Consciousness and Revolution: The Marxism of Antonio Gramsci, 1911-1921

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"The only philosophy is history in action, that is, life itself."
— Antonio Gramsci

The ideology which Karl Marx bequeathed to his followers in the international socialist movement proved to be a compound as unstable as it was explosive. The rich variety of interpretations which Marxist socialism generated, while reflecting the scope and power of the ideology, also splintered the movement in every major European country. In Italy, the socialist party was sharply divided by 1902 between moderate positivists [1] like Filippo Turati, founder of the party, and insurrectionary intransigents, many of whom were influenced by the revolutionary syndicalism of Georges Sorel. While the moderates believed, like Friedrich Engels, in an inevitable but unhurried coming of socialism, the intransigents emphasized Marx's unshakeable faith in revolutionary change; they developed a doctrine which stressed spontaneity and the power of both will and ideas to transform reality. After years of factional struggle, the party ousted Turati permanently from its leadership in 1912. Yet his successors were unable to dethrone his complacent positivism. In the decade and a half which preceded and encompassed the First World War, the fundamental philosophical disagreement between apostles of evolutionary determinism and revolutionary voluntarism remained unresolved.

In the last year of the war a young Turinese socialist, Antonio Gramsci, transcended the terms of this disagreement and began to draw together the elements for a new Italian Marxism. As a student at the University of Turin between 1911 and 1916, Gramsci had been impressed with the German idealist tradition. During the war, he expressed a highly intellectual brand of revolutionary voluntarism, but he opposed those revolutionary socialists, primarily syndicalists, who followed Mussolini in supporting

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Italian involvement in the conflict. At the same time, Gramsci carried on a spirited polemic with Turati and Claudio Treves, editor of the moderate socialist journal *Critica Sociale* (Social Criticism), over the revolutionary potential of popular anti-war sentiment. In 1917, when the Bolsheviks seized power in Russa, Turati denounced their revolution as premature; Gramsci praised it as the conclusive vindication of the power of ideas over material conditions in the establishment of socialism. As he learned more about events in Russia,[2] however, and as he struggled in Turin to forge an organizational vehicle for his revolutionary vision, Gramsci left his simple idealism behind. In the process, he laid the major theoretical foundations for the Italian Communist Party, which he helped establish in 1921.

In order to place the maturation of Gramsci's Marxism in the proper context, it is important that we first review the salient experiences of his childhood and adolescence. Gramsci belongs among that group of thinkers, perhaps a minority, whose concerns as adults seem clearly prefigured in the trials and expectations of youth.[3]

Antonio Gramsci was born in 1891, in the Sardinian village of Ales. Sardinia was then one of the most backward regions of Italy. Feudal land tenure had lasted there until 1835, longer than anywhere in Europe outside of Russia.[4] Gramsci's family was poor, and his childhood was very hard. For a number of years his father was imprisoned as a result of a local political dispute involving his activities as village surveyor. Although Antonio showed academic promise even in primary school, he had to leave school when he was eleven and work for two years in order to help support the family. He remembered his mother as devoted, intelligent and resourceful, yet as a boy he often felt alienated and humiliated. These feelings were reinforced by his own physical deformity — he was a hunchback. As he later recalled in writing to his wife Giulia, "that I could be loved [seemed] an absolute, almost fatal impossibility." [5] Gramsci's youthful preoccupation with establishing reliable human relationships helps us understand the wellsprings and intensity of his subsequent commitment to socialism. He never completely overcame some of his self-doubts. As he wrote in another letter to his wife,

> How many times I wondered if a man could bind himself to the masses if he had never loved anyone, not even his parents; if one could love a collectivity when one had not profoundly loved single human creatures.[6]

As a result of these feelings, Antonio became extremely reticent as a child.[7] As an adolescent, he confided in his younger brother Carlo that he had early become convinced he could rely only upon himself. In fact, however, his parents somehow saved enough money to send him to secondary school and then to the lyceum in Cagliari. In 1911 the young Gramsci won a scholarship to study at the University of Turin. Already, his own experience had taught him that intense, exhausting intellectual activity could earn what must have seemed an almost transcendent kind of material aid. "Ideas do not fall out of the sky," Antonio Labriola, one of Italy's first Marxist philosophers, had claimed,[8] but for Gramsci ideas did seem capable of drawing material comforts practically "out of the sky."

Gramsci closely identified with what he felt to be the aspirations of the South. When he arrived in Turin, his favorite writer was Gaetano Salvemini, the socialist spokesman and protagonist of the South in national political life.[9] In Turin, Gramsci soon became friends with another scholarship student from Sardinia, Palmiro Togliatti — the man who would assume leadership of the Italian Communist Party in 1926 following Gramsci's imprisonment by Mussolini. In describing Gramsci's early political inclinations, Togliatti recalled that

> When Gramsci came over from Sardinia, he was already a socialist. That he was so, perhaps, is better explained by a Sardinian instinct for rebellion, and a sort of humanitarianism, rather than by familiarity with any system of ideas.[10]

In his years at the University of Turin, Gramsci's intellectual horizons were widened tremendously. He deepened the passion for rigorous scholarship which he retained throughout his life. Between 1890 and the mid-1910's, sociological positivism constituted the dominant philosophical approach of professors at the university. As Gramsci was later to recall, this philosophy took the especially objectionable form of explaining the backwardness of southern Italy in these terms:

> The South is a lead weight which impedes the more rapid development of Italy; the southerners are biologically inferior beings . . . . if the South is backward, the fault is not to be found in the capitalist system or in any other historical cause, but is the fault of nature, which has made the southerner lazy, incapable, criminal and barbarous.[11]

Gramsci was particularly aggrieved by the presence of this kind of biological determinism among many northern socialists, even within the leadership of the party. An exception in this regard was Turati, who had travelled extensively in southern Italy as a young man. Nonetheless, Gramsci was now predisposed against a spirit of acquiescence in the face of inevitable, natural forces which he subsequently encountered in Turati's Marxism.

In his first two years of university study, Gramsci's chief academic interests lay in literature and specifically in linguistics. He was now systematically introduced, through literary criticism, to the thought of Benedetto Croce and was deeply impressed by the Neapolitan's philosophical idealism and by his dedication to moral and intellectual rejuvenation in Italy.[12] Between 1911 and 1913 Gramsci devoted himself almost exclusively to his studies, and he found particularly congenial Croce's insistence that intellectual life represented the key to Italy's broader regeneration and that academics ought to emphasize the social relevance of their work. Gramsci had found more than a critical theory — he interpreted Crocean idealism as a way of life.[13] He also became familiar with the work of Hegel, and this acquaintance would help him subsequently to appreciate the subjective dimension of Marx's thought.

In 1913 Gramsci's health began to deteriorate. The severe university regimen took its toll on his already fragile constitution, and he began to suffer headaches, dizzy spells, and stomach disorders.[14] The next two years were a period of extended illness and depression for Gramsci; he attended classes irregularly. An impoverished student in an expensive city, he was forced repeatedly to appeal to his parents for additional financial support. He suffered from loneliness as well. As he wrote to his parents in a letter from this period,

> I should have never detached myself so far from Life [sic] in the way I did. I've lived right out of this world for a

> couple of years: it was like a long dream. I allowed all the links which bound me to the world of men to snap off . . . . I lived entirely by the brain, and not at all by the heart.[15]

In 1914 Gramsci began to attend meetings of the Turinese section of the Young Socialist Federation, on the invitation of a fellow student and acquaintance, the committed activist Angelo Tasca. Initially, Gramsci was content to observe; he only occasionally entered into the more theoretical discussions. Gradually, however, his circle of activity widened, and late in 1914 he published his first political essay in the Turinese socialist weekly *Il Grido del Popolo* (The Cry of the People). At the university, Gramsci became interested in philosophy. As Annibale Pastore, his professor of theoretical philosophy recalled, Antonio's main concern became "How thought brings about action . . . how thought makes hands move, and how and why we can act with ideas.[16]"

Political commitment seemed to offer resolution to the continuing feelings of isolation. His questions became more focused: what was the proper relationship between students and popular masses, intellectuals and workers? Could the gap between the two be overcome? [17] Gramsci thus began to reformulate in social terms the problem of human communication, which had long preoccupied him personally. In search of answers to his questions, Gramsci now began to read Marx systematically.

When Italy entered the First World War in May of 1915, Gramsci decided to leave the university. He had become deeply involved in the Turinese Socialist Youth Federation, and with the coming of the war Tasca and several other active members of the group were drafted. Gramsci, who was exempted from military service because of his physical disabilities, inherited their position of leadership. By 1916 he was contributing pieces to *Il Grido del Popolo* on a wide variety of political topics. In the Turinese edition of the national party newspaper, *Avanti!* (Forward!) he published literary and theater reviews and wrote a regular column on popular life and customs.[18] Through his journalistic activity, Gramsci sought to close the distance he perceived separating the concerns of intellectuals and those of the common people. He believed, with Marx, that the socialist revolution would come only when the proletariat "appropriated the fruits of philosophy." Thus he deliberately maintained a sophisticated level in much of his writing,

attempting gradually to introduce his readers to the canons of Marxism as he understood them. If philosophy could advance only through the practical activity of the workers, the workers themselves needed the guiding light of philosophy.[19] The intense desire to implement this creed sustained Gramsci through the heavy editorial and organizational responsibilities he assumed over the next several years.

In one of his contributions to *Il Grido,* entitled "Socialism and Culture," Gramsci spelled out the revolutionary value of "cultural preparation." The passage shows how strong Gramsci's aversion to positivism remained and how partial he still was to philosophical idealism:

> Man is above all else consciousness — that is, he is a product of history, not nature. There is no other way of explaining why socialism has not already come into existence [although] there have always been exploiters and exploited. . . . Man has only been able to acquire a sense of his worth gradually . . . an awareness generated not out of brute psychological needs, but out of intelligent reasoning.[20]

Gramsci went on to explain how

> first a few, and later entire social classes . . . perceive ways of converting the structure of repression into one of rebellion and social reconstruction. This means that every revolution has been preceded by an intense labor of social criticism, of cultural penetration.[21]

It was the intelligentsia, persons like Gramsci himself, who must spearhead this effort of cultural preparation. Gramsci here called for a cultural organizational elite parallel in importance and similar in function to the revolutionary political elite Lenin would soon forge in Russia. Even before his exposure to Lenin's works, Gramsci's thinking was developing in a direction which would make him quite receptive to the ideas of the Bolshevik leader.

A major theme of Gramsci's writings of this period is his criticism of the bourgeois press. He was especially concerned about the press because of its potential as a vehicle for social criticism and for transforming consciousness. In December of 1916, he wrote two articles in which he described in uncompromising terms

the constantly biased bourgeois presentation of strike activity and workers' demonstrations.[22] He noted almost despairingly how workers not directly involved in these activities continued to believe the accounts presented in the bourgeois press. When word of the Russian Revolution began to reach Italy in early 1917, Gramsci repeatedly warned his readers of the distortion he suspected in the reportage of papers like the Turinese daily, *La Stampa.*

On February 11, 1917, a manifesto entitled *La Città Futura* (The Future City) appeared in Turin under the auspices of the Piedmontese Socialist Youth Federation. Though unsigned, this magazine was written and edited almost exclusively by Gramsci, and it fully elaborated Gramsci's socialist creed on the eve of the revolution in Russia. Toward the beginning of the manifesto, Gramsci noted that the bourgeoisie fear revolution because of its potential violence. The bourgeoisie feel, as the Italian adage has it, that "an egg today is better than a chicken tomorrow." The socialists know, however, that "to have the chicken, one must break the egg." [23]

In a subsequent section of the manifesto dealing with discipline, Gramsci contrasted the "mechanical and authoritarian" discipline, which holds together bourgeois society, with the "autonomous and spontaneous" discipline which will typify the socialist order. Gramsci argued that the discipline employed by the bourgeois state turns its "citizens" into "subjects" even while these are deceived into thinking that they influence events. The subject becomes a citizen again through the socialist revolution. His rebellious impulse stems from a newly conquered sense of personal worth (obtained in the period of "cultural preparation") and from a desire to "freely affirm himself" after the bonds of capitalist society have been broken.[24] Here Gramsci is clearly building on Marx's understanding of the socialist revolution as the watershed between the "realm of necessity" and the "realm of freedom."

The final section of *La Città Futura* optimistically described the power of the revolutionary will to hasten the coming of socialism and stressed the need to strengthen the workers' own optimism, their own sense of what is possible. Indeed, Gramsci was soon to respond enthusiastically to the Russian Revolution because of this need to give form to his own sense of the possible.

Gramsci's first extensive comments on the March Revolution appeared in *Il Grido* on April 29, 1917. Gramsci praised the revolution for having transcended the "Jacobinism" which typified the French Revolution. In *La Città Futura* he had constructed his analysis of "bourgeois discipline" on the Jacobin example. Now he defined Jacobinism as the violent substitution of one authoritarian regime for another.[25] Gramsci based his more favorable initial evaluation of the March Revolution on reports of the introduction of universal suffrage in Russia and the freeing of war and political prisoners. The idealistic, voluntaristic spirit of *La Città Futura* is still very much in evidence when Gramsci proclaimed:

> the revolution was not only substituted power for power, it has substituted custom for custom, it has inaugurated a new moral atmosphere, it has inaugurated the freedom of the spirit as well as the freedom of the body.[26]

In another article written at the same time, he argued that in Italy the socialist party, unlike the "Jacobin" bourgeois parties, promised to link itself both with the Italian people as a whole and with their desire to enter national political life.[27]

Gramsci's desire to see even in the March Revolution the complete transcendence of the bourgeois civil order led him to focus on the Bolsheviks, and on Lenin in particular, at a remarkably early stage. Lenin's call at Zimmerwald (1915) and Kienthal (1916) to transform the imperialist war into a class war had introduced the Russian leader to Italian socialists. Now, however, Lenin's policies appeared to Gramsci to possess much wider significance. In April, Gramsci stated that

> We are persuaded that the Russian Revolution is more than a single event, a proletarian action, and that it will naturally be realized in a socialist regime.[28]

He described Lenin as the "most socialist and most revolutionary leader" in Russia and the Bolsheviks as those who conceive of history as the "infinite process of creation."

The same approach typified Gramsci's article "The Russian Maximalists," written in July of 1917. The maximalist Bolsheviks "embody the ideal-limit of socialism: they want *all* of socialism," and they will prevent any "lasting compromise between the past . . . and the goal toward which the revolution must tend." [29]

In light of his keen interest in revolution at home, it is no wonder that Gramsci took delight in the news from Russia. But how did Turati and his fellow determinist socialists respond? In fact, the March Revolution was greeted with enthusiasm by all segments of the socialist party — and by most Italian liberals as well. Turati's moderate journal *Critica Sociale* carried an uncharacteristically euphoric article entitled "Springtime of the Revolution," which described how

> impatient revolution has overtaken tranquil reform. [The commoner from] the piazza has mounted the back of the Duma, forcing it to recognize that all hope for progress lies with the revolution.[30]

Turati, and the young editor of *Critica Sociale,* Claudio Treves, continued to praise the revolution until November. Although their attitude toward Lenin was critical, they failed to devote much attention to him or to his party. For Treves and Turati, the revolution had not yet exceeded their own theoretical timetable: like the Mensheviks, they assumed that bourgeois democracy, and certainly not proletarian dictatorship, constituted Russia's present destiny.

The success of the November Revolution came as an unpleasant shock. The first response to the Bolshevik seizure of power did not appear in *Critica Sociale* until December of 1917. In part, this delay reflected the national panic after the Italian military disaster at Caporetto which overshadowed all events beyond Italy's borders. At a deeper level however, the extended silence in *Critica Sociale* reflected an uncertainty over how to respond to an event so inexplicable to the moderate's own deterministic conception of Marxism.

Gramsci, on the other hand, responded quickly and vigorously. His controversial article, "The Revolution Against *Kapital,*" appeared on November 24 in *Avanti!* Gramsci argued that the November Revolution demonstrated that the "laws of historical materialism are not as iron-clad" as had been thought. In particular, the Bolsheviks had discredited

> the fatal necessity that in an Oriental society [such as Russia], an era of bourgeois capitalism was necessary before the proletariat could even think of redress, of its vindication as a class, of its revolution.[31]

Since this thesis had appeared originally in Marx's *Das Kapital,* Gramsci spoke of a "revolution against *Kapital,*" against "the book of the Russian bourgeoisie." [32] In contradicting certain assertions made in *Das Kapital,* however, Gramsci stressed that the Bolsheviks had not renounced the "immanent, living thought" of Marx himself:

> Marxist thought lives on, and that which will never die . . . is the continuation of Italian and German idealist thought, which in Marx was burdened by positivistic and naturalistic encrustations. And this thought posits always as a major motive in history not brute economic facts . . . but the societies of men, who encounter one another, begin developing out of these contacts a collective social will . . . until this will becomes the mover of the economy, the molder of objective reality.[33]

It is significant that Gramsci did not simply equate Marx and Lenin. Rather, he returned to the Italian and German idealists he had studied during his university years, Croce and Hegel, and derived from them a theory of the primacy of consciousness which could account for the Russian achievement and link it to at least part of the Marxist heritage.

Gramsci excused Marx's inability to foresee the revolution occuring first in Russia by noting that "Marx predicted the predictable." In Gramsci's analysis, it was precisely what was not foreseeable — the World War — which "out of three years of unspeakable suffering, of unspeakable misery," awakened the collective will of the Russian people in an unprecedented way. Lenin's greatness lay in sensing the revolutionary potential inherent in this collective will and then in educating the Russian people in the economic causes of their suffering. In Russia, the hardship caused by the war substituted for the role which in the West had been played by a long history of proletarian struggle:

> Socialist preaching enabled the Russian people imaginatively to live through the history of the struggle against capitalism. . . . Socialist preaching has created the social will of the Russian people.[34]

Gramsci's evaluation of Lenin in "The Revolution Against *Kapital*" bears a remarkable similarity to Georges Sorel's

interpretation of the Russian leader. For Sorel, who called Lenin "the greatest theoretician that socialism has had since Marx," the Russian leader's success was due to his profound sensibility to the uniqueness of Russian history. Sorel observed that

> In order to give Russian socialism a basis that a Marxist may regard as secure, a stupendous effort of intelligence is required . . . the necessity arises of demonstrating to the directors of production and to the masses certain rules derived from the experiences of highly developed capitalism. These rules [of worker discipline, for example] have to be constantly put forth by the men who have won the confidence of the people, have earned a moral authority.[35]

Sorel's insistence on the importance of intelligence, on its independence from constraining material conditions, and his practical stress on motivation all recall Gramsci's emphasis in "The Revolution Against *Kapital.*" The Frenchman's sense of *historical* consciousness as an indispensable form of intelligence is a theme which appeared increasingly in Gramsci's writing as well. Since Sorel's remarks were not published until 1919, one cannot speak of any borrowing on Gramsci's part. Their analyses of Lenin seemed to have evolved separately, but in parallel directions.[36]

The appearance of Gramsci's article soon brought a response from *Critica Sociale.* In his December article, "Lenin, Martov and We," Treves drew on a letter by the Menshevik leader which had been published in the *Journal de Paris.* In that letter, Martov had reported the use of "terror" against the majority of the Russian people; he had spoken of arbitrary persecutions and violence against the Bolsheviks' political opponents and of widespread repression of freedom of the press and assembly.[37] It was to counter reports such as these that Sorel would later state, "Lenin is not, after all, a candidate for the prize of virtue awarded by the French Academy; he is accountable only to Russian history.[38] " For Treves, however, Martov's report already suggested that the Leninist revolution had gone awry. A crude voluntarism had substituted itself for determinism, and "the transformative force of the instrument of labor" had degenerated into

> a heroic or hysterical violence of individuals or groups, which values the most frantic subjectivism and applaudes the worst emphases of demagogues.[39]

Gramsci responded to Treves in a January, 1918 article entitled "The Criticism of Criticism." Treves's abstract formula "the transformative force of the instrument of labor" for Gramsci neglected "the individual, existing man." Lenin exemplified a "new generation" which

> seeks to return to the genuine doctrine of Marx, for which man and reality, the instrument of labor and the will, are not divorced, but become one and the same in the historical act.

This new generation furthermore "believes that the laws of historical materialism are valid only after the fact, but cannot be used as hypotheses for the present or future.[40]"

This sensitivity to material factors as forces determining historical events is a new element in Gramsci's thinking. In Russia, he realized, the new conditions created by the war were economic factors, which in turn made possible a new system of ownership and production: socialism. Shortages of food among workers and peasants had been just as indispensable in creating a revolutionary atmosphere as was Lenin's leadership. Will remained crucial, but Gramsci now became uncomfortable with Treves's accusation of "voluntarism." In another article from the same period he stated:

> Voluntarism? The word has no meaning, or is used arbitrarily. Will, in a Marxist sense, signifies an understanding of one's goal, which in turn implies an exact understanding of one's own potential, and of means for expressing it in action.[41]

Gramsci's more pragmatic conception of will, and his new appreciation for objective factors, reflected both his widening knowledge of material conditions in post-revolutionary Russia and his increasing exposure to some of Lenin's writings.[42] In June, 1918, he wrote that

> The Bolsheviks are not utopians or dreamers. The documents of their pedagogical and practical activity demonstrate how their mentality shies away from any

> form of Messianism . . . how they continually insist on the difficulties which the revolution must overcome.[43]

According to Gramsci's friend Palmiro Togliatti, the most important single source of information on Lenin during the war was the American socialist magazine *The Liberator.*[44] The New York publication carried John Reed's first-hand accounts of conditions in Soviet Russia and Max Eastman's editorials on Leninism. Beginning in 1918, it also began carrying short translations of Lenin's own speeches and writings. One of Eastman's longer pieces on Lenin, entitled "A Statesman of the New Order," was soon edited and reprinted by Gramsci in 1919 in one of the first issues of his new magazine *Ordine Nuovo* (New Order). Eastman's portrait of Lenin in this article must have struck a responsive chord in Gramsci. In Lenin Eastman claimed to have found a "super statesman" who combined the exhaustive learning (in "economics and politics and social psychology") of the professor; the vision of the idealist; the patience and directness of the teacher; and the flexibility of the politician — all united with an "iron determination to put the conclusions of his thought into action." For Eastman, as now for Gramsci, the key to Lenin's genius lay in his ability to think undogmatically in the concrete situation in which he found himself.[45]

Gramsci was attacked as a "pragmatist" and an "opportunist" in 1917 and 1918, the period of transition in his thinking between an early, unbridled idealism and his mature appreciation for the tempering influence of material forces. Although Eastman, who had studied philosophy at Columbia under Dewey, was a self-conscious pragmatist, Gramsci was not. Since his university days he had maintained a non-pragmatic concern for logical consistency and clarity. At the same time, his writings in this period contained remarks such as, "life is always a revolution;" or, "truth and falsehood are manifestations of thought; life simply is."[46] These statements reveal Gramsci's growing awareness that disembodied ideas neither make nor explain history.

By September of 1918, with the article entitled "The Work of Lenin," Gramsci had definitively transcended the idealistic bias which had lead him less than a year earlier to distinguish between a freely creative Lenin and the hidebound Marx of *Das Kapital.* He now embraced an image of Lenin free of any mythical dimensions. Lenin, he wrote,

> is the cool student of historical realty, which tends organically to construct a new society upon solid and permanent foundations according to the precepts of the Marxist conception — it is revolution which builds without temporizing illusions, but obeys the dictates of reason and political wisdom.[47]

Gramsci affirmed a close link between Marx and Lenin:

> Lenin, applying the method elucidated by Marx, finds that reality lies in the profound and unbridgeable abyss which capitalism has opened up between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and in the continually sharpening antagonism between the two classes.[48]

The earlier emphasis on establishing a "reign of freedom" now clearly had given way to a hardheaded concern with organizational strategy.

In 1919 and 1920, Italy was engulfed by a wave of industrial disturbances, lockouts, and strikes, as industrialists sought to adjust to the reduced demands of a peacetime economy. In response, Turinese workers in particular became very militant during this *biennio rosso* or "Red Biennium," as it came to be known. By August of 1920, a rising tide of factory occupations in Turin and other cities led Lenin, Zinoviev, and Bukharin to assert, in a letter to the Italian Socialist Party, that "in Italy there are at hand all the most important conditions for a genuine popular proletarian revolution." [49]

Gramsci attempted in a variety of ways to channel this proletarian revolutionary spirit. He opened the pages of *Ordine Nuovo* to Max Eastman, Emile Zola, Romain Rolland, and Anatole Lunacharsky. His old concern with cultural preparation remained strong: literature was to be treated as "living experience of revolutionary consciousness." [50] Gramsci also became deeply involved in the Turinese workers' attempts to establish self-management factory councils, viewing these councils as the Italian equivalents of the Russian soviets. Since the councils were both created and maintained by the workers, they, like the soviets, provided an invaluable forum for the strengthening of proletarian self-confidence. In a statement which recalls Sorel's concern for the "morality of the producer," Gramsci described their multiple function:

> The existence of the council gives the workers a direct responsibility in production . . . institutes a voluntary and conscious discipline, creates a psychology of the producer, of the creator of history.[52]

The familiar Gramscian concern with willpower and intelligence is here wedded to the concrete institution of the factory council, just as slightly earlier it was wedded to the concrete figure of Lenin. From the consciousness of one man, located in a revolutionary situation, Gramsci shifted his attention to the consciousness of a group of men.

In his approach to the factory councils, Gramsci in fact won the praise of both Lenin and Sorel.[53] Unfortunately for Gramsci, the councils still addressed but a small minority of the Italian proletariat. Gramsci denied that either the existing mass trade union organizations or the socialist party itself could become, like the factory councils, "living embodiments of radical change itself." [54] It was in response to this situation that, after the great wave of factory occupations of late 1920 had failed to ignite the revolution, Gramsci joined with other left-wing socialists in deserting the mother party to found the Italian Communist Party in January of 1921.

In terms of theory, all of these activities reflected Gramsci's deepening identification of Lenin with the essence of his own Marxism and with the needs of Italian socialism. In practice, for Gramsci, as for revolutionary socialists across Europe, Marxism-Leninism dictated international proletarian solidarity and the application of Bolshevik aims and methods at home. It is true that Lenin's own success had stemmed from his tactical flexibility and sensitivity to Russian national conditions. Yet Lenin was convinced that the Russian proletariat could emancipate itself, and his own regime could remain socialist, only if revolutions also succeeded in one or more Western European countries. Thus Lenin insisted on international subservience to a single revolutionary program.[55]

By the end of 1918, reform socialists like Filippo Turati had arrived at a programmatic and theoretical perspective directly opposed to that of Gramsci. Class collaboration rather than class struggle seemed the key to realizing the hopes of Italian workers. As a parliamentary delegate, Turati was very concerned about the

vulnerability of the Italian democratic system, which following the war came under continual attack from the extreme nationalist Right as well as the revolutionary Left.[56] Repeatedly, Turati asserted that the Leninist "travesty of Marxism" was completely inapplicable to Italy. He insisted on the need for Italian socialists to define a strategy uniquely adapted to national considerations. Here he implicitly denied Lenin's resolute assertion that the proletariat could emancipate itself only in several nations at once.

The same insistence on Italy's particular and rather advanced level of economic and social development characterized Turati's direct response to Lenin, which appeared in *Critica Sociale* in December of 1918. Compared to Italy, Russia's proletariat was both tiny and "immature." Because Russia's proletariat was still so small, Turati argued that Lenin was "utopian" in claiming to have established a "dictatorship of the proletariat." Even though he had demonstrated the ability to conquer power at the head of a small and disciplined minority, Lenin should have refused to rule, especially since his regime apparently required terror to maintain itself. Lenin, he concluded, ought not to be identified with Marx, but with "father Michael" (Bakunin).[57]

In his article, Turati demonstrated his still unshaken conception of history as a process of inexorable evolution, in which no stage can be by-passed safely. He turned to Gramsci's old favorite, *Das Kapital,* for substantiation of his approach:

> The Marx of the *Manifesto* and *Kapital* represented a socialism that was no longer embodied in the idea of a leader . . . to be applied, like a bandaid, to any time and place . . . but rather a historical development, in which the new content (the proletariat), having slowly evolved, breaks the framework of juridical and social relations which have become too narrow to contain it.[58]

Turati's concrete program for the post-war period followed directly from this uncompromising evolutionism. On December 22nd and 23rd, 1918, the Parliamentary Group issued a statement which provided the "solid staircase" upon which the proletariat could securely advance. The "staircase" included such reforms as universal suffrage, the eight hour day, democratic judicial reform, and general disarmament. The group's statement also promised the establishment of agricultural collectives and workers' control

of production and consumption.[59] Nevertheless, it is clear that a resumption of the old, gradualistic path to socialism was the only alternative which Turati and his reformist colleagues could offer to the Leninist apocalypse of international revolution. Thus Turati's experience of the war and his encounter with Lenin did little to alter his conception of Marxism. Despite his eloquent reaffirmations of his old faith, he exercised declining influence in the turbulent world ushered in by war and revolution.

For Gramsci, on the other hand, the encounter with Lenin proved to be a pivotal event. During the years at the University of Turin, between 1911 and 1915, Gramsci's thinking had already diverged from the Turatian orthodoxy. As a student, he embraced a socialism heavily influenced by German idealism and voluntarism. As his initial response to the November Revolution showed, even in late 1917 his commitment to a Marxism "burdened with deterministic encrustations" was qualified. It was only through his increasing knowledge of events in Russia, obtained chiefly through *The Liberator,* that he grew to appreciate the importance of material conditions as well as ideals and will. And it was by reflecting on the example of Lenin that Gramsci's mature conception of Marxism, now understood as a science transcending the dichotomy between idealism and materialism, took shape.

By 1921, the philosophical schism between Gramscian and Turatian Marxism had solidified in institutional form. Separate Italian socialist and communist parties henceforth conducted an increasingly desperate defense of the socialist dream in the face of ascendant Fascism. In 1925 all opposition parties were banned, and in 1926 Gramsci himself was imprisoned. He died eleven years later of illnesses contracted in prison. Turati was driven into exile in 1924, and he died in Paris in 1932.

In the long run, much of the contradiction between Gramsci's and Turati's thought was to be overcome. Following the defeat of Fascism, and in the wake of another World War, the Italian Communist Party appropriated both Turati's commitment to parliamentarism and his insistence on an "Italian [and therefore non-Soviet] road to socialism." Yet in its openness to change, its emphasis on the cultural dimensions of the revolutionary process, and its awareness of the testimony of recent history, the party confirmed the legacy of its founder. In this statement from one of his prison notebooks we find foreshadowed the humanistic

communism of the party after 1945; we hear as well an echo of Gramsci's lonely childhood and his lifelong struggle to overcome it:

> A revolution cannot be successfully fought if men have not acquired a historical awareness of their time and its background. Men . . . must find in the interpretation of the past the strength, underpinned by a new culture, to radically modify relationships between themselves, to upset the concept of individuality as isolation, and affirm the concept of individuality as original contribution to collective life.[60]

APPENDIX:
Gramsci's Sources of Information Concerning Lenin

The problem of just when and how Gramsci learned about the activities of Lenin and the Bolsheviks is a complex one. Given the great variety of possible sources of information available to Gramsci, the account which follows is necessarily incomplete. Nevertheless, several major avenues of influence have been established.

Most Italian scholars writing on the spread of Leninist thought to Italy during and immediately following the First World War have relied on Palmiro Togliatti's recollections of the period.[61] Togliatti stated that Lenin's name, which had been almost unknown prior to the war, first gained currency in Italy as a result of the international socialist conferences at Lugano in 1914, Zimmerwald in 1915, and Kienthal in 1916. Lenin was quite influential within the left-wing opposition at Zimmerwald, was selected as a member of the separate Bureau which the left-wing established, and he helped the faction publish its own bulletin and two issues of a theoretical journal, *Vorboten.*[62]

Togliatti has indicated that extracts and commentaries of Lenin's writings began to appear in 1917 in several French journals and reviews and in the American magazine *The Liberator.* Togliatti failed to cite any specific French titles, and he was premature in his reference to *The Liberator,* which did not begin publication until February, 1918. In a recent article on Lenin and Gramsci, Alastair Davidson has cited *Clarté* and several other French language publications as primary sources of information for Gramsci

beginning in 1919. Davidson views the French journals as the key link between Lenin and Gramsci, since "French was the only language which he [Gramsci] read without difficulty." [63] Nevertheless both Togliatti and Max Eastman note that Gramsci himself singled out *The Liberator* as an especially important source.[64] On the national level, *Avanti!*, the official socialist party organ, began to carry accounts written by the Russian emigré Victor Suchomlin in late 1917. Lenin's statements began to appear in translation in the Turinese socialist weekly *Il Grido del Popolo,* particularly after Gramsci assumed editorship of the paper in early October of 1917. As early as September 1917, Gramsci claimed to have been in touch with "a Polish comrade" who translated articles from *Pravda* and furnished other material concerning Lenin and the Bolsheviks for *Il Grido del Popolo.*[65] The identity of this mysterious comrade remains open to question. Giuseppe Fiori refers quite matter-of-factly to an Aron Wizner as "the translator of a number of Bolshevik texts and documents." [66] Francesco Romano suggests more tentatively the name of Chiarini, "a young Bolshevik who had come to study in Italy." [67] The translation from *Pravda* which appeared in *Il Grido del Popolo,* September 22, 1917, carried Chiarini's signature, as well as a prefatory note from the editors attesting to the authenticity of the document. In 1917, Lenin's essay on "The Military Program of the Proletarian Revolution," which he had written in the fall of 1916, appeared in German translation in *Jugend Internationale.*[68] Having studied German philosophy at the university, Gramsci almost certainly benefitted from Lenin's article in this widely circulating magazine.

It was in 1918 that, according to Togliatti, Lenin became "widely known, translated, published and read." Even so, it was not Lenin's theoretical works but rather, as Togliatti puts it, his "writings dedicated to the immediate struggle of those years, against social-chauvinism and centrism, for the creation of communist parties in all countries, and for the foundation and organization of the Communist International." [69] According to Paolo Spriano, the French edition of the Comintern's own publication, *The Communist International,* was an important source of Lenin's writings beginning in 1919. In addition, Spriano finds strong internal evidence that Gramsci's conception of the factory council movement reflects the influence of Lenin's description of the "soviets of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies" of the 1905

revolution, which appeared in *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution* (published in Russia in September of 1917).[70]

Only in the years 1919 to 1921 did the major statements of Leninist theory become known. Italian translations generally lagged behind translations into French, German, and English. *The Proletarian Revolution and the Defection of Kautsky* was translated into French and published in 1919 under the auspices of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. In this work Lenin associated Kautsky in Germany, Longuet in France, and Turati in Italy with the common heresy of approving the bourgeois nation-state's right to self-defense. Even after the conclusion of the imperialist world war, such sentiments represented the betrayal of the international revolution.[71] Gramsci's own attacks on Turati at the time, and his resolute internationalism, echoed Lenin's ideas.

Lenin's essential *State and Revolution* did not appear in Italian until 1920.[72] Lenin's opinions and theses prepared for the first and second congresses of the Comintern, as well as all the following works, were published in Italian only in 1921: *Extremism, Infantile Malady of Communism; Imperialism as the Latest Stage of Capitalism; The Proletarian Revolution and the Defection of Kautsky; Revolution and War; The Elections for the Constituent Assembly and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat;* and *Socialism and the War* (jointly written by Lenin and Zinoviev). Even in 1921, *What Is To Be Done?, Two Tactics,* and *One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward* were not well known, and *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* and *Empiriocriticism* were virtually unknown.[73]

NOTES

[1] A very useful and full definition of "positivism" may be found in H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* (New York, 1958). For a discussion of the philosophical divergence within Marxism, see pp. 67-104.

[2] See appendix for an account of Gramsci's sources of information concerning Lenin.

[3] The best introduction to Gramsci's thought in English remains John M. Cammett's *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (Stanford, 1967). Giuseppe Fiori, in his *Antonio Gramsci: Life of a Revolutionary,* tr. by Tom Nairn (New York, 1971) provides a vivid personal portrait. The most detailed account of the relationship between Gramsci's life and thought is Salvatore Romano's *Antonio Gramsci* (Turin, 1965).

[4] Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, pp. 10-11.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Fiori, *Life of a Revolutionary*, p. 15.

[8] Labriola's statement is quoted in the introduction to Rosa Luxemburg's *Social Reform or Revolution*, tr. by Integer (Columbo, Ceylon, 1969).

[9] Fiori, *Life of a Revolutionary*, p. 57.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

[11] Antonio Gramsci, "The Southern Question," in *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, tr. by Louis Marks (New York, 1972), p. 31.

[12] Romano, *Antonio Gramsci*, p. 65.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

[14] Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, p. 18, from Palmiro Togliatti, *Gramsci* (Rome, 1955), p. 81.

[15] Fiori, *Life of a Revolutionary*, p. 99.

[16] Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, p. 18, as quoted from Domenico Zucaro, "Antonio Gramsci all' Università di Torino, 1911-1915," *Società XIII, 6 (Dec. 1957), p. 1109.*

[17] *Romano, Antonio Gramsci*, p. 83.

[18] *Ibid.* Gramsci's activities as a journalist receive exhaustive treatment in Romano's chapter four, pp. 141-204.

[19] An outstanding discussion of the philosophical underpinnings of Marx's thought, especially regarding the relationship between Marx and Hegel, may be found in Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Though of Karl Marx* (London, 1968). For Marx, Hegelian idealism was the most sophisticated expression of bourgeois philosophy. He felt he had both completed and transcended Hegelianism with his own revolution in philosophy, which was at the same time a complete philosophy of revolution.

[20] Gramsci, *Scritti giovanili* (Turin, 1972), p. 24, originally in *Il Grido del Popolo*, Vol. 22, no. 601 (Jan. 24, 1916).

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 53-57. "Newspapers and Workers" appeared originally in *Avanti!*, Vol. 201, no. 249, (Dec. 22, 1916), and "What is a Bourgeois Newspaper?" appeared on the following day.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 106. Originally in *Il Grido del Popolo* Vol. 22, no. 666 (April 24, 1917).

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

[27] Gramsci, *Per la verità* (Rome, 1974) pp. 38-41. Originally in *Il Grido del Popolo* Vol. 22, no. 687 (Sept. 22, 1917).

[28] Gramsci, *Scritti giovanili*, p. 106.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 123. Originally in *Il Grido del Popolo* Vol. 22, no. 679 (July 28, 1917).

[30] Claudio Treves, as quoted in Mario Spinella, ed., *Critica Sociale* (Milan, 1959), p. 82.

[31] Gramsci, *Scritti giovanili*, p. 149.

[32] In late 19th century Russia, "scientific," evolutionary Marxism had become quite fashionable, and many bourgeois liberals suddenly "discovered" that they were "Marxists."

[33] Gramsci, *Scritti giovanili*, p. 150.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 151. The American Marxist historian Eugene Genovese, in an article entitled "On Antonio Gramsci," notes that, for Gramsci, "revolutionary thought does not see time as a factor of progress . . . to pass through one stage and avance to another, it is enough that the first stage be realized in thought." *In Red and Black* (New York, 1968), p. 393.

[35] Georges Sorel, "In Defense of Lenin," appendix to *Reflections on Violence*, fourth ed., (1919), tr. by J. Roth and T. E. Hulme (New York, 1950), p. 279.

[36] The initial translation of *Reflections on Violence* appeared in Italy in 1908. For Sorel's influence on Gramsci as a university student, see Romano, pp. 198-204.

[37] Spinella, *Critica Sociale*, p. 380.

[38] Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, p. 284.

[39] Spinella, *Critica Sociale*, p. 380.

[40] Gramsci, *Scritti giovanili*, pp. 153-155. Originally in *Il Grido del Popolo*, Vol. 23, no. 703 (Jan. 12, 1918).

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 220. Originally in *Il Grido del Popolo*, Vol. 23, no. 719 (May 4, 1918). Gramsci's evolving conception of will, in response to his increasing appreciation for Lenin, is discussed in Franco Calamandrei, "L'iniziativa politica da Lenin a Gramsci e Togliatti," *Critica Marxista*, Vol. 5, no. 4-5 (1967), p. 83-84.

[42] See appendix.

[43] Quoted in Aurelio Lepre, "Bordiga e Gramsci di fronte alla guerra," *Critica Marxista*, Vol. 5, no. 4-5 (1967), p. 134.

[44] Togliatti, *Gramsci* (Rome, 1967), p. 139.

[45] Max Eastman, "A Statesman of the New Order," *The Liberator*, Vol. 1, no. 7 (Sept. 1918), p. 10.

[46] Romano, *Antonio Gramsci*, pp. 230-231.

[47] Quoted in Lepre, "Bordiga e Gramsci," p. 135.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] Paolo Spriano, *L'Ordine Nuovo e i consigli di fabbrica* (Turin, 1971), p. 127. Gramsci's sense of the parallel revolutionary contexts in the two cities led him to designate Turin "the Petrograd of Italy."

[50] Romano Giachetti, "Antonio Gramsci: The Subjective Revolution," in Dick Howard and Karl Klare, eds., *The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism Since Lenin* (New York, 1972), p. 154.

[51] Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, pp. 216-244.

[52] Gramsci, *L'Ordine Nuovo, 1919-1920* (Turin, 1955), p. 38. Originially "Sindicati e Consigli," in Vol. I, no. 21 (Oct. 11, 1919).

[53] Spriano, *L'Ordine Nuovo e i consigli di fabbrica*, pp. 55, 115.

[54] Giachetti, "The Subjective Revolution," p. 156.

[55] In July of 1920, all European socialist parties were forced to choose between adherence to Lenin's famous Twenty-One Points or explusion from the Comintern.

[56] Gaetano Arfe, *Storia del socialismo italiano* (Turin, 1965), pp. 212-215.

[57] Spinella, *Critica Sociale*, p. 340.

[58] Quoted in Orazio Niceforo, "Turati e il leninismo," *Critica Sociale*, Vol. 62 (1970), p. 316.

[59] Franco Catalano, *Filippo Turati* (Milan, 1957), p. 258.

[60] Gramsci, *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce* (Turin, 1949), pp. 29-30, as paraphrased by Giachetti, "The Subjective Revolution," p. 160. For a

somewhat different rendering, see Marks, ed., *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, pp. 78-79.

[61] Togliatti, *Gramsci*, pp. 139-140. See also Togliatti's *Leninismo nel pensiero e nell'azione di A. Gramsci* (Rome, 1958).

[62] V. I. Lenin, *Sul movimento operaio italiano* (tr. by Felice Platone, Florence, 1952), p. 106.

[63] Alastair Davidson, "Gramsci and Lenin 1917-1922," in *The Socialist Register.* Annual. Vol. XI, (1974), p. 130. Davidson's assessment of Gramsci's linguistic abilities is based on the recollections of Alfonso Leonetti, who worked with Gramsci on *Ordine Nuovo.*

[64] Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, pp. 59, 237.

[65] Romano, *Antonio Gransci*, p. 231.

[66] Fiori, *Life of a Revolutionary*, p. 114.

[67] Romano, *Antonio Gramsci*, p. 232.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 591.

[69] Togliatti, *Gramsci*, pp. 139-140.

[70] Spriano, *L'Ordine Nuovo e i consigli di fabbrica.* pp. 59, 62.

[71] Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Defection of Kautsky.* Selected Works, Vol. 3 (Moscow, 1967), pp. 43-127.

[72] G. Sanna's translation was published in Milan by *Avanti!.* In 1920, *Avanti!* also published Lenin's "The Grand Initiative: The Heroism of the Russian Worker on the Internal Front."

[73] These publication dates are drawn from Togliatti's *Gransci*, pp. 139-140, as confirmed and expanded through a search of the second and third supplements to Attilio Pagliaini, ed., *Catalogo Generale della Libreria Italiana* (Milan, 1928 and 1932).