

Antonio Gramsci and the Bolshevization of the PCI

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A totalitarian politics tends: 1. ensure that the members of a certain party find in this one party all the satisfaction they formerly found in a multiplicity of organizations...; 2. destroy all other organizations or incorporate them in a system of which the party is the sole governor. This happens when: 1. the given party is the vehicle of a new culture, and we have a progressive phase; 2. the given party wants to prevent another force, the vehicle of a new culture, from becoming totalitarian, and we have an objectively regressive and reactionary phase, even if the reaction (as always happens) tries to appear itself as the vehicle of a new culture.

Antonioni Gramsci
Note su Machiavelli

Since the publication of John Cammett's work on Antonio Gramsci in 1967 new information has come to light which drastically alters our understanding of Gramsci's impact on Italian communism in the 1920s. Cammett did not explain how Gramsci won power in the PCI, nor is it clear from his account that Gramsci was the prime mover in the 'Bolshevization' of the communist party. Finally, Cammett failed to assess the ideological significance of this change both for the party and for Gramsci's own political thought.(1)

Paolo Spriano's massive new work, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano*, has provided us with revealing data about Gramsci's successful power struggle with Amadeo Bordiga.(2) But neither Spriano nor Cammett were able to consult all Gramsci's unedited writings from this period, many of which have only recently been identified. (3) These writings, which the Institute Gramsci in Rome kindly made available to me, reveal a dramatic metamorphosis in Gramsci's political mind as well as in his political behaviour between 1923 and 1926. They cast doubt on the official party thesis-espoused also by Cammett-that there is a 'direct line of descent' from Gramsci's factory council experience of 1919-20 to his *Quaderni del carcere* written ten years later, and that the tradition of *Ordine Nuovo* (the former mouthpiece of the factory councils) is the tradition Gramsci implanted in his party in the 1920s.(4)

Our evidence suggests, on the contrary, that though Gramsci tried to keep faith in his earlier ideal of workers' democracy, he was ultimately obliged to sacrifice this ideal to the more realistic program of Bolshevization. This makes it easier to understand why, in his prison notebooks, the libertarian concept of the factory council is supplanted by the authoritarian concept of monolithic party dictatorship. And why his youthful belief in a 'Proletarian enlightenment' preparing the path for a democratic revolution from below is replaced by his blueprint for an explicitly 'totalitarian' culture organized

from above. Gramsci's personal metamorphosis must be understood in the context of three historical developments: the failure of the post-war revolts in Italy and other European countries, the rise of Fascism and the rise of Stalinism. The thorough Bolshevization of European communist parties would have been inconceivable were it not for the isolation and impotence of these parties in their home countries. In Italy, the disillusioning defeats of the biennio rosso left the masses apathetic and the socialist elite deeply divided. And though the intervention of Moscow was partly responsible for the disastrous schism in Italian socialism at the Congress of Livorno in 1921, the consequent isolation of the 'pure communists' made them all the more dependent on Moscow for material and spiritual sustenance. And the hard knocks of Fascism would make it that much easier for them to accept the harsh lessons of Bolshevization.

No Italian had greater faith in the Russians than Antonio Gramsci, who believed that Bolshevik principles were of universal validity. 'What is, in fact, the Communist International?' he asked in January 1921. 'It is the international realization of the principles and methods of the Russian Revolution.'⁽⁵⁾ But the principles and methods of Bolshevism were far from being permanently defined in 1921. They were to undergo a subtle but profound change in the next five years, a change linked to the rise of Joseph Stalin. During the same period Antonio Gramsci rose to power in the communist party of Italy. It was also during these years that the PCI was 'Bolshevized'; that is, set on a monolithic footing, its policy and personnel strictly subordinated to the will of Stalin's 'majority'. Anyone familiar with the history of the Comintern will immediately realize that such a coincidence could not have been purely coincidental. The coincidence of changing circumstances in Russia and the political metamorphosis of Antonio Gramsci can be conceived and rationally understood only as Bolshevizing practice.

Gramsci, however, did not immediately come to grips with his mission, nor was he able to carry it out until he won the leadership of the party in the latter part of 1924. The period from the Congress of Livorno to the Fifth Congress of the Communist International was the period of Gramsci's gradual discovery of his historical task, and of his power struggle with Amadeo Bordiga.

GRAMSCI'S STRUGGLE WITH BORDIGA

At Livorno Amadeo Bordiga emerged as leader of the new communist party. Gramsci was little known outside Turin, and suspicions of 'interventionism' and 'idealism' still shadowed his reputation.⁽⁶⁾ He was shy and ill-at-ease with crowds, and his quiet voice was unsuited to command an assembly of Italians. Bordiga, on the other hand, was a nationally-known figure. What he lacked in brain power he made up for with great physical energy and personal magnetism. But Bordiga possessed one trait which made him unfit to survive as leader of a section of the Communist International, and that was his stubborn pride. Bordiga's pride would founder on the rocks of Comintern discipline, when that discipline demanded sudden reversals in the guiding policies of his party.

Hostilities between Bordiga and the Comintern commenced in the summer of 1921, when the Third Congress of the International announced the new tactic of the united

front. Bordiga approved of united action 'from below' against Fascism, but remained hostile to the notion of making political deals with other parties. For this he has been roundly condemned as a 'sectarian' by party historians. But if Bordiga is to blame, the blame must be shared by the great majority of party leaders who initially supported him, including all the former ordinovisti except Angelo Tasca. Tasca, along with Antonio Graziadei, was the only consistent advocate of the united front 'from above' throughout the 1920s, a consistency which resulted in his expulsion from the party at the end of the decade.(7)

Gramsci's views in 1921-22 were, at least on the surface, indistinguishable from those of the bordighisti. He patiently accepted his subordinate role on the central committee, and, as editor of *Ordine Nuovo* (now an official party mouthpiece), he obediently followed Bordiga's line. At the Rome Congress of the PCI in March 1922, he cast his vote, like everyone else, in favor of Bordiga's 'Theses', which repudiated the united front 'from above'. Like the majority, he continued to devote his best energies to assassinating the character of social-democrats, while Fascists were carrying out assassinations of the deadlier sort. The bordighisti and ordinovisti were brought even closer together by the fact that the 'right opposition' led by Tasca and Graziadei might get control of the party by virtue of their support for the Comintern line.(8)

At the Rome Congress Gramsci was appointed to represent the PCI in the Executive of the Communist International. At the end of May 1922, he left Turin for Moscow. His year-and-a-half sojourn in the Soviet Union would bring about a dramatic change in his political fortune, as well as in his political views. This did not happen overnight, however. During the summer of 1922 Gramsci faithfully represented Bordiga in Moscow. It was not until the Fourth World Congress in November that a crack appeared in his loyalty. Zinoviev, President of the International, then demanded that the PCI 'fuse' with the PSI under G.M. Serrati, who had just expelled the reformists and declared his allegiance to the Third International. Faced with Bordiga's resolute opposition of the fusion, Comintern spokesman Matyas Rakosi cornered Gramsci and bluntly suggested that he replace Bordiga. Gramsci declined on the grounds that such a change would require extensive preparation in the party.(9) This was a skillful response because, while it avoided an immediate confrontation, it did not rule out the possibility that he would accept the offer if these preparations were carried out.

If we may trust Gramsci's memory as he looked back on these events over a year later, he had held reservations about Bordiga's politics since early in 1922. Evidently, he had supported Bordiga's 'Rome Theses' only for a 'contingent reason of party organization', and if they had not been presented merely as 'suggestions' to the Comintern, he would have voted against them.(10)The contingency about which he was worried was the possibility that the 'right opposition' might get control of the party. To Togliatti he later admitted quite frankly that he 'put up with a lot because the situation of the party and the movement was such that any appearance of schism in the ranks of the majority would have been disastrous, and would have breathed life into the aimless and unqualified minority'. He also cited his poor health as a reason for his reluctance to challenge Bordiga. (11)

During the Fourth World Congress Bolshevik leaders skillfully played off Tasca's

'aimless' minority against Bordiga's majority, a tactic which provided Gramsci with an opportunity to take the side of the Comintern. He helped convince the majority that to preserve their control of the party they would have to submit, at least verbally, to the Comintern line. He was then appointed, along with Tasca and Mauro Scoccimarro, to a commission to arrange the fusion with the PSI. However, while they negotiated with Serrati in Moscow, Pietro Nenni led a rebellion against the fusion in Italy, and the negotiations collapsed. The Comintern now insisted that the PCI fuse with Serrati's tiny faction of *terzini*, while Bordiga continued to insist that his party could only admit new members on an individual basis.

In February 1923 Mussolini had Bordiga thrown in jail. Undaunted, the fiery leader launched a famous 'manifesto' from prison, defending his conduct of party affairs, denouncing the united front tactic and demanding an international debate on the Italian question.⁽¹²⁾ By the end of 1923 he had convinced all the other majority leaders to sign it. All, that is, except Antonio Gramsci.

Gramsci was now in Vienna, where the Comintern had sent him to make better contact with the home front, while remaining free from the mandate for his arrest which had been issued in Italy. He was now faced with a critical decision. The Comintern had taken advantage of Bordiga's imprisonment to eliminate him from the party leadership in June. Should Gramsci rally to his support, as the others had? Or should he side with the Comintern against his own party? He was by now convinced that the Comintern line was correct, and that to break with the International would be disastrous. It was up to him to bring his party to heel and weld it into an effective weapon of world communism.

The Comintern's 'act of authority' in June had meanwhile raised some vital questions about party organization and discipline. Could the authority of the Comintern be legitimately extended to dismissing the democratically-elected leaders of national sections? To what extent should criticism and opposition to the Comintern line be tolerated? In some notes Gramsci hurriedly jotted down at the time of the coup, we can see his emerging vision of the monolithic party. Raising the spectre of factionalism, he warned against the appearance of differences of opinion within the party leadership.

From the whole experience of the Russian Revolution it appears that the absence of unanimity in the great public votes determines special positions in the midst of the great masses. The political oppositionists coalesce into a minority. They expand and generalize their position, conspire to publish manifestoes, programs, etc ... and carry on an all-out effort of agitation, which can become extremely dangerous at a certain moment.⁽¹³⁾ He advised that it would be better to raise important questions in 'private discussions' rather than in public where they might have international repercussions. And these questions, even in private, should only be raised within the limits of decisions made by previous congresses.⁽¹⁴⁾

Such statements reveal that Gramsci had fully accepted the structural changes in the International inaugurated at its Fourth Congress in 1922. These changes entailed acknowledgement of Bolshevik supremacy on all questions, an increased centralization of authority in the Comintern and unity at both national and international levels. Moreover, Gramsci's endorsement of political monolithism

coincided with the fusion of party and state in Russia, which was formally approved by the Twelfth Congress of Russian Communist Party in April 1923.

In Gramsci's campaign against Bordiga's 'manifesto', we can perceive his growing commitment to the logic of Bolshevization. But this commitment was not an easy one for the former prophet of the factory councils. The distressed conscience of a democrat is evident in his complaint that Bordiga had discouraged debate within the party by his dictatorial usurpation of authority and responsibility. 'The error of the party', he said, 'was to have posed in an exaggerated and abstract fashion the problem of party organization, which then meant merely to create an apparatus of functionaries who were completely loyal to the official line.'⁽¹⁵⁾ If Gramsci knew what was right, it would prove more difficult for him to do what was right once he had changed places with Bordiga.

This twist of fate was already in the cards in 1923. By their autocratic removal of Bordiga in June, the Comintern placed him in the role of opposition, not only to the tactics, but also to the organizational procedures of the International. Something similar happened to Trotsky in Russia, and it was natural that the Bordiga and Trotsky issues should converge. The minimum demand of an oppositionist was to call for free and rational discussion of the issues, and this inevitably placed them in the role of democrats. Free discussion was precisely the major demand of Bordiga's 'manifesto'.⁽¹⁶⁾ Gramsci, while blaming Bordiga for suppressing discussion, was nevertheless obliged to reject his appeal for a national and international debate on the issues. He threatened expulsion for those who did not come to heel, and he paraded the spectre of a takeover by the 'right opposition', in which he now suspected the influence of the petty-bourgeoisie.⁽¹⁷⁾

Meanwhile in Russia the Trotskyist opposition had been condemned as a 'petty-bourgeois deviation from Leninism'. Gramsci's attitude towards the Trotsky-Stalin conflict provides a revealing sidelight on his personal metamorphosis. His description of the conflict in a letter of February 1924 is noteworthy for its neutral tone and healthy scepticism towards the ideological labels used in the fray. He found the historical evidence of a 'right-wing' or 'Menshevik' tendency more convincing in the case of Zinoviev and Kamenev—who formed with Stalin the ruling triumvirate—than the case of Trotsky. And he defended Trotsky against charges that he was responsible for the failure of the German communist putsch of October 1923.⁽¹⁸⁾

Other evidence suggests that Gramsci continued to view the Russian conflict with circumspection. A letter he wrote to Umberto Terracini in March reveals his mounting concern that the PCI should attain a level of strength and self-confidence capable of resisting the corrosive clashes in the Russian Party. He even hinted at the desirability of a certain amount of political autonomy within the International:

If, by the V Congress, our party is cured of its crisis, if it has a stable nucleus and a center which enjoys, not for its international connections but for its own actions, the faith of the Italian masses, we will be able to assume an independent position and to permit ourselves even the luxury of criticism. For the present it seems convenient to louvoyer [tack] for awhile, so as not to add to the confusion and to the crisis of faith and prestige which already

exists on a large scale.(19)

In this brief comment Gramsci put his finger accurately on the historical reason for the subordination of European parties to Moscow. He did not foresee how long that reason would remain in force. Thus, his 'tacking', however convenient it seemed at the moment, led him ever further off his desired course.

Just what his desired course was, we may surmise from the third series of *Ordine Nuovo*, launched by Gramsci from Vienna in March 1924. On the front page of the new journal there was an echo of its original purpose: '*Ordine Nuovo* proposes to arouse in the masses of workers and peasants a revolutionary vanguard capable of creating the state of workers' and peasants' councils .. "(20) In a letter to Togliatti, Gramsci remarked that 'The specific program of the review, in my opinion, must still be the factory organization'. He hoped to reconstruct 'an ambience like that of 1920', when their ideas were immediately tested by reality and never appeared as 'the cold application of an intellectual scheme'.(21)

But there was a difference in 1924 between what Gramsci wanted to do and what he could do. Italian reality was no longer as friendly to the soviet ideal as it had been in 1920. The labor movement had practically ground to a halt. In 1923 only 300,000 labor hours were lost in strikes, or one for every 55 hours lost in 1920. In all Italy only about 10,000 men and women carried the card of the communist party, or one for every 20 who had carried the card of the social party in 1920. No matter how much he longed for the good old days, not even Antonio Gramsci could turn the clock back, nor could he recover the confidence in the masses which had inspired his original conception of the soviet. If, in 1920, he had placed his hopes on the concrete experience of the councils to prepare the workers for enlightened selfgovernment, by 1924 the 'passivity', the 'torpor' and the 'dull stupor' of the workers indicated that only the vigorous propaganda of the party could save them.(22)

If objective circumstances thwarted Gramsci's soviet ambitions, they favored his reconstruction of the party. By April 1924 he had convinced a majority of his comrades not to go along with Bordiga's 'manifesto'. On April 18 his 'center' position won a slim majority on the central committee. This victory was an important step along the path to power.(23)

In May he left Vienna for Italy. In the national elections of April he had been elected deputy to Parliament in a Venetian district. In early May he attended a clandestine convention of the party on the shores of Lake Como. It was at Como that the analogy between Bordiga and Trotsky was introduced into Italy, and it was Gramsci who introduced it. He blamed both men for their 'passive opposition', which had created a 'sense of uneasiness in the entire party'. In Trotsky's case he now drew the ominous conclusion that

... an opposition by conspicuous personalities of the workers' movement even maintained within the limits of formal discipline-can not only impede the development of the revolutionary situation, but can even endanger the conquests of the revolution.
(24)

Only three months after his cautious defense of Trotsky, Gramsci was advising him to shut up.

Gramsci's observation of a 'sense of uneasiness' in the party had a very real basis in fact. The fact was that Bordiga was far from defeated. The new Executive created by the Comintern had as yet no real authority in Italy. Though Gramsci controlled the central committee, Bordiga still enjoyed the loyalty of the rank and file. The delegates at Como gave Bordiga ten votes for every one of Gramsci's. Gramsci's 'majority' won even fewer votes than Tasca's 'minority'.(25)

Despite the overwhelming mandate for Bordiga at Como, the 'center' continued as the official leadership by virtue of its slim majority in the central committee. The will of the leaders, however, was of little account in the absence of an army. In the national elections of April the Communists had won only 19 seats, compared to 375 won by the Fascist coalition. The Communists called these results a 'success' in light of the brutal campaign of intimidation carried on by the Fascists.(26) But their real failure was objectively revealed at the Fifth World Congress in June 1924.

At the Fifth World Congress the Comintern launched its campaign for the complete Bolshevization of member parties. Though this process had been evident from the very beginning of the International, never before had it been so explicitly demanded that members conform ideologically and organizationally to the ruling party of Russia. Never before had the Bolsheviks so clearly indicated their will to dominate and control every facet of party policy and personnel in western countries.

Amadeo Bordiga raised one of the few voices of opposition at the Fifth Congress. The Bolsheviks were appalled by his suggestion that they should be subordinate to the Comintern like the rest of the parties, and that decisive power in the International should go to the advanced capitalist countries.(27) They were also embarrassed by the fact that their own tactical line was now almost indistinguishable from Bordiga's. Though Stalin personally admired Bordiga, the latter's proud defiance and distrust of Bolshevik authority obliged the Comintern to remove the remnants of his following from the central committee, leaving the 'center' in a position of clear superiority. In August the central committee so carefully pruned by the Comintern elected Antonio Gramsci General Secretary of the PCI.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY

From August 1924 to November 1926 Antonio Gramsci was the leader of Italian communism. The major success of his leadership was to eliminate from the party practically all opposition to the discipline and policies of the Comintern. During the same period Benito Mussolini eliminated practically all opposition to the discipline and policies of the Fascist State, including that of the pure but impotent communists. It was also in this period that Joseph Stalin triumphed over the Trotskyist opposition in Russia.

Trotskyist and 'new left' critics of party historiography in Italy have argued with conviction that Gramsci's political role was objectively no different from that of Albert Treint, who, as General Secretary of the French communist party in 1924-25,

represented the Zinoviev-Stalin version of international communism.(28) 'Objectively', this claim is indisputable, but the subjective reality is more complex. As long as Gramsci could believe that the goals of world revolution were best served by Comintern discipline, he would bend over backwards to accommodate the will of the Russian 'majority'. An unfortunate result of his good faith was that he spent an inordinate amount of energy defending the actions of the Bolsheviks, often at the expense of his own credibility. He defended the overthrow of the Georgian and Armenian Republics, the suppression of civil liberty and the terrorism of the Cheka on the grounds that the prisons, police, courts and diplomacy were securely in the hands of the proletariat. Between January 1921 and November 1926, the only time he publicly objected to Soviet behavior was when the Soviet ambassador to Italy formally invited Benito Mussolini to supper.(29)

A more significant aspect of Gramsci's new role was his effort to reorganize the party along Bolshevik lines. Even after his election as General Secretary, his control of the party was far from secure, and would remain so until the party's Third Congress at Lyons in January 1926. In the meantime he faced the stolid resistance of Amadeo Bordiga, who still held sway over the rank and file and controlled most of the federal secretaries. Bordiga represented the major obstacle to Bolshevization in Italy. Having been forced into the role of opposition by bureaucratic manoeuvres, he was bound to defend, like Trotsky in Russia, the passe principle of party democracy. It was through Bolshevization - the elimination of party democracy - that Gramsci achieved his final triumph over Bordiga.

This intention was announced by one of his first moves as General Secretary, which was to gag the mouthpieces of dissent. Bordiga's journal *Prometeo* and the *Pagine Rosse* of Serrati's newly-recruited *terzini* were efficiently silenced, presumably by withholding Comintern subsidies.(30) Gramsci did, however, permit the opposition to express their views in *l'Unita*, which enabled something like a dialogue to continue within the party.

This privilege was compromised, however, when Gramsci adopted another Bolshevik expedient, appointment from above, to eliminate the more intractable of Bordiga's followers from key provincial posts. The occasion for this hatchet work was provided by the formation in June 1925 of a *Comitato d'intesa* ('entente') to represent Bordiga's position in the debates for the forthcoming Congress of Lyons. Gramsci immediately denounced the entente as 'factionalist' and demanded 'full and complete submission to the discipline of the International'.(31) The few who refused to submit were relieved of their duties.

Gramsci never did anything without theoretical justification, and he found the justification for these actions in the theory of 'Bolshevik monolithism'. Speaking to the central committee in 1925, he defined Trotsky's position in Russia as 'factionalist', adding that this was especially dangerous in Russia, because to divide the party in a party state meant also to divide the state. And that would give rise to a counter-revolutionary movement.(32)

Other evidence suggests that there was considerable tension in Gramsci's effort to adapt to this new mode of reasoning. He condemned Bordiga's former leadership for

its 'over-centralization', but when it came to suggesting an alternative, he was obliged to recognise that 'Our party is not a democratic party. It is a party centralized nationally and internationally'.(33) He accused Bordiga of having discouraged discussion within the party, which had led to 'intellectual stagnation'.(34) But this scruple was bound to suffer when the discussions were turned against himself. The central committee could not renounce 'full control' over discussions, he said, because discussions were also 'campaigns'.(35) He frankly admitted that the Communist Party did not proceed by democratic rules which would permit minority groups to struggle to become the majority.(36)

The anti-democratic trend in Italian communism was determined not only by order from abroad, but also by repression at home. Many Bolshevik expedients were justified in Gramsci's mind by the counterrevolutionary crisis in Italy. This was true, for instance, of his reorganization of the party cells, in conformity with the commands of the Fifth World Congress. Bordiga charged that the cells would encourage a 'corporate mentality' and 'lend themselves to the convenient dictatorship of a bureaucratic functionary'.(37) He then launched the heretical charge that Leninist organizational criteria were appropriate only to Russia. Gramsci replied that the Fascist repression launched in January 1925 had placed the PCI in a position similar to that of the Bolsheviks before the war, when Czarist persecution threatened their very existence.(38)

Fascist repression also frustrated any hopes Gramsci may have entertained to integrate the lessons of Bolshevism with the democratic tradition of Ordine Nuovo. He tried, for instance, to impose a 'soviet' interpretation on the Comintern design for 'workers' and peasants' Committees'. Speaking to the central committee in 1925, he explicitly equated the new program with the factory councils of 1920.(39) But neither in Russia nor in Italy did words like 'soviet' and 'factory council' still imply a democratic movement from below, generating the political form of a new state based on the universal suffrage of the producing classes. 'Soviet' now implied an instrument of party dictatorship, and 'councils' were but instruments for extending party influence. If, in 1920, the party had been conceived as the servant of the soviet, by 1926 the soviet was conceived as the servant of the party.

That this was true even of Gramsci is revealed in the 'Lyons Theses' of January 1926, which must be considered a definitive statement of his views at that time. Significantly, his historical sketch of the labour movement in Italy made no mention of Ordine Nuovo. Equally significant is the fact that he began the history of the PCI abruptly at the Congress of Livorno and viewed its entire development as a struggle for Bolshevization. The major lesson he drew from the experience of the biennio rosso was that the struggle against capitalism could not succeed without the leadership of the communist party. The only lesson he drew from the factory council episode was that party organization must be based on the places of production. In other words, any new 'councils' or 'workers' committees' would serve merely as party recruiting centers.(40)

This new meaning, though it directly expressed changes in the Russian regime, also harmonized with the new reality of Fascist Italy. It would have been ridiculous to suppose in 1926 that Mussolini would permit a soviet anti-state to spawn 'organically', like weeds in his garden. In fact, the *commissioni interni*, or grievance committees,

which had formerly provided the basis for factory councils, had been suppressed for several years. Nor did the situation in the labor unions favor their revival. Given the unlikely prospects for a radicalization of the workers and peasants under the auspices of labor and socialist leaders, it was logical for Gramsci to view every 'class' organization as a tool for breaking their hold on the masses and for extending the influence of the PCI. In any case, the workers' and peasants' committees did not get off the ground before the Vidoni Pact of October 1925 destroyed the last hope for an independent labor movement and the Rocco Law of April 1926 codified the emerging Corporative State.

The triumph of Fascism in Italy coincided with the triumph of Stalin in Russia. It was a time of ruthlessness, and there was little room for political manoeuver or 'tacking'. Gramsci's desperate position in Rome, where he was constantly shadowed by police spies, made him short-tempered with complaints about Stalin's methods. It was war, and in war nobody should be surprised when both sides used bullets. Even the sudden fall of Zinoviev from the Politbureau in July 1926 gave Gramsci no pause, except to say that all opposition within the party was 'objectively' counter-revolutionary, and that 'past services don't matter'.(41)

In October 1926 the conflict between Trotsky, now allied with Zinoviev and Kamenev, and Stalin, now allied with Bukharin, raised the spectre of a major schism in the Russian Party. This at least was too much for Gramsci. In an extraordinary letter to the central committee of the CPSU, he warned of the repercussions the conflict might have on the international movement:

. . . today you are destroying your work. You degrade and risk annulling the leadership function which the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R. had won through the impetus of Lenin. It seems to us that the violent passion of the Russian Question causes you to lose sight of the international aspects of the Russian questions themselves, causes you to forget that your duties as Russian militants can and must be fulfilled only within the context of the interests of the international proletariat.(42)

This was a serious warning, though Gramsci padded it with all the correct denunciations of the opposition, and affirmed his allegiance to the political line of the 'majority'.(43)

Despite this show of loyalty, Gramsci's concluding advice to 'avoid excessive measures' was sufficient cause for alarm in the paranoid atmosphere of the Comintern. Palmiro Togliatti, then representing the PCI in Moscow, recognized as much in his refusal to forward the letter to the central committee of the Russian Party. He argued that the opposition had already submitted to discipline, and that the letter would only encourage them to renew hostilities.⁴⁴ It was true that the opposition had, on 4 October, signed a statement of submission. But they politely maintained their criticism of Stalin's politics, just as Stalin preserved his intention of giving them the axe. Towards the end of the month he forced Trotsky out of the Politbureau and removed Zinoviev from the top post in the Comintern. Thus, Gramsci was intuitively correct in his reply to Togliatti, ordering him to forward the letter regardless of the momentary truce. He did, however, give Togliatti permission to alter the letter, placing his assertion of the opposition's 'responsibility' for the crisis at the beginning.(45) In

response to this unwavering criticism, the Russians sent Jules Humbert-Droz to Italy with the ill-disguised threat that 'The executive committee of the International fears that the executive committee of the PCI aligns itself with the Trotskyist opposition'.(46) This threat obliged the PCI to officially withdraw Gramsci's letter.

Recently, Massimo Salvadori has argued that this episode is proof of Gramsci's dissociation from Stalin and from Stalinism in general.(47) This is a comforting conclusion, but the evidence does not support it. The facts of the case are, in brief: 1. that Gramsci opposed the Trotskyists on both organizational and tactical issues; 2. that he supported Stalin on these issues; 3. that he opposed the use of 'excessive measures'; 4. that the only way he proposed to avoid such measures was for the Trotskyists to submit to the Stalinists; and 5. That the 'unity' he so urgently demanded meant unity on Stalin's terms. On the other hand, Gramsci's intervention in the dispute was novel in one very important respect. Up to that moment he had considered the elementary fact of the Bolshevik victory of 1917 sufficient justification for their leadership of the world party. But after nine years this was no longer enough. To retain its leadership, the Russian Party would now have to provide proof of progress towards socialism.(48) Now this was a clever manoeuvre on Gramsci's part, for it endorsed Stalin's proposal to build 'socialism in one country', but made his fealty contingent on Stalin's fealty to that goal.

Once love is made conditional, it is more easily betrayed. Within two years, Gramsci would break with the discipline of the International.(49) But it would prove less easy for him to break with the habits of thought which those rules had bred into him. His commitment to the logic of Bolshevik monolithism was not contingent upon the behavior of the Bolshevik regime, but was by 1926 conceived as an historically-necessary response to the crisis of Italian communism.

The principle of monolithism, as it came to be practised under Stalin, represented a metamorphosis of Lenin's hallowed doctrine of *partiinost*, or 'party-mindedness'. This metamorphosis originated in the tragic conditions of war-torn Russia, in the rise of the party-state and in the rise of Joseph Stalin, but it found fertile soil in the defeated and isolated parties of Europe, and in the weary hearts of their leaders. Antonio Gramsci, though he was an exceptional man, was no exception to this history.

Notes

1. This is the historiographical line of the PCI. It has also been argued in the United States by John M. Cammett in his *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (Palo Alto 1967), 155-85.

2. Paolo Spriano, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano*, 2 vols. (Turin, 1967-69), I: *Da Bordiga a Gramsci*.

3. Elsa Fubini is in charge of editing Gramsci's writings and speeches from the period 1923-26. Her work will complete the series of Gramsci's published *Opere*.

4. Communist historians, while arguing that Gramsci maintained the soviet

ideal, have reinterpreted that ideal in terms of the significance it subsequently acquired, when the soviets were reduced to instruments of party dictatorship in Russia. There was always, of course, considerable tension in Gramsci's concept of the relationship between soviet and party. Communist historians, by conveniently resolving that tension in favor of the party, have managed to obscure the real transition which occurred in Russian politics and in Gramsci's political thought in the 1920s. A good example of this is Franco Ferri's 'Consigli di fabbrica e partito nel pensiero di Antonio Gramsci', *Rinascita*, (September 1957), XIV, No. 9, 465. In the fall of 1969 a group of young communists led by Rossana Rossanda took note of this change and attempted to revitalize the original program of *Ordine Nuovo*. They were excluded from the Party in the spring of 1970.

5. 'Russia e l'Internazionale', (9 January 1921), in *Socialismo e fascismo, 1921-1922* (Turin 1967), 33.

6. Spriano, *op. cit.*, note 2, I, 118. The 'interventionist' charge stemmed from Gramsci's momentary and ill-advised support for Mussolini when the latter called for an 'active and operational neutrality' in October 1914. The 'idealist' label stemmed from Gramsci's long-standing admiration for Benedetto Croce and his staunch opposition to all positivistic or deterministic interpretations of Marxism.

7. Angelo Tasca, 'I primi dieci anni del P.C.I.: Ordinovisti e Bordighisti', *Il Mondo* (8 Septemebr 1953).

8. Spriano, *op. cit.*, I, 160.

9. *Ibid.*, 249.

10. Letter to Togliatti, Terracini and others, (9 February 1924), in Giansiro Ferrati and Niccolo Gallo (eds.), *2000 pagine di Gramsci*, 2 vols. (Milan 1964), I, 670.

11. Letter to Palmiro Togliatti (27 January 19124), *op. cit.*, I, 663.

12. Amadeo Bordiga, 'Manifesto', in Helmut Gruber (ed.), *International Communism in the Era of Lenin: A Documentary History* (New York 1967), 371-79.

13. 'Impostazione del rapporto tra il P.C.d'I. e il Comintern' (June 1923), *Archivio del P.C.I.*, 188/14. Photostatic copy available at Istituto Gramsci in Rome.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Letter to Togliatti, Terracini and others, *op. cit.* note 10, I, 671.

16. Bordiga, *op. cit.*, 379.

17. Letters to Scoccimarro and Terracini, *op. cit.* Note 10, I, 655, 659.

18. Letter to Togliatti, Terracini and others, op. cit. note 10, I, 666-68.
19. Letter to Terracini, cited by Spriano, op. cit. note 2, I, 354.
20. *L'Ordine nuovo* (1 March 1924), Feltrinelli Reprint (Milan 1966).
21. Letter to Togliatti (27 March 1924), op. cit. note 10, I, 680-81.
22. 'Le elezioni', *L'Ordine nuovo* (1 March 1924).
23. Spriano, op. cit. note 2, I, 349.
24. Antonio Gramsci, article in *Lo Stato operaio*, (15 May 1924), cited by Spriano, op. cit., I, 361.
25. Spriano, op. cit., I, 359.
26. *Ibid.*, 340.
27. *Ibid.*, 371.
28. Robert Paris 'Il Gramsci di tutti', *Giovane Critica* (Fall 1969), 49; Stefano Merli, 'I nostri conti con la teoria di "rivoluzione senza rivoluzione" di Gramsci', *Giovane Critica* (Fall 1967), 63-64.
29. 'Franche parole al compagno Jurenef', *L'Unita*, (13 July 1924). For Gramsci's defense of Soviet foreign policy against the barbs of the socialist press, see 'Gli amici di Treves', 'Il fronte antisovietista dell'on. Treves', and 'L'on. Treves il furbissimo', *L'Unita* (20 October, 18 August and 29 July 1925). For his defense of soviet domestic policy see the following articles in *L'Unita*: 'La ce-ka' (7 December 1924); 'Menscivismo e liberta' (31 July 1925); 'La coda di paglia dell'on. Treves' (2 August 1925); and 'I contradini e la dittatura del proletariato' (17 September 1926).
30. Spriano, op. cit. note 2, I, 401.
31. 'La lotta contro la frazione', *L'Unita* (10 June 1925).
32. 'Relazione al C.C.' (15 February 1925). Archivio del P.C.I., 1925 296/5. Photostatic copy available at Istituto Gramsci in Rome.
33. 'Necessita di una preparazione ideologica di massa' (May 1925), op. cit. note 10, I, 747.
34. *Ibid.*
35. 'Puntini sugli i', *L'Unita* (22 July 1925). For Bordiga's point of view, see Bordiga, 'Sull'iniziativa del Comitato d'intesa', *L'Unita* (25 July 1925).

36. 'Democrazia interna e liberta di discussione', *l'Unita* (12 June 1925).
37. Cited in Spriano, *op. cit.* note 2, I, 480.
38. 'La situazione interna del nostro partito e i compiti del prossimo Congresso', *Critica Marxista* (September-December 1963), I, No. 5-6 291-92. This was a speech to the central committee in May 1925, opening the preparatory debates for the Lyons Congress.
39. *Op. cit.* note 32. See also 'Ne fascismo ne liberalismo: Soviettismo' *l'Unita* (7 October 1924).
40. 'Tesi sulla situazione italiana e sui compiti del P.C.I.' (January 1926), in Palmiro Togliatti (ed.), *Trenta anni di vita e lotte del P.C.I.* (Rom 1951), 93-99.
41. 'Prowedimenti del C.C. del P.C. dell'U.R.S.S.', *l'Unita* (27 July 1926).
42. 'La lettera di Gramsci al P.C.U.S. nel 1926', *op. cit.* note 10, I, 823.
43. *Ibid.*, 824-25.
44. Togliatti's letter of reply has been edited by Franco Ferri in 'Gramsci e Togliatti', *Rinascita-Il Contemporaneo* (24 April 1970). This article includes all correspondence related to the issue.
45. Gramsci's letter of reply, *op. cit.*, 18-19.
46. Cited in Massimo Salvadori, *Gramsci e il problema della democrazia* (Turin 1970), 34.
47. *Ibid.*, 30-43.
48. In 'Gramsci e Togliatti', *op cit.*, 19.
49. Gramsci's disagreement with the tactical line of the Sixth World Congress (which called for a new war on social-democracy) would probably have resulted in his exclusion from the party, had he not been confined in prison.