

1926, Gramsci, Some aspects of the southern question

Antonio Gramsci

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Unfinished, October 1926

Text from Antonio Gramsci "Selections from political writings (1921-1926)", translated and edited by Quintin Hoare (Lawrence and Wishart, London 1978). Transcribed to the www with the kind permission of Quintin Hoare.

These notes were initially stimulated by the publication of an article on the Southern question by "Ulenspiegel" in the 18 September issue of the journal *Quarto Stato*, and by the somewhat comical editorial presentation which preceded it. "Ulenspiegel" informed his readers of Guido Dorso's recent book *La Rivoluzione meridionale* (pub. Piero Gobetti, Turin, 1925), and alluded to the author's assessment of our party's position on the southern question. 246 In their presentation, the editors of *Quarto Stato* - who proclaim themselves to be "young people who know the Southern problem *thoroughly in its general lines*" [*sic*] - protest Collectively at the idea that the Communist Party can be accorded any "merits". Nothing wrong so far: young people of the *Quarto Stato* type have always and everywhere expressed extreme opinions and violent protests on paper, without the paper rebelling. But then these "young people" add the following words: "We have not forgotten that the magical formula of the Turin Communists used to be: divide the big estates among the rural proletariat. This formula is at the antipodes from any sound, realistic vision of the Southern problem." And here it becomes necessary to set the record straight, since the only thing that is "magical" is the impudence and

superficial dilettantism of the "young" writers of *Quarto Stato*.

The "magical formula" is a complete invention. And the "young people" of *Quarto Stato* must have a low opinion indeed of their extremely intellectual readers if they dare to distort the truth in this way, with such garrulous presumption. Here, in fact, is a passage from *L'Ordine Nuovo*, no. 3, January 1920, which sums up the viewpoint of the Turin Communists:

The Northern bourgeoisie has subjugated the South of Italy and the Islands, and reduced them to exploitable colonies; by emancipating itself from capitalist slavery, the Northern proletariat will emancipate the Southern peasant masses enslaved to the banks and the parasitic industry of the North. The economic and political regeneration of the peasants should not be sought in a division of uncultivated or poorly cultivated lands, but in the solidarity of the industrial proletariat. This in turn needs the solidarity of the peasantry and has an "interest" in ensuring that capitalism is not reborn economically from landed property; that Southern Italy and the Islands do not become a military base for capitalist counterrevolution. By introducing workers' control over industry, the proletariat will orient industry to the production of agricultural machinery for the peasants, clothing and footwear for the peasants, electrical lighting for the peasants, and will prevent industry and the banks from exploiting the peasants and subjecting them as slaves to the strongrooms. By smashing the factory autocracy, by smashing the oppressive apparatus of the capitalist State and setting up a workers' State that will subject the capitalists to the law of useful labour, the workers will smash all the chains that bind the peasant to his poverty and desperation. By setting up a workers' dictatorship and taking over the industries and banks, the proletariat will swing the enormous weight of the State bureaucracy behind the peasants in their struggle against the landowners, against the elements and against poverty. The proletariat will provide the peasants with credit, set up cooperatives, guarantee security of person and property against looters and carry out public works of reclamation and irrigation. It will do all this because an increase in agricultural production is in its interests; because to win and keep the solidarity of the peasants is in its interests; because it is in its interests to orient industrial production to work which will promote peace and brotherhood between town and countryside, between North and South.

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That was written in January 1920. Seven years have gone by and we are seven years older politically too. Today, certain concepts might be expressed better. The period immediately following the conquest of State power, characterized by simple workers' control of industry, could and

should be more clearly distinguished from the subsequent periods. But the important thing to note here is that the fundamental concept of the Turin communists was not the "magical formula" of dividing the big estates, but rather the political alliance between Northern workers and Southern peasants, to oust the bourgeoisie from State power. Furthermore, precisely the Turin communists (though they supported division of the land, subordinated to the solidary action of the two classes) themselves warned against 'miraculist' illusions in a mechanical sharing out of the big estates. In the same article of 3 January, we find: "What can a poor peasant achieve by occupying uncultivated or poorly cultivated lands? Without machinery, without accommodation on the place of work, without credit to tide him over till harvest-time, without cooperative institutions to acquire the harvest (if - long before harvest time - the peasant has not hung himself from the strongest bush or the least unhealthy-looking wild fig in the undergrowth of his uncultivated land!) and preserve him from the clutches of the usurers - without all these things, what can a poor peasant achieve by occupying?"

We were still for the very realistic and in no way "magical" formula of land to the peasants. But we wanted it to be incorporated in a general revolutionary action of the two allied classes, under the leadership of the industrial proletariat. The writers of *Quarto Stato* have invented entirely the "magical formula" they attribute to the Turin Communists; they have thus revealed their journalistic unseriousness and a lack of scruple proper to village pharmacy intellectuals (and these too are significant political factors, which bring their own consequences).

In the proletarian camp, the Turin communists had one undeniable "merit": that of bringing the Southern question forcibly to the attention of the workers' vanguard, and identifying it as one of the essential problems of national policy for the revolutionary proletariat. In this sense, they contributed in practice to bringing the Southern question out of its indistinct, intellectualistic, so-called "concretist" phase and impelling it into a new phase. 241 The revolutionary worker of Turin and Milan became the protagonist of the Southern question, in place of the Giustino Fortunatos, the Gaetano Salvemini, the Eugenio Azimontis and the Arturo Labriolas - to mention only the names of the patron saints beloved of the "young people" of *Quarto Stato*.

The Turin communists posed concretely the question of the "hegemony of the proletariat": i.e. of the social basis of the proletarian dictatorship and of the workers' State. The proletariat can become the leading [*dirigente*] and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of

class alliances which allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State. 250 In Italy, in the real class relations which exist there, this means to the extent that it succeeds in gaining the consent of the broad peasant masses. But the peasant question is historically determined in Italy; it is not the "peasant and agrarian question in general". In Italy the peasant question, through the specific Italian tradition, and the specific development of Italian history, has taken two typical and particular forms - the Southern question and that of the Vatican. Winning the majority of the peasant masses thus means, for the Italian proletariat, making these two questions its own from the social point of view; understanding the class demands which they represent; incorporating these demands into its revolutionary transitional programme; placing these demands among the objectives for which it struggles.

The first problem to resolve, for the Turin communists, was how to modify the political stance and general ideology of the proletariat itself, as a national element which exists within the ensemble of State life and is unconsciously subjected to the influence of bourgeois education, the bourgeois press and bourgeois traditions. It is well known what kind of ideology has been disseminated in myriad ways among the masses in the North, by the propagandists of the bourgeoisie: the South is the ball and chain which prevents the social development of Italy from progressing more rapidly; the Southerners are biologically inferior beings, semi-barbarians or total barbarians, by natural destiny; if the South is backward, the fault does not lie with the capitalist system or with any other historical cause, but with Nature, which has made the Southerners lazy, incapable, criminal and barbaric - only tempering this harsh fate with the purely individual explosion of a few great geniuses, like isolated palm-trees in an arid and barren desert. The Socialist Party was to a great extent the vehicle for this bourgeois ideology within the Northern proletariat. The Socialist Party gave its blessing to all the "Southernist" literature of the clique of writers who made up the so-called positive school: the Ferri's, Sergi's, Niceforo's, Orano's and their lesser followers, who in articles, tales, short stories, novels, impressions and memoirs, in a variety of forms, reiterated one single refrain." Once again, "science" was used to crush the wretched and exploited; but this time it was dressed in socialist colours, and claimed to be the science of the proletariat.

The Turin communists reacted energetically against this ideology, precisely in Turin itself, where war veterans' reminiscences and descriptions of "banditry" in the South and the Islands had most powerfully influenced the popular traditions and outlook. They reacted energetically,

in practical forms, and succeeded in achieving concrete results of the greatest historical significance. They succeeded in achieving, precisely in Turin, embryonic forms of what will be the solution to the Southern problem.

Moreover, even before the War, an episode occurred in Turin which potentially contained all the action and propaganda carried out by the communists in the post-war period. When in 1914 the death of Pilade Gay left the city's fourth ward vacant and posed the question of a new candidate, a group in the Socialist Party section which included the future editors of *L'Ordine Nuovo* floated the idea of putting up Gaetano Salvemini. Salvemini was at the time the most radical spokesman for the peasant masses in the South. He was outside the Socialist Party, indeed was waging a vigorous campaign against the Socialist Party, and one that was extremely dangerous, since his assertions and accusations aroused in the working masses of the South hatred not simply for such individuals as Turati, Treves and D'Aragona, but for the industrial proletariat as a whole. (Many of the bullets discharged by the royal guards in 1919, 1920, 1921 and 1922 against the workers were cast from the same lead which served to print Salvemini's articles.) Nevertheless, the Turin group wanted to take a stand on Salvemini's name, in the sense which was explained to Salvemini himself by comrade Ottavio Pastore, who had gone to Florence to obtain the former's agreement to the candidature.

"The Turin workers want to elect a deputy for the peasants of Apulia. The Turin workers know that in the general elections of 1913, the peasants of Molfetta and Bitonto were overwhelmingly in favour of Salvemini. But the administrative pressure of the Giolitti government, and the violence of hired thugs and police, prevented the Apulian peasants from expressing their wishes. The Turin workers do not ask Salvemini for guarantees of any kind: neither to the party, nor to a programme, nor to the discipline of the Socialist parliamentary group. Once elected, Salvemini will be answerable to the Apulian peasants, not to the workers of Turin, who will carry out electoral propaganda according to their own principles and will in no way be committed by Salvemini's political activity."

Salvemini did not agree to stand, although he was shaken and even moved by the proposal (in those days, no one yet spoke of communist ".perfidy", and manners were honourable and unconstrained). He proposed that Mussolini should be the candidate, and promised to come to Turin to support the Socialist Party in the electoral campaign. In fact he held two huge meetings, at the Chamber of Labour and in Piazza Statuto, where he spoke to mass audiences who saw and applauded in him the representative of the Southern peasants, oppressed and exploited in yet

more odious and bestial ways than the Northern proletariat. The approach that was potentially contained in this episode, and which was not developed further purely because of Salvemini's decision, was taken up again and applied by the communists in the postwar period. Let us recall the most significant and symptomatic facts.

In 1919 the *Giovane Sardegna* association was formed, first prelude of what was later to become the Sardinian Action Party-" *Giovane Sardegna* aimed to unite all Sardinians - both on the island itself and on the mainland - into a regional bloc capable of exerting effective pressure on the government, to ensure that the promises made during the War to the soldiers were kept. The organizer of *Giovane Sardegna* on the mainland was a certain professor Pietro Nurra, a *Socialist*, who is very probably today a member of the group of "young people" who discover each week in *Quarto Stato* some new horizon to explore. The association was joined - with the enthusiasm which every new chance to get hold of badges, titles and little medals arouses - by lawyers, teachers and civil servants. The constituent assembly held in Turin, for Sardinians living in Piedmont, saw an impressive roster of interventions. The majority was made up of humble folk: men of the people with no discernible qualifications; unskilled labourers; retired people living on pensions; former *carabinieri*, former prison warders and former frontier guards now engaged in a wide variety of petty commercial enterprise. All of these were fired with enthusiasm by the idea of finding themselves among fellowcountrymen and hearing speeches about their native land, to which they remained bound by innumerable bonds of kinship, friendship, memory, suffering and hope: the hope of returning to their country, but to a country more prosperous and wealthy, which would offer conditions for living, albeit modestly.

The Sardinian communists, who numbered precisely eight, attended the meeting, presented a resolution of their own to the Chair, and asked to be allowed to make a counter-report. After the fiery rhetoric of the official report, embellished with all the Venuses and Cupids of provincial oratory; after those who intervened in the debate had wept at the memories of past griefs and of the blood spilled in battle by the Sardinian regiments, and had been fired with enthusiasm to the point of delirium at the idea of a united bloc of all the generous sons of Sardinia - after all this, it was very difficult to "pitch" the counterreport right. The most optimistic forecasts were for - if not a lynching - at least a trip to police headquarters, after being rescued from the "righteous indignation of the crowd". However, the counterreport, though it provoked great astonishment, was in fact listened to attentively. And once the spell had been broken, the revolutionary conclusion was reached swiftly and methodically. The dilemma - Are you poor devils from

Sardinia for a bloc with the gentry of the island, who have ruined you and who are the local overseers of capitalist exploitation? Or are you for a bloc with the revolutionary workers of the mainland, who want to destroy all forms of exploitation and free all the oppressed? - this dilemma was rammed into the heads of all those present. The vote, by division of the assembly, was a tremendous success: on one side, there was a handful of smartly dressed gentry, top-hatted officials, professional people, livid with rage and fear, with a circle of forty-odd policemen to garnish the consensus; on the other side, there was the whole mass of poor folk, with the women dressed up in their party best, clustered around the tiny communist cell. An hour later, at the Chamber of Labour, the Sardinian Socialist Education Circle was set up,, with 256 members. The founding of *Giovane Sardegna* was put off *sine die*, and never in fact took place.

This was the political basis for the activity carried out among the soldiers of the Sassari Brigade, a brigade with an almost totally regional composition. The Sassari Brigade had taken part in the repression of the insurrectional movement of August 1917 in Turin. It was confidently believed that it would never fraternize with the workers, because of the legacy of hatred which every repressive action leaves behind it - both in the masses, as a hatred which is also turned against the material instruments of the repression, and in the ranks, because of the memory of the soldiers who have fallen beneath the blows of the insurgents. The Brigade was welcomed by a throng of ladies and gentlemen, who offered the soldiers flowers, cigars and fruit. The state of mind of the soldiers is well captured by the following account, given by a tannery worker from Sassari involved in the first propagandistic soundings: "I approached a bivouac on X Square (in the first days, the Sardinian soldiers bivouacked in the squares as if in a conquered city) and I spoke with a young peasant, who had welcomed me warmly because I was from Sassari like him. 'What have you come to do in Turin?' 'We have come to shoot the gentry who are on strike.' 'But it is not the gentry who are on strike, it is the workers and they are poor.' 'They're all gentry here: they have collars and ties; they earn 30 *lire* a day. I know poor people and I know how they are dressed, yes indeed, in Sassari there are lots of poor people; all of us "diggers" are poor and we earn 1 1/2 *lire* a day.' 'But I am a worker too and I am poor.' 'You're poor because you're a Sardinian.' 'But if I go on strike with the others, will you shoot me?' The soldier reflected a bit, then put a hand on my shoulder: 'Listen, when you go on strike with the others, stay at home!'."

Such was the attitude of the overwhelming majority of the Brigade, which contained only a small number of mine-workers from the Iglesias field. And yet, within a few months, on the eve of the general strike of 20-21 July, the

Brigade was moved away from Turin, the older soldiers were discharged and the unit was split into three: one third was sent to Aosta, one third to Trieste and one third to Rome. The Brigade was moved out at night, without advance warning. No elegant throng applauded them at the station. Their songs, though still songs of war, no longer had the same content as those they sang on their arrival.

Did these events have no consequences? On the contrary, they have had results which still subsist to this day and continue to work in the depths of the popular masses. They illuminated, for an instant, brains which had never thought in that way, and which remained marked by them, radically modified. Our archives have been scattered, and we have destroyed many papers ourselves for fear they might lead to arrests and harassment. But we can recall dozens and indeed hundreds of letters sent from Sardinia to the *Avanti!* editorial offices in Turin; letters which were frequently collective, signed by all the Sassari Brigade veterans in a particular village. By uncontrolled and uncontrollable paths, the political attitude which we supported was disseminated. The formation of the Sardinian Action Party was strongly influenced by it at the base, and it would be possible to recall in this respect episodes that are rich in content and significance. The last verifiable repercussion of this activity occurred in 1922, when, with the same aim as in the case of the Sassari Brigade, 300 *carabinieri* from the Cagliari Legion were sent to Turin. At the editorial offices of *L'Ordine Nuovo* we received a statement of principle, signed by a large proportion of these *carabinieri*. It echoed in every way our positions on the Southern problem, and was decisive proof of the correctness of our approach.

The proletariat had itself to adopt this approach for it to become politically effective: that goes without saying. No mass action is possible, if the masses in question are not convinced of the ends they wish to attain and the methods to be applied. The proletariat, in order to become capable as a class of governing, must strip itself of every residue of corporatism, every syndicalist prejudice and incrustation. What does this mean? That, in addition to the need to overcome the distinctions which exist between one trade and another, it is necessary - in order to win the trust and consent of the peasants and of some semiproletarian urban categories - to overcome certain prejudices and conquer certain forms of egoism which can and do subsist within the working class as such, even when craft particularism has disappeared. The metalworker, the joiner, the building-worker, etc., must not only think as proletarians, and no longer as metal-worker, joiner, building-worker, etc.; they must also take a further step. They must think as workers who are members of a class which aims to lead the peasants and intellectuals. Of a class which can win and build socialism only if it is

aided and followed by the great majority of these social strata. If this is not achieved, the proletariat does not become the leading class; and these strata (which in Italy represent the majority of the population), remaining under bourgeois leadership, enable the State to resist the proletarian assault and wear it down.

Well, what has occurred on the terrain of the Southern question shows that the proletariat has understood these duties. Two events should be recalled: one took place in Turin; the other occurred at Reggio Emilia, i.e. in the very citadel of reformism, class corporatism and working-class protectionism which is cited as a prime example by the "Southernists" in their propaganda among the peasants of the South.

After the occupation of the factories, the Fiat board proposed to the workers that they should run the firm as a cooperative. Naturally, the reformists were in favour. An industrial crisis was looming; the spectre of unemployment tormented the workers' families. If Fiat became a cooperative, a certain job security might be obtained by the skilled workers, and especially by the politically most active workers, who were convinced that they were marked out for dismissal. The Socialist Party section, led by the communists, intervened energetically on the question. The workers were told the following:

"A great firm like Fiat can be taken over as a cooperative by the workers, only if the latter have resolved to enter the system of bourgeois political forces which governs Italy today. The proposal of the Fiat board forms a part of Giolitti's political plan. In what does this plan consist? The bourgeoisie, even before the War, could not govern peacefully any longer. The rising of the Sicilian peasants in 1894 and the Milan insurrection of 1898 were the *experimentum crucis* of the Italian bourgeoisie. 254 After the bloody decade 1890-1900, the bourgeoisie was forced to renounce a dictatorship that was too exclusive, too violent, too direct. For there had risen against it *simultaneously*, even if not in a coordinated fashion, the Southern peasants and the Northern workers.

"In the new century, the ruling class inaugurated a new policy of class alliances, class political blocs: i.e. bourgeois democracy. It had to choose: either a rural democracy, i.e. an alliance with the Southern peasants, a policy of free trade, universal suffrage, administrative decentralization and low prices for industrial products; or a capitalist/worker industrial bloc, without universal suffrage, with tariff barriers, with the maintenance of a highly centralized State (the expression of bourgeois dominion over the peasants, especially in the South and the Islands), and with a reformist

policy on wages and trade union freedoms. It chose, not by chance, the latter solution. Giolitti personified bourgeois rule; the Socialist Party became the instrument of Giolitti's policies.

"If you look closely, it was in the decade 1900-1910 that the most radical crises occurred in the socialist and working-class movement. The masses reacted spontaneously against the policy of the reformist leaders. Syndicalism was born: the instinctive, elemental, primitive but healthy expression of working-class reaction against the bloc with the bourgeoisie and in favour of a bloc with the peasants - and *first and foremost with the Southern peasants*. Precisely that. Indeed, in a certain sense, syndicalism is a weak attempt on the part of the Southern peasants, represented by their most advanced intellectuals, to lead the proletariat. Who forms the leading nucleus of Italian syndicalism, and what is its ideological essence? The leading nucleus of syndicalism is made up almost exclusively of southerners: Labriola, Leone, Longobardi, Orano. The ideological essence of syndicalism is a new liberalism, more energetic, more aggressive, more pugnacious than the traditional variety. If you look closely there are two fundamental themes around which the successive crises of syndicalism and the gradual passage of the syndicalist leaders into the bourgeois camp took place: emigration and free trade, two themes closely bound up with Southernism. The phenomenon of emigration gave birth to the idea of Enrico Corradini's 'proletarian nation'; the Libyan war appeared to a whole layer of intellectuals as the beginning of the 'great proletariat's' offensive against the capitalist and plutocratic world." A whole group of syndicalists went over to nationalism; indeed the Nationalist Party was originally made up of exsyndicalist intellectuals (Monicelli, Forges-Davanzati, Maraviglia). Labriola's book *History of Ten Years* (the ten years from 1900 to 1910) is the most typical and characteristic expression of this antiGiolittian and Southernist neo-liberalism.

"In the ten years in question, capitalism was strengthened and developed, and directed a part of its activity towards the agriculture of the Po Valley. The most characteristic feature of those ten years was the mass strikes of the agricultural workers of the Po Valley. A profound upheaval took place among the Northern peasants: there occurred a deep class differentiation (the number of *braccianti* [landless labourers] increased by 50 per cent, according to the 1911 census figures), and to this there corresponded a recasting of political currents and spiritual attitudes. Christian democracy and Mussolinism were the two most outstanding products of the period. Romagna was the regional crucible of these two new activities; the *bracciante* seemed to have become the social protagonist of the political struggle. The left organs of social democracy (like *Azione* in Cesena) and

Mussolinism too soon fell under the control of the 'Southernists'. *Azione* in Cesena was a regional edition of Gaetano Salvemini's *Unità. Avanti!*, under Mussolini's editorship, slowly but surely became transformed into a tribune for syndicalist and Southernist writers. People like Fancello, Lanzillo, Panunzio and Ciccotti became frequent contributors. Salvemini himself did not hide his sympathies for Mussolini, who also became the darling of Prezzolini's *Voce*. Everyone remembers that, in fact, when Mussolini left *Avanti!* and the Socialist Party, he was surrounded by this cohort of syndicalists and Southernists.

"The most notable repercussion of this period in the revolutionary camp was the Red Week of June 1914: Romagna and the Marches were the epicentre of Red Week. In the field of bourgeois politics, the most notable repercussion was the Gentiloni pact. Since the Socialist Party, as a consequence of the rural movements in the Po Valley, had returned after 1910 to an intransigent tactic, the industrial bloc supported and represented by Giolitti lost its effectiveness. Giolitti shifted his rifle to the other shoulder. He replaced the alliance between bourgeoisie and workers by an alliance between bourgeoisie and the catholics, who represented the peasant masses of Northern and Central Italy. As a result of this alliance, Sonnino's Conservative Party was totally destroyed, preserving only a tiny cell in Southern Italy, around Antonio Salandra.

"The War and post-war period saw a series of molecular processes of the highest importance take place within the bourgeois class. Salandra and Nitti were the first two Southern heads of government (leaving aside Sicilians, of course, such as Crispi, who was the most energetic representative of the bourgeois dictatorship in the nineteenth century). They sought to realize the industrial bourgeois/Southern landowner plan - Salandra on a conservative basis, Nitti on a democratic one. (Both these heads of government were solidly assisted by *Il Corriere della Sera*, i.e. by the Lombard textile industry.) Salandra was already trying during the War to shift the technical forces of the State organization in favour of the South: i.e. to replace the Giolittian State personnel with a new personnel which embodied the bourgeoisie's new political course. You remember the campaign waged by *La Stampa*, especially in 1917-18, for close collaboration between Giolittians and Socialists to prevent the 'Apulianization' of the State. This campaign in *La Stampa* was led by Francesco Ciccotti, i.e. it was *de facto* an expression of the agreement which existed between Giolitti and the reformists. The question was not a small one, and the Giolittians, in their defensive obstinacy, went so far that they passed the limits allowed to a party by the big bourgeoisie; they went as far as those demonstrations of antipatriotism and defeatism which are

fresh in every memory.

"Today, Giolitti is once more in power, and once more the big bourgeoisie is putting its trust in him, as a result of the panic which has filled it before the impetuous movement of the popular masses. Giolitti wants to tame the Turin workers. He has beaten them twice: in the strike of last April, and in the occupation of the factories - with the help of the CGL, i.e. of corporative reformism. He now thinks that he can tie them into the bourgeois State system. What in fact will happen if the skilled workforce of Fiat accepts the board's proposals? The present industrial shares will become debentures: in other words, the cooperative will have to pay to debenture-holders a fixed dividend, whatever the turnover may be. The Fiat company will be cut off in every way from the institutions of credit, which remain in the hands of the bourgeoisie, whose interest it is to get the workers at its mercy. The skilled workforce will perforce have to bind itself to the State, which will 'come to the assistance of the workers' through the activity of the working-class deputies: through the subordination of the working-class political party to government policies. That is Giolitti's plan as applied in full. The Turin proletariat will no longer exist as an independent class, but merely as an appendage of the bourgeois State. Class corporatism will have triumphed, but the proletariat will have lost its position and role as leader and guide. It will appear to the mass of poorer workers as privileged. It will appear to the peasants as an exploiter just like the bourgeoisie, because the bourgeoisie - as it has always done - will present the privileged nuclei of the working class to the peasant masses as the sole cause of their ills and their misery."

The skilled workers of Fiat accepted almost unanimously our point of view, and the board's proposals were rejected. But this experiment could not be sufficient. The Turin proletariat, in a whole series of actions, had shown that it had reached an extremely high level of political maturity and capability. The technicians and white-collar workers in the factories were able to improve their conditions in 1919 only because they were supported by the workers. To break the militancy of the technicians, the employers proposed to the workers that they should themselves nominate, through elections, new squad and shop foremen. The workers rejected the proposal, although they had many points of difference with the technicians, who had always been an instrument of repression and persecution for the bosses. Then the press waged a rabid campaign to isolate the technicians, highlighting their very high salaries, which reached as much as 7,000 *lire* a month. The skilled workers also gave support to the agitation of the hodmen, and it was only thus that the latter succeeded in winning their demands. Within the factories, all privileges and forms of exploitation of the

less skilled by the more skilled categories were swept away. Through these actions, the proletarian vanguard won its position as a social vanguard. This was the basis upon which the Communist Party developed in Turin. But outside Turin? Well, we wanted expressly to take the problem outside Turin, and precisely to Reggio Emilia, where there existed the greatest concentration of reformism and class corporatism. 262

Reggio Emilia had always been the target of the "Southernists". A phrase of Camillo Prampolini: "Italy is made up of Northerners and filthy Southerners" could be taken as the most characteristic expression of the violent hatred disseminated among Southerners against the workers of the North .261 At Reggio Emilia, a problem arose similar to the one at Fiat: a big factory was to pass into the hands of the workers as a cooperative enterprise. The Reggio reformists were full of enthusiasm for the project and trumpeted its praises in their press and at meetings. 264 A Turin communist went to Reggio, took the floor at a factory meeting, outlined the problem between North and South in its entirety, and the "miracle" was achieved: the workers, by an overwhelming majority, rejected the reformist, corporate position. It was shown that the reformists did not represent the spirit of the Reggio workers; they represented merely their passivity, and other negative aspects. They had succeeded in establishing a political monopoly - thanks to the notable concentration in their ranks of organizers and propagandists with certain professional talents - and hence in preventing the development and organization of a revolutionary current. But the presence of a capable revolutionary was enough to thwart them and show that the Reggio workers are valiant fighters and not swine raised on government fodder.

In April 1921, 5,000 revolutionary workers were laid off by Fiat, the Workers' Councils were abolished, real wages were cut. At Reggio Emilia, something similar probably happened. In other words, the workers were defeated. But the sacrifice that they had made, had it been useless? We do not believe so: indeed, we are certain that it was not useless - though it would certainly be difficult to adduce a whole series of great mass events which prove the immediate, lightning effectiveness of these actions. In any case, so far as the peasants are concerned, such proof is always difficult, indeed almost impossible: and it is yet more difficult in the case of the peasant masses in the South.

The South can be defined as a great social disintegration. The peasants, who make up the great majority of its population, have no cohesion among themselves (of course, some exceptions must be made: Apulia, Sardinia, Sicily, where there exist special characteristics within the great canvas of

the South's structure). Southern society is a great agrarian bloc, made up of three social layers: the great amorphous, disintegrated mass of the peasantry; the intellectuals of the petty and medium rural bourgeoisie; and the big landowners and great intellectuals. The Southern peasants are in perpetual ferment, but as a mass they are incapable of giving a centralized expression to their aspirations and needs. The middle layer of intellectuals receives the impulses for its political and ideological activity from the peasant base. The big landowners in the political field and the great intellectuals in the ideological field centralize and dominate, in the last analysis, this whole complex of phenomena. Naturally, it is in the ideological sphere that the centralization is most effective and precise. Giustino Fortunato and Benedetto Croce thus represent the keystones of the Southern system and, in a certain sense, are the two major figures of Italian reaction.

The Southern intellectuals are one of the most interesting and important social strata in Italian national life. One only has to think of the fact that more than three fifths of the State bureaucracy is made up of Southerners to convince oneself of this. Now, to understand the particular psychology of the Southern intellectuals, it is necessary to keep in mind certain factual data.

1. In every country, the layer of intellectuals has been radically modified by the development of capitalism. The old type of intellectual was the organizing element in a society with a mainly peasant and artisanal basis. To organize the State, to organize commerce, the dominant class bred a particular type of intellectual. Industry has introduced a new type of intellectual: the technical organizer, the specialist in applied science. In the societies where the economic forces have developed in a capitalist direction, to the point where they have absorbed the greater part of national activity, it is this second type of intellectual which has prevailed, with all his characteristics of order and intellectual discipline. In the countries, on the other hand, where agriculture still plays a considerable or even preponderant role, the old type has remained predominant. It provides the bulk of the State personnel; and locally too, in the villages and little country towns, it has the function of intermediary between the peasant and the administration in general. In Southern Italy this type predominates, with all its characteristic features. Democratic in its peasant face; reactionary in the face turned towards the big landowner and the government: politicking, corrupt and faithless. One could not understand the traditional cast of the Southern political parties, if one did not take the characteristics of this social stratum into account.

2. The Southern intellectual mainly comes from a layer which is still important in the South: the rural bourgeois. In other words, the petty and medium landowner who is not a peasant, who does not work the land, who would be ashamed to be a farmer, but who wants to extract from the little land he has - leased out either for rent or on a simple share-cropping basis - the wherewithal to live fittingly; the wherewithal to send his sons to a university or seminary; and the wherewithal to provide dowries for his daughters, who must marry officers or civil functionaries of the State. From this social layer, the intellectuals derive a fierce antipathy to the working peasant - who is regarded as a machine for work to be bled dry, and one which can be replaced, given the excess working population. They also acquire an atavistic, instinctive feeling of crazy fear of the peasants with their destructive violence; hence, they practise a refined hypocrisy and a highly refined art of deceiving and taming the peasant masses.

3. Since the clergy belong to the social group of intellectuals, it is necessary to note the features which distinguish the Southern clergy as a whole from the Northern clergy. The Northern priest is generally the son of an artisan or a peasant, has democratic sympathies, is more tied to the mass of peasants. Morally, he is more correct than the Southern priest, who often lives more or less openly with a woman. He therefore exercises a spiritual function that is more complete, from a social point of view, in that he guides a family's entire activities. In the North, the separation of Church from State and the expropriation of ecclesiastical goods was more radical than in the South, where the parishes and convents either have preserved or have reconstituted considerable assets, both fixed and movable. In the South, the priest appears to the peasant: 1. as a land administrator, with whom the peasant enters into conflict on the question of rents; 2. as a usurer, who asks for extremely high rates of interest and manipulates the religious element in order to make certain of collecting his rent or interest; 3. as a man subject to all the ordinary passions (women and money), and who therefore, from a spiritual point of view, inspires no confidence in his discretion and impartiality. Hence confession exercises only the most minimal role of guidance, and the Southern peasant, if often superstitious in a pagan sense, is not clerical. All this, taken together, explains why in the South the Popular Party (except in some parts of Sicily) does not have any great position or possess any network of institutions and mass organizations. The attitude of the peasant towards the clergy is summed up in the popular saying: "The priest is a priest at the altar; outside, he is a man like anyone else."

The Southern peasant is bound to the big landowner through the mediation of the intellectual. The peasant movements, insofar as they do not take the

form of autonomous, independent mass organizations, even in a formal sense (i.e. capable of selecting out peasant cadres, themselves of peasant origin, and of registering and accumulating the differentiation and progress achieved within the movement), always end up by finding themselves a place in the ordinary articulations of the State apparatus - communes, provinces, Chamber of Deputies. This process takes place through the composition and decomposition of local parties, whose personnel is made up of intellectuals, but which are controlled by the big landowners and their agents - like Salandra, Orlando, Di Cesarò.

The War appeared to introduce a new element into this type of organization, with the war-veterans' movement. In this, the peasant-soldiers and the intellectual-officers formed a mutual bloc that was more closely united, and that was to some extent antagonistic to the big landowners. It did not last long, and its last residue is the National Union conceived of by Amendola, which has some phantom existence thanks to its anti-fascism. However, given the lack of any tradition of *explicit* organization of *democratic* intellectuals in the South, even this grouping must be stressed and taken into account, since it might be transformed from a tiny trickle of water into a swollen, muddy torrent, in changed general political conditions.

The only region where the war-veterans' movement took on a more precise profile, and succeeded in creating a more solid social structure, was Sardinia. And this is understandable. Precisely because in Sardinia the big landowner class is very exiguous, carries out no function, and does not have the ancient cultural and governmental traditions of the mainland South. The pressure exerted from below, by the mass of peasants and herdsmen, finds no suffocating counterweight in the higher social stratum of the big landowners. The leading intellectuals feel the full weight of this pressure, and take steps forward which are more remarkable than the National Union.

The Sicilian situation has very specific features, which distinguish it both from Sardinia and from the South. The big landowners are far more compact and resolute there than in the mainland South. Moreover, there exists there a certain developed industry and commerce (Sicily is the richest region of the entire South and one of the richest in Italy). The upper classes feel very keenly their importance in national life and make its weight felt. Sicily and Piedmont are the two regions which have played a preeminent role since 1870. The popular masses of Sicily are more advanced than in the South, but their progress has taken on a typically Sicilian form. There exists a mass Sicilian socialism, which has a whole

tradition and development that is peculiar to it. In the 1922 Chamber, it had around 20 of the 52 deputies who had been elected from the island.

We have said that the Southern peasant is tied to the big landowner through the mediation of the intellectual. This type of organization is most widespread, throughout the mainland South and Sicily. It creates a monstrous agrarian bloc which, as a whole, functions as the intermediary and the overseer of Northern capitalism and the big banks. Its single aim is to preserve the *status quo*. Within it, there exists no intellectual light, no programme, no drive towards improvements or progress. If any ideas or programmes have been put forward, they have had their origins outside the South, in the conservative agrarian politicians (especially in Tuscany) who were associated in Parliament with the conservatives of the Southern agrarian bloc. Sonnino and Franchetti were among the few intelligent bourgeois who posed the Southern problem as a national problem, and outlined a government plan to solve it.

What was the point of view of Sonnino and Franchetti? They stressed the need to create in Southern Italy an economically independent middle stratum which would fulfil the role (as was said at that time) of "public opinion" - and would, on the one hand, limit the cruel and arbitrary actions of the landowners, on the other, moderate the insurrectionism of the poor peasants. Sonnino and Franchetti had been terrified by the popularity which the Bakuninist ideas of the First International had enjoyed in the South. This terror made them make blunders which were often grotesque. In one of their publications, for instance, reference is made to the fact that a popular tavern or *trattoria* in a village in Calabria (I am quoting from memory) is named "The Strikers" [*Scioperanti*], to demonstrate how widespread and deeprooted internationalist ideas are. The fact, if true (and it must be true, given the intellectual probity of the authors), can be more simply explained if one recalls that there are numerous Albanian colonies in the South, and that the word *skipetari* [Albanians] has undergone the most strange and bizarre distortions in the various dialects (thus certain documents of the Venetian Republic speak of military formations of "*S'ciopetà*").²⁶⁸ The fact is that it is not so much that Bakunin's theories were widespread in the South, as that the situation there was such as to have probably suggested to Bakunin his theories. Certainly, the poor Southern peasants were thinking about a "great revolt" long before Bakunin's brain had thought out the theory of "general destruction".

The government plan of Sonnino and Franchetti never even began to be put into practice. And it could not be. The nexus of relations between North and South in the organization of the national economy and the State is

such that the birth of a broad middle class of an economic nature (which means the birth of a broad capitalist bourgeoisie) is made almost impossible. Any accumulation of capital on the spot, any accumulation of savings, is made impossible by the fiscal and customs system, and by the fact that the capitalists who own shares do not transform their profits into new capital on the spot, because they are not from that spot. When emigration took on the gigantic dimensions it did in the twentieth century, and the first remittances began to flood in from America, the liberal economists cried triumphantly: Sonnino's dream will come true! A silent revolution is under way in the South which, slowly but surely, will change the entire economic and social structure of the country. But the State intervened, and the silent revolution was stifled at birth. The government offered treasury bonds carrying guaranteed interest, and the emigrants and their families were transformed from agents of the silent revolution into agents for giving the State the financial means to subsidize the parasitic industries of the North. Francesco Nitti, on the democratic level and formally outside the Southern agrarian bloc, might seem an effective realizer of Sonnino's programme; but he was, in fact, Northern capitalism's best agent for raking in the last resources of Southern savings. The thousands of millions swallowed up by the *Banca di sconto* were almost all owed to the South: the 400,000 creditors of the *Banca Italiana di Sconto* were overwhelmingly Southern savers. 269

Over and above the agrarian bloc, there functions in the South an intellectual bloc which in practice has so far served to prevent the cracks in the agrarian bloc becoming too dangerous and causing a landslide. Giustino Fortunato and Benedetto Croce are the exponents of this intellectual bloc, and they can thus be considered as the most active reactionaries of the whole peninsula.

We have already said that Southern Italy represents a great social disintegration. This formula can be applied not only to the peasants, but also to the intellectuals. It is a remarkable fact that in the South, side by side with huge property, there have existed and continue to exist great accumulations of culture and intelligence in single individuals, or small groups of great intellectuals, while there does not exist any organization of middle culture. There exist in the South the Laterza publishing house, and the review *La Critica*.²¹⁰ There exist academies and cultural bodies of the greatest erudition. But there do not exist small or medium reviews, nor publishing houses around which medium groupings of Southern intellectuals might form. The Southerners who have sought to leave the agrarian bloc and pose the Southern question in a radical form have found hospitality in, and grouped themselves around, reviews printed outside the

South. Indeed, one might say that all the cultural initiatives by medium intellectuals which have taken place in this century in Central and Northern Italy have been characterized by Southernism, because they have been strongly influenced by Southern intellectuals: all the journals of the group of Florentine intellectuals, like *Voce* and *Unità*; the journals of the Christian democrats, like *Azione* in Cesena; the journals of the young Emilian and Milanese liberals published by G. Borelli, such as *Patria* in Bologna or *Azione* in Milan; and lastly, Gobetti's *Rivoluzione liberale*.

Well, the supreme political and intellectual rulers of all these initiatives have been Giustino Fortunato and Benedetto Croce. In a broader sphere than the stifling agrarian bloc, they have seen to it that the problems of the South would be posed in a way which did not go beyond certain limits; did not become revolutionary. Men of the highest culture and intelligence, who arose on the traditional terrain of the South but were linked to European and hence to world culture, they had all the necessary gifts to satisfy the intellectual needs of the most sincere representatives of the cultured youth in the South; to comfort their restless impulses to revolt against existing conditions; to steer them along a middle way of classical serenity in thought and action. The so-called neo-protestants or Calvinists have failed to understand that in Italy, since modern conditions of civilization rendered impossible any mass religious reform, the only historically possible reformation has taken place with Benedetto Croce's philosophy. The direction and method of thought have been changed and a new conception of the world has been constructed, transcending catholicism and every other mythological religion. In this sense, Benedetto Croce has fulfilled an extremely important "national" function. He has detached the radical intellectuals of the South from the peasant masses, forcing them to take part in national and European culture; and through this culture, he has secured their absorption by the national bourgeoisie and hence by the agrarian bloc.

L'Ordine Nuovo and the Turin communists - if in a certain sense they can be related to the intellectual formations to which we have alluded; and if, therefore, they too have felt the intellectual influence of Giustino Fortunato or of Benedetto Croce - nevertheless represent at the same time a complete break with that tradition and the beginning of a new development, which has already borne fruit and which will continue to do so. As has already been said, they posed the urban proletariat as the modern protagonist of Italian history, and hence also of the Southern question. Having served as intermediaries between the proletariat and certain strata of left intellectuals, they succeeded in modifying - if not completely at least to a notable extent - their mental outlook.

This is the main factor in the figure of Piero Gobetti, if one reflects carefully. Gobetti was not a communist and would probably never have become one. But he had understood the social and historical position of the proletariat, and could no longer think in abstraction from this element. Gobetti, in our work together on the paper, had been brought by us into contact with a living world which he had previously only known through formulae in books. His most striking characteristic was intellectual loyalty, and the total absence of every kind of petty vanity or meanness. Therefore, he could not fail to become convinced of the way in which a whole series of traditional ways of viewing and thinking about the proletariat were false and unjust.

What consequence did these contacts with the proletarian world have for Gobetti? They were the source and stimulus for a conception which we have no wish to discuss or develop: a conception which is to a great extent related to syndicalism and the way of thinking of the intellectual syndicalists. In it, the principles of liberalism are projected from the level of individual phenomena to that of mass phenomena. The qualities of excellence and prestige in the lives of individuals are carried over into classes, conceived of almost as collective individualities. This conception usually leads, in the intellectuals who share it, to mere contemplation and the noting down of merits and demerits; to an odious and foolish position, as referees of contests or bestowers of prizes and punishments. In practice, Gobetti escaped this destiny. He revealed himself to be an organizer of culture of extraordinary talents, and during this last period had a function which must be neither neglected nor under-estimated by the workers. He dug a trench beyond which those groups of honourable, sincere intellectuals who in 1919-1920-1921 felt that the proletariat would be superior as a ruling class to the bourgeoisie did not retreat.

Some people in good faith and honestly, others in extremely bad faith and dishonestly, went around saying that Gobetti was nothing but a communist in disguise: an agent, if not of the Communist Party, at least of the *Ordine Nuovo* communist group. It is unnecessary even to deny such fatuous rumours. The figure of Gobetti and the movement which he represented were spontaneous products of the new Italian historical climate. In this lies their significance and their importance. Comrades in the party sometimes reproved us for not having fought against the *Rivoluzione liberale* current of ideas. Indeed, this absence of conflict seemed to prove the organic relationship, of a Machiavellian kind (as people used to say), between us and Gobetti. We could not fight against Gobetti, because he developed and represented a movement which should not be fought against, at least so far as its main principles are concerned.

Not to understand that, means not to understand the question of intellectuals and the function which they fulfil in the class struggle. Gobetti, in practice, served us as a link: 1. with those intellectuals born on the terrain of capitalist techniques who in 1919-20 had taken up a left position, favourable to the dictatorship of the proletariat; 2. with a series of Southern intellectuals who through more complex relationships, posed the Southern question on a terrain different from the traditional one, by introducing into it the proletariat of the North (of these intellectuals, Guido Dorso is the most substantial and interesting figure). Why should we have fought against the *Rivoluzione liberale* movement? Perhaps because it was not made up of pure communists who had accepted our programme and our ideas from A to Z? This could not be asked of them, because it would have been both politically and historically a paradox.

Intellectuals develop slowly, far more slowly than any other social group, by their very nature and historical function. They represent the entire cultural tradition of a people, seeking to resume and synthesize all of its history. This can be said especially of the old type of intellectual: the intellectual born on the peasant terrain. To think it possible that such intellectuals, *en masse*, can break with the entire past and situate themselves totally upon the terrain of a new ideology, is absurd. It is absurd for the mass of intellectuals, and perhaps it is also absurd for very many intellectuals taken individually as well - notwithstanding all the honourable efforts which they make and want to make.

Now, we are interested in the mass of intellectuals, and not just in individuals. It is certainly important and useful for the proletariat that one or more intellectuals, individually, should adopt its programme and ideas; should merge into the proletariat, becoming and feeling themselves to be an integral part of it. The proletariat, as a class, is poor in organizing elements. It does not have its own stratum of intellectuals, and can only create one very slowly, very painfully, after the winning of State power. But it is also important and useful for a break to occur in the mass of intellectuals: a break of an organic kind, historically characterized. For there to be formed, as a mass formation, a left tendency, in the modern sense of the word: i.e. one oriented towards the revolutionary proletariat.

The alliance between proletariat and peasant masses requires this formation. It is all the more required by the alliance between proletariat and peasant masses in the South. The proletariat will destroy the Southern agrarian bloc insofar as it succeeds, through its party, in organizing increasingly significant masses of poor peasants into autonomous and

independent formations. But its greater or lesser success in this necessary task will also depend upon its ability to break up the intellectual bloc that is the flexible, but extremely resistant, armour of the agrarian bloc. The proletariat was helped towards the accomplishment of this task by Piero Gobetti, and we think that the dead man's friends will continue, even without his leadership, the work he undertook. This is gigantic and difficult, but precisely worthy of every sacrifice (even that of life, as in Gobetti's case) on the part of those intellectuals (and there are many of them, more than is believed) - from North and South - who have understood that only two social forces are essentially national and bearers of the future: the proletariat and the peasants.