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LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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THE CONCEPT OF INTELLECTUALS IN
GRAMSCI'S POLITICAL THEORY

By: Orietta CAPONI

Thesis presented to the School of
Graduate Studies in partial ful-
fillment of the requirements for
the Ph.D. degree in Philosophy

University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Canada, 1982

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge my debt to the sound direction and constant encouragement of my thesis supervisor, Prof. H. Aronovitch, Ph.D., of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Ottawa.

I also wish to thank all of those from whom I have learned and from whom I have received inspiration and advice.

NOTES ON TEXTS

Whenever possible, quotations from Gramsci's work have been taken from existing English translations. When texts have not been available in translation I have used the Italian original source.

In the case of the Prison Notebooks, whenever possible, reference is given to both English and Italian editions. The dates indicated for Gramsci's works which were published posthumously are the approximate dates of composition as established by the critical edition of V. Gerratana.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....

Notes on Texts.....

INTRODUCTION..... VI

Notes..... XVII

CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPTION OF INTELLECTUALS IN THE EARLY WRITINGS..... 1

1. The conception of a new culture in the period
1914-1920..... 3

2. The conception of intellectuals during the years
1921-1926..... 28

Notes..... 40

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BLOC AND HEGEMONY..... 44

1. Structure and superstructure in the notion of
"historical bloc"..... 46

2. The Leninist roots of the concept of hegemony..... 66

Notes..... 85

CHAPTER III

THE STATE AND THE ROLE OF THE INTELLECTUALS IN THE HISTORICAL
BLOC..... 89

1. Gramsci's expanded concept of the state.....	91
2. The role of the intellectual within the historical bloc.....	101
3. Gramsci's conception of the modern political party.....	117
Notes.....	123

CHAPTER IV

THE ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL OF THE PROLETARIAT.....	127
1. The organic intellectual of the proletariat.....	128
2. The new hegemony and the old.....	137
3. The new Party: the modern Prince, the collective intellectual.....	142
A. Gramsci's concept of the revolutionary party.....	142
B. Democratic centralism - the relationship between leaders and led within the party.....	152
C. The relationship of the party to the masses.....	164
D. Gramsci's conception of the party as compared to Lenin's.....	167
Notes.....	170

CHAPTER V

THE PROLETARIAT DICTATORSHIP AND THE WITHERING AWAY OF THE STATE.....	174
1. Revolution as "war of position".....	175
2. The dictatorship of the proletariat.....	181
Notes.....	214

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....	216
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BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	223
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INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of Marxism the question of the role, value and position of intellectuals in a movement dedicated to the goal of workers' self-emancipation has been an important and controversial problem. Already in 1866 during the Congress of the First International emphatic support was given to a motion to exclude theoreticians and intellectuals from the organization since they were not workers. The European workers' movement of the late 19th century was marked by strong anti-intellectual tendencies. These tendencies were based on the idea, expressed by the anarchist Bakunin, that the division in the International between intellectuals, as the directing group, and the majority of the workers could result only in a class-divided post-revolutionary society with intellectuals as a new dominant class.

Marx himself never explicitly confronted the problem of intellectuals, but his doctrine of the dialectical unity of theory and praxis amounts to a stance against anti-intellectualism and against separation of intellectuals from workers. However, as Marx recognized intellectuals tend to come to the working class from the outside, to be members originally of the bourgeois intelligentsia.

Marx's writings allow for different and opposing interpretations of the role and value of intellectuals in a revolutionary movement. On the one hand Marx, seemed to recognize that class consciousness could not be spontaneously generated through the labour experiences of the working class so that education of the proletariat from the outside was necessary. On the other hand, Marx's economic analysis often seems to promise the inherent inevitability of revolution.

Many of the major ideological differences of the Second International were based on these ambiguities in Marx's writings. 'Orthodox Marxists', like Kautsky, proclaimed the inevitability of proletarian revolution as the result of the economic conditions alone. They shared the view of Marxism as a science of history based above all on Marx's later economic writings. Since the 'Orthodox Marxists' considered that the thoughts and actions of the working class would be natural consequences of the inevitable demise of capitalism, they ignored the importance of political education for the advent of socialism.

Among those who underestimated political education must also be mentioned R. Luxemburg. Even though she did not share the mechanistic view held by Kautsky and other orthodox

Marxists, she still believed that the proletarian outlook would arise spontaneously from the long series of struggles against capitalism. She placed great faith in the spontaneous and progressive awakening of the working class. Revolutionary aims, for her, could not be inculcated in the masses by intellectual elites but rather had to flow from the logic of capitalism's development.

Against these theories of the inevitability of proletarian revolution and of the spontaneous awakening of the masses arose the revolutionary theory of Lenin. For him, class consciousness was not a natural and spontaneous product of the situation and experiences of the working class: these could only produce "trade-union consciousness". Lenin proclaimed the necessity of supplying class consciousness for the workers from outside through the action of the "vanguard-party". It was, thus, Lenin who initially asserted the importance of political education for the proletariat and criticized the fatalistic vision of economicistic and deterministic interpretations of Marxism which could only lead to the passivity of the working class. But at the same time Lenin's emphasis on the necessity of the intervention of an "external element" into the class struggle, his insistence on a strong centralized organization of the party and on intellectual leadership imposed on the

masses only increased the contradiction between the tendency to intellectual domination and the socialist goal of proletarian self-emancipation.

The work of Antonio Gramsci as a whole is in essence an effort to overcome this contradiction. Gramsci deplored and vehemently opposed the mechanistic and deterministic view of the principal tenets of the Second International and insisted on the subjective aspect of Marxist theory. He pointed out that the revolutionary change required a change in consciousness achieved by the masses from within their ranks and not imposed from outside. Hence arose the crucial role for and the new meaning Gramsci gave to intellectuals in his revolutionary theory.

Gramsci's work is of importance and interest today whether from a Marxist or a non-Marxist perspective. From a Marxist perspective Gramsci's writings are, first, a challenge to those who deny the need for theorists in a workers movement aimed at proletarian self-emancipation. Gramsci throughout his work sought a dialectical relationship between the spontaneity of workers' movement and the necessity of conscious leadership. From his early writings to his mature reflections in his Prison Notebooks, Gramsci's central preoccupation was to elaborate a theory which recognized the indispensability of intel-

lectuals in the cause of proletarian revolution while trying to guard against the threat of a post-revolutionary society dominated by a new class of intellectuals. In addition, Gramsci's related theory of hegemony is essential to any project of Marxist political analysis. That theory explains how a particular class maintains its ruling position not only through economic or physical power but also through the support of the ruled who come to accept its social, cultural and moral values. The analysis of this 'ideological' dimension is an area which Marxist studies have comparatively neglected until recent times and the development of it seems imperative today when the survival of capitalism, especially in the more industrially advanced countries has posed for the Marxists the necessity of explaining the mechanisms and reasons for this survival.

Moreover, the reality of the bureaucratic dictatorship of the Soviet regime has forced many Marxists to try to find a more humane and democratic alternative. The Soviet regime has reproduced at another level the division between leaders and led of capitalist societies by means of a strongly centralized Leninist party. The search for alternative cannot ignore the work of Gramsci, above all what he has to say on the role of the party as "collective intellectual" of the working class and on the democratic relationship between the party and the masses required in a socialist state.

From a non-Marxist perspective, Gramsci's theory is also useful and interesting for those who try to find a more humane alternative to contemporary society. That theory speaks to a number of problems in social and political analysis. Among them, for instance, the importance of ideological and cultural hegemony for the strengthening of political power and the inextricable interweaving of civil society and government in advanced capitalism.

The aim of this study is to analyse Gramsci's attempt to overcome the dilemma for the presence of intellectuals in a movement of proletariat self-liberation, with the potential that that presence has for leading to a tyrannical new class in some future socialist society.

The major methodological problem in studying Gramsci's work is that his writings are all fragmentary. His early writings have the form of political journalism and party documents. In these writings, concepts and theories are sketched in haste to respond to immediate problems of the workers' struggle. On the other hand, the later Prison Notebooks are just notes, unfinished fragments, elements of and indications for further study written under difficult physical, mental and intellectual conditions. However, I think that in spite of the unfinished form of Gramsci's writings, it is possible to find a unity

underlying his work. I shall try to demonstrate in this study that the notion of intellectual is the keystone of Gramsci's theory and that this concept provides the focal point for the systematic presentation or reconstruction of Gramsci's views.

Another difficulty in studying Gramsci's work is the existence of highly different interpretations of his thought. The broad difference of interpretations can partly be explained by the unfinished and unsystematic form of Gramsci's writings. But it is also necessary to recognize that some of the literature on Gramsci has been motivated by the desire to use him in support of specific political aims. His writings have been interpreted, for example, as supporting a program of democratic transition to socialism. This interpretation has rested on emphasizing the cultural aspect of Gramsci's theory of hegemony without taking into consideration his theory of the state and of political dominance.¹ On the other hand, Gramsci's work has been presented as a mere version of Leninist theory adapted to Western countries, without considering the innovations of his conceptions of the party and of the state and the challenge they pose to Leninism.²

To avoid the usual one-sidedness of interpretations of Gramsci and to show the unity of his theory it is necessary to present an analysis of his views in their own right and on

their own terms. That is, we shall try to stick closely to Gramsci's texts and intentions. However, this already implies considering his writings in relation to the historical and social reality they address.

This study then is a reconstruction of Gramsci's thought around the concept of the intellectual following the progressive development of this concept from the early writings to the Prison Notebooks. Its plan is as follows.

The first chapter contains the analysis of Gramsci's early writings. This analysis tries to show how in the early writings there are already present the fundamental themes which will be developed by Gramsci in his mature reflections: a strong criticism of the positivistic and economicistic interpretations of Marxism and an endorsement of a humanistic and voluntaristic vision of Marxism. The chapter presents Gramsci's conception of a new proletarian culture as he elaborated it during the years 1914-1920, before the constitution of the Italian Communist Party. Emphasis is placed on the idea that Gramsci's discussion of the revolutionary function of culture is the first step towards his later elaboration of the function and role of intellectuals in a revolutionary movement.

This first chapter also treats Gramsci's theory of the Factory Councils and their importance to his view of the

education of workers. It will be shown that the failure of the Turin councils movement forced Gramsci to recognize the incapability of the Italian Socialist Party to lead a revolution in Italy and to accept the need for a disciplined, hierarchically organized party, while still insisting that mass participation remains the underpinning of the party. In that regard Gramsci's early reflections on the importance of culture and the role of intellectuals in class struggle will be drawn out.

The second chapter deals with Gramsci's notion of the "historical bloc", that is, of the dialectical unity of structure and superstructure. Gramsci's theory on these matters is examined in relation to that of Marx. The aim is to show that Gramsci retrieves and builds on important and neglected aspects of Marx's theory in analysing the role of ideology in society and its complex relationship to the economic structure. Gramsci's theory of hegemony is also compared to Lenin's views with the purpose of showing that even if Gramsci's theory can be considered Leninist in origin it nonetheless differs from and transcends Lenin's views in many ways.

The concepts analyzed in the second chapter are deepened and extended in the third chapter. It focuses on Gramsci's concept of the state as the dialectical unity of consent and

on the relation of his concept of the state to his theory of intellectuals. Gramsci's concept of the state involves a critique of both the liberal view of the state as merely playing the role of referee and the orthodox Marxist view of the state as a purely repressive instrument. Gramsci's own fuller concept of the state is connected up with an understanding of the ideological role of intellectuals and the class they represent.

The fourth chapter takes up the creation of a new "organic intellectual" of the working class and of his/her function in the diffusion of proletarian hegemony. It is here that Gramsci's theory of the intellectual as expressing the self-consciousness of the workers most clearly appears in opposition to Lenin's notion of a "vanguard" external to the working class. Gramsci's distinctive conception of democratic centralism is thus explored and seen to be continuous with his earlier reflections on workers' councils and their educative role.

The fifth chapter brings together the themes of hegemony, of the gradual affirmation of proletarian leadership in civil society, of the new organic intellectual of the working class and of the party as the collective intellectual by focussing them all on the goals of the proletarian seizure

of state power and the subsequent establishment of proletarian dictatorship. The chapter presents those matters in Gramsci and goes on to consider some problems they pose. Exposition after a time gives way to critical assessment and evaluation.

The chapter assesses, thus, two different overall interpretations of Gramsci's theory: one which holds that this theory provides the basis for a totalitarian state, the other which holds that it provides the basis for a purely democratic route to socialism. We try to show that Gramsci's theory actually seeks a dialectical relation between the use of force and consent with the precise measure of the relations determined by the character of specific historical conditions. At the same time we recall that, for Gramsci, in the long run a socialist society cannot but be democratic because it will be based on the collective participation of the masses, whose preparation for political life has been realized by the educative function of the party and the state.

This leaves some serious problems for Gramsci's theory. Above all is the problem about the length of proletarian dictatorship and the possibility that the party and the state, allegedly means for liberation, become ends in themselves and perpetuate their authoritative intervention in society.

Gramsci could not know what the historical record was to show on these matters. But in terms of his theory there is the special problem of whether in practice intellectuals can actually become integrated into a popular movement. Though Gramsci may not have settled that problem, and though we certainly cannot hope to without more experience to go on, Gramsci's insights into the problem are of lasting interest.

NOTES

1. Examples of this kind of interpretation are G. Tamburrano, Antonio Gramsci (Sugar Co., Milan, 1977) and P. Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci," New Left Review no. 100, (Nov. 1976 - Jan. 1977).

2. Examples of this kind of interpretation are R. Mondolfo, "Intorno a Gramsci e alla Filosofia della Prassi" and "Le Antinomie di Gramsci," Umanesimo di Marx (Einaudi, Torino, 1968) and L. Pellicani, Gramsci: An Alternative Communism? (Hoover Press, Stanford, 1981).

Among the Leninist interpretations of Gramsci there is also P. Togliatti's. We have not employed it in this work because, in our view, it has contributed little to a thoughtful appraisal of Gramsci since it is too compromise by the Italian Communist Party's desire of elevating Gramsci to the level of a patron saint.

CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPTION OF INTELLECTUALS IN THE EARLY WRITINGS

It is necessary to consider the chronological development of Gramsci's concept of the intellectual from his early writings to his Prison Notebooks to have a proper account of his theory. Gramsci's analysis of the role of intellectuals in the quest for proletarian hegemony was not confined to his mature period. To suppose the contrary involves misunderstanding Gramsci's early work and can lead to misinterpreting his whole view of the role of intellectuals in society.

It is standard practice to distinguish in Gramsci's work between the writings done before and the writings done during his incarceration. In the former period, from 1914 to 1926, Gramsci was involved in workers' struggles as nominal leader of the Turin socialist movement: in that period the socialist revolution appeared not only possible but imminent. But Gramsci's theory of intellectuals was not just part of a strategy born of contingent historical conditions, as it might seem to be if one divided his Prison Notebooks from his earlier work. Gramsci's mature reflections on the role of intellectuals and of the party in producing and diffusing a par-

particular world-view were the corollary to his early preoccupation with the necessity for workers' education and for the creation of a new proletarian culture. Only by tracing out the development of the concept of the intellectual in Gramsci's work it is possible to understand the real meaning of his theory and to avoid the false division between Gramsci's views before and after his imprisonment. Some of Gramsci's interpreters have explicitly made this false division. But even most of those who do not have treated the problem of intellectuals only in reference to Gramsci's Prison Notebooks and Letters. In this way they assume that the theory of intellectuals was developed by Gramsci only in his mature reflections and as a consequence of the changed Italian political situation.

In turning to examine the concept of the intellectual in Gramsci's early writings, that is, those composed before his incarceration, I shall subdivide these writings into two groups. The first group is that of the period 1914-1920, before the constitution of the Communist Party, the second, that of the period 1921-1926, during the fascist era. In the first period, Gramsci was concerned with worker councils and regarded a disciplined party as occupying a subsidiary role. In the second period, the idea of the party became central, though worker councils were still supported in principle.

1. The conception of a new culture in the period 1914-1920

Throughout his political work and life Gramsci believed that only if the working class became "educated" ("colta") could it realize the unity of theory and praxis, express a "collective will" and present a genuine alternative to bourgeois culture. Gramsci's meditation on "intellectuals" begins in his early writings, with what he has to say about the meaning of culture.

Culture is a very complex concept which Gramsci clarified and developed in the course of his entire work. The fully developed concept of culture covers any intellectual, artistic or ideological creation of human beings and also their technical abilities and skills. Culture is the system by which people understand themselves and others, it is a vision of the world. Culture is the totality of ideas, traditions, folklore and belief which constitutes the ideological framework of society. We find in Gramsci's early writings and in the Prison Notebooks two meanings of the concept of ideology, which correspond to the two fundamental meanings in Marx's own theory.¹ On the one hand there is the pejorative meaning of ideology as the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, as the instrument of political domination used by the dominant class to justify and perpetuate the status quo. On the other

hand, ideology in a positive sense is class consciousness, the interpretation of reality through which men acquire consciousness of the economic contradictions of society. Ideology in this positive sense is indispensable to the proletariat. So Gramsci's concern with culture is a concern of the ideological component to the project of proletariat emancipation.

In an article of January 29, 1916, "Socialism and Culture", Gramsci defines, for the first time, what he means by 'culture' in a socialist movement. Culture is not encyclopaedic knowledge in which men are seen

...as mere receptacles to be stuffed full of empirical data and a mass of unconnected raw facts, which have to be filled in the brain as in the columns of the dictionary... Culture is something quite different. It is organization, discipline of one's inner self, a coming to terms with one's own personality; it is the attainment of a higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one's own historical value, one's function in life, one's own rights and obligations. 2

The process of attaining a higher awareness cannot occur by "spontaneous evolution" as happens in nature through a "fatalistic natural law". On the contrary, since man is above all spirit, "mind", since he is an historical creature, he obtains awareness of his personality gradually through

"intelligent reflection" and it is precisely by means of cultural penetration that he can transform society.

...he is a product of history, not nature. Otherwise how could one explain the fact, given that there have always been exploiters and exploited...that socialism has not yet come into being? The fact is that only by degrees...has humanity acquired consciousness of its own value... And this consciousness was formed not under the brutal goad of physiological necessity, but as a result of intelligent reflection, at first by just a few people and later by a whole class
... 3

Culture is seen by Gramsci as a process by which individuals acquire consciousness of themselves through understanding their role in society and their relations to others. Since historical reality is not something that develops above and outside human beings, since men are not objects but subjects of the historical process, it is necessary that they acquire consciousness of themselves and of their historical situation. Culture is precisely this acquisition of consciousness through a critique of the existing conditions. Culture is above all knowledge of history as the continuous study of past events in the light of present needs.

It was through a critique of capitalist civilization that the unified consciousness of the proletariat was or is still being formed, and a critique implies culture, not simply a spontaneous and naturalistic evolution. 4

Gramsci is really elaborating an embryonic theory of the revolutionary function of culture. Through the knowledge of oneself of one's own ideas and aspirations together with the knowledge of others and of the history of one's society, one acquires awareness of the necessity for changing it. Gramsci remarks that every revolution has been preceded by a cultural movement involving the acquisition of new ideas and criticism of the existing conditions.

To know oneself means to be oneself, to be master of oneself, to distinguish oneself...to exist as an element of order but of one's own order and one's own discipline in striving for an ideal. And we cannot be successful in this unless we also know others, their history, the successive efforts they have made to be what they are, to create the civilization they have created and which we seek to replace with our own. 5

For Gramsci, the revolutionary function of culture is possible only if education is antipositivistic and anti-deterministic. Speaking about technical and professional schools Gramsci said that they had to be:

A school of freedom and free initiative, not a school of slavery and mechanical precision. 6

In these years one of the principal intellectual tasks Gramsci took up was that of restoring the unity of Marxism, which had

been undermined by the 'scientific socialism' of the Second International. This preoccupation remained fundamental throughout Gramsci's lifetime.

The positivistic materialism of the Soviets, like Bukharin, had subordinated man to a new absolute: the material facts. Man became an object of evolution and no more a subject of the revolution. The socialists of the Second International considered science itself as a kind of faith and this mystical vision of science had created the idea that human history obeyed natural laws which man could not control. Gramsci believed that only when the limits of science were understood would it be possible to define the real meaning and aim of culture in the socialist movement.

È stato detto: il socialismo è morto nel momento stesso in cui è stato dimostrato che la società futura che i socialisti dicevano di star creando era solo un mito buono per le folle. Anch'io credo che il mito si sia dissolto nel nulla... Il raggiungimento di questa società modello era un postulato del positivismo filosofico, della filosofia scientifica. Ma questa concezione non era scientifica, era solo meccanica, aridamente meccanica. 7

For Gramsci, human will was at the center of historical processes. He believed that the scientific pretension of the Marxists of the Second International, with their vulgar materialist concep-

tion of the transition from capitalism to socialism, could lead only to political quietism and passivity. They regarded the transition to socialism and also the demise of capitalism as inevitable. Gramsci's critique was directed against such attempts to explain historical change with a formal system of causal laws which excluded the 'subjective' dimension. Against this vision, Gramsci asserted that the proletariat had the capacity and the awareness of its capacity to change history.

È avvenuto un processo di interiorizzazione: si è trasportato dall'esterno all'interno il fattore della storia: a un periodo di espansione ne succede sempre uno di intensificazione. Alla legge naturale, al fatale andare delle cose degli pseudo-scienziati, è stata sostituita la volontà tenace dell'uomo. 8

In his criticisms of positivistic Marxism Gramsci drew on the idealism that dominated Italian intellectual life before World War I, above all in the work of Benedetto Croce. Croce argued against positivistic philosophy that there were no predestined plans of historical and moral development or final truths for men to discover and follow. He rejected positivistic modes of thought and emphasized personal moral responsibility in practical acts. But like the classical idealists Croce remained tied to the concept of an abstract human essence ('spirit of man'). His dialectic was conceived as a 'pure conceptual dialectic' devoid of concrete historical content. The idealistic perspective of Croce helped Gramsci to criticize the vulgar materialist

conception of Marxism, but Gramsci recognized that Croce fell into the opposite tendency of overstressing the spiritual component of human existence. Both the materialist and the idealist theories failed, according to Gramsci, to understand the dialectical relation between subject and object, thought and action. For Gramsci, Marxism had to be purified of any residue of metaphysics. That is why he criticized both the materialism of soviet theorists which subordinated men to the extrinsic necessity of material conditions and the idealism of Croce which emphasized the spiritual side of human nature without taking into consideration concrete historical reality.

Gramsci sought to return Marxism to what he thought was the spirit of Marx himself. He wanted to avoid counterposing material conditions to consciousness, the economic structure to the ideological superstructure; he considered historical movement to be the result of the dialectical interrelation between the material basis and conscious human activity. Central in all his articles of the period before the constitution of the Italian Communist Party is the idea that revolution can never be only a transformation of economic conditions, as the orthodox Marxists of the Second International wanted to present it, but must also be a cultural and moral transformation.

In February 1917 the Russian Revolution broke out and Gramsci's theoretical considerations of this time are related to his reflections on Leninism. In his article "Notes of the Russian Revolution" (April 29, 1917) he wrote:

There must be more to the revolution than the question of power; there must be the question of morality, of a way of life. 9

For him, the Russian Revolution had to be not only a change in political power but the creation of a new moral vision, the affirmation of a spiritual liberty. In June of the same year, following this idea, he asserted:

Attraverso la conquista della realtà economica, perseguiamo la possibilità di instaurare un ambiente morale in cui l'attività produttiva di valori sia spontanea, creatrice, suscitata dalla pura e semplice umanità, dal carattere, della genialità libera, senza che siano necessari stimoli eteronomi, religiosi o di privilegio. La conquista della realtà economica è solo nell'apparenza vistosa il nostro unico scopo: attraverso essa noi prepariamo la strada all'uomo completo, libero, e la Nuova vita morale fervida vogliamo sia estesa al più grande numero possibile di individui.,10

In these early writings Gramsci is thus already elaborating a conception which was to be central in his latter writings, that of hegemony: if the proletariat wanted to become the dominant

class it had to build an alternative culture which would enable it to rule by legitimate consent. To make clear what Gramsci means by a new culture it is necessary to relate his early writings to his mature ones. In all of Gramsci's early writings, stretching from before the establishment of the Italian Communist Party on through the fascist era, concepts and theories were only sketched. This was due to the impelling necessity for quick publication in response to current problems of the workers' struggle. Therefore his early reflections on the new culture must be elaborated in the light of his later work, above all of his fully developed theory of the hegemonic influence of intellectuals. The problem of a new proletarian culture was seen by Gramsci in relation of the specific situation of 'Post-Risorgimento Italy'. He stressed the continuing lack in Italy, after its geographical unification, of a unified national consciousness. The bourgeoisie through its intellectuals had proved incapable of creating a 'national' culture. The Italian intellectuals, whose major representative was Croce, created a culture of the 'elite' detached from everyday reality. Their idealist perspective which neglected the real historical and economic situation, created an abyss between intellectuals and the masses. These intellectuals were in no position to bring about an intellectual and moral reform because their culture was separated from the needs, beliefs and aspirations of the majority of the people. A new proletarian culture, Gramsci held, would be a truly national and popular

culture in the sense that it would give expression to the aspirations of the people. To do this a new culture would have to harmonize humanistic education and awareness of historical reality with the technical abilities and skills of the industrial world. Creating a new culture could not involve reckless destruction of the old one. Gramsci admitted the great value of Croce's idealism in its antipositivistic polemic just as he granted the necessity of scientific discipline. Gramsci wanted, above all, to make it possible for the workers' movement to overcome bourgeois culture (i.e. Croce's idealism) in a dialectical way: taking the important and valid aspects and integrating them with the new ideas:

Non invano Hegel è vissuto ed ha scritto, come non si nega e non si supera il cattolicesimo ignorandolo, così non si supera e non si nega l'idealismo ignorandolo, o trattandolo come una semplice questione di cultura. 11.

The highest point of bourgeois culture, for Gramsci was philosophical idealism, and since culture is knowledge of one's own social context, of one's own historical reality, socialists cannot build a new culture without knowing and yet going beyond philosophical idealism. Hence Gramsci's attempts to connect the Crocean idealistic concepts of autonomy, spiritual formation, education with the necessities of a workers' movement.

The new culture would have to provide the means for the masses to overcome the conception of themselves in terms of individual economic interests by creating an awareness of the totality of social life and their political homogeneity in it as a class. The principles of the new moral order could not be the same of the bourgeois society. In bourgeois society the dominant class's ideology had won out, the exploited class had consented to be exploited; the new culture had to show the exploited class the real meaning of its situation. The working class which had no property and whose production was a social production would have to overcome its belief in private property, which was the foundation of its exploitation.

Owing to the subordination of everyday life to bourgeois ideology, the new culture, i.e. the hegemony of the proletariat, could not be expected to arise spontaneously. It would require the hard work of organization. This would be possible only through a new relation between intellectuals and masses. The intellectuals would not stand above the people but rather be part of them, the cultural elaboration of their consciousness.

The intellectual's error consist in believing that...the intellectual can be an intellectual (and not a pure pedant) if distinct and separate from the people-nation, that is, without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and

therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world ... If the relationship between intellectuals and people-nation, between the leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled, is provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge ... then and only then is the relationship one of representation. 12

These concepts were to be elaborated by Gramsci in his Prison Notebooks but, in his early writings, we can already find them in an embryonic form, as when Gramsci speaks about the necessity of organizing culture and of creating a cultural organism in the proletarian movement.

Organizziamo la cultura così come cerchiamo di organizzare ogni attività pratica. 13

Gramsci judged the socialist movement of his time to be caught in a contradiction between its theory and its practice.

Siamo rivoluzionari nell'azione, mentre siamo riformisti nel pensiero. 14

An institution was therefore needed which would allow the instauration of a new cultural awareness. The problem of what the culture must do progressively become for Gramsci the pro-

blem of what the intellectuals must do. In December 18, 1917, Gramsci wrote:

Gli intellettuali rappresentano un peso morto nel nostro movimento, perché in esso non hanno un compito specifico, adeguato alla loro capacità. 15

Gramsci clearly saw the absurdity of this situation, because

esistono dei problemi filosofici, religiosi, morali, che l'azione politica ed economica presuppone ... Il socialismo è una visione integrale della vita: ha una filosofia, una mistica, una morale. 16

Gramsci meant for socialist culture to be the self-consciousness of the workers' movement. Intellectuals, socialist intellectuals, had to take on a new role. They could no longer be "intellettuali di carriera" who considered themselves beyond the common man. The breach between intellectuals and the masses had to be overcome. Everyone had to be transformed into an intellectual through socialist education, through culture:

L'educazione, la cultura, l'organizzazione diffusa del sapere e dell'esperienza, è l'indipendenza delle masse dagli intellettuali. La fase più intelligente della lotta contro il dispotismo degli intellettuali di carriera e delle competenze per diritto divino, è costituita dall'opera per intensificare la cultura, per approfondire la consapevolezza. E questa opera non si può rimandare a domani,

a quando saremo liberi politicamente.
E essa stessa libertà, è essa stessa
stimolo all'azione e condizione dell'
azione. 17

The aspiration to unite theory and praxis is present in this text as in the whole of Gramsci's thought: it is possible to free man from economic alienation, from the slavery of class domination, only if man is also freed from intellectual domination. Through the new culture the proletariat would attain political autonomy, through the understanding of their historical situation the workers would come to have a clear view of the possibilities of action open to them. Culture and action cannot be separated: the man of action is the true philosopher, and the philosopher must of necessity be a man of action.

...one could say that each one of us changes himself, modifies himself to the extent that he changes and modifies the complex relations of which he is the hub. In this sense, the real philosopher is, and cannot be other than, the politician, the active man who modifies the environment, understanding by environment the ensemble of relations which each of us enters to take part in. 18

Gramsci always saw the problem of the unity between theory and praxis as one of the fundamental problems of Marxism. Marxist philosophy is precisely the philosophy of praxis because it has to provide a method for the interpretation of reality as a guide to action.

In the years 1919-20 Gramsci deepened his analysis of the concept of culture and its revolutionary function through the pages of "L'Ordine Nuovo". In March 1919 Gramsci and other members of the Socialist Party, including Togliatti, Terracini and Tasca, decided to start a new paper, united by only "a vague passion for a vague proletarian culture", as Gramsci himself recalled. At the beginning the paper was under the direction of Tasca, who filled it with his articles and editorials of abstract cultural subjects, caused it to be more and more estranged from the political reality and from the workers' struggles.

This is what Comrade Tasca meant by culture: he meant 'recollection' not 'thought' - and 'recollection of the discarded useless junk of working-class thought... What was L'Ordine Nuovo in its first numbers? It was an anthology, nothing but an anthology...a journal of abstract culture, abstract information...(it was) a mess, the product of a mediocre intellectualism. 19

Gramsci and Togliatti's daily contact with the workers' leaders convinced them that the paper was completely useless to revolutionary aims. They brought off a 'coup d'etat' of the paper's editorship and put as the proposition for the future:

The proposal that we devote our energies to 'unearthing' a Soviet tradition within the Italian working class, to digging out the thread of a real revolutionary spirit in Italy - real because at one

with the universal spirit of the workers' International, the product of a real historical situation and an achievement of the working class itself. 20

The central concern of "L'Ordine Nuovo" became the problem of the development of the "internal commissions" of the factory. Gramsci looked to these to become the Italian counterpart of the Russian soviets and he named them "Factory Councils". The Factory Councils were to be institutions of proletarian self-government, means for the development of the new integral proletarian culture which would be the theoretical elaboration of the practical activity of workers' every day life in the factories.

The articles of "L'Ordine Nuovo" and Gramsci's work during 1919-1920 for the organization of the workers' council movement in Turin show how, for him political action was always related to cultural action. Gramsci believed that the soviets (Factory Councils) were "organs of workers' democracy" and vehicles for the political education and organization he thought essential.

Such a system of workers' democracy... would give the masses a permanent structure and discipline. It would be a magnificent school of political and administrative experience and would involve the masses down to the last man,

accustoming them to tenacity and perseverance, and to thinking of themselves as an army in the field which needs a strict cohesion if it is not to be destroyed and reduced to slavery. 21

* * *

Gramsci's theory of Factory Councils derived from Lenin's theoretical elaboration of the Russian Soviets. After the first World War, Turin was the most highly industrialized city in Italy. There was a strong tradition of trade-union organization and there were also the beginnings of workers' organization in the factories: the internal commissions. These organizations were expression of a trade-unionist mentality, they were organizations created to protect the workers as wage earners and not as producers, they were reformist and not revolutionary institutions. Gramsci and the other members of "L'Ordine Nuovo" movement wanted to transform these institutions into organizations for workers' control. These new ideas were rapidly accepted by most of the workers and by the autumn of 1919 the council movement had spread to many factories in Turin.

Gramsci maintained that by their very nature the

Italian Socialist Party and the unions perpetuated bourgeois hegemony. Both the unions and the party were born of liberal democracy and could never transcend the logic of capitalism.²² By contrast he viewed the factory councils as means to counter that hegemony. Gramsci did not explicitly attack the traditional organizations (i.e. the party and the unions) but postponed their leading role to a later time, when the proletariat had acquired cultural domination.²³

Meetings held inside the factory, together with ceaseless propaganda and persuasion by the most conscious elements, should effect a radical transformation of the worker's mentality, should make the masses better equipped to exercise power, and finally should diffuse a consciousness of the rights and obligations of comrade and worker that is both concrete and effective, because spontaneously generated from living historical experience. ²⁴

For Gramsci, the councils were to be a means for directing revolutionary action and also, above all, a pattern for future society.

... the birth of the workers' Factory Councils is a major historical event - the beginning of a new era in the history of human race. For now the revolutionary process has burst into the light of day, and entered the phase where it can be controlled and documented. ²⁵

The factory councils represented a "new era of humanity" because they were the centers of education for the working class. The educative process of the councils was to be Socratic: it would not impose historical data and technical skills from outside, but would focus on the formation of self-consciousness, on bringing to light the revolutionary potential of the working class. For Gramsci, the proletariat was the revolutionary class because it was the really productive force in industrial society: the use of its labour force in industry was essential for the production of merchandises. The workers' should come to see themselves as producers. This would mean seeing their activity as an element of a totality, i.e. as a collective one tied with that of technicians and employees to create a unity of production.

The worker can see himself as a producer only if he sees himself as an inseparable part of the whole labour system... At this point the worker has become a producer, for he has acquired an awareness of his role in the process of production, at all its levels, from the workshop to the nation and the world. At this point he is aware of his class; he becomes a communist, because productivity does not require private property; he becomes a revolutionary, because he sees the capitalist, the private property owner, as a dead hand, an encumbrance on the productive process, which must be done away with. 26

For Gramsci, the councils were able to preserve workers' spontaneity, while enabling them to participate in decisions and begin to become the "collective individual" that he/she would be in a future socialist society.

The Factory Council is the model of the proletarian State... In the one as in the other, the concept of citizen gives way to the concept of comrade. Collaboration in effective and useful production develops solidarity and multiples bonds of affection and fraternity... The Council is the most effective organ for mutual education and for developing the new social spirit that the proletariat has successfully engendered from the rich and living experience of the community of labour. 27

Factory councils were the living example of proletarian leadership. They were the embryonic form of a new society. They prepared workers technically, politically and culturally for revolutionary transformation, for autogoverno (self-government) within a qualitatively different form of society. Gramsci regarded the councils movement as enabling the workers to understand their role not through abstract, intellectual elaborations but through the theoretical and practical collaboration of the daily work in the factories. The factory Councils were the bearers of the new idea of culture: culture as the development of a consciousness of the present including its origins and its limitations. Culture in this way was the means of revolutionary transformation. The factory councils were the living

example of Gramsci's theory of the dialectical relation between theory and practice. They were the political organization of workers in the economic world of the factories. Factory councils were educational centers because the practical life of work created in the workers the consciousness of themselves as a class, through their institutions the workers came to think of themselves as inseparables from their comrades in labour. Through the factory councils the workers related education to life and attained maturity to seize power.

In all his political writings Gramsci maintained that through education the masses can be persuaded to accept "spontaneously" the decisions of their leaders. For him, a spontaneous insurrectionary movement can be transformed into a conscious, revolutionary force only with organization. People must be led to consciousness of their needs and their aims. This does not mean that revolution is imposed on the masses. On the contrary, with a Socratic "maieutic" method the proletariat is led by its most advanced members to the awareness of its revolutionary direction. The proletariat is the revolutionary class and with the right means, at the right moment, can be directed to develop a revolutionary process.

In 1919 Gramsci considered that the moment was right for directing the masses to the revolution. In fact, the post-

war Italian situation appeared to most socialist and conservatives as a revolutionary situation. Gramsci characterised the post war period as revolutionary because of the crisis produced by the war, a war without any justification for the proletariat since it was really a conflict between imperialist powers. To Gramsci, the whole tradition of the Italian liberal state had collapsed in post-war Italy. The political and economic decay of the Italian state which had begun immediately after the war continued at a fearful pace in late 1919 and early 1920.

Rapid inflation swept the country, production fell in many industries and unemployment was widespread. The early months of 1920 marked the crest of the post-war strike wave throughout Europe. The most important strike with a basically political objective was the April general strike in Turin with the later occupation of the factories and the instauration of the self-government of the factory councils. This strike was really a proletarian struggle for the control of production. But the strike and the factories occupation ended with the failure of Turin labor movement, (i.e. of the factory councils movement).

Understanding the failure is important to understanding the development of Gramsci's views. The principal reason for the defeat of the factory councils movement was the refusal of the national leadership of the Italian Socialist Party to support the strike, creating the isolation of Piedmont from the

rest of the nation. Although the principles of the councils movement were accepted by a wide range of workers, the opposition to them led by the Italian Socialist Party and the trade unions was more general. The battle between the Ordine Nuovo group and the leadership of the Socialist Party was based in the differences between the Third and the Second International: the line of the Party was that the possession of power was the culmination of the revolutionary process, whereas Gramsci believed that the masses could be prepared for the revolution only by possessing power. Even Bordiga on the extreme left of the Party was against the councils movement arguing that the Ordine Nuovo was more preoccupied with the creation of power institutions than with the conquest of power itself. As for the trade unions, they were always openly hostile to the councils movement because it constituted a threat to the power of the union bureaucracy.

Gramsci recognized that the disastrous setback in the councils movement was due to the negative role of the Italian Socialist Party in the general strike of April. The failure of the Turin labour movement made him aware of the decisive role that a political party could play in the success or failure of a revolution. That is why by 1920 we find in Gramsci's articles that the concept of the party is becoming as important as that of the councils. In fact, on the 8th of May 1920 Gramsci wrote:

The Party...must become...a homogeneous, cohesive party, with a doctrine and tactics of its own, and a rigid and implacable discipline... The existence of a cohesive and highly disciplined communist party...that can co-ordinate and centralize in its central executive committee the whole of the proletariat's revolutionary action, is the fundamental and indispensable condition for attempting any experiment with Soviets. In the absence of such a condition, every experiment proposed should be rejected as absurd and useful only to those who would slander the ideas of Soviets. 28

In spite of the failure of the councils movement and Gramsci's recognition that he and his friends had been mistaken in their optimistic view of the movement, Gramsci did not forsake his belief in the importance of the factory councils for a revolution. The idea of a new and integrated culture, of a unity of theory and praxis, remained alive in all of Gramsci's political writings. He continued always to believe that revolutionary change should come from the self-conscious initiative of the masses, from the self-consciousness that has arisen through a process of education and organization.

* * *

Most of Gramsci's commentators agree with C. Boggs's view that:

He (Gramsci) never turned his backs on the positive experience of the Ordine Nuovo period or on his earlier theoretical interest in hegemony and mass consciousness. 29

Nevertheless they fail to show explicitly the relationship between Gramsci's later development of the idea of the party and his earlier theory of the councils movement. For example, A. Showstack Sassoon remarks that in his prison writings Gramsci concentrated on the role of the party as a vehicle of the intellectual and moral reform of the masses; and J. Karabel has mentioned that the function of the party as presented by Gramsci in his Prison Notebooks is essentially cultural; it has to provide the means for the organization and expression of the national-popular collective will. But in analysing Gramsci's theory of the party, such commentators do not bring out the important relations between these later views of Gramsci and Gramsci's earlier ideas of the intellectual and educational role of the Factory Councils. These interpreters of Gramsci fail to see that in his later views the party was to serve in a broader way the same organizational, cultural and educational role that the councils had during the Turin struggles. Above all, as we will see, the internal organization of the party had to be worked out, for Gramsci, in direct and constant contact with the working class movement, with its reality in the world of production, as was the case for the factory councils.

It is true that factory councils largely disappear from Gramsci's later writings but the ideas behind his support of factory councils are present throughout his work: namely belief in the necessity for a conscious group to organize the spontaneous insurrection of the masses; the belief that the goal of proletarian liberation could only be achieved with the voluntary political activity of proletariat itself, or rather by means of a continually dialectical interaction between the proletariat and its conscious vanguard; and belief in the integration of culture and action in the need to understand reality so as to be able to transform it.

2. The conception of intellectuals during the years 1921-26.

At the beginning of 1922 Gramsci was involved in political and economic struggles; the unity between political action and cultural reflection was part of his everyday life. He had already split from the Socialist Party and with others had founded the Communist Party. The Italian Socialist Party had been divided into a reformist wing, which believed that the party must work to improve society through parliamentary means, within the existing political and economical framework, and a maximalist wing which believed that it was only necessary to wait for the inevitable triumph of the proletariat predicted

by Marx. Gramsci had never been an enthusiastic supporter of the maximalist leadership of the PSI, but he believed that the Party could be renewed from below by the councils movement. Nevertheless the Turin experiment in workers' democracy only increased the disunity of the Socialist movement.

To the existing division between the reformist and the revolutionaries was now added a division among the revolutionaries: as between the maximalists, the ordinovisti, and the abstentionists led by Bordiga who was calling for the formation of a smaller more compact and totally uncompromising revolutionary party.

The Second Congress of the Third International in 1920 declared in its "Twenty-one Points" the necessity of eliminating reformism in the parties of the International. During this congress Lenin clearly indicated his support of the "Ordine Nuovo" movement in preference to maximalism. Gramsci and Bordiga in spite of the great differences between their positions found themselves together in the battle against the leadership of the PSI for the expulsion of the reformists according to the directives of the Third International. Serrati, the leader of the PSI presented a motion asserting that the Party was already committed in substance to the politics of the Points and rejecting mass expulsion. Gramsci believed it necessary to support the abstentionist faction in order to eliminate the reformists from the Party. Meanwhile the Ordinovisti had develop-

ed a great mass movement but only in Turin, while the abstentionists had a national network of groups and the support of the Socialist Youth Federation. Gramsci and Bordiga together attacked Serrati and when they realized that the split was inevitable, they published a manifesto calling for full adherence to the Third International, for changing the name of the party to the Communist Party and for expelling the reformists.

The new Party faced numerous fascist attacks on its members and office, but what really worried Gramsci was the strong ideological campaign that the fascists were waging to destroy any form of Marxist culture and awareness in Italy. In the light of this new political situation Gramsci repeatedly stressed the need for an extensive organizational preparation of the working class for revolution. This period was a very difficult one for Gramsci, because he realized that the socialist revolution was nowhere as near as he had believed and, although he never gave up hope of the revolution, he understood that, under fascist domination, there was going to be a long period in which the proletariat would retreat into a defensive position, with the principal concern of preserving itself in a hostile environment. 1922 marked the beginning of a period in which Gramsci in the face of the fascist threat, came to think the party was especially important in preserving the unity of the working class. It was in these years that Gramsci began to

develop ideas of a disciplined, hierarchically organized party, whose internal pedagogical dynamics were nonetheless to remain those of the factory councils.

The central idea of Gramsci's work continued always to be the need for the ideological preparation of the masses. Against the terrible penetration of fascist ideas it was more than ever necessary to create a strong ideology to counter the prevailing one. The rapid diffusion and success of fascist ideas among the population* persuaded Gramsci daily of the importance of ideas in the struggle for power.

* Gramsci's analysis of Fascism is long and complex and can only be suggested here. For Gramsci, Fascism was a movement reflecting the crisis of authority of the ruling class in Italy after World War I. Fascism was seen by him as an element of the dissolution of the Italian liberal state. It was a part of the development of civil society related to the loss of consensus of the dominant class. In its origins Fascism was based on the support of the veterans of World War I who were economically dissatisfied with civilian life and wounded in their nationalist feelings because Italy had failed to obtain after the war the territories they considered she was entitled to. In very short time the fascist movement enlarged the basis of its support, becoming also the expression of the dissatisfactions of the petty bourgeoisie which as a consequence of the industrial revolution had progressively lost its vital function in production and, therefore, political importance as well. At the same time, Fascism gained the endorsement of the industrial class which was aiming to reaffirm its dominance against the increasing offensive of the workers. As Gramsci pointed out, the bourgeoisie in order to preserve its social and economic position was prepared to destroy the liberal state which it had built. The fascist movement profitted from both the crisis of authority of the liberal state and from the

It would really be a crime if the same thing were to occur in the Communist Party with respect to the fascist period, as occurred in the Socialist Party with respect to the war period. But this would be inevitable, if our party were not to have an orientation in this field too: if it did not take care in good time to reinforce its present cadres and members ideologically and politically... Mass ideological preparation is thus a necessity of revolutionary struggle, and one of the indispensable conditions for victory. 30

The revolutionary party needed not only strict discipline and tight organization, but ideological hegemony over the masses. The idea of a centralist party had not eliminated the necessity of education: if the revolution was to be successful the party was indispensable but the party could exist only on the basis of the self-consciousness of the masses.

During the last years before his arrest (November 8, 1926) Gramsci was involved with the problems of leading the Italian Communist Party, first as member of the central com-

*(Cont'd) debility of the Italian Socialist Party divided between internal factions. Fascism could rapidly diffuse its ideas and gain the support of the petty bourgeoisie and of the industrial class presenting itself as the defender of law and order against the threat of revolution. In fact, it promised reforms in the economic structure without radical and destructive cataclysms, without social convulsions. Moreover, Fascism was able to mobilize the "national-popular" potential of the population capturing its more basic emotional national feelings.

mittee and after as deputy. After the fascists consolidated their power, the Communist Party increasingly became an isolated and clandestine minority. It was necessary if a future revolution were to be successful for the Party to widen its basis. There were two ways in which this could be done: first by winning over the members of the working class who were still in the lines of the Socialist party; second, and for Gramsci, this was more important, by winning over the peasantry. Gramsci's essay on the Southern Question of 1926 deals precisely with the ways of providing the Italian Communist Party the means of winning the support of the peasantry.

This essay can be considered the result of all of Gramsci's reflections to that time on culture and the role of ideas in the revolutionary movement. It is also the beginning of Gramsci's later studies on the way in which a social group realizes its ideological control and diffuses its values in society, i.e. attains hegemony.

Gramsci maintained that the peasant on his own could arrive at no more than a general, unfocussed discontent with society and that peasants following only their revolutionary instincts without real leadership must end in disaster:

What can a poor peasant achieve by
occupying uncultivated or poorly

cultivated lands?... Momentarily he can satisfy his land-holder's instincts and slake his primitive thirst for land. But subsequently... becomes aware of his impotence, his solitude and the desperation of his plight. He turns into a bandit, not a revolutionary; he becomes an assassin of the 'gentry', not a fighter for communism. 31

The only possibility of victory for the peasants was their alliance with the revolutionary workers, which would focus their instincts of revolt against the 'signori'.

Gli operai settentrionali e i contadini meridionali sono dunque le due forze rivoluzionarie immediate...alle quali dobbiamo rivolgere tutta la nostra attenzione... Se noi riusciremo a dare una organizzazione ai contadini meridionali, avremo vinto la rivoluzione... Il nostro compito generale dunque è chiaro: organizzare gli operai del Nord e i contadini meridionali e saldare la loro alleanza rivoluzionaria. 32

The task of winning over the southern peasants was a very difficult one because they had been influenced for decades by bourgeois intellectuals and the Catholic Church. In his analysis of the southern situation Gramsci reached several general conclusions about the role of intellectuals in the establishment of political hegemony. Gramsci realized that the 'signori' in the South of Italy avoided the danger of

peasants' insubordination by the threat of force from the army and the police, and also by the daily consolidation of their power through the intellectuals, who were courted by the great landowners with economic, social and political privileges.

The Southern peasant is bound to the big landowner through the mediation of the intellectual. 33

In the essay on the Southern Question, which remained uncompleted due to his arrest, Gramsci sketched his later distinction between rural and urban intellectuals in relation to the concrete Italian situation. The presence in Italy of an underdeveloped, agrarian southern region and a northern industrial region provided the basis of this distinction. The metropolitan bourgeoisie of the North produced technicians for the industry directly linked with the dominant mode of production. These were the urban intellectuals, who Gramsci later would name the organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie. In the South, on the contrary, the intellectuals were detached from the modern mode of production and were rather linked with a pre-capitalist mode of production. These were the rural intellectuals whom Gramsci divided into two groups: "the intellectual of the petty and middle-level rural bourgeoisie", who were functionaries and members of the liberal professions, and the "great intellectuals" (grandi intellettuali). The 'middle layer of intellectuals' remained ideologically tied to the peasants' world and gave expression

to its way of thinking. The "great intellectuals" - such as B. Croce and G. Forturato - "centralize and dominate" the other intellectuals and thus together with the great landowners exercise their authority over the "agrarian bloc". That is why they

"represent the keystones of the Southern system and, in a certain sense, are the two major figures of Italian reaction" 34

Gramsci maintained that intellectuals were always tied to a social group: the southern intellectuals tied to the peasant world had "restless impulses to revolt against the existing conditions", but these impulses were suffocated by the great intellectuals, tied to the agrarian bourgeoisie.

Gramsci's analysis of the intellectuals and their role in the creation and consolidation of hegemony included a study of the major influence of the Catholic Church. The clergy was, for him, only another type of intellectual, which served a very specific function. In the South of Italy it served in a sophisticated way to mediate the relation between the government, the landowners and the peasants.

Gramsci not only analyzed the role of the traditional, rural intellectual of the South, he also emphasized that the

development of capitalism had provoked radical changes in the concept of the intellectual:

In every country, the layer of intellectuals has been radically modified by the development of capitalism... Industry has introduced a new type of intellectual: the technical organizer, the specialist in applied science. 35

We can sum up the various claims of Gramsci's essay on the Southern Question as follows: 1) intellectuals always give expression to the consciousness of a social group; 2) there are different levels of intellectuals - a point which will be the basis for Gramsci's later distinction between traditional and organic intellectuals; 3) the primary function of the "great intellectuals" is to express the ideas of the dominant class and to block and annul any revolutionary effort of other social groups..

The aim of the essay on the Southern Question is to make evident the function of intellectuals in the class struggle and show that no intellectual group can be really impartial in the sense of being separated from political problems, however, impartial it may think it is.

In this chapter I have sought to show that the problem of the intellectuals and therefore the problem of hegemony are present in the earliest of Gramsci's works. I disagree with Tamburrano who writes:

Fino al 1926 Gramsci non aveva mai parlato di egemonia nei termini dei Quaderni. Egli aveva sostenuto... la concezione leninista del partito e della strategia: partito di masse, conquista della maggioranza della classe operaia, preparazione ideologica e materiale alla rivoluzione. In questo schema non rientrava la concezione dell'azione intellettuale e morale...per la conquista del potere e per l'esercizio di esso. 36

In my view Gramsci's preoccupation with the cultural preparation of the masses and his support of the factory councils as bearers of a new vision of life were aspects of his wrestling with the problem of hegemony. In his article "Notes on the Russian Revolution" (April 29, 1917) Gramsci had already affirmed that violence is never enough for the conquest of power.

It [the Russian revolution] has not only replaced one power by another, it has replaced one way of life by another. It has created a new moral order, and in addition to the physical liberty of the individual, has established liberty of the mind. 37

I agree with A. Showstack Sassoon³⁸ that Gramsci's

interest in the problem of intellectuals become more sophisticated and moved to a new level during his prison period, as a consequence of the success of Fascism and of the support that a great number of Italian intellectuals gave to this movement. As Sassoon points out, this interest is only an extension of Gramsci's interest in the problem of culture that was there in his earliest writings. Moreover, Gramsci's conception of the party as the instrument of the ideological preparation of the proletariat was the evolution of his earlier theory of the factory councils as vehicles of worker's education and organization.

In Gramsci's early writings in the period before the Communist Party and in the era of Fascism we already find some of the problem that are going to occupy Gramsci for the rest of his life: they concern the ways in which a social group exercises hegemony over the masses and the role of intellectuals in society. Gramsci came to believe that if a revolutionary party was to succeed in replacing bourgeois influence over the workers and the peasants it would have to provide an ideology which harmonize an historical awareness of reality with the technical skills necessary for the industrial world, a culture in which the masses could see the realization of their aspirations. The creation and affirmation of this ideology would be

possible only through the cultural work of a new group of intellectuals tied to the socialist movement: the organic intellectual of the proletariat.

NOTES

1. In the German Ideology Marx writes: "In every epoch the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas, that is, the class that is the ruling material power of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual power. The class having the means of material production has also control over the means of intellectual production, so that it also controls, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of intellectual production". (Writings of the young Marx on Philosophy and Society, Anchor Books, New York, 1967, pg. 438). This pejorative meaning of ideology as the ideal expression of the dominant material relations is applied by Gramsci in the "Essay on the Southern Question" to explain how the ideological influence of the bourgeoisie has prevented an alliance between the industrial proletariat of the North of Italy and the peasants of the South: "The general ideology of the proletariat itself...is unconsciously subjected to the influence of bourgeois education, the bourgeois press and bourgeois traditions. It is well known what kind of ideology has been disseminated in myriad ways among the masses in the North, by the propagandists of the bourgeoisie: The South is the ball and chain which prevents the social development of Italy from progressing more rapidly; the Southerners are biologically inferior beings, semi barbarians or total barbarians, by natural destiny..." (A. Gramsci, Selections from Political Writings, V II, International Publishers, New York, 1978 (hereafter SPW II) pg. 444). And in the Prison Notebooks Gramsci observes that "The supremacy of a social

1. (Cont'd) group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as intellectual and moral leadership" (A. Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, International Publishers, New York, 1971 (hereafter SPN), pg. 57).
We find in Marx the positive meaning of ideology as class consciousness in the Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy: "At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society, come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or...with the property relation within which they have been at work hitherto" during this process there arise "ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out" (K. Marx - F. Engels, Selected Works, International Publishers, New York, 1977, pgs. 182-183) Gramsci likewise observes in his early writings "L'uomo acquista coscienza della realtà obiettiva, si impadronisce del segreto che fa giocare il succedersi reale degli avvenimenti. La ricerca della sostanza storica, il fissarla nel sistema e nei rapporti di produzione e di scambio, fa scoprire come la società degli uomini sia scissa in due classi" (A. Gramsci, Scritti Giovanili, Einaudi, Torino, 1958, (hereafter SG) pg. 219) and in his mature writings he affirms: "The term 'catharsis' can be employed to indicate the passage from the purely economic...to the ethico-political moment, that is the superior elaboration of the structure into superstructure in the minds of men" (SPN pg. 366).
2. A. Gramsci, Selections from Political Writings, V. I, International Publishers, New York, 1977, (hereafter SPW I) pg. 11. Jan. 29, 1916.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid. pg. 13. Jan. 29, 1916.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid. pgs. 26, 27. Dec. 24, 1916.
7. SG pg. 84.
8. Ibid. pg. 85.
9. SPW I pg. 28. April 29, 1917.
10. SG pg. 117, my emphasis, O.C.

11. Ibid. pg. 16.
12. SPN pg. 418 or Quaderni dal carcere, edizione critica dell' Instituto Gramsci a cura di Valentino Gerratana, Einaudi, Torino, 1975 (hereafter EC) pg. 1505 (1932-33).
13. SG pg. 147.
14. Ibid. pg. 132.
15. Ibid. pg. 145.
16. Ibid. pg. 144.
17. Ibid. pg. 301.
18. SPN pg. 352 or EC 1345 (1932).
19. SPW I pgs. 292, 293, August 28, 1920.
20. Ibid. pg. 293.
21. Ibid. pg. 67, my emphasis, O.C. June, 21, 1919.
22. See Ibid. pg. 100 to pg. 102, October 11, 1919.
23. See Ibid. pg. 190 to pg. 196, May 8, 1920.
24. Ibid. pgs. 67, 68, my emphasis, O.C. June 21, 1919.
25. Ibid. pg. 262, June 5, 1920.
26. Ibid. pgs. 110, 111, Nov. 8, 1919.
27. Ibid. pg. 100, October 11, 1919.
28. Ibid. pgs. 194, 195, my emphasis, O.C. May, 8, 1920.
29. C. Boggs, Gramsci's Marxism, Pluto Press, London, 1976, pgs. 104, 105.
30. SPW II pgs. 287, 290.
31. SPW I pgs. 147, 148, Jan. 3, 1920.
32. A. Gramsci, La Costruzione del Partito Comunista, Einaudi, Torino, 1978, (hereafter CPC) pg. 478.
33. SPW II pg. 456.
34. Ibid. pg. 454.

35. Ibid.

36. G. Tamburrano, Antonio Gramsci, Sugar Co., Milan, 1977, pgs. 289, 290.

37. SPW I pg. 30. April 29, 1917.

38. A Showstack Sassoon, Gramsci's Politics, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1980.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BLOC AND HEGEMONY

Gramsci's concept of intellectuals is the backbone of his political thought. It cannot be studied, however, without taking into consideration the two other fundamental concepts of his thought: historical bloc and hegemony. As we will see, there exists among the three concepts an internal dialectical relation. The achievement of 'hegemony' presupposes the creation of an hegemonic apparatus, through which a class diffuses its own moral and intellectual views in society. For the establishment of this apparatus it is necessary that a class creates its own intellectual group. A dominant class has to be dominant not only economically and politically but also ideologically and intellectually. That is why, for Gramsci, history cannot be seen as the process of economic forces alone or as the mere furtherance of political powers. Gramsci's theory is thus a theory of the relations between structure and superstructure, between economy and culture within the "historical bloc".

Gramsci's persistent belief in the importance of culture and of the role of intellectuals in society proceeds from the basic premise that political control depends upon controlling

the ideas or minds of people and not just their bodies. Gramsci used the concept of hegemony to enlarge the Marxist concept of the state as a dictatorship of the dominant class based only on force.

...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. 1

In his Prison Notebooks Gramsci distinguished between two forms of rule that a class can exercise over society: one of dictatorship, that is, based on force or "domination", the other of "intellectual and moral direction", based on "consent" or "hegemony". At the heart of the concept of "hegemony" is the idea that it is impossible to transform society and to exercise power permanently by the use of material force and violence alone; it is necessary to organize a counter-hegemonic structure and an intellectual group to replace the cultural apparatus of the existing order and to secure the consent of the people.

In this chapter I shall consider the dialectical relation between structure and superstructure within the historical bloc and the position in the superstructural level of political and civil society. I shall analyze also Gramsci's concept of hegemony in regard to its Leninist roots and in its development.

1. Structure and superstructure in the notion of "historical bloc"

There are two fundamental concepts in Marxist theory on which the materialist interpretation of society is based: structure and superstructure. It is therefore first necessary to clarify these concepts in Marx. This will enable us to examine the relation between Marx and Gramsci and determine whether there are substantial differences between the two thinkers or whether Gramsci's theory represents an extension of and complement to Marx's.

The writings of Marx and Engels on the relation between structure and superstructure can give justification for both a deterministic approach which treats the superstructure as a reflection of the economic process and an anti-deterministic approach which treats the superstructures as having an independent and creative role to play in social transformation.² We are not going to develop a critical analysis of the ambiguities and contradictions in Marx's and Engels' writings in relation to the problem of structure and superstructure. This is a very complex problem which deserves a sophisticated and long study which could be out of place here. We can only briefly say that these ambiguities and contradictions arise in part because Marx and Engels were conducting a polemic against two fronts: the idealist and the materialist. This brought them to emphasize

sometimes the material determination and sometimes the free subjective initiative in history. Further reason, though, for these ambiguities in Marx and Engels can be found in their failure to confront systematically the problems of political power, political education and the role of intellectuals in the revolutionary process. But the very presence of these theoretical ambiguities in Marx's and Engels' examination of the relation between structure and superstructure renders one-sided the interpretation of Marxism which consider the structure as the only determining factor in the historical process and also those which consider the superstructure as completely detached from the economic basis. Gramsci's interpretation is precisely an effort to articulate a much more dynamic and complex relationship between base and superstructure and thereby a new approach to the problem of revolutionary strategy.

Marx's examination of the ideological superstructure, above all in his early writings, seems to present it as something which even if it is determined by the material structure is not just a pale reflection of it. Superstructure is not thus a level 'above' the social structure, rather the ideological superstructure resides and develops in the socioeconomic structure itself. Capitalist production, for example, produces a specific ideology and this ideology helps preserve those relations of production.

Marx, at least in his early writings, does not treat ideology as the mechanical "reflection" of material conditions, which occurs after the fact of the social structure. Ideology, according to Marx, is determined by the structure in a dialectical way and this means that structure and superstructure mutually affect each other. The ideology which is the expression (and not the mechanical reflex) of the social structure, itself shapes the economic structure. It is necessary to underline that Marx uses the word "reflection" in a metaphorical sense. He more often uses in his writings the german word Ausdruck or "expression". For example, in the famous quote:

The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas. 3

The point about usage is important because the word "reflection" seems to indicate a causal relation between the material basis and the ideological formations, whereas the word "expression" indicates a dynamic, active relation between the two moments. The historical conditions do not casually determine the ideological formations. Rather the ideology is an organic part of the social totality, it is an essential aspect of the social reality. We can see the active role of ideology when, for example, the bourgeois state uses the legal ideology of private property to justify the greatly unequal distribution of property

and the accumulation of wealth in a few hands. To interpret Marx's use of the word "reflection" as signifying a scientific explanation of the relation between structure and super-structure and not as a literary illustration of a theory can only conduce to a mechanical determinism which is arguably false to Marx's intentions.

In interpreting Marx's theory of ideology Gramsci gave great importance to Marx's affirmation that it is men who make history, men becoming aware through a newfound ideology of their economic and social conditions. We can find the best criticism of a mechanistic and economistic interpretation of Marx in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks. It was there that Gramsci set himself against, on the one hand, the idealist distortion of Marx, inspired by Croce, which reduced the historical process to the ethical-political aspect of reality, and against, on the other hand, the deterministic interpretation of Marxism, which excluded the element of "subjectivity" from the historical process, creating a false fetishism of the material facts.

On the one hand there is the excess of 'economism' on the other hand the excess of 'ideologism'; on the one hand the mechanic causes are excessively appraised, on the other hand the 'voluntary' and individual element. The dialectical nexus between the two orders of investigation is not exactly established. 4

Gramsci referred to Marx's claim in the introduction to the Critique of Political Economy that it is through ideologies that men express their consciousness of the social conflict. For Gramsci, this claim

...should be considered as an affirmation of epistemological and not simply psychological and moral value. From this, it follows that the theoretical-practical principle of hegemony has also epistemological significance... If a social group is formed which is one hundred per cent homogeneous on the level of ideology this means that the premises exist one hundred per cent for this revolutionising: that is that the 'rational' is actively and actually real. This reasoning is based on the necessary reciprocity between structure and superstructure, a reciprocity which is nothing other than the real dialectical process. 5

For Gramsci, the superstructure is a catalyst towards social transformation.

Gramsci relied on the concepts of structure and superstructure in order to formulate his notion of the "historical bloc".⁶ The relation, for Gramsci, between structure and superstructure cannot be understood as a contingent external relation; it is rather a necessary relation in which institutions and ideas are seen as a unit, as an organic system.

Structures and superstructures form an 'historical bloc'. That is to say the complex, contradictory and discordant

ensemble of the superstructures is the reflection of the ensemble of the social relations of production. 7

The historical bloc combines in a dialectical relationship the structure and superstructure, i.e. the productive, economic level of society and the conceptualization of it in political and cultural ideas. On this relationship is based the hegemony of a class over society and over other classes. Thus an historical bloc always embodies the ideology and dominance of one class. This implies that to create a new, alternative historical bloc, a new class must create its own hegemonic apparatus.

For Gramsci, the superstructural level encompassed civil society as well as political dimension or the state; the whole in fact amounted to Gramsci's 'expanded' concept of the state. The superstructure comprised two contrary aspects: coercion and persuasion, force and consensus, that is political society and civil society, which Gramsci thus integrated into an enlarged concept of the state. But before we can examine Gramsci's expanded concept of the state we must elaborate further the dialectical unity of structure and superstructure within the historical bloc.

This problem [relation between structure and superstructure] seems to me the crucial problem of historical materialism. 8

Gramsci insisted that it was essential to get straight on what was permanent and what was occasional in the socio-economic structure to arrive at an historical analysis without mistakes and excesses.

...in studying a structure, it is necessary to distinguish organic movements (relatively permanent) from movements which may be termed 'conjunctural' (and which appear as occasional, immediate, almost accidental). Conjunctural phenomena...give rise to political criticism of a minor, day-to-day character, which has as its subject top political leaders and personalities with direct governmental responsibilities. Organic phenomena on the other hand give rise to socio-historical criticism, whose subject is wider social groupings beyond the public figure and beyond the top leaders. 9

For Gramsci, to understand correctly the relation between the permanent and the occasional, and therefore the relation between structure and superstructure within an historical bloc, it was necessary to bear in mind the relation of forces present in any historical moment. In the relation of forces he distinguished three fundamental moments which are the following:

- 1) A relation of social forces which is closely linked to the structure, objective, independent of human will and which can be measured with the system

of the exact or physical sciences.
(sic). 10

This relation of forces is objective. This just means that on the basis of the development of material forces of production there arises a series of social groups (number of factories and workers, number of cities and their population, etc.) which have an essential function in the world of production.

2) A subsequent moment is the relation of political forces; in other words, an evaluation of the degree of homogeneity, self-awareness, and organization attained by the various social classes. 11

This is the moment in which a class acquires its homogeneity and consciousness as a class. Gramsci analyzed and differentiated further this moment dividing it into three stages corresponding to the different levels of collective consciousness which a class goes through to reach its complete political self-awareness.

In the first level basic economic necessity lead individuals to link up with others in a similar situation.

The first and most elementary of these is the economic-corporate level: a tradesman feels obliged to stand by another tradesman, a manufacturer by another manufacturer, etc. 12

In the second level

...consciousness is reached of the solidarity of interests among all members of a social class - but still in the purely economic field. 13

Here individuals group themselves into classes based on their economic and social activities but only because they have common economic aims and interests. In the third level the purely economic phase of the struggle is overcome and there begins the real political phase in which a class acquires consciousness of its place in society and of its being under the domination of another class.

This is the most purely political phase, and marks the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures. 14

Gramsci named this level 'catharsis':

The term 'catharsis' can be employed to indicate the passage from the purely economic...to the ethico-political moment, that is the superior elaboration of the structure into superstructure in the minds of men... To establish the 'cathartic' moment becomes therefore, it seems to me, the starting point for all the philosophy of praxis... 15

Gramsci regarded this 'catharsis' as the passage from the objective phase of class struggle to the subjective one, from the phase governed by necessity, i.e. material facts to the phase

expressing liberty, i.e. the affirmation of human will. In the latter phase is formed the class's self-awareness. This is the level of the creation, diffusion and consolidation of a series of political and ideological mechanisms: Party, intellectuals, cultural institutions, etc. This is the last phase under the moment labelled "relations of political forces". After it comes the third and final moment in the relation of forces making up an historical bloc.

3) The third moment is that of the relation of military forces... 16

This is the final moment of the political struggle. Revolution is conceived by Gramsci as a continuation of the political struggle, as the extreme expression of social contradictions.

For Gramsci, the key to avoiding the excesses of economist and the idealist interpretations of the relation between structure and superstructure, is the recognition that the political phase is essential for historical change. The political phase, the phase in which is formulated the class's self-awareness, is the mediation between the economic phase and the moment of action. The whole of Gramsci's concept of the historical bloc aims to avoid a one-sided interpretation of Marx's theory of the relation between material basis and ideological outcome: it is necessary to embrace the totality of the relations of forces through which a class comes to be

dominant and ruling or dominated and ruled. It is necessary to study the position of classes in the economic structure and the process through which those classes have acquired consciousness of their role in society.

Gramsci's concept of the historical bloc and above all his conception of civil society as a moment within the superstructure have often been used to justify positing a rupture between him and Marx. We maintain however, that Gramsci's views here represent an attempt to resolve the contradictions that arise from one-sided readings of Marx's writings which emphasize only its deterministic or its antideterministic aspects.

Marx said of civil society:

Civil society comprises the entire material interaction among individuals at a particular evolutionary stage of the productive forces. It comprises the entire commercial and industrial life of a stage... 17

In Gramsci, however, civil society includes also the complex of ideologies and institutions of the superstructural level through which a class develops and establishes its hegemony over society.

What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or the 'State'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that or 'direct domination' or command exercised through the State and 'juridical' government. 18

Gramsci was not thus placing the motor of history in the ideological superstructure. He is merely changing Marx's terminology: Marx's "superstructure" is still a superstructure in Gramsci, but is named by him "civil society". The important thing is that Gramsci as well as Marx considered class struggles as the fundamental motor of historical development.

Gramsci arrived at his concept of civil society from the formulations of Hegel. To analyze the roots of this concept we can draw on N. Bobbio's analysis in his article, "Gramsci and the conception of civil society".

Bobbio points out that in the tradition of natural law, civil society referred actually to political society and therefore to the state. As such it was considered either the radical negation of 'natural society', in the manner of Hobbes and

Rousseau, or the mere conservation and regulation of it as in Locke and Kant. Hegel introduced a radical innovation with respect to the tradition of natural law: he decided to use the term "civil society" to indicate pre-political society or what had before been called natural society. This innovation was not only terminological but also and above all substantive. For Hegel, civil society

...is no longer the reign of a natural order which must be freed from the restrictions and distortions which bad positive laws imposed on it, but, on the contrary, it is the reign of 'dis-soluteness, misery and physical and ethical corruption' which must be regulated, dominated and annulled in the superior order of the state. 19

In this sense Hegel did not regard the state merely as negating pre-state society as in the case of Hobbes and Rousseau, nor only as regulating and therefore perfecting it as in the case of Locke and Kant. The state, for Hegel, was both the conservation and overcoming of civil society.

Bobbio affirms that with this new meaning Hegel's concept of civil society is a pre-marxist concept. But he immediately adds that Hegel's concept of civil society is from a certain aspect wider and from another one more restricted than that which will be later formulated by Marx. It is wider because it includes not only the sphere of economic and social

relations, but also the administration of justice and organization of police force and of corporations which, for Marx, will be part of the state.

The actuality of the universal principle of freedom therein contained - the protection of property through the Administration of Justice...care for particular interests as a common interest, by means of the Police and the Corporation. 20

It is more restricted because Hegel's civil society constitutes the intermediate moment between the family and the state and, in this way, it does not include all the pre-state relations and institutions as will be the case in Marx's.

Marx and Gramsci both referred to Hegel's concept of civil society in their analysis of capitalism. In the preface of the Contribution of the Critic of Political Economy Marx said:

My investigation led to the result that legal relations as well as forms of State are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called general development of the human mind, but rather have their roots in the material conditions of life, the sum total of which Hegel, following the example of the Englishmen and Frenchmen of the eighteenth century, combines under the name of 'civil society' that, however, the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy. 21

And Gramsci said:

Civil society as Hegel understands it, and in the way in which it is often used in these notes (i.e. as the political and cultural hegemony of a social group on the whole of society as the ethical content of the State). 22

As we can see, Marx and Gramsci both refer back to the Hegelian conception of civil society: while Marx analyzes its structural content, Gramsci analyzes its superstructural content. The two different interpretations seem contradictory only if one does not bear in mind Hegel's broad notion of civil society. As we have explained, for him, civil society was not only the realm of material necessity but included also the administration of justice and the organization of police, force and corporations, i.e. the regulations of the public law. Civil society in Hegel is not only the place where men are opposed to each other as producers and consumers of merchandise, it is also the ethical basis of the state because through the educative influence of civil life men realize that they are creatures of reason; they have a universal side and so can align themselves with the universal without sacrifice of freedom. In civil society they begin to realize that their true freedom consists in the acceptance of principles and laws, in the synthesis of universal and particular interests.

The difference between Gramsci and Marx in relation to the concept of civil society is terminological and not substantial. I do not want to deny the substantial and original contribution that Gramsci's concept of civil society provides to Marxism through its extensive analysis of the role and functions of ideology in society. What I want to emphasize by saying that the difference between Marx and Gramsci in their concepts of civil society is terminological is that Gramsci never transfers into the superstructure elements which for Marx were part of the structural basis, or what Marx termed civil society. In other words, Gramsci does not give an idealistic interpretation of historical movement as seen by Marx. Why then did Gramsci place civil society in the superstructure? This reconceptualization of Marx's view of civil society is fundamental for Gramsci's elaboration of the theory of hegemony. It is in civil society that the economically dominant class exercises its hegemony over the other classes to obtain their consent. It is in civil society that the proletariat has to create a new, alternative historical bloc. It is in civil society that the education of the masses to a new vision of the world is realized.

In viewing civil society as part of the superstructure Gramsci achieved three advantages over the traditional Marxist view: 1) he gave needed emphasis to the process of education of the masses for revolution; 2) against economic and

determinist interpretations of Marx, he put into proper perspective the importance of bare economic facts in understanding revolutionary changes; 3) his vision of the state as the synthesis of civil and political society, of consent and force, created the possibility (as we will see in more detail later on) of a more realistic explanation of the elimination of the state under communism: when the proletariat through the hegemonic process has acquired universal consent of the people and established a new moral and intellectual order, in which ideas

and culture will not be in contradiction with the system of production, then violence and force will become unnecessary and political society will be absorbed by civil society.

Gramsci's new vision of civil society complements Marx's economic theory. Marx himself recognized that his studies were incomplete in the ideological sphere. Gramsci's innovation is really the development of ideas and principles implicit in Marx's writings. Besides, Marx in one of his last writings gave a further, even if only sketched, elaboration of the concept of the state and of civil society. As H. Portelli has pointed out:

Marx lui même a démontré le contraire: dans un de ses dernier écrite essentiels, la Critique du programme de Gotha, il distingue justement au sein de la superstructure l'appareil d'Etat et ce qu'il appelle la 'société', et qui correspond à la notion gramscienne de société civile. ... La société est donc définie comme le fondement intellectuel et moral de l'Etat, de façon analogue à la société civile gramscienne. 23

Gramsci's interest in the superstructure was the result of his having to consider conditions of capitalism different from and more complex and developed than those Marx and Engels had to deal with and also of his attempts to oppose economistic and mechanistic distortions of Marxism.

Gramsci's innovations in the conception of civil society are considered by N. Bobbio so fundamental, as to amount to an inversion of Marx's relation between ideologies and economic basis.

In Gramsci, the relation between institutions and ideologies is inverted, even within the scheme of a reciprocal action: the ideologies become the primary moment of history, and the institutions the secondary one. 24

Bobbio has made a double mistake in attributing to Gramsci a mechanical inversion of Marx's relation between structure and superstructure. Bobbio's first error is to see Marx's analysis of society as one-sided, as an economicistic and mechanistic interpretation of society. Marx of course focussed on the economics of capitalist society, but he did not underestimate the importance of the ideological superstructure. In the Preface of 1859, in the German Ideology and in various passages of Capital Marx has shown that he considered ideologies in the class struggle to play an important and active role. He considered the economic basis the fundamental but not the only element in the historical process. His conception of history sought:

...to set forth the real process of production, starting out from the material production of life itself, and to comprehend the form of interaction connected with this and created by this mode of production, that

is, by civil society in its various stages, as the basis of all history. We have to show civil society in action as State and also explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc. and trace their genesis from that basis. The whole thing can be depicted in its totality (and thus the reciprocal action of these various sides too). 25

The second error in Bobbio is that though Gramsci investigated the superstructural level more thoroughly than Marx, he did not ignore the fundamental role of the economic basis. Bobbio writes:

Once the moment of civil society is considered as the moment in which the transition from necessity to freedom takes place, the ideologies, which have their historical roots in civil society, are no longer seen just as a posthumous justification of a power which has been formed historically by material conditions, but are seen as forces capable of creating a new history and of collaborating in the formation of a new power, rather than to justify a power which has already been established. 26

This passage of Bobbio not only evinces a mechanistic interpretation of Marx, with the superstructure seen as a simple causal reflection of material conditions, but also turns Gramsci into a Crocean idealist who considers ideologies as the primary, positive and active element of history.

The root of Bibbio's misinterpretation of Gramsci is his assumption that Gramsci's notion of civil society is opposed to Marx's. I have sought to demonstrate in these pages that Gramsci's notion of civil society is actually a complement of Marx's theory. G. Tamburrano has understood his main point:

Uno degli apporti più considerevoli, e certamente il più importante sul piano pratico, che Gramsci ha dato al marxismo riguarda la rivalutazione dell'importanza della sovrastruttura. 27

Gramsci did 'revalue' the idea of superstructures but in doing so just retrieved Marx's theory of ideology from determinist distortions. Gramsci's affirmation of the interaction between structure and superstructure is the development of Marx's own suggestions about the importance of ideas in the historical process. Gramsci elaborated the role of the superstructure in the historical development, a role already recognized by Marx.

We can conclude with G. Bonomi that:

Dovrebbe, dunque, risultare chiaro che giustamente Boobio afferma la distinzione tra la società civile di Marx e quella di Gramsci, ma tuttavia erroneamente fa di questa distinzione terminologica una distinzione sostanziale, quasi che Gramsci avesse

trasportato nell'ambito sovrastrutturale non solo il termine di 'società civile', ma anche i contenuti che essa aveva nella terminologia marxiana. Niente di ciò, Gramsci resta marxista a pieno diritto, e se del rapporto struttura-sovrastruttura sviluppa tutti i contenuti del secondo termine, non ne 'inverte' assolutamente il rapporto... 28

2. The Leninist roots of the concept of hegemony

One of the most significant of Gramsci's intellectual contributions from his twenty years in prison is the theory of hegemony, which lies fragmented and dispersed through his Prison Notebooks. The basic premise of the theory of hegemony is Marx's affirmation that "the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of the ruling class". The study of ideologies in class struggles was not completely developed by Marx, but, as he had shown in his early writings, he was aware of the importance of ideas to the dominant class:

The individuals who comprise the ruling class possess among other things consciousness and thought. Insofar as they rule as a class and determine the extent of a historical epoch, it is self-evident that they do it in its entire range. Among other things they rule also as thinkers and producers of ideas and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age. 29

Marx insisted that a thorough critique of the ideology of a society was necessary but only after having treated extensively its economic or material basis.

Gramsci took very seriously Marx's statement that men become aware within the ideological sphere of the conflict between forces of production and relations of production. Gramsci thus carried forward Marx's theory by an analysis of the role of ideology in society. He was the theoretician of the superstructure as Marx was the theoretician of the social basis or economic structure. Gramsci centred his studies on the concept of cultural control because he considered that this problem opened a new strategy of revolutionary development in Western societies.

For Gramsci, hegemony was the complex of intellectual and political control exercised by the dominant class over the other classes of society through the institutions of civil society. To elaborate the concept of hegemony, Gramsci utilized as a methodological guide the two fundamental principles of political science enunciated by Marx in the Critique of Political Economy:

1. -that no social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still find room for further for-

ward movement 2. -that a society does not set itself tasks for whose solution the necessary condition have not already been incubated, etc. 30

This means that no social or ideological, i.e. superstructural, manifestations of a mode of production can be separated from the structural-material developments and vice versa. The correct interpretation of Marx's thesis, in Gramsci's view, is that material conditions alone are insufficient for a revolution and that it is also necessary that men acquire consciousness of their role within the social structure and in consequence organize themselves and act to realize their goals. As we have said, in his analysis of the superstructure Gramsci distinguished two spheres: political society and civil society. For him, a class did not become a ruling class merely through the control of the coercive apparatus of the state or political society, and through the possession of the means of production, but also through the struggle for hegemony in civil society. With the term hegemony Gramsci sought to express the idea that the supremacy of a class in society could not be reduced to a mere coercion, but also had to be based on the consent of the other subordinate classes. The proletariat therefore had to acquire consciousness of its role in society through the elaboration of its vision of the world, i.e. Marxism, which is precisely a critique of the bourgeois vision of the world. This process was to be realized by the educative and organizational role of

the party. It was through the party, the fundamental institution of the revolutionary class, that this class could exercise its hegemony in civil society. We shall later see exactly how the party, as the collective intellectual of the working class, is supposed to obtain the active consensus of the masses. It would adapt the philosophy of praxis to the demands and requirements of society forming a national - popular will.

Having presented in general Gramsci's theory of hegemony it is necessary now to analyze its background in the Leninist tradition and to show at the same time its innovations with respect to this tradition.

The pedigree of Gramsci's concept of hegemony can be traced specifically to the political vocabulary of the Russian revolutionaries and above all to Lenin. The theoretical and political influence of Lenin's work is an aspect that cannot be overlooked in the examination of Gramsci's writings. Gramsci followed attentively the revolution of 1917 and became personally acquainted with the Russian reality when in 1922 he went to Moscow as a member of the Executive of the Communist International. In spite of these things and of his having read attentively, most of Lenin's work, it would be an error to think that Gramsci expected the Bolshevik experience to be reproduced in other countries or that he followed Lenin's theory literally.

Rather, Lenin's writings were used by him as a methodological basis for developing his views.

Gramsci referred to Lenin's theory of hegemony, as it appeared in Two tactics of Social Democracy, to understand and solve the real problems of the Italian situation: How did the concrete problem of the quest for proletariat hegemony appear in Italy? How was it possible to solve the problem of the alliance between the workers of the industrial North and the peasants of the agrarian South?

La importanza decisiva della concezione del bolscevismo, esposta per la prima volta da Lenin nel suo libro Due tattiche, dopo la scissione dal mencevismo, è apparsa proprio in Italia, dopo l'occupazione delle fabbriche del settembre 1920. I contadini poveri di tutta Italia, ma specialmente del Mezzogiorno e delle Isole, avevano bisogno della terra, ma essi erano troppo ignoranti, troppo isolati nei loro villaggi... per resistere all'attacco concentrato delle truppe fasciste... Solo l'aiuto degli operai, solo una stretta alleanza dell'operaio e del contadino poteva salvare la situazione... Il contadino non può conquistare la terra senza l'aiuto degli operai; l'operaio non può rovesciare il capitalista senza l'aiuto del contadino... la rivoluzione si presenta praticamente come una egemonia del proletariato che guida il suo alleato, la classe dei contadini. 31

Here we must take into account the principal events of the decade of the twenties to follow Gramsci's later ideas and re-

flections. The failure of the factory councils movement in 1920, the split of the Italian Socialist Party in 1921 and the victory of Fascism in 1922 were the essential political events in the background against which Gramsci drew on Lenin. It is precisely in his theoretical response to Fascism that Gramsci began to use the concept of hegemony in a more precise way. Even in Gramsci's earlier writings though, there are elements that show that he was always aware that a class needs to create an ideological cultural hegemony before the violent conquest of power.

...every revolution has been preceded by an intense labour of criticism, by the diffusion of culture and the spread of ideas amongst masses of men ...the bayonets of Napoleon's armies found their road already smoothed by an invisible army of books... 32

While in prison Gramsci began really to see the possibilities of the Leninist concept of hegemony and it is by reference to this period and this concept that it is possible to trace a connection between Lenin and Gramsci. This connection is even more significant if we take into consideration the intimate relation between the Third International and the Italian Communist Party in the early nineteen twenties, because, as we know, Lenin's influence over the Third International was the determining force.

The development and definition of the concept of hegemony in Gramsci was related to the national reality of Italy. Gramsci realized that underestimation of the power of ideas had led to serious political errors on the part of the Italian left in its confrontation with Fascism. In an article of May, 1925 Gramsci wrote:

The economic struggle cannot be separated from the political struggle, nor can either of them be separated from the ideological struggle... The element of "spontaneity" is not sufficient for revolutionary struggle: it never leads the working class beyond the limits of the existing bourgeois democracy. The element of consciousness is needed, the 'ideological' element... Theoretical activity, in other words struggle of the ideological front, has always been neglected in the Italian workers' movement. 33

For Gramsci, the unity in the hegemonic process between the political and the ideological elements was the only way to combat the reactionary ideas propagated by the Fascist movement. This strategic necessity initially elaborated by Gramsci under the impulse of the compelling struggle against Fascism, would be extended and deepened by him while in prison, his conviction being that it was always necessary to find a way to persuade the masses in preparation for the moment of force and violence that was the revolution.

Gramsci saw the victory of Fascism in Italy and its growing popularity among the masses as demonstrating the important role played by the superstructural level in the consolidation of capitalist power in Western societies and the necessity of a very different revolutionary strategy from that used by the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917.

The determination, which in Russia was direct and drove the masses onto the streets for a revolutionary uprising, in central and western Europe is complicated by all these political superstructures created by the greater development of capitalism. This makes the action of the masses slower and more prudent, and therefore requires of the revolutionary party a strategy and tactics altogether more complex and long-term than those which were necessary for the Bolsheviks in the period between March and November 1917. (sic) 34

Gramsci's analysis of Fascism is fundamental to the development of his concept of hegemony. For Gramsci, Fascism was the consequence of the lack of hegemony of the Italian bourgeoisie during the crisis of the post-war period. The Italian Liberal State was incapable of facing the social-economic problems of that period and the institutions of civil society, newspapers, parties, parliament, etc., lost all credibility and popularity among the masses. The bourgeoisie could not draw on the consensus of the people and could only save its

power through violence and force, through a pure dictatorship. Fascism, Gramsci affirmed, was the only way for capitalism to maintain its authority and preserve its economic system. But the Fascist movement born as a moment of force and violence, solidified its power through using the institutions of civil society and winning over the majority of the intellectuals to build its ideological justification. The big mistake of the Italian left and one of the principal causes of its failure against Fascism was precisely its underestimation of the hegemonic capacity of its adversaries.

The ideological triumph of Fascism was, for Gramsci, a proof of the different strategic tactics that the revolutionary movement had to use in Western societies. He credited Lenin with realizing that the means for the victory of the revolution in the West would have to be different from those in Russia in 1917.

It seems to me that Ilitch understood that a change was necessary from the war of manoeuvre applied victoriously in the East in 1917, to a war of position which was the only form possible in the West... where the social structures were of themselves still capable of becoming heavily-armed fortifications ... In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State

and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. 35

Gramsci thus looked to civil society, i.e. the complex of "private organizations", churches, trade unions, political parties, schools, etc. through which a social group exercises its hegemony over the whole society. To develop his concept of hegemony Gramsci had to analyze anew the workings of civil society.

Gramsci had read and admired Lenin's writings as early as 1922 but it was after the division of the Italian Socialist Party, and during the controversy with Bordiga, who insisted in maintaining the Communist Party as a small elite revolutionary group, that Gramsci really manifested the strong influence that the Bolshevik leader had had on his thought, above all in regard to the development of the concept of hegemony.

Lenin himself made no systematic study of the problem of hegemony. After the 1905 democratic revolution (bourgeois in its social and economic substance), Lenin had to deal with two different positions: that of Trotsky who wanted a fast transition to the proletarian-socialist revolution, and that of the reformist group of Social-Democrats, who wanted to give political leadership to the rising bourgeoisie. Lenin rejected

both of these solutions and developed the theory of the bourgeois-democratic revolution growing into the socialist revolution when the working class with the peasantry as its ally comes to play the leading role. That is why Lenin could affirm that the bourgeois revolution was more useful to the proletariat than to the bourgeoisie, because it had created the necessary political environment for workers' participation in the political struggle. In light of these events Lenin stated, above all in What Is To Be Done? and in Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution, three essential factors of the hegemonic process which would be reelaborated by Gramsci: 1) A democratic revolution which overthrows the autocracy and clears the ground for the subsequent class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat is fundamental for workers to participate in the struggle for hegemony; 2) An alliance between the proletariat and the peasants and also the petty bourgeoisie is essential for the affirmation of the proletarian hegemony; 3) The proletariat needs a vanguard, the party, to lead the hegemonic process.

Gramsci's treatment of the problem of hegemony was more extensive and complete than Lenin's, since he had to take into account the historical conditions of a more advanced capitalism. It is true that

...in Lenin...the term (hegemony)
continued to signify little more

than the political leadership of a proletarian vanguard... More precisely, this meant winning the allegiance of the huge peasantry to the revolutionary program of the tiny proletariat.. 36 .

Nevertheless, Lenin's affirmation in Two Tactics that the proletariat had to lead the revolution and establish itself as an independent political force, i.e. had to conquer the hegemony over the whole society, was central to Gramsci's future elaboration of his concept of hegemony. (see quotation N. 31 p. 70).

Gramsci's theory was really a new development of Leninism. Lenin had maintained that revolutionary class consciousness is not a natural and spontaneous product of the life experience of the working class, that without the assistance of the revolutionary intelligensia the working class could only develop "trade-union consciousness". Both Gramsci's concept of hegemony and his theory of the intellectuals built on these points, while at the same time going beyond them.

A critique of Lenin's thought would be out of place here, but it must be borne in mind that most of the principles of Lenin's theory were elaborated in relation to the unique conditions of the Russian revolution. Lenin himself realized this, as Gramsci pointed out; specifically that his tactics and strategy for a revolution were strictly related to the

dictatorial situation of Tzarist Russia and the secrecy necessary for a revolutionary movement to escape the surveillance of the Tzarist secret police.

Lenin was convinced, at least until 1917, as his polemic with Trotsky after 1905 shows clearly, that

...only a revolutionary dictatorship relying on the overwhelming majority of the people can be at all durable... The Russian proletariat, however, at present constitutes a minority. 37

Only as events forced the choice upon him did Lenin definitely accept the formula of a tightly disciplined body of professional revolutionaries, a conscious minority, who would lead and guide the proletariat even against its will if that should be necessary. Lenin's vision of the party as a small group of elect revolutionaries, as an elitist and highly disciplined political party, assigned a secondary and inferior role to the workers in the history and development of socialism. This kind of party could easily become a new priesthood, the instrument for imposing from above on the working class a new faith in a religion without God. There is no proof in Gramsci's writings that he directly recognized these problems but his theories of hegemony and of the party were intended to avoid the dangers of Lenin's theory.

Gramsci as well as Lenin criticized any mechanistic and economicistic interpretation of Marxism. He gave importance to the voluntarist element necessary for a revolution and considered that the spontaneous mass movement was to be organized by a conscious leadership. But his concept of the organic intellectual of the proletariat was specifically aimed at overcoming the elitist character of the "professional revolutionaries" of Lenin. Gramsci's organic intellectuals had to arise from the masses, they were the theoretical side of the revolutionary activity of the working class. They were not to inculcate consciousness in the masses but to help to bring to light the "socialist" and "Marxist" consciousness already present in the proletariat.

Lenin gave relatively little thought to the precise circumstances and details of life after the revolution. In his emphasis on "first things first" he never lost sight of the importance of political power. For him, the social revolution must be preceded by the seizure of political power. He limited the function of hegemony, under the heading of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", to the post-revolutionary period, after the conquest of state power. Lenin in State and Revolution wrote:

According to Marx, the state is an organ of class domination, an organ of oppression of one class by another. 38

That is why, for him, the hegemony of the proletariat before the revolution was really reduced to the organization of the party as the ideal instrument for the seizure of state power. Lenin's notion of hegemony for the pre-revolutionary period was fundamentally political: the cultural and educational preparation of the masses occupied a very secondary place. Gramsci, on the contrary, considered that the process of hegemony had to begin before the conquest of the state or political society and had to be a process of political education. Gramsci's concept of hegemony was broader and richer than Lenin's because he was not only concerned with the party and the state but with the whole concept of culture and the development of a new proletarian vision of the world. Proletarian hegemony prior to the seizure of state power, Gramsci argued, meant that the proletariat would universalize its vision of the world, establish its cultural and moral control of society. For Gramsci, the party was not only a political but an educational institution. In its dialectical and democratic internal organization it had to constitute, as we will explain later on, the core of the new future society.

In State and Revolution Lenin was not so much concerned with the practical politics of the immediate present as with the theoretical exposition of the future society under socialism. He believed that a new egalitarian and just society could be built by the revolutionaries through the use of political power,

the ultimate goal being the creation of a new stateless society. But his elitist and highly centralized party was the most difficult obstacle to be overcome for the realization of this vision and one of the principal cause of the future bureaucratization of Russian state. Gramsci's conception of the party is best seen as an attempt to respond to just such contradictions in Lenin's thought. Gramsci's aim was true self-emancipation of the proletariat. He always believed that unity and discipline were not to be imposed artificially but had to arise from general discussion and debate. The function of the party was not to be purely political but fundamentally cultural, it must further the development of the collective will already present in the practical activity of the masses. Gramsci's views on the internal organization of the party and its dialectical relation to the masses will be discussed in chapter IV.

To summarize the preceding argument, Gramsci agreed with Lenin's political program insofar as it acknowledged the role of political as well as economic factors, and so rejected economic determinism. But Gramsci extended and developed Lenin's concept of the state by taking into account the complex social circumstances of the more advanced capitalist societies of the West. He maintained that in those societies class power did not rest only on force but also on consensus or hegemony. Gramsci realized that Lenin's vision of the state was direct-

ly related to a specific type of society: the Russian society of 1917. Gramsci sought to disentangle essential Leninist principles from the aspects they took on in consequence of the peculiarities of Tzarist autocracy and to develop those principles.

We must not therefore go as far as does, for example, G. Tamburrano who aims to present Gramsci's theory as a pure "democratic theory".

La teoria dell'egemonia è una
teoria democratica ed è un filone
di pensiero nuovo in Gramsci e
nella dottrina comunista. 39

Tamburrano's interpretation underlines only the aspect of consensus and does not take into account the dialectical relation between civil and political society in Gramsci's expanded concept of the state. To insist only on the aspect of ideological and cultural hegemony in Gramsci's theory of the state is to make him in effect a follower of the speculative idealism of Croce. And Gramsci, as we saw earlier, had criticized Croce because

Croce's historical-political work stresses only what in politics is defined as the phase of 'hegemony', of consensus and cultural leadership, as distinct from the phase of coercion, whether exercised by legislative or executive powers, or expressed through police intervention. 40

Gramsci criticized the reduction of class power to ideological consensus alone and also its reduction to the moment of force or violence alone. Gramsci never believed that class power could be exercised only through political and cultural hegemony or deny the role of the structure in favor of the superstructure:

for though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity. 41

Tamburrano's analysis of Gramsci's theory of hegemony was aimed against those who maintain that Gramsci's work is just a straightforward application of Leninism applied to the Italian situation. I agree that Gramsci's concept of hegemony is not simply borrowed unchanged from Leninism. Gramsci was able to fuse Lenin's principles with elements that superseded these principles without excluding them. Tamburrano does not seem to have understood Lenin's theoretical contribution to the concept of hegemony; on the other hand he does not grasp Gramsci's position within the Italian Communist Party. Gramsci was ^{always} always against Bordiga's sectarian position which sought to exclude any alliance with other 'impure' communist groups (i.e. socialist, democrats). Gramsci thus lent support to the position of Lenin and the Third International which recommended that the Italian Communist Party enter into alliances which

would make up a "United Front" to resist reactionary attacks. As C. Buci-Glucksmann asserted, the attempt of some commentators to set Gramsci and Lenin in sharp opposition to each other misses

...il posto dell'egemonia nel pensiero leniniano e a passare sotto silenzio la III Internazionale... Durante la svolta 1923-24...in piena battaglia contro la direzione di Bordiga, Gramsci riprende esplicitamente da Lenin il concetto teorico-pratico di egemonia ... Si tratta, per Gramsci, di applicare in Italia la linea del Comintern, la parola d'ordine del 'governo operaio e contadino', si tratta di lottare per fare del partito comunista, che è alle prese con la violenza fascista, un partito di classe, di massa... 42

Tamburrano's interpretation cannot be accepted because, as it will become fully apparent later on, Gramsci's theory of hegemony does not eliminate the moment of revolution and the subsequent proletarian dictatorship.

We may note finally that Gramsci's analysis of Fascism and his theory of hegemony have the political mark of the Bolshevik leader who

advanced philosophy as philosophy in so far as he advanced political doctrine and practice. 43

For Gramsci, the true philosophy of Lenin was not in his philosophical essays, but in his political writings, which were aimed at creating the 'hegemonic apparatus' involving a new ideological horizon, a new intellectual and moral order. That is why Gramsci could affirm

that the theorization and realization of hegemony carried out by Ilitch was also a great 'metaphysical' event. 44

Gramsci's concept of hegemony is a fundamental theoretical and practical development in Marxist theory. The idea that the hegemony is not only a post-revolutionary problem but involves also the essential preparation for proletarian revolution was aimed at solving the contradictions in Lenin's theory and making more realistic the possibility of a new type of state whose ultimate goal is its self-elimination.

NOTES

1. A Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, International Publishers, New York, 1971, (hereafter SPN), pg. 57, or Quaderni dal carcere, edizione critica dell' Istituto Gramsci a cura di V. Gerratana, Einaudi, Torino, 1975 (hereafter EC), pg. 2010 (1934).
2. In a letter to J. Bloch (London, September 21(22), 1890) Engels underlined that according to Marx and him there was an interaction between the structural basis and

2. (Cont'd) the ideological superstructure. He explained that they were "partly to blame" for the fact that some interpreters layed more stress on the economic side because they had devoted most of their intellectual efforts to study the economic basis of society vis-à-vis their idealist adversaries. Moreover for lack of "time, space and ocassion" they did not give due importance to the superstructural factors. But "if somebody twists this into saying that the economic elements is the only determining one, he transforms that position into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure...also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form. There is an interaction of all these elements in which...the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary" (K. Marx, F. Engels, Selected Works, International Publishers, New York, 1977), pg. 692.
3. Writings of the young Marx on Philosophy and Society, Anchor Books, New York, 1967, pg. 438, my emphasis, O.C.
4. EC, pg. 456.
5. SPN pgs. 365, 366, my emphasis, O.C. or EC 1249-1250 (1932).
6. Gramsci affirmed that the concept of historical bloc had been created by Sorel. Probably he was thinking of the book Reflections on the Violence, where Sorel used the term "bloc of historical forces" when he treated the problem of myth.
7. SPN pg. 366. or EC 1250 (1932).
8. EC pg. 455. or EC 1409 (1932).
9. SPN pgs. 177, 178. or EC 1579 (1933).
10. Ibid. pg. 180. or EC 1583 (1932).
11. Ibid. pg. 181. or EC 1583.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.
15. Ibid. pgs. 366, 367. or EC 1250-1274 (1932).
16. Ibid. pg. 183. or EC 1586 (1932).
17. Writings of the young Marx..., pgs. 468, 469.
18. SPN pg. 12. or EC 1518-13 (1932).
19. N. Bobbio, "Gramsci and the conception of civil society", Gramsci and Marxist Theory, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1979, pg. 28.
20. Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Oxford University Press, New York, 1979, pg. 126.
21. K. Marx, F. Engels, op. cit., pg. 182.
22. EC pg. 703.
23. H. Portelli, Gramsci et le Bloc Historique, Press Universitaires de France, Paris, 1972, pg. 16.
24. N. Bobbio, op. cit., pg. 36.
25. Writings of the young Marx..., pg. 431.
26. N. Bobbio, op. cit., pg. 36.
27. G. Tamburrano, Antonio Gramsci, Sugar Co., Milan, 1977, pg. 254, my emphasis, O.C.
28. G. Bonomi, Partito e Rivoluzione in Gramsci, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1973, pg. 50.
29. Writings of the young Marx..., pg. 438.
30. SPN pg. 106. or EC 1774 (1933).
31. Quoted in E. Ragionieri, "Gramsci e il dibattito teorico del movimento operaio internazionale", Gramsci e la cultura contemporanea, V.I., Editori Riuniti, Istituto Gramsci, Roma, 1975, pg. 123.
32. A Gramsci, Selections from Political Writings, V.I., International Publishers, New York, 1977, (hereafter SPW I) pg. 12. Jan. 29, 1916.

33. A Gramsci, Selections from Political Writings, V. II, International Publishers, New York, 1978, (hereafter SPW II) pgs. 287, 288, my emphasis, O.C.
34. Ibid. pgs. 199, 200. Feb. 9, 1924.
35. SPN pgs. 237, 238. or EC 866 (1931).
36. T.R. Bates, "Gramsci and the theory of hegemony", Journal of the History of Ideas, 36, no. 2, USA, 1977, pg. 352.
37. V.I. Lenin, Selected Works, London, 1963, pg. 35.
38. V.I. Lenin, State and Revolution, International Publishers, New York, 1977, pg. 9.
39. G. Tamburrano, op. cit., pg. 257.
40. A. Gramsci, Letters from Prison, Harper Colophon Books, New York, 1975. (hereafter LP) pg. 235.
41. SPN pg. 161. or EC 1591 (1932).
42. C. Buci-Glucksmann, Gramsci e la Stato, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1976, pg. 211 and 213.
43. SPN pg. 365. or EC 1249 (1932).
44. Ibid. pg. 357. or EC 886 (1932).

CHAPTER III

THE STATE AND THE ROLE OF THE INTELLECTUALS IN THE HISTORICAL BLOC

Gramsci's theory of the state is fundamental to his concept of the intellectual and the intellectual's function. Implicit in Gramsci's conception of the function of the intellectuals in creating a proletarian counter hegemony is his particular understanding of the relation between state and civil society.

For Gramsci, the analysis of capitalist society, which was indispensable for the triumph of a future revolution, could not be limited to the study of the economic structure. It had to embrace the whole ideological and political superstructure integrated under the state. Gramsci realized that the complex superstructures created by modern states were resistant to the most catastrophic of economic crisis.⁵ He referred to

...the most advanced States, where 'civil society' has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic 'incursions' of the immediate economic element (crisis, depressions, etc.). 1

For this reason he rejected Rosa Luxemburg "economistic" and "spontaneist" thesis that an economic crisis was necessary and sufficient for the triumph of the revolution.² The failure of the European workers' movement after World War I and the victory of Fascism indicated the necessity for a new strategy for the revolutionary movement. Working out that strategy required the theory of hegemony and the conceptualization of the state.

Fascism showed how popular consent could be used to gain political power and how political power in turn could be consolidated through consent. On the other hand the classical Marxian vision of the state which emphasized its basis in force and coercion was inadequate for understanding the complex interrelation between structure and superstructure in the modern democracies in the West.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony, as we have seen, involved expanding the traditional concept of the state. The state, for him, was a totality constituted by the unity of two elements: civil society and political society, hegemony and authority, moral-intellectual direction and force.

Another point which needs to be defined and developed is the 'dual perspective' in political action and in national life. The dual perspective can present itself

on various levels...but these can all theoretically be reduced to two fundamental levels, corresponding to the dual nature of Machiavelli's Centaur - half-animal and half-human. They are the levels of force and of consent, authority and hegemony... 3

In this chapter I shall analyze this 'expanded' concept of the state and the role of intellectuals in a given historical bloc, in the extension and consolidation of state power.

1. Gramsci's 'expanded' concept of the state

Gramsci elaborated his concept of the state against a view limited to the coercive aspect of political and bureaucratic structures. Gramsci's view of the state included in it civil society. This new conception arose from his historical analysis of advanced capitalist societies where political decisions and facts were filtered through the complex and contradictory whole of social institutions. Through his historical analysis Gramsci revealed differences between the Russian case where civil society was not fully developed and the state was basically coercive, and the Western countries where the structure of civil society was broadly developed and the domination of the fundamental class was ideologically justified through

the "private" and "public" organisms of civil socceity.

Gramsci defined the state "in its integral meaning: dictatorship + hegemony"*.⁴ For Gramsci,

...the general notion of the State includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society (in the sense that one might say that State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion).⁵

It is this definition that we can call the extended definition of the state, but besides it Gramsci presents also a limited definition of the state:

...the State represents the coercive and punitive force of juridical regulation of a country...⁶

There is no ambiguity between these two definitions. For Gramsci, the real meaning of the state is the one given by the extended

* The Italian text reads "nel significato integrale: dittatura più egemonia" (A. Gramsci, Passato e Presente, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1977, pg. 91). In the English tradition the term dictatorship has the substantial pejorative meaning of a supreme and despotic government. Here the term is used by Gramsci as a synonym for authority without any prejudice or pejorative connotation. However, there remains the substantive question as to whether the state which Gramsci endorses for a socialist society is in fact, contrary to his intention, as well as a name, a dictatorship. The problems related to this will be analysed in Chapter V.

definition. He only used the limited definition of the state when referred to the traditional political conception. In fact, he refused to identify the state with

... 'government by functionaries' or political society, which in every-day language is the form of State life to which the term of State is applied and which is commonly understood as the entire State. 7

Gramsci's theory of the state, based on an 'expanded' concept of it, is linked to his criticism of the liberal ideology of the state, i.e. the criticism of

... a State whose functions are limited to the safeguarding of public order and of respect for the laws. 8

The state as supreme power could not be understood except under the dual perspective, corresponding to the dual nature of Machiavelli's Centaur: coercion and consent. The state, "political society", was not just the government. The state was that but only in the presence of civil society, as the place where inlay the justification and consent for state power.

The identification in liberal ideology of the state with the government made a false and unreal distinction between civil and political society, which hid the class character of the state:

Naturally liberals ('economists') are for the 'State as veilleur de nuit! and would like the historical initiative to be left to civil society and to the various forces which spring up there - with the 'State' as guardian of 'fair play' and of the rules of the game. 9

Gramsci explained that the ideology of economic liberalism was based on the theoretical error of considering the distinction between political and civil society as an organic one. This error led to the conclusion that "economic activity belongs to civil society and that the State must not intervene to regulate it".¹⁰ "Laissez-faire" was really a deliberate policy aimed at precise end, the notion that it was just allowing for spontaneous economic development was a myth. Precisely because civil and political society are "one and the same", "laissez-faire" was in fact a form of state regulation, supported by specific laws and coercive power, which was imposed on civil society by the dominant class.

For Gramsci, any distinction between civil and political society is purely methodological and not organic: the terms not refer to distinct organisms or institutions, but rather to different functions of the state, which can be accomplished by any of its various organisms or institutions. For example, one of the most important functions of the state is its educative function, i.e. the function of raising the masses to a particular

cultural and moral level which corresponds to the interests of the ruling class. To accomplish this function the state uses both its powers of positive educational institutions such as schools and also its powers of negative action in repressive institutions such as courts and prisons. To demonstrate the concrete unity of political and civil society it is enough to note the ways the legal-administrative apparatus of the state intervenes in civil society, e.g., in the schools, in the media, in cultural associations, etc. The function of the law in the state and in society

...it is a problem of education of the masses, of their 'adaptation' in accordance with the requirement of the goal to be achieved... Through 'law' the State renders the ruling group 'homogeneous' and tends to create a social conformism which is useful to the ruling group's line of development. The general activity of law...is wider than purely State and governmental activity and also includes the activity involved in directing civil society, in those zones which the technicians of law call legally neutral - i.e. in morality and in custom generally... 11

For Gramsci, it was necessary to overcome not only the liberals' conception of the state as exclusively authoritarian, but also the theory of the ultraleftist wing of the Communist Party, which analysed the state with reference only to one social class. Gramsci opposed Bordiga's simplistic view

of the state's connection with the interests of the bourgeoisie by revealing the organic relation between the state and the class. For Gramsci, it was necessary to understand the life of the state through the various relations and contradictions of the organisms which constituted it.

Gramsci's concept of the state as civil society + political society overcame the rigid model of orthodox Marxism. The state, for Gramsci, implied not only coercion and force but also consent and ideology, i.e. hegemony. But here as elsewhere Gramsci was out to criticize not only the mechanistic views of orthodox Marxism but also the idealistic views of Croce and his followers. For Croce, history was essentially the story of cultural or ethical and political development. History was not created by classes but by individuals who developed and renewed culture through philosophical fervor, artistic creation, heroic actions and technical inventions. History, for Croce, involved only changes at the level of the superstructure and always changes for the best.*

* Croce defines human nature through what is universal in it: the absolute Spirit. The absolute Spirit is the absolute and static image in which every man recognize himself. For Croce, men are manifestations of the universal, instruments of the eternal. Thought and action achieve their unity in history which is seen as the development of the Spirit. In this sense evil, mistake, tyranny, injustice, etc. are considered only as

Nevertheless it is necessary to recognize the debt Gramsci owes to Croce in his reconceptualization of the state as involving ideological and cultural aspects. One of the things in Croce's work that most interested Gramsci was precisely Croce's "ethical-political history", which Gramsci considered equivalent to the hegemonic moment.

Che la storia etico-politica sia
la storia del momento dell'egemonia
si può vedere da tutta una serie
di scritti teorici del Croce... 12

For Gramsci, it was indispensable that the Marxist theory analyze the ethical-political dimension to the creation of the modern state, since the exclusively economic and political explanations were insufficient in theory and inadequate in practice as a useful strategy for the conquest of power.

Il pensiero del Croce deve essere
dunque apprezzato come valore
strumentale e così si può dire che
esso ha energicamente attirato l'at-

* (Cont'd) negative moments necessary for the development of the Spirit. In the dialectic of the Spirit, nothing disappears or dies, everything is "conserved" in the eternal transformation. Croce regards men as the protagonists of history but in the sense that history is the history of the human spirit. Like Hegel, Croce conceptualizes historical development as the unfolding of the self-consciousness of the Spirit. He accepted Hegel's "concrete-universal" as the solution of the dualism between the positive and negative, evil and goodness. For him, the world is the best possible world because is the product of man and of his rationality which are the projection of the Idea.

tenzione allo studio dei fatti di cultura e di pensiero come elementi di dominio politico, alla funzione dei grandi intellettuali nella vita degli Stati, al momento dell'egemonia e del consenso come forma necessaria del blocco storico concreto. 13

But to turn history into purely ethical-political history meant, for Gramsci, denying the true role of the relations of production in the dialectical movement of society, it meant to falling in

...una ipostasi arbitraria e meccanica del momento dell'egemonia, della direzione politica, del consenso nella vita e nello svolgimento dell'attività dello Stato e della società civile. 14

Croce's mistake was to separate the political, moral and intellectual level from the material basis of the state. Gramsci's criticism of Croce was based on his vision of structure and superstructure as organically related within the historical bloc.

La storia etico-politica, in quanto prescinde dal concetto di blocco storico in cui contenuto sociale e forma etico-politica si identificano concretamente nella ricostruzione dei vari periodi storici, è niente altro che una presentazione polemica di filosofemi più o meno interessanti ma non è storia. 15

Thus, in presenting an account of the state which superceded the conception of the state as pure repressive instrument welded a social class, Gramsci was borrowing in part from

Croce's idealist vision of the state as the incarnation of the human ethos. Here the concept of hegemony becomes central.

It is therefore necessary to combat economism not only in the theory of historiography, but also and specially in the theory and practice of politics. In this field, the struggle can and must be carried on by developing the concept of hegemony... 16

Hegemony was that essential aspect of the state by which it maintained itself not through coercion but through justification and consent.

The bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its cultural and economic level. The entire function of the State has been transformed, the State has become an 'educator', etc. 17

The optimum for the bourgeoisie would be to govern with the 'spontaneous' consent of the masses, by creating an hegemonic apparatus which would present its aims and interests as the 'universal' ones. This is the real meaning of Gramsci's concept of the "historical bloc", whose institutional form is the state:

...State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules... 18

But it is necessary to remember that the world-view of a class is determined by the place that such a class occupies in the world of production. Precisely because this conception is determined it is also limited: a class would never have a conception of the world which goes against its economic and political interests. That is why the bourgeois conception of the world naturally presents the capitalist regime as eternal. But the interests and aims of the bourgeoisie can never be truly the interests and aims of the whole of society. In a class divided society, such as capitalism, class struggles is inevitable and it is impossible for the dominant class to obtain absolute consent, since its ideology must hide the economic contradictions underlying the society. And that is why, for Gramsci, a coercive apparatus is also always necessary in such a society. In capitalism subordinate classes have their own vehicles of hegemony in civil society, namely parties, unions, etc., and civil society is therefore the field of class struggles. In a class divided society, civil and political society are in contradiction: in civil society there are organizations of the various classes while the political domain is in

the hands only of the dominant class, the bourgeoisie. This contradiction can be overcome, Gramsci argued, only in a communist society, where the coercion would no longer be necessary because there would be no more classes.

Gramsci's analysis of the extended concept of the state and the role of the intellectuals in the creation of consent, were above all the basis for the development of a revolutionary strategy to lead to such a society.

A class claiming to be capable of assimilating the whole of society, and which was at the same time really able to express such a process, would perfect this conception of the State and of law, so as to conceive the end of the State and of law - rendered useless since they will have exhausted their function and will have been absorbed by civil society. 19

2. The role of the intellectual within the historical bloc

For Gramsci, as we have explained, the state in its expanded conception is the dialectical unity of civil society and political society, of hegemony and coercion. This concept is integrally linked to his notion of intellectuals and their role in the social process. Gramsci stressed this link in a letter of September 1931:

This research [the research on intellectuals] will also concern the concept of the State, which is usually thought of as a political society - i.e., a dictatorship or some other coercive apparatus used to control the masses in conformity with a given type of production and economy - and not as a balance between political society and civil society, by which I mean the hegemony of one social group over the entire nation... 20

The concept of intellectuals is really the key to understanding how the state, the classes and society all relate to each other. Gramsci examined the whole question of intellectuals as part of working out the dialectical unity between structure and superstructure in the historical bloc.

In turning directly to the place of intellectuals in the social context, Gramsci was forced to revise the usual way of categorising intellectuals. Gramsci specified the category not by the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities but by the position of these activities in society.

What are the 'maximum' limits of acceptance of the term 'intellectual'? ... The most widespread error of method seems to me that of having looked for this criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities

(and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations. 21

For Gramsci, intellectuals have a role in all levels of society: in the structural basis as well as in the superstructure.

Gramsci's 'functional' view of intellectuals aims to highlight the idealist myth according to which they are a group entirely independent of society. This myth derived from the relative autonomy of intellectuals from the particular class they represent. The relation between the intellectuals and classes is not a simple mechanical one. Precisely because the superstructure is not a passive 'reflection' of the structural basis, the position of intellectuals vis-à-vis the class they represent is relatively autonomous. There can be first, a structural autonomy: the class origin of an intellectual may be different or even opposed to the class whose interests he represents.

Second and more important, there is relative autonomy in the function of the intellectual: the intellectual is not the passive agent of a class but the active organizer of its ideology or political consciousness. Thus it is possible for some intellectuals to be critical of the class they represent for the most part.²¹ Intellectuals are precisely the critical self-consciousness of their class. They are "the cultural self-consciousness, the self-criticism of the dominant class".²² This function of intellectuals creates the possibility for a subordinate

class to overcome the ideology of the time and acquire its own world-view which it may then diffuse in society as a base for its political power. For such a complete detachment of intellectuals from the dominant class to be achieved their critique of the prevailing ideology would have to become a systematic challenge to political, economical and cultural power of the dominant class.

The initial relative autonomy of intellectuals is based on the very nature of their role as organizers of the world-view of the class they represent. The function of intellectuals is to give to the members of the class they represent an awareness of their situation, to elaborate a distinctive and coherent conception of the world appropriate to their society. But intellectuals are not therefore the passive 'reflection' of the dominant class. Rather they are the active constructors of a system of ideas which may exhibit internal contradictions because of the point of view from which it starts. The activity of intellectuals is determined and limited by the place and function in society of the class they represent, but at the same time the activity of intellectuals transforms the place and function of that class. That is why, for Gramsci, intellectuals had to be defined not by their cognitive or cultural activities but by their social function.

The relationship of intellectuals to the world of production is always mediated, unlike that of the capitalist or the proletarian classes.²³ These fundamental groups are related directly to the economic structure of their society, while the function of intellectuals is always superstructural even if it may be relatively near to the structural basis, as we shall see is the case for the "organic intellectuals". Intellectuals perform "organisational and connective" functions in both civil society or the realm of hegemony and in political society or the domain of the coercive apparatus of the dominant class.

The intellectuals are the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government. These comprise:

1. The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.
2. The apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed. ²⁴

Posing the problem in this way it is clear that the consequence is a considerable enlargement of the concept of intellectual. Intellectuals are not only the teachers, professors, journalists, etc. of civil society, but also the whole range of functionaries and clerks of political society. By Gramsci's definition of the concept of the intellectual it is possible to arrive at the conclusion that "although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist".

All men are intellectuals...but
not all men have in society the
function of intellectuals. 25

Even if it is possible to speak of a category of intellectuals in relation to their specific social functions.

There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: homo faber cannot be separated from homo sapiens. Each man, finally outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a 'philosopher', an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought. 26

Gramsci's organic extension of the concept of the state

is paralleled by his organic extension of the category of intellectuals. This extension of the concept of intellectual is not arbitrary. As we have seen before: all men are intellectuals in the sense that everyone uses to a major or minor degree his mind so as to appropriate a particular conception of the world, but all men do not have the specific functions of intellectuals in society. That is why Gramsci analysed the role and positions of intellectuals in modern society in all their complexity. In fact, rather than refer to intellectuals tout court, Gramsci drew on concrete historical reality and spelled out several distinctions regarding intellectuals.

The first distinction is the most abstract one since it can be applied to any social reality: it is the distinction between "organic" and "traditional" intellectuals. The organic intellectual is more directly related to the economic structure of his/her particular society. In general:

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields. 27

That is, every developed class creates a group of intellectuals

who are "specialists" in those intellectual activities which are required for the class to perform its function in the mode of production.

The capitalist entrepreneur creates alongside himself the industrial technician, the specialist in political economy, the organisers of a new culture, of a new legal system, etc. 28

As the old type of intellectual was the organiser of a society based mainly on an agricultural and handicraft economy, the capitalist society with the industrial revolution introduced a new type of intellectual: the technician, the specialist in applied science, the organiser of industrial production. The organic intellectuals are therefore, in the first place, the organisers of the function performed in the economic field by the class to which they are linked. But, since the ruling position of a class in society does not depend only or directly on its place in the world of production, but rather also on its capacity to propagate its own world-view, to achieve hegemony in the social and political fields, the organic intellectuals are as well the organisers of the cultural self-consciousness of the class. Their function is to elaborate the ideology of their class and administer its government. Organic intellectuals belong to the same historical period as the class which creates them and they give to this class a unity and a consciousness of its own function in the economic, social and political fields.

The second distinction within the category of intellectuals subdivides organic intellectuals. This distinction is between those intellectuals (specialists) who exercise technical capacities and those intellectuals (directors) who exercise also administrative, organisational activities more linked to the specifically political area. The new organic intellectual that Gramsci envisions for the proletariat is to perform ideological and organisational functions aimed at the diffusion of a new conception of the world. The organic intellectuals of the working class must play their role in the world of production and also a "directive" political role through the new revolutionary party.

In the modern world, technical education, closely bound to industrial labour...must form the basis of the new type of intellectual... The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence...but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, 'permanent persuader', and not just a simple orator (but superior at the same time to the abstract mathematical spirit); from technique-as-work one proceeds to technique-as-science and to the humanist conception of history, without which one remains 'specialised' and does not become 'directive' (specialised and political). 29

We shall return to the problem of creating the new stratum of intellectuals. But we must first look at the group with which Gramsci contrast it: traditional intellectuals.

...every 'essential' social group which emerges into history out of the preceding economic structure, and as an expression of a development of this structure, has found (at least in all of history up to the present) categories of intellectuals already in existence and which seemed indeed to represent an historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms. 30

A fundamental characteristic of traditional intellectuals is that since they were linked to the dominant class of a previous type of society, they have lost the social basis in which they were organically rooted. Traditional intellectuals are those who are organically linked with a class which is no longer fundamental to the existing mode of production, in the way that a class of landowners is not fundamental to capitalism but a holdover in it from feudalism. And thus an example of traditional intellectuals within capitalism are the ecclesiastics.

The category of ecclesiastics can be considered the category of intellectuals organically bound to the landed aristocracy...with which it shared the exercise of feudal ownership of land, and the use of state privileges connected with property. 31

The fact that they are attached to the past, fastens among traditional intellectuals the illusion of being a socially independent group. It seems to them that they are autonomous from the new dominant group and that they are tied only to an historical

tradition of ideas and culture. Gramsci thus also names Croce and Gentile as traditional intellectuals because they consider themselves as part of the intellectual tradition of idealism without any link to a particular mode of production.³² In fact, for Gramsci, both the clergy and Croce and Gentile are far from autonomous or independent of the dominant capitalist class: they are "extremely efficient instrument of hegemony".³³

To understand better the case of Croce and Gentile, whom Gramsci calls "great" intellectuals, it is necessary to take into consideration still another dimension of Gramsci's distinction between organic and traditional intellectuals. This dimension Gramsci presents with specific reference to Italy, namely the variance between the position of urban and rural intellectuals. In Italy, this variance was the result of special geographic and economic differences.⁵ Italy consisted on the one hand of an underdeveloped southern region, dominated by a rural bourgeoisie which gave rise to associated state functionaries and members of the liberal professions; and on the other hand a northern industrial region with a metropolitan bourgeoisie which produced technicians for industry, that is intellectuals directly linked to the dominant mode of production. Thus, in Italy, most of the traditional intellectuals were connected to the rural bourgeoisie of the South while most of the organic intellectuals were part of the urban sector of the North where

the capitalist industry was developed.

This concrete analysis of the Italian situation was already sketched by Gramsci in his early essay on "Some aspects of the Southern Question" in which he had explained how traditional intellectuals helped to create a reactionary "agrarian bloc" in the South where they served as intermediaries between the peasants and the landowners, staffing positions in the state bureaucracy and administration. In the Prison Notebooks Gramsci continued and deepened this discussion.

Intellectuals of the rural type are for the most part 'traditional' that is they are linked to the social mass of country people and the town (particularly small-town) petite bourgeoisie, not as yet elaborated and set in motion by the capitalist system. This type of intellectual brings into contact the peasant masses with the local and state administration (lawyers, notaries, etc.). Because of this activity they have an important politico-social function, since professional mediation is difficult to separate from political. 34

The masses of Southern intellectuals were traditional in the sense that the capitalist mode of production had not yet developed in the agricultural South; theirs was still a pre-capitalistic world. The Southern Italian intellectuals can be seen as having had two different social roles: they were traditional in relation to the dominant mode of production, but they were organic

in relation to the surviving pre-capitalistic mode of production of the agrarian sub-bloc of the South. Any historical bloc is formed by different sub-blocs, in the concrete Italian situation there was the agrarian bloc of the South and the industrial bloc of the North. In both, the intellectuals served to render homogeneous different social groups binding together the whole historical and national bloc.

There is a further aspect of the traditional intellectuals of the South, which refers mainly to Benedetto Croce and Giustino Fortunato as great intellectuals (grandi intellettuali). They not only served to hold the agrarian bloc together but also to weld it to the nation as a whole. This they did by detaching radical Southern intellectuals from the peasant masses. In fact, the great intellectuals forced the radical intellectuals of the South into an elitist approach to culture by presenting all intellectual issues in general European and humanistic terms. This left the radical intellectuals without the essential means for addressing the local questions in their popular context.

In this sense, Benedetto Croce has fulfilled an extremely important 'national' function. He had detached the radical intellectuals of the South from the peasant masses, forcing them to take part in national and European culture; and through this culture, he had secured their absorption by the national bourgeoisie and hence by the agrarian bloc. 35

The "great intellectuals" had thereby prevented the formation of a worker-peasant alliance capable of creating a new historical national bloc. That is why Gramsci could consider them as "the most active reactionaries of the whole peninsula".*³⁶

Central to Gramsci's study of the differences between urban and rural intellectuals in Italy were their connections with the masses: in the one case the peasants of the south of Italy, in the other case the working class of the north. The intellectuals of the agrarian south had a strong political influence over the peasants, partly because of their professional activities in the state administration and partly because their higher standard of life served as a model for the social aspirations and ambitions of the peasantry.

* Gramsci in his Prison Notebooks analysed further the particular problems posed by Croce's great hegemonic influence in Italian political life. For Gramsci, Croce was an effective hegemonic force for Fascism because certain of the principles of his historical analysis were an apology for the repressive and violent regime of Mussolini. Croce's vision of history as a process of cultural and ethical development can be taken to suggest that the Fascist movement which followed the Italian economic crisis of 1917-1921 was the means to overcome in a 'civilized' manner such a crisis without upsetting the foundation of society. For Gramsci, Croce's historical theory has an evident political purpose which Croce himself always refused to admit. His theory of historical development and progress as the result of a dialectic of conservation and innovation contributed to "the reinforcement of fascism - furnishing it indirectly with an intellectual justification" (A. Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, International Publishers, New York, 1971, pg. 119.)

One can understand nothing of the collective life of the peasantry and of the germs and ferments of development which exist within it, if one does not take into consideration and examine concretely and in depth this effective subordination to the intellectuals. Every organic development of the peasant masses, up to a certain point, is linked to and depends on movements among the intellectuals. 37

The relationship between the urban intellectuals of the north and the working class was quite different.

With the urban intellectuals it is another matter. Factory technicians do not exercise any political function over the instrumental masses, or at least this is a phase that has been superseded. Sometimes, rather, the contrary takes place, and the instrumental masses, at least in the person of their own organic intellectuals, exercise a political influence on the technicians. 38

Gramsci acknowledged that the peasants were clearly incapable of fastening and supporting their own organic intellectuals, who would further the political role of the peasantry.³⁹ But Gramsci maintained that the working class could and would exercise an autonomous political influence through the creation of its new organic intellectuals. That is why the leading role in establishing a new hegemony had to go to the proletariat and the peasants had to be there as its allies.

Looking at intellectuals not only in regard to their specific intellectual activities but rather also and equally in regard to their social functions means seeing them as the mediating factor between civil society and the state (in the restricted sense). It is in this sense that the problem of intellectuals as Gramsci examined it is really the key to the larger problem of the constitution and formation of the historical bloc.

If the relationship between intellectuals and people-nation, between leaders and led, the rulers and the ruled, is provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge (not mechanically but in a way that is alive), then and only then is the relationship one of representation. Only then can there take place an exchange of individual elements between the rulers and the ruled, leaders (*dirigenti*) and led, and can the shared life be realised which alone is a social force-with the creation of the 'historical bloc'. 40

As we have seen there are different categories of intellectuals but all intellectuals have in common the role of being organisers of the world-view of the class they represent. The organic link between structure and superstructure lies in this function accomplished by the intellectuals. It is with this as a premise that Gramsci aims to develop a theory for the creation of a "new intellectual" of the working class, and a new relationship between intellectuals and masses, and between

leaders and led. We shall soon examine this further theory. We have here only to add that Gramsci believed that the creation of the new intellectual of the working class, the building of the new hegemony of the proletariat and the transformation of the relation between rulers and ruled could not be postponed until after the attainment of political power. In keeping with his expanded concept of the state, Gramsci insisted on the creation of a new Weltanschauung for the development of a new state. The creation of this new Weltanschauung implied a genuine cultural reformation rooted in changes in the social relations of production, wrought by the party as the "collective intellectual" of the working class. And it is to these matters and specifically to Gramsci's conception of the modern political party that we therefore now turn.

3. Gramsci's conception of the modern political party

Fundamental, for Gramsci, to the creation of the new intellectual of the working class is the function of the political party. We shall examine Gramsci's conception of the modern party in general and then his views of the revolutionary party in particular.

Gramsci's theory of the party as an instrument of

class organization emerges first in his critique of Croce's denial of any theoretical value to politics and parties as permanent organizations. Croce's speculative philosophy was based on the "dialectic of distincts" with allowed for the existence of only four sciences: Aesthetics, Economics, Logic and Ethics, relating to the pursuit respectively of: the Beautiful, the Useful, the True, and the Good. In this system politics was reduced to mere passion and transitory interests without any philosophical value. Croce relegated politics to struggles by individual or groups over scarce resources "Vain is it to try to differentiate political actions from those which are practical and utilitarian..."⁴¹ Politics was, thus, for Croce the mere expression of momentary passion and interest. Gramsci argued that this conception of politics did not allow Croce to explain or justify permanent political organizations such as parties. Because he could not conceive passion as controlled or constructive, Croce underestimated the historical role of political parties in society.

Croce's conception of political/passion excludes parties, since it is not possible to think of an organised and permanent passion... It excludes parties, and excludes every plan of action worked out in advance. However, parties exist and plans of action are worked out, put into practice, and are often successful to a remarkable extent. So there is a flaw in Croce's conception. ⁴²

7 Gramsci maintained that to overcome Croce's difficulties in explaining the permanent organizations in which passions become controlled and hence no longer irrational, it was necessary to understand the relation between politics and economics. It was necessary to take into account the dialectical unity between structure and superstructure, between the economic relations of production and the political organizations of civil society. The failure to consider this dialectical relation was the central flaw in Croce's thought.

Politics becomes permanent action and gives birth to permanent organizations precisely in so far as it identifies itself with economics. But it is also distinct from it, which is why one may speak...of 'political passion' as of an immediate impulse to action which is born on the 'permanent and organic' terrain of economic life but which transcends it... 43

The dialectical interplay between structure and superstructure, between economic relations and political organizations was the basis of Gramsci's theory of the party and above all of its task as the organic intellectual of the proletariat. He always considered that was necessary to see politics and party organizations in terms of concrete historical situations.

Already in 1921 Gramsci wrote:

Politically, the broad masses only exist insofar as they are organized within political parties. 44

For Gramsci, twentieth century political parties were organisms which represented the interests of social groups, they were the political and ideological instruments which allowed a determined social class to obtain political homogeneity.

Gramsci drew attention to the different roles which a party may play vis-à-vis the different classes of society.

For example:

1. The political party for some social groups is nothing other than the specific way of elaborating their own category of organic intellectuals directly in the political and philosophical field and not just in the field of productive technique. These intellectuals are formed in this way and cannot indeed be formed in any other way, given the general character and the conditions of formation, life and development of the social group. 45

Through the institutions of civil society such as schools and administrative organizations, the dominant class could form its own intellectuals not only in the sphere of production but also in the spheres of the superstructures. For the proletariat to create an alternative hegemony it would, Gramsci inferred, have to develop its organic intellectuals

in the political and philosophical fields and not only in the factories and this would be possible only through its political party, because the proletariat was in a subordinate position in society and did not have political power. The struggle for hegemony could not be limited to the productive sphere only but had to be extended also to the various areas of the superstructure. The proletariat had to have the means to confront the hegemony of the dominant class in all the areas where the consent to and justification of power were built. I do not think as A. Showstack Sassoon remarks that this is an "implicit...recognition of one of the limits of the problematic of the factory councils movement",⁴⁶ but rather an implication of that problematic. The problem of that period was not the factory councils in se but the failure of the Italian Socialist Party to provide the proletariat with organic intellectuals to elaborate a new political and philosophical conception. Gramsci was critical of the Italian Socialist Party for its failure to create the means for an alternative hegemony, specifically for its failure to recognize the need and give support to the factory councils.

Thus the first task of a party in relation to a subordinate class is to allow it to create an independent group of intellectuals. The second task of a political party is to provide a link between the class's organic intellectuals and the

traditional intelligensia. This task is the same for all classes.

2. The political party, for all groups, is precisely the mechanism which carries out in civil society the same function as the State carries out, more synthetically and over a larger scale, in political society. In other words it is responsible for welding together the organic intellectuals of a given group - the dominant one - and the traditional intellectuals. 47

Gramsci believed that if a social group had to establish a new hegemony one of its most important goals was the 'ideological' conquest of the traditional intellectuals, and this required it to develop its own organic intellectuals and hence its own ideological world-view.

Although the role of the party as a link between organic intellectuals of a class and the traditional intelligensia was the same for all social groups, the way in which this link needs to be forged could not be the same for all classes, because of their different positions in society. The dominant class which controls the state apparatus and which possesses hegemony in the various institutions of civil society welds together its organic intellectuals and the traditional ones not only by means of a political party but also by means of the state itself. The subordinate class must rely only on its political party. The political party is thus the vehicle through

which the proletariat can develop its organic intellectuals and achieve hegemony by gaining de facto power in civil society. This is the way by which the working class can win over the traditional intellectuals, converting them to a new world-view and showing its moral superiority. While the political party of the dominant class helps it to maintain its political power through justification and consent, the revolutionary party has to introduce a new-world view into the existing historical bloc and set the basis for a new one.

NOTES

1. A Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, International Publishers, New York, 1971 (hereafter SPN) pg. 235, or Quaderni dal carcere edizione critica dell' Istituto Gramsci a cura di V. Gerratana Einaudi, Torino, 1975 (hereafter EC), pg. 1615 (1932).
2. See Ibid. pgs. 233, 234 or EC 1614-1615 (1932).
3. Ibid. pgs. 169, 170 MACH 45-46.
4. Ibid. pg. 239 or EC 803 (1931).
5. Ibid. pg. 263 or EC 763-764 (1931).
6. Ibid. pg. 267.
7. Ibid. pg. 268, my emphasis, O.C. or EC 920 (1931).
8. Ibid. pg. 261 or EC 761 (1931).

9. Ibid. pg. 262. or EC 762 (1931).
10. Ibid. pg. 160. EC 1590 (1932).
11. Ibid. pg. 195. EC 758 (1931).
12. A. Gramsci, Il Materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1979, pg. 234.
13. Ibid. pg. 219, my emphasis, O.C.
14. Ibid. pg. 233.
15. Ibid. pg. 250.
16. SPN pg. 165. MACH 42.
17. Ibid. pg. 260. or EC 760 (1931).
18. Ibid. pg. 244. or EC 1765 (1933).
19. Ibid. pg. 260. or EC 760 (1931).
20. A. Gramsci, Letters from Prison, Harper Colophon Books, New York, 1975, (hereafter LP) pg. 204.
21. SPN pg. 8. or EC 1516 (1932).
22. A. Gramsci, Note sul Machiavelli, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1979, pg. 486.
23. See SPN pg. 12. or EC 1518-19 (1932).
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid. pg. 9. or EC 1517 (1932).
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid. pg. 5. or EC 1513 (1932).
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid. pgs. 9, 10. EC 1517 (1932).
30. Ibid. pgs. 6, 7. EC 1515 (1932).
31. Ibid. pg. 7. EC 1515 (1932).
32. See Ibid. pgs. 7, 8. EC 1515-1516 (1932).

33. LP pg. 204.
34. SPN pg. 14. EC 1521 (1932).
35. A. Gramsci, Selections from Political Writings II, International Publishers, New York, 1978, (hereafter SPW II) pg. 460.
36. Ibid. pg. 459.
37. SPN pgs. 14, 15. EC 1521-22 (1932).
38. Ibid. pg. 15. EC 1522 (1932).
39. See Ibid. pg. 6. EC 1515 (1932).
40. Ibid. pg. 418. EC 1505 (1932033).
41. B. Croce, Elementi di Politica, Bari, 1946, pg. 10.
42. SPN pgs. 138, 139. MACH 15.
43. Ibid. pgs. 139, 140. MACH 16.
44. SPW II pg. 71.
45. SPN pg. 15. EC 1522 (1932).
46. A. Showstack Sassoon, Gramsci's Politics, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1980, pg. 146.
47. SPN pg. 15. EC 1522 (1932).

CHAPTER IV

THE ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL OF THE PROLETARIAT

For Gramsci, in Western societies the authority of the dominant class is based as much on social, ideological and cultural power as on political power exercised by the government. The former power consists of the diffusion of a Weltanschauung, i.e., the dominant class makes its vision of the world and its values into the common sense of society, the way of thinking of the majority of the people. The dominant class establishes its hegemony not only through the exercise of economic power and state power but also through intellectual and moral control over the educational, cultural, religious and administrative institutions of civil society. Given this view of Western capitalist societies, Gramsci considered it essential that the proletariat achieve ideological and cultural hegemony before the effective conquest of state power. Lenin believed that the proletariat would exercise this hegemony only after the socialist revolution. This strategy, Gramsci argued, was right for Tzarist Russia where civil society was almost non-existent and political power was dictatorial consisting of the coercive apparatus of the state. But in Western societies, for a revolution to be successful the violent conquest of power was

not enough. It was also necessary that the proletariat achieve ideological and cultural hegemony in civil society in preparation for the moment of revolution. For the proletariat to become the new dominant class it would have to create its own culture, its own hegemonic apparatus, freeing itself from the ideological alienation of the bourgeois Weltanschauung.

This process would require the proletariat to create its own "organic intellectuals" who would operate through the revolutionary party. That is why Gramsci's reflections on hegemony are inseparable from his analysis of the role of intellectuals in the revolutionary process and of the function of the party as the consciousness of the working class.

Just as the coercive apparatus of the bourgeois state needed the collaboration of intellectuals for the diffusion and affirmation of its hegemony, for the consolidation of its power through popular consensus, so the proletariat would need to create its distinctive organic intellectuals to further its distinctive ideology. Mere ideological change would of course be insufficient, the change would have to include the economic and political spheres as well. That is why the organic intellectuals of the working class would have to have a novel and special relationship to the world of production. In other words,

the new intellectual should be the living example of the marxist unity of theory and praxis.

The traditional and vulgarised type of the intellectual is given by the man of letters, the philosopher, the artist... In the modern world, technical education, closely bound to industrial labour even at the most primitive and unqualified level, must form the basis of the new type of intellectual. 1

In this chapter I shall focus directly on Gramsci's theory of new intellectuals of the working class and their functions in elaborating and diffusing the proletarian Weltanschauung. I shall also present Gramsci's theory of the revolutionary party, regarding its internal organization, its relationship to the masses and its status as the collective intellectual of the proletariat. As in an earlier chapter I shall in this chapter, and specially at the end of it, explain how Gramsci's views, although Leninist in origins, transcend the orthodox Leninist position.

1. The organic intellectual of the proletariat

The traditional classes, we have seen Gramsci argued, developed their own intellectual strata, which promoted their

hegemony over subordinate classes. The proletariat, for its revolution to be successful, would have to create its distinctive organic intellectuals. The proletariat had to develop its own intellegensia.*

The dominant class of the present is dominant precisely because it has been able to propagate its ideology throughout society even among classes whose economic interests are in contradiction to those of the dominant one. That is why the subordinate class, subjected to an ideology that was not its own, was incapable of realizing its own interests and historical role. The working class lived amidst a contradiction between its real situation in the world of production and the ideology

* For Gramsci, the only really revolutionary class in capitalism was the working class. The other subordinate classes, for example the artisans and the peasants, could be expected to fight only to protect their limited private property (the artisan his store and the peasant his small land) and in this way they would only preserve the system of exploitation. Gramsci shared in the Marxist faith that the proletariat "even if it wanted to...could never cultivate an exploiter's mentality. The proletarian could never become a proprietor, unless he were to destroy the factories and machines and become the proprietor of a pile of useless scrap metal, only to perish on it the day after. It is precisely because the proletarian, at a certain stage in the development of the technology of industrial production, cannot become a proprietor and exploiter, that he is summoned by history to establish communism and liberate all the oppressed and exploited." (A. Gramsci, Selections from Political Writings I, International Publishers, New York, 1977, pgs. 169, 170).

which it had adopted. It may have had feelings of rebellion against the dominant class, but these were only a "first glimmer" of class consciousness, a "basic, polemical attitude".² An autonomous world view would have to be built up from this elementary consciousness which would in time go beyond it and amount to true class consciousness. The working class lived

...the contrast between thought and action... It signifies that the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes - when, that is, the group is acting as an organic totality. But this same group has, for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group... 3

The task of the organic intellectual of the proletariat was precisely

...to determine and to organize the reform of moral and intellectual life, in words to fit culture to the sphere of practice... (sic) 4

Since the working class was in a subordinate ideological, economic and political position in society, there were particular difficulties that this class had to face in achieving its hegemony in bourgeois society.

First the problem, for Gramsci, was not merely how to exchange one ideology for another in the sense of imposing a new ideology on the proletariat in place of the old one imposed upon it. The new ideology would be the expression of notions already implicit in the practical activity of the proletariat. Ideology here evidently does not have a pejorative connotation. The point was to construct

...a theory which, by coinciding and identifying itself with the decisive elements of the practice itself, can accelerate the historical process that is going on, rendering practice more homogeneous, more coherent, more efficient in all its elements, and thus, in other words, developing its potential to the maximum... 5

For Gramsci, the only theory capable of realizing this unity of theory and praxis was Marxism understood as the philosophy of praxis. It was the philosophy of praxis in that it insisted knowledge of reality was indispensable to the constructive transformation of reality, and also in that it took its departure from the "common sense" of the masses and thereupon erected its world-view. Common sense, according to Gramsci, was a series of "stratified deposits" consisting of the philosophies and outlooks of peoples throughout the past. The common sense conception of the world was "not critical and coherent but disjointed and episodic".⁶ However, in this common sense there was already an embryonic consciousness "which manifests itself

in action" and which Gramsci named "good sense": The task for intellectuals was to render into theoretically coherent form an already existing activity. What distinguished the philosophy of praxis from the other philosophies was thus that

the philosophy of praxis does not tend to leave the 'simple' in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but rather to lead them to a higher conception of life. 7

For Gramsci, the greatest weakness of other philosophies like that of Italian idealism or of the Renaissance was their inability to extend their influence beyond elite circles. They were not able to create "an ideological unity" between the bottom and the top, between the 'simple' and the intellectuals".⁸ By contrast, the philosophy of praxis

...affirms the need for contact between intellectuals and simple ...in order to construct an intellectual-moral bloc which can make politically possible the intellectual progress of the mass and not only of small intellectual groups. (sic) 9

The task of the intellectual of the proletariat was to lead the proletariat out of its inarticulate and incoherent consciousness to the awareness of its role in society and its revolutionary potential, because

A human mass does not 'distinguish' itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organizing itself; and there is not organization without intellectuals, that is without the theoretical aspect of the theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of people 'specialised' in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas. 10

For intellectuals to be in a position to elevate the masses to the consciousness of their role, those intellectuals would, Gramsci maintained, have to arise from the masses they represent. They would have to "feel" the passions and needs of that class and share its aspirations. For Gramsci, the lack of a "sentimental" connection between intellectuals and people could lead to the establishment of an intellectual "caste" which would have only a bureaucratic and formal relationship to its class.

In the absence of such a nexus the relations between the intellectual and the people-nation are, or are reduced to, relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order; the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood (so-called organic centralism). 11

Gramsci's conception of a dialectical and hence more democratic relation between party and masses is one of the principal aspects of his theory and, as we shall see later,

the step by which he transcends Lenin's orthodox position
the party as vanguard.

For Gramsci, the new intellectual of the working class not only had to arise from the masses but had to be completely different in nature from bourgeois intellectuals. The point is not to substitute one intellectual group for another. The new intellectual of the working class had to emerge from "below", from the world of production. The creation of the proletarian organic intellectual

...consist therefore in the critical elaboration of the intellectual activity that exists in everyone at a certain degree of development. 12

The new intellectual would elaborate a new conception of the world as part of the concrete activity of trying to overcome the capitalist mode of production. The new intellectuals therefore would have an active function in the transition to a socialist society; and building a socialist state would thus depend on the prior theoretical apprehension of the ingredients of productive activity. The new intellectual would no longer be only a man of letters, a philosopher or an artist but would have to become a "constructor, organiser, 'permanent persuader'".¹³ We shall have more to say on exactly what is in developing this new intelligensia when we discuss Gramsci's theory of the re-

volutionary party. At the moment other matters intrude.

Gramsci's theory of intellectuals goes far beyond Lenin's views in What is to be Done? But this is often missed or misunderstood. Consider what G. Bonomi says:

È da notare come questa concezione gramsciana della 'necessità di studiare ed elaborare gli elementi della psicologia popolare...per trasformati, educandoli, in una mentalità moderna' sia perfettamente in linea con la concezione leninista del rapporto dialettico tra spontaneità e direzione consapevole. 14

Bonomi is maintaining that Lenin's affirmation that socialist consciousness had to be brought to the workers from without does not mean disregarding the importance of the "spontaneous element" of the revolutionary movement. But even accepting this, Gramsci's conception of the organic intellectual is still qualitatively different from Lenin's. As Gramsci himself maybe did not realize, due to his great admiration and respect for the Bolshevik leader, his theory of the new intellectual implicitly acknowledged a contradiction in Lenin and represented an attempt to overcome it. The contradiction in Lenin was that between the notion of an external vanguard as the only mean to bring consciousness to the workers and the socialist ideal of proletarian self-emancipation. Gramsci's

intellectuals do not come from without, they come from within the working class, and only in that way do they and can they express the consciousness of that class. Gramsci agreed with Lenin that Marxism had to become the vision of the world of the proletariat but while Lenin considered that

the theory of socialism...grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. 15

Gramsci thought, as Bonomi himself points out, that in the contradictory consciousness of the working class were already implicitly present "socialist" and "marxist" elements which its organic intellectuals had to draw out in a Socratic way. This does not mean that Gramsci can be charged with a naive belief in the 'spontaneous' potential of the workers, because as he himself explained:

This unity between 'spontaneity' and 'conscious leadership' or 'discipline' is precisely the real political action of the subaltern classes, in so far as this is mass politics and not only merely an adventure by groups claiming to represent the masses. 16

Lenin believed that members of the party had to be "professional revolutionaries" because he thought that a socialist science emerged separately from the spontaneous class

struggles. But, for Gramsci, everyone was a potential intellectual and his theory of the organization of the party, as we will see, aimed to elevate the cultural and intellectual level of the whole working class. For Gramsci, the intellectuals of the working class could not and would not be an "elite", a "caste". They would not manipulate from outside otherwise passive proletarians but would embody the integration of mental and physical labour, they would be the first examples of the future new man evolved in the party as the embryo of the new classless society. Gramsci's vision of the creation of organic intellectuals of the proletariat is that of a dialectical and democratic process which would ideally result in a society in which the traditional division between leaders and led would be eliminated, in which everyone would become an intellectual.

2. The new hegemony and the old

Gramsci himself recognized that:

...creating a group of independent intellectuals is not an easy thing
 ... It is the conception of a subaltern social group, deprived of historical initiative, in continuous but disorganic expansion, unable to go beyond certain qualitative level,

which still remains below the level of possession of the State and of the real exercise of hegemony over the whole of society which alone permits a certain organic equilibrium in the development of the intellectual group. 17

What then of the problem that the working class must develop its own organic intellectual group given its lack of economic and political power. J. Karabel has written:

...the most fundamental problem with Gramsci's theory of intellectuals is that...the organic intellectual of the proletariat may be well-nigh impossible to form within capitalist society. 18

That is, for the working class to seize state power it is necessary that it creates its own organic intellectuals who give it revolutionary self-awareness, but at the same time it seems that without the state apparatus it would be impossible for the proletariat to have the necessary institutional basis for the formation of its own intellectuals.

Karabel's argument provides a nice statement of the very problem for which Gramsci's theory of hegemony attempts to find a solution. Gramsci's theory of hegemony requires that the workers gain control of civil society through their party, because in this way the proletariat while lacking political power, will win a de facto power. The strategy that aims at

controlling the superstructure of civil society is what Gramsci named the "war of position". He derived the phrase from modern military science which, he said, has chosen as the fundamental strategy for the more industrial and advanced states the war of position, i.e., the slow and progressive conquest of enemy's trenches.

The same reduction must take place in the art and science of politics, at least in the case of the most advanced States, where 'civil society' has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic 'incursions' of the immediate economic element... The superstructures of the civil society are like the trench-system of modern warfare. 19

Thus, revolution, for Gramsci, is not the single moment of violence for the conquest of state power but a process that begins with the building of proletarian counter hegemony because

the decisive element in every situation is the permanently organised and long-prepared force which can be put into the field when it is judged that a situation is favourable... Therefore the essential task is that of systematically and patiently ensuring that this force is formed, developed, and rendered ever more homogeneous, compact, and self-aware. 20

Karabel however concludes that:

Lacking control over either the state or the economy, it is not immediately apparent how the proletariat is to establish its control over civil society. 21

Karabel reasons that Gramsci's concept of hegemony does not solve the problem of how the proletariat can succeed in developing its organic intellectuals because

...the possession of state power seems a necessary precondition for success...in the establishment of hegemony in civil society... (and) in the elaboration of organic intellectuals. 22

It seems to me, however, that Karabel misses the solution Gramsci poses for this problem. Gramsci insists that the control of civil society is a precondition for the seizure of state power precisely because in civil society the contradictions between the productive forces and the relations of production are expressed. The fundamental point is that, for Gramsci, it was necessary to translate economic contradictions into political contradictions, or to make explicit that this is already happening in reality. Thus Gramsci says:

If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer 'leading' but only 'dominant', exercising coercive force alone, this means

precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. 23

The process through which the party of the proletariat diffuses and affirms its hegemony in civil society, creating a de facto power, has its roots in the existing conditions of the economic structure. When the economic conditions amount to contradictions in the economic structure, and when these in turn bring about contradictions at the superstructural level, the lack of hegemony of the dominant class creates a vacuum of power. The objective for the proletariat, through its organizations, even before acceding to actual political power, is to fill that vacuum, to isolate the dominant class in the ideological and political field, by winning over to itself the consensus of other subordinate groups.

However, to be able to transform the economic basis and hence to carry through the change of ideology, culture and ethics control of the juridical and coercive apparatus of the state is required. The struggle for the establishment of proletarian hegemony in civil society is precondition for the seizure of power and is not to be confused with the conquest of power itself.

We shall in time discuss Gramsci's views on the seizure of power by the proletariat, the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the achievement of the final goal of a socialist society. These issues are the most fundamental and controversial ones in Gramsci's theory, and in Marxist theory in general, and so, it will be necessary to examine them carefully and in their proper turn. Our immediate task is to attend to Gramsci's conception of the party.

3. The new Party: the modern Prince, the collective intellectual

A. Gramsci's concept of the revolutionary Party

Gramsci's analysis of hegemony, of his general notion of the historical bloc and his specific views on the function of intellectuals in the revolutionary process all comes together in his theory of the Party. The Party is, for Gramsci, the fundamental setting for the formation of the organic intellectual of the proletariat and hence for the diffusion of proletarian hegemony: the Party is the principal institution in the working class's struggle for the control of civil society.

In his early writings Gramsci already pointed out the

necessity of proletarian organization:

Il dovere dell'organizzazione, la propaganda del dovere di organizzarsi e associarsi, dovrebbe dunque essere discriminante tra marxisti e non marxisti. 24

...occorre che una organizzazione di combattimento sia creata, alla quale gli elementi migliori della classe lavoratrice aderiscano con entusiasmo e convinzione, attorno alla quale le grandi masse si stringano fiduciose e sicure. È necessaria una organizzazione nella quale prende carne e figura una volontà chiara di lotta... 25

And the same problem is again underlined by Gramsci in the Prison Notebooks

A human mass does not 'distinguish' itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organizing itself... 26

For Gramsci, the organization of the working class is the fundamental aspect of the proletarian struggle for the conquest of state power and the creation of a new society. This organization can only be accomplished through the Communist Party.

The Communist Party is the historically determined political party of the revolutionary working class... With the creation of the Communist Party, the working class has broken all its tradition and asserted its political

maturity... It submits its candidature as a ruling class, and asserts that it can exercise this historical function only in an institutional context that is different from the existing one: in a new state system, and not within the framework of the bureaucratic parliamentary state. 27

The historical function of the Party is to develop a collective will through an intellectual and moral reform that will lead to a new hegemony in civil society and to a new state. The collective will is, for Gramsci, the

operative awareness of historical necessity, as protagonist of a real effective historical drama. 28

This collective will, Gramsci insisted, can be formed precisely because it is based on material conditions which are already partially in evidence.

Gramsci utilized the figure of Machiavelli's 'Prince' as the symbol of the revolutionary Party because he found in Machiavelli the recognition that the modern nation-state must rest on a popular basis.²⁹ We are not interested, here, in Gramsci's interpretation of Machiavelli per se, but, rather in the parallel made by Gramsci between his aims and Machiavelli's, i.e., their recognition of

...the necessity of having a leader who knew what he wanted and how to obtain it... 30

who would create a collective will and so form a new state. For Gramsci, in the modern epoch of proletarian revolution the leader cannot be a charismatic person but must be an organism which represents the interests of the people in a socially organised form. This organism is precisely the revolutionary Party.

The modern prince...cannot be a real person, a concrete individual. It can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which a collective will, which has already been recognised and has to some extent asserted itself in action, begins to take concrete form. History has already provided this organism, and it is the political party - the first cell in which there come together germs of a collective will tending to become universal and total. 31

That is why the party is seen by Gramsci as an historical necessity, as the decisive factor for the development of the subjective elements which are both possible and necessary once certain objective material conditions have come about.

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 future evolution...to be foreseen. 32

For Gramsci, the necessity for the party is not an abstract metaphysical necessity but concrete historical necessity. It arises from the dialectical interrelation between the objective conditions and the voluntary political initiative of the people. The party itself, Gramsci argued, is constituted from three elements. The first is:

A mass element, composed of ordinary, average men, whose participation takes the form of discipline and loyalty, rather than any creative spirit or organizational ability. Without these the party would not exist, it is true, but it is also true that neither could it exist with these alone. They are a force in so far as there is somebody to centralise, organise and discipline them... Admittedly any of these elements might become a cohesive force, but I am speaking of them precisely at the moment when they are not this nor in any condition to become it... 33

The first element is the rank and file of the party which provide the essential social basis to the party. The paragraph just quoted though, seems to contradict Gramsci's claim that all members of the political party must be considered intellectuals. To understand this statement it is therefore necessary to remember that Gramsci distinguishes different levels of intellectual activities and that, for him, a worker already

becomes an intellectual in the broadest sense when he enters the revolutionary party and so overcomes the limits of his existence in the economic sphere. All the members of the party function as intellectuals because they are no longer defined simply by their individual class background and because they all are agents of the "directive and organisational, i.e. intellectual" function of the party as a whole.

In the political party the elements of an economic social group get beyond that moment of their historical development and become agents of more general activities of a national and international character. 34

The second element of the party, for Gramsci, is the force which centralises, organises and directs the social basis.

The principal cohesive element, which centralises nationally and renders effective and powerful a complex of forces which left to themselves would count for little or nothing. This element is endowed with great cohesive, centralising and disciplinary powers... It is also true that neither could this element form the party alone; however, it could do so more than could the first element considered. 35

Gramsci realizes that the second element, the leadership of the party, cannot by itself constitute the party but he also remarks that it is easier to create a party having leaders than to create leaders having only the basic mass element.

One speaks of generals without an army, but in reality it is easier to form an army than to form generals. So much is this true that an already existing army is destroyed if it loses its generals, while the existence of a united group of generals who agree among themselves and have common aims soon creates an army even when none exists. 36

The third element can be considered the most important one in Gramsci's theory of the party and it is:

An intermediate element, which articulates the first element with the second and maintains contact between them, not only physically but also morally and intellectually. 37

The third element allows the political, moral and intellectual interaction and integration between the masses and the leadership. These middle-level cadres are the organic intellectuals of the proletariat who perform a mediating function to insure a dynamic relation between masses and leadership. This does not mean that for Gramsci only persons at this third level are intellectuals. As we have said, for Gramsci, all members of the party are intellectuals due to its directive, educational role in society, but there exist different degrees of intellectual activities.

The purpose of the party is to promote the proletarian

hegemony through intellectual and moral reform. That is why the third element of the party, i.e., the middle-level cadres, is an essential aspect of Gramsci's theory of the party. This is the element which allows the party to operate as the organic and collective intellectual of the proletariat for the creation of a new state. The proletariat exercises its hegemony, brings about an intellectual and moral reform not simply spontaneously but through the deliberate action of its organic intellectuals. These organic intellectuals are also fundamental for Gramsci's conception of the democratic organization of the party. They are the element which prevents the crystallization of the division between leaders and led because it forms "the connecting fabric of the organization" and it is "the instrument for binding it to the masses".³⁸ It is fundamental, for Gramsci, that the leaders foster the middle-level cadres who will be the future leaders and insure a dynamic movement of continuous intellectual ascent of the masses. In fact, Gramsci argued, if the leader does not have an instrumental view of the masses but

...tends to achieve organic political ends for which these masses are the necessary historical protagonists, if the leader develops a 'constituent', constructive work then... [he] tends to create an intermediate stratum between himself and the masses, to create possible concurrents and equals, to raise the level of ability of the masses, to create elements which can substitute him in the function of leader. 39

We shall return to analyse the relationship between leaders and led within the party and Gramsci's conception of "democratic centralism". But we must first take at least an initial look at Gramsci's view of the relationship between the party and the masses.

Polemizing against Bordiga for whom the party was "'organ' of the working class constituted through the synthesis of heterogeneous elements",⁴⁰ Gramsci in the Lyon Thesis affirmed that the party was a "part" of the working class. Bordiga considered the party as a group of orthodox Marxists who, drawn from outside the working class, were the only ones capable of governing the working class and directing it to a future liberation. On this view, however, the party was not a representative of the class but a substitute for it. Gramsci, on the other hand, considered the party as part of the working class, as its consciousness. As the consciousness of an individual cannot be abstracted from the individual himself, the party cannot be an external element which acts for and instead of the class. The party is part of the class. Its task is to elevate the whole class to a superior intellectual and political level. The party through its tripartite organization has the potential, in Gramsci's view, to include the whole of the class it represents which is conceived as tending to unify the whole of society. This leaves open, as A.S. Sassoon correctly

signals,⁴¹ the question of the effective boundaries of the party, a question in response to which Gramsci is equivocal, but we are not yet in a position to elaborate this question and response.

The party is the mediating factor which transforms the embryo of the collective will at the beginning of the revolutionary process into the expression of society as a whole. Through the party, through its educational function, the masses are transformed gradually into conscious agents of the revolutionary process, into new intellectuals, i.e. in "directive" (specialised and political).⁴² The party is, for Gramsci,

...the result of a dialectical process, in which the spontaneous movement of the revolutionary masses and the organizing and directing will of the centre converge. ⁴³

Thus the intellectual and moral reform which is the principal task of the party begins within the party in the democratic relationship between leaders and led and is spread through society by the relationship between the party and the masses, a relationship which also must be democratic. According to Gramsci, the party of the working class has to expand enormously so as to bring about a new hegemony and a new conception of the world through unifying a whole spectrum of the population. Yet if the party is to succeed in bringing about a new and unified society, a classless society, the fulfillment of its task will

require its own elimination. For Gramsci, the party is only a means to create a counter-hegemony in the heart of bourgeois society and to achieve the education and moral reform of the masses; it is never an end in itself.

...since every party is only the nomenclature for a class, it is obvious that the party which proposes to put an end to class divisions will only achieve complete self-fulfillment when it ceases to exist because classes, and therefore their expressions, no longer exist. 44

We defer assessing the plausibility of this view until chapter V.

B. Democratic centralism - The relationship between leaders and led within the party

Speaking about political organization and collective action, Gramsci argued that the first element to be considered is "that there really exist rulers and ruled, leaders and led". He stated that this division

-though in the last analysis it has its origins in a division between social groups - is in fact, things being as they are, also to be found within the group itself, even where it is a socially homogeneous one. 45

For Gramsci, organizational questions must always be solved by reference to concrete political reality. He therefore believed that the development of leaders by the working class through its political party had to occur in the face of the reality of the division in the world between rulers and ruled. To expect an immediate elimination of this historical fact would be, Gramsci argued, utopian. The real problem, for Gramsci, is to analyze the nature of this division and create a new relationship between rulers and ruled which will aim at a future transformation of this reality.

In the formation of leaders, one premiss is fundamental is it the intention that there should always be rulers and ruled, or is the objective to create the conditions in which this division is no longer necessary? 46

Gramsci does not accept the theory of bourgeois ideologists who aim to present as absolute the present historical bourgeois reality, in which the division between rulers and ruled is taken as a natural one, based on the existence of charismatic individuals who, almost by the grace of God, have the task of leading the amorphous, and incompetent masses. At the same time he is also aware of the impossibility of eliminating all at once the reality of the division between rulers and ruled because the transformation of society is a long and contradictory process achieved by concrete means related always to a changing reality.

Communism has always aimed at eliminating the gap between rulers and ruled and this process, for Gramsci, has to begin within the revolutionary Party. Gramsci writes that parties "can be considered as schools of State life" and the party whose aim is the creation of a new type of state must itself be a new type of party. That is why its internal organization has to be uniquely democratic so as to allow for the transition to a society where the party itself and hence any division between rulers and ruled would be no longer necessary. In the revolutionary party the division between leaders and led has to cease to be based on class privileges and transformed into a simple technical fact, that is the division between the different levels of the party has to be considered a functional one, based on a division of labour rather than an oligarchic, static division between classes.

If there is no class division, the question becomes purely technical
 - the orchestra does not think that its director is an oligarchic boss
 - of division of labour and of education. That is, centralization must take account of the fact that in popular parties education and political 'apprenticeships' take place in very large part through the participation of the followers in the intellectual life (discussions) and organization of the parties. 47

Within the revolutionary party it is necessary to base the organization on the general principle that

...the relationship between teacher and pupil is active and reciprocal so that every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher. 48

The essence of Gramsci's democracy is educational and aims to avoid as much as possible the dangers of bureaucratization. The application of this theory to the internal organization of the party is what Gramsci called "democratic centralism",

...which is so to speak a 'centralism' in movement - i.e. a continual adaptation of the organization to the real movement, a matching of thrusts from below with orders from above, a continuous insertion of elements thrown up from the depths of the rank and file into the solid framework of the leadership apparatus which ensures continuity and the regular accumulation of experience. 49

The central preoccupation of Gramsci was always the necessity of a dialectical relationship between the masses and the conscious leadership, of rooting the activities of the party in a mass movement. For Gramsci, real democracy in the party has to be a concrete democracy based on a process of discussion and debate which ensures a continuous raising of the intellectual and political level of the members. The principle of democratic centralism fits the internal organization of the party to its general, historical task of emancipation.

This explains why Gramsci could never present a static, abstract idea of party organization. The only general

principle affirmed by him is the necessity of continuously relating the party's policy to an ever-changing historical reality. What he requires is just

...an organic unity between theory and practice, between the intellectual strata and popular masses, between rulers and ruled. 50

(because)

Democratic centralism offers an elastic formula...it comes alive in so far as it is interpreted and continually adapted to necessity. 51

Gramsci's conception of the party's organization as democratic and continually related to historical necessity goes back to his experience at the Ordine Nuovo and to his debate with Bordiga within the Italian Communist Party. Gramsci attacked the fact that under Bordiga the Italian Communist Party was detached from reality and incapable of maintaining links with the masses. In a letter to Togliatti, Terracini and others of February, 1924, Gramsci wrote:

In our party we have had another aspect of the danger to lament: the withering of all individual activity; the passivity of the mass of members; the stupid confidence that there is always somebody else who is thinking of everything and taking care of everything... And it should be added that the work carried out has only been controlled to the most minimal extent, and that in the party there has therefore been produced a real separation between the membership and the leadership...

The error of the party has been to have accorded priority in an abstract fashion to the problem of party organization, which on practice has simply meant creating an apparatus of functionaries who could depended on for their orthodoxy toward the official view. 52

The consequence of Bordiga's view of the party was a rigid "bureaucratic centralism" in which the leaders of the party were seen as insisting on body of dogma to be followed by the individual members in a mechanical way, and to uphold no matter what changes occur in historical reality. The result of this kind of organization, Gramsci argued, was the passivity of the individual members of the party

...the individual expects the organism to act, even if he does not do anything himself...[he] tends to think that there indeed exists, over and above individuals, a phantasmagorical being...a kind of autonomous divinity. 53

For Gramsci, the active, direct participation and consent of the individual members in the party is necessary and this is possible if within the party itself there exists the continuous development of all members as "intellectuals". The moral and intellectual reform which would be the basis of the new state, has to begin within the party itself. The members must not apply mechanically orders given from above but must

intervene actively in discussions and follow strategy and tactics which they fully understand and have even helped to formulate.

Democratic centralism is, thus, for Gramsci, the way to avoid a bureaucratization of the party and to establish an organic, functional relationship between leaders and led. The principle of democratic centralism is articulated and developed through Gramsci's conception of the three-level structure of the party that we have already examined. The fundamental condition for democracy in the party and for the constant furthering of the intellectual and political development of the masses is the establishment of the intermediate stratum that allows the division between the different levels of the party to be based just on a division of labour, that is, to be a technical division rather than a class division. The differences among the three levels of the party are considered as differences which can always be overcome through a process of education.

The solution of the problem, which is complicated precisely because of the large function that the intellectuals have in advanced parties, can be found in the formation of an intermediate stratum, as numerous as possible, between the leaders and the followers, which can serve as a balance to prevent the leaders from deviating in moments of radical

crisis and to elevate continually
the mass of members. 54

That is why all members of the party must be considered intellectuals in Gramsci broadened sense of the term. They are intellectuals because they are all agents within the party and they all have the potential through the educative function of the party to become "directives".

Notwithstanding all this Gramsci insists that throughout the three levels there must exist ideological homogeneity and rigid discipline. The unity and discipline of the party are fundamental for workers' struggle to impose its hegemony on civil society and influence other groups. The unity of the party must not rest on passive, reflexive agreement, it has to be the result of the positive consent and participation of all members. This idea is directly linked to Gramsci's definition of discipline. Discipline which is a permanent relationship between rulers and ruled for the establishment of a collective will cannot be

passive and servile acceptance of
orders...mechanical execution of
a command...but...conscious and
lucid understanding of the aim to
be realized. 55 •

Discipline is therefore not to be ritualized but based on debate and discussion. Decisions have to arise from the continuous

and permanent relationship among the different levels of the party. Once a decision has been reached though, it must be carried out without allowing any disobedience.

Discipline, therefore, does not annul personality and freedom: the question of 'personality and freedom' is related not to the fact of discipline itself, but to the 'origin of the power which orders the discipline'. If its origins is 'democratic', i.e., if the authority is a specialised, technical function and not an 'arbitrariness' or an exterior and extrinsic imposition, the discipline is a necessary element of democratic order, of freedom. 56

For Gramsci, the nature of the source of discipline is fundamental. The leadership has to be a technical leadership based on greater skill and knowledge not on abstract privileges. Discipline, Gramsci argued, has to be conscious discipline, brought out from the active intervention and understanding of party's policy by each member. Only conscious, responsible discipline can generate freedom.

...the only freedom is 'responsible' freedom; i.e. universal, that is the individual aspect of a collective or group 'freedom', the individual expression of a law. 57

Only through the precise division of responsibilities and tasks based solely on technical competence and through conscious, active discipline is it possible to create within

the party genuine democratic centralism which would be the result of a dynamic unity of all the elements. In this way the members of the party would be directives and agents and not passive executors of orders.

The fundamental function of the party .

...is that of elaborating its own component parts - those elements of a social group which has been born and developed as an 'economic group - and of turning them into qualified political intellectuals, leaders (directives) ('dirigenti') and organisers of all the activities and functions inherent in the organic development of an integral society, both civil and political.
(sic) 58

As the mode of relationship between rulers and ruled is transformed within the party, its relationship with the masses is also transformed. The new internal atmosphere of the party, based on discussion and debate creates a new concept of democracy for society as a whole. The party is the embryo of the new type of state which it seeks to create.

Looking now to the development of Gramsci's thought over the course of his life, we can see that when, after the failure of the Turin labour movement in 1920, Gramsci turned,

above all in his Prison Notebooks, his studies to the concept of the party he was not turning away from the principles behind the factory councils. This claim, which we made earlier, can be specifically supported by reference to Gramsci's analysis of the tripartite structure of the party. The democratic centralism of the party shares the ideal of the workers councils. The party has to prepare workers technically, politically and culturally for self-government in a future society qualitatively different from the present one. The party as well as the factory councils has to elaborate its internal organization and its policy in direct and constant relation with reality, with the world of production. As in the factory councils so in the party, the intellectual and political education of the masses is not a process imposed from outside. In a Socratic way the party spells out in theory the revolutionary potential of the proletariat which is already present in the proletariat's activity. The party is to embody, as the councils were to do, a real dialectical relation between theory and practice, between intellectuals and masses.

W.L. Adamson considers that even recognizing all what we have said,

...one may well doubt whether...the democratic ethos of the Turin movement is not inevitably negated by the new, all-encompassing structure of the party. 59

I think that Adamson raises an important problem for Gramsci's theory of the party. It is true that "the new central committee [of the party] is invested with an ultimate authority"⁶⁰ and that Gramsci place absolute importance on the function of the party. This is perhaps quite understandable in the context of the "highly defensive circumstances in which the Italian proletariat found itself after 1921"⁶¹ but, at the same time it raises the question of the future position of the party in a socialist state. For Gramsci, the working class under capitalism is not in a position to develop autonomously and the party is thus the chief instrument to create its organic intellectuals and build its hegemony within bourgeois society. This all-encompassing function of the party even with its democratic internal organization and its dialectical relationship to the masses can become very dangerous after the achievement of state power. We shall discuss this more later but we should bear in mind that Gramsci's conception of democracy as requiring the active, constant participation of all members in the party's decisions, may provide an important basis for criticising any socialist state in which a party takes on an all-embracing function. But we shall still have to admit, when we discuss these matters in chapter V, that Gramsci's failure to specify particular rules and procedures for the active and constant participation of the masses in the party and in the state is one of the fundamental limits of his theory.

C. The relationship of the party to the masses

Parallel to but distinct from the issue, which we have just been discussing, of the internal organization of the party is the issue of the party's relation to the masses. In regard to both issues Gramsci insists on democratic relationship and in both cases Gramsci is harking back to the principles of the factory councils.

In an article of December, 1919, Gramsci wrote:

...the Party comes to be identified with the historical consciousness of the mass of the people, and it governs their spontaneous, irresistible movement...the Party...exercises the most effective of dictatorships, a dictatorship based on prestige, on the conscious and spontaneous acceptance of an authority that workers see as indispensable if their mission is to be accomplished. It would be disastrous if a sectarian conception of the Party's role in the revolution were to prompt the claim that this apparatus had actually assumed a concrete form, that the system for controlling the masses in movement had been frozen in mechanical forms of immediate power, forcing the revolutionary process into the forms of the Party. 62

Throughout his work, Gramsci criticizes both the view of the masses as material to be manipulated by an elite leader-

ship and the view of the masses as spontaneously moving towards social transformation. The party is the dialectical link between conscious leadership and the spontaneity of mass movement.

In the Prison Notebooks Gramsci goes back to the example of the Ordine Nuovo movement to explain what the relationship should be between the party and the mass movement.

This leadership was not 'abstract'; it neither consisted in mechanically repeating scientific or theoretical formulae, nor did it confuse politics, real action, with theoretical disquisition... This element of 'spontaneity' was not neglected and even less despised. It was educated, directed... It gave the masses a 'theoretical' consciousness of being creators of historical and institutional values, of being founders of a State. 63

As we know, the central idea of the councils theory was that the revolution was not a single, isolated moment of action but a process. Gramsci's expectation of the factory councils was that they would shape social forces and give them political form

...which has the potential to develop normally and continuously into the skeleton of the socialist State in which the dictatorship of the proletariat will be embodied. 64

The fundamental task of the factory councils was to organize and educate the proletariat, to transform the mentality of the masses from the mentality of a subordinate class to that of a controlling one. This is exactly the role of the Party in relation to the masses. That is why Gramsci always insisted on the necessity of a daily continuous contact of the Party with the workers.

The practice of the factory movement (1919-1920) has shown that only an organization adapted to the place and system of production makes it possible to establish a contact between the upper and lower strata of the working masses...and to create bonds of solidarity which eliminate the basis for any phenomenon of 'labour aristocracy'. 65

The spontaneous workers movement has to be organized by the Party in a conscious struggle: the working class can become an effective political force only through the activities of the party. The elitist nature of the party in relation to the mass movement is based on the necessity for the working class to establish its hegemony in civil society within capitalism. It is through the party that the working class can acquire the means for its revolutionary struggle. The political work of the party is to raise the cultural level of an ever-increasing number of people so as to establish the new hegemony. Just as

the internal structure of the party must be democratic, based on discussion and debate, so an organic link is necessary between the party and the masses. The party has to elaborate its policy in terms of a continuous relation to the ongoing struggle in the real world, providing a concrete understanding of the spontaneous mass movement. Thus democracy requires, for Gramsci, the active, political intervention of the masses for their future self-government.

D. Gramsci's conception of the party as compared to Lenin's

It is the leitmotif of Lenin's work that only a vanguard can bring from without a revolutionary consciousness to the proletariat. This vision brought Lenin to a distinction between the historical protagonist of the revolutionary process, the proletariat, and the political consciousness of this process, the party. That is why the Leninist party was a party of professional revolutionaries, a cadre party. We will not discuss here how far the essential principles of Lenin's theory of the party were a response to specific Russian conditions. We are only concerned with the consequences of his position. Lenin's party was a vanguard party directed by a highly centralized leadership group whose task was to co-ordinate the masses toward the objective of the seizure of state power. Lenin's

conception of the party as an external vanguard, his tendency to neglect the contradictions between leaders and led in the revolutionary movement can easily degenerate into a vision of a party as an abstract revolutionary consciousness imposed from without on the masses which are seen only as an instrument for the realization of an ideal they have not helped to formulate.

Gramsci's conception of the party aims to a more dialectical relationship between vanguard and masses to allow for genuine proletarian self-emancipation. Gramsci agrees with Lenin on the need for strong leadership, unity and discipline within the party but, as we have seen, he never talks about a cadre party and discipline and unity are not to be imposed, they are to arise from general discussion and debate. The fundamental difference between Lenin's and Gramsci's conception of the party is that for the latter the party is mechanism internal to the masses. The fundamental function of Gramsci's party is cultural, i.e. it must bring about an intellectual and moral reform and actualize a collective will that is already present in the practical activity of the proletariat. Revolutionary consciousness is thus seen by Gramsci as internal to the working class and not as something that has to be brought from without by a vanguard as in Lenin. Gramsci's innovations are directly related to his tripartite structure of the party.

His idea of democratic centralism is superior to the Leninist in its insistence on an element intermediate between the party's vanguard and the masses which is fundamental for the education of the masses and for the future withering away of the division between rulers and ruled.

Emphasizing the extensions and alterations that Gramsci made to Leninism does not amount to claiming that Gramsci's theory is the antithesis of Lenin's. Gramsci accepted Lenin's critique of economism, while believing as Lenin did that the point of departure for a Marxist analysis is always the economic structure. Gramsci as well as Lenin affirmed that the new vision of the world for the proletariat was to be the philosophy of praxis and that the goal of the revolutionary movement was the withering away of the state and the instauration of communism. The innovations in Gramsci's theory lie in his view of the party not as a vanguard of professional revolutionaries but as a "collective intellectual" rooted in everyday working class and peasant life, i.e. Gramsci's view of the organic intellectual of the proletariat. These innovations have to be understood against the background of Gramsci's experience in the factory councils movement, because, as we have frequently emphasized, he never turned his back on the positive experiences of the Ordine Nuovo but rather transferred its fundamental

principles to his theory of the party.

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CHAPTER V

THE PROLETARIAT DICTATORSHIP AND THE WITHERING AWAY OF THE STATE

For Gramsci, a revolution can be made only if it is based on popular consent created by an ideological struggle. This ideological struggle involves the affirmation of a new collective will around a new historical project. The revolutionary party can be successful only if it has the ability to win popular consent. The prerequisite to revolution is an hegemonic struggle in which the working class goes beyond mere economic demands and aspirations and aims to create a new historical bloc. This struggle for hegemony which, for Gramsci, takes the form of a war of position is to be crowned by the building of a new state, and yet it must not be forgotten that the ultimate aim of a proletarian revolution is to overcome the division between leaders and led, i.e. the withering away of the state.

The real task of the working class is therefore only in part the building of a new state. This task is an intermediate means for eventually expanding the area of hegemony so that it takes over and eliminates the area of coercion. Gramsci's vision of the state as

...political society + civil society,
in other words hegemony protected by
the armour of coercion. 1

is fundamental for a doctrine which conceives the state as capable of withering away.

It is possible to imagine the coercive element of the State withering away by degrees, as ever-more conspicuous elements of regulated society (or ethical State or civil society) make their appearance. 2

Gramsci never doubted that the creation of a new "regulated society" would be a long process which would develop through different stages. In this chapter I shall follow Gramsci's theory of these transitional stages. I shall analyze Gramsci's views about the use of force and violence, his conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of the process whereby this new state is to lead its self-elimination. I shall examine also the different problems and criticisms which this controversial part of Gramsci's thought raises, above all concerning the possibility for socialism to be democratic.

1. Revolution as "war of position"

For Gramsci, the spread of proletarian hegemony in civil society is a precondition for the seizure of state power

and is not to be confused with the conquest of power per se.

Lenin, looking at Russian society dominated by Tzarist despotism to the extent that all aspects of civil society were completely subordinated to the state, had seen in organized violence the only means for destroying the existing order and establishing communism. Gramsci, on the other hand, observing the specific conditions of Western countries, in which civil society was a distinct though related source of power for the state, elaborated through his theory of hegemony a different revolutionary strategy. Yet Gramsci's theory of hegemony, of the gradual affirmation of proletarian leadership in civil society must not be taken to imply that he supported only an ideological or cultural revolution. A class, he insisted, does not become dominant merely by diffusing its vision of the world, and besides, the hegemony which a subordinate class can establish before taking over state power is always necessarily limited. For Gramsci, the struggle for ideological and cultural hegemony was never sufficient for a revolution, he always insisted that it was also necessary for the proletariat to take over state apparatus. The struggle for hegemony has the goal of a total transformation of society beyond capitalism. Therefore Gramsci was not a mere reformist if this means one who is content to work for piecemeal changes of the existing political and economic framework. We can see though why Gramsci might be taken to be a reformist. For Gramsci, is only unquestionably committed

to revolution if the term revolution means systematic change or total transformation. However, if the term revolution is considered as necessarily implying the violent seizure of state power, on this matter Gramsci's position is ambiguous.

Gramsci never specifically spoke about how the proletariat would or should take over power. Out of a desire to avoid presenting himself as a prophet, he never gave a precise description of the moment of revolution. It should be clear in the light of Gramsci's whole work that, for him, only the specific circumstances of a given historical moment could supply the answer to the question of whether and in what form a revolution was appropriate and justified. It would have been contradictory to his basic theory and to his ideas about the party's organization and policy had Gramsci set up general principles and means for the conquest of state power.

Gramsci referred metaphorically to the struggle for hegemony as a "war of position" or a kind of trench warfare in contrast to the "war of movement" or frontal attack. Gramsci conceded that the latter kind of strategy was the appropriate means for the Russian Revolution in 1917 because "the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous".³ But since in advanced Western countries the state apparatus depended on the hegemony which the dominant class had established

in civil society, a new strategy was needed for the proletariat to establish its hegemony on a broad basis before taking over state power.

To understand better Gramsci's views here we have to keep in mind his notion of "organic crisis". Simply put, there is an organic crisis when there is a crisis of hegemony of the dominant class, when there is a conflict between "represented and representatives". This crisis can occur

...either because the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, of forcibly extracted, the consent of the broad masses (war, for example), or, because huge masses (specially peasants and petit-bourgeois intellectuals) have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution. 4

A crisis of hegemony thus involves a "crisis of authority", or a general crisis of the state. So Gramsci's revolution is predicated not only on a contradiction between productive forces and relations of production but also on a contradiction between civil society or the realm of consent and political society or the realm of coercion. The crisis reaches its most acute stage when the ruling class is still dominant but no longer hegemonic,

while the insurgent class exercises a broad hegemony but is not yet dominant.

Could the crisis be resolved, according to Gramsci, without violence and bloodshed? Does Gramsci's theory of revolution as a war of position imply that the proletariat could and should acquire state power by a peaceful road? Or does it imply that the seizure of state power by violence, i.e. a war of movement, is always necessary even given the general process of a war of position? Gramsci's writings seem ambiguous on this crucial issue. On the one hand he believed that the Western countries

...have entered a culminating phase in the political-historical situation, since in politics the 'war of position', once won, is decisive definitively. In politics, in other words, the war of manoeuvre subsists so long as it is a question of winning positions which are not decisive, so that all the resources of the State's hegemony cannot be mobilised. But when, for one reason or another, these positions have lost their value and only the decisive positions are at stake, then one passes over to siege warfare; this is concentrated, difficult, and requires exceptional qualities of patience and inventiveness. 5

In this passage, Gramsci gives a relatively subordinate place to the war of movement or frontal attack and seems even to suggest that there could be circumstances which would allow the

complete avoidance of a direct confrontation for the seizure of state power. On the other hand, he also wrote:

The massive structures of the modern democracies, both as State organizations, and as complexes of associations in civil society, constitute for the art of politics as it were the 'trenches' and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position: they render merely 'partial' the element of movement which before used to be 'the whole' of war, etc. 6

In this passage the frontal attack is seen as a tactically necessary stage following upon the peaceful process of the diffusion of proletarian hegemony. These passages are typical of a systematic ambiguity throughout Gramsci's thought.

I think that the reason for these ambiguities in Gramsci's writings on the problem of a peaceful or violent takeover of power by the proletariat has to be related to his affirmation that only the specific historical situations can determine in any specific moment the most proper means. For him, it was necessary to analyse the specific circumstances of each individual country to find the most appropriate strategy for revolution in any singular case. We may suggest that what Gramsci meant on the whole to be saying is that where there is no other route to political power in capitalist society violence has to be permitted.

2. The dictatorship of the proletariat

In none of his writings did Gramsci attempt to spell out a description of future society; he regarded such attempts as utopian exercises. But Gramsci's views of such a future society is already contained in his analysis of the long term process by which the proletariat would establish its hegemony before and after the seizure of state power.

The socialist state, the new state of the working class will as a state have the general characteristics of the bourgeois state: hegemony and coercion. Just as, for Gramsci, the state under capitalism was the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, so the state under socialism will be the dictatorship of the proletariat. Against the anarchist thesis which looked for the withering away of the state immediately after the revolution, Gramsci maintained that the victory of the proletariat would not result in an immediate elimination of class struggle and hence there would still exist, after the revolution, the division between rulers and ruled.

La dittatura del proletariato è ancora uno Stato nazionale e uno Stato di classe. I termini della concorrenza e della lotta di classe sono spostati, ma la concorrenza e le classi sussistono. La dittatura del proletariato deve risolvere gli stessi problemi dello Stato borghese:

di difesa esterna ed interna. Queste sono le condizioni reali obiettive con le quali dobbiamo fare i conti; ragionare e operare come esistesse già l'Internazionale comunista, come fosse già superato il periodo della lotta tra Stati socialisti e Stati borghesi, della concorrenza spietata tra le economie nazionali comuniste e quelle capitalistiche, sarebbe un errore disastroso per la rivoluzione proletaria. 7

For Gramsci, only when the classes have disappeared internationally would it be possible to expect a withering away of the state. Meanwhile, due to the existence of the class struggle, the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is the perpetuation of a class state, would be necessary and indispensable for the consolidation and defense of the proletarian revolution.

We should recall here that Gramsci's extended concept of the state led him to define the state as

...the equilibrium between political society,.. (i.e. a dictatorship or some other coercive apparatus used to control the masses in uniformity with a given type of production and economy...) and civil society (or the hegemony of a social group over the entire nation exercised through so-called private organizations, such as the Church, the unions, the schools, etc.) 8

With this extended conception of the state Gramsci went well beyond the orthodox Marxist notion of the state as mere tool of class domination and maintained that the ethical or educative aspect of the state was one of its most important functions.

...every state is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular critical and moral level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes. 9

For Gramsci, every state aims thus to create a certain type of civilization and of citizen. To achieve this task the state uses 'the school as a positive educative function' and the law and tribunals as a "repressive and negative educative function" and also uses the whole array of private institutions of civil society which constitute "the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling class" to establish the consensus of the ruled towards the rulers. The private institutions of civil society are the parties, the Church, the family, the media, cultural associations, libraries, etc. This apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling class is seen by Gramsci as part of the state since it is the means through which a class propagates its vision of the world and gains consent to its rule.

We must emphasize, though, that in this analysis of

the state as educator, Gramsci refers essentially to the bourgeois state.

The previous ruling classes were essentially conservative in the sense that they did not tend to construct an organic passage from the other classes into their own... 10

It is with the advent of the bourgeoisie that the state became educator because

the bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level. 11

But, Gramsci argues, the bourgeois class cannot achieve this assimilation completely because the capitalist system is based unavoidably on the existence of class division and therefore on the existence of a subordinate class. Since a class's world-view is determined by its position in the world of production, a class cannot elaborate a vision of the world which goes against its economic and political interests. So the bourgeois vision of the world necessarily presents the capitalist regime as eternal and therefore presents the division of classes as eternal.

For Gramsci, the very presence of a state reveals the existence of conflicts and contradictions in civil society which

have to be controlled by a coercive apparatus. Complete hegemony thus amounts to disappearance of the state in its restricted sense, i.e. in the sense in which the state is just equated with coercion.

...in reality, only the social group that poses the end of the State and its own end as the target to be achieved can create an ethical State - i.e. one which tends to put an end to the internal division of the ruled, etc., and to create a technically and morally unitary social organism. 12

Thus, for Gramsci, the real ethical state, in which the ruling class can present its interest as the interest of society as a whole is a socialist state and because it is based on a genuine consensus it would create in the long run the possibility of its self-elimination.

Hegemony in the socialist state will be based on consensus but will still in the meantime maintain a dominant class over subordinate ones, in other words a division between rulers and ruled. This division cannot be eliminated by the single moment of revolution, on the contrary it will persist throughout a long period of transition in which the institutions of a new society are being built up.

Behind Gramsci's views on what is involved in building socialism lies his conception of the dialectical relation

between base and superstructure. For Gramsci, the new state has not only to carry through a revolution in the social relations of production, has also to bring about appropriately new forms of behaviour in society.

) Midway between the economic structure and the State...stands civil society, which must be radically transformed in a concrete manner and not only in legal documents and science books... 13

In addition to changing the economic structure it will also be necessary to change the superstructure and only through the juridical and coercive apparatus of the state will that be possible.

In reality, the State must be considered of as an 'educator' in as much as it tends precisely to create a new type or level of civilization. Because one is acting essentially on economic forces, reorganizing and developing the apparatus of economic production, creating a new structure, the conclusion must not be drawn that superstructural factors should be left to themselves, to develop spontaneously, to a haphazard and sporadic germination. 14

The key point, for Gramsci, is that to suppose the superstructure will spontaneously change because the structure has been changed is to treat the relation between structure and superstructure as a deterministic and mechanical relation and,

as we know, Gramsci criticized this position throughout his work.

...the State is the instrument for adapting civil society to the economic structure, but the State has to 'wish' to do this and, consequently, it must be the representative of the change which had occurred in the economic structure which rules the State. Waiting for civil society to adapt to the new structure by means of propaganda and persuasion...is a new form of empty and inconsistent economic moralism, a new form of economic rethoric. 15

It is by such an analysis that Gramsci comes to insist on the need for an intellectual and moral reform and a new kind of relationship between leaders and led. And so Gramsci concludes that even if the two fundamental elements of the bourgeois state, coercion and consent, must still be present in the proletarian state, the latter state will be essentially different from the former one. The source of the difference, Gramsci thinks, is a new concept of democracy and the fact that in the structure of the new proletarian state there will be the premises of its own extinction.

Gramsci never minimized the necessity for a dominant class and hence also for the proletariat to politically and socially destroy its enemies. But, as his theory of hegemony shows, force alone does not suffice: a dominant class while

exercising a dictatorship over its enemies has to be able to obtain the consent of other groups which are in a position to be its allies. The proletarian state will exercise hegemony towards these "kindred and allied groups". In other words, the dictatorship, the coercive aspect of the proletarian state ~~will~~ be used against those forces which are in essence hostile to the proletarian revolution. Gramsci's theory of the state as hegemony + coercion, derived from the analysis of a class divided society, remains for him valid so long as the conditions of class struggles remain. The proletarian state must rely to an extent on similar means to those used by the bourgeois state though in the service of a different aim.

The essential thing that the dictatorship of the proletariat must do to realize its ultimate goal is educate the masses. Hegemony, authority based on consent, requires the intellectual and moral reform of the population so as to make it capable of self-government and real democracy which is what Gramsci intended in speaking of the regulated society or communism.

What then are Gramsci's views of the process of intellectual and moral reform under the proletarian dictatorship and of the institutions which will allow for this process and hence

for the withering away of the state? How does Gramsci conceive of political education and of the universal expansion of proletarian hegemony?

Gramsci, as we know, set out to criticize the positivistic deformations of Marxism in order to retrieve what, for him, was its real meaning. To the positivistic vision of Marxism Gramsci opposes an historicist and humanist Marxism. The philosophy of praxis, was for him, an historical conception of social reality which asserts the primacy of human will and action over the automatism of the social and economic laws predicated by the Second International. Belief in the existence of abstract forces in history, Gramsci argues, can only result in the political passivity of the masses. His revolutionary theory aims to replace human passivity with conscious critical activity. In this sense, the philosophy of praxis is, for him, the ideological tool to intellectually organize the experience of the masses, transform their consciousness and give them the possibility of elaborating a new world-view to oppose to the bourgeois world-view.

The special relevance of these general reminders for our present purpose is as follows: since the process of the establishment of proletarian leadership is a process which has to begin before the seizure of state power, to understand the

later part of the process we must go back to how the process is supposed to originate and develop.

A group, Gramsci argues, can be said to be hegemonic when it has succeeded in creating a society in which the state, in the restricted sense of the coercive apparatus of government, and civil society are integrated in an historical bloc. But this integration in a class state, Gramsci notes, occurs over against a subordinate class which is always a potentially disruptive element within an historical bloc. In other words, any social group which aspires to a political autonomy constitutes a potential danger for a given historical bloc because its goal is the creation of a new historical bloc. Hence the necessity for the use of coercion against it to maintain the precarious equilibrium of society. But, for Gramsci, a ruling class in the industrialized countries of the West exercises not only coercion but also ideological hegemony. And an "organic crisis" takes the form of a struggle for ideological control as well as political control. In this framework the problem for a subordinate class in its quest for hegemony and a new historical bloc becomes the problem of how it may achieve unity and awareness of its distinctive class situation.

The core of the problem as Gramsci diagnoses it is that a subordinate group has a contradictory consciousness created by

the sedimentation of heterogeneous conceptions of the world. This contradictory consciousness is what Gramsci names "common sense". Within this common sense exists a positive element or "good sense" consisting of an embryonic critical consciousness. But "good sense" has to be refined and futhered through political education. Political education is, thus, the process of elevating good sense to the level of a distinctive conception of the world. For Marxism to become the new world-view of the proletariat it must be built on a critique of common sense. It must supercede it while conserving its positive element. This is how we must understand Gramsci's claim that political education is based on the spontaneity of the masses, but on a directed and educated spontaneity purged of extraneous contaminations.

For Gramsci, Marxism is the only philosophy that can elevate the cultural and intellectual level of the masses because though it begins from common sense it does not leave "the 'simple' in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but rather lead them to a higher conception of life".¹⁶ Subordinate groups generally are characterized by a condition of cultural and political immaturity because at the level of common sense consciousness the only terms in which a class can achieve solidarity of interests among its members are purely economic terms. With the overcoming of this level is the origins of that class's hegemony, i.e. the historical phase in which a class unites ideologically and politically. This is the cathartic

moment: "the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures".¹⁷

For Gramsci, this development of the political consciousness of a class, above all of a class in an ideologically and politically subordinate position is never simply a function of the natural course of economic evolution, but rather the result of a theoretical elaboration of the revolutionary elements implicit in the practical activity of the class. The spontaneity has to be directed by the organic intellectuals of the class. The spontaneous movement of the masses has to be directed through political education based on the active leadership of organic intellectuals. Political education is precisely, for Gramsci, a dialectical relation between organic intellectuals and masses.

The intellectual stratum develops both quantitatively and qualitatively, but every leap forward towards a new breadth and complexity of the intellectual stratum is tied to an analogous movement of the part of the mass of the 'simple', who raise themselves to higher levels of culture and at the same time extend their circle of influence towards the stratum of specialized intellectuals, producing outstanding individuals and groups of greater or less importance. ¹⁸

Workers and organic intellectuals are complementary in the process of political education:

The popular element 'feels' but does not always know or understand;

the intellectual element 'knows'
but does not always understand
and in particular does not always
feel. 19

The mutual interchange and organic cohesion between teachers and students in the process of political education will be the basis for the new relationship between leaders and led within the party and the socialist state. Only thus

...can there take place an exchange
of individual elements between the
rulers and the ruled, the leaders
and the led, and can the shared life
be realized which alone is a social
force - with the creation of the
'historical bloc'. 20

It is in terms of this vision of political education as a dialectical relationship between the popular element and the intellectual stratum that Gramsci develops his conception of the revolutionary party as the collective intellectual of the proletariat. It is the party as organically linked to the masses that is the instrument of the cultural and moral revolution. The political party is the unifying force in the interplay between intellectuals and masses, between theory and praxis. The revolutionary party, for Gramsci, must be expansive because it aims at raising the intellectual tone and level of the masses as a whole. For Gramsci, both this process and its result are to manifest democratic centralism, as we discussed earlier. The progressive, expansive direction of the party is to come

through its three level structure which is to provide for rapport and interaction among the levels.

The process of political education, of the actualization of the dialectical unity between intellectuals and masses, of the diffusion of hegemony in society, can only be completed after the seizure of state power and with the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship.

Only after the creation of a new
State does the cultural problem
impose itself in all its complexity
and tend towards a coherent solution. 21

Control of the apparatus of government will allow the new ruling class to become "really autonomous and hegemonic".²² But, then, the universal diffusion of proletarian hegemony will only be finally realized after the possession of the governmental apparatus will have created the possibility of the elimination of the use of coercion. The socialist state will exist for the unique purpose of increasing the area of hegemony until the coercive element will be no longer necessary. Since the intellectual and moral reform of the population, i.e. the transformation of the superstructure, cannot be left to changes produced spontaneously by the economic sphere, the socialist state must provide the conditions, institutions and mechanisms for the realization of the superstructural changes. The socialist state

must prepare the terrain for the establishment of the regulated society, i.e. for the self-government of the people.

It is very important, for Gramsci, not to confuse the dictatorship of the proletariat with the regulated society.

This confusion

...is peculiar to the middle class and petty intellectuals, who would be glad of any regularisation that would prevent sharp struggles and upheavals. It is a typically reactionary and regressive conception. 23

In this affirmation Gramsci openly criticized any utopian theory which considers the seizure of power will be enough to end class struggles. In Gramsci's thought, the goal of the withering away of the state is not to come by an immediate and anarchic act of destruction of the state but by a long process. In this long process there will be a whole historical period in which the state will pass from being identified with active government to being a mere "nightwatchman". The nightwatchman state will allow the full development of civil society and will set the basis for the passage to the last stage which will be the subsumption of political society under civil society. In other words, there would be a gradual extinction of the authoritative and coercive intervention of the state and also a gradual development of a regulated society.

In the doctrine of the State as regulated society, one will have to pass from a phase in which 'State' will be equal to 'government', and 'State' will be identified with 'civil society', to a phase of the State as nightwatchman - i.e. of a coercive organization which will safeguard the development of the continually proliferating elements of regulated society, and which will therefore progressively reduce its own authoritative and forcible interventions. 24

For Gramsci, the progressive subsumption of political society under civil society as the arena of the self-government of the masses is the fundamental feature of the transition towards communism. The different stages in this progressive subsumption correspond to a progressive increase of proletarian hegemony. That is why the proletarian state, as well as the proletarian party, has to be expansive, it has to raise the intellectual level of the masses and bring about a new relationship between the intellectuals and the masses.

The hegemonic function of the state, its expansive character, for Gramsci, embodies "democratic centralism" by contrast with "bureaucratic centralism". A state based on democratic centralism is committed to the spontaneous development of the masses and the avoidance of a fixed group of the people in command.

A continuous movement takes place from the base upwards, a continuous replacement through all the capillaries of society, a continuous circulation of men. 25

A state based on democratic centralism is, for Gramsci a state in which there is an organic relationship between the leaders and the masses constituting an ever-expanding intellectual and cultural preparation of the masses for governmental tasks.

To understand what Gramsci means by democratic centralism within the socialist state we have to base ourselves on his analysis of party organization. The notion of proletarian democracy as the active consent and critical participation of the masses is already given in the notion of the internal democratic organization of the party.

Gramsci himself did not provide a model for the new state, because he insisted, as we saw elsewhere, that organizations have always to be related to concrete historical realities. In his discussion of the party he provides only general principles for the processes of party politics which can be applied also to the processes of politics in the state.

The principles of "democratic centralism" are spelled

out by Gramsci in contrast to those of "organic or bureaucratic centralism". For him, "organic or bureaucratic centralism" is a kind of organization based

...on the presupposition - true only in exceptional moments, when popular passions are aflame - that the relationship between ruler and ruled is determined by the fact that the rulers satisfy the interest of the ruled and thus 'must' have their consent, i.e. the individual must identify with the whole - which (whatever the organism involved) is represented by the rulers. 26

In a state based on organic or bureaucratic centralism the ruled accept the central government and cannot change its personnel or interfere in the policy of the state. This need not be because the ruled are kept down by force as much as because they consider the rulers to be the only "bearers of truth" which is of course what the rulers take themselves to be in such a situation. But in a state based on democratic centralism the consensus of the people is active and direct. The fundamental guaranty of democracy, for Gramsci, in the state as well as in the party is extensive political participation by the masses. Therefore, for Gramsci, real democracy can only be achieved through establishing conditions for the active participation of the population and for the abolition of the division between rulers and ruled.

Although Gramsci does not go into specifics as to

the nature of bourgeois hegemony under capitalism, his writings clearly indicate that in his view the hegemony of a bourgeois state is always necessarily limited due to the unavoidable presence of a coercive apparatus to control the disruptive force of subordinate groups. Hence in a bourgeois state the division between rulers and ruled cannot be eliminated. That is why, for Gramsci, a bourgeois state can never be genuinely expansive: the spread of the leading group will eventually reach a point of "saturation" as a consequence of the necessary existence of subordinate groups.

The prevalence of bureaucratic centralism in the State indicates that the leading group is saturated, that it is turning into a narrow clique which tends to perpetuate its selfish privileges by controlling or even by striffling the birth of oppositional forces... 27

But this suggests a key problem for Gramsci's own views, namely how the proletarian state, still a class state based on the division between leaders and led, can avoid becoming another version of bureaucratic centralism. This problem is extremely serious because Gramsci nowhere explicitly spells out the means by which the socialist state will build the universal hegemony which alone can permit the instauration of regulated society and hence the abolition of the division between rulers and ruled.

We shall here try, therefore, to elaborate a tentative argument based on Gramsci's suggestions about party organization. The logic of Gramsci's thought seems to suggest that in a socialist state there has to be discipline since "discipline is a necessary element of democratic order, of freedom".²⁸ This discipline cannot be "passive and supine acceptance of orders" but must rest on "a conscious and clear understanding of the aims to be realized". Through political education discipline is to become conscious discipline willingly accepted. This, for Gramsci, is possible only when the authority involved is based on a "specialized technical function". That is, when the division between rulers and ruled is not a function of class division but of a difference just in technical capacities. Only in this sense is discipline a necessary element of democracy. Gramsci operates with two definitions of democracy. One definition presupposes the division of labour and the division between leaders and led: but on the basis of thoroughgoing social mobility in the formation of the leading group.

In a hegemonic system democracy between the ruling group and ruled groups exists to the extent that the development of economy, and therefore of the legislation which expresses that development holds open the channels for the ruled to enter the ruling group. 29

It is possible to think that this kind of democracy can exist

in any hegemonic system. But Gramsci gives a second definition of democracy which he believes reflects a truer form of democracy and which will be realized only with the elimination of the division between leaders and led and the establishment of the regulated society. The preconditions of democracy in this truer sense have to be realized during the exercise of democracy in the first sense under the socialist state. Democracy in this second and truer sense is thus precisely the elimination of the division between rulers and ruled through the universalization of proletarian hegemony and the withering away of the state.

Still, saying this leaves us and so Gramsci without specific mechanisms and institutions for how all this is to be achieved. Gramsci simply does not clarify how - through what institutional basis - democractic centralism, the active consent and participation of the people, is to be manifest.

The following though, is clear: Gramsci does not accept as adequate parliamentary mechanisms in which the consent of the people ends at the moment of voting. He affirms the possibility of

...a different solution...both for
parliamentarism and for the bureau-
cratic system - with a new type of
representative system. 30

In this new type of representative system

...the people's consent does not end at the moment of voting... That consent is presumed to be permanently active; so much so that those who give it may be considered as 'functionaries' of the State, and elections as a means of voluntary enrolment of State functionaries of a certain type - a means which in a certain sense may be related to the idea of self-government (though on a different level). Since elections are held on the basis not of a vague, generic programmes, but of programmes of immediate, concrete work, anyone who gives his consent commits himself to do something more than the simple, juridical citizen towards their realisation - i.e. to be a vanguard of active and responsible work. 31

This passage as well as the whole of Gramsci's theory of democratic centralism suggests that full discussion and debate is the only means to create active critical consent.

But full discussion and debate necessitates the existence of autonomous political organizations, which in dialectical relation with the state bring into the open possible disagreements in order to solve them through democratic exchange of opinions. And in fact, when Gramsci speaks of a new type of representative system he is evidently thinking of the system of factory councils. So far so good for Gramsci. Yet, in the Prison Notebooks the role of the party as the instrument for realizing the intellectual and moral reform of the masses remains an all-embracing one. Gramsci neither explicitly takes into consideration other political organizations nor specifies

the relationship of the party to such other political organizations. Moreover, he never gives an idea of the precise nature of the relationship between the party and the state after the revolution. It seems evident, though, that Gramsci's notion of democracy as sprouting up from below and also his hostility to the fascist regime for its totalitarian control from above speak against a restrictive identification of the party and the state or government. For that identification, the absence of alternative and intermediate organizations would seem to jeopardize the possibility of the full discussion and debate necessary for the building of a universal hegemony. The problem then shapes up as follows: as a consequence of the failure of the councils movement and of the victory of Fascism Gramsci incorporated the principles of the councils into the internal tripartite organization of the party. Yet one may well wonder whether in this incorporation Gramsci's goal of a future democratic society based on the diffusion of proletarian hegemony is negated by the all-encompassing role of the party.

In the Prison Notebooks Gramsci is still supporting in principle the idea of mass power. That is why he affirms the necessity for the socialist state to consist of representative institutions different from those of the liberal tradition, but he does not specify what these new institutions are to be. This is an area which is neglected by Gramsci and the

neglect constitutes a limitation in the whole of his work. It is just these limitations in Gramsci's theory which led to the criticisms of Gramsci by for example R. Mondolfo. Mondolfo contends that Gramsci's political thought provides the basis for a totalitarian party and a totalitarian state.

Mondolfo holds that the distinction between leaders and led, between organic intellectuals and masses instead of being just a transitional stage, as Gramsci believes it to be, will become a permanent condition in the socialist state. Mondolfo admits that the role of the party, as the collective intellectual of the proletariat, can be considered necessary and justified at the beginning of the process of proletarian revolution within the bourgeois society. He recognized that the masses are subordinate to the ethic and ideology of capitalist society and cannot spontaneously achieve consciousness of their historical role and their interests. That is why it is necessary to create a conscious group that organizes and educates the people so as to change their mentality from that of subordinates to that of protagonists and rulers.

Il compito di attuare questo processo per la rivoluzione proletaria è affidato da Gramsci al partito comunista ...e questa sua concezione può essere perfettamente comprensibile per la fase della lotta per il rovesciamento della classe dominante, che è una fase più negativa che costruttiva. 32

But Mondolfo points out that the necessity for creating proletarian hegemony through the party as a fundamental condition for the conquest of state power hardens the division between leaders and led, intellectuals and masses. In fact, he says, this division

...è proiettata nella visione della società futura con la teoria del moderno Principe, che suppone una distinzione persistente di dirigenti e diretti, di apparato e massa, di intellettuali organici da una parte, incaricati di esercitare l'azione educativa e conservare il consenso 'spontaneo' del popolo e la legalità e la disciplina, ed il popolo stesso dall'altra parte, che accetta la direzione spirituale, consente e ubbidisce. 33

The permanent division between leaders and led in the socialist state is thus rendered inevitable, for Mondolfo, by Gramsci's conception of the all-embracing role of the party. Mondolfo's interpretation of Gramsci's party as totalitarian is centred on the following Gramsci's passage:

The modern Prince, as it develops, revolutionises the whole system of intellectual and moral relations, in that its development means precisely that any given act is seen as useful or harmful, as virtuous or as wicked, only in so far as it has as its point of reference the modern Prince itself, and helps to strengthen or to oppose it. In men's consciences, the Prince takes the place of the divinity or the categorical imperative, and becomes

the basis for a modern laicism
and for a complete laicisation
of all aspects of life and of
all customary relationships. ³⁴

For Mondolfo, this passage indicates a contradiction between Gramsci's goal of a full democratic society based on the diffusion of proletarian hegemony and the totalitarian action of the party which subordinates the collective will under its centralized organism. I believe, however, that Gramsci here is not speaking of the "Prince" in the sense of the party organism but, as he himself says,³⁵ as the "symbol of the collective will". The "Prince" in this passage symbolizes, as G. Tamburrano points out³⁶ the organized complex of proletarian struggle. The "Prince" is the collective will in its development, is the diffusion of proletarian hegemony in the whole aspects of society. Going even further along Tamburrano's line, we can say that in this passage Gramsci is offering a vision of the future society in which class antagonisms have been overcome and universalization of proletarian hegemony prevails.

Mondolfo goes too far: he is mistaken in considering Gramsci's party as a strictly Leninist party. Mondolfo overlooks the differences and innovations, which we have stressed, achieved by Gramsci's theory of intellectuals and of the party. Above all Mondolfo does not give due consideration to the important elements that Gramsci's theory of democratic centralism

can furnish for an extended notion of democracy. This theory in its true intent, does not seek to exclude but rather presupposes the existence of a plurality of political and social organizations. If the formation of a collective will, which is the basis for a true democracy, is genuinely a process of full discussion and debate which insures continually raising the intellectual level of the masses, the party cannot be the only vehicle of proletarian education and cannot be identified with the state. But Gramsci's failure to spell out and support this key point is the major trouble with his political theory and engenders contradictory interpretations of his theory. This omission can allow Gramsci's principles to be invoked in support of a de facto identification between party and state. Such an identification would in turn render thoroughly problematic or even impossible the kind of full discussion and debate necessary for true intellectual and moral reform. And without that reform there can be no expansion of proletarian hegemony, as the actual history of supposedly socialist states has demonstrated, and the goal of a regulated society and of the actualization of true democracy becomes an unrealizable utopia.

I believe that Gramsci wanted to avoid any totalitarian system or form of political repression and control and that many main elements of his views testify to that wish: his notion of hegemony as a democratic movement from below and his attacks of

any totalitarian control from above; his continual concern to find an alternative to bureaucratic centralism and his conception of democratic centralism, among other things. However, the possibility of a totalitarian interpretation of Gramsci's political theory must be taken as a sign of trouble. It points out the limitations of Gramsci's theory: on the one hand he did not specify the mechanisms and institutions which will permit the active participation of the people in the socialist state at the same as he centers his analysis on the all-embracing function of the party; on the other hand he only describes the socialist state and the future regulated society in little more than generic phrases.

Mondolfo's perspective on Gramsci can be all the more understood given the example of Russian totalitarianism. For even if in Gramsci there are elements and indications for pluralism, Gramsci's overwhelming preoccupation with the role of the party can make one wonder if this kind of party could ever allow the building of autonomous social and political organizations in a socialist society. Even if Gramsci's party implies both internal democracy and a democratic relationship with the masses, its all-embracing function before the seizure of state power could well lead to an equally all-embracing function in the resulting socialist state and so to a totalitarian regime as in Russia.

The more fundamental problem seems to be: can the masses become in the long run the real subject of their history? Or will they always remain the objects of those more conscious agents who have had the task for educating them for self-government? Gramsci's goal is a democratic society in which it will be possible to achieve human fulfillment. Democracy is, for Gramsci, precisely human fulfillment as collective participation in making and executing decisions. But for this to be, individuals have to be transformed into the protagonists of their history. What, though, are the guaranties that the process of political education will have the result Gramsci predicted? If one can accept that people need to be educated to exercise and keep power and rule themselves in their own interest, one cannot and should not accept that the party and the state has to be the only means to realize this process. Certainly this is a bad and dangerous argument which can easily be the basis for the bureaucratic centralism that Gramsci wanted so strongly to avoid. The problem is that Gramsci was too vague and optimistic about the result of an intellectual and moral reform and about the dialectical relationship between intellectuals and masses in the process of political education.

Gramsci looked to a long run in which due to the ever-expanding intellectual and political development of the masses the differences between the intellectuals and the masses

would disappear. The principle of democratic centralism with its continuous dynamic movement from below was to be the means to avoid the hardening of a leadership group. But the absence of the specification of mechanisms for insuring that transforms this teleological vision into á kind of faith.

It is not an adequate answer to this point to say that in the period of the proletarian dictatorship the division between leaders and masses is, as Gramsci held, a division based not on class privileges but on differences in skill and technical preparation. For even then the function of the leading group can still become an elitist one. The leading group can come to consider itself, and perhaps even come to be considered by the masses to be, best suited for the exercise of power and in that way subvert Gramsci's vision of democratic centralism. The result will thus be the instauration of a 'new class' in the socialist state. Gramsci maintains that the organic intellectuals of the working class who are to be the new ruling group have to sprout from "below", and so be "the critical elaboration of the intellectual activity that exists in everyone". But the process whereby everyone is to become his/her intellectual cannot be completed before the seizure of state power and will even have to go for a long period after it. During all that time, until it has reached an appropriately high level of consciousness, it will not be possible for the working class to create alterna-

tive political organizations. But then when, and more importantly by whose judgment, will it be possible to consider that the masses are intellectually and politically prepared to govern themselves? If this judgment depends on the intellectual group, Mondolfo is quite right in his criticism. The full discussion and debate which are the basis for democratic centralism necessitate social and political organizations independent of the party and the state but, at the same time, the creation of such organizations necessitates a developed politicization of the masses. So the high level of consciousness of the masses seems to be the condition and the result of democratic centralism. But then the possibility of eliminating the division between leaders and led seems very improbable because it seems, or can be claimed to be, continually necessary for the intellectual development of the masses.

The solution could be that the party and its functions must be matched by the existence of autonomous social and political organizations not only after the seizure of state power but also before, during the development of proletarian hegemony within capitalist society. The particular experiences of the failure of the factory councils movement prevented Gramsci from considering just this possibility in his Prison Notebooks.

In Gramsci there are, as we have seen, valid elements that may be used in constructing a theory of a democratic socialist society. But these elements cannot justify an apologetic interpretation such as a G. Tamburrano's which seeks to show that Gramsci's theory is completely detached from the Leninist tradition and presents him as the spokesman of a new "democratic" way toward socialism. The chief point here is that, for Gramsci, in the first stages of the proletarian dictatorship, even if force and consent are to work together, it seems clear that coercion will be the stronger element and that it will be essential in creating the basis for the expanding area of consent. Above all the proletarian dictatorship will "tend to 'liquidate', or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force" antagonist groups".³⁷ Thus, Gramsci affirmed the necessity

...(propria di ogni Stato e quindi anche dello Stato operaio) della costrizione, e cioè dell'esercito operaio, dei tribunali operai, dello galere ove chiudere i nemici dichiarati e irriducibili della classe operaia, del plotone d'esecuzione per chi combatte con le armi in pugno la classe operaia. ³⁸

Gramsci further admits the possibility of the existence of hostile groups, for example, members of the former bourgeoisie, which cannot be assimilated to the revolutionary program. They

will be a disruptive force in the proletarian state and will justify the use of coercion. Democracy therefore, for Gramsci, in the socialist state is democracy only for the "allied and kindred groups". Gramsci considers this situation inevitable in so far as the socialist state is a state and has to defend itself and destroy its enemies. But this paves the way for the apparatus of coercion to survive for a very long time, at the least, especially because in some passages in Gramsci the withering away of the state seems to be linked to the disappearance at the international level of enemies of the proletarian state. In other words, the coercive apparatus of the proletarian state is necessary for it to defend itself not only against internal enemies but also against external ones. Clearly this claim can be used to extend the length of proletarian dictatorship for an almost undetermined period of time and can be an even available justification for the coercive intervention of the state.

So we must conclude by saying that there are several contradictions and problems in Gramsci which remain without answers. These arise in part out of the fragmentary and unsystematic form of his writings. But for that very reason Gramsci's theory has to be seen in the context of its time and place to the specifics of which it sought to respond resulting at time in innovations and at time in limitations.

NOTES

1. A. Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, International Publishers, New York, 1971 (hereafter SPN) pg. 263, or Quaderni dal carcere ed. critica dell' Instituto Gramsci a cura di V. Gerratana Einaudi, Torino, 1975 (hereafter EC), pg. 763-764 (1931).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. pg. 238. EC 801-802 (1931).
4. Ibid. pg. 210. EC 1602-03 (1932).
5. Ibid. pg. 230. EC 803 (1931).
6. Ibid. pg. 243. EC 1567 (1932).
7. A. Gramsci, L'Ordine Nuovo, Einaudi, Torino, 1972, pg. 380. my emphasis, O.C.
8. A. Gramsci, Letters from Prison, Harper Colophon Books, New York, 1975, pg. 204.
9. SPN pg. 258. EC 693, 56:57 (1930).
10. Ibid. pg. 260. EC 760 (1931).
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid. pg. 259, my emphasis, O.C. 759 (1931).
13. A. Gramsci, Il materialismo storico, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1977, (hereafter MS) pg. 337.
14. SPN pg. 247. MACH 108.
15. MS pg. 337.
16. SPN pg. 332.
17. Ibid. pg. 181. EC 1583-84 (1932).
18. Ibid. pgs. 334, 335. EC 1386 (1932).
19. Ibid. pg. 418. EC 1505 (1932-33).
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid. pg. 298. EC 1863 (1933).

22. Ibid. pg. 388. EC 1859 (1933).
23. Ibid. pg. 258. EC 693 (1930).
24. Ibid. pg. 263. EC 763-764 (1931).
25. A. Gramsci, Selections from Political Writings, II, International Publishers, New York, 1978, pg. 212. Nov. 6, 1924.
26. SPN pg. 187, footnote.
27. Ibid. pg. 189. EC 1634 (1932).
28. A. Gramsci, Passato e Presente, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1977, pg. 83.
29. A. Gramsci, Note sul Machiavelli, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1977, pgs. 199, 200.
30. SPN pg. 254. EC 1741 (1933).
31. Ibid. pgs. 193, 194. EC 757 (1931).
32. R. Mondolfo, "Le antinomie di Gramsci", in R. Mondolfo, Umanesimo di Marx, Einaudi, Torino, 1968, pg. 407.
33. Ibid.
34. SPN pg. 133. EC 1599 (1933).
35. Ibid. pg. 125. MACH 3.
36. G. Tamburrano, Antonio Gramsci, Sugar Co., Milano, 1977, pgs. 319, 320.
37. SPN pg. 57. EC 2010 (1934).
38. A. Gramsci, Socialismo e Fascismo, Einaudi, Torino, 1972, pg. 409.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this work I have tried to present a reconstruction of Gramsci's political thought around his concept of intellectuals. At the basis of this reconstruction has been the conviction that there is a substantial continuity from Gramsci's early writings to his mature reflections. Throughout Gramsci's works we have found the following fundamental themes: 1) a critique of deterministic interpretations of Marxism; 2) a reevaluation of men as subjects of their history: men are thus thought to acquire consciousness of their position and role in society at the superstructural level while this critical consciousness leads them to modify the structure itself; 3) the overcoming of the dualism of structure and superstructure and its replacement by a unitary vision of historical movement as the result of the dialectical relation between material basis and conscious human activity; 4) the idea that the domination of a class over another is always the domination of a given world-view over another: the supremacy of a class depending thus upon its ability to create a new world-view, involving an intellectual and moral reform, i.e., a new culture; 5) the importance of the function of intellectuals in the elaboration and diffusion of class hegemony in society; 6) the idea that political education, i.e. the process of intellectual and moral reform for the establishment of proletarian

hegemony implies a dialectical relationship between intellectuals and the masses, between conscious leadership and the internal process of self-education of the masses.

In examining Gramsci's early writings we found that these themes were already present, even if in an incomplete and tentative form. These themes were fundamental in Gramsci's theory of the factory councils as vehicles of workers' education and self-determination and in his analysis of the role of intellectuals in the diffusion and consolidation of the ruling class hegemony in the specific historical conditions of Italy. In discussing the failure of the factory councils movement we pointed out that this failure was seen by Gramsci as the failure of the Italian Socialist Party and made Gramsci aware of the decisive role that the party could play in a revolutionary movement. But the conviction that mass consciousness had to arise from a process of education and organization based on a dialectical relationship between leaders and masses remained for Gramsci central in his conception of the party.

When we turned to the mature reflections of Gramsci's prison period we saw the themes of the early writings elaborated and deepened through the concept of the "historical bloc" as the unity of structure and superstructure; the expanded concept of state as the unity of civil and political society, of consent

and coercion; the concept of "hegemony" as the complex of intellectual and political control exercised by the dominant class over society. Gramsci extracts these concepts from neglected aspects of Marx's theory and fashions them so as to overcome the limitations of orthodox Marxist and Leninist concepts of class domination and hegemony. Gramsci's key insight is that class domination in advanced capitalist societies is exercised not only through the coercive apparatus of the state but also through the popular consent formed in civil society. It is thus that the role of intellectuals is crucial to Gramsci, for creating and propagating the world-view of a given class and hence serving as the mediating factor between civil society and political society. In fact, the organic link between structure and superstructure lies in precisely this social function of intellectuals.

In Gramsci's view, the struggle for the liberation of the proletariat must begin with the struggle for hegemony. It has to create a new world-view as the basis for its future conquest and maintenance of state power. This is the task of the "organic intellectuals" of the proletariat. Gramsci's concept of the new intellectual of the working class was contrasted with Lenin's idea of "professional revolutionaries". In Gramsci's view, the organic intellectuals of the proletariat elaborate the self-consciousness of the workers and are not an

external vanguard who impose a consciousness on the workers from the outside.

For Gramsci, the intellectual and moral reform of the masses which is to be initiated by the organic intellectuals requires the institution of the party as the embodiment of the collective will, that is, as the collective intellectual of the working class. The organization of the party is to be tripartite with an intermediate level included between leaders and led as the essential means for continually expanding the intellectual and political development of the masses. In this way the internal structure of the party is marked by democratic centralism, and so as well is the relation of the party to the masses. Democratic centralization requires active participation based on discussion and debate. And the division between leaders and led within the party is not to be based on class privileges but on differences of technical education and skills. The new party for all these reasons presents in embryo the constitution of the future socialist state.

Concerning the road to socialism, Gramsci insist again that in the complex conditions of Western countries where civil society is the basis for the power of the state the working class must establish its hegemony on a wide basis before the seizure of state power. This will make for a situation in

which the ruling class will still be dominant but no longer hegemonic while the insurgent class will exercise a broad hegemony but will not yet be dominant. We noted that Gramsci's writings are ambiguous as to whether the takeover of political power must be violent or maybe peaceful and suggested that Gramsci leaves that issue to be decided by the specific conditions of concrete historical situations. In any case, even where the process is a peaceful one, the goal is a total transformation of capitalist society.

The takeover of political power will result first in a proletarian dictatorship, that is a class state which will have the two fundamental characteristics of all states: consent and coercion. The difference, for Gramsci, is to be that the proletarian state will be "expansive", based on democratic centralism. It will create the possibility for the expansion of the area of consent or hegemony until the area of coercion eventually disappears. A lengthy historical period is to be expected before the state can wither away, and during that period the coercive apparatus of the state will remain indispensable to further the proletarian hegemony and to permit the proletarian state to defend itself against internal and external enemies. But the final goal is to be the regulated society in which coercion and so the state are not necessary. Movement towards that goal will involve the growth of democratic

centralism until the basic division between leaders and led is overcome.

But, to come again to the problems with Gramsci's views, Gramsci does not specify the mechanisms and institutions which will insure the active consent and participation of the masses, i.e. the effective actualization of democratic centralism. Gramsci's theory of democratic centralism, insisting as it does on full discussion and debate as the only means to create active consent, implies the need for autonomous social and political organizations besides the party within the socialist state. But in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks the role of the party as the instrument to realize the intellectual and moral reform of the masses remains an all-embracing one.

The all-embracing role that Gramsci attributes to the party can be understood as a response to the failure of the factory councils movement. But even given that Gramsci seeks to incorporate the democratic principles of the factory councils into the organization of the party he offers no specifics as to how this is to be done. Equally, he gives no specifics as to the relationship between the party and the state and between the party and other organizations in a socialist society. These omissions or limitations in Gramsci's work are serious ones. They leave the way open for a de facto identification between

the party and the state and for the promise of proletarian democracy to degenerate into totalitarianism.

The issue with regard to Gramsci's whole theory of intellectuals is this: his theory fails to spell out effective means for avoiding the crystalization of the division between intellectuals and masses. Gramsci's vision of democratic centralism requires a continuous and dynamic movement from below, an ever-expanding intellectual and political education of the masses until the differences between elites and followers will disappear. But the lack of specifics in Gramsci as to the actual workings of democratic centralism leaves the prospect of proletarian emancipation and of the withering away of the state off in the future. Moreover, Gramsci's insistence that the differences between leading group and masses were to be based not on class privileges but on differences in skill and education does not serve to avoid the possibility of the instauration of a "new class" in the socialist state.

Gramsci's theory of intellectuals, the guiding theme of all his work, is a genuine innovation in Marxist theory and of relevance to social and political analysis whatever the orientation of that analysis; as to its practical relevance for a program seeking socialism that is truly democratic, the prospects of the theory are perhaps still untested, but the perils seen as great as the prospects.

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