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GRAMSCI AND ITALY'S PASSIVE REVOLUTION

Edited by
John A. Davis

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Volume 1

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PASSIVE REVOLUTION



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EDITED BY JOHN A. DAVIS



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1 INTRODUCTION: ANTONIO GRAMSCI AND ITALY'S PASSIVE REVOLUTION

John A. Davis

In the thirty years since the publication of the *Prison Notebooks* the interest and importance of Antonio Gramsci's contribution to Marxist thought and political analysis has become widely recognised. It is in particular on the basis of his analysis of the structure of the capitalist state and his insistence on the essentially political nature of power exercised through what Hegel had termed the 'institutions of civil society' that this reputation has been established. Deeply influenced both by Lenin's appeal for a more revolutionary interpretation of Marx's writings and by his own aversion to the sterile gradualism of the reformist socialism of the Second International, Gramsci sought to rehabilitate that area of social activity which had been relegated to a subservient and almost irrelevant 'superstructure', and to demonstrate the essentially political function and class orientation of culture, ideology and social institutions. It was from this that the now familiar concept of 'hegemony' emerged, together with the call for the revolutionary movement to extend the front of its struggle in order to combat the capitalist classes at the level of ideology and civil institutions, as well as in the more traditional and restricted sphere of the so-called 'state apparatus'.¹

The concern to explore and identify the structures of the capitalist state is not only the principal characteristic of Gramsci's theoretical and political writings, but also the inspiration for his writings on Italian history. The problem of the nature and structure of the capitalist state in Western Europe is the central theme of those sections of the *Prison Notebooks* which are devoted to the century of Italian history which witnessed national unification, the formation of the liberal state and the establishment of Mussolini's fascist dictatorship. Gramsci the historian cannot be separated from, or contrasted to, Gramsci the political theorist or Gramsci the revolutionary. His historical writings were not the product of a retirement from active politics enforced by seclusion in a fascist prison. One of the principal motives for analysing Italy's immediate past was to reveal to his colleagues the inadequacy of their awareness of the fundamental structures and organisation of the state which they had unsuccessfully attempted to replace.² In his address to

the Lyons Congress of the Communist Party in 1926, Gramsci had already pointed uncompromisingly to the 'political, organizational, tactical and strategic weaknesses of the workers' party' as a cause of the success of the fascist movement in Italy.³ It was from this insistence on the need for unsparing and unsentimental self-criticism and reflection that much of the originality of Gramsci's thought was to derive. And it was along this *via crucis* that Gramsci embarked on a *post mortem* not only of Italian socialism, but also of the corpse of the liberal state. Only through careful analysis of the political structures and organisation of that state could a basis be laid for constructing a more effective and realistic revolutionary strategy. This could be achieved only by looking first at the origins and evolution of that state, and then by attempting to assess the relationship between Mussolini's fascist dictatorship and the earlier liberal state.

At first sight the essentially political emphasis of Gramsci's historical writings might seem to make them an inappropriate focus for a collection of essays concerned predominantly with economic and social aspects of Italy's history in this period. One recent Italian commentator, who could not be considered hostile to Gramsci, has indeed claimed that the *Prison Notebooks* contribute nothing new to an understanding of Italy's economic development in this period, because this was not Gramsci's primary concern.⁴ But it is, perhaps, precisely for this reason that so many of the questions and problems which Gramsci raised have shown the need for wider investigation of the economic and social structures around which the political systems of the liberal state were organised. It was certainly no accident that the debate on Italian industrialisation in the late nineteenth century – one of the few aspects of modern Italian history, other than fascism of course, to attract wide attention outside Italy – began with the criticisms which Rosario Romeo levelled against Gramsci's assessment of the shortcomings of national unification.⁵

It would be wrong to suggest, however, that Gramsci's analysis is of interest to the economic or social historian for purely negative reasons, or that the problems it poses are simply a matter of filling in gaps or demonstrating incongruencies. Few historical writers have been more impressed than Gramsci by the need to reveal the nature of the relations and inter-relations which united the disparate material, social and political aspects of the historical process both in, and over, time. If Gramsci had little that was new to say about the economic structure and development of the modern Italian state, this structure remained his fundamental point of reference. The alliance between the progres-

sive manufacturing and industrial bourgeoisie of the North and the traditional landowners of the South, the 'historical alliance', was the central reality of the Italian state, and the point from which his analysis of its political systems begins. And if much of the originality of Gramsci's analysis is to be found in the exploration of the ideological aspects of political relations, and in particular the relationship between social forces and forms of political representation, the material basis of those relationships is never called into doubt. Not only, then, are economic structures and relationships an integral part of Gramsci's historical analysis, but they are also the stuff on which that analysis is founded.

Gramsci was not, of course, the first to have identified the alliance between northern industry and southern landlords as the central and determining feature of the liberal state. Since the adoption of industrial and agrarian protectionism in the 1880s this had been one of the dominant themes in both socialist and free-trade liberal political writing. But Gramsci was the first to argue that the origins and consequences of this alliance constituted the fundamental feature of continuity running through Italy's political development from unification to fascism. This was the material reality which he set against Benedetto Croce's claim that the inspiration of the modern Italian state lay in the spirit and ethos of liberalism. Putting Croce through the same undignified exercise to which Marx had earlier subjected Hegel, Gramsci argued that the politics and ideology of Italian liberalism could only be understood in relation to the material and social structure within which they had taken form. Written in the same decade as the publication of Croce's *History of Italy* and *History of Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* at times read almost as a dialogue with Croce. But from this dialogue emerged an interpretation of the continuities running through Italy's history from the Risorgimento to fascism which drew together in a single comprehensive analysis a wide range of earlier socialist and anti-Crocean ideas and writing. And whereas for Croce fascism had represented an irrational and therefore temporary aberration from the guiding tendencies in Italy's development, for Gramsci it was an explicable, although not inevitable, continuation of the economic and political structure which had been present from the birth of the unified state. It is this alternative interpretation of the fundamental features and tendencies in modern Italian history that has become one of the principal bases for historical debate and discussion in Italy since the publication of the *Prison Notebooks*.

As Perry Anderson has recently pointed out, few Marxist writers are more difficult to read accurately or systematically than Gramsci.⁶

There are many reasons for this: the appalling circumstances and restrictions under which he was writing; the peculiar economy and terseness of his style, and the rapid juxtaposition of assertion and suggestion; the sheer breadth and complexity of his imagination. At any one moment his analysis develops at a series of levels: the problem of the state in general, that in Italy in particular; the role of ideology and intellectuals in general terms, and in the Italian state in particular; the relations between city and countryside in general, and in the particular circumstances of Italy. The list of problems that are confronted is long, and the relationship between the general and the particular is something that Gramsci rarely loses sight of; in his search for the unity of the historical process, each individual piece of the historical jigsaw is carefully related to a final overall pattern.

Not only does this mean that any descriptive account of necessity loses the richness of Gramsci's own writing, but it also makes it difficult, and potentially misleading, to single out any one theme of interpretation. There is, however, one theme which recurs time and time again in his analysis of the modern Italian state, and around which his interpretation of the fundamental tendencies in this period is based. This is the 'passive revolution'. Although the term is used in a number of ways, it is in essence both a description of the nature of the liberal state and an assessment of the shortcomings of that state.

The way in which 'passive revolution' was defined by Gramsci shows clearly the inseparability of his political and historical method. The central problem was always the state, and the variety of forms which political power might take within the state. But if the state — and Gramsci was concerned primarily, of course, with the capitalist state, and in particular the Western versions of that state — could in practice take a variety of forms which would differ in important ways from one country to another, so too would the political processes which created the state. Just as there were different types of capitalist state, so there were different forms of bourgeois revolutions. In Italy the form taken by both was 'passive revolution'.

In theoretical terms Gramsci explained this concept by reference to Marx's well-known assertion in the *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy* that 'no social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still find room for further movement, a society does not set itself tasks for whose solutions the necessary conditions have not already been incubated'.⁷ On one hand, this might seem to provide a good explanation of the type of state which had resulted from unification in Italy. The Italian bourgeoisie of the early

nineteenth century had been, in economic terms at least, relatively weak and heterogenous. It would therefore be entirely consonant with Marx's statement to find 'pre-capitalist' groups – in other words, the traditional aristocratic and landowning interests – represented strongly in the new political structure.

But such a definition also presented serious problems for Gramsci, because to define the basis of the Italian bourgeois state in such terms came close to an open invitation to the kind of political gradualism adopted by the Second International. It implied that the bourgeois revolution in Italy had been incomplete, hence introducing endless possibilities of procrastination for the revolutionary parties while they comfortably and inactively awaited the Second Coming. What Gramsci was concerned above all to stress was that such a form of revolution was still revolution. National unification had not simply provided a first step towards the capitalist state in Italy, but had created that state. It had permitted industrialisation, the establishment of bourgeois democracy, and Italy's elevation to the status of a Great Power (formally recognised in the Versailles Peace Treaty). At the same time, the circumstances in which that state had been created, and the nature of the social forces on which it was based, gave Italian capitalism both its particular, unique form and also determined limits beyond which it could not progress.

The argument becomes clearer if we look at the passage in which Gramsci contrasted the different forms taken by the state in Russia and in the West:

In Russia the state was everything and civil society was primordial and gelatinous: in the West there was a proper relation between the state and civil society, and when the state trembled the sturdy section of civil society was at once revealed. The state was only an outer ditch, behind which was a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks.⁸

It was the presence, for historical and cultural reasons, of these 'fortresses and earthworks' in European societies that made 'passive revolution' possible. The material weaknesses of the nineteenth-century Italian bourgeoisie, for example, could be compensated by political action directed, consciously or unconsciously, to achieve domination through the institutions of civil society – through culture and literature, through professional institutions and ethos, through education. By achieving 'hegemonic' power in this fashion, even a numerically small advanced bourgeois elite could give a decisively 'capitalist' imprint to a political revolution which necessitated support from more traditional social

forces. This, in Gramsci's view, was what had occurred in Italy in the nineteenth century, and the alliance between the advanced bourgeoisie of the North and the traditional landowners of the South was both cause and effect of the 'passive revolution'.

This provides at least one reason for Gramsci's very detailed analysis of the factors which contributed to the success of the Moderate 'Party' (the term is clearly anachronistic), which after 1848 became increasingly identified with the policies of Cavour, in providing the leadership for the national revolution.⁹ They were confronted by 'very powerful and united forces which looked for leadership to the Vatican and were hostile to unification'.¹⁰ The Moderates had little economic strength and even fewer physical resources. They had, therefore, to seek allies. First they looked to Piedmont and its army to carry through their revolution, and hence the national question became predominant. Secondly they had to choose between alliance either with the more traditional social groups on the peninsula or with the people. For the Moderates, any alliance with the people was out of the question, partly as a result of the terror which French Jacobinism had implanted amongst the European bourgeoisie, and they opted for alliance with the traditional groups. The result was, in Gramsci's phrase, "'revolution" without "revolution"'.¹¹

But revolution none the less, and it is here that the issue of 'hegemony' becomes relevant. Although the resources for establishing leadership on the basis of coercion were, in Gramsci's view, limited, the Moderates succeeded in compensating this by eliciting voluntary support and consensus. The ideology of Moderate liberalism, at once progressive in material terms and conservative in social terms, dominated Italian culture, and won over the professional and bureaucratic classes. Hence the Moderates became 'hegemonic', and it was this which constituted the dynamic element of the 'passive revolution'.

The process of passive revolution had other important features, which Gramsci developed in contrasting the success of the Moderates with the failure of the Radicals — that is, Mazzini, Garibaldi, Pisacane, Ferrari and their followers. At every point they were outmanoeuvred by the Moderates. The Moderate programme had a broad eclectic appeal; the Moderates learned from their mistakes; they used the national question and the external enemy, Austria, to unite a heterogeneous following; they were prepared to adopt radical measures such as the expropriation of Church land. The Radicals, on the other hand, were unsure of their radicalism. They did not attempt to counter the 'spontaneous' support won by the Moderates with an alternative 'organised' political force; they had no unified programme, no understanding of the political forces

opposing them. Above all they failed to play the card of agrarian reform, and hence failed to recruit to their platform the vast potential of peasant unrest. Hence the notion of 'the failed revolution'.

The debate which developed around the 'failed revolution'¹² has perhaps served to draw attention away from what was undoubtedly Gramsci's principal concern in examining the relationship between the Moderates and the Radicals. Because, in the Moderates' ability to dominate and even absorb the Radicals, Gramsci saw one of the central features of the type of political system which would emerge from the passive revolution. Particularly important was the conclusion that the 'Action Party (i.e. the Radicals) were in fact led "indirectly" by Cavour and the King'.¹³ This was a demonstration of the 'hegemonic' power of the Moderates, but it also foreshadowed a political system which was to become a fundamental feature of the liberal state — *trasformismo*. In *trasformismo* the lines of distinction between the different historical political parties and interests were gradually eroded in a single undifferentiated ruling alliance. 'One might say — Gramsci noted — that the entire state life of Italy from 1848 onwards has been characterised by *trasformismo*.'¹⁴

An even more fundamental feature of the 'passive revolution' than the absorption of the Radicals, however, was the alliance with the South. In Gramsci's view this alliance not only lay at the heart of the 'passive revolution', but its continuation after 1870 was the principal reason why 'passive revolution' remained the framework for political action within, and after, the liberal state.

The origins and development of the North-South alliance are analysed by Gramsci at two levels — one economic and the other ideological.¹⁵ To explain the economic origins of the unification of these two very distinct sections of the peninsula, Gramsci drew heavily on Marx's discussion of the relationship between city and countryside.¹⁶ This was a relationship, or series of relationships, which had a particular fascination for Gramsci. While on one hand the problems could be posed in purely economic terms — the ways in which the city, the nucleus of capitalist development, transmitted the germs of capitalist modes of production and social relations to the surrounding rural areas, and hence dominated the countryside — on the other, these relationships demonstrated precisely that inter-penetration of economic and cultural influences which constituted so important a feature of Gramsci's own thought.

Applying the concept to the South, Gramsci argued that the region as a whole stood in relation to the North as countryside stands to city. The South was predominantly rural and semi-feudal. The great Southern cities (Palermo and Naples were the largest cities not only on the

peninsula but also in the Mediterranean for most of the nineteenth century) were essentially 'silent', pre-capitalist cities.¹⁷ They were centres of consumption but not of production, in which the absentee Southern landlords spent their rent-rolls. They were, then, dependent on revenues from the agrarian economy, and their inhabitants simply provided the services required by the urbanised landowners. For this reason, this predominantly agrarian economy of the South was irresistably drawn into the more advanced urban economy of the North. The South came to constitute a classical *Nebenland*, an area of colonial dependence which the Northern economy could exploit at will and from which, in particular, it could draw off capital through taxation and through the internal imbalance of trade, in order to further the development of the Northern economy.¹⁸ The alliance between North and South embodied in national unification was not merely an unequal partnership, but a partnership which ensured the continuing, and even worsening, backwardness of the South.

Equally important, however, was the political partnership which accompanied this economic symbiosis. What made the South an essential feature of the 'passive revolution' was the fact that it provided extensive possibilities for the exercise of that type of political influence which Gramsci described as 'hegemony'. The economic structure of the South meant that the Southern bourgeoisie, other than the great landowners, was predominantly professional, bureaucratic and intellectual. It was the sons of the Southern gentry who filled the law courts, the schools, the universities and the political institutions of the liberal state, and it was they who provided the most effective evangelists of the ideology of that state. The social basis of the Southern bourgeoisie had made them particularly susceptible to the attraction of the Cavourian programme, and as a result the Southern bourgeoisie provided one of the most important bases for the continued exercise of Northern hegemonic power. It was for this reason that Gramsci singled out two of the great Southern intellectuals, Benedetto Croce and Giustino Fortunato, as the bastions of Italian capitalism.¹⁹

Both the theory of economic exploitation and the political contribution of the Southern bourgeoisie had been widely discussed by earlier Italian writers. Gaetano Salvemini, for one, had described the block of Southern deputies who obediently gave their votes to any government prepared to offer them in return political patronage and privilege as 'Giolitti's askaris'. But the originality of Gramsci's argument lies not only in the way in which the economic and political features of the alliance become reciprocally self-sustaining, but also in the claim that

the backwardness of the South was a necessary condition for the development of Italian capitalism. The 'Southern Problem', that open wound in Italian society, was not accidental or even, given the structure of the state, open to remedy. It could not, therefore, be argued that the South simply represented a 'feudal residue' which would wither away as the Italian economy progressed. In fact, the contrary was true. For this reason, not only was the alliance between North and South an essential feature of the 'passive revolution', but was to remain the main limitation to the subsequent development of the Italian state thereafter.

North and South, *trasformismo* and passive revolution, all then became part of a single process which determined the essential character of the liberal state. But the process did not end with national unification. For Gramsci, Italy's political development between 1870 and 1914 was dominated by the attempt to maintain and extend both the structure and the strategy of the 'passive revolution'. Crispi's attempt to speed up the rate of development and establish Italy among the Great Powers failed because he stepped outside the confines of the passive revolution. Trade war with France alienated both export-orientated industrialists and many landowners, so threatening the base of the system of political and economic alliances. But in Giolitti, Gramsci recognised the master of the strategy of 'passive revolution'. Giolitti's parliamentary alliance with the Socialists in the face of mounting opposition to the exclusive political power of the traditional ruling class constituted, for Gramsci, the high point of *trasformismo*, the incorporation of the workers' representatives, but not the workers, in the political system.²⁰

Yet if the strategy of passive revolution reached its culmination in the pre-war decade, it was shortly to be thrown into serious crisis for the first time. When Mussolini and the Intransigents wrested control of the Socialist Party from the reformists, the trasformist alliance broke down. War with Libya in 1911 made reconciliation impossible, and in 1913 Giolitti 'changed his rifle to the other shoulder' and set out to woo the Catholic peasantry of Northern Italy by means of the Gentiloni Pact. But the concessions made on the way made it difficult to keep the system together. The crisis which followed the outbreak of war in Europe and the fierce debate over whether and how Italy should intervene served to polarise attitudes further, making the politics of 'passive revolution' unworkable. The introduction of universal suffrage in the South also made electoral manageering more difficult, further weakening the traditional system, and Giolitti for once was unable to find a formula to bridge the growing diversity of interests and political ambitions.

Although the war brought crucial changes to Italy's economic and

social structure, the crisis which followed the peace was, in Gramsci's view, essentially a continuation of the pre-war problem. The rapid expansion of certain sectors of heavy industry in particular and the parallel mobilisation and politicisation of large strata of the working class and the peasantry which had resulted from the war, meant that the circumstances had changed radically. But underlying the crisis and underlying the emergence of the 'fascist solution', Gramsci saw the attempts of the traditional capitalist classes to restore the structure of passive revolution.

Gramsci did not provide any comprehensive analysis of the rise of Italian fascism, and clearly in the case of his prison writings it was a difficult subject for him to approach directly.²¹ However, his earlier writings and his address to the Lyons Party Congress in 1926 make it clear that he saw fascism as the consequence not of any single cause, but rather as the product of a convergence of developments and problems, not least of which was the strategy of the left in these years. But if he avoided any single explanation, and so implicitly denied that the fascist solution was in any sense predetermined or inevitable, he did insist on the continuities which linked fascism to the liberal state.

Other socialists, like Bordiga, had argued that the fascist experiment was no more than a temporary expedient adopted by the capitalist classes in response to the panic aroused by the show of proletarian strength in the post-war crisis. But it was an expedient which could not outlive that sense of panic, because it was only in a system of bourgeois democracy that Italian capitalism could continue to develop. The fascist counter-revolution was useful only in the short term, but would thereafter begin to damage the interests of the bourgeoisie. But for Gramsci such an interpretation risked perpetuating the unjustified optimism which had encouraged the left to under-estimate the strength of the capitalist state throughout the post-war crisis. Fascism was something more than a capitalist 'White Guard', and it bore a more permanent relationship to the structure of the liberal state. Only if the nature of that relationship was made clear would it be possible to construct an effective strategy of opposition.²²

Gramsci's writings on fascism from the time of the first appearance of the blackshirt squads to the corporatist regime which became established by the early 1930s are filled with this search for continuities and links. He was amongst the first to point to the significance of the *petit bourgeois* following which the fascist movement had developed from its earliest appearance. Comparing this urban and rural *petit bourgeoisie* to Kipling's Bandar Log people²³ – mindless apes ready to follow any leader

prepared to flatter their vanities and aspirations – Gramsci drew two conclusions. First, the presence of this *petit bourgeois* following suggested that fascism was something more than an anti-socialist strike-breaking force at the service of Italian capitalism, and that it had a firm base in certain aspects of the social structure. Secondly, the means by which this following had been achieved suggested a parallel with the liberal state. In order to win the support of these groups the fascists had created a programme and an ideology which appealed directly to their aspirations. And in this Gramsci saw a successful attempt to create a new form of hegemonic power which, in the changed circumstances of post-war Italy, was able to replace the earlier forms of hegemony exercised by the traditional ruling classes within the liberal state.²⁴ The form, together with the circumstances, had changed, but the structure of political domination remained the same.

If fascism as a new form of hegemonic power suggested one continuity with the liberal state, another lay in the city-countryside relations which underlay the emergent fascist movement. It was the rapid expansion of agrarian fascism in the Po Valley and in Tuscany in particular, in the years between 1920 and 1922, which had transformed Mussolini's early urban fascism into a mass movement. For Gramsci, the adoption of the fascist solution by the Northern agrarians was of the utmost significance. After the factory occupations he had written: 'By striking at the peasant class, the agrarians are attempting to bring about the subjugation of the urban workers as well.'²⁵ In other words, agrarian fascism was not a separate phenomenon, but was closely related to the struggle in the cities to dominate the organised working classes. In fact, what this amounted to was a revival and continuation, in the new circumstances created by the war, of the traditional industrial-agrarian axis of the Italian political structure. And because the counter-offensive directed against the peasantry struck at the weakest sector of the proletarian front, it made the question of the formation of an effective worker-peasant alliance all the more immediate.

On the nature of this new city-countryside partnership Gramsci seemed less certain. Northern agriculture was certainly very different from that of the South, as was the agrarian structure. But the objectives of the new alliance seemed unchanged. The agrarians had come to the rescue of the Northern industrialists who had been abandoned by the state in their struggle with the workers. In so doing, the agrarians seemed to be attempting to restore the political influence of which they had in important ways been deprived by the war. The result was to restore and reconstruct the 'passive revolution'.

Despite the anti-capitalist rhetoric of early fascism, Gramsci had little doubt that the movement which emerged from the post-war crisis represented an attempt to reconstruct and reconsolidate bourgeois power in the new circumstances resulting from the war. This continuity was strengthened and confirmed, in Gramsci's view, by the behaviour of the regime once it had established power. In the introduction of corporatist institutions, particularly those in the economic and financial fields in the early 1930s, Gramsci saw evidence of a direct connection between the fascist experiment and the problems posed for Italy by developments in the international economy since the war. In the essay on *Americanism and Fordism* he suggested that fascism was in some senses a response to the problems created for the European economies as a whole, and that of Italy in particular, by the advent of mass production, rationalised planning and scientific management in America. The changes associated with Henry Ford and Frederick Taylor posed a terrible threat to the antiquated 'liberal' structures of the Western economies, which they could not afford to neglect. The question that Gramsci asked was whether fascism could be seen as an attempt to introduce such forms of economic organisation in Italy:

The ideological hypothesis could be posed in the following terms: that there is a passive revolution involved in the fact that through the legislative intervention of the state and by means of the corporate organisations, far reaching modifications are being introduced into the country's economic structure in order to accentuate the 'plan of production' element; in other words, that socialisation and co-operation in the sphere of production are being increased without, however, touching (or at least not going beyond the regulation and control of) individual and group appropriation and profit.²⁶

As Paul Corner points out in the last essay in this book, this is a question on which there is both little agreement and little research. But although Gramsci believed that the fascist economic system could in some senses be seen as an attempt to modernise and develop the Italian economic structure within the context of passive revolution — that is, without permitting any parallel political and social development — his own conclusion was that this intention could not be realised. The crucial difference between America and the Western European countries lay in their social structures.²⁷ Like Lenin, Gramsci argued that the distinctive feature of American society lay in the absence of a pre-capitalist structure. The American bourgeois revolution had been born *ex novo*. In

Europe, on the other hand, the capitalist revolutions had been established in the context of the struggle against pre-capitalist social classes which had never entirely disappeared. In Italy, in particular, the legacy of this pre-capitalist structure weighed heavily. The 'passive revolution' had meant that Italian society remained trapped in a framework in which capitalist and pre-capitalist groups co-existed side by side in mutual interdependence. Unlike America, Italian society contained large parasitic and non-productive groups, superfluous bureaucrats and professionals, whom Gramsci described with a characteristic flourish as 'pensioners of economic history'. The presence of such groups, he argued, made impossible the type of reorganisation and rationalisation of production which was taking place in America. Rather than reduce their numbers, in fact, the experiments embodied in the corporate institutions of the fascist state simply served to increase the opportunities for bureaucratic and non-productive employment. Fascism was not a new departure, but a continuation of the traditional structure of the passive revolution, and for that very reason was incapable of advancing the structure of Italian society beyond the limits dictated by the 'passive revolution'.

It is then 'passive revolution' which both defines and explains the continuity of Italian history from unification to fascism. At every stage there were alternatives: the Radicals might have taken up the peasant cause, Giolitti might have gone further towards effectively incorporating the working classes into the political system; in the post-war crisis other alternatives were available and might have been adopted. But in each case, Gramsci argued, to have accepted such alternatives would have implied moving outside the framework of 'passive revolution'. It would have forced the Italian capitalist classes to accept some broader degree of social and political change as the concomitant of economic development. This they were not prepared to do because it would have jeopardised the alliance between industry and agriculture, of which 'passive revolution' was the direct political expression.

It is against this interpretation that the essays which follow can be set. While they do not provide a comprehensive discussion of Gramsci's analysis, they do attempt to explore further certain of the problems and relationships identified by Gramsci. Although the range of topics with which they deal is too narrow to provide the basis for any thorough revision of Gramsci's arguments, the conclusions of each of the contributions would tend to confirm that the predominant relations in, and between, industry and agriculture, constituted one of the principal obstacles both to development and stability in the liberal state. On the

other hand, the conclusions reached are less easily reconcilable with the more general interpretative concepts which Gramsci uses, and in particular they raise a number of questions concerning the 'passive revolution' and the implications of immobility and continuity which surround it.

It is not, I think, very helpful to pose the question in terms of whether Gramsci's reading of Italian history was right or wrong, at least in part because such a question is unanswerable. The question that would appear to be more relevant and useful is to what extent the concept of 'passive revolution' adequately serves to identify the aspects of the relationship between social forces and political organisation which were particular to Italy, and hence would explain the particular development of the Italian state. Following on from this one can also ask how adequate was Gramsci's analysis of the social and, in particular, economic bases of those social forces – the agrarian and industrial classes in particular – and to what extent does more detailed study of these relationships confirm or modify his own analysis.

First, to what extent was the 'passive revolution' a specific characteristic of the bourgeois state in Italy? Certainly the alliance between industrial and agrarian sectors of the national bourgeoisie was not in itself unique. Paul Ginsborg, in the first of the essays which follow, argues that the relationship between these two sectors of the middle classes played a major role in determining the timing of the delays between political and economic change throughout Europe. Both the partnership of manufacturing and agrarian interests and also the role played by the agrarian question – in other words, the satisfactory absorption of the countryside in capitalist relations of production – were not problems unique to Italy, but rather general features of the European bourgeois revolutions. In which case the social and economic base of the political system in Italy might be compared with that of Louis Philippe's France or Bismarck's Germany, and the transition from the liberal state to fascism with Louis Napoleon's Caesarism or German National Socialism. Such comparisons are of course frequently made, but they have not, it must be said, proved particularly fruitful. Highly specific political, cultural and economic realities tend to inhibit comparison of any but the most general and superficial features of these developments. Does the concept of 'passive revolution' identify any qualitative feature, then, of this reasonably typical political system?

Gramsci uses the term 'passive revolution' in both a comparative and a particular sense. He applies it at times to Europe as a whole, for the period between 1815 and 1870, and then again for the years after the First World War. He also uses it at other times as a synonym for 'war of

position', in contrast to 'war of manoeuvre'. At the same time, it was only in Italy that 'passive revolution' became the permanent form of political organisation and strategy. There were also particular characteristics of the Italian state and society which made this form of 'passive revolution' possible. As we have described above, it was the hegemonic power of the advanced sectors of the national bourgeoisie which, in Gramsci's view, enabled them to establish and maintain control over the direction and programme of the revolution. But this resulted from two features which were peculiar to Italy — the material weakness of the bourgeoisie and the opportunities for hegemonic action provided by the peculiar social and economic situation of the South. Hegemony is used not only to designate forms of political power dependent on consensus rather than coercion, but also to provide the qualitative distinction of the 'passive revolution'. But it is precisely in the evaluation of this qualitative feature that Gramsci's argument seems least certain.

The general remarks which Gramsci makes on the importance of the formation of hegemonic power before achieving control of the state suggest that he saw certain parallels between the situation of the nineteenth-century Moderates and that of the Communist Party after the fascist victory. Like the earlier Moderates, the Communist Party lacked the resources and organisation to mount a frontal assault on the fascist state. Did Gramsci then see in the Moderate strategy of 'passive revolution' a possible model for the Communist Party to adopt? The suggestion has been vehemently denied,²⁸ and even if such a model is not entirely foreign to the policies of the present-day Communist Party in Italy, there would not seem to be any grounds for believing that Gramsci was recommending such a strategy. Certainly he did advocate that the revolutionary struggle should also be waged through the institutions of 'civil society', but this was something far short of advocating the adoption of 'passive revolution'.

It is not so much Gramsci's revolutionary philosophy which becomes unclear as a result of this parallel, but rather his interpretation of the national revolution. On one hand, he stressed the strength of the opposition which the nineteenth-century Liberals overcame, their willingness to adopt certain policies which were more 'radical' than those of the Radicals, and he even described the 'passive revolution' on one occasion as a 'brilliant solution' to the problems facing the Liberals.²⁹ On the other hand, there can be no doubt as to the negative character of his overall evaluation. Echoing Mazzini, he wrote: 'They [the Moderates] were aiming at the creation of a modern state, and they created a bastard.'³⁰ Such a 'failed revolution' would hardly provide a healthy

model for the Communist Party to adopt in the 1930s. But this also places a major question mark against the concept of hegemony. How effective was the much discussed hegemonic role of the Italian bourgeoisie? Did it, in particular, provide an outcome which in any way went qualitatively beyond the material interests of the dominant social forces? The answer is clearly, no. In which case the prop on which the distinctive feature of the 'passive revolution' rested collapses. If hegemony ceases to be the distinctive feature of the bourgeois political ascendancy in Italy, then we are forced back on to the industrial-agrarian alliance — and in particular the specific features and content of that alliance — in order to discover the peculiarities of the 'Italian case'.

If 'passive revolution' presents problems in terms of the specificity of the political system which resulted from unification, the continuities implied in it also raise certain questions. In the first place, the argument that passive revolution was both cause and effect involves a degree of *a posteriori* rationalisation. As Paul Ginsborg argues, in the case of the Risorgimento this results in an undue subordination of the 'moment' of revolution to the more general 'process', and causes Gramsci to underestimate the real alternatives open to the Italian Liberals in 1848 and 1860. My own essay also suggests that neither 'passive revolution' nor the industrial-agrarian alliance can be seen as causes, rather than results, of the unification of North and South. Similarly, Paul Corner's argument that it was the South that lost most heavily under fascism would also question one of the most fundamental aspects of the continuity of the 'passive revolution'.

What these problems suggest, I think, is a certain tension between the different levels of Gramsci's analysis. At one level, he was always extremely alert to specific social and economic relations, and to specific circumstances of time and place. At a more general and comparative level, however, such distinctions tend to become lost in a series of broader and more abstract categories which perhaps owe much to the Idealist tradition in Italian historiography. The search for the unity and the integral relations binding the different elements of the historical process together is not reconciled wholly satisfactorily with Gramsci's own awareness of distinctions of time and place, and of the peculiar diversities of social and economic conditions in Italy. As a result these broad comparative concepts do not really help to identify the particular features of the economic and social structure around which the Italian state evolved. As Gramsci himself argued 'the state is only conceivable as the concrete form of a specific economic world, a specific system of production',³¹ and it is therefore the nature of the relations embodied in the highly

diversified texture of the Italian economic system which requires closer examination.

It is with one such set of relations, those between landlord and peasant, that Adrian Lyttelton's essay is concerned. Arguing that the failure to resolve the agrarian question constituted a fundamental weakness of Italian liberalism, he shows that relations between landlords and peasants developed in a variety of forms which differed not only between North and South, but also at a more localised level. Although in certain areas – in particular the Po Valley and Tuscany – the links between agrarian instability and fascism might seem direct, he warns against any simple equation of the two. Even in cases where agrarian conflict assumed the character of open class antagonism, the political consequences were far from uniform. Rather than determining any one political outcome, Adrian Lyttelton concludes, the failure to solve the agrarian question both undermined the liberal state and also served to obstruct any gradual process of social or political development at either local or national level.

Frank Snowden takes up a similar argument in his detailed study of one of the forms of agrarian contract discussed in Adrian Lyttelton's essay, the Tuscan *mezzadria*. Describing the gradual collapse of the traditional *mezzadria* system under the impact of commercialisation from the 1880s to the early 1920s, he shows how the contractual situation of the peasants deteriorated rapidly in the face of unbending landlord conservatism. The growing insecurity of the landlords on the one hand, and the growing but still disorganised resentment of the peasants on the other, combined to produce a peculiarly volatile situation in the province by the close of the First World War, making the region very vulnerable to the influence of the early fascist movement. This particular case lends further support to Adrian Lyttelton's more general conclusions, and shows the importance of studying both specific economic relations and also the specific regional circumstances within which they evolved.

The element of regional diversity is again stressed in the essays by Alice Kelikian and Anthony Cardoza, which examine the relations between and within industry and agriculture in two different regional contexts in the early twentieth century. Anthony Cardoza traces the growing inter-penetration between industrial and agricultural capital in the Po Delta, a region which was to play a vital part in the development of agrarian fascism. He argues that this economic inter-penetration should not be seen as an attempt to put the clock back, but marked the advance of industrial capitalism into the countryside. At the same time, the political consequences of this partnership by the time of the outbreak of the European war were far from clear. The uncertainty and insecurity

which accompanied the partnership, together with the difficulty of expressing these new economic interests within the framework of existing political parties helps to explain the particular susceptibility of the Po Valley agrarians to the blandishments of the fascists. But while Anthony Cardoza's argument confirms the importance of the relationship between industry and agriculture in this region, which Gramsci had pointed to, it also demonstrates that it was of a very different nature from the earlier North-South alliance of industry and agriculture, and was not therefore simply a continuation of the 'historical alliance'.

Similar political uncertainty and confusion resulted from the economic changes caused by the war in the province of Brescia which Alice Kelikian has studied. The war broke down the earlier equilibrium between agriculture and industry in the province, brought about qualitative changes in industrial organisation and reduced the region's economic isolation. However, these changes were far from completed by the end of the war. The Brescian workers were little better organised than they had been before, and the traditional Brescian entrepreneurs were far from reconciled to the new forms of industrial corporatism which the war had encouraged. This again serves not only to indicate the regional diversity of economic structures and relations, but also shows the complexity of the divisions and distinctions within specific economic groups.

In the final essay, Paul Corner takes up the question which Gramsci had posed on the economic significance of the fascist regime. He argues the highly unconventional case that the fascist period, far from being a phase of economic stagnation which masked a tendency to protect agriculture at the expense of industry, in fact brought about a major shift in the structure of the Italian economy. The 'Battle for Wheat' and the 'Quota 90', he argues, did not, as has generally been assumed, protect the more backward sectors of Italian industry and agriculture, but rather subordinated them to the interests of heavy industry and capitalist farming in the North. As a result these two key sectors were able to develop and consolidate despite the international economic circumstances of the 1930s, and laid the basis for the post-war 'economic miracle'.

Paul Corner's argument is highly original and will certainly be contested, but if he is right it would seem to cast doubt on the economic continuities between fascism and pre-fascism. It would also question the continuity of the 'historical alliance' of North and South in the fascist period. And this touches on what is perhaps the least tidy part of Gramsci's analysis. Because he does not define the role played by the South in the transition to fascism, the relationship between the new agrarian-industrial partnerships which had emerged in the North and the traditional 'historical

alliance' remains unclear. Those, like Sereni,³² who have examined this relationship more fully have tended to emphasise the continuity. One of the problems, of course, lies in the essentially passive role played by the South in the transition to fascism. Adrian Lyttelton's conclusions on the continuing fragmentation and isolation of the Southern peasantry – which reflect Gramsci's own analysis – provide one explanation of this relative passivity. The absence of effective or organised peasant opposition in the South meant that the type of counter-offensive adopted by the Tuscan and Emilian landlords was simply not needed. But if, as Paul Corner argues, the Southern landlords as well as the Southern economy were losers under the fascist regime, this passivity may well reflect a shift in the political structure which deprived the Southern landowners of their former privileged political position. And the fact that, of all the traditional groups in Italy, it was the Southern landowners who emerged weakest from the Second World War, would seem to support such an argument.

The specific characteristics of the economic relations and structures on which the political system of the liberal state were based would then confirm Gramsci's arguments on the weaknesses and limitations of Italian capitalism. But they also indicate that industry and agriculture encompassed a variety of relationships which make it difficult to talk of any single agrarian or industrial interest, or any fixed relationship between the two. The arguments raised in these essays would also suggest that the fundamental continuity of the economic structure on which the political systems from Risorgimento to fascism were based is a problem which still remains very much open to debate.

Notes

(For reasons of space the bibliographical references to this introduction have been kept to a minimum. More detailed bibliographies on specific issues will be found accompanying the essays which follow. The most recent and useful general survey of Italian economic historiography for the period covered by this volume is: V. Castronovo, 'Dall'Unità à oggi – storia economica' in the new *Storia d'Italia*, vol.4 (Turin, 1974).)

1. Wherever possible reference will be made to Gramsci's writings in English in the excellent edition of the *Prison Notebooks*, edited by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (London, 1971: hereafter *PN*) and A. Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings (1921-6)*, ed. Q. Hoare (London, 1978). In addition to the Introduction to the Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith edition of the *Prison Notebooks*, more general guides are provided by: J. Joll, *Gramsci* (London, 1977); J. Cammet, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (Stanford, 1967);

- M. Clark, *Antonio Gramsci and the Revolution that Failed* (New Haven, 1977); A. Davidson, *Antonio Gramsci: Towards an Intellectual Biography* (London, 1976). There is a useful bibliographical guide to works in English on Gramsci: P. Cozens, *Twenty Years of Antonio Gramsci* (London, 1977).
2. The 'revolutionary' nature of Gramsci's history is particularly stressed by A. Macciocchi, *Pour Gramsci* (Paris, 1971).
3. P. Spriano, *Storia del Partito Comunista Italiano*, vol. I (Turin, 1967), p.492.
4. A. Pizzorno, 'A propos de la méthode de Gramsci, de l'historiographie, des sciences sociales', *L'Homme et la Société* (April-June 1968) p.163.
5. See P. Ginsborg and A. Lyttelton below. Romeo's essay is included in *Risorgimento e Capitalismo* (Bari, 1970) but has never been translated. A. Gershenkron's first interventions are in *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), chapters 2, 4, 5 and Appendix 1. There is also an interesting summary of the debate in the postscript to J. Cammet, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*.
6. P. Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', *New Left Review*, 100 (Nov. 1976-June 1977) p.5.
7. *PN*, p.106.
8. *PN*, p.138.
9. *PN*, pp.58-62.
10. A. Gramsci, *Il Risorgimento* (Turin, 1966), p.54.
11. *PN*, p.59.
12. See note 5 above.
13. *PN*, p.57.
14. *PN*, p.58.
15. *PN*, pp.90-102: also the important essay on 'The Southern Question' in *The Modern Prince & Other Writings*, ed. L. Marks (New York, 1957).
16. See in particular *The German Ideology*.
17. *PN*, p.91.
18. E. Sereni, *Il Capitalismo nelle Campagne (1860-1900)* (Turin, 1968), pp.36-40.
19. A. Gramsci, 'The Southern Question', p.42.
20. *PN*, p.94.
21. There is a useful introduction to Gramsci's writings on fascism in A. Gramsci, *Sul Fascismo*, ed. E. Santarelli (Rome, 1969), pp.15-30.
22. P. Spriano, *Storia del Partito Comunista Italiano*, pp.480-93.
23. V. Guerratura, 'Il popolo delle scimmie tra reazione e rivoluzione', *Rinascita* (27.10.72) pp.31-3.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Ordine Nuovo 1922, cited in L. Paggi, *Gramsci e il Moderno Principe* (Turin, 1970), p.408.
26. *PN*, pp. 117-18.
27. *PN*, pp.278-318 ('Americanism and Fordism'); F. De Felice, 'Una chiave per la letteratura in Americanismo e Fordismo', *Rinascita* (27.10.72) pp.33-5.
28. V. Guerratura, 'Il popolo delle scimmie', p.32.
29. *PN*, p.59.
30. *PN*, p.90.
31. *PN*, p.116.
32. E. Sereni, *La Questione Agraria nella Rinascita Nazionale Italiano* (Turin, 1946, 1st edn).

2 GRAMSCI AND THE ERA OF BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION IN ITALY*

Paul Ginsborg

The concept of bourgeois revolution has been under attack for some time now. The terrain chosen for the offensive is, hardly surprisingly, that of the so-called 'classic' bourgeois revolution which took place in France between 1789 and 1794. Ever since Alfred Cobban in the mid-1960s launched his swingeing onslaught on the Marxist interpretation of the French Revolution, the term 'bourgeois revolution' has fallen into considerable disrepute amongst Anglo-Saxon historians. What, asked Cobban, does the bourgeois revolution mean? His answer for France in the 1790s was typically belittling and polemical: 'A class of officials and professional men moved up from the minor to the major posts in government and dispossessed the minions of an effete court.'¹ Not every one agreed with all that Cobban had to say, but few had doubts about the bankruptcy of Marxist terminology. G.V. Taylor, at the end of a widely-acclaimed article published in 1967, officially declared the Marxist interpretation obsolete: 'The phrases "bourgeois revolution" and "revolutionary bourgeoisie" with their inherent deceptions, will have to go, and others must be found that convey with precision and veracity the realities of social history.'²

More recently, and more surprisingly, the attack has come from another quarter. Roberto Zapperi, a scholar of the school of the Italian Communist Mario Tronti, has reached a point of view startlingly similar to that of Taylor. In his book, misleadingly entitled *For a Critique of the Concept of Bourgeois Revolution*, Zapperi analyses the writings of the Abbe Sieyès. He produces indisputable evidence to show that Sieyès was in no way the theoretician of a flourishing French capitalist bourgeoisie. Galvanised by this discovery, Zapperi feels free to leap to the most iconoclastic of conclusions: 'The concepts of bourgeoisie and of bourgeois revolution . . . melt under the pressure of their own aporias and reveal, beneath their definitive appearance, a substantially mystifying nature.' Marx, decides Zapperi, has got it all wrong. Before the rise

*I am grateful to Norman Hampson, Gwyn Williams and Alberto Tovaglieri, all of whom have made me think about this subject. None of them, naturally, bears any responsibility for what follows.

of the proletariat there were 'no classes', and the concept of bourgeois revolution was Marx's 'unwarranted projection into the past of the prospect of proletarian revolution'.³

Traditional Marxist historiography has left itself sadly exposed to such cross-fire. Confusion reigns paramount, even in the most distinguished of minds. Albert Soboul is just one example among many. After a lifetime of study of the French Revolution, he seems quite unable to decide whether the Revolution marked the beginning, the middle or the end of the development of capitalism in France. In his 1973 Foreword to the English edition of his *Précis d'Histoire de la Révolution française*, Soboul contradicts himself three times in fifteen pages. On p. 3 he proudly announces that 'the Revolution of 1789-94 marked the *arrival* of modern bourgeois capitalist society in the history of France'. But by p. 8 the Revolution has become only a '*decisive stage* in the development of capitalism'. By the end of the Foreword the French Revolution, while still 'a classic bourgeois revolution' is relegated to being 'the *starting-point* for capitalist society'.⁴ [All italics are mine.] Soboul's Foreword reminds the present author of nothing so much as being on another great bourgeois institution, the inter-city train between London and Newcastle. The tape-recorded announcement of the various stations *en route* had been inserted the wrong way round, so that as the train pulled into London a recorded voice solemnly intoned 'this is Newcastle, this is Newcastle'. But it wasn't.

At the heart of the problem lies the absence of any adequate definition of the concept of bourgeois revolution. Marx himself never elaborated systematically on the concept, and much of the subsequent confusion has derived from what he did write. In a famous passage from the *Manifesto* he and Engels described the way in which the bourgeoisie achieved economic and political power:

At a certain stage . . . the feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder. Into their place stepped free competition, accompanied by a social and political constitution adapted to it, and by the economical and political sway of the bourgeois class.⁵

This passage seems to have been widely interpreted as being a blueprint for bourgeois revolution. The task of Marxist historians became that of demonstrating how, in any given bourgeois revolution, the revolutionary bourgeoisie *at a certain moment* broke the bonds of feudal society,

seized political power and established a new economic and political order. From Jean Jaurès onwards, all the great Marxist historians of the French Revolution have worked within this framework. For Jaurès, the frenzied activity of the eighteenth-century French bourgeoisie led to 'the deforestation of entire regions, sacrificed to the needs of industrial furnaces'. He continues: 'All this was a huge flaming fire of bourgeois power, which sweeping through the ancient mediaeval forest, lit up the furthest corners with its purple glow. A furnace of wealth and work; a furnace also of Revolution.'⁶

Wonderful stuff, but non-Marxist historians had every right to question if this was what really happened. The more historical evidence that was accumulated, often by Marxists themselves, the more it became obvious that the facts would not fit the straitjacket. The actual development of the eighteenth-century French bourgeoisie could not in all honesty be said to resemble 'a huge flaming fire'; many of the bourgeois representatives in Paris were positively reluctant to abolish feudal dues on the night of 4 August 1789; the immediate economic consequences of the Revolution damaged more than stimulated the development of French capitalism; and so on and so forth. Cobban and Taylor triumphantly concluded that the concept of bourgeois revolution made no historical sense, and that the Marxist interpretation was therefore disproved. In the world of Anglo-Saxon *academia* every one could sleep a little more easily at night.

The purpose of this chapter is to argue the need for a more rigorous and accurate elaboration of the Marxist concept of bourgeois revolution. The suggestions that follow are, as will become obvious, more tentative than definitive, cover only some aspects of the question, use only a European frame of reference, and are intended to stimulate and provoke those more able and knowledgeable than myself. The first part of the chapter deals with general problems of definition. The remainder attempts to assess Antonio Gramsci's contribution to our understanding of bourgeois revolution in a single country, Italy.

What is Bourgeois Revolution?

Process

It is impossible to examine a single bourgeois revolution, like that in France between 1789-94, without first having some conception of the *era* of bourgeois revolution in any particular country. The passage quoted above from the *Communist Manifesto* would seem to make historical sense only if applied to an historical process, not to a specific

moment in history.^{6a}

The epoch of bourgeois revolution can perhaps be best characterised in terms of a twofold process, both economic and political. In economic terms, the period witnesses the definitive triumph of capitalism as the dominant mode of production. In the political sphere, the absolutist state comes to be replaced by one founded on the principles of bourgeois democracy. It is as well to begin by examining separately these two processes.

The economic transition from feudalism to capitalism is the only aspect of bourgeois revolution that has received the detailed attention it deserves. Ever since Maurice Dobb wrote his famous book *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, debate has raged fast and furious as to where the transition begins, how it develops and what are its decisive stages. Space does not permit an adequate summary of this debate. But if French history remains our principal field of enquiry for the moment, it can be seen that whatever the disagreements over the exact pattern of development of French capitalism, there is some measure of accord on an end date for the transition. By 1880, on the admission of both bourgeois and Marxist historians, France had developed a fully-fledged capitalist economy.⁷ Obviously backward sectors remained, especially in the countryside and in some areas of manufacturing like the Parisian luxury crafts. But the vital point is that after the great industrial boom of 1840-80, capitalism had become the *dominant* mode of production in France.

The political process of the establishment of bourgeois democracy has been the subject of less attention, though a very recent comparative article by Goran Therborn may well serve to revive debate.⁸ Therborn's definition of bourgeois democracy is worth repeating here as a basis for future discussion. He uses the term to denote a state with a representative government elected by the entire adult population whose votes carry equal weight and who are allowed to vote for any opinion without state intimidation. 'Such a state', continues Therborn, 'is a *bourgeois* democracy in so far as the state apparatus has a bourgeois class composition and the state power operates in such a way as to maintain and promote capitalist relations of production and the class character of the state apparatus.'

It requires little historical common sense to realise that nowhere in Europe did such a state come into being at one fell swoop. In France, despite the singular achievements of 1789-94, a whole century elapsed before bourgeois democracy was firmly established. Gramsci, in a perceptive passage from the *Prison Notebooks*, describes the nature of this process in French society:

In fact, it was only in 1870-71, with the attempt of the Commune, that all the germs of 1789 were finally exhausted. It was then that the new bourgeois class struggling for power defeated not only the representatives of the old society unwilling to admit that it had been definitively superseded, but also the still newer groups who maintained that the new structure created by the 1789 revolution was itself already outdated; by this victory the bourgeoisie demonstrated its vitality *vis-à-vis* both the old and the very new.⁹

However, if Therborn's definition is to be followed, the process would have to be significantly elongated. Gramsci maintained that the *substance* of bourgeois power had been achieved by 1871, but universal suffrage did not come into being in France until 1946.

During the epoch of bourgeois revolution, therefore, it is an essential preliminary task for the historian to trace the dual process which led to the dominance of the capitalist mode of production and the creation of a modern bourgeois-democratic state. An immediate and thorny problem presents itself. What is the connection between the two processes, the one economic, the other political?

Marx wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*: 'Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance of that class.'¹⁰ In practice, it is difficult to demonstrate any such direct co-relation. The French bourgeoisie, it is true, achieved economic and political supremacy at approximately the same time — the 1870s and 1880s. However, they seem far more the exception than the rule. In the same period, their German neighbours, to take one example among many, enjoyed immense economic power but more limited political power. Of course, it could be argued that the bourgeoisie of Wilhelmine Germany exercised *effective* control even if *formally* deprived of full political rights. But Marx was quite categorical that the bourgeois-democratic state was the highest expression of the bourgeois political order. The German bourgeoisie, then, was politically out of step in the second half of the nineteenth century. They had yet to make their 'corresponding political advance'.

In general, as has often been noted, it seems difficult to sustain any mechanistic relationship between economic 'base' and political 'super-structure'. The degree of capitalist development would seem to be a dominant but not exclusive factor in explaining the political rise of the bourgeoisie. Capitalism and democracy are not yoked inseparably together. The complex connection between the two can only be located satisfactorily in the specific historical experience of each national

bourgeoisie. One of the most important ways of identifying this connection is to turn from the general processes at work in the epoch of bourgeois revolution to an examination of the particular moments of conflict in that era.

Moment

It is tempting, in view of the very real difficulties of comprehension and coherence, to describe bourgeois revolution *solely* in terms of a process. Many modern Marxist historians seem to take this point of view. Giorgio Candeloro, for instance, at the beginning of his magnificent multi-volume history of Italy, describes the whole of the Risorgimento as 'a national and bourgeois revolution'.¹¹

However, every major Marxist thinker has so far used the term primarily to denote *not* the period of transformation to a bourgeois economy and state, but to describe a specific upheaval such as the French revolution of 1789-94 or the English revolution of the 1640s. It is a moment of conflict, not a process of change, that has habitually borne the Marxist label 'bourgeois revolution'. For Lenin, who came as close as anyone to distinguishing between process and moment, the Russian peasant 'emancipation' of 1861 marked the beginning of 'bourgeois Russia' or 'the era of bourgeois revolutions'. Within this era, however, the revolution of 1905 was the first 'bourgeois revolution'.¹²

This being so, it is incumbent on Marxist historians to try to define what they mean by the moment of bourgeois revolution. As far as I am aware any such attempt at definition has been notably absent from Marxist historiography on the French revolution. The vagueness with which the term has been habitually used goes a long way to explain the ease and joy with which the Cobbanite vultures have been able to swoop upon their prey.

As a first approximation, a successful bourgeois revolution is perhaps best defined both by its course and by its achievements. Its course, like that of all revolutions, is marked by a violent social upheaval which overthrows the existing political order. Its achievements, specific to bourgeois revolution alone, lie in the creation of a state power and institutional framework consonant with the flourishing of bourgeois property relations, and with the development of bourgeois society as a whole.

The two parts of this definition are perhaps worth a few words of elaboration. The course of bourgeois revolution has been described in this way precisely to distinguish process from moment, gradual transition from violent upheaval. Its achievements are given empirical content in a

characteristically vigorous passage written by Marx in 1851. No single bourgeois revolution ever carried through all the items that Marx lists, but taken together they represent most of the foundations of bourgeois society. Marx, examining the cumulative effects of two bourgeois revolutions – the English of 1640 and the French of 1789 – states that they meant

the proclamation of the political order for the new European society . . . the victory of bourgeois property over feudal property, of nationality over provincialism, of competition over the guild, of the partition of estates over primogeniture, of the owner's mastery of the land over the land's mastery of its owner, of enlightenment over superstition, of the family over the family name, of industry over heroic laziness, of civil law over privileges of mediaeval origin.¹³

Immediately a number of caveats must be issued and confusions dealt with. In the first place, obvious though it sounds, no two bourgeois revolutions are the same. The 'classic' bourgeois revolution would seem to be a contradiction in terms. The historian, in trying to trace the pattern of events and eventual achievements of any particular bourgeois revolution, has to pay great attention to a wide number of variants: the particular pattern of capitalist development in the country in question; the specific structure of the state; the peculiar tensions created by differing relations between the social classes. Nearly always there is a dominant question, a specific unresolvable contradiction that lies at the heart of a revolution and decisively influences its trajectory.

Secondly, many anti-Marxist historians (and some Marxists as well) have made the mistake of assuming that in all circumstances it must be the bourgeoisie who make the bourgeois revolution. In other words, the leading role of the bourgeoisie (and sometimes just the commercial and manufacturing bourgeoisie) has been taken as a *definitive* feature of bourgeois revolution. This common confusion has led to a highly popular historical game: hunt the bourgeoisie, often to be played on a board of eighteenth-century France. One side tries to show that a revolutionary bourgeoisie did not exist and hopes to win a certificate bearing the words: 'Marxist history is bunkum'. The other strives to demonstrate exactly the opposite, aiming to gain the coveted title of 'hero of the Revolution'. Both pursue a false model of bourgeois revolution.

The specificity of bourgeois revolution, as has been outlined above, does not depend on its leading actors but on its contribution to the general development of bourgeois society.¹⁴ Quite often classes other

than the bourgeoisie objectively further the bourgeois revolution while pursuing their own aims. Sometimes they do this in opposition to sections of the bourgeoisie itself. This paradox is perhaps best explained by an historical example already mentioned *en passant*. In the summer of 1789 the revolt of the French peasantry constrained the National Assembly to decree the partial abolition of feudal dues and obligations. The decision, as Cobban showed ('advance to go' in the board game), was taken against the wishes of many bourgeois landowners and in the face of opposition from representatives of the Third Estate. The decree of 4 August 1789, however, was quite clearly a critical step in the establishment of bourgeois property relations in the countryside. The driving force behind it had been the peasantry, not the bourgeoisie.

This mode of reasoning about bourgeois revolution is patently present in the writings and political activity of both Marx and Lenin. In the German revolution of 1848, in the face of the hesitations of the German liberal bourgeoisie, Marx urged the German workers and artisans to fight for a programme of advanced bourgeois democracy. In the most extreme of cases, that of Russia in 1905-7, Lenin continuously stressed that the bourgeois revolution was going to have to be made by the peasantry and workers in open opposition to a weak and terrified bourgeoisie.¹⁵ In this last case, however, Lenin's insistence on a bourgeois revolution *against* the bourgeoisie cannot help but raise serious terminological doubts. While one can remain quite clear about the meaning of the term 'bourgeois revolution', the term itself here seems profoundly unsatisfactory.

Finally, another common misapprehension must be dealt with. *Bourgeois* and *bourgeois-democratic* revolutions are often casually regarded as being synonymous. In fact, as we have seen earlier, the magic hyphen between 'bourgeois' and 'democratic' masks a very complex question. The political freedoms associated with bourgeois democracy are sometimes a corollary of successful bourgeois revolution, but cannot, any more than bourgeois leadership, be regarded as an essential part of a general definition. None of the great bourgeois revolutions, as Therborn has pointed out, actually established bourgeois democracy.¹⁶ The Jacobin constitution of 1793 remained a model for the democrats of nineteenth-century Europe, but was never operative during the French Revolution itself. Only in the latter half of the European epoch of bourgeois revolution do we find the stable establishment of bourgeois democracy, and then very often not as a result of revolution.¹⁷

For a Typology of Bourgeois Revolution

Any brief attempt at defining bourgeois revolution, such as the one above,

is bound to raise, intentionally and unintentionally, as many problems as it solves. Yet a number of yardsticks have emerged which may be of use in the future work of historical analysis: the distinction between process and moment, a definition of bourgeois revolution in terms of its course and its achievements, an insistence on avoiding the twin pitfalls of necessarily identifying bourgeois revolution in terms of bourgeois leadership and democracy. These instruments need to be refined or discarded before any systematic categorisation of bourgeois revolution can be attempted.

A typology of this kind would be a major historical undertaking of the sort which Perry Anderson has promised us and which we eagerly await. Here it is possible only to make a few preliminary observations before turning to examine Gramsci's writing and the Italian experience.

Up till now, comparative analysis of bourgeois revolutions has hardly reached exalted levels. In his *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci refers the reader to Engels's considerations of the German, French and English revolutions.¹⁸ If, as Anderson has justly exhorted, 'there is no place for fideism in rational knowledge, which is necessarily cumulative',¹⁹ then Engels's attempt at comparison can hardly be called enlightening. According to Engels, 'the long fight of the bourgeoisie against feudalism culminated in three great decisive battles' — the Protestant Reformation in Germany, the English revolution of the 1640s and the French of 1789. Implicit in this schema is the idea of defining the *moment* of bourgeois revolution primarily by its causation — the need of a revolutionary bourgeoisie at a certain moment to break decisively the bonds of feudalism. This, as I have already tried to argue, would seem to present serious historical problems. While the *era* of bourgeois revolution undoubtedly has its foundations in the contradiction between relations of property and productive forces, the specific moments of conflict within that era can rarely, if ever, be described as 'decisive battles' which resolve this contradiction.

Even if we abandon the schema and merely consider the examples, it is hard to see how the Protestant Reformation was a successful bourgeois revolution. During its course the existing German political order was not overthrown, in spite of the Peasants' Revolt. Its most significant result, according to Engels, was the triumph of Calvinism, a creed 'fit for the boldest bourgeoisie of his time'. However, the partial victory of a specific ideology is by itself scant justification for such a prominent position in the bourgeois hall of fame.

On England and France, Engels is more judicious, and the events themselves are obviously more worthy of the terminology employed.

Yet with regard to the French Revolution it is worth noting that Engels repeats the famous and sweeping historical judgement of the Marx of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*. For both of them the Revolution signified 'the complete triumph of the bourgeoisie', 'the smashing of the feudal base to pieces', 'the destruction of the aristocracy', etc.²⁰ Modern Marxist historians would tend to be more cautious. No one but the most diehard Cobbanite could deny the decisive contribution of the *moment* of the French Revolution to the general *development* of the French bourgeois state and society. Yet that development was in no way complete even by 1815, and the residues of a pre-revolutionary past (and of some aspects of the Revolution itself) weighed heavily on the France of the nineteenth century. Marx himself recognised this clearly in other passages of his work. Yet his frequent over-estimation of the *actual* historical achievements of the French Revolution began a historical school which, as we shall see when we turn to Gramsci's writings, has taken a long time to die.

Later attempts at comparison have been, as far as I know, no more than half-hearted. In 1904 Jaurès made a passing reference, later taken up by Soboul, to the English Revolution as being 'strictly bourgeois and conservative' when compared to 'its mainly bourgeois and democratic French counterpart'.²¹ The bases for these judgements are not easy to discover. Taken at face value, the idea of the English Revolution being 'strictly bourgeois' seems a very strange one.

Anderson, at the end of his *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, makes the distinction between bourgeois revolutions from below (Spain, England and France), and those from above (Italy and Germany).²² Until this distinction is fully developed in a future work, it would be unfair to pass definitive judgement upon it. At first sight it looks unpromising. The formative *process* of the bourgeois national state in Italy and Germany was, it is true, carried through from above (though Garibaldi's exploits in southern Italy are hardly to be forgotten in this respect). But to describe this process as a 'bourgeois revolution from above' is to risk lumping together process and moment indiscriminately. It also implies the abandonment of any idea of defining bourgeois revolution in terms of its course, i.e. as a moment of violent social upheaval which overthrows the existing political order.^{22a}

At present, no satisfactory methodology for the comparative analysis of bourgeois revolutions exists. It has yet to be created. A few schematic considerations on this subject may not be entirely useless. Without becoming date fetishists, the duration of the dual process which characterises the era of bourgeois revolution would have to be identified for

any given country. Once this time span has been established (no easy task), an analysis of process could give way to that of moment. Here both quantitative and qualitative factors come into play: not only the number of revolutions, but also their precise nature, the degree of their success, their partial or all-embracing character.

The critical question then arises of the connection between process and moment. Here it is not possible to make more than one or two initial comments. In the absence of any single successful bourgeois revolution (as in Germany), the process by which the bourgeois-democratic state comes into being is of necessity unusually protracted and heavily influenced by the residues of a feudal past. The opposite also appears historically valid. In France, the decisive nature of the revolution of 1789-94 meant that even under the Restoration there could be no going back on the centralised and essentially modern state structure created by the Jacobins and Napoleon. For the great majority of European countries it is worth reiterating an historical commonplace: namely that the clamorous failure of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions of 1848-9 retarded by many decades the process by which bourgeois democracy was established on the Continent. Finally, it would seem that the connection between bourgeois revolution and the development of capitalism as the dominant mode of production is by no means a linear one. While successful revolutions, like the French, provided the institutional framework for capitalism, there is no immediate chronological link between bourgeois revolution and industrial growth.

In any typology of bourgeois revolution, certain key historical variants have to figure centrally. Periodisation is of prime importance. The difference between early and late revolutions is in general very marked, because in the latter (as is well known) the 'threat from below', the growth of an industrial working class, conditioned and constrained the bourgeoisie, forcing it to seek compromise rather than confrontation with the forces of the *ancien régime*. The degree of international intervention seems no less important. The nature of bourgeois revolutions in the more backward European countries was often heavily determined both by direct foreign intervention (Napoleon's *Grande Armée*), and by the historical examples provided by the English and French experience.

Lastly (though the list would be enormously extended in any systematic study), the agrarian question merits particular attention. The epoch of bourgeois revolution in the different nation states has been marked by extremely diverse solutions to the problem of the land. This diversity has been much commented upon, from Lenin's notorious distinction between the 'American' and the 'Prussian' roads, to Barrington

Moore's comparative study of the political importance of differing peasant/landlord relationships.²³ The agrarian question, in fact, is much more than a partial aspect of a general economic transition. It lies at the heart of any comparative history of bourgeois revolution.

The Italian Case

It is as well to start by trying to establish the broad outlines of the epoch of bourgeois revolution in Italy. Immediately we run into controversy. Are the beginnings of the definitive transition to a bourgeois state and economy to be sought in the eighteenth century or at a much earlier date, at the time of the highly prosperous city states of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance? The present author is in no way qualified to answer this question, which itself requires the elaboration of a sophisticated set of criteria and many pages of accurate historical analysis. Here a methodological suggestion will have to take the place of detailed discussion. Maurice Dobb has written:²⁴

the process of historical change is for the most part gradual and continuous. In the sense that there is no event which cannot be connected with some immediately antecedent event in a rational chain it can be described as continuous throughout. But what seems necessarily to be implied in any conception of development as divided into periods or epochs, each characterised by its distinctive economic system, is that there are crucial points in economic development at which the tempo is abnormally accelerated and at which continuity is broken.

Dobb's observation can be applied to the Italian case in a negative way. Continuity was broken, but in the sense of a dramatic interruption in the process of bourgeois development, both economic and political. This interruption was so profound as to last nearly two hundred years, until the mid-eighteenth century. Such a protracted regression (with very few exceptions) makes it almost meaningless to talk of any continuity of transition from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century.²⁵ In general, the *irreversibility* of the twofold process of change, understood not in the sense of temporary setbacks but of long-term trends, would seem to be one essential criterion for identifying the beginnings of a definitive transition to bourgeois society. In Italy the decisive acceleration of tempo is perhaps best located, both in economic and political terms, in the second half of the eighteenth century.

The same difficulty surrounds what is often confusingly called 'the

completion of the bourgeois revolution'. In economic terms (though here too the criterion of judgement needs to be much refined), it is possible to argue that, in spite of the grave and continuing backwardness of the South, capitalism had become the dominant mode of production in Italy by the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁶

As for the triumph of bourgeois democracy, a case can be made for 1913, when for the first time elections were held on the basis of adult male suffrage. Supporters of this thesis would maintain that the *substance* of the modern bourgeois state existed as much in Giolitti's Italy as, say, in Gambetta's France. But a more purist argument, along Therborn's lines, would be that bourgeois democracy triumphed only in 1947 with the creation of universal suffrage, the abolition of the monarchy and the setting up of the first Italian Republic.

The question of course is an exquisitely political one, for it relates directly to the strategy of the working-class movement in Italy. If the epoch of bourgeois revolution had not come to a close by 1943 then it could be argued that the task of the left-wing forces during the Resistance and afterwards was to fight for its completion. This was the position substantially adopted by Togliatti and the Italian Communist Party. In a speech of June 1945 Togliatti claimed that the 'democratic revolution in our country has never been either brought to an end nor seriously developed'.²⁷ Togliatti, of course, always spoke of the need for 'progressive democracy', but this somewhat vague formula came to mean in reality, as Quazza has shown, the acceptance of a standard bourgeois parliamentary regime.²⁸ Indeed Togliatti himself stressed the *essential continuity* between the political struggles of the democratic wing of the bourgeoisie in the Risorgimento and the PCI (Partito Comunista Italiana) in the Resistance: 'In demanding a national Constituent Assembly, we find ourselves in the company of the best men of our Risorgimento, in the company of Carlo Cattaneo, of Giuseppe Mazzini, of Giuseppe Garibaldi, and we are proud to be in such company.'²⁹ If, on the other hand, the epoch of bourgeois revolution had come to a close some decades before the Resistance, then the theoretical framework for the Italian working-class movement from 1943 onwards had perforce to be a very different one.

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the era of bourgeois revolution in Italy extends from the middle of the eighteenth century to the second decade of the twentieth century. In that period it is not difficult to distinguish five moments of bourgeois revolution: the years 1796-9, a profound revolutionary upheaval carried throughout the peninsula on the bayonets of the French army, a revolution interrupted in

1799 but many of whose achievements were consolidated and developed in Napoleonic Italy; the revolutionary waves of 1820-1 and 1830-2, both partial in geographical extent and unqualified failures; the extraordinary nationwide sequence of revolutions in 1848-9, promising so much in their early stages but destined to ultimate defeat; and finally the events of 1859-60, a mixture of dynastic war in the North, nationalist revolution in the Centre and volunteer-led insurrection in the South, all of which combined to produce the unification of the majority of the peninsula.

Examining these revolutions and the process which connects them, certain broad characteristics of the Italian case are immediately identifiable. These are in no way novel or controversial, but are worth noting here before proceeding further. Many of them derive directly from Gramsci's observations. In the first place, even a cursory glance is sufficient to reveal that the *dominant* question in all of the Italian revolutions of the nineteenth century was the national one. The need for national independence and unification rapidly over-rode every other problem – whether economic, social or political. Manin was not alone when he told Nassau Senior in 1857: 'I would take Murat, the Pope, Napoleon Bonaparte, the devil himself for king, if I could therefore drive out the foreigners and unite Italy under a single sceptre. Give us unity and we will get all the rest.'³⁰

Secondly, there was an extraordinarily high degree of foreign participation in the Italian bourgeois revolutions. The only two revolutions which can be categorised as successful (in differing measures) – those of 1796-9 and 1859-60 – were both heavily dependent on French intervention. Those in between, purely autochthonous affairs, were catastrophic failures. In fact the Italian bourgeoisie, unlike the French or the English, never made its own revolution at any stage. Even if, in polemical fashion, the Resistance of 1943-5 is to be included here as the 'last bourgeois revolution', the major contribution of Allied troops in liberating the peninsula can hardly be forgotten.

The historic weakness of the Italian bourgeoisie is also revealed by the predominant role played by a single dynastic state, Piedmont, during the critical years of the era under examination. The reliance upon a monarchist army and subservience to a monarchist constitution, this *substitution* of a state for a class, was heavily reflected in the political ordering of the new nation state. The basic elements of bourgeois democracy which are to be found in Mazzini's Rome and Manin's Venice in 1848-9 are not present in the Italy of Cavour and Victor Emmanuel II. In 1859-60 plebiscites took the place of parliaments. The

supreme moment of bourgeois revolution in Italy was therefore a deeply flawed one. While the creation of a national market and state were considerable achievements, the exclusion of the mass of the population from the right to vote and the continuing powers of the monarchy retarded the creation of bourgeois democracy in Italy for many decades.

Above all, the Italian revolutions failed to resolve the agrarian question. If the English liquidated the peasantry and the French maintained a significant stratum of rural small-holders, the Italians did neither, leaving the southern peasantry in particular in a state of abject misery and permanent revolt. Soboul is right when he traces this failure back to the revolutions of 1796-9 and to Napoleonic Italy.³¹ The reforms of this period tended more to unite bourgeois and aristocratic landowners than to confront the peasant problem. But the question remained an open one, to reappear in dramatic form in the revolutions of 1848-9 and again during Garibaldi's expedition of 1860. The final solution, if such it can be called, was the civil war in the South between 1860-70, when a Piedmontese army of occupation slowly annihilated the subversion in the southern countryside. This tribute of blood was the material basis for the formation of the new Italian ruling class — the 'historic bloc' of southern landowners and northern bourgeoisie.

Gramsci's 'Prison Notebooks'

Gramsci's notes on the Risorgimento abound with insights and stimuli with regard to those distinctive characteristics of the Italian case which have been briefly outlined above. However, our task here is not to provide an exegesis of his work (though most of his principal themes will of necessity emerge in due course).³² It is rather to attempt a critical analysis of the *categories* he uses. In other words, we need to try to assess how much he contributes to those theoretical and historiographical problems outlined in the first part of this essay.

Immediately a somewhat surprising and saddening fact emerges. Since the war no less than three major congresses have been organised by the Italian Communist Party to examine Gramsci's writings.³³ In spite of the interventions of a number of extremely able and accomplished historians, it is impossible to say that any substantial *Marxist* critique of Gramsci's historical writing has emerged. Part of the reason for this lies with an initial, justifiable concern to defend Gramsci's notes on the Risorgimento against the summary liquidation of them by Croce, Chabod and others. Later there was the task of replying to the much more substantial criticism launched by Rosario Romeo.³⁴ But

much of the reason also lies with the persistence of the sort of fideism towards Gramsci which Anderson has warned against when dealing with the historical writings of Marx and Engels. This excess of deference is nothing but a disservice to Gramsci himself.³⁵ His own exhortations and the very nature of his notebooks – their unfinished, convoluted and often contradictory character – would strongly suggest a quite different approach.

Of the categories that Gramsci uses when writing on the *Risorgimento*, only those of 'passive revolution' and 'war of position/war of manoeuvre' relate directly to the *overall* problem of defining bourgeois revolution. It is as well to start with these, before turning to other terms such as 'hegemony' and 'Jacobinism' which are more categories *within* bourgeois revolution than descriptions of bourgeois revolution itself.

Passive Revolution

When writing of bourgeois revolution Gramsci employs the concept 'passive revolution' in two closely related ways.³⁶ The term is used *first* to describe the transformation of society in a bourgeois direction without an upheaval like the French Revolution and without the active participation of the popular masses. In *Quaderno 4* he writes:³⁷

Vincenzo Cuoco has called 'passive revolution' that which happened in Italy as a reaction to the Napoleonic wars. The concept of passive revolution seems to me exact not only for Italy, but for other countries which modernised the State by a series of reforms or national wars, without undergoing a political revolution of the radical Jacobin variety.

Similarly, when reviewing Croce's *History of Europe*, Gramsci uses 'passive revolution' (and also Quinet's expression 'restoration-revolution') to describe the period 1815-70. In those years, writes Gramsci,³⁸

the demands which in France found a Jacobin-Napoleonic expression were satisfied in small doses, legally, in a reformist manner – in such a way that it was possible to preserve the political and economic position of the old feudal classes, to avoid agrarian reform, and, especially, to avoid the popular masses going through a period of political experience such as occurred in France in the years of Jacobinism, in 1831, and in 1848.

In the *second* place the term is used to signify a process of 'molecular' change by which *either* the bourgeoisie as a whole slowly exerts its supremacy with regard to the forces of the *ancien régime*, or a *section* of the bourgeoisie succeeds in grouping the whole of the rest of the class around it. Thus, in *Quaderno 15*, Gramsci describes how³⁹

under a fixed political canopy, social relations are necessarily modified and new effective political forces arise and develop. These indirectly exert their influence, by means of slow but inexorable pressure, on the official political forces which are themselves modified almost without being aware of it.

And again, this time with explicit reference to changes within the nationalist bourgeoisie:⁴⁰

One may also apply to the concept of passive revolution (documenting it from the Italian Risorgimento) the interpretative criterion of molecular changes which in fact progressively modify the pre-existing composition of forces, and hence become the matrix of new changes. Thus, in the Italian Risorgimento, it has been seen how the composition of the moderate forces was progressively modified by the passing over to Cavourism (after 1848) of ever new elements of the Action Party, so that on the one hand neo-Guelphism was liquidated, and on the other the Mazzinian movement was impoverished.

This second use of the term (to paraphrase drastically, passive revolution as molecular transformation) seems a particularly appropriate description of certain historical processes. It conveys well that gradual but remorseless fusion of aristocracy and bourgeoisie, with the eventual triumph of the latter, which is so frequent and fascinating a pattern in the era of bourgeois revolution.

Passive revolution would also seem an accurate description of certain dynamics of change within the bourgeoisie itself. Gramsci's subtle analysis of the way in which the Italian liberal Moderates absorbed the major elements of the radical Action Party (and were themselves changed in the process), is probably his greatest contribution to the history of the Risorgimento. In this context, as we shall see in a moment, the Gramscian concept of hegemony is also of fundamental importance.

However, to revert to the central problem, it is Gramsci's first, slightly different use of passive revolution (the transformation of

society in a bourgeois direction without violent upheaval and without mass participation), that is relevant to the larger task of defining bourgeois revolution. Here Gramsci's contribution seems a more dubious one. In the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci rarely employs the term 'bourgeois revolution'. In *Quaderno 19* he writes of 'the bourgeois revolution in England which took place before that in France', clearly referring to the moments of the English revolution of 1640 and the French Revolution of 1789.⁴¹ But in general he seems to avoid the term, perhaps because he found it unsatisfactory. However, his own adoption of 'passive revolution' to describe a broad period of history such as the Risorgimento, does not help to dispel the confusion. Implicit in its usage is the idea of bourgeois revolution taking place over a long period of time, and of its being defined primarily as a *process*. Any attempt to distinguish between process and moment tends to disappear, as does any analysis of the relationship between the two.

On an historical level it is difficult to accept this vision of the era of bourgeois revolution in Italy. The course of the Risorgimento (to concentrate only on the central years of this era) was by no means as 'passive' as Gramsci implies. Certainly, no section of the Italian lower classes went through a political experience comparable to that of the Parisian *sans-culottes*. But the Risorgimento is rich in moments which witnessed the intense participation of the artisans and urban poor of the major Italian cities. In 1848, for instance, the urban lower classes were the driving force behind the revolutions in Palermo, Milan and Venice. As for the peasantry, the whole history of the South in the first half of the nineteenth century is marked by their involvement in recurring moments of revolution.⁴²

Perhaps the term 'passive revolution' can be used to stress the failures of the Risorgimento, in the sense that the masses were excluded from the political life of the new nation state and from any of the benefits deriving from its creation. But as a description of the *course* of the Risorgimento it is inaccurate. Too many of the moments of revolution, and of their actual class composition, come to be obscured.

In fact, Gramsci himself levels a somewhat similar criticism against Croce, reproving him for beginning his *History of Europe* from the date 1815 and his *History of Italy* from 1871. In this way, argues Gramsci, Croce tendentially excludes 'the moment of struggle; the moment in which the conflicting forces are formed, are assembled and take up their positions; the moment in which one ethical-political system dissolves and another is formed by fire and steel'.⁴³ Here Gramsci reveals unequivocally his awareness of the need to distinguish between process

and moment, and the impossibility of reducing bourgeois revolution simply to a process. However, nowhere in his work is there a systematic or coherent development of this problem. Had there been, Gramsci would perhaps have been forced to look again at his use of 'passive revolution'.

War of Position, War of Manoeuvre

At first sight, it may appear that Gramsci's use of the categories 'war of position' and 'war of manoeuvre' go some way to cover the lacunae outlined above. Quintin Hoare has briefly summarised the meaning of the two terms: '[war of position] is the form of political struggle which alone is possible in periods of relatively stable equilibrium between the fundamental classes, i.e., when frontal attack, or war of manoeuvre is impossible'.⁴⁴ And he goes on to quote the important passage from the *Prison Notebooks* where Gramsci asks the question:

does there exist an absolute identity between war of position and passive revolution? Or at least does there exist, or can there be conceived, an entire historical period in which the two concepts must be considered identical — until the point at which the war of position once again becomes war of manoeuvre?⁴⁵

Though Gramsci himself does not attempt a systematic application of this schema, it could be used to analyse the era of bourgeois revolution in Italy. The period 1815-48, for instance, could be termed a war of position, to be followed on a national scale by the war of manoeuvre of 1848-9. The disasters of the revolutionary biennium then led to a new war of position (perhaps also aptly termed passive revolution in Gramsci's second meaning of the term). In 1859 the cycle repeats itself, though this time the war of manoeuvre — laborious in the North, breathtaking in the South — is crowned with success.

However, while appropriate in some situations, a consistent use of these military analogies leaves more than a vague sense of dissatisfaction. The terms war of position/war of manoeuvre strongly imply the existence of armies and hierarchies of command. There is the danger of a quite false picture of bourgeois revolution emerging, with a bourgeois 'army' under the leadership of its most advanced sectors passing through alternate phases of war in its quest for final victory. A systematic use of this terminology could give the impression (quite historically mistaken) of a constantly class-conscious bourgeoisie planning its strategy for the seizure of power, and choosing its moment to move

onto the offensive. The heroic figure of the 'revolutionary bourgeoisie', principal actor in a long-running historical drama on bourgeois revolution, here stages a comeback, disguised under a First World War great-coat.

Hegemony

Of all the categories that Gramsci uses in the *Prison Notebooks* that of hegemony is undoubtedly the one that has most profoundly influenced Marxist historians. What he means by the term is clearly revealed in a passage from *Quaderno 19*, where he deals with the leadership question in the Risorgimento:

the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'. A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to 'liquidate', or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well. The Moderates continued to lead the Action Party even after 1870 and 1876, and so-called 'transformism' was only the parliamentary expression of this action of intellectual, moral and political hegemony.⁴⁶

In this extract Gramsci applies the term 'hegemony' to relations *within* the newly emergent Italian ruling class, to the function of control, absorption and leadership exercised by the liberal monarchists over the democrats of the Action Party. When 'hegemony' is linked with 'passive revolution' (understood as molecular transformation), then we are provided by Gramsci with an extremely valuable framework for analysing the formation of the Italian bourgeoisie. The constituent elements upon which the Moderates built their hegemony can be examined one by one: their solid class base in northern and central Italy, the shared interests of progressive aristocracy and bourgeoisie, the example of Cavour's Piedmont, the Moderates' profound ideological harmony with the dominant European values and attitudes of the time, the way in which they 'were a real, organic vanguard of the upper classes, to which economically they belonged'.⁴⁷

The Action Party had no answers when faced with so coherent and

cohesive an opponent. Gramsci concentrates most of his attention on the period after 1848, in which 'the Moderates formed a national bloc under their own hegemony — influencing the two supreme leaders of the Action Party, Mazzini and Garibaldi, in different ways and to a different extent'.⁴⁸ Certainly, the way in which Garibaldi 'fitted the boot of Italy' onto Victor Emmanuel's leg is the most striking example of the Moderates' devastating 'leadership' of the Action Party. But it is interesting to note that this hegemony existed strongly even at an earlier stage of the Risorgimento. In 1848 both Cattaneo in Milan and La Masa in Palermo led popular insurrections which gave them the possibility of undisputed power in the two cities. Neither of them felt able to proceed without invoking the aid of the Moderates, who rapidly reassumed control of the situation. La Masa gave way to Ruggero Settimo, Cattaneo to Casati.⁴⁹ In the spring of 1848 the democrats gained power through revolution, but it was the Moderates who exercised the real leadership.

Hegemony thus appears a key concept for analysing the leadership struggles *within* the Italian bourgeoisie. However, this is not Gramsci's only use of the term. Hegemony is also employed to denote the leadership (in the widest sense) by the bourgeoisie of other classes that lie below it. This is quite a different kettle of fish. Here what is implied is not just that one section of the ruling class exerts its hegemony over another, but that the dominant class *as a whole* 'leads' those classes which are by their very nature antagonistic to it. In the section 'Relations of force' Gramsci writes:

It is true that the State is seen as the organ of one particular group, destined to create favourable conditions for the latter's maximum expansion. But the development and expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the 'national energies'.⁵⁰

The Italian Moderates in the nineteenth century were as unsuccessful in this task as they were successful in establishing their hegemony over the Action Party. Gramsci, with every justification, is quite explicit in this respect. The Moderates, based on the Piedmontese monarchist state and deriving their force from it, were one of those groups which 'have the function of "domination" without that of "leadership": dictatorship without hegemony'.⁵¹

The consequences of this failure were clear for all to see: the civil

war in the South between 1860-70, the narrow and corrupt nature of Italian political life, the forced emigration of hundreds of thousands of the peasantry, from both North and South; this was the tragic balance-sheet of the Moderates' ill-contrived bourgeois revolution. Gramsci's condemnation of the solution of 1860 rings out unambivalently: 'They said that they were aiming at the creation of a modern State in Italy and they in fact produced a bastard.'⁵²

Could all this have been prevented or at least mitigated? Could the bourgeoisie have established its hegemony instead of an outright and uncompromising dominion? At the heart of any answer to these questions lies the agrarian problem. With nine-tenths of the population in 1860 living on the land, for the most part in abject poverty, any hegemonic aspirations on the part of the bourgeoisie had to come to terms first and foremost with the rural masses. Gramsci had few doubts that it was quite historically impossible for the Moderates to have acted in any other way, to have established any relationship other than that based on repression, on exploitation, on forced enrolment in the army. Their attitudes were governed by the system of alliances they had created, by an historic bloc whose material bases were in direct opposition to those of the peasantry: 'their [the Moderates] approach to the national question required a bloc of all the right-wing forces — including the classes of the great landowners — around Piedmont as a State and as an army'.⁵³ And this bloc included not just the great *latifondisti* but 'a special "rural bourgeoisie", embodiment of a parasitism bequeathed to modern times by the dissolution as a class of the bourgeoisie of the Era of the Communes (the hundred cities, the cities of silence)'.⁵⁴

But if these considerations ruled out the Moderates, there remained the other wing of the bourgeoisie, the Action Party. Their class base did not tie them indissolubly to the landowners. Their strength lay in the northern and central cities, where they succeeded at various stages in the Risorgimento in establishing a real leadership over the artisans and urban poor (the bases of which Gramsci does not examine and which, as far as I know, have never been seriously studied by any historian). Could the Action Party have established some sort of link with the peasantry as well?

It is this question which runs like a tormented refrain right through Gramsci's writing on the Risorgimento. At times he was quite categorical, stating that the interests of a section of the urban bourgeoisie 'should have been tied to those of the peasantry'; at times he was less sure, writing that 'agrarian reform "could have" taken place because the

peasantry were nearly all the people and it was a strongly felt need'. At other moments he was still more cautious, maintaining only that 'an action on the peasantry was always possible'.⁵⁵ Behind all these remarks, and others like them, lay Gramsci's attempted analysis of the failure of the Action Party to construct a different bourgeois hegemony, a hegemony based on the popular masses and in contraposition to that of the Moderates, a hegemony which would have led to a less repressive, backward and undemocratic construction of the modern Italian nation state. And behind this lay a precise historical experience which Gramsci did not tire of citing; a bourgeois revolution in which, according to Gramsci, a section of the bourgeoisie had done exactly what the Action Party did not do. The wheel has come full circle, for Gramsci's model was the Jacobins in the French Revolution.

Jacobinism

Gramsci uses 'Jacobinism' in two senses. The first is a general one, as a method of describing those parties or individuals who display 'extreme energy, decisiveness and resolution'.⁵⁶ The second, which directly concerns us here, is historical and finds its most concise summary in his note on the problem of leadership in the *Risorgimento*:⁵⁷

Without the agrarian policy of the Jacobins, Paris would have had the Vendée at its very doors . . . Rural France accepted the hegemony of Paris; in other words, it understood that in order definitively to destroy the old regime it had to make a bloc with the most advanced elements of the Third Estate, and not with the Girondin moderates. If it is true that the Jacobins 'forced' its hand, it is also true that this always occurred in the direction of a real historical development. For not only did they organise a bourgeois government, i.e. make the bourgeoisie the dominant class – they did more. They created the bourgeois State, made the bourgeoisie into the leading, hegemonic class of the nation, in other words gave the new State a permanent basis and created the compact French nation.

These judgements are repeated incessantly. For Gramsci Jacobinism represented 'the union of city and countryside'; the Jacobins 'succeeded in crushing all the right-wing parties up to and including the Girondins on the terrain of the agrarian question'; they were successful 'not merely in preventing a rural coalition against Paris but in multiplying their supporters in the Provinces'; they were convinced of 'the absolute truth of their slogans about equality, fraternity and liberty,

and what is more important, the great popular masses whom the Jacobins stirred up and drew into the struggle were also convinced of their truth'.⁵⁸

Gramsci's exaltation of the Jacobin experience must itself be considered on two levels – the first purely historical, the second more general, concerned with the overall problem of alliances in a bourgeois revolution.

On an historical level, Gramsci continues that long-lasting Marxist tradition to which we referred earlier in this article. The tendency to exaggerate the actual achievements of the French Revolution and render mythical its principal heroes is not one he manages to avoid. In this Gramsci follows Marx (the French Revolution 'destroyed large landed property by dividing it up into smallholdings'⁵⁹), but more specifically Mathiez, whose three volumes on the Revolution were amongst the books which he was allowed in prison.

Mathiez, whose academic love affair with Robespierre was never a closely guarded secret, presents a riveting but idealised picture of the brief period of Jacobin supremacy. With regard to the relationship between the Jacobins and the peasantry, Mathiez writes that the Montagnards 'understood especially the need to enlist the support of the masses, giving them positive satisfaction in accordance with the plan laid down by Robespierre'.⁶⁰ Mathiez then lists the first, decisive measures taken by the Jacobins: the law of 3 June 1793, establishing the sale of emigré land in small plots; that of 10 June, regulating the division of village common land 'in accordance with a scrupulously lawful method'; and the famous law of 17 July which abolished without obligation all remaining feudal dues and rights in the French countryside. As a result, concludes Mathiez, 'the fall of the Girondins appeared to the peasantry as the definitive liberation of the land'.

However, the picture of peasant consent constructed by Mathiez and adopted by Gramsci seems no more than half the truth. The Jacobin decrees favourably influenced the peasantry in some areas of France, but their importance should not be exaggerated. Certain parts of the countryside, particularly those near the borders, responded enthusiastically to the demands of the *levée en masse* but others were lukewarm if not overtly hostile. Nor can the peasant community, even in a single area, be treated as a whole. If the *labourers* and the middle peasantry stood to gain from the survival of the Republic, the landless labourers, as Lefebvre has pointed out, were those who benefited least from the legislation of the Revolution.⁶¹

Above all, the element of *coercion* (and not just 'decisiveness' or

'resolution') explicit in the Jacobin experience needs to be given its rightful place. The Jacobins succeeded in putting more than 700,000 men into the field in the space of a few months, they overcame the threat to the survival of the Republic, they ensured the bases of the modern French nation state. But all this was at a price. In the countryside they did not hesitate to use the instruments of the Terror if faced with opposition of any sort. Desertion and resistance to conscription were more frequent than Mathiez would have us believe. The need to feed the towns meant the forced requisitioning of entire rural areas; the *armées révolutionnaires*, composed in great part from the towns, sowed panic and despair among the rural communities on which they descended. Without wishing to simplify grossly a very complex situation, one fact seems quite clear. The Jacobins, to use Bouloiseau's expression, did all they could to 'seduce' rural France, but if rejected they did not hesitate to impose their will by force.⁶² Thus the alliance between the Jacobins and the peasantry, presented by Gramsci primarily in hegemonic terms, as the 'union of city and countryside', was in reality a bond based as much on force as on consent.

This brings us on to the more general question of the nature of alliances in the epoch of bourgeois revolution. Perry Anderson's observations in his recent article on Gramsci, though referring principally to bourgeois/proletarian relations in the contemporary Western state, seem relevant here as well. Anderson is at pains to stress the *combination* of 'leadership' and 'domination' which lies at the heart of bourgeois political power.⁶³ Bourgeois power cannot be based purely on hegemony because of the necessary antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the classes below it, necessary because it derives directly from different and conflicting positions in the capitalist mode of production.

Much the same applies to the bourgeois/peasant relationship in the period under discussion. This relationship can be one of pure dominance, as exercised by the Italian Moderates in the nineteenth century. But if the question is one of *alliance* rather than domination, then the admixture of coercion and consent typical of the Jacobin experience would seem a more accurate characterisation of the relationship than any consensual model based primarily on 'intellectual, moral and political leadership'.

We need to go further. There have been very few attempts to study the nature of alliances in bourgeois revolution. A number of elementary questions come immediately to mind. It is imperative to establish not only which fractions of the bourgeoisie are or could be involved (and how far they were represented by political divisions like Girondins

and Jacobins, Moderates and Action Party), but also *which fractions of the peasantry*. In his notes on the Risorgimento Gramsci devotes a few lines to the distinctions (or lack of them) between landless labourers and smallholders in the Italian peasantry.⁶⁴ But these insights are never developed with reference to the problem of alliances, in either the French or Italian cases.

Secondly, we need to try and establish *on what terms* any such alliance is made. Gramsci tackles this problem on a general level in his notes on Machiavelli:

The fact of hegemony undoubtedly presupposes that the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is exercised will be taken into account. A certain equilibrium of compromise must be formed; in other words the leading group has to make sacrifices of an economic/corporative nature. But it is also beyond dispute that such compromise and such sacrifices cannot touch the essential. For if hegemony is ethico-political it cannot help but be economic as well, it cannot help but have its foundation in the decisive function that the leading group exercises in the decisive nucleus of economic activity.⁶⁵

The question therefore arises of what 'sacrifices' the bourgeoisie (or a section of it) are willing or able to make in any given historical situation, while preserving their own supremacy in the economic field. Any alliance between bourgeois and peasant is thus bound to be unequal. The bourgeoisie may grant certain concessions or reforms, but any peasant demand which threatens its long-term economic dominance must be ruled out of court. The terrain for historic compromise exists, but within carefully stipulated limits.

Thirdly, we need to examine the *temporal* aspect of any alliance. Gramsci again offers a valuable guideline in his prison writing, where he notes that 'the peasant policy adopted by the French Jacobins was no more than an immediate political intuition'.⁶⁶ An alliance may be only short-term but of decisive importance if it coincides with, or is created during the *moment* of revolution. Indeed the connection between a successful if temporary bourgeois/peasant alliance and the survival of any given bourgeois revolution would seem a very strong one. It was not by chance that Gramsci concentrated so much of his attention on this question. As Walter Maturi has observed, the intervention of the peasant masses was for Gramsci what Hannibal's elephants were for the German High Command before the First World War.⁶⁷ Both seemed, in

different ways, to be decisive instruments employed at the critical moment on the great battlefields of history.

The Agrarian Question in Italy

It is now possible, by way of a conclusion, to turn back to Gramsci's recurring question: in the Italian situation could the Action Party have made some sort of alliance with the peasantry? In trying to provide an answer, both the partial falseness of his Jacobin model and the elementary categories of alliance outlined above (with which section of the peasantry, on what terms, at what moment?) need to be borne in mind.

The debate surrounding this aspect of Gramsci's writing has been very considerable. It is dominated by Rosario Romeo's intervention and the reactions to it. The relevant section of Romeo's argument is that in which he attributes to Gramsci the thesis of the 'failed agrarian revolution' in Italy during the Risorgimento. Romeo, in the early pages of his critique of Gramsci, expresses profound scepticism as to 'a real possibility of an agrarian revolution'. A little later he writes that 'a peasant revolution, aimed at the conquest of the land' would have attacked inevitably the most advanced sectors of the agrarian economy 'especially in the north and centre of the peninsula' and would have imposed on Italian democracy 'a physiognomy of rural democracy'. In this way 'an agrarian revolution' would have 'protected the peasants from exploitation' and have prevented or retarded the original accumulation of capital in Italy.⁶⁸

Apart from the fact that Romeo's account of the mechanics of accumulation has been very strongly contested by Gerschenkron,⁶⁹ the disturbing factor in his critique is his totally false insistence on 'agrarian revolution'. Gramsci insistently and consistently writes of agrarian *reform* not *revolution*, and always in the wider context of the 'decisive economic function' exercised by the bourgeoisie. Many Marxist historians have remarked on this point, none more clearly than Renato Zangheri:

I cannot find in Gramsci any prediction that this process (of capitalist transformation in the countryside) would have developed in the direction of a rural democracy as Romeo suggests. Romeo confuses agrarian reform with the creation of peasant property, which is only one particular form of it; while it is by no means certain that the laws of capitalism, as they became more widely operative in the countryside, would have refrained from subjugating new peasant property to the normal capitalist process of differentiation and

'selection'.⁷⁰

Romeo's references to the likely destruction of the most advanced sectors of the agrarian economy in the north and centre seem equally wide of the mark. The idea that Gramsci was suggesting the break-up of the large landed estates of the Po valley seems about as likely as his advocacy of the re-introduction of the guilds. The problem for Gramsci was not one of trying to turn back the capitalist clock. It was rather to examine the possible historical alternatives to the Moderates' immobile and in many ways catastrophic solution to the peasant question.

To deal satisfactorily with this problem would demand a full-scale study quite beyond the scope of this article. It would be necessary not only to examine in detail agrarian conditions throughout the peninsula (on which much valuable work has been done), but also to relate these conditions to specific political situations (and this has been much less frequently attempted).⁷¹ Here it is only possible to give one or two tentative indications.

Gramsci, towards the end of his section on the city-countryside relationship during the Risorgimento, sketched the beginnings of an answer to the question he had posed. He realised the importance of looking at different sectors of the peninsula and divided them up as follows: the northern urban force, followed by the rural forces of the southern mainland, the North and centre, Sicily and finally Sardinia. Then, in one of his most provocative analogies, he suggested a way to examine the connection between them: 'the first of these forces (the northern urban force) retains its function of "locomotive" in any case; what is needed, therefore, is an examination of the various "most advantageous" combinations for building a "train" to move forward through history as fast as possible.'⁷²

Gramsci's own analysis of these possible 'combinations' did not, for obvious reasons, get very far. Nor did he deal with the very real problem of the internal class divisions *within* the various sectors that he had outlined. However, it is possible to identify at least two moments of bourgeois revolution when the 'locomotive' of the northern urban force (or at least a section of it) was presented with a real opportunity of combining with the countryside in a decisive fashion. The account that follows is of necessity simplified but not, I hope, entirely distorted.

The first occasion was in the spring of 1848. The temporary weakness of Austria, the successful insurrections in Milan and Venice, and the sympathy with which the revolution was initially viewed in the Lombardo-Venetian countryside, all created the conditions for a

successful 'national-popular' alliance at a turning point in the history of the Risorgimento. Two factors deserve particular attention. The international situation, determined by the revolutions of Paris, Vienna and Budapest, was uniquely favourable to such a development. And, for the only time in nineteenth-century Italy, the strongest ideological influence in the countryside — the network of parish priests — was sympathetic to the national cause. Gramsci himself, so attentive to the cultural elements in any successful alliance, did not let this point slip by. Indeed, in his section on the origins of the Risorgimento he goes as far as to say that Pius IX's espousal of Catholic liberalism (for however short a period) can be considered 'the political masterpiece of the Risorgimento'.⁷³ At the time, this masterpiece was not valued at its true worth.

It is important to stress that the *sort* of alliance feasible in the North in 1848 was not one which could have called into question (let alone reversed) the basic lines of development of northern agriculture. If agrarian reform meant anything in the North, it was an amelioration of agrarian contracts for at least part of the peasantry, and measures to combat the chronic pauperism of the *braccianti* of the Po Valley. Thus of Gramsci's multiple formulations of the Action Party/peasant relationship, that which refers to an action 'on' the peasantry is probably the most appropriate in this context. In the Veneto, Manin's abolition of the personal tax and reduction of the salt tax were steps in the right direction, but insufficient by themselves. The democrats of Milan and Venice failed to evolve a strategy, based on limited material concessions, to utilise peasant enthusiasm at this critical moment. They would have had the great advantage of building on the basis of a belief in a Holy War against the Austrians. But in the rural areas they never acted in any planned, let alone 'Jacobin' manner. As a result, the myth of Radetzky soon replaced that of Pio Nono.⁷⁴

A second moment of possible convergence was in the South in 1860. Gramsci himself noted the need to study the 'political conduct of the Garibaldini in Sicily'.⁷⁵ Here too the 'northern urban force' can be called the locomotive because Garibaldi's Thousand were for the most part radicals and democrats, artisans and students from the northern Italian cities. The agrarian situation in Sicily and on the southern mainland was in striking contrast to that of the North. The hidebound and parasitic class of *latifondisti*, replenished in the nineteenth century by a new wave of bourgeois landowners, had taken every opportunity of usurping the common land of the villages and reducing the peasantry of the inland areas to a state of absolute deprivation and almost perma-

ment revolt. In 1841 the Bourbon Ferdinand II had passed a law promising the peasantry at least one-fifth of any land where they could establish a custom of ancestral usage, in return for their abandonment of 'promiscuous rights', such as grazing, the collecting of wood, etc. The peasantry were forcibly excluded from exercising these rights, but very little land came their way.⁷⁶

Agrarian reform in the South therefore meant something quite different from that in the North. It meant, as Candeloro has argued, an effective splitting up of the demesne land promised to the peasantry from the time of Zurlo onwards, and an equitable division of the vast ecclesiastical estates that came onto the agrarian market in the wake of Garibaldi's successful expedition. Only in this way could the savage divide between landlord and destitute sharecropper have been overcome by the formation of a stratum of peasant proprietors. Certainly the idea of a 'rural democracy' in the South seems entirely improbable. Not all the peasantry could have gained land and many of those who might have received holdings would soon have sold them again in the face of mounting debt and the absence of capital. But the peasant community none the less could have become more stratified, as landholding extended further down the rural social ladder. Such a solution, to quote Candeloro again, was one 'which would have generated new contrasts and social differentiations, but which would undoubtedly have been more dynamic and progressive in terms of the general development of the country than that which in fact established itself in 1860'.⁷⁷

Garibaldi at first seemed intent on carrying out a reform of this sort. His proclamation of 2 June 1860 promised the peasants 'an equitable division of the land, as well as the abolition of the food excise and the grist tax'.⁷⁸ At the same time spontaneous peasant insurrection had resulted in the breakdown of Bourbon local government and contributed significantly to the early successes of the Garibaldini. Yet an alliance was never forged between the two sides. Garibaldi and his officers put the national war effort before all else, and decided that the support of the local landowners was a more effective weapon for conscription than a programme of social reform. Outright coercion rapidly took the place of initial peasant consent and enthusiasm. At Bronte, to the west of Mount Etna, an exasperated peasantry, having waited in vain for the implementation of reform, rose up and slaughtered the local notables. Nino Bixio, despatched by Garibaldi to put down the rising, executed five of the villagers, including the radical lawyer Lombardo who had tried to enforce the just division of the demesne land. The events at Bronte signalled the end of

all hopes of a different solution to the agrarian question in the South.⁷⁹

Thus on at least two occasions of great importance the Action Party failed to link with the peasantry and effectively challenge the Moderates' strategy of bourgeois revolution. Many of the reasons for this failure have already become apparent. Others appear with regularity in Gramsci's writing: Mazzini's notions of religious reform and his lack of attention to social problems; the Action Party's fears, shared with the Moderates, of stirring up class warfare (and in this respect the Jacobin experience and 1848 in Paris were for them negative models); Austrian threats to use the peasantry, as at Cracow in 1846, against liberal and nationalist landowners; an international climate that was unfavourable, especially after 1848, to any other than a moderate solution to the Italian question. To these must be added the Action Party leaders' profound ignorance of the problems of the peasantry. Coming from urban backgrounds, living a great part of their active political life in exile, the historic figures of the democratic wing of the Italian bourgeoisie were quite unprepared for those dramatic moments in the history of the Risorgimento in which they were called upon to formulate agrarian policy.

The importance of their failures cannot be under-estimated. Here the connection between process and moment, a connection founded centrally on the agrarian question, reappears with great clarity. The shortcomings of Cattaneo, Mazzini and Manin in northern Italy in the spring of 1848 were the starting point for that decomposition of the democrats which Gramsci describes so well. Bourgeois democratic principles were henceforth always to be subordinate to the somewhat different political programme of Camillo Cavour. As for the South in 1860, the limited horizons of the Garibaldini meant that the strident problems of the *Mezzogiorno* received a purely repressive solution at the supreme moment of bourgeois revolution in Italy. The historic backwardness of the South became a permanent feature of the new nation state, decisively influencing the whole process of Italian economic and political development.

Notes

1. A. Cobban, 'The myth of the French Revolution', in Cobban (ed.), *Aspects of the French Revolution* (London, 1968), p. 106.

2. G.V. Taylor, 'Non-capitalist wealth and the origins of the French Revolution', *American Historical Review*, vol. 72 (1967) p. 496.

3. R. Zapperi, *Per la critica del concetto della rivoluzione borghese* (Bari, 1974), pp. 13, 83, 91.

4. A. Soboul, *The French Revolution, 1787-1799* (London, 1974).

For a summary of recent Marxist writing on the French Revolution, centring on the figure of Soboul, see G. Ellis, 'The "Marxist interpretation" of the French Revolution', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 93 (1978) pp. 353-76.

5. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in K. Marx, *The Revolution of 1848*, ed. D. Fernbach (London, 1973), p. 72.

6. J. Jaurès, *Histoire socialiste de la Révolution française*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1901), p. 70.

6a. In a later formulation of the problem, Marx himself writes of 'a period [or 'epoch' in some translations] of social revolution', engendered by the conflict between the material forces of production on the one hand, and the existing relations of production on the other; see Marx's 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago, 1904), p. 12.

7. See R. Price, *The Economic Modernisation of France* (London, 1975), Introduction and p. 225; and, more guardedly, T. Kemp, *Economic Forces in French History* (London, 1971), pp. 200-4 and 217-18. D. Richet places the decisive transformation 'in the second half of the XIXth century'; 'Autour des origines idéologiques lointaines de la Révolution française', *Annales, économies, sociétés, civilisations*, vol. 24 (1969) p. 22. But see also R. Robin's criticisms of Richet's account of the transition to capitalism, and a suggested periodisation, in 'La natura dello stato alla fine dell'Ancien Regime: formazione sociale, Stato e transizione', *Studi Storici*, yr. 14 (1973) pp. 645-6 and 653-4.

8. G. Therborn, 'The rule of Capital and the rise of Democracy', *New Left Review*, no. 103 (1977) p. 4.

9. A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. Q. Hoare and D. Nowell-Smith (London, 1971), p. 179. Reference is made wherever possible to this English selection (hereafter *PN*). Where no English translation exists, the reader is referred either to the complete critical edition of the *Quaderni del carcere*, ed. V. Gerratana (Torino, 1975: hereafter *Ec*); or to C. Vivanti's amply annotated edition of one of these notebooks, *Quaderno 19, Risorgimento italiano* (Torino, 1977: hereafter *Q 19*).

10. Marx, *Manifesto*, p. 69.

11. G. Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia moderna*, vol. 1 (Milano, 1956), p. 16. See also S. Soldani, 'Risorgimento', in *Il Mondo contemporaneo. Storia d'Italia*, eds. F. Levi, U. Levra, N. Tranfaglia, vol. 3 (Firenze, 1978), p. 1159, where the Risorgimento is described as 'a decisive stage in the development and affirmation of the bourgeois revolution in the peninsula'. I too plead guilty to using the term bourgeois revolution in this way in my *Daniele Manin e la rivoluzione veneziana del 1848-49* (Milano, 1978).

12. V.I. Lenin, '“Riforma contadina” e rivoluzione proletaria-contadina' (19 Marzo 1911), in *Opere complete*, vol. 17 (Roma, 1966), pp. 107 and 112.

13. K. Marx, 'The bourgeoisie and the counter-revolution' (*Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, 15 December 1848), in *The Revolutions of 1848*, pp. 192-3.

14. Isaac Deutscher makes this point clearly in his *The Unfinished Revolution, Russia 1917-67* (London, 1967), p. 22.

15. 'Does the concept of bourgeois revolution not imply perhaps that only the bourgeoisie can accomplish it? The Mensheviks often err towards this point of view. But such an opinion is a caricature of Marxism. Bourgeois in its economic and social content, the liberation movement need not be so with regard to its driving forces. These can be not the bourgeoisie, but the proletariat and the peasantry'; V.I. Lenin, 'La questione agraria e le forze della rivoluzione' (1 April 1907), *Opere complete*, vol. 12 (Roma, 1965), pp. 304-5.

16. Therborn, 'The rule of Capital and the rise of Democracy', p. 17.

17. It is perhaps worth adding that Therborn's definition of bourgeois democracy seems deficient with respect to the question of civil liberties. The right of assembly and the freedom of the press would appear as intrinsic a part of bourgeois democracy as the right to vote. The struggle for their implementation forms a central and recurrent theme in the bourgeois revolutions of the nineteenth century. Indeed, for the Russian Marxist dissident Leonid Pliusc, civil liberties *are* the bourgeois revolution. Intentionally standing Marxism on its head, Pliusc declared in December 1977 that in order to establish civil liberties, Russia, 'having made the socialist revolution, has now to make the bourgeois one'; *Il Manifesto*, 12 Nov. 1977. More polemic than serious attempt at definition, Pliusc's remark nevertheless provides food for thought.

18. F. Engels, introduction to *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* (London, 1892), pp. xxi-xxx.

19. P. Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London, 1974), p. 9: 'Marx and Engels themselves can never be taken simply at their word: the errors of their writings on the past should not be evaded or ignored, but identified and criticized. To do so is not to depart from historical materialism, but to rejoin it.'

20. Engels, introduction to *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xxviii; Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in *Surveys from Exile*, ed. D. Fernbach (London, 1973), p. 147. For a useful introduction to Marx's writing on the French Revolution, see J. Bruhat, 'La Révolution française et la formation de la pensée de Marx', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, yr. 38 (1966) pp. 125-70.

21. Soboul, *The French Revolution, 1787-1799*, p. 5.

22. P. Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London, 1974), p. 431.

22a. Unfortunately, the brief but provocative remarks of N. Poulantzas in the chapter 'Sur les modèles de la révolution bourgeoise' in his *Pouvoir politique et classes sociales*, Paris, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 178-95, were brought to my attention too late to incorporate in this article. Poulantzas tries to compare the British, French and German experiences.

23. Barrington Moore Jr., *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston, 1966); V.I. Lenin, 'Il programma agrario della socialdemocrazia' (Nov.-Dec. 1907), *Opere complete*, vol. 13 (Roma, 1965), pp. 400-1. Some very general remarks on what the author calls the 'revolutions of the liberal-bourgeois period' are to be found in E.J. Hobsbawm, 'La Rivoluzione', *Studi Storici*, yr. 17 (1976) pp. 32-3.

24. M. Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (London, 1963), pp. 11-12.

25. See G. Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia moderna*, vol. 1, pp. 48-63.

26. Central to this question is the work of S. Merli, *Proletariato di fabbrica e capitalismo industriale. Il caso italiano: 1880-1900*, 2 vols. (Firenze 1972-3). Merli argues against those Marxist and bourgeois historians who have placed Italy's industrial revolution *after* 1896. According to Merli, such a periodisation ignores the fact that by the end of the nineteenth century 'the working class has already discovered the political party, trade union and sectional organisation is already at a high level of development, the Italian proletariat has already undergone a social, political and human experience that has made it emerge from pre-history and has formed it as an alternative class' (vol. 1, p. 33).

27. Speech to the Prima Conferenza femminile del PCI, Rome, 2-5 June 1945, quoted in G. Quazza, *Resistenza e Storia d'Italia* (Milano, 1976), p. 170.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

29. From his 'Rapporto ai quadri dell'organizzazione comunista napoletana, 11 aprile 1944', now in G. Manacorda (ed.), *Il Socialismo nella storia d'Italia* (Bari, 1966), p. 747. It is interesting (and sad) to note Togliatti's rather different judgement of these figures during the 'social-fascist' period of world Communism.

In an article of 1931 he wrote: 'Its [the Risorgimento's] heroes are mediocre figures of provincial politicians, court intriguers, intellectuals behind their times, oleographic men of arms . . . it is absurd to think that there is a "Risorgimento" to take up again, to finish, to carry through afresh, and that this is the task of democratic anti-fascism'; P. Togliatti, 'Sul movimento di Giustizia e Libertà', in *Opere*, vol. 3, pt. 1 (Roma, 1973), p. 418. This contrast was brought to my attention by the outstanding article of C. Pavone, 'Le idee della Resistenza: antifascisti e fascisti di fronte alle tradizioni del Risorgimento', *Passato e Presente*, no. 7 (1959) pp. 850-918.

30. Nassau Senior, *Conversations with M. Thiers, M. Guizot, and Other Distinguished Persons during the Second Empire*, vol. 2 (London, 1878), p. 127.

31. A. Soboul, 'Risorgimento e rivoluzione borghese: schema di una direttiva di ricerca', in Istituto A. Gramsci, *Problemi dell'Unità d'Italia. Atti del II Convegno di studi gramsciani tenuto a Roma, 19-21 marzo 1960* (Roma, 1962), p. 814.

32. In order not to clash with John Davis's essay, I have intentionally avoided as far as possible a discussion of the city-countryside relationship in Gramsci's writing.

33. Istituto A. Gramsci, *Studi Gramsciani. Atti del Convegno tenuto a Roma 11-12 gennaio 1958* (Roma, 1958); Istituto A. Gramsci, *Problemi dell'Unità d'Italia*; Istituto A. Gramsci, *Politica e storia in Gramsci. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi Gramsciani, Firenze 9-11 dicembre 1977*, vol. 1, *Relazioni a stampa* (Roma, 1977).

34. Romeo's two essays are published in his *Risorgimento e Capitalismo* (Bari, 1959). See also F. Chabod, 'Croce storico', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, vol. 64 (1952) p. 521; and the remarks of Croce in *Quaderni della Critica*, vol. 15 (1949) p. 112.

35. The latest example of this attitude is C. Vivanti's introduction and notes to *Quaderno 19*. Although informative his comments are intentionally acritical.

36. See Quentin Hoare's useful summary in *PN*, p. 46.

37. *Ec*, p. 504.

38. *PN*, p. 119.

39. *Ec*, pp. 1818-19.

40. *PN*, p. 109.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

42. For the most important of these moments, that of 1860, see below.

43. *PN*, p. 119.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 206. Gramsci's other use of the terms, to differentiate between the strategy of the working-class movement in the West and the East, does not concern us here.

45. *PN*, p. 108.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-8.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

49. G. La Masa, *Documenti della rivoluzione siciliana del 1847-9*, vol. 1 (Torino, 1850), p. 75; C. Cattaneo, *Dell'insurrezione di Milano e della successiva guerra* (Lugano, 1849), chap. 5.

50. *PN*, p. 182.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

54. *Ec*, p. 2045.

55. For the first of these formulations, *Ec*, p. 1930, but note the square brackets around the words *avrebbero dovuto essere legati* indicating that they are a later addition by Gramsci; for the second, *Q 19*, pp. 44-5; for the third, *PN*, p. 82, where Gramsci's '*azione sui contadini*' is translated as 'action directed at the peasantry'.

56. *PN*, p. 66.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

58. The four quotations cited are respectively from *Ec*, p. 961; *PN*, p. 102; *ibid.*; and *PN*, p. 78.

59. 'Review of M. Guizot's book on the English Revolution', in K. Marx, *Surveys from Exile*, p. 254.

60. A. Mathiez, *La Rivoluzione francese* vol. 3 (Milano, 1933), p. 17. This is the edition which Gramsci used in prison. For the Jacobin laws of 1793, see pp. 17-18.

61. See G. Lefebvre, 'La Révolution française et les paysans' in *Etudes sur la Révolution française* (Paris, 1954), p. 268.

62. M. Bouloiseau, *La Francia rivoluzionaria. La Repubblica Giacobina, 1792-1794* (Bari, 1975), p. 203. (Original French title, *La République jacobine, 10 août 1792-9 thermidor an II* (Paris, 1972).

63. P. Anderson, 'The antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', *New Left Review*, no. 100 (1976) pp. 42-4.

64. *PN*, pp. 75-6.

65. *Ec*, p. 1591.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 962.

67. W. Maturi, *Interpretazioni del Risorgimento* (Torino, 1962), p. 624.

68. R. Romeo, *Risorgimento e capitalismo* (Bari, 1974: 1st edn. 1959), pp. 23-9. I realise that my piecemeal quotation of Romeo is an unsatisfactory procedure, but there is no single extract from these pages that summarises his position adequately. I have tried my best not to distort his argument in any way.

69. A. Gerschenkron, 'Rosario Romeo and the original accumulation of capital' in Gerschenkron (ed.), *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 90-118. See also their debate and attempted reconciliation at Rome in July 1960, now published as 'Consensi, dissensi, ipotesi in un dibattito Gerschenkron-Romeo', in *La formazione dell'Italia industriale*, ed. A. Caracciolo (Bari, 1969), pp. 53-81. Gerschenkron (p. 65) shows as little understanding as Romeo of what Gramsci was saying.

70. R. Zangheri, 'La mancata rivoluzione agraria nel Risorgimento e i problemi economici dell'Unità', in Istituto A. Gramsci, *Studi Gramsciani*, p. 375. See also the acute critiques of G. Candeloro, 'Intervento', in Istituto A. Gramsci, *Studi Gramsciani*, pp. 515-23 and L. Cafagna, 'Intorno al "revisionismo risorgimentale"', *Società*, yr. 12 (1956) pp. 1015-35.

71. Amongst the fundamental recent works on Italian agrarian conditions are: M. Romani, *L'Agricoltura in Lombardia dal periodo delle riforme al 1859. Struttura, organizzazione sociale e tecnica* (Milano, 1957); R. Villari, *Mezzogiorno e contadini nell'età moderna* (Bari, 1961); P. Villani, *Mezzogiorno tra riforme e rivoluzione* (Bari, 1962); M. Berengo, *L'Agricoltura veneta dalla caduta della Repubblica all'Unità*, (Milano, 1963); C. Poni, *Gli aratri e l'economia agraria nel Bolognese dal XVII al XIX secolo* (Bologna, 1963); C. Pazzagli, *L'Agricoltura toscana nella prima metà dell'800. Tecniche produttive e rapporti mezzadrili* (Firenze, 1973); G. Giogetti, *Contadini e proprietari nell'Italia moderna. Rapporti di produzione e contratti agrari dal secolo XVI a oggi* (Torino, 1974).

72. *PN*, p. 98.

73. *Q 19*, p. 19. Note also Gramsci's observation, taken from Momigliano, that Italian national consciousness could be formed only by overcoming two other 'cultural forms': municipal particularism and Catholic cosmopolitanism; *Ec*, p. 1801.

74. F. Della Peruta, 'I contadini nella rivoluzione lombarda del 1848', in Della Peruta, *Democrazia e socialismo nel Risorgimento* (Roma, 1965), pp. 59-108. Ginsborg, *Daniele Manin e la rivoluzione veneziana*, chaps. 3-6.

75. *PN*, p. 101.

76. D. Mack Smith, 'The Latifundia in modern Sicilian history', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 51 (1965) pp. 95-7. On p. 96, n. 1 he writes: 'It was roughly calculated by A. Battaglia in 1907 that if only this "fifth part" had been in fact distributed as the law of 1841 prescribed, there would have been land to settle 700,000 peasants'. See also the excellent chapter entitled 'Linee di sviluppo dei contratti nelle regioni del latifondo' in G. Giogetti, *Contadini e proprietari nell'Italia moderna*, pp. 200-77.

77. G. Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia moderna*, vol. 5 (Milano, 1968), p. 50.

78. D. Mack Smith, 'The peasants' revolt in Sicily, 1860', in *Victor Emanuel, Cavour and the Risorgimento* (London, 1971), pp. 198-9. The demesne lands due to the peasantry were to be split up by lottery, and plots to be reserved for those fighting in the war of liberation. See also the detailed study by S.F. Romano, *Momenti del Risorgimento in Sicilia* (Messina, 1952), pt. 3, pp. 111-268.

79. D. Mack Smith, 'The peasants' revolt', pp. 212-14.

3 THE SOUTH, THE RISORGIMENTO AND THE ORIGINS OF THE 'SOUTHERN PROBLEM'

John A. Davis

Gramsci's most comprehensive analysis of the significance of the South in Italy's economic and political development since unification is to be found in the *Prison Notebooks*, and yet it was a problem which had attracted his attention long before this. At the Socialist Party Congress of 1921, which saw the birth of the Italian Communist Party, Gramsci had declared that the South constituted 'the central problem of our national life'.¹ In the highly concentrated essay on 'The Southern Problem', which was unfinished at the time of his arrest, Gramsci made his first systematic attempt to set the problem of the South in the context of Italy's political development, and to analyse in particular the social basis of the southern agrarian 'bloc'. In the *Prison Notebooks* the South becomes not only the central feature of national life after unification, but also a central feature in the making of the national revolution.

As a Sardinian, Gramsci's concern for the South is easily explicable. But behind this concern also lay over half a century of debate, investigation and polemic on the conditions of the South in the national state and their causes – a debate which had been accompanied by some of the finest examples of economic and sociological investigation of the period. It was on this vast, and often impressive, body of literature and research that Gramsci was able to draw as he developed his own analysis of the origins and development of the Southern Problem. Like Gaetano Salvemini and others before him, he saw in the alliance between the industrialists of the North and the reactionary landowning classes of the South the fulcrum of the Italian political system. But while it was the industrial and agricultural protective tariffs of the 1880s which had given fullest expression to this alliance, Gramsci saw its origins in the earlier absorption of the southern liberals into the hegemonic programme of the Cavourian moderates. The dominant political structure of the unified state was therefore 'organically' related to the relationship between the dominant social forces which had brought about the national revolution. The Southern Problem was not a casual consequence of unification, but was rather inherent in the 'passive revolution' from which unification resulted.²

In many respects Gramsci's analysis of the origins of the Southern Problem is very persuasive. The emphasis, for example, on the weaker position of the South with respect to the North, and hence on its relative backwardness, even before unification, is an important corrective to the simplistic notion that the poverty of the South resulted solely from unification. Also, the emphasis on the passivity of the political contribution of the southern liberals during the Risorgimento would seem apt, even if one might wish to give this an interpretation which differs slightly from Gramsci's. Similarly, Gramsci's observations on the peculiarities of the Southern social structure provide the essential starting point for any further research.

But Gramsci's analysis of the origins of the Southern Problem and of the relations between North and South during the Risorgimento also raises certain important problems. It was, of course, primarily with the forces of political and ideological attraction that he was concerned. But underlying these he also saw a parallel and necessary process of economic attraction and subordination. There was, he claimed, '[d]uring the Risorgimento . . . embryonically the historical relationship between North and South similar to that between a great city and a great rural area', and there was 'ever since 1815 . . . a relatively homogenous politico-economic structure' between the two parts of the peninsula.³ The political and economic forces of attraction combined to form, in Gramsci's analogy, a locomotive and its wagons, so that the collapse of the Bourbon dynasty in the South in the face of Garibaldi and his volunteers in 1860 was an almost mechanical sequel to Cavour's victories of the previous year.

It is precisely this economic parallelism which we wish to question in the following pages. Not only does the interpretation of the economic relations between North and South in terms of the relationship between city and countryside give rise to a number of empirical difficulties, but the implication that the two parts of the peninsula formed a complementary economic system even before unification would seem to beg important questions on the origins of the Southern Problem. We shall argue, in fact, that Gramsci's search for the origins of the national political elite led him to project backwards a unity of political purpose and economic logic which may distort and even over-simplify the economic and political forces which drew the South into the national state. His emphasis on the spontaneous and complementary attraction between the two regions, in particular, might lead one to overlook the widespread economic and social crisis which was evident in the South both before and after unification. And what was hinted at by the flight

of the ruler whom Garibaldi contemptuously described as 'that poor little devil Francis' was soon to be demonstrated more fully by the chaos and confusion which followed unification, and by the four long years of tortured civil war in the southern provinces. The involvement of the South in national unification and the origins of the Southern Problem cannot be seen apart from this evidence of widespread crisis and collapse.

It is in the origins and nature of this crisis in southern society that an explanation of the forces which drew the Mezzogiorno and Sicily into the national movement can be found. The complex and contradictory pressures which accompanied this crisis reveal not only the undoubtedly 'passive' nature of the political revolution in the South, but also that the economic experiences of the two parts of the Italian peninsula in the century before unification were very different and distinct. The origins of the 'Southern Problem' were, then, perhaps more complex than Gramsci's interpretation allows.

Like Gramsci, most recent historians of the social and economic development of the South have tended to concentrate on the problem of the southern agrarian bourgeoisie. The emergence of a new rural bourgeoisie has been traced from the first opportunities for the introduction of more commercially orientated and emancipated forms of agricultural organisation in the eighteenth century. Increasing demand for foodstuffs and raw materials generated by population growth and economic expansion in Northern Europe brought about a steady upswing in prices, exports and production in the Italian South in the first two-thirds of the century. This buoyant market fell away in the last decades of the century, but, it is argued, had been sufficient to create a new social force whose voice can be heard behind the growing clamour for reform, culminating in the premature Jacobin Republic of 1799. The great step forward came with the occupation of the mainland in 1805 and its inclusion in the Napoleonic Empire. In 1805 Joseph Bonaparte declared feudalism abolished, and the consolidation of the new rural bourgeoisie went ahead apace. Estate bailiffs, small provincial merchants, wealthier peasants and others were able to take advantage of the emancipation of the land market to become landowners. Those parts of the former feudal estates which had been subject to common rights of pasture, wood-gathering and so forth, were expropriated and destined for division amongst the destitute landless peasantry. In practice, the new capitalist farmers were more often the beneficiaries of such divisions, hence the growing tension in social relations in the countryside. Under the Restoration this new class con-

tinued to expand, it is argued, although increasingly coming into conflict with the archaic and immobile structure of the Bourbon state, its restrictions on free trade, its obscurantism, clericalism and opposition to the circulation of ideas and political democracy.⁴

What this implies is that the South, before unification, was experiencing a process similar, albeit more limited and chronologically unsynchronised, to that which was occurring in the North. The gap between the two should not be under-estimated, for the southern bourgeoisie was only just and more tentatively beginning to set out on the path that the Jacinis, the Cavours, the Ricasolis and so many others in the North had been following for over a century. But despite the distance of achievement which separated the two, they were moving in the same direction and were pioneering and establishing the same process – the introduction of an agriculture organised on capitalist lines.

The relative weakness of the southern bourgeoisie and the limitations of its development in the period has also been emphasised. In his study of Sicily, Romeo concludes that despite the gradual process of land redistribution which took place on the perimeters of the latifundia economy, the changes in the early nineteenth century 'did not substantially change the character of Sicilian society, which remained much as it had been in the 18th Century'.⁵ Villani has also stressed the weaknesses and limitations of the mainland bourgeoisie:

. . . the fact that it was created and grew up in the shadow of the feudal system, the fact that it received its inheritance from the feudal class without any dramatic struggles, tended to limit its drive and prevented it becoming a fully 'hegemonic' class capable of providing or even imposing a programme of rapid and soundly based economic growth.⁶

Despite these weaknesses and limitations, however, the new bourgeoisie remains the focus of attention. Its establishment upsets traditional social relations, and in particular leads to the disappearance of the lands on which the common rights which played such a fundamental role in the subsistence peasant economy were located. The growing violence and disorder in the countryside which followed served to increase the timidity and conservatism of the new capitalist farmers. Although arguing from different positions, both Romeo and Villani place the responsibility for the failings and limitations of the southern Risorgimento on the weaknesses and inadequacies of the new rural bourgeoisie. As another Italian economic historian has put it, the South

suffered from both too much and too little capitalism.⁷

The emphasis on the weakness of the new social forces in the South would certainly seem right, and bears out Gramsci's own insistence on the relative weakness of the southern bourgeoisie. But the sense in which this bourgeoisie was in fact 'new' is less clear. Nor is it necessarily very helpful to couple the emphasis on the limitations of the agrarian bourgeoisie with the rather elusive notion that they formed a 'rising' social class. As in other 'rising gentry' debates, the room for semantic muddle and woolliness is ample, and it is essential to define the terms carefully. If, as would seem to be implicit, the term 'rural bourgeoisie' means a new and vital class which was engaged in introducing and establishing new methods and new relations of production in the feudal or semi-feudal agrarian structure of the South, then this would seem to bear very little relation to the economic realities of the southern countryside in the early nineteenth century. Had such a class been present, the subsequent failure of the South to develop along lines comparable with the North would be the more difficult to explain, as would the conservative and even reactionary contribution of the South to the national political structure after 1860. As an abstraction, it also encourages some rather circular explanations of southern backwardness; the continuation of archaic systems of social relations in the South, of backward economic and political organisation, are blamed on a weak agrarian bourgeoisie which held back from doing away with them. But if that was the case, then it is not clear in what sense this 'new' class was a capitalist class at all — and if it was not, as Gramsci would undoubtedly have pointed out, this would suggest that the traditional feudal landlord class had not yet exhausted its historical function. In other words, in making the southern bourgeoisie 'responsible' for the lack of development, there is the risk of blaming it for not being something different to what it in fact was. Tautology and contradiction spin out of control if we insist on seizing on such mastodontic 'ideal types' as feudalism and capitalism to describe the often subtle and complex changes occurring within a backward but still complex agrarian society.

If it is to be argued that the southern economy was growing, then it is not enough simply to demonstrate that land was changing hands, or that the ownership of property was becoming less concentrated. We must also show that new forms of technique and organisation were being introduced, that productivity, and not just volumes of production, increased (because so of course did the population — massively).⁸ And throughout the century before unification there is indeed scant

evidence that such was in fact the case.

The last decades of the eighteenth century saw the reversal of the relative prosperity which had accompanied the upswing in agricultural prices in the early part of the century. And just at the moment when commercial and political problems outside the Mediterranean were unsettling the basis of that short-lived prosperity, the demographic trend which had been rising steadily over the century began to catch up with and even bear down on the expansion in production.⁹ As the demographic balance shifted and began to outstrip production, a situation began to emerge which was to become an almost permanent feature of southern society for the remainder of this period. The demographic trend and the growing commercial crisis combined to bear down brutally on precisely those groups who had benefited from the earlier prosperity to acquire some share of land. As the rural population grew relentlessly and the falling agricultural market drove small tenants off their holdings in increasing numbers, social relations in the countryside began to deteriorate rapidly. The distance and the tension between those who succeeded in clinging on to their property and the ever growing army of landless *braccianti* (agricultural labourers) which surrounded them widened and grew.

The process is clearly illustrated by the movements in the distribution of property in a region recently studied by Gérard Delille. In the period between 1754 and 1816, the percentage of those owning land covering an area of between 1 and 20 *moggia* (1 *moggia* = 1/3 hectare) in the region fell from 70 per cent to 40 per cent of the total, while in the same period the total of those holding tiny and in agricultural terms quite unviable parcels of less than 1 *moggia* increased threefold (from 18 per cent to 56 per cent of the total), whereas the percentage owning larger properties over 20 *moggia* fell from 7.4 per cent to 2.9 per cent.¹⁰ What this suggests is a rapid decline and deterioration in the agrarian economy which may well have wiped out many of the gains made earlier in the century, and certainly engendered a similar and violent decline in social relations due to the insecurity of both the smaller landowner and the landless peasants. But within this context, the smaller landowner begins to appear not so much as the prototype of a new economic class, but rather as the survivor of a previous wave of upward social and economic mobility – an embattled survivor, many of whose colleagues had been, or were in the process of being, thrown back into the ranks of the landless *braccianti*. This demographic and economic reversal in the late eighteenth century was sufficiently extensive for Delille to speak of a return to the economic and demographic

patterns of the seventeenth century.¹¹

The economic fortunes of the southern mainland during the ten years of French rule between 1805 and 1815 are still far from clear. While on one hand the Continental System provided new and privileged markets for many southern agricultural products and even important openings for manufacturing enterprise, especially textiles, the war and the Allied blockade disastrously disrupted trade in the Mediterranean.¹² For Sicily, British occupation did bring trade and wealth, but this was similarly short-lived and dependent entirely on the conditions created by the war. But the most difficult problem remains that of the effect of the reforms introduced on the mainland by the French, and the degree of land redistribution which followed from them. It is still the case that the decrees by which Joseph Bonaparte abolished feudal system are widely seen as marking the end of the *ancien régime* and the establishment of the new bourgeois order.

There are a number of reasons for doubting the effectiveness of these measures, especially in view of the very short period in which to implement them. Giuseppe Zurlo's Feudal Commission, which was established to administer the new legislation, was faced by enormous difficulties, not least of which was the absence of any land register. The pressing military needs confronting Murat's government placed a premium on raising cash from the sales of ex-demesne and Church property as quickly as possible. This created great opportunities and fat pickings for those with capital and contacts with the government, and in the opinion of a later British consul in Naples it was the Neapolitan financiers and courtiers who benefited most from the sales.¹³ But whereas the sense of urgency may have produced good bargains at knock-down prices for the wealthy of the capital, it did less to favour the small landowners and landless peasants who were intended to be the primary beneficiaries. In 1806, for example, the vast sheep-run similar to the Castilian *Mesta* which covered some 300,000 ha in Apulia and was known as the *Tavoliere di Puglia*, was emancipated by decree of the rights and restrictions which reserved the area for transhumance, provision being made for existing feudal tenants to convert their holdings into emphyteuts (annual quit-rents). In order to qualify, however, these tenants were obliged to apply for the conversion of their holdings within only 20 days of the publication of the law. In addition, the rents for the newly disencumbered properties were increased considerably, and the peasants also had to pay various other surcharges such as entry fees.¹⁴

More specific information on the degree of redistribution can be

found in the only quantitative study of the land sales which has been attempted. Villani's study shows that with the exception of only the two most advanced agricultural regions (Apulia and Salernitano) the great bulk of the purchases were made by a small handful of purchasers — whose names included some of the oldest and most powerful feudal families in the Kingdom. Some 65 per cent of all the purchases were made by individuals representing less than 7 per cent of the total number of purchasers.¹⁵

Evidence on the way in which the process of dividing ex-feudal estates into small peasant properties developed does not add much support to the notion of a major or effective redistribution either. On the vast latifundum of Conigliano in Calabria the emancipation of those parts of the feudal estate subject to 'common rights' meant that the huge area of 5,000 ha was destined for division amongst about 900 small proprietors and tenants. The division was not made until 1817, and the rents for the allotments were then set at over 40 times higher than those for similar allotments ten years earlier.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, within a year the peasants were surrendering their land because they could not pay the rent. By 1855 the man who had purchased the latifundum from the feudatories, the Duke of Conigliano, had himself taken over 134 of the allotments originally designed to establish a small peasant landowning class.¹⁷

Whether it was new men like Baron Compagna at Conigliano or former feudatories who were making the purchases, the main consequence of the land sales in this period seems to have been a process of concentration, and even reconcentration, of large property in the hands of a relatively small group, surrounded by a myriad of tiny properties always teetering on the limits of economic feasibility and chronically vulnerable to any change in the economic climate. While this was certainly true of the classic latifundia terrain of Calabria, it seems also to have been true of more advanced areas as well. In the case of Capitanata, for example, a recent study concludes that the main beneficiaries were 'the former leading feudatories' together with a number of merchants and others from Foggia and the Abruzzi.¹⁸ A. Lepre has also used information from later census returns to examine the structure of property in the 1820s and 1830s and has drawn similar conclusions — a very small number of large properties and high rent rolls, surrounded by a mass of tiny fragmented parcels of land.¹⁹ Although Sicily was unaffected by the French legislation, the attempt to reform the feudal estates on the island led, according to Romeo, to a similar result — the Sicilian latifundum remained intact, but was surrounded by a prolifera-

tion of tiny peasant properties.²⁰

There can be no doubt that the French reforms brought changes, and the acreage of land removed from the control of former feudal holders was considerable. But the changes were quantitative rather than qualitative. The lands that were lost were generally those of least value, as those parts of the feudal estates which were not subject to common rights were not touched by the legislation. There is scant evidence that the new owners adopted techniques of farming which differed from their predecessors. Again the Calabrian latifundia provide a good, if exaggerated, example. When the Jacini Enquiry into the State of Agriculture was conducted in the 1880s, the report on the Calabrias showed that Giuseppe Compagna still held the estates which he had originally acquired in 1806, and that these now covered some 10 million ha. Even this was dwarfed by his neighbour, Luigi Quinteri, who owned over 20 million ha. The investigator reported that both families had built up their estates through influence acquired as government officers, through the purchase of former feudal and demesne lands, and also from the renewed sales of Crown lands after 1860.²¹

What struck the investigator was the way in which these 'new men' had preserved the traditional structure of the latifundum without making any attempt to overcome its limitations. The latifundum was, after all, a system based on grassland, sheep grazing and minimal use of labour. The scattering of peasant properties around the perimeter served to keep wages low, and the integrity of the latifundum was carefully protected by the Calabrian custom which permitted only the youngest son in a family to marry. The estate was not seen as a source of production in itself, but rather as a base for exploiting the needs and poverty of the fragile peasant economy which surrounded it. The Jacini investigator, Branca, noted with some astonishment that virtually every landowner in Calabria was indebted to the latifundist Quinteri, who was the only source of credit and loans in a capital-starved, unproductive and precarious economy. In this he differed little from the former feudal Dukes of Conigliano.²² But despite his wealth, Quinteri lived in spartan frugality in Cosenza: 'The fable of Midas who turned to gold everything he touched, that telling allusion both to the torments of avarice and the power of savings, is still a reality here in distant Calabria due to the absence of any awareness of the needs and costs of a more refined form of civilization.'²³

Calabria was, of course, one of the most backward regions in the South, but the attitudes and behaviour of the latifundist Quinteri were still in many ways 'typical'. Even in areas such as the Terra di Lavoro

which had a more advanced and diversified agriculture, men who built up estates through purchases of demesne lands showed little interest in the agricultural exploitation of that land, but were content to use it as a base for penetrating the local economy, providing credit for local land-owners and peasants, and investing in remunerative government offices, to collect taxes, build roads and so forth.²⁴

Changes in personnel did not, therefore, necessarily lead to the adoption of new methods, although the changes that were taking place did often lead to a deterioration in the state of agriculture. This was due to the fact that although the structure of the feudal estate had outlived its usefulness, it had often originally been designed to accommodate the realities of the natural agricultural environment.²⁵ This of course was also the weakness, in the sense that no attempt was made to overcome the obstacles created by the environment. But in those areas, especially the cereal and sheep-grazing regions, where large feudal properties had developed, they provided a degree of centralised organisation which was often vital for the preservation of workable farmland. This did not prevent problems like deafforestation and the destruction of the natural hydrographic systems on which most of the fertile land in the South was dependent, but it did serve to restrain further damage. One of the most apparent consequences of the removal of these traditional restraints without any new controls being put in their place, was the disastrous increase in the destruction of mountain woodland, the collapse of irrigation systems and the resulting rapid impoverishment of the soil.²⁶

All this provides further evidence of the lack of any real structural change accompanying the land redistribution which resulted from the abolition of feudal rights over property. The negative consequences of the changes that did occur well illustrate the absence of new methods and techniques, and the failure to inject any new productivity into a traditional agriculture based on the defence of extremely poor levels of production. Features of renewal and revival are not readily apparent. It should also be remembered that the capital invested in the land sales between 1805-15, as in the sales after 1860, was almost entirely lost to agriculture in the South and was transferred to meet the financial obligations of the state.²⁷ The developments during the French period, in fact, seem in many ways similar to those of the mid-eighteenth century – a phase of short-lived prosperity, resulting in both the expansion of cultivation (through use of previously uncultivated land – and much of the ex-feudal property fell into this category) and the establishment of a band of precarious peasant properties. A very similar process would

occur again in the years after 1860. But in each case, the consequences were similar. The new properties were vulnerable to the slightest shift in the economic climate, and when conditions deteriorated they were the first victims. Rather than evidence of progress they represent a relentless but a Sisyphean struggle to create tiny anchor-holds of security on the margins of the traditional agrarian structure.

The economic storm which revealed the instability and weakness of the changes which had occurred during the French occupation was quick to follow. One of the central issues in any explanation of the chronic instability and state of crisis in the South in the years immediately prior to unification must be the prolonged agricultural depression which set in within a few years of the close of the European war and, in the South, began to relent only in the 1850s.

The immediate cause of the slump was the fall in value of the Kingdom's staple exports. Wheat and olive oil accounted for over 50 per cent of the Kingdom's exports,²⁸ and these were precisely the products worst affected. With the ending of the Blockade and the Imperial System prices were bound to fall, and Neapolitan and Sicilian products were faced with new competitors — olive oil from Spain, vegetable oil from North Africa (especially Egypt), and cereals from the Black Sea which now began to appear on the European markets. At the same time, technological progress was also undermining traditional markets for oil (the introduction of gas lighting, for example), hence placing a premium on improved quality and diversification.²⁹

Of the two, the fall in cereal prices was the more damaging. Average wheat prices in the Kingdom fell from 2 ducats per tomola during the Muratist period, and 2.6 ducats in the post-war boom, to no more than 1.50 ducats for the whole period 1820-34.³⁰ The consequences were to be felt by the agrarian economy as a whole due to the duration of the depression, but they were to be felt most particularly once again by the small and middling landowners. This was partly due to the fact that their economic margins were narrow, but the situation was aggravated by the fact that the high cereal prices of the French period had encouraged a massive extension of cereal production, and it was on this that the new properties had become dependent. Olive groves and vines had been ploughed up to make way for cereals, woodland had been pulled down and unsuitable hillsides sown with wheat and coarser cereals.³¹ The capital costs of production were low, and most soil would provide a yield for a few years anyway. But this was a source of terrible vulnerability once the market fell, because the new owners were still weighed down with the mortgages and debts entered into when

they acquired the land. Rents, too, had also been fixed against the higher prices of the earlier years, with the result that their true incidence gradually increased.

The new and precarious properties were not the only ones to suffer, however. The fall in prices began to affect agrarian rent-rolls more widely. The increased burden of rents for the tenant was matched by the increasing incidence of the land tax for the landowner. The new tax had been assessed in terms of notional yields at average prices in the period 1807-20. As prices fell so the true incidence of the tax rose, and by the 1830s was calculated to represent some 26 per cent of gross agricultural income.³²

Contemporaries were in little doubt over the consequences. Reviewing the situation in the Apulian provinces in 1839 De Samuele Cagnazzi claimed that:

these difficulties have damaged rural capital and have destroyed all the smaller landowners in spite of the distribution of the common lands amongst the landless, and now nearly all the land is in the hands of a few great landowners.³³

Giuseppe della Valle saw a chain effect of consequences working its way up and down the agrarian hierarchy. Initially landowners tried to offset declining profits by increasing the exactions from their tenants, with the result that many of the latter defaulted on their leases and were reduced to the status of *braccianti*. But as the depression moved into its second decade this form of evasion was no longer possible for want of replacement tenants, and so the crisis began to work its way back up the hierarchy. As income from land fell, so the indebtedness of the landlords rose, and these debts:

represented arithmetically not only the quantity of capital belonging to each landowner which has already been destroyed, but also that which will be eaten up within a short time due to the difference between farming income and the high interest rates on the loans incurred. Consequently this has been accompanied by a progressive decay of rural property, made worse by the obstacle to free trade in land as a result of those obligations which still encumber land, and the general discredit into which agriculture is fallen.³⁴

With average returns on agriculture estimated at 3.5 per cent and less, and average loan interest over 20 per cent and often very much higher,³⁵

the trap of indebtedness was one from which escape was difficult for even the most substantial landowner.

To some extent the South was protected by its very backwardness. Lack of communications meant that only those areas with direct access to the sea could specialise in commercial production, and much of the Kingdom's agriculture was conducted in a landlocked circle of subsistence consumption. In the isolated mountain valleys, and even well down on to the malarial plains, fragmented economies existed in which the producers' main enemy was over-production, bringing inevitably lower returns: 'It was necessary to have lived in those days to remember how little farmers desired good harvests which simply cause them more work without providing them with any reward for their labours.'³⁶

But this isolation from the market economy should not be exaggerated, because it was continuously being penetrated, not least by the development of a centralised administrative state which had been the real innovation of the French occupation. The encroachment of a single centralised land tax, however inefficiently assessed and administered, brought even the most distant sectors of agriculture into contact with a money economy.³⁷ The economic policies of the later Bourbon governments were also aimed at reducing regional disparities in agrarian markets.

The seriousness of this prolonged crisis affecting southern agriculture has been under-estimated, to some extent because of evidence that the volume of production was increasing and the volume of the Kingdom's trade continued to expand. But this of course was itself a product of the same crisis, and landowners attempted to increase production in order to offset lower unit prices. Again, the problem of the balance between demographic expansion and increased production must be taken into account. The depression produced a frontal collision, and behind the growing violence and disorder in the countryside can be seen the efforts of a threatened landowning class to defend falling incomes through the acquisition of further land, so coming directly into conflict with the ever more desperate land-hunger of a pauperised peasantry. The anger and frustration of the peasants was increasingly expressed in the demand for the restitution of those common rights which had existed under the feudal order, while the lands on which those rights were based were being drawn away to support the ailing landlord economy.

Increased production in this period cannot then be taken as an indication that the economy was improving.³⁸ There is no evidence that the balance between production and population improved, that there was

any increase in productivity, or any move towards specialisation. In fact the reverse seems to have been the case. Increased production resulted from farming less suitable and so less productive land, and was concentrated almost entirely in the traditional crops. As a result, the *per capita* value of foreign trade in the Kingdom remained lower than in any other European state except Tsarist Russia,³⁹ and the trade balance remained in deficit.⁴⁰

The same depression also affected the North of the peninsula, of course, and a comparison between the reactions and responses of the two regions well illustrates the fundamental differences between their economies. In the North the depression seems to have had damaging effects only in the less advanced regions. In Tuscany it was the same crisis which called into question the whole structure of the classical Tuscan *mezzadria*, the rigidity of which made it difficult to respond to changing market conditions. But even the debate on the *mezzadria* illustrates a difference, because it was a debate inspired by an awareness and knowledge of a more advanced and specialised form of agriculture than was possible within the structure of the subsistence orientated mixed-farming system of the *mezzadria*.⁴¹ In the Po Valley, however, the fall in wheat and oil prices was to some extent, although not always, offset by the presence of more specialised crops, such as rice and silk. The agricultural depression certainly hit the North hard in the 1820s and 1830s, but the evidence of recovery in the 1850s suggests that a different process was at work.⁴² The investments in production in Lombardy and the Po Valley which had been going on for at least a century gave the economic structures of these areas a resilience to the crisis which was quite lacking in the South. In some cases the depression may even have served to speed up the development of specialist production, although it is true that silk was one of the products worst affected in these years. In the South, however, the picture was very different, and, as we have seen, the main response was simply to produce more of the traditional devalued staples. Even if it would be exaggerated to claim that the depression in fact encouraged specialisation, experimentation and increased unit productivity in the North, the much stronger economic and organisational base of northern agriculture certainly helped mitigate the effects of the crisis. In the South, the depression accentuated and revealed the weaknesses and backwardness of agricultural organisation, and revived the elements of crisis and tension in southern society.

Although one should avoid exaggerating the degree of economic development in the North, and also remember that many regions of the

North, the Venetian mainland being one obvious case, were quite as backward as those of the South,⁴³ the comparison between the more advanced areas of the two regions shows a clear distinction. In one, the depression could be absorbed; in the other, it led to little short of disaster.

Taking the development of the southern economy as a whole in the century before unification, there would seem to be at least two tendencies which are difficult to reconcile with the implications of Gramsci's arguments. First, the analogy of city and countryside does not seem to fit the realities of economic development in the North and South. The pattern of economic development in the South was not only different, but even the reverse, of that in the North. Rather than a single, if chronologically unsynchronised, economic system, we would seem to be faced with two different and divergent economies. The second point follows from this; in the absence of evidence for a process of steady economic revival and growth in the South, it becomes difficult to identify in the agrarian bourgeoisie the principal agent of economic and social change. Those changes which did occur were often aimless and inconclusive, and did little to alter the traditional structure of agrarian society. In fact, Romeo's conclusions on Sicily could well be applied to the Mezzogiorno as a whole. But if a new, capitalist, agrarian bourgeoisie cannot be held responsible for the widespread social tension and economic disruption in the South, what had brought about this crisis?

One result of the attention which has been devoted to the problem of the rising bourgeoisie is that the importance of what was clearly the principal agent of economic and political disruption in the South – and hence the real force behind the integration of the South into the new Italian state – has been under-estimated. What lay behind the growing economic, social and political crisis in the South was the often contradictory and destructive impact on this backward and peripheral society of the developing European commercial system. It was the inability of the southern economy to respond to the pressures and demands of the new markets dominated by the industrialising powers which undermined its traditional agrarian structure without putting anything new in its place, just as it was the political pressures exerted within the same system that ultimately undermined the political and economic independence of the southern state. The Bourbon regime's attempts to resist the political and economic encroachment of the northern powers, and in particular Great Britain, was not only to lead to the collapse of the dynasty, but was also to reveal the backwardness and immobilism of the economy and social structure of the South. The

international economic context within which the southern crisis was played out in the first half of the nineteenth century was certainly as important as that international ideological system with which Gramsci was more concerned.

The political and economic strategy of the last Bourbon kings in the South after 1815 was developed against a permanent backdrop of foreign indebtedness. Penniless in 1815 because of the military costs of their deposition and restoration, the Bourbon governments were subsequently confronted by a permanent foreign trade deficit, frequent budget deficits and a massive foreign debt. This was particularly aggravated by the massive cost of the Austrian assistance in 1821 to suppress the Revolution, a situation which resulted in the purchase of the Kingdom's national debt by the Viennese Rothschilds.⁴⁴ Thereafter the largest single item on the Kingdom's expenditure was servicing a debt which was held predominantly by foreign investors.⁴⁵

The economic strategy which was adopted to meet and overcome this situation was largely the work of one of the ablest financial administrators of his day, Luigi de' Medici. After the Revolution of 1820 had ruined his first attempts to restore the state's finances through careful economy, de' Medici was quite literally forced to adopt a more challenging policy. In order to service the massive foreign debt, it was essential to increase revenue. The depressed state of agriculture meant that any increase from that source was politically inadvisable, while the level of indirect taxation on the poor was already high.

As the opportunities for increasing revenue from traditional sources were limited, de' Medici came to the conclusion that a fresh source of production and wealth in the Kingdom must be created — a native manufacturing sector. The strategy was established with the tariffs which were introduced between 1823 and 1825, imposing an impenetrable barrier against the import of foreign manufactures and subjecting a range of domestic export goods to duty. The preamble to the 1823 measures clearly stated the objectives: the protective measures adopted by other governments had put the Kingdom at a trading disadvantage and caused her merchant fleet and industries to languish; Naples was therefore simply responding in kind to ensure the well being of its own economy.⁴⁶

De' Medici's hope was that protectionism would recreate the conditions of the period of the French occupation, and thereby allow a new flowering of industrial and manufacturing activity in the Kingdom. The artificial shortages at that time resulting from the Imperial system and from the British blockade had created the opportunity for a num-

ber of industries to develop in the South. Swiss textile manufacturers, in particular, who were unable to keep their factories in production at home because of the lack of raw materials, were attracted to the Kingdom by the possibilities of producing cotton there. And they remained there because of the warm welcome they received from Murat's government.⁴⁷ Through protection, de' Medici was hoping to revive and build on these initiatives, and thereby not only create new sources of wealth and revenue within the Kingdom, but also improve the national trading account by reducing the need to purchase foreign manufactured goods. But protective tariffs could only partly restore the circumstances of the French period — they could protect native industries and keep foreign goods out of the home market. They could not create foreign markets — indeed the danger was that reprisals would reduce traditional markets for other goods, and this in fact occurred. Secondly, the industrial initiatives of the Muratist period had been accompanied by high agricultural prices, giving the domestic market a degree of vitality which in 1823 was certainly lacking.

The flaws in the analogy on which de' Medici's strategy was based were less immediately apparent than the dramatic deterioration in the Kingdom's relations with Great Britain which it brought about. Ostensibly the cause lay in yet another heavy debt of gratitude incurred by the Bourbons; this time for the gracious protection of His Britannic Majesty's Navy during their exile in Sicily while Murat occupied their capital. The debt was paid in the form of a concession of 10 per cent on Neapolitan tariffs for goods carried on British vessels. This concession was contained in the Treaty of 26 September 1816 between the two countries, and was not extended to native vessels.⁴⁸ In other words, not only British goods but also British shipping were given considerable advantage over their native competitors. But when in 1823 the level of the tariffs was increased, the 10 per cent concession was also extended to Neapolitan shipping as well. At this, the British government declared that the Treaty of 1816 had been violated, and in 1828 responded with penal discriminatory tariffs against one of the staple Neapolitan exports, olive oil. Increasing diplomatic pressure was put on the Bourbon government to see the error of its ways. In the mid-1830s negotiations were begun, in the face of the very damaging British retaliation, to establish some form of reciprocal trading agreement, but little progress was possible as the British could not be moved from their insistence on the restitution of their 10 per cent concession.⁴⁹ As Great Britain was the Kingdom's single most important trading partner in the period before unification, accounting for about a third of the Kingdom's total

trade and, with the exception of a short period in the 1850s,⁵⁰ a net exporter, the importance and value of this concession was considerable. As a result, trading and diplomatic relations were poor.

In 1840 the conflict produced an open clash which provides a minor but instructive example of the 'imperialism of free trade', and gives a clear picture of the Bourbon Kingdom's position in the European trading system. The 'Affair of the Sicilian Brimstone', as the suitably gothic title went, arose from the fact that Sicily enjoyed a natural world monopoly over the production of sulphur in the early nineteenth century, although this was shortly to be undermined by the development of pyrites substitutes.⁵¹ Expanding demand from British and French industries in the 1820s and 1830s led to a rapid increase in production in Sicily. The difficulties which beset the Sicilian industry, however, well illustrate the problems facing a backward economy attempting to take advantage of new opportunities and challenges.

The system of mining was extremely primitive ('A Sicilian sulphur mine is generally a labyrinth of confusion' reported a British consular agent),⁵² and was largely dependent on a brutal exploitation of a labour force which the poverty of the island made abundant and cheap. The opening of new mines and the use of this large and expendable labour force had made it possible for production to expand to meet the increasing demand, but the wholly disorganised manner in which this happened led to over-production. Prices for best quality sulphur in Sicily fell between 1833 and 1838 by over 50 per cent (from 41.2 to 18.4 *carlini* per *cantaro*) and this was reflected by a similar drop in import prices in Britain.⁵³

The situation caused great concern in Sicily and Naples, because sulphur was, after all, one of the Kingdom's very few natural assets. It also caused concern amongst the merchants, most of whom were British. Although the British colony in Sicily had an important interest in the mines, the trade was dominated by some 20 English houses operating from Messina, Syracuse and Palermo.⁵⁴ In return for advances of working capital, the Sicilian mine-owners 'were obliged to commit their produce in advance at very low prices and often for several years at a time'.⁵⁵ The buoyancy of the market in the 1820s and early 1830s encouraged many of these English factors to invest directly in production. In 1838, for example, one of the leading British merchants, George Wood, acting as agent for houses in Liverpool and Glasgow, leased the *Fiume del Riesi* mine from its owner, Don Giuseppe Fainici, who lacked the capital to work it. Wood invested heavily in drainage and pumping and brought in English engineers to work the mine. But

Wood and others quickly found that production costs were highly uneconomic, in particular because expansion in production meant using mines that were distant from the ports and less easy to work. Even before prices began to fall, it was estimated that the mines were running at annual losses of 20 to 25 per cent on outlay.⁵⁶

It seems very probable that the English merchants played a very effective double game. Realising that his investments were at risk, Mr Wood in April 1837 wrote to the Neapolitan government suggesting that some control should be imposed on the production of sulphur, and that in view of the desperate state of the industry this might be done through the granting of a monopoly over the export of sulphur to a licensed company.⁵⁷ In fact this was precisely the course which the Bourbon government adopted, although clearly to Mr Wood's chagrin they conferred the licence on a French company, Taix and Aycard. In return for the guarantee of customs revenue and the purchase of fixed quotas at fixed prices from the producers, Taix and Aycard were granted the exclusive right to export sulphur from the Kingdom.

The move threw the British merchants in Sicily into uproar, and they began mobilising 'their Connections and Partners in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Birmingham, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen'.⁵⁸ In the House of Commons their case was to be put by Lord Llandor and Mr William Gladstone.⁵⁹ But Palmerston's reaction anticipated that of the British merchants. He had always found the Neapolitan commercial policies particularly irritating, commenting on an earlier occasion: 'The continuance however, of their High Duty on our commodities . . . is not a matter of indifference because it tends, as far as the Neapolitan and Sicilian markets are concerned, to cramp important Branches of British Industry.'⁶⁰ His distemper had been increased by a series of smaller wrangles over quarantine policies, steam navigation licences and other matters,⁶¹ so that the proposed concession to the French company provided an excellent focus for his anger. On being informed in October 1837 of the possibility of such a concession, he wrote at once to inform the British consul in Naples, Temple, that this would constitute a violation of the 1816 Treaty 'the fourth Article of which expressly stipulates that British commerce in general and the British subjects who carry the commerce on, shall be treated throughout the dominions of the King of the Two Sicilies upon the same footing as the commerce and subjects of the most favoured nations, not only with respect to the persons and property of such British subjects but also with regard to every species of article in which they may traffic.'⁶² The following February orders were given for

visits of British naval vessels to Sicily to be increased 'in order to support the representations which H.M. Consuls may make against the acts of vexation or injustice committed towards British subjects'.⁶³ As the Neapolitan government chose to proceed with 'this most objectionable project' the British representative in Naples was instructed in January 1840 to pass on the message: 'If the Sulphur Monopoly be not immediately abandoned, H.M. government will be compelled to resort to unfriendly measures.'⁶⁴

The Neapolitan government could not revoke the licence without suffering complete humiliation, and accordingly Admiral Stopford was ordered to sail from Malta on the 13 March 1840 with a squadron to blockade the Neapolitan and Sicilian ports and seize Neapolitan vessels. The Neapolitan government had no means of resisting, but there was growing concern in Europe that the British action might spark off more serious trouble in Italy, which made it possible for the Bourbon government to escape the humiliation of open surrender behind the discreet veil of French mediation. Britain agreed to the mediation, although only on the 'condition' that it would concede nothing.⁶⁵ In fact, the settlement was concerned almost entirely with assessing the damages which the Neapolitan government should pay both the holders of the monopoly and the injured British merchants.

The episode is the more extraordinary because not only was Britain's case that the monopoly constituted a violation of the 1816 Treaty not recognised by any other European state, but it had also been deemed invalid by the Crown Attorney General in Britain as well.⁶⁶ Britain's action had no legality in international law, and Admiral Stopford's action verged on piracy on the high seas. To make matters even worse, the pretended injuries suffered by the British merchants turned out to be entirely fictitious. Sullivan, one of the Commissioners appointed to assess the damages, was Palmerston's nephew, and he wrote in some embarrassment to his uncle in 1841 to inform him that the original claims had been 'quite preposterous' and even when reduced were still highly dubious. 'The great difficulty will be to bring *proofs* forward that any *actual* losses have been incurred in consequence of the monopoly, whereas it might be proved that positive gains were made.'⁶⁷ To the surprise of the Commissioners one of the largest claims was from the same Mr Wood who had originally proposed the monopoly as a solution to the problem of over-production. Sullivan did not conceal his opinion that far from sustaining losses, the British merchants had benefited enormously from the whole affair because the disruption of the sulphur trade had resulted in the value of their sulphur stocks being

greatly increased: 'if they obtain one half of what they actually claim, I think that they will have no just cause for complaint.'⁶⁸

The dramatic confrontation over the sulphur monopoly was, in British eyes, simply another distasteful but unavoidable episode in the unfolding of the mission of free trade, but for the Neapolitan government it marked the end of their bid for economic and commercial independence. The real heresy of the Bourbons – and, in view of his earlier involvement with the sulphur lobby, this may have added some warmth to Gladstone's later charge that the Bourbon regime was 'the negation of God erected as a system of government'⁶⁹ – was that they resisted the new gospel. Macgregor, the British negotiator in the talks on reciprocal trade, had been one of the firmest advocates of the use of force over the sulphur issue and his motives were clear:

I beg leave to assure your Lordship that my best judgement and abilities shall be exerted to assist in carrying through these measures which, considering the great natural Resources of the Two Sicilies hitherto by restrictions and other Administrative means paralysed as to their commercial development, will . . . be attended by the greatest practical advantage to British Trade and Navigation.⁷⁰

Although it did not follow until 1845, the outcome of the sulphur confrontation was the reciprocal trade agreement signed in 1845 with Britain, followed by a further series of similar agreements with other nations.

It was because de' Medici's strategy for economic independence and industrial growth conflicted with British trading interests in the Mediterranean that it was destined to fail sooner or later. But the consequences were to prove fatal, because economic rivalry was also accompanied, as we have seen, by political hostility. With the failure of their economic strategy, the Bourbons began to look for diplomatic assistance, especially as the signs of Austria's growing weakness became more evident. There was little choice, but the ally they chose to woo – St Petersburg – could not have been better selected to exacerbate British fears. The diplomatic isolation of the dynasty was then formally concluded when the Powers at the Paris Peace Conference publicly censured the Neapolitan government and broke off diplomatic relations.⁷¹

In fact, the sulphur conflict was never more than a rearguard action. The structure of the Kingdom's trading balance over the period from 1820 to 1860 shows clearly the degree of economic dependence on the great industrial powers. The Kingdom's principal trading contacts were

not with the other states on the peninsula, but with Britain, France and Austria. The Kingdom's imports were supplied mainly by Britain (roughly 35 per cent) and France (roughly 30 per cent), followed at some distance by Austria (8 per cent). The same three, this time in the order France, Austria and Britain, were the principal purchasers of the Kingdom's exports (accounting for between 65 per cent and 70 per cent).⁷² While the Sardinian states also provided an outlet for exports, the Kingdom's main trading axes were with London, Marseilles and Trieste. And it was only for a short period in the 1850s, due to the particular demands created by the Crimean War, that the Kingdom's trade balance with her principal partner, Great Britain, was out of deficit.⁷³

Bourbon political strategy was dictated then by an awareness of the realities of this economic subordination and a quite unrealistic, or simply desperate, under-estimation of the strength of the opposition. But the nature of this subordination shows that the concept of even an embryonic city-countryside relationship between North and South prior to 1860 is, in economic terms at least, misleading and premature. The peripheral and backward southern economies (since we have been glossing over the distinctions between and the relations between the mainland and Sicily) were firmly embedded in a trading relationship dominated by Britain and France, rather than in an incipient national economy. And this of course was to provide at least one of the factors in the post-unification Southern Problem. Not only was the economic unification of the two regions the product of a political rather than an economic process, but the economies of the two regions, although different in structure, were often parallel rather than complementary in what they produced.

There would then appear to be an element of anachronism in the economic and social parallelism between North and South implied in Gramsci's city-countryside analogy, evocative as it may be in other respects. But to emphasise the degree of disparity between the economic conditions and situations of the two parts of the peninsula is not necessarily to imply that their subsequent unification was purely fortuitous or accidental. The political and economic initiatives taken, however fitfully and inconsistently, by the last Bourbon rulers in the South led both to their diplomatic isolation, as we have seen, and also increasingly to their estrangement from the most powerful economic forces within their own state. This was the political consequence of the predicament of the South and this was what lay behind the collapse of the Bourbon state.

In many ways Gramsci's concept of 'passive revolution' provides an excellent description of the process of political dissolution in the South and also an explanation of the absence of any effective social change in the political revolution of 1860-1. But in focusing attention exclusively on the developing relationship between the conservative southern Liberals and the Cavourian Moderates, there is again a risk of seeing the origins of the crisis in the South too much through a later, post-unification perspective. This not only distorts the nature of the political crisis in the South before 1860, but also over-simplifies it. The principal factor in this political disintegration was the initiative taken by the Bourbon government in response to their Kingdom's international economic and political predicament and it is this which reflects the real 'passivity' of the political revolution in the South: the Bourbons' efforts to defend and protect the Kingdom's independence led to their diplomatic and domestic isolation; the Liberal opposition not only failed to exploit the collapse of the dynasty to effect any significant political, never mind social or economic change, but also showed itself incapable of comprehending the fundamental features of the southern predicament or envisaging any effective solutions to them. The 'failed', or absent radical revolution was matched at least by the political failure of the future southern ruling classes.

Just as the international consequences of the Bourbons' economic and political strategy earn them a footnote in the history of the imperialism of free trade, so the domestic implications provide an interesting example of an unsuccessful attempt at modernisation. Arguably the greatest legacy of the French occupation on the mainland was the model and example of a modern, centralised and rational bureaucracy. Nearly all the more perceptive contemporary observers and administrators were agreed that an effective, centralised bureaucracy was not only an essential practical prerequisite for the modernisation of the southern state, but that it held within it the possibility for creating the basis of a new type of political system.⁷⁴ Joachim Murat had himself well understood the way in which bureaucracy functioned as a reservoir of political patronage, and the extension and centralisation of the bureaucracy before 1815 was intended as much to strengthen the political base of the foreign regime as to effect the reforms which had been introduced. It was equally significant that the returning Bourbons swallowed their pride and refrained from any large-scale purge of the Muratist administration in order not to damage their political position.⁷⁵ On the other hand, the political purges after the Revolution of 1820-1 were to provide a large army of political oppon-

ents and perhaps one of the strongest breeding grounds for the Liberal opposition.

De' Medici was clearly well aware of the economic and political advantages of a modern bureaucratic structure, and perhaps did more than anyone else to create a new administrative 'ethos' in this period. An impressive line of administrators, including men like the economist Ludovico Bianchini and the civil engineer Carlo Afan de Rivera, were all part of the tradition which he established, and which drew heavily on the reform movement of the previous century. But just as de' Medici's industrial policy was frustrated by the reactions of the European powers, so his strategy of modernisation at home was to be undermined by the economic and financial realities of the Kingdom. In the reaction after 1820 the attempt to build on the French model floundered and collapsed. The purges of the administration and the liberal professions were the result as much of financial necessity as of political vindictiveness. The huge financial burden which the Bourbons incurred for the assistance provided by the Austrian army in restoring them to their throne was to remain as a recurrent charge until 1830, and meant economy to the bone.⁷⁶ But even more damaging than the loss of jobs was the fact that the same financial necessity brought about a return to the earlier practice of farming out principal sources of tax revenue. In 1823 the revenues on customs duties, on the salt, tobacco, playing cards and gun-powder monopolies were farmed out to private speculators, and the same was in effect true of the collection of the new land tax, as the office of tax collector was one that was freely bought, sold and inherited.⁷⁷ Despite the disclaimers by Bianchini and others, this clearly showed that the attempts to break away from the old hand-to-mouth expedients of the *ancien régime* had been unsuccessful. As happened so often in the South, the new modern institutions introduced by the French were quickly adapted to fit older corporate and decentralised realities. The economic vulnerability of the bureaucracy continued, so that it never became either an effective administrative tool or an effective political base. When Ferdinand II came to the throne, 'being unable to ask sacrifices from property or industry without causing them grievous harm, it was therefore necessary to turn to those who were paid by or received pensions from the State'.⁷⁸

The failure to create an effective modern bureaucracy was largely determined, then, by the lack of means, but it was to have consequences which were typical of many other situations of 'under-development'. The scarcity of alternative forms of employment meant that the bureaucracy remained a primary focus of job hunger in the South.

Bianchini, normally an over-optimistic reporter, rightly pointed to the economic realities which lay behind this:

From time immemorial the absence of industry, crafts, careers and professions amongst us has driven people to seek jobs from the government, so that for a long time it was generally believed that a portion of our public expenditure ought to be devoted to providing wages for the large number of citizens who lack jobs. Also, public office was highly honourable because it conferred privilege, and offices were often held virtually as part of a family's patrimony, with uncles being succeeded by nephews, fathers by sons . . .⁷⁹

Precarious and unrewarding as they might appear, such jobs were havens of security in the circumstances of the surrounding economy. At times of political insecurity and change the permanent, relentless pressure for jobs burst into an avalanche, as was evident in both 1848 and 1860. Settembrini claimed, doubtless with a degree of exaggeration, that in 1848 the new constitutional ministers were unable to get into their offices because of the vast throng of place-seekers.⁸⁰ And of the flood of petitions which rained down on the new parliament, one can stand for all:

Gaetano Borruto of Reggio in 1843 set out to teach the people the benefits of the constitutional regime. He called together the craft guilds and was the first to explain the message of regeneration. He begs for a pension for himself and his family, and also some positions for his two brothers . . .⁸¹

Such pleas were to accompany revolutions everywhere in Europe, but the degree of dependence on state employment was exceptional, if not unique, in the Italian South. And the existence of the problem prior to unification does show that later observers, such as Salvemini, were wrong to see the distortion of bureaucratic employment as a peculiar feature of the post-unification 'Southern Problem'.⁸² As Bianchini understood, in the passage quoted above, the real significance of the problem was not that it constituted a novelty — on the contrary. The failure of the Bourbon state to build on the basis provided by Joseph Bonaparte and Joachim Murat meant that in place of a modern bureaucratic structure, the older uncontrolled and uncontrollable corporate structures of the *ancien régime* survived, in which the state was no more than a nominal head of the administrative structure and in which real

power came to be exercised by private patronage and clientism. It was also the persistence of the institutional disorganisation of the *ancien régime* which was to provide one of the most important institutional bases for what Gramsci and others described as the phenomenon of social 'disintegration' in the South.⁸³

Politically, the consequences were very dangerous for the regime. On one hand, it was committed to an economic strategy which required some degree of organisation and control, while lacking the necessary administrative resources to provide this. Secondly, economic and financial pressure meant that it proved impossible to use the bureaucracy to create a political base. As Luigi Blanch noted, the regime found itself in an uncomfortable half-way house, being neither a feudal nor yet a national monarchy.⁸⁴ The President of Ferdinand II's Consulta put the same point rather differently in a letter to the King in 1843:

Cavalier de' Medici described the present state of our Monarchy well when he said that it was a Monarchy *à la Napoleon*. It lacks support from either the clergy or the aristocracy, so that its only physical strength lies in the Army and the Civil Employees – and the latter are for the most part quite happy to watch revolutions taking place from their windows, so long as someone goes on paying them . . .⁸⁵

The political consequences of the Bourbons' failure to create a new political base in a modern, or modernising bureaucracy was the more damaging because the economic strategy to which they had committed themselves was to have the effect of isolating the dynasty from the dominant economic interests in the South. It was the landowning class in particular which became increasingly disaffected, and it was the loss of the loyalty of this group which sealed the fate of the dynasty.

But both the nature of the grievances of the agrarian lobby in the South and also the very uncertain and inadequate manner in which they were channeled into a political programme again shows clearly the weakness and backwardness of the social forces which after 1860 were to become the southern ruling class. In contrast to the North, for example, where increasingly the free trade platform came to provide a meeting point for agrarian and commercial liberalism, in the South the agrarian and the commercial interests remained deeply divided. In part this was a throw-back to an earlier mentality – the 'honest' farmer's suspicion of the 'speculations', 'games' and 'tricks' carried out at his expense by the merchant and entrepreneur which was a commonplace of the *ancien régime*. The rivalry was evident in 1820 when concerted

attempts were made to restrict the franchise qualification in Naples to landed property alone. But unlike other parts of the peninsula, this division did not weaken, and was as evident not only in 1848 but also in 1860. While this reflected the backwardness of the southern agrarians, it was also to some extent a result of the government's economic strategy.

The agrarians' hostility to the commercial and industrial interests was greatly increased by the protective tariffs introduced by de' Medici. For the agrarians such a strategy could only be interpreted as indifference to their own interests, and worse. First, it laid the Kingdom open to reprisals, and it was the agrarian interests which had to bear the cost of Britain's retaliation against Neapolitan olive oil. Not only were markets for agricultural products reduced, but the landowners also were aware that as the principal consumer group – indeed the only significant consumer group – in the Kingdom, they would also be called on to subsidise the domestic manufactures which de' Medici was keen to establish through the prices they would pay for the products. When agriculture was in the depths of devastating depression, the industrial gamble seemed little more than lunacy to many landowners. The attack on the government's strategy in the 1830s and 1840s, although inevitably cautious, became increasingly vocal, and many of those who were to become leading spokesmen of the Liberals – De Augustinis, Dragonetti, Scialoja, Durini and others – became fierce critics of a policy which seemed to sacrifice agriculture to the fantasy of industrialisation. To some extent, then, Palmerston's efforts to break down the barriers of Bourbon protectionism were matched by a similar internal pressure from the agrarian lobby.

The government's industrial strategy was, however, only one limb of the agrarians' growing discontent with the Bourbon regime. An equally powerful irritant lay in the controls over the free movement of grain and staple foodstuffs in and out of the Kingdom. In their concern to preserve the popular loyalty to which the dynasty had owed its restoration in 1799, the Bourbons revived the spirit, although not the form, of the traditional *Annona*⁸⁶ regulations in 1815, in an attempt to ensure cheap food supplies. The export of cereals and certain other foodstuffs was prohibited until such time as the government's agents were able to report that the coming harvest would be adequate for domestic needs. At the first sign of possible shortage, on the other hand, the free import of cereals was permitted.⁸⁷ In fact, the logic of the Neapolitan Corn Laws was quite the reverse of those of England in the same period. Whereas the latter were designed to protect the producer and keep prices

high, the Neapolitan restrictions were designed to protect the consumer and tended to guarantee the producer the lowest possible return. Prices would only rise when supplies were short, but this was precisely the condition that triggered the freeing of imports, which naturally resulted in prices falling. The restrictions also made it extremely difficult for Neapolitan producers to take advantage of opportunities on foreign markets in view of the unpredictability of the controls. And when in 1845 the principle of reciprocal trade was admitted in the trade agreement with Great Britain, while the restrictions on the export of cereals were retained, the frustration of those producing for the commercial sector became even greater.

The attractiveness of the free trade platform of the Cavourian Moderates for the southern landowners needs little explanation in such a context. But, as Gramsci was quick to note, there is need for some caution in talking of a platform in so far as the southern Liberals were concerned. The major southern contribution was to come after not before unification, and lay in that transformation of liberalism into a moral and ethical doctrine which reached its fullest expression in Croce. Even in terms of 'economic liberalism' it is difficult to identify any coherent platform in the South before or in 1860 which went beyond a crude and imitative mixture of economic *laissez-faire* and social conservatism.

On one hand, this does no more than reflect again the 'passivity' of the southern revolution and indicates that the southern agrarians were not in any sense the principal agents in the changes that did occur. But certain features of the developing fascination with the northern free trade philosophies were to have major consequences for the future development of the South in the new unified Italian State. The great weakness of southern liberalism was the failure to learn from the contradictions which had brought about the collapse of the Bourbon regime.

In the first place, the anti-industrial tendency in southern liberalism did not slacken, nor did the hostility between the agrarian and the industrial and commercial interests. To some extent this reflected the fact that the small group of Neapolitan financiers and industrialists were mainly foreigners, and tended to work hand-in-glove with the Crown. The very small handful of industrial manufacturers in the Kingdom — engaged mainly in textile production, together with the engineering industry which developed around the government's ship and railway building programme — were totally dependent on de' Medici's protective tariffs, and often more direct subsidies as well, so

that they had little interest in the agrarian free trade platform. Even the merchants of the capital were lukewarm, because they were well aware of the very cramped opportunities for the Kingdom to participate in reciprocal trade due to the narrow range of its products. If they argued for free trade, it was generally through expediency, and in particular the desire to avoid British reprisals.⁸⁸

On the few occasions when the mercantile and industrial interests were able to express their interests clearly, they showed themselves hostile to the Liberal movement and tied to the existing regime. Antonio Scialoja, who had been Minister of Trade in the Liberal government of 1848, was to write scathingly a decade later that the mercantile class in Naples was:

partly in the hands of foreigners who, with only a few noble exceptions, are quite happy with any form of government so long as they are not asked to pay for it and will be quite content to praise it, and partly in the hands of a class of nationals who, to speak the truth, are totally indifferent to political liberty, but who might perhaps be woken from their slumbers if they were called on to pay . . .⁸⁹

Scialoja was to prove no friend of the commercial interest, but his criticisms do not seem exaggerated. When the Liberal government set up a Finance Committee in July 1848 it did not include any of the leading financiers or merchants of Naples.⁹⁰ The same government's attempts to raise a portion of a 3 million ducat forced loan from industry and commerce (700,000 ducats) and liquid capital (500,000) gave rise to an outcry that was 'impossible to describe'. Within a week the levies on commerce and the professions had been abandoned.⁹¹

The difficult commercial situation resulting from the revolution might at first sight appear to explain this reluctance. However, when the King in October wished to raise funds he had little difficulty in selling rent of 600,000 ducats (i.e. 4,327,432 ducats capital) on the national debt, and the principal subscribers were the Rothschilds and a number of leading Neapolitan financiers.⁹² Early in the following year the leading textile manufacturer in the Kingdom, Davide Wonwiller, was able to sell 200,000 ducats of Neapolitan government stock in his native Switzerland on behalf of the government.⁹³ The Neapolitan expeditionary force which suppressed the separatist revolution in Sicily was also financed by the Rothschild Bank. Again in Sicily, the leading financial interests seem to have behaved similarly to their Neapolitan counterparts, and refused to subscribe to the forced loan which the

Liberal leader Michele Amari attempted to raise in 1848.⁹⁴

In the perennial rivalry between the mainland and Sicily, the Neapolitan commercial interests again showed themselves to be staunch defenders of privilege and the *status quo*. When the Palermo government in 1848 granted Messina the status of a free port, the Neapolitan merchants at once began to agitate for its abolition. The matter was put on the Chamber of Commerce agenda under the peremptory heading: 'Damages caused in Good Faith & Damages committed through Fraud and through Abuse of Free Trade.' The merchants reminded the constitutional government that: 'all citizens are equal, especially under the present representative regime, so that all privileges must be considered inadmissible.'⁹⁵ Rather than call for similar facilities, the merchants demanded that the free port at Messina be suppressed before it ruined trade and commerce on the mainland. They threatened that if the 'incalculable damages caused to those merchants involved in manufacture and trade' were not stopped forthwith, 'they would find themselves forced into the necessity of dismissing all their employees, who amount to hundreds of thousands of men'.⁹⁶ This was not a threat which the beleaguered Liberal regime could take lightly.

Such attitudes and political loyalties reflect the precariousness and dependence of the commercial and industrial groups in southern society. This is perhaps one of the clearest examples of the failure of de' Medici's strategy to take root. Like the government's initiative itself, the commercial and manufacturing structure of the Kingdom never progressed beyond that of the *ancien régime*. The manufacturers and merchants were not an independent, self-assured class with its own interests and programmes: they were still, like their eighteenth-century forebears, *gens du roi*, the King's men.⁹⁷ Their industries, and often their commerce too, could only survive if they had protection, and often more permanent assistance too, from the government. De' Medici and his successors had intervened personally in the case of virtually every manufacturing venture which was established in the Kingdom after 1820. Protection was afforded through the tariffs, and further assistance in the form of free accommodation, free convict labour and guaranteed markets through government contracts. The most important ventures were reliant on all these forms of aid. Even in commerce, the most lucrative opportunities were to be found in catering for and supplying the state's needs, especially those of the armed forces. Elsewhere limited opportunity encouraged monopoly and exclusion, with the result that the merchant often became identified as not only one of the staunchest defenders of the restrictions on which the backwardness

of the economy was grounded, but even as the principal vested interest in backwardness and its continuity.

The failure of de' Medici's strategy to bring into being any independent or broad-based manufacturing and commercial interest meant in turn that support for the bid to establish an industrial sector was very limited. The close contacts between the administration and the few entrepreneurs made the Liberals suspicious and hostile. As a result they tended to under-estimate both the fragility of the industrial sector which had developed since 1805 and the problems facing its expansion. As a result, when Scialoja returned to Naples in 1860 he was one of the principal supporters of the immediate extension of the much lower Piedmontese tariff system to the South.⁹⁸ The inevitable consequences were pointed out by the Swiss textile manufacturer Wonwiller and others, but the Liberals were unmoved. As a result the Neapolitan industrial sector was almost destroyed within a few years.

What is at issue here is not so much whether unification destroyed those industries which had been able to develop in the South – it did, but they were already in very serious difficulty before 1860 and their existence had always been 'artificial'.⁹⁹ What is important is that the Piedmontese tariffs were introduced at the instigation of southern Liberals without any regard for the consequences. There was not any debate – as there has been in more recent times – as to whether or not the economic solution to the problems of the South lay in industrialisation. The action was supported because the southern Liberals had no clearer understanding of the nature of the economic problems of the South than had, for example, Macgregor in the letter quoted above. They shared the belief that free trade was the answer to everything, and that this would unlock the unexploited natural resources of the Kingdom. The myth that the South was an unexploited Eden was one that was as common in the South as in the North.

This was the real key to the 'failure' of the southern revolution. The Liberal programme was something adopted and external, which bore little relation to the realities of the southern predicament. In particular, it was largely untouched by the tradition of serious applied investigation which had begun in the Southern Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁰ Curiously, it was not the Liberals, but rather the Bourbon administration which was the heir of this tradition, and this was partly why it was to be lost. What men like de' Medici, Bianchini, Afan de Rivera and others had in common, and what made them heirs of eighteenth-century reformism, was an understanding that the nature of the obstacles holding back the development of agriculture, commerce

and manufacturing in the South required collective action. Collective action which could only be attempted and directed by an enlightened and modern state. Nowhere were the limitations of the free-trade solution more obvious than in the face of the ever growing problem of the physical destruction of the productive structure of the Kingdom – rampant deafforestation, with the consequent flooding of coastal agricultural land which malaria quickly rendered uninhabitable. This was precisely the problem which the effects of the cyclical patterns of economic development in the century before unification tended to aggravate. It is difficult to find a finer or more perceptive analysis of the state of the agrarian economy in the South and the obstacles to its improvement than that provided by Carlo Afan de Rivera in the 1840s, nor a clearer appeal for what we would now call rational planning.¹⁰¹

The dilemma of the South, even before unification, was that the Bourbon state was quite inadequate to provide the framework within which such a reformist programme might be effected. One of the heaviest penalties of unification was that this tradition was to be lost and neglected until the new forms of political and economic subordination to which the South was subjected had served to worsen and aggravate even further those same fundamental problems. The failure of those who in 1860 found themselves as the ruling classes in the South to learn from that tradition was to have the greatest consequences, and reflects their lack of any effective programme or alternative. Just as the traditional economy had been disrupted by the encroachment of the new international commercial economy without anything new emerging to replace lost traditional equilibria, so the passing of the old political order failed to lead to anything new – beyond a new sense of instability. As Raffaele de Cesare remarked 'Not so much new times, new faces, as new times, old faces'.¹⁰²

The process which lay behind the collapse of the Bourbon state in the South and its absorption into the new unified Italy was, then, both more complex and less mechanical than is implied in Gramsci's interpretation. And this, in turn, adds to the complexity of the problem which was to become – and still remains – one of the central features of the Italian state: the economic and social backwardness of the South.

The forces which undermined the Bourbon regime and threw the traditional structures of agrarian society into crisis were almost entirely external. The impact of the contradictory and complex pressures exerted by the emerging international manufacturing economy offered incentives and opportunities for one part of the peninsula, dislocation and uncertainty for the other. The crisis in the South was induced from

outside, and in this lies the explanation of the passive nature of the political revolution that followed. It was for the same reason that unification brought no signs of revival in the South, but was in turn to aggravate existing difficulties with new economic, fiscal and political burdens. The same forces which encouraged growth in the North and brought confusion to the South acted to mould the peninsula into a single political and economic unit, but in a way that was both less neat and less complementary than Gramsci suggested.

It is precisely the absence of a process of economic and social integration to parallel the growing political attraction between the Cavourian Moderates and the southern agrarians that reveals the emptiness of the southern revolution. The fact that the majority of the spokesmen of the southern Liberals were exiles as well as 'intellectuals' has often been noted. But this was a symptom and a reflection of the failure of the southern agrarians to develop a political or economic programme of their own which bore any relation to the realities and imperatives of southern society. The creed of Free Trade was alien and imitative. Within twenty years it was to be discarded with the same enthusiasm that it had been seized on in 1860. But the new protectionism of the Crispi tariffs, which christened the formal political alliance between industry and southern agriculture, was not in any sense a return to the earlier strategy which the Bourbons, with all their reluctance, uncertainty and inadequacy, had attempted. In de' Medici's strategy there lay an awareness that the problem of growth must be posed in the context of the entire economy of the South, together with a recognition that new sources of production could only be created with the support of the stronger sectors of the traditional economy. It would be wrong to exaggerate the coherence and clarity of this strategy, but the recognition of the need for solutions which were both collective and planned in order to overcome the fundamental economic disabilities of the South was the great achievement of the tradition which had begun with Genovesi and Galanti in the eighteenth century and was kept alive by the more enlightened Bourbon administrators of the early nineteenth century. But in the protectionism of the agrarian-industrial alliance of the 1880s this vision had disappeared, and was replaced by a cruder mechanism whereby the weaker and most vulnerable sectors of the southern economy were forced to support the most entrenched and the most traditional. Although agricultural protectionism was, in view of the international situation which provoked it, unavoidable, the political form which it took in Italy served to petrify and perpetuate the backwardness of the economic and social structure of the South.

There is, and was, no single, unchanging, 'Southern Problem', and the economic, social and political predicament of the South both predated unification and changed with unification. To see the participation of the South in national unification as a pre-history of the later agrarian-industrial alliance is an over-simplification which distorts the nature and origins of the Southern Problem. The agrarian-industrial alliance was a political consequence of unification, but it was not already present as a dominant influence in the making of the national revolution. On the other hand, the economic and social malaise of the South was clearly evident and critical before 1860. What changed in 1860 was that the problems of the South were transposed into an economic and political context in which the need to find solutions was outweighed by the advantages of preserving and exploiting those very weaknesses. The predicament and contradictions of the last period of Bourbon rule in the South should warn against any facile diagnosis of the nature and origins of the problems of the Italian South. It also suggests that one of the great sacrifices in 1860 was the loss of a tradition of inquiry and analysis firmly rooted in the realities of the southern predicament. The Bourbon state did not and could not provide an effective framework to implement this tradition, but the new state was not even concerned to make the effort.

Notes

1. M. Salvadori, *Gramsci e il problema storico della democrazia* (Turin, 1970), p. 79.

2. For Gramsci's writings on the South in English see: 'The Southern Question' in *The Modern Prince & Other Writings*, ed. L. Marks (New York, 1972), pp. 28-51; and *Prison Notebooks*, eds. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (London, 1971: hereafter *PN*), pp. 90-102; J. Joll, *Gramsci* (London, 1977), chap. 6; A. Davidson, *Antonio Gramsci* (London, 1978): Introduction above.

3. *PN*, pp. 92-3

4. The most recent general survey is A. Caracciolo 'La Storia Economica', in *Storia d'Italia* (Einaudi) vol. 3. *Dal Primo Settecento all'Unità*, pp. 515-617. See also A. Lepre, *Storia del Mezzogiorno nel Risorgimento* (Rome, 1969); D. Demarco, *Il Crollo del Regno delle Due Sicilie* (Naples, 1960), pt. I; G. Galasso, *Il Mezzogiorno nella storia d'Italia* (Florence, 1979).

5. R. Romeo, *Il Risorgimento in Sicilia* (Bari, 1973), p. 253.

6. P. Villani, 'Il Capitalismo Agrario in Italia', *Studi Storici*, a. vii (1966) p. 494.

7. E. Sereni, quoted in P. Villani, *ibid.*, p. 512.

8. G. Galasso, 'Lo sviluppo demografico del Mezzogiorno prima e dopo l'Unità' in *Mezzogiorno medievale e moderno* (Turin, 1964), pp. 303 ff.; A. Caracciolo 'La Storia Economica', p. 520.

9. On the late eighteenth century crisis see: G. Aliberti, 'Economia e società a Napoli da Carlo III ai Napoleonidi' in *Storia di Napoli*, vol. 8 (Naples, 1972);

- G. Delille, *La Croissance d'une Société Rurale* (Naples, 1973), pp. 222-40; P. Macry, *Mercato e Società nel Regno di Napoli* (Naples, 1974), pp. 423-76.
10. G. Delille, *ibid.*, p. 212.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 208 ff.
12. P. Villani, 'Le Royaume de Naples pendant la domination française (1806-1815)', *Annales Historiques de la Revolution Française*, a. xlv (1972); J. Rambaud, *Naples sous Joseph Bonaparte 1806-8* (Paris, 1911); A. Valente, *Gioachino Murat e L'Italia Meridionale* (Turin, 1941).
13. J. Goodwin, 'Progress of the Two Sicilies under the Spanish Bourbons', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 5 (London) 1842, p. 61.
14. L. Matucci, 'La riforma del Tavoliere e l'eversione della feudalità in Capitanata 1806-15', *Quaderni Storici*, n.18 (1972), p. 263.
15. P. Villani, *La Vendita dei Beni dello Stato* (Milano, 1964), pp. 156-7.
16. R. Merzario, *Signori e Contadini in Calabria* (Milan, 1975), p. 127.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
18. L. Matucci, 'La riforma del Tavoliere', p. 277.
19. A. Lepre, 'Classi, movimenti politici e lotta di classe nel mezzogiorno dalla fine del settecento al 1860', *Studi Storici*, a.xvi (1975) pp. 357-60.
20. R. Romeo, *Il Risorgimento*, pp. 189-90.
21. *Atti della Giunta per l'Inchiesta Agraria*, vol. IX (Rome, 1882), p. xxv.
22. R. Merzario, *Signori e Contadini*, p. 72: see also, G. Delille, *Agricoltura e demografia nel Regno di Napoli nei secoli XVIII e XIX* (Naples, 1977), esp. pp. 104-50.
23. *Atti della Giunta*, vol. IX, p. xxvii.
24. See for example J. Davis, 'The Case of the Vanishing Bourgeoisie', *Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome*, t. 88 (1976) n.2, pp. 866-71.
25. R. Merzario, *Signori e Contadini*, p. 72.
26. On land reclamation in the period see: G. Arias, *La Questione Meridionale*, vol. I, pt. II, (Bologna, 1921) Chap. 2; R. Ciasca, *Storia delle Bonifiche del Regno di Napoli* (Bari, 1928).
27. L. De Rosa, 'Property rights and economic change — economic growth in the 18th & 19th centuries in Southern Italy' in *Proceedings of the VIIth International Economic History Conference* (Edinburgh, 1978).
28. A. Graziani, 'Il Commercio Estero del Regno delle Due Sicilie', *Archivio Economico dell'Unificazione Italiana*, ser. 1, vol. x (1960) p. 27.
29. *Naples Chamber of Commerce*, Register of Proceedings: 11 April 1843.
30. L. Bianchini, *Storia delle Finanze del Regno di Napoli*, vol. VII (Naples, 1859), p. 545.
31. G. Della Valle, *Della Miseria Pubblica, Sue Cause ed Indizzi* (Naples, 1833), pp. 26-7.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.
33. L. de Samuele Cagnazzi, *Saggio sullo Stato presente della popolazione del Regno di Puglia ne' passati tempi e nel presente*, vol. II (Naples, 1839), 245.
34. G. Della Valle, *Della Miseria Pubblica*, p. 35.
35. L. Bianchini, 'Se la conversione delle rendite pubbliche del R. di Napoli sia giusta ed utile', *Il Progresso*, vol. XIV (Naples, 1836) p. 122.
36. *Atti della Giunta*, vol. VII, p. 155.
37. e.g. C. Afan de Rivera, *Considerazioni sui mezzi da restituire il Valore proprio a' doni che ha la natura largamente conceduto al Regno delle Due Sicilie* 2 vols (Naples, 1833).
38. For a contrary view see: D. Demarco, *op. cit.*
39. D. Demarco, *Il Crollo del Regno delle due Sicilie*, p. 173.
40. A. Graziani, 'Il Commercio Estero'; I. Glazier and V. Bandera, 'Terms of Trade between South Italy and the UK 1817-1869', *Journal of European Economic History*, vol. I (1972) pp. 14-15.

41. See E. Sereni, *Il Capitalismo nelle Campagne 1860-1900* (Turin, 1968), pp. 179 ff.
42. M. Romani, *Storia economica d'Italia nel secolo XIX* (Rome, 1970), who does however stress the damage caused by silk worm and vine disease in the North in the 1850s; A. Caracciolo, 'La Storia Economica', pp. 597-605.
43. See A. Lyttelton below, pp. 111-120.
44. G. Cingari, *Mezzogiorno e Risorgimento* (Bari, 1970), pp. 139-56.
45. Ibid.
46. The preamble to the tariff is in L. Bianchini *Dell'influenza della Pubblica Amministrazione sulle Industrie* (Naples, 1828), pp. 20 ff.
47. G. Wenner, *L'Industria Tessile Salernitana 1824-1918* (Salerno, 1953).
48. E. Pontieri, 'Sul Trattato di Commercio Anglo-Napoletano del 1815' in *Il Riformismo Borbonico nella Sicilia del Sette e del Ottocento* (Rome, 1945), p. 289.
49. Ibid.
50. I. Glazier and V. Bandera, 'Terms of Trade', pp. 15-17.
51. On the sulphur crisis see: D. Mack Smith, *Modern Sicily* (London, 1968), pp. 385-6; V. Giura, 'La Questione degli Zolfi Siciliani 1838-41', *Cahiers Internationaux de l'Histoire Economique et Sociale* (Droz-Geneva, 1973), n. 19.
52. *Public Record Office* FO vol. 185: report to Ld. Aberdeen from British agents Sullivan and Parish, 30 Dec. 1841.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.: 'Exposé de la question des soufres de Sicile' (1840).
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.: Sullivan and Parish to Palmerston, 27 Aug. 1841.
58. *PRO*: Board of Trade 2/11; Macgregor to Palmerston, 3 Nov. 1839.
59. *PRO*: FO vol. 161; Kennedy to Palmerston, 18 May 1839.
60. Palmerston Letter-Books (Brit. Museum Add. 48522) Naples, Sardinia, Tuscany; 20 Oct. 1835.
61. Ibid., 6 Sept. 1836; 13 Dec. 1836.
62. Ibid., 10 Oct. 1837.
63. Ibid., 3 Feb. 1838.
64. Ibid., 15 Jan. 1840.
65. V. Giura, 'La Questione degli Zolfi Siciliani', p. 75-80.
66. Ibid., p. 83.
67. *PRO*; FO 60 vol. 185; Sullivan to Palmerston, 22 June 1841.
68. Ibid.
69. J. Morley, *Life of Gladstone* vol. 1, (London, 1903), p. 391.
70. *PRO*: B.T. 2/11; 492-3 - Macgregor to Palmerston, 20 Sept. 1839.
71. See R. Moscati, *La fine del Regno di Napoli* (Florence, 1960).
72. A. Graziani, 'Il Commercio Estero', p. 21.
73. I. Glazier and V. Bandera, 'Terms of Trade', p. 15.
74. e.g. L. Blanch, 'Memoria sullo Stato di Napoli' (1830) in *Scritti Storici*, ed. B. Croce (Bari, 1945), II, pp. 302-34.
75. R. Romeo, 'Momenti e problemi della restaurazione nel Regno delle Due Sicilie' in *Mezzogiorno e Sicilia nel Risorgimento* (Naples, 1963), pp. 51-115.
76. G. Cingari, *Mezzogiorno e Risorgimento*, ch. iv.
77. L. Bianchini, *Storia delle finanze*, p. 476.
78. Ibid., p. 465.
79. Ibid., p. 493.
80. L. Settembrini, *Ricordanze della mia vita* (Feltrinelli, 1961), p. 202.
81. *Le Assemblée del Risorgimento*, vol. X (Rome, 1910), p. 256.
82. e.g. 'La piccola borghesia intellettuale nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia' in G. Salvemini, *Opere*, vol. IV (Feltrinelli, 1963), pp. 483-92.

83. *The Modern Prince*, p. 42.
84. L. Blanch, 'Memoria sullo Stato di Napoli'.
85. *Archivio di Stato, Naples*: Archivio Borbone; f.807, pt. II, inc. 823; C. Ceva Grimaldi to Ferdinand II, Aug. 1843.
86. *Annona* – the name given to the complex regulations in force in the eighteenth century and earlier to guarantee urban food supplies.
87. A. Graziani, 'Il Commercio Estero', p. 8.
88. See J.A. Davis 'Oligarchia capitalistica e immobilismo economico a Napoli (1815-60)' in *Studi Storici* xvi, n. 2 (1975) pp. 384-414; *Società e Imprenditori nel Regno Borbonico (1815-60)* (Bari, 1979), chap. 3.
89. A. Scialoja, *I Bilanci del Regno di Napoli* (Turin, 1858), p. 15.
90. *Le Assemblee del Risorgimento*, vol. X, p. 166.
91. L. Bianchini, *Storia delle Finanze*, p. 475.
92. *ASN*: Archivio Borbone; f. 866.
93. *Ibid.*
94. D. Mack Smith, *Modern Sicily*, p. 424; S. Romano, *Momenti del Risorgimento in Sicilia* (Florence, 1952), p. 102.
95. Chamber of Commerce, Naples: 7 Nov. 1848.
96. *Ibid.*
97. Cf. J. Bouvier, *Finances et Financiers de l'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1964).
98. A. Scirocco, *Governo e paese nel Mezzogiorno nella crisi dell'unificazione* (Milan, 1963), pp. 63 ff.
99. See: R. Villari, *Problemi dell'economia napoletana alla vigilia dell'Unificazione* (Naples, 1957).
100. There is a wide bibliography on the Southern Enlightenment but see: F. Venturi, *Italy and the Enlightenment* (London, 1972); R. Romeo, 'Illuministi meridionali' in *Mezzogiorno e Sicilia*, pp. 17-51; P. Villani, 'Il Dibattito sulla feudalità nel Regno di Napoli dal Genovesi a Canosa' in *Saggi e Ricerche sul Settecento* (Naples, 1969), pp. 252-331.
101. See especially: C. Afan de Rivera, *Considerazioni*.
102. Quoted in A. Scirocco, p. 138.

4 LANDLORDS, PEASANTS AND THE LIMITS OF LIBERALISM

Adrian Lyttelton

The relationship between liberalism and the rise of industrial capitalism is variable and can take on many different forms. The two leading new nations of the later nineteenth century, Germany and Italy, provide an interesting contrast in this respect. In Germany the genius of Bismarck helped to preserve illiberal political structures and values in an industrialising society. In Italy, on the other hand, under the leadership of Cavour a liberal elite took power in a predominantly agrarian society. In both cases, though in different ways, the lack of symmetry between political and economic structures ended by discrediting them and facilitating the flight into dictatorship.¹ In Italy, the part played by agrarian conflict in bringing about the final breakdown of liberal institutions was decisive. In the years after the First World War, in spite of such dramatic episodes as the occupation of the factories, the breakdown of the state's mediating function and the consequent crisis of confidence among the employers was not so complete or radical in industry as it was in agriculture. The political aims of the agrarians were more extreme than those of the urban fascists; nothing less than a total reconstruction of the state could consolidate their rural counter-revolution.² So if one looks for the long-term origins of fascism, the agrarian question must be held to be of primary importance.

This essay will attempt to investigate some of the ways in which the agrarian problem shaped and constrained Italian liberalism. My concern will not be with the story of organised class conflict, but with its pre-history. It is part of my argument that much of the initial thrust behind Italian liberalism came from the activities of an elite of enlightened, modernising landlords. Although little work has been done on the political attitudes of landlords during the nineteenth century, enough is known at least about their economic performance to make clear the extent of inertia and resistance to innovation even in the most progressive regions. Yet, because the old order did not offer satisfactory answers to the problems posed by the industrial revolution and the changing structure of markets in Europe, the progressive minority came to occupy a strategic position. It has been a commonplace in criticism of the Risorgimento to point out that the 'bourgeois revolution' in Italy

was incomplete because of the continued influence of the traditional landed classes. While this criticism seems in essence valid, its formulation has often obscured the nature of the problem. Liberalism had never been the ideology of an autonomous bourgeois revolution (Mazzinian nationalism might perhaps make that claim); nor were agrarian capitalism and innovation exclusively the work of the new bourgeoisie. In short, the compromise was not so much one between social groups as between social principles. The same men who sincerely promoted the formation of a national market for commodities and a national public for information, tried to reconcile these liberal ideals with relations of production which did not meet the needs of capitalist rationality and with forms of patronage which prolonged the fragmentation of politics.

The most ambitious and influential recent theory that has attempted to link the course of political development with that of agrarian change is contained in the well-known book by Barrington Moore Jr., *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.³ It is a book with very valuable insights, but some serious weaknesses. One of the major drawbacks is that his method of analysis leads him to write as if agricultural and political systems were co-extensive, i.e. as if nations had one dominant system of agriculture. This is a dubious assumption anywhere and it would be particularly inapplicable to Italy. Not only the variations of climate and relief but the absence of unifying political institutions have produced an extraordinary variety of different agricultural systems in Italy. Any adequate analysis of political development must take account of their plurality. One can, however, salvage the spirit rather than the letter of Barrington Moore's enterprise by maintaining that the major paths of development which he suggests led to dictatorship, democracy or revolution were all present within the complex and regionally fragmented reality of Italy. To put things differently, we can distinguish — as a rough guide — four or five different modes of relationship between landlord and peasant, each of which had different political consequences. The names I have given these are dependence, antagonism, communal rebellion, factionalism and co-operation. The last of these plays little part in the story. To simplify considerably, the North and Centre of Italy, and especially the regions where share-cropping was dominant, were distinguished by the breakdown of traditional relationships of dependence leading to antagonism and finally to overt and organised class conflict, whereas the South was distinguished by an alternation of communal rebellion and factionalism. The reader should be cautioned against one weakness inherent in this approach. It

does not do justice to the importance of the linkages between local communities and the larger world, or to the role of the 'fringes' of rural society in maintaining these links.⁴ Unfortunately, with a few exceptions, notably in the study of the Sicilian *mafia*, this is a field which has been little explored.

One of Barrington Moore's main ideas is of great relevance to the understanding of the Risorgimento. This is his argument that the character of the response made by the landed upper class to the opportunities of increased production for the market is crucial for political development. By focusing attention on the relationship between the landed upper classes, the state and the peasantry, he avoids many of the pitfalls contained in the concept of the 'bourgeois revolution'.⁵

The argument against attributing the main role in the Risorgimento to the commercial or industrial bourgeoisie had been stated, long before Barrington Moore, by the American historian K.R. Greenfield. In his study of Lombardy, the region where an aggressive capitalist class might most plausibly have been expected to develop, he showed that the anti-thesis between dynamic progressive entrepreneurs and reactionary noble landlords did not fit the facts. The merchant class of Milan was for the most part highly traditional in outlook; it was not interested in the development of distant markets but in monopolising the existing opportunities, particularly in the luxury trades. On the other hand, members of the landed aristocracy were prominent in the liberal movement.⁶ However, Greenfield's arguments against a materialist interpretation of the Risorgimento seem dubious in one respect. In so far as the nobility and large landed proprietors were interested in commercial agriculture, increasing specialisation and raising crop yields, they also had an interest in the removal of obstacles to trade. Moreover, as Greenfield himself shows, a number of landowners were also industrialists, who built silk-reeling mills on their estates.

The origins of the liberal movement can be traced back to the reforms of the eighteenth century. In Lombardy particularly the continuity is evident. A small number of patrician families provided much of the leadership; in the eighteenth century the circle of the Caffè around Pietro Verri and Beccaria, in the Restoration period Confalonieri and his friends of the review *Il Conciliatore*.⁷ It would be wrong to suggest that the reformers of the eighteenth century were moved primarily by material interest, or that most noble landowners found it easy to accept their ideas. Certainly the reforming programme would have had little success if it had not coincided with the action of the Austrian state. The governments of Maria Theresa and Joseph, acting in conjunction with

the reformers among the nobility, ended the patricians' monopoly of office and expropriated their valuable rights of taxation.⁸ At the same time as the nobles lost the old basis of their power as an office-holding and feudal order, the market offered them new economic opportunities. The rising prices of wheat and other agricultural produce in the later eighteenth century stimulated a search for ways in which marketable surpluses could be increased. Since feudal rents and revenues had at first risen together with prices, it is fairly clear that without state action the nobility would not have had much incentive to change its attitudes. But the combination of a new vulnerability and a new opportunity made the ideas of the reformers relevant to the situation in which the landed upper classes found themselves. Before the coming of Napoleon in 1796 they were only a minority of the patriciate, though a significant one.⁹ However, the French occupation greatly accelerated change by abolishing altogether the formal privileges of the nobility, and put the reformers in a position of great strategic importance. One of their number, Francesco Melzi d'Eril, became vice president of the Republic of Italy under Napoleon.

What the moderate reformers of the eighteenth century wanted was to transform the mentality of the nobility and thereby put their power on a new basis. They sought to convert their fellow nobles from an order of feudal office-holders educated in jurisprudence into a class of enlightened landlords educated in economics. Active participation in agriculture and commerce was to compensate for the loss of income derived from exclusive privileges. Melzi advised the nobles to give up the illusory advantages of rank and concentrate on the real advantages of property.¹⁰ The model was clearly something like the English aristocracy, a class whose power was founded on a solid economic base but which still enjoyed certain formal marks of deference. These last, however, had to be earned by the merits of the nobility as a ruling class. Verri's argument for the continuing preponderance of the nobility in the state did not rest on a defence of the existing structure of legal privileges, but on the sociological argument that only a class of hereditary landowners had both the experience and the leisure needed for the pursuit of the public interest.

A principal aim of both eighteenth-century reformers and nineteenth-century liberals was to establish the political and economic prerequisites for a developed system of commercial agriculture. These were: the establishment of unambiguous and clearly defined property rights in land, with the abolition of feudal tenure and the customary rights of tenants and peasant communities; the conversion into private property

of communal, Church and public lands; the creation of an active and free land market by the abolition of trusts, entails and primogeniture; and the removal of both administrative and physical obstacles to free trade in agricultural produce. This was the economic side of the 'national programme', which was adopted by the progressive section of the nobility and won wide support among the middle classes.¹¹

The place of economics in the reform movement cannot be dismissed as mere ideology. Class interest, rather, acted as a selective force, implementing those points in the programme which were acceptable to the landed classes. Economics to the reformers was 'the science of public good', and the 'public good' at which reformers like Beccaria aimed was not simply that of increased production; a just distribution of the product should also be among the aims of the economist. However, optimistic presuppositions veiled the possible conflict between the needs of production and those of distribution. Beccaria, it is true, recognised that the large capitalist farms of Lombardy, run by leaseholders, were more efficient than small peasant farms. In general, nevertheless, he believed that small property was more efficient than large, and that a better distribution from the point of view of social justice would also lead to an increase in production. The second crucial presupposition was that the establishment of a free market in land would automatically bring about this optimum distribution. Concentration of landholding was seen as an unnatural evil arising from entails and primogeniture.¹²

The first serious attempt by governments at agrarian reform showed that the task of reconciling optimum production with optimum distribution was not easy. The precarious viability of small peasant property was shown by the outcome both of Peter Leopold's reforms in Tuscany and of those of Caracciolo in Sicily. The hardly fortuitous coincidence between the freeing of the grain trade and the rise of prices produced violent reactions from peasants (and urban artisans) in several regions of Italy. In Tuscany, after the 1790 riots which led to the fall of the reforming minister Gianni, discontent erupted again in the 1799 movement of the *Viva Maria* bands against the French occupation. In Piedmont, peasant hatred of the new class of capitalist leaseholders found expression both in sporadic outbreaks of violence and in petitions to the King.¹³ Centralisation and the attack on the privileges of the Church were also frequently resented by the peasants as a menace to the values of the local community. In Tuscany, the traditionalist clergy were able to guide peasant agitation into the channels of religious reaction against the reforms of the Jansenist clerics which had been temporarily backed by the state. These reformers aimed to reduce unproductive diversions such

as processions and feast-days, and particularly objected to what seemed to them the grotesque proliferation of local cults of the saints. To the peasant, a religion which attacked familiar rituals and struck at the symbols of local community must have seemed cold and incomprehensible.

From these early failures, the later heirs of the reforming programme learnt a lesson of caution. The liberals of the nineteenth century were more limited and less optimistic in their social aims, and they had notable and well-grounded hesitations about disturbing the traditional order either in religion or in property relations. Yet if their broader aim, that of bringing Italy into the family of advanced nations, was to be achieved, they had to effect change both in modes of production and in values. Ultimately they had to choose; but men and societies can stand a lot of inconsistency, and it was a long time before the contradictions inherent in the liberalism of enlightened landlords showed themselves to be irreconcilable.

Under the *ancien régime* the prevalent form of tenure in most of North and Central Italy, except in the mountain areas, was the *mezzadria* or sharecropping system. In its classical form, peasant and landlord each had a half share in all produce, although there were many local variations and exceptions to equal division. Even in the regions of classical *mezzadria* there is an important distinction to be made between areas where the peasants were expected to provide most of the farm's working capital and those where the landlords did. Thus the relatively prosperous *mezzadri* of Bologna and the Po Valley were required to furnish the draught animals for the farm. In the hills of Tuscany and Umbria, however, where the *mezzadria* system was most solidly rooted, the landlord provided the cattle and the sharecropper usually owned only a few tools. Under the *mezzadria* system the landlord always had the obligation to provide a house — for which he could charge rent — and an integrated farm or *podere*. The *podere* had to be a workable unit of cultivation with proper drainage and was usually planted with vines, olives or fruit trees. *Appoderamento* or the creation of *poderi* required a quite considerable initial investment on the part of the landlord.¹⁴ Once set up, however, the *mezzadria* system had the advantage from the landlord's point of view of minimising the outlay of working capital. The *mezzadria* system was associated with a pattern of highly dispersed settlement and with large, extended or multiple family units. The dominance of the towns over the country established in the communal period had exerted itself to the detriment of the cohesion of peasant communities. The scattered families of cultivators who delivered their

produce to urban landlords were largely self-sufficient.

The relationship between landlord and tenant was in theory governed by a freely revocable contract. In law, the right of the landlord to dispossess the sharecropper at the end of the year was unrestricted, and it was frequently employed. The threat of eviction allowed the landlord to exercise a high degree of control over the lives of his tenants. The agent or *fattore* was expected to watch carefully for any signs of immorality or unreliability, such as frequent visits to the inn or extravagance in dress. The structure of the peasant family was highly patriarchal. The head of the family was responsible to the landlord for the work and good behaviour of all the household's members, even if they were married adults. He controlled all the regular agricultural earnings of the household.

The *mezzadria* contract usually contained supplementary obligations on the tenant to perform certain kinds of labour, such as carting and the maintenance of ditches. These, and the heavy overtones of personal allegiance surrounding the relationship, give some content to the Marxist term 'feudal residues'. In spite of the heavy burdens it imposed, the *mezzadria* system offered some advantages to the peasant family. It allowed the family to work together as a single productive unit, and in spite of the legal insecurity of the peasants' position, a high degree of actual stability often prevailed. The *mezzadria* contract was a partnership, although an unequal one. The landlord could prescribe what crops were grown and how they should be cultivated, e.g. how often land should be ploughed. The obligation to work fields by the spade, a method which required heavy labour from the peasants, was often included in contracts. But the landlord could not easily alter practices or methods without the agreement of the peasant. This was always seen by agricultural reformers as one of the major drawbacks of the system, since it made innovation very difficult. The first interest of the peasant was to secure subsistence for his family.¹⁵ He tried as far as possible to achieve self-sufficiency and to restrict cash purchases, and in consequence opposed specialisation. I should add that this description does not apply to sharecroppers in the immediate vicinity of large cities, who were often more market-orientated. In general, however, the *mezzadria* system was bound up with the mode of agriculture known as *cultura promiscua* — promiscuous cultivation — in which fields of wheat or maize were interspersed by rows of vines, olives or fruit trees. This system of cultivation was often denounced as economically irrational because it achieved lower yields than specialised cultivation would have done. But it was not irrational from the peasant's point of view. As well as ensuring

self-sufficiency, the *cultura promiscua* system allowed the peasant to spread his risks; a bad year was unlikely to affect all crops equally. Even the criticism which reformers and Marxist historians have levelled at *mezzadria*, namely that it rested on the premise that the labour of the peasant family would receive remuneration inferior to its real cost, while valid in the context of a modern economy, may be historically misleading. As theorists of the peasant economy like Chayanov and Kula have pointed out, such a criticism fails to take account of the following: (1) that in an economy largely dominated by self-sufficient producers, it does not make much sense to value their labour at the current market rate; and (2) that it is in the interest of the head of the peasant family to maximise its production, even if the rate of return is very low, as otherwise some of the family's labour power might not be utilised at all.¹⁶

The *mezzadria* system put a premium on the size and cohesion of the peasant household. In theory, at least, the landlords distributed the various farms among the *mezzadri* in relation to the amount of labour they could command. Consequently, a large family unit with several able-bodied men stood to obtain a large farm, and would enjoy economic advantages as well as social prestige. Carlo Cattaneo wrote: 'In order that such a sharecropping system may prove useful it is necessary that the peasant family should be numerous and fit for labour.'¹⁷ A family whose labour did not meet requirements could hire wage labourers, but their higher cost meant that the family would usually be hard-pressed to maintain their obligations to the landlord. In addition, the multiple family system, in which peasants and married children or married brothers lived and worked together, again served to reduce risks. A complex household is less exposed to the normal fluctuations of birth and death than a simple one. The death of one adult wage-earner may be fatal to the labour capacity of a simple nuclear family: it will have proportionately less effect on the larger unit. So from both the peasant and the landlord's point of view the multiple family served to maintain continuity and ensure a supply of labour adequate to the needs of the farm.

During the 1820s and the 1830s the *mezzadria* system came under severe attack in its heartland, Tuscany. The dramatic fall in prices after the Napoleonic wars, which put an end to 50 years of profitable inflation, stimulated some landlords to make greater efforts to raise productivity. Some reformers argued that *mezzadria* should be substituted by direct farming with wage labour, which would yield a higher rate of return on capital. The defenders of the system often admitted the truth of the purely economic criticisms. However, they argued that the social and

political benefits of the system outweighed its economic disadvantages. They described it as a 'fraternal society between capitalist and worker', in which the latter was 'not a machine but a man', not a slave but a companion.¹⁸ Fifty years later the writer of the report on Tuscany in the great Jacini agrarian enquiry still uses the same arguments. In terms of social relationships, 'the system of *mezzadria* in Tuscany fully achieved the solution of the most difficult problem of our age and removes all antagonism between capital and labour. The Tuscan *mezzadro* feels he is a partner and not a slave of the landowner . . . neither historical memories nor present facts awake the ideas of oppressor and oppressed; while instead the classes see each other as protector and protected.'¹⁹ The intellectuals among the landlord class, like Gino Capponi were influenced by events outside Italy. The 1830 revolution in France and the rise of industrial class conflict in England alarmed them and increased their caution about provoking social change in the interests of economic efficiency. One should note here the use of the modern terms 'capitalist' and 'worker' to describe, somewhat paradoxically, a system in which the antagonism arising from an unequivocal cash nexus was avoided.

Behind these lofty motivations, however, other reasons for the maintenance of *mezzadria* may be discerned. Landlords too wished to minimise risk, and a lot of capital had been sunk in peasant housing, which could not easily be adapted to a system of wage labour. From the point of view of profit, the experiments of the reformers were not particularly successful.²⁰ Underlying the rhetoric of co-operation and 'affection' between landlord and peasant, we can easily discern the logic of dependence. The *mezzadria* system ensured peasant submissiveness. One of the secrets of landlord control lay in the system of accounting and debt. The landlord was expected by custom though not by law to 'carry' his tenant's debt from one year to another: the same was true if the peasants had a credit against the landlord. Either way, this made the ties hard to break. The isolation of the *mezzadri* was another strong guarantee of social order. The English economist Bowring noted: 'the universal isolation of the peasants, a necessary consequence of the *mezzadria* system. Where there is no association, there is necessarily extreme ignorance. Every family of peasants in Tuscany lives as if it were alone.' Social tranquillity was thus ensured, but, he added, only at 'the terrible cost of a stationary civilisation'. Gino Capponi, in his defence of *mezzadria* wrote that the peasant families associated with each other only at Church or at the market; and visits to market were rare 'because they buy and sell little. A good farmer goes to market seldom.'²¹ The importance of this isolation comes out clearly if we read the

correspondence of the future Prime Minister of Italy, Bettino Ricasoli, during the period of the 1848 revolution. During the rule of the democrats in 1849 Ricasoli's letters insist that it is both vital and possible to keep the peasants in complete ignorance of what was happening.²²

Other aspects of the Ricasoli correspondence show the strains imposed on the *mezzadria* by an ambitious landlord whose urge for achievement as well as search for profit led him to apply intense effort and will-power to the rationalisation of agriculture. Tuscany produced few fine wines because the peasants valued quantity more than quality.²³ Ricasoli was one of the few landowners who succeeded in emulating French wine-growers in the consistency of his vintage. To achieve this he had to introduce a rigid discipline and conformity which went beyond the normal pressures of the system. Ricasoli's distinctive religious views, for his was a peculiarly Protestant kind of Catholicism, underpinned his adherence to a particularly rigorous form of the work ethic. He was particularly annoyed when he found out that his peasants had been making donations of oil to the friars before he received his share. On this issue, as on that of the right to gather wood, Ricasoli's interpretation of property rights came into collision with custom and with the peasants' sense of fairness. The religious issue had even wider significance. Here two different mentalities were involved. For the peasants, giving alms to the Church was not only a duty but a spiritual investment, designed to secure better harvests through the intercession of the friars.²⁴ The conflict between the liberal movement and the Church must be seen as the major influence which undermined the hegemony of the landed classes, though its political effects did not become evident until after the irreparable breach of unification.

North of the Appennines, the landlords' response to the new opportunities and necessities of production for the market was eventually more decisive. In Emilia and the Veneto, cultural and political innovation lagged behind Tuscany. But the flat land and heavy, rich soil of the Po Valley had far higher potential for the new agriculture than the light soils of the Tuscan hills. The incentive to destroy *mezzadria* tenure and to extend the area of specialised farming, particularly cattle-raising, was consequently greater. The irrigated Lombard plain had for centuries offered the example of the possibilities of capitalism and high farming. However, even in the Po Valley the elimination of *mezzadria* tenure was a slow and incomplete process. By 1848 population growth had already produced large agglomerations of landless labourers in the villages around Bologna. In the commune of Molinella, for example, which achieved legendary status in the twentieth century as a centre of peasant socialism

and resistance to fascism, labourers formed 55 per cent of the agricultural population in 1847 compared to 40 per cent of sharecroppers. But in the Bolognese plain as a whole sharecroppers still outnumbered labourers by 52 per cent to 40 per cent, and in the hills they were almost three times as numerous.²⁵ Most other provinces would almost certainly have shown a lower percentage of labourers at this date. Even in the later nineteenth century *mezzadria* tenures remained prevalent in the hills and did not disappear altogether in the plains. Rather, with the reduction in their number, the *mezzadria* became a relatively privileged minority within the rural population as increased taxation and indebtedness forced many families down into the ranks of the agricultural proletariat. Falling infant mortality and the introduction of more intensive methods of cultivation both favoured the growth of the large multiple household; but at the same time the tensions always present within these large families were accentuated by the growing rebelliousness of the younger peasants. This was attributed by contemporaries both to the effects of military service and to the greater demand for labour especially on reclamation projects.²⁶

Why did the landlords allow the *mezzadria* to survive even where the advantages of direct management were evident? In large part, I think, because the social and political dangers of a landless proletariat were evident even before the great agricultural strikes of the 1880s. The landless labourer might be economically necessary, but as a social type he was undesirable. His characteristics, as seen by the landlord, differed from those of the sharecropper as night from day. The uncertainty of employment — he was lucky if he could find work two days out of three — not only reduced him to desperate poverty but destroyed all incentives for regularity and sobriety. 'They live between a debauch and a fast.'²⁷ The *bracciantie* lived in large communities and rapidly acquired the habits of urban life. They were the first rural workers to acquire a taste for smoking, in spite of their poverty. Drink, disorder and unstable family ties were — with some exaggeration — believed to be as characteristic of them as of the urban proletariat. They took out their resentment in drunken abuse of their betters and they stole to keep alive. By the 1870s rural theft had become one of the main worries of landlords, second only to taxes. Policing was inadequate, and many local officials were afraid to take action. In some areas seasonal migration from the over-populated mountains aggravated the problem. A Venetian proprietor in the 1870s complained of the 'swarms' of 'nomads' who descended from the mountains with nothing but a stick and a handkerchief and slept out in haylofts. They lived, he said, not only by begging

but by devastating the crops and fruit trees of the farms they passed.²⁸ Theft naturally hit the sharecropper or small tenant even harder than the landlord. Consequently it would not be an exaggeration to say that before the 1880s the major form of overt and endemic class hostility was that between peasant farmer and day labourer. This was another powerful influence in maintaining traditional patterns of dependence.

Ricasoli was only one of the liberal leaders who was also prominent as an agricultural reformer. Among the chief statemen of the *Risorgimento*, both Cavour and the Bolognese Minghetti played a leading role in their local agrarian associations. The ideology of liberalism was bound up with admiration for the English free trade system and received support from England for this reason. The economic and political strategy of Cavour depended on a vision of the complementary interests of Italian exporters of primary goods and English industry. It was only at a later stage that the incompatibility of free trade with the development of Italian industry was perceived. In any case, until the great agrarian crisis of the 1880s many landlords, though certainly not Cavour, were prepared to argue that large-scale industrialisation was undesirable because of its social consequences.

The mentality of Cavour was notably different from that of Ricasoli. The Cavour family was altogether an odd family. Cavour's father was an extraordinary combination of place-seeker, large farmer and speculator. The absurdity of neat divisions between aristocratic and bourgeois mentality can be seen in the career of a man who continued to manipulate his family connections and his influence at court as zealously as any *ancien régime* noble, while at the same time investing in improved rice cultivation, merino sheep, steamers and, most striking of all, acting as agent to collect a Geneva banker's debts. This was unusual. The Piedmontese nobility preserved a far more prickly and exclusive consciousness of rank than the Lombards or the Tuscans right down to 1848.

The great Cavour was even less of a traditional aristocrat than his father. Court life was repugnant to him. He was an individualist, who regarded family traditions and controls with impatience. However in his vision of society he still assigned the landed upper classes a central role. Though his own estates in the rice-growing area of Vercelli were cultivated by wage-labour, like the Tuscan landlords he hesitated before the prospect of creating an agricultural proletariat on the English model. He was not, he said, 'the absolute partisan of the English agricultural system', which had transformed the land into 'a collection of vast workshops, where there is only a master and workers'. He praised the Lombard system of silkworm-raising for preserving 'the ties of sympathy and

affection' between landlords and workers. Only a class of landowners who succeeded in retaining the loyalty of their tenants would be able 'to dominate the movement of society in such a way that it is progressive and ameliorative instead of destructive and revolutionary'.²⁹ The landed aristocracy should not promote change beyond the point where it would undermine their political influence.

It should be noted that Piedmont was the region in Italy where a property-owning peasantry developed most successfully. By the mid-nineteenth century some peasant proprietors had already made the transition from subsistence agriculture to specialised commodity production. This posed problems for the aristocracy since a more independent peasant class could turn to the alternative political leadership provided by the small-town notables from the professional classes. On the other hand, Piedmont was the one region in which liberalism could be said to have acquired a popular following in the countryside.³⁰ As has been pointed out by other critics of Barrington Moore, where the peasantry itself is capable of making the transition to commercial agriculture its survival, even alongside the landowning nobility, would seem to favour the development of democracy. The Piedmontese case would seem to confirm this. However, it is far more questionable whether the traditional deference of a subordinate class of tenants or sharecroppers to their landlords, such as existed in other regions of Italy, can successfully adapt to the pressures of change. The strategy of landlord control began to break down in some of the *mezzadria* areas soon after unification. In these areas, specialisation had already changed the nature of the *mezzadria* contract from within. Thus in Bologna province, the great expansion in hemp cultivation destroyed the traditional balance between crops on which the peasant economy had been based. Hemp was by far the most profitable crop for the landlord, but for the peasant it meant more intensive and more closely regulated work. The social character of the peasant's work changed and became more and more like day labour.³¹

The growing tensions between landlord and peasant arising directly out of the relations of production were accentuated by the wider social and political developments associated with unification. After 1860, the conflict with the Church weakened the liberal landlords' hegemony at the same time as the increased burden of state taxation sharpened the discontent of the peasants. The 1869 riots against the milling tax were the most serious outbreak of peasant discontent in north Italy since Napoleonic times. By the end of the next decade, the onset of the world agricultural depression destroyed the premisses on which landlord liberalism had previously been based. The majority of the

the landowning classes were converted to protectionism. Some groups, like the Tuscan landlords, whose best opportunities lay in developing wine and oil exports, remained relatively faithful to free trade. But the general European triumph of protectionism condemned this strategy to failure. In Tuscany particularly, the victory of protectionism destroyed the stimulus for innovation and with it the optimistic faith in progress.³² It can be argued that the importance of the formation of the 'protectionist bloc' has been over-emphasised. In both agriculture and industry, interests which were favourable to free trade were later to lend enthusiastic support to fascism. What was vital was not so much the deliberate creation of a protectionist alliance as the failure of the previous strategy of development, made inevitable by the changing structure of world markets.

The 1880s also saw the first successes of the Socialists, unique in Europe, in organising agricultural labour in the lowland of Emilia and Lombardy. The prevailing response of the landlords was to demand repression. However, there were some who argued that the fault was in the system of wage labour, and that a reversal of the trend away from *mezzadria* would diminish militancy, while also cushioning the landlords against the effects of a rise in wages. At the same time, though, the improvement of communications and the spread of market relationships put the landlords under greater pressure to modernise. Productivity and social peace came more and more clearly into conflict. The advantage of *mezzadria* to the peasant also dwindled as wage labour became remunerative and as the consumption of urban goods increased. The landlords tried to lay the burden of modernisation on the peasant by making him pay all or a large part of the cost of fertilisers, protective crop sprays and threshing machinery.³³ Changes in methods of cultivation and type of crop were resisted by the peasant because they involved more risks, more expense and more work, while his security against eviction was not enough to allow him to put his faith in long-term improvements. Greater subordination was combined with greater uncertainty, and resentment at innovation sharpened the peasant's awareness of the traditional forms of exploitation.

Nevertheless, until the First World War the landlord continued to play an important role as patron, by mediating between the peasant and the foreign worlds of the law and state administration. Unification, by increasing the pressures of the latter, may even have made the landlord's protection more necessary than before. Perhaps only a major political crisis, such as the war provided, could have shaken this traditional pattern. Once confidence was broken, it could never be restored. Both landlords

and peasants took an increasingly literal view of their contractual rights and obligations. The harsh outlines of the economic relationship were no longer obscured by the halo of social custom. As a 'strictly business contract'³⁴ the *mezzadria* did not work well. It did not guarantee to either party a sufficient certainty of profit and therefore discouraged innovation. Gains could only be made at the expense of the other party. Once landlord hegemony had broken down, coercion became necessary to the profitability of the system.

The *mezzadria* system in central Italy worked like a kind of dam. For a long time it effectively contained and limited peasant discontent and prevented it from finding an outlet. In the end, the dam broke, with dramatic results. Nowhere was the mobilisation of the peasantry so abrupt as in Tuscany and Umbria in 1919-20, and nowhere else was the counter-offensive of the landlords so brutal. The success of the system in delaying the emergence of peasant protest, and also of other forms of change, such as the break-up of large estates, contributed to this polarisation. The delay may help to explain why Tuscany became a 'red' region while the Veneto became a bastion of Christian democracy. In both regions, until the First World War, the strength of the right of the Liberal Party reflects the continued recognition of the landlord as patron by his tenants. But in the Veneto and Lombardy this went together with new forms of association sponsored by the Catholic movement. In these regions, the landlords' response had avoided a shift to wage labour. They kept their tenants on the land but compelled them to pay their rent either in money or in certain specified crops, rather than in a half share of all. The point of the latter arrangement was to increase the landlord's share of marketable cash crops, while leaving the tenants with those needed for subsistence. The most widely diffused contract of this sort was the *fitto a grano*, or wheat lease, in which the peasant paid a fixed rent in wheat; this contract was made possible by the spread in the cultivation of maize, which replaced wheat as the staple of peasant diet.³⁵ Since maize met the peasant's subsistence needs, wheat became a cash crop, which was handed over to the landlord for sale. As the yields of maize per acre were much higher than those of wheat the change made possible a great increase in the rural population. Maize did for Italy what the potato did for Ireland and Northern Europe. It lowered the threshold of survival. This is always an ambiguous benefit. Fewer peasants died of famine, but according to one observer the diffusion of the maize diet led to a 'sensible deterioration in bodily stature, colour, and strength'.³⁶ Reliance on an exclusive diet of maize could in fact cause the terrible deficiency disease of pellagra, leading to madness and

death. Although by the mid-nineteenth century maize had spread almost everywhere it could possibly be cultivated, even in arid and mountainous areas of the South, where the crop was highly precarious, it was in the Veneto and Lombardy that it remained most important. The incidence of pellagra was highest in these areas, and the peasants' capacity to survive on maize explains why the wheat lease was most common in the Veneto.

The landlords also took steps to secure a larger take of other easily marketable crops such as wine, oil and silk. The growth in demand for silk on the markets of Lyons and London prompted the landlords to extend the planting of mulberry trees. In the late 1870s, according to Jacini, the hills of Lombardy were 'like one vast mulberry grove'. In order to secure the full co-operation of the peasants in protecting the trees and raising the silkworms, which were peculiarly vulnerable to neglect, it was necessary to concede them a share of the final product.³⁷ The landlords, however, controlled the disposal and marketing of the cocoons and paid the peasant in cash. So in the silk-raising areas a form of share-cropping survived and was actually strengthened by the advance of commercialisation. Incidentally, the landlords also took more care of rural housing and hygiene in these areas, but their real concern was for the health of the silkworm, rather than the peasants. The large role played by women both in raising the silkworms and in reeling the raw silk made it a family enterprise. Silk production was a highly profitable commercial enterprise which was none the less compatible with the preservation of the existing agrarian structure. It was this relatively tradition-bound form of commercialisation which gave the first real impulse to industrial development.³⁸ This did not take place according to the classical model by which the capitalist agricultural revolution simultaneously expels or 'liberates' labour from the land and ensures the surplus necessary for the subsistence of an urban working class: rather, for a long time industrial and agricultural work were 'intertwined'. Even after the introduction of the factory system much of the industrial workforce was provided by the women and children of peasant families who still worked the land. This part-time system allowed the industrialist to pay lower wages and provided the workers with some sort of cushion against unemployment. 'Getting rid of the peasants', as B. Moore puts it, does not necessarily turn them into industrial workers, and on the other hand in the first stage of industrialisation, labour in industry does not necessarily destroy the peasant family economy. The areas where this kind of industrialisation took place were likely to show a higher degree of participation by the peasants in organised political movements than elsewhere. Savings accumulated through industrial labour ultimately

assisted peasant land purchase. Class tensions were less unmanageable in these areas and it is significant that fascism found it difficult to get a foothold.

At the same time, though, the effect of this pattern of industrialisation on the mentality of employers was unfavourable to liberal values. The peculiar nature of this type of industrialisation fostered the emergence of an anti-democratic paternalism which attempted to combine traditional values with modern techniques. The leading textile industrialist Alessandro Rossi, who was the architect of the protectionist bloc between industrialists and agrarians, was also an apologist for rural industry, the worker-peasant and for Catholicism and 'social imperialism' against liberalism.³⁹ The peculiar nature of industrialisation in parts of the Lombardo-Veneto area may help to explain the surprising success of the Catholic Church in maintaining its influence not only in rural areas but in partially industrialised communities.

The South presents a very different picture. The agrarian conditions of southern Italy and Sicily had more in common with Andalusia, or even Hungary, than with the Lombard plains. In the South, moreover, feudalism was still a political as well as an economic reality at the end of the eighteenth century. In spite of the reforms, feudal jurisdiction had resisted the inroads of royal absolutism much more successfully than in France or northern Italy. Outside Naples, about 70 per cent of the population still lived in communes subject to feudal control. Within the nobility, there was an enormous concentration of land and power in the hands of a small number of families. Eighty-four families controlled 2 million vassals out of a total population of 5 million; there were 18 families with more than 30,000 vassals each, headed by Prince Pignatelli with 70,000.⁴⁰ Yet this vast extension of feudal control was a source of weakness as well as of strength. The peasant communities of the South, living for the most part in highly concentrated settlements, had a tradition of active resistance to feudal claims, with the leadership usually coming from a small number of bourgeois rural notables. The barons could less easily obtain compensation for the loss of feudal revenues; the abysmal state of communications and of techniques in most areas precluded any resort to specialised commercial agriculture. Absenteeism undoubtedly often prevented the nobility from seizing what opportunities there were. Probably about one quarter of all noble families, and a much larger number of the higher nobility, lived in Naples, at a much greater distance from their estates than even the town-dwelling aristocracy of the north. Thus, while the political power of the nobility remained greater in Naples than in the North, its economic basis was weaker.