

L' Ordine Nuovo and the workers' councils movement in Turin in the postwar years (1919-1920)

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ABSTRACT

The first issue of L'Ordine Nuovo (The New Order) “a weekly review of socialist culture”, was published in Turin on an extremely convenient date: May 1, 1919. Despite being listed as “editorial secretary”, Gramsci was, in fact, the foremost promoter of this small Turin-based enterprise. The underlying idea of the newspaper was the need for the working class to build a culture of its own, a crucial part of the development of a revolutionary conscience. Nonetheless, it did not disregard, but rather pre-emptively encompassed, the acquisition of wider and more general cultural instruments. This included major cultural traditions that preceded the advent of the working class in the global scenario, starting from the set of (scientific, artistic, literary, etc...) events that could be summarized with a formula of the great bourgeois culture. Said process was primarily, and understandably, led by Benedetto Croce, undisputed “provoker of theoretical elaboration”. As Mario Montagna, one of the newspaper's promoters who, after Gramsci's death, advocated the publication of the Sardinian writer's work, declared: “L'Ordine Nuovo must become for young socialists what La Voce was for the bourgeoisie: the core around which all intelligence and willpower develops”.

KEYWORDS

L'Ordine Nuovo, Gramsci, Turin, Weekly review, Socialist culture

¹ The authors of this paper have worked together; however, the writing of paragraphs 1, 2, 7, 8 was by A. d'Orsi, and paragraphs 3, 4, 5, 6, by F. Chiarotto.

As is well known, Antonio Gramsci did not participate in the First World War due to unfit physical conditions. Nonetheless, he did somehow participate in it through his work as a journalist for socialist newspapers, denouncing on a daily basis not only the barbarities of the war, but also its stupidity and lies. During the years of conflict, he was perhaps its most ruthless and coherent critic in Italy; from that moment on, and during his whole career and life, he continued to fight in the name of truth.²

Once his university companions (Tasca, Terracini, and Togliatti), all socialists like himself, returned from the front, an old idea came back to life: a newspaper. At that moment, the important headlines, aside from the effects of the Great War, were the Soviet Union and the not-so-theoretical international debate regarding the possibilities of a revolution in the capitalist West; alongside these was a heated discourse regarding how to “update” Marxist doctrine without falling into reformist revisionism.

The first issue of *L'Ordine Nuovo* (*The New Order*) “a weekly review of socialist culture”, was published in Turin on an extremely convenient date: May 1, 1919.³ The release of this weekly newspaper took place in a particularly charged political climate. Shortly before May 1, the Socialist Party prepared a manifesto which – in its uncensored pages – exhorted workers with words almost worthy of Marx’s and Engels’ *Manifesto*: “Workers! This great historical hour is calling you, and urges you to make crucial historical conquests!”⁴ The editorial of the first issue of this novel newspaper presented an appeal to mobilization, to be achieved through education, upheaval and organization⁵: “this issue is to bring us together, get to know each other, get a first fertile feel of freedom, and of the vibrations of souls united by the same faith. It is a proclamation for the mobilization of socialist intelligence and willpower, to determine and emphasize the Socialist State.”

Despite being listed as “editorial secretary”, Gramsci was, in fact, as confirmed by testimonies, the foremost promoter of this small Turin-based enterprise. The latter, situated within a highly international dimension, was after all not far from the discussions of young Marxists taking place in a variety of locations and settings on both sides of the Atlantic.

² See d’Orsi, A. “Gramsci e la guerra: dal giornalismo alla riflessione storica”. In: *Gramsci nel suo tempo*, ed. Giasi, Francesco. Preface by Vacca, G. 2 vol. Roma: Carocci, Roma, 2008 (I), pp. 127-53.

³ The amount of 6000 Liras necessary to bring the newspaper to life was recovered, according to Togliatti’s testimony, by Angelo Tasca: see Ferrara, Marcella e Ferrera, Maurizio. *Conversando con Togliatti*. Roma: Rinascita, 1951, p. 47.

⁴ Central State Archives, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Direzione generale di P.S., Affari generali e riservati, 1919, K9, b. 53: dispatch of the head of cabinet to heads of office “press review”. Cited in Spriano, P. *L'Ordine Nuovo e i Consigli di fabbrica*. Turin: Einaudi, 1971, p. 17.

⁵ The famous headline of the first issue read as follows: “Educate yourselves, for we will need all our intelligence. Rouse yourselves, for we will need all our enthusiasm. Organize yourselves, for we will need all our strength”. *L'Ordine Nuovo*, I, 1, 1° May 1919.

The underlying idea of the newspaper was the need for the working class to build a culture of its own, a crucial part of the development of a revolutionary conscience. Nonetheless, it did not disregard, but rather pre-emptively encompassed, the acquisition of wider and more general cultural instruments. This included major cultural traditions that preceded the advent of the working class in the global scenario, starting from the set of (scientific, artistic, literary, etc...) events that could be summarized with a formula of the great bourgeois culture. Said process was primarily, and understandably, led by Benedetto Croce, undisputed “provoker of theoretical elaboration”.⁶ As Mario Montagna, one of the newspaper’s promoters who, after Gramsci’s death, advocated the publication of the Sardinian writer’s work, declared: “*L’Ordine Nuovo* must become for young socialists what *La Voce* was for the bourgeoisie: the core around which all intelligence and willpower develops”.⁷

2.

Gramsci’s work demonstrates that revolution, more than an act, represents a process. At the basis of said process there must be the effort of the working class to acquire political awareness, and thus cultural preparedness. Hereby derives the crucial importance of the determination to help the proletariat educate itself, (“educate yourselves, for we will need all our intelligence” is one of the titles gawking from the newspaper’s front page), and more generally the battle of ideas⁸, of pedagogical and cultural work that would later provoke accusations of “culturalism” towards the *ordinovisti*, as the promoters of the newspaper would soon be known. Among these was the well-known recrimination by Bordiga and his group, who backed the Neapolitan newspaper *The Soviet*: “The need for education calls for a convention of teachers, not socialists. One does not become socialist through education, but rather because of the real needs of the class they belong to”.⁹ After all, a little over a year after the foundation of the newspaper, Gramsci himself would draw up a critical judgment of it which, in excessive terms, reduced the first few issues of the newspaper to a modest cultural hotchpotch: nothing more – according to the (excessively severe) self-critical assessment of its very promoter – than a “producer of mediocre intellectualism”, with a predominantly pedagogical nature, supported by vague resolutions:

When, in April 1919, three, four, or five of us decided [...] to start publishing the newspaper *L’Ordine Nuovo*, not one of us (perhaps...) thought we could change the world, renew the brains and hearts of the human multitudes, or open a new cycle in history. Not one of us (perhaps...: some did fantasize with the idea of 6000 subscribers in just a few months) deluded themselves with the optimistic idea of a successful venture. Who were we? What did we

⁶ Spriano, P. Op.Cit, p. 25.

⁷ Montagnana expressed such a remark at the Congress of young socialists in August 1919. See, *ibidem*, p. 53. Regarding Montagna’s role in the publication of Gramsci’s work see Chiarotto, F. *Operazione Gramsci. Alla conquista degli intellettuali nell’Italia del dopoguerra*. Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2011.

⁸ This was the column of the newspaper edited by Palmiro Togliatti, which will be repeated with the same title in *Rinascita* (*Rebirth*), in the postwar years.

⁹ Bordiga, A. *Preparazione culturale o preparazione rivoluzionaria?*, in «L’Avanguardia», 20 October 1912.

represent? What new message were we the bearers of? Alas! The only sentiment that united us during our meetings was that aroused by a vague passion for a vague proletarian culture; we wanted to do, do, do; we felt anxious, disoriented, drowning in the fervent atmosphere of the months following the armistice, when the cataclysm of Italian society seemed imminent.¹⁰

However, already from the May 15, 1919 issue, Gramsci identified a specific research focus, the Workers' Councils, which soon became the newspaper's core interest.¹¹ The path was set with the so-called "editorial turning point" of June 27, the editorial *Working Class Democracy* written by Gramsci with the collaboration of Togliatti.¹² The focus of the editorial group's attention shifted to the factory, the analysis of its mechanisms, and the study of factors of production: here, the germ of tomorrow's working-class State was reflected upon, as well as the nucleus of a new civilization of producers to be built with the revolution. Centers of proletarian life already existed in capitalist society: Internal Councils in the factories, socialist circles, peasant communities; it was just a matter of helping them grow, develop, and mature as organs of an effective counter-power which, at the right moment, would be able to oust and replace bourgeois power, demonstrating an ability to better manage all problems, starting from those inherent to the production process.

Internal councils are organs of working class democracy which must be freed of the limitations imposed on them by entrepreneurs, and fed with new life and energy. Today, internal councils restrict the capitalist's power in the factory, and exercise functions of arbitration and discipline. Tomorrow they will have to be, developed and enhanced, the organs of proletarian power that will substitute capitalists in all their useful functions of management and administration [...].¹³

Councils, district circles, and urban commissariats would thus form a series of concentric circles that, far from the trade unions and party itself, would bring to life to an authentic fabric of working class self-government. Furthermore,

Such a system of working class democracy (integrated with the equivalent peasant organizations) would provide the masses with a permanent form and discipline. It would be a magnificent lesson of political and administrative experience, and it would organize the masses to the very last man: they would thus get used to tenacity and perseverance, and to considering

¹⁰ Gramsci, A. *Il programma dell' "Ordine Nuovo"*, in «L'Ordine Nuovo», II, 12, 14 August 1920, now in ID., *L'Ordine Nuovo*, eds. Gerratan, V. and Santucci, Antonio A.. Turin: Einaudi, 1987, pp. 619, 621 (619).

¹¹ ID., *Maggioranza e minoranza nell'azione socialista*, in «L'Ordine Nuovo», I, 2, 15 May 1919; now therein, p. 373.

¹² ID., *Democrazia operaia*, therein, p. 87-91 (89-90). The text may also be read in Gramsci, A. *Scritti dalla libertà. 1910-1926*, eds. D'Orsi, A. and Chiarotto, F. Roma: Editori Internazionali Riuniti, 2012, pp. 315-18.

¹³ Ibid.

themselves as an army on the field that needs firm cohesion, unless it wants to be destroyed and enslaved.¹⁴

Behind the political, pedagogical and organizational effort to transform the centers of proletarian life into organs of self-government for the masses (in the case in point, the internal councils into Workers' Councils, the Italian equivalent to the Russian soviet), as theorized by an "*ordinovista*" such as Gramsci, a preoccupation regarding the situation of crisis could be perceived. This was one of those situations which could only be resolved with the victory of one or the other rival, without middle grounds, compromise, or mediation, as Gramsci himself theorized in his later reflections from prison. Gramsci considered the "proletariat's dictatorship", which was widely discussed in Leninist Russia, as an empty formula, which could only be filled by immediately working towards transformation, and towards the bottom-up implementation of the working-class State, and could certainly "not be improvised".

The world after the war was an exhausted world in all aspects. Thus, revolutionaries could not fall into the temptation of adding destruction to destruction, chaos to chaos. On the other hand, it was a matter of building a different order, based on the expulsion of the capitalist from the factory, the increase of self-managed production, a spontaneously accepted and constructed discipline not imposed by force from the outside, and on a collective effort to build political awareness regarding the epochal duties of the working class and its allies. It was, therefore, a matter of erecting a "new order", which combined authentic justice and productive efficiency, substantial democracy and producers' self-government, thus freeing society and the State from the "plutocratic gangs that detain power and that could once more precipitate the populations into the abyss of war".¹⁵

Both in the *L'Ordine Nuovo* and in *Avanti!* (*Forward!*) (whose Piedmont edition he would later edit) Gramsci refined his political theory by insisting on certain key concepts. Among these were the idea of the communist method as a "method of permanent revolution"¹⁶, the need for proletarian internationalism (organized response to the international antirevolutionary repression), and an alliance between the peasants and the working class, maintaining a specific hierarchy according to the classes' respective historical characteristics, yet with the certainty of the crucial need for unity.

Factory workers and poor peasants are the two driving forces of proletarian revolution. In particular for them communism represents a crucial necessity: its advent means life and freedom, and the permanence of private property means imminent danger to be crushed, to lose everything, even life itself. They are the invincible element, the continuity of revolutionary enthusiasm, the tenacious willpower to refuse compromise, and to go on

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gramsci, A. *Vita politica internazionale*, in «L'Ordine Nuovo», I, 5, 7 June 1919, now in ID., *L'Ordine Nuovo*, Op.Cit., pp. 66-71 (67).

¹⁶ ID., *Il problema delle commissioni interne. Postilla*, ivi, I, 15, 23rd August 1919, therein, pp. 176-79 (176).

relentlessly towards unabridged achievements, without losing hope over partial and transitory failures, and without false hopes of easy success. They are the backbone of revolution, tenacious battalions of the proletarian army that advances, knocking over with impetus all obstacles, or besieging them with the human tides that crumble and wear down patiently and with indefatigable sacrifice. Communism is their civilization, the system of historical conditions through which they will acquire a personality, a dignity, and a culture; through which they will become the creative spirit of progress and beauty.¹⁷

3.

Overall, since the second half of 1919, *L'Ordine Nuovo* characterized itself as an organ of the movement of Councils, and more generally as a means to communicate to factory workers those things that interested them, without worrying about descending to an exaggeratedly basic level. This objective was confirmed by the testimony of one of the protagonists of that experience, Andrea Viglono, future editor, who in an interview many years later would recall:

[...] what characterized this new newspaper was the tendency to make it unique, because in the proletarian movement this problem always existed: often, the proletarian newspaper, the *Avanti!*», did not offer enough variety of news columns, and almost no sports news. Thus, readers were forced to also purchase other newspapers. One of the *L'Ordine Nuovo*'s priorities was, on the other hand, to produce a complete newspaper which could satisfy the most demanding reader's needs.¹⁸

The Gramscian idea was based on the indispensable need to help the proletariat rise to the ownership of the intellectual instruments and knowledge they had been deprived of, whilst at the same time, be schooled and learn from their experience. Togliatti shared this idea, and remembering their common professor at the University of Turin, Arturo Farinelli, he recalled: "Farinelli was right when he said that one must not descend to the people, but rather rise to them".¹⁹ The testimony of a factory worker, who participated in the experience of the Councils, reflects the almost "spiritual" atmosphere and "disciplined enthusiasm" that reigned in the factory:

A proof of the work carried out is found [...] in the numerous and prolonged meetings till late at night [...]. I would like to give some examples of the disciplined spirit of enthusiasm, on the brink of religious spirit I would say, that inspires those who are participating in the new movement; the Commissioners who want to start exerting control in the factory, the workers

¹⁷ ID., *Operai e contadini*, in therein, I, 12, 2nd August 1919, now in ID., *L'Ordine Nuovo*, Op.Cit., pp. 156-61 (159-60).

¹⁸ D'Orsi, A. ed. *Ifucili nelle rotative. «L'Ordine Nuovo», i fascisti, Gramsci e Gobetti. Una conversazione con Andrea Viglono*, *Historia Magistra. Rivista di storia critica*, I, n. 2, pp. 99-107 (102).

¹⁹ Togliatti, P. *La battaglia delle idee*, in «L'Ordine Nuovo», 2, 15 May 1919.

who vote for them, support them and surround them. These are episodes that show the new ways in which the spirit of class struggle manifests itself.²⁰

In the writings of the young journalist Gramsci, one can perceive, aside from Marx's not-at-all sporadic presence, a strong faith in the thaumaturgical virtues of communism, represented in its historical realization by Bolshevism, although imperfect, to be defended at all costs: "Bolshevism is above all else a reaction of the spirit and of humanity, which strives to be reintegrated into essential values, and which no longer wants to be the object of speculation and exchange".²¹ Therefore, one could say that in Gramsci's theoretic-political context before the birth of the PCd'I (Partito Comunista d'Italia - Italian Communist Party), whilst Marx provided instruments to denounce the present, Lenin taught the construction of the "city of the future".

By that time, however, with the successful Revolution in Russia a perspective of an epochal mutation had arisen on the horizon of history: the revolution could be spread like a beneficial germ, if not even exported with weapons, as the Bolshevik Russians seemed to have been devising for some time. Also for this reason, for Gramsci, fascinated by the Bolsheviks like most other socialist leaders and virtually all young members of the Party, the international dimension became an integral part of political reflection. In this regard, he delivered an extremely clear sentence, which seems to draw him distinctly closer to Leon Trotsky: "Communism will only be when it will be international".²²

As is well known, after Lenin's death, the path of socialism was undertaken by one country only, and the international dimension thus started to be interpreted as a supra-national dimension, where the "supra" was the USSR, which was, in turn, the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), which was the ruling party, which was the Prime Secretary: in other words, Joseph Stalin. The affiliated parties only had to obey and protect the country of fulfilled socialism, the guiding party, and its leader. This situation would not change for decades to come; and once it did, it was too late.

4.

Of course, over the postwar years, after the already mentioned "editorial *coup d'état*", and with the transformation of the "socialist culture review" into an organ of the Councils movement, Gramsci's stance rapidly toughened, or, one could even say, "Bolshevized" itself. One must not forget that that was still the era when, as far as Western socialists were concerned, Russia was the country where "a hundred flowers bloomed": proof that there existed no contrast nor contradiction between communism and culture. This represented, in a new form, the return of the young Gramsci's authentic *leit motiv*. After all, it appears to be particularly significant that he paid so much attention to Anatoly Lunacharsky – at that time the Soviet People's Commissar for Enlightenment – ever since

20 Matta, E. in «L'Ordine Nuovo», I, 1920. In SPRIANO, Op.Cit, pp. 226-30 (227 e 228).

21 Gramsci, A. *Valori* in «Avanti!» (Piedmont edition), 13th June 1919. Now in ID., *Scritti dalla libertà*, Op.Cit, pp. 307-308 (307).

22 Gramsci, A. *Lo Stato e il socialismo*, in «L'Ordine Nuovo», 28th June – 5th July 1919; now in ID., *L'Ordine Nuovo*, Op.Cit., pp. 114-20.

his collaboration in the newspaper *Grido del Popolo*. The newspaper had published an article by the Soviet intellectual, where he argued that cultural activity such as “self-education and proletarian creation” should play an equal role compared to the other three typical facets of the working class movement: politics, economics, and cooperation.²³

This remained the peculiar viewpoint of the *L'Ordine Nuovo* even after having adhered to the theory and practice of Workers' Councils: a respect for art, passion for culture, and some sort of omnivorous hunger for anything that could provide teaching. When speaking of respect for art, not only was reference being made to a place for creativity, expression, and research, but also to a form of truth, of the highest and most noble kind. From this point of view, Gramsci and the other *ordinovisti* had to fight long and hard against widespread stereotypes according to which communism and art were incompatible. As previously mentioned, it was the magical era of the Russian *statu nascenti*, when even Marinetti could find interested listeners. At that time, Gramsci was easily able to compose an authentic paean to a communism that glorified art, as opposed to a capitalist society where poetry was “subdued to the [...] laws of supply and demand”, by “merchants greedy for wealth and exploitation”. The latter, “whilst artificially launching literary adventurers, let first-class artists die of starvation and desperation”, committing authentic “crimes against living creators of beauty”. On the contrary, communism was on a different wave-length. Freeing men from their wage-slavery would allow them back into the world they had been excluded from – “the reign of beauty and grace”.²⁴

However, the communist aspiration was directly and immediately related to construction, since the revolution should be built, rather than awaited: in fact, the factory, a physical, economic and organizational space for industrial production, was also at the heart of society. Starting from this vital organ, and through instruments of self-organization, the working class could assemble the center of proletarian counter-power, repudiating the bureaucratic separation between unionists and non-unionists. Internal commissions – who shortly after acquired the form of Italian soviets, i.e. Workers' Councils -, “in the tomorrow would have to become the organs of the proletarian power that would substitute the capitalist in all his functions of management and administration”.²⁵ Clearly, Gramsci already presented a formula here of proletarian dictatorship that led late Marxism to Leninism. Nonetheless, in Marxism, this formula held an eminently democratic meaning (the overthrowing of bourgeois dictatorship, with the difference being that here the great majority of the population – in other words the proletariat – would dominate the meager bourgeois minority). How was Gramsci's version of the dictatorship of the proletariat unique?

²³ See ID., *La cultura nel movimento socialista*, in «Il Grido del Popolo», 1st June 1918. Now in ID., *Il nostro Marx. 1918-1919*, ed. Caprioglio, S. Turin: Einaudi, 1984, p. 77.

²⁴ ID., *Cronache dell'“Ordine Nuovo”*, in «L'Ordine Nuovo», 14th June 1919, now in ID., *L'Ordine Nuovo*, Op. Cit., p. 78-79.

²⁵ ID., *Democrazia operaia*, Op.Cit.

First of all, according to him, proletarian dictatorship was the movement that suppressed the order of capitalist production and created a new order; it abolished private property of the means of production, and established collective property. At the same time, however, proletarian dictatorship would have a productive and organizational meaning: it would allow an escape from the economic crisis of the postwar period, improve the nation's (and nations') economic fabric, and increase production itself: "no society can survive without production, let alone a dictatorship that, acting within conditions of economic decay after five years of war, and months of armed bourgeois terrorism, needs an extremely high level of production".²⁶ However, according to Gramsci, proletarian dictatorship ("which must stop being nothing but a formula") possesses a strong pedagogical tension: there is no improvisation yet socialism and the proletarian State cannot be created from scratch. The "communist practice" of "collective" discussion had to be launched in time for it to create a fabric of intrinsic solidarity, set the foundations for a new proletarian life, and plant the seed of socialist culture.²⁷ Nonetheless, the essential core continued to be a pedagogical work in the cultural realm, which had to help prepare and accompany the revolution and the construction of the proletarian state, and of a new order.

This is the idea behind the renowned motto of the protests of 1968, that "truth is revolutionary". As Gramsci wrote: "Saying the truth, and reaching the truth together, is carrying out the communist and revolutionary action".²⁸ It is easy to see how "«communism», i.e. socialism in real terms, has drifted apart from the practice of truth; nevertheless, it is even more important to highlight that there existed this overt requirement at the origin of Italian communism.

There existed a theory of revolution behind the willpower to create a communist Party: ever since 1919 Gramsci identified an objective need for revolution. "Proletarian revolution is imposed, not proposed".²⁹ This position should be aligned with that expressed in the comments regarding events in Russia, *The Revolution Against Capital*³⁰, published in 1917. In Russia, the war not only plunged the situation into chaos from a socio-economic point of view, it also "served to awaken willpower". Socialism inspired that huge social body constituted by the proletariat, creating a united willpower, a social willpower. The latter allowed the development of conditions needed to achieve full socio-economic maturity.

Gramsci was inspired by Lenin in regards to two key issues: 1) despite the fact that socio-economic structure constitutes the foundation of history, it is men ("men in

²⁶ ID., *I sindacati e la dittatura*, in «L'Ordine Nuovo», 25th October 1919; now in ID., *L'Ordine Nuovo*, Op. Cit., p. 256-62.

²⁷ ID., *Democrazia operaia* cit.

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ ID., *Lo sviluppo della rivoluzione*, in «L'Ordine Nuovo», 13th September 1919; now in ID., *L'Ordine Nuovo*, op. cit., pp. 203-207.

³⁰ ID., *La rivoluzione contro il Capitale*, in «Avanti!», 24th December 1917; now in ID., *La città futura (1917-1918)*, ed. Caprioglio, S. Turin: Einaudi, 1982, pp. 513-17 and in ID., *Scritti dalla libertà*, Op.Cit., pp. 244-47.

flesh and blood”: an extremely functional expression used by both Marx and Gramsci) who concretely make history; 2) Proletarian dictatorship is necessary and does not consist in the abolition of the State, but in the substitution of the (bourgeois) State with another (the proletarian one), built upon the Soviets (= Councils).

Another issue is the following: even though Gramsci was erroneously setting the question, perhaps he was not (completely) wrong in perceiving that the postwar situation implied a radical change in socio-political conditions. Nothing would ever be the same, the liberal State had fallen behind and the war had caused too much of an overall and profound disruption for the general state of things to endure: a clash of opposing imperialisms, financial and industrial concentrations and impoverishment of economic resources. Above all, social collision was too strong to be allowed to continue with liberal (pseudo) democracy: from it would sprout either the conquest of power on the part of the working class, or its harsh defeat. According to Gramsci, the conquest of power represents the foundation of the economic rebirth of the collective, and it implies “stopping the process of dissolution of the civil world, and setting the grounds for a new order where useful activities could be restarted, as well as a new, energetic, rapid and vital impetus towards higher forms of production and cohabitation”.³¹

In this sense, the proletariat effectively represented a “general class”: a concept that Gramsci essentially defined at the national level. Doing the revolution, and creating a party that would establish a proletarian dictatorship (the republic of Councils, i.e. a self-managed democracy), represented for the working class the fulfillment of a national duty. From this also stemmed the issue of the relation between democracy and socialism. There was no unambiguous, coherent position; there were plenty of changes of opinion and doubts: nonetheless, this relation stood at the very core of the building of the revolutionary process. Without the objective conditions there could be no revolution; there could be no revolution without the subjective preparation of those who had to do it; and there could be no socialism without a higher form of democracy.

5.

During the first elections of the postwar years (November 1919), the Italian Socialist Party (*Partito Socialista Italiano* – PSI) was widely successful; according to Gramsci, this reflected the will of the masses: “a socialist government [that] would use in their favor the State’s administrative, legal, military, and procurement apparatus”. Nevertheless, given what would be in the powers of socialist members of parliament, the underlying issue was a different one, which could only be resolved with and within the masses.

The masses must understand that the resolution of the terrible problems of our times will not be possible so long as the State will be based on private property and national-bureaucratic property, so long as industrial and agricultural production will be based on the individual and competitive initiative of capitalists and large landowners./ They must understand that a

³¹ ID., *Lo sviluppo della rivoluzione*, Op. Cit.

radical solution must be found within the masses themselves, organized appropriately so as to constitute an apparatus of social power, the apparatus of the proletarian and peasant State, the producers' State. However, it cannot be an abstract, passive conviction. The Party must show them proactive work, reconstructive work: the Party must give the impetus for proletarian and peasant Councils to become a reality, and not remain dead words of a congress resolution.³²

In fact, the decisive phase of the development of Workers' Councils began in the autumn of 1919: after the constitution of the first Fiat Councils, the idea started to visibly transform (certainly thanks the influence of Rosa Luxemburg and Daniel De Leon on Gramsci) into a movement, which not only became fully recognized within the PSI, but also started to become known at the national and international level: the previous month, Gramsci had met the English communist Sylvia Pankhurst in Turin (Togliatti would later translate a series of *Letters from England* regarding the *L'Ordine Nuovo*), and the French revolutionary syndicalist Georges Sorel had expressed his fondest appreciation of the newspaper. This appraisal, in fact, brought upon the Turin group suspicions of anarchic-trade unionism, and of generally not aligning with Party ideals. This was demonstrated at the Bologna Congress in October of that year, and during the November elections, when, among the wide-spread socialist success, none of the *ordinovisti* were elected; as a matter of fact, not one of them was even nominated³³. Nonetheless, Gramsci took it upon himself to clarify the *ordinovisti*'s position regarding said accusations:

The trade unionist tendencies of the *L'Ordine Nuovo* are nothing but a myth: we only bear the fault of believing that the communist revolution can only be carried out by the masses, and not by a party secretary, nor a president of the republic by force of decrees: apparently this opinion is also shared by Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg, and Lenin, hence, according to Treves and Turati, they are all anarchic trade unionists.³⁴

Even during his reflections in prison, he felt the need to explain in which direction the movement's "spontaneity" and "voluntarism" had been going:

This direction was not "abstract", it did not consist in the systematic repetition of scientific or theoretical formulas: it did not confuse politics or real action with theoretical disquisition; it applied to real men, formed within given historical dynamics, with definite sentiments, ways of living, fragments of conceptions of the world, etc., which resulted in the "spontaneous"

³² ID., *La settimana politica*, in «L'Ordine Nuovo», I, 27, 22nd November 1919, now therein pp. 328-30 (329-30) and in ID., *La nostra città futura. Scritti torinesi (1911-1922)*, edited by A. D'Orsi, Carocci, Roma 2004, pp. 188-90.

³³ The "Soviet" of 3 October 1920, reporting on the discussion which took place at the II Congress of the International Communist (July-August, Moscow-St. Petersburg), underlined Serrati's and Graziadei's positions, who believe the Turin group to be undisciplined. Bombacci thought that it would be dangerous to "value the trade unionist tendencies of the *L'Ordine Nuovo*", Op. Cit. in SPRIANO, «*L'Ordine Nuovo*» e *i consigli di fabbrica* cit., p. 115.

³⁴ A. GRAMSCI, [not confirmed], «Cronache dell'Ordine Nuovo», II, 9, 9th October 1920, now in ID., *L'Ordine Nuovo*, Op.Cit., pp. 703-704.

combinations of a given environment of material production, and the “casual” agglomeration within it of diverse social elements. This element of “spontaneity” was neither neglected nor despised: it was *educated*, directed, purified from all that might pollute it, to make it more homogeneous with modern theory, but in a historically efficient, alive manner. The very leaders were talking of “spontaneity” of the movement; it was right that it was talked about: this statement represented a stimulating and energetic element of profound unification, and was above all else the denial that it was something arbitrary, adventurous, unnatural [and not historically necessary]. It gave the masses a «theoretical» conscience, to create historical and institutional values, and found States.³⁵

1920 turned out to be a decisive year for the Councils, and consequently for Antonio Gramsci’s notoriety: at the PSI Congress of October 1919 in Bologna he was a semi-anonymous local delegate, whilst during the course of the following year he managed to impose himself as a recognized leader at the national level. Gramsci was strongly convinced that 1920 was a year to further develop the process started in 1919, a year which he referred to as the year “that has seen the dawn of the history of the human kind freed from classes and intestinal wars”.³⁶ Based on events taking place in Italy and internationally, as well as on ideas he gathered from reading, Gramsci unraveled an ever richer line of thought, which gradually became more precise and dissimilar to that of the other prominent editor of *L’Ordine Nuovo*, Angelo Tasca. The latter, despite his remarkable effort to promote unity within the party and trade unions, “tended, in substance, towards diminishing the novelty and revolutionary charge of Workers’ Councils”.³⁷ From this point of view, and at the more general political level, Tasca’s political line, within a general trend of moderation, progressively detached from that of the other three founders of the newspaper, who, despite their differences, all held a distinctly more revolutionary stand-point. From this, Gramsci’s relative isolation resulted, when, in 1920, the time came to define a line for the autumn administrative elections: split with Tasca, he did not identify with Bordiga’s abstentionism either. The latter, after the II Congress of the International Communist, had become a recognized national leader, with followers in the Turin section of the PSI. Nonetheless, Gramsci was perhaps trying to distance himself even more from Togliatti’s and Terracini’s election craze. Subsequently, the Group for communist education that he established was adhered to by only a handful of comrades and in the August elections for Secretary in the Turin Section, Togliatti was elected, instead of Gramsci.

6.

It was perhaps also to overcome this isolation that Gramsci convinced his brother Gennaro to come to Turin, and assigned him the role of administrator of the newspaper;

³⁵ ID., *Quaderni del carcere*, Critical Edition of the Istituto Gramsci, ed. Gerratana, V. therein, 1975, 4 vol. The citation is from Q. 3 (1939), p. 330.

³⁶ ID., *L’anno rivoluzionario*, in «Avanti!» (Piedmont edition), 1st January 1920, now in ID., *L’Ordine Nuovo*, Op.Cit, pp. 373-75 (375).

³⁷ SPRIANO, «*L’Ordine Nuovo*» e i Consigli di fabbrica. Op.Cit, p. 89

the latter's originality risked contributing to the exclusion from the Party of these "young men", who were "true self-taught revolutionaries".³⁸ Nonetheless, one of their shortcomings was a "Turin-centrism", in that they used the city's social and political reality as a national paradigm (which is in fact a rather relevant mistake, since the overall level of political conscience of the great majority of Italian popular masses was far from the one achieved in this city.)³⁹ Still, the *ordinovistic* theoretical originality was largely identified in the determination of an Italian way applied to the theory and practice of Workers' Councils. According to Gramsci, the Turin working class, "vanguard of the Italian proletariat" (as he repeatedly observed, with an exaggerated optimism), had the task of learning to exercise control of production, subtracting it from capitalists, thus increasing the industrial production capacity, and eliminating profit and its beneficiaries. The Council had to substitute capitalist property not only at the symbolic and political level, but also at a concrete and managerial level. "Proletarian control" was supposed to be proof of, on the one hand, the working class' ability to take a leading role in the management of production, whilst rationalizing and increasing it; and on the other hand, its more general aptitude to be the ruling class. Once again the idea appeared, which had already emerged in June 1919, that the factory should be at the heart of the state, and that the citizen-producer should have a central role in the emancipation from wage-slavery, and be the founding element for the construction of a new society.

In this sense, the foremost strength of the *ordinovisti* was being within the working class, and knowing how to hear its voice and interpret its needs; Gramsci personally made an example of himself in this regard. If he did indeed overestimate the possibilities of a revolution in Italy, also due to the deformed perspective he derived from his Turin-centric view, it is equally true that he was cognizant of the dangers faced by the movement, always aware of the huge difficulties the proletariat was facing, and the immensity of the effort necessary to proceed.

Bourgeois society is anything but simple; it is a complex set of organisms that, whilst operating in an apparently autonomous manner, conspire towards a common goal. Neither will a communal society be simple. The reflection on the problem of the Councils clarifies all the more the gravity of the problems regarding reconstruction, and how there exists no single formula for their solution. [...] Building a communal society means, first and foremost, trying to use class struggle to create organisms able to develop a system for all humanity.⁴⁰

It was, thus, necessary to overcome the purely trade-unionist vision, founded on the pursuit of objectives that were at the same time limited and immediate, and assume a universalistic point of view. Turin represented an exceptional position for the development and acceleration of the proletarian movement. Socialism and proletarian

³⁸ Lombardo Rdice, LO; Carbone, G. *Vita di Antonio Gramsci*. Roma: Edizioni di Cultura Sociale, 1952, p. 88.

³⁹ See d'Orsi, A. *Introduzione to A. Gramsci, Scritti dalla libertà*, Op.Cit..

⁴⁰ Gramsci, A. *L'esempio della Russia*, in «L'Ordine Nuovo», I, 33, 10th January 1920, now in ID., *L'Ordine Nuovo*, Op. Cit., pp. 381-85 (381).

dictatorship were, above all else, needed to save the “magnificent apparatus of industrial production, intellectual production and propulsion of civil life” which was this city; Turin, in particular, represented a “decisive historical force” of the national State, and “forge of the Italian capitalist revolution”, despite not being the capitalist city par excellence, like Milan (“real capital of the bourgeois dictatorship”). Turin, on the other hand, “is the industrial city par excellence, the proletarian city par excellence. The Turin working class is compact, disciplined, distinguished as only in a few other cities around the world. Turin is like one single factory: its working population is of one kind, and is strongly unified by industrial production”.⁴¹

Faith in the Turin proletariat, and in its role of guidance for the communist revolution in Italy, immediately translated for Gramsci into work towards the conquering of factories, to establish a potentially substitutive power to capitalist command. This is what Workers’ Councils were for, and in alliance with those created in rural areas; they would be an instrument for the pedagogical and cultural transformation of the subjects of the revolution (the proletariat). Moreover, it would be a tool for the taking over of the economic system, recovering it from the state of decay the war had plunged it into, developing it, redeeming it from capitalist relations, and directing it towards the establishment of communism, with a constant, “strenuous effort towards productivity”. What was, in Gramsci’s idea the role of trade unions? “Obviously trade unions also adopt a revolutionary character if, and only if, their action stops being addressed towards immediate objectives, and starts working towards a final goal which goes past struggle between professions, and if this goal is explicitly and consciously expressed”.⁴²

The real opportunities of the Turin proletariat, its relations with the trade unions and political structures of Italian socialism, and the role of Workers’ Councils, faced a revealing moment during the battle of the spring of 1920, also known as the “strike of the clock-hands”. A month-long struggle started, which included a 10-day general strike throughout the whole of Piedmont, involving half a million industrial and agricultural workers. The strike, however, ended due to a harsh defeat of the Councils movement, ratified on April 24 with the signing of an agreement elaborated by the prefect.⁴³ Nevertheless, this event represented a great proof of the maturity of Turin working class. An atmosphere of enthusiasm and hope reigned in the city. Even those who did not work in factories were directly involved: there was a need to “maintain a connection between one factory and the next, among the different organizations, and between the struggling workers and the families”. In the words of the “professional revolutionary” and party militant Teresa Noce: “Those of us who were not occupying, were always among the

⁴¹ ID., *La settimana politica*, Op.Cit., in therein, pp. 386-90 (387).

⁴² ID., *L’esempio della Russia*, Op.Cit., therein, pp. 381-85 (381-82).

⁴³ For a reconstruction of events, see SPRIANO, «*L’Ordine Nuovo*» e i Consigli di fabbrica cit., p. 101. The agreement provided for a rise in salary of 4 Liras per day for metallurgists, and an increase in salary of up to 20% for other workers. Moreover, the government promised to as soon as possible present to the parliament a law draft for the «workers’ control of the industry». Finally, it was guaranteed that there would be no retaliation against the workers that occupied the factories. See Noce, N. *Rivoluzionaria professionale. La storia del P.C.I. nella vita appassionata di una donna*. Milan: Bompiani, 1974, p. 41.

workers that directed the struggle”.⁴⁴ The workers saw occupations as a more revolutionary form of struggle than the general strike: “do as the Russians” became their motto; in this perspective, defense, also armed, was organized. One should not forget that “even though there were hundreds of millions of Liras in the plants’ safes, the workers paid for all expenses with their personal money, funds from some trade unions, and class solidarity”.⁴⁵

7.

How did Gramsci feel about this defeat? His analysis was clear and bitter. Nonetheless, his resolution and strength of will did not fade. And he was the first to incite the proletariat, highlight its heroism, and theorize regarding its invincible strength.

During the general strike, capitalism and State power unsheathed all their weapons. The bourgeois State provided Turin industrialists with fifty-thousand men under arms, with armored cars, flamethrowers, light batteries; for ten days the city was at the mercy of royal guards, the working class seemed to have been annihilated, to have disappeared into darkness. Industrialists, having raised ten million Liras, flooded the city with posters and leaflets, hired journalists and ‘*barabbas*’, provocateurs and strikebreakers, published a newspaper that used the same typographical style as the strike bulletin, diffused scaremonger news, false news, started associations, leagues, trade unions, political parties, from every corner of the city; [...]; the only thing that the working class had to oppose this unleashing of capitalist forces was nothing more than its energy, resistance, and sacrifice. Metallurgic workers lasted one month, without salary: many of them suffered hunger, had to pawn their belongings at the Mount of Piety; the rest of the working population also suffered hardship, misery, desolation [...]. The strike ended with a defeat; the idea that had brought the fighters forwards was scorned even by some of the working class representatives; the energy and the faith of the leaders of the general strike was labeled as illusion, naivety, and a mistake; once back in the factories, the proletariat had to take a step back due to the terrible pressure enforced upon them by the owner-class and the power of the State: a discouragement, a bending of consciences and willpower, the undoing of class sentiments and energy could

44 Noce, N. *Rivoluzionaria professionale*, Op.Cit., p. 40.

45 *Ibid.* Regarding this experience see also the testimony by Viglono, in D’Orsi, *I fucili nelle rotative*, Op.Cit., pp. 104-105: “The workers who occupied the factories were convinced they had them, so they took care of production. It was a merit to demonstrate that during the occupation of the factories there was still production: the workers produced [...]. Naturally production was very difficult because it was complicated: the stocking of raw materials was impossible, and the supply, despite being excellent, was also very difficult. On the other hand, the “Saturday pay” that Luigi Einaudi counted on was not a big problem: he used to say ‘we’ll see them on Saturday’. However, despite there being no pay on Saturdays because there were no buyers who paid [...], the workers kept on working and producing. If the reformist trade union movement had not reached an agreement, led by the national FIOM and the Confederacy of Work..., if they hadn’t reached a compromise, the workers could have resisted for who knows how long...”.

be justified, the prevailing of bitterness could be natural, a step back of the revolutionary army could be predicted.⁴⁶

Yet, even after this terrible experience, hope was not to be lost; Gramsci adopted Romain Rolland's motto, "pessimism of intelligence, optimism of willpower", and transformed it into the insignia of political action, but also of existence: "Our pessimism may have increased, but our willpower has not decreased".⁴⁷ The great Mayday protest following the strike of the clock-hands, which ended with a terrible police repression that did not manage to wear down the people's fighting spirit, represented for him a proof that the Turin proletariat, despite having been defeated, had not been won. And it was ready to fight.

[...] the hungry, the miserable, the flogged to blood by the capitalist whip, the scorned by their own unaware or infamous struggle comrades (?), have not lost faith in the future of the working class, have not lost faith in the communist revolution; the whole of Turin's proletariat flooded the streets and squares to demonstrate its belief in the revolution, to unleash against the millions and billions of wealth of the capitalist class the human strengths of the working class, the hundreds of thousands of hearts, arms, and brains of the working class, to contrast the safes with the iron battalions of militants of the proletarian revolution.⁴⁸

The "weekly review of socialist culture", the *L'Ordine Nuovo*, had by this point become a declared instrument for the working-class revolutionary struggle, and was recognized by Lenin as "fully respondent to the fundamental principles of the II Comintern".⁴⁹ When commenting on the first anniversary of the newspaper ("a year of research, experience, taste, networking; a year of uncertainties, also, errors, also, disillusionments, also"), its author summarized the ideology of the *ordinovisti* as follows:

[...] the constitution of the proletarian State must be founded on the factory, on the workers' organization of the factory, in whose hands industrial power, now held by the private owner, must be deposited [...]. Having supported with honesty and ardor the theoretical thesis and dependent practices of this line of thought, the *L'Ordine Nuovo* has won the sympathy of many among the vanguard of the industrial and agricultural working classes in Italy, and a lot of spite and hatred on the part of the enemies of the working class.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Gramsci, A. *La forza della Rivoluzione*, in «L'Ordine Nuovo», I, 2, 8th May 1920, now in ID., *L'Ordine Nuovo*, Op.Cit., pp. 518-20 (518-19); and in ID., *Scritti dalla libertà*, Op.Cit., pp. 363-65.

⁴⁷ Gramsci, A. *Funzionarismo*, in «L'Ordine Nuovo», 4th March 1921, now in ID., *Socialismo e fascismo*. Turin: , Einaudi, 1966, pp. 90-91.

⁴⁸ ID., *La forza della Rivoluzione*, Op.Cit.

⁴⁹ Cfr. *Tesi sui compiti fondamentali del II Congresso dell'I.C.*, point 17, in LENIN, V.I. *Sul movimento operaio italiano*, Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1962, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Gramsci, A. *Cronache dell'"Ordine Nuovo"*, now in ID., *L'Ordine Nuovo*, Op.Cit., pp. 500-501.

During the occupation of the factories, a real overturning of the existing order took place; however, it was not merely a form of protest, a refusal of that order; it was, rather, precisely an attempt to establish a “new order”.

Working class activity, initiatives in production, internal order, military defense on the part of the working class! The social hierarchy has been broken, historical values inverted; the “working” class, the “instrumental” class has become the “ruling” class, it has taken the lead, found representatives within itself, men that can be invested with government power, men that can assume all functions of an elementary and mechanical aggregate to form an organic structure, a living creature. [...] Today, with the proletarian occupation, the factory’s despotic power has been broken [...]. Every factory is an illegal State, a proletarian republic living day by day, awaiting the evolving of events.⁵¹

8.

Events might have not been favorable, both due to a lack of support of the Councils movement by the Party and trade unions, and to the internal divisions of the movement itself, and the delayed response of the leaders to the emergencies of the historical situation.⁵² Years later, this judgment would still not change. A letter by Gramsci to Alfonso Leonetti, dated 28th of January 1924, reads as follows:

[...] in 1919-20, we made very serious mistakes [...]. For fear of being labelled as status seekers and careerists, we did not establish a fraction and try to organize it in the whole of Italy. We did not want to give the Turin Workers’ Councils an autonomous executive center, which could have exercised a great amount of influence all over the country, for fear of a division among trade unions and of being prematurely expelled from the PSI.⁵³

Fruitful work, discipline, rigorous dedication, seriousness in resolutions, attention to real necessities and problems, and not to mere ideological issues: the Gramsci of autumn 1920 was not, in essence, so different from the one that had arrived to the city nine year earlier, despite the obvious process of intellectual, political and human growth. Now, the progressive, inevitable hardening of his political position, in an anti-reformist and filo-Bolshevik sense, would shortly after lead him from the communist Fraction, to the Communist Party of Italy (PCd’I).

The failure of the “Italian revolution”, following the occupation of the factories, did not induce Gramsci to withdraw in the heat of the moment; the battle continued, and,

⁵¹ ID., *Domenica rossa*, in “Avanti!”, 5th September 1920, now in ID., *L’Ordine Nuovo*, Op.Cit., pp. 668-72 (668-69) and in ID., *Scritti dalla libertà*, Op.Cit., pp. 382-84.

⁵² It cannot be forgotten, for the sake of argument, that “L’Avanti!” refused to print in Milan the manifesto of the Turin section of the party, which invoked the solidarity of all workers. The newspaper harshly commented on the strike, judging it as a “painful experiment”, in Spriano, P. *L’Ordine Nuovo e i Consigli*, Op.Cit., p. 99.

⁵³ See the letter of 28 January 1924, in Togliatti, P. *La formazione del gruppo dirigente del Partito comunista italiano nel 1923-1924*. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1962, pp. 461-62.

before transferring it to the insignias of the PCd'I, in January 1921, he still led it from the PSI, within the group of young people which had constituted itself as "communist Fraction". The priority was to defend the communist idea and principle from the daily ideological attacks on the part of the press, and turn those attacks around towards the bourgeoisie, which by then appeared to be in complete moral, and social, decay. The situation left behind by the war was "atrocious", and, addressing his political rivals, Gramsci added:

it is the landscape of your "civilization", collapsed like a building with no human inhabitants, it is the landscape of your institutions, reduced to mere form with no driving spirit; it is your imperialistic war that mowed down five-hundred-thousand youths, the flower of productive forces, and reduced another half a million energies to an army of beggars and wretches; it is your inability to give a bloody world back its peace; it is the unconstrained luxury and thirst of pleasures that you have triggered among your irresponsible ranks; it is the barbarity, slackness in work, the elementary brutal instinct that you have filthily prompted because of your hunger for riches and power: this landscape is that of your decomposition as a class of incompetents and failures, overcome by history.⁵⁴

In the face of such a landscape of debris, Gramsci continued to contrast, with strength but without denying the difficulties of such a huge task, revolutionary willpower: communism as the only alternative to the barbarities and catastrophe of humanity. For such a task, recalling Marx was fundamental, whilst highlighting the importance of "re-laborating, within the master's conceptions, present reality".

Despite developing his political position in an ever more Leninist sense, Gramsci continued to use different resources, directly and indirectly, from Sorel to Rosa Luxemburg, with a strong characterization of his own socialism, which could in some way be defined as "national" and "Turin-based" at the same time; nevertheless, he always remained lucidly antinationalist and intensely internationalist. His journalist work transformed more and more into political action, whilst the criticism of the reformists' "wait and see policy" and of the verbal extremism of inflexible Party members, lethally brought Gramsci and his comrades of the communist Fraction to separation from the mother organization. During the two years following the end of the war he focalized onto a new political conception; now it was time to transform it into action. The problem he faced was the appropriation, in its original terms, of the soviet revolutionary experience, which forced him to "stand up to a socialist tradition"⁵⁵. Gramsci's very work, just as Bordiga's and the others – especially between Turin, Naples and Milan – who would bring the PCd'I to life, thus placed itself inside the crisis of the Italian socialist movement; however, "Gramsci constituted the most advanced and complex part of this crisis. In the

54 Gramsci, A. *La Compagnia di Gesù*, in «Avanti!» 9 oct. 1920, now in ID., *L'Ordine Nuovo*, Op.Cit., pp. 705-707 and in ID., *Scritti dalla libertà*, Op.Cit., pp. 390-93.

55 de Felice, F. *Serrati, Bordiga, Gramsci e il problema della rivoluzione in Italia 1919-1920*. Bari: De Donato, 1971, p. 391.

permanent acquisition of new strategic and tactical terms in which to set out the class struggle".⁵⁶

9.

In reality, after the occupation of the factories, and up until his death, Gramsci considered the problem of the revolution in Italy (and in Europe) both in terms of a reflection on defeat (the pessimism of reason), and in those of a resetting of a possible counter-charge (the optimism of willpower). Even though with time the first prevailed, together they represented a critical meditation on the reasons behind a failed revolution. Hence, Gramsci immersed himself into the fervent debate, which had arisen both in Turin and elsewhere, regarding the imminent Congress of the Socialist Party. At the end of the month, after having been announced in a Manifesto published in October in Milan, the communist Fraction officially came to being in Imola; in it, however, Bordiga's position strongly prevailed, which, on the contrary to Gramsci's encouragement of an action of renovation from within, argued for the immediate rupture from the mother organization. Bordiga prevailed, also thanks to the backing of Soviet circles and Lenin himself. In short, Gramsci was no protagonist of the separation of Livorno, nor of the founding of the Communist Party; he accepted this, after all, with no major enthusiasm. Nonetheless, he later stuck by the defense of its reasons and necessities, quite like Marx had done with the Communes.

Bordiga was the real author of the separation, and at the Congress in Livorno Gramsci did not even speak: he was, however, elected representative of the Turin group, together with Terracini, within the central Committee of the new Party, finally called "Communist". The Turin group, since January 1, 1921, in other words since before the founding of the PCd'I, had already established a daily newspaper, which maintained the title and premises of the *L'Ordine Nuovo*, on Arcivescovado St. in Turin, but in fact pursued the well-tested experience of the Piedmont edition of the *Avanti!*. The circulation also remained more or less the same (30-40,000 copies) and the editor-in-chief, Gramsci, became its director. Within this new newspaper, a small community of editors, typographer, professionals, and readers was brought together. Yet, it was not a party newspaper in the strictest sense; in fact, Piero Gobetti was hired to be in charge of the theatre page and to collaborate in the literary section: this had previously been taken care of by Gramsci himself, who decisively influenced the professional preparedness of this young man. Unforgettable pages by the director of the *L'Ordine Nuovo* read as follows:

Through his work in the newspaper, he has been put into contact with a living world that he had previously only known through formulas in books. His most outstanding characteristics were his intellectual loyalty and the complete absence of any form of petty vanity or meanness: thus, he could not help but

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

convince himself that a whole series of ways of looking at, and thinking about, the proletariat were false and unfair.⁵⁷

10.

Ever since the editorial of the first issue of the newspaper, not signed but without a doubt written by Gramsci, one could perceive a particular tension between being an eminent member of the new party – a section of the Comintern and thus having a series of obligations -, and the originality of a line which, before it was political, was intellectual and human. The formula of the “proletarian State”, so often evoked, was now being more analytically explained. Within the centrality and almost-sacredness of the idea of the state, concepts and cultural auras that in Gramsci were already present since his first years in Turin resurfaced: discipline and hierarchy, words used in a very different way to that developed and repeated in those same years by Alfredo Rocco or Benito Mussolini (“*Gerarchia*” - hierarchy – was the theoretical newspaper founded by the Duce exactly one year later, in January 1922); men in flesh and blood, together with the overcoming of disorganic individuality: the young humanism is not left behind, but it is at the same time tempered by an attention to the reasons of the state, which certainly should not be confused with the “National Interest”. There was no “firm domination of the people”, according to Botero’s famous definition of the state nor “news of half attempts to buy it, keep it, confirm it” for the “National Interest”. Here, there was the opposite, the state of the workers, which is also – as Gramsci clarifies – the state of peasants and of all the other states of populations who recognized the need to break the bourgeois machine and substitute it with a new one, which would keep in mind the fact that the great majority of the population was proletarian or semi-proletarian. In the Comintern, Gramsci saw the intent to create a global proletarian state, starting from the Russian core. Also from this arises his harsh critique of the Italian socialist leaders’ policies, who were unable to understand events and guide the masses within and ahead of them. The PSI was not able to “organize the political life of the Italian people”, nor provide it with a sense of direction or objective. This is mainly due to the fact that the party did not possess its own notion of the state, and operated politically accordingly. The new state hierarchy needed to have the working class at the top, and the socialist party (or the communist party, from then on: even though the PCd’I had not yet formally been born) had to be its political representation. Those who tried to represent all (as Italian socialists do) ended up not representing anyone. Nonetheless, to this canonical position of Leninist revolutionary vanguard (in the shoes of the urban proletariat), Gramsci added a desire and a need for institutional functioning, seriousness of people, importance of work, and honesty in behavior.

Whilst Gramsci’s popularity in the city grew, within the new party he maintained rather isolated positions; he did not share Bordiga’s line, extremist to the point of sectarianism, but did not mean to attack it, in particular due to his full awareness of the dramatic moment the working class movement and the proletariat were going through,

⁵⁷ Gramsci, A. *La costruzione del Partito Comunista. 1923-1926*. Turin: Einaudi, 1971, p. 157.

suffering the extremely violent and systematic aggression by fascist groups. In the political elections of 1921, which constituted a great success for the new party – even within an overall situation of retreat on the part of antifascist forces – Francesco Misiano and Pietro Rabezzana were elected members of parliament, but not Gramsci. This was not at all surprising; an acute observant of the Comintern efficiently described the situation: “Gramsci, a lot more profound than other comrades, analyzes the situation fairly. He acutely understands the Russian revolution. Yet, on the outside, he cannot influence the masses. First of all, he is no public speaker; secondly, he is young, short and hunchbacked, which has a deep meaning for listeners”.⁵⁸ After all, by this point Gramsci’s physical and psychological conditions had once again worsened, and family problems had arisen to create new sources of worry. His health and family problems, together with his dissatisfaction with the prevalence of Bordiga’s line within the Party, heightened his sensitivity. Reliable witnesses, such as Alfonso Leonetti, later spoke of his nervousness, some degree of irritability, and his violent scolding of the editors, demanding the uttermost seriousness, rigor, and dedication. We must demonstrate to the owners – he repeated – that we are capable, what the working class and its newspaper are capable of. If we do not know how to manage a newspaper, he asked, how do we mean to be capable of managing a state?

As a result of the experience of the Workers’ Councils and of the *L’Ordine Nuovo*, despite the failed attempt to reach immediate objectives, the need to break from the Socialist Party arose clearly: Livorno’s turning point took place precisely in that “warm autumn” under the *Mole*. Many years later, Palmiro Togliatti confirmed:

At the end of 1921, the majority of the proletarian movement of Turin became communist, and this fundamental acquisition was never lost. [...] Turin’s proletariat, in the most industrialized city in Italy, always resumed its leading role in decisive turning points. [...]. For this reason, when remembering the founding of our party, it is necessary to recognize its roots in that string movement which brought to the constitution of Workers’ Councils. The latter were not a creation of Gramsci’s intellect, but rather an organization arisen from the working class itself; likewise, the separation from the socialist party was not imposed, but rather spontaneous, a separation which was rooted in real facts and in the conscience of the Turin proletariat.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ See Degott, cit. in Fiori, G. Op.Cit., p. 175.

⁵⁹ Togliatti, P. *Discorsi di Torino*, ed. Gianotti, R. Preface by Pecchioli, U. Turin: Gruppo editoriale piemontese, 1974, p. 406.

