
So, in the prestigious *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* series, Gramsci takes up his rightful place of honour between Filmer and Harrington. At first glance, the reader (or potential buyer, especially a librarian in these days of cut-backs) might ask: do we really need another Gramsci collection? We already have (for this period in English) the collections edited by Hoare in the 1970s, as well as that (again published by Lawrence and Wishart, and not limited to the pre-prison period) edited by Forgacs in 1988. But such doubts would be mistaken for two main reasons. First, this collection contains pieces available for the first time in English, and second, the translation is of an exceptional quality, surpassing all previous renditions of Gramsci and bringing old, familiar pieces back to life even for someone (like this reviewer) who has read them innumerable times. In fact, Virginia Cox’s work captures beautifully both the stark clarity of Gramsci’s prose and his dry wit and sarcasm. For these qualities alone, this collection is to be recommended for students of Gramsci and libraries which already have the other translations.

But what about the actual content of the collection? The greatest surprises for those who know Gramsci come in the earlier sections, where Richard Bellamy has chosen some off-beat and fascinating pieces from the Sard’s fledgling journalistic career. ‘Cocaine’ (21.5.1918) is a brutal attack on the decadence of the rich: ‘categories of people who are entirely irresponsible [...] I am amazed that so few slip down the slope of destructive pleasures’ (p. 72). ‘Football and Scopone’ (27.8.1918) equates sporting success with the free market, and ‘scopone’ with countries where ‘the characteristic forms of civic life are the police spy, the plain-clothes policeman, the anonymous letter, the cult of incompetence and career-mongering (with corresponding pay-offs and favours for the politicians)’ (p. 74). And this is not the only time we recognize the Italy of today—and the petty-bourgeois Italy which Gramsci so despised—in these pieces written over seventy years ago. Gramsci never had much faith in ‘la gente’,—and he was well aware of ‘the scant interest the broad mass of people has always shown in political struggle’ (p. 5, 31.10.1914). ‘Capitalism’, he argued in 1919, ‘keeps going especially through the work of its lackeys and sycophants; and that disreputable breed is far from extinct’. His vicious denunciation of parasitic ‘bureaucrats’ remains just as effective as it did in 1920: ‘stockbrokers, small-time politicians down on their luck... having their little slice of power, so they can torture those beneath them and make them suffer’ (p. 151).

And there is much more here to treasure: the constant attention towards the role of the Church; the biting analyses (many of them familiar from previous collections) of the ‘white-hot crucible of working-class life’ (p. 253, 1923); generous intellectual and political references (from Gentile...
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and Croce to Salvemini and even to the hated ‘active’ reformists who are described as ‘intelligent, capable people who, let us admit it frankly, show themselves capable of working better and with more tenacity and perseverance than our own comrades’ (p. 251, 1923). This is not to say that Gramsci was polite in his criticism. ‘Marinetti is hardly doing anything at the moment’, he wrote to Trotsky in 1922, ‘he has got married and he prefers to dedicate all his energies to his wife’ (p. 244). ‘Young people of the Quarto Stato stamp’ were accused of ‘forcing ... opinions and objections on to long suffering pieces of paper’ (p. 313). Finally, Gramsci’s warnings about fascism are well-known, but here we are provided with two lesser known pieces which add to his ‘prophetic’ reputation. First, in ‘Socialism and Italy’ (1917) he predicted the violent anti-socialism of Mussolini’s movement: ‘The hunt is on. They are out to get us—to get socialism, to get the socialists. Anyone want to join in? ... Anyone want to bring along some nails and crucify the Antichrist?’ (p. 27). Second, in ‘The State and Socialism’ (1919) he anticipated the language (and even the clichés) of the regime: ‘The revolution needs men of sober mind, men who will see that there is bread in the shops, that the trains run on time’ (p. 101).

The collection’s value is augmented by a synthetic introduction by the editor, a chronology, a bibliography, an index and a glossary of terms. My only complaint is with the rather strange glossary of ‘political, labour and other organizations’ which is written in a weird truncated style (should there not be a ‘was’ in the sentence ‘the latter strongly opposed to any deal with the PCd’T? what does ‘Based on Parma and rather small’ tell us about the Unione Italiana del Lavoro?) and is not error-free: the USI was also very ‘strong’ in Apulia, and Togliatti was not a ‘fellow Sard’ but quite decidedly Piedmontese. It is unfortunate that small corners were cut in such an otherwise praiseworthy and enjoyable collection.

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The book begins by outlining a paradox in most discussions of the Italian political economy. On the one hand there are those which see Italy as chaotic, corrupt, suffering from a weak state and prone to regular crises. On the other hand, this picture sits alongside accounts of Italian success. Locke sets himself the task of explaining the nature of the paradox which lies behind these two images of Italy, while at the same time developing an alternative approach to the study of comparative political economy. He begins by outlining the two dominant approaches which are often associated with these images of Italy. First, the ‘National models’ school of comparative political economy, which focuses on the institutional arrangements and patterns of state-societal relations across different nations.

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