to be rulers.

By April 1920, he had concrete suggestions to make to the PSI in "Towards a renewal of the Socialist Party" (SPWI:190-196). He discussed how the existing party could develop to meet both the urgent needs of the Italian working class and the requirements of the International movement. This document was, in effect, a first draft of his vision of a communist party: the key elements were there. The party must "immerse itself in the reality of the class struggle...It needs to be in a position to give real leadership" (ibid). In doing so, it not only wins the trust and allegiance of the masses but becomes "their guide and intellect". It repeated, in five sections, the necessity for political education, historic and doctrinal, the need for information about the international context and "dialogue of ideas" (ibid). More important still, there should be analysis and discussion of current events with the workers, "drawing lessons from them... to form a revolutionary consciousness" (ibid). There must be explicit objectives and strategies to tackle them. Only where the party has led, will it be able to command. By being part of the class, the leadership can become "the motor centre for proletarian action" (ibid). Because the masses understand the objectives and have been involved in the thinking, they will respond with disciplined action when the order is given. A copy of this article reached Lenin, who told an affronted PSI delegation in July/August 1920 that this was exactly the way forward for Italian Socialism (Spriano1967:73). Bordiga was also in Moscow and his opposition to the Factory Councils and the Turin group was hardened by Lenin's approval of Gramsci, and by Bucharin's assertion that the formation of councils was essential, especially in difficult times (Spriano 1967:75).

### ***Leadership***

In "Superstition", May 1920, written after the lock out by employers and the defeat of the "clock-hand strike", Gramsci wrote a superbly constructed article (CF:212). It was

punctuated by the refrain, "The working class of Turin has been defeated" (ibid). He used the refrain to lay out the stages of this battle. He described the alliance between industrialists in the face of a common foe and their clever manipulation of the workers, who, without central leadership or direction reacted incoherently to provocation offered. He described the pressure by the industrialists' alliance on a weak state, to force it either to support, or to turn a blind eye to the employers' show of force. He contrasted this to the ineptitude, unpreparedness and straightforward reluctance to act at all on the part of the body which purported to represent the labouring man. The employers and the state recognised and treated this strike as a battle which had national implications. Both they and the workers knew that it was actually about who held industrial power, but the CGL and the PSI only saw it in local terms (Spriano 1967:53).

Using the negative space technique, as he did in his earlier years in Turin, Gramsci outlines what sort of organisation a revolutionary party ought to be. It ought to be capable of, "organising the revolutionary energies; capable of co-ordinating and focusing a vast and profound movement; capable of giving political substance to a powerful and irresistible upward surge by the oppressed class; capable of creating a state and galvanising it with revolutionary dynamism" (op cit:214). These are constant themes for Gramsci; the motive force must come from the *bottom up*; the party must *lead* by translating into political terms and concerted action the inchoate desires of the masses. Even before the revolution, the form of the state must be planned and concrete preparations made so that it can *function* immediately. All of this, however, has to be based on a working class which has *already* actively developed its political consciousness through its own educative methods and organisations (CF:212).

By July 1920, in "Two Revolutions", Gramsci recognized that while the educative drive to create informed and politically conscious workers is essential, that there also needed to be a drive to construct and operate a party (CF:216). Moreover, he saw that these two educative projects should have been concurrent rather than consecutive: the tasks then follow the policy. Before any takeover of power, the party must take on two simultaneous educative tasks; train party leaders, so that they have policies with which to govern, and also train group leaders and mentors to have the skills to guide members. In addition, and simultaneously, it was necessary to train workers so that the bourgeois institutions of government and their workers could be replaced by proletarian ones immediately after taking power.

### ***Failure and Isolation***

On January 1<sup>st</sup> 1921, he opened the first edition of the daily *L'Ordine Nuovo*<sup>5</sup> with a statement about what a political party must do in order to justify that title (SPWI: 368,371). It must have its own vision of the state which it has “concretized”, meaning having translated it into alternative institutions and alternative policies and strategies which relate to the real problems of the existing society. It must then promulgate this vision and the programme of action which supports it, across the whole population. This programme must “enable it to actually organise a state in practice, i.e. in concrete circumstances, using real men...” (ibid). It has to do this in addition to the task of criticising and destroying the existing state. It must be able to organise the political life of the people to guide and direct them. It must also guide the revolutionary vanguard, so that it understands its concrete tasks and responsibilities, forming twin movements of creation and destruction. Most of the article reiterates his criticism of the year before. The PSI had squandered the political power it held, and has failed utterly to use it to build a Socialist state or power base. He explains once again the structural reasons for its failure. In the process of criticising the PSI, Gramsci was putting forward his ideas on what a party should be. He finishes with the statement of the key task for the Communist party, which he says it has already begun, “the concrete work of political guidance and education which is today the fundamental precondition for the founding of the Italian workers’ state” (SPWI:371): the party must lead. While criticising the Socialist Party and outlining the task of a communist party in these articles, he was demonstrating in his own practice, the necessary dual tasks of destruction and creation in preparation for the new order.

In “The Livorno Conference”, published before the conference in January 1921, he clarifies how the communist party should deal with the “Southern Question” (SPWI: 375,7). This piece, once again, does not outline structures and organisational systems. It is concerned with the values of a communist party; dedication, loyalty, discipline, cooperation and a sharing of hardship to reach a common goal. Only the working class can complete the work of the Risorgimento and finally unify Italy “in economic and spiritual terms” (SPWI:375). The relationship between the urban industrial workers, who are the leading and militant minority, and the agricultural workers, who are the backward and repressed majority is, in Gramsci’s view, key to the success of the revolution. He promises hardship for everyone during the process of smashing bourgeois power and constructing a new state. Although the industrial north will lead, because the proletariat can wield more effective economical and political levers than the fragmented and less politically conscious south, the northern proletariat must not feel superior or expect

---

<sup>5</sup> *L'Ordine Nuovo* was published in three incarnations which are referred to as Series one, the original “cultural journal” 1919-1920, Turin; series two, the daily newspaper, 1921-1923, Turin; and series three which reverted to the fortnightly cultural political journal; 1924-1925, Rome.



privileges; because ultimately they cannot win or hold power without the support of the poor peasants of the south. The peasants need to support the industrial workers, because when economic power is in worker hands, then the resources will be available to modernise agriculture and improve their own lives.

There was another, deeper element to the formation of a new order. In the aftermath of the occupation of the factories, Davidson describes him as taking stock and beginning to concentrate his ideas (Davidson 1977:159). He thought, not about what the party needed to do from its own perspective to change society, but about the barriers which prevented all that energy and hope from achieving anything. If he could identify the nature of these barriers, then effort could be targeted on them to break them down. He perceived two causes for failure; firstly, the lack of organisation and leadership which has been described, but secondly, he recognised that although the power and prestige of the state had, in his estimation, dwindled to a precarious level, yet bourgeois society had held together and indeed was gathering strength again. The Factory Council fire had not been extinguished by the water cannons of state power, but suffocated under the webs of interests, relationships, contracts, law, financial institutions, and the ancient social relationships of patronage and friendship within civil society.

It was not just that the occupation of the factories had been abandoned by the PSI and opposed by the Unions; not just that the employers had sunk their differences in order to defeat worker power; not just that the state had allowed illegal violence and pressure and that the army and police force had been mobilised: all of those had been expected. It was the fact that society, the socialist movement itself, many of the workers, the petty bourgeoisie, and the peasants when facing the revolutionary moment, drew back from what they perceived as an abyss. Tamburrano says that, although the power of the state had indeed disintegrated, what Gramsci had not considered was that there might be a reaction to reinstate bourgeois modes of being, even by the proletariat, because that is what it knew, rather than a revolution to install new modes (Tamburrano 1977:133). Williams says that a shared concept of what is *normal* decides how much change a society can envisage, or accept, before it feels so threatened that rejection, retrenchment and reaction set in (Williams 1975b:255). He says that what happened during the occupation of the factories, was that Italian socialism lost its nerve at all levels and balked at creating a new model of society which it could not even imagine (ibid). The party would have to find a way to replace the existing hegemony with its own view of society, its own institutions, its own set of relations, to make the un-thinkable, thinkable. "When does a party become historically necessary? When the conditions for its "triumph", for its inevitable progress to State power, are at least in the process of

formation, and allow their evolution, all things going normally, to be forseen” (SPN:152). It was the essential educative task; it was also, as his linguistic studies had taught him, a matter of leadership and prestige.

After the congress and split in Livorno, Gramsci drew back from centre stage of the political scene. With hindsight, he wrote that Bordiga wasted the three months before the fascist tidal wave, looking inwards and creating his model party, instead of concentrating on the Party’s “mission to continue winning over the majority of workers” (CPC:90). Although he remained as editor and director of the daily *L’Ordine Nuovo* until spring 1922, he was no longer free to write what he really thought because he was bound by party discipline to the manifesto. In terms of his own political development, for the time being, his swansong, the article “Worker control”, written three weeks after the Livorno conference, uses his key phrases and ideas (SPWII:10). The role of the party is leadership; the tasks which the party must undertake must be specific, and an essential task is the continuing education of the proletariat so that they will be able to take over the new state (SPWII:10). Henceforward, he subordinated his views, and his power within the party, to Bordiga. He continued to analyse the issue of the agricultural workers, ascribing the poverty and backwardness of the south to exploitation and speculation by northern capitalists and southern landowners (SPWII: 67).

In Turin, he continued personally to work with groups outside the party. *L’Ordine Nuovo* supported worker education very successfully through a local version of the *Prolet’Kult* and, in private, he did “not suppress his criticisms” (Fiori 1970:154). He had lost political influence both in Turin and the central group. He was not comfortable with the Rome Theses but he signed them in the interest of unity and he was not re-elected to the executive in spring 1922. On Terracini’s suggestion, he was sent to Moscow as the representative of the PCd’I. So Gramsci left for Moscow in May 1922, with the express mission of defending the PCd’I’s reluctance to comply with the Comintern’s proposal for a united front. He arrived in Moscow exhausted, frustrated, depressed and seriously ill, bringing with him his unaltered ideas for an effective communist party. The experience of the next two years would help him to mature and clarify them.

### ***Moscow***

The period of Gramsci’s stay in Moscow has been examined very little and is sometimes seen as a hiatus (Fubini 1971:xiii). In terms of public writing, it was: Gramsci published nothing in Italy for eighteen months. It was, in fact, a decisive period in his own personal and political development, giving him time for reflection and for his own education. For

his own part, Gramsci knew he had made mistakes, in his thinking and in his practice. On the whole, they had been of omission rather than commission. Politically, he had spent too little time and thought on identifying and developing the role and function of the party within a revolutionary movement. He had failed to expand the Factory Council movement, in part because he had made inflated assumptions about the political consciousness of the workers, and in part because there was no revolutionary party organism to support expansion.

He had abstained, and asked the education group to abstain, from a group election at a crucial moment, missing an opportunity to become part of the inner circle who set up the Communist Party of Italy (Spriano 1967:60). He admitted, in an article in *L'Ordine Nuovo* in May 1924, as he already had in letters to Terracini and Togliatti, that the *Ordine Nuovo* group had not given enough thought to the party, nor had they had the courage to put themselves forward and push harder for a central communist party (CPC:162). He had avoided the limelight, self conscious about his deformity. He had been intellectually uncomfortable with the cult of personality, because he had been trained to regard the message as more important than the identity of the messenger. He had never bothered to build a network of allies and influential friends (Forgacs, Nowell Smith 1985:17). During 1919-1922, he had avoided, where possible, the ordeal of presenting his views to large meetings and rallies. He had sent Togliatti, Terracini and Tasca to PSI meetings to deliver the speeches he had written. He did not even speak at the crucial Livorno conference, although his name was on the programme and he had been shaken by the virulence of attacks on him (Spriano 1967:118). It is true that his speaking voice lacked power, but the problem was more that he could not overcome his reserve and his dislike of conference debate, which many of his colleagues noted (Spriano 1967:118). Further, his debates in person until December 1920, had almost always been relatively non-combative, since he held discussions with uneducated workers, or with colleagues and acquaintances who were sympathetic to him personally, or to his political stance. He had often managed to address large groups of workers, because they listened to him in utter silence, straining to catch every word. Teresa Noce recalls,

When Gramsci came to the *Camera del Lavoro* to speak, it was very moving, because you could not hear another sound in the room, not a rustle, and heaven help anyone who coughed. Because with that voice of his, so weak, if there was any noise you couldn't hear him. And the workers wanted to hear him (Bermani 2007:300).

As a consequence of his practice of sending others to meetings, he was not personally known to, or acquainted with, other Italian activists. In future, he would have to steel

himself to argue his case against unknown, educated opponents, who were committed to a different vision of the party. Degott, writing back to the Comintern in 1921, concluded, regretfully, that despite his great intellectual gifts and political acuity, he was not leader material (Fiori 1970:150).

In Moscow and Vienna, Gramsci learnt how to conduct himself as a political leader. He observed the business of government in a socialist state. He went to all the sessions of the IV Internationale and also to the plethora of meetings of the various committees which were held at all hours of the day and night (EL:108). To Togliatti he wrote, in February 1924, that because he had so little reliable information from the party in Italy in 1922 to 23, that he had had to be extremely cautious, and had inadvertently acquired the reputation of being a fox of devilish astuteness (EL:215). He began to understand why the Soviet leadership was so insistent that all votes made by the party on important issues had to be unanimous. In their view, it was better to discuss sticking points, both privately and publicly, until agreement was achieved. Then, when *everyone's* name was on the decision, it was more difficult for a splinter group to start opposition without reneging on the decision and losing credibility. He would use their rationale in his own battle with the quarrelsome old guard in the Italian party to avoid factionism (EL:303,317). He was able to visit and evaluate the importance of the Petrograd school for party workers and to negotiate places in it for Italian comrades. He renewed acquaintance with activists in exile. He organised the foundation of the anti-fascist information offices in Berlin, and in Vienna for the Comintern. From a theoretical point of view, when his reading of Russian became more advanced, he began to study and translate Lenin's writings. He knew the differences in theoretical and practical policies between Trotsky and Stalin and watched the jostling for position begin as Lenin's health deteriorated toward death in 1923.

Gramsci had been sent to Moscow in 1922 to argue against the proposed United Front policy. This policy required the PCd'I to join up with the PSI from whom they had split with the Comintern's support and such acrimony in the previous year. At this point in 1922, Gramsci was sincerely in agreement with Bordiga in arguing against fusion. When Bordiga arrived in Moscow for the IVth meeting of the Comintern that autumn he was, as ever, outspoken and obdurate. The United Front became the official Comintern party line and it was left to Gramsci to negotiate a way out of the impasse. Despite his poor health, he had spent enough time in Soviet party meetings and in the Comintern to learn more about the political situation in Europe, as a whole, and had begun to understand why the United Front was necessary in the face of fascist bourgeois reaction all over Europe. Although in Turin he, personally, had always worked with other revolutionary

groups and could see the usefulness of joining together in the face of Fascism, it was still difficult to join up again with the PSI and Serrati. He wrote to Germanetto that he spent a year “wriggling like an eel” (EL:262). However tedious the endless meetings were, they proved very useful politically to Gramsci. He gained experience, authority and respect from the process.

### ***The Italian Crisis***

All problems of organization are political problems. Antonio Gramsci 1926, Lyons Thesis no.29 (SPWII:362)

In February 1923, Bordiga and several of the executive committee of the PCd'I were arrested and imprisoned. It took six weeks for any official communications to reach Moscow from the Italian executive. When the two reports arrived in late March they contradicted each other. The Comintern, startled, expressed doubts about the capability and political direction of the PCd'I. Gramsci reported, “Everyone was in agreement in insisting that the problem was not *one of organisation but of politics: a party of doctrinaires, which does not want to become a mass party, which does nothing to win over the sympathy of the masses, cannot set up a safe and solid illegal system*” (EL:518. [my emphasis]). Spurred on by the disarray revealed by the reports, and by disquieting unofficial news of a new manifesto devised by Bordiga, Gramsci decided that the party would have to be pressured openly by him to comply with the United Front. In the first letter for many months, signed also by Germanetto, Gramsci insisted that the executive in Italy must start working in earnest towards the United Front or they might cease to be recognised and supported by the Comintern which would be politically disastrous (EL:517-21; EL:114).

The Comintern's verdict, in March 1923, on the state of the party had confirmed Gramsci's own views on what was wrong with the PCd'I under Bordiga. The time had come to rethink the ethos and to change the direction of the PCd'I. The separation between the leaders, the party and the class was counter-productive and would have to be bridged. The rigidity of the organisational structures meant that the party could not react to changing circumstances and differing objectives. Bordiga's refusal to work with other groups continued to limit party growth and effectiveness. This policy would have to change, not only to comply with the Comintern United Front, but in order to survive. The rigid centralisation and much vaunted discipline was, in reality, only a complete absence of division of labour and responsibilities. This resulted in muddle, duplication and the party being viewed from Moscow as a joke, much to Gramsci's mortification (EL:213;

EL:518) ). Worst of all, Bordiga did not see the need for education, never had; never would (CPC:68). This too, limited the growth of the party and also, potentially, its effectiveness when the crisis came. If the workers were not involved in the thinking and the decisions, would they really go to the barricades against the army and the fascists when Bordiga gave the order? Would there be any intermediate leaders in place to organise them? No education and no cooperation with other groups also meant that the issue of changing perceptions and gathering tacit support within society was not being addressed.

In September 1923, the Comintern decided that a new daily newspaper should be published in Italy by the communist party, in conjunction with the section of the socialist party which was still part of the Internationale. Gramsci would be the editor. He used this mandate to stamp his own ideas on the project, including its name, *Unità*. In November 1923, now that he was gone, the Italian party executive realised what an asset Gramsci had been. The executive now consisted of the original group, plus Togliatti and Scoccimarro, who had been drafted in when Bordiga and others were imprisoned, and who were sympathetic to Gramsci. Others of his old allies had been asked to join the Central Committee. Both Togliatti and Terracini, wrote to the Comintern in December 1923, arguing against Gramsci being sent to Berlin to work for the Comintern, and asking for him to be sent closer to Italy so that the party there could have the value of "his great intellect and authority" (cited Spriano 1967:296). The Comintern agreed to send Gramsci to Vienna to support the Italian party, with the hope that he would take on the leadership. He arrived in Vienna in mid-December 1923 with the specific task of setting up *Unità*.

### ***Gramsci's Party***

In the question of proletarian dictatorship, the key problem is not the physical personification of the function of command. The key problem consists in the nature of the relations which the leader or leaders have with the party of the working class, in the relations which exist between this party and the working class...Are the leader and the party elements of the working class, are they a part of the working class, do they represent its deepest and most vital interests and aspirations...? How was this party formed, how did it develop, through what process did the selection of the men who lead it take place? Antonio Gramsci. March 1924 (SPWII:209).

It was from Vienna, therefore, that Gramsci began his campaign to transform the Communist Party in terms of its political basis, its direction and its organization. The new Manifesto for the Italian party, written by Bordiga, finally reached Gramsci in its revised

form in December 1923. Most of the executive and the enlarged central committee, including Togliatti, had signed it. It is from this point, I think, that Gramsci realised how much needed to be done. He would eventually have to take on the leadership in opposition to Bordiga. He would work for the Party, but only to bring about the needed transformation. If the group forming within the party wished him to play a leading part in its revival, then they must be prepared to espouse the new direction and aims wholeheartedly. Gramsci made it quite clear to Scoccimarro on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1924 that he would not sign, or in any way support, Bordiga's "Manifesto of the Left". He wrote,

I do not wish, by signing this manifesto to appear a complete clown. Besides I don't at all agree with its substance. I have a quite different concept of the party, its function, the relations which it ought to establish with the workers who are outside the party, and those which it should have with the population in general (EL:160).

If necessary, Gramsci would stand alone against the manifesto (EL:161). In a letter to Terracini on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1924 he repeated his opposition.

I persist in my stance because I hold it to be necessary and opportune...Now it's essential that you too, and Scoccimarro and Togliatti must take the decision to opt for clarity, for the position which is closest to your innermost convictions...Then we could accomplish great work together and give our party all the development possible in the circumstances (EL:177).

From March 1923 to February 1924, it is the party and leadership which concerns him. That is the party's historical task of leadership, rather than his assumption of leadership. The concept of the party which Gramsci had begun to formulate in 1920 would now be put into practice. The party's role was to lead. It would need to have clear objectives, which would be met by specified goals and tasks. The party would decide the best way to achieve them and then finally set up the best organisational structures and use the best people to complete the task. This in fact implies several concentric circles; politically conscious members; a layer of activists to lead task groups and finally, a central leading group who are highly competent and able to synthesise the will of the people into policies and action. This, in its turn, relies entirely on the "concrete work of political guidance and education", which he had repeatedly advocated in 1920, having already taken place at several levels (SPWI: 149,371). Since this had not happened it would now be a priority.

In Turin he had made the mistake of concentrating only on educating the masses. From Vienna, he could see the chaotic situation in Italy, at all levels. The party leadership were in prison and the working class was left bewildered and without direction or leadership,

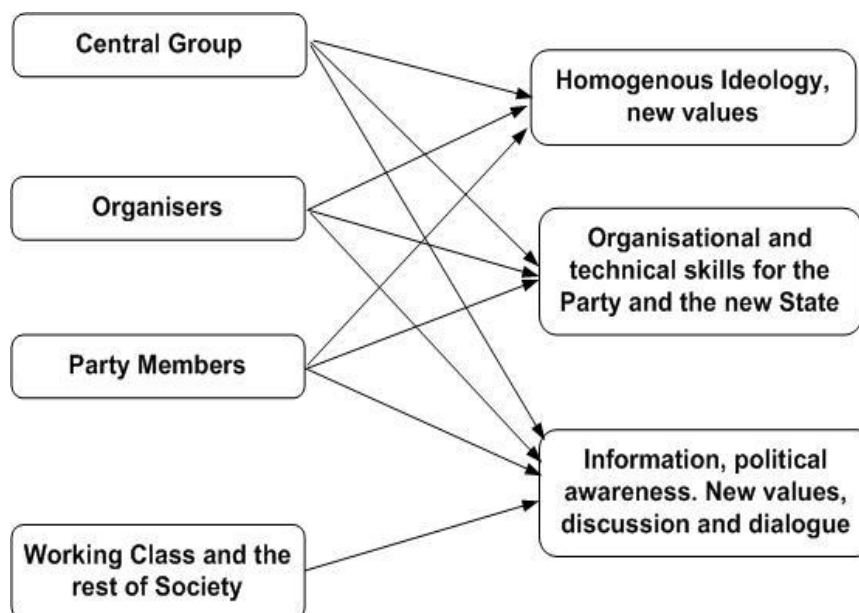
after the internecine feuding in the PSI and the PCd'I. Gramsci had to focus on constructing a new kind of party leadership at central and devolved levels. This reinvigorated leadership nucleus would then be equipped, following his direction, to reclaim and re-engage the masses. This time, therefore, Gramsci's educative drive was to start, not with the working class, but with the longstanding leading group. Although this group was, in effect, the only one he could communicate with at the time, because the newspapers had been suppressed, nevertheless, it was still a conscious choice. One of the things he had learnt from Turin was the inefficiency and destructiveness of factions and splinter groups. By contrast, he had seen how the Soviet government's insistence on consensus had helped it to effect changes. In Gramsci's view, it was essential that in future the political aims be unequivocally agreed by all who had a leading role in the party, particularly before they took discussion about the party to the masses (EL:161).

The politics, which in Gramsci's view, needed to be understood and agreed urgently, both by his emerging group of allies and eventually by the rest of the executive were these; there would be no factions, and the party would adhere to the policies of the Internationale. The Italian party needed to work towards the United Front policy. Of course, Gramsci understood how difficult it was for the principal parties to trust each other, after the Livorno schism and the mutual bitter vituperation and suspicion, but combining forces in the face of Fascism made sense, and importantly, the Communist Party needed the prestige of the Comintern's backing. The new party would be a party of the masses, not of the immaculate few. The PCd'I needed to re-engage the working class and build a majority, so they needed to work with as many political groups as possible. The party would be part of the class, not separate from it; members would need to work within factories and in the countryside. Indeed everyone, including the central group, should be working within the proletariat. The organisation of the party would stem from its functions and there would have to be different policies on education, selection and management. Later, in prison he would describe the model as "Being truly systematic cannot be found in architectural structures but in the inner coherence and in the ingenious consistency of each particular solution (Q10§4:1216).

Gramsci wanted to construct a robust, stable but adaptable party capable, not only of withstanding the time of fire and iron, but also of finding creative ways to extend its influence on the people of Italy. The party needed to look outward rather than inward. "The aim was not a mass party but a party which worked to create the mass conditions in which all particular problems are solved in the development of a communist revolution" (Williams 1975b:231).



How was this change in direction and the creation of a new party to be achieved? The politics were contentious, all of them in direct contrast to those of Bordiga, and the concept of the party, lacking as it was in any explicitly expressed structure, difficult to grasp. It depended very heavily indeed on an immense educative effort, as Gramsci himself made clear in letters, and later in his articles (SPWII 224,8) and in his speeches in the party congress at Lyons (SPWII 313,375). He envisaged three broad fields of education, (Figure 8) that would be experienced at different levels and at different life-stages, by different groups both inside and outside the party (SPW1:305, EL:240,242). The first two fields were important for the politics and the function of the party. Neither would be successful unless the party leaders, the cadre and the party members understood and could apply the principles (SPWII:358). The proletarian class outside the party would also need to be clear about the aims and become engaged in the process. He would pursue these ideas in meetings and articles until his arrest in 1926.



**Figure 8 Three broad fields of education**

By February 1924, *Unità* was being published and Gramsci began to write articles which put into practice the proposals he had made to the executive and to his new leading group. In March the third series of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, for which he had editorial responsibility, also appeared. He used it, as he had the original journal, to start a “battle of Ideas” in which any reader could engage and with which he hoped to start discussion within the working class (EL:216).

His correspondence in 1923 to 1924, however, is directed at educating the existing central leading group, by which I mean not only Bordiga’s party executive, and the

enlarged central committee set up after the arrests in February 1923, but also other long standing comrades. For the first time he started to build a personal following. After an eighteen month silence in which there were no letters attributable to Gramsci alone, he wrote to the Italian party executive and to Togliatti in March 1923. There are two letters to Togliatti in the ensuing five months and then there is parallel correspondence to the two groups from December 1923 to March 1924. One strand of correspondence was to the new inner leading group, either as individuals, or as a group, while the other strand was to the official party executive which had been formed by Bordiga and to which Bordiga returned as an influential member. He wrote to his inner group in different terms and sometimes on different topics to the letters which he sent to the executive. He also wrote to individuals within the group, but often marked these letters for circulation to a list of named people.

There are two layers of communication at work in both lines of correspondence. The first is explicit; information, political and educative argument, all aimed at changing the political direction and culture of the party. He gives proposals and rationales for a range of new publications, in terms of their function within the new party policies, their intended audiences and appropriate suggested content. In addition, he issued very detailed instructions about the content, editorial control, layout, production, distribution and finance of the two publications which were launched while he was still in Vienna (EL:137:132:146:168:189). In a form of distance learning, he guided the recipients to rethink their attitudes and behaviour in the light of changing expectations and circumstances. The letters lead the recipients to think about the moral and ethical values they wish the party to promote and to live by, as well as its political aims.

The second layer of communication is implicit and about process. It is discernible in the way in which the letters themselves demonstrate how the political/educative task should be carried out. In the first letter to the new inner group, he says that clarity and coherence are essential within the leading group, before they go to the masses to discuss their new strategy (EL:224). As he tries to achieve both understanding and consensus at the centre of the party amongst old comrades and old adversaries, his letters go through the stages of explaining, supporting, inviting discussion and making concrete proposals for political action. They are positive and supportive in tone, even where they are critical. He tells them about the lack of confidence in the party expressed to him by workers in exile with whom he has talked (EL:231). They explain why, in Gramsci's view, his suggested actions are necessary; that is, in order to widen the party membership base, to work actively for the eventual revolution and government by the workers. In addition, they also needed to create an effective party organisation for the

long term, which also had mechanisms which would help it to survive in the short term, as an effective and secure clandestine party within Italy (EL:225-237).

Togliatti, his university friend and ex-*L'Ordine Nuovo* colleague, received five letters, plus one to be shared with Scoccimarro. Scoccimarro, who had worked with Gramsci in Turin and again in Moscow, received two in addition to the joint Togliatti letter. Germanetto, Arcuno, Tresso and Leonetti; all people with whom he has worked in Turin or Moscow each received one. He wrote one letter to Grieco, which is strictly editorial. Terracini, on the other hand, also an erstwhile colleague from *L'Ordine Nuovo*, received seventeen. Gramsci needed to secure the backing of a group, within the executive or the central committee, before being able to make changes or take over the leadership.

The pattern of correspondence and the content suggests that letters were addressed to individuals in proportion to how important their support was to Gramsci and, in Terracini's case, their importance within the existing executive. Togliatti and Terracini received more letters than the others, because their support is likely to be more influential amongst the executive and the central committee, and Terracini needed a lot of persuasion. For some time, however, Gramsci was still not sure who would support him openly. This is indicated in the single letter to Leonetti, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1924, which presumably was not for circulation (EL:220). He obviously counted Leonetti as a trusted ally, as in the letter he described the positions, as he sees them, of the three other founding members of the *L'Ordine Nuovo*. "Tasca belongs to the minority....Togliatti, as ever, can't decide...and tries to justify his indecision in juridical nitpicking. I think Umberto (Terracini) is even more extreme than Amadeo (Bordiga)...but doesn't have his intellectual strength, his practical sense and organising capacity." Togliatti's support was important to Gramsci on personal and intellectual grounds. Gramsci needed dialogue and discussion to refine and reinforce his ideas. He looked on Togliatti as the leading member of the group in Italy and most of the letters to him are to be circulated to the rest of the group. Politically, therefore, he wanted to ensure that Togliatti was totally clear and in agreement with the new line, so the letters are very frank about the disastrous perception that the Comintern had formed of the Italian party, politically and organisationally under Bordiga (EL:212,214). Togliatti alone did not have to submit articles to Gramsci for editorial approval before publication. Letters to Togliatti are more conceptual and broad brush on politics and organisation than those to Terracini, and it is in a letter to Togliatti that Gramsci made an important statement about the nature of leadership within the party.

### ***Homogenous ideology and creative autonomy***

Gramsci argues that the problems and lessons of people's daily lives, their ideas and material conditions, provide material for intellectual and political work. For that work to be effective, however, intellectuals themselves must undergo, in Gramsci's terms, an intellectual and moral reform in which the way they view their roles and their skills is transformed so that they can play a part in creating a more democratic and just society (Showstack Sassoon 1987:xix).

The first letter he wrote to Togliatti in May 1923, when Togliatti had joined the Executive committee, encapsulated Gramsci's core concept,

we need to create within the party a nucleus, which would not be a faction, of comrades who share maximum ideological homogeneity and who will therefore succeed in imprinting all practical activities with the maximum possible unanimity of direction" (E:118,123).

The politics of the party come first; the goals to be reached and the principles by which the party operates in order to achieve them; then the tasks to be completed on the way can be planned. Only then would the party structures and systems which would make the actions possible be put into place. The only centralisation which was effective was that of belief and understanding. The term "nucleus" was not, I think, a term which Gramsci meant to apply to a central leading group only. I think he envisages the nucleus as leading the party at all levels, so that the homogenous ideology would run through the party as the *filo rosso*, the scarlet thread. Nor did he envisage that the central leading group would consist of a group of people who remained the same. The educative drive would ensure the solid ideological base, but it also had to provide skills, knowledge and information so that a worker could take responsibility for management of larger and larger areas of party work, in preparation for government of the new state.

In the same letter, Gramsci tells Togliatti that he believes the Turin group should lead the party because, "despite our mistakes, we worked positively and we created something"(ibid). He goes on to say that the central group should not worry about the leadership status, but rather moves forward, explaining their political actions to the party and the masses but, "without looking at ourselves too much in the mirror" (ibid). He has practical suggestions to make for political activity. These are polemical; Togliatti should start up discussions about the current political situation, rather than going back over history; in his polemic against the PSI, he should emphasise the gap between what the socialists say and what they actually do (EL:121). Togliatti should make practical proposals to the party, giving the masses concrete targets for action and organisation.

In August 1923, he wrote again; we have only a fragment of this letter, again addressed to Togliatti, and possibly it was meant to be circulated to the putative inner group. Gramsci wants a party which has unity of purpose and vision and politics, and the capability to govern. The inner group, in particular, needed to commit to becoming a party of the masses, to construct different relationships within and outside the party, to eschew any factionism, and to share a single set of understandings and beliefs, the “homogenous ideology”. They needed to increase the level of political activity, to get on with the work, whatever the difficulties, which is what Gramsci meant by “optimism of the will”. He does not want them to get bogged down in structural and procedural issues. He tells them quite clearly that this will make the situation worse. What they must do now, he says, is “work concretely, showing through party actions and by demonstrating the high level of political industriousness needed to meet the situation in Italy, that we are who we say we are. We must stop behaving, as we have until now, like ‘misunderstood geniuses’” (EL: 126). Gramsci tells them sternly that underlying the Comintern’s insistence on the united front, which so exercises Togliatti and the executive, are the Comintern’s real concerns about the capability of the Italian party. He lists them.

“Does it understand the political situation in Italy and is it equipped to lead the proletariat? Is the PCd’I ready to develop a huge political campaign, that is to say, is it ideologically or organisationally equipped for a determinate action? Has the PCd’I leading group assimilated the political doctrine of the Internationale?” (ibid).

He does not need to say that, under Bordiga, the answer would be “no” to all the concerns, but that by contrast the concerns will be addressed in his own politics.

He does not write to Togliatti again until 27<sup>th</sup> January 1924 (SPWII:182,187). The letter is a long one and not for circulation. In it, he analyses the weakness of the existing party organisation, as revealed both by the conflicting reports sent to Moscow, and by his own talks with Italian delegates to the IV Internationale. Based on that evidence, the famed centralisation is nothing more than “the absence of any division of labour or precise attribution of responsibilities” (ibid). He is horrified by the casual way in which appointments have been made and tasks distributed. He says it will be a matter of life or death for the party to have good systems managed by well chosen people: people with wide experience, schooled to be able to cope with anything and able to stay cool and not lose their heads whatever the situation (ibid). They will have to root out a lot of people to get rid of the bad habits of “couldn’t care less”, woolly areas of responsibility, no supervision and, therefore, no immediate sanctions for weak or careless performance. The party must be centralised, but centralisation means “organisation and criteria of limits” and that central decisions, once taken, cannot be altered (SPWII:184,5). In the

postscript to the letter, he spells out to Togliatti, once again, that the organisation of the party cannot be separate from its politics. There was a need for absolute clarity about the relations between leadership and party; party and the working class and eventually, the whole of society. This had to be sorted out by discussion, understood and accepted before the revolution (SPWII:187). His last letter to Togliatti, before returning to Rome, is once again an appeal for clarity and unity, achieved, not by decree, but by communication and discussion (EL:330).

Letters to Terracini are not to be circulated, many of them dealing with editorial or administrative decisions for the existing party. They go into more detail about how the organisation will work, in reply to questions from Terracini, who had been on the executive from the beginning. In his replies, Gramsci explained point by point, his reasons for not signing Bordiga's "Manifesto of the Left" and for changing the politics of the party. He explained why the united front is essential; he made criticisms of the existing organisation, and explained how it should work. He wrote to Terracini,

we are at an historic turning point for the Italian communist movement. This is the moment in which we must, with firm resolution and great precision, lay the new foundations for the development of the party (EL:176).

He sees centralisation in less mechanical terms than Bordiga and Terracini. The essential element is centralisation of politics and purpose and unanimity of approach. If centralisation of belief, and boundaries of competence, were to be established, then operational decisions could be de-centralised. This was the concept of "creative autonomy" (EL:301). If every cell-leader; group secretary; party activist and executive group member shared the same beliefs, the same political aims, the same understanding of the ethics and approach of the party, then the issues of discipline, integrity and unity of action would be "automatically centralised". He explains this concept in his analysis of the ineffectiveness of the Comintern's mandatory instructions, as enacted in most European parties. He outlines how it should have been interpreted, and this outline is a blueprint for how he envisages effective organisation of action for the party, particularly in clandestinity (ibid). When a general order was issued, it would be enacted, taking into account the local situation, according to previously laid down local criteria and guidelines (ibid). It would be as though party workers were all magnetised, when the pulse of orders and tasks came through they would all point true north without need of detailed instructions for every step, from the centre.

...I am more and more convinced that we, in our country, have to work to build a strong party, which is politically and organizationally well-equipped and robust,

with a full kitbag of general ideas which are very clear and very well embedded in each individual consciousness, so that there is no possibility of falling apart at every blow from the sort of issues which will crop up every day, becoming more numerous and dangerous as the situation develops and the objectives of the revolutionary movement become stronger” (EL: 303).

He goes on to say that the leading group needs to develop the kind of spirit of togetherness and the certainty of having the support of the whole group when they solve problems that has been the great strength of the Russian party (ibid).

Letters to Terracini tend to explain a concept again in terms of the concrete. Terracini had asked for clarification of the policy on unions and activism in factories, of creating illegal organisations, which Gramsci had discussed in a letter to his inner group (EL:332). Gramsci explained that he had carefully avoided advocating specific forms of illegal activity, because he had been out of Italy too long to know what the situation on the ground really was, and, therefore, what was possible. What he was asking the group to do, was to frame the problem and come up with a workable solution, for something that the party and the workers could actually do to make them feel less isolated and scattered.

... we have to get out of this stagnation. We've got to get out of the present pattern where everything ends up as an exchange of letters and in meetings...we have got to get started and at least start discussing amongst ourselves so that we have clear ideas and precise directives. I think that you agree on that at least (EL:334).

The party will have to find new techniques for agitation, propaganda and organisation. In fact, he suggests ways in which, with minimum risk, a big demonstration on 1<sup>st</sup> May could be organised (ibid). Although he had written individual letters to Terracini and Scoccimarro, to explain why he would not sign the manifesto, and to explain his political aims, he does this all over again, at Terracini's request, for the new inner group.

### ***The Inner group and the Party Executive***

There is a difference between the letters to the two groups, which is similar to the difference in style of letter between Togliatti and Terracini, one theoretical and one transactional. Gramsci, said his friends in Turin, was born to be a teacher (Bermani 2007:299). Intuitively, he started each group from the things they knew, understood and could actually put into action in their different circumstances, and then moved them forward. In early 1924, the inner group members had no power of their own to start party

tasks, but they are the future ruling group so he needed them to be solidly in agreement with him and each other. He, therefore, concentrated on the politics. He writes more specifically to this group about future policies. Not every letter to the inner group deals with all the educative and political tasks overtly, but each of them reiterates Gramsci's political approach, reinforcing the "homogenous ideology" and demonstrating his own educative technique. His letters implicitly illustrate, as well as explicitly describe, how he expects to achieve ideological homogeneity.

What Gramsci was helping them to do was to think more critically and, indeed, self-critically since he says in the past self-criticism and reasoned discussion has been sorely lacking (SPWII:191). He refers to their shared experience as evidence of past achievement, as well as past mistakes; they know how to work alongside the workers but they were not able to consolidate and expand the movement. Now they need to collect and analyse information, so that they can plan strategically from the concrete and he insists that they must use analysis of the contemporary political situation, both international and Italian to inform their actions for the present and the future (EL:235).

He reminds them about the Factory Council model of dialogue. Workers became politically conscious and committed by listening to the *Ordine Nuovo* group and by subsequent discussion: importantly, this had been a dialogue. The *Ordine Nuovo* group, in turn, had listened to responses as ideas were tested out on the Factory Councils. As a result, when ideas emerged as policy or strategy, there was already a current of support and ownership (EL:297). He demonstrates his process again in his letters. He asks them as individuals or as a group, for concrete details about the situation in the party and in daily life, so that strategies can be based in reality. He shows them that he listens. He quotes letters he has received from workers in support of his belief of the understanding and energy which can come from the bottom up, to revitalise the party (EL:254). His letters almost always include general suggestions for tangible actions, which, in the right circumstances, might be taken to move the party forward. He refuses to issue specific directions for action at this stage because he says that has been away too long and no longer knows what the mass of workers endure or think (EL:333). The principles are immutable, but the practice must be based in reality.

The letters to the executive are more businesslike, more didactic than influencing, less friendly. There are no individual reminiscences or best wishes to wives and the content is much more direct and provocative. He tells them quite clearly from the beginning the new direction they must take. Gramsci expects argument and discussion because, in his experience, that is the best way for adults to learn. Although he did not commit to



leading the party until a letter to Togliatti and Scoccimarro on March 1<sup>st</sup> 1924, the letters to the executive all contain proposals directed at implementing his own and the Comintern's policies, by actions to expand the party and increase its influence. The executive itself had spent much of its time over the past two years developing a party organisation, based on structures and systems and struggling to survive. Despite their efforts the party had shrunk. Although there is much less detail about future political strategies, the letters propose actions, which will change the party's direction, in a very concrete way by tasks which could be attempted legally.

The tasks are almost all educational, and in the form of new publications. He proposes eight new publications or series in the letters (EL:146, EL:184)). Given the journalistic expertise of the existing executive, and the dearth of any other activists this was a practical starting point. He recognised that the party desperately needed a middle layer of leaders and, in 1923, he had described it as a party which consisted of generals and foot soldiers which needed officers and NCOs to make it function (CPC:5). This middle group, the cadre, would be needed to recruit, educate and organise in all the fields of expansion for the party. Gramsci could not reach this group directly in 1923 and early 1924, but because they will be so crucial to his intended policies and to the growth of a new sphere of influence in society, he brings the immediate need for them and their training into the correspondence to the executive. Through the process of discussing what this middle group would need to possess, in terms of experience, qualities, and commitment; what functions they would undertake and, therefore, what education and training they would need, Gramsci was able to repeat the politics of the new party and its new direction without repeatedly lecturing the executive directly.

In September 1923, he had proposed that the paper, which the Comintern wished to found in Italy, should not be overtly communist, although the communist executive would control the contents. This was a ruse to keep it legal, so as to reach and influence a broad range of readers, and to provide workers with information about socialist activity, inside and outside Italy. He suggested the paper be named *Unità* to symbolise the various unities which he lists; between worker and peasant; between north and south; between the party and other anti fascist organisations and between the factions of the PCd'I whose splits have so concerned workers. It should publish articles from any political anti-fascist group, so long as the copy passed the editorial standard (EL:129,131). On 6<sup>th</sup> December, he agreed to edit a new series of *L'Ordine Nuovo* which will, once again, be a journal of working class politics and culture and whose masthead would proclaim its intention to create a worker, peasant vanguard who would help to found a worker/peasant government in a communist society (EL:133).

On 20<sup>th</sup> December, he wrote again to the executive (EL:146). This time, the letter focuses on publications for specific audiences. The sort of knowledge that Gramsci wanted to disseminate to the party members would also be published to the widest possible audience. Society, as a whole, needed an alternative viewpoint and concrete information from which to make critical judgements. As part of this, legal or semi-legal publications needed to be founded or relaunched, to provide a vehicle for information and political discussion. He proposed an annual review, mainly factual, for party members or “sympathisers” of current affairs. These would include political, economic and military information about Italy, Western Europe and Russia, with essays on Marxism, and explanatory articles about the Comintern. Next, he suggested a quarterly, aimed at the education of the “better qualified members who hold responsibilities” which would also “establish sympathy for our movement amongst intellectual and technocrat circles” (ibid). Each edition would have a central theme arranged in three sections; theory; issues in Italy, and a section of bibliography and critiques of publications dealing with the theme. Finally, he proposes a series of “elementary propaganda” tracts to be available for distribution and sale in factories and workshops (ibid).

Part of the letter is about the Petrograd school for party workers. He tells them that they have not been doing enough to support this; that it is imperative to improve the skills level of the party workers, and that money must be found to send them to Petrograd and to support them and their families. Selection of candidates must be made on strictly political and moral criteria. On January 5<sup>th</sup> 1924, the Petrograd school is the first topic of the letter (EL:163). He repeats that candidates must be chosen by criteria which are rigorously political and in accord with party morality.

Then, over January and early February, there is a very interesting series of letters which are contrapuntal; two to the executive and two to the inner group. On the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1924, he wrote to the Italian executive (EL:184). The letter is entirely about the importance of educative preparation, whether by mass publication for party members and the proletariat, or limited publication for the specific needs of the party. He told them that the lack of mass publication has resulted in the masses, (and party members are included in this), being dominated by the influence of the state-controlled press. At best, he tells them, this means the proletariat have now given up revolutionary activities and wait passively for democracy to return; at worst, some party leaders have even tried to expunge any revolutionary ideology (ibid). The right wing communist faction and the socialists have managed to retain legality and can still publish, and have taken advantage of that to take over our readership. If the situation continues, the leaders of

the right wing grouping, “will end up exercising the function of political leaders for the proletariat and will inevitably wipe out the authority and prestige of our central committee which can only now and then, irregularly, remind the masses that it exists” (ibid).

The executive must also solve another issue; the party has a core of faithful members who must be considered as future cadre of the party. Gramsci thought that, for at least five years after the re-establishment of some freedoms, they would be the only people the party could rely on to run the party. The party must not assume “that past work and experience will suffice...they must be supported and directed by a whole range of party activity” (ibid). He went on to say that the same is true of the hundreds of exiled and emigrant workers, who should have not only political education, but specific training to become party cadre on their return. He proposed solutions to the problems he set out. The party needs to select and train three hundred people capable of being regional officers and three thousand for first level jobs in the party (ibid). Then he went on to talk about “strictly intellectual initiatives” which he summarised:

- A periodical, two to three times yearly, which would inspire and organise the first line of the party around an activity.

For the periodical, he asks each member of the executive by name to write an article. There is a certain irony about the choices: Bordiga on revolutionary tactics; Togliatti on the Vatican; Tasca on Education and the political significance of the Gentile reforms; Terracini on the Comintern programme and progress, so far and so on (ibid). He is, however, acknowledging their political and journalistic expertise and ensuring their names appear as part of the new drive. The executive were pleased and this publication proposal was accepted immediately (EL:239).

- Create party schools, especially abroad
- Create a correspondence course about the party organisation and the organisational principles proper to the party, in all fields. Instalments two and three will aim to create elements we will call second level.

He goes on to say that this is just an outline and that the activities are interdependent and must not lead to closed ranks and certificates which guarantee tasks or jobs (ibid)

- Publications for bookshops, “the series, having been planned to meet the need for elementary propaganda to defend our principles, programme and our ideology in general” (ibid).

Later, he goes on to list the sort of topics he has in mind, which include translations from Lenin; the Southern Question; how to organise and manage a party school and a guide for a self-taught worker. A second anthology will be on Historical Materialism and, besides essays on Marx, Engels and Bucharin, will contain monographs on the Agrarian question; the Trade Union question; issue of schools and culture and so on (ibid). Thus, at the same time as he explains what needs to be done to rebuild the party and to equip, fortify and galvanise the masses, he is educating the executive in the principles of the new orientation.

On February 9<sup>th</sup> 1924, he wrote to the new inner group, as a whole, for the first time explaining, "...in broad outline, the reasons why I find it necessary at this moment to bring about not merely a fundamental discussion before the mass of party members on our internal situation, but also to a new alignment of the groups seeking leadership of the party" (SPWII:191,203). What follows is a detailed critique of Bordiga's manifesto, a clear statement of the need for open discussion of general issues within the wider party, and an analysis of the current situation in which Bordiga's leadership has left them. The existing party has a narrow and re-active policy; an inefficient organisation; a tendency to splinter groups; misconceptions of the process of revolution and of the real meaning of centralisation, and is divorced from the proletariat who, confused by the polemics, have become apathetic. Under Bordiga, the party had ignored or disapproved of spontaneous worker action. Gramsci argued that the party had to become involved in, and to exploit, any action which arose directly from the workforce, turning it into a political act. This would channel the motivation and the energy of the workers toward the party's own ends and the workers would see themselves as contributing to the communist cause and the party as something organic (SPWII:198).

The party should recognise that the dictatorship of the proletariat, which remained its ultimate aim, would probably only be achieved after several intermediate stages and it needed to prepare for that process. The party must publish "detailed theses on the situation and possible phases of future development" (ibid). In addition, based on his analysis, he proposed some immediate tasks which the party must undertake. Firstly, there are organisational tasks, which include setting up an agitation and propaganda committee. Then there are practical problems which the party must tackle to re-engage the masses across Italy. It must find ways to work within the unions, by setting up communist cells or Factory Councils in industry, or worker cells for rural workers. It must bring the Milanese proletariat into the party. They must organise and recruit the seamen and railway workers, because they have political rather than purely trade union significance. Finally, and essentially, they must win over the peasants, particularly in the

south (*ibid*). Such an increase in activity would require a corresponding increase in people to do the work, from cell organisers and party secretaries to regional co-ordinators. In Bordiga's organisation, these jobs had been parcelled out to whoever was available or willing; there had been no indoctrination or training of any kind. Gramsci's party, while apparently less formally structured would be much more rigorous, in selection, in education and training and in expectations.<sup>6</sup>

The next day, 10<sup>th</sup> February, he sent a letter to the executive which outlined in detail what he intended to include in the first correspondence course and how it would be of practical use to members in the current situation (EL:239). Topics included, "Working amongst the peasants and the organisational relations between workers and peasants, with a brief look at the issue of religion", and "The issue of education and general preparation of party members". Its rationale is the last topic for the course. "Demonstration of how and why every form and necessary action of the organisation should be closely tied to the necessities for a victorious revolution" (EL:241). The final page of each instalment of the course will be given over to general responses, to frequently asked questions, although individual letters will also receive a reply. In effect, the list of practical uses and topics reminds his colleagues of the party principles and of all the ways in which revolutionary actions can be taken, from leafleting to security screening. They have also been reminded of the importance of dialogue and that learning from it is mutual. In these letters, the executive have been asked to initiate a wide range of education and training for a large number of people. They have been told this is in order to form a party cadre, but there have been only general indications of their tasks and functions. The new inner group has been given Gramsci's political priorities for their deployment. This meant that only Togliatti, Scoccimarro and Terracini, who were his inner group allies within the executive, saw the whole picture. In fact, after Gramsci took his decision on March 1<sup>st</sup> to go for the leadership of the party, he did not write to the party executive about political plans for Italy again. He concentrated on reinforcing the political and ethical unity of the inner group.

On March 1<sup>st</sup> 1924, he wrote a long letter to Togliatti and Scoccimarro, with instructions to copy, "the sections which seem important to you", for Terracini (EL:253,265). Much of the letter is about writing an analysis of the Italian situation, which will lead on to new strategies for the party, to be presented at a party conference to form the basis of the new leadership. The main points of the strategy have a strong educative flavour and cover the three fields of education he had identified in 1920 (CF:216). These are;

---

<sup>6</sup> Under Bordiga there had been no security vetting either, resulting in at least one appointment to a sensitive post in the party of a carabinieri officer working undercover (EL:307fn).

detailed and incessant propaganda and real action to promulgate the motion for the worker/peasant government; battle against the insular ideas of the skilled workers of the north (in reformist unions), this will link the poorly paid northern workers with the peasants of the south and the islands; study of the possibility of armed insurrection in the South and the islands; reorganisation of the party; saturation level of political education, “so as to avoid serious argument or discord at the culminating moment of our actions” (ibid); broadening of the sphere of party leadership; creation of an upper level of leadership; audit of party members and their political biographies “so that we can keep in contact with the best ones, stimulate, improve, supervise and guide them continually”(ibid); better management and preparation of the emigrant workers; creation of party schools in every important foreign centre directed from a central office, put three or four emigrant workers on the management committee(ibid). This is a clear picture (which he wants the inner group to discuss with him or endorse) of an Italy, galvanised by political and moral education, by the engagement of ordinary people in the process of revolution, into finally forming itself into a nation as well as a socialist state.

As he was writing these letters, he was also writing articles for mass publication. The first edition of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, March 1924, says that it will be renewing the struggle to deepen the political education of the masses, in order that they should be able to think clearly about the issues (CPC: 162). On April 1<sup>st</sup>, in an article, “The programme of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, Gramsci set out the mission of the journal (SPWII: 224,228). This was to support, by educative means, the political task of the party to bring about the Internationale’s aim of a government of workers and peasants. In order to achieve this, it would be necessary to show how this slogan applied to Italy; how it was relevant to every aspect of daily life and how it answered the concerns of all the disparate pressure groups.

Thus in Gramsci’s eyes, the success of the Italian revolution depended above all on the immense task of educating and mobilizing the masses and of the development of a vast non-sectarian (non-Bordigan) part based on the working class and aimed at gaining the majority of it, but at the same time allied with other social groups such as the peasantry and the lower middle classes...(Lawner,1975:55)

The party, supported by *L'Ordine Nuovo*, would need to bring the masses up to the same political level as other member countries of the Internationale. Having outlined this huge educative task, Gramsci continued by saying that talking would not be enough, the party would need to back the propaganda by systems and people who could organise action, sustain the movement and translate popular energy into political progress (SPWII:227).

Slogans only serve to impel the broad masses into movement and to give them a general orientation. But woe betide the party responsible if it has not thought about organizing them in practice; about creating a structure which will discipline them and make them permanently strong" (ibid).

So Gramsci's focus here, and the mission of the journal, is the preparation of a large and competent cadre based on existing members, who should each, "be personally dear to us", and at whom the range of education he proposes has been targeted (ibid). This is not general education; this is training for the fight.

Our task is to improve the cadres: to make them capable of confronting the forthcoming struggles...Experience in all countries has shown...that the most favourable situations can be reversed as result of the weakness of the cadres of the revolutionary party (ibid).

He sets out the details of the party schools at home and abroad, and of the correspondence course and makes an appeal for the money to be raised by his readers to pay for it (ibid). The educative task is quite clearly an integral part of the political task, to meet the aims of the Internationale and to construct the sort of party which will help to do it. These articles are proof that he expects his proposals to the executive to be acted upon. They repeat the core messages of the need for political education; for ideological homogeneity to ensure his kind of centralisation; of the value of open discussion and of discipline and leadership.

### ***The Party School***

In April 1925, he wrote an article in *L'Ordine Nuovo*, to publicise the first course of the party school (CPC:48). Gramsci is at pains to point out here that the school is strictly vocational, the calling is the party and the education is entirely focused on its aims. It must never lose its character of "passionate militancy" to become instead "objective study" and unbiased culture" (ibid). "Study and culture for us", he says, "can only be the theoretical consciousness of our immediate and long term aims and the ways in which we can succeed in turning them into action" (ibid). In the introduction to Part One of the notes for the Party school course, he explains why the training of experienced and long serving members is so essential (SPWII: 285,292). Not only do these members need to be really clear about the Marxist doctrine, so that in the present they can keep any worker militant action on the right lines, but they also need to form the framework able to organise and educate the expected influx of new recruits, so that in the future the party is

not overwhelmed and its beliefs diluted. The course will train them in the three fronts of the struggle; political, economic and ideological. As far as the average worker is concerned, these three fronts are as one, because s/he cannot be expected to understand the complexity of the role which the proletariat is destined to play in mankind's development; "but the party can and must, as a whole, represent this higher consciousness. Otherwise it will not be at the head but at the tail of the masses; it will not lead them but being dragged along behind" (ibid). The members of the cadre, given the dangers ahead, may have to exercise "creative autonomy" and leadership, based on the centralisation of belief, which they will have established.

In order for the party to live and be in contact with the masses, it is necessary for every member of the party to be an active political element, a leader. Precisely because the party is strongly centralised a vast amount of propaganda and agitation amongst its ranks is required. It is necessary for the party in an organised fashion to educate its members and raise their ideological level. Centralisation means, in particular, that in any situation whatsoever...even if the leading committees are unable to function for a given period...all members of the party, and everyone in its ambit, have been rendered capable of orienting themselves and knowing how to derive from reality the elements with which to establish a line, so that the working class is not cast down but will feel that it is being led and can still fight. Mass ideological preparation is thus a necessity of revolutionary struggle, and one of the indispensable conditions for victory (SPWII:290).

In the introduction to Part Two of the Party School notes, "The Life of the School", Gramsci outlined an original and constructive solution to the difficulties of the correspondence course (CPC:58). Pedagogically, this is a remarkable document. First, he analysed the difficulties and gave them a political element. The students were very diverse in educational experience, ability, work context and life experience, because the party was now much bigger and worked across rural as well as urban contexts. The education system in Italy was designed to divide the classes. It reinforced the dominance of the bourgeois ruling class and undermined and restricted the knowledge, the technical skills and the intellectual skills of the working class, so that they had no confidence in their own competence or opinions. A correspondence course was the only solution for a small semi-legal party, even though the distance between individual learners and between them and a tutor was a great disadvantage. Moreover, the party could not devote sufficient people to answer six hundred letters every fortnight if they all requested support.

Gramsci went on to illustrate his own understanding of how education for adults works best. He described the ideal learning situation within a face to face group, which is very similar to his own "educational experiment", which he described in 1918 (EL:92). At that



time, he had devised individualised learning and facilitative techniques for discussions. In the ideal school he describes in 1925, the teacher knows his students and designs the material and adapts his methods to their individual strengths and weaknesses, “and seeks to make the school live collectively in such a way that each individual is continually developed, and that such development is organic and systematic” (CPC:58). With regard to the course notes, he admitted the disadvantages of the rather authoritarian learning notes; they are too abstract and rigid and need to be challenged, discussed and related to the real world. They seem abstract, because they have been written for an imaginary average student. It would be “more just and rational”, says Gramsci, to write specific notes for each group of learners adapted to their sphere of production or their social circumstances (ibid). Gramsci however, is bracing in the face of difficulty. He said that everyone, ultimately, is self taught, even the best school cannot be a substitute for initiative in learning. For the working class, this school “will complete and clarify their concrete experience which has been learnt from life, give people an aim, teach them to generalise and to reason better and more quickly” (ibid).

Gramsci’s descriptions of the ideal learning situation, the best way to write a distance course and the extent to which everyone is self-taught, reveal his confidence in the individual and his belief in self discipline and responsibility. This is further explored in his solution to the difficulties of distance learning. It was necessary to find a cheap effective system to support the learners. His solution was also designed to involve students in managing the learning process themselves. It would be necessary to create a layer of party tutors from the workers themselves. His idea was that learners should meet locally in order to study together and should elect a tutor from their number. (He had outlined criteria of length of service in the movement, participation in the organization of the party or a union, personal qualities of morality and commitment when sketching the party tutor to the executive in 1924 (EL:241). Now the criteria are, “willingness, length of service and comparatively better education, etc, etc.”(CPC:61). Working together would allow the groups to answer many of the questions themselves. The tutor need only forward difficult questions to the party. The tutors’ more important task was to study the material for the class in advance, so that they could explain difficult ideas and help the others to understand concepts which had been written too abstractly. The class and the tutor had to explore their local economic and political context and collect data and real examples, so that the theoretical questions for discussion became relevant and concrete. Every lesson had to be contextualised, “and should explain the phenomena, whether political, economical or ideological, which fall within comrades’ experience” (ibid). The education would be active not passive. In addition, by doing this work the tutors also prepared

themselves to be able to organise the propaganda for an area, or to become cell-leaders (ibid).

Although this was a creative and pragmatic method of supporting party members to become the new cadre, and of helping the tutors to teach themselves to be an immediate second line management layer, there are some danger points. The system relied on the good sense of the group to pick the most suitable leader in the “first selection”. There is no model for the second stage of selection. The system then relied on this leader being sufficiently indoctrinated in the party dogma to be able to answer the “simple questions”, and to do so in a desired way. S/he needed to be able to distinguish which questions needed to be forwarded and to have the skill to draw out argument and highlight important ideas. Clearly, it would be difficult to ensure homogeneity in the first courses with uncontrolled selection of tutors. Gramsci had earlier proposed “inspectors” to monitor political education as part of the party training system, in 1924 (EL:242). Perhaps, in time, these would have been put into place. Gramsci, however, had faith in the workers’ ability to organise their learning. He said that the vitality of the party school would be in direct proportion to the active participation of students. This would be enrichment, not just in individual learning, but in the students’ increased effectiveness in the party. The political practice and organisation of the party would be improved and more people would return to the workplace with heightened political consciousness, so that the political struggle would be intensified (CPC:62).

### **Conclusion**

A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise “leadership” before winning governmental power (this is indeed one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to “lead” as well. Antonio Gramsci (SPN:57).

Gramsci returned to Italy in 1924, appointed by the Comintern to take over the PCd’I. He was, says Spriano, “a man transformed” (Spriano 1967:291). He was not only more *self*-confident, but determined and confident of success. His health had improved and he was emotionally fulfilled. In Moscow he had met and married a beautiful girl, Giulia Schucht and had become a father. Despite what he saw as his deformity, he felt that he was finally as other men (EL:324). When he re-entered Italian politics officially in June 1924, he was to make a determined attempt to disseminate a comprehensible ideology, and create far-seeing policies and a robust organisation. He foresaw this would be necessary to fortify the communist cells. The party needed to give them a solid basis for

belief and survival, in an increasingly dangerous situation. He travelled around Italy as much as he could, meeting workers, peasants and party members, whilst still acting as a parliamentary deputy, editing *L'Ordine Nuovo* and writing at least 133 papers and articles (Davidson 1977:215). On 1<sup>st</sup> September 1924, in "The Italian Crisis" (SPWII: 265,266), he wrote of the party's "historic mission". This remained recruitment and education of the greatest number of workers and peasants, in order to make them into organisers and leaders. There also needed to be an enormous amount of work in trades unions (ibid). Although at the first party congress in Como in summer 1924, he still did not have the majority vote, by the time of the Lyons congress, two years later, he had truly become the leader of the party which was gaining membership and authority. He had built on the ideas which he had shared with his colleagues by letter from Vienna. This correspondence is arguably the most important educative work Gramsci undertook. Looking back, Togliatti was to say that Gramsci was thinking, "at a much higher level" than the rest of his group (cited Spriano 1967:346).

There was a last, important exchange of correspondence in 1926. News of the leadership struggle, and the rift between Stalin and Trotsky, had reached everywhere and Gramsci was worried about the effect it was having on other communist parties and the ammunition it was providing for the opposition press. In September 1926, he wrote to Togliatti in Moscow, enclosing a letter of rebuke to the Soviet government (SPWII:426). Gramsci was deeply concerned by the international implications of the split in the Russian leadership. Such a split would threaten the foundations of his own struggle to create a nucleus with a homogenous ideology. He says in the letter, that he had been confident that, if this were achieved, "the party would be better prepared and equipped to overcome the multiple difficulties which attend the exercise of power in a workers' state" (ibid). A new hegemony required a change in minds and hearts, first from the proletariat and then from the agrarian masses. In order to lead the revolution, the proletariat needed to become virtuous and disciplined, moving from seeking individual profit to serving the common good. The hegemony will be established, "if it is very rich in the spirit of sacrifice, and has freed itself completely from every residue of reformist or syndicalist corporativism" (SPWII:430). This was entirely an educative matter and, as such, needed exemplars and leadership to carry it out. The proletariat needed to see unity and discipline in the ruling group (SPWII:32). He points out this is a pragmatic consideration. The proletariat would need to believe in this moral high ground and the assurance of unity and sacrifice among the ruling group, in order to sustain it in the face of continuing material hardship. Boldly, he used a Russian example to contrast the poverty of the new ruling class, the proletariat, with the conspicuous wealth of the vanquished, "the Nepman in his furs" (ibid). The principles and practice of the hegemony

of the proletariat was threatened by Russian disunity. It would undo the educative work in building a party cadre that Italy had undertaken under Russian guidance. "...it is halting this process of development and elaboration...putting off once again the achievement of organic unity of the world party of the workers" (op cit:429). He accuses the Russians of destroying their own legacy and losing their "leading function" (op cit:430).

It is clear from this letter that Gramsci retained a quasi-religious belief in the educative element of the Marxist Leninism mission to change the world. The letter is ostensibly from the PCd'I executive, but it is a deeply personal statement and the personal consequences for him would reverberate down the years.

### ***Post Scriptum***

The letter to the Russian ruling council of September 1926 was never officially delivered. Togliatti, who supported Stalin's stance, advised against it. Gramsci was prevented by the Fascist secret police from attending a party conference in Italy where he intended to defend his position. Influenced by correspondence with Togliatti the party executive decided in Gramsci's absence, that given their dependence on Russian support, the letter was unwise. Togliatti distanced himself from Gramsci. Togliatti had, however, shown the letter to Manuil'skij and its contents were certainly known to Stalin (Daniele, Vacca 1999: 426).

Stalin's government was never to countenance attempts to free, or to make an exchange for the leader of the Communist Party of Italy, Antonio Gramsci (Rossi, Vacca 2007:12).

## Chapter Seven: Prisoner 7047

### The Red Cockatoo

And they did to it what is always done  
 To the learned and the eloquent,  
 They took a cage with stout bars  
 And shut it up inside.  
 Po Chü-i AD 772-846 Translated by Arthur Whaley

### ***Introduction***

Antonio Gramsci was arrested, illegally, at 10.30 pm on November 6<sup>th</sup> 1926. Whatever the official charges, the real reason was articulated by the prosecutor at his show trial. “We must prevent this brain from functioning for twenty years” (Fiori 1977:230). Despite incompetent and hostile medical supervision, which exacerbated his medical conditions and eventually resulted in constant and extreme pain; despite sleep deprivation and poor diet; despite the depersonalising grind of the prison regulations and of prison life and despite isolation from his loved ones, the Fascist state never succeeded in this intent. This chapter explores the purposes and the layered meaning of the letters, rather than the “*Prison Notebooks*”, because the letters contain Gramsci’s *public* messages, both political and personal. In particular, it explores the educational import of the letters. They were the only method open to him to continue to be visible and through them, Gramsci continued his political mission to change society.

### ***The importance of the letters as political documents***

What do we know of Antonio Gramsci in November 1926? He was a man with two passions; the construction of a Communist party as a stage in the development of a socialist state, and his love for his wife and sons, in that order. Gramsci’s working life lasted only twenty two years, from 1915 to his death in 1937, and was bisected by his arrest almost halfway between those two dates. The writings from these two halves of his life are the expressions and product of two very different ways of being. The writing of the first half is the expression of a controlled and controlling self, gradually progressing towards professional mastery and political importance; able to articulate, and to lead the realisation of a new mode of being for Italian society. This was a man who had some control over his life and destiny, and a vision of the future, both in private for his personal life, as well as a public one for Italy. His writings from this period are almost all public, that is, intended for publication. They are newspaper articles or political documents such

as the report of the Como conference and the Lyons Theses. There are a small number of letters intended for publication, many of which are also public. There are surprisingly few private letters, even to his new wife, who had remained in Moscow.

The second half of his life was spent under physical control by his enemies, who wished to prevent him from taking further action of any kind in social and political change. They intended to prevent him from communicating his vision. From his arrest in 1926, therefore, the balance between the forms of writing he used had to change. Firstly, he was not allowed to write in his cell for the first two years, or indeed to write anything except letters, and then only in the communal room. At Turi he was finally given permission to write in his cell, *with the exception of* letters, which still had to be written communally. Gramsci used his time in prison to continue to study and to think. He would reflect on his political experience from childhood in Sardinia to leadership in Rome; on its Italian social and political context, and on the relationship between the Italian experience and its context to the international one. His political theories, written in the *Prison Notebooks*, on hegemony; the intellectuals; the party; the state and on education, when first published in an edited form twenty years after his death, were swiftly acknowledged as the most original and important Marxist thought of the twentieth century. However, these writings remained inside his cell with Gramsci, the pages of the exercise books counted and stamped, to make sure they did. On the other hand, he started to write letters to family and friends within days of his arrest in November 1926 and they alone reached 'the vast and terrible world'. The writings of this part of his life, therefore, are adjuncts to, or actually function as, his political activity.

His letters from prison, like those from Vienna, represent his efforts at directing political action from a distance. They illustrate how apparently private letters may serve a public and political purpose and indicate a tension between public and private in his life. He wrote prolifically in prison. His study notes, *Prison Notebooks* (Q) filled thirty two exercise books, and he wrote around 500 letters to friends and family, most of which have been published as the *Letters from Prison* (LP1 and LP2). The letters, having won the Viareggio Prize for Nonfiction in 1947, have gradually come to be regarded as a literary classic and their political importance downplayed. This is partly because they are almost all addressed to family members and partly because their content is medical, domestic and affective, as well as cultural and intellectual. As a literary classic, the letters are seen as a personal and private story of an heroic struggle against physical pain and mental torment. They give an inspiring and pathetic account of one man's tragic descent through hell to death. The contemporary importance and the purposes of

the letters, as opposed to the study notes, and the perception of what was private and what public, has, in my view, become distorted by their subsequent publication.

Gramsci had been a journalist, educator and politician for eleven years, so it is not reasonable to suppose that he could stop being a communicator of ideas; a conveyor of political messages while in prison. Just because he could not write directions for the current political activity did not mean that he could not write politically. The messages were sent out in his letters. This was, after all, a method of direction which he had used from 1922 to 1924, from Moscow and Vienna to the party in Rome, and then again from 1924 to 1926, when he was in Rome and Togliatti and other leading party members were in Moscow. Using letters to direct political strategy and action, to explain and persuade, was a technique he had used before, albeit as little as possible. From Vienna, the political direction in the letters had been tempered by the friendly tone and the personal additions. In the letters to Giulia from Vienna and Rome the intimate was interwoven with political comment and analysis. Gramsci never wrote idly, and certainly not letters which, hitherto, had been his least favourite written form, as he admitted himself in a letter to his friend Berti in 1927;

... I have calculated that this year is the most epistoliferous of my entire life; it is possible that I didn't write as many letters in all of my (preceding) existence as I've written this year. Let this be said especially for you, who again and again have insinuated calamitous rumours with regard to my congenital antiepistolography (sic) (LP1:149).

The letters then are significant. That is, they convey meanings and purposes on several levels. Many of them are broadly political in the maintenance of his political persona and his example of resistance (LP1:70, 84,106). In them he told stories and fables which illustrated the moral values and stance required of committed Communists (LP1:101,116,125). He talked about the importance of personal responsibility and accountability. The letters reminded the party of Gramsci's continuing role as political thinker and as a cultural and moral leader, even though he could no longer be the active, concrete leader.

The party established a fragile two-way line of communication between 1931 and 1932, and there is then a short period where the letters give specific political messages. Gramsci was able to register his opposition to the major change in strategy. The letters of that period also provide a commentary and a clarification, in a nutshell, of the ideas in the *Prison Notebooks* on hegemony and the role of education, and of the intellectuals in its construction. Gramsci's politics, before prison, were based on the essential task of creating a new hegemony and he repeatedly wrote that a huge educative effort would be

needed to accomplish it. There is a continuous stream of messages in the letters centred on the educative. Besides the stories and fables, and indeed forthright advice for adults, he commented generally about the place of education within any political system; about the Italian education system and particularly about the education of his Sardinian nieces and nephews. He commented on the Russian system for his own children. If society is to be changed from the bottom up, both in terms of knowledge and skills, and more importantly in values, what better way to start than with children? The letters addressed to both the Russian and Sardinian families, which focus on the educative, whether for the adults or the children, should also be regarded as political.

Of course the letters were personal too and the personal and the political are often intertwined. Through the letters, we can see how he struggled to sustain his image of himself, to maintain a relationship with Giulia, his wife, and to survive physically and mentally. Finally, the letters become a dialogue with himself as well as with Tania, Giulia and his sons, as he tries to create a new self and a new set of values which will allow him to survive, whilst keeping his Self and his honour intact.

To portray oneself as striving for noble ends is to generate expectations, and to open oneself to reproach should the narrative not “ring true” in terms of subsequent actions. By one’s narratives, then, one’s moral status is negotiated, and the result is one to which the person can subsequently be held responsible (Macintyre cited Gergen 2005: 114 ).

### ***The patterns within the correspondence***

The rhythm of the letters was dictated by prison regulation. From internal exile in Ustica he could write out freely to friends and family. From Milan and Rome prisons,

while awaiting trial, he was again allowed to write to both friends and family from his cell, although everything was subject to censorship. Once sentenced and transferred to Turi, he became subject to the full force of prison regulation and to a governor who imposed every petty restriction he possibly could, including those which had actually been superseded elsewhere (Fiori 1970). Under this regime, Gramsci was allowed one sheet of paper a fortnight on which, in an hour and a half exactly on every other Monday, letters had to be written. In prison, Gramsci both literally and figuratively had no time for pointless chat, “I really don’t know what to write to Giulia... and I don’t want to write a ‘proper’ letter, as people say” (LP1:297). He could write only to members of his family and even these had to be previously checked and approved. He could only send one letter. Since the single sheet of paper with which he was issued was large, he often wrote two letters on it to two different family members and one half would be sent on. It



was usually his sister-in-law, Tania, who forwarded sections of the letters to his two families, to Sardinia, or to Moscow but she also sent copies of his letters to the party.

Thus the letters were never private. Throughout his time in prison everything that he sent from, or that was sent to him in prison, was read or scrutinised with care or suspicion by a number of people. At least two of the prison staff read the letters he sent, as is shown by the stamps and signatures on them. Gramsci felt inhibited by censorship and never became used to it, so that he was unable to express his feelings freely to his wife as he had done before from Vienna and Rome (LP1:40,55, LP2:373). On occasion, the letters he sent were confiscated, never reaching the intended recipient, and have subsequently been found in the State archives. He commented on goods not received, or incoming letters questioned. Although the letters could only be sent out to named and approved members of his family, Gramsci knew that their circulation went beyond the named recipient. In 1927, Tania, Giulia's sister, moved to Milan to be near him, "doubtless with the mandate of the party and with help from the Soviet Legation for whom she worked" (Vacca 2007:15). Tania's lack of association with the Italian communist party was an advantage, as she could become an approved correspondent and visitor, but she was able to write to the Party, and was able to pass on news or to give any material help to Gramsci much more quickly than anyone else. Thus, from early 1927, there was a makeshift link with the party *via* her.

Piero Sraffa, an economist who had been on the fringes of *L'Ordine Nuovo* in Turin, and who had become very friendly with Gramsci in the two years in Rome, had also made contact with the party early in 1927. He visited Camilla Ravera in the secret headquarters near Genoa. He volunteered to be a link between Gramsci and the party and this was approved. He lectured in Cambridge and would be able, on his journeys to and from Italy, to visit the Party in Paris. He was also able, because of his influential relatives, to visit Gramsci in prison in Milan, in August of that year (Sraffa 1991).

However, it was not until a meeting could be arranged between Tania and Sraffa in October 1927, that the arrangements for a more solid link were finalised. Tania, henceforth, was to communicate with the Party in Paris via Sraffa. Either Sraffa, or a trusted courier, took copies of Gramsci's letters to Togliatti (Spriano 1979:52) and, on at least four occasions, Tania wrote detailed reports of her visits to Gramsci (Sraffa 1991). From 1927 onwards, therefore, there was an "official" (if indirect and subject to filtering by Tania), line of communication from Gramsci to the party, which Gramsci knew about and had approved (Rossi & Vacca 2007:16). Spriano (1979), interpreted a phrase from a letter to Giulia in April 1928 just before his trial, saying that Gramsci had decided, "on principle" not to write "outside", to mean that he would not write directly to the party.

However from 1929, the more recent opinions, including Rossi and Vacca, agree that he *did* want two way communications with the party, at least about long term ideas and strategies. (Gerratana 1991; Natoli 1997; Rossi & Vacca 2007). Inward communication from the Party to Gramsci, was much more difficult to achieve. For its part, the party also wanted to have communication. Camilla Ravera was particularly concerned, not only so that they could help Antonio himself but, "so that in difficult and serious moments we might obtain one of his incisive and illuminating directives" (Gerratana 1991:xxxiii). Typically, Togliatti was much more cautious about trying to communicate. He said that he did not want to do anything which might put Gramsci in further jeopardy (ibid). His position between Gramsci and Stalin was becoming difficult, so it was also possible that he was not so eager to receive directives, however incisive and illuminating.

The language of the letters differs according to the recipient. The letters to Sardinia are linguistically and conceptually simpler than those sent to Tania or Giulia. This is because Gramsci's mother and sisters were politically uneducated and knew nothing, since he had not written to them for years from Turin, about his political life or the political struggle. He explained, as simply as he could to his mother, that, in his case, prison was not a disgrace because his rectitude, conscience, innocence or guilt would play no part in the sentence (LP1:102). In his first letter to Teresina, he begged her to try to make his mother understand this (LP1:90). His letters to them were more concrete and direct, as well as being more openly tender and affectionate than he was able to be for Giulia. His letters to the Schucht sisters dealt with ideas and concepts. For example, he wrote two letters about the education of the children of the two families, within a fortnight of each other, one to Carlo in December 1928 and the next to Giulia in January 1929. To Carlo, he criticises a letter from his niece Edmea in detail, particularly the spelling mistakes. He tells Carlo that they should train her to do methodical and disciplined work rather than relying on her "intelligence", otherwise her work will be like those little girls who have ribbons and pretty dresses but wear grubby knickers underneath (LP1:240). The letter to Giulia, however, discusses whether or not Meccano deprives a child of inventiveness and might create an abstract, dry, mechanical and bureaucratic imagination. He remarks, "How interesting it must be to observe the reactions to these pedagogical principles in the brain of a small child..." (LP1:242) In his letters to his sons too, the language is simple.

The flow of the correspondence is always disjointed. From the correspondence with Tania which has been published, it is clear that letters were delayed and occasionally went astray, so that even with Tania who wrote regularly and assiduously, the thread of conversation is not continuous (AT). Very early on, Gramsci asks Tania to number her

letters and postcards, and also those from Giulia separately, so that he could keep track and see where there were gaps (LP108). She did not do this. The dialogue jerks forward and back to answer questions asked weeks before, or to pick up an idea. His correspondence with Giulia is even more painfully fractured. There are forty one original letters from Giulia to Antonio held at the Gramsci institute, of which only thirteen have been published (Cambria 1976, Paulesu Quercioli 1987). By correlating these originals from Giulia to the references in Gramsci's letters, about those he has *received* from Giulia, it appears there ought to be at least another thirteen letters from Giulia, which are not in the archive. This would make a total of fifty four letters over ten years, so that Gramsci's complaints about how rarely she wrote seem justified<sup>7</sup>. Their correspondence resembled, he said, the conversation of the giants in the Scandinavian folktale, who spoke only at intervals of five hundred years (LP1:355).

Gramsci grumbled about Giulia not replying to his queries, but in fact he often does not respond to the information she gives him. He says, in April 18<sup>th</sup> 1927, that he has received two letters from Giulia. On examination of the correspondence files in the Gramsci archive, these seem likely to have been the letters dated 14<sup>th</sup> March 1927 and 1<sup>st</sup> March 1927. In the letter of the 1<sup>st</sup> March, Giulia told Gramsci that Delio remembers, "the gesture you make when putting on your specs and remembers the place for your pencil and pen" (Schucht 1927). She wrote to him in April that Delio had asked her, "what does Dad use as a blanket if he has sent his to us? Where is tomorrow hidden? Is it in the sun?" (Schucht 1927). In August 1928, she described Delio going fishing, saying that he often does not remember to undress, so he wades into the water fully clothed. "He says there is nothing wrong, because his head stays out of the water and his shoes won't float away on the current" (Schucht 1928). She goes on to say that Giuliano is not old enough to fish, but he chases the cats, dogs and chickens. He also loves to sing and a professional musician friend has said that he ought to be enrolled in a music school straight away<sup>8</sup> Gramsci makes no response to any of these pieces of information. As Gramsci remarked, their correspondence consisted of two monologues rather than a dialogue (LP1:355). Equally, the coded correspondence which Gramsci held with Togliatti in 1931 – 1932, had long pauses between the letters while they were copied by Tania, sent to Moscow, and a response sent back to Sraffa, who rewrote and sent it to Tania, who then wove Togliatti's response into her letter. Inevitably the dialogue lost immediacy, and probably shades of meaning, in this protracted process.

### ***Political Purposes and Hidden meanings***

<sup>7</sup> Future publication by Antonio Gramsci jr of material he has found in Moscow recently may reveal more letters.

<sup>8</sup> Giuliano became a music teacher at the Moscow Conservatoire and his son Antonio is also a musician.

Gramsci was a political theoretician, but above all he was a practical politician, that is a fighter... the unifying theme of his work can be found only his real practical activity which started in the years of his youth, and gradually developed until Fascism came to power, until his arrest and *even after*. (Togliatti 1958 [my emphasis])

What real activity could a practical politician undertake in prison? How could he continue his fight to change society? Obviously, any activity he undertook in prison could not be in any way overtly political, but then a lot of the work that Gramsci had always considered to be essential to the construction of a new society, that is the educative process, never had been perceived as obviously political. For much of his career, his belief and insistence on the importance of the educative for the success of communism had been denigrated and dismissed as irrelevant to real politics. Its subtlety and low key movement would now be an advantage. He could continue to work for social change. He would continue to educate comrades both in and out of prison. This he did in person and by letter.

Gramsci had a direct, practical involvement in the education of political prisoners whilst in prison. On Ustica, he did this by organising a system of adult education (LP1:52). When he was moved to Milan and then Rome and until his conviction in 1928, he was allowed to correspond freely, so he continued correspondence with other political detainees still in Ustica. To Berti he gave his opinions on the best organisation of the school he had started (LP1:119). Berti had asked for some “inspired ideas”, a suggestion which Gramsci sternly rejects. Rather, the school should practise methods based on the development of rigorously recorded experience, which is constantly subjected to the most “dispassionate or objective self-criticism”. However, he suggests a school at three levels, in which the top level would be for teachers. This should “function as a club”, in which each member would have to contribute as a lecturer, prioritising in particular “pedagogical or didactic subjects” (ibid). This idea is a clearly a reiteration of the second instalment of notes for the Party School entitled “Life of the School” written in 1925 (CPC:58). Equally, it is obvious that he wanted the school on Ustica to prepare a cadre for the future.

In another letter, Gramsci explained to Berti how he found food for thought, even in the random selection of books sent to him weekly by the prison library in Milan. He could, he said, “find interesting things even in the lowest intellectual production” and goes on to explain how popular serial novels reveal “whole systems of beliefs and fears” (LP:127). He was effectively using the concrete phenomena of a society as the start for critical

reflection, illustrating the teaching and learning methods which he had outlined in the notes for the party school and which Berti could use in Ustica. To Tania and Sraffa, Gramsci wrote vivid and lively accounts of the journeys between prisons. He wrote pithy reviews on the books he had read, "*The History of the Third Republic*", by Zevaes, is dismissed as "superficial but amusing", while he castigates Michels, in *Contemporary France*, as displaying "a most refined hypocrisy aimed at furthering an academic career" (LP1:171,2). To Tania, he sent little anecdotes which illustrated revolutionary virtues, such as his account of the sparrows he had tamed, only one of which showed a proper rebellious spirit (LP1:125,6). He gave her his considered critical opinion, that the book of Prison Regulations ranked as a masterpiece of mass organisation, equal to the Catholic Catechism and the Italian Army's Corporals' Manual (LP1:97). He described for her and for Sraffa, the dire circumstances of the ordinary prisoners and the general backwardness and poverty of life on Ustica for all its inhabitants (LP1:49,58,97,104). Gramsci wrote sociological reports on the different groups within prison to Tania, which directed his readers to his published policies. In his speeches at the Lyons congress in 1925, published in February 1926, and in the paper he had almost finished when he was arrested, called "*The Southern Question*", Gramsci had emphasised how important the support of the peasants would be to the party, if it was to succeed in gaining power (QM). In particular, it was essential to educate and develop the masses in the south of Italy. In these letters, he illustrates how different the allegiances of the people of the south are, how deprived and backward their circumstances, and, by implication, reminds the party of the huge task of political education which would be needed, to change their entrenched habits of the heart. These beautifully written and humorous letters were maintaining his persona to the party, and indeed to the authorities via the censor. His account of the highlights of his first five months of detention was so effective, that the authorities confiscated it and put it in the trial documentation as evidence (LP1:98fn). The letters sent the message that Gramsci was still Gramsci; was still a brilliant journalist; still thinking and still capable of leadership.

At Turi, his life was much more difficult. Once again he began to discuss politics in an organised way with his fellow prisoners. This was not continuous. The last cycle of workshops started in 1930, when he discussed the themes of the intellectuals and the party; the issue of the military and the party and the idea of a constituent assembly (Natoli 1997). His letters sent the message that he was still strong, still committed, still leading and teaching. However, his situation began to deteriorate in 1930, partly because his chronic illnesses were becoming worse, as a result of utter neglect and incompetence and partly from the change in political climate and support. In January 1930, he wrote to Tania quoting a letter from Spaventa, a 19<sup>th</sup> century political prisoner,

who was among the few not to ask for mercy from the Bourbons. In his case, pressure was put on his captors for his release by England and France (LP1:305). The message is clear; he will not ask Mussolini for mercy, the pressure for his release needs to come from Russia. The reply he received from the party, dated 1<sup>st</sup> May, via Sraffa and Tania, shocked him. It was clear that the party had no ongoing plans to negotiate his freedom. In her letter, Tania suddenly switches from "I" to "we" in mid sentence.

...we want to make sure that your stay in prison is under the best possible conditions so that you can maintain your physical as well as moral and intellectual persona intact...we hope that preserving all your great qualities you can only emerge even more learned than you are now, and we are sure that you have the moral and intellectual qualities to do this...our affection and our faith in you must serve as a great support to you so that you might even feel content (AT: 509).

Gramsci was dismayed. He replied on the 19<sup>th</sup> May,

What had not been included in my evaluation was the other prison, added on top of the first and is constituted by being cut off from my family as well as from social life... I could foresee the blows from my adversaries..., I could not foresee that blows would also come from other sides, which I should least expect them (metaphorical blows of course, but the criminal code also divides crimes into acts and omissions: that is omissions too can be a faults or blows LP1:331).

By "the blows coming from other sides", he meant not only the party outside, but his comrades inside Turi. Rumours about external politics were seeping through to the prison. As the news of the *svolta*, as the about turn in policy became known, some of the prisoners became impatient and suspicious of Gramsci's stance. In the discussion groups, Gramsci made clear his opposition to the new party line, which ordered recruitment and build-up of the party in secret in preparation for imminent revolution an immediate class war. It was diametrically opposed to Gramsci's policies as set out in the Lyons Congress; long-haul policies of meticulous preparation of the masses; of the construction of a new hegemony, including working with other classes during a short period of parliamentary democracy, if necessary. It was also in his view hopelessly unrealistic in the Italian context. It would both expose a tiny, scattered, clandestine party to immeasurable risks and harden both Fascism and public opinion against them, thus actually making their task more difficult. His patient analysis was not well received amongst some of the detainees, who were cheered by the thought of action. Feelings ran so high that, during the course of 1930, they wrote a letter of denunciation against him to the party, increasing his sense of abandonment (Spriano 1979).

The reason for the party's weakening effort to free him was due to its already precarious relationship with Stalin's government. In 1929, the Comintern had decided that all

bourgeois governments were failing and, therefore, that all the member parties of the Comintern should prepare forthwith for imminent revolution in their own countries. This was, of course, a complete reversal of the CPd'I policies, as agreed by the Lyons conference, which had been written by Gramsci and Togliatti. Togliatti had argued strongly against it in the Comintern, reinforcing the Russian opinion that the Italians were untrustworthy, but he had been defeated and the policy had been imposed in July 1929. Over the next months, the PCd'I had slowly begun to implement the new order. By June 1930, Bordiga and then Leonetti, Tressa and Ravazzoli had been expelled from the party for dissidence. Togliatti had been summoned to the Comintern to justify the expulsions and felt that he needed Gramsci's assent. He was also concerned about Gramsci's situation in Turi and the rumours about the discord. The party could not afford a rift with Gramsci, its titular head and a hero of the revolution, but neither could it afford to be perceived to be in any way in opposition to Stalin. Gennaro, Gramsci's brother was found, brought back from Paris and dispatched to Turi in July 1930, to consult Gramsci.

We know now that Gramsci did give his assent to the expulsions, but that he also made clear his adherence to the line of the Lyons conference. Contrary to the accounts by Fiori and Spriano, these opinions were known to Togliatti. They were in a written report by Gennaro, which was found in 2003 in the Moscow archives, by Silvio Pons of the *Fondazione Istituto Gramsci* (Rossi & Vacca 2007). Furthermore, in December 1930, Gramsci wrote a letter commenting on a debate in Oxford between Croce and Lunacarskij (LP1:364,5). His comments thinly disguised his opinion that Russian Bolshevism had not advanced past a primitive stage and this was the reason for its present mistaken analyses and policies. He compares it to the Reformation which was a bottom-up movement and necessarily crude to begin with and yet, when refined, became the basis for modern civilisation. By implication, the Italian Party needed to continue its formation of the masses and the cadre in order for Marxism to be fully understood and intellectually developed in Italian Communism. Togliatti should look beyond the immediate difficult situation (Rossi & Vacca:27). Later that December, Terracini instigated an appeal on behalf of the imprisoned leaders. Gramsci's letter on the subject made it clear he thought that, since the conviction had been entirely on political grounds, there could only be a political solution, i.e. an exchange organised by Russia.

During 1931, Tania became worried about his situation, both in terms of his health and of his mental wellbeing. He was now very isolated at Turi and Giulia had not written to him for months. Gramsci wrote to Tania in July 1931, talking of the threads to his life which were snapping one by one and which he might find impossible to retie (LP2:45). She felt that he was beginning to give up. A train of correspondence was instigated by Sraffa

and Togliatti to stimulate him, starting with enquiries about his plan of studies (Sraffa 1991). According to a recent work, Gramsci realised this was an attempt to get his political opinions (Rossi & Vacca 2007). On August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1931, he said that he was no longer sticking to his study plan and he needed much more reference material, to write about the intellectuals. Tania was worried by this response, but in fact, despite a serious health crisis in August, he started to write about his study themes in September.

He encapsulated, very briefly, his theory of the state, giving, in a nutshell, the extended writing he was doing at this time on his concept of the state and the role of the intellectuals in constructing and supporting the hegemony on which a modern state depended. He said that he would write about the intellectuals and also a new interpretation of Canto X of Dante's *Inferno*, based on one which he had written briefly about years ago in Turin. Togliatti is silent on the concept of the state and hegemony. Development of these ideas would inevitably be critical of the dictatorship emerging in Russia, but he was keen to have the Dante essay (Rossi&Vacca 2007:48). Tania wrote to Gramsci, in February 1932, and told him that his work had been shown to her "Piemontese friend" (Togliatti). Togliatti hastened to find the original article and Sraffa, via Tania, told Gramsci in May that he had done so and gave details.

In September 1931, Gramsci wrote a detailed account of his reading of Canto X (LP2:74). Rossi and Vacca interpret the apparently literary and historical writing on Canto X of Dante's *Inferno* as incorporating both a political and a personal plea to the party (Rossi & Vacca 2007). The section begins with a comment on Croce's writing on poetic structure and then Gramsci goes on to examine the two characters in the Canto. He identifies himself with the character of Cavalcante, who is traditionally seen in Dantean criticism as the secondary role behind that of Farinata, the heroic rebel. In the poem, both characters live in a fiery tomb inside a cone of darkness so they cannot see the present or the immediate past or future. On hearing Dante speaking, Florentine Farinata rears up, defiant, ready to justify his rebellion. Cavalcante, however, only wants to know about his son and falls back into his tomb in despair, having misinterpreted Dante's use of the past tense to mean that his son is dead.

Rossi & Vacca (op.cit) think that the concern for his son can be interpreted both as Gramsci's concern for his own family and for the fate of his figurative son, the Party. In the new political situation, the party is in danger of being crushed by Fascism and of being reduced to puppet status by the Comintern. Gramsci's choice of the non-heroic role is also significant. Togliatti thought that he had been safeguarding Gramsci and his family from Comintern reprisal for his opposition, by making Gramsci into a hero.



Gramsci, however, rejects iconic status for both political and personal reasons. Icons are immutable and immobile. Such a status would make his dissension from the party line in the future much more difficult. In any case, he hated ideas which became rigid. On a personal level, he was afraid that hero status might prevent any reduction of his sentence, or remove the privilege of writing (Rossi & Vacca 2007:45/6). What Gramsci was also doing, was exploring whether political messages could be transmitted through literary criticism.

Rossi & Vacca base their argument for a literary code on the fact that this letter has a single, sustained subject and this is unusual. They add that there may be other messages (ibid). Using their criteria, I think that the second half of the letter, which also starts from Croce's work on the poetic structure of the *Inferno*, before linking it to stage directions, can be also be interpreted as a message about his concerns over the party. In "point 4" of his new interpretation of the canto, Gramsci says,

It seems to me that this interpretation mortally wounds Croce's thesis on the poetry and the structure of *The Divine Comedy*. *Without structure there would be no poetry and therefore the structure also has a poetic value.*

But a further question is linked to this: what is the artistic importance of stage directions in works for the theatre? The recent innovations in performance art that give ever greater importance to the director, pose the question in ever sharper form. The author of the play struggles with the actors and the director by means of the stage directions, which allow him to define his characters better; the author wants his share in the spectacle to be respected and he wants the interpretation of the play by the actors and the director (who are translators from one art to another and critics at the same time) to remain true to his vision. In *Man and Superman* G B Shaw provides in the appendix a small manual written by John Tanner, the protagonist, to define the protagonist's character better and help the actor to be more faithful to his image. A theatrical work without stage directions is lyricism rather than the depiction of living people in dramatic conflict; stage directions have in part incorporated the old monologues, etc. If in the theatre the work of art is the result of the collaboration of the writer and actors unified aesthetically by the director of the performance, in this creative process, stage directions *have an essential importance insofar as they limit the arbitrary decisions of the actors and the director*. The entire structure of the Divine comedy is devoted to this exalted function, *and if it is right to make distinctions, one must be very cautious in each particular instance* (LP2:75,76 [my italics]).

In this section, Gramsci is returning to his concerns about the Comintern and the *svolta*. The new policy in the *svolta* was in direct opposition to his analysis of the situation in Italy and the best way to tackle it. In addition, he feared the implications its implementation had for the organisation and culture of the party which were, in his view, part of its politics. Unlike his contemporaries, who saw the organisation as a functional administrative matter and separate from the intellectual business of ideology and political strategy, Gramsci saw the importance of the link between the organisation of the party and its ideology. He thought that, in order to be convincing, what a party did and how it

did it, had to demonstrate what it proclaimed as policy. The organisation of the party must be congruent with, and express in action, the party's political message. In his view, the executive committee must remain, to use Gramscian terms *dirigente*; leading within the masses. Because the new policy had been dictated by the Comintern, however, it was top-down and would have to be imposed on party activists as it had been imposed on Togliatti. The executive must guard against becoming an impenetrable ruling group, distanced from the masses, drifting back to the Bordigean and PSI model, or worse, moving toward the Stalinist Comintern model, becoming *dominante*; rulers.

In these notes on stage directions, therefore, he continues to express his displeasure at the distortion of the original aims and the nature of the Internationale/Comintern by Stalin and his unease that Stalins' increasing power will distort the aims of Communism itself. In this extract, the writer is interpreted as the Party, working within and with the masses. Between them, they write the work, i.e. the politics of the party, its ideology and strategy for Italy, the direction agreed at the Lyons conference (or indeed the original aims of the Internationale). The stage directions are the culture, the ethos of the party which shapes the training and guidance given to the cadre. This formation and guidance suggests ideas, and sets boundaries for actions, which they the actors/cadre, can take in the realisation of the new state.

The director is the leading group, or individual leader, who pulls the action together, who has creative autonomy, but should still act within the limits imposed by the directions, i.e. the shared moral code and the vision. The culture and organisation of the party, its bottom-up approach, its negotiated and shared values and integrity, should limit the director's and the actors' actions. If the stage directions, the moral code and values of the party and the principles, guidance and training derived from them, are ignored, then the balance and purpose of the work changes and the author's (the Party with the masses) intentions are traduced. This is an educative message directed at the leading group, to remind them of their shared and agreed ideals.

Stalin, of course, as Gramsci had foreseen, was throwing away the rulebook, both in terms of the Comintern and the Russian state acting as moral leaders, and, indeed, of morals. Perhaps the prophecy of one of his Factory Council stewards in 1920, echoed down the years. Garino had told him, "you see, Gramsci, I think that the dictatorship of the proletariat will end up by distorting itself, degenerating and becoming dictatorship by the party or even worse by one man..." (Bermani 2007:298). At the time, Gramsci had protested vehemently that the organisation of the party would not permit such a thing. Garino had continued, "and I said no, but history actually has given us many lessons. And, whether you like it or not, I can't manage to convince myself that it wouldn't be

possible for it to degenerate into a dictatorship (by the party), even into a personal one” (ibid).

The interpretation of the stage direction passage reflects Gramsci’s reported preoccupations in 1931. Firstly, as we have already noted, he believed the party should continue to act according to the proposals of the Lyons conference. This included the policy that the cadre should be properly developed to be capable of creative autonomy. Gramsci’s conception of creative autonomy, however, had always included a shared set of values and beliefs which, in effect, set the boundaries for actions. The party, therefore, had to continue its work of hammering out principles and guidelines with its activists, to avoid unbridled spontaneous action, or violence (lyricism) and to make them competent to work independently, to change society in a robust and sustainable way (living people in conflict).

During 1930 to 1931, Gramsci had, according to the testimony of Giovanni Lai, been holding informal workshops in his usual manner, i.e. that everyone should join in the discussion about the political subject of the day. In these workshops, Gramsci and the other political prisoners discussed the current situation, that of a small clandestine party in the face of Fascism, and what its strategy should be, explaining that his opposition to preparation for immediate revolution was based on an analysis of the real situation. Lai reported;

He, (Gramsci) continued that the socialist revolution was a serious undertaking which had to be prepared for by educating the working class for the struggle and by educating its militants to become capable leaders...capable of leading, even autonomously, in any political or military situation (Gramsci 1967:757).

The group leaders needed to understand and embrace the principles by which they should act. Magnani too, talking of time spent with Gramsci at Turi, said that one of his preoccupations was that comrades should have a good level of general and political education. He wanted to train political cadres while he was in prison, so that they could move forward political actions, even if they were on their own. “...So that they didn’t have to wait on a directive from the centre, if the post didn’t come, because it had been held up or blocked. You can’t stop the political action of a party just because the post hasn’t arrived” (Bermani 2007:316). In addition, in November 1931, he states his defence of the Lyons conference clearly. In response to the news that Terracini is preparing an appeal, he refutes the trial accusation that he prepared a leaflet about preparing for civil war, and reminds them of the paper he wrote for the Lyons Conference, in his capacity as Party leader. In this paper, a summary of which was published in 1926, he asserted

that Italy was not in such a (revolutionary) situation and that the work which had to be done was that of “political organisation” and not of “attempts at insurrection” (LP2:96). Thus, both in code and in clear, Gramsci was still convinced that the Lyons conference was right and of the need for political and educative work.

He continued to send his political opinions at intervals, under the guise of literary criticism. Togliatti and Sraffa suggested to Tania that she should ask for Gramsci's thoughts on Croce's *History of Europe*, ostensibly for a review which she was writing. In the course of letters from April to July 1931, Gramsci was able to give his thoughts on the theory of hegemony (LP2:169). On the nefarious techniques of transformism which succeeded in absorbing opposition without engaging with it or solving issues (LP2:181,2). He commented on Croce's style as one of his great strengths and one which the party would have to emulate. Croce had the ability to promulgate a new conception of the world in such a simple way that, “it is absorbed as good sense or common sense” and “solutions to issues ...find their way into everyday life”, without most people realising their origin (LP2:167). From Gramsci's point of view, these thoughts might possibly be put together as an article and published, as three of his articles had been published, or republished, in the course of 1930 to 1931. This would keep his presence as leader alive. This idea had also occurred to Sraffa. In May 1932, he wrote to Togliatti “Judging by the first instalment (Gramsci's letter of April 18<sup>th</sup>), with a few finishing touches it will make an excellent review” (Sraffa 1991: 225). Even if Gramsci's ideas could not be published, he would still have made them known to Togliatti. For his part, Togliatti was keen to have his political opinions and Tania was told to put phrases into her letters, to let Gramsci know that his ideas had been well-received and to suggest other directions for comment in the review. (Sraffa 1991: 61) They hoped the correspondence could continue, as it was useful for all concerned. In the May letter to Togliatti, Sraffa says,

The system seems to be working, and we mustn't let it drop. The minute he has finished Croce, we must find him another subject. Do you have any ideas? What about De Man's books? Obviously we have to find a topic where the political content can be disguised as literary (Sraffa 1991:225).

The correspondence was brought to an end abruptly in mid July 1932, when Gramsci's cell was suddenly searched by OVRA, the Fascist secret police, and he feared he had been the subject of a denunciation. He warned Tania to write to him only about family things and that in the clearest possible way (LP2:190).

His strategic messages to the party cease in 1932. As his health deteriorated, the messages to the Party become angry, anguished and entirely focused on attempts to be freed by exchange, or at least to have his prison regime changed. During the course of 1932 and 1933, his medical condition became so bad; so painful, that he told Tania he felt that he could not go on. He felt abandoned and betrayed and his political antennae were correct. The Comintern had chosen “to make Gramsci a non-person” (Hobsbawm 2010:24). In a long letter to Tania in February 1933, he said that he had been condemned by a much vaster organisation than the Tribunal and that he counted Giulia among those who condemned him (LP2:276). From his point of view, he is corresponding with substitutes. Tania cares for and supports him, but she is not Giulia; Sraffa gives him financial support and intellectual stimulus, but he is not Togliatti and the party. He has supporters at Turi, but in the main they are anarchists not communists. In 1934, indeed, he writes only one letter, to his mother, who, unknown to him, died two years before and whose death had been concealed from him.

When his health improved, so did his state of mind, but the letters from 1935 onwards are family oriented, or official petitions. In the last years of his life, when he was finally receiving some appropriate medical care and had been granted a measure of freedom, he recovered sufficiently to write to his sons and his wife.

### ***The family as the foundation for a new State***

I am very sorry that I cannot be near my dear boys and that I cannot help them in their work both in school and in life. Letter to Delio, April 1935 (LP2:346).

Whilst his political messages to the party were necessarily sporadic and heavily concealed his political ideas for the role of the family and the education and instruction of children continued throughout his time in prison. Even in 1933, in the depths of chaos he continued to write to, and about, the children. He could still guide ‘molecular’ change in society.

There was a deeply affective side to Gramsci’s role in his childrens’ childhood, but there was also an involvement in the formative process. He wanted to know all about their intellectual development, he wanted to advise and support. At the same time, however, he was clearly setting out his political view on education through apparently private, familial advice. Education had always been an important element for him in the development of socialism and socialists and so the letters continue the work he began in Turin. Even as a young man estranged from his own family, he had recognised the

importance of the family. It had, or should have, a key role in forming the values of the new society through upbringing and through education, in the English sense. The two meanings of *educazione* are conflated in articles which he wrote as a young man for *il Grido del Popolo and Avanti*. In 1916, for example, in “*Socialism and Culture*”, in which he said culture is not about knowing lots of things but about discipline, being one’s own person understanding one’s function in life, one’s rights and responsibilities. This does not happen spontaneously, it has to be learnt (CF:120). In 1918, writing about the Family, he describes it as a “moral organism...the initial social nucleus which overrides the individual and imposes on him/her obligations and responsibilities”. He deplores the change in its function to pursuing material things for the children and goes on to say that it must return to its moral task of training the next generation in human values and citizenship. This theme is also present in *Prison Notebook 3*, where once again he writes about the crisis in the family. He regrets that the older generation is failing to educate the younger (Q3§61:340 ).

In the letters to both families, he discussed his own ideas on the education of children, on the organisation of society and on the importance of personal responsibility and accountability. His ideas on the education of children are parallel to those for adults. There is an emphasis on guidance on discipline, particularly self-discipline, and the perception of study as work. The guidance on values must begin within the family. His ideas were expressed as direct criticism or advice, both for the family in Sardinia and for his own sons.

In a letter to his mother in 1927, he remembers with love and gratitude, her struggle and sacrifice. Edmea, his niece will not have similar memories, so the family must make sure that she is strong morally. There must be less softness and sentimentality, he says, if she is to cope with these times of fire and iron. Edmea, particularly needs guidance, since she does not have in her own mother, an example to follow, as his own mother was to her family (LP1:77). In June 1927, he says that they are ruining her. He disapproves strongly of Edmea’s materialistic tendencies and her interest in money (LP1:117). In a letter to Teresina, he says that she has misunderstood the comments he has made about Edmea. Firstly, he only met her once when she was small, then he avoids making judgements on the basis of “intelligence”, “natural goodness”, “eagerness of mind”, because they are so vague and misleading. He sets much more store by force of will, love of discipline and work, and sticking to principles and thinks those things are even more important in the people who bring the children up (LP2:31).

Indeed, he writes improving letters to his siblings and Giulia about their own lives and attitudes (LP1:140, LP2:10,11). He writes on the occasion of Delio's seventh birthday, in 1931, about his concern that Giulia, whilst being theoretically convinced of being an element of the state and as such having the duty to mould and train the new generation for the new society, in practice cannot rid herself of the old liberal spontaneous growth ideas (LP2:49). As far as Delio and Giuliano are concerned, he suspects that Giulia and her family have been heavily influenced by Rousseau. Gramsci does not subscribe to the idea that the child has everything already latent inside it, so that child rearing is just the "unwinding of a thread" (LP1:30,2).

Discipline, therefore, begins within the family, and must be inculcated before puberty (LP1: 348). He returns to the theme of discipline several times, both to his sons and to the Sardinian family (LP2: 355,387). However, Gramsci uses discipline in the sense of inculcating self discipline, a moral code. It does not mean repression. It should not suppress the child's personal and legitimate reactions and emotions. In a letter to his mother in 1929, he says that children become fond of those who take them seriously, including whims and naughty behaviour which are often, Gramsci says, an expression of the child's own will and feelings which s/he is trying to develop and establish, in opposition or contrast to those of grownups. If the grownups respond in too authoritarian a manner, or resort to violence, then they will only make the children into hypocrites, i.e. they will learn to conceal what they think and feel (LP1:243).

Nor does Gramsci believe that the intellectual development of a child can just happen on its own; it had to be worked at. Gramsci had always thought that appropriately organised instruction; schooling, was very important and should be available equally to all. This theme runs through his writings, from the first essay written when he was twelve, in which he saw education as the thing which would empower him, "to support himself with honour", through his early writings, such as "Men and Machines"(op.cit.) and "On Illiteracy"(op.cit), to the "*Prison Notebooks*" themselves and into his letters home.

Gramsci used this correspondence, not only to give advice, but to try to find out about the current reality of education in schools, in rural Italy and Russia. He asks for specific information about curriculum and organisation to inform his notes (LP:158).

An idea which can be traced from his early writings is that of a broad base to learning for all. The curriculum followed in the early stages of formal education, should cover a wide foundation of skills and knowledge, so that the child's access to a range of intellectual or vocational learning choices at a later stage is not restricted. He writes several letters around the theme of the broad curriculum. There are letters about the secondary school

and courses which Edmea will have to follow. She will be forced into a vocational curriculum, but Gramsci says she must continue to study in her own right, to keep the options open (LP2:134,285). This idea reappears in the *Prison Notebooks*. In “a common basic education”, he says, “there must be a balance between working manually and the development of the capacity for intellectual work” (SPN:27). Gramsci also expressed concerns about the Soviet system. He asks Giulia what precisely is the “pedagogical purpose”, behind the “shock troops” being sent into Soviet primary schools, to encourage specialism. He suggests there is “a danger...is that of creating artificial precocious orientation” (LP2:110). In a later letter to Giulia, he tells her he has little faith in her ability to recognise “a propensity for a specific professional orientation”. He goes on to express, in a few lines, his educational principle which includes the character as well as the mind.

... in each of them there exists all tendencies, as in all children, both toward the paractical and toward the theoretical or the imaginative, and that it would indeed be right to guide them..., toward the harmonious blending of all their intellectual and practical faculties that in due time will be able to become specialised, based on a personality that has been vigorously formed in a total and integral manner. Modern man should be a synthesis...recreating, so to speak, the Italian man of the Renaissance, a modern type of Leonardo da Vinci who has become a mass-man or collective man while nevertheless maintaining his strong personality as an individual. A mere nothing, as you can see (LP2:194,5).

This is an interesting comment, because Gramsci regarded the Renaissance as reactionary and repressive as a movement (LP2:67). Here, however, he admires the versatility it encouraged in the individual.

He also thought that children should learn to express themselves clearly and accurately in both the written and spoken word. Ideally, he wanted them to speak more than one language and spelling was important (LP1:240). He complained repeatedly about Edmea's spelling, grammar and style (LP1:344). He does not criticise his own sons for spelling and grammar, because their letters were translated, (although he seems to have seen some of the originals), but he comments when their writing lacks originality or style, “you have written me four lines that seem taken from a grammar for foreigners” (LP2:380), “your notes keep getting shorter and more stereotyped” (LP2:358). He thought that, while Delio was more imaginative and expressed his feelings, he did not do so in as organised and technically advanced manner as did his cousin Franco, in Sardinia (LP2:374). He was baffled and sceptical about the ways in which his sons are being excused from rigour. He writes a humorous letter to Tania, with imperfectly concealed scepticism, about Russian methods, when he has been told by Tania that “Delio has not been taught how to write, as he has been judged to have a brain which is



already overdeveloped for his age and they think that the effort to learn will be too much for him" (AT:697). Consequently, he has invented his own system and writes from right to left. Gramsci, although relieved that at least he is using his hands, not his feet, and remarking that, should Delio learn Arabic such a mode of writing will be useful, asks why Delio has not been given similar freedom from all conventions. Should he not be allowed to dress himself with his trousers on his head and his gloves on his feet? Why not give him the choice of girls' clothes too? (LP2:28)

Competent use of language is important, because it will help the children to learn to think and to express themselves logically and critically, "one of the most difficult things, at your age, is to sit behind a desk and put one's thoughts in order (or even to think) and to write them down with a certain grace" (LP2:358); rigour at all stages was essential to intellectual and social development. This was expressed in the early writings on education for adults, "Socialism and Culture", in "The Peoples' University"(CF:119,131). Finally he uses it with his own sons, when he gives them a critique of HG wells, after Delio has mentioned him, "as an imaginative writer ... he is too mechanical, dry and flavourless: as a historian he lacks intellectual discipline, the sense of order and method. Tell me if you like me writing to you like this and if you understand" (LP2:378). He demands a response to their reading of Pushkin which will show that they are thinking, "give proof of your capacity to criticise, that is to discern the true from the false and the certain from the possible or the copy" (LP2:367). In a letter to Delio when he is twelve, Gramsci discusses the merits of Chekov, Gorki and Tolstoy (LP2:360).

Through his letters, Gramsci tried to ensure that the new generation were brought up to be active members of the new state which he envisioned.

I think you like history...because it deals with human beings. And everything that deals with people, as many people as possible, all the people in the world as they join together and work and struggle and better themselves should please you more than anything else (LP:383).

Children must learn self discipline, in order to study in an orderly manner and to understand that learning is important and classes as work. When Giuliano says he cannot answer his father's question about whether he is moving resolutely towards his goal, Gramsci rebukes him, "Why can't you answer when it is up to you to be disciplined, to resist negative impulses, etc? (LP2:387). His own concept of childhood then, is one of preparation for work. This is not in the sense of vocational training, but the work of achieving understanding and discipline, of becoming an engaged citizen. He says to Giuliano, who has complained about being given low marks, "when one must do

something, one must do it without complaining, without mewling like a puppy on the teat, so as to draw all the benefit from it " (LP2:379).

At the same time, however, children must be allowed to be children, be listened to and allowed to develop their own personalities and gifts. He is not as concerned as Giulia is in November 1932, that Giuliano likes to look at himself in the mirror. He finds a quote from Lombroso in the following January to try to help her to see mirror gazing as a stage in the development, in the sense of self rather than pernicious narcissism (LP2:256,7). In his view, while the family in its role of "functionary of the state" had to ensure that children understood and continued the moral values of the new society and state, at the same time this was not to be a rigid code imposed from the top, but a dialogue. There is a difference, a tension, between the necessity, as he sees it, of the duty to mould the mind and train the character and the equal necessity of allowing, simultaneously, the freedom to display and develop individuality in terms of personality, to form a new Leonardo. This is, of course, a reflection of his view of hegemony; that it is not a single will imposed over groups and individuals, but a multitude of single wills guided and collected together, to achieve agreed aims.

His letters to adults about the children and their education are often stern, so too, on occasion, are the letters to his sons, but they are also loving and amusing. To them he can express the warmth and tenderness that his past political duty, as much as present censorship, have forced him to deny to his loved ones. He uses stories about his own past; how he played truant from school; how he watched hedgehogs collect apples and how he caught and tamed them and watched them catch snakes. Why horses in Sardinia wear false ears and tails. He recounts the lovely folk tale of the mouse and the mountain, which he asks Giulia to tell them (and it ends with a real five year plan, he says). He comments about their letters and drawings in order to both reach and teach them. He wants to pass on his experience in order to improve his sons' chances, to demonstrate what is possible, which is, as he says in a brief note in the *Prison Notebooks*, the only justification for autobiographical writing (Q14§59:1718).

His letters to his mother are not directed at asking her to think about change. Rather, he uses his memories of her struggle and her steadfastness as an example for everyone else (LP2:123,223,242). It was to his mother that he wrote his personal credo, which was a much more difficult and uncompromising requirement for responsible decisions and actions than was demanded by Catholicism.

But you can't imagine how many things I remember. If you think about it seriously, all the questions about the soul and immortality of the soul and paradise and hell are at bottom only a way of seeing this very simple fact; that every action of ours is passed on to others according to its value, of good or evil, it passes from father to son, from one generation to the next in a perpetual movement. Since all the memories we have of you are of goodness and strength and you have given all of your strength to raise us, it means that you are already in the only true paradise that exists, which for a mother, I think, is the heart of her children (LP2:40).

As a father, that was a paradise he aspired to himself.

For Antonio Gramsci, in the relationship as father to his own children, unlike in almost any other important area of his life, there was little personal experience. He had few positive memories of his own father. He had spent so little time with Delio and had never met Giuliano. For him, there was never to be a nexus between theory and practice and that, said Rita Montagnana, a colleague from his Turin days and a founder member of the party, was the worst pain, "Perhaps one of the greatest torments for him was that of not seeing his children grow up, of not being able to help his partner to bring them up and teach them" (Paulesu Quercioli 1977).

### ***Meanings and purposes in the personal letters***

...more than kisses letters mingle soules. (John Donne 1598, letter to Sir Henry Wotton)

Of course the letters also deal with domestic matters; what medicines he needed; whether or not Tania should send new socks, or merely a needle and wool for darning; what the food was like and so on. The truly personal purpose of the letters is to be found in their reflexive nature. Reflexive, as grammatically defined, where the subject is the object of the action (Lennie and Grego 1966:169). The letters often have both an outward purpose and an inward effect. Through this prism we become aware of the emotional and intellectual support which Gramsci needs himself. When writing to his mother about the way she used to perform poems and songs for him, he is reminding her of her strength, of happiness past, in order to comfort her while reminding himself of warmth and solidarity in difficult circumstances. He tells her, and himself, that they will all be together again and that his sons will enjoy the Sardinian delicacies he lists. He tells Giulia about adventuring out as a boy being Robinson Crusoe with his survival kit. In his memory, he sees himself as free and self-reliant in his beloved Sardinia, whilst implying to her that his sons need a bit of untrammelled boyishness (LP1:276). To Carlo, he writes an account of his student life of poverty and starvation. He says this is to

convince Carlo that he has survived before and will survive again, and that Carlo too should take a grip and get on with life, but at the same time he is reminding himself that he is tough. Perhaps all letters described as 'personal' have this reflexive element, mirroring back to the writer the very effect he or she wished the recipient to receive. Certainly, the nostalgic element in them has been noted as providing such support, "the *integrative features* of the nostalgic episode are needed to boost the *integrative capacity* of the present self" (Dickinson and Erben 2006:242). In these letters, Gramsci is certainly seeking "a heightened sense of interconnectedness (which is) remedy to the loss of resonance, depth and richness" which he was experiencing in prison (Taylor 1989 cited Dickinson and Erben:op.cit 242).

The letters to his mother, to Giulia and his sons, are multipurpose and multilayered. The reflexive and constructive element in the letters can be seen in the closing period of his life, in the reconstruction of himself, as a real person for his children, by using stories about his childhood and about Sardinia. This is in order not to become, as he puts it, "a mythical flying Dutchman" in their lives. "How individuals recount their histories...shapes what individuals can claim of their lives. Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are a means by which identities may be fashioned" (Halse 2006:97 citing Rosenwald and Ochberg). Rubin (1986) perceives autobiographical memory as more a reconstruction than a reproduction. In another layer of meaning and function, these little narratives illustrate perseverance, discipline, a scientific approach to the world, the importance of history in the development of an improved society and so on.

Thus, the letters were personal, particularly in the fact that in many of them Gramsci seems to be communing with himself as much as with his respondent. They were personal in applying his political and philosophical ideas, to his own dilemma and particularly, in the case of his thoughts on education, to the concrete lives of his families and friends, or illustrating his ideas from real experience.

(the letters (are) ...a kind of intellectual and spiritual biography characterised by a stress on the learning process, on education understood in the broadest sense as embracing personality development, the mastery of necessary skills and the acquisition of a philosophy of life, of a world view (Rosengarten,1984:19).

The tone and content of the letters alters during the phases of his life in confinement. The phases correspond to the narrative types in lives disrupted by spinal injury which are categorised as restitution, quest and chaos (Smith & Sparkes 2004). The letters during the five weeks he spent in Ustica are marked with a sense of relief. He had escaped being sent to prison in Africa, which he knew would have been fatal. His letters are

cheerful, even insouciant, as though he were taking a well-earned rest in congenial company. The sentence of internal exile is only a hiatus in his work. Even when he is summarily recalled to Milan and he realised that the second trial would be much more dangerous, he is still convinced that he will be returning to political life before long (Rossi.&Vacca 2007). He writes to his mother, in June 1927, "I believe that in one way or another, I won't stay here any longer than three years, even if they were to sentence me, let us say, to twenty years" (LP1:115). This is a form of the restitution narrative, whereby the subject says of his disrupted life "yesterday I was healthy, today I am sick, but tomorrow I will be healthy again (Smith & Sparkes op.cit citing Frank 1995). However, when he arrived at Turi, in 1928, and became subject to the full force of the prison regime, he was forced to reassess his life and to find ways to survive, politically and personally. His letters reflect the 'quest narrative' which is "defined by the person's belief that there is something to be gained by the experience" (Smith & Sparkes op cit:621). His letters become educative, intellectual messages. To Giulia he writes the story of the man in the ditch, which is a fable of self-help for them both (LP2:189). To Tania, he writes about trying to garden in the prison courtyard and his indecision about whether to do this in a manner dictated by Rousseau, or the voluntarists (LP1:261). He sets out his study plan (LP1:83). He muses on the different reactions to prison, at different stages, that he has observed in others and in himself (LP2:229). He starts to do translations of German fairytales to send to the children to improve his German and later starts to learn English (LP1:255).

The dark was descending however and in November 1931, one of the fairytales prompts the only personal note in the *Prison Notebooks*. He remarks in anguish that he has not heard from Giulia for months and of the impossibility of a dialogue with her

We have become like ghosts to each other, unreal beings, outside time and space, pale and conventional memories (crystallised) of the brief time we lived together; we don't understand each other's needs any more, we don't know how to keep the current of common feelings going any more, we are no longer a source of strength for each other.(Quad.B, f 23 cited Borghese 1981:657)

Gradually in the course of 1932 and in 1933, during critical illness and severe depression, he descends into the chaos plot. This plot is one in which the subject cannot imagine life ever improving and he feels a "solidity of disconnection...from his life in this world" (Smith & Sparkes op.cit:620). He has always considered himself, he says in November 1932, "a dead man on leave"(LP:224). Later in November, he tells Tania that he has decided to divorce Giulia, in order to allow her a new life (LP2:228). He writes that he viewed his life sometimes, "as a great (for me) mistake, a huge miscalculation" (LP2:276). Gramsci talks in May 1933, of being no longer able to believe that he can

achieve any enduring way of being (LP2:300,306). He has reached the point aptly described by Gerard Manley Hopkins,

No worst there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief...  
 O the mind has mountains; cliffs of fall  
 Frightful, sheer, no man fathomed. Hold them cheap  
 May who ne'er hung there... (Hopkins 1963)

In the fourth and last stage of his prison life, when Tania and Sraffa had succeeded finally in getting him treatment, he climbed back to quest mode, devoting himself to rebuilding a relationship with Giulia and to strengthening his link with his sons.

Another way in which the letters can be analysed, is by looking at the direction of the energy flow. Gramsci remarked in December 1932, that two phases of his prison life were over and that 1933 would mark the third (LP2: 238). He explains the differences between the phases, and I think that they are marked by the differences in the tidal flow of the correspondence. By this, I mean whether the impetus of the drive for change in the letters was from the inside out, or from the outside in. Gramsci sent out energy from his arrest until 1928. His political focus being educative and maintenance of his political persona. In this phase he still feels strong. The next phase, from arrival in Turi is one of dialogue, of the impetus moving from Gramsci out and he seeks a similar impulse of energy back. The outward flow is political and educative, as well as personal. Gramsci wrote about the necessary changes in society. He gave direction, on education for example, explained his ideas, reiterated his brilliance as a journalist, or tried to comfort his mother. As time passes, however, the need for response, for the inward flow of energy, increases. In contrast to the direction of movement of the other letters, the correspondence and the dialogue it represents was, in my view, also Gramsci's defence *against* change, about trying to remain the Self that he had been on entry to prison; against the possible erosion of self. Imprisonment had effectively shipwrecked his life and forced him to construct a mode for intellectual and political survival. He is Robinson Crusoe once again, as he imagined himself to be as a child, marooned and vulnerable to attack, his pen and the fortnightly sheet of paper are, simultaneously, his shield and only method of communication. The letters are a way of preventing what he most feared, mental and emotional deterioration, and of slowing the metamorphosis from the, "self on arrival in prison", to becoming a different self by what he describes as, creeping "molecular" change. He illustrated the insidious change in the Self by a dreadful analogy to a shipwrecked person, who under extreme circumstances might even become a cannibal. In these letters, he set out actions to be taken on his behalf, expressed a need

for dialogue, revealed his anguish, elicited support to defend against the change in his Self, which he dreaded.

Painfully, he came to realise that remaining the same was not possible, so that the inward, defensive impulse was then directed towards physical and mental survival. Eventually, the letters became a dialogue with Tania/Sraffa/Togliatti and above all with himself as, under the onslaught of pain and despair, he relinquished some parts of himself and reinforces a core self which he can survive with self-respect. "This continuous effort to construct himself, is the most original and unmistakable feature of his personality, such as it emerges from the *Prison Notebooks* and the "*Letters from Prison*" Gerratana (1975:xiv). The letters then, are both the medium for *inside to outside* direction of change and for an *outside to inside* control of change.

### **Conclusion**

For Gramsci, the political and the personal are merged. The person was political. He saw and understood the routines and happenings in prison within the context of fascism and through the lens of Marxist thought, "the most concrete things...will betray a highly dialectical meaning, when interrogated with sufficient insight" (Nairn 1982:164). His political mission was the most important thing in his life; even Giulia and his sons were secondary. He regretted the pain this had caused them both, but he expected Giulia, a committed communist and party worker, who came from a leading Bolshevik family, to understand this.

Gramsci was allowed to write in his cell for eight of the ten years, producing the *Prison Notebooks*, as well as the letters. However, if we look at the writings in terms of what was *intended* for publication, meaning something that is written for communication and dissemination to other people, then the smaller output, the letters, however personal and private the authorities supposed them to be, should be regarded as the public, published and *political* utterances. Conversely, the far larger production, the *Prison Notebooks*, although when subsequently edited and published as essays, appear to be public as well as political, are actually the *private* notes of a scholar.

What the *Prison Notebooks* provide, apart from being, in Gerratana's view, Gramsci's autobiography, are theories and essays which restate Gramsci's belief in a different way of political being and the importance of the educative and educational as methods of achieving the political transformation and leadership of Italy.

“being excluded from immediate politics...he (Gramsci) could only concentrate on politics which moves on a longer wavelength in the higher dimension of cultural, ethical and moral theory, which is, in any case the underlying tenet, the *raison d’être* of his interest in political struggle”( Gerratana 1997:76).

It should always be borne in mind, however, that, although they are rightly regarded as the most important innovation in twentieth century Marxist thought, they were *not intended for publication by Gramsci in the form in which he left them, nor did he expect them to be published in his foreseeable future*. Gramsci knew they would not be permitted to leave his cell, so they were certainly not written for the purpose of influencing the contemporary political scene, or as blueprints for *immediate* action. Gerratana (1975) believes, indeed, that the unfinished nature of some of the material is deliberate and that much of the material would have been discarded by Gramsci, had he lived to edit and publish himself.

The only method, by which he might actively continue his political mission on the outside, was not by writing notes which only he could read, but by sending out letters. It is the letters, therefore, which should be viewed as Gramsci’s “public political” statements, in the sense that they were Gramsci’s only remaining way of immediately instigating, directing or influencing change, whether on a small scale, within the family, or on a larger scale within the party.

His writings in prison, both notebooks and letters, were extensively used by Togliatti and the PCd’I after World War II, to underpin and validate the party’s policies and strategies. The model of the PCd’I ascribed to Togliatti by Hobsbawm “a mass party, open even to Catholics...polycentric and democratic allowing different roads to socialism” is entirely Gramscian (Hobsbawm 2010:23,24). The *Prison Notebooks*, which were viewed as Gramsci’s political legacy were in the first instance published, in Togliatti’s words, “in a way which would be useful to the party”, that is, selected and arranged thematically, by Togliatti. That the letters too were deemed to be politically significant, can be judged by Togliatti’s reaction on receiving them (Natoli 1997:xxii). The 1947 publication of the letters was titled, “*A Selection*”. The selection, again made by Togliatti, omitted not only those letters “...private to the family”, but also those inconvenient to the party (ibid). In addition, the letters were censored; whole passages deleted. Not only were inconvenient references deleted, but much of Gramsci’s intellectual questioning and struggle was suppressed. How ironic that Gramsci’s own party should continue censorship, the practice he hated most and which was utterly at odds with his principles. “There must be truth between us even if we bleed”, he wrote to Giulia. Such censorship was a betrayal, both of Gramsci’s public stance which required that government should tell the truth, and of Togliatti’s personal knowledge about his friend.



The Gramsci depicted by this edited 1947 edition was serene and resolute while facing his fate, a secular saint and hero. While this was a useful image for the party to project, it was also static and immutable; all the things Gramsci had rejected and resisted during his life. Just as Gramsci's person had been a potentially useful political pawn in Mussolini's hands, now his edited thoughts and sanitised persona were used by Togliatti to enhance the party image. It would be another forty years, before an unexpurgated and almost complete edition was produced.

The complete letters reflect the changes forced on him by imprisonment, as well as his efforts to continue to lead political change in society. Read together, the letters and the notebooks also show his increasing interest in the individual. *Together*, the letters and the notebooks form the praxis of the prison years.

At least his enemies recognised and respected his worth.

The one who leads the party...Gramsci ... is the soul of the whole movement and shows the party the path to follow". The Bologna Chief of Police, testimony to the Tribunal (cited Spriano1979:23,24,fn29).

## Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The notion of “educative” is bound up with the concept of *individual* identity and its relationship to the moral and ethical within society. Antonio Gramsci was, in his own self image and that of the world, first and foremost a man who wished to transform society following the precepts of Karl Marx. Nothing that he wrote can be considered without that fact in mind, since his entire life was devoted to building what he saw as a new and more just and moral society. It seems to me that while Gramsci repeatedly wrote about the necessity of armed struggle, he also simultaneously worked and wrote to achieve educative ends, which were, that not only should each citizen develop a moral and ethical identity, but that this moral and ethical viewpoint should be one which was cohesive with, and contributed to, the aims of a socialist state- in other words would contribute towards the creation of a collective will and a new hegemony

When Gramsci was introduced to the critical study of Marx, his philosophy professor remembers that,. Gramsci wanted “to understand... the ultimately practical significance of theoretical life...to understand how ideas become practical forces”(Fiori 1990:93). The final phrase expresses issues which exercised Gramsci for the rest of his working life. Given reasonable premises, what makes some ideas more likely than others to become practical forces? Why does society accept some changes but not others? How can the process of change be started and successfully achieved? His own life experience had convinced him that Italian society needed to be changed but he had no illusions about how difficult the task of changing society would be. Germino says “From Sardinia he acquired an attitude of realistic assessment of the enormous practical difficulties impeding radical change” (Germino 1990:6).

The language theories he studied proposed that people choose to change their language and customs to something they perceive to be more prestigious and that authority and prestige was located in the capacity to produce progressive ideas, but the prestigious group was not the only one using its intellect. Gramsci recognised that in order to make a choice there must have been a critical judgement made by the subordinate group about the relative merits or advantages of one culture with regard to the other. Gramsci proposes a process in which the two groups merge and work together to generate new ideas, a new language, a new world-view and eventually a new society. Consent he saw, was more effective than overt coercion, and consent could be created. It could be done by preparing the masses for a change using a ‘battalion of books’ and by involving the people in discussion and research so that the new ideas would then be based on

reality; both the reality of circumstances and of the needs and aspirations of the masses. Further they would be based on the shared values and ideals which had been shaped during the dialogue. Subsequent planned concerted action would therefore be based not only on detailed current information and the clear objectives but on mass understanding and support which had already been established. It was therefore more likely to be effective because it was the expression of the collective spirit and the collective will.. This was why some ideas succeeded because they were accepted before the final proposal or call for action arrived. Gramsci began to perceive that the task of turning ideas into action would need a significant educative input; a new holistic approach to the educative development of the individual and society (Ives 2004). This would be how change could be started.

This preparation is what Gramsci was doing in his journalism in the Turin Years. His articles and the *Ordine Nuovo* group provided the original intellectual stimulus for critical thinking about social relations, and new political approaches. In 1920 Gramsci had described this educative mission in terms of the party being the liberator transforming the individual worker “from executor, to initiator, from mass to leader and guide, from brawn to brain and purpose”, the process was itself creative, and as a result of it the worker would be expected to initiate ideas himself (SPWI: 333). The workers’ critical reflection on history and on their existing conditions would produce creative solutions to contemporary issues. The industrial workers of Turin were the ideal partners in this educative mission because they were already changing role and function to meet the technical demands of modern manufacture. Eventually the Ordine Nuovi and the workers had a crash course in management and government when they occupied the factories. Gramsci acknowledged that this period was developmental both for him and his colleagues. The failure of the occupation of the factories, and the part played by the PSI convinced him of the need for a party which would lead. In order to do so it would have to train leaders to take responsibility at different levels, because he wanted mobility not hierarchy within the movement.

He had never agreed with Bordiga’s style of party. Bordiga had constructed the communist party according to a fixed set of Marxist principles visualized abstractly, not in the context of the concrete situation. Gramsci recognised the pattern only too well. It was analogous to the split between literary Italian and the vernacular and continued the split between intellectuals and the masses. Bordiga’s party was inward looking and focussed on its own form and perfection, just like “la lingua bella”. It was exclusive, not wishing to learn or cooperate with any other group and the vanguard held themselves apart from the masses just as the traditional intellectuals had done. For all his scoffing at

Gramsci as the academic and the intellectual, it was actually Bordiga who built a party entirely on theory. He and his vanguard, would impose their perception of society, admittedly an improved model, from above upon the masses. This was precisely how the liberal elite had governed.

Gramsci had a very different concept of the party. His model is loosely framed, inclusive, outward looking, flexible, it was based on people rather than systems which was why the educative drive was critically important. "The dictatorship of the proletariat is empowering not repressive. There is a *continuous movement* to be seen *from the bottom to the top*, a *continuous exchange* across all the social capillaries, a *continuous circulation* of men"(CPC15). He was convinced of the importance of the educative in changing attitudes, ethos and political practice in the party and the masses and so it was essential that the people who would spearhead the process for the masses should undergo the same educative process. So the letters from Vienna to the existing party elite in the next phase of his life, are about the intellectual and ethical reasons for his form of the organisation, and about communicating the political and moral parameters for action through newspapers and activism. At the Lyons Conference in January 1926, he described the party as "collegiate" (SPNWII:366). He said it had to undertake a huge educative task with the masses, particularly the peasants as a priority. The party school notes he wrote in 1925 underline this mission.

The two men, Gramsci and Bordiga liked each other and respected each other's commitment to an ideal, but the two party models display the simple and profound difference between them. Bordiga's party would continue to direct from the top because, despite the rhetoric about the single non-negotiable aim of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Bordiga did not really believe that the proletariat had the capacity to dictate. Gramsci, on the other hand, was convinced that workers had the capacity to govern and his party was designed to share the responsibility with ordinary people and to develop their skills and confidence.

Arrest and imprisonment forced him back from the front line, but by letter and in person he continued to remind colleagues of the importance of moral leadership and of the need to adhere to the educative principles of the Lyons conference. Since the collective will is the aggregation of individuals' wills, the individual too needs to be in educative dialogue, needs to develop his or her talents for personal fulfilment and the common good and so the letters are full of advice and guidance to this family and friends.

Gramsci's political genius lay in his ability to engage the masses, to communicate his conviction they should and could be the new protagonist of history and to persuade them to join in the process which would develop them as the new rulers. They liked the fact that the educative process was two-way and applied to everyone. "I'm with you. I've come to teach and I've come to learn" he said in 1920, to FIAT carworkers (Paulesu Quercioli 1977:243). They were inspired by his absolute conviction that their joint vision could be achieved if they planned and worked for it with "optimism of the will". They saw that he was prepared to sacrifice everything for it. He wrote to Tania that unlike many men he was willing to be the dung of history, ploughed into the earth to ensure better harvests for the future. Ordinary working people recognised and responded not only to his intellectual and moral inspiration but to the man.

Many comrades have talked about Gramsci's humanity, and what they say is true, he was different from the others...he humanised the ideas of Socialism, the ideas about world revolution. Every step he took, his every action was about changing things, to wrench millions and millions of people from suffering and to give them a personality and a new dignity. In all his actions there was deep human feeling. Giorgio Carretto, factory worker (Paulesu Quercioli 1977:243).

At the very end of his life Gramsci prepared to return to Sardinia. He told a fellow patient that he was not Italian he was Sardo. Amongst other things from Sardinia which Gramsci had carried with him from his difficult childhood was a need for the truth. In the first instance this meant no avoidance or suppression of unpleasant or inconvenient facts. It is present in his preference for the philological approach where each small fact and feeling is significant in building a truthful picture of a situation so that decisions have a solid foundation. He is quite explicit about the importance of the truth, politically and privately. As a young man he proclaimed that to tell the truth was a revolutionary act. In the *Prison Notebooks* he writes that "in the politics of the masses telling the truth is a political necessity". Towards the end of his life to Giulia he writes that they need to really talk to each other again "I have always had the opinion that the truth holds its own medicine". The insistence on the truth however difficult won him trust and respect whilst making him occasionally an uncomfortable companion. What shines through the biographies, oral histories, eyewitness accounts is everyone's recognition, even Mussolini's, of his integrity. This was a man who practised what he preached.

The young are demanding of their leaders. They will only recognise them if they see them set an example of how to behave. And Gramsci truly did that –a master who above all taught by example, even as far as his death in prison. Ferruccio Rigamonte, delegate of the Communist Youth Federation (Paulesu Quercioli 1977:176))

## References

Where titles are given in the original language, they have been translated by the author.

Absolom, R. (1995) *Italy since 1800*. Harlow: Longman.

Adamson, W. (1980) *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory*. London: California University Press.

Anderson, P. (1977) The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci, *New Left Review* 100: pp 5-78.

Ascoli, G. (1975). *Scritti sulla questione della lingua*. Torino: Einaudi.

Banfield, E.C. (1967) *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*. The Free Press, New York.

Bartoli, M. (1912) *Appunti di glottologia, anno accademico 1912-13, Università di Torino*. Torino: Dattilo-Litografate/A.Viretto.

Bartoli, M. (1917) Alberto Trauzzi Aree e limiti linguistici nella dialettologia italiana moderna, *Giornale storico della Letteratura Italiana*, (69):376-94.

Bellamy, R. (1994) Introduction in *Pre-prison Writings of Antonio Gramsci*. Bellamy, R. (ed); translated by Cox, V. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press ppi-xxxi.

Bermani, C. (1987) *Gramsci Raccontato: testimonianze raccolte da Cesare Bermani, Gianni Bosoe, Mimma Paulesu Quercioli*. Roma: Edizioni associate.

Bermani, C. (2007) *Gramsci, gli intellettuali e la cultura proletaria*. Milano. Cooperativa Colibri.

Bobbio, N. (1958) Nota sulla dialettica in Gramsci in *Atti del Convegno di Studi Gramsciani*, Istituto Antonio Gramsci (ed) :pp73-86.

Boothman, D. (2008) The Sources for Gramsci's Concept of Hegemony, *Rethinking Marxism*, 20 (2) pp.201-215.

Bordiga, A. 1927 *Unpublished letter from Ustica*. Epistolario, Fondo Antonio Gramsci, Fondazione Istituto Gramsci Via Portuense 95c 00153 Roma.

Borghese, L. (1981) Tia Alene in Bicicletta, *Belfagor*. XXXVI (6) pp635-665

Bosworth, R.J.B. (2006) *Mussolini's Italy: Life under Dictatorship*. London: Allen Lane.

Buttigieg, J. (1992) Introduction, in Buttigieg, J. (ed.) *Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks*. Vol.1. New York: Columbia University (pp1-64).

- Buttigieg, J. (2006) *The Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci's Work in Progress, *Rethinking Marxism* 18 (1). pp37-42.
- Brockmeier, J. (2000) Autobiographical Time in *Narrative Enquiry* 10 (1) pp51-73.
- Cambria, A. (1976) *Amore come rivoluzione*. Milano: Sugarco.
- Cammett, J. (1967) *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Clark, M. (1977) *Antonio Gramsci and the Revolution that failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Clark, M. (1984) *Modern Italy 1871-1982*. Harlow: Longman.
- Colombo, C. (Ed), (1977) *Gramsci e il suo tempo*. Milano: Longanesi.
- Coluzzi, P. (2009) Endangered minority and regional languages ('dialects') in Italy, *Modern Italy* 14 (1) pp39-54.
- Daniele, C. (1997) Introduzione, in *Antonio Gramsci – Tatiana Schucht, Lettere 1926-1935*. Natoli, A. Daniele, C. (eds) Torino: Einaudi
- Daniele, C. Vacca, G. (1999) *Gramsci a Roma, Togliatti a Mosca*. Torino: Einaudi
- Davidson, A. (1964) *Antonio Gramsci, The Man and His Ideas*. Sydney: Australian Left Review.
- Davidson, A. (1977) *Antonio Gramsci*. London: Merlin.
- Davis, J. (Ed) (1979) *Gramsci and Italy's Passive Revolution*. London: Croom Helm.
- De Felice, R. (1964) Un corso di glottologia di Matteo Bartoli negli appunti di Gramsci, *Rivista storica del socialismo*, vol 21: 219-21.
- De Mauro, T. (1979) Prefazione, in Lo Piparo, F. *Lingua, Intellettuali Egeonia in Gramsci*. Bari: Laterza, pp v-xvi .
- De Mauro, T. (1994a) "Lingua e dialetti" in Ginsborg, P. (Ed) *Lo Stato dell'Italia*. Milano: Mondadori .
- De Mauro, T. (1994b) *Come parlano gli Italiani*. Firenze: La Nuova Editrice.
- Denzin, N. K. (1989) *Interpretative Biography*. Newbury Park: Sage.

- Devoto, G. & Oli, G.C. (2000-2001) *Il Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*. Firenze: Le Monnier.
- Dickinson, H. & Erben, M. (1981) Recent Developments in Radical Education Theory *Social Science Teacher*, 10 (3):101-108.
- Dickinson, H., Erben, M. (2006) Nostalgia and Autobiography: The past in the Present. *Auto/Biography* 14(3) pp.223-244.
- D'Orsi, A. (2004) Dalla pace alle elezioni politiche in D'Orsi, A. (ed.) *Antonio Gramsci; La nostra città futura, Scritti torinese(1911-1922)*. Roma: Carocci
- Duggan, C. (1994) *A Concise History of Italy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Duggan, C. (2007) *The Force of Destiny*. London: Penguin.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica (1926) "Italian", in Vol 13: pp888-897 and "Sardinia", in Vol 23: pp210-217. Cambridge.
- Erben, M D (1999) The Biographic and the Educative: A question of Values, in *Values and Educational Research*. Scott, D. (ed) London: Bedford Way Papers
- Femia, J.V. (1981) *Gramsci's Political Thought*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Finocchiaro, M. (1988) *Gramsci and the history of dialectical thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fiori, G. (1990) *Antonio Gramsci*. Translated by T Nairn. London: Verso.
- Gergen, K.J. (2005) Narrative, Moral identity and Historical Consciousness in Straub, J.(ed.) *Narration, Identity and Historical Consciousness*. New York: Bergahn Books pp99-119.
- Gerratana, V. (1988) "Prefazione" in Gramsci, A. *Lettere dal Carcere, volume 2*. Roma: Editrice L'Unità.
- Gerratana, V. (1997) *Gramsci, problemi di metodo*. Roma: Editori Riuniti.
- Germino, D. L. (1990) *Antonio Gramsci: Architect of a New Politics*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press
- Gilks, D. (2007) Riforma e Rinascimento, Protestantism and Catholicism in Antonio Gramsci's Writing on Italian History, 1926-35, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 12 (3), pp286-306.
- Gouldner, A. (1979) *The Future of Intellectuals and the rise of the new class*. London: Macmillan.



- Gramsci, A. (1967) *La formazione dell'uomo*. Edited by G Urbani. Roma: Editori Riuniti.
- Gramsci, A. (1988) *A Gramsci Reader*. D. Forgacs (ed) London: Lawrence and Wishart .
- Green, M. Ives, P. (2009) Subalternity and Language: Overcoming the Fragmentation of Common Sense, *Historical Materialism* 17 pp3-30.
- Halse, C. (2006) Writing /Reading a Life: the Rhetorical Practice of Autobiography *Auto/Biography* vol 14 (2) pp95-115.
- Hoare, Q. (1971) Introduction in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Hoare, Q and Nowell-Smith, G. (eds) London: Lawrence and Wishart. pp xvii-xcvi
- Hobsbawm, E. (2010) Poker Face, *London Review of Books* 23 (7) pp23-24.
- Hopkins, G. M. (1963) Sonnets 42 and 46 in Gardner, W.H. (compiler and editor) *The Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. London: Penguin pp 61,63.
- Jones, M. (1997) Sardinia, in *The Dialects of Italy*. Maiden, M. Parry, M. (Eds).1997.pp
- Ives, P. (2004) *Gramsci's Politics of Language*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Ives, P. (2005) Language, Agency and Hegemony: A Gramscian Response to Post Marxism. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 8(4) pp455-468.
- Lawner, L. (1975) Introduction in *Antonio Gramsci, Letters from Prison*. London: Jonathan Cape. pp3-56.
- Lennie, D. Grego, M. (1966) *Italian for You*. London: Longman.
- Lepschy, A. Lepschy,G. (1991) *The Italian Language Today*. London: Hutchinson.
- Levi, C. (1965) *Cristo si e fermato a Eboli*. London: Harrap.
- Levy, C. (1999) *Gramsci and the Anarchists*. Oxford: Berg.
- Levy, C. (2007) 'Soversivisimo' The radical political culture of otherness in Liberal Italy, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 12 (2) pp147-161.
- Liquori, G (2006) *Sentieri gramsciani*. Roma. Carocci.
- Lo Piparo, F. (1979) *Lingua, intellettuali, egemonia in Gramsci*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Mack Smith, D. (1974) Regionalism, in Tannenbaum, E and Neother, E (eds.) *Modern Italy*. New York: University Press pp170- 195.

- Mack Smith, D. (1997) *Modern Italy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Maiden, M. (1995) *A Linguistic History of Italy*. Harlow: Longman.
- Maiden, M. Parry, M. (1997) *The Dialects of Italy*. London: Routledge.
- Meillet, A. (1948) *Linguistique Historique et Linguistique Général*. Paris: Champion.
- Mosca, G. Moiola Titone, G. Salustri, M. Santucci, B. (1986) *Ascoltare Parlare, Leggere, Scrivere*. Roma: Lucarini.
- Nairn, T. (1982) Antonu su Gobbu, in Showstack Sassoon, A. (ed.) *Approaches to Gramsci*. London 1982: pp.159-179.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995) Narrative in Qualitative Analysis in Hatch, J. A and Wisniewski, R [eds], *Life History and Narrative*. London: Falmer. pp5-23.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2005) Narrative Psychology and Historical Consciousness: Relationships and Perspectives in Straub, J. (ed). *Narration, Identity and Historical Consciousness*. New York: Bergahn Books.
- Paulesu Quercioli, M. (1977) *Gramsci vivo nelle testimonianze dei suoi contemporanei*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Paulesu Quercioli, M. (1991) *Le donne di Casa Gramsci*. Roma: Editori Riuniti.
- Rosengarten, F. (1984) Three Essays on Antonio Gramsci's 'Letters from Prison' *Italian Quarterly*, 97-98, pp7-40.
- Rosengarten, F. (1994) Introduction in *Antonio Gramsci, Letters from Prison, Vol. 1*. Rosengarten F (ed.), translated by R. Rosenthal. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rossi, A., Vacca, G. (2007) *Gramsci tra Mussolini e Stalin*. Roma: Fazi Editore
- Santucci, A. A. (1992) Avvertenza in *Antonio Gramsci, Lettere 1908-1926*. Santucci, A.A. (ed). Torino: Einaudi
- Schucht G (1927-1937) *Unpublished Letters*. Epistolario, Fondo Antonio Gramsci, Fondazione Istituto Gramsci Via Portuense 95c 00153 Roma.
- Showstack Sassoon, A. (1987) 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. *Gramsci's Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Smith, B. & Sparkes, A. (2004) Men, sport and spinal cord injury; an analysis of metaphors and narrative type, *Disability and Society*. 19 (6) October p613-626.
- Snowden, F. (1979) Sharecropper to proletarian in Davis, J.(ed.) *Gramsci and Italy's Passive Revolution*. London: Croom Helm pp140-158.

- Spriano, P. (1964 ) *L'Occupazione delle Fabbriche*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Spriano, P. (1967) *Storia del Partito comunista italiano, da Bordiga a Gramsci*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Spriano, P. (1971) *L'Ordine Nuovo ed i consigli di Fabbrica*. Einaudi: Torino.
- Spriano P (1979) *Antonio Gramsci and the Party; The Prison Years*. Translated by J. Fraser. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Sraffa, P. (1991) *Lettere a Tania per Gramsci*. Edited by Gerratana, V. Roma: Editori Riuniti.
- Tamburrano, G. (1977) *Antonio Gramsci*. Milan: Sugarco.
- Tannenbaum, E. (1974) "Education", in Tannenbaum, E. and Neother, E. (eds.) *Modern Italy*: New York: University Press pps
- Togliatti, P. (1949) *Gramsci*. Milano: Milano-Sera
- Togliatti, P (1958) *Gramsci, combattente* in *Atti del Convegno di Studi Gramsciani*, Istituto Antonio Gramsci (ed) :pp25-38.
- Urbinati, N. (1998) "From the periphery of modernity", *Political Theory*, vol 26: pp370-391.
- Vacca, G. (1982) "The Intellectuals and the Marxist Theory of the State", in Showstack Sassoon, A (ed.) *Approaches to Gramsci*. London:pp37-67
- Vacca, G. (1999) *Appuntamenti con Gramsci*. Roma: Carocci
- Williams, G.A. (1975a) Introduction in *The Occupation of the Factories: Italy 1920* . Spriano P., translated by G.A. Williams. London: Pluto
- Williams, G, A. (1975b) *Proletarian Order; Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Yarnit, M. (1980) 150 Hours, in:Thompson J (ed.) *Adult Education for Change*. (1988): London: Croom Helm.pp185-199.