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The State: A Biography. Gramsci and the Monstrous State

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The State: A Biography. Gramsci and the Monstrous State

Description

The following article on Antonio Gramsci and the theory of the State is part of a book-length project called 'The State - a biography.' It comprises a careful reading of Gramsci's writing on the State, State theory and working class strategy.

The book traces the biography of an idea - the idea that the State saves capitalism from itself, and is an essential part of the sustaining mechanism associated with capitalism, which supports the social formation in the face of the inevitable crises of capitalist over-accumulation, ruthless competition and social inequality.

For quite a long time, this kind of theorizing held centre stage among the high priests of political theory. It was the biggest game in town. It was rumoured that Foucault's students and Poulantzas's students fought pitched battles in the halls of the French Academy, and that the Chilean Generals, as they overthrew democratically-elected Marxist Salvador Allende's government in Chile burnt Poulantzas's books on television to show the people who the enemy really was. It was heady stuff. It was the kind of theorizing that the self-styled 'most sophisticated students' talked about, read and pretended to comprehend. Thousands attended conferences about it. Many more read the books, tried to understand them and apply them to their own political situations, and hoped for a better world. Whether all this theorizing and debating contributed to public welfare and progressive politics is an issue that will garner some attention as the book progresses. In one way, then, this is also the biography of a generation of leftist thinkers during the period from about 1960 to the present day.

This idea starts with Antonio Gramsci. Later chapters review the work of Nicos Poulantzas, Stuart Hall and the Regulation School. And I continue with the rise of 'New Times,' a set of Eurocommunist ideas that influenced Tony Blair and those around him. The conclusion reviews fresh initiatives in this field as a new generation seeks to understand the importance of the State.

I hope the reader will find value in the book for the two reasons of clarity and significance. I hope, through biography, that the book offers up a readable and approachable account of state theorizing that respects the sophistication of the magnificent writing on this topic. My second hope is that the reader will also become aware of how extraordinarily important it is to understand this reasoning if we are to come to grips with our present reality, and the State's role in securing the future.

Disciplines

Sociology

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THE STATE

A Biography



Christopher Wilkes

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The State

A Biography

Chapter One, the Introduction, is omitted.

2. The Monstrous State

1. Antonio Gramsci

In 1926, Antonio Gramsci, already a member of the Italian parliament, found himself under arrest in the aftermath of an attempt on Benito Mussolini's life. As a result, and as a prominent figure in the Communist Party, and indeed one of its leaders from the early days of its foundation in 1921, he was imprisoned. Famously, the prosecutor at his trial commented that 'For twenty years we must stop this brain from functioning'.¹ The prosecutor was to be profoundly disappointed. It is a rare historical moment when the power of intellectual work is fully acknowledged as a fundamental threat by the established authorities. While Gramsci wrote important works before he entered prison, his most famous and significant writing about the State took place under conditions of extreme privation and increasingly poor health. Indeed, he died in 1937, shortly after leaving prison.

Making sense of Gramsci's writings is more complicated than usual. For one thing, he was writing from incarceration under the watchful eye of his guards. Thus he routinely wrote in code :

Names of well-known Marxists and Communists are almost always given in the Quaderni (notebooks) in the form of a substitute or a circumlocution. Thus Marx is referred to as "the founder of the philosophy of praxis", Lenin as "Ilich" or "Vilich" [V. Ilich], Trotsky as "Leon Davidovitch" or "Bronstein" and so on. Similarly, certain identifiable concepts of Marxism Leninism such as the class struggle or the dictatorship of the proletariat are usually masked under innocuous sounding titles.²

As well, the chaotic and incomplete nature of Gramsci's original manuscripts, fragments and notes is well documented by his translators and editors. Gramsci frequently commented that his writing was partial, merely a preface to the finished article which never actually appeared, and that an intellectual biography outlining the steps he had taken to develop these theories would therefore be impossible to write³ :

... in a note in one of the Quaderni entitled "Questions of Method" he offers a warning, ostensibly about Marx but equally if not more applicable to himself, against confusing unfinished or unpublished work with works published and approved by an author during his lifetime. In the same note he also refers to the importance and to the inherent difficulties of reconstructing the "intellectual biography" of an author. To perform such a task, in relation to the Prison Notebooks, would be an immensely valuable but also intricate labour.

Gramsci suffered from ill health all his life. His period in prison exacerbated these problems, and it was only in 1933, when he was finally transferred to the prison clinic, that he began to systematise his writings, and allow others to see more clearly what he was

¹ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, ISBN 0-85315-280-2, p.lxxxix.

² Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections From The Prison Notebooks*, (Kindle Locations 139-142). Kindle Edition.

³ Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections From The Prison Notebooks*, (Kindle Locations 93-98). Kindle Edition.

writing. But as his editors comment,⁴ the notes themselves are fragmentary, collected in 33 notebooks, and erratically constructed. Thus it is not just the incomplete nature of the writing – their provisional status - that poses problems, but the disarray that later commentators faced when seeking to place a logic round Gramsci's written ideas. Gramsci speaks of needing an adversary to debate with in order to give his arguments substance :

(I)n (a) letter to (his sister in law) Tatiana (15 December 1930: LO. pp. 389-92) he writes: “thinking ‘disinterestedly’ or study for its own sake are difficult for me ... I do not like throwing stones in the dark ; I like to have a concrete interlocutor or adversary”, and he speaks of the “polemical nature” of his entire intellectual formation.⁵

Collectively these challenges put paid decisively to any question that the ‘final intellectual solution’ or some fundamental truth about the state is to be found in these writings. Instead, we discover highly original and thought-provoking analysis about the rise of the first fascist state, which, by the time of Gramsci's imprisonment, had been in power for four years. These arguments are contingent, provisional, and written, as it were, in the heat of battle as he struggled to survive in a fascist prison.

Fascism at this historical moment was a novel phenomenon, and political theorists, politicians and political activists scrambled to understand what was happening. Was this a new phenomenon, or had we seen it all before? People on the left could not understand the class basis of the new state – was it a petty bourgeois phenomenon, a working class uprising, or merely an instrument of the ruling class? No simple analysis seemed to fit, and fascism did not appear to align to any existing models of politics.⁶ For some years other political parties were allowed to exist, and communist members of parliament remained in the House. But by 1926, through a series of decisive and extreme repressions, the delusion of a multi-party system was put to rest, and the authoritarian state was put in place.

Gramsci had grown up in the South.⁷ He had begun his life in Sardinia in 1891. Through scholarship support, he had gained entry to high school, and then to university in Turin. At this time Turin was a hotbed of leftist activity and thought. It was a large, industrializing town in which unions were gaining power, and in which FIAT was developing a major component of the car industry.

At the same time, the Left was deeply influenced by two further factors. First, Italian involvement in World War One split opinion. The air of neutrality that hung over the party in the early days of the war did not sit well with Gramsci. Mussolini, then a socialist in charge of a leftist flank of the party, wanted to see a more active role taken, a position that Gramsci supported in writing, and a position for which he was roundly criticised in later years. Gramsci continued to be resolutely against the war, and the party finally moved in this direction as the country itself found the war increasingly unpopular.

Second, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia occurred in 1917, and while the orthodox press

⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Preface.

⁵ Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections From The Prison Notebooks* (Kindle Locations 82-85). Kindle Edition.

⁶ Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections From The Prison Notebooks* (Kindle Locations 82-85). Kindle Edition.

⁷ Much of this discussion is based on the introduction to the Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith edition of *Prison Notebooks*.

in Italy argued that the revolution against the Tsar was probably a bourgeois revolution, it soon became clear that it had taken on a proletarian quality. Nothing could have been more important to the evolving communist and socialist elements in Italy.

In Turin, Gramsci first came into contact with intellectual life in its fullest form. By 1915, he was working fulltime as a political journalist, and writing about a large number of matters, not just politics, but culture, the arts and broader social fields. He was widely read. At the same time, Turin politics were warming up. As news filtered through from Moscow of the uprising, there were those who thought that revolutionaries in Turin should 'Do a Russia', and act while the time was right. There was talk of bringing weapons and bombs to political meetings. At the same time, it was hard to know what was actually going on in Russia. In one sense this was not, on the face of things, a Marxist revolution at all. It had not followed the bourgeois evolution, as Marx had proposed would happen. How could a revolution against the bourgeoisie occur if the bourgeoisie had yet to take power? Much remained unclear.

As it turned out in Turin, there was plenty of revolutionary spirit but very little organization. There were brief uprisings, shortages of bread, strikes and barricades, but these activities were brutally repressed by the authorities. Some were sent to the front ; others were imprisoned. Yet more were killed in the fighting, but no revolution was to occur. Over the next several years, the powerlessness of the left was exposed time and time again.

Gramsci's fundamental political ideas were beginning to form during this period. He was certainly to the left of the party and he sought action, rather than reform. But he didn't adhere to principles at all costs, as some on the left of the party tended to advocate.

2. The Rise of Fascism

In order to understand the polemic in which Gramsci was engaged in during his prison years, we need to come to terms with the basic history of the period, and particularly to gain a clear understanding about where fascism came from, and what its main characteristics comprised. During the war, the immediate sources of Italian fascism⁸ became clear. While the revisionist left largely took a moderate reformist stand, and formed an alliance with business, it was the petty bourgeois class – small business – that were wholly repelled by this strategy, and from which the roots of fascism could be said to emerge.⁹ But the move towards a fascist state had much deeper and longer roots than a petty bourgeois uprising. It had close ties to ancient tendencies in Italian history to dream of a recovered empire. When the Italian Fascist Party came to power, they made these connections to Italian history very clear. The Roman Empire was considered the first incarnation of this empire, the Italian

⁸ The Oxford English Dictionary tells us that : "Fascism /faz(ə)m -sz(ə)m/ n. [mass noun] (is) an authoritarian and nationalistic right-wing system of government and social organization. - (in general use) extreme right-wing, authoritarian, or intolerant views or practices. The term Fascism was first used of the totalitarian right-wing nationalist regime of Mussolini in Italy (1922–43); the regimes of the Nazis in Germany and Franco in Spain were also Fascist. Fascism tends to include a belief in the supremacy of one national or ethnic group, a contempt for democracy, an insistence on obedience to a powerful leader, and a strong demagogic approach. Stevenson, Angus. Oxford Dictionary of English (Kindle Locations 140597-140605). Oxford University Press - A. Kindle Edition.

⁹ Hoare and Smith make this claim in their introduction to the Prison Notebooks.

Renaissance the second version. The new Italian fascists would bring about the Third Empire.

Italy had entered the First World War by signing the London Pact.¹⁰ This agreement, signed and maintained in secret throughout the war, offered Italy the chance to recover territory lost in past years and to gain new ones, in exchange for Italian support of the ‘Triple Entente’¹¹ against Germany. Britain and its allies hoped to bring Italy into the war against Germany and Austria in return for promising territories to Italy. The acquisition of these territories, which included a good deal of Austria, as well as a series of German overseas territories, clearly depended on the Triple Entente winning the war, which they assumed would be a formality in 1915. The Triple Entente was in the business of cutting up Europe under the threat of military intervention.

As might have been predicted, all did not go well. Certainly the ‘Triple Entente’ were on the winning side of the war, but, from the Italian standpoint, the conditions of the treaty were never met. The Italians did indeed enter the war against Austria in 1915, and, though there was a delay, formally opposed Germany in 1916. But, from the Italian position, most of those territories that had been promised in the words of the Treaty of London were never ceded to Italy. Woodrow Wilson claimed that since the Treaty had been signed in secret, it had no formal legal standing, and should not be honoured.

The Treaty was indeed kept secret, but the Russian October Revolution of 1917 put paid to that. *Izvestia*, a Russian journal expressing the view of the new Russian government, published the agreement in 1917, and the secret was out. The Treaty of Versailles, one of the major peace agreements signed at the end of the First World War, nullified the Treaty of London, and the Italian claims were rejected. This caused very serious resentment among the Italian political class and more widely among Italians of all backgrounds, especially since Britain and France were able to secure overseas territories from Germany. Many historians have since argued that this profound and widespread disillusion paved the way for the rise Mussolini’s fascist régime four years later.

One must not ignore, however, the massive social unrest smouldering throughout the northern, industrialising centres of Italy. The unrest in Turin was certainly the most formidable sign of resistance to the existing regime, but industrial unrest was widespread among the emerging industrial working class. A new political formulation would need to provide a solution to the tradition of class conflict that had been simmering for generations. With Mussolini’s background as a leader of the socialist movement, a new way forward presented itself.

Thirdly, Italy was reeling from the catastrophe of the war. Italy was now burdened down with heavy war debts taken on for the provision of the war, in the hope that a successful

¹⁰ The agreement is more formally known as the Treaty of London. Terence Ball, Richard Bellamy. *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*. Pp. 133.

¹¹ The Triple Entente (or Three Way Agreement) connected the Russian Empire, the French Third Empire and the United Kingdom. They stood against the ‘Triple Alliance’ of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. The London Pact meant that Italy sided with the ‘Triple Entente’ and not with the ‘Triple Alliance’ during World War One. For a detailed description of this period of Italian history and the rise of fascism see *The Rise of Italian Fascism, 1919–1929*, Payne, Stanley G.. *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Kindle Location 1495). University of Wisconsin Press. Kindle Edition.

outcome to the war effort would reap huge benefits to the state in terms of new territories and extended opportunities for economic growth. These hopes proved to be utterly unfounded. The Italian Prime Minister returned from the peace talks empty handed and disgraced. It was not hard to see this set-back as a profound insult to Italy as a whole. The Italian war effort, and the economic investment in the war, had proved catastrophic. In human terms, the soldiers returned to a bankrupt country, managed by liberal elites entirely unsympathetic to their plight, and to a country riddled with social unrest. The veterans were despised, spat upon and thrown aside as a reminder of Italian humiliation. The anger of returning veterans and the need to restore national pride further fuelled the fire of fascism, and gave Mussolini a fertile source of violent supporters ready to fight for a new order.

3. The Nature of the Italian Fascist State

If this history provides a brief background to the rise of fascism, we can now turn to the matter of outlining what comprised the fascist State, and why we should consider it totalitarian.¹² Perhaps a striking way to answer this first question is to quote Mussolini himself :

Fascism is for the only liberty which can be a serious thing, the liberty of the state and of the individual in the state. Therefore for the fascist, *everything is in the state, and no human or spiritual thing exists, or has any sort of value, outside the state.* In this sense fascism is totalitarian, and the fascist state which is the synthesis and unity of every value, interprets, develops and strengthens the entire life of the people.¹³

Totalitarianism in this view thus simply means that nothing should exist beyond the state. Individuals lived ‘within the state’, and nothing was beyond the State’s control. The State is therefore the agent of history, of Italian destiny, and the primary modernizing force in Italian society and culture. By implication, therefore, all personal ambitions and aspiration should be subsumed by the needs of the State and society as a whole.¹⁴

A second element of Italian fascism is corporatism. While totalitarianism provides the mechanism to achieve national unity, and to ensure national success, corporatism offered the possibility of easing industrial conflicts once and for all. Mussolini called this strategy a ‘third alternative’, eschewing the twin choices of capitalism and socialism. Instead, in Mussolini’s emerging fascist state, employers and employees were to come together, under the guidance of the State, of course, to form cooperatives or ‘syndicates’, using the fascist terminology.

¹² It is startling to remind ourselves that in the earliest days of the fascist movement, a program was put forward that was largely socialist in outline. See *A History of Fascism*, Stanley Payne, and especially chapter four, footnote 18 : The “postulates” of May 13 included abolishing the Senate, lowering the voting age to sixteen for both sexes, establishing the eight-hour day, worker participation in technical management, a national technical council for labor, old age and sickness insurance for all, confiscation of uncultivated land, development of a full secular school system, progressive taxation with a capital levy, an 85 percent tax on war profits, confiscation of the property of religious institutions, and declaration of the principle of the “nation in arms.” Payne, Stanley G.. *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Kindle Locations 11373-11377). University of Wisconsin Press. Kindle Edition.

¹³ Benito Mussolini, Giovanni Gentile, *Doctrine of Fascism*, 1883-1945 ; Italy ; 1968.

¹⁴ Another example of fascist sloganing makes the same point : *Tutto nello Stato, niente al di fuori dello Stato, nulla contro lo Stato* (“Everything in the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State”) Used by Mussolini in a speech before the Chamber of Deputies, May 26, 1927. *Disco del 1927 ; Milano, Alpes, 1928, page 157.* My Italics.

To begin with, Mussolini worked with established principles of liberal economics. If we allow ourselves to assume the entire fascist State came into being overnight with Mussolini's ascendancy to power, we'd be guilty of a readily-made, but simple and obvious mistake. Historians agree that from 1922 until 1925, the emerging State gave every sign of confusion, panic, changes of policy, incomplete implementation and endless false starts. And until 1925, economic policies followed the established tradition of liberalism – a balanced budget was achieved, and private enterprise was supported. Between 1925 and 1929, however, the policies and practices of the State gained a much sharper focus. And from 1926, economic strategy took a decidedly corporatist turn. The 'Pact of the Vidoni Palace'¹⁵ meant that all non-State unions would be banned, and that henceforth economic policies would be managed by the State. State-led unions would supersede workers' councils, Christian unions and other forms of non-State unions, and, on the business side of the equation, control was not far behind :

Mussolini identified the tasks that Fascism had assumed ... The working masses must recognize that the enhancement of production and the development of the peninsula required disciplined collaboration under the aegis of the state. But this was not understood to mean that only labour would be subject to Fascist control. The state, Mussolini went on, must assume "imposing tasks." Ultimately, it must "control all the forces of industry, all the forces of finance, and all the forces of labour." Fascist intention, and the intention of the legislation on the syndicates, was totalitarian and hegemonic in purposes.¹⁶

At this time business and labour were organized into twelve syndicalist organizations which managed all labour contracts in every sector of the economy. Private companies, though nominally still in private hands, were in fact, controlled by the State :

Mussolini ... eliminated the ability of business to make independent decisions: the government controlled all prices and wages, and firms in any industry could be forced into a cartel when the majority voted for it. The well-connected heads of big business had a hand in making policy, but most smaller businessmen were effectively turned into state employees contending with corrupt bureaucracies. They acquiesced, hoping that the restrictions would be temporary. Land being fundamental to the nation, the fascist state regimented agriculture even more fully, dictating crops, breaking up farms, and threatening expropriation to enforce its commands.

Banking also came under extraordinary control. As Italy's industrial and banking system sank under the weight of depression and regulation, and as unemployment rose, the government set up public works programs and took control over decisions about building and expanding factories. The government created the Istituto Mobiliare in 1931 to control credit, and the IRI later acquired all shares held by banks in industrial, agricultural, and real estate enterprises.¹⁷

Third, violence, threatened, imagined or real, had been at the heart of fascism from the very beginning. It remained so during the structuring of the new state. In his personal life, Mussolini had proved himself to be a violent child, a playground bully and a braggart. Violence was manifested in the life of his early followers, and especially the black shirts, the paramilitary wing of the National Fascist Party, so garbed because black was the colour of death. Behind all the acts of the emerging State was the possibility, the actuality, the

¹⁵ James McGregor, *Italian Fascism and Developmental Dictatorship*, Princeton Legacy Library, Princeton, New Jersey, 1979, page 199.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, page 200.

¹⁷ Recovered from <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc1/Fascism.html>, and authored by Sheldon Richman.

inevitability of violence.

Violence in a wide variety of forms had increased after 1919 from a variety of sources. There were the ‘Sempre Pronti’ (Always Ready) one of the many middle-class defence leagues that existed at that time. This group had carried out a planned assault in 1919.¹⁸ This was only the start of a wider pattern of political violence :

Violence in Italy generally increased after World War I, and several hundred deaths resulted from political disorders during 1919 and the first half of 1920, most of these the result of activities by Socialists or the army and police. Members of the Fasci di Combattimento had engaged in comparatively few such acts during the first year of their organization’s existence, if for no other reason than numerical weakness. (But) (b)y the spring of 1920 the Fasci were organizing a political militia of squadre (squads) in various parts of the north, the strongest at the newly incorporated city of Trieste, an Italian island in a Slovene hinterland. Using the excuse of the murder of two Italian naval officers at Split on the Yugoslav coast, the Trieste squadre seized the offensive on July 20, carrying out the first in a series of assaults against both Socialists and Slovene organizations in the city and in the surrounding countryside. They soon dominated the streets and had the Socialists on the run, with local Italian military authorities watching complacently and even providing equipment. On July 3 Il Popolo d’Italia declared that the Fasci were neither “legalitarian at any price, nor a priori antilegalitarian,” and said that “they do not preach violence for the sake of violence, but reply to all violence by passing to the counterattack,” and so would use “means adapted to the circumstances.”¹⁹

And :

Violence continued through the electoral period. According to one record, during the first four and a half months of 1921 there were at least 207 political killings, with distinctly more Socialist than Fascist victims, while another ten Socialists were killed on the day after elections. Army and government employees were generally (though not universally) sympathetic to the Fascist offensive and in some areas helped the squadristi to obtain arms, though on April 20 the prime minister had issued strong orders to end such complicity. Not all violence was initiated by Fascists; on March 23 a bomb placed by anarchists in a Milan theater killed twenty-one people and injured perhaps as many as two hundred.²⁰

Indeed, critics argued that because of the open-endedness of early fascist policies, the lack of clear doctrine, the shifts towards the left and then to the right, that the only enduring quality of this early brand of fascism was brute force.²¹ This régime of violence continued both within the structure of the State itself through the police and the military apparatus, but also in the informal organs of the fascist movement :

Many studies have suggested that squad violence and “pockets of illegality persisted throughout Italy, often on the margins of the Fascist Militia ... into the late 1920s and early 1930s. In such cases, Fascist ras (leaders), together with their cronies and clients, continued to rule towns, small cities, and neighborhoods as private fiefdoms, engaging in a wide array of illegal activities, ranging from extortion to physical attacks. Local and central authorities often turned a blind eye to this type of criminality, but in special circumstances larger political forces

¹⁸ Payne, Stanley G. *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Kindle Locations 1765-1766). University of Wisconsin Press. Kindle Edition.

¹⁹ Payne, Stanley G.. *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Kindle Locations 1773-1777). University of Wisconsin Press. Kindle Edition.

²⁰ Payne, Stanley G.. *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Kindle Locations 1833-1837). University of Wisconsin Press. Kindle Edition.

²¹ Payne, Stanley G.. *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Kindle Location 1894). University of Wisconsin Press. Kindle Edition

compelled police and *carabinieri* to investigate and prosecute Fascists. Over the course of the regime, the political winds regularly shifted, most commonly in response to Mussolini's appointment of a new party secretary. During these periods, Fascists at the national and provincial levels engaged in factional struggles, smear campaigns, and denunciatory practices in order to win political offices and administrative positions. But ... the disgraced Fascist hierarch and his supporters never completely dropped out of the game. Political rehabilitation and opportunities for revenge, always remained possible ... These shifts in political power thus lead to serious, sometimes violent conflicts, as ambitious party men sought to capitalize on a changing political landscape.²²

Overall, it was the threat of violence that had such great power over the actions of citizens, and which prevented the rise of alternatives and resistance to the emerging fascist régime. Even though the possibility of violence, the worship of violence and death, the willingness, even eagerness to use violence to purge dissenters was commonplace, during the most violent years, the number of actual deaths on each side of the political divide was limited :

The two years of maximal political violence were 1921 and 1922, when the Fascist offensive was at its height. The Fascists also suffered numerous fatalities and sometimes referred to "thousands" of their member slain by "subversives," but the nearest thing to a detailed Fascist report indicates that a total of 463 Fascists were slain during 1919 – 22. A later Fascist government report indicated that only 428 members were slain through the end of 1923. The number of leftists, mainly Socialists, killed by Fascists was probably at least twice as high. Gaetano Salvemini later calculated roughly that approximately 900 Socialists had been killed by the end of 1922, and that figure may be close to the mark. Not all the latter were slain by Fascists, for official statistics reported 92 people killed by the police and army during 1920 and 115 the following year. The total number of deaths from political violence in Italy for the four years 1919– 22 may have amounted to nearly 2,000.²³

Fourth, an essential and important element of the emerging fascist State was embodied in its formal relationship with the Catholic church. As one of the most important elements of the justifying ideological structure of Italian society, it was not possible for Mussolini to ignore the church hierarchy. And, just as importantly, since the church held spiritual and cultural sway over large sections of the population, Mussolini was desperate to gain the ideological agreement of these spiritual adherents to his cause. He did this by signing a concordat with the church.²⁴ Early on, the Vatican were complicit with the new régime. The church leadership may have felt they had little choice in the matter, given the violence of the new political order and its followers. They may have considered that their best chance of survival was to reach a mutually agreed pact, in which both the fascist State and the church were able to gain some autonomy and legitimacy. Whatever the reasoning, the Vatican was not an unwilling partner. The church hierarchy, though not always the lay clergy, was hostile to the left, so as the rightist quality of fascism congealed, the church increasingly found ideological agreement with Mussolini. This then, was not simply a matter of survival, but also a mechanism whereby the anti-clerical left could be crushed. In any event, an agreement was reached :

Overt, often intense, hostility between church and state had existed since unification in 1860, but as early as 1922 the Vatican had indicated it would not oppose a Mussolini government

²² *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini's Italy*. Michael R. Eisner. Cambridge University Press, 2011, pages 216-217.

²³ Payne, Stanley G. *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Kindle Locations 1938-1943). University of Wisconsin Press. Kindle Edition.

²⁴ Payne, Stanley G. *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Kindle Location 2210). University of Wisconsin Press. Kindle Edition.

and appreciated Fascism's role in the defeat of the left. Signature of the three Lateran Pacts in 1929 completed the system. One granted the papacy full independent state sovereignty over an area around St. Peter's Cathedral now designated Vatican City, ending the Vatican's long period as a territorial "prisoner" of the Italian state. A second agreed to terms of financial compensation for the seizure of Church lands by the liberal state in the nineteenth century, while the third created a concordat in which the Italian state granted official status to the Catholic religion, promised freedom for all nonpolitical activities of the large laymen's association, Catholic Action, and other Catholic groups, and provided for Catholicism to be taught in all state primary and secondary schools. For the Church it was an agreement that restored the status of religion and would promote the re-Christianization of Italy; for Mussolini it was a useful compromise that raised his government to a plateau of acceptance it had never enjoyed before.²⁵

Fifth, one cannot overlook the iconography of fascism – the imagery embodied in fascist architecture, the speeches, the self-consciously propagandist public ideology, the discourse, style, display – all were used to influence and attach themselves to the social imaginary :

Frequent and large-scale public marches were a common feature. Especially impressive were the opulent funeral services for the fallen, which had become a centerpiece of Fascist ritual, uniting the living and the dead in a tribute to courage and the overcoming of mere mortality. The massed response of "Present!" to the calling of the slain comrade's name expressed the new Fascist cult of transcendence through violence and death.²⁶

The original symbol was the fasces, which comprised a bundle of sticks with an axe. These items, with their origins in ancient Rome, symbolized the power of the magistrate in court, representing also the wider power over life and death. Various other elements of Roman tradition were used, including the SPQR motto.²⁷

None of this iconography was more obvious, and to later eyes, more absurd, than the imagery of 'Il Duce', the 'Universal Genius' who at one time ran eight ministries on his own, and apparently embodied all human knowledge in the person of a small, dyspeptic, and very violent man.²⁸ Mussolini began to use the iconography of ancient Rome in an extensive way. By the 1930's, he was excavating, renewing and replacing large areas of the ancient city, recovering, as he saw it, the glories of the past. As one commentator has it :

...the Fascist state concerned itself with both modernity and progress, but at the same time aimed to restore the ancient city center to both remember the past, and ... to bring in tourists and revenue to the country. Examples of this desire are evident in many of the travel guides published in the 1930s by the Italian State Tourism Department. For example, a *Tourist Review* from 1935 states that Rome, "characterized the architecture of Imperial Rome is revived in Fascist architecture, which also displays a revival of the pleasure derived from vast but light structures with gracefully developed harmonious lines". Another travel guide from the same year writes of ancient Rome as holding "hidden gems", which are "ideal havens where life takes on a serene calm...enchants and attracts the tourist". Statements such as these acknowledge that the Fascist state was persistent in using the improvements made to the city to showcase Italy's impressiveness. They also suggest that the government was very much

²⁵ Payne, Stanley G.. *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Kindle Locations 2212-2215). University of Wisconsin Press. Kindle Edition.

²⁶ Payne, Stanley G.. *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Kindle Location 1941). University of Wisconsin Press. Kindle Edition.

²⁷ *Senātus Populusque Rōmānus*, meaning the Senate and people of Rome.

²⁸ Follo, Valentina, "The Power of Images in the Age of Mussolini" (2013). Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations. Paper 858. Turro, Katherine, "Aesthetics under Mussolini: Public Art & Architecture, 1922-1940" (2012). History Honors Papers. Paper 16. <http://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/histhp/16>.

aware of how other countries perceived Italy.²⁹

The image of the great man himself was ubiquitous and fluid :

Not only was the iconography of Mussolini multi-faceted, but the different iconographic categories coexisted. The overwhelming impression when sifting through busts, sculptures, oil paintings and lithographs is that he could take up different personas at any given time.³⁰

Mussolini was, at one time or another, portrayed as an ancient Roman leader from the earlier Empire, as a medieval knight riding a horse into battle, as the facsimile of Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Italian leader at the forefront of the unifying process among Italian city-states, but perhaps most importantly as a medieval warrior.³¹ Indeed his reworking of the culture and art of Italy amount to, in Pieri's words, nothing less than 'an actual reworking of the visual landscape of the country, both physically through architecture, and metaphorically.'³² Mussolini's iconography represented him in busts, paintings, on coins, in suits of armor and upon horses, all towards a single aim, which was to display his will, his power, his inevitable might that could not be resisted.

There were other elements of Italian fascism which should not be overlooked. Fascism placed particular emphasis on women.³³ Fascist ideology recommended a return to home and hearth, much as the church proposed. In this way both ideologies were in consonance. Grazia Deledda comments about her own experience :

My first small literary successes, like some great successes, also brought deep disappointments.

My family prohibited me from writing, since my future was supposed to be quite different from the kind I dreamed about; it was supposed to be a future devoted entirely to home life, to household chores, bare reality, raising a large family.

So long as I wrote children's stories, nobody bothered much. But when the love stories started – with nighttime rendezvous, kisses, and sweet compromising words – the persecution became relentless, from all my family, and was backed up by outsiders, who were the most frightening and dangerous of all.

A well-bred girl can't write about these things unless she is writing for experience or as a private outlet ; if she somehow does arouse the curiosity of the young men in the district, not one of them will think of asking her to marry them.³⁴

The story speaks forcefully and touchingly to the sense of isolation and repression that was deeply felt by intellectual women in Mussolini's time, and it is a repression already there in the social infrastructure, in the everyday life of the family, and in church teachings, waiting

²⁹ Turro, op. cit. page 109.

³⁰ *The Cult of the Duce : Mussolini and the Italians*, edited by Stephen Gundle, Christopher Duggan and Guiliana Pieri, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, page 165.

³¹ Ibid., page 168. The article is Guiliana Pieri's 'Portraits of the Duce.' There are some very striking phrases in this article that speak to the issue of the relation between the state, Mussolini and art. For example Pieri comments, quoting Saporì (page 161) : 'I don't think the terms art and Italy are separable' (attributed to Mussolini, Campidoglio, May 24, 1924) 'Invested with the supreme political authority his (Mussolini's) moral law is that of the Roman citizen ; he creates the state every day. Hence he respects all creators : he is an artist and an art patron.'

³² Ibid.

³³ The seminal work here is *How Fascism Ruled Women, Italy 1922-1945*, Victoria de Grazia, University of California, Berkeley, 1992. But there is a brilliant and imaginative literature to be followed here beyond this seminal work. See, for example *The Crisis-Woman, Body Politics and the Modern Woman in Fascist Italy*, Natasha V. Chang, University of Toronto Press, 2015, Toronto. See also *The Clockwork Factory: Women and Work in Fascist Italy*, Perry R. Wilson, Clarendon Press, London, 1993 ; and *Unspeakable Women ; Selected Short Stories by Italian Women During Fascism*. Translations, Introduction and Afterword by Robin Pickering-Iazzi, Feminist Press at the City University of New York, New York, 1993.

³⁴ Ibid., page 23. The short story is by Grazia Deledda, and is called 'Grace'.

for the State to re-affirm.

In its place, another incarnation of womanhood, riding the waving of modernism, presented itself. In 'The Crisis-Woman', Natasha Chang explains the rise of an alternative :

... a decade after the establishment of the fascist regime : a man relaxes in an easy chair at home, and is interrupted by a maid announcing a caller. "Who wants me, a gentleman?" he asks. "No", the maid replies. "A lady?" he inquires again. "No," she replies once more. "Well, then, who is it?" he insists. "It's a crisis-woman." The maid replies smugly. Readers unfamiliar with fascist culture might wonder who ... a crisis-woman is ... the *donna-crisi* was in the fascist imagination a dangerous type of well-to-do modern woman with an extremely thin and consequently sterile body that purportedly confirmed her cosmopolitan, non-domestic, non-maternal and non-fascist interests ... in fascist Italy, the thinness and sterility of the crisis-woman were viewed as a deviant masculinization of the naturally curvaceous and fertile female body.³⁵

The fascist State's policy towards women was very clear. Under the policy of reconciliation with the Catholic church, a close alliance concerning the role of women was formed between the State and the church. Strong motherhood and submission were the cornerstones of the policy. Mussolini, whose wife Rachel came from a peasant family, bore the dictator five children. He had been married before, but this was ignored when he came to marry his second wife. Mussolini had many mistresses, which his wife was expected to ignore, and she was identified as the model fascist wife. Presumably Mussolini found this relationship entirely satisfactory, and it was therefore no surprise that Italian fascism found a place for such an ideology as well.

The 'strong mother, submissive woman' policy was emphasized in schools and fascist youth organizations :³⁶

Fascist propaganda liked to denounce the slim, sophisticated modern woman, and idealised the rounded, maternal, submissive wife and mother, but many Italian women wanted to look like fashion models and films stars they saw at the cinema in magazines. Usually from America, this fuelled part of the fascist denouncement of the United States. Many Italian women were unwilling to accept their appointed position in society in the fascist regime. Mussolini's main motivation behind his attitude towards women was to ensure the increased production of babies. In his Italy, he pictured a vast Italian Empire, with a vast populace. The boys would grow up into fascist warriors and the girls would grow up to be fascist mothers.³⁷

Mussolini encouraged a high birth rate to ensure further warriors would be available to the state. The so-called 'Battle for the Births' was one of four economic battles that Mussolini pursued.³⁸ Marriage loans were made available to encourage matrimony, and those sufficiently successful to have fostered at least six children were exempt from taxation. Bachelors, by contrast, were taxed at a higher rate.

The policy was almost a complete failure. Working class women needed to work to feed the

³⁵ Natasha Chang, Introduction, page one.

³⁶ Recovered from <https://samjousins.wordpress.com/2013/01/04/the-position-of-women-in-fascist-society>, September 6, 2016.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The 'Battle for the Grain', the 'Battle for the Lira', and the 'Battle for the Land' were the three other economic battles he pursued.

family, since wages were low. No pressure to stay at home could match the necessity to make to money so that the family could eat, and be clothed and housed. Levels of working activity for women were largely unchanged during the fascist period, and marriage rates were equally unaltered. But it did keep women of out white-collar jobs.³⁹ Teaching was an exception, and women dominated here.

The ideological focus on youth was equally inescapable. It was a fundamental belief of the emerging fascist régime that the management of youthful energy and potential was essential to the success of the new state. Accordingly, young people’s lives were strictly managed, at least in theory :

Children were taught at school, that the great days of modern Italy started in 1922 with the March on Rome. Children were taught that Mussolini was the only man who could lead Italy back to greatness. Children were taught to call him “Il Duce” and boys were encouraged to attend after school youth movements. Three existed ;

Organisation	Age Group	Uniform
Sons of the She Wolf	4 to 8	Black shirt
Ballila	8 to 14	Black shirt, black cap, shorts, grey socks
Avanguardista	14 to 18	Same as Balilla except knickerbockers instead of shorts.

Boys were taught that fighting for them was a natural extension of the normal male lifestyle. One of the more famous Fascist slogans was “War is to the male what childbearing is to the female.” Girls were taught that giving birth was natural – while for boys, fighting was the same – natural.

Children were taught to obey those in charge. This was not an unusual move in a dictatorship. Once the OVRA had dealt with those adults who challenged the authority of the state, all future adults of Fascist Italy would be model civilians and not a challenge to those in charge.

Boys took part in semi-military exercises while members of the Balilla. They marched and used imitation guns. Mussolini had once said “I am preparing the young to a fight for life, but also for the nation.”

Members of the Balilla had to remember the following:

**“I believe in Rome, the Eternal, the mother of my country ...
I believe in the genius of Mussolini ... and in the resurrection of the Empire.”**

The glory of the old Roman Empire always lurked in the background of much of what children did. A child in a youth movements was a “legionary” while an adult officer was a “centurion” – a throwback to the days of when the Ancient Roman army dominated much of western Europe.⁴⁰

³⁹ Recovered from <https://samjcousins.wordpress.com/2013/01/04/the-position-of-women-in-fascist-society>, September 6, 2016.

⁴⁰ Recovered from <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/modern-world-history-1918-to-1980/italy-1900-to-1939/life-in-fascist-italy/>, September 8th. 2016. For a more scholarly account, see Leeden, Michael A. 1969. "Italian Fascism and Youth." *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 3: 137–154. See also Katharina Schembs, *Fascist youth organizations and propaganda in a transnational perspective : Balilla and Gioventù italiana del Littorio all'estero in Argentina (1922-1955)* », *Amnis* [En ligne], 12 | 2013, mis en ligne le 20 juin 2013, consulté le 08 septembre 2016. URL : <http://amnis.revues.org/2021> ; DOI : 10.4000/amnis.2021.

The new fascist policies set the newness of the young against the old, the decadent and the backward-looking. Physical activity was valued beyond merely intellectual pursuits.⁴¹ The overall purpose of all these activities was to create the ‘new man’, the foundation stone for the new régime in which all the old problems of the past would be swept away, and a new world developed.

This model for Italian fascism at least had a logic to it. But as the historical record suggests,⁴² the plan was a long way from being realized on the ground. It has been said more than once that Mussolini’s fascism, for all its bluff and arrogance, its claim to total control and complete revision of the old society, failed to enact most of its policies, and was unwilling or unable to bring the plan to completion. We have already noted the almost complete failure of the policy aimed at women. And while private enterprise was nominally under the control of the State, the day-to-day reality of life in the private sector suggested a considerable degree of independence from the state authorities. Very few members of the fascist parties were placed in charge of major elements of the economy or of the State – this tended to be a piecemeal operation. Thus, contrasting Mussolini’s totalitarianism with that of later régimes, such as Hitler’s Germany or Stalin’s Russia, where the purges and the violence were very widespread, and control over all sectors was handed over to party apparatchiks and leaders, we can speak of an incomplete ‘success’. Grandiose in its public displays and worshipful of the great leader it might have been, but the Italian fascist State was profoundly incomplete.

4. Gramsci and the Response to Fascism.

a. Americanism and Fordism

In ‘Prison Notebooks’, Gramsci sets out his principle ideas on the State and the future of State activity in “Americanism and Fordism”⁴³ and in ‘State and Civil Society’.⁴⁴ In ‘Americanism and Fordism’, Gramsci exhibits a fascination with the new forms of industrial organization developed by Henry Ford in the United States. Broadly speaking, Fordism refers to a system in which production is entirely industrialized and rationalized, in which there is little scope for the artisanal production of the past, and, similarly, a world in which mass consumption is also prevalent. Fordism imagines, therefore, a social universe in which large, industrial plants, filled with highly efficient workers, churn out thousands of similar products which are then eagerly grasped by the thousands of families eager to buy the cars, washing machines and dishwashers that are produced. At the heart of this system of mass production, there is the notion of the ‘well-paid worker’, a member of the industrial army who is generously reimbursed for his labour by the new and high profitable system, thus becoming, with his family, the ideal mass consumer. In its fully-realized form, Fordism creates a virtuous cycle of happy production and consumption.

⁴¹ See Katharina Schembs, *op. cit.*

⁴² See Payne, *op. cit.*, especially.

⁴³ Prison Notebooks, 279ff.

⁴⁴ Prison Notebooks, 207ff.

Though the system was first most fully established to produce motor cars, it is a system that could theoretically be applied to any form of production. The notion of the division of labour, was, of course not new. The idea that a complex production system could be broken down into small, manageable, and readily repeatable tasks had been famously discussed in Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations.'⁴⁵ But the degree to which such a simple idea had been developed, using specialized technology, was of a new order. The Ford Motor Company, one of several small motor companies that had emerged between 1890-1910, found that by increasing wages substantially, they could reduce absenteeism and worker turnover. They began producing the Model 'T' Ford in 1908. The car was cheap, sturdy and black. It was joked that you could have the car in any colour as long as that colour was black. At one time sales of the car comprised 60% of all U.S. domestic car sales. As Ford became more efficient, the price of the car went down substantially. But the key element of this new system of production was not the mass production of cars ; it was the mass production of consumers. Henry Ford said :

I will build a car for the great multitude. It will be large enough for the family, but small enough for the individual to run and care for. It will be constructed of the best materials, by the best men to be hired, after the simplest designs that modern engineering can devise. But it will be so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one – and enjoy with his family the blessing of hours of pleasure in God's great open spaces.⁴⁶

Mass consumption was the essential and necessary corollary of mass production. If consumers were not available in large numbers to buy the products of mass consumption, then the system would fail. The Ford showrooms would be filled with unsold cars. The triumph of the Fordist system of production was in completing the cycle of consumption, paying workers enough that they themselves could buy the cars that they produced. Fordism also showed the way for other goods to be produced using the same system. A wide range of products could be produced in such a system, further enlarging production, and, in parallel, enlarging the number of consumers available to buy the products being churned out.⁴⁷

Henry Ford never used the term Fordism, but Antonio Gramsci did, and it became an important focus in the thinking of State theorists from that moment.⁴⁸ In his 1934 article,

⁴⁵ *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith, Strahan and Cadell, London, 1776. On page 6, Smith tells us the story of a 'trifling manufacture', pin-making, in which the simple task of making a pin can be broken down into a series of small tasks, each of which can be more efficiently completed by a specialist worker, rather than having one worker make the whole pin. The specialization and rationalization of the system thus leads to radical efficiency through this simple division of labour.

⁴⁶ Ford, Henry; Crowther, Samuel (1922), *My Life and Work*, Garden City, New York, USA: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., page 23.

⁴⁷ Much more could be said about this system, and its forerunner, Taylorism. The reader is directed to the following sources. On Henry Ford, see Wik, Reynold M. (1972). *Henry Ford and Grass-Roots America*. Ann Arbor, MI, U.S.: University of Michigan Press, and Hounshell, David A. (1984), *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States*, Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press. See also the sources of Fordism in Taylorism. Good further reading on Taylorism is to be found in Beissinger, Mark R. (1988), *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline, and Soviet Power*, London, UK: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, and Braverman, Harry (1998) [1974], *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, New York, NY, USA, as well as Drury, Horace Bookwalter (1915), *Scientific management: a history and criticism*, New York, NY, USA: Columbia University. Drury's piece is especially interesting because it is a contemporary critique of Taylorism.

⁴⁸ Wikipedia tells us that 'Fordism is a key concept in the theories of the Regulation School.' (See Fordism article, recovered September 9th, 2016.) The Regulation School citation explains that it is '... is a group of writers in political economy and economic whose origins can be traced to France in the early 1970s'. (Wikipedia's Regulation School entry, recovered

Gramsci examined the political dilemma that Fordism raised. At one level, the implementation of technical-rational systems into the productive system was not a 'right' or a 'left' solution. Rationalism could equally be applied to a Soviet system as much as it could to Fascism, or to capitalism itself.⁴⁹ As Hughes tells us :

After World War 1, Europeans and Russians wanted to know how the United States had become the most productive enterprise in the history of the world. This was especially true of liberals in defeated and despairing Germany, and among the Soviet leaders in a Russia prostrated by World War 1, the revolutions of 1917, civil war from 1917 to 1921, famine and disease. While middle-class Americans believed that the world was waiting to hear about their political system and their free enterprise, Germans and Russians were asking about Taylorism and Fordism.⁵⁰

Indeed, one could argue that capitalism could potentially solve a profound problem by introducing Fordism on a wide scale. If one could pay workers a good wage, and produce consumer products at low prices, then the old issues of class struggle, the failure to support the mass of the people through capitalism, could perhaps be swept aside. Fordism, it was argued, might just work to satisfy the large majority of the people without any revolution at all, socialist or fascist.

Gramsci wrestled with these problems in his notes on this topic. Gramsci starts his account by dealing with certain aspects of Italian history.⁵¹ He concerns himself first with the lassitude of Italian workers – their ill-health, the high levels of unreported unemployment, the 'really remarkable segment of the population which is absolutely parasitic and which requires for its service the labour of another immense and indirectly parasitic mass.'⁵² This is a widespread problem, says Gramsci, and it is a worse problem in China and India.⁵³ But America is different :

America does not have "great historical and cultural traditions"; but neither does it have this leaden burden to support. This is one of the main reasons ... for its formidable accumulation of capital which has taken place.⁵⁴

Gramsci treats history as a burden, and America, freed of this burden, is able to move quickly into Fordism :

September 9th, 2016.) However, this line of theorising clearly did not start in 1970, as this account of Gramsci will clearly illustrate. Indeed, Jessop himself, a major theorist often connected with this tradition, does not source his own thinking to this school, but wrote much of his early work around the writing of Nicos Poulantzas, who was writing in the 1960's. It is of value, therefore, to suspend judgement about where the boundaries of this school and its naming usefully reside.

⁴⁹ Indeed, Lenin and Stalin were very interested in Taylorism, and implemented many similar ideas. Stalin commented : 'American efficiency is that indomitable force which neither knows nor recognizes obstacles; which continues on a task once started until it is finished, even if it is a minor task; and without which serious constructive work is inconceivable ... The combination of the Russian revolutionary sweep with American efficiency is the essence of Leninism.' (Quoted in Hughes, Thomas P. (2004). *American Genesis: A Century of Invention and Technological Enthusiasm 1870–1970*. 2nd ed. The University of Chicago Press, page 251.

⁵⁰ Hughes, op. cit., page 249.

⁵¹ 'The Naples Problem' comes up for discussion, and whether Neapolitans are hard-working or lazy. He discusses Goethe's argument about the 'organic vagabondry' of Neapolitans, and Goethe's reasonable claim that they are 'very active and industrious'. He talks about how living off the state can damage one's health : 'Even today it happens that men who are still relatively young, not much above forty, in excellent health and at the height of their physical and intellectual capacities, after twenty five years of state service, cease to devote themselves to any productive activity ...' (*Prison Notebooks*, hereinafter *PN*, page 283)

⁵² *PN*, 284.

⁵³ *PN*, 285

⁵⁴ *PN*, 285

The non-existence of viscous parasitic sedimentations left behind by past phases of history has allowed industry, and commerce in particular, to develop on a sound basis.⁵⁵

The beginning of this section seems to suggest unambiguously that the way forward is not clear in Italy in the way that it is in America. But this argument is never completed. Having opened the door, we are instead led through a series of rambling accounts which take us off the beaten path. And we are reminded that we are facing a series of notes, rather than a fully elaborated argument, and a finished product. ‘In America’, Gramsci argues, ‘rationalisation has determined the need to elaborate a new type of man suited to the new type of work and productive process.’⁵⁶ But this process is only at an early stage, it seems. Gramsci appears to be giving grudging praise to the new system, yet he is not willing to accept defeat by Fordism just yet. For Gramsci, ‘the fundamental question of hegemony’ has not yet been posed. Yet capitalism has, by this time, faced the Crash of ‘29, and so it might be argued that a hegemonic crisis is indeed underway. Gramsci seems uncertain about this matter at the moment. Gramsci is fully aware that in America the unions have been badly beaten through violent counter-measures, and that the ‘American popular masses’⁵⁷ are in a backward stage. There is also the ‘negro question.’⁵⁸

In all this discussion, there is a curious vacuum, explained almost entirely by the extraordinary circumstances under which Gramsci is writing – the censorship system - which prevented him from directly mentioning Mussolini or the rise of the fascist State, even though these topics are embedded in everything he writes. Gramsci can see in Italy the ‘beginnings of a Fordist fanfare’⁵⁹ but at least at the time of writing he is unclear how this will all turn out. Gramsci understands how Enlightenment thinking, typical of the ‘ruralism’ that pervades Italian elite understandings, has prevented the cities from developing in a simple, rationalist way. What follows is a long polemic, mostly literary in form, which reviews this debate.⁶⁰ Then we are treated to a dismissive sneering pointed in the direction of Massimo Favel, a ‘young radical’ to whom Gramsci has taken a dislike, and whose theories are critically examined. And it takes Gramsci several pages to come to some conclusions about the State’s role in all this :

Americanisation requires a particular environment, a particular social structure (or at least a determined intention to create it) and a certain type of State. This state is the Liberal State, not in the sense of free trade liberalism or of effective political liberty, but in the more fundamental sense of free initiative and of economic individualism which ... on the level of “civil society” ... arrives at a regime of industrial concentration and monopoly.⁶¹

Gramsci believes that the removal of the semi-feudal way of life, and especially the rentier class⁶² is essential if Italy’s industry is to flourish. Gramsci is pleased to see the end of the old

⁵⁵ *PN*, 285.

⁵⁶ *PN*, 286.

⁵⁷ *PN*, 287.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, and especially footnote 16, which sets the parameters of this debate.

⁶¹ *PN*, 293.

⁶² The rentier class comprises those who live off the work of others and do nothing. This could refer to those who simply gather rents, or, more broadly, those who benefit from others’ work in other ways, such as ‘coupon clippers’, living off the interest of bonds, or people who might receive stock dividends. The term attracts opprobrium because of the utter idleness of those who benefit in this way. Even capitalists work in their industries and businesses. Lenin commented on ‘... the extraordinary growth of a class, or rather, of a stratum of rentiers, i.e., people who live by ‘clipping coupons’ [in the sense of

social structure, and he see the emerging Italian State as being responsible for this,⁶³ but this has not solved the problem :

Indeed the State is creating new *rentiers*, that is to say it is promoting the old forms of parasitic accumulation of savings and tending to create closed social formations. In reality the corporative⁶⁴ trend has operated to shore up the crumbling positions of the middle classes and not to eliminate them, and is becoming ... more and more a machinery to preserve the existing order just as it is rather than a propulsive force ... But there still remains a way out : the corporative trend ... could yet manage to proceed by very slow and almost imperceptible stages to modify the social structure without violent shocks ...⁶⁵

Where the State might go with this ‘very slow and almost imperceptible’ development is unclear.⁶⁶

Gramsci then takes up the issue of production and discipline in a discussion of Trotsky. He is examining the ways in which the labour force and the cultural life of the community must be orchestrated towards production, and the errors that the early Soviet state made in trying to bring this about. One error was to try and treat works like soldiers, subject to the same harsh discipline. Gramsci reminds us that such a policy has failed and will inevitably fail :

The principle of coercion, direct or indirect, in the ordering of production and work, is correct : but the form which it assumed was mistaken. The military model had become a pernicious prejudice and militarization of labour was a failure.⁶⁷

As he develops his own account of the State, and how it is to manage the workforce, Gramsci’s early rejection of simple violence is important to note. Instead, what Gramsci starts to reveal is his belief that the new forms of industrialization surrounding Fordism requires nothing less than the formation of a new kind of human being. Frederick Taylor, the father of scientific management, had very crudely referred to this new kind of human being as a ‘trained gorilla’. Taylor writes :

This work [pig-iron handling] is so crude and elementary in its nature that the writer firmly believes that it would be possible to train an intelligent gorilla so as to become a more efficient pig-iron handler than any man could be.⁶⁸

Gramsci is quick to join the chorus of displeasure that resulted from this identification of the

collecting interest payments on bonds], who take no part in any enterprise whatever, whose profession is idleness. The export of capital, one of the most essential economic bases of imperialism, still more completely isolates the rentiers from production and sets the seal of parasitism on the whole country that lives by exploiting the labour of several overseas countries and colonies.’ Vladimir Lenin, "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism", Lenin’s Selected Works, Progress Publishers, 1963, Moscow, Volume 1, pp. 667–766.

⁶³ PN, 293.

⁶⁴ By ‘corporative’, Gramsci appears to be referring to the tendency by the fascist state to incorporate but trade union and private business interests into the state through the establishment of syndicates.

⁶⁵ PN, 294.

⁶⁶ This brief discussion of the state is then followed by some notes on ‘The Sexual Question’, ‘Feminism and “Masculinism”’, and ‘Animality’ and Industrialism’ before Gramsci returns to his central topic several pages later in ‘Rationalism of Production and Work.’ We begin to see in this latter section that Gramsci has been rambling towards a central point, which is to point out that sexuality, feminism and masculinity, the control of man’s ‘animal instincts’ are all to be managed in the cause of developing the industrial strength of a nation.

⁶⁷ PN, 301.

⁶⁸ PN, 302. The reference is to Frederick Taylor’s *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911), page 40, in footnote 36 in Prison Notebooks.

new worker in this way :

Taylor is in fact expressing with brutal cynicism the purpose of American society – developing in the worker to the highest degree automatic and mechanical attitudes, breaking up the old psycho-physical nexus of qualified professional work, which demands a certain active participation of intelligence, fantasy and initiative on the part of the worker, and reducing productive operations exclusively to the mechanical, physical aspect ... the most recent phase of a long process which began with industrialism itself.

It is a phase which will itself be superseded by the creation of a psycho-physical nexus of a new type, both different and undoubtedly *superior*.⁶⁹

Gramsci is very interested in the degree to which Henry Ford has tried to enter into and manage the moral and private life of workers. It is Gramsci's claim that Ford is trying to 'smash' any vestiges of private life that the worker may have outside the workplace, to manage and coerce not just public life, but the remnants of private life that remain as well.⁷⁰ The 'new worker' that Fordism is creating is required to be efficient, 'well adjusted' and ready for work.

The 'high-wage' worker, argues Gramsci, creates a 'double-edged weapon'.⁷¹ The problem is that it gives the worker some freedom. Here the State must enter to curb these potential freedoms, and to support the new industrial system, as it does in establishing prohibition in the United States. Henry Ford, 'with the aid of a body of inspectors'⁷² also tried to oversee how the Ford workers spent their money. These broader functions, Gramsci argues, could also become, in some later stage of society's development, a function of the State.⁷³ These broader functions will include sexuality :

It seems clear that the new industrialism wants monogamy : it wants the man as worker not to squander his nervous energies in the disorderly and stimulating pursuit of occasional sexual satisfaction. The employee who goes to work after a night of "excess" is no good for his work. The exaltation of passion cannot be reconciled with the timed movements of productive motions connected with the most perfect automatism. This complex of direct and indirect repression and coercion exercised on the masses will undoubtedly produce results and a new form of sexual union will emerge whose fundamental characteristic would apparently have to be monogamy and relative stability.⁷⁴

Gramsci then continues his fascination with all things American by discussing the traits of the American upper classes. He is especially bemused, as he believes many Europeans are, by the fact the wealthy Americans seem to like to work, even if the necessity to work has been removed :⁷⁵

Until recently the American people was a working people. The "vocation of work" was not a trait inherent only in the working class but it was a specific quality of the ruling classes as well. The fact that a millionaire continued to be practically active until forced to retire by age

⁶⁹ PN, 302-303.

⁷⁰ PN, 303.

⁷¹ PN, 303.

⁷² PN, 304.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ PN, 304-305.

⁷⁵ PN, 305.

or illness and that his activity occupied a very considerable part of his day, is a typically American phenomenon.⁷⁶

Gramsci explains this bizarre phenomenon by turning to the pioneer experience, which required strong individuals to throw themselves against nature to make a living. This turns the wealthy women in America into “luxury mammals”⁷⁷ :

Beauty competitions, competitions for new film actresses (recall the 30,000 Italian girls who sent photographs of themselves in bathing costumes to Fox in 1926) the theatre, etc., all of which select the feminine beauty of the world and put it up for auction, stimulate the mental attitudes of prostitution, and “white slaving” is practised quite legally among the upper classes. The women, with nothing to do, travel ; they are continually crossing the ocean to come to Europe ...⁷⁸

In this phenomenon, Gramsci sees class division. The American upper classes are becoming more and more immoral ; the working classes are expected instead to adhere to a strict moral code. Thus Gramsci sees emerging a clear American class structure, typical of traditional European societies.

Gramsci then, for the remainder of this section of Prison Notebooks, concentrates much more precisely on Taylorism, Fordism and the State. Is Taylorism and Fordism the future of work, Gramsci asks. Gramsci writes at length about the difficulty of turning some tasks into ‘merely’ mechanized task. Take, for example, the medieval scribe, who is asked copy an ancient text.⁷⁹ If the scribe cannot understand part of the text, he may leave it out. If he thinks the original author made a mistake, or should have written a paragraph in another way, he may make the change. Gramsci’s point is that creativity is a curse of the copier. By being creative and using his humanity to the full, he fails to produce a perfect copy. The problem for new American industrialist is that the worker remains a thinking man, and can not be reduced to the status of a trained gorilla.⁸⁰

Gramsci then continues with the ‘problem’ of high wages thrown up by Fordism. Here we begin to see the clearest example of Gramsci’s claim that coercion on its own will never work, and consent must always be present to make people conform to new work régimes. If people are to take up this new kind of work proposed for Fordism, then more than coercion must be involved :

Coercion has therefore to be ingeniously combined with persuasion and consent. This effect can be achieved ... by higher remuneration, such as to permit a particular living standard which can maintain and restore the strength that has been worn down by the new form of toil.⁸¹

But this phenomenon cannot last. Indeed, Gramsci claims, the high wages paid at Ford have

⁷⁶ *PN*, 305.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *PN*, 306. Gramsci further comments : ‘(It is worth noting that ship’s captains in the United States have been deprived of their right to celebrate marriages on board ship, since so many couples get married on leaving Europe and divorced again before disembarking in America.) Prostitution in a real sense is spreading, in a form barely disguised by fragile legal formulae.’

⁷⁹ *PN*, 308-309.

⁸⁰ *PN*, 310.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

not eased the problem of instability. So does Fordism make sense? And is it something people on the left should support, or should it be fought by the trade unions and legislation?⁸² For Gramsci, this is a profoundly important question. Should society and the State throw their lot together to support the rise of Fordism or should it be resisted at all costs? He puts the question in this way :

(Is it) possible, with the material and moral pressure of society and of the State, to lead the workers as a mass to undergo the entire process of psycho-physical transformation so that the average type of Ford worker becomes the average type of worker in general? Or whether this is impossible because it would lead to physical degeneration and to deterioration of the species, with the consequent destruction of all labour power. It seems possible to reply that the Ford method is rational, that is, that it should be generalised ; but that a long process is needed for this, during which a change must take place in social conditions and in the way of life and the habits of individuals. This however cannot take place through coercion alone, but only through tempering compulsion (self-discipline) with persuasion. Persuasion should also take the form of high wages, which offer the possibility of a better standard of living, or more exactly perhaps, the possibility of realising a standard of living which is adequate to the new methods of production and work which demand a particular degree of expenditure of muscular and nervous energy.⁸³

We can now trace with some clarity Gramsci's struggle in wrestling with the problem of Fordism. He is deeply ambiguous in his support of the new initiatives. He speaks sharply of prostitution and white slavery among wealthy American women, and he castigates Taylorism for its crude depiction of the new worker as a trained gorilla. Yet here he is, towards the end of his argument, playing seriously with the idea of its implementation on a broad scale.

He ends this discussion with a further account of the State, this time from a completely different angle, or so it seems at first glance. The financial markets are in bad shape at the end of the war, and during the Great Depression. Investors are flocking instead to Government bonds as a source of safe revenue, and a huge flow of capital has thus moved to the State. But this forces the State to take on new functions :

... can it (the State) fail to interest itself in the organization of production and exchange? Will it leave it, as before, up to the initiative of competition and private initiative? If this were to happen, the crisis of confidence that has struck private industry and commerce would overwhelm the State as well ... the State is therefore led necessarily to intervene in order to check whether the investments which have taken place through State means are properly administered.⁸⁴

We see the start now of Gramsci's account of why fascism arose, of course hidden in a coded language. If the State has become the repository of savings and investments because the private sector has become so weak, it must by necessity start to involve itself in economic management. The State must now try also to meet collective needs.⁸⁵ The State is thus likely to become more protectionist and autarkic.⁸⁶ In such conditions a 'complex of demands' emerges, and the State moves towards 'something absolute'⁸⁷ :

⁸² *PN*, 312.

⁸³ *PN*, 312.

⁸⁴ *PN*, 314.

⁸⁵ *PN*, 315.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

The result of these phenomena is that in theory the State appears to have its social-political base among the ordinary folks and the intellectuals, while in reality its structure remains plutocratic. Besides, it is the State itself which becomes the biggest plutocratic organism, the *holding* of the masses of savings of the small capitalists.⁸⁸

Thus fascism has achieved the impossible task of both appearing to represent the people as a whole, but remain fully in the arms of large, capitalist interests. And because of its new role as a major repository of private savings, it also plays the role of plutocrat itself. Totalitarianism is essential to bring this task to fruition.

Finally, Gramsci must put the American question to rest once and for all. Is America, asks Gramsci, showing us the model of a new society. On a cultural level, the new America is not significant, in the Gramscian view. All we have here is some tired rehashing of ancient cultural tropes. In Paris, Pirandello quips :

Americanism is as strident and jarring as the make-up on the face of an aging *femme du monde*.⁸⁹

Much more seriously, Gramsci comments :

The problem is not whether in America there exists a new civilization, a new culture, even if only as a “beacon”, and whether it is invading or has invaded Europe. If the problem were to be posed in this way, the answer would be simple : no, it does not exist, and indeed all that they do in America is to remasticate the old European culture. The problem is rather this ; whether America, through the implacable weight of its economic production will compel or is already compelling Europe to overturn its excessively antiquated economic and social basis ... whether we are undergoing a transformation of the material bases of European civilization which in the long run ... will bring about the overthrow of the existing forms of civilization and the forced birth of a new.⁹⁰

Gramsci leaves the larger issue of economic and social transformation as an open question. It is not clear to him what is presently happening. The new order remains to be rebuilt, and whether Fordism or some alternative is at the centre of this change is still undecided. Certainly the ‘old strata’ are being torn away, whatever is to come. But no fundamental changes have yet occurred in the social strata or social classes, as far as he can see :

What we are dealing with is an organic extension and an intensification of European civilization, which has simply required a new coating in the American climate ... For this reason it is true that in Paris Americanism can appear like a form of make-up, a superficial foreign fashion.⁹¹

b. The State and Civil Society

In this famous section, Gramsci sets out his most important arguments about politics, the State and the rise of fascism. When do dictators and violence develop in society, Gramsci begins. It is when social classes and political parties are separated :

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Cited in Gramsci, *PN*, page 316, from an interview given to Corrado Alvaro (*L'Italia Letteraria*, 14 June, 1929.)

⁹⁰ *PN*, 317.

⁹¹ *PN*, 318.

When such crises occur, the immediate situation becomes delicate and dangerous, because the field is open for violent solutions, for the activities of unknown forces, represented by charismatic “men of destiny”.⁹²

The crisis occurs, in whichever country it may develop, because ruling control or hegemony falters, and the projects of this ruling category fail, or perhaps when the mass of people are discontent and seek change, unwilling to put up with things as they are.⁹³ Rulers are better able to organize in such situations than working people, and so they are more efficient in their efforts to ‘reabsorb control’.⁹⁴ Ruling interests may concede some small power, but opponents are soon crushed, and social order is retained. Commonly, the dominant social class maintains leadership and the political party representing their interests is rejigged and reshaped to maintain that social order. Gramsci is assuming that all political parties represent a particular social class, and that they only come into existence in order to represent this class.

But there may come a time when these parties cannot manage the situation. In these instances, the need for a dictator may arise :

When the crisis does not find this organic solution, but that of the charismatic leader, it means that a static equilibrium exists ... it means that no group, neither the conservatives nor the progressives, has the strength for victory, and that even the conservative group needs a master.⁹⁵

Gramsci reminds us that political parties are rarely very good at renovating themselves and adapting to new circumstances. Political parties have bureaucracies, and these elements of party structure are sources of hidebound conservatism.⁹⁶ And where does the Army stand in all this, he asks? He urges us to attend to the social strata from which elements of the Army is drawn. The role of the Army is to be beyond politics, to exist on a ‘terrain of apparent neutrality and superiority to the factions’.⁹⁷ Yet it is the Army that decides in the end. Their task is to defend the constitution, which means support for the reactionary side, for the world as it is. So the ‘first problem’ is to decide where the bureaucracy, either civil or military, comes from.⁹⁸ For Gramsci, an initial answer lies in the ‘small, rural bourgeoisie’⁹⁹ It’s not the only class from which the bureaucracy comes, Gramsci admits, but it is particularly well suited to the social functions involved,¹⁰⁰ and he notes that its psychology makes it amply suited for the work.¹⁰¹ Gramsci explains :

⁹² *PN*, 210.

⁹³ *PN*, 210.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *PN*, 211.

⁹⁶ *PN*, 211. Gramsci comments : ‘ One can see what has happened to a number of German parties as a result of the expansion of Hitlerism. French parties are a rich field for such research : they are all mummified and anachronistic – historico-political documents of the various phases of past French history, whose outdated terminology they continue to repeat ; their crisis could become even more catastrophic than that of the German parties.’ (*PN*, 211) One can begin to discern the wider power of Gramsci’s writing. Clearly, he is one of the most intelligent and insightful political writers of his era. We know this from the start. But he’s also very funny, with a commanding and coruscating use of language at his disposal.

⁹⁷ *PN*, 212.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

The members of this stratum are accustomed to direct command over nuclei of men, however tiny, and to commanding “politically”, not “economically”. In other words, their art of command implies no aptitude for ordering “things”, for ordering “men and things” into an organic whole, as occurs in industrial production – since this stratum has no economic functions in the modern sense of the word.¹⁰²

To suggest that small farmers have ‘no economic function’ is confusing. This is a somewhat obscure passage, but its meaning can be readily abstracted. Gramsci is arguing that small farmers have a vested interest in ensuring that the rural peasantry do not advance in society because any advance by the peasants will diminish their own strength and wealth. Thus small farmers show immense energy in resisting any peasant uprising.¹⁰³ But if you are looking for a class that will support the established order, then this is where to look :

This social stratum finds its limits, and the reason for its ultimate weakness, in its territorial dispersal and in the “non-homogeneity” which is intimately connected to this dispersal. This explains some of its other characteristics too : its volubility, the multiplicity of ideological systems it follows, even the bizarre nature of the ideologies it sometimes follows. Its will is directed towards a specific end – but it can be retarded, and usually requires a lengthy process before it becomes politically and organizationally centralised. (But) This process accelerates when the specific “will” of this stratum coincides with the will and immediate interests of the ruling class : not only that but its “military strength” then at once reveals itself, so that, sometimes, when organised, it lays down the law to the ruling class ...¹⁰⁴

Gramsci is suggesting that not only the ‘small rural bourgeoisie’ can be called upon to fill the ranks of the bureaucracy and the military, but that when they are organized they can direct society as a whole. While it is true that in most cases the towns dominate the countryside, in cases of crisis, this normal state of affairs may not always hold. Small farmers see the sources of their problems in the towns, and that they must ‘dictate a solution to the urban ruling classes.’¹⁰⁵

In a whole series of countries, therefore, military influence in national life means not only the influence and weight of the military in the technical sense, but the influence and weight of the social stratum from which the latter (especially the junior officers) mostly derives its origins.¹⁰⁶

Gramsci then discusses the situation in Spain and Greece, which offer, in his view, important examples of this phenomenon at work. In Spain, no such small rural landowner class exists, and thus the junior officer class assumed no important political role. The military governments in Spain are therefore ‘governments of “great generals” ’.¹⁰⁷ Greece also posits a different model, Gramsci argues. Here the situation is that islands shape the structure of rural life, and thus rural owners and workers are even more widely distributed, and thus passivity is normal. Indeed it seems that Gramsci was looking for a wider agreement with his model in Italy, but finds in Greece and Spain rather different situations, thus suggesting the Italian situation may be less common than he thought at first glance :

¹⁰² *PN*, 213.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *PN*, 213-214.

¹⁰⁶ *PN*, 214-215.

¹⁰⁷ *PN*, 215

In countries like Spain, the total passivity of the countryside enables the generals of the landowning aristocracy to utilize the army politically to restabilise the threatened equilibrium – in other words, the supremacy of the ruling classes.¹⁰⁸

The follows a long discursus on Caesarism, Napoleon III and Bismarck. Caesarism, argues Gramsci, can take either a reactionary or a progressive form. A dictator can intervene to help progressive forces win the battle, or he can intervene to restore reactionary forces to power. All is dependent on the particular events and ‘concrete history’¹⁰⁹ of the moment. He takes Caesar and Napoleon I to be progressive dictators, and Napoleon III and Bismarck to be conservative dictators. Dictatorship on its own is not necessarily an enemy of progress, therefore.¹¹⁰ But total restorations never take place. The ruling class never quite recovers its position in the way it once was. Something is always changed. He traces these changes in Italy, and argues that until 1926, a Caesarist solution without a Caesar might have been said to have occurred.¹¹¹ He may be referring to the way in which Mussolini managed and manipulated various coalitions of parties, and finally gained more direct control during the 1925-1926 period, when any pretence of democracy and parliamentary rule was put to one side.

Everything has changed since 1848, Gramsci argues :

In the period up to Napoleon III, the regular military forces ... were a decisive element in the advent of Caesarism ... through a quite precise *coup d'état* ... In the modern world trade-union and political forces ... complicate the problem.¹¹²

Gramsci’s point is that the rise of organized trade unions, of parliamentary political parties and the simple expansion of the State itself and its bureaucracies make the kind of coup d’état that Napoleon III achieved hard to duplicate. The resistance to such a move is now so complicated and dense that no such possibility arises. What has happened in the modern world, however, is that there is no possible resolution of the conflicts between A and B, the opposing forces of reaction and progression. The struggle now is between social classes, and these struggles cannot be resolved. The struggle is ‘historical incurable.’¹¹³

The ‘Fable of the Beaver’, the section which follows, is no friendly woodland tale. Instead, Gramsci reminds that the story is that the beaver, chased by ‘trappers who want his testicles from which medicinal drugs can be extracted, to save his life tears off his own testicles.’¹¹⁴ The section that follows is heavily footnoted by the editors, and this suggests the meaning is obscure and needs full clarification. Gramsci is trying to explain the passivity of political

¹⁰⁸ PN, 216. Then begins a long and rambling section on Caesarism. By Caesarism, Gramsci refers to dictatorship (See editors introduction, page 207) but not just a fascist dictatorship. The question he is raising here is whether the dictatorship is revolutionary (transforming class relations) or revisionist. (the old order stays in place.) The Napoleonic era is also widely canvassed as a form of dictatorship which might help explain Mussolini. Gramsci makes a note to himself here to make a ‘catalogue of this historical events which have culminated in a great “Heroic” personality.’ (Ibid, 219) and he reviews some of these events on pages 219-223.

¹⁰⁹ PN, 219.

¹¹⁰ PN, 219.

¹¹¹ PN, 220.

¹¹² PN, 220.

¹¹³ PN, 222.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 223. As a young faculty member in New Zealand, I was involved in demonstrations that became widespread throughout the country in opposition to apartheid, and a visiting South African rugby team. At the time a wit wrote a slogan on a bridge in the city : ‘Help the police. Beat yourself up.’ Gramsci is proposing that progressive forces in Italy have followed this line of advice.

parties who give in to dictatorship by giving up their own power without a fight. Gramsci is accusing the leaders of the various political parties of avoiding conflict, avoiding responsibility and ignoring the necessity of power, and if needed, of violence. There was too much talk, too much theorising, and too little willingness to do anything.¹¹⁵ Those actions that were taken were hopeless and prevented progress from being made :

... the “spontaneous” events occurred (1919 -1920), damaging interests, disturbed settled positions, aroused terrible hatreds even among peaceful folk, brought out of their passivity social strata which had been stagnating in putridity ... They created ... the generic “panic”, the “great fear” which could not fail to unify the process of repression which would crush them without pity.¹¹⁶

Gramsci is wrestling deeply with issues of tactics and strategy, and arguing with the division that occurred between the parliamentary group and the party itself, who seemed not only unable to come together, but to develop any sort of coherent program for the proletariat when an opportunity had existed in 1919.¹¹⁷ Gramsci points out a common and recurring problem for parties in general, not just the left, in Italy, which he refers to as ‘an imbalance between agitation and propaganda.’¹¹⁸ Parties don’t just reflect class interests, but work with them and against them if they are to be effective :

This precisely did not occur in Italy, and the result of this “omission” is precisely the imbalance between agitation and propaganda ...¹¹⁹

The gap between speech and action is a defining element in Italian politics. And the State has a responsibility in this. In fact, the State has worked to destroy parties, and ‘detach them from the broad masses’¹²⁰ :

Classes produce parties, and parties form the personnel of State and government, the leaders of civil and political society. There must be a useful and fruitful relations in these manifestations and functions. There cannot be any formation of leaders without the theoretical, doctrinal activity of parties, without a systematic attempt to discover and study the causes which govern the nature of the class represented and the way in which it has developed.¹²¹

Because the State has failed to carry out this function, has failed to support parties, and has failed to understand the interests that these parties might represent, the political system has now failed entirely. There are now no suitable bureaucrats ; there is a ‘squalor of parliamentary life’.¹²² All has fallen into corruption and decay :

Hence squalor of cultural life and wretched inadequacy of high culture. Instead of political history, bloodless erudition: instead of religion, superstition; instead of books and great reviews, daily papers and broadsheets; instead of serious politics, ephemeral quarrels and personal clashes. The universities and all the institutions which develop intellectual and

¹¹⁵ *PN*, 225.

¹¹⁶ *PN*, 225.

¹¹⁷ *PN*, 226.

¹¹⁸ *PN*, 227.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*. When the State sets itself apart from the parties, and damages the parties themselves, it opens the door for dictatorship.

¹²¹ *PN*, pages 227-228.

¹²² *PN*, 228.

technical abilities, since they were not permeated by the life of the parties, by the living realities of national life, produced apolitical national cadres, with a purely rhetorical and non-national mental formation. Thus the bureaucracy became estranged from the country, and via its administrative positions became a true political party, the worst of all, because the bureaucratic hierarchy replaced the intellectual and political hierarchy. The bureaucracy became precisely the State/Bonapartist party.¹²³

In this brilliant section, Gramsci lays out for us not only a detailed account of the Italian crisis, but also an account of how the State and parties are connected. In the Gramscian view, parties represent social classes and the people. If the parties are working in the right way, then, in dialogue with their constituents, they bring the concerns and their interests to the State. The State then embodies the wishes of the people. If the parties are invested in the State, provide the State with its workers, represent the interests of their constituents, populate the universities and the halls of culture, then the State and the parties are doing their job. But in the present Italian situation, the State and the parties are separated, and the State itself has now become a political party, and the traditional parties are nowhere to be seen. In this situation, the door is open to a new Caesar, and he has arrived in the person of Benito Mussolini.

Gramsci acknowledges the rise of a powerful and antagonistic force that has become established in opposition to the established order. But in most cases this new mass order, the rising working class, has been poorly led and has failed to take advantage of the social disorder attending the end of World War One¹²⁴ :

The problem was to reconstruct a hegemonic apparatus for these formerly passive and apolitical elements. It was impossible to achieve this without the use of force – which could not be “legal”.¹²⁵

Military war, says Gramsci, is simple enough. A military campaign involves the capture of a territory, and the destruction of an army. Once the territory is captured and the enemy army is destroyed, the strategy can be said to have been successful. But ‘Political struggle is enormously more complex.’¹²⁶ Now Gramsci is initiating his discussion of ‘war of manoeuvre’ and ‘war of position’, central elements of his developing political-strategic theory :

Ghandi’s passive resistance is a war of position, which at certain moments becomes a war of movement, and at others underground warfare. Boycotts are a form of war of position, strikes of (a) war of movement, the secret preparation of weapons and combat troops belongs to underground warfare.¹²⁷

Then begins a detailed discussion of British military tactics in India, and the French preoccupations with Germany. In each case, Gramsci argues, it would suit the controlling forces to provoke the subordinate populations into revolt, thus exposing their leadership and the sources of discontent.¹²⁸ The situation in the Balkans and in Ireland is also discussed.

¹²³ *PN*, 228.

¹²⁴ *PN*, 229.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *PN*, 229-230.

¹²⁸ *PN*, 230.

Gramsci reviews the best possible tactics for each situation. But he urges us not to use military tactics as a simple parallel to the way in which political tactics might work :

... the general criterion should be kept in mind that comparisons between military art and politics, if made, should always be taken *cum grano salis* [with a pinch of salt] – in other words, as stimuli to thought, or as terms *reductio ad absurdum*.¹²⁹

There are, Gramsci argues, other forms of warfare available in politics.¹³⁰ He is particularly fascinated by ‘commandos’, the small, armed bands that some armies maintain to capture certain locations – what we might term ‘special forces’ in our own era – and especially their counterpart in the private sector – the informal paramilitary militia that have developed in the Italian setting, for example. Don’t be misled by the tactics of the ruling classes, says Gramsci. For those who don’t have to work all day, it is possible to create commando activity at any time. For those tied to fixed hours, such tactics are impossible. In any event, the over-use of the military model is a mistake.¹³¹ Only in politics is manoeuvre and movement possible.

In his critique of Rosa Luxemburg,¹³² he points to her analysis of ‘the historical experiences of 1905’,¹³³ and suggests that she neglected the role of these voluntary groups in these important historical events. Nonetheless, Luxemburg showed how the war of manoeuvre could happen in politics. She showed how the economic crisis could be likened to the ‘field artillery in war opens a breach in the enemy’s defences.’¹³⁴ This initial breach thus allows one’s troops to rush in and take advantage of the situation. But Gramsci felt the argument, in the end, was little more than a delusion :

This view was a form of iron economic determinism, with the aggravating factor that it was conceived of as operating with lightning speed in time and in space. It was out and out historical mysticism, the awaiting of a sort of miraculous illumination.¹³⁵

Gramsci then leads us into the fields of Russian military tactics – we are wandering with him into the ‘vast marshy and swampy zones’¹³⁶ of the Russian front, through a discussion of cannon, machine guns and rifles, through the Polish campaign of 1920, and finally to a conclusion that the war of manoeuvre should be understood as a tactic, rather than a strategy.¹³⁷ This long ratiocination finally leads us back, however, to civil society and the State. Advanced States, Gramsci claims, are not subject to such militaristic and direct incursions because civil society is now a complex structure, and will not yield to an immediate economic crisis of the kind that Luxemburg had discussed :

The superstructures of civil society are like the trench systems of modern warfare. In war it would sometimes happen that a fierce artillery attack seemed to have destroyed the enemy’s entire defensive system, whereas in fact it had only destroyed the outer perimeter ; and at the

¹²⁹ PN, 231

¹³⁰ PN, 231.

¹³¹ PN, 232.

¹³² PN, 233.

¹³³ Ibid. A reference to the 1905 uprising in Russia that brought about significant changes to the political system, including the formation of the Duma, the establishment, of a multi-party system, and the creation of the Russian Constitution.

¹³⁴ PN, 233.

¹³⁵ PN, 233.

¹³⁶ PN, 234

¹³⁷ PN, 235.

moment of their advance and attack the assailants would find themselves confronted by a line of defence which was still effective. The same thing happens in politics during the great economic crises. A crisis cannot give the attacking forces the ability to organise with lightning speed in time and space ; still less can it endow them with fighting spirit.¹³⁸

A counter-argument might be posed by the experience of 1917 in the case of the Russian Revolution. Attempts to seize power result in a variety of responses, some immediate, some more long-lasting and slower :

In Russia, the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous ; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks ; more or less numerous from one State to the next, it goes without saying – but this precisely necessitated an accurate reconnaissance of each individual country.¹³⁹

Some obvious conclusions can be drawn from this long foray into what might be called semi-historical analysis. Certainly Gramsci was fully aware of the military tactics surrounding various shifts in governments and societies, and especially the events in Russia, both in 1905 and in 1917. Clear too, was his wide knowledge of the major activities in World War One. But these references hardly amount to serious historical accounts. Instead they are gestural moves made to document and illuminate his arguments, rather than attempts to secure, once and for all, the detailed history of an epoch to cement his case in place. He cleverly brings the discussion of trenches, and inner and outer circles of defence, back to the direct parallels with State and civil society, and in the heading to the next section of the notes, he sets out his conclusion clearly. There has been an important transition, in his view, from a strategy that he terms ‘the war of manoeuvre (the frontal attack) to the war of position’.¹⁴⁰ If the State in the West comprises several layers, several trenches, then it is not amenable to the kind of spontaneist attack that so excited the imagination of Rosa Luxembourg. The trenches of civil society, of hegemony – the ‘spontaneous consent’ of the masses¹⁴¹ - must be taken over before the State can be won back. But this new war, the ‘war of position’ will not be easy :

The war of position demands enormous sacrifices by infinite masses of people. So an unprecedented concentration of hegemony is necessary, and hence a more ‘interventionist’ government, which will take the offensive more openly against the oppositionists and organise permanently the “impossibility” of internal disintegration with controls of every kind, political, administrative, etc., reinforcement of the hegemonic “positions” of the dominant group ...¹⁴²

Gramsci believes that a ‘culminating phase’ has occurred in the ‘politico-historical situation’. If the war of position has now been won in the Italian case, this is a decisive moment, and the social structure is no longer readily susceptible to change.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ *PN*, 235.

¹³⁹ *PN*, 238.

¹⁴⁰ *PN*, 238. This is a close paraphrase of his heading.

¹⁴¹ *PN*, page 12.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pages 238-239.

¹⁴³ Then follows a long discussion, somewhat off the point, about nationalism and international. (pages 240-241) The debate that is reviewed is between Stalin and Trotsky. How does an internationalist strategy develop? One must start, one imagines from a particular national situation, and extend the argument from there. Some of the problems and challenges

Gramsci turns next to the question of how the State ‘forms’ the new man required for the new society. The State’s role :

... is always that of creating new and higher types of civilization ; of adapting the “civilization” and the morality of the broadest popular mass to the necessities of the continuous development of the economic apparatus of production.¹⁴⁴

In somewhat ornate language, Gramsci is reminding us of the obvious fact that education creates workers, that it fashions its citizens to the needs of the economy. Perhaps it may even need to create new physical types of being. The question he is wrestling with, however, is how will everyone fit in – how will consent be achieved?¹⁴⁵ In a detailed footnote¹⁴⁶ Gramsci reminds us that this is not a new problem, but rather an enduring one. The issue at present in Italy is the struggle for hegemony, the struggle, perhaps more precisely, between two hegemonies :

The old intellectual and moral leaders of society feel the ground slipping from under their feet ... This is the reason for their reactionary and conservative tendencies ; for the particular form of civilization, culture and morality which they represented is decomposing, and they loudly proclaim the death of all civilization, all culture, all morality ; they call for repressive measures by the State.¹⁴⁷

The emerging hegemony calls for something quite different. It is a hegemony based ‘The world of production, work.’¹⁴⁸ In this new universe, the State must be seen as taking an active role :

Because one is acting essentially on economic forces, reorganising and developing the apparatus of economic production, creating a new structure, the conclusion must not be drawn that superstructural factors should be left to themselves, to develop spontaneously, to a haphazard and sporadic germination. The State ... is an instrument of “rationalization”, of acceleration and of Taylorisation .. It operates according to a plan, urges, incites, solicits, and “punishes” ; ... The Law is the repressive and negative aspect of the entire positive, civilizing activity undertaken by the State.¹⁴⁹

developing both nationalism and internationalism are canvassed, though somewhat obliquely, and no clear conclusions are drawn.

¹⁴⁴ *PN*, 242.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁶ Footnote 42, page 242.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*. Gramsci comments ‘Collective and individual life must be organised with a view to the maximum yield of the productive process.’ *Ibid*. On pages 242-243, Gramsci repeats his previous argument that States become more complex during the 1800’s ; the old primitive States of the past are being swept away. ‘The massive structures of the modern democracies, both as State organizations, and as complexes of associations in civil society, constitute for the art of politics as it were the “trenches” and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position : they render merely “partial” the element of movement which before used to be “the whole” of the war etc.’ (*PN*, 243.) Writing as he is in note form, it is not surprising repetition creeps into the account. Pages 244 and 245 constitute an aside on sociology and political science without adding much to the broader argument on the State. Gramsci comments ; ‘Everything that is of real importance in sociology is nothing other than political science’ (*PN*, 243) and on page 244 ‘And, lo and behold, society can now be studied with the methods of the natural sciences!’, an early critique of positivism, of which, of course, Marx himself had been criticised. A wider discussion of what constitutes science then follows. Pages 245-247 comprise some incomplete notes on the separation of powers, rather like a shopping list of ‘things to do’ rather than complete arguments.

¹⁴⁹ *PN*, 247. There are moments among the notes at this stage where the role of the State is brilliantly illuminated, such as the brief section on the Law cited above. There are also many diversions and distractions. See, for example the section titled ‘Politics and Constitutional Law, (pages 247-253) in which the argument veers widely away from the main path. A long discussion of Machiavelli, and the early history of ‘pre-states’ in Italy is also canvassed.

In 'Parliament and the State'¹⁵⁰, Gramsci asks the question – does Parliament sit outside the State or within it? What is the relation between the two? But Gramsci comes to no conclusion on this point. The section is very brief and constitutes a series of further questions – Does parliament pose a difficulty for the State, a hindrance, a nuisance. Certainly, parliamentarians 'get in the way' of the career bureaucrat, but then they should be 'leading the State' in a democratic system. The questions hint at fascism, of course. Perhaps the parties are in the way. Perhaps democracy and parliamentarianism should be a thing of the past. Perhaps the bureaucracy has become ossified.¹⁵¹

Gramsci is keen to understand the duplicities and confusions rising up under the new fascist régime, and especially among the theorists of the new régime. Gramsci urges us to understand that fascism, despite its apologists, is still a class state – it is merely the latest incarnation of the monopoly capitalism of the past.¹⁵² It is clear, argues Gramsci, that no real equality can be realized without economic transformation. It cannot simply be willed into being.¹⁵³ The State is ethical to the extent that its purpose is to 'raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling class'¹⁵⁴ :

The school as a positive educative function, and the courts as a repressive and negative educative function, are the most important State activities in this sense : but, in reality, a multitude of other so-called private initiatives and activities tend to the same end – initiatives and activities which form the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes.¹⁵⁵

Gramsci argues that in Hegel's time, the bourgeoisie seemed to claim everything. There was a world that was limitless. Everything was bourgeois.¹⁵⁶ But the only thing that can create a truly ethical State, separate from class interests, is the rise of the classless society.¹⁵⁷ Then an interesting passage emerges in which Gramsci returns to the issue of consent. In a discussion of the French revolution, which in an earlier passage, Gramsci had referred to as a 'progressive Caesarism', Gramsci comments on the rise of consent at this time :

The State does have and request consent, but it also "educates" this consent by means of the political and synodical associations ; these, however, are private organisms, left to the private initiative of the ruling class.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁰ *PN*, 253-254.

¹⁵¹ A long peroration then develops under the heading 'Self-criticism and the hypocrisy of self-criticism.' (pages 254-257.)

¹⁵² *PN*, 257. In the notes to this section Hoare and Smith explain : '... the principal theorists of the 'corporate economy' in fascist Italy ... claimed that corporatism represented a "post-Capitalist" economy, and that it had abolished the anarchy of liberal capitalism.' (Footnote 59, page 257) But Gramsci is at pains to confirm that no such change has occurred, and that capitalist interests remain strong under fascism. Thus the only post-capitalist alternative remains Communism. There still remains a 'class-State'.

¹⁵³ *PN*, 258.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* So the State has ethical and moral purposes, and the phrase 'The Ethical State' the editors tell us in footnote 60, page 258, that comes from Croce. But, in the Gramscian view, it only has these purposes, not to elevate the moral life of society, but rather to prepare citizens more fully for the life of the newly-integrated economy.

¹⁵⁵ *PN*, 258.

¹⁵⁶ *PN*, 258-259.

¹⁵⁷ *PN*, 259

¹⁵⁸ *PN*, 259.

The argument prefigures later discussion of Italy's situation. Consent is always required for the State to be secured, but it doesn't bubble up from the ground organically. It must be managed by the State in alliance with civil society.¹⁵⁹ After some discussion of the aftermath of the French Revolution, Gramsci makes an important argument about the rise of the bourgeoisie, and the difference this makes to the structure of the State :

The revolution which the bourgeois class has brought into the conception of law, and hence into the function of the State, consists especially in the will to conform (hence ethnicity of the law and of the State). The previous ruling class were essentially conservative in the sense that they did not tend to construct an organic passage from the other classes into their own, i.e. to enlarge their class sphere "technically" and ideologically: their conception was that of a closed caste. The bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level. The entire function of the State has been transformed ; the State has become an "educator", etc.¹⁶⁰

This is a seminal moment in Gramsci's writing about the State because he encapsulates the bourgeois moment so powerfully, and show us its strength, a strength which was to last and carry many such régimes through a range of crises in the years to come. The capacity to produce a 'State in motion', a fluid State, able to embrace, absorb, co-opt and adapt itself to a wide variety of conditions, suggests a new kind of administration not seen before in this form. The State may falter, of course. It may return merely to a 'State of force'¹⁶¹, but if it is successful, the State and civil society will become as one.

Other writers, such as Halévy,¹⁶² have argued that the private sector is responsible for the rise of the modern State, but Gramsci claims that such arguments are exact proof in supporting his claim that the new bourgeois State is capable of absorbing everything :

... what does that signify if not that by "State" should be understood not only the apparatus of government, but also the "private" apparatus of "hegemony" or civil society.¹⁶³

Gramsci then continues his hunt for a more precise definition of the emerging bourgeois State. Is the newly-forming state just a 'night-watchman',¹⁶⁴ a State involved merely with maintenance of law and order? No, says Gramsci, for this kind of assessment misses the point as well, 'on the other side', as it were. If we give the private sector primacy, then we miss the significance of the coercive elements of the State. If we give law and order primacy, then consent and civil society are overlooked. Both consent (civil society) and coercion (political society) are embedded in the State. It is in the thesis of the 'State capable of

¹⁵⁹ In the French Revolution, Gramsci tells us, the work of 'private consent' was managed by two 'prevalent types' - clubs which were focused on charismatic individuals, with newspapers. No second 'type' is mentioned. He is referring to the Jacobins, and the various fractions, counter-clubs, and disputes that focused on this famous group. Again, we are reminded of the incomplete nature of Gramsci's notes.

¹⁶⁰ PN, 260.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., 261. The reference is to Daniël Halévy's book *Décadence de la liberté*.

¹⁶³ Ibid. Gramsci also cites Curzio Malaparte, from his book *Technique of the Coup d'Etat* who claims that 'Everything within the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State' a common fascist slogan used by Mussolini and widely repeated, simply meant "Where there is freedom, there is no State.' Gramsci thinks Malaparte has missed the point entirely. Malaparte himself is most interesting. An early fascist, he soon came to blows with the fascist state, and was himself imprisoned several times. His own name 'Malaparte' was created as a joke against Napoleon, which in Italian means 'good side'. 'Malaparte' obviously means 'bad side.'

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

absorbing everything' that Gramsci encapsulates the fundamental qualities of the emerging bourgeois State.

These elements of the State can take on various forms.¹⁶⁵ Intellectuals, Gramsci comments, want the State to stay out of the economy, but intervene in cultural matters. Catholics want the State to act on their behalf entirely. If this can't be achieved, then they want a neutral State that at least won't help their enemies.¹⁶⁶ Here perhaps, is one of the most famous passages in which Gramsci tries again to say, as precisely¹⁶⁷ as he can, how these elements of the State fit together :

We are still on the terrain of the identification of State and government – an identification which is precisely a representation of the economic-corporate form, in other words of the confusion between civil society and political society. For it should be remarked that the general notion of State includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society (in the sense that one might say that State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion) In a doctrine of the State which conceives the latter as tendentially capable of withering away¹⁶⁸ by degrees, as ever-more conspicuous elements of regulated society (or ethical State or civil society) make their appearance.¹⁶⁹

If we can't avoid 'a phase of economic-corporate primitivism' a phrase which he appears to be using to refer to fascism, then economic management must be the primary concern.¹⁷⁰ It must reshape the relation between men (sic) and the economic order, as Gramsci has suggested previously. This is the primary function of the State in this early stage of development. If the State has an ethical purpose, then it is to fit citizens to the new economic morality and economic order. There is little 'cultural' (superstructural) work in all this beyond the economic.¹⁷¹ If there is cultural work to be done at all, then it will be to deny the past, to criticise the previous errors of history.¹⁷²

In Robert Dahl's¹⁷³ much later work on the functioning of modern society, he made the much-disputed claim, contra C. Wright Mills¹⁷⁴ and his argument concerning power elites, that all branches of society have their forms of representation, and that it is in this way

¹⁶⁵ PN, 262.

¹⁶⁶ I am paraphrasing Gramsci here. PN, 262.

¹⁶⁷ 'Precisely' is a much-overused word in the Gramscian vocabulary, perhaps because the state of affairs to which it refers – putting the argument together in the most unambiguous fashion possible – is so hard to achieve.

¹⁶⁸ Gramsci clearly refers, in code as usual, to the Engels/Leninist theorem of the 'withering of the state' under the last stages of Communism. Engels initiated this argument, and Lenin expanded this account further. At some advanced stage of society in the future, Lenin and others argued, there would be no need for coercion. Only 'civil society' would remain. Stalin made passing reference to the same idea, but argued instead that society was not yet ready for the transition, both because of enduring external threats, and because of the under-developed state of the domestic sphere.

¹⁶⁹ Pages 262-263 in PN.

¹⁷⁰ PN, 263.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² PN, 264. Gramsci then discusses some allied topics – How does domestic policy and foreign policy connect. Which determines the other. These are questions he raises for himself, but which he does not attempt to answer.

¹⁷³ Robert Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*. 1961, Yale University Press, New Haven. Dahl spoke of the pluralistic nature of political power.

¹⁷⁴ Dahl's much discredited functional theory of politics was widely criticized, and clearly there is a wide difference between Gramsci and Dahl on almost every topic. For critiques of Dahl, see especially C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, Oxford University Press, 1956, Oxford, and C. William Domhoff, *Who Really Rules? New Haven and community power re-examined*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1978.

democracy is able to function. In the next section of the notebooks we see Gramsci in a Dahlian moment :

In any given society nobody is disorganized and without party, provided that one takes organization and party in a broad and not formal sense. In this multiplicity of private associations ... one or more predominates relatively or absolutely – constituting the hegemonic apparatus of one social group over the rest of the population (or civil society) : the basis for the State in the narrow sense of the government-coercive apparatus.¹⁷⁵

Again we see the Gramscian pairing of civil society/hegemony on the one hand, and coercive State on the other. Gramsci is telling us individuals have multiple affiliations, some contradictory, some not. The aim of fascism is to break these bonds and ensure that all interests are represented under the new régime. Totalitarianism can thus have two phases – the progressive phase in which a new culture is developed, and a reactionary phase, when other forms of culture are being suppressed.¹⁷⁶

5. The Gramscian Contribution to the Theory of the State

A reasonable commentator could argue¹⁷⁷ that because of the indeterminate nature of Gramsci's notes, the extreme conditions under which he was forced to write, and the limited access he had to the texts required for this work, that his writing on the State ends up being incoherent, incomplete and frequently contradictory.

1. Consider, for example, the central concept of 'hegemony'. In Prison Notebooks, the concept is referred to no less than fifty-one times, and it is not difficult among these many and varied references to discover inconsistencies. In the section on the intellectuals,¹⁷⁸ for example, hegemony is consent, set over and against the coercive power of the State. It is associated with civil society and '... that ensemble of organisms commonly called "private".'¹⁷⁹ Hegemony is that 'which the dominant group exercises throughout society.'¹⁸⁰ This seems pretty clear. Hegemony can be dominant,¹⁸¹ but we are still in the realm of civil society. But certainly ambiguities still remain. What for example, does Gramsci mean when he talks about Serbia :

If one studies what is happening in the kingdom of Yugoslavia, one sees that within it the 'Serbian' forces or those favourable to Serb hegemony are the forces which oppose agrarian reform. Both in Croatia and in the other non-Serb regions we find that there is an anti-Serb rural intellectual bloc, and that the conservative forces are favourable to Serbia. In this case,

¹⁷⁵ *PN*, 264-265.

¹⁷⁶ *PN*, 265. Gramsci further argues that both phases are asserted to be progressive even if the suppression of other ideas is clearly not progressive. The remaining sections of the 'State and Civil Society' notes add little that is new to Gramsci's argument.

¹⁷⁷ See the Smith Hoare introduction, for example.

¹⁷⁸ *PN*, 12.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *PN*, 53. Hegemony may be dominant, but through the exercise of dominating through ideas, or the predominating discourse. For the challenges facing translators as they try to establish a consistency in the case of the term 'hegemony', see footnote 5, pages 55-6 in *PN*.

too, there do not exist local “hegemonic” groups – they are under the hegemony of Serbia.¹⁸²

It could readily be asserted that this ‘hegemony’ is both political and private, that is, that the local groups are under the political control, the leadership of Serbian forces, rather than merely the influence of Serbian thought. The use is imprecise and ambiguous. Yet even here, Gramsci carefully refers to the non-existence of an ‘anti-Serb rural intellectual bloc’, so we could reasonably assume that the primary emphasis is on ideas, rather than force. Yet the uncertainty in the distinction between direction and hegemony remains.¹⁸³ ‘Leadership’ and ‘hegemony’ are used as synonyms in Gramsci’s discussion of Croce,¹⁸⁴ and he uses the term ‘political hegemony’ in his discussion of the Risorgimento, further confusing the distinction between the State/political, and the civil/hegemony parts of society.¹⁸⁵ Yet the distinction between State and civil society, between coercion and hegemony, is maintained in many other places.¹⁸⁶ And the weight of evidence clearly comes down on the side of a clear and useful distinction.

Gramsci thus provides for us a distinct separation between the coercive powers of the State and the need for civil society, sometimes called private society, to be won over before the State’s authority can be challenged. This does not mean that the two areas do not overlap, or that ‘consent’ is not ‘within the State’. Indeed, in his famous summary, often quoted, perhaps because it is so succinct, he argues :

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

Thus it still remains clear that he holds closely to the separation of those elements of the State which are coercive, and those aspects which remain in the realm of consent.

2. Then, there is his continued focus on political strategy. There may have been those who valued a direct assault on Italian fascism – this strategy is certainly heroic, and rewards those involved with the mantle of revolutionary purity – Gramsci saw how many activists were drawn to such a strategy like moths to a flame. He understood the personal struggles involved in such an approach. But it was clear to him, from his own biography, from his very detailed examination of Mussolini’s régime, coupled with his exhaustive reading of history, that such an approach would be doomed to failure, and would result in martyrdom and death in the Italian moment in which he lived. He had already experienced the political tragedies in Turin, where many colleagues and fellow activists had been beaten, killed and

¹⁸² PN, 104.

¹⁸³ See footnote 186 above.

¹⁸⁴ See footnote six, pages 128 in PN. See also Gramsci’s use of hegemony as leadership in his review of the French Revolution. (PN, 77, 79, 82, 83).

¹⁸⁵ PN, 58, 59, 66, 70, 76, 94, 98, 103. But on page 104, Gramsci makes it clear that he is talking about the intellectuals and their role in establishing hegemony. And in his discussion of philosophy and the especially the ‘philosophy of praxis’ hegemony is clearly placed in the realm of ideas. (PN, 333, 357, 365, 442, 462.) And again his discussion of the ‘*Hegemony of Western Culture over the whole World Culture*’ focuses on intellectual and cultural elements (page 416-418). In discussing Bertrand Russell on page 447, the same sense is applied.

¹⁸⁶ PN, 176, 388, 404, 408

imprisoned. Uprisings and insurrections had been put down repeatedly, relentlessly and with great violence. He had read his history and read it widely, and understood fully that revolutionary strategy had to have more to its weaponry than mere force. He made this argument on the basis of his realization that the modern bourgeois State was no Russia. It had surrounding it a series of trenches, of which only the outer ring was the State itself. It was the inner rings of civil society, now elaborately formed within and without the State, that also needed to be overcome. The left, therefore, needed to shift from the 'War of Manoeuvre', the frontal attack, to the 'War of Position', which is the struggle to gain decisive influence in society.

His political-strategic approach is embedded in history, and reflective always of lessons learned from the past. How is it that States come to a crisis and allow dictatorship and violence to emerge, he asks. It is the loss of hegemony by the dominant forces that brings this about. Usually this situation does not result in an enduring crisis. In most cases the dominant group recovers the situation. But, because of the slowness of the older political parties, this cannot always occur. In this instance, then an enduring crisis develops which needs drastic action :

... it means that no group, neither the conservatives nor the progressives, has the strength for victory, and that even the conservative group needs a master.¹⁸⁷

Gramsci also calls on historical analysis to show how certain classes play significant roles in these revolutionary moments. In a broken Italy, defeated in war (though technically on the winning side), financially bankrupt, and politically disorganized, it was the small farmers, along with the disenchanted and despised returning soldiers, who provided important elements of the emerging revolutionary class. The left had their chance in Turin, but, as Gramsci reminds us, they were long on rhetoric, and short on organization, and they failed. As the new fascist State emerged, Gramsci could see and could point out the enduringly bourgeois nature of Mussolini's new society. Private, capitalist interests still ruled the roost, even more strongly entrenched than before.

3. Then there is the question of Fordism. This topic, closely allied to Gramsci's thinking about the State and the future of the bourgeois social formation, is also dealt with in a deeply ambiguous way. One can, from the start, discern a fascination with the emergence of this new form of production, and uncertainty about how to deal with its existence, and he admits, its success in developing the productive forces of American society to a very high level. As the American industrial behemoth took flight, Gramsci and the left intellectuals from Italy and Germany could only look on in admiration and surprise, given the disastrous economic conditions of their own countries, and wonder how America did it. The 'super-exploitation of the workers' was the first answer, but Ford had paid higher wages. Indeed, as Gramsci argued, Fordism was neither a 'rightist' or a 'leftist' solution, and might lend itself to either side of the political bandwagon. Indeed, Hughes makes a telling point about the political fluidity of Fordism that is worth repeating :

While middle-class Americans believed that the world was waiting to hear about their political system

¹⁸⁷ PN, 211.

and their free enterprise, Germans and Russians were asking about Taylorism and Fordism.¹⁸⁸

Ford had shown that capitalism could make a profit, pay workers well, and create consumers, all by rationalising the workplace. Gramsci thought Italian history would get in the way here, and that Italian workers were indolent and lazy, thus ill-suited to the new régime.¹⁸⁹ But in Russia, Stalin was keen to learn from the Americans, to implement their programs and listen to their experts. It seemed, at first glance, that Taylorism and Fordism has won the day. But in Russia, it was Gramsci's view that a major error had been made in Stalin's attempts to introduce these new methods. The error was fundamental and telling. It was to militarize the workplace, and to introduce the harsh discipline of the army into industrial production. Gramsci thought this to be a profound error, and for a very significant reason. He thought Stalin had misinterpreted the role of the State, and reduced it to a coercive force. This was a disastrous misunderstanding, and would lead to failure. It would lead to failure because it failed to take into account the other half of the equation – private society, hegemony, consent. Indeed, for the new system to work, Gramsci thought that a 'new man'¹⁹⁰ might need to be developed through the apparatus of the State, and that this new man must bring to the workplace a strong belief in the system, a hegemonic acceptance, a consent to be 'managed'. Henry Ford had used a private army of inspectors to try to manage the private sphere. It was clear a secure family structure enabled the 'ideal worker' to arrive at work ready to be productive. Thus Fordism was not merely a theory of industrial work. It was a theory of society as a whole. It required a total rethinking.

Was Fordism important in the end? Gramsci remains ambiguous to the last on this topic, and especially about Fordism in Italy. On the cultural level, he is unambiguous, certainly. American culture he analyses as merely a rehashing of old European cultural tropes in a vulgar and somewhat louche form. But the industrial production system is another matter. He sees the beginning of Fordism in the emerging Italian fascist State, but he seems unclear about whether it will succeed to replace the archaic formations of the past. The answer seems to lie in the question of whether Mussolini can attend to the hegemonic side of the equation. Can Mussolini and the fascist State produce the new men and women that Fordism seems to require, and will these new citizens be true believers in the new régime? Gramsci does not come to a final decision on this central issue.

4. The Public and Private Nature of the State. Gramsci's lasting contribution has always taken to be his elaboration of the concept of 'hegemony', discussed above in this section. But more broadly we should perhaps remind ourselves that it lies more precisely in his dual notion of the public and private nature of the State. The Russian case is clearly absolutely central to his developing understanding of the State and the tactics required to achieve revolution, as well as to developing an understanding of the mechanics of the newly-emerging bourgeois States. Russian revolutionary tactics comprised almost entirely a 'War of Manoeuvre', a direct assault on the coercive apparatus of the State. Once this was achieved, the 'private' elements of the State, the elements of consent, were readily overcome. Gramsci reminds us this was no Marxist revolution in the strict sense. The bourgeois class were not fully formed, and the bourgeois State was absent. While a simple 'War of Manoeuvre' may

¹⁸⁸ Hughes, *op. cit.*, page 249.

¹⁸⁹ See footnote 59.

¹⁹⁰ Workers were always assumed to be male.

be successful in an underdeveloped society, it cannot possibly work in an advanced bourgeois State, where the mechanisms for establishing and maintaining consent are so elaborate and so strong. He uses the powerful imagery of trenches and battlements to make this point. The coercive elements of the State are merely one set of defences to overcome. More powerfully, the private and hegemonic battlements pose further and wider challenges for the potential revolutionary. Here the double task is to overthrow the coercive apparatus, to be sure, but also to gain the hearts and minds of society at large, a far more daunting task, for which the revolutionary left is ill-equipped. This theory of the dual nature of the State allowed him to foresee challenges in the Russian case, and also allowed him to understand Mussolini's emerging régime in a new way.

5. The question of the 'New Man', and the 'New Woman'. Gramsci is uncertain how things will emerge under fascism. He died in 1937, and Mussolini was to endure until April 28, 1945, when, along with his mistress, Claretta Petacci¹⁹¹, he was shot by partisans. Gramsci had already understood, however, that the new society, whatever it might turn out to be, would require a new kind of human being to carry out the functions necessary in the new society. Fascism was hegemonic inasmuch as it carried the population along with these ideas. The 'New Man' was clearly the ideal worker, honed and sharpened to fit perfectly into the new industrial order. This required the State to intervene in private life. It required monogamy and a stable home life. Correspondingly, the new order required the arrival of the 'New Woman' exhibiting the qualities of strong motherhood and submission. Few Italian women thought this an attractive proposition, and Gramsci clearly saw this weakness as a failure in the emergence of a new hegemony. And indeed, the fascist policies had little effect on the way women lived and worked. This was unfinished business.

6. Finally, Gramsci developed unrivalled understandings of the new régime. As the forerunner of other similarly-named political systems, Gramsci, through his biography and his understandings, offered unique explanations of Italian fascism. His biography gave him particular insights into the complex goings-on around him. First, as a journalist during the war, and then as an activist-journalist during the post-war period, and finally as a politician, he was writing from the trenches. His contribution is thus explained in part by his biography. And the historicist nature of his writing must also be remembered. He sought to explain history through context. He did not take the view that history was all the same everywhere.¹⁹² He understood, more than most, that a new form of society was developing, and that theory needed to be reworked, rapidly and dramatically, if this new society was to be understood and challenged.

Gramsci's notes are hardly complete, a comment endlessly made and repeated by commentators over the years. They ramble, they are disorganized, sometimes incoherent. But the writing is also highly creative, richly supported by history, and driven by an

¹⁹¹ Interestingly, Mussolini's mistress was very much not a 'new woman', but rather a 'crisis woman', a slim, elegant, woman not designed for the tasks of the new state. See footnote 42, and the wider discussion of the crisis woman in Natasha Chang's book, *op. cit.*

¹⁹² The precise nature of his historicism is still a matter of debate, though the fact of his historicist leanings is not in question. See, for example, *Gramsci's Historicism ; a realist interpretation*, Esteve Morera, Routledge Revival, 1990, New York. Morera comments : For some, historicism is the theory that only knowledge of history is knowledge ... there is (also) the historicism that truth is relative to its historical conditions. For others, historicism is the theory that only history is real, and that nothing exists outside history' (Ibid., page 2). Morera argues several kinds of historicism are at work in Gramsci's writing.

exceptional intelligence. Gramsci's universe was overwhelmed by a rapidly changing history. This was a world in which the decaying elements of Italian society were thrown against the rising fervour of the working class, and the emergence of what appeared to be an entirely new order. The fact that we have such extraordinary insights of this period to call upon, as we wrestle with the broad issue of how capitalism survived this turmoil, rests to a large extent on the theory of the State that Gramsci set out, against all the odds, during his extraordinary lifetime.