GRAMSCI, A BOLSHEVIK

One of the coursest vulgarities propagated about Antonio Gramsci by the opportunist politicians and the bourgeois intellectuals is the alleged distance, or even the contrast, between his positions and those defended by Lenin and Stalin, consequently his proximity with Trotsky's ideas.

The origins of this legend are remote and well orchestrated, beginning from the fascist "*Il Messaggero*", which, in announcing the Gramsci's death, spoke in ignorant and cowardly fashion of "*his fidelity to Trotsky*".

In the sixties and seventies of last century, Gramsci's "trotskism" was the daily bread of revisionist swindlers, which in this manner constructed the unworthy mythology of the extraneousness or even the aversion between the "good" Gramsci and the "wicked" Stalin.

In reality, from the cheking of the texts is coming out exactly the opposite, namely the coincidence with the Bolshevik positions and a clean-cut criticism of the positions of Trotsky and other Stalin's opposers. So let's leave now Gramsci to speak.

In his activity of leader and secretary of the Communist Party of Italy

In 1924 Gramsci, in his address to the "Conference of Como", sketched a parallel between Trotsky and Bordiga (who had moreover some differences of view), criticizing the one and the other:

"Trotsky's attitude, initially, can be compared to comrade Bordiga's at present. Trotsky, although taking part "in a disciplined manner" in the work of the party, had through his attitude of passive opposition - similar to Bordiga's - created a state of unease throughout the party, which could not fail to get a whiff of this situation. [...] This shows that opposition - even kept within the limits of a formal discipline - on the part of exceptional personalities in the workers' movement can not merely hamper the development of the revolutionary situation, but can put in danger the very conquests of the revolution." (A. GRAMSCI, La costruzione del Partito comunista. 1923-1926, Einaudi, Torino, 1971).

In the following year Gramsci, pursuing his struggle for the Party's bolshevization, asserted that Trotsky's positions about the "American supercapitalsm" were dangerous and had to be rejected because, "deferring tha revolution to an indetermined time, they would displace all tactics of Communist International [...[and would displace the Russian State's tactics too, because, if the European revolution is postponed for a whole historical period, namely if the Russian working class can not, for a long period of time, relay on the support of the proletariat of other countries, it's evident that the Russian revolution has to modify itself" (Record of the Gramsci's report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Italy of 6 February 1925).

Always Gramsci was aware of the importance of the struggle against the deviations from leninism and against fractionism. So, in the same report he stated: "Besides, the motion ought to say that Trotsky's conceptions, and first of all his attitude, represent a danger, as, in a country where a party alone exists, the lack of unity in the party split the State. This produces a counter-revolutionary movement: [...] At last, from the Trotsky question we ought to draw some lessons for our party. Trotsky, before the last measures, was in the same position where now is Bordiga in our party. He had in the Central Committee a part merely figurative. His position represented a tendential state of fraction, likewise the Bordiga's attitude maintains in our party an objective fractionistic situation .[...] Bordiga's attitude has disastrous repercussions, likewise had that of Trotsky" (Ibid.).

Again in 1925, in occasion of the V Plenum of the enlarged Executive of International, the italian delegation, led by Gramsci, sided without reservations in favour of the Stalin's positions concerning the criticism towards Trotsky.

For Gramsci the choice of socialism's edification in URSS, in the conditions of capitalistic encirclement, was consistent with the necessities of a period characterized by the relative stabilization of capitalism and the ebbing of revolutionary wave.

Therefore his intransigent criticism to Trotsky, to the strategy of "permanent revolution" which he considered incorrect, simplistic, insufficient, and his agreement with the strategy and policy of Bolshevik leading group: an agreement that, as we'll see, he will confirm in his *Prison Notebooks*.

Always Gramsci worried for the cohesion of Russian party, needed by proletariat both at national and international level.

In those years, in which the divergent positions between the Soviet party and the trotskyist and zinovievist block were become programmatic, Gramsci several times warned about the disgregation risks upon which the international bourgeosie would certainly lever in order to knock down the proletarian power in Russia.

With regard to the struggle engaged by the CC of PCR (b) against the opposition block of Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev, Gramsci wrote:

"In fact, a question is prominent in the measures jointly adopted by the Central Committee and the Central Commission of Control of the Communist Party of U.R.S.S.: the defence of the organizational unity of the Party itself. It's evident that, on this ground, no concession or compromise is possible, whoever is the beginner of the work of Party's disgregation, whatever is the nature and the width of his past merits, whatever is the position that he holds at the head of communist organisation. [...] So we think as well that all the International must steadily gather close around the Central Committee of the Communist Party of URSS in order to approve its energy, rigour and resolution in striking whoever is attempting the Party's unity" (Measures of the C. C. of C. P. of URSS in defence of Party's unity, in "L'Unità, 27 July 1926).

By the same worry for the organisational and ideological unity of the Soviet party, and for its national and international repercussions (particularly for the struggle that was conducted in Italy in aid of Party's development), is inspired the famous "Letter to the Committee of Soviet Communist Party" of October 1926, published in GRAMSCI, *Scritti politici*, III, Editori Riuniti, 1973).

In this letter Gramsci, in the name of Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Italy, did intervene in the harsh political clash that was developing in URSS between the Bolshevik leading group and the trotskyist-zinovievist opposition, declaring "basically correct the political line of the majority of the Central Committee of the CPSU", headed by Stalin.

Although Gramsci was only partially informed about the Russian situation, his siding with the Leninist majority about the contents of the struggle was downright and unequivocal. The essential charge to the splinter-block of oppositions is very hard and motivated by a reason of principle, explained by Gramsci in very clear terms:

"We repeat that we are struck by the fact that the attitude of the opposition [Zinoviev, Kamenev e Trotzky] concerns the entire political line of the Central Committee, and touches the very heart of the Leninist doctrine and the political action of our Soviet party. It is the principle and practice of the proletariat's hegemony that are brought into question; the fundamental relations of alliance between workers and peasants that are disturbed and placed in danger: i.e. the pillars of the workers' state and the revolution."

Being a fierce supporter of Leninism, Gramsci in the same letter harshly criticized "the root of the errors of the Joint Opposition, and the origin of the latent dangers contained in its activities. In the ideology and practice of the Joint Opposition are born again, to the full, the whole tradition of social democracy and syndicalism which has hitherto prevented the Western proletariat from organizing itself as a leading class."

It's a stance that Gramsci further reinforced in the following "Letter to Togliatti" (26th october 1926), in which, thinking about the slowness of the bolshevization process inside the

occidental parties, wrote: "The Russian discussion and the ideology of the Oppositions play a greater role in this slowing down and halting insofar as the Oppositions represent in Russia all the old prejudices of class corporatism and syndicalism that weigh on the traditions of the Western proletariat and slow down their ideological and political development."

And he concluded pointing out: "Our letter was a whole indictment of the opposition, not made in demagogic terms, but precisely for that reason more effective and more serious" (Ibid.).

Therefore is completely without foundation an interpretation of these letters that aims to strenghten the idea about a "Gramsci trotskyist" or oscillating. It's very clear on which side Gramsci stood in the struggle that developed within the Russian party: on the side of the Bolshevik majority of the Party members.

In the Prison Notebooks

As it's well-known, the revisionists assert that Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* does not writes about Stalin, or only indirectly, and when he hints at Stalin's URSS, he mentions it in a critical way (cfr., for instance, the thesis of G. Vacca in *L'URSS staliniana nell'analisi dei Quaderni del carcere*, in *Gorbacev e la sinistra europea*, Roma 1989, p. 75).

It is a matter of lies and mistifications, as the passages in *Prison Notebooks* relating to Soviet socialism are all in favour of Lenin and Stalin and against Trotsky. Four are the questions that Gramsci tackles in his *Notebooks* in order to defend Bolshevism and criticize Trotsky: 1) the theory of permanent revolution; 2) the revolution's phases, and the consequent strategy and tactics; 3) the industrialization in URSS; 4) the relation between internationalism and national policy.

Let's survey now the notes of *Prison Notebooks*, on the basis of the edition of International Gramsci Society (IGS). The text corresponds to that one of the Critical edition edited by V. Gerratana and published by Einaudi in 1975. In square brackets we insert the necessary explications of pseudonyms (for instance, in the *Notebooks* Lenin is named Ilich or Ilici, Stalin is named Bessarion, Trotsky sometimes is named Bronstein, sometimes Leone Davidovici or Davidovich) and of periphrases used by Gramsci in order to elude the Fascist censorship.

1. Gramsci wrote about Trotsky already in *Notebook 1*, at the end of an important note entitled "Class political leadership before and after the coming to the government". Taking as a starting point the events of Italian "Risorgimento", he was referring to the enormous and quite new problems that Soviet government had to face. In this note Gramsci was directly concerned with the Trotskyist password of "permanent revolution":

"With respect to the 'Jacobin' slogan launched by Marx to Germany in 1846-49 [the idea of uninterrupted revolution], its complex fortunes are worth studying. Taken up again, systematized, developed, intellectualized by the Parvus-Bronstein [Helphand-Trotzky] group, it proved inert and ineffective in 1905, and subsequently. It had become an abstract thing, belonging in the scientist's cabinet. The tendency which opposed it [Bolshevism] in this literary form, and indeed did not use it 'on purpose', applied it in fact in a form which adhered to actual, concrete, living history, adapted to the time and particular society which had to be transformed; as the alliance of two social groups [working class and peasants] with the hegemony of the urban group [working class]".

According to Gramsci, modern Jacobinism expressed itself first of all in a policy of alliance with peasants, under the working class egemony. So Gramsci esteemed the value of the correct Bolshevik policy conducted by Stalin against the Trotskyist thesis of "permanent revolution". This thesis dismissed the importance of poor peasants as a revolutionary force and expressed an entire mistrust in proletariat's capacity of leading all exploited and

oppressed people in the revolution, so much it denied the possibility of socialism edification in a country alone.

The note ends with a very hard charge against Trotsky, who is compared with the reactionary bourgeois Crispi: "In one case [Trotsky], you had the Jacobin temperament without an adequate political content; in the second [Bolshevism], a Jacobin temperament and content derived from the new historical relations, and not from a literary and intellectualistic label." It's interesting to observe that this same note was taken again almost integrally in Notebook 19, written in 1934-35, namely after the definitive breaking off with Troskyism.

Gramsci went back to the question of "permanent revolution" in a famous note intitled "Position war and manoeuvred or frontal war":

"It should be seen whether Bronstein's [Trotsky] famous theory about the permanent character of the movement is not the political reflection of the theory of war of manoeuvre (recall the observation of the cossack general Krasnov) -i.e. in the last analysis, a reflection of the general-economic-cultural-social conditions in a country in which the structures of national life are embryonic and loose, and incapable of becoming 'trench or fortress'. In this case one might say that Bronstein, apparently 'Western', was in fact a cosmopolitan -i.e. superficially national and superficially Western or European.

Ilich [Lenin] on the other hand was profoundly national and profoundly European. Bronstein in his memoirs recalls being told that his theory had been proved true ... fifteen years later, and replying to the epigram with another epigram. In reality his theory, as such, was good neither fifteen years earlier nor fifteen years later."

After having opposed Lenin to Trotsky, Gramsci added: "Bronstein's theory can be compared to that of certain French syndicalists on the general strike, and to Rosa's [Luxemburg] theory in the work translated by Alessandri. Rosa's pamphlet and theories anyway influenced the French syndicalists".

2. In his reflections, Gramsci linked the question of "permanent revolution" to the question of the transition from the "war of manouvre" to the "war of position". In particular, after the defeat of the revolution in Germany in 1923, and the transition of the worker movement to defensive positions, Gramsci was convinced that the problem of the development of the revolutionary process in Europe had to be re-elaborated, understanding the reasons of the the temporary failure and establishing the revolutionary tasks appropriate for the new phase.

The observation contained in *Notebook 6*, § 138 is dedicated to this relevant strategic and tactical question:

"Transition from the War of Manoeuvre (and from Frontal Attack) to the War of Position in the Political Field as Well. This seems to me to be the most important question of political theory that the post-war period has posed, and the most difficult to solve correctly. It is related to the problems raised by Bronstein [Trotsky], who in one way or another can be considered the political theorist of frontal attack in a period in which it only leads to defeats."

Facing the complex problem of the alternative, or rather of the combination, between "assault tactic" and "siege tactic", that had place in the debate of the Communist International, Gramsci started from a consideration of extraordinary importance, systematically ignored by the revisionists and reformists: "All this indicates that we have entered a culminating phase in the political-historical situation, since in politics the 'war of position', once won, is decisive definitively."

On the base of this consideration, that Gramsci realized analyzing the profound crisis of leadership and government skill of the bourgeoisie, but also the greater resistance of the State apparatus in the West and the existence of large intermediate social groups, he added in *Notebook 7 § 16*:

"It seems to me that Ilich [Lenin] understood that a change was necessary from the war of manoeuvre applied victoriously in the East in 1917, to a war of position which was the only form possible in the West [...] This is what the formula of the "united front" seems to me to mean [...] Ilich, however, did not have time to expand his formula - though it should be borne in mind that he could only have expanded it theoretically, whereas the fundamental task was a national one; that is to say, it required a reconaissance of the terrain and identification of the elements of trench and fortress represented by the elements of civil society".

We are here in the heart of the research that Gramsci developed in the *Notebooks*. But there was another key aspect of strategic and tactical methods determined by relations of power historically created: that of the Soviet Union. Regarding this question, Gramsci wrote:

"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 organize permanently the 'impossibility' of internal disintegration with controls of every kind, political, administrative, etc., reinforcement of the hegemonic 'positions' of the dominant group, etc."

It's an open adhesion to Stalin politics, to the reinforcement of proletarian dictatorship. A political line that "requires exceptional qualities of patience and inventiveness", but was the only one successuful in that concrete historic situation. A political line diametrically opposed to Trotsky's line.

3. As we have seen, a fundamental aspect of the "war of position" was the defence of Soviet power and of socialism edification. In this last case too, acute problems did arise. To the utmost interesting is the criticism expressed by Gramscy at the beginning of a famous note (*Notebook 4*, § 52):

"Americanism and fordism. The tendency represented by Lev Davidovitch [Trotsky] was closely connected to this series of problems, a fact which does not seem to me to have been fully brought out. Its essential content, from this point of view, consisted in an "over"-resolute (and therefore not rationalised) will to give supremacy in national life to industry and industrial methods, to accelerate, through coercion imposed from the outside, the growth of discipline and order in production, and to adapt customs to the necessities of work. Given the general way in which all the problems connected with this tendency were conceived, it was destined necessarily to end up in a form of Bonapartism. Hence the inexorable necessity of crushing it."

Gramsci here takes into account one of the crucial questions of the debate that involved the RCP (b) and the Communist International in the Twenties of last century: the question of the forms and rhythms of industrialization and NEP.

According to Gramsci, Trotsky is the highest representative of a harmful tendency, a kind of "americanism", founded on the coercion, the command and the military systems, namely the upholder of the forced and accelerated introduction of forms of production, modes of living and culture tied to the requirements of private capital (not carelessly Gramsci reminded the "interest of Lev Davidovic [Trotsky] in Americanism. He wrote articles, researched into the "byt" [life, mode of living] and in literature").

In the same note Gramsci affirmed that "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 the militarization of labour was a failure".

Therefore it was a position irreconcilable with Leninism, a position which contradicted the "temporary retreat" of the NEP and would bring about the break of the alliance with paysans and the ruine of Soviet power. So it was a tendency that had to be smashed without delay, as it aimed to capitalism's restauration.

Gramsci never evinced doubts on this matter. In fact, in two other occasions he explained and approved the Trotsky's liquidation: in *Notebook 14 § 76*, seeing it in perspective as "an episode of the liquidation of the «black» parliament too that existed after the abolition of the «legal» parliament"; and in *Notebook 22* (dateable at 1934), when, referring to Trotsky's tendency, he confirmed "the inexorable necessity of smashing it".

4. Last but not least, we present another note of great importance: the one contained in *Notebook 14*, § 68, in which Gramsci, taking as the starting point the talk of Stalin at Sverdlov University of Moscow (9 June 1925 – see the note below), put directly in antithesis Stalin (Bessarion) and Trotsky (Davidovici).

Gramsci writes, examining deeply the question of the relation between internationalism and the national policy:

"A work (in the form of questions and answers) by Joseph Bessarion [Stalin] dating from September 1927: it deals with certain key problems of the science and art of politics. The problem which seems to me to need further elaboration is the following: how, according to the philosophy of praxis (as it manifests itself politically) whether as formulated by its founder [Marx] or particularly as restated by its most recent great theoretician [Lenin] the international situation should be considered in its national aspect. In reality, the internal relations of any nation are the result of a combination which is 'original' and (in a certain sense) unique: these relations must be understood and conceived in their originality and uniqueness if one wishes to dominate them and direct them. To be sure, the line of development is towards internationalism, but the point of departure is 'national' -and it is from this point of departure that one must begin. Yet the perspective is international and cannot be otherwise. Consequently, it is necessary to study accurately the combination of national forces which the international class [the proletariat] will have to lead and develop, in accordance with the international perspective and directives [those of the Comintern]. [...] It is on this point, in my opinion, that the fundamental disagreement between Leo Davidovici [Trotsky] and Bessarion [Stalin] as interpreter of the majority movement [Bolshevism] really hinges. The accusations of nationalism are inept if they refer to the nucleus of the question. If one studies the majoritarians' struggle from 1902 up to 1917, one can see that its originality consisted in purging internationalism of every vague and purely ideological (in a pejorative sense) element, to give it a realistic political content."

It's clear as daylight that Gramsci, drafting "the fundamental disagreement" that divided Trotsky/Davidovici and Stalin/Bessarion, stood up firmly by the side of Stalin, the interpreter of Bolshevism who, in estimation of Gramsci, correctly drew up and solved the problem of the combination of the national forces that the international class must direct and develop in the perspective of world communism.

One of the best Bolsheviks

In the light of the texts, an interpretation of Gramsci's thought in a Trotskyist sense results without any ground. On the contrary, from the Gramsci's work, the reflections contained in the *Prison Notebooks* included, emerges inequivocally a ruthless criticism of Trotsky.

In all passages where Gramsci writes about Trotsky the content is always of harsh polemic. At the same time, he appraised positively the Lenin's and Stalin's choices, approved the Bolshevik policy, those features too that bourgeosie and revisionists embrace in the misleading concept of "totalitarism".

There is no handwriting or discourse in which Gramsci, in freedom or in prison, has negatively appraised or even has denigrated the leadership of Bolshevik party and comrade Stalin.

So, the forgers of modern revisionism, the magicians of "socialism of the 21th century" and the bourgeois and reactionary intellectuals are completetely disconfermed.

Antonio Gramsci was a great revolutionary leader of proletariat, a giant of the communist thought and action who always fought the anti-leninist deviations, who always defended the proletarian dictature, the system of working-class democracy embodied in the Counsels (Soviet) against the false bourgeois democracy and its socialdemocratic variants (as the today's "participative democracy"). He always insisted on the necessity of a revolutionary transformation of whole society through the demolition of the bourgeois State, and always remained devoted to marxism-leninism and to proletarian socialism, until the last day of his life.

As wrote the Comintern on the occasioni of his death: "Strictly binded to the masses, capable of instruct itself at the school of the masses, able to know all aspects of the social ide, inflexible revolutionary faithfult until his last breath to the Communist International and to his own party, Gramsci leaves to us the memory of one of the best representative of the generation of Bolshevik that, in the ranks of Communist International, was builded in the spirit of the doctrine of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, in the spirit of Bolshevism".

To snatch Antonio Gramsci, the great communist leader, from the bourgeoisie, revisionist and opportunist jaws is an important task for revolutionary proletariat.

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Note: This Stalin's speech, titled *Questions and answers* (*Works*, vol. 7) was translated in italian language and published in serial form by "L'Unità" in 1926. Gramsci, quoting by heart in jail, confused the date of that speech with the date (September 1927) of the Stalin's *Interview with the first American workers delegation*, that was in questions and replies too (*Works*, vol. 10), whose Gramsci in jail had read an account in a magazine.

The exchange of dates was not noticed by the editor of the critical edition of *Prison Notebooks*, Valentino Gerratana, who has perpetuated the mistake with a misleading explanatory note. Instead it's clear that Gramsci was referring to the *Questions and answers* of 1925 (cfr., particularly, the Stalin's reply to the question n. 2) and 9).