

Editor's Note

The reader uninitiated in the history of the working class in Italy, and of the socialist and then communist parties in that country in the crucial years between 1912 and 1926, will find not find John Chiaradia's text "Amadeo Bordiga and the Myth of Antonio Gramsci" an easy read. It does not pretend to substitute for a full social and political history of Italy in those years; it is rather an attempt to disclose, perhaps for the first time in English, the quite explosive truth about the long-cultivated historical oblivion of one of the great, and greatly ignored, figures of the 20th century Marxism, Amadeo Bordiga, leader of the Italian Communist Left, and the important initial role played in this oblivion by the far better known Antonio Gramsci.

Chiaradia's text might strike such a reader, or even one more familiar with the figures and developments to which he refers, as a vast academic "review of the literature". But Chiaradia aims much higher than that: by debunking so many esteemed works and their authors, he is attempting to tell the story, largely unknown in the English-speaking world and, in reality little known to this day in Italy or the rest of Europe, of what one might call the Stalinization of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I) in the early to mid-1920's, with Antonio Gramsci as Stalin's hatchet man in that country.

Chiaradia has had, to put it mildly, a difficult time getting this story out. Both academic and left publishing in the English-speaking world, where Italy is concerned, are dominated by what one might call the "Anglo-American Gramsci Mafia". Chiaradia's manuscripts, which go back to his 1972 doctoral thesis *The Spectral Figure of Amadeo Bordiga*¹ have been rejected time and again by "outside readers" beholden to this particular form of academic *omerta*. Some of his manuscripts have been returned from publishers without comment. The following work, written in 2001, was also relegated to the "gnawing critique of the mice" (Marx), or, in more contemporary terms, of the computer virus, as it were.

Only in the past two decades has the English-speaking radical left become vaguely aware of the name of Amadeo Bordiga. Even

¹ Available from Amazon as a print-on-demand book: *The Spectral Figure of Amadeo Bordiga: A Case Study in the Decline of Marxism in the West, 1912-26*.

the broadly left communist and libertarian milieu, has had a hard time getting past the specter of the Bordiga, "more Leninist than Lenin" for whom Lenin was the unabashed "rehabilitator of Marxism", who tried to convince Lenin to drop the term "democratic centralism" (too much of a concession to democratic ideology) for "organic centralism". Difficulties are only enhanced by the few English translations of Bordiga's work. Checking the on-line catalogue of the best university library in the U.S., I found 550 titles about Antonio Gramsci, and 10 about Bordiga, none in English. That is a 55:1 ratio. Yet I would say that Bordiga is easily 55 times more important than Gramsci in the current ferment attempting to discover and develop a revolutionary communist theory for our time.

Before going any further, a cautionary note: Bordiga would retch at any personalization of his theoretical work, any attempt to concoct a "Bordigism". He saw himself merely as the expression of the "invariance" of the work of Marx and Engels, however much one might quarrel with his understanding of that invariance, or whether there is such a thing. Bordiga, in his own mind, was one theoretician of the Italian Communist Left, nothing more or less. (For an elaboration of the full content of that current, see the invaluable book of Philippe Bourrinet, *The Italian Communist Left*, available at <http://www.left-dis.nl/>)

What a contrast with the post-1945 reverence for Gramsci. A quick glance at recent titles of "Gramsci studies" reveals work on a neo-Gramscian theory of international relations, a similar one on a neo-Gramscian political economy, Gramsci on pedagogy as compared to Paulo Freire, Gramsci on hegemony, on psychology and on space; the post-colonial Gramsci, Gramsci and Walter Benjamin, Gramsci and Hannah Arendt, etc.

One can of course not blame Gramsci for what others have done in his name since his death in prison in 1937, but one can surely recognize that the *intransigence* that shines through the writings of Bordiga and of the Italian Communist Left (many of whose books are collective, anonymous works) would hardly provide comparable material for all the academics, editors, publishers, etc. who have made careers from "Gramsci studies".

Chiaradia, in the text that follows, properly shows how all the key works on Gramsci available in English, including those of Cammett, Boggs, Piccone, and Hoare, are shot through with at best ignorance and at worst simple dishonesty about Gramsci's

role in destroying the left-wing majority of the PCd'I. These works and many others tend to pass quickly over the crucial years of the early 1920's and blithely discuss Gramsci's development with nary a mention of Stalin or the "Bolshevization" i.e. Stalinization, of the international communist movement in 1924-25, nominally under the auspices of Gregory Zinoviev. Bordiga, whose role as key figure in the majority left-wing of the first years (1921-1923) of the PCd'I can hardly be denied, is referred to repeatedly in these works as "dogmatic", "rigid", and "sectarian", but no one excels in this school of distortion and falsification like Paul Piccone, in whose book *Italian Marxism* Bordiga is referred to as a "vulgar" "Marxist-Leninist" and a Stalinist. Piccone is obviously quite innocent of any knowledge of Bordiga's speech to the Extended Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) in 1926, in which he, as the last western revolutionary to do so, read the riot act to Stalin and his flunkies over the destruction of the International, after which Stalin was heard to say that while not agreeing with him, "Bordiga says what he thinks", a searing if inadvertent commentary on all those figures populating the heights of the Russian and other parties who had already learned not to say what they thought².

In conclusion, one can hardly read Chiaradia's polemical "review of the literature" without recalling the grandeur of the years from 1917 to 1923, when the European parties that emerged to found the Communist International in England, France, Germany and Italy were quite different from what they were by 1924, for the simple reason that they were based on, and expressed, radical mass working-class movements. Bordiga, who lived until 1970, may have spent decades of his life in his study, producing after 1945 the highly original works for which he is now becoming known³, but from 1912 till 1926 he was a prominent figure in a mass workers' movement. We, today, may feel separated as by an abyss from the realities that produced Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Korsch, Sylvia Pankhurst, Pierre Monatte, Alfred Rosmer, Herman Gorter, or Anton Pannekoek (or John Reed in the

² I believe it was James P. Cannon, future leader of American Trotskyism, who said around this time that the Third International "takes leaders and turns them into shit, and takes shit and turns it into leaders".

³ His very early discovery of the importance of Marx's 1844 manuscripts, a two-volume study of Soviet capitalism, pamphlets of the 1950's and 1960's demonstrating the *social* character of what became known as the environmental crisis, on the agrarian question, and much more, regrettably still not widely translated into English.

U.S. or Andres Nin in Spain or the peripatetic Victor Serge), and all had their strengths and weaknesses, which were, we should recall, the strengths and weakness of the world working-class movement of that era. Looking back, it is above all the Italian Communist Left and the German-Dutch councilists, who in very different ways, at the dawn of the Third International, insisted that the Russian Revolution and its worker-peasant alliance could not be a universal model for the advanced capitalist world, who speak to us most directly from that moment.

Chiaradia, in his decades-long attempt to clear away the webs of falsification, ignorance and complacency about Amadeo Bordiga and the Italian Communist Left, has made one contribution to a retrieval of what is living from that era.

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New York City
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John Chiaradia

AMADEO BORDIGA AND THE MYTH OF ANTONIO GRAMSCI

PREFACE

A fruitful contribution to the renaissance of Marxism requires a purely historical treatment of the twenties as a period of the revolutionary working class movement

which is now entirely closed.
This is the only way to make its
experiences and lessons properly
relevant to the essentially new
phase of the present.

Gyorgy Lukács,
1967

Marxism has been the greatest fantasy of our century.

Leszek Kolakowski

When I began this commentary, both the USSR and the PCI (the Italian Communist Party) had disappeared. Basing myself on earlier archival work and supplementary readings, I set out to show that the change signified by the rise of Antonio Gramsci to leadership (1924-1926) had, contrary to nearly all extant commentary on that event, a profoundly negative impact on Italian Communism. As a result and in time, the very essence of the party was drained, and it was derailed from its original intent, namely, that of class revolution. As a consequence of these changes, the party would play an altogether different role from the one it had been intended for. By way of evidence, my intention was to establish two points and draw the connecting straight line. They were: one, developments in the Soviet party; two, the tandem echo in the Italian party led by Gramsci, with the connecting line being the ideology and practices associated at the time with Stalin, which I label Center communism. Hence, from the time of Gramsci's return from the USSR in 1924, there had been a parental relationship between the two parties. Discussion accompanies the origin and rise of this dependency.

One cannot fully understand the history of the PCI, the influence it exerted on Italian politics, and its undramatic and quiet demise without knowledge of this early period. The

dissolution of the USSR surprised me, although it should not have. In contrast, the disappearance of the Italian party, if unexpected, was fully in keeping with the changes alluded to below and its subsequent history. Many years ago in the conclusion of an early study of Italian communism, I had written, “When a Western Stalinist party finally breaks down--the PCI in Italy--it remains on the right, never moving to the left, thus disclosing again the nature of its genesis.”⁴ One of the most astounding aspects of this story is not the transformation undergone in the mid-1920s, but that in the English-speaking world the change has remained unknown.

One may surmise that when faced with the beginning of the total collapse of the “socialist camp” at the end of the 1980s, the Communist leadership found itself confronted by a stark dilemma: either go to the left--a step it could not undertake because of its very nature--and assert its intention of remaining a party of socialism, bringing into play a reconsideration of past policies and history going back to Gramsci and earlier with all the destabilization that might arise as had already happened in the Soviet party, or move “to the right and to the front” and declare its fealty to the bourgeois order, thereby closing off that past and openly acknowledge its own non-socialist allegiance. The leadership chose the latter, and the largest communist party in the West disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. In reality, as in the USSR, programmatically and ideologically the reconciliation with capitalism had been building within the party for decades.

Meanwhile, I had to react to the appearance of a number of new studies and a conference on Gramsci at Columbia University. The first of the new titles, a work by Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism, the Western European Left in the 20th Century*,⁵ was brought to my attention by a friend to whom I had given an early manuscript for critical comment. When it became

⁴ In unpublished Ph.D, pp. 378-379. See n66.

⁵ New York, New Press: 1996.

clear that Sassoon knew absolutely nothing about the origins of Italian communism yet continued to repeat the old disinformation about the early years, I found his history the perfect foil for my views. The same may be said for the conference. My knowledge of what transpired there was due also to friends who attended, did not agree with the views expressed, and brought me papers distributed by the discussants. The only speaker who actually centered his comments on “Gramsci and modernity,” the stated theme of the deliberations, was Giancarlo Corsini; that said, I believe that the annual American Halloween fad celebrating vampires does not necessarily imply a significant social influence going back to Bram Stoker’s lively and imaginative writing. My treatment of the conference will clarify this point.

As the second millennium approached its own *fin de siecle*, a cascade of new analytical studies emerged in Italy centering on the political activities of the two major figures of early Italian communism, Amadeo Bordiga and Antonio Gramsci.⁶ The significance of these new titles to this writing is that they provided additional reinforcement of my own archival findings from the early

⁶ These include: 1.) volumes I&II of an VIII-volume anthology of all of Bordiga’s writings to 1926: 1) Luigi Gerosa, *Amadeo Bordiga, Scritti 1911-1926, I, Dalla guerra di Libia al Congresso socialista di Ancona, 1911-1914*, (Graphos, Genova: 1996); *Amadeo Bordiga, Scritti 1911-1926, La guerra, la rivoluzione russa e la nuova Internazionale, 1914-1918, II*, (1998). 2.) Arturo Peregalli & Sandro Saggiorno, *Amadeo Bordiga, la sconfitta e gli anni oscuri (1926-1945)* (Nuova Grafica, Milan: 1998), covering the years from the Congress of Lyons to the end of WWII. 3.) Giuseppe Vacca, *Gramsci a Roma Togliatti a Mosca* (Einaudi, Turin: 1999), an attempt to vindicate Gramsci’s behavior in light of the mounting historiographic criticism, but at the expense of Togliatti and the Russian leadership in Moscow. 4.) Luigi Cortesi, *Le origini del PCI* (FrancoAngeli, Milan: 1999), a reissue of his earlier history with up-to-date commentary. 5.) Edited by Luigi Cortesi, *Amadeo Bordiga nella storia del comunismo* (Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Naples: 1999), papers originally delivered at a conference in Bologna in 1996, with additional commentary.

1970s, and further confirmed the assessments already laid down in this commentary. I made liberal use of their new data.

To fully understand my argument, let me explain further what I mean by the key term Center communism. I intend a movement that aspires to socialism and comes to power either from a delegation of authority, as happened in Eastern Europe, or after a long, difficult revolutionary struggle, the case with Russia, Yugoslavia, China and other lands of East Asia. More tellingly, these regimes introduced economies based on state-capitalism, transformed the ruling party into an elitist formation served by power and special privileges, and excluded the working population from meaningful empowerment, even as they laid claim to building an existing socialism. By meaningful, I mean the ability to raise, consider, and carry through command decisions by the working class itself. By state-capitalism, I mean the elimination of private ownership of all aspects of productive resources, without the socialist corollary: the laboring class involvement as an expression of mastery in all aspects of the change, and the steps toward the elimination of commodity production. Most importantly of all, that class continued to experience degradation and exploitive alienation, labored and lived in social relations not dissimilar from those of capitalism, and never matured--never was permitted to mature--politically and intellectually into a "ruling class" endowed with the decisive voice, authority and understanding to implement, *qua* working class, the change of relationships and the assumption of responsibilities that would transform and move itself and society onto a new stage--that of socialism. The absence of private ownership became the fiction concealing the invariant continuity in social relations.

Such an undertaking would have to be preceded by an enormous educational effort by the party, a party capable of both leading and following, motivated by a different vision of its role and

acceptance of its limits; one that understands socialism to be the handiwork of the many million-numbered working and allied classes, not of the short-lived exiguous party, and responds to the ever changing realities of the class to the point of knowing when its very existence is no longer needed. Therefore, a party not only of democratic incorporation but dedicated also to revolutionary transformation. With the change enacted, both the doctrine and the organization have no further role. Instead, the arrival and formation of a command economy give notice that the socialist transformation has been derailed.

In this age of triumphant capitalist elitism one can both not imagine and find unreal the thought of working and lower-class millions involved in the actual common effort of devising and laying out the social relations of a new society; of the common working people bearing up and delivering themselves from the deforming heritage of the old society as they face, in concert with peers, the daunting responsibility of sacrifice, power, decision-making, and error; venturing into social relations never conceived of before; of what this will do to them and to their society, a transformed social surrounding that must come to exclude all relations and transactions of a commercial or monetary nature, including wages, wealth, titles and inheritance. In summary, this would involve the conscious and deliberate construction of an entirely new social order, that, in the end, would be of a sight and scale—internationally, that is-- more awing, inspiring, and astonishing than the building of pyramids in that early dawn of antiquity.

One might paraphrase and quote here those magnificent lines from Lenin's *State and Revolution*, often dismissed as mere utopian babble by the hard, practical men of class society and class restoration. Discussing the Paris Commune and how the society it had briefly given life to was something “qualitatively” different, a democracy “transformed from capitalist democracy into

proletarian democracy,” and the state “into something which is no longer the state in the accepted sense of the word,” Lenin continued with the dismantling of the old regime: “the organ of suppression is now the majority of the population [the dictatorship of the proletariat] and not a minority, as was the case with slavery, serfdom and wage labor. And, once the majority of the people *itself* suppresses its oppressors, a ‘special force’ for suppression is *no longer necessary*. In his sense the state begins *to wither away*...[T]he more the discharge of state power devolves upon the people generally, the less need is there for the existence of this power.”⁷

In Lenin’s lifetime such an implementation was nigh impossible. Never did the opportunity arise during the decades when the “socialist camp” towered on the world scene. We see now that it signaled a derailment, perhaps better described as a changing of tracks, for the very leadership of those Centrist regimes would have been amongst the most opposed. For the skeptical of mind who regard such views as mere fantasy, in its initial ages on the Earth mankind faced and solved through communal social effort even greater problems; to name a few, the development of language, the creation of a social organization and the invention of technology, which allowed it to survive more easily and progress to the level of establishing documented history. Nevertheless, no Center communist movement ever ventured beyond a capitalism of state; no working class functioned in those societies other than to produce surplus value, never rising above a salaried labor force.

My use of the term, therefore, is simply instrumental--to make clear my views. I intend no wider application. I do insist that behind the political changes discussed in Italy and the USSR there was a commonality of practice and ideology of no small importance. Many historians have discussed and analyzed the Soviet ties with the Western parties; nonetheless, to the very end, one

⁷ *State and Revolution* (International Publishers, New York: 1974), p. 37.

should not discount the power and influence emanating from the presence, example, and policies of the Centrist Soviet party.

“Leninism [he meant the machinery of political control],” Deng Xiaoping allegedly remarked, “is important, and the rest [Marxism, the vision and rationale of an alternative egalitarian society that informs the goal of Leninist practice] is nonsense.” Whether apocryphal or his actual words (to which I added explanatory bracketed comments) is of small importance here, but the sentiments aptly describe the underlying practice of the creed. Indeed, one needed no Marxism to justify that practice of “Leninism.” A well-run and properly oriented mafia would have done just as well, once the old regime had been removed.

The parabola of the political change that came over and overcame the early communist movement may be illustrated by two events. The first was the “Appeal to the Workers of Europe, America and Japan” issued in 1920 by the First Congress of the Peoples of the East held in Baku: representatives of twenty Asian peoples issued a call to the workers of the West to join in the effort to rid the world of oppression. Signed by Zinoviev, the document expressed the earlier revolutionary Bolshevism rather than the deceptive later Center communism. The transformation of the inner values and import of communist politics in the 1920s remains one aspect of the twentieth century that has yet to be revealed in its fullest.

Lastly, in the research I was struck by the parallelism in the use of terms that bespeaks of common experiences within the early communist movement during the first decade after 1917, vivid markers of the changes alluded to above. Thus, Robert V. Daniels in 1960 chose “state of siege” to describe conditions in the Soviet party of 1923; the term was identical with Bordiga’s depiction of the Italian party of 1926. “Strangled,” declared Trotsky in 1927, intending the fate of a

party at the hands of Stalin and his followers; “suffocating us,” Bordiga averred eighteen months earlier, registering what befell the majoritarian current in the Italian party, the *Sinistra*, under Gramsci’s leadership. In both instances, the likelihood that the earlier use prompted the later term is zero.

When most on the American Left, for example, hailed the Vietnamese resistance to American imperialism, wrongly believing that the liberation of Saigon and the end of a victorious national unification would bring Vietnam to the dawn of a renascent new-day socialism, the monthly organ of the postwar *Sinistra* party reported an assessment that seemed outrageous. In a leaflet passed out at the gates of factories, they wrote, “The war in Vietnam may be over... the real war by the masses of Vietnam has yet to begin. It will be a social war, a revolutionary war, the aim of which will not be ‘freedom’ or ‘independence,’ which are mere words from blabbermouths, but bread and land. Their victory will be possible only if their heroic example awakens in your hearts and arms the flame of revolutionary class action...”⁸ I did not know it then but this was the message of the Baku Appeal addressed anew to the workers of the West and again emphasizing that only the joint efforts of both halves of the world would bring about a global move to socialism.

Both as a closing and as a beginning and to forewarn the reader by indicating what can be expected in the subsequent text, I thought it best to reproduce here the latest relevant comment by Giorgio Galli, an important and long-active political commentator on the Italian scene. On the occasion of the opening in the city of Formia, in May 2000, of the Amadeo Bordiga Foundation (*Fondazione Amadeo Bordiga*), he wrote: “Amadeo Bordiga was long ignored by the official

⁸ “La Vera Guerra delle Masse Popolari Vietnamite comincia ora,” “*Il Programma Comunista*,” February 8, 1973. At the time, I was so struck by the piece that I clipped it, never dreaming that after two decades a confirming study would appear in the West.

historiography that called itself Communist, that traced itself back to Stalin, and lasted into the nineteen eighties. It is significant that we begin again to talk about Bordiga at a time when that self-defined communist movement seems to have vanished, and its history is now viewed as something criminal or at most an illusion. This is important because Bordiga is the evidence that the history of communism is also the account of a scientific thought, and as such will not end with the year 2000.”⁹

The commentary that follows--a “rethinking of Marxism,” to cite the going phrase--is one with a wide and perhaps still too fitful a re-assessment occurring across the globe heralding, one would hope, an international renaissance of the Left. The process was actually moved along and helped by the collapse of Center communism and its faux socialism. Moreover, the urgency for that Left grows with each unfolding world crisis. These pages were not written for the skeptic, the ‘non-believer.’ There will be plenty of time, breath, and argument to deal with them further along, although noting that with each leveling of the playing field, the formidability of conservative and liberal argument diminishes . For the past half century and more, the political exchanges in the public arena have been entertained in the absence of a contender on the left. Thus, the commentary is directed to those who have not reconciled themselves with the dissolution of the significant socialist class-movement that turned the corner with the arrival of the 20th century; who sense further that socialism was never truly tested despite claims to the contrary. Hence, all the original questions, possibilities, and political confrontations remain open, even as the frightful social, political, ecological conditions associated with “free-marketism” and the brutal American military

⁹ Quoted from the brochure, “*Fondazione Amadeo Bordiga*,” Formia, May 27, 2000.

hegemony worsen the present and darken the future toward which mankind advances. Amidst these circumstances, I add my findings and views. Simply stated, my intention is to recuperate a lost past, suggest a more accurate understanding of the present, and employ both in structuring the arriving future.

With the exception of the pages found in “The Agony of the *Sinistra*, ” all writings date from the mid-1990s. As indicated by the EPILOGUE, I first set out simply to clarify Gramsci’s actions after his return to Italy in 1924. With the realization that to understand Gramsci’s political behavior his writings from the early years had to be analyzed, I added GRAMSCI’S EARLY WRITINGS AND LATER HISTORY, containing an appended review of how the Gramsci of that period is usually depicted. With the ADDENDUM, I chose to generalize further on the themes found in the EPILOGUE and EARLY WRITINGS, providing more details and ranging more widely in my considerations.

I am well aware that I took shortcuts and sacrificed historical diversity to the end of dramatizing my thesis; beyond this limited introductory offer, there is room and need for additional histories. They are coming, impelled by the crises of capitalism.

One final comment: a shorter and earlier version was submitted to one of the left journals. Two editors agreed to publish the EPILOGUE, but were overruled by others who felt that the final dedicatory remarks addressed to the memory of Italian anti-fascists of yore--no more than several pages in many--reduced the paper from an historical document to a personal writing. That assessment brought to mind the woeful tale of an unfortunate princess who spent a sleepless night because of a pea under the mattress. In the end, I turned the dedication into a separate piece. My interest in those men and women is both personal and historical, the more so now that they are both

gone and forgotten. With history being the account of the human collective that goes beyond an assemblage of facts, none deserve to be left out. Further justification is superfluous.

All terms and names in this Preface will be explained or identified below.

A DEDICATION

A Stevenà la Resistenza nacque col fascismo.¹⁰

If I had the power of invocation, it would be to call up the spectral figures of two men, Antonio Gramsci and Amadeo Bordiga, for one last debate before the Italian anti-fascists whom I remember from before, during, and after the World War. These were the men and women who endured exile, went to Spain, and suffered additional privations and want in those difficult times. They lived with years of loneliness, often seized by a consuming longing for home and village of which they would talk about amongst themselves even as they shouldered the left movements of their day. One met and saw them on May Day and at the innumerable banquets and kindred activities used to raise funds for and in support of their political goals. These were men and women of great political passion, often tempered by a deep-grained humility. Their admission to the US was hampered and rendered difficult by the immigration laws of 1921, 1924, and 1929, given their low social status. Numerically a handful compared to the many in the Italian emigrant colonies of Latin America and Western Europe, they formed a separate exiguous human stream coursing through the small seas of the various Italian-American communities in the US, communities that never understood, embraced, honored or remember them. The topics of their

¹⁰ "In Stevenà, the Resistance was born with fascism." From a pamphlet, *"Ricordi del partigiano 'Freccia,'"* by Toni Pessot (Savioprint, S.p.a., Pordenone: 1985). Stevenà is a workingclass borough of Caneva, a commune in the western Friuli-Venezia Giulia region of Italy. The author, Pessot, an *alpino*, was sent to the Russian front in 1942 as punishment for anti-fascist activity. Surviving the ordeal, upon returning he became a leader in the Resistance. The anti-fascism of Stevenà, often tied to or motivated by a socialist ideology, was typical of the towns in the Carnic piedmont.

political discourse were invariably the same: party, class, class struggle, anti-fascism, and socialism; for most, Soviet socialism was an article of faith.

Overwhelmingly of humble working-class origin and inarticulate when it came down to written testimonials, they hardly figure in the subsequent American literature on the enemies of fascism even if they were the body and soul of the active anti-fascist movement. No history speaks of them because they left few traces. If the beautiful Udinese Tina Modotti is recalled at all in the US today, it is more for her photography and limited role in Hollywood, less so for her years of dedicated political activism; a comparable male figure would bring to mind Yves Montand, the memorable French actor born to a family of anti-fascist Tuscan exiles. In their anonymous mass, those somber, dark-eyed and dark-haired anti-fascists can be viewed today looking out from every photograph commemorative of an anti-fascist event of those years. If they may be paralleled to any movement in modern Italian history, it would be to the early Jacobin-republicans who between 1789 and 1815 embodied deep historical impulses and raised the banner of a united republican Italy. By 1815, the numbers who had fought and died, been sentenced to prison, or fled into exile mounted into the thousands. Nevertheless, these largely unnamed patriots laid the political basis for the subsequent *Risorgimento*.¹¹ I know of no memorial commemorating them. Likewise, I know of none that invokes the steadfastness and the long vigil of the anti-fascists.¹²

Few now would recall André Malreaux's homage: a recounting of the attack on the Ibarra Palace by the gray-haired volunteers of the Garibaldi Brigade, closely supported by other foreign

¹¹ Giorgio Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia moderna*, vol. I (Milan, Feltrinelli: 1972), pp. 289-375. Possibly the most sympathetic short account.

¹² Unforgettable accounts of the anti-fascists are found in André Malreaux's *Man's Hope*, and in two volumes by Gustav Reglar: *The Owl of Minerva* and *The Great Crusade*.

volunteers, and all of whom joined in intoning the Internationale. Perhaps because the tormented and the exiled were now coming face to face with their tormentors, or those who fronted for them, the ardor of the attackers was such that they seemed impervious to the machine-gun fire. So began the drama that would lead to the great rout of the Italian fascist legions at Guadalajara in 1937. Gustav Reglar, a German exile and major chronicler of the International Brigades, provided a proper epitaph for the fallen, the Italian volunteers and their international comrades: "Their lives had been stolen from them, from them who had pondered most deeply upon the well-being of their country." Several decades later in his autobiography, Reglar remembered the Internationals with a note of mournful realism: "Seldom have men drawn so close to the problems of the century, while remaining so remote from the masses they wished to serve."

Meanwhile, time has claimed these anti-fascists. Today, decades later, if as a whole they remain unforgettable, most often only a partial individual identification is possible : Zorzini from Zara (now Zadar); Aurelio from Capodistria (now Koper); Sbogar and John and Maria Mihalich from Trieste; Piero, Antonietta, and Giacomo from Udine; Ugo, Cadore; Italo and Ida, Verona; the Lendinaras, Veneto; La Milanese, Milan; Bonacci, Genoa; Mazzetti, Piedmont; Terenzio, Ildegonda and Verbana, Romagna; Arturo, Beppo and Ada, Tuscany; Sanbucetto, Abruzzi; Gabriele and Tony, Campania; Perrotti, Avellino; Joe and the brothers Mariotti, Sardinia; Tondo, Apulie; Michele Salerno, Calabria; Giurato and Nino Siracusa, along with Gaspare Nicotri, who as an oldster in the 1950s recalled with pride his role as a Garibaldian volunteer in the Greek war for independence in the 1890s, Sicily; Lippa for the hundred whose names I've forgotten; Vito for the

faces that have blurred; Altieri for the "*Auslanders*" in Rochester, Detroit, Philadelphia, Chicago and elsewhere; Candela for all Italy. And the memory of several Italian-Americans symbolic of those who worked closely and identified with them: Mary Testa, Charlie Cafiero, and Tony Lombardo; Maria Palazzola for those steadfast women I never did get to meet or have not named, amongst them Frances Ribaud and Esther D'Addario. In all, an Athenian jury of 500.

As foreman of the jury, Bruno Allorto, the last of the *amici*, who died in 1989 still remembering when Giuseppe Berti came to New York during the war years laying claim to a prepotency drawn from "Big Stalin" to proclaim his authority as a "Little Stalin." The same Berti who never admitted to having defamed Bordiga across four decades, and also accused him of having been--a utopian! Along with Marx, Lenin, and, metaphorically, God, for in a most imaginative instant the universe was cleaved from darkness and two beings were created with an independent will of their own. Expelled from Eden, they began the return.

Before this jury, and in the light of subsequent history, Gramsci and Bordiga would have to defend their views of 1914-1926. I've no doubt how the jury would decide. Nor am I uncertain how it would deal with the shades of a Giuseppe Berti, Ruggiero Grieco and a Palmiro Togliatti. The reasons for those views will be indicated in the subsequent text. If at times one senses almost a Manichean contrasting between Gramsci and Bordiga, responsibility for this rests primarily on the Togliattian leadership of Italian communism: between the late 1920s and the 1960s that leadership did its utmost to cover over and bury the actual origins of that movement, and in the process idolatrizing one man (Gramsci) and besmirching the other (Bordiga). There is pathology here that goes well beyond normative historiographic deception. Indeed, Gramsci began the process.

PROLOGUE

“A Leninist before Lenin, bah!”

Antonio Gramsci , speaking about Amadeo Bordiga,
at the Congress of Lyons.¹³

The chapter that follows, “The Agony of the *Sinistra*,” is based largely on data obtained in 1970 at the Italian State Archives and the Antonio Gramsci Institute in Rome, and took its extant form in 1972. At the time, the methodology of research at each archive differed. At the State Archives, one asked for prefectural reports from 1921, and huge folders--all that the State possessed, one had the impression--were delivered. The researcher's task was to search through innumerable documents much the way a placer miner sieves through a sandbar for flecks and flashes of gold. In contrast, at the Gramsci Institute if I wanted, say, the letters exchanged between Gramsci and Amadeo Bordiga in 1925, the *annus terribilis* of Italian communism, a selected number of letters were placed before me. It was never, "You will find what you are seeking in these 1925 documents." Simply stated: some one else had made a narrow selection. Only later did I question the method of documentary presentation, when it was claimed that some researchers were

¹³ Gramsci's sarcastic comment upon hearing Bordiga recall that a Marxist current, the *Sinistra*, had existed in the Socialist Party prior to World War I. Quoted in Arturo Peregalli & Sandro Soggiorno, *Amadeo Bordiga, la sconfitta e gli anni oscuri (1926-1945)* (Milan, *La Graffica Nuova*: 1998), p.71.

denied access to the Institute on political grounds.¹⁴ I must add, when requested the Institute made copies of documents shown me.

The archival material upon which the chapter rests remained a "disjointed and unassembled" puzzle until the early months of 1971. By then I was back in the stacks of Butler Library, Columbia University, reading through the Feltrinelli Reprints of *L'Unita`* (1924-26), the issues of that paper prior to its suppression by the fascist authorities. On June 7, 1925, there appeared the first harsh attack ostensibly against a Committee of Understanding, but in reality against the entire *Sinistra* and Amadeo Bordiga. The article was the beginning of a "mobilized" press campaign of distortion and disinformation that must rank amongst the worst in Italian leftwing history, although it is almost never mentioned in accounts of Italian communism, and when mentioned even more rarely assessed. As I leafed through the hyperbole, hysteria, and heavy-handedness, the aggressive use of this party organ in a factional disagreement coalesced with the unassembled data mentioned above to recall a pattern encountered earlier.

The recollection that led to my recognizing the pattern arose from another fortuitous circumstance. The sources on the origins of Italian communism found at Columbia in the late 1960s--the Feltrinelli Reprints, a few Italian periodicals from the first and many more from the second postwar, copies of the dissident "*La rivista storica del socialismo*," and numerous monographs, amongst the most revealing being works by Soviet authors, were sufficient to establish

¹⁴ Letter to this writer from a researcher in the mid-1970s. In the letter, he claimed that researchers from the *Partito Comunista Internazionale* (PCInt.) were denied use of the Institute. Later, I sent him my copies of documents. He had known Bordiga, and when we met in 1991, he was making free use of the Archive, and thought the Institute was in "terrible condition." Knowing of my use of his name, in 1997 he requested that it not be known for fear that the Institute would introduce research restrictions.

that Gramsci's role in the formation of Italian communism was limited, a point by then already beginning to be conceded by Italian communist historians and clearly indicated by Paolo Spriano's sub-title to tome 1 of a multivolume opus: *The History of the Italian Communist Party, I. From Bordiga to Gramsci* (trans.).¹⁵ Simultaneously, I assiduously read the literature of the debates and events in the Soviet Communist party in the 1920s. Although I had long known the overall results of the struggle between Stalin and his opponents, I now sought out the inner details. This led me to consult works by Trotsky--his *Lessons of October* and *The New Course*--Moshe Lewin, Robert V. Daniels, Edward H. Carr, and others. What stood out in all accounts were the manipulative politics and underhanded organizational maneuvers used by Stalin and his Center faction to prevail over opponents whose political stature and ideological keenness they could not match. When it suddenly struck me to apply these schemata to the events in the Italian party of 1925, all the disjointed and unassembled materials fell into a logical, complementary, and interrelated whole. Hence, using data taken from archival and other primary sources, "The Agony of the *Sinistra*" is a recounting of how Gramsci, upon returning to Italy after a long stay in the USSR and Vienna, led his newly-organized Center faction to the overwhelming victory claimed at the III Congress of Lyons in January, 1926.

Let me make clear that I use the term *Sinistra* to identify the political current that became the founding element of the *Partito Comunista d'Italia* (PCd'I)¹⁶ of 1921. Identified under various

¹⁵ Paolo Spriano, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano, I. Da Gramsci a Bordiga* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1967).

¹⁶ The Togliattian leadership later changed the name to *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI); as the USSR and the "socialist" east collapsed, the PCI became the *Partito democratico della sinistra* (PDS), a party without any radical ideology, revolutionary intents, or socialist goals. Later, it changed again to *Democratici di sinistra* (DS).

designations¹⁷ and never formally organized as a separate political organization prior to that date, this current, whose views were most clearly and consistently expressed by Amadeo Bordiga, had been assembling over the previous decade in the leftwing of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and the Socialist Youth Federation (FGS), but was unable to influence national socialist policy at critical moments. The foremost example illustrating this condition was the Bologna meeting of the socialist leadership on the eve of Italy's calculated entrance into World War I in May, 1915. Earlier, reflecting the influence of the *Sinistra*, the 10,000-strong FGS had voted support for a general strike.¹⁸ *Sinistra* spokesmen representing the sections at Naples, Turin, Viareggio, and Forlì¹⁹ demanded a general strike. Reformists and parliamentarians on the right opposed any street action. In her study of the Milanese *Sinistra*, Mirella Mingrado quotes the remarks Bordiga directed at the Socialist rightwing, "It is not that you are afraid of the consequences of repression; we do not accuse you of cowardice; but you are afraid of being accused of betraying the Motherland."

¹⁷ Enzo Santarelli, *La revisione del marxismo in Italia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964), p. 128, and Giuseppe Berti, *I primi dieci anni del P.C.I.* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1967), p. 39 *et passim*. Santarelli uses "socialismo `rivoluzionario'" to identify the current, and Berti "una sinistra organizzativa...dal 1912." Both men were guardians of PCI historiographic orthodoxy, and Berti's 1930s-50s writings were simply Stalinist. Also, see Luigi Cortesi, *Le origini del Partito comunista italiano* (Bari: Laterza, 1973), p. 210. For a firstclass history of the Milanese *Sinistra*, see work of Mirella Mingrado, details in n19 below.

¹⁸ *Storia della sinistra comunista Italiana* [henceforth, Sdsc] (Edizioni "il programma comunista del Partito comunista internazionale" Milan: 1964), I, p. 122.

¹⁹ Mirella Mingrado, *Mussolini, Turati e Fortichiari, La formazione della sinistra socialista a Milano* (Graphos, Genoa: ?), p.101. A detailed account of the rise of the Milanese *Sinistra*; unfortunately, by stopping at 1918, she left undone the chronicle of the most dramatic years, 1919-1926: the struggle for the formation of a revolutionary party, the battle against fascism, and the *Sinistra's* suppression at the hands of the new Center led by Gramsci.

The compromise agreed to represented a muffled defeat for the *Sinistra* and was classically expressed by Costantino Lazzari's evasive slogan "neither support nor sabotage," more meaningfully translated as "neither support nor resistance." The Socialist Party would neither support nor oppose the decision to fling the nation and the peasant-worker army into the "furnace" (Benedetto Croce's metaphor) of a senseless, imperialistic war.

Early on at the onset of hostilities in August 1914, Bordiga analyzed in the national edition of *Avanti!* the imperialistic nature of the conflict and the need to maintain neutrality.²⁰ In December, he stressed that in the event of "defensive war," the ruse that had been used to ruin the International, socialists were obliged to unhesitatingly "weaken the State [nation] in which they find themselves."²¹ Probably in recognition of the acuity of his insight into these events, after Bologna, Bordiga returned with the obituary. Noting the blood sacrifice now to be demanded of the working class, he concluded by laying out the twin perspectives facing socialists: "Either towards a pseudo-national socialism or a new international."²²

Long afterwards, some historians erroneously espied an echo of Leninism in Bordiga's early writings,²³ though in general they are either totally overlooked or mentioned hastily in passing.

²⁰ *Avanti!*, August 14, 1914

²¹ *Avanti!*, Dec 21, 1914. By 1913, Bordiga has seen through the "defensive war" ploy used to entrap the working classes of both sides. See Franco Livorsi, *Amadeo Bordiga* (Rome: Riuniti, 1976), p. 43.

²² *Avanti!*, May 23, 1915.

²³ Gwyn A. Williams, *Proletarian Order* (London: Pluto Press, 1975), p. 12. John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (California: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 38.

None who have published expositions favorable to Antonio Gramsci--John Cammett,²⁴ Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith,²⁵ and Paul Piccone,²⁶ to name a few--have appositioned the war views of the two men, a comparison that would highlight the amateurishness of Gramsci's intellectual justification of Mussolini's late 1914 interventionism—that Italy join the war against the Central Powers. If the omission of Bordiga's prewar writings is at best an historical oversight, to write the early history of Italian communism without acknowledging the *Sinistra*, warps the historical record by omitting the political matrix from whence the PCd'I arose. Doing so disregards evidence and violates the very canons that make history a discipline of the social sciences.²⁷

Bordiga was active in Naples; the *Sinistra* was an overwhelmingly northern working-class movement. If not novel, the two—Bordiga and the *Sinistra*-- established a symbiosis that was striking for its day. During all the early years of Italian communism Milan, Alessandria, Novara, and Turin in particular remained northern strongholds of *Sinistra* activity and loyalty. Ironically, May 1915 testified to the strength and presence of the left current in Turin. One of the specious policy agreements entered into by the socialist leadership at the Bologna meeting indicated above devolved to each local socialist section the initiative to act against the war. From the very beginning of the war crisis in May 1915, the Socialists and working class of Turin began to assume strong

²⁴ *Supra*, footnote 9.

²⁵ Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith, Vol. I. *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Political Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

²⁶ Paul Piccone, *Italian Marxism* (University of California Press, 1983).

²⁷ The assessment applies to the works of Williams, Piccone, Hoare & Smith, and Cammett. Even Martin Clark's very fine reading of Gramsci's Turin years in his *Antonio Gramsci and the Revolution that Failed* (Yale University Press, New Haven: 1977) is marred by the omission.

antiwar stances.²⁸ These activities may have been coordinated through an understanding between Pietro Rabezzana and Bruno Fortichiari, respectively from the anti-war Turinese socialists and Milanese *Sinistra*.²⁹ Having opted for a general strike as Italy neared the war declaration, the Turinese working class went out and was bloodied by the police. Finding itself alone, the action was quickly ended.³⁰ The event foreshadowed what would happen in 1919-1920.

There is unanimous agreement amongst *all* writers of the early history of Italian communism that the cadre of the PCd'I's and the rank and file were *Sinistra* in loyalty and views until after the revealing Como Conference of May, 1924. Palmiro Togliatti conceded the same in a letter from November 1924.³¹ Disagreement arises over what happened next. Stating the problem candidly: How was Gramsci able to garner the 90.8 percent majority at the Lyons Congress of January, 1926, a mere fourteen months after Togliatti's testimonial letter?

To better understand the debate and the nature of the changes involved, the reader must have some idea of the history of communist historiography prior to and after 1945. In its cartoon-

²⁸ Camilla Ravera, *Diario di Trent'Anni* (Rome: Riuniti, 1973). Pp. 12-14. She mentions large or huge demonstrations on May 1, 12, and 17. Joining the PSI in January, 1918, for decades she remained an associate and loyal supporter of the Togliattian leadership.

²⁹ Bruno Fortichiari, *Comunismo e revisionismo in Italia* (Turin: Tennerello, 1978), p. 31. A leading member of the socialist *Sinistra* at Milan from before 1915, he also recalled Bordiga's situation in 1915, "In Naples Bordiga was totally isolated and immobilized by negative surroundings." A founder of the PCd'I, he was a leading member of the Executive Committee and head of the underground apparatus. Fortichiari was later expelled by the exiled Togliattian leadership. Rejoining the PCI after WWII, he was again extruded.

³⁰ Discussed by Cammett, *op. cit.*, p. 36. As indicated earlier, not only does he overlook the *Sinistra*, but ascribed to Gramsci a primacy in anticipating "socialism in one country," a claim almost immediately challenged by a (then) Soviet reviewer. Cammett, p. 61 & M.A. Dodolev, "Voprosy Istorii," 1968, No. 8, pp. 193-95.

³¹ Letter of November 11, 1924, reprinted in *Rinascita*, September 29, 1962.

history written during the party's openly Stalinist years, the 1930s-1950s, there was no mention of the *Sinistra*, and Bordiga was either denounced or he was made to disappear into an "un-person."³² Exemplifying this period was a special issue of *Rinascita* commemorating the thirtieth anniversary (1951) of the PCI. In preparation, Togliatti had ordered Bordiga depicted in a "critical and destructive fashion."³³ Acting as the hatchet-man, Giuseppe Berti presented Bordiga as a "Trotskyist," "fascist sympathizer," and "supporter of the bourgeois class."³⁴ In the same period from the thirties to the fifties Gramsci was most often referred to as "the founder of the party," the proponent of "Italian soviets," and the "leader of the [Italian] working class."³⁵ Distortion and interchanging of roles extended even to a dramatic, well-known incident from November 1917. Against a backdrop of the October Revolution and the defeat at Caporetto, the socialist *Sinistra* bent the party leaders to a meeting in Florence, at which Bordiga "analyzed the situation in Italy, noted the defeat at the front, the disorganization of the Italian state and ended with these words: 'We must act. The industrial proletariat is tired. But it is armed. We must act.' Gramsci agreed."³⁶ In the rewrite, Gramsci was made the speaker and Bordiga the assenter.

³² The phrase is Cammett's, p. 159.

³³ Luigi Cortesi in Angelo Tasca, *I primi dieci anni del PCI* (Bari: Laterza, 1971), p. 34.

³⁴ Berti in "*Rinascita*, 'Trenta anni di vita e di lotte del PCI,'" p. 61. (Rome, 1952).

³⁵ Palmiro Togliatti, *Il Partito comunista italiano* (Rome: Riuniti, 1961), p. 13. Also, Bordiga is a *camorrista* in P. Togliatti, *Antonio Gramsci, capo della classe operaia italiana* (Edizione del Partito Comunista Italiano, 1944).

³⁶ Originally in Giovanni Germanetto, *Souvenirs d'un perruquier* (Paris: 1931), p. 113. An example of Stalinist practice in the Italian party: a later edition omitted the event.

Since I shall invoke that period and this 1917 event more than once, it should be noted that the antiwar demonstrations, protests, and agitation that broke out in the Milanese region in August 1917, coincident with the revolt in Turin, were perhaps the most extensive from the war's beginning. In a letter to Anna Kuliscioff, Turati described them as a "*jacquerie*," adding that the women demonstrators would "kill the rich (*fare la pelle a i signori*) amongst whom--let's be clear--there is us..."³⁷ The events suggest the fragility of the Italian home front a mere two months before the overwhelming military disaster of Caporetto..

Parenthetically, Spriano began the revisionist history mentioned earlier with the 1917 event, reproduced the above passage, footnoted but did not inform his readers what Bordiga later recalled of Gramsci at Florence: "Notwithstanding all reconstruction efforts, Gramsci did not say a word."³⁸

In the 1950s the first writers began to critically question the Togliattian leadership's postwar version of communist history. As early as 1953, Giorgio Galli, initially with Fulvio Bellini and later (1958) alone, wrote challenging alternative histories of the PCI and specifically mentioned the inadmissible methods used by Gramsci to suppress the support Bordiga enjoyed in the party ranks. If at all, these works were scantily documented. During the latter fifties, the sixties, and into the seventies innumerable articles appearing in the short-lived "*La rivista storica del socialismo*" and monographs by communists and non-party leftist intellectuals provided alternative accounts of the communist past, versions that contrasted with the party-sponsored by then plural "histories."

³⁷ Mingrado, pp. 131-136.

³⁸ Spriano, p.4 and n.2. By beginning his history with 1917, Spriano skipped over the prior *Sinistra* history and Bordiga's point-man role. Bordiga's recollection is found in *Sdsc*, I, p.115. Bordiga and other anonymous members of the PCd'Int. prepared the text.

The returned testimony of Angelo Tasca (1950s) and the appearance of reprints, published memoirs, and documentaries, enriched the sources. In this new, post-Twentieth Congress period, as the PCI shed its overt Stalinist features, two pivotal documentaries emerged: *The Formation of the Leadership of the Italian Communist Party in 1923-24* (trans.), with an introduction by Togliatti, and Berti's *The First Ten Years of the PCI: Unpublished Documents from the Archive of Angelo Tasca*. (trans.).³⁹

In the actual 1923-24 epistolary exchanges of *The Formation* one could: 1) learn of the esteem and affection that key extant communist leaders, including Togliatti, had felt for Bordiga; 2) trace the guarded or furtive⁴⁰ manner by which Gramsci organized from Vienna--with assured Comintern support, one surmised--a Center faction largely drawn initially from a number of former *Ordinovisti* to constitute a new non-*Sinistra* leadership; and 3) his first rewriting of the origins and early history of the PCd'I, in so doing shifting the origins away from the actual working-class roots (with which he had no link) to inspiration coming from the Russian Revolution. The private nature of these activities and exchanges conducted amidst the hostile political climate then prevailing in Italy meant that the party membership remained unapprised. In his widely-revealing introduction to Tasca's documents, Berti witted the careful reader of the heavy Russian influence on Gramsci and

³⁹ *La formazione del gruppo dirigente del Partito comunista italiano nel 1923-24* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962), and *I primi dieci anni di vita del PCI. Documenti inediti dell'archivio Angelo Tasca* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1966).

⁴⁰ Furtive is more accurate. Fortichiari, a founder of the party, a member of its Executive Committee, and a *Sinistra* spokesman, lived with Gramsci in Vienna. He recalled, "I had understood that he [Gramsci] had a rapport with Italy [the correspondence carried on through the Russian embassy], without my knowing, that is, I wasn't supposed to know." Gramsci's bodyguard, Mario Codevilla, who had been beholden to Fortichiari for helping to save his life, kept the latter informed. B. Fortichiari, *op. cit.* p. 149. Also, note the reluctant Togliatti's warning to Gramsci in March 1924, "I advise you to be cautious or we shall end up a small clique (*piccola cricca*)...." *Formazione*, p. 239 *et passim*.

acknowledged what Gramsci had begun to erase in the new history--that the PCd'I had arisen from the *Sinistra*. These revelations plus much more had the effect of further discrediting the broken shards of the earlier Togliattian histories.

Against this background Spriano published the volume indicated earlier. If not an official history, for the first time he gave the party a well-sculpted version of its own past, and with this manuscript also established his preeminence in the field. The support and resources he enjoyed can only be guessed at. This was *grande histoire*: an impressively documented narrative tracing in rich detail the pre-history and history of the PCI from 1917 to the Resistance, with the story told in an upright and declarative prose. If Spriano conceded Bordiga's primacy and acknowledged the intrusive hand of the Comintern, Gramsci was presented as the great Leninist innovator--"the only Leninist worthy of name in Italy"⁴¹--whose timely and enlightened intervention rescued the party from Bordiga's "sectarianism" and set it on the road to become the formidable workingclass party of the postwar era. By contrast, Spriano deconstructed and disqualified Bordiga in every way possible: "without intellectual complications," "no inclinations to cultural discussions," "obsession of purity," "tenacious and inflexible to absurdity," "geometric intellect," "doctrinal tone," "extreme linear simplicity," "few references to reality," skipping to "coherent but sterile," "scholastic, Byzantine," and "Machiavellianism."⁴²

⁴¹ This quotation is found in Spriano's "Gramsci e Lenin," "Rinascita," XXXVII, No. 20 (May 15, 1970). On Lenin's centenary, he continued the "Leninization" of Gramsci.

⁴² Spriano, pp. 11,12,13,40,42,54,179. Not coincidentally, some of the latter terms were coopted from Gramsci's successful effort to block Bordiga's Manifesto, discussed further on in the text. Spriano's "hard line" characterization was in keeping with Ernesto Ragionieri's efforts to deny that Togliatti's earlier writings had been influenced by Bordiga. See his *P. Togliatti, Opere* (Rome: Riuniti, 1967), I, pp. lxxix-civ. One can suppose that both men sought to counter the disclosures found in *Formazione*.

Though presenting a more truthful account of the PCI's history that drew mutterings of discontent from hard-nosed conservative communists, Spriano deepened the obloquy against Bordiga. This clearly partisan interpretation spurred conflicting responses. Important new titles by Rosa Alcarà, Andreina De Clementi, Luigi Cortesi, Franco Livorsi, Fortichiari and others followed. If Spriano's influence remained formidable in Italy, over foreign historians it seemed total. There is uncritical acceptance of Spriano in all the English titles mentioned earlier.

Two years after the death of Bordiga (1970), much like the arrival of the uninvited apparition of Poe's Red Death amongst the revelers, there appeared Volume II of *The History of the Communist Sinistra, 1919-1920* (trans.),⁴³ prepared by the small reconstituted *Sinistra* party. In recapitulating the role of the *Sinistra* during the two years, the events, roles and words of the principal participants were subjected to a meticulous exposition and analysis. Key documents were reprinted in toto. Readers could follow the original exchanges without the interpreting text. The tome championed no hero, but contained a fulsome presentation of Bordiga's views set against a background of events to which they were a response. Conceding partisanship, this historical reconstruction of the hopes and failures of the "Red Biennial" (1919-1920) was without earlier parallel. Under the light of this genre of Marxist writing, Spriano's volume could be seen now as a non-Marxist, market-readied account--an exemplary idealistic recital of the Hero (Gramsci) as History. Presciently anticipating an approaching time when the Gramscian-Togliattian PCI was no more, even as they sought to allay the disquieted past, the collective authorship addressed themselves to a future revolutionary socialist generation. This uniquely important volume met with universal silence in Italy and abroad.

⁴³ *Storia della sinistra comunista, II, (edizioni del programma comunista del partito comunista internazionale [Milan]: 1972).*

How did the authors mentioned above depict the events in the Italian party of 1925, the change detailed in "The Agony of the *Sinistra*"? Spriano conceded that credibility remained a problem. Agreeing that the "overturn" ("*capovolgimento*") that reduced the "Bordigan *Sinistra*" from a majority to less than ten percent "is neither believable nor normal," and admitting that the Gramscian-led Center used its authority to limit free expression and was intolerant of the opposition, he repudiated any attempt to put into question the outcome of Lyons. Lyons had resulted from the labors of Gramsci and Togliatti, who had been helped by Bordiga's isolation, the arrival of new a membership, and the perception in the ranks that the differences were not substantive.⁴⁴ (Only much later, before his death, would Spriano drop a remark that may provide an insight into the very core of Centrist historiography.)

Spriano's historiographic stance was supported and more defiantly stated by an old-time party stalwart, the conservative Giorgio Amendola: "Gramsci prepared the III Congress of the PCd'I with an arduous fight to win over one at a time the supporters of Bordiga. It was an exemplary political effort carried out without giving in to the temptation of [applying] disciplinary measures. Even after Bordiga refused to accept the post of Vice President of the [Third] International and turned to factionalism with 'The Committee of Understanding'...Gramsci...avoided using disciplinary measures."⁴⁵

Earlier (1961), in his introduction to *The Formation*, Togliatti, who along with Gramsci had been a key figure in the Center's 1925-activities, had written in beatific innocence, "This group [the

⁴⁴ Spriano, pp. 477-497.

⁴⁵ Giorgio Amendola, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano 1921-1943* (Rome: Riuniti, 1978), pp. 100-101.

Center] finished winning a majority at the III Party Congress held at Lyons in January 1926,"⁴⁶ words that implied "politicking" to the very end. However, many years later and nearly a decade after Spriano, Franco Livorsi, another communist historian and author of two titles on Bordiga, remained unconvinced. "In the final analysis, in disciplinary terms one cannot explain the negative outcome for the Bordigan wing, which at the Lyons Congress, January 20-26, 1926, barely gained 9.2% of the ballots, against the 90.8% for the Center."⁴⁷

Yet Berti by then had disclosed one of the keys to unlocking the "secrets" that explained the outcome at Lyons. Acknowledging difficulty in rooting out "extremism" in the party's ranks, he conceded, "...using an organizational conference held in December 1925, the Congress of Lyons was prepared perhaps a bit too well in the sense that the December conference separated the wheat from the chaff in such a fashion that the Bordigan *Sinistra* was represented in a manner that understated its actual numbers (*forze*) in the Party."⁴⁸ In a word, the congress had been stacked!

A decade later, Fortichiari confirmed from personal knowledge that the delegates to Lyons had been screened to guarantee a preponderance for the Center, and added his own accusation. As head of the successful illegal activities of the PCd'I (*Ufficio I*) he had dozens of secure places in Milan where a congress could have been held, helped and aided by "hundreds of trained and trusted comrades, an expression of a working class unbowed by fascism." The Gramsci-led Center simply did not trust the communist rank and file,⁴⁹ a charge that gains credence after one learns of the early

⁴⁶ *La formazione*, p. 11.

⁴⁷ *Amadeo Bordiga*, p. 304. The earlier title: *Amadeo Bordiga, Scritti scelti* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1975).

⁴⁸ Berti, *I primi dieci anni*, pp. 184 & 188.

⁴⁹ Fortichiari, p. 115.

1925 events in Milan.⁵⁰ Berti did note that Gramsci "was opposed to using methods that were not of democratic discussion and conviction when dealing with *bordighiani* and *trotskisti*," contrasting that attitude with Togliatti's approval of Stalin's use of "administrative measures" against Trotsky and his followers.⁵¹ However, these comments applied to 1926. By then, the *Sinistra* in Italy had been destroyed. Berti made another admission concerning the Tasca Archives that remains perplexing and raises suspicions: "In the mass of documents and notes, the year 1925 is just about missing (*quasi assente*)."⁵²

What of the three authors whose works appeared in English--Cammett, Hoare, and Piccone? John Cammett's *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* is probably the most influential work on Gramsci published (1967) in the US, despite a number of earlier and later titles. Researched and written in a "Jurassic Age" when the USSR and the Togliattian PCI appeared to be viable entities and not nocturnal creatures on political leave until daybreak, the study in no way differs or takes issue with Spriano and the PCI orthodoxy. Thus all compliments to Bordiga are binary, one backhanded. If Bordiga was "clever," he was also "specious," and when "brilliant," "superficial."⁵³ He noted the 1925 change, depicting it fleetingly as a natural tidal sweep coincidental with Gramsci's arrival at leadership: "There [at Como, 1924] Gramsci learned most of the party cadre was still Bordigan, though his own position as Party leader was unchallenged. The

⁵⁰ *Infra*, pp. 46-47.

⁵¹ Berti, *I primi dieci anni*, p. 146.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 13. Writing in the 1950s, Tasca noted very casually that the situation in the PCd'I changed gradually ("*lentamente*") in the course of 1925 and was not finished ("*non poteva esser liquidata*") until January 1926. Cortesi, *I Primi dieci anni*, p. 139.

⁵³ Cammett, pp. 91 & 58.

Bordigan view was not reduced to a marginal position until the latter part of 1925.⁵⁴ Like Spriano, Cammett hinted that Gramsci might have resorted to undemocratic methods, but his discussion is so unclear that it is of no value in illuminating the dramatic sea change of 1925.⁵⁵ Characteristic of his vision, some years later in a preface to a sympathetic presentation of Italian Eurocommunism, Cammett traced the movement to the heritage left by Gramsci and Togliatti.⁵⁶

In their latest edition of *Antonio Gramsci, Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926*, Quinton Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith, two well-known influential compilers of Gramscian anthologies, had at their disposal the innumerable titles of critical historiography. The impact of new data on the judgments of the two men was negligible, even though Hoare & Smith worked up a cottage industry with Gramsci's writings.⁵⁷ Hence more recent history does not necessarily mean more accurate historiography, something that will be strikingly clear also with Donald Sassoon

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 171-72 & footnote.

⁵⁶ Carl Marzani, *The Promise of Eurocommunism* (Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1980), p. xiv. The rationale behind Eurocommunism was pithily expressed by Tasca decades earlier: "The masses more and more conscientious, the bourgeoisie more and more enlightened; the former patient, the latter resigned to the inevitable: joint executors to a world whose ends were desired and accepted." [Angelo Tasca] Angelo Rossi, *The Rise of Italian Fascism* (London: Methuen and Co., 1938), p.72. Tasca's epigrammatic words summarized the outlook of Filippo Turati; they had in mind the Italian scene and the small, politically involved, and militant Italian working class of the early 20th century associated with an international movement of some worth. Most likely both men would be shocked by the "politically" disenfranchised, ideologically bereft, and socially atomized US working class of the 1990s, which left it disarmed and vulnerable to the globalization (capitalist resurgence) of recent decades. Objective conditions limited Eurocommunism to an impractical illusion, one of many political devices introduced by the Togliattian party in the postwar to cover its strategic poverty and expedite its gradual assimilation into the political establishment, completed by the 1990s.

⁵⁷ This volume was first published by International Publishers of New York and reissued by a university press. Both men put out more than a half dozen books on Gramsci.

publishing in the mid-1990s. Their description of the change reads: "Perhaps not surprisingly, in this situation of growing impotence, under impossible conditions, the internal struggle which raged in the PCI in 1925 and 1926--and which saw Bordiga's overwhelming domination in May 1924 at all levels below the Central Committee totally reversed within eighteen months--was hardly focused within the country at all."⁵⁸ In admitting a raging struggle, they gave no details of how the PCd'I was so drastically overhauled, i.e., reversing Bordiga's all-level "domination." Elsewhere they wrote that there was a "remarkable degree of real discussion" in the 1925-1926 party.⁵⁹ Similarly, one could describe Stalin's Great Terror as a time of "flourishing judicial activity." They granted to Bordiga a one-time "superior awareness" of events in the USSR,⁶⁰ and overlooked Bordiga's writings of 1914, 1915, his role in 1917, and his stress on the need for new tactics in 1919. They conceded Bordiga's primacy in calling for the "pre-eminence" of the party--here the binary came into play—but found it was done "crudely."⁶¹

Finally, in handling the PCd'I's tactics of 1921-1923 they moved from bad history to worse. The claim that Bordiga felt "no urgency for sinking roots in the working class" or fighting with it is contradicted by all the trade union articles of the Rome Theses drawn up by Gramsci and Tasca,⁶² the first 55 articles by Bordiga and Umberto Terracini,⁶³ republished documents from the early

⁵⁸ Hoare, *op. cit.*, p. xv.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xix.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

⁶² Reproduced in "Rassegna comunista," January 30, 1922.

⁶³ Reproduced in *In difesa della continuita` del programma comunista, 2* (Edizioni del programma comunista, Milan: n.d.), pp. 65-72.

PCd'I,⁶⁴ as well as by numerous writings by Gramsci during 1921-1922 when he *fully* embraced *Sinistra* tactics.⁶⁵ Most tellingly, to claim that, "unlike Bordiga," Gramsci understood the need to win the majority of the working class, they witlessly repeated the spurious, politically-motivated charge made by Mauro Scoccimarro before the Executive Committee of the Communist International (henceforth ECCI) of 1925, and used by the Gramscian leadership to destroy the *Sinistra*. The episode is discussed below,⁶⁶ where one gets a glimpse of the collaboration with Stalin who was attending his first ECCI.⁶⁷

In the misalliance of fact and opinion that is the introduction to this volume of Gramsci's writings, appropriately the first article, "Caporetto and Vittorio Veneto," contained this pearl from the *Sinistra's* ideology: "The central idea of Maximalism [Center socialists led by Serrati] was not that of the Communist International: i. e. that all the activity and effort of the proletariat should be turned and directed towards the conquest of political power and the foundation of the workers' State; that all the specific problems of the working class can be effectively solved through the solution of the first and most important problem--that of winning political power and having armed forces in its own hands."⁶⁸ Sadly, even if Hoare & Smith had been aware that these were *Sinistra* sentiments, there is no certainty that they would have informed their readers.

⁶⁴ One example will suffice: Documents from 1921 by the Partito comunista d'Italia and found in *Manifesti ed altri documenti politici* (Rome: Libreria Editrice del P.C. d'Italia, n.d.).

⁶⁵ See numerous articles in A. Gramsci, *Opere, Il socialismo e fascismo L'Ordine nuovo 1921-1922* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966).

⁶⁶ *Infra*, pp. 48-49.

⁶⁷ Helmut Gruber, *Soviet Russia Masters the Comintern: Communism in the Era of Stalin's Ascendancy* (Anchor Books, Garden City, NY: 1974), p. xiv.

⁶⁸ Hoare, pp. 3-4.

A few lines from Piccone's Italian Marxism will conclude this preface. A more erudite commentator will have to judge his analyses of the components of Italian Marxism in the 20th century and the place of Gramsci. At times the text was not easy to follow but with Bordiga or the change of 1925 the prose emerged into an undappled sunlight. Thus, of the latter he wrote: "Although Stalinist 'administrative measures' were clearly never imported in [*sic*] Italy, in 1925 the Gramsci-Togliatti takeover of the party was hardly an example of democracy in action. [Giorgio] Galli may be exaggerating in claiming that 'the victory of the Gramsci-Togliatti group [was] obtained with the same technique [used by the Stalinist apparatus]...by overcoming him [Bordiga]...through the distortion of his thought, the most gratuitous accusations, disciplinary provisions, and through the manipulation of the assemblies.'"⁶⁹ The double quotation begs this question: What if evidence of Stalinist measures was found and Galli proven right?

In a text that does not spare binary characterizations of Bordiga, the following appeared to illustrate Piccone's assessments. "While Bordiga remained ideologically committed to a Marxism-Leninism of the most vulgar Stalinist brand even while engaged in a political struggle with Moscow, Gramsci and Togliatti sought to recycle [Antonio] Labriola against Bukharin and other lesser Comintern luminaries."⁷⁰

Two serious objections can be raised to the passage. First, since Bordiga opposed both Stalin and his hybrid "Marxist-Leninist" ideology and had critically challenged Stalin's program and methods before the Executive Committee of the International and in a private encounter; never suppressed an oppositional current or view within the party; most importantly, defended with the

⁶⁹ Piccone, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Rome Theses the view that the class--not the party--was the final arbiter of revolution, why was he so characterized? Second, the idyll that Gramsci and Togliatti were bearers of Labriolan enlightenment to Bukharin when the lights of reason were actually being shut down in both parties does not fit with their documented activities, or with the historical account of the times. Describing the atmosphere in the Soviet party in December 1923--a situation that would worsen with the years--Robert V. Daniels wrote, "The methods of struggle brought into play against Trotsky and his followers--the bitter charges and relentless organizational pressure--put the party into a permanent state of siege. There was no turning back."⁷¹ As we will see, if we substitute Bordiga and the *Sinistra* for "Trotsky and his followers," Daniels could be describing the Italian party of 1925.

In conclusion, Piccone was unhistorically imaginative and his reconstruction embarrassingly inaccurate: where it was subject to an empirical test, his account verged too far from the documents in evidence to be credible.

Next, to the "Agony of the Sinistra" and the data from the archives. Except for a number of stylistic changes introduced to smooth the writing, the 1972 text follows. Archival and other footnotes remain unchanged.⁷² Bracketed statements are explanatory inserts. To repeat, the acronym PCI stands for the *Partito Comunista Italiano*, the name change introduced during the Togliattian period to replace the original *Partito Comunista d'Italia*, but is used here. Although I would present the chapter differently in style and structure if written today, and now regard some statements as

⁷¹ Robert V. Daniels, *The Conscience of Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), p.230.

⁷² Anyone questioning this statement should consult my unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, *The Spectral Figure of Amadeo Bordiga, a Case Study in the Decline of Marxism in the West, 1912-26*, Bobst Library, New York University, 1972.

doubtful, most significantly, nothing that I have subsequently come across contradicts the archival data on how Gramsci and his Center-group "won over" the party in 1925. In point of fact, titles emerging in the later years both confirm and add details to the 1974 text.

CHAPTER I

The Agony of the Sinistra

At the end of the Fifth Congress [1924], the International had issued an unusual declaration—that of labeling the majority of the PCI's cadre and base the political enemy. Further, to minimize the *Sinistra* and alter its image, the International reintroduced the term "extremist," last used by Maximalists and Reformists against the insurgent communist wing prior to Livorno, and giving it a meaning synonymous with "fringe" or "sect."

The Fifth Congress had formally settled the Italian question. The responsibility for disciplining the party was transferred to the new leadership. In light of the studied disinterest manifested by the Comintern during the unusual events now about to occur, it is probably safe to suppose that at some point during the congress the *Centro* [Center] and Soviet leadership came to a meeting of minds on the steps needed to "rectify" the Italian party.

1. *Breaking the Sinistra*

Firmly in command, the *Centro* took on the task in earnest. An enlarged CC [Central Committee] in August approved the decisions of the recent congress, and elevated Gramsci to the position of General Secretary, a title borrowed directly from the Soviet party. For the first time since inception, the PCI was given a ranked, official leader to substitute for Bordiga.

At this meeting Gramsci predicted the rapid downfall of Mussolini: "Will there be an armed conflict? No. A grand-style fight will be avoided by the opponents and by the Fascists. The opposite of 1922 will occur: then the 'March on Rome' was choreographed as part of the molecular process in

which the real forces of the bourgeois state (the army, the police, the courts, the police, the newspapers, the Vatican, Masonry, etc.) had passed to fascism. Today these forces are in the opposition. If fascism resisted, it would be destroyed...." ⁷³ Implicit in Gramsci's optimism was his then-held view that fascism was limited to a movement of the petite bourgeoisie.⁷⁴ Hence Mussolini was no statesman or dictator, no representative of national life, but a phenomenon out of rustic folklore. As a second step against the *Sinistra, Prometeo*, the generally inoffensive cultural-political monthly edited by Bordiga, was suppressed⁷⁵, and the section at Naples was denied the authority to issue another.⁷⁶

In September, *L'Unita`* began reporting on provincial meetings attended by top party officials, and where approval was invariably extended to the results of the Fifth Congress. Typical was the one held at Como in the presence of a representative of the EC [Executive Committee] and the interregional secretary; the congress condemned "opportunists" on both "left" and "right."⁷⁷ Where the *Sinistra* was not criticized outright, it was invited to join the leadership. By October, most provincial congresses were over.

The one described in detail was at Naples. Both Gramsci and Bordiga spoke. With the Minority [Tasca and the communist rightwing] assimilated, Gramsci stressed the homogeneity of

⁷³ *L'Unita`*, August 27, 1924.

⁷⁴ "Fascism: A Letter from Italy," G. Masci [A. Gramsci], Second Section, *Daily Worker*, March 29, 1924.

⁷⁵ *Archivio del Partito Comunista*, Gramsci Institute of Rome, *fascicolo* 241, letter of August 26, 1924. Henceforth designated as APC.

⁷⁶ AP, *fascicolo* 241, letter of November 2, 1924.

⁷⁷ *L'Unita`*, September 20, 1924. Similar meetings were reported at Turin, Massa-Carrara and Lucca, Padua, Umbria, Bologna, Florence, Milan (no vote), Cremona, Alessandria (no vote), Bari, Cosenza (no vote), Verona, etc.

the CC and asked the *Sinistra* to abandon "abstentionism," which he defined as tantamount to factionalism. Bordiga stressed that the *Centro* was where the Minority had been two years earlier. "Had they wanted the *Centrale* [CC] to be the expression of the party, they should have had it picked by the PCI, not by Moscow." After further discussion, Gramsci indicated that a vote on the two views was not necessary. In any case, all knew that Naples was with the *Sinistra*. In *L'Unita`* the editors [in reporting the congress] appended a gratuitous note implying Bordiga's detachment from reality: "in Comrade Bordiga's speech there was no indication of practical work...."⁷⁸ If [Jules] Humbert-Droz is to be believed, Gramsci's inner feelings were of a different order than those reported in *L'Unita`*, and these were promptly relayed to the Presidium in Moscow. Here Gramsci charged Bordiga with having conducted himself "as a demagogue" and having placed the Comintern on trial. He accused Bordiga of having used Trotsky's popularity to win an easy victory without getting to the bottom of the Russian crisis.⁷⁹

Within a few days, Humbert-Droz again reported on the congresses. "Led by Bordiga," he wrote, "the *Sinistra* is very unhappy with the actions of the Executive [Committee] because it limits the *Sinistra's* [free] expression and is trying to move the party to accept the line of the International. The *Sinistra* would want a wide debate of all views at the congresses, and believes that until that moment the party should be more administered than led by the Executive."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ "Relazioni di Gramsci e Bordiga," *L'Unita`*, October 15, 1924.

⁷⁹ Humbert-Droz, *Il contrasta tra l'Internazionale, [e il P.C.I 1922-1928. Documenti inediti dell'Archivio di Jules Humbert-Droz, segretario dell'Internazionale comunista (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1969)]* p. 188.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp, 212-13. Humbert-Droz approved of the restrictions placed on the *Sinistra*. His loyalty to the Soviet leadership appears to have extended to the late 1930s.

By the fall of the year, the *Centro* had begun to manipulate an endorsement of itself and approval of the policies that were not winning support in unfettered ideological debates. Writing to the Comintern in October, Togliatti reported that two interregional secretaries with "extreme left" views had been replaced and that five new interregional secretaries had been appointed, "comrades who share the beliefs of the Central Committee."⁸¹ A month later, he admitted to Moscow that despite all efforts, the party "had not profoundly altered its opinion from the one indicated at the [Como] conference of last May."⁸²

These self-serving activities had become a subject of exchange between Naples and Rome. "The International and the present leadership," wrote Bordiga, "want to escape from the situation created by our refusal, and they wish to get the party to accept the International on the basis of discipline and conviction. Not only are they in their right, but it is their precious duty. Except that to do this they employ means that are damaging to the movement.

"To realize their dream the recent provincial congresses were organized under a curious system that merits being called Giolittian, rather than dictatorial. The rights of the congresses to express themselves varied according to the prognostications. When possible, support of the *Centrale* was approved; in other cases approval was extended only to the directives of the V Congress, or to the famous invitation to Bordiga to enter the *Centrale*. When, as happened in the more important congresses, the *Sinistra* could easily demonstrate that it was the majority, the congresses were not allowed to vote on political questions under the pretext that they were merely consultative."⁸³

⁸¹ Letter of October 7, 1924, reprinted in *Rinascita*, September 15, 1962.

⁸² Letter of November 11, 1924, reprinted in *Rinascita*, September 29, 1962.

⁸³ APC, *fascicolo* 246, Letter of November 2, 1924. [Giovanni Giolitti, the great liberal statesman of the early 20th century used various coercive measures to assure himself a parliamentary majority in the national elections.]

By the beginning of 1925 the campaign to realign the party had failed to win over the base.⁸⁴ This fact coupled with the ineffectiveness of the anti-fascist Aventine Opposition--strikingly demonstrated by Mussolini in his defiant January 3, 1925 speech when he assumed the responsibility for the murder of Matteotti and defied the opposition to impeach him--left that leadership, which had twice endorsed the opposition, in a precarious and politically vulnerable position. Cut off from its political base, blocked in its united-front maneuvers, hemmed in by the threatening violence and restrictions of the regime, the only avenue of maneuver remaining to the beleaguered *Centro* was to execute a "retreat to the front"⁸⁵ and to the right, in this case towards the International.

The leadership had been jostled into moving in this direction by another circumstance: the rising clamor around Trotsky. *Avanti!* had devoted much attention to this affair, seeing in it evidence of the political intolerance within the International. The paper had warned Bordiga of the fate awaiting dissenters within the ranks of the Comintern, notwithstanding that the *Sinistra* represented a majority of the PCI.⁸⁶ The problem had become acute with the arrival at *L'Unita`* of a long analysis

⁸⁴ Spriano, *op. cit.*, p. 442. Between September and December *Sinistra* majorities had prevailed in congresses at Turin, Alessandria, Novara, Biella, Milan, Pavia, Como, Bergamo, Trento, Modena, Rome, Naples, Teramo, Macerata, Cosenza, and Cremona.

⁸⁵ This expression was used in an ironic sense by Tasca to describe how the National Council of the CGL and the directorate of the PSI maneuvered out of the revolutionary situation created by the workingclass seizure of the factories in September 1920. See Angelo Tasca, *Nascita e avvento del fascismo* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1950), p. 121.

⁸⁶ "*Trotsky e i problemi della rivoluzione, Avanti!*, February 1-2, 1925. On the 19 *Avanti!* had this to say: "According to information given out by the Central Committee, one group of the party, the majority because it is the *Sinistra*, has adhered to Trotsky's ideas....Against this faction, which we repeat is the majority, the minority in leadership...."

of Trotsky's *Lessons of October*⁸⁷ by Bordiga and intended for publication. Having pondered Trotsky's polemic and the Russian situation, Bordiga thought that he had found therein evidence of the correctness of the policies advocated by the PCI prior to the change in leadership by the International. The lesson of October was very clear: "WE CAN AWAIT THE MASSES, AND WE MUST, BUT, AT THE PRICE OF DEFEAT, THE PARTY CANNOT EXPECT THE MASSES TO AWAIT IT." In summary, he wrote, "*Our greatest elector is the rifle in the hands of the insurgent worker.*" In the course of his analysis, Bordiga insisted that Trotsky be judged on the basis of what he had written, not on factional need.⁸⁸ The article presented possible uses for the *Centro*, not all negative. Publication would undoubtedly render a disservice to the anti-Trotsky cause in Moscow, and the reasoning tended to undercut the leadership's revolutionary claims. On the other hand, the article did firmly identify Bordiga with Trotsky. The dilemma was resolved by forwarding the piece to Moscow, which blocked publication and at the same time invited Bordiga to attend the coming session of the ECCI [Executive Committee of the Communist International].

Meanwhile the Italian leadership made known its own solidarity with the anti-Trotsky majority in the Russian party. This motion by the Central Committee was also a blow at Bordiga.⁸⁹ In identifying Trotsky with "a pessimistic vision" of the world revolution, and declaring that counterrevolution in Russia and abroad (in Italy the PSI) had gathered to Trotsky's banners, the text elaborated the need for Bolshevization and unanimity of views. The "role of leaders" (Trotsky and Bordiga) was denounced. Any further attempt to reopen the issue, the motion declared, would be

⁸⁷ Issued in late 1924, Trotsky utilized this work to strike at Zinoviev and Kamenev, as well as generalize against those in the revolutionary party who draw back from seizure of power on the eve of the revolution.

⁸⁸ Article in APC, *fascicolo* 340. Dated Naples February 8. 1925, "*La Quistione Trockij*"; the back bears a marking in Cyrillic.

⁸⁹ "*Mozione sulla bolscevizzazione,*" *L'Unita`*, February 18, 1925.

taken as counterrevolutionary. Finally, again Bordiga was criticized for not entering into the leadership.

Two events in early 1925 illustrate the gulf being created within the PCI. The first was an unexpected demonstration of rank-and-file feeling in Milan; the other, an ideological reconstruction soon to be foisted on Bordiga.

At the *Universita` Proletaria*, a workingclass evening school of long standing situated in the *Castello Sforzesco* at the center of Milan, Bordiga delivered a lecture on the role of the middle class in capitalist society.

Milan was a well-known *Sinistra* stronghold, and earlier in January Repossi, a major figure in the Milanese movement, had been suspended for a number of months.⁹⁰ This move by the *Centro* had struck at the very core of Milanese workingclass communism. On the evening of March 22 three thousand Communists and sympathizers arrived to greet Bordiga with flowers and "waves of applause." Hundreds ran out after the lecture to surround and delay his departing automobile.⁹¹

The event was remarkable on more than one count. First, the large gathering represented an act of defiance directed as much, perhaps, against the repressive acts of the *Centro* as against the regime of Mussolini. Second, this was probably the largest meeting of Communists in the years between the founding of the party in 1921 and the outlawing of all political parties in 1926.

⁹⁰ APC, *fascicolo* 340, document NO.6.

⁹¹ "La conferenza del compagno Bordiga," *L'Unita`*, March 24, 1925.

The arrangement of the evening had undoubtedly been planned by the local *Sinistra*, and many attending the lecture may have been drawn from the numerous *Sinistra* sections throughout Piedmont, Lombardy, and Emilia.⁹² Yet the outpouring of feeling was spontaneous and deep.

By 1925, Bordiga had been the recognized leader of the *Sinistra* for at least a decade, and his stature as a Marxist and a Communist was unmatched by anyone in Italy. Bordiga personified the generation that had come to maturity with the war and *il dopoguerra*, the postwar years. These revolutionaries had seen their hopes of socialism wrecked by Maximalism and were now straddled with fascism.

At the news from Milan, the *Centro* responded with counter-measures. The local Communist leadership in Milan was dissolved (this removed Fortichiari), and Terracini sent an explanatory note to the International.⁹³ But no amount of effort could expunge the event, and the incident was to remain the largest and last public expression of esteem by the rank and file for Bordiga. As it turned out, a *dernier salut* within an unforeseen outburst of political sentiment that flared up to hold at bay for an instant the darkness about to entomb this workers' movement.

The second event was the Enlarged ECCI session held in Moscow during March and April. Although Gennari had gone on a special mission to Naples to persuade Bordiga to attend,⁹⁴ the latter had declined, using "reasons of family" as the excuse.⁹⁵ Present from Italy were Gramsci,

⁹² Judging from the data contained in the Fortichiari Memo, [a document sent to this writer in the early 1970s by Fortichiari] the *Sinistra* was heavily concentrated in the iron triangle of Milan, Turin, Genoa.

⁹³ APC, *fascicolo* 313, letter of April 7, 1925.

⁹⁴ De Clementi, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

⁹⁵ APC, *fascicolo* 340, Bordiga's letter of July 19, 1925.

Scoccimarro, Vittorio Flecchia, Telini, and Grieco. The "Trotsky-Bordiga equation"⁹⁶ introduced by Gramsci at Como, and further developed by the February CC, was now drawn to a conclusion.

In remarks to the ECCI Scoccimarro attributed Bordiga's mistakes to a methodology that was both "too abstract" and "foreign to the living dialectics of Leninism"; Bordiga saw the party as an entity unto itself and not "as part of the working class"; between Trotsky and Bordiga affinities existed; both relied on a mechanical articulation of dialectics; both were opposed to the application of Bolshevization to Western Europe. "Truthfully Bolshevism has given us tactics that have universal applicability." Scoccimarro hinted that Bordiga held Lenin responsible for the German fiasco of 1923. Bordiga had never abandoned abstentionism, as shown by his refusal to capture the majority of the working class. Bordiga stood for inflexible tactics and a party of leaders. "All this to show that Bordiga's concepts of the party are mistaken."⁹⁷

Scoccimarro's attack had been massive and, by being delivered before a leading body of the Comintern, bore the imprimatur of the International. All the pressure of that organization was now being turned against the *Sinistra*. Before the Italian Commission, Humbert-Droz made charges later incorporated into one of the adopted resolutions. Bordiga was pronounced an abstentionist on all questions, a rigid theoretician who saw the party as a collection of chieftains out to lead the masses.⁹⁸ Results were soon forthcoming. A number of minor incidents illustrate what was happening inside the Italian leadership. Humbert-Droz reported that Grieco had begun to weaken and was detaching himself from the *Sinistra*. Scoccimarro's remarks appeared in *L'Unita`*,

⁹⁶ The expression is Spriano's.

⁹⁷ *L'Unita`*, April 18 and June 25, 1925.

⁹⁸ LPC [*La Presse Correspondence, French edition of Imprekorr*], No. 45, April 25, 1925, p. 356.

becoming another thrust against the party's left wing. After Scoccimarro's speech before the ECCI, Stalin met Gramsci and Scoccimarro and asked them to attack Trotsky. They agreed, and upon returning Scoccimarro promptly lived up to his word.⁹⁹

2. *Trial by L'Unita`*

In Volume II of his *Socialism in One Country*, E. H. Carr covers the methodical campaign undertaken against Trotsky in the fall of 1924, following the appearance of the *Lessons of October*, and the early months of 1925, when the International was harnessed to the task, as we have just seen with Scoccimarro. The "lower party organs were mobilized to express detestation of Trotsky's heresies and new confidence in the party leadership"; mobilization of the press was "equally intense."¹⁰⁰

What had happened earlier in the Soviet Union now found its replicating echo in Italy. At some point in the spring of 1925, the *Centro* set out to finally settle with the *Sinistra*, an extreme move arising from the failure of earlier efforts. The stubbornness evinced by the party ranks combined with the difficulties pressing in from the outside seem to have produced an intense desperation, if not paranoia, amongst the party leaders. As earlier, the central figure remained Gramsci, though aided by a number of lieutenants who formed a transmission belt over which the worst examples of Soviet practice were fed into the Italian party. At a meeting of the Central Committee, Gramsci renewed the attack, directed at both leader and followers. Bordiga was faulted for the party's ideological deficiency, and the *Sinistra* for showing little appreciation of the International's true

⁹⁹ Berti, *op. cit.*, pp. 218-19. Gramsci was hesitant, but he did consent.

¹⁰⁰ *Socialism in One Country* (New York: Macmillan, 1958-66), II, pp. 3-35.

importance. Like Serrati before him, Bordiga had created a party patriotism. Moreover, the "so-called 'Italian *Sinistra*'" had assumed special airs. Gramsci cited Lenin's assessment to describe the party's main weakness: "a love of revolutionary poses and superficial phrases being the most revealing trait, not of Bordiga, but of his followers." Bordiga had crystallized a state of permanent pessimism and sectarianism. The tonic for this malady? Bolshevization!¹⁰¹

Here Gramsci was repeating charges leveled at the *Sinistra* by the Soviet leadership. The ominous note in the outburst was that the attack had been directed at the *Sinistra* base, the rank and file of the party. By then, 1925, Bordiga was back at his profession as a construction engineer,¹⁰² which probably meant the cutting off of party subventions.

On May 26, *L'Unita`* announced the beginning of preparations for the third party congress. Scoccimarro wrote to Moscow on June 4 to complain that a remark dropped by Zinoviev at the Enlarged ECCI--that Bordiga had gone over to the extreme right--was boomeranging. "Naturally no worker believes us," he lamented. "The charge becomes a polemic against us." Nonetheless, the Comintern was assured that the party did not face the danger of schism.¹⁰³

In the charged atmosphere of the time, a press campaign without precedent in the history of Italian radicalism was unleashed by *L'Unita`*, and a wave of political violence and intolerance soon engulfed the embattled party. On June 7, the Central Committee printed a communiqué in *L'Unita`*. It announced that "self-styled Communists of the Italian *Sinistra*" had confused 1925 with 1919-20,

¹⁰¹ "Comunicato del CC," *L'Unita`*, July 3, 1925. From a comparison of texts, Zinoviev, not Lenin, was the author. Cf. IPC [*International Press Correspondence*], NO. 52, July 30, 1924.

¹⁰² Report of the prefect of Naples (No. 346), March 23, 1925, ACS [*Archivio Centrale dello Stato*], VCPC [*Vecchio Casellario Politico Centrale*], busta Amadeo Bordiga.

¹⁰³ APC, fascicolo 313, Letter of June 4, 1925.

the years preceding the Livorno schism. Having been rejected earlier by "the mass of the party," the extremism of the group was a great disservice to the party, at the very time when the later was fighting both fascism and the semi-fascism of the Aventine Opposition. As a consequence, the Central Committee was suspending Onorato Damen, M. Manfredi, Carlo Venegoni, Mario Lanfranchi, Reossi, and Fortichiari--all prominent *Sinistra* spokesmen--for having founded a factional Committee of Understanding.¹⁰⁴

Along with the communiqué, *L'Unita`* printed a letter from the suspended men addressed to the Executive Committee on June 1, several days after the announced start of congressional preparations. The missive contained a request for the free expression of opinion in all pre-congressional and congressional debates, the presence of the *Sinistra* in all provincial meetings, and the opening of the paper to opinions from the left. Below this letter, *L'Unita`* added a note casting doubts on the motives of those signing.

The same issue reproduced the texts of two letters from April 25 and May 22 that had come into the hands of the *Centro*. The contents indicated how a group had formed the Committee of Understanding to defend the *Sinistra* and come to the aid of Bordiga. One letter was enumerated "Circular No. 1" and bore the seal of the Committee.

The Executive Committee accompanied these texts with a call to mobilization addressed to the entire party. In the appeal to the party, the Committee was depicted as schismatic, and the absence of Bordiga's name indicative of a broad, sinister maneuver. All party members were asked to demonstrate their party loyalty, even to the point of breaking the most profound personal ties.

¹⁰⁴ Not only does much of the phraseology of the communique appear in earlier writings of Gramsci, but the description of of 1925 is almost a word-for-word repetition of the lines from Gramsci's editorial of March 15, 1925, the new series of *Ordine Nuovo*. See *La formazione*, p. 359

Once the revelations of June 7 are extracted from the charges, it becomes quite clear that by the spring the *Sinistra* had finally begun to react in its own defense. The existence of the official seal and the beginning of enumeration were suggestive evidence that the left wing was about to initiate a factional fight to regain a party where it saw itself the majority.

It is difficult to believe that Scoccimarro was unaware of the campaign about to begin, when he discounted the possibility of a split in a letter to the International and not meant for the eyes of the membership. Thus the evidence suggests that labeling the *Sinistra* "schismatic" was either a panicky reaction or, more likely, a falsehood; in either case, a move that fit in with the political direction adopted by the leadership under Gramsci. Placing the event into earlier and later history, it becomes clear that the *Centro* had begun the annihilation of the *Sinistra*. Under a masthead "Against Schisms, Factions, For the Iron Unity of the Party," on June 8 the leadership made clear that there would be no open discussion. It accused the Committee of seeking the "permanent disintegration" of the party. Committee members were likened to the "traitorous" Paul Levi and Frossard. To underline its point, it reprinted article 27 of the Theses of Bolshevization: "The Bolshevik party does not consider internal democracy an absolute principle."

The campaign became a daily feature, at times taking up the entire second and third page of the newspaper. On the twelfth, Zinoviev was quoted as saying that the Bolsheviks had acquired political character fighting "against the liquidators on the left." Bukharin was also cited to confirm that Bordiga "had obeyed as long as Lenin was alive; now he says: Lenin is dead, I can form a faction." Both remarks had been made before the ECCI of that year and indicate the extent of the coordinated assault against Bordiga. Also on the twelfth, the paper scoffed at the request for free discussion found in the June 1 letter: "We can state without being accused of *giolittismo* that the

masses of the party are not the only arbiters and do not decide independently on the soundness of various political opinions." One opinion must prevail--that of the International. On the seventeenth, Luigi Longo repeated the same message, thus indicating that he, too, had left the *Sinistra*. On the thirteenth, Vicenza was reported rallying to the *Centro*, and on the sixteenth Como, although both were relatively unimportant. But on the seventeenth, it was Bologna, and on the twentieth Venice, Milan, and Bergamo.

The *L'Unita`* of June 19 printed a short note written by Bordiga on June 8, the day following the beginning of the campaign. He confirmed his association with the Committee and asked for time to answer "the many false" accusations in the press. In an accompanying comment, the editors pointed to Bordiga's haste in siding with the Committee as evidence of disloyalty to the EC, and again rejected the charge about the absence of free discussion. The danger of schism had forced the Central Committee to behave as it had; that was the reason the Committee had mobilized the party, instead of opening debate. "The letter [of June 1 from the *Sinistra*] to the EC was an attempt to give the Committee [of Understanding] a legality...to hoodwink the leadership of the party."

Anonymous criticism appeared on the twenty-first. The campaign was having a disastrous impact on the ranks, wrote MV, and was directed against a current that had wanted nothing more than "to intervene in the discussion in a democratic manner." What better proof of the *Sinistra's* loyalty, continued the writer, than its voluntary surrender of leadership and return to the ranks, when finding itself in disagreement with the International?

L'Unita`'s reply was implacable: "There can be no discussion between undisciplined violators and the party, but we print MV's letter because it reflects, and not by accident, the simple-

minded attempt by a few partisans of the left faction to pass off the Committee of Understanding as an honest matter, and the *Centrale*, which enjoys the approval of the International, as perverted and fanatical factionalists...."

The support of Parma, Vimercate, and Monza was in by the twenty-third. When the powerful left stronghold of Novara in Piedmont with a membership on the par with Turin and Milan announced suspending judgment until all documents had been published, the leadership took that decision to mean that the *Centrale* was fabricating evidence. As further indication of a large conspiracy against both party and International, the Center cited the fact that the Committee of Understanding had met in Naples on May 12, the very day the Central Committee convened.¹⁰⁵

At the end of three weeks of intense press campaigning, on the twenty-sixth the EC announced that the danger of factionalism had been reduced and contained. The attacks on the *Sinistra* continued with the publications of the speeches and decisions of the March-April ECCI. Bordiga's suppressed article on Trotsky appeared on July 4, now that the latter had been twice condemned by the Soviet party and the International. Scoccimarro's attack on Trotsky was thrown in. "Fighting Trotskyism," Scoccimarro concluded, "means to oppose deviation in the defense of Leninism." No one could miss the message: opposing Trotskyism abroad meant fighting Bordiga at home. Meanwhile, *L'Unita`* announced the support of Reggio Calabria, Sondrio, Pavia, Biella, Novara, Padua, Lecce, Rome, Avellino, and Pesaro.

A telegram from the Presidium of the International appeared in the July 2 *L'Unita`* ordered the immediate dissolution of the Committee of Understanding, and provided further evidence of the International's backing. Under protest, the Committee dissolved itself.

¹⁰⁵ *L'Unita`*, June 24, 1925.

The *Sinistra* was now stripped of any defense. Unable to make known its views, much of its leadership removed from positions of authority, and the Committee gone, all now rested with the loyalty of the party base. In the International's press, Chiarini (Lubjarsky) implied that Bordiga's abstentionism had been the real cause for the failed fusion between PCI and PSI.¹⁰⁶

In an undated letter—written actually on June 17 but not published until July 2--Bordiga denied that the Committee had ever intended to leave the party. The Committee had been formed only after representatives of the *Centro* had commandeered the provincial congresses to remove the *Sinistra* leadership, including Fortichiari at Milan and Bordiga at Naples. Responsibility for the virulent internecine campaign embroiling the party lay with the *Centro*.

In this instance, *L'Unita`* amended customary practice and prefaced the letter: "...Comrade Bordiga refrains from using the insane and provocative language characteristic...of [*Sinistra*] documents, but the Central Committee deems it essential to correctly answer him." The rationale used by the *Centro* throughout the campaign, Gramsci's new history, followed. A second letter from July 12 was printed on the twenty-second. Here Bordiga asked for an end to the charges and counter-charges, pleading that the time had come for a serious handling of the problems facing the PCd'I. These problems did not stem from his being a member, and his "expulsion, courteously indicated by Comrade Humbert-Droz as the only foreseeable end to the crisis, would solve nothing, because I am sure that my specter would not cease to revolve about the triumphant party leaders disturbing their much sought-after sleep." He contested the reason given for his removal from the leadership of the Neapolitan section, namely, the continued police surveillance. In reality, the move was just another blow against the *Sinistra*.

¹⁰⁶ IC [*L'Internationale Communiste*, monthly periodical issued by the ECCI], No. 2 (August, 1925), 116-26.

In the closing days of July, on the twenty-sixth and twenty-eighth, there appeared in *L'Unita`* a rare public exchange of views between Bordiga and Gramsci. The issue was Bolshevization. Bordiga stated that Bolshevization seemingly belittled the role of the revolutionary intellectuals to the advantage of the party's workingclass membership, but, in fact, by confining the proletarians to narrow factory cells increased the likelihood they would be manipulated by a careerist bureaucracy. Under the *Centro*, only intellectuals sat in the Executive Committee, whereas the *Sinistra* had included two members of the working class--Repossi and Fortichiari. He argued that the International had changed after the 1921 congress in violation of what Lenin intended, and he repeated the criticism of the old *Ordinovismo*.

Gramsci utilized a series of quotations to prove that Bolshevization was in keeping with Leninism, and that the International had not moved away from original goals. He reiterated again the praise given by Lenin to the statement appearing in the May 8, 1920 issue of the *Ordine Nuovo* calling for the renewal of the party. Gramsci accused Bordiga of having referred to the *Ordinovisti* "with malevolent remarks, full of hatred, rancor, not intending to cancel the differences but to deepen and render them unbridgeable."

For the record, Bordiga had written, "The contrary error is that of syndicalism, of which the doctrine of the *Ordinovisti* is a special case. In the beginning the latter found the magic formula to be organizational: the factory councils, and all--the party, economic revolution, the worker's state--was reduced to that. In these manifestations, there is an anti-Leninist and anti-Marxist survival...."

With the public campaign occupying the columns of *L'Unita`*, Bordiga directed an anguished letter to the Central Committee. For the first time he dropped his guard and spoke of his personal circumstances. He had used the expression "family reasons" to explain his refusal to attend

the spring ECCI, and the phrase had been picked up by *L'Unita`* to mercilessly taunt him in the press insinuating that he had failed in his duty.

In his letter, Bordiga turned the phrase around, applying it to those who went to Moscow "for reasons of family." The meaning was double-edged: it could apply to the *Centro* for accepting power from the Comintern, or, more likely, to Gramsci who had married and left a wife and two children in Russia. In the process he mentioned the hardships that he had imposed on his own at home. "If anyone sacrificed his family, it was I: on many an occasion, they went hungry at home, and, unfortunately, the consequences are very evident. I did not go see my son, at a time when he was declared mortally ill by a doctor who is still here to testify."¹⁰⁷ Bordiga included a defense of the *Sinistra*, and agreed to the *Centro's* proposal that all charges and documents be sent to a Control Commission of the International for adjudication.

Citing the arrest of Terracini as the cause of their delayed response, the EC indicated that it had no intention of publishing the letter. "The reasons? They are obvious (*'intuitive'*)." A two-page statement of reasons was appended.¹⁰⁸

Responding in turn, Bordiga accepted the explanation, but backed out of the agreement to place the matter before a Control Commission. The appeal to a distant body would simply serve to evade a confrontation at home. He begged *L'Unita`* to print a short, enclosed letter, wherein he informed the party that he had not remained silent. Not all his letters had been published.¹⁰⁹

Toward the end of September, Bordiga received a brief communication form

¹⁰⁷APC, *fascicolo* 340 letter of July 19, 1925.

¹⁰⁸APC, *fascicolo* 341, letter of August 18, 1925.

¹⁰⁹APC, letter of August 30, 1925.

Ercoli/Togliatti. "Dear Comrade, We inform you that the Executive Committee has decided not to publish the [August 30] letter in question. Instead, *L'Unita`* will print a statement from the EC, a copy of which is included."¹¹⁰

The intimidation that the leadership had succeeded in instilling was shown by another incident. In light of the third party congress, leading *Sinistra* representatives wrote to the EC expressing their desire to meet and requesting the presence of the Executive Committee. The reply was forthright: "We inform you that the Executive Committee has denied your request for a meeting with the *Sinistra*. So obvious are the reasons that had you thought about it no letter would have been written."¹¹¹

The death knell of the *Sinistra* was being sounded; the end of the movement that had struggled to coalesce and recognize itself at Livorno, only to bear the terror of the early years of fascism. The agony of this moment was captured in a letter from Repossi to Zinoviev. Intercepted by the police, it has lain in the State archives seemingly unclaimed and unpublished through more than two decades of post-Liberation communist historiography.

Reposi reminded the International's president of the promise made at the Fifth Congress--that Zinoviev would oppose any move to the right by that organization. The fact was that the truth about Bordiga was being kept from the party, seventy percent of which supported the *Sinistra*.¹¹² Let the truth out--that the *Sinistra* was not against the International--and one would see the reaction. "And here lies the dishonesty, for the majority is with us." The *Centro* would succeed because the

¹¹⁰APC, letter of September 22, 1925.

¹¹¹APC, letter of September 17 and answer of September 27, 1925

¹¹²The only numerical assessment found in the extant papers of the period. The figure is in keeping with *Avanti!* and Togliatti, both cited earlier.

party was now a mass of workers led by obedient bureaucrats: "not love, no line, none of that, but bureaucracy and spying¹¹³ amongst the comrades...that is the Italian party."

As a spokesman of a working-class communist movement being destroyed to make way for another genre of communism, Repossi merits being quoted at length. "Dear comrade, pardon my frankness, but you know it already. I am unaccustomed to diplomatic subtleties. The first time we spoke, you asked if I was against the [ex-Socialist] *Terzini*. No!, I replied clearly. *Sotto voce* [Umberto] Terracini urged me to hide that fact. Well, in all honesty, pretense disgusts me. Those who have lived in the factory and have felt in their soul the passion of the proletariat's struggle cannot simulate: they know how to call a spade a spade." His final words have acquired a mocking irony never intended by the writer. "When the International will have returned to its origins, Comrade Zinoviev, I hope it will be able to count on you."¹¹⁴ Eleven years later at the end of a mock trial in 1936, Zinoviev was shot to death. The *Centro* he had helped bring to power nodded approval.

Having for his own reasons helped serve as Zinoviev's cat's paw in 1925, Togliatti entered Stalin's assassins' chorus in 1936. "What a time for the Trotskyite-Zinovievite bandits to plot the sacrilegious crimes against the socialist Motherland; they dared raise their infamous hands against the Bolshevik party, against its beloved leaders, against *Stalin* who with steady hand has led and leads the proletariat."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ A PCI document, NP 4896 from 1925, reads, "We are aware of the reunion of the followers of Bordiga. Continue surveillance and keep us informed." ACS, PS, busta 1903.

¹¹⁴Letter to Comrade Zinoviev (3287), August 28, 1925, ACS [Archivio Centrale dello Stato], busta Luigi Repossi.

¹¹⁵*Le complete contre la revolution russe* (Paris:Bureau D'Editions, 1937), p. 16.

3. *The Demise of the Sinistra*

In coordination with the campaign in the press and the use of the International,¹¹⁶ the leadership tore at the *Sinistra* through the inner party network. The change of interregional secretaries, the removal of Bordiga and Fortichiari,¹¹⁷ and the manipulation of the provincial congresses had been the preliminary steps in this direction.

From the archival papers of 1925, enough evidence can be obtained to get a glimpse of how the party was being ripped apart all over Italy and refit into the image being sent down from above. The thrust here was against the last holdout of the left wing, the party base.

The operation turned into the first significant purge in the history of the PCI. A report from Rusconi, evidently a functionary in the Neapolitan region, mentioned the dissolution of the party at Salerno. Speaking of a Nicola Fiore, described as being "very harmful to our movement," Rusconi added, "his adherence to the *Sinistra* has nothing to do with it."¹¹⁸ Renzo De Felice's study of the Italian parties in 1926 found evidence that the Pavia section had been dissolved, and the Milan

¹¹⁶ During the months when the *Sinistra* was being destroyed, no indication was given by Humbert-Droz. This silence and that of the International signaled where sympathy lay. Given the dependence of the *Centro*, it is likely their plans were discussed with the Russian leadership. This would account for the silence in Moscow. Since the published papers of Humbert-Droz represent only a selection from his archive, the possibility remains that some day we may see his reports documenting the agony of the *Sinistra*. He died in 1971.

¹¹⁷ There is a report that the Central Committee suspended Damen and Perrone, along with Repossi and Fortichiari in August for being "followers of Bordiga." See items 34792, 1926, and 24 660/484 34, April 15, 1932, ACS, VCPC [*Vecchio Casellario Politico Centrale*], busta 3403.

¹¹⁸Letter of July 29, 1929, ACS, PS, busta 1903, fascicolo *Bollettini e Circolari*.

section "overturned."¹¹⁹ One enthusiastic interregional secretary wrote of the "extremist fortresses falling one at a time." Novara was for the *Centrale*, and Alessandria had "spontaneously" discharged its organizer.¹²⁰ Both are in Piedmont.

A report from yet another functionary in the south, Landuzzi, contained these lines: "If as I hope [Francesco] Morabito is liquidated, no one will think of factionalism, which should not exist." Landuzzi continued, "Almost sure I will pursue the same line with [Fortunato] La Camera."¹²¹ Both men had been arrested and put on trial with Bordiga and the others during the successful court defense of 1923. Landuzzi added, "You know I prefer to obey and not to lead; if you give the organizer of Naples authority over Sicily, the problem of organizational accommodation will be solved."

During the course of one such accommodation, Bordiga was substituted in the leadership of the Neapolitan section. The explanation for the action--that continuous police surveillance prevented the carrying out of responsibilities. In November, two months before the Lyons Congress, the Neapolitan section was dissolved. "We believe you will agree with us," he was told, "that it is preferable to have a small group in Naples which might initially undertake simple propaganda, rather than an unreliable section of 400 unable to do systematic party work." Reorganization entailed a revision of membership, and the situation would improve by halving the numbers.¹²²

¹¹⁹ "La situazione dei partiti anti-fascisti alla vigilia della loro soppressione secondo la polizia fascista," *Rivista storica del socialismo*, IX, no. 25/6 (1966), pp. 79-96.

¹²⁰ Letter of August 5, 1925 (number 4975-4976), ACS, PS [*Pubblica Sicurezza*], busta 1902, fascicolo *Bollettini e Circolari*.

¹²¹ Letter of August 6, 1925 (No. 5011) ACS, PS, busta 103, fascicolo *Bollettini e Circolari*.

From Trieste a prefectural report noted that members supporting the Committee of Understanding had been expelled and their readmission refused.¹²³ Related news from Venice: the Communist section was reported dissolved in January 1925.¹²⁴

In answer to charges of one member in the area of Gorizia, that the leadership was guilty of expelling those in disagreement, the interregional secretary answered, "And in the good name of the functionaries of the Party...we are going to shove the insinuation down your throat."¹²⁵ The PCI was now a long way from the tight comradeship of Imola and Livorno.

Resistance did not fold easily at the grassroots. A report from Genoa in December mentioned that provisional committees had voted 4 for the *Centro* and 2 for the *Sinistra*, but "the situation at the base is more unfavorable to us." One section had gone to the left, and another did not show up. At meetings "a member of the provincial level always intervenes for us." Will we have a majority? "It is difficult to say." From his account, one suspects that Alessandria had not been tied down securely. "We will have to make another attempt in that city."¹²⁶

The campaign must have gone badly. With the congress only a few weeks away, in November the *Centro* sent out a circular that alone could have assured success. A differential was

¹²² APC, *fascicolo* 341, letter of November 19, 1925.

¹²³ Report of Prefect of Trieste (number 33533), September 2, 1925, ACS, PS, *busta* 107, *fascicolo Trieste*.

¹²⁴ Report of the prefect of Venice (number 27300), July 19, 1925, ACS, PS, *busta* 107, *fascicolo Venezia*.

¹²⁵ APC, *fascicolo* 340, document dated September 1, 1925 (number 00259).

¹²⁶ Report dated December 24, 1925, ACS, PS, *busta* 102, *fascicolo Preparazione Congressuale*.

introduced in elections to provincial congresses: unless delivered in writing, the votes of absentee *Sinistra* supporters would be added "to the theses of the *Centrale*."¹²⁷

Without listing his sources, in 1958 Galli had named Turin, Rome, Aquila, Cosenza, Alessandria, Biella, Trieste, Cremona, Pavia, and Foggia as cities where *Sinistra* majorities had been dismembered by the leadership. In *L'Unita`* many had been listed as supporters of that leadership. "From the spring of 1925 the functionaries¹²⁸ of the *Centro* prepared and dominated the congresses, and it was no longer possible to get an idea of the feelings of the PCI's [PCd'I] base."¹²⁹

During the crisis of regime ensuing from the Matteotti assassination of June 1924, Communist membership surged to over 20,000. Andreina De Clementi has suggested that the lack of sophistication of the new arrivals facilitated the triumph of the *Centro*. The observation has merit and recalls "the Lenin Levy," the admission of 240,000 workers into the Bolshevik party after the death of Lenin, an influx of green recruits that flouted the concept of Bolshevik elitism and proved useful to the First Triumvirate in manipulating the party against Trotsky. The explanation does not account for the many sections suppressed by the leadership in the course of 1925. The Italian conditions were strikingly different. Even in the less threatening atmosphere of those months, only

¹²⁷ Party circular, November 28, 1925, ACS, PS, busta 102, fascicolo K-1. According to Fortichiari, every provincial congress in northern Italy had voted *Sinistra*.

¹²⁸ One such functionary was Pietro Secchia, the "hard revolutionary" of the Togliattian party who died in 1972. Secchia had been a follower of the *Sinistra* and attended the Naples meeting of the Committee of Understanding. There he proposed that the Committee appropriate funds meant for the FGC [the Federation of Young Communists]. The proposal was not accepted. Hearing of Gramsci's "either or" ultimatum--either a functionary with the party and therefore against the Committee or with the Committee and no longer a functionary--Secchia left the *Sinistra*, remaining a "hard liner," but devoid of *Sinistra* ideology or morality. See "Le vedovelle del Compagno Secchia," *Il programma comunista*, August 26, 1973.

¹²⁹ Galli, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

the most committed would be likely to join the severely-tested Communists. Moreover, new members entering the party through a *Sinistra* section probably adopted the views of the majority with whom they now associated. Both reasons may help explain the obdurate survival of a *Sinistra* majority in Turin and elsewhere until 1925. The possibility exists, too, that having dissolved a section, the leadership proceeded to found a more pliable one in its place; that may have occurred at Venice.

Seventy or so delegates, about as many as had attended the Como conference less than two years earlier, journeyed across the Alps in January, 1926 to attend the Third Congress of Lyons. Representing a membership whose loyalty to the *Sinistra* had been overwhelming a short year earlier, as had been the case from the beginning of the party, these delegates voted 90.8 percent for the *Centro* and 9.2 percent for the *Sinistra*. The result was even more astonishing at the FGC, whose continuous left-wing orientation stretched back to when the youth federation was still socialist--94.6 percent for the *Centro*! With the *Sinistra* destroyed, the party was broken.

Citing poor health and personal reasons, Tasca withdrew from the leadership in 1924 [I no longer recall the source for this statement]. In his famous study of fascism produced many years later, he had this to say about the PSI's conduct between 1919 and 1922. "The fate of Italian Socialism was indeed tragic, for it suffered as much from the insight of some of its members as from the obtuseness of others."¹³⁰ If we substitute "Communism" for "Socialism," Tasca's epigraph could be applied with precision to the communist movement between 1921 and 1926, the very movement he had helped first to create and then destroy. After expulsion from the PCI [PCd'I]

¹³⁰ Rossi, *The Rise of Fascism*, p. 73.

along with Graziadei, he wrote prolifically on communism, analyzing from personal knowledge the make-up of Stalinism,¹³¹ but the deeds against the *Sinistra* he carried to his grave.

4. *The Sixth Plenum of the ECCI*

The epilogue of the Fourth Congress of the International had taken place in Italy with the arrests of 1923 and the refusal of the Socialists to fuse with the PCI. Appropriately, the follow-up to the third Italian congress occurred in Moscow. Bordiga and Togliatti were merely the foremost members of a larger Italian delegation going to the Sixth Plenum of the ECCI held in February 1926. In his opening remarks, Zinoviev reported that the problem of the "ultra-left" had been eliminated by the Italian party.¹³² Bordiga had gone to Moscow to get the Comintern to reverse the decisions of the Lyons Congress, although why he thought it possible remains a mystery.¹³³ Unable to budge the Comintern, he renewed his criticism of policies.

All of Bordiga's addresses before the Comintern can be read with interest and value today, but none equals the delivery to the 1926 Plenum. Speaking for the last time before a body amongst whose founders he rightly belongs, Bordiga's enumeration of the ills besetting the Third International may be taken as a requiem for those International left-wing vanguards that had been drawn originally to the October Revolution. Always in the minority, the *Sinistra* was now reduced

¹³¹ A. Rossi, *Autopsie du Stalinisme* (Paris: Editions Pierre Horay), 1957.

¹³² My handling of the ECCI is based on IPC [*International Press Correspondence*], IV, 17,20, 26 (March-April, 1926), and LCI [*La Correspondance internationale*], No. 33 March 13, 1926, No. 35, March 17, 1926, and issues of March 16 and April 6 of that year.

¹³³ One *Sinistra* policy stressed the need to remain in the PCI and International until expelled.

to one solitary voice defending those principles upon which Bordiga believed proletarian internationalism had rested.

He opened with a review of the tactics from the earlier congresses that had led to the crisis facing the Comintern. This was followed by his first *clou*, a rejection of Bolshevization. The Russian party labored under special conditions in a country where the modern bourgeoisie had not fully overcome the feudal aristocracy. "It is essential that we learn how to attack a modern bourgeois democratic state that, on the one hand, has the resources to corrupt and dissuade the proletariat, and, on the other, is able to defend itself militarily with far more efficacy than had the tsarist regime. This problem is not found in the history of the Russian Revolution." The great contribution of the Russian revolutionaries had been the restoration of Marxism, not their organizational experience. Revolutions posed the problem of force, not of form. Bolshevization stifled the worker, for the latter was deprived of the political vitality and stimulation brought by the revolutionary intellectual.

Next he turned to a review of the means used to discipline the parties, to the "criminal code" that was destroying the internal fabric of the parties and forcing the rank and file into submission to the new policies. "In this past period we have experienced a type of sport that consists of hitting out, intervening, breaking, ill-treating, and in some instances it is often first-rate revolutionaries who are attacked." Whatever its usefulness, this violence needed to be severely limited, and not made "the rule, a sport, the ideal of party leaders."¹³⁴ Bordiga had described the recent history of the Italian Sinistra, although he may have had other foreign parties in mind, perhaps the Russian.

¹³⁴ "But the Moscow trials were not at all an accident," Trotsky wrote more than a decade later. "The servile obedience, hypocrisy, the official cult of lying, bribery, and other forms of corruption had already begun to blossom

He turned to scrutinize the significance of factions. He saw them more as symptoms than causes. Their appearance called for study of conditions, "not the lopping off of heads." Here, too, the remarks could apply equally to Stalin or Gramsci. With this he arrived at the most sensitive topic, the sacrosanct subject never discussed in Comintern assemblies--the relationship between International movement and the Russian party and state.

Bordiga acknowledged the principal responsibility undertaken by the Russian party--that of standing firm against the pressures arising from the non-proletarian majority inside the USSR and preparing to meet a foreign intervention--yet given that "the world revolution had not yet developed in other countries, it becomes a matter of conducting Russian policies in strict coordination with the broadly revolutionary policies of the proletariat." The Russian party and proletariat remained the first-line defenders of the USSR, but "it is also fundamentally necessary to rely on the proletariat of the capitalist countries, on their class sensibilities," also forged by antagonistic class relationships. Such policies could not be entertained by a retreat to a form of national socialism: these problems "cannot be resolved within the Russian movement, but need the direct assistance of the International Communist Proletariat." Without this collaboration and reliance, "dangers will imperil revolutionary strategy in Russia and our own policies in the capitalist countries."

Bordiga's views stood in opposition to those personified by "socialism in one country." Proceeding from the same Marxist premises, Bordiga was arguing for an International that remained open-ended, a promulgator of policies dependent on and recognizing the roles of the Western and other working classes, at the very time when these classes had not gained proletarian sovereignty. In this order of things, the borders of the proletarian state were class lines, not political boundaries.

luxuriantly in Moscow [and the International] by 1924-25." *Their Morals and Ours* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), p. 26.

Moreover, although strictly disciplined to the International, the workingclass parties had to be free from the authoritarian imposition recently experienced by the *Sinistra*. The continued hopes for socialism in Russia and the success of proletarian revolution elsewhere were presented as interrelated aspects of the same development. But in the end, he concluded on a note of deep pessimism.

That he had made a deep impression on the Plenum is evident from the remarks of the German delegate Arthur Rosenberg. Rosenberg could not agree with Bordiga's "metaphysics," but paid tribute to "two great speeches in principle. That of Zinoviev presenting the line of the Presidium of the Russian Central Committee, and Bordiga's in opposition."¹³⁵

More informative was E.H. Carr, whose analytical summary had the advantage of being composed several decades after the event: "This powerful, though solitary, assault contained everything that the leaders of the Comintern most disliked and feared, and provided a focus for the rest of the debate. Most delegates passed over in silence Bordiga's attack on the Russian party and its role in the Comintern, which cut too close to the bone."¹³⁶

No delegate rose to discuss the merits of the address. It fell to Togliatti to repair the damage. Well aware of the effects the words had, and probably still admitting to himself the range of Bordiga's stature, something he would publicly concede four decades later, after the appearance of documents that compelled the PCI to alter its post-Liberation history,¹³⁷ Togliatti declared, "You

¹³⁵[I have since lost the source of this quotation.]

¹³⁶Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, p. 502

¹³⁷ Personal interview in Rome with Michele Salerno, retired editor of *Paese Sera*, Roman evening daily, June 7, 1970. Signor Salerno was "shocked" upon hearing Togliatti describe Bordiga as a man of "great ability." The documents are found in *La formazione*.

have heard Bordiga, and it appears you have a certain sympathy for him. He presents his questions with sincerity and appears to have the qualities of a leader, but we think he is no great revolutionary leader. Had we followed the policies advised by Comrade Bordiga during the last two years, the Communist Party would have been smashed." He called on the ECCI to condemn the *Sinistra* leader and what he stood for.

If a few years earlier Radek had rated Bordiga as "one of the few minds capable of leading the International,"¹³⁸ at this session the real compliment came from another unexpected Soviet source. After an all-night meeting with Trotsky, Bordiga had an extended and ineffectual encounter with Stalin. "I can respect Bordiga, whom I don't consider either a Leninist or a Marxist, and believe him," said the General Secretary of the Soviet party, "because he says what he thinks...." The slipped remark bespoke of what the International had/was to become. Few appeared to have noted it at the time.

In closing, Zinoviev listed Bordiga's seven cardinal sins. Looking back, Zinoviev's frivolity was matched only by the irony in the remarks dropped by Bukharin: "In his arguments, Comrade Bordiga brought up twice or thrice the problem of party democracy in its national and international aspects. It is superfluous to deal with it at any length here." Zinoviev was then in his last months as president of the International, to be followed by Bukharin whose tenure would not be long-lived.

On June 27, 1926, two months after the close of the Plenum, *L'Unita`* featured an account by Grieco, the old Rossi of the Fourth Congress of the International, now displaying his new political loyalty. He told the readership that Bordiga had been the solitary opposition at the ECCI. "He was more temperate in presenting the criticism known to us and heard by us in a more savage

¹³⁸*La formazione*, p.280.

style at our recent [Lyons] congress....Bordiga broke a lance in favor of [internal] party democracy." Three years before he had written in admiration: "Bordiga prefers to command armed battalions."

Returning from Moscow, Bordiga devoted himself to earning a living.¹³⁹ "After the dissolution of the provincial and Neapolitan bodies of the Communist party," notes an archival report," Bordiga refuses all visits by any party comrades, except for [Dr. Ludovico] Tarsia and lawyer Michele Bianco."¹⁴⁰

Sometime in the course of 1926, the Blackshirts ransacked his residence, and in December the police arrived [this is in error: he was arrested earlier]. The next three years were spent in prison exile on an island in the Tyrrhenian Sea.

During that very December, Togliatti spoke before the Seventh Plenum of the ECCL. Zinoviev's turn had come, and with him the entire Left [United] Opposition was under siege. "We will tell the parties," the *Centro* leader declared, "that we will wrap ourselves around the Russian party; before the entire world proletariat we again stress that the Russian party must lead the International, and that this role for us is the most serious guarantee of victory for the revolution."¹⁴¹

Bordiga was freed in early 1930. The exiled Central Committee expelled him on charges of conduct unbecoming a communist, defending Trotsky, and factionalism.¹⁴² On the surface, the act

¹³⁹ At Lyons Bordiga was coopted into the leadership as a symbolic figurehead, but appears not to have played the role.

¹⁴⁰ Report of prefect of Naples (Number 11567), April 4, 1926, ACS, VCPC, busta Ludovico Tarsia.

¹⁴¹ Berti, *I primi dieci anni*, p. 285.

¹⁴² *Il lavoratore*, May 3, 1930, a weekly of the Italian Section of the Communist Party of the USA.

was a genuflection, a gesture of obedience to the Soviet leadership. Inner thoughts have remained veiled.

The exiled and morally footloose Grieco surveyed the Italian political scene in 1927. Yes, there had been an abstentionist Bordiga at the Bologna Congress of 1919, and the ECCI had invited him to the Second Congress of the International in 1920, but once there he had turned into a "killjoy" ("*guastafesta*").¹⁴³ So fell another of the many spadeful of deceptions dropped by Grieco to cover the past.

He was still at it in 1937, at a time when Stalin's political star shone in the heavens above the silence enshrouding the growing hecatombs of the slaughtered old Bolsheviks. Within the Italian leadership, a senseless, ritualistic search for residual traces of Trotskyism and *bordighismo* was renewed amidst a plethora of *mea culpas*. If Grieco owned up to having been guilty of that weakness, he denied the same had ever been true of Togliatti. "A solid Marxist-Leninist grounding immunized Togliatti against Trotskyism and its *bordighista* variant. In Togliatti, the aversion to Bordiga was profound; one might say it was physical."¹⁴⁴ In this manner he cleansed himself with an act of self-flagellation. Many years later when death came, he had yet to unbend himself and look up to the truth.

Ten years after the Seventh Plenum, Gramsci lay dead. "The first Marxist, the first Leninist, the first Bolshevik of the Italian working class," intoned Togliatti. Two post-World War II images were in the making, those of Bordiga and Gramsci. Within the decade--Liberation!

¹⁴³ *Lo stato operaio*, I 9-10 (November-December, 1927), pp. 985-94.

¹⁴⁴ Ruggiero Grieco, *Scritti scelti* (Rome: Riuniti, 1966), I, p. 539.

Many of the institutions and movements of the pre-1922 scene survived fascism and the war--the Vatican, the bourgeois system of property, the latifundia in the south, and the working class as the laboring class, as the beast of burden in modern society. Two did not. One, an institution that had long forfeited any reason to remain as a symbol of a united Italy--the monarchy; the other, the communist *Sinistra*--that exiguous workingclass vanguard that had labored successfully to maturity between 1912-1926.

The continued euphoria of post-Liberation, the immense prestige of the Italian Communist Party, the vitality and hope of the newly freed working class--hailed as the new ruling class in Togliatti's intoxicating rhetoric, as he called upon that class to rebuild the nation without regard to existing social relations--were the setting of a new myth and soon, among Communists and those influenced by them, Gramsci was venerated as the sage, all-knowing founding Father of Italian Communism.

In the early postwar years it was not quickly apparent that in the name of social revolution the working class had been offered another cult.

EPILOGUE

Trotsky: "The [United] Opposition is of the opinion that Stalin's leadership makes victory [in China] more difficult."

Molotov: "Where is the Party?"

Trotsky: "The Party, you strangled it."

Discussion in Central Committee, August 1, 1927, found in *La révolution défigurée* (Paris: 1929), p. 191.

There remains the task of drawing from both the EPILOGUE and "The Agony of the *Sinistra*" the needed conclusions and a rounding some of out the historical perspective in light of the new interpretation presented.

1. The first should come as no surprise, namely, that in 1914, 1915, 1917, and 1919 the *Sinistra* and Bordiga were the elements in the Socialist party with the clearest understanding of the nature of the war crisis and the task facing the party and the class. Gramsci need hardly be mentioned. His initial sympathy for Mussolini's interventionism kept him absent from the 1915 antiwar efforts of the Turinese working class,¹⁴⁵ and his famed 1917 commentary, "The revolution

¹⁴⁵ This has always been a contentious point with supporters of Gramsci, who often have denied it. Like Tasca earlier, Berti (*op. cit.*, p. 48) confirmed it, noting that beside his article in *Il Grido del Popolo*, "a second to Mussolini's interventionist *"Il Popolo d'Italia"* was never printed.. At the XVII Congress of the PSI at Livorno in 1921, after shouts of "Gramsci, Gramsci," it was Bordiga who actually defended him; see speech in *Resoconto stenografico del XVII Congresso Nazionle del Partito Socialista Italiano* (Milan: *Edizioni Avanti!*, 1963), pp. 271-96. The German historian Christian Riechers in *Gramsci e le ideologie del suo tempo* [original: *Antonio Gramsci--Marxismus in Italien*] ([Genoa(?):] Graphos, 1993), pp.54-71, discusses Gramsci's wartime activities; he notes the strange concepts used by Gramsci in the interventionist article; quotes Umberto Calosso, a collaborator at *Ordine Nuovo*, that Gramsci "believed neutralism untenable, and after Caporetto was hostile to Serrati's views of non-resistance to the

against 'Capital' "--the object of so much subsequent attention--appeared to have little influence in Italy and, in any case, was irrelevant to an understanding of the specifics in 1917 Petrograd. The events of that year had less to do with "the continuation of Italian and German philosophical idealism (*pensiero idealistico*)," as Gramsci would have it, than with the more down-to-earth interaction of party, soviet, and working class in the insurrection known as the October Revolution. This irrelevance to reality would appear time and again in his political writings.

The primacy continued into 1919. It was the *Sinistra* and their spokesmen who first raised the need to consider new tactics, the quality of the party, the need for expeditiousness, if workingclass revolution was to be taken seriously, a goal claimed by the majoritarian Maximalists. In this rich thematic that extended all through 1919, abstentionism, mentioned by all subsequent histories, was secondary to the more important themes noted above.¹⁴⁶ Still, those who subsequently scoffed at abstentionism have yet to indicate how the 1919 election could have become something other than a disaster for the successful Socialists. At the time, Gramsci was fully occupied with seeking in the "factory council" the origins of the new workers' state and the locus of the revolution, all the while giving his loyalty to the vacuous and paralyzing policies of Maximalism.

invasion"; Riechers concludes that Gramsci's wartime position was a "particular version of what the *Communist Manifesto* defines as 'bourgeois socialism.'" Cammett concedes the article, and in defending Gramsci remarks: "Gramsci clearly thought" Mussolini "still a revolutionary Socialist" and "felt--and he assumed Mussolini agreed--that war would bring about a collapse of the bourgeois order...." (pp.36-38, and bottom note) In few words, Gramsci misjudged, which is my point. These judgmental errors would grow in number and destructiveness until 1926. The fundamental question raised by these political errors is why his judgment was so poor. In the hagiography, they are redressed as examples of brilliant novelty.

¹⁴⁶Sdsc, II, p. 34. Abstentionism was not originally proposed by Bordiga.

Analogously, it was the *Sinistra* that in the early congresses of the Third International stressed the need for tactics that took into account the more advanced make-up of Western society. That experience was not part of the history of the successful Russian revolutionaries, and a discussion of those tactics necessitated an involvement of the Western parties.¹⁴⁷ Hence, as the goals of the International changed, Bordiga and the *Sinistra* became opponents of Bolshevization, and Gramsci, a neophyte adherent to the new Stalinist Center, a proponent.

Perhaps the singular most telling example of how the early history of Italian communism was subsequently and deliberately misrepresented is this episode, aptly an earlier instance of "Comrade Vlado's fur hat." In the latter incident, Vladimir Clementis and Klement Gottwald were photographed together in 1948 on the occasion of the founding of a new "workingclass-based" regime in Czechoslovakia. It was snowing, and Clementis placed his fur hat on Gottwald's bare head. Later, Clementis was purged, expunged from history, and his figure airbrushed from the photo. The telltale hat remained to indicate his former presence. Our case concerns the noted "For a Renewal of the Socialist Party" from May 1920 almost universally associated with Gramsci. Amongst the many who praised Gramsci for that piece, almost none pointed out that the text omitted any mention of Gramsci's earlier councilarism; or that the contents represented a *démarche* toward to the strong *Sinistra* presence in the Turin section that stressed the principality of the party, and was already a year into a discussion of what had to be done. Without the latter, probably there would have been no call for renewal. The same *Sinistra* of the antiwar actions of 1915, the revolt of 1917 (Tasca's assessment), and that would continue until suppressed by the Gramscian leadership.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

One could airbrush them from history, but not their ideological contribution imbedded in the statement. An exception was Cortesi, who identified "Renewal" as closer to the *Sinistra* of Turin ("sinistri torinesi") than to the views of Gramsci.¹⁴⁸ Volume II of *Sinistra* history said it best: the content of the article "is so little 'Gramscian' and 'Ordinovista' that it conditions every soviet experiment with the presence of the class party, understood as strongly centralized and centralizing."¹⁴⁹ Gramsci's reservations, if not continued opposition, were indicated by two expedients: first, the May 8 statement was featured on the third page of the periodical, rather than on the front page where Gramsci placed his factory-council writings; second, in the subsequent May-June issues, Gramsci returned to the theme of the factory council as the crucible of revolution, an implicit repudiation of the May 8 statement.¹⁵⁰ Had the Bolsheviks not praised "For a Renovation of the Socialist Party" in preparation for the Second Comintern Congress, the incident might never have entered the hagiography. To be sure, a better informed Lenin promptly condemned the factory-council theories.¹⁵¹ Archival reports are not always trustworthy, yet merit attention; one such document from February 1920 mentioned Abstentionist (*Sinistra*) numbers: 150 at Bologna, Florence 50, Novara 2,000, Turin 1,000, "the entire Socialist section of the city."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Cortesi, *Le origini del Partito*, p. 227.

¹⁴⁹ Sdsc, II, p. 327.

¹⁵⁰ Any undergraduate with a reading knowledge of Italian may verify these assertions by turning to the appropriate issues of a Feltrinelli Reprint.

¹⁵¹ Ignazio Silone in Preface to Angelo Tasca, *Nascita e avvento del fascismo* (Florence, *La Nuova Italia*, 1950), p. vii.

¹⁵² ACS, VCPC, found in Bordiga's *busta*.

By way of passing to 1926, for both men the final year of activity before arrest by the Fascist authorities, to further illustrate the difference between their operating principles we must stop at 1923-1924. Finding itself in growing disagreement with the policies and tactics of the International, the *Sinistra*-staffed Executive Committee of the PCd'I voluntarily resigned in early 1923 shortly after clandestinely returning from the Fourth Congress of the International. This action opened the door to the soon-to-be-formed Gramscian Center.

An effort by Bordiga to call a special congress to discuss the troubled relationship with the Comintern failed for reasons that are not clear, although annual congresses had been stipulated by the founding congress at Livorno. Bordiga spent most of 1923 in prison until emerging after a victorious acquittal in October. During this time with the help of sympathetic prison guards he composed and smuggled out a Manifesto intended to inform the party membership of the full extent of the disagreement with the International, and included an appeal for open discussion.¹⁵³ "The party is going through a crisis of such nature," Bordiga had written, "that it can be resolved only by the participation of the whole mass of members." The document was circulated amongst the leadership remaining at large. Receiving initial support from the new men moving up,¹⁵⁴ it was twice blocked by Gramsci who termed it "mad," "Byzantine," and "Machiavellian." Gramsci's action benefited himself, and also the destructive reaction gathering in Moscow. Above all, it was a disservice to the party membership and attendant class, who were now cut out from considering and deciding on this absolutely critical matter.

¹⁵³ The document is found in Helmut Gruber, *International Communism in the Era of Lenin* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY: 1967), p.p. 371-379.

¹⁵⁴ See Togliatti's remark: "a proposal that will attract the more intelligent comrades," in *La formazione*, pp. 53-60.

To anyone who has been alerted to what to look for, Gramsci's surreptitious and successful effort to organize a Center leadership can be seen and followed in the 1923-1924 correspondence of *The Formation*. What is missing from the documentation is the soft evidence--the conversations, the inner thoughts, the oral debates, and the reactions in the party ranks. Since the postwar PCI historians have always understated the nature of the transition and the PCInt. has yet to reconstruct those years, one is left with occasional and revealing glimpses from diverse sources.

So Fortichiari wrote of the growing skepticism and distrust that the Milanese communists felt for *L'Unita`* edited by Gramsci; of the abandonment of the *Ufficio I*, the party's well-functioning underground network, because it was staffed by a *Sinistra* cadre; of the cutting out of Luigi Repossi, the central figure in the PCd'I's trade union activities and a veteran activist and foremost representative of the Milanese proletariat.

One senses an equivocal note in Gramsci's letter of February 9, 1924, where he identified Trotsky, Bukharin and Radek--in opposition to Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev--with efforts "to assure the revolution its socialist and worker character," and then failed to identify with these goals.¹⁵⁵ Similarly in Togliatti's views to Gramsci of December, 1923, when still expressing the *Sinistra* position he argued against not involving the party and the working class in the issues raised by Bordiga's Manifesto. Were we to do that, he continued, "it would be dirty business" ("*cosa*

¹⁵⁵ *La formazione*, pp. 186-201. In this letter Gramsci alluded to Bordiga's views that the International was too much under Russian influence and Bordiga's hopes of eliminating that hegemony through revolutions in Central and Western Europe; Gramsci disagreed: Comintern tactics "were ideal for interpreting and guiding events." Arriving in Moscow in 1923, Fortichiari recalled the impression that Gramsci had distanced himself from Trotsky, whom Fortichiari remembered as no friend of the *Sinistra*, thus contributing to Trotsky's isolation. *Comunismo e revisionismo*, p. 141.

brutta qualora fosse vera").¹⁵⁶ But he did just that: party and class remained uninformed and uninvolved. Under whose pressure? Gramsci's for one. As a result of what reasoning we may never know. The letter does show how the relationship of the leadership to the party base and to the working class had begun to alter, moving away from co-involving the base and making that class the final arbiter. Also, incidents surface indicating that in defense of the new politics the morality of the group constituting the Center had begun to mutate. Today, we can identify the mutant as proto-Stalinism.¹⁵⁷

Two documents from the closing months of 1926, both a reaction to the most burning issue within the communist movement of the time, that is, the struggle between the now dominant Stalin-Bukharin coalition and the United [Left] Opposition, allow us to pit the views and judgments of the two men.

Gramsci's is the better known: the never-delivered cautionary appeal he sent to the Central Committee of the Soviet party. In it he pleaded with the Soviets to consider the destructive effects the internecine struggle was having on the masses in the West, coming after the difficulties experienced in becoming true Bolshevik parties "under the guidance" of the Communist Party of the USSR. Continuing, "Now we declare that we believe that the political line followed by the majority of the Central Committee of the Communist party of the USSR is correct, and if we have to pronounce ourselves on the question the majority of the Italian Party will concur." He balanced his statement with a critical assessment of the United Opposition: "There arises fully developed

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹⁵⁷ Jules Humbert-Droz, *Il contrasto tra L'Internazionale e il P.C.I.* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1969), p. 137. Writing several decades later, he recalled that the leadership of the PCI did not hesitate to use "the inadmissible methods frequently employed by Stalin..." He was referring to the Center leadership.

from the ideology and practice of the opposition bloc the social democratic and syndicalist tradition that has heretofore kept the Western proletariat from organizing itself as a ruling class." Nevertheless, he praised Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev for their past contributions, adding his own cautionary note: "We appeal especially to them and to those largely responsible for the present situation, because we want to be sure that the majority of the Central Committee of the USSR does not intend to over-win (*stravincere*) the fight and is disposed to avoid excessive measures." As earlier, he ended with a call for unity.¹⁵⁸

As with so much of the history of the *Sinistra*, Bordiga's letter,¹⁵⁹ an answer to one from Karl Korsch, has remained in the shadows. Both men were attempting to respond to the turn taken by Soviet developments. Far more than Gramsci's, Bordiga's letter does not lend itself to a simple summary. He disagreed with Korsch; the Russian Revolution had been proletarian, not bourgeois, but with limited tactical applicability. He mentioned the effort to develop a tactical left position that could be applied to problems that were diverse in time and place, one that remained on a revolutionary terrain and was cognizant of objective reality. He opposed criticizing the United Opposition for having been compelled to bow to the majority. Then in antipodal contrast to Gramsci: "We agree with the position taken by the Russian Left as regards the directives of the state policies of the Russian party. We oppose the direction taken by the majority of the [Russian] central committee because it is the beginning of a degeneration of the Russian party and the proletarian dictatorship that will lead away from revolutionary Marxism and Leninism." Expulsion from the International would diminish even more the limited freedom to influence the course of the working class; with

¹⁵⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Scritti politici* (Rome: Riuniti, 1967), pp. 713-19.

¹⁵⁹ *Quaderni del Programma Comunista*, No. 4, April, 1980, pp. 5-8, (Milan: *Il programma comunista*)

every means short of giving reason for expulsion from the party, one must oppose the prevailing policies. It was difficult, but he remained hopeful: "In spite of everything we can wait. There will be new outside developments, and I count on the collapse of the present state of siege before we are compelled to respond to [their] provocations."

In summary, the best in Gramsci's October letter are the several stratagems he advanced to becalm the destructive in-fighting in the Soviet party; the worst that he misunderstood the nature of the issue and identified completely with the Stalinist Center. The United Opposition was striving to defend itself against a mortal alien peril, while deeply involved in questioning internal Soviet policies, the nature of the party, the threat of bureaucracy, intra-party openness, the relations of the party to the class and to the foreign proletariat; in its revolutionary isolation, the remaining mind of the revolution seeking an agenda for survival. For Gramsci to compare the United Opposition to Western social democracy and syndicalism is to suggest that, as in 1914, 1917, and 1919, he again missed reality. To which must be added that Gramsci's concerns came late: many of the same issues had been dramatically and boldly aired by Bordiga in remarks before the ECCI earlier in the year.

What stands out with Bordiga was the clear identification with the Opposition, the need to stand up against the Center's policies, the assessment that those policies would have fatal consequences for the revolution, and the need to develop tactical steps to continue the international class struggle without losing its class or Marxist essence. Whereas Gramsci's was an appeal to political reason, Bordiga sought a tactical political response based on the inapplicability of the Russian model in a Western setting. In counseling a wait and see attitude, Bordiga's restrained reaction--both then and earlier--may have contributed to his isolation and defeat. Nevertheless, the

letter to Korsch remains a testimonial to Bordiga's early perspicacity: on the matter of where the Soviet regime was being led, time proved him right.

There remains this final task--making clear the meaning of veiled remarks. In his letter, Gramsci used "painful experience, across painful and exhausting crises" to describe the change from the old to the new party. Four decades later, Berti recalled that the transformation had been "very complex, contradictory, difficult, hampered by innumerable impediments."¹⁶⁰ For both, strange words to describe what comes naturally to revolutionary ideologues--undaunting political debate leading to a new enlightenment. The reality is that those unrevealing words masked the underhanded destruction by every means then available of a dissenting majoritarian current.

Referring to the situation in the parties, Bordiga used an expression consonant with and illustrative of both Gramsci and Berti: "state of siege (*stato d'assedio*)". Thirty years later Daniels would apply the term to the Russian party of 1923. No one reading Daniels would fail to identify the man most associated with that state of affairs—Stalin! In the Italian party, that responsibility fell on Stalin's follower—Gramsci! "When Gramsci returned to Italy," recalled Fortichiari testifying to Gramsci's actions and the esteem he enjoyed, "and acted as a Stalinist, it was Gramsci who was doing it; had another done it, we would have laughed in his face."¹⁶¹ How else could Gramsci have been able to remain leader of a party that gave him a fealty based on discipline, without conviction?

2. Up to this point, I make two claims. First, between Bordiga and Gramsci, 1914-1926, Bordiga had the clearer understanding of the problems and the needs facing the revolutionary Italian

¹⁶⁰ Berti, *op. cit.*, p. 184

¹⁶¹ Fortichiari, *Comunismo e revisionismo*, p. 161.

workingclass movement; there was no match. Hence, Radek's encomium to Bordiga in 1924.¹⁶² Second, unable to win over the PCd'I base after returning to Italy, Gramsci resorted to the "slash and burn" measures used by the Stalinist Center with whom he had already indicated his solidarity. Evidence suggests that his political migration was completed before returning; thus the rush to block the Manifesto and rewrite the party's past, transferring its genesis to the Russian events. Western historians have endlessly detailed those activities in the Russian party, but have remained mute or unobservant with the Italian. Lyons represented the triumph of Gramsci's leadership over and against the party.

One should recall here Amendola's deceptive comments half a century later: "Gramsci prepared the III Congress and won over "the supporters of Bordiga one at a time..." without "disciplinary measures." So long as the PCI existed, the truth about Lyons had to be suppressed. We should note that Amendola conceded the existence of a Gramscian cult and the political purpose behind it, maintaining that the use of historical myths had been justified by none other than Gramsci.¹⁶³

The incorporation of myths into history degrades the social science, an example being Amendola's writing so characteristic of much in print about Gramsci. Of greater importance to the English-reading world, if the statements above are accurate why are they not more in evidence in the English-based histories? Some answer is provided immediately below.

¹⁶² See above, p. 68, n138.

¹⁶³ Giorgio Amendola, *Comunismo, antifascismo, e resistenza* (Rome: Riuniti, 1970), pp. 144-145. When I first read this it was difficult to escape the conclusion that in casting responsibility on Gramsci, Amendola was preparing an alibi, an avoidance of *mea culpa*. As I discovered later, this was not the case.

Although I had first read Gramsci in the gray paper-backed Einaudi edition on historical materialism, when I began serious studies in the origins of Italian communism, it was through the Feltrinelli reprints of *Il Soviet, Ordine Nuovo*, other original periodicals, as well as the critical writings of the 1950s-1960s. From there I went on to the Italian archives. The advantage of this entrance into the origins of Italian communism was that one got to see the beginning and early years of the movement *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, as it was, before being larded over by a latter-day politically-biased historiography.

Most English-language historians of Italian communism seemingly skip over these early years to get to the Gramscian period. To fill this gap, they rely often on Spriano, turn to inaccurate sources, or appear to substitute their own unfounded assumptions. The evidence here is overwhelming.

Thus a crafted historian, Helmut Gruber, erroneously associated (1967) Bordiga with syndicalists and Dutch Tribunists in an initial volume on the early Comintern of Lenin's time,¹⁶⁴ and failed to mention Bordiga's great oppositional speech to the 1926 ECCI in a companion volume on the Stalin years¹⁶⁵. Older students of Italian history know how much early post-World War II Italian studies in the United States were indebted to A. William Salomone. In *Italy from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (1970) he mistakenly listed Gramsci as the founder of "the Italian Communist Party (PCI)," who was for a time threatened "by the ultra-activist positions assumed by

¹⁶⁴ *International Communism in the Era of Lenin*, pp. 361 & 383.

¹⁶⁵ *Soviet Russia Masters the Comintern: Communism in the Era of Stalin's Ascendancy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974)

Amadeo Bordiga,¹⁶⁶ as if the political clash between the two arose from a non-political manic condition in the latter. Grant Amyot (1980) made Amadeo Bordiga "the first (1921-24) General Secretary of the Pcd'I,"¹⁶⁷ not realizing that Gramsci had assumed that title in 1924 as part of the Stalinization of the PCd'I. Bordiga was without title. For John A. Baker (1989), Bordiga, the "first PCI leader," was a radical intellectual who "dreamed of coming to power on the shoulders of an embattled proletariat."¹⁶⁸ One has to wonder how he managed to sidle into Bordiga's mind--in the limbic area surrounding the thalamus.

In his study of Angelo Tasca (1986), Alexander J. De Grand noted, "The PCI [PCd'I], however, opposed *L'Alleanza del lavoro* [Labor Alliance, 1922] from the start." The statement is a half-truth. Although declining to enter into a *political* alliance with that body, the PCd'I pledged unstinting efforts to help the Alliance unite the class and undertake a defense of all class interests. This support was underlined by Bordiga's assertion (years later in an interview) that the Alliance had made use of the party's illegal but functioning communication network during the disastrous "legal strike" of 1922.

Moreover, a mass of documentary evidence suggests that the PCd'I remained very involved with the Alliance. The *Sinistra* PCd'I strongly supported labor alliances. The PCd'I's pivotal revolutionary policy rested on trade-union and working-class unity that are clearly laid out in

¹⁶⁶ *Italy from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, Double Day & Co., Inc., 1970), pp. 397-98.

¹⁶⁷ *The Italian Communist Party* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p. 89.

¹⁶⁸ *Italian Communism* (National Defense University Press, Fort Lesley J. McNair: Washington, D.C.: 1989). p. 21. The inside cover features a photograph from the PCI's VI Congress, 1948. One sees four descending portraits: Marx, Stalin, Gramsci, and Togliatti. The filial descent, Stalin-Gramsci-Togliatti, was accurate.

documents from the period and in the writings of Gramsci; PCd'I members were duty bound to work in all areas of working-class life, to enlighten and to influence working-class understanding.¹⁶⁹ Only when the class matured and gave indication that it was ready to act *as a class for itself* was a revolutionary change thinkable. The tragedy here is that these tactics were never given the opportunity to prove or invalidate their putative efficacy. Still, without being explicit, De Grand accurately sensed something: "In general, Tasca backed the measures taken against the party left, but his warning at the Como conference that the Center faction that made itself into the party would now make the party, which still belonged to Bordiga, into a faction took on a new meaning"¹⁷⁰

A few years later (1989), he returned to the topic. "While Bordiga and his followers continued to be a problem at Milan, Naples, and a few other centers, the leadership used all the weapons at its disposal to eliminate these pockets of resistance and gain full control over the apparatus."¹⁷¹ Disclosing more than any earlier historian, he conceded that Gramsci's leadership had been "artificially imposed by the Comintern," that "in 1925 Gramsci acted decisively to destroy the remaining centers of Bordiga's influence in the PCI [PCd'I]", and did "not hesitate to use

¹⁶⁹ See *Relazione del Partito comunista d'Italia al IV Congresso dell'Internazionale comunista, novembre 1922* (Milan: Edizioni Iskra, 1976), and Gramsci's trade-union writings in *Opere II, Socialismo e fascismo L'Ordine nuovo 1921 1922* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966); Spriano, *Da Bordiga*, pp. 193-201. For data on the party's relations with the Alliance, see "Un'intervista ad Amadeo Bordiga," *Storia contemporanea*, 3 (1973), pp. 569-92; also, E. Peluso in *LPC*, March 11, 1922, pp. 145-46, *LCI* September 16, 1922, pp. 538-39, & September 20, p. 547; note Terracini's statement, *LCI*, November, 1922 (No. 23), pp. 683-84; lastly, Armando Borghi's views in *La rivoluzione mancata* (Milan: Edizioni Azioni Comune, 1974), pp.164-66. Borghi, a Syndicalist opponent of the PCd'I, blames the Reformists for the failure of the Alliance.

¹⁷⁰ *In Stalin's Shadow* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern University Press, 1986), pp. 32 & 44.

¹⁷¹ Alexander De Grand, *The Italian Left in the 20th Century* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989) pp. 54-60.

disciplinary measures to break potential opposition," but mars this otherwise accurate account by erroneously absolving Gramsci of enforcing "these measures to the point of expulsion, or to the elimination of debate within the party." Further, basing oneself on De Grand, one senses that, along with Gramsci, Tasca was involved.

The capping summit to this grand pyramid of mounted disinformation was provided by Eric Hobsbawm with the assertion (1974) that "the Party [the PCI] had done more than anyone to strip the layers of myth and dogma from its own history..."¹⁷²

Parenthetically, in none of these studies have I found references to vol. II of the *Sinistra* history, to Fortichiari, or to reprinted *Sinistra* documents from the early years, with the exception of the weekly, *Il Soviet*. If mentioned, the Rome Theses are never analyzed. Almost all characterizations of Bordiga and the *Sinistra* period rest on an absence of documentary backing. Without this data one cannot accurately reconstruct the first three years of the Pcd'I, making it easier to fantasize or be offhandedly dismissive of critical writings as was Hobsbawm with Cortesi. One looks in vain for evidence of the agony of the *Sinistra*, finding only disparaging caricatures of Bordiga: "superficial" (Cammett), "crude" (Hoare), "vulgar" (Piccone) and a blizzard of epithets with Spriano, some--"Byzantine," "Machiavellian--borrowed from Gramsci's efforts to block Bordiga's 1923 manifesto. Learned men who chose to parrot mindlessly a politically-biased misrepresentation.

The sheer number of these demi-histories by left historians is itself revealing and indicative of a reaction tantamount to a political self-castration. The apotheosis of historical fraud and the long effrontery to the muse of history exacted from the Left an onerous political price: the myopic

¹⁷² "The Great Gramsci," in "New York Review of Books," April 4, 1974.

inability to understand what had occurred, and a self-paralyzing indifference to the imperative need for an alternative movement.

And Spriano as metaphor for so much of postwar PCI-historiography? His role may be seen most clearly looking at a later work, *Stalin and the European Communists*.¹⁷³ Written and published in the mid-1980s, in the late Soviet years, when the PCI's decayed ideology left it leached of any pretense of Marxism, Leninism, or belief in socialism, the work is rich in unintended irony and parallelism.

No defunct Soviet practice was more unworldly than the decades-long attack on Trotsky. Every few years from the 1930s into the 1970s a new *Borba protiv Trotskisma*¹⁷⁴ would appear prepared by "intellectual workers" who themselves were denied the opportunity to read Trotsky in the original. For many years, the Italian equivalent of this practice was Bordiga.

This writer recalls being astounded reading in the back issues of a pro-PCI weekly published in New York¹⁷⁵ an attack appearing in 1940 against Bordiga by the eminent Neapolitan Communist intellectual Emilio Sereni in which Bordiga was denounced for being a *guappo*, a member of the Neapolitan camorra, the Neapolitan underworld. The mystery cleared up some time later. In 1939, the Soviets opened an attack on Dora Kaplan, the woman who had wounded Lenin and was a distant relation of Sereni's Russian-born wife, Xenia. Sereni's act of contrition--his pitiful cry, "I hear you, Master. Have I not eaten your flies?"--was to pile on Bordiga. The obverse of

¹⁷³ *Stalin and the European Communists* (Thetford, Norfolk: Thetford Press, 1985). First published in 1983.

¹⁷⁴ *The Struggle Against Trotskyism*, an actual title from the 1970s.

¹⁷⁵ *L'Unita` del Popolo*, published weekly from late 1930s into the 1950s.

these attacks was the cult of Stalin, the Italian equivalent in the 1930s-50s being the cult of Gramsci/Togliatti.

Giuseppe Boffa, a comrade and colleague of Spriano, a *L'Unita`* correspondent, prolific writer and stalwart upholder of the old PCI and its ideology, a palatine Senator of the First Republic and a one-time believer in Soviet socialism, wrote analyzing Stalinism, "Yet it is true that Stalinism involved a vast assault on the ideas, ideals, and political orientations of the Russian Revolution in general and of October 1917 in particular."¹⁷⁶

Yet both he and Spriano never mentioned nor acknowledged that it was Gramsci, followed by Togliatti, who was Stalin's adherent and patsy, and Bordiga--a "premature" anti-Stalinist--the candid, lifelong opponent. Or that Bordiga had sensed from the first hour what Stalin represented, whereas Gramsci had brought Stalinism to the Italian party, and Togliatti served Stalin in the West.

By way of settling the point, one final stop with Fortichiari. Published a half century after the events he described, his work included an interview with Cortesi. In one instance, Cortesi observed that Spriano had recently [1970s] published a circular from the Executive Committee of the old PCd'I "in which they [the Gramscian leadership] spoke of tracking the comrades [the *Sinistra*] using police methods, to follow them 'in their persons and homes, and so on.' Did they [the Gramscian leadership] use such measures against you [Fortichiari]?" "Those were the methods," Fortichiari replied, "and in the life of the party this was something new, unheard of."¹⁷⁷ Spriano's document was similar to the party document I found from 1925 that included the comment, "We are

¹⁷⁶ Giuseppe Boffa, *The Stalin Phenomenon* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 192.

¹⁷⁷ Fortichiari, p. 154.

aware of the reunion of the followers of Bordiga. Continue the surveillance and keep us informed."¹⁷⁸

Disclosure of the circular by Spriano belonged to volume I of his history, *From Bordiga to Gramsci*, along with a general assessment of how these activities impacted the party and the Lyons Congress, not to the 1970s when its true import would be lost. Spriano was too capable and seasoned a historian to have missed what I found in the archival papers of 1925, and of which there is only a limited mention, but one which shows the Gramscian leadership ordering a search of the persons and homes of *Sinistra* members, as if dealing with criminals rather than dissidents many of whom, more so than Gramsci, contributed to building the Italian movement, but who were now to be subjected to a “policing operation (*opera di polizia di partito*).”¹⁷⁹ . By disclosing the document in the 1970s, he may have been replicating the practice of the Togliattian years, when documents were dribbled out in such a fashion as to befuddle rather than enlighten. The use of a cadre to spy on and control a membership independently verified by Spriano's circular, my document, Fortichiari's recollection, and Repossi's anguished archival letter is additional indication of the Stalinist state of siege that the Center leadership clamped on the party in 1925. Such documents are not found in any of the archival papers of 1921-1924, the brief three-year life span of the *Sinistra*-led party.

This brings us to the third claim. Either the writers cited in the PROLOGUE and EPILOGUE knew nothing of the events of 1925 and prepared inaccurate accounts, and this would seem to be true of a few; or they had some inkling and did not press on, publishing incomplete and misleading accounts; or they knew, and prepared a partisan history based on a politically correct

¹⁷⁸ ACS, PS, busta 1903. Communist document, NP 4896.

¹⁷⁹ *Da Bordiga a Gramsci*, pp.455-456.

selection of documents. There is every reason to fit Spriano into the last category, Hobsbawm notwithstanding.

3. Now to the final and perhaps most telling of rounded-out conclusions. Three years after the Lyons Congress commemorated the destruction of the *Sinistra*, in late January 1929, as the PCd'I representative to the International at Moscow, Tasca, a former rightwing-communist critic of the *Sinistra* who earlier had striven to align the PCd'I with the Comintern-sponsored tactics, now free of earlier illusions about the leadership in Moscow sent a report to the exile Italian leadership led by Togliatti. He described the political degradation he witnessed in Moscow centering his damning comments on Stalin. The letter marked the beginning of Tasca's "emergency exit." "All rests on Stalin," he wrote. "The International doesn't exist; the Communist party of the USSR does not exist; Stalin is the 'Lord and Master' who moves all. Is he up to this tremendous responsibility? My answer is clear: Stalin is *immeasurably below that need*. Review all his works: you will not find one idea that is his...Stalin plagiarizes because he cannot do otherwise...Stalin is the point-man (*pattuglia di punta*) of counterrevolution; as long as he has a free hand, he is the liquidator of the spirit and conquests of the October revolution."¹⁸⁰

This latter-day revelation by Tasca confirming both Bordiga's earlier judgment and how erroneous and pernicious had been Gramsci's would lead to his expulsion, ironically even before Bordiga's. By then, the party's rank and file had been purged, disciplined and oriented to look to the East for their enlightenment. Was it Tasca who, belatedly realizing what had been done, gleaned his 1925 files to remove evidence of the steps he had approved against the *Sinistra*; a wiping of one's

¹⁸⁰ Berti, *I primi dieci anni*, pp. 466-69. Also, recall Tasca's understatement of the 1925 events in his 1950 writings. *Supra*, n40.

own blade so to speak to destroy evidence of unconscionable misdeeds? Here, too, we may never know. He was present, and, if De Grand is to be believed, "backed" the actions, but for that year this meticulous man left no file. The rest is conjecture.

It bears repeating that Gramsci's 1923-24 *svolta*, his turn to Centrism, was predicated on the belief that the Russian-dominated International and the Stalin-led Center--quoting from his 1923-26 writings--were "correct," "ideal," "Marxism as expressed in Leninism" and "in the line of historical development." A more misguiding set of assumptions could not have been assembled.

How "socialist" was the ex-USSR? To raise the question today is to embarrassingly recall the repression, crises, purges, death camps, the gulag, as well as the hypocrisy, hidden privilege of a still-surviving *nomenklatura* re clothed as businessmen and oligarchs, exploitation and sham of "really existing socialism," all of which served to discredit socialism and reinforce the old regimes of class rule and class exploitation in the West.¹⁸¹

How "Marxist" was the Togliattian Communist Party (PCI)? Without getting lost in the question, as a minimum a Marxist party must have clearly enunciated tenets that unambiguously establish the revolutionary role of the party, the incompatibility of remaining within the old regime, the sovereignty of the working class, and the international solidarity of working-class relations. Whatever the PCI was, it espoused none of the above. This also may have a Gramscian root.

Both Berti and Volume II of the *Sinistra* history noted how Gramsci from being an exponent of *Sinistra* views moved ever rightward to become, in the words of the latter, a bearer of Stalinism

¹⁸¹ Well summarized by Chris Harman, *Class Struggles in Eastern Europe 1945-83*, (Guilford, England: Biddles Limited, 1988), pp. 1-2, and ending: "In the West many of those who once believed themselves revolutionaries have retreated into a pessimistic toleration...In the East the old guard of activists...no longer believe in anything. And most of the younger generation of dissidents have no interest in 'Marxism' or 'socialism.' identifying them with the regimes they quite rightly hate."

and its "efficacious instrument."¹⁸² He carried the new leadership with him, and, again citing Berti, that rightward movement continued after him.

If there was a Gramscian heritage it was that of orienting the party into a dependence on the Stalinist state for its subsidized "Marxism" and politics; under that tutelage, it undertook the frontist experience and the war resistance. The PCI leadership knew then, if the rank and file did not, that the struggle for socialism had been abjured.¹⁸³ Nothing could have been more anathema to the Stalinist state or the Togliattian leadership than a return to the policies of revolutionary Marxism. Those were the years of a strident demagoguery--Gramsci the leader of Italian soviets and founder of the party, the working class as the new ruling class, the USSR as leader of the socialist camp, and Bordiga the fascist--which was no more than a cover for the absence of a socialist perspective or of socialism.

Appropriately, the first major historical debate to break out in postwar Italy was not the absence of contemporary workingclass revolution in the West, but Gramsci's views about the absence of a Jacobin phase in the *Risorgimento*. Through the long postwar decades the party would go through many phases, from defender of Stalin to polycentric communism to Euro-communism and to post-Euro-communism or "national solidarity"; the phase it never undertook was a move to the left to engage its constituencies with the question of what went wrong and why socialism could not--should not?-- be attained. The very nature of the Lyons Congress precluded such a step.

175 *Sdsc, II*, p. 209, & Berti, *Dieci anni*, p. 29.

¹⁸³ *Stalin and the European Communists*, pp. 185-86. Spriano also quotes Dimitrov's message to Tito a few hours after the German attack on the USSR. "Keep in mind that in the present stage the issue is liberation from fascist oppression and not socialist revolution." Pp. 172-73.

As the end approached, the PCI whispered its adherence to the "Marxism is Dead" gang, the absolution for past sins. No one even bothered to recall Spriano's ultimate summation of the Lyons Congress: "the most mature Leninism developed by Gramsci and Togliatti."¹⁸⁴ With its red veneer gone, it no longer mattered--not Marx, not Lenin, not even, one suspects, Gramsci. All was now in an unrecyclable past.

When its metaphor-mentor, the USSR, began its death throes, the Center party shed its no-longer-believable communist persona and reemerged as the Democratic Party of the Left, thus freeing itself from the responsibilities of a nightmarish and better-forgotten past. Centrist communism has no defensible past: that past constitutes one long recital of indictable policies wherein lay a covert defense of the *status quo*. As it shifted further to the right several years later, the name was changed to *Democratici di Sinistra*, Democrats of the Left (DS), under which it led Italy into the US-led NATO aggression against Yugoslavia.

Now that the PCI has returned to primordial dust, mind-wrenching questions remain: What was it? Why did it last so long? How was it able to draw some of the best and most morally committed men and women into the black hole of anti-revolutionary politics? And for those on the Left who retain the ideals of the workers' movement with its vision of an unalienated, ennobled humanity free of political and economic oppression and rationally coping, what is the significance of the decades-long Center-communist interregnum, of this movement that had long before turned away from the working class, socialism, and Marxism? We are at a classical Latin *aut aut*: either left scholars take up the suggestion by Lukács and research more accurate accounts of the 1920s or

¹⁸⁴ Spriano, *Da Bordiga*, 497.

Kolakowski is right, and Marxism is simply the grandest of the utopian socialisms. What is not acceptable is that Kolakowski is wrong and some form of socialism existed in Eastern Europe.

The above would be of simple academic interest were it not that the USSR and the communist movement commanded after the last World War vast interest and allegiance in the European working classes, particularly in Italy. These remarks bring us to the final conclusions, even if tentative and admittedly needing more confirming research.

As much as American and Allied pressure, communist policies bear the responsibilities for the absence of social revolution in Western Europe during the war and in the early postwar years. The three systemic crises of European capitalism--fascism, depression, and war--were allowed to slip by without being the occasion for working-class emancipation. Central to this period was Togliatti's role in theoretically decoupling societal change from social revolution.¹⁸⁵ Under the banner of a broad anti-fascism, the interests of the class was subsumed to the goal of restoring the pre-fascist social and political order, the very same responsible for the triumph of fascism. Togliatti's precedent was the social patriotism of the first war that had called on the working and peasant masses to put off reform until after the conflict. With liberation achieved, anti-fascism became an empty symbolism, soon to be besmirched by the political reaction that followed the war.

This is not the place to develop at length this argument, but there is enough evidence to accuse the PCI of having espoused policies in the name of the anti-fascist struggle that sacrificed its followers to the resurrection of the bourgeois state. Once the war was over, Togliatti urged the working classes to demonstrate their own *noblesse oblige* by rebuilding the nation. The remarkable

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.24-27. Interestingly, Spriano traced Togliatti's "democracy of a new type" to Stalin. This theoretical construct implied a gradual democratization without workingclass revolution. Was Spriano suggesting a "social-democratic intent" by Stalin?

postwar capitalist reconstruction and repositioning in Western Europe rested on the prior keeping in place of the Western working classes.

If Hobsbawm wishes to argue, as he has in a recent study,¹⁸⁶ the ultimate irony of the October Revolution is that it saved the Western democracies from defeat by the Axis, and there was no alternative to the Stalinist industrialization—a questionable view that can be used also to exculpate many of his earlier political judgments—we have the obligation to raise a more fundamental consideration: Center communism's prior role in derailing the politics of class revolution, begun in October, thus returning the confrontation to a war amongst states, that is, amongst ruling elites (classes).

In tandem with Soviet policies, strong working-class support of communist parties in France and Italy was used on occasion to raise substantial opposition to Western actions, often with numerous working-class casualties, yet contained no thought-out radical challenge to the social order. Neither the USSR nor its parties would have tolerated such a challenge. The intrinsic values of Center communism, whether as the surface radicalism of the Communist parties or the hype socialism of the Stalinist state, were essentially conservative. The real threat to both would have been insurgent working classes.

When the history of this period is rewritten with the aid of newly opened archives, more than ever it will be seen that aggressive American policy rather than "Stalin's ambition" fueled those conflicts. Where there was popular-based resistance to the old social order in Yugoslavia and Greece, the challengers were on their own. For a variety of reasons the former could not achieve socialism and the latter was speedily crushed.

¹⁸⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (New York, Pantheon Books: 1994), pp. 497-499.

We are again at the beginning. There was a working-class uprising in Petrograd and other centers of Russia in 1917, and the audaciousness of Lenin and the Bolsheviks as followers and instigators of these events¹⁸⁷ consisted in their attempt to funnel the exploding fury of the peasant and workingclass masses into a socialist direction leading back through the Finland Station to a general European workingclass revolution. That general revolution did not occur. Despite the successful October revolt, Lenin's attempt failed.

Given their meager forces and isolation, were they doomed to fail from the beginning? Possibly. Was the subsequent Stalinist state driven into bankruptcy by the gargantuan Reagan military spending and the rapid development of electronics? Hardly. The German invasion had been more trying. By the 1980s, the USSR had all the means to counter and match the West; the failure was political, hence dating from an earlier time.

Claiming agreement with the Soviet historian Roy Medvedev, Boffa identified 1928-33 as "the moment of a clear cut repudiation of [a good] Leninism and a transition to [a bad] Stalinism."¹⁸⁸ In dating the change so late, he avoided having to deal with the events and implications of "The Agony of the *Sinistra*." By 1928, as one American historian observed, the political line of the International was one of "general poverty" served by "fifth-rate" men who "had been maneuvered into power in the parties."¹⁸⁹ These remarks suggest that the change had come earlier. If we are to pick a date marking the crossing of the divide, 1926 is more realistic. There was still standing that year the last substantive internal opposition to the amassing of reaction personified

¹⁸⁷ See Alexander Rabinowitz, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power* (W.W. Norton & Co., New York: 1978).

¹⁸⁸ Boffa, p. 192.

¹⁸⁹ Gruber, *Soviet Russia Masters the Comintern*, pp.4 & 9.

by Stalin, but facing an impossible task. Abroad, the *Gleichschaltung* of the International was in process; Lyons was one complementary set of changes suggested above, a small episode in a larger chain of events. The *Sinistra's* destruction at the hands of Gramsci was part of the counterrevolution sweeping out from Moscow. If Boffa was right in categorizing Stalinism as a "vast assault" on the ideals of the once-admired October Revolution, how could Lyons be otherwise? As Stalinism was being pumped into the Russian party and the International, it is not conceivable that a Marxist mini-renaissance occurred in Italy led by self-proclaimed adherents of Stalin. In this world of humans, the wings of angels do not sprout from the shoulder blades of men.

Lyons initially strengthened the Stalinist Center, but in the long run helped bring on its isolation from the working masses. In the final days as the "socialist camp" disintegrated, these classes in the USSR and abroad stood aside or supported the anti-regime forces.

Thus the beginning, the transformation, and the end: 1926 was the antecedent for 1991, just as 1917 had been for 1926: from the October Revolution to the national and international emergence of anti-socialist¹⁹⁰ Center communism, and its demise at the end of this cycle. If the portals to a possible socialism had been forced opened by the events of 1917, they were shut tight by those of 1926.

With its affirmed intention to serve the needs of the market economy, the fully formed Democratic Party of the Left (and its successor DS) that stepped forth from the molted skin of the PCI will bring--judging from advance practice in the US--the total corruption of politics by means of the effective disenfranchisement of the majority, the immense concentration of wealth along

¹⁹⁰ Coming from a Soviet provenance, dissident Boris Kagarlitsky wrote, "Stalin's crimes were...`the correct line'of the statocracy ...[in its] struggle against the working class and against socialism." *The Thinking Reed* (Verso, uncorrected proof, New York: 1988), p. 180.

with the degradation of labor, and increased deprivation for the most needy. That new beginning represented the final mutation of the party of Lyons. In fundamental essence how different are the political goals of the DPL/DS from those of the old PCI, given the loyalty shown first to counterrevolutionary Stalinism and then to the bourgeois order?

The *Sinistra* had been deeply rooted and *sui generis*, thus necessitating great difficulty to destroy it. Seen more globally, it was part of a European leftwing upsurge on the eve of the Great War that operated more strongly in Italy and Russia, and also elsewhere. Even in the absence of Lenin and the October Revolution, it is likely that this leftwing working-class vanguard would have evolved its program. A political reassessment in the light of the dramatic events of the past few years may confirm what I have long suspected: that the Rome Theses of 1922 were the high point of Marxist revolutionary tactics in the West.

These theses had a kinship with but were not a descendant of Leninism. When the members of the *Sinistra* hailed Bolshevism as "A Plant for All climes," they were referring to the intent that suffused that movement, and in keeping with Marx's original ideas--that of bringing a working class to revolutionary power--while rejecting the use of Bolshevik tactics in the West. This early-perceived affinity with the Bolsheviks helps explain why the *Sinistra* was the first socialist group in Italy to attempt contact with the newly-formed Third International; why it was the singular socialist current in Italy to advance new political tactics that would have readied the PSI to resolve the postwar crisis through revolutionary action. Today, it remains a defender of October. Those who have traced Stalinism to Leninism might explain this anomaly of the Italian movement: it was the Leninist-like *Sinistra* that fought Stalin and Stalinism in the name of values that both Lenin and Marx would most likely find congenial and agreeable.

Just as Leninism had been honed to fit the Russian milieu, so the Rome Theses were a tentative set of guideposts meant for a party operating in the circumstances of Western society whose aim was to carry out a revolutionary change not only the dream of innumerable men and women but a necessity to eliminate the vileness, hypocrisy, and butchery of an incorrigibly irrational social order. If these matters are understood, then one can see the need to bury the *Sinistra* and the Rome Theses in obloquy and inattention during this long counterrevolutionary postwar period when all major influences on Europe--the US and its allies, Western social democracy, religion and a mindless popular culture, the Stalinist state and its satellite fittings, and the communist movement--operated to deny the working classes their self-recognition and the knowledge to transform society before the arrival of a long-predicted barbarism, now within the gates. Voiced or not, amongst those forces that made up the disparate coalition of postwar conservatism, there was one point of unanimity: there must be no working class lurch to the left.

During the decades of postwar, Gramscian thought gave birth to no challenge to the dominant conservative hegemony, despite the repeated hopes of numerous sympathetic historians, and none of whom had anything to say about the events of 1925. Likewise, no one sympathetic to Gramsci has delved into the significance of this unexplained contemporaneity: the tandem-rise of Gramsci during Stalin's ascendancy.

The *Sinistra* of the early years of the PCd'I may have been the most significant workingclass vanguard to arise in Italy in the twentieth century, making the sacrificial offering of this vanguard to "the god that failed" Gramsci's most influential political act prior to imprisonment. With respect to that action, he was truly "a man from the abyss." Nineteen twenty-five must be seen for what it was: the satanic year of Italian communism.

Gramsci was the point-man--"*pattuglia di punta*," in Tasca's incisive words--in the destruction of the *Sinistra*. In actuality, he was borne on the cusp of a deep, broad, on-going restructuring of tectonic social plates, changes eliciting, one gathers, a never-analyzed politically sympathetic resonance in him much as they had the opposite effect on Bordiga, and which spurred him to reach for leadership. Bolshevism and the *Sinistra* had risen to the fore in the only golden age of European workingclass insurgency of the twentieth century--the years 1912-1923, including the "Red Week" events in Italy of June 1914 and the "Red Biennial" of 1919-1920--when large numbers of European workers acted, to cite Marx, as a proletariat looking to themselves and seeking to found a new society. Hence the referral by Lukács that opens this paper. Center communism was spawned during the reflux, the years marked by the emergence of the Stalinist counterrevolution and reinforcement of the status-quo capitalism. Much like the *Sinistra* and Bolshevism earlier, Center communism acted as both cause and effect.

Events as distanced as the elimination of the *Sinistra*, the Moscow Trials, and the suppression of the anarchists in Catalonia had an umbilical tie. The same can be said for the public comments on behalf of Centrist policies in the disparate remarks of Grieco, Togliatti, and Sereni. When that politically *declassée and deracinée* camarilla returned to Italy in 1944-45, the only ware they had to offer to the newly liberated working classes was their own pretense of a Left.

There remains Gramsci and the Gramsci of the Prison Writings. Skimming through the final authoritative Gerratana edition¹⁹¹, I have found no comments on the events of 1925 or any positive reference to Trotsky or negative to Stalin. That does not ring well for those who approach him with preset illusions. All too often, in prefaces or commentaries, one reads vague allusions to Gramsci's

¹⁹¹ Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975).

anti-Stalinism that are always undocumented or unsubstantiated. Here there was no better source than Spriano. Writing at a time when the East was still perceived as “really existing socialism,” he commented: “But the only reference in the *Quaderni* [*Prison Notebooks*] indicate maximum support for him [Stalin] in the great controversy with Trotsky. Substantially speaking, never in these years or later is there indication that Gramsci dissents from the line laid down (*orientamento*), or better, from the historical development of the communist movement as it actually unfolded in the USSR and the International...”¹⁹² The German historian Christian Riechers was equally emphatic. “During his imprisonment Gramsci developed a number of criticisms of the Stalinist regime--according to the testimony of prison comrades--but these few doubts (*singoli dubbi*) did not affect his basic concurrence with the winning [Stalinist] line.”¹⁹³

When Gramsci left for Russia in 1922, the presence of a lively *Sinistra* party in Italy and the Bolshevik successes in Russia, two points on a straight line, suggest the viability of revolutionary Marxism in the conditions of postwar Europe. When he returned in 1924 to the leaderless party, it was as an emissary on mission and the carrier of policies that would lead him to pit himself against the party, and then to mangle it. Beyond Gramsci, there would unfold the greater tragedy--what befell both Soviet and Western Left.

Unlike his admirers, Gramsci could have had no illusion as to how he got to the top. Nonetheless, any assessment of Gramsci must objectively and independently evaluate the whole man--his actions prior to 1926 and the writings. A most fundamental question to be asked about Gramsci is not what he did in 1924-1926; that answer lies in the archives. But, Why? Why did this

¹⁹² *Storia del Partito comunista italiano, II, Gli anni della clandestinità* (Turin: Einaudi, 1969), p. 275

¹⁹³ Riechers, *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

brilliant and determined man give himself to incipient Stalinism, from the beginning a ferocious destroyer and negation of all the values of the workers' movement, including its ideology; a process Gramsci participated in with the suppression of the *Sinistra*, his mis-analyses, and the rewriting of history?¹⁹⁴ One may address to Gramsci Trotsky's words to Molotov: "The Party, you strangled it." Further, how does the knowledge of these two years inform the earlier and later man?

The takeover of the *Sinistra* party by the Gramscian-led group would not have been possible without the support of the Russian party where a transubstantiation also was in course, one that brought to the fore interests and men having little to do with what remained of the ideals of October and the earlier workers' movement. Similarly, in the Italian party two claimants to communism, two genres of Marxism, two moralities, two conceptions of the role of the working class--determinant and sovereign for the *Sinistra*, reductionist and subordinate for the Center--had met head on, and victory went to Gramsci's politically and financially subventioned Center.

The transformation of the PCd'I may be a metaphor for what happened with much of the Western Left in the interwar period. The events in the Italian party, 1923-1926, represent a clear clinical case of how a Western party was felled and transformed. It was their, i.e., Soviet counter-Marxism, their values, and their morality that likely flowed into that Left; changes not easily detectable amid soaring Five Year plans and a tactical anti-fascism on the one hand; depression, spreading fascism, and appeasement on the other. Clearly, the collapse of the Western Left, so stunningly demonstrated by the absence of a real, alternative choice in contemporary politics, had

¹⁹⁴ Martin Clark, *op. cit.*, provides a *solitaire*, a rare comment suggesting the presence of a troublesome human trait whose existence one had long suspected but could never prove: Gramsci "as a young man had an unattractive Robespierrian side--self-righteousness, contempt for lesser mortals and for the existing labor movement, above all a Puritanical zeal in denouncing deviations, ideological, financial, or sexual." P. 54.

profound causes that cannot be disassociated from the earlier devastation. Morally and programmatically, Center communism was *never* a movement of the Left, despite political claims and the role it played to the end of the masquerade. Only with great difficulty will the Left rise to regain the once-enjoyed position of moral and political eminence, its only proper and fitting role. A resurgent Left would reclaim its heritage from the past and reopen the road to a future. Such a renaissance would transform the political scene and bring back sane and revolutionary politics--that of open class loyalty, reason, and hope.

GRAMSCI'S EARLY WRITINGS

AND LATER HISTORY

To achieve self-control in the industrial area, the working class has to go beyond the organizational limits of the trade union and create a new type of organization that is no longer bureaucratic and embraces the entire working masses, including those who are not members of trade unions. The system of factory councils is the concrete historical expression of the working class' desire for self-control. The struggle in this area develops along the following lines though not always in chronological order: 1. the struggle for the founding and functioning of the councils; 2. the struggle to centralize

councilor control in a particular industry, and all activity therein; 3.

the struggle to establish national control of all productive activity.

thesis 22, Trade Union Theses, the Rome Theses, discussants Antonio Gramsci and Angelo Tasca¹⁹⁵

In the preceding pages I argued: the elimination and substitution of the *Sinistra* marked the end of a significant revolutionary working-class-based Marxist movement in Italy. I stressed the actual physical methods used by Gramsci--dissolution of sections, expulsion, misrepresentation, replacement of cadre, and so on--to achieve this end, rather than basing myself on analyses of his writings and tracing the development of his ideas. This is the very opposite of almost all sympathetic presentations of Gramsci, wherein Gramsci's intellectualism is discussed with no or little attention given to his political practices. The reason for my approach is easily explained: at the very outset of my research in the archives, the evidence of his destructive activities was there literally for the picking. Interpreting its significance soon followed. As is manifestly evident, an open debate is not conducted by gagging the opponent, which is what the Center did. My initial presentation of Gramsci, therefore, rested heavily on his actions, less so on his writing. Anyone who is limited to "knowing" Gramsci only through these writings--just about everyone, that is--never meets the "other" Gramsci. Penetrating and understanding his writings took more understanding than I possessed then.

The time has come to look at these writings with clear definite purposes in mind. It would be disconcerting not to find in them ample indications pointing to Gramsci's later behavior. The

¹⁹⁵ Theses adopted by overwhelming vote at the Second Congress of the PCd'I, 1922, were reported (*relatori*) and prepared by Gramsci and Tasca. Cf. "Rassegna Comunista," January 30, 1922, pp. 835-863.

writing themselves should provide some insight into the multiple phases of his political ideology. The dominant overreaching and overlooked question about the years immediately prior to imprisonment is why he came to identify politically and morally with a particular set of Soviet leaders, namely, those led by Stalin. To this and related matters, I will be looking for answers in these writings.

One of the difficulties of getting “to the actual Gramsci” by relying on his writings from the period of leadership, 1924-1926, is that they were intentionally deceptive. Gramsci was unlikely to refer in public print to the underhanded methods he employed. To cite one example: the circular issued in November 1925, two months prior to Lyons, permitting the Center to arrogate to itself the votes of absentee members of the *Sinistra*,¹⁹⁶ an absenteeism partially a reaction to the oppressive tactics he employed. Nor could *L’Unita`*, then under his direction, depict honestly and objectively the situation unfolding in the party. One finds in Riechers a significant detail omitted from the summarized account in *L’Unita`* of the sectional congress held in Naples in 1924. At that gathering Gramsci was bested, but the exchange between Gramsci and Bordiga lasted some fourteen hours!¹⁹⁷ A truly marathon event, and an early sign of the difficulty Gramsci would face with the rank and file.

With these considerations in mind, I want to lead the reader through a number of Gramsci’s early writings: a) his 1914 article written on the heels of Mussolini’s open move to interventionism, b) the November 1917 invocation against *Capital*, c) writings from the factory

¹⁹⁶ *Supra*, n127, p. 61.

¹⁹⁷ Riechers, p. 91. Bordiga had the “overwhelming (*schiacciante*)” support of the delegates. Andreina Clementi, *Amadeo Bordiga* (Einaudi, Turin: 1972), p. 198. By avoiding a vote, Gramsci was further able to skip over his failure and Bordiga’s support.

council period (1919-1920), and d) the May 1920 statement calling for the reform of the Socialist Party. Passing references were made to all of the above in earlier pages.

a) “Active and Operating Neutrality”¹⁹⁸ appeared some two week after Mussolini’s “From Active Neutrality to Active and Operating Neutrality” proclaimed in *Avanti!* his clamorous change of stance--from a pro-Entente neutrality to a “revolutionary interventionism” against the Central Powers. In the article, Gramsci followed suit, but in a fashion indisputably his own.

Substantively, he opened with a question, “What role should the *Italian* Socialist Party (mark it well, not the *proletariat* or *socialism* in general) play at the present junction of Italian history?” Why the italics or what he intended by parsing party, class, and socialism are not clear, but continued with, “For the Socialist Party...is an *Italian* party whose task it is to win the Italian nation to the International. This its *immediate*, its *present* task gives it *peculiar national* characteristics, compelling it to assume a specific function and responsibility of its own within Italian life.” The additional italics do not lessen the ambiguity, but the statement ends with a commonplace understanding. The task of the Italian party was no different from the Bulgarian, German, or Russian, to which must be added a query. Is the role of the party to “win the nation,” a political superstructure necessary for the legitimization and defense of successful bourgeois rule and interests wherein lie ruling and exploited classes; or does the party clarify for the working class the irreconcilable conflict underlying the class struggles and bring long-term perspective to those roiling struggles: knowledge of a socialism that transcends national lines, the reason Marx stressed from the beginning the supra-national commonality of working-class interests?

¹⁹⁸ Reproduced in Quintin Hoare, *Antonio Gramsci Selections from Political Writings (1910-1920)* (International Publishers, New York: 1977), pp. 6-9.

Significantly, there is no mention by Gramsci how these “*Italian*” and “*national characteristics*” fit in with the international obligation of the Socialist Party at that point of international war and socialist crisis.

“It [the Socialist Party] is a potential state,” he continued, “in the process of formation...[that will] build up the organs it needs to overcome the bourgeois state and absorb it.” The concept of the party as “potential state” is of uncertain origin, and later in “really existing socialism” would prove lethal. Here we run into another basal difficulty: Is socialism the product of the working class moving into revolutionary action and imposing itself on society, an act simultaneously destructive and creative; by so acting the worker steps out of his old persona to assume the new role of ruler knowing that his intent is the elimination of all rule, perhaps an experience as necessary for socialism as the inferno of forest fire to propagate some forms of flora? Or is the change a “building up,” an “overcoming” from within, formally and essentially, a step-by-step process of reformist gradualism? If not the answers, the raising of these questions is critical to an evaluation of Gramscian thought even at the debut of his political career.

Next he continued his puzzling “dissection.” We don’t question, he writes, “the concept of neutrality...but *how* this neutrality should be expressed.” He accused rightwing reformists of using neutrality to keep the proletariat in passivity, whilst the “proletariat’s opponents are themselves creating their own hour”; two interesting observations whose citation in the article is puzzling: many reformists were sympathetic to a pro-Entente war, their main concern at the time to keep the party from arousing a massive class-based opposition-- “the rabble (*la teppa*),” in their class-laced argot--a feat elements of the class had demonstrated as recently as during Red Week of the previous June. As for the “opponents,” if by that designation he meant that part of the ruling

establishment and or class seeking entrance into the war, Gramsci's piece could only help in that quest.

These earlier assertions are followed by the beginning of *his* what is to be done, pronounced in rhetoric quintessentially Gramscian and reflecting what Joseph Femia labels the "idealistic phase."¹⁹⁹ "But revolutionaries who see history as the product of their own actions, made up of an uninterrupted series of wrenches executed upon the other active and passive forces of society, and prepare the most favorable conditions for the final *wrench* (the revolution), should ...[adopt] the alternative formulation 'active and operating neutrality' which means putting class struggle back at the center of the nation's life."

The statement is remarkable for the voluntaristic, Nietzschean and elitist overtones, and its anti-materialistic stance. Historical materialism does not rest on the history-making of hero-revolutionaries, but posits the converse: a larger moment of societal development determines the nature of the class struggle, in which the revolutionaries, the classes, are spurred to action by necessity, thus entering into history: a massive, emerging, conjunctural crisis that revolutionaries prepare for and may lead but cannot create of their own will. Moreover, at the time of this writing the class struggle *was* already at the center of Italian political life: the effort by most Socialists, the most active being those aligned with the leftwing, to block the government from rushing the nation into the war. The opposition to the war, inflamed by the problems of unemployment and spiraling cost of living increases, reached massive proportions in the Milanese region, were national in scope and likely no less evident in Turin. As the authorities turned ever more oppressively against the

¹⁹⁹ Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci Political Thought* (Clarendon Press, Oxford: 1981), pp. 4-5 & 101.

anti-war camp, the number of workingclass victims mounted.²⁰⁰ Gramsci's lack of involvement with this *actual* frontline struggle is made clear by the omission of any mention in the article.

Having "returned" the class struggle to its rightful place, Gramsci would force the bourgeoisie "to assume its responsibilities"(?), to recognize it had "failed to achieve its aim"(?), that it "led our country up a blind alley"(?), from which escape is possible only by "abandoning all these institutions which bear direct responsibility for its present parlous state"?. Only by employing the tactics of "Active and Operating Neutrality," he counseled, would the Socialist Party "free itself from all the bourgeois encrustations with which fear of war has encumbered it..." Whatever he meant by all of the above, did he intend also that the proletariat should become interventionist, something denied by some post-war Centrist intellectuals, including Giuseppe Fiori, his foremost biographer?²⁰¹

Moving on to a criticism of Angelo Tasca for his stand on neutrality, and denying Tasca's view that Mussolini's interventionism contradicted his earlier anti-Libyan war stance, Gramsci quoted Mussolini's words, at the same time intermingling his own: " '[repeating Mussolini's injunction to the bourgeoisie:] Proceed wherever your destiny summons you,' in other words, ' If

²⁰⁰ Mingardo, pp. 91-97

²⁰¹ In his biography, *Antonio Gramsci, Life of a Revolutionary* (Verso, New York: 1990), Giuseppe Fiori so garbled Gramsci's argument that he paves over his interventionism. Fiori ended his rewriting of the article with these words: "Gramsci believed the revolutionaries should set themselves the task of preparing conditions most favorable for the decisive social 'dislocation' (or revolution), by exerting a continuous series of pressures upon the active and passive forces of society [?]. And if the Italian bourgeoisie felt summoned to the war by *its* destiny--here would be the occasion for another series of 'wrenches,' leading up to the final one..." Pp. 96-97. One is left with the erroneous impression that Gramsci would have used a "wrench" to block entrance into war (or turn war into revolution?). Further into the text Fiori laments, that on the basis of the article, Gramsci could not escape the "accusation" of interventionism, adding: "[I]t was consistently interpreted in this light by sectarians [sinister boll weevil Bordighists?]." P. 97.

you see waging war on Austria as *your* duty, then the proletariat will not sabotage your actions ,’ he [Mussolini] is not renouncing his past attitude to the Libyan War...” To the unanswered question above, would Gramsci have the working class join in an interventionist war desired by the bourgeoisie and other interventionist, the answer is yes, for the proletariat would refrain from opposing the move to war, which meant they too would be called to battle. What reasons did Gramsci give for this momentous decision, which contravened the anti-war actions by the Young Socialists (FGC), and strenuous efforts being undertaken by Bordiga²⁰² and the PSI’s left wing, not to speak of the years of controversy in the earlier congresses of the International?

The answer is found next in Gramsci’s embrace of Mussolini’s reasoning, the underlying intent of the article. “He [Mussolini] is arguing that the proletariat, now that it has acquired a clear consciousness of its class power and of its revolutionary potential...should allow for the free operation of those forces which the proletariat considers strongest--and which it does not feel able to replace [the bourgeoisie],” which turns out to be another reason for involvement in war. Probably intending with his next statement to further valorize Mussolini’s justification, Gramsci introduced more ambiguity instead: “Nor does Mussolini exclude the possibility (on the contrary, it presupposes it) that the proletariat might renounce its antagonistic attitude and, after the ruling class has failed or shown itself to be impotent, eliminate it and take over public affairs itself...” By “failed” and “impotent” did he mean if the bourgeoisie failed to act for war, the proletariat should overthrow it, perhaps to launch a revolutionary war? But if the proletariat was so prepared, ready and strong, why would it need a “failed” decision before acting? His words rely on an abstract

²⁰²Earlier, I had cited Livorsi, and now De Clementi: “In the span of time he edited *Il Socialista* [the weekly organ of the Neapolitan socialists], the paper gave voice to the most solid and consistent class opposition to the war.” (P. 43).

realism having little to do with the realities of the moment. Or by “failed/impotent” did he have in mind defeat in a war, and then revolution, such as happened in Russia? Not likely. Moreover, any comparison of the Italian scene of 1914 with the Russian of 1917 would immediately highlight the presence in the latter of the subjective and objective elements of revolution missing in the former.

In summary, at a time when battles on the Eastern and Western fronts had already turned into huge meat grinders of innocent proletarian lives, Gramsci was drawn to Mussolini whom he might have taken to personify those hero-revolutionaries “who see history as a product of their own actions.” In this light-headed venture into the fateful public debate Gramsci made no reference to the leftwing efforts in the earlier congresses of the Second International to meet the threat of war with internal working-class opposition. Nor did he discuss how a German or Austro-Hungarian proletariat could not but view an attack by the Italian state, supported or not by the Italian working class, as a threat to “the Motherland,” thus triggering its own response and resulting in each working class marching to war against the other still enlisted in the cause of socialism--the very scenario that had destroyed the proletarian solidarity of the Second International three months earlier.

In conclusion, “Active and Operating Neutrality” was the work of a political dilettante whose superficial and reckless support for intervention never mentioned that the war was a primary outcome of the inter-imperialist rivalry amongst various class systems at war amongst themselves, and in which the proletariats of all the warring nations had nothing to gain. If advocacy in the 1915 article was demagogic since the proletariat had nothing to gain in an offensive war, it does point to the ruse found in the generic anti-fascism of the 1930s and 1940s wherein the working class would be sacrificed to assure the continued rule of capital in a post-fascist Italy.

One might also note that his early accent on “*Italian*” party and “*peculiar national*” characteristics may be interpreted--as they were by Riechers²⁰³--as early signs of a way of thinking that would sprout into an “Italian road” to socialism. Post-1945 Centrist historians would first hail Gramsci for his pioneering primacy in conceiving of an “Italian way” that fit so well with the touted Centrist credo of each state its own “national socialism,” only to deny it later. His gradualism, the concept of socialism resulting from a “process” to “overcome” and “absorb” the state would reappear later in discussions of the factory council. Both concepts would inform his later writings.

b) “The Revolution Against *Capital*” in the “*Avanti!*” of November 24, 1917, is probably Gramsci’s best known and most cited early writing. The article highlights one characteristic that came to represent his style as a *litterateur*, a flair for the ability to restate the commonplace in such a manner as to create instantaneous novelty. If he appeared in “Active and Operating Neutrality” to position *Italian*, *proletariat*, and *socialism* in askance to one another, in “The Revolution Against *Capital*” he appositioned the “Maximalist”-Bolsheviks responsible for the October seizure of power to *Capital*, Marx’s major *oeuvre*. Let us follow his analysis.²⁰⁴

Crediting the “Bolshevik” revolution with becoming part (“*definitivamente innestata*”) of the “general revolution of the Russian people,” and for being responsible for propelling the revolution onwards, he noted that these Maximalists had established a dictatorship and were laying down the socialist structures that would permit, he wrote optimistically, “a harmonic development [of the revolution] without too many great shocks.”

²⁰³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 58 & 95.

²⁰⁴ Text in Quintin Hoare, *Antonio Gramsci, Selections*, pp 34-37. Much of the translation from the original is mine.

Turning to the October event, he provided an explanation that would bring notoriety to the article: “The Bolshevik revolution is more the result of ideology than of material causes. (hence it matters little to us to know more than we know.) It is the revolution against Karl Marx’s *Capital*. In Russia, Marx’s *Capital* was more a book of the bourgeoisie than of the workers. It was the critical proof of the fatal need that Russia had of a bourgeoisie, a need to initiate a capitalistic phase, that a Western-style civil society emerge before the proletariat could think even ...of its revolution.”

In reality, the bases of modern Russian industrialization and the acceleration of the tempo of development in the late 19th-early 20th century had little to do with Marx, but by so positing these developments Gramsci could move closer to the heart of his thought, the explanation for the revolution. “Facts have overtaken ideology,” he continued. “Events have overwhelmed the critical model according to which the history of Russia was supposed to unfold based on the canons of historical materialism. The Bolsheviks have reneged on Marx by indicating with their actions and conquests that the laws of historical materialism are not as iron bound as one would think and was thought.”

Gramsci now arrived at his ontological understanding of the impulse behind the October seizure of power. “And yet there is a fatality in these events, too, and if the Bolsheviks renounce certain affirmations of *Capital*, they don’t renounce its living immanent thought. In a word, they are not ‘Marxist’; they have not drawn from the works of the Maestro an empty doctrine made up of dogmatic and unchallengeable beliefs.” He was now at the heart of his ontology. “They personify the Marxist thought that never dies, that is the continuation of German and Italian idealism, and which in Marx had become encrusted with positivistic and naturalistic contamination. And this thought [German and Italian idealism] always posits as the principal maker of history, not brute

economic facts, but man, the society of men, who are drawn to each other and develop from these contacts (civilization) a collective social will, learn to understand and evaluate economic facts, adapting them to their will, until this will becomes the force behind the economy, the molder of objective reality, that lives, that moves, and acquires the character of ebullient terrestrial matter, and can be directed where the will wishes, and how it pleases the will.”

Turning to a consideration of Gramsci's words, to say history is the work of man is a tautology, and to attribute the Bolshevik actions of 1917 to the acts of men tells us nothing for it overlooks the reasons for the particular uniqueness of those events. The explanation, both the material and ideological bases why the workers and soldiers assimilated the Bolshevik program, thus permitting that small party to assume leadership, take control of the revolution, and promulgate the deeds that gave the October Revolution its grandeur and world-shaking influence, is not found in the proprietary precepts of “German and Italian idealism,” but in the long narrative of Russian developments going back at least to what Franco Venturi a generation ago called “the roots of revolution,” which included the contradictory persistence of a retrograde Tsarist despotism, the expansion of modern capitalism, the arrival of Marxist thought, the growth and experience of the working class, the influence of simmering peasant rebellions stretching back centuries, the contribution of a host of intellectuals who provided an enlightened leadership to the struggling lower classes. To bring to term this epicyclical note: the specific tactics associated with Trotsky and Lenin, amongst the foremost of those Marxist intellectuals, who, prior to the war, had recognized in the 1905-soviet an original institution of proletarian power, revived the concept of “permanent revolution” from the writings of a young Marx, considered the limitations of a “bourgeois” revolution in Russia, established an ideologically homogenous political party, and

never lost sight that any workingclass revolution in Russia, a violent overthrow and imposition following on a crisis of the old order, must be taken as one aspect of a larger European reality from which Russia would never be able to isolate itself; elements, then, that remove the mystery why the Bolsheviks, who entered the revolution with an exiguous party, would emerge triumphant, but unconsidered by a Gramsci still at the level of denying the presence of an objective materiality that conditions how men think and react and remains independent of men's beliefs.

It was perspicacious of Gramsci to imply that the proactive Bolsheviks had refused turning historical materialism into canon, a criticism that could have been more insightfully directed at reformists and the leadership of the PSI at home: with Italy then in the post-Caporetto crisis, the former were seeking ways to emerge as patriotic defenders, and the latter remained immobile on the tactic of neither support nor opposition to the war. With that praise added, there is no indication in the article that the birth of a working-class regime in Russia necessitated adoption of new tactics by the Italian Socialist Party--or a change of views by Gramsci. On the contrary, his omission of any consideration of how a successful working-class revolution in Russia altered the political landscape of Europe and what should be the imperative obligation and political response of Italian Socialists bespeaks of Gramsci's own very limited views, and is indicative of a deeper paradox hidden beneath the enthusiasm in the sentiment.

The Bolsheviks and their spokesmen had opposed proletarian participation on the side of the belligerents. They saw the war as a catastrophe brought on by the conflicting contradictions of international capitalism, views mirrored in the writings of Bordiga, and hoped to use the continuous massacre to arouse the embittered soldiers and workers to overthrow capitalism from one end of Europe to another, goals toward which Gramsci was alien and even hostile at the time. Several

months earlier in August, Turin had its own “popular [working class] revolt” in which “the intransigents”--Giovanni Boero, Francesco Barberis, Luigi Gilodi, Pietro Rabezzana, Maria Giudice, Elvira Zocca, most of whom were in the pre- and postwar *Sinistra*--figured highly, without meaningful involvement by Gramsci.²⁰⁵ As noted earlier,²⁰⁶ in 1917 Gramsci remained an “*Italian* socialist” and a continuing believer in national defense, even after Caporetto, views, that is, in opposition to wartime workingclass revolution and to Leninist thought.

The rest of the article is of less interest and the terms more populist-idealist than Marxist. Thus we read how the war has “unleashed the will” (“*spoltrire le volonta`*”), how socialist propaganda (“*predicazione*”) has made “the Russian people” aware of the experience of other proletariats, how the same propaganda has created the “social will” of “the Russian people,” how “the Russian people” are able to pass through certain experiences “by thought” (“*col pensiero*”), all of which tends to reflect the idealistic basis of Gramsci’s beliefs, and his distance from conceptualizing the materialistic incandescence of class struggles.

c) In this survey of Gramsci’s numerous factory-council writings, my attention is directed principally to his earlier articles. Then, to clarify the role of the factory council and to outline his singular perception of that body, I include the comments of two participants from the years of the Russian Revolution. Finally, I conclude with my assessments and views.

Earlier I highlighted in “Active and Operating Neutrality,” Gramsci’s expressions of choice marking the change to socialism-- “to win the nation,” “to overcome” and “absorb” the state-- that downplayed clear consideration of revolutionary class action. This line of thinking, this

²⁰⁵ Spriano, *Da Bordiga*, pp. 89 & 15. He uses the term “*rigidi*” for Intransigents. Earlier, Tasca conceded that the August events involved the *Sinistra*. Fiori noted that Gramsci “probably” played no role. P. 98.

²⁰⁶ See n145.

perception of gradualism, reappeared in a description of the role of councils in his lengthy “The Conquest of the State,” July 1919: “conviction has already taken root in the masses that the proletarian State is already embodied in a system of workers’, peasants’, and soldiers’ Councils...To sum up, the creation of the proletarian State is not a thaumaturgical act: it is itself a process of development. It presupposes a preparatory period involving organization and propaganda. Greater emphasis and power must be given to the proletarian factory institutions that already exist, comparable ones must be set up in the villages, they must be composed of Communists conscious of the revolutionary mission these institutions must accomplish. Otherwise all our enthusiasm, all the faith of the working masses, will not succeed in preventing the revolution from degenerating pathetically into a parliament of schemers and irresponsible others, nor in avoiding...more dreadful sacrifices in bringing about a proletarian State.”²⁰⁷ In the piece Gramsci identified the “workers’, peasants’ and soldiers’ Council,” i.e., the soviet, the political organ in the Russian Revolution, but placed greater stress on the need to enhance the “proletarian factory institutions,” the as-yet unnamed factory councils. One might note this unexpected inconsistency: the belief that a (bourgeois) parliamentary institution would continue to exist in a future proletarian state, as if parliament was the real locus of bourgeois power.

Two weeks later, he again emphasized the importance of the factory body. “This must be the immediate task of the Italian Socialist Party: to promote the development of the proletarian factory institutions wherever they exist and to set them up where they have not yet emerged...And finally--from the base upwards, from the inner reality of the industrial process, from the capillary sources of capitalist profit (for whose protection and expansion all the various functions of the

²⁰⁷ Gramsci, *Selections*, pp. 73-78.

democratic-parliamentary State are organized)--to generate teeming communist forces who...will bring into being the International of Communist Republics.”²⁰⁸

With the above Gramsci came close to making the “factory institution” the crucible of revolution, the vital heart of societal change. Here he was not far from expressing a faith in the work site as the source of autonomous revolutionary action, consciously or not sidling away from the proposition that the revolution is an unavoidable political rite of passage. This message was repeated in “The Development of the Revolution”: “If the foundations of the revolutionary process are not rooted within the productive life itself, the revolution will remain a sterile appeal to the will, a false mirage--and chaos, disorder, unemployment and hunger will swallow up and crush the finest and most vigorous proletarian forces.”²⁰⁹

In this on-going development, Gramsci identified the factory council, not some other agency, as the demiurge of the new society, the locus of creation, rather than revolution. “The Factory Council is the model of the proletarian State,” one reads in perhaps his most forceful statement. “All the problems inherent in the organization of the proletarian State are inherent in the organization of the Council. 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 multiplies bonds of affection and fraternity...All eventually acquire a communist consciousness that enables them to comprehend what a great step forward the communist economy represents over the capitalist.” The paean to the inherent fecundity of the factory council closed with these rapturous words: “It is a joyous awareness of being an organic whole, a homogeneous and compact system which, through useful work, and the disinterested production of social wealth, asserts its

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-93.

sovereignty, and realizes its power and its freedom to create history,²¹⁰ sentiments apotheosizing the factory council as the creator of the new socialist society.

This exultation of the factory site and the productive relations therein dismissed the proletarian revolution as, initially, a principally political act, a conscious class decision that proceeds to abrogate the old social relations, the impediment to a rational use of the productive forces created under bourgeois rule, and installs a new class at the helm. In defending his factory-council views, Gramsci seemingly belittled the political party, in the minds of most socialists, the designated entity chosen to confront bourgeois power on its most vital level, the state. Inherent in his view, there lies a near non-attention to the organizational difficulties confronting any movement seeking revolutionary transformation.

Let us labor on this point. Without an entity larger than the work site or a knowledge that the worker's travail is both national and international, and without a remembrance of experience and recollection of ideology, the likely result of the class struggle is a battling in the dark. Such circumstances lead to a constant refashioning of solidarity, to losing in the end what had been gained in the beginning, or coming to a settlement inimical to long-term class needs and destructive of a socialist goal. Historically, such is the "eulogized" performance of reformism, paid for with the coin of an a-socialist politicism. To believe otherwise even then was to trivialize the corpus of ideas and practices associated with Marx, and to deprive the worker of the understanding that his efforts come to rest on a set of demands that are consciously political: the awareness to revamp society through an act of revolutionary seizure, and rationalize productive forces encumbered by the old social relations. Historical practice has shown that the political party is the most effective entity

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

here, not as a surrogate for the class struggle but as adjunct to the class. The problem then—and now—is not for or against the party, something Gramsci was late in realizing, but deciding on the quality and nature of the party and how one goes about creating it. One will meet the problem again immediately below in “Renewal,” but for now a quote from Lukács epitomizes and summarizes this point: “If the meaning of history is to be found in the process of history...this presupposes a proletariat with a relatively advanced awareness of its own position...”²¹¹

In his sympathetic account of the council movement in Turin, Martin Clark remarked how Gramsci overlooked and belittled the political: “Gramsci never formulated a theory of *purely* political Soviets.” *Ordine Nuovo* had initially raised the slogan of power to “Workers and Peasants’ Councils,” but soon narrowed concerns to the factory. “Gramsci was very insistent on this point: a successful Socialist revolution did not merely mean power passing into the hands of the Socialists, for such a revolution would be disastrous unless the relations of production had been transformed beforehand.”²¹²

With all the power at the disposal of a modern bourgeois state any “transformation” of productive relations could proceed only so far, before inciting a bourgeois reaction. This did happen in Turin, leading up to the April strike of 1920. Moreover, the undercutting of the primary role of politics, or however one wants to denote the centrality of state power, may help explain Gramsci’s lack of attention to that other critical problem of the entire war and immediate postwar period: beyond the presence of the party, one had to be concerned with its composition.

²¹¹ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA: 1968), p. 22.

²¹² Martin Clark, pp. 59-61.

Gramsci's factory-council stance was strikingly at odds with some of the earliest Marxian writing on the decisiveness of political action clearly expressed even in this cumbersome translation: "Further, it follows that every class with its struggling for mastery," one reads in *The German Ideology*, "even when its domination, as is the case with the proletariat, postulates the abolition of the old form of society in its entirety and of domination itself, must first conquer for itself political power in order to represent its interest in turn as the general interest, which immediately it is forced to do."²¹³

If Gramsci's 1919-1920 views are to be understood clearly in their setting, another matter demands probing and consideration. In this biennial Gramsci was associated with the factory council, not the soviet, the Russian *workers' council* of 1905 and the more extended system of 1917. As the first truly national leader of the 1905 Petersburg soviet, Trotsky clearly understood the revolutionary *political* implications embodied in the first council. In the 1922-Preface to *1905*,²¹⁴ written several years after the event, he noted, "Even in 1905 the workers of Petersburg called their soviet a proletarian government," an observation repeated in *The History of the Russian Revolution*: "From the moment of its formation the Soviet [of 1917] in the person of the Executive Committee begins to function as a sovereign."²¹⁵ How did the soviet differ from the factory council?

Anna M. Pankratova in her study of the factory council's role in the Russian Revolution clearly delineated this difference: "The soviets (*soviety*) [plural] are the organs of proletarian

²¹³ *The German Ideology, Part One* (International Publishers, New York: 1970), p. 54.

²¹⁴ *1905* (Random House, New York: 1971), p. xi.

²¹⁵ *The History of the Russian Revolution* (Simon & Shuster, New York: 1932), vol. I, pp. 157-159.

power...The factory councils (*fabrichno-zavoskie komitety*) [plural] the center of that [workingclass] turmoil,” with “the historic role of controlling production.”²¹⁶ In short, the Russian factory councils were subordinate proletarian bodies active in and around the factory functioning in the shadow of the soviets, the commanding embodiment of political power permitting the factory council to fulfill its secondary role. Thus the first success of the Petrograd factory councils was the enactment of the 8-hour day.

It’s not clear why Gramsci exulted an underling body of proletarian power, assigning to it soviet-type capabilities. The most obvious explanation is that he reflected a substantial syndicalist and Sorelian influence. Nikolai Lubjarski, a Russian active in Italy under the pseudonym Carlo Niccolini took that view in 1919.²¹⁷ Whatever the reason, it is difficult to avoid placing Gramsci’s factory-council credo in line with his 1917 identification of the October Revolution with “Italian and German idealism,” and the earlier 1914 view that the proletariat would do well following Mussolini into interventionist war, all three speaking for an inspired but fractured perception of reality.

One final aspect of Gramsci and the factory councils merits comment. If looking upon the Russian Revolution from afar, with its complex network of “councils,” Gramsci scanted the soviet to favor the factory council, espying in conquest of the factory and control of the productive process victory for the revolution, so historians sympathetic to him have tended to reverse the relationship, identifying soviets with his factory councils. Cammett’s characterization,

²¹⁶ *Fabzakomy b Borbe za Sotsialisticheskuyu Fabriky (Krasnaya Nov’, Moskva: 1923)*, pp. 175 & 179-180. Prepared under M.N. Pokrovsky.

²¹⁷ Cf. Maximalist periodical *Comunismo*, edited by Serrati, December 1, 1919, pp. 401-407.

“Gramsci’s campaign to organize Italian soviets (*consigli di fabbrica*),”²¹⁸ was matched by Spriano’s, “The Factory Council...has amongst its duties that of taking possession of the enterprise in anticipation of running it; in the task that its promoters assign to it, it is a kind of soviet, a ‘proletarian power’ conquered in the internal productive process, the first cell of a future Workers’-Council State (*Stato dei Consigli*).”²¹⁹ One “creative” Soviet historian labeled them the “factory-council soviets (*fabrichno-zavodskie soviety*),”²²⁰ although the earliest appearance of this hybrid may be traced to the 1950s, when Felice Platone, an early *Ordinovista* and Togliatti’s henchman in the postwar years, wrote an account of the 1920 April strike at Turin under a misleading title, “The Factory-Council Soviets.”²²¹

These writings really represented the spin-off from the propaganda campaign and altering of the record of its own past begun by the Togliattian leadership in the 1930s, one element of the Italian party’s sympathetic response to the events and rewriting of history in the USSR. In that pseudo-history, Gramsci was recast as “the leader of the working class” and “founder of Italian soviets.”

Despite ancient and ubiquitous legends, no phoenixes existed in the animal kingdom. Similarly, soviets never arose in Italy: not the authentic workers’-council variety nor of the spurious factory-council soviets. Moreover, soviets do not sprout from factory councils, Spriano’s

²¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 71-72 & 78.

²¹⁹ *Da Bordiga a Gramsci*, pp. 46-63.

²²⁰ B.R. Lopukhov, *Obrazovanie Italyanskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (Akademii Nauk, Moscow: 1962)*.

²²¹ *Tridtsat Let Zhizn' I Borba Italyanskoi Kommynisticheskoi Partii (Izdatelstvo: Inostrannoi Literatyri, Moskva: 1953)*, p. 82. The original, *Trent'anni di vita e lotta del PCI ("Rinascita," Quaderni, No, 2, Rome: 1952)* is generally viewed as one of the worst examples in Italy of “Stalinist” history.

engaging misrepresentation notwithstanding. Instead, this was another example of the widespread deception found in Centrist historiography. The association of the factory council with soviets and workers' councils is also bad scholarship: an incorrect application of proper nomenclature. It crops up again with Donald Sassoon in the 1990s.

d) "Toward a Renewal of the Socialist Party" appearing in the May 8, 1920 issue of *Ordine Nuovo*, had been drawn up in April and would appear to contradict my earlier assertion about Gramsci's early failure to give due attention to the role of the party and the nature of its composition. Let us see how sympathetic historians handled the writing, before looking at it critically and assessing its contents.

Cammett is typical: "Just before the National Conference [of the PSI in nearby Milan, April 19-21, 1920] Gramsci wrote one of his most important editorials in this period, 'For a Renewal of the Socialist Party.'" Taken to Milan by Togliatti, the report "went almost unnoticed; however, it was read in Moscow."²²² Fiori penned something similar. Mentioning the "word-orgies" that characterized the PSI's leadership, he added, "Meanwhile Gramsci prepared and had approved by the Turin section a nine-point document entitled 'For a Renewal of the Socialist Party'..."²²³ Both historians make Gramsci the originator and author.

Spriano approached the subject differently. Skipping over the document's genesis, he described Gramsci's dissatisfaction with the PSI, dating from early April, 1920: "[F]or the first time he openly denounced the inadequacies of the PSI, come to sense (*intuito*) the need for decision, the existence of a dilemma, and spoke of a new type of party, 'homogeneous, cohesive,

²²² *Op. cit.*, pp. 103-104.

²²³ *Antonio Gramsci*, pp. 127-128.

with its own beliefs, its own tactics, with an implacable and unbending discipline.’ ” The quotation reciting the characteristics of the new party embedded in Spriano’s larger excerpt was lifted from “Renewal.” However, in contrast to the other two historians, Spriano does *not* ascribe those words to Gramsci’s pen. Spriano next adjoined what is, at first reading, a puzzling comment: “Gramsci [after the appearance of “Renewal”] did not change his idea of the general view of power, since even after April he will continue to insist that ‘as Marxists, we must force ourselves to seek the reality of power in the productive organism,’ and that ‘the revolution is proletarian and communist only to the degree that it liberates the forces of production and of the proletariat.’ ”²²⁴ Inferentially, Spriano was saying that Gramsci did not fully accept or give consistent heed to “Renewal,” an interpretation reinforced by Gramsci’s subsequent admission, also attributed to Gramsci by Spriano, that he had not taken seriously the threat mentioned in “Renewal” of an impending rightwing reaction. In short, if Gramsci did not agree with his own judgments, why write so dramatic an analysis--or did he? Spriano’s treatment only deepens the uncertainty already raised by Cortesi and the postwar *Sinistra*. Laying these matters aside for the moment, let us look at the contents and inner fabric of the nine points of “Renewal.”²²⁵

The opening sentences credited the “Turin city Section and provincial Federation” for the ensuing criticism of the party’s leadership and policies. There is no mention of Gramsci. Point 1 described the level of class struggle, concluding : “In the long run, all these movements on the part of the Italian working people will effect a gigantic economic revolution that will introduce new modes of production, a new order in the productive and distributive process, and give power...to the

²²⁴ Spriano, I, p.57. Spriano writes, Gramsci “perorated (*perorato*) a new type of party,” followed by a quote from “Renewal.”

²²⁵ Found in *Selections from Political Writings*, pp.190-196.

class of industrial and agricultural workers, by seizing it from the hands of the capitalists and landowners.” Point 2 surveyed the strength of capitalism whose class power rested on a maximum degree of internal organization and staunch support from the bourgeois state. The crushing of the April strike in Turin was cited as an example of that power: “They exploited the lack of any revolutionary co-ordination and concentration in the Italian workers’ force in a bid to smash the solidarity of the Turin proletariat and blot out of the workers’ mind the prestige and authority of the factory institutions (Councils and shop-floor delegates) that had begun the struggle for workers’ control.” Point 3 contained the warning of impending reaction: “The present phase of the class struggle in Italy is the phase that precedes: either the conquest of political power on the part of the revolutionary proletariat...or a tremendous reaction on the part of the propertied classes and governing caste. No violence will be spared....”

Point 4 held the Socialist Party responsible for the disarray found in the working class. “The Socialist Party watches the course of events like a spectator.” “The Socialist Party should embody the vigilant revolutionary consciousness of the whole of the exploited class.” “But even after the Congress of Bologna, the Socialist Party has continued to be merely a parliamentary party...” “It has not acquired its own stance [representing] ...the revolutionary proletariat alone.” Point 5 continued criticism of the party for its lack of direction, the failure to deal with “reformists and opportunists,” the absence of revolutionary education. It included this hallmark statement: “The political party of the working class justifies its existence only to the extent that, by powerfully centralizing and coordinating proletarian action, it counterpoises a *de facto* revolutionary power to the legal power of the bourgeois State and limits its freedom of initiative and maneuver.”²²⁶ Point 6

covered the Socialist party's failure to develop an international policy and educate the working class to the knowledge that each class struggle cast an international influence, and was an international event: "It [the PSI] has made no effort to mount a comprehensive educational campaign designed to make the Italian working class conscious of the fact that the proletarian revolution is a worldwide phenomenon and that each single event must be considered and judged within a global context." Point 7 continued with the changes needed to turn the PSI into "a homogeneous cohesive party, with a doctrine and tactics of its own, and a rigid and implacable discipline. Non-communist revolutionaries must be eliminated from the Party, and its leadership freed from the preoccupation of preserving unity and balance between various tendencies..." The Party "must promote the formation of communist groups in all factories, unions, cooperatives, barracks...and organize the setting up of Factory Councils *to exercise control over industrial and agricultural production.* [my emphasis] The "existence of a cohesive and highly disciplined communist party," able to mobilize and coordinate the revolutionary activities of the entire proletariat, "is the fundamental and indispensable condition for attempting any experience with Soviets." 8 continued the mobilization of the party's efforts. Point 9 reaffirmed the source responsible for the statement: "On the basis of these considerations, the Turin Socialist Section has decided to seek an understanding with all those groups of comrades...[leading] to a [national] congress..."

I quoted at length from the document so the reader might get a good grasp of its depth, range and internal cohesion. It is strikingly obvious from the text, that it does not contain a single

²²⁶ The words recall Terracini's statement at Livorno, 1921: "A party is formed when social conditions require it. As the class gains a consciousness of itself....the party is formed, and when the class changes the party changes, and when the class disappears the party disappears." Both are prime statements of *Sinistra* views.

idea that can be identified as distinctly Gramscian. No references to the “will”, none to Italian idealism, no seeking distinctly “Italian characteristics,” and no separation of a national socialism from the international movement. Not just the revolution, but every class struggle was judged to represent a facet of an interrelated global development involving the international working class. That class had to understand that the revolutionary worker was no mere national figure but an international player. The principal reason for the party’s existence was stated--to facilitate revolution! Point 6 actually contained a clear refutation of Gramsci’s factory-council views; the description of the factory-council role therein could have been borrowed from Pankratova’s study, still three years in the future. Nothing was said about the prior transformation of the work site to assure the rise of the new state; rather, with the new state, the work site would be transformed. The main stress was on the renewal of the political party, for only a new, politically sound party (“a homogenous cohesive party”) could lead the revolution; the revolution being understood as an immanently political act requiring the involvement of the immensity of the working masses. There was the understanding, too, that only the predominance of revolutionary representatives transformed the soviets into bodies of the workers’ state. For this, the new party was needed. In the event of failure, the deluge would follow.

The key to understanding the genesis of “Toward a Renewal of the Socialist Party” is not found in Fiori, or Cammett, or even Spriano, although the last inadvertently let the cat out of the bag. It may be read in the simple account found in volume II of the *Sinistra* history²²⁷: at the time, the Turin Socialist section was led by an Abstentionist leadership headed by Giovanni Boero; the textual contents of “Renewal” represented a compromise expressing the disparate views found

²²⁷ SDSC, II, pp. 324-327.

in the section. Gramsci's position must have had an ephemeral backing, and this was indicated by the handling of the factory council in the text. Nationwide, the Abstentionist *Sinistra* was seeking to transform the PSI into a revolutionary communist party, and demanding the expulsion of the reformist rightwing, two views also clearly missing from the text and a further indication of the compromise by the socialist leftwingers who dropped those demands. Nonetheless, most of the fundamental ideas of "Renewal"--the need for a sound, homogeneous party, the case for mobilization of the entire working class, the revolution as a centralized political act, the international dimension of these actions, the danger of a rightwing reaction, and so on-- can be traced easily in the earlier issues of the slender *Il Soviet*, beginning publication in January 1919.

Moreover, the question of the quality of the party and its responsibilities had been raised by the *Sinistra* in the most determined fashion and was associated with that current from the very beginning of the postwar. This campaign would lead to the formation of a national faction at a meeting in Florence that very month, May 1920. The tactical steps to win over and mobilize the working class listed in "Renewal" would appear later in the Rome Theses of 1922. Yet so strong was the *Sinistra* influence in Turin that even before 1921 Livorno Congress the section attempted to secede prematurely from the PSI and establish a communist party.²²⁸ One of the less discussed anomalies of Turin 1920 was the persistence of a large influential *Sinistra* presence in the rank and file, and the existence of a small, active, largely petit-bourgeois *Ordinivista* element.

The section, then, was the political group that turned to Gramsci to edit the document, and that copy was published in *Ordine Nuovo*. How much of the writing was his would be difficult to determine. If judged by contents alone, very little. Perhaps decisively, there is no Gramscian

²²⁸ *Il Soviet*, October 3, 1920.

provenance to which the sophisticated treatment of the revolutionary political party in “Renewal” may be traced. This helps explain his cavalier conduct toward the document, which amounted to a disregard of its prescriptions. The absence of clear Gramscian contents in the document was the basis of Cortesi’s critique cited earlier.

The treatment of “Renewal” in the various narratives mentioned above illustrates again how the early history of Italian Communism was manipulated to fit a political need. Indicative, too, that Fiori reversed the order of events--from Gramsci to the section, rather than from the section to Gramsci, similar to the turnabout of roles in the 1917 Florence meeting indicated earlier. Were these histories the work of political hacks or party ideologues, the results would be understandable. But in each case there is a trained historian who demands to be taken seriously. Their particular “history” rests on several widely employed precepts: i) never credit the presence of a *Sinistra* current, ii) reduce the political opposition to a singleton, Bordiga, who is re-dressed with the most pejorative terms, and iii) always enhance the role of Gramsci.. To what degree such guidelines were unconsciously followed would be difficult to assay.

For the English-reading West, Cammett was the most prominent. Researching and preparing his text between the late 1950s and early 1960s, a time when the appearance of documentation of the past and new criticism of the Centrist party was still at the beginning, when the Khrushchev years brought a blush of hope to Western leftist intellectuals, and the US was sinking into the bloody orgies of its second colonial war in Asia even as American hegemony was being challenged in the Caribbean by charismatic Cuban revolutionaries, he encased in his narrative an idealized and unhistorical Gramsci lifted directly from the Togliattian PCI; that is, an iconic figure independent of the actual historical past. There is reason to be less forgiving with

Fiori, who as a native had greater exposure to both the documentation and the criticism. He passed over in silence the reduction of Gramsci's factory-council views in "Renewal; when that ploy is added to his rewriting of Gramsci's 1914 article, something more intentional is suggested. Spriano's was the most sophisticated and therefore the most open to charges. By the use of quotations and allegations, he was able to put together an almost seamless account that actually omitted giving Gramsci the credit, yet any untutored reader would conclude that Spriano, along with Cammett and Fiori, attributed "Renewal" to Gramsci.

All three erase the *Sinistra* in the background, and both Fiori and Spriano flayed Bordiga. Spriano had this to say: "Bordiga continues his coherent but sterile game," was more truly a "Maximalist," who turned to Abstentionism "to guarantee" the "purity" of the new movement. In the penultimate charge ("Maximalist"), Spriano was repeating Gramsci, who raised the accusation after his turn to the right in the middle 1920s. The last ascription ("abstention/purity") was Spriano's, never Bordiga's, yet is repeated by Fiori. That Bordiga's views of the soviet and the factory council were mirrored in "Renewal," not to speak of their identity with statements by Trotsky and Pankratova, did not deter these attacks.²²⁹

Let's return now to the question that opened this chapter. Do these four earlier writings help understand Gramsci's later conduct? Separating the four into the first three that represent Gramsci's comments on unique situations from the last which requires a consideration apart, what is most in evidence in the three is Gramsci's disregard for the objective realities of each particular set of circumstance. One saw this in his reaction to Mussolini's interventionism. Gramsci's stand that the proletariat abandon absolute neutrality and turn to "active and operative neutrality" was a

²²⁹ Bordiga's council views are found in *Antonio Gramsci, Selections from Political Writings*, pp. 214-236.

non-proposal. Realistically at the time the proletariat had no arms, no military organization, no command of industrial structures, no effective revolutionary leadership, nor consciousness of what to do, with whom, when. That consciousness is better viewed as “agitated,” rather than revolutionary. On a practical basis, how then would “active and operative neutrality” be enforced? If a revolution was to be made, who would lead it, or, once the war had begun, how could one overthrow a bourgeois state now in command of a large standing army? And to whom could the revolutionary proletariat turn for aid, with the International destroyed and Europe sundered by various battlefields? By 1914, the Italian working class had shown itself quite capable of acting in “the great tradition,” but that was not sufficient. Even the much larger, more militant working class of 1919-1920 would end being beaten into submission, such the price of not having the proper political leadership.

This same absence of historical realism was found in “The Revolution against *Capital*.” Today no one takes seriously the view that Lenin and his Bolshevik comrades were guided by “Italian and German idealism” or proceeded *ex novo* out of the depth of philosophical idealism to upstage their opponents and carry out the revolution. Indeed, Lenin had written a celebrated polemic attacking idealistic philosophy and opposing in particular the neo-Kantian mode popular amongst socialist intellectuals at the beginning of the century, while seeking to reestablish the integrity of Marxian materialism.²³⁰ The contrary existed. As good materialists, the Bolsheviks had done much in anticipation that both the European bourgeoisie and Tsarist regimes would present them with the opportunity to participate in revolution. If the actual coming of war in 1914 caught

²³⁰ *Materialism and Emperio-Criticism* (1908).

them too by surprise, they remained amongst the best prepared for it, both ideologically and organizationally. Thus they had at hand a party and, with Lenin and later Trotsky, a strategy.

Gramsci's "The Revolution against *Capital*" was an ideologically idealistic interpretation of the October seizure of power laid out on the simplest possible level, and its value lies in its intimate revelation of the ontological lens through which Gramsci viewed the world, not for its encapsulation of the causes behind the events of 1917. In *Capital*, as he had in the earlier piece, he built up his own straw men, and proceeded to demolish them. The "positivistic encrustations" were not in Marx, but in the philosophical views that determined his political priorities in Italy. Marx had driven home the need for proactive involvement, exemplified by the axiom "the proletariat is revolutionary or it is nothing." The Bolsheviks had acted on it. Such was not the case with Gramsci. Given the strength of the Socialist left wing in Turin and Gramsci's personal ties to Tasca, it was not possible that he was unaware of the antiwar activities of the FGS even before 1914 or ignorant of the internal struggle within the organization to educate young socialists in the class struggle rather than studies of culture. He must have been familiar with Bordiga's antiwar article of August 8, 1914, with the proposal for a general strike made by the *Sinistra* at the Bologna meeting which preceded the large effort by the Turinese proletariat to oppose the war. None of these appears to have touched Gramsci intellectually or politically.

When he did meet the *Sinistra* in the person of Bordiga at the much-mentioned *convegno* at Florence in November 1917, he arrived as a chance, last minute substitute, a delegate who had never taken a clear antiwar position.²³¹ Hence, Riechers's characterization of Gramsci as a "bourgeois socialist." It must have been difficult for Fiori to concede that at Florence Gramsci

²³¹ Riechers, pp. 60 & 62.

“subscribed to Bordiga’s view that the revolutionary working class might intervene effectively in the crisis provoked by the war,”²³² words suggestive of how far Gramsci was from an understanding of revolutionary materialism but which imply (without providing evidence) that Gramsci somehow expressed himself at Florence. The activities Gramsci praised the Bolsheviks for in 1917 the *Sinistra* had attempted to do in Italy, although their organizational and ideological development was not on the level of the Russian revolutionaries. Three more years would be needed for him to come to Bordiga’s view of the centrality of the party. These very same failures of judgment apply to his disregard of the soviet and over-valorization of the factory council.

The counterpoint to the above was Gramsci’s reaction to “Toward a Renewal of the Socialist Party.” The statement posited the presence of an objectively dangerous but no less hopeful world. A material world respondent to its own larger antecedents, yet reflecting an objective reality and positing two antagonistic classes--bourgeois and proletarian--locked in struggle, with the latter faced with a decision: either remain with the old class-based system of exploitation and privately-owned production and expect a terrible denouement, or seize the occasion presented by a society in crisis and with revolution vault to the new social order--socialism. The key to its genesis lay in *world-shaking events* that had moved millions of men and women, amongst them the working class of Turin. “Renewal” laid out a plan of action for the proletariat, led by its renewed political party. The statement was epistemologically materialistic, close to the programmatic position of the Bolsheviks, and quintessentially anti-Gramscism. Initially, Gramsci eschewed it. The Bolsheviks recognized its worth, and Gramsci claimed it as his own. He would reassert this claim with a vehemence upon his return in 1924, when by then he had in his hands control of Italian

²³² Fiori, p. 111.

Communist leadership and media. With the less sophisticated of his admirers, this recasting of Gramsci's past became Scripture.

The historian seeking to understand the Gramsci of this period is obliged to attempt to recompose the dilemma that the coming of world war had posed to him, never an easy and always an uncertain undertaking. The International had foreseen the coming of the war. Member parties had been vividly reminded by the events of the previous decade that the violence of war was indisputably connected to hostile military camps tied to rival capitalistic blocs. The attempt to organize through earlier congresses an effective, reactive general strike of all working classes to an imposed systemic war--an effort from which the PSI was truly absent-- had proven impossible, and that tactic rendered even more difficult, once a major member party undertook support of "defensist" war at the outbreak of hostilities in 1914.²³³ Laden as he was with an idealism that seeks the source of reality in the projection of the mind, the war with its imposing structures of clashing forces and destructive reality must have produced a baffling reaction. Moreover, unlike Bordiga, there is little evidence prior to 1914 that he gave much thought to war and the necessary responses of the party and the working class. After being politically scorched for his ill-advised foray in favor of Mussolini's interventionism, it comes as no surprise that he retreated for the next couple years to write about cultural matters which ill-prepared him for the shocks of 1917.

In the Prison *Notebooks* Gramsci criticized two of Croce's histories: one from 1815, after the wars of the French Revolution, the other from 1871, at the end of the struggles for Italian

²³³ For a treatment how the Second International sought to confront war, see Georges Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War* (Clarendon Press, Oxford Press: 1972). Support of a general strike was strong with the Dutch and French. The *Sinistra's* support of that strike was probably traceable to influence from the body. For all their considerations, according to Haupt, the socialist parties were not prepared for the events of the last few days prior to the general war.

Unification.²³⁴ He accused Croce of deliberately avoiding the epistemological complexities associated with revolution and class struggle. Something similar can be said about Gramsci's early articles. In both "Active and Operating Neutrality" and "The Revolution against *Capital*" he reduced the scenario from the awing and complex realities operating behind the conflict of systems and the collapse of a society to the actions of men, as if by their actions alone they were the creators of a new reality. Thus he conjured up the image of "revolutionaries" who make history from "the product of their own action" and revolution made by "man, the society of men," omitting the heftier social and historical reality in which these men operated in 1914 and 1917. The same reductionism is found in his handling of the factory council which in the actual unfolding of the Russian Revolution occupied a niche on a secondary level.

If this speculative interpretation of Gramsci is sound, it would explain also his otherwise inexplicable relationship to "Renewal." It is not only that "Renewal" represented a repudiation of key earlier writings, seen most strikingly with the handling of the factory council, but the very structure, contents, and sub-text of the document, and its contrary ontology more repulsed than attracted him. "Renewal" is so singularly unlike the other Gramscian writings that its incorporation in the development of Gramscian thought poses problems for sympathetic historians, as we will note below.

Not recognizing the idealism firing the Gramscian analyses of this period may lead a commentator to gross conclusions. Very much like Spriano earlier, a Joseph V. Femia rated

²³⁴ *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decinono (The History of Europe in the 19th Century)* and *Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915 (The History of Italy from 1871 to 1915)*.

Gramsci as “the most prominent spokesman of Leninism in Italy.”²³⁵ Even if one omits any consideration of his actions in 1925, this would be an offensive absurdity. One need only remember how both men reacted to the war of 1914, or contrast Lenin’s last expressed reaction to Stalin as found in his will to that of Gramsci in his letter of 1926 to the Russian Central Committee. Philosophically, Gramsci seemingly accepted the dualism that separates the development of nature from that of human affairs, in contrast to Lenin’s monism, and the priority of matter over mind.²³⁶ However, Croce’s legacy does begin to provide some background for his political mis-analyses. If we are to understand the motivation firing his political misdeeds, something more must be added.

I will close out this chapter with a discussion of two studies of Gramscian thought and activities in which I limit my comments largely to the authors’ treatment of Gramsci prior to 1926. The first is American, published in the 1970s; the other English, dating from the decade of the 1980s. Both typify the general depiction of Gramsci found in the English-speaking world through much of the post-World War II decades. Both works are intellectual history, and similar in their approach to Gramsci almost to the fault of being sibling writings. The second is more developed and sophisticated; still, the similarities outnumber the disparities. Together they begin to illustrate

²³⁵ Femia, p. 64.

²³⁶ Cf. “To Hegel...the process of thinking, which, under the name of ‘the Idea,’ he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos (the creator, the maker) of the real world....With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind....” Marx, quoted in Lenin’s “Karl Marx, A Brief Biographical Sketch with the Exposition of Marxism,” written between 1913-1914, in *Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 21* (Progressive Publishers, Moscow: 1974), p. 51.

the peculiar handling found in historiography that transformed the Gramsci of Italian communist history into the “Great” Gramsci of the last several decades.

Gramsci’s Marxism by Carl Boggs²³⁷ is a discursive handling of Gramsci’s writings. As a historian of ideas, Boggs remained subject to the moral imperative of that discipline--a getting of the basic facts right. In Boggs’s opinion not only was Gramsci a Marxist, but a *creative* Marxist (his emphasis), possibly the greatest Marxist of the century, whose superior intellectual and political abilities were present from his initial coming into the socialist movement and reached their zenith in the *Prison Writings* of his late years.

Boggs described on the first page of the first chapter one of the many examples of the creative Gramsci in action. “As soon as the young Gramsci launched into serious theoretical work during his early socialist period in Turin, one of his first intellectual tasks was that of helping to restore the philosophical unity of Marxism that had been undermined by the ‘scientific’ orthodoxy of the Second International.” He was “critical” of “objectivist theory”--the stance, “I have been defeated for the moment, but the tide of history is working for me in the long run”-- for it turned the Socialist Party to “political quietism and passivity,” and Boggs ended this handling with a quotation (below).²³⁸

²³⁷ *Gramsci’s Marxism* (Pluto Press, London: 1976).

²³⁸ Pp. 21-22. The quotation reads: “When you don’t have the initiative in the struggle and the struggle itself comes to be identified with a series of defeats, mechanical determinism becomes a tremendous force of moral resistance, of cohesion, and of patient and obstinate perseverance.” (In *The Study of Philosophy*, p. 336.) It would be difficult to identify this view with any of the major elements in the PSI: reformists, Maximalists, or the *Sinistra*.

Boggs cited no source to verify the scope of this early and ambitious undertaking by Gramsci (“restore philosophical unity of Marxism”); nor did he list the years of this activity--1913, 1915, 1918, all? Traced to its source, the quote turned out to be one of the most often cited, an excerpt from *Selection from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* by Hoare and Newell-Smith written many years after the period of alleged commitment and activity with nothing to indicate it had anything to do with his early period. This conflation, this *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*--the use of a text from a later time to vindicate an earlier ascription--is used by Boggs time and time again to put together a selective composite image of Gramsci. One result is that he must rewrite history, concocting a psuedo-history of the Italian socialist movement in which to embed a surreal image of Gramsci. Also notable, other historians with stronger Gramsci credentials do not share his findings about what preoccupied Gramsci then. Neither the critic Riechers nor Cammett’s oliaginous view of the young Gramsci agrees with Boggs, but each agrees with one another; namely, Gramsci’s concerns at the time were mainly cultural and educational.²³⁹

Perhaps the most egregious example of error is the compilation found on pages 60-61. In the long two-part contradistinctive commentary that follows--in effect, two disparate accounts--Boggs’ text appears in Italics and my comments to them are found within the brackets. In the ADDENDUM I will indicate why the narratives of these years in the literature sympathetic to Gramsci are largely unhistorical. Unavoidably and with apologies, there is no way of sparing the reader from slogging through so much bad history. The road to the “new Jerusalem” was never easy, and we have to grapple with the circumstance that in the crisis of mankind opening the 21st

²³⁹ Riechers, pp. 63, Cammett, pp. 43-58. Cammett notes how Gramsci stressed the “educational” preparation of the proletariat.

century, there is no Left! By moving through the debris of decades—the mountains of disinformation and misinformation that through sheer repetition buried the past and turned myth into history-- we can begin to understand how this huge historical deception was put together and maintained. Now, to the two accounts.

“The Ordine Nuovo movement in Turin during 1919-1921 represented for Gramsci a pioneering attempt to construct a real alternative to the ossified Marxism of European Social Democracy. With its nucleus built around the factory council...” [The years of the “*Ordine Nuovo movement*” were 1919-1920, not 1919-1921. Again, the intended grand design, “*pioneering attempt to construct a real alternative to the ossified Marxism,*” is interpretive. With no objective evidence cited to show Gramsci had those goals in mind at *that* time, the statement remains an allegation. Boggs does not mention Gramsci’s acceptance of very limited councilarist views found in “Renewal,” and makes no reference to Gramsci’s 1922 factory-council theses.] “*L’Ordine Nuovo sought to create a mass participatory revolutionary movement directly linked to the everyday needs and demands of the working class, situated outside the mediating framework of parties, trade unions, and local government.*” [Contrasting Boggs’ statement with the Leonetti recollection below, the difference with 1919-1921 becomes stark. Gramsci’s factory council had to do with a transformation of the workers’ relations within the work site, even with more efficient production, not “*mass participation.*”] “*Isolated by the PSI and the victim of massive police repression after the factory occupations of spring 1920 l’Ordine Nuovo disintegrated to...to become one of the motivating forces founding in the founding of the Communist Party the following year.*”” [There is no evidence of “*isolating*” and Boggs can cite none. The Maximalist of the PSI and the reformist leadership of the General Confederation of Labor (CGL) were indifferent and equally “hostile” to

both the factory-council movement and to the *Sinistra*. Were Gramsci and the workers victims of police repression? Strikingly in contrast, Spriano, Cammett, and Clark agree on the near *absence* of violence in the April lockout in Turin.²⁴⁰ Moreover, a lockout, not a factory occupation triggered the April strike. Factory occupations occurred in September—the famous occupation cited by all. The “disintegration” was a political fallout, no doubt accelerated by the failed strike, but not by police repression. The same events reinforced the Turin *Sinistra*. A second unrelated *Ordine Nuovo* founded by the PCd’I in 1921, with Gramsci as editor, is unmentioned.] “*But the PCI [PCd’I] an isolated sect dominated not by the Ordinovist but by the faction of Amadeo Bordiga progressed little beyond the PSI in its sensitivity to mass consciousness*”. [From its origin the PCd’I participated in all political life, national and local, was present in all major trade unions, and elected 15 deputies to parliament in 1921. Membership was in the order of 40-50,000, with an equal number in the Youth Federation. The PCd’I was small, highly active, with an influence that probably belied its numbers. Boggs evinces no knowledge of the early years, 1921-1924. To Boggs, as with all Centrist history, these are “non-years” and “non-history,” the historiographic equivalence of the Stalinist “un-person.” Moreover, the PCd’I was made up of a number of currents, Bordiga and his immediate followers being one. In the PCd’I’s five-man Executive Committee, only Bordiga and Grieco could be listed as the “faction of Bordiga”; Terracini was *Ordinovista* by origin, Repossì and Fortichiari, workingclass members from the earlier socialist *Sinistra*. PCd’I

²⁴⁰ Spriano, *Da Gramsci a Bordiga*, pp. 52-58, Cammett, *Gramsci*, pp. 98-101, and Clark, pp. 98-110. Clark has the most complete account. The government of Francesco Nitti had “more sense,” he remarks, than to resort to violence. There was a “sit in” in one plant, but no occupation. The peasant strikes in Piedmont were not in solidarity with Turin. What emerges from the April events is that the huge combativeness shown by strikers and their supporters was, in the end, squandered. Blame here falls on the strike leaders in Turin, the CGL and PSI. But, then, neither the CGL nor Maximalists wanted to push the class struggle to the ultimate—that is, revolution.

policy devoted its attention overwhelmingly to trade-union and workingclass activity. An example: at the 1921 Verona meeting of the General Confederation of Labor, the PCd'I delegates pushed the proposal that the entire working class be mobilized to fight the fascist bands, simultaneously seeking to unite the several independent trade-union organizations, but failed to convince the reformist leadership.] "*Bordigans, though ultra-leftists in their total refusal to participate in bourgeois structures, were ultra-Leninists in their emphasis upon the role of the centralized organization as a safeguard of a revolutionary leadership.*" [This is totally wrong. Bordiga opposed electoral abstentionism in the *Avanti!* of 1913 and in *L'Unita`* of 1924.²⁴¹ Bordiga's fifteen-month support of abstentionism ended with the Milan meeting of October 1920, and had never been accepted by the larger *Sinistra* following. Boggs appears to believe it lasted throughout the five years prior to the banning of all political parties in 1926. The PCd'I participated on all levels of government. Again, the *Sinistra* was never Leninist. The entire leadership,²⁴² Gramsci included (see below), wanted a strongly centralized political movement, which had been also one of the 21 Demands made at the second congress of the Comintern in 1920.] "*Thus, at a time when Mussolini was moving to consolidate the fascist dictatorship Gramsci saw in the sectarian and intransigence of Bordiga's line nothing but political sterility when tactical wisdom demanded a unified popular force (a 'united front' that would not entangle the PCI in elite alliances) which would effectively combat fascism*" [Unless the years are indicated, the statement is

²⁴¹ *Avanti!*, July 13, 1913 & *L'Unita`*, February 27, 1924.

²⁴² "In 1921-1922 we were emerging from a great defeat, that of the occupation of the factories, and all--from Tasca to Gramsci, from Graziadei too Marabini--all had a desire to build a new party with an iron discipline and homogeneous ideology," Alfonso Leonetti, one of the last living *Ordinovisti*, interviewed in Rome, 1970. Cf. dissertation, "Spectral Figure," p. 176.

meaningless. Mussolini received ministerial power after the October, 1922, "March on Rome." The consolidation of the dictatorship did not occur until the end of 1925 and 1926. The events of the intervening years are crucial to understanding the political evolution of this period, and are omitted by Boggs. Further, Gramsci did not openly indicate disagreement with the general political line of the PCd'I until his return from the USSR in late 1923. Tasca and the correspondence in *The Formation* agree on that point; then one must add Terracini's testimony.²⁴³ Boggs never explained what he meant by "elite alliances," a critical tactical problem. From the beginning, the PCd'I supported all opposition to fascism including the political, but did not itself join in political "united fronts." The *Sinistra* opposed, as did Gramsci for most of the period, those advocated by Comintern Congresses. The initial disagreement between Bordiga and Gramsci over criticism of Comintern policies--Bordiga's Manifesto, with Gramsci the defender of the Comintern and Bordiga the critic--is unmentioned. Boggs omitted reference to the Aventine Secession of 1924, following the Matteotti assassination, into which Gramsci led the PCd'I. No longer in the leadership from 1923, the move was criticized by Bordiga. By "elite alliances," did Boggs mean an agreement amongst leaders without regard to the effect on the rank and file and the working class, the gist of Bordiga's criticism? At the head of the Centrist-controlled Central Committee, Gramsci determined policy in 1924, not Bordiga.] "*Bordiga was arrested in 1924 and it was not until the Lyons Party Congress in 1926 that Gramsci's position was adopted by the central committee but by this time the PCI was on the verge of being forced underground with much of its leadership fleeing into exile.*"

²⁴³ "Conversazioni con Terracini," "*Rinascita*," March 17, 1972. Terracini: "I will never forget that both Gramsci and Togliatti were fully in agreement with my position and made no effort to lessen the validity of my endorsement of the tactics of the Rome Theses." Terracini was also an *Ordinovista*, 1919-1920.

Gramsci himself was arrested in November 1926....” [First of all, Bordiga was arrested in 1923, and this error is followed by a grosser one. Gramsci was in control of the Central Committee from the summer of 1924 when he had himself nominated General Secretary, an affirmation documented in “The Agony of the *Sinistra*.” As leader of the party and with the backing of the Central Committee and Comintern, he orchestrated in 1925 the destruction of the *Sinistra*. The continuous arrival of Comintern subsidies and support of Jules Humbert-Droz were the litmus tests of Comintern backing. With these supports, Gramsci was able to hire/fire functionaries, and remain “independent” of rank-and-file support. Boggs made no mention of the 1923 resignation by Bordiga and the Executive Committee. Not coincidentally, Gramsci’s campaign went into high gear after his return from the ECCI at Moscow (1925) where he had first encountered Stalin.²⁴⁴ One finds his intentions reflected in his report to the Central Committee, May, 1925. Finally, Bordiga, too, was arrested in 1926]

How dismissive Boggs was of the actual on-the-ground events may be sensed from this lapidary remark by Luigi Cortesi, perhaps Italy’s foremost historian of the Italian communism after the death of Spriano: “The PCd’I of 1924-26 (between Como and Lyons) was run like a police organization (*fu un partito commissariato*).”²⁴⁵ Cortesi typifies the new and differently detailed history of Italian communism that began to emerge in the 1990s.

Whether Boggs was badly informed or rearranged history to serve his needs cannot be determined. Both examples are found in Centrist narratives. Boggs’ uninformed knowledge of the period shows up again in the following: “Gramsci often criticized the Italian Socialist Party

²⁴⁴ Cortesi, *Amadeo Bordiga nella storia del comunismo*, pp. 170-171.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

leadership for its failure to take advantage of the crisis of bourgeois authority in the years 1918-1920. Instead of supplying political and strategic direction during the wide-spread anti-capitalist insurrections of that critical period, the PSI was enslaved by the paralysis of its short-range economic goal-orientation on the one hand [the reformists] and its fatalistic waiting for the appearance of the ‘ripe’ objective conditions on the other [the Maximalist].”²⁴⁶

The reality is that at almost every critical point in Socialist history, 1913-1920, Gramsci was absent. Prior to the war he did not help in the militancy associated with Mussolini’s Intransigent Revolutionaries or join the leftwing effort to shape an antiwar response. His interventionist article in 1914 effectively cut him off from the Turinese proletariat, thus leaving him no role in their 1915 remonstrances and 1917 revolt. Notwithstanding his presence in the Florence *convegno*, “Revolution Against *Capital*” remained programmatically sterile. In 1919-1920, he lost himself in the worker-council concept until the dramatic events of the April strikes brought him face-to-face with the magnitude of state power: at the behest of the industrialists and in response to the labor struggle, the Interior Ministry flooded Turin with troops. Although strikes had spread into Piedmont and evidence of solidarity mounted in neighboring regions, the strike-leadership, in a subtextual admission of its own limited prowess, appealed directly to the CGL and PSI, the organized body and class-party of the working class, real-life entities that Gramsci had given insufficient or little attention to earlier; the response was negative. The disastrous outcome of the strike-encounter—the class struggle at its cutting edge--forced even a Gramsci to look elsewhere, and this brought a move to the *Sinistra* and an acceptance of the necessity and importance of the political party and the ancillary views associated with it. Summarily, Gramsci did not associate

²⁴⁶ Boggs, p. 41.

with the left socialists and their efforts to limit the influence of the reformists and bestir the Maximalists to action until quit late in the biennial, perhaps no earlier than May 1920. This background information helps explain Gramsci's secondary role in the original PCd'I leadership.

Before proceeding with additional critical comments of Boggs, let us turn to Joseph V. Femia's *Gramsci's Political Thought*.²⁴⁷ The earlier criticism of Boggs applies equally to a number of areas handled in Femia, although his is a more thoughtful exegesis. "The burden of my argument," he indicates, "is this: Gramsci, in his *Quaderni*, was far from denying the classical Marxist primacy of being over thought; he only wished to say that subject and object existed in an interactive relationship, manifested in *praxis*."²⁴⁸ This respectable assessment does not entail my approval of Femia's reconstruction of history. Regrettably, his discussion of the early Gramsci and the history of Italian communism prior to 1926 are on a par with Boggs.

"Before Bukharin, his [Gramsci's] chief target on this front [i.e., deterministic Marxism] was the Maximalist strand of Italian Marxism, ranging from Serrati on the Socialist Centre to Bordiga on the extreme Communist Left,"²⁴⁹ he wrote, although there is no indication anywhere in the book that Femia read anything by Bordiga or had the slightest familiarity with the *Sinistra's* history or its historiography. Again, I know of no criticism of Bordiga by Gramsci--except a non-acceptance of electoral abstentionism, expressed in May 1920-- prior to his political change in 1923-1924, and Femia cited none. Lastly, Gramsci initially identified Bordiga with Maximalism

²⁴⁷ *Gramsci's Political Thought* (Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1981).

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 127

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

during the post-1924 struggle with the *Sinistra*, rendering the accusation suspect and becoming, with Femia, an example of rote repetition of Gramsci and Spriano.

A similar assessment can be applied to the following: “Even after his effective renunciation of the *Ordine Nuovo* principles, he [Gramsci] became increasingly disenchanted with Bordiga’s sectarian approach, which elevated ideological and organizational purity above the need to keep close contact with the masses. In 1924 he [Gramsci] wrote...”²⁵⁰ Specifically to this quotation, what principles of *Ordine Nuovo* did Femia have in mind? The factory-council views refuted by “Renewal,” abandoned by Gramsci in preparation of the trade-union theses quoted to open this chapter, and never discussed in the *Quaderni*?²⁵¹ The factory council as the crucible of socialist revolution was the fantasy crushed by the April strikes. More importantly, what were those principles of “purity” which were never identified, by Femia and others, before and after him? Surely not Boggs’ belief that the PCd’I did not participate in “bourgeois institutions.” That quotation suggests that Femia also was unfamiliar with the thinking and activities of the early years, and of the roles played by Bordiga and Gramsci. As with Boggs, Femia does not deal with the actual events of 1921-1923. He cautioned against conflation, yet resorted to it in the quotation.

In 1924 Gramsci was seeking to turn the party away from its founding policies, his first act the blocking of the Manifesto. What this meant for the party’s membership has already been detailed earlier. Initially, he succeeded in winning the allegiance of the small *ex-ordinovista group* and failed miserably with the party base. Along with these efforts went a revamping of the party’s ideology and a rewriting of the party’s origins. These changes actually signaled the

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

beginning of a new movement. To cite Gramsci in 1924 *without* some indication of the binary level on which he operated is to employ the very means Femia was critical of. It is also incomplete history. That Gramsci would resort to rewriting the past and turn to harsh methods against the rank and file--detailed above in "Agony"--tells us much about his personal political morality. That Femia should overlook or be unaware of this drama says much about the reliability of his historicity.

It is noteworthy that Femia never mentioned "Renewal," yet a quotation in the text indicates he was familiar with the contents.²⁵² An objective presentation of the contents of "Renewal" would jeopardize at the very least his--and Boggs'--interpretation of Gramsci's factory-council views. How else to account for the omissive treatment of "Renewal" by Spriano, Boggs, and Femia?

The same absence of important and clarifying detail is found in his handling of Gramsci's relationship to the Centrist leadership gathering around Stalin in the mid-1920s. In those years two great political dramas were inseparably intertwined. The major in the USSR pitted the Centrist leadership against the Left/United Opposition; its outcome would determine the future of the Soviet state and influence left movements worldwide. A lesser drama was occurring in Italy between the Gramscian minority in leadership and the leftwing majority in the base. By word and deed, the *Sinistra* stood with the Russian Opposition, and in the course of 1925 would be victimized by the use of punitive measures proven effective in the USSR. Femia does hint that

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 127. "In late April [1920], Gramsci informs all concerned: 'The existence of a cohesive and strongly discipline Communist Party....is the fundamental and indispensable condition for attempting any Soviet experiment.'" The inner quotation is from "Renewal" and expresses Bordiga's and the *Sinistra's* view. Boggs does the same: "[The PSI was] in Gramsci's words 'a spectator of the course of events.'" P. 89. Boggs also does not identify "Renewal."

Gramsci may have acted improperly in 1925, but, like Cammett and Spriano, is not explicit. Since Gramsci did not act independently, by omitting mention of the internal struggle in the USSR and its relation to the parallel Italian events, Femia undermines his narrative. Simply stated, without knowledge of the internecine Russian struggle in the background and the aid that came to Gramsci through the International, Gramsci's actions are incomprehensible.

“Since the International was directed by men who had participated in the Revolution of October,” remarked Femia, Gramsci looked to it as “the indispensable guide.” Most socialists probably did look to the Russian leadership initially, but many never gave up a critical independence which, with Bordiga, began to emerge by the Second Comintern Congress of 1920. In any case, Femia does not get to the heart of Gramsci's 1925-ties with the International, then deeply involved in boosting and keeping him in leadership. Femia does not mention that it was Gramsci, who at the ECCI of June, 1923 suggested that the International designate a new leadership for the PCd'I, which turned out to be Gramsci.²⁵³ Femia innocently quotes Gramsci from “*L'Unita*” of October 17, 1925, “He who is independent of the Soviet Union is “independent” of the working class, and thus “dependent” on the bourgeois class, ’”²⁵⁴ without making clear (or understanding?) that Gramsci's self-serving comment was a blow against Bordiga and his followers in the ongoing struggle to subdue the party.

Many years later one of the remaining active apologists for Gramsci, Giuseppe Vacca, conceded what had been noted by Galli, Cortesi, Riechers, and leaps out from the pages of *Formation* and other early documents, but somehow was missed by Femia: “Moreover, the

²⁵³ Letter to Togliatti, January 27, 1924, *Formazione*, p. 175.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Gramscian group was installed [1923-1924] in the leadership of the PCd'I by Zinoviev..."²⁵⁵ The Ace in Gramsci's hand in his struggle against the party was the backing of the International, which in 1925 was firmly controlled by Stalin and his followers.

The quotation in *L'unita'* was indication of the symbiotic understanding between Gramsci and the Soviet leaders. Not only had they provided him with power, but he saw in them a future pillar of support. He wrote in February, 1924, "They possess a material base that we can have only after the revolution and that lends their supremacy a permanent and unassailable character."²⁵⁶ In the bargain of exchange, Gramsci received leadership and the Soviets were freed of Bordiga's political threat and cutting criticism.

It would be crudely simplistic to view Gramsci as a mere "opportunist" who slid into the vacuum left by Bordiga's resignation. A decidedly contributory factor was the coincidence in thinking between Gramsci and the new leading group in Moscow. The politics of "socialism in one country" bore similarity to and was probably taken as confirmation of his own earlier inclination to a national-socialist identity. "In the history of the Third International," Riechers noted, "the Lyons Theses was one of the first documents of a national road to socialism."²⁵⁷ Ernesto Ragionieri noted the affinity when affirming Gramsci's "unquestioned support" of Stalin's politics: "The politics of socialism in one country was complementary (*perfettamente aderente*) to the needs of history entering into the phase of 'a war of position'..." Cortesi went further: "The concept of hegemony, central to Gramsci's elaboration...[was] joined to Stalinism, becoming one corpus in the

²⁵⁵ Giuseppe Vacca, *Gramsci a Roma Togliatti a Mosca*, pp. 104&86.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, , p. 190. I owe this to the newest study on Bordiga, Arturo Peregalli & Sandro Saggiorno, *Amadeo Bordiga, la sconfitta e gli anni oscuri (1926-1945)* (*La Grafica Nuova*, Milan: 1998).

²⁵⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 94.

reevaluation of the national role of the working class, the driving force (*filo conduttore*) in *gramscismo* and Gramsci's thinking."²⁵⁸

In the course of 1923 Gramsci aligned himself politically with the triumphant Soviet leaders. He may have begun with Zinoviev but ended with Stalin. This embrace marked the beginning of the PCd'I's move to the right, the change of its political tactics, and the evisceration of its ideology. As indicated earlier, there is no clear written evidence that Gramsci ever broke with Stalin, then or in his later years.

Gramsci *was* critical of Stalin, Femia insists: "To be sure he [Gramsci] does not mention Stalin in this context and casts his arguments in a very general form. Still, there is one passage which indicates that he had Soviet Communism in mind."²⁵⁹ The quotation does not bear Femia out and is reproduced in the footnote. Why should Gramsci veil his "arguments in a very general form" in the *Prison Writings*, when Bordiga had cast his criticism (also unmentioned by Femia) openly in 1926? By 1929 even Tasca had come to realize what Stalin represented. Further, why did Femia fail to mention Gramsci's 1926 letter wherein lay an open identification with the majority led by Stalin? To both questions, there are no answers. In the end, Femia's narrative treatment of this issue conforms to an observation: those who allege Gramsci was critical of Stalin are long on assertion and short on documentation.

²⁵⁸ Luigi Cortesi, *Le origini del PCI* (1999 edition), p 306.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 158. The quotation reads: "It [the ruling party] is progressive when it tends to keep dispossessed reactionary forces within the bounds of legality and to raise the backward masses to the level of the new legality. It is regressive when it tends to restrain the living forces of history and to maintain an outdated, anti-historical legality that has become an empty shell." Presumably, Femia felt that Gramsci had in mind, with the second variation, the Soviet Communist Party. On the basis of the above quotation, a loyal Stalinist could claim that his party was described by the first.

The degree to which a Femia will “torture” history to justify Gramsci is seen with his treatment of the factory council. Expressed algebraically, Gramsci initially believed : the factory council(a) = requisite site of revolution(b), or $a=b$. In “Renewal” the equation was changed: leadership by the party(c) = revolution(b), or $c = b$. Anyone believing Gramsci authored “Renewal” would have to accept the following senseless incongruity: on Monday, Gramsci stood for $a = b$; on Tuesday, $c = b$; on Wednesday, back to $a = b$. The most direct way out of this problematic inconsistency is to seek a Copernican solution, avoiding epicyclical explanations and advancing the simplest hypothesis: namely, Gramsci was not the author of “Renewal”. In so doing, all the elements--Gramsci’s behavior, Spriano’s account, etc.--fall into place.

In the real Italian world of 1920 marked by the continued paralysis of the PSI and the outcome of the April strikes--seen by many as the beginning of the end of the “Red Biennial,”²⁶⁰- - the vivid presence of the *Sinistra*, evident in “Renewal,” and the Second Comintern Congress served to compel a struggling Gramsci to accept the leadership of those socialists stressing the pivotal role of the party. In the process, he moved to the *Sinistra*, remaining in loyal agreement until some time in 1923. Hence, his statement of November, 1920, “But a revolutionary movement can only be conducted without prior consultations, without the apparatus of representative assemblies. A revolution must be minutely prepared by a workers’ general staff, just as war is prepared by a general staff of the army,”²⁶¹ was indication of a difficult, belated political migration.

²⁶⁰ DeClementi: “generally assumed to be the beginning of the decline of the workingclass actions and the rise of the industrialist offensive.” P. 135.

²⁶¹ *Ordine Nuovo*, November 24, 1920.

Returning to Femia, one notes how he struggled to keep all the balls in the air. He mentioned the “curious juxtaposition of two distinct, though perhaps reconcilable, positions in confusing oscillation” during the months following the April strikes. On one day Gramsci named “the Communist Party” as the “instrument and historical form of inner liberation,” and on the next “revived all the main themes of council doctrine and not mentioning the party,” and is forced to explain: “The press of events simply did not allow Gramsci the luxury of working out a coherent synthesis of his faith in the councils and the new-found appreciation of the creative potential of the revolutionary party.”²⁶² The explanation is an obfuscation: it obscures the internal ideological conflict within Gramsci and his political shift to the left, at least for a time.

Handling the writings of Boggs and Femia, one has no trouble identifying the basis of their faulty constructions. Selection of detail is a must for all successful historical writing, but in their case they omit every key document that conflicts with a predetermined image: “Active and Operating Neutrality” is out; a snippet of “Renewal” is included, wrongly attributed, and unnamed; also out is Gramsci’s role and association with the Trade Union theses of the Rome Theses; Gramsci’s 1921-1922 *Sinistra* writings are consigned to a desk drawer; the same with the 1926 letter to the Central Committee of the Russian Party; ditto the epistolary in *The Formation of the Leading Group in the Italian Communist Party in 1923-1924*, a primary source of unparalleled importance; swaths of history before 1926 important for understanding Gramsci’s political evolution are deleted.

Where necessary, Gramscian writings are reinterpreted to meanings not intended in the original or wrung to render a between-the-lines significance not visible to an objective viewer. The

²⁶² Femia, p. 150.

opposition in the party to Gramsci remains the singular Amadeo Bordiga, who is always described as addicted to bizarre--almost hygienic--non-political goals. The presence of a *Sinistra* workingclass current is never recognized, and writings by Bordiga rarely printed, if mentioned at all. Even rarer--as a matter of fact, never—does one find his writings accompanied by a contextual explanation. Bordiga's analytical and critical 1926 speech to the Executive Committee of the Communist International and his written defense of Trotsky containing this magnificent line, "Our greatest elector is the rifle in the hands of the insurgent worker," are not mentioned and remain largely unknown to this day. "The Agony of the *Sinistra*" is phantom history. The rule is to skip over the problematic record of Gramsci's pre-prison years and simply concentrate on his *Quaderni*, using those texts to retroactively overlay and bury the earlier period. Fiction replaces history.

Laying bare some of the mechanics used by both men to piece together their narratives does not clarify what motivated them to compose unhistorical and erroneous accounts. *Gramsci's Marxism* by Boggs is pulp fiction meriting deposition in the nearest recycling bin; *Gramsci's Political Thought* too flawed to be deemed a serious exposition of Gramsci's early political and intellectual development.

In keeping with what they have written in their narratives, both men provide superficial explanations for the absence of a revolutionary Marxist tradition in the post-World War II Italian Communist Party, even as they trivialize the nature of revolutionary change. "The PCI failed to maintain its revolutionary identity," wrote Boggs, "precisely because it operated *exclusively* within parliament, trade unions, local administrations, etc. thus gradually adopting the logic of bourgeois social and authority relations, instead of attempting to create *alternative popular* forms of social

democracy along the lines suggested by Gramsci.”²⁶³ What better example of a vulgar political Marxism?

Given the goal they postulated, to convincingly demonstrate Gramsci’s intellectual and political greatness, at the same time disregarding the history projected by the documents of the time, it is understandable that they should overlook and pass over without comment the verity that the absence of a postwar revolutionary Marxism was common to the entire Western Left, not to Italy alone. Hence, the source of this political barrenness had to be sought elsewhere, not merely in the postwar tactics of Togliatti--a Togliatti who had returned in Italy in 1944 with his politics, tactics, and (im)morality in place--a veteran in the services demanded of a loyal Stalinist.

The very earlier history they would not--or could not--bring themselves to concede, what I named “The Agony of the *Sinistra*,” namely, the deliberate destruction of a workingclass vanguard by Gramsci, with the complicity of an initially-unwilling Togliatti, deranged Marxism, gave rise to a new morality, and left the PCd’I hostage to the policies of the Soviet leadership. With these changes, all hopes of socialism evaporated. As espoused by Togliatti, the PCI’s anti-fascism obviated any possibility of a revolutionary transformation of Italy. Perhaps, this configuration of reality was understood by neither. Boggs and Femia were right in and scorning the postwar reformist PCI, but erred in not dating the change from Gramsci’s assumption of leadership, itself already emblematic of a vaster degeneration and collapse. In actuality, Italy was a sideshow to the larger event unfolding in the arena of the Big Tent, the USSR.

In his acknowledgments, Boggs mentioned his indebtedness to Paul Piccone. No surprise. Femia noted an obligation to Leszek Kolakowski and Isaiah Berlin, the latter the great icon of

²⁶³ Boggs, p. 80.

Western liberal thinkers. With Kolakowski this narrative has come full circle: first cited as a critic of mythical Marxism, he is harnessed by Femia in the service of newer if less imposing contemporary myth. Nothing in their treatment of Gramsci's early years contradicts the findings in "The Agony of the *Sinistra*." In the end, Boggs and Femia make crystal clear: there was no "Great" Gramsci prior to 1927.

ADDENDUM

“For the ultimate triumph of the ideas set forth in the Manifesto Marx relied solely and exclusively upon the intellectual development of the working class, as it necessarily had to ensue from united action and discussion....`the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself’...’ ”

Communist Manifesto F. Engels, letter of May 1, 1890, for the German edition of *The*

“The methods used here, those used to organize this congress... prepare the laceration and the degeneration of the Party and the failure of the proletarian struggle. [They are] the expression of an opportunistic defeatism that has visibly entered the Party and the proletariat, even if you don’t grasp the actual peril that lies at the end of this atrocious development. [W]e feel it our duty to affirm this statement without hesitation and with full responsibility--that no solidarity will ever unite us with those men whom we have judged, independent of their intentions or psychological make up, as representatives of an irreversible opportunistic degeneration in the party. [T]he process that we have witnessed clashes so thoroughly with all our presentation of the situation, creating the very

repugnance for the circumstances in which you seek to strangle us (soffocarci), that we are sure of rendering a service to our cause today by seeing to it that the process and method go to the end, so that the proletariat may understand and reject it , however painful that turns out to be. But if the painful consequences of that merciless denouement that we see coming are real, then at the least we will be able to say that we have fought to the end against the disastrous methods that undermine our ranks, [and] we shed a bit of light and clarity on the darkness created by our opponents. You have forced me to say things I never wanted to say, that we nearly refused to believe had we not seen the false path along which you are being dragged irresistibly toward irreparable and ruinous deeds.”

Bordiga at the Lyons Congress²⁶⁴

Two events, the first a number of new titles, the second a conference on Gramsci at Columbia University, have a bearing on the validity of the interpretation found in the above pages. A discussion of both followed by a reconsideration of how they affect the general theses of this commentary make up the three sections of the ADDENDUM.

²⁶⁴ After the dissolution of the USSR, the PCInt. had a search made of the files of the Third International at Moscow for documents relating to Lyons. A Centrist account of the congress, *A Proposito del Congresso di Lione*, contained a summary of, they believe, Bordiga's opening statement. The above is a translated one-paragraph precis of an eight-paragraph statement in my possession. Peregalli quotes the same statement, but lists a different provenance, *Prometeo of June 1928. Op.cit.*, p. 83, n83.

1. Donald Sassoon's *One Hundred Years of Socialism, The Western European Left in the 20th Century*, is exactly what the title states. The text is a compendia of data devoted to each national left, and interpreted by the author. Simply the pages devoted to "Italian Communism and Gramsci" and the corresponding footnoted-sources interest us.²⁶⁵ He devotes some nine pages to the section on Italian socialism, beginning with a rapid survey of the four principal factions in the Italian Socialist Party in 1920--the reformists led by Turati, the "maximalists" of Serrati, "the communists" aligned with Bordiga, and Gramsci's "culturalists" or "workers' councils wing". The first three are summarized and dismissed in something more than two pages within which perhaps three paragraphs go to Bordiga. For Sassoon, only the fourth, i.e., Gramsci, is of interest. Putting aside any analysis of Sassoon's handling of Gramsci's post-1926 writings, that is, the *Prison Notebooks*, let us look narrowly and closely at his handling of Gramsci and Bordiga, pre-1926.

The most remarkable fact about this two-page summary is that, regardless of amount of controversy involved, Sassoon has paved over completely all Gramsci's actions in the years prior to 1926. There is no mention of his 1914 lunge into interventionism and his absence from the early anti-war activities of the Turinese proletariat; no reference to the celebrated 1917 article greeting the Russian Revolution, and the Johnny-come-lately (1920) need to reform the party; or 1921-1922 when his writings embodied the ideology of the *Sinistra*; no reference to the means used to manufacture the 90.8 percent majority at Lyons; or the endorsement of Bolshevization, his misreading of the struggle within the Bolshevik party, and his embrace of Stalin's ("majority") views in 1926; even his "worker-council" period is curtly dismissed.

²⁶⁵ Published by New Press, New York, 1996. Text, pp. 73-82; footnotes, pp. 789-790.

Sassoon's presentation of Bordiga is equally omissive and, in addition, amply erroneous. Thus, he associates Bordiga with the acceptance of the "Bolshevik model" for Western Europe, something Bordiga *always* openly opposed in the leading bodies of the International. Berti had compared the *Sinistra* party to a self-contained armored submarine awaiting the lifting arrival of a revolutionary tide; borrowing this *Bertian* configuration, Sassoon writes, "Once this [Bordiga's] analysis was made, there is no need for further thought: iron discipline, agitation and propaganda, avoidance of compromise and doctrinal purity were all that *was* required," and ends paralleling Bordiga to the "wait-and-see" attitudes of Serrati and Kautsky.

Such a caricature cannot begin to explain why Bordiga and the *Sinistra*--unlike Kautsky and, perhaps, Serrati--saw through the defensive war shibboleth before the war crisis of 1914, and, in contrast to Gramsci, argued for neutrality in 1914 and militant street and strike action to oppose intervention in 1915; or were able in 1915 to anticipate the need for a new international, accurately foreseeing that the alternative would be a false "national socialism"; or why amidst the various crises of October 1917 they forced the party leadership to meet at Florence in November to stiffen resistance against any attempt by the Reformists to use Caporetto to openly endorse the war; or why even from the first issues of *Il Soviet* in early 1919, at a time when the socialists had the ear and loyalty of perhaps a majority of the working class, they hammered out a three-part message to the party: replace parliamentarianism, reform the party, and move quickly to avoid an inevitable rightwing reaction. Certainly not all the above, but should he not have better informed his readers, including that Bordiga forthrightly opposed Stalin and openly described the violence (introduced into Italy by Gramsci) being applied to cow and dragoon the party ranks into accepting and following the new line from Moscow, or that Bordiga was amongst the first to

recognize the danger to the workers' movement emanating from the isolationist policies of "socialism in one country," an early variety of the national socialism he had warned against? With all these issues, Sassoon remained silent.

Indeed, the above argues the opposite: for a man who was aware of the ever-changing nature of reality. Exactly because Bordiga never accepted the "Bolshevik model," never surrendered his analytical keenness and political morality to the Russian leadership, and opposed Bolshevization as bureaucratic and destructive of the revolutionary workers' role, for these and other reasons he was besmirched by the subsequent Russian and Togliattian leaderships. The *Sinistra* did herald the October Revolution not for its model, for its *valorization* of revolutionary Marxism, its break with the right and center of the Second International.

Not only is Sassoon equally ommissive and dismissive, but he writes bad history as well. Sassoon did not mention and probably was unaware that the resignation of Bordiga, Repossi, Terracini, Fortichiari, and Grieco from the leadership of the PCd'I, in January 1923 opened the door to Gramsci; else how explain that he wrongfully has the International intervene to remove Bordiga in June 1924? He describes the party as being "little more than a persecuted sect," and never mentions the *Sinistra* or its agony, which might have compelled him to explain why the persecution and undoing of this over 20,000 strong "sect" at the hands of Gramsci took a good part of a year--1925, not 1924. Moreover, since by then (1924) the PSI had a membership hardly larger than the PCd'I, why is the former a party and the latter a sect?²⁶⁶ Given the above, Sassoon would

²⁶⁶ Delegates to the Congress of Lyons were based on a membership of 28,000. This figure would represent a Centrist assessment. Assertion found in *La liquidazione della Sinistra del PCd'IT (1925)*. (Tipografia Rosio, Milan: 1991), p. 17. The fourth volume of a series, *Documenti sul Comunismo Rivoluzionario in Italia*, it was anonymously compiled by a *Sinistra* group not politically connected to the PCInt. Introductory remarks are anonymous and undocumented, but ninety percent of the book is given to a reproduction of

be in no position to deny Fortichiari's assertion, that every sectional congress in northern Italy called to name delegates to the Lyons Congress gave its support to the *Sinistra*.²⁶⁷

Did Sassoon know that delegates representing 58 thousand members voted for the communist motion at the PSI's Livorno Congress in 1921, a substantial minority, and but for the politically suicidal tactics followed by Serrati would have been a majority; that the 50-thousand-strong Socialist Youth Federation (FGS) in which the influence of Bordiga was paramount and the tradition of being with the *Sinistra* long passed as a body to the new Communist Youth Federation (FGC), or that at the Rome Congress of 1922, the PCd'I still claimed a 40-thousand membership? The party may well have become a sect, after the *Sinistra* was suppressed by Gramsci. One can imagine the anger, bewilderment, disgust, and resignation of that membership, noted above in "The Agony of the *Sinistra*," as their leaders were replaced, their views misrepresented, and their history denied. A most recent study from the new history found that party membership in the industrial centers typified by Turin and Milan had halved in the period 1925-1926, what the authors call "the vertiginous crisis of registration,"²⁶⁸ a membership loss that coincides with the suppression of the *Sinistra*.

On what was happening in the party, Christian Riechers commented, "Adapting himself to the Machiavellianism taking hold in the Communist International [1923], Gramsci became an expert in altering (*remozione*) the past as a means to political ends. At the beginning of 1924 he

documents from 1925, Comintern, Centrist, and oppositional. In their words, 1925 is the year the *Sinistra* was liquidated. Evidently, bringing to light and making known the early documents, not writing a detailed narrative of the past, was the purpose underlying this volume.

²⁶⁷ Letter from Fortichiari in my possession, dated January 15, 1974.

²⁶⁸ Peregalli, *Amadeo Borgiga*, p. 86. As the industrial proletariat was leaving, peasant membership rose (p. 23), changing the social composition of the party and altering its political make-up.

peremptorily declared that the first three years of the party were not history.”²⁶⁹ In short order, the party and history of the early PCd’I were reduced by Centrist writers to a scrabbling “sect,” with Bordiga, one of the important figures in the early years of the International and the towering presence in the founding of the party, turned into a mono-dimensional set of deprecating adjectives. These changes that entailed downgrading or erasing the record of these years were political and remain sacrosanct in Centrist historiography. The tailings are found in Boggs, Femia, and now Sassoon. It is legitimate to ask at this point: Who did the greater harm to the PCd’I, Gramsci or Mussolini?

The party had survived the terrible devastation of 1923, and rebounded rapidly in 1924. These are a prelude to an even greater historical error by Sassoon: he blames Bordiga for the failed merger of the Communists and Socialists, adding that after Bordiga’s “removal” in 1924 “Gramsci’s group...[took over] and the merger followed,” when in actual fact under the leadership of Pietro Nenni and Arturo Vella the Twentieth Congress of the PSI had rejected merger a year earlier, in 1923, at a time when Bordiga was imprisoned, although some two thousand socialist *terzini*, as these loyal followers of the Third International were called, moved into Communist ranks with Serrati, where by providing Gramsci with a base he had not been able to win they probably did more harm than good. Now, Bordiga was opposed to merger, but so was just about everyone in the leadership including Togliatti and Gramsci, until the latter’s *svolta* in 1923. In summary, it would be harder to find a more unhistorical piece of writing, more loaded with disinformation, than these several paragraphs by Sassoon. And the effort is not warranted to correct his misuse of the term “workers’ councils” to describe the factory-council movement of Turin.

²⁶⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

How is it that this seasoned and clearly capable professional was so unfamiliar with the ABC's of the Italian scene, in the process rushing off a curtly illiterate secenario? There is a clear possibility that he was gulled, led open-eyed down the pristine path following a precedent set by many an illustrious writer before him. Adding to that, some of the answer is found in a survey of his sources. The thirty-odd footnotes cited represent a decidedly pro-Gramscian Centrist slant: Berti, Togliatti, Franco De Felice, and especially the anthologies of Gramsci's writings prepared by Quintin Hoare with Geoffrey Nowell Smith, two names encountered earlier, and, separately, Quintin Hoare. The only contrary source, *Amadeo Bordiga* by Andreina De Clementi, is named but not used, and the work down-graded by the designation "pro-Bordiga." The presumption conveyed is that the other sources are normatively objective, not pro-Gramsci. No primary source from the *Sinistra* movement, 1912-1925, is cited, nor any reprint or secondary work from the abundant publications issued in the postwar by the small *Sinistra* party, nor from the many revisionist findings appearing between the 1950s and 1970s. There comes to mind the Italian saying *Wine may be made even from grapes*, and he demonstrates that even the most skillful vintner is unable to produce a reasonable product from a foul mash.

Above all, what makes Sassoon's concise summary a revealing find is that in a few paragraphs he provides another example of the "smoking gun"--a graphic illustration of how so much of the early Gramsci is based on historiographic mirrors, rather than actual history. By means of a refined or correct selection of documents an idealized picture is constructed, and this composition is then reflected endlessly, uncritically, and mindlessly from one author to another.

Back in 1958, after a study of the war reactions of Gramsci and Bordiga, Aldo Romano concluded that in 1914-1915 Bordiga was the "lead man of Italian socialism," a shocker at the

time.²⁷⁰ This is not mentioned. Tasca recalled in 1953 and Stefano Merli uncovered in 1964 that Gramsci had not begun to distance himself from the *Sinistra* until the spring of 1923 when he called on the Comintern to replace the leaders of the PCd'I, in those years a finding with major implications.²⁷¹ This, too, is left to oblivion. *Und so weiter*. Instead, one turns to other uncritical sources--Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith's *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. However, in a much earlier edition of *Selections* Hoare and Smith acknowledge their debt to Dr. Elsa Fubini, Professor Valentino Gerratana, and Franco Ferri of the Gramsci Institute, adding, "We would like to acknowledge our indebtedness...without which this General Introduction could not have been written. The most important...the series of books...by Paolo Spriano,"²⁷² hence, to the very people who created and/or maintained the postwar Gramscian cult, and these politically partisan views become the "objective" basis for that history.

Over time, one comes eventually to recognize a principal axiom with this writing: With Gramsci, one may take any liberty provided it is positive, with Bordiga provided it is negative. In this "history," primary sources don't count. To specifically recall one case: in the years Serreni depicted Bordiga as a *camorrista*, i.e., a member of the Neapolitan underworld, to be even-handed and complimentary he ranged Gramsci with Zhdanov.²⁷³ Considered laudatory then, mentioning the equation is tabu today. Cammett provided a clearer illustration nearer at hand. Agreeing that the purpose behind the meeting of Florence in November 1917 was to block the right wing and

²⁷⁰ *Rivista storica del socialismo* (henceforth *RsdS*), No. 4 (1958), pp. 405-442.

²⁷¹ *Il Mondo*, August 25-September 25, 1953 & *RsdS*, No. 7 (1964), pp. 605-625.

²⁷² New York, International Publishers, 1973.

²⁷³ "Gramsci e la scienza di avanguardia," *"Societa' "*, No. IV,, No. 1 (1948), pp. 3-30.

continue “intransigent hostility toward the war,” he has Bordiga open with a call “for an immediate socialist revolution,” a claim that is undocumented, rests on no historical reconstruction,²⁷⁴ is not made by Bordiga himself, and is, one may aver with complete authority, vintage Cammett rather than Bordiga. Parenthetically, in his reconstruction of the event decades later, Bordiga penned an observation suggesting that “socialist revolution” was not on the agenda: “[At Caporetto] The masses [of deserting soldiers] had understood as much as they were able, given the *absence of a revolutionary party* (my emphasis).”²⁷⁵

After saddling Bordiga with the characterization of “exuberant personality and superficial brilliance,” Cammett ends with this equally undocumented gloss of Gramsci: “At Florence as later, it was his positive, creative attitude towards the problems of revolutionary Socialism that distinguished Gramsci from most of his comrades.”²⁷⁶ That is, even if at that gathering, Gramsci remained mute! Magic realism in the annals of history, or simply Amendola?

Sassoon continues the practice. He never apprises the reader that the definitive edition of the *Prison Notebooks* did not appear until thirty years after the war, in part because the early publications had been selectively compiled to serve political ends; no mention that the 1947

²⁷⁴ Cammett probably based himself on Giovanni Germanetto’s (in)famous *Souvenirs d’un perruquier*, p. 113. In this original account, Germanetto has Gramsci agreeing with Bordiga. If that’s the case, why is Bordiga’s proposal “superficial” and Gramsci’s acceptance “creative”? Whether Gramsci said anything remains to be proven, but by 1931 the party had been Stalinized, and in a later edition Germanetto omitted the account completely. Spriano takes no position but downplays “socialist revolution”: “At Florence, perhaps the order of the day is not the problem of ‘doing as in Russia’...” *Storia*, vol. I, pp.3-4. Beyond blocking a reformist declaration of solidarity with the war, for Bordiga the importance of Florence lay in helping set the basis for the postwar *Sinistra*. See *Sdsc*, I, 117-118.

²⁷⁵ *Sdsc*, I, p. 114.

²⁷⁶ Cammett, *op. cit.* pp. 56-58.

version of Gramsci's *Letters from Prison* were edited to remove all reference to Bordiga, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, and reference to the workers' opposition, and even the thousand-page 1965 edition edited by Fubini and Sergio Caprioglio contained no letter from Gramsci to Bordiga, although that correspondence existed.²⁷⁷ In summary, Sassoon presented the orthodox Centrist view of Gramsci, one that darkened out and varnished over the actual historical man and events. This perversion of history lasted from the the 1930s into the 1990s.

About the time I read Sassoon, I came across another publication germane to this subject, *The Liquidation of the Sinistra of the PCd'I (1925)* (trans.),²⁷⁸ henceforth *Liquidazione*, compiled by an independent *Sinistra* group. The summarizing introductions contained in this volume, although undocumented, are in keeping with the archival evidence and judgments listed in "The Agony of the *Sinistra*," and absolutely devastating in their judgments of Gramsci's 1924-1926 years.

Describing Gramsci's lead in the destruction of the *Sinistra*, in their introduction they wrote, "The role of Gramsci in this effort is unequalled. Against the *Sinistra* he used every means: theoretical, political and organizational. He cited *Leninism*, as defined in Moscow. He used his position to shatter (*sgretolare*) and replace cadre (*quadri federali*). He continuously resorted to appointments from above. He used the threat of expulsion. He transferred initiative from the party to the functionaries." These activities culminated with the removal of Fortichiari from the leadership of Milan, numerically one the largest Communist sections (2314 members) in Italy,

²⁷⁷ Giorgio Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti* (Bari: Laterza, 1973), p. 433 & passim.

²⁷⁸ *La liquidazione della Sinistra del PCd'I* (Tipografia Rosio, Milan: 1991). It's not clear who were the compilers of this volume, and if related to the Onorato Secondo Damen group that split from the main body back in 1952.

though it could not compare with Turin (3858), or Novara (3338).²⁷⁹ Further, they continue, “Bordiga was taken out of the leadership in Naples. The leaders of the federations of Turin, Rome, Aquila, Cosenza were removed.. The [*Sinistra*] majorities of Alessandria, Biella, Trieste, Cremona, Pavia,²⁸⁰ Foggia were mutilated (*mutilate*); leading (*federali*) committees with a strong *Sinistra* presence were overturned (*scombussolati*) and rearranged.”²⁸¹

Turning to another aspect of Gramsci’s activity in the years 1924-1926, the period that would culminate in the triumph at Lyons,²⁸² they claimed, “But the leading role of Gramsci in the liquidation of the *Sinistra* does not stop here. Amidst his attacks on Bordiga, he theorized that the [auto]biography of all revolutionaries is in large part the struggle against one’s personal past errors; he not only justified (*autocertificava*) a cleansing (*purgazione*) of his past--which for him coming

²⁷⁹ Giorgio Galli, *La Storia del PCI (Tascabili Bonpiani, Milan: 1976,* p. 66. The figures date to the end of 1921. The *Sinistra*, was especially strong in Piedmont, which is interesting in of itself. On the other hand, Pavia in Emilia had 977, smaller but still twice Naples in the south. This new edition of Galli contains a revealing Introduction that will be cited later.

²⁸⁰ Recall Renzo De Felice’s finding in 1966: the dissolution of the Pavia section and the overturning of the Milan body: n114, *supra*.

²⁸¹ *Liquidazione*, pp. 18-20.

²⁸² *Liquidazione* provides an example of Comintern involvement in the operation against the *Sinistra*, something I could only guess at in print in the 1970s. Citing a directive of August 20, 1925, from the *Presidium* of the Comintern to the Gramscian leadership, these steps are mentioned: 1) have the Central Committee control the internal debate, and attack all of Bordiga’s views; 2) articles in the press must be brief and pitched to the workers’ understanding; 3) the debate must be taken into the cells; 4) the date for the [Lyons] congress must be set only after it becomes clear that the party is overwhelmingly with the Central Committee and against Bordiga; September [1925] is not a good time; 5) to test party opinion convoke a congress in each region; 6) to control those [local] leaders and isolate them from the members, a representative must be sent to the branches (*federazioni*) that are against or not with the Central Committee; 7) have congresses in those areas that support the Central Committee and publish the results immediately. P. 32.

from idealism to communism, and in the way he was moving ahead, could be quite useful--but at the same time granted (*rilasciava*) his collaborators, old and new, the authority to construct a new persona, denying class origins (*passato classista*), thus he embodied the role of a bad *Maestro*.²⁸³

The statement brings confirmation to Amendola. It was Gramsci, then, as Amendola alleged, who began the politically-motivated practice of advancing bogus claims and consciously making use of myths in history! Is this the reason behind Gramsci's insistent claim to the authorship of "For A Renewal of the Socialist Party" written in 1920, although internal documentary evidence has shown that it embodied the year-old reformist views of the *Sinistra* and the *Sinistra* majority in the Turin section? One must also recall the lament and complaint made by Jules Humbert-Droz describing the conduct of Gramscian leadership: the use of "inadmissible methods frequently employed by Stalin." This emissary of the International let out another slip, when stating that the results of the Lyons Congress "were known beforehand."²⁸⁴ Again, the bad *Maestro*? The same ethic may have been at work when after his *svolta* Gramsci suddenly tarred Bordiga with being a "Maximalist!"²⁸⁵

The great value of *Liquidazione* (ninety percent of the text is composed of original documents from 1925) is that by providing details it added dimensions and confirms from another source the changes described in "The Agony of the *Sinistra*," much the way "Agony" provides the documentation for the introductory remarks of *Liquidazione*. In "The Agony," one finds the documents substantiating the removal of Fortichiani and Bordiga, as well as for the vindictive

²⁸³ *Liquidazione*, p. 34. In the above translation, for purposes of clarity I disregarded all italics found in the Italian text.

²⁸⁴ Quoted in Arturo Peregalli, *Amadeo Bordiga*, p. 56.

²⁸⁵ Spriano, "Gramsci e....partito," "Rinascita," September 17, 1971.

actions used against the membership and cadre in 1924-1925. In the 1970s, I used “death knell,” “tore,” and “ripped apart,” and cited De Felice’s “overturn,” all words freighted with violence, to describe events--the expulsion in Trieste, the “throat shoving” in the Goriziano, the dissolution and changes in Venice, Pavia, Milan, and the purging in the Neapolitan region, and elsewhere; in short, Gramsci’s “police management” (Cortesi) of the party. In the 1990s, *Liquidazione* employed *mutilare* (mutilate), *sgrettolare* (shatter), and *scombussolare* (overturn) to describe the same events, a parallelism drawn from two separate evaluations of the same historical campaign; a shared division of view unbeknownst to either party. From a most recent “salvaging operation” by Giuseppe Vacca, who in the 1990s attempted to vindicate Gramsci (who had it “right”) by casting overboard Togliatti and the Russians (who had it “wrong”), we learn that the section at Pesaro in north central Italy “refused to accept the results of the Congress [of Lyons],” and the problem “liquidated” by expulsion.²⁸⁶ There is not a breath of any of these happenings in the histories cited earlier, from Cammett to Sassoon, and a singular referral in Spriano, as if the incident was an aberration and not emblematic of policy. Furthermore, there is no mention of Gramsci’s vicious 1925 campaign in Vacca..

Liquidazione does lift the curtain of the past limitedly to reveal yet another facet of the complex organizational nature of the PCd’I under *Sinistra* leadership: the existence of an illegal party imposed by demand of the Second Comintern Congress and which operated in parallel with the legal organization. The event is mentioned here to suggest the seriousness and complexity of the policies employed by that leadership. Postwar Centrist historiography either overlooked this aspect

²⁸⁶ *Gramsci a Roma Togliatti a Moscow*, pp. 49-50. The news was given Gramsci by Scoccimarro, who blamed Bordiga. Who else?

of the past or was disparaging of the whole subject , raising vague charges of incompetence or allusions to Blanqui.²⁸⁷

Recounting the details of Bordiga's lecture at the *Universita` proletaria* in March 1925, *Liquidazione* adds, "Emerging from the *Castello Sforzesco* in *Foro Bonaparte*, Bordiga was acclaimed by an enormous mass of comrades. That evening, in the quarter where the section (*federazione*) was located, there occurred in Bordiga's presence a march by the military organization (*comparto militante*) that was ready to repulse any fascist intrusion. At least 2,000 marchers in combat readiness (*in asseto di combattimento*) took part."²⁸⁸

Nowhere have I found additional references to that event,²⁸⁹ but it does bring to mind and appears to confirm Fortichiari's "hundreds of trained and trusted comrades" in Milan whom Gramsci would not rely upon.²⁹⁰ If one adds in Bordiga's statement that three years earlier the operating illegal network of the PCd'I provided communications during the ill-fated "legal strike" of 1922, one begins to sense the dimension of this party's multi-level activity that had survived and continued to function effectively under the difficult conditions existing after Mussolini's March on Rome. Here is additional reason to reject Sasson's misrepresentation of history.

In their prefatory summation, the authors conclude that with the completion of Bolshevization, the Center's self-characterization of itself as "a party of steel, with a membership

²⁸⁷ See Togliatti's account of "4 lost pistols," p. 19 of *La formazione*.

²⁸⁸ *Liquidazione*, p. 28

²⁸⁹ The event was confirmed in an e-mail from Mario Maffi, son of Bruno Maffi, a long-term activist in the present *Sinistra*.

²⁹⁰ Consult n49, *supra*.

cemented by unity [and] obedient to its leaders was a bureaucratic caricature of Lenin and Marxism,”²⁹¹ a finding in keeping with the “The Agony of the *Sinistra*.”

This last claim made by the Center must be added to the many made on behalf of Gramsci for the period ending in 1926: 1) The founder of the party; documentation shows that his role was secondary. 2) The leader of Italian soviets and workers’ councils; the reality was that soviets never existed in Italy, and Gramsci never led workers’ councils. 3) The great Leninist; more accurately, he was the first Italian Stalinist. 4) The savior of the party; by the same meter, Stalin was the greatest savior of all. 5) The leader of the working class; no one person may have fit this title in that period, neither Gramsci nor even Bordiga, else they would not have had to contend with a minoritarian status.

Almost as an addendum to the preceding paragraph, in a new edition of *Storia del PCI* by Galli issued in 1976, one finds this comment by the author: “In a reevaluation of the role of Amadeo Bordiga as the leader (*dirigente*) of the first years of the PCI and in an implicit admission that only the intervention of the III International made Gramsci the leader of the party, facts already evident in 1957, the same Togliatti changed his account found in the cited Gramscian documentation [*The Formation of the Leadership of the Italian Communist Party in 1923-24*].”²⁹³ Which is to say, the ranks of the party didn’t want Gramsci as their leader, and by himself he could not have remained in that role. Galli quotes the expression used by Spriano to characterize the Gramscian party’s relationship to the USSR, “*il legame d’acciaio*”—“the bond of steel,” the actual

²⁹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

²⁹² P. 22, *supra*.

²⁹³ *Storia del PCI* (1976 edition), p. ii.

fundamental support that cemented Gramsci's power and hold on the party. With this admission, the inquiry about the nature and significance of the Lyons Congress is concluded.

The compilers of *Liquidazione* are critical of at least one aspect of *Sinistra's* performance, namely, the absence of a militant defensive response by Bordiga and the *Sinistra* to the attacks made on them in 1924-1925, which they see as a principal cause of defeat. "When he was viciously accused of factionalism and of constituting an international faction in 1924-1925, one need only remember that in reality Bordiga kept himself within party discipline,"²⁹⁴ and they believe he could have done more. That these internecine struggles took place in the background of a rapidly consolidating fascist regime when most national and international attention was on Mussolini and his government may explain why communist affairs drew little attention, but not why the *Sinistra* was not more resistant.

Those in the know maintain that Korsch in the 1926 letter to Bordiga proposed setting up a new left international under Bordiga's leadership, a proposal Bordiga turned down. Whatever the reality, with Gramsci and the Center hacking away on one side and the International hemming in on the other, it's not clear how much room there was for maneuver. The final word is that by 1926 the *Sinistra*, a militant Western workingclass current amongst the best in the West, had been eliminated, and Bordiga would soon disappear from mainstream communist politics.

In the dark decades that followed Italian communists and militant workers believing they were struggling for socialism would fight in Spain, experience the bitter national liberation years in Italy, and stand in the postwar years against the armed ruffians led by Mario Scelba, egged on now by the US, and not knowing that by being party members and followers they were their own

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 11 & 35.

worst obstacle. The US would draw up interventionist plans to subvert and destroy a possible “left” victory in the April 1948 elections--plans that have remained undisclosed a half century later.

Before closing, a glance at the historical Bordiga as depicted in De Clementi's *Amadeo Bordiga*. This is a tightly argued work that traces and evaluates Bordiga's political development and role in a sympathetic manner without omitting critical assessments. Never a follower of Bordiga or of the *Sinistra*, her attempt to present more balanced judgments was unacceptable to Centrists, for whom any reconstruction of Bordiga that deviated from their views was most generally denounced as “myth-making.” For its day and many years thereafter, her study remained the most detailed account of Bordiga's politics, from his appearance in socialist ranks well before 1914 to his opposition to Stalin. Not a new-day revelation, but of interest to us is that she noted the affinity and disagreements Bordiga shared with major figures in the post-World War I European Left, many of whom rejected with Bordiga the “Bolshevik model” and rested their belief in the efficacy of abstentionism in the more economically developed and politically sophisticated West.

As with other critics, her findings were less challenged than disregarded by orthodox Centrist historians who were probably aided by the power and domestic influence of the PCI, the many uncritical foreign supporters--Hobsbawm, Hoare & Smith, Cammett, and others--and, above all, by the cultivated awe surrounding the prison writings and martyrdom of Gramsci.

In her narrative she discussed a pivotal metal-workers strike in Naples in February 1919, with its radicalization of the local working class, and depicts a Bordiga whose model of workers'

control would never have meshed with later Stalinism, just as his concept of leadership cannot be equated with Gramsci's later practice.

The importance of this first conflict, more than in the outcome that left unachieved the fundamental demands, was the manner it was conducted; the intended changes with which Bordiga reestablished the policies and structure of the Neapolitan working class became, for the first time, a real propellant [to action] and would remain unchanged in the course of the bitter subsequent struggles. The attempt to politicize the economic struggles sought in parallel by the [*Sinistra*] Socialist Section produced unexpected, controversial results and, all told, [were] of small relevance; but the most innovative aspect of the Bordigan strategy, one that in general is undervalued and overlooked, consisted in the respect for and constant stimulus toward worker self-control of the struggle, guaranteed by the daily meeting of the working-committee categories who held the power of decision, and this limited the power of the representatives involved in negotiations and communications. If it is true that Bordiga was shown to be impatient with defections or unfavorable results, it is true also that he never tried to superimpose his will or his political goals on the will or the actual potential of the [working-] class movement, and this too was indicated by him as the most positive outcome. "The action was led," he wrote at the end of this strike, "the problems were handled by genuine workers, and it [the strike] was not used for some personal exhibitionism. Thus the organization kept its class image."²⁹⁵

Later, we will note how these tactics were a forerunner and illustrative of the Rome Theses adopted at the second and last Congress of the *Sinistra* PCd'I in 1922.

2. With an opening event on April 2, 1997, the conference on Gramsci was held at *Casa Italiana*, Columbia University,²⁹⁶ and dedicated to GRAMSCI AND MODERNITY, discussed on

²⁹⁵ Amadeo Bordiga (Turin: Einaudi, 1972), pp. 68-69.

²⁹⁶ Although I twice telephoned Casa Italiana to have an announcement sent to me, that card, seemingly from the *Instituto Italiano Di Coltura* of Manhattan, New York City, never arrived. A copy of that announcement, plus printed copies of the remarks delivered were given to me by one of the attendants.

April 3. For the reason indicated in the appropriate footnote, I did not attend and my remarks are limited to the four papers distributed by discussants at the conference.²⁹⁷

a. The comments of Giuseppe Vacca, Director of the *Fondazione Antonio Gramsci*, appear to be a selection from some earlier work and translated--if that term can be used--by someone not familiar with normative usage.

Entitled "PRISON NOTEBOOKS" AND THE '900 POLITICS, he opened with (I believe) a criticism of Togliatti's characterization of Gramsci as "the forerunner of 'Italian Way to Socialism,'" and presented a Gramsci seemingly critical of Stalin:

Since 1929's [*sic*] Gramsci had perceived the risk that, if USSR had been long cut off the revolution would be deformed (9). Against that risk he had pointed out: socialism at a snail's pace." That's to keep up the alliance among workers and peasants and to build up a "middle economy" as presuppositions both of the democratic character of the "proletarian dictatorship" and its temporariness[*sic*]. Actually that last one could be warranted only by the connection that alliance assured between the 'building of socialism in one country' and the development of the proletarian ruling function on a world scale. Instead in the '29-'30 turn the alliance between workers and peasants was split and there got broken also any tie between the internal development in USSR and the chances of "revolutionary masses" on an international plan [*sic*]. [And further along:] Gramsci sees Stalinian USSR dominated by a sort of military regulation and an actual tampering of the economy....A kind of politics dictated, according to Gramsci, by "fatalistic believes" [*sic*], a phenomenon of "political Cadornism" followed by irreparable consequences. Gramsci notices also that to those "fatalistic convincements" [*sic*] joins "a tendency to trust later blindly and senselessly to the regulating virtue of arms[....]." "They think that the intervention of will is useful to the destruction and not to the reconstruction [....]. Destruction is conceived as mechanic, not as destruction-reconstruction. In such a way of thinking, concludes Gramsci, it's neither taken into account the factor 'time' nor of economy itself."

The text does not improve, as it moves along.

If Vacca meant that in the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci was critical of Stalin, then he stood in direct contradiction to Spriano who was probably the better historian of the two, although the real

²⁹⁷ I have no way of knowing in what order the papers were presented; my order of discussion is completely arbitrary.

problem here is establishing the veracity of both Vacca and Spriano. Moreover, the tying of the fate of the Russian Revolution to the world revolution or the foreign proletariats was a concept associated with Lenin, Trotsky, and Bordiga, as indicated by the latter in his 1926 speech, never with Gramsci.

However, the following may be revealing. In the winter of 1990-1991, I was invited to a meeting of American historians of Italian history held in the School of International Affairs, Columbia. Much to the skepticism of many present, Vacca described the 1946-Togliatti as a “social democrat,” an assertion contradicted by my recollections and the accounts of the period. The invective between Togliatti and Giuseppe Saragat, the leader of Italy’s post-World War II social democracy after the latter headed a secession from the Nenni-led Socialist Party prior to the critical April 18, 1948, election to form the *Partito social-democratico italiano* (Psdi), is easily remembered.

This ability and readiness of Centrist, now ex-Centrist, historians to change their findings according to the dictates of changing political needs was described by Roberto Gabriele in 1966: “But no one is fooled who for years has seen the trustees and official interpreters of the history of the PCI and the workingclass movement punctually alter their ‘scientific’ work to fit the decisions of a political leadership, often--and this is the real tragedy--without conviction.”²⁹⁸ Such seems to be the case (again) with Vacca. Should some form of fascism return to power in Italy, one would not be surprised to see an aging *camerata*²⁹⁹ Vacca announce that Gramsci, too, had a fascist root. Well, if not fascist, at least interventionist!

²⁹⁸ Rds, No. 27 (1966), pp. 178-188.

²⁹⁹ The fascist term for ‘comrade,’ as opposed to *compagno* used by socialists, communists, and others on the Left.

That his presentation, which at times comes close to being gibberish, was delivered and printed in that form is not the only indication of the lack of seriousness of the conference. Since the (then) PDS had abjured all interest in socialism, his remarks appear ill-fitting and inappropriate, a seeming carry-over from a bygone time.

b. A second paper by Claudia Mancini, listed as a member of the Italian parliament and *La Sapienza* University, was entitled “PRAXIS AND PRAGMATISM, The Influence of James on Gramsci,” soon presented the reader with another set of problems: the thorns and barbs of abstruseness. Consider this statement:

The centrality of Prediction is related to the basic relationship between knowledge and Will. It means the refusal of ethical intellectualism, involving the pretension of building a moral system on an exclusively cognitive basis, without any support on a practical basis. All four pragmatists [Valiati, Calderoni, Papini and Prezzolini] are in agreement on this point, and this very same point is the reason of the ambiguous but lasting relationship between Croce and *Leonardo* and subsequently followed by the *Voce*. This connection between Knowledge and Will could nevertheless be interpreted in different ways. According to Valiati and Calderoni--who never freed themselves from the Mystic Empiricism of S. J. Mills, approaching F. Brentano’s classification of the mental acts--Prediction is necessary so that it creates a voluntary act but doesn’t actually coincide with it. For both philosophers, the independent foundation of Will implies a necessary distinction between Knowledge and Will and not the reduction of the first to the second. Prediction is, therefore, a cognitive element necessary to Will not belonging to its sphere.

Here the writer clothes her views in a thicket of such arcane abstractions that the literate reader can never be sure of what he/she is being asked to grasp. Mancini never clarifies the numerous elements that liberally lard every sentence, and this lends a dense incomprehensibility to the paper as a whole. Two attentive readers would be capable giving diverse interpretations to the same words. Most listeners and readers would probably remain flummoxed. Take these assertions: “Prediction can only occur when the collective Will is given a solid shape in the form of a proper

programme; in fact, it is part of the same programme. If the reality of historical events is regarded as the results of the game of differing and conflicting wills, a clash between opposing programmes (thesis and antithesis)....” Is this a statement with a referent, the proletariat (“collective Will”), and the means (“proper programme”) by which it develops consciousness and mediates the class struggle (“game of differing and conflicting wills”) to achieve socialism (prediction)? If so, why the substitutions; if not, what? Apart from being a “post-modernist” statement of solipsistic gobbledygook, and contradictory of Marxist materialism insofar that it can be understood, is Mancini’s paper really communicative? Pressed against Mancini’s, Vacca’s primitive propositions are at least identifiable.

c. After the briars and dank tunnels of the first two, with the papers of Giancarlo Corsini and Renato Zangheri we are into a civilized English. Corsini’s *THE AMERICAN WAY TO GRAMSCI*, with its reference to T. J. Jackson Lear’s meditative and analytical discussion of Gramsci’s writings on hegemony,³⁰⁰ and other comments to hegemony drawn by Corsini from historical and cultural writings, ended with his own example, a blurb from an issue of Cole Porter songs, to which he appends this visionary reaction: “I see Gramsci traveling light across this continent, with Marx in his kit-bag and without the political, philosophical or ideological burden of past appropriations, not always innocent.” It is difficult to take this *reductio ad absurdum* of Gramsci as little more than light cavalry overture, and it borders on and slips beneath the inconsequential. To espy a Marxist in Gramsci one has to possess the powers of a medium endowed with abilities beyond those of an ordinary trickster, who, unlike Corsini, must be truly capable of conjuring an apparition from out the emptiness of hot air.

³⁰⁰ “American Historical Review,” June, 1985, pp. 567-593.

d. The same cannot be said for Zangheri's NOTES FROM GRAMSCI AND THE 1900s, in my view a cautious paper, and the best of the four. In his passage through the *Prison Notebooks*, however, at one point he quoted Gramsci, "Every trace of autonomous initiative is, therefore, invaluable," and continues with these observations, "In recent years, following a research in the Notebooks, evidence has been found of Gramsci's repeated alarm pointing to the authoritarian turn undertaken by the events in the Soviet Union, and the reference to the Soviet experience contained in the general reflections on 'Bonapartism' and 'Caesarism' was not difficult to notice." The statement is not footnoted and would appear to be an illustration of the dictum applying to allegations of Gramsci's "anti-Stalinism" found at the end of the discussion of Femia.

Probing further, if "not difficult to notice," why was attention not drawn to this "alarm" earlier--say at the time of the 1948 PCI congress, when Gramsci was figured so prominently with Stalin, or before and after the denunciation of Stalin by Khrushchev in 1956? Again, the contrast has to be drawn between Gramsci's veiled criticisms (the existence of which have yet to be verified) and Bordiga's open remarks (on the public record since 1926). Doubts are deepened when in the same paragraph Zangheri ties "Gramsci" with "research," the "united front" and its abandonment "by the Third International on behalf of favoring 'bolshevization' of the communist parties," which is a conflation of two altogether disparate political tactics, the united front and Bolshevization, that are not incompatible and were discussed in the International at different times, although in the early 1920s both were opposed by Bordiga and (eventually) supported by Gramsci. He cites a secondary source here (C. Natoli), but for Bolshevization could have gone directly to the *L'Unità* of July 26 & 28, 1925, to see how both men stood, one in opposition one in support.

One wonders how Zangheri would react to the following assessment of Gramsci's behavior which is much closer to the actual archival record of Gramsci's "conspiratorial" behavior in 1924-1926? "Gramsci had educated Togliatti and the other comrades on the privileged position of the Russians in contrast to the other parties and on the necessity to avoid dissension with that party and the Comintern; Gramsci himself had introduced to the PCd'I the methods associated with 'Bolshevization,' destroying the unity of the Italian leadership to the point of 'over-winning' (*stravincere*) with the *Sinistra* opposition; not only was he not opposed to ratcheting up the 'ideological terror,' the substitute for an open political discussion that Bordiga spoke against before the ECCI [in 1926], but he himself was involved [in carrying it out]."³⁰¹

Zangheri may aver that the above was penned by a critic of Gramsci in the mid '90s, but the following came from an admirer and dates from two decades earlier; hence ignorance is no defense. In a small volume published in the seventies and reissued in the late eighties,³⁰² Spriano discussed Gramsci's final years. He wrote of the deep hostility that Gramsci felt for Trotsky, and even of his support for the steps taken against Zinoviev, Gramsci's first mentor in the Comintern. "The reasons Gramsci showed himself to be very opposed to the Russian opposition in 1925-1926 were never superseded in the notes [*Quaderni*]. In them, it appears, Gramsci seems to reaffirm the continuity of Lenin-Stalin..." Spriano disagreed with Valentino Gerratana, another (like Femia earlier) who claimed that Gramsci's late writings contained criticism that might apply to Stalin. On the contrary, asserted Spriano, Gramsci's allusions were too vague, and he seemed actually to justify the actions ("*storicizzarli in senso giustificazionista.*"). Further on: "Gramsci found it fully

³⁰¹ Amadeo Bordiga *nella storia del comunismo*, p. 199

³⁰² P. Spriano, *Gramsci in carcere e il partito* (Riuniti, Rome: 1988).

natural that they should uncover against the one called ‘the fugitive or the traitor [Trotsky]’ evidence that seemed overlooked earlier.” Lastly, Spriano made known that a week before his death, Gramsci sent a written appeal to the Italian authorities asking to be allowed to emigrate to Moscow after his pending release,³⁰³ a fact never mentioned once in any of the pro-Gramscian literature I have seen. Surely one can read in this appeal the desire of a lonely and desperately sick man to be with his immediate family. Yet, knowing the details of his political behavior and the make-up of his ideological loyalties, it is difficult not to sense in the that final wish an indication of Gramsci’s continued identification with the Stalinist regime in Moscow.

What is most striking about this conference on Gramsci is not what was discussed, but what was not. At a few years from the still-fresh disappearance of “really existing socialism,” the dissolution of the “socialist camp,” when the Gramscian/Togliattian-PCI finally emerged from behind its Centrist facade long after having consigned Marx to the attic for the second time in the century--the first by Giolitti in the early years after 1900, from whence he was rescued by the Intransigent-Revolutionary wing of the PSI in which Bordiga (and Mussolini) labored--whilst the “manic” churning of capitalism, to cite William Greider’s apt term, has spread that system to all the corners of the Earth, bringing to the developing world the satanic mills, inhuman labor, often confronting peasant or working parents with a Hobson’s choice--consign their children to the mill or the sex-parlor; for Europe and the US, an ever wider bifurcation in the distribution of wealth and power that further undermines a largely symbolic “democracy”; to which must be added the despoliation of the planet, the ongoing commercialization of culture, the ubiquitous underworld of drugs and crime, the manipulation and fragmentation of whole societies, the deconstruction of social

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.160. The text of the appeal is reprinted.

services to feed the insatiable hungers of financial speculation, and the possibility that these developments will lay the basis for underclass outbursts of unparalleled dimensions and brutal reactive suppressions by the dominant Western powers, not to speak of crises of international relations and planned predatory wars led by the US--all indissolubly tied to the underlying capitalistic structure, now encompassing many of the social wastelands of the former pseudo-national socialism of the East. And this in the best of times! On all of these, even with its pitiful rearguard attempts by Vacca and Zangheri to give Gramsci's cheeks an anti-Stalinist blush, the conference was silent.

For a conference given to GRAMSCI AND MODERNITY, it was a misnomer, and likely expensive. Still, it remained true to the traditional postwar *Gramscismo*, the decades of intellectual testimonials with their many devotionals to an idolatized and iconic Gramsci, permitting many to display their commitment and herald their association with the political Left yet avoid confronting, as one critic pointed out, “the hard nut of Marxist science.”³⁰⁴ In other words, the broad avoidance of a real analyses of class relations in the West, of the crises of socialism already evident East and West, and of the menacing future whence the world was headed, given the underlying class contradictions operating in both sets of conflicted societies.

Then why hold one? The reason, I believe, lies in the needs generated by the cult and its renewal. Thus we witnessed a form of “the rites of Lenin's Tomb”: ever so often the body of that dead revolutionary is checked and re-embalmed against further decay, a ritual that never made sense, and never less so than after the disparagement of the October Revolution and the open disavowal of any socialism. Thus, the disassociation of Lenin from his life's work is complete.

³⁰⁴ Cortesi, *Le origini del PCI*, 1999 edition, p. 20.

At this conference, so it was with Gramsci. In their homilies, the idolaters forever guard against disclosing the whole, real man, just as none talked about the realities of the collapse of “socialism,” its disavowal by the party of Lyons, the questions raised by a resurgent and triumphant capitalism, notwithstanding that concern with socialism had been the *modus operendi* determining the principal intellectual concerns and lifework of Gramsci. A conference given to such maintenance is no more than an invocation of scripture, has little to say that is new, and in no way illuminates the complex and ongoing nature of the contemporary class struggles, themselves suggestive of a world pregnant with the need to advance to a new and more rational social order. It is difficult to avoid concluding that, very much akin to Sassoon’s peremptory remarks, this was a pseudo-conference, informed by a pseudo-critique, and resting on a pseudo-history. These Gramscian show-and-tell events were never more than detractions and exercises in doing nothingness, when even the slightest possibility of socialism remained on the agenda. Having served their purpose, with “the end of socialism,” they are now probably over with.

3. In the course of this text I have never asserted the superiority of one man, Gramsci or Bordiga, over the other. Rather, I have said that, if one judges by the whole record of the years 1912-1926, Bordiga and the *Sinistra* had a superior and more realistic understanding of what was needed if the Italian working class was to undertake the epic struggle for socialism and the evidence is laid out in the documents, from their antiwar actions of 1912-1915 to the opposition to Stalin in 1926.

Except for a short period when he followed in the tracks of the *Sinistra*, the contrast was Gramsci. However literately brilliant, he fell politically and analytically short when measured

against the same standard. Returning to Italy in 1924, he used the power and thrust of the Comintern to impose himself and faux policies on a resistant party. The change was a turning point, though hidden by being clothed in phrases of a common ideology. After that, for Gramsci came prison and the prison writings; for Bordiga, a shorter prison sentence followed by some twenty or more years of political activity and writings in the second postwar.

One would have expected that the collapse of Center communism and its non-existing socialism would lead to a reassessment of Gramsci. The very absence of that change bespeaks the nature of the belief. One can no more imagine a Vacca voluntarily owning up to the realities of the past than Bram Stoker's fictional Dracula kiss a crucifix wet with holy water, garlanded with the sinuous garlic flower, and lying on a Cavallo mirror.

The transformation of Bordiga from leader of Italian communists to sectarian and worse may be traced in the Comintern and Russian writings of the 1920s and later, shorn of the exotic attributes initially supplied by Gramsci and added to by others beginning in the 1930s--Machiavellian, sectarian, *camorrista*, *guappo*, fascist--it is the image presented by Sassoon in the 1990s.

We are now at the end of a contentious century and at the beginning of a new millennium; for the Western Left, a hundred years of high expectations, great deeds, and shattering disappointments, within which lies the parted red thread of man's hope. If only to understand what occurred in the middle decades of the 20th century, there is an absolute need for an aggressive and unbiased reconsideration of the two men, one that never omits the backdrop of events against which they labored. For Gramsci, to determine *his deeds* as well as his words and what gave him the morphological ability to be such a political chameleon; the ease to opportunistically move from

one political stance to another, ending in or at least by the stables of Stalin in 1926 that began the long service of the PCI to the Russian party.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Gramsci's writings--their emphasis on a national socialism, the deep regard for the efficacy of manipulated politics, the scanting of revolution and mass action, the categorical inability to grasp a materialistic ontology, his self-centered political myopia, the ease with which he adapted to the slippery and demented morality of the Stalinist methods--were the idealistic intellectual accompaniment of an era marked by a false socialism and serviced by a correlated leftism that never challenged the dominant bourgeois order despite several prolonged systemic crises, and in the end used Gramscian covers to assimilate itself without difficulty into the status quo.³⁰⁵ If so, this also would personify Gramsci as the eponym and talisman of an era--the era of false "really existing socialism,"-- and Sassoon's assessments one of a genre, hopefully amongst the last.

It would seem to be a matter of simple justice if one of the more decisive funerary comments on Gramsci came from the pens of the contemporary, living heirs of the old *Sinistra*.. They aver that Gramsci never understood the "simple ABC's of Marxism" which helps explain his "strange destiny" and "varied intellectual heredity," and continue: "He passed unmarred through the folds of a Stalinist historiography wherein he was venerated for his destruction of the *Sinistra*; similarly through the post-Stalinist writings, now hailed as precursor of the 'national roads' to socialism; celebrated in the school of Trotskyism for his anti-Stalinism; praised in the writings of the Resistance period as 'the man of culture' unjustly prosecuted, and defender and standard bearer

³⁰⁵ Of interest this comment by Ce Clementi: the national road to socialism was "was a more or less conscious expedient introduced stealthily [by the post-1945 PCI] to abandon the telling (*discriminanti*) Marxist theories." P. 131.

of the united fronts and the multi-class alliances; some autonomous workers' movements take him as one who was an 'immediatist' and their own; with 'Third World' sympathizers he is a forerunner of peasant and popular-class revolutions."³⁰⁶ Thus a man who appealed to many currents, yet in the end nurtured none. When the time came, the movement he inspired struck its tents and, heads held high, passed gleefully to the bourgeois order.

In summary, in the titanic struggle for socialism before 1926, Gramsci's engagement, when not destructive had been of no great relevance. Notwithstanding the details of this sordid history, all the merit that accrues to Gramsci's should be stated openly, fairly, honestly, along with the dark deeds from the underside of his behavior. A materialistic criticism of his intellectuality is not possible without a full knowledge of his actions, and that has never been done.

Comparative studies should indicate the sources of both men's ideologies and how they stood on major issues: the coming of World War in 1914, their assessments of the Russian Revolution, the nature of workingclass revolution and the means to that end, fascism, the opposition to Stalin, and the contemporary relevance of their writings, all resting on a frank and documented reading of past conduct and written texts, not on latter-day interpretations, thus clearly and truthfully delineating the political profile of each.

The extent of misrepresentation by Centrist historians is recalled by Peregalli citing this example: having broken on *political matters*, Gramsci and Bordiga continued a personal correspondence and may even have seen each other at Formia in the thirties; whereas with Togliatti Gramsci severed all *political and personal ties* after 1926,³⁰⁷ which would reduce the

³⁰⁶ Mss, "Gramscian Thought, A Disorder in the Age of Communism," to appear in "International Paper", 10, 2001.

legend of “Togliatti as the heir of Gramsci” to another spurious myth possibly modeled on the earlier nefarious claim--“Stalin, the heir of Lenin.”

With Bordiga must be added his activities in Southern Italy after the arrival of the Allies, when a fairly widespread *Sinistra* sentiment did briefly resurface,³⁰⁸ and his voluminous writings and activities between 1945 and his death.³⁰⁹ Major titles by Bordiga include the *Dialogue with Stalin, Dialogue with the Dead, and The Economic and Social Structure of Today's Russia*³¹⁰ (translated titles) from the 1950s, in which on the basis of Marxist texts and a minute study of social and economic conditions in the USSR he argued his case for the absence of socialism in “really existing socialism.”

Loren Goldner, a commentator more keenly familiar with Bordiga's post-World-War II writings, the result in part of his contact with the French ultra-left communists influenced by Bordiga, made this observation that diverges from my presentation: “[W]hen pressed to identify the capitalist class in his Russian capitalism,[Bordiga] said that it existed in the interstices of the Russian economy, as a class in **formation**. For him the idea of ‘state capitalism’ was nonsensical because the state could only be a medium for the interests of a class...[The] Soviet Union was a society in **transition to capitalism**.”³¹¹ A clarification I am happy to accept.

³⁰⁷ Peregalli, *Amadeo Bordiga*, p. 170.

³⁰⁸ Arturo Peregalli, *L'altra resistenza, il PCI e le opposizioni di sinistra, 1943-1945* (Genova, Graphos: 1991)

³⁰⁹ Liliana Grilli, *Amadeo Bordiga: capitalismo sovietico e comunismo* (La Pietra, Milan: 1982). Her appendix lists 45 titles of the collections of Bordiga's writings from 1945. Pp. 293-295

³¹⁰ *Dialagato con Stalin* (Prometeo, Milan: 1953), *Dialagato coi morti* (Edizioni de “il programma comunista” del Partito comunista internazionalista, Milan: 1956), *Struttura economica e sociale della Russia di oggi* (Edizioni il programma comunista, Milan: 1976), a new edition.

Bordiga's writings from this period are probably amongst his most important and remain unknown to this day. Much of what has happened since his death suggest how his insights, had they been known earlier, might have alerted and enriched the often parochial and close-minded Western Left. His analyses documenting the persistence of capitalist processes in the USSR and demonstrating that the very nature of the industrialization process, given the aggregate of relationships developed therein including the continued subordination and exploitation of the working class and the extraction of their surplus value, contributed to the existence of capitalist values and remained exploitive notwithstanding the absence of private ownership. Thus he anticipated the re-emergence of the present system of private property decades before the event, and overall his analyses are congruent with recent findings.³¹² Soviet society, he noted, was larded with commercial transactions, and *never* confronted world capitalism with a superior social structure and an alternative system of production.

To mention Bordiga's half-century-old writings on the topic of Soviet "socialism" underscores how misleading and baneful were/are those accounts by historians, left or right of the political divide, who describe or denote the former spent regimes as "socialist" or "communist." Placed side by side, the values, structures, and operations of "really existing socialism" and Western society often overlapped and coincided. Both upheld privileged groups or classes, exploited labor and confiscated surplus value. Both purchased loyalty through an increase in "bread and circus," while subjecting the population to increasing manipulation. Both led the world into huge

³¹¹ Pamphlet by Loren Goldner, *Communism is the Material Human Community, Amadeo Bordiga Today* (Collective Action Notes, POB 22962, Balto., MD 32203: 1997), p. 10.

³¹² Grilli, pp. 119-182. This book is a valuable introduction to Bordiga's post-World War II thinking. The "recent findings" refer to the disparate works of Gabriel Kolko and Kotz & Weir mentioned below and others.

armaments races, and threw their people into wars over which they had little say and even less real understanding. Both could be more tolerant domestically, once all possibility of political challenge had been eliminated. Finally, both ended the millennium as examples of compatible class societies. It is no marvel that the political establishments of the “ex-socialist” regimes of the East and the heirs of the PCI had little difficulty fitting into and accepting a subordinate and lackey’s role in the US-led NATO war in Yugoslavia, one of the most manipulated conflicts of 20th century Europe, a century and a continent marked by crises and wars displaying all manner of lower-class manipulation, the unavoidable stigma of Cain distinguishing every system of class rule.

Bordiga never abandoned the Marxist paradigm. If for Kolakowski the collapse of those erstwhile “socialist regimes” demonstrated the chimerical utopianism of Marxism, for the members of the postwar *Sinistra* party--and for Bordiga, had he been alive--the event was a vindication of the efficacy of Marxist analyses resting on a constant on-the-ground attention to reality stretching back to the 1920s and earlier. To them, the re-emergence of capitalism in “former socialism,” no less than the globalization of the last decades, was evidence of the viability of a materialist outlook and its efficacy as a tool of contemporary analysis. To get to one major point: the late twentieth century crisis of Marxism cannot be disassociated from Marxism-Leninism, a spurious interpretation of Marxism rejected by Bordiga and properly associated with Center communism.

Perhaps the most responsible and accountable summaries of Bordiga’s final labors in the post-1945 period were penned by Lilliana Grilli. One merits being cited here. “The point of view assumed by Bordiga between 1945 and 1970 in defense of the historical interests of the proletariat...took the form from of ‘a privileged observer’ that permitted him ...to assume on the one hand a scientific understanding of contemporary reality and on the other...of looking at the

present with the eyes of the future.” Continuing: “He was...the most up to date of our theoretical communist revolutionaries, the formulator of theoretical analyses and political solutions unacceptable to the eyes of almost the totality of his contemporaries because they were ‘too far ahead’ of his time.”³¹³ One has constantly to underline that the celebratory attention given to Gramsci in the postwar decades was accompanied by a near total blackout of Bordiga’s writings. Whenever identified by Sereni, Spriano, Piccone, Boggs, and others, it was always in association with a belittling and vilification unsubstantiated by any valid historical source. This obliteration of Bordiga from the postwar Italian scene would not have succeeded so well without a generous and mindless “me too” approval from leftwing collaborators abroad. Bordiga also awaits an objective materialistic assessment.

This commentary is not concerned with the make-up of Bordiga’s Marxism--one would need a separate title for that--except as a counterpoint and backdrop to more accurately understand Italian communist history and dramatically illuminate the political bacchanalia that passed for intellectual Marxism in Italy in the postwar decades, finding its commemorative exponent in the figure of Antonio Gramsci. It is appropriate to mention that Bordiga’s “determinist” Marxism served him well throughout his life. Earlier we noted that he was probably the first socialist to put into print in 1914 Italy the imperialist nature of the World War and the imperative that socialists ready themselves to turn against their own class-based state. In “*Il Socialista*,” the periodical of the Socialist section of Naples, Bordiga noted by middle September, 1914, Mussolini’s initial gliding toward interventionism, something Mussolini promptly denied, a mere three weeks before his actual break in October.³¹⁴ In 1915, he foresaw the need for a new international, and was amongst

³¹³ Amadeo Bordiga nella storia del comunismo, pp. 349&353.

the few in 1919 Italy who gave serious efforts and thought to the development of tactical steps to bring about revolution in the West,³¹⁵ of which Lenin and his Bolsheviks had such desperate need. These same down-to-earth considerations motivated Bordiga to oppose turning Bolshevik experiences into precepts for fashioning political tactics for Western parties, with his opposition to Bolshevization of those parties the most dramatic and visible example of this opposition in the mid-twenties. This insight continued into his post-Liberation critique of Soviet “socialism,” only superficially touched on above

Not all of his views are easily accepted or easily comprehensible--his stance on World War II and his assessment of the role of political democracy in capitalist society, for example. If his view of that democracy is harsh, it remains realistic and merits deep consideration in light of the ever greater debauchery of democratic realities in the contemporary practices of Western capitalism. Moneyed-interests openly shape and dominate the political contests, and the electorate is called upon to decide amongst candidates speaking for the same behind--the--scene power groups with key questions remaining off the public agenda and decided *in camera* or by distant, non-representative bodies. Increasingly actual Western democratic practice consists of a gentlemen's debate amongst contenders, all of whom agree on a defense of the status quo, in the absence any meaningful Left able to appeal to a class opposition and present a challenging alternative. Thus Bordiga's decades-old criticisms remain strikingly relevant with contemporary critical commentary.

³¹⁴ Reprinted in SDSC, 1 *bis*, pp. 28-30.

³¹⁵ Alexander Hoebel, *Amadeo Bordiga nella storia*, p. 99. Summarizing these efforts, Hoebel uses this phrase, striking in Italian: “*in modo assillante.*”

“A society like the United States which has rampant inequality, minimal popular involvement in decision making, and widespread depoliticization can never be regarded as democratic in an honest use of the term,” wrote Robert W. McChesney of the American scene. And later: “The corporate media cement a system whereby the wealthy and powerful few make the important decisions with virtually no informed public participation.”³¹⁶ That formal Western democratic government was structured from its beginning to avoid and evade popular control was suggested by Ellen Meiksins Wood in this view of the American model. The excerpt merits citation in full, and expresses a view Bordiga would have endorsed fully if only because it constitutes a debunking of democratic illusions similar to a battle for realism he conducted in the issues of *Il Soviet* of 1919 and in the later congresses of the Comintern: “The American republic firmly established a definition of democracy in which the transfer of power to ‘representatives of the people’ constituted not just a necessary condition to size and complexity but rather the very essence of democracy itself. The Americans, then, though they did not invent representation, can be credited with the establishing an essential constitutive idea of modern democracy: its identification with the alienation of [popular] power.”³¹⁷

Bordiga’s negative and critical appraisal of democratic practice in conditions class domination with the obvious concentration of wealth and economic inequality--which translates into political servility and economic abuse of the masses--contrasted with the democratic processes prevailing in the PCd’I during the two years of *de facto Sinistra* leadership (1921-1923). In the

³¹⁶ *Rich Media Poor Democracy* (University of Illinois, Urbana: 1999), pp. 5 & 281.

³¹⁷ *Democracy Against Capitalism* (Cambridge University Press, New York: 1995), p.217.

archival papers I examined there was nothing to suggest a squelching of contrary opinions, although by March 1922 a rightist faction had formed within the party under the leadership of Angelo Tasca, with a smaller group of rightwing dissidents drawn to Nicola Bombacci. The documents do indicate that the overwhelming majority of remaining activists, including the secondary leaders Gramsci and Togliatti, were united amongst themselves in an open political opposition to Tasca and the International.

The newer history of the nineties contrasts Bordiga's handling of this internal opposition with Gramsci's treatment of the *Sinistra* after 1924, bringing to the fore in so doing what had been clear from my archival research in 1970: "Never had there been anything like this [Gramsci's campaign against the *Sinistra*]-the Russian [party] being the exception--in a party that under Bordiga's leadership had permitted the presence in the ranks of various currents and programs [and] sought to promote a methodical collaboration amongst them...The parallel to what was happening in the Russian party is evident..."³¹⁸ That after his assumption of power Gramsci undertook to limit the internal democracy in the PCd'I is the view shared by Peregalli, Cortesi, Fortichiari, and pro-Gramscian writers, although the latter minimize the matter and avoid all detail. Needless to add, archival evidence is on the side of the critics.

Difficulties may arise over Bordiga's assessment of Stalin, though it should appear less *outré* once the illusory lens of any would-be socialism is removed: with the revolution turned inward, a brutal, exploitive period followed during which Stalin used the state power to set the basis for a modern industry; thus he acted as a surrogate for the primitive accumulation and forced

³¹⁸ Amadeo Bordiga *nella storia*, pp. 170-174. For parallelism, see "Agony of the *Sinistra*," *supra*.

labor that found its affinity and parallel in the brutalities of other nascent capitalisms. Its historical importance lay in creating a large and modern working class whose presence made possible a future resumption of the class struggle for socialism. To interpret these events otherwise, he believed, was to misunderstand the paradigm of historical development discovered by Marx. Since the possibility of following a socialist mode had never materialized, isolated Russia reverted to a well-worn road, and its history remained consonant with materialistic history despite Stalin, not because of him. The workings of this process may be viewed today in the barbwire encampments of Central America wherein native labor is brought into the world market subject to the inhuman conditions needed to extract the most surplus value on behalf of foreign capital, under the watchful eye of the CIA and the US-supported military.

Again, the Centrist party's need to disregard, belittle, misrepresent and in every way disparage its early history and Bordiga's always provocative and often trenchantly realistic analyses, doing everything to successfully exclude them from the on-going debates during the postwar decades, aligned that critically influential political force---which had abandoned all aspects of a left program-- ever more deeply with other conservative influences in the Italian and European postwar setting, thus moving the intellectual and political agenda ever to the right wherein gathered regressive and anti-workingclass forces with which the PCI found the laxity to collaborate. Few commentators of his day gave credence to Bordiga's prescient analysis foretelling the second coming of capitalism to Russia decades before the event.

With this rapid overview of Bordiga's thinking ended, caution remains the word: a "cherry picking" of ideas does not constitute a systematic review and assessment of his intellectual Marxism. Moreover, no greater disservice could be done to the lifework of this man than to

misrepresent his views by enclosing them in distortion, adulation or myth, as was done with Gramsci. With a VIII-volume anthology of all of his writing between 1911-1926 in the preparation, and the first two in print,³¹⁹ his intellectualism will become more accessible. No doubt, someone will be stimulated to put together a similar collection of his more important and topically vital post-1945 texts.

Except for the final point handled below, this ADDENDUM has reached its closure. What I set out to do from the beginning was to detail the means used by Antonio Gramsci between 1924-1926 to emerge as the victor of the Congress of Lyons, and thereby presenting an account that differed from those found in the English-reading market. Of the thousands of titles on Gramsci cited by Gianfranco Corsini in his remarks to the conference, it is unlikely that more than a clutch of those authors had an inkling of what I describe herein. Femia was probably right when he noted, “Despite the huge and ever-growing pile of secondary literature, there remains to this day remarkably little general agreement about what Gramsci really said. His work has called into existence an army of interpreters whose unceasing labours have buried them beneath a mountain of commentary which has obscured the texts themselves.”³²⁰ What Femia failed to realize is that the ambiguity surrounding Gramsci arose from the political imperative to fashion a Gramsci other than life, and perhaps Femia himself must be counted as one of the victims.

In recent decades some writers criticized the postwar Togliattian leadership for having manipulated the figure and writings of Gramsci, thus absolving the latter of any responsibility; in my reconstruction that responsibility is traced to Gramsci who laid down the rules of engagement

³¹⁹ See n2 *supra*.

³²⁰ Femia, p. 8.

permitting the “good pupil” Togliatti to be “creative” in his own way. In short, what happened in the Italian party correlated to what had been occurring in the Russian party, although the latter story is well known.

Yet, my findings from 1970 were not completely new. To some degree they had been outlined by Galli more than a decade earlier. Moreover, the near simultaneous publication by Christian Riechers in Germany and Bruno Fortichiari in Italy of findings and recollections that reinforced each other and were congruent with my own had established by the 1970s a triangulation focusing on Gramsci from separate perspectives of time and interpretation. Each worked independently of the other, and all three are strongly backed up by the details cited in *Liquidazione* (1991) and, more recently, by the new histories of Peregalli, Cortesi, the first two volumes by Luigi Gerosa, the findings emerging from the 1996 Congress in Bologna, and to some degree by Vacca, even though the last never intended his work to be so used.³²¹ The proper metaphor here is not a jigsaw puzzle of interlocking pieces, but a fresco in which each authority deepens hues or adds details to an outline sketched by the first until by the end the portrait is fairly complete. What is common to all, even to a degree in Vacca, is a reassessment of both men that fits easily within the lines indicated in this commentary.

As is most usually the case, puzzling questions remain. For one, how could so many researchers during the early postwar years thumb through the Italian archival papers of 1925 with their clear evidence of political mayhem by the Gramscian leadership without questioning the extant idealized view of Gramsci which found expression in such deceptive works as the biography by Giuseppe Fiori, and others too numerous to list? Or what is one to make of the following which in

³²¹ See n2.

its details is so illustrative of the conflicted political history of the Twentieth Century in the West, a period of fearful realities, severe social stress and deforming personal moralities?

Ignazio Silone had helped lead the Socialist Youth Federation into the new communist movement in 1921. In *The God that Failed* (1949), a book published with the surreptitious aid of the CIA³²² and intending to epitomize the West's view of the Cold War as a mortal conflict between Western "capitalist democracy" and demonic "communist totalitarianism," he donated his name and talent describing the dishonesty and manipulation he had witnessed as a party delegate to the Comintern of 1927, thus fulfilling his division of labor in the preparation of the volume. Yet he never mentioned the earlier suppression of the anti-Stalinist *Sinistra* in the Italian party of 1925 when he was active in the Centrist leadership, a silence that matches the absence of documents for 1925 in the archive left by Angelo Tasca.

The reference to Silone would have ended with the last quizzical sentences had not fairly convincing evidence emerged indicating he had been an informer for various police authorities between 1919 and 1930, including the Italian fascist secret police, the OVRA.³²³ Dossier evidence suggests that under Gramsci he became a party official with substantial authority over members in Western Europe. As Gramsci's associate, "Silvestri (Silone) had to have known about Gramsci's

³²² Frances Stoner Saunders, *THE CIA AND THE WORLD OF ARTS AND LETTERS, the Cultural Cold War* (The New Press, New York: 2000), pp. 64-67. A must reading for anyone seriously concerned with understanding the US role in the Cold War.

³²³ The following were consulted: "Perspectives and Debates, Ignazio Silone and the Fascist Political Police, in "Journal of Modern Italian Studies," May-June, 2000, pp.36-60; John Foot, "New Left Review," May-June, 2000; Alexander Stile, "New Yorker," May, 2000; Alexander Cockburn, "The Nation," June 5, 2000. Alexander De Grand questions the accusation. Last but not least: Dario Biocca & Mauro Canali, *L'informatore Silone, I comunisti e la polizia* (Luni, Milan: 2000). Raised in an anti-fascist family forced to leave Italy, I recall how impressed I had been by Silone's early novels, when still a boy.

and the Comintern's destruction of the *Sinistra*, though as yet no indication has surfaced where he personally stood on the matter. Open opposition was hardly an option, if one wished to remain in leadership during the consolidation of a Stalinist formation in the PCd'I of the middle-late 1920s.

In his post-World War II writings Silone adapted himself easily to the demands of the anti-communist crusade in the West. In this most-often-quoted passage from his postwar anti-communist screeds, he recalled the drama, the narrow and traumatic world of the clandestine communist: "So I too had to adapt myself, for a number of years, to living like a foreigner in my own country. One had to change one's name, abandon every former link with family and friends, and live a false life to remove suspicion of conspiratorial activity. The Party became family, school, church, barracks; the world that lay beyond it was to be destroyed and rebuilt."³²⁴ He never mentioned his role with the police, much the way he remained publicly silent about his stance during the earlier dirty politics applied against the left communists.

Today, one can almost imagine the shudders these words elicited from trusting and naïve readers in the West during those early Cold War years, amidst mounting anti-communist hysteria and atomic spy trials and a nasty hot war raging in Korea. Yet they represented a sham, as false and pretentious as he made himself out to be in the 1950s crusade. As an informer for the OVRA, a role about which there can be little doubt after reading the evidence presented in Biocca and Canali's *L'informatore Silone*, he was immune from arrest, torture, imprisonment or death, no matter how frequent his visits to Italy, at the time in the late 1920s when practically the entire

³²⁴ *The God That Failed* (Harpers & Brothers, New York: 1949), p. 99.

domestic communist leadership lay in prison. A great writer he was, but also a veteran political *poseur* typifying the falseness of the camp he sold himself to.

At the 1950 Berlin meeting to establish the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom in which Arthur Koestler and Ignazio Silone participated along with numerous others, Koestler wondered whether Silone was honest, in the end concluding he was not.³²⁵ At that gathering of paid propagandists working for a new rising power ever ready to utilize any means even the most vile to achieve its ends, Koestler, a “violent rapist” in the opinion of his most recent biographer,³²⁶ had met and judged a prevaricator, Silone, who was a liar as well. Was Silone aware then that the CIA stood behind the event? When his silence over the fate of the *Sinistra* and the likely probability that he acquiesced to its destruction are added to the charge that he was a stoolie for two regimes, it would appear that such a disclosure would not have detracted him from playing the role he did. Interesting that he should have sandwiched his creative years between two periods of villainy. In the postwar Italian political scene after 1945, already corrupted by a deceptive and two-faced PCI, the duplicitous role of a Silone only added to the mephitic atmosphere and further obstructed the emergence of an alternative left movement.

As a final consideration, how did Bordiga express the centrality of the working class? The question is best approached through the Rome Theses adopted in 1922, the set of precepts to guide the *Sinistra* party. The most vital of all workingclass matters--class revolution—was dealt with there.

³²⁵ Saunders, pp. 75-76.

³²⁶ David Cesarini, *Arthur Koestler, The Homeless Mind* (William Heinmann, London: 1998).

Parenthetically, the events of the Russian Revolution for Bordiga were consonant with and coherently explainable within the materialistic interpretation of history. Marx and Engel's prescient writings on the possibility of a unique revolution in Russia, but still noting the inevitability of a capitalistic development; Lenin's prior development of tactics, and the possibility of introducing to that process a worker and peasant hegemony that would enhance and channel bourgeois development; the revival of the Marxist concept of permanent revolution popularized by Trotsky before 1917; the recognition that capitalism was an interconnected world-system subject to unavoidable internal and global crises that could be and were used by an adroit, revolutionary Marxist party to lead a thoroughly politicized minority working class to the seizure of power; in summation, the totality of theoretical considerations making the October Revolution in backward Russia very comprehensible, although in a country where further development of entrepreneurial and state capitalism under consolidated workingclass control represented progress toward socialism but did not constitute socialism at that point.

Rejecting the view that historical materialism posited a pat scheme applicable in all circumstances, and standing on a materialistic ontology, he understood that the revolution had been two-phased, and could never be taken as a model for the more economically and politically advanced West.³²⁷ Yet anyone familiar with the Russian, albeit Soviet, and English literature on the political ferment in the factories, military units, and workingclass quarters of Petrograd in the months leading to the October Revolution will espy in the conclusion of these theses a familiar scenario.

³²⁷ Grilli, pp. 27-45. For this paragraph, I rely heavily on her discussion.

Clearly, the party and the class make revolution, but under what circumstances? Yes, the party must possess a compact and discipline internal organization, a strong following amongst the trade unions and population, a communications network free of unfriendly control, even “a military type structure” so as to be free to undertake and lead the action at the proper moment. Nonetheless, the heart of the process remained elsewhere, for the party--a frail reed by itself amidst the titanic forces called into play with revolution--must base its actions on the cue emanating from the class that evinces the final embodiment of a maturing consciousness, a reflection of the party’s foremost labor and the measure of its ability: the realization by the class that it is *a class for itself*. “But above all, before taking action...the party must base itself on a study of the situation to assure...that the party following amongst the masses and the degree of proletarian participation will progressively grow in the course of the action...” In the end, not the party, although its presence and role continued to provide the tempered point of change, remaining the subordinate leader of the action, but the will of the class and the consciousness of the masses having understood the fullness of the responsibility and now rising on their own for themselves was the ultimate authority in deciding for revolution.³²⁸

³²⁸ See *supra*, n51.