

Gramsci and Bukharin: Neglected Legacies

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Abstract

This paper revisits the relationship between the political thought of Antonio Gramsci and Nikolai Bukharin. Adopting a contextualist approach, it sets out to bring to light a set of Bukharinist legacies in Gramsci's theory of hegemony that have been poorly recognised to date, due mainly to the excessive focus on Gramsci's critique of Bukharin's *Saggio Popolare* in the current literature. Its principle argument is that if Gramsci's development of his theory of hegemony is seen as partly emerging through his contact with Bukharin and Bukharinist ideas prevalent in Comintern circles in the mid-1920s, then we come to a new understanding of the influence of Bukharin on Gramsci's ideas that tends to narrow the distance between their respective approaches to socialist revolution.

Introduction: Bukharin and Gramscian Studies

It has long been an axiomatic principle among scholars of Antonio Gramsci to begin any analysis of his Marxism by distinguishing it clearly from that of the Second International, and indeed, the leading theorists of the Russian Revolution, who in one way or another, are considered to be legatees of the economic determinism and class-reductionist dogmas of the former.¹ The work of Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin has undoubtedly provided the most fertile ground for such argumentation, since it was not only in Bukharin's writings that the most trenchant economic determinism and class reductionism among the leading Russian Revolutionaries could be found, but also, it was Bukharin's work which Gramsci actually employed in his *Prison Notebooks* to mount a devastating critique on what he regarded as the serious shortcomings of the Marxism of his day.² Given that I have no intention here of taking issue with either of these two propositions, it might well seem a hopeless endeavour to set out now to convince the reader of a Bukharinist influence and set of legacies at work in the mature political thought of Antonio Gramsci. This, however, is precisely what the current paper will attempt to achieve, and the best way to illustrate where there is room for developing such argumentation is to begin by highlighting what I regard as the

¹ See, for example, E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London, 2001), 65-75.

² See *Notebook 11* in A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere: Vol II*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Torino, 2007), 1363-1509.

key shortcomings of the existing literature in its treatment of the Gramsci-Bukharin relationship.

The most common interpretation of the relationship between Gramsci and Bukharin's work – especially in the English-speaking world – is that Gramsci developed his political thought in the *Prison Notebooks* partly through a rigorous critique of the latter's mechanical economic determinism and ahistorical sociological Marxism.³ This insistence on a clear gulf between Gramsci and Bukharin has traditionally been supported from three different – though frequently overlapping – perspectives. Firstly, there has long been a tendency to treat the Gramsci-Bukharin relationship as solely revolving around the former's critique of Bukharin's 1921 text, *Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology*, in the *Prison Notebooks*. This produces an assessment of Gramsci's political thought which is largely consistent with his own intentions that his Marxism should be interpreted as fundamentally at odds with Bukharin and Bukharinism. As this article will demonstrate, such an approach fails to take account of the full ambit of Bukharin's very substantial writings, especially after 1921 when a significant transformation occurred in his thinking. Indeed, these approaches follow the Italian far too uncritically into an ahistorical and narrowly focused assessment of Bukharin's Marxism which tends to obscure the true extent of Gramsci's debt to the Bolshevik leader which must be sought beyond the pages of what Gramsci called the '*Saggio Popolare*'.

Secondly, a further essential argument for proposing a radical break between Gramsci's political thought and Bukharin is the familiar one - raised by Gramsci himself in the *Prison Notebooks* - of positing a fundamental disparity between the problems confronted by backward peasant Russia and the modern industrial West which places Gramsci firmly within a tradition of 'Western Marxism', despite the seemingly anomalous phenomena of Italian fascism and the backwardness of the *mezzogiorno* in 1920s Italy.⁴ Once again I intend to challenge this attempt to sanitize Gramsci from the theorists of the Russian Revolution and Bukharin in particular, pointing out that not only did Gramsci learn from Bukharin's analysis of how Russia could best advance towards socialism, but also – and which is too often forgotten by the exponents of the 'Western' Marxism thesis – he was influenced considerably by Bukharin's wider involvement in developing ideas for international revolution through his leading role at the Comintern until 1928.

A third trend in the literature which has served to discredit any notion of a Bukharinist influence on Gramsci's political thought in much the same manner as the Western Marxist thesis is the more recent development of a body of work that has interpreted Gramsci as a specifically *Italian* political thinker who was primarily - if not exclusively - concerned with the problems of Italy in the early 1920s and 1930s, and particularly its chronically unstable liberal state, the

³ J. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process* (Oxford, 1981), 66-79; J. Martin, *Gramsci's Political Analysis* (Basingstoke, 1998), 77-9.

⁴ P. Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London, 1976).

uneven economic and cultural development between North and South, and the advent of fascism.⁵ Yet again the effect of such an approach has been to distinguish sharply between Gramsci's Italian political thought and that of the Bolsheviks such as Bukharin who, we are led to believe, were concerned with a completely different set of problems and challenges in a very different political and economic context. While I do not wish to make light of the considerable divergences between the national arenas in which Gramsci and Bukharin operated in the 1920s and early 1930s, I nevertheless believe that the boundaries around the Italian state in this brand of contextualism have been too severely drawn. As I will show below, a more inclusive approach that recognises that context is both national and international allows us to explore more fully the more diverse influences on Gramsci's political thought, and especially those of the theorists of the Russian Revolution such as Bukharin whose concerns were by no means as alien to Italian conditions as is sometimes assumed.

However, it would of course be wrong to suggest that all of the literature to date has explored the relationship between Gramsci and Bukharin's ideas solely with reference to his critique of the *Saggio Popolare*, or endeavoured to erect a firm barrier between these two Marxist thinkers on the basis of the former's 'Western' or 'Italian' political and economic context. In particular, a number of Gramscian scholars, who have been inclined to take much more seriously Gramsci's close relationship with the Leninist tradition of the Russian Revolution, have gone so far as to teasing out his indebtedness to the leading theorists of the Comintern - including Bukharin - focusing particularly on the latter's analysis of the 'stabilization' of capitalism in the mid-1920s and their corresponding adoption of 'united front' tactics to win over the masses of workers and peasants.⁶ While these scholars have correctly highlighted how such concerns would continue to frame the development of Gramsci's political thought in prison, none of them in my view have explored in any great detail the specific interconnections between Bukharin's ideas of the mid-1920s - when he had become the dominant theorist of both the Russian Revolution and the Comintern - and Gramsci's immediate pre-prison and prison writings which exhibit significant similarities and a tendency to draw on Bukharin to develop ideas to meet his own specific Italian context. This article will not only attempt to do just this, but in doing so it will also take issue with those - perhaps somewhat dated now - approaches that have insisted on Gramsci's Leninist credentials by arguing that it is not so much Leninism that Gramsci inherited from the theorists of the Comintern, as that particular version of it that was consistently endorsed and propagated by Bukharin and his followers throughout the mid-1920s up until their demise in 1928-9 when Stalin

⁵ R. Bellamy and D. Schecter, *Gramsci and the Italian State* (Manchester, 1993); P. Piccone, *Italian Marxism* (Berkeley, 1983).

⁶ C. Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State* (London, 1980); P. Spriano, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano, Vol I* (Torino, 1967).

began reorientating the International for a new frontal assault under the sectarian slogan of ‘class against class.’⁷

In sum, what I hope to achieve in the following is to bring about some cause for reflection and revision in the field of Gramscian studies concerning the relationship between Gramsci and Bukharin. As argued above, I believe that their relationship has not been fully explored due to an excessively narrow focus on Bukharin’s *Historical Materialism* and Gramsci’s critique of this work in the *Prison Notebooks*, as well as a tendency to place Gramsci within interpretive categories – Western Marxist, Italian political thinker and even Leninist – that serve to obscure somewhat the full extent of Bukharin’s influence on his political thought. In keeping with a contextualist approach to the history of political ideas,⁸ the first part of this paper will set out to demonstrate that Gramsci’s political thought was not *exclusively* framed by his Italian political, economic and cultural context, but also, by a set of problems and concerns that were closely associated with Bukharin’s analysis of the difficulties of achieving a socialist revolution both in Russia and in the wider international arena. The second part of the paper will then move on to illustrate how some of Bukharin’s key ideas of the mid 1920s – long after he had abandoned the dogmatic tendencies of the *Saggio* - were taken up and developed by Gramsci within the ambit of his theory of hegemony in the writings he produced just before his imprisonment and thereafter. I then conclude by offering some reflections on the reasons for Gramsci’s obvious antipathy to Bukharin in the *Prison Notebooks*.

Part I

Recontextualising Gramsci: The Post-‘Saggio’ Bukharin and the Comintern 1922-26

It is something of a mystery why Gramscian studies have remained largely impervious to the considerable literature on the Bukharinist phase of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern which, since as early as the 1970s, authors such as Stephen Cohen have meticulously recorded, demonstrating convincingly that there was an alternative vision of the Soviet State and international communism available between Lenin and Stalin in the mid-1920s in NEP Russia before the descent into totalitarianism.⁹ As Cohen points out, while Stalin was slowly manufacturing the bureaucratic and organizational changes that would eventually allow him to turn the Party and the Comintern into his own personal fiefdoms, in

⁷ John Biggart argues that Bukharin’s theory of cultural revolution constitutes a radical break with Leninism. J. Biggart, ‘Bukharin’s Theory of Cultural Revolution’, in: *The Ideas of Nikolai Bukharin*, ed. A.Kemp-Welch (Oxford, 1992), 131.

⁸ Q. Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Vol. I* (Cambridge, 2002).

⁹ See, in particular, S. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, (London, 1974); A. Kemp-Welch, ed. *The Ideas of Nikolai Bukharin* (Oxford, 1992); NN. Kozlov and E.D. Weitz, eds. *Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin: A Centenary Appraisal* (New York, 1990).

the mid-1920s after the decline and death of Lenin (1924) it was Bukharin's interpretation of Leninist policy and ideology that dominated in Soviet political circles until by 1925-27 'Official Bolshevism' had become 'largely Bukharinist.'¹⁰ Moreover, this was by no means an influence that was confined to NEP Russia, for Bukharin had become by 1925 the de facto head of International Communism. Indeed, he 'systematically wrote his theories into the resolutions of the Comintern,' promoted his Soviet allies to key positions on the Political Secretariat of its Executive Committee,¹¹ and presided over the period of "Bolshevization" of its member parties. It is therefore with some justification that Eric D. Weitz argues that his important role in international communism has for too long been obscured by historians' understandable fixations with the figure of Stalin – not to mention his ongoing disputes with Trotsky – which has led to a failure to recognise that 'Bukharin's tenure at the head of the Comintern constituted a decisive period in the shaping of the international communist movement.'¹² In this section I set out to re-explore a key dimension of this Bukharinist context of Gramsci's political thought, namely the identification of a set of problems confronted by Russian and international communism in the mid-1920s that Bukharin was responsible for formulating and – along with his many followers - disseminating in international communist circles. I then move on to show how this Bukharinist framing of the difficulties confronted by communist parties was well-known to Gramsci through his connections with Bukharin and the Comintern, and indeed, they began to surface in his writings in the years just prior to his incarceration at the end of 1926. This will give us the foundations on which to explore an even closer relationship between Bukharin's ideas and Gramsci's theory of hegemony in the second part of the paper.

If there is one idea that Bukharin is most commonly remembered for, it is the rather misconceived notion that he was responsible for mistakenly reorientating the Russian Revolution towards the construction of socialism on the Russian peasantry – a so-called 'wager on the peasants' who Bukharin naively believed could be convinced rather than coerced into renouncing their petty-bourgeois ways and taking up the revolutionary cause of socialism. In fact, the description of this key dimension of Bukharin's political thought that presents it as a 'wager on the peasants' and a uniquely and eccentric Bukharinist idea has more to do with subsequent Stalinist and Trotskyite depictions of his work spread widely in international communist circles to discredit him rather than the real content of Bukharin's thought.

The Russian Revolution had of course only succeeded thanks to the support of the peasantry in the countryside in the first place who were drawn into the Revolutionary upsurge as a consequence of Bolshevik promises of 'Peace, Land

¹⁰ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 215.

¹¹ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 216-7.

¹² E.D. Weitz, 'Bukharin and "Bukharinism" in the Comintern, 1919-29', in: *Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin: A Centenary Appraisal*, ed. N.N. Kozlov and E.D. Weitz (New York, 1990), 59.

and Bread',¹³ and the *smycha* (alliance of workers and peasants) became a basic tenet of Bolshevism shared by all its leaders - and especially Lenin - in the years thereafter.¹⁴ However, there is no doubt that among the leading Bolsheviks it was Bukharin above all who most often wrote and expounded the idea that without the support of the Russian peasantry the Bolshevik Revolution was doomed. The *problem* of winning over the countryside was therefore a key aspect of his thinking. But it was by no means an idea that had occurred to Bukharin in an idealistic flurry of eccentric theorizing about the progressive nature of the Russian peasant. It was in fact born out of the painful and disastrous experience of War Communism and especially the events of 1920-21 when the almost total alienation of the peasantry induced by policies of forced requisitioning and state coercion led to a situation where Russian farmers were refusing to produce grain, and indeed, were threatening to join forces with masses of hungry workers, soldiers and sailors in the cities to overturn the Revolution as the Kronstadt Rebellion in March 1921 most clearly indicated.¹⁵ As is well-known, these events ushered in a radical change of direction in economic policy (NEP) of the fledgling Soviet State – involving the abandonment of coercive measures in the countryside and the partial reintroduction of the market for mainly agricultural produce – which would be Lenin's last major legacy to the Russian Revolution. It was Bukharin above all who emerged as the leading theorist and advocate of NEP, principally on the realistic and pragmatic basis that no proletarian revolution could survive either in Russia or internationally without the support of the peasant masses. Indeed, the *smycha* became for this leading Bolshevik "the fundamental question of our revolution," the "slogan of slogans," "a *condition sine qua non* of the proletarian revolution" which would remain interminably unstable and unlikely ever to reach a socialist outcome without their support.¹⁶ This problem of the peasantry had barely crossed the mind of the early Bukharin,¹⁷ or indeed, the other leading theorists of Bolshevism who had all complacently placed their faith in the power of the coercive apparatus of the state (the dictatorship of the proletariat) and the inevitability of economic laws of modernization which would burgeon the ranks of the proletariat in the same measure as they displaced and dispersed the semi-feudal peasantry. While these problems were certainly accentuated in Russia due to its relatively backward economy in comparison to other European states of the period, among Bukharin's key contributions to debates and strategy in international communist circles at this time - including the PCd'I and Gramsci – was his insistence that communist party's even in the industrial West could not bring a successful revolution to fruition without the support of the peasant masses.¹⁸

¹³ S. Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 3rd edition (London, 2008), 56-7

¹⁴ As early as 1905 Lenin argued for a worker-peasant alliance in *Two Tactics of Social Democracy*, V. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 9 (Moscow, 1962), 15-140.

¹⁵ Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 94; Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 106.

¹⁶ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 145.

¹⁷ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 56-7.

¹⁸ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 149.

Bukharin's exportation of his concerns about winning over the peasantry into the international arena of the Comintern demonstrates that his political thought was by no means narrowly national as Trotsky and the Left Opposition claimed at the time.¹⁹ Indeed, the second major difficulty confronting communist revolutionaries in the 1920s which Bukharin's work highlighted demonstrates only too plainly his internationalist perspective as well as his consistent tendency to see Russia's march towards socialism as inextricably bound up with the battle between the forces of capitalism and communism on the wider international stage. For it was during Bukharin's ascendancy at the Comintern between 1924-27 that the thesis of the 'relative stabilization of world capitalism' was formulated under his aegis,²⁰ a difficulty which he insisted had consequences for both the Soviet State and its communist allies in Western Europe who were now faced with a much more robust enemy than had been the case in the immediate post-War period. They would therefore have to adapt their tactics and strategy accordingly. While Bukharin was not alone in pointing out the challenges that the re-establishment of 'equilibrium' in capitalist countries posed for international communists,²¹ it was Bukharin above all who had long insisted on the ingenious ability of state capitalism to spread its organizational tentacles across the fields of the economy and politics and successfully hold off the advancing revolutionary wave.²² This emphasis on the resilience of capitalism and its 'stabilization' became a commonplace assumption in international communist circles during Bukharin's ascendancy between 1924-7, and the Bolshevik leader and his followers ensured that the days of complacency about the inevitable collapse of a degenerate capitalist system – which had encouraged a series of 'adventurist' and ill-conceived attempts at revolution in Western Europe (particularly in Germany in 1921 and 1923)²³ – were brought to a swift conclusion in favour of a more sober and realistic assessment of the truly momentous effort that would be required to achieve a successful revolution in the West.²⁴

For Bukharin, moreover, this re-stabilization of capitalist equilibrium presented two key problems and challenges for the revolutionary communist movement. The first of these was primarily related to Russia where the need to set the economy and the political system on a sound and stable foundation with no return to the days of early 1921 with near economic collapse and mass opposition to the regime simply could not be contemplated, given that the enemy

¹⁹ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 188.

²⁰ Weitz, 'Bukharin and "Bukharinism" in the Comintern, 1919-29', 62. Ernesto Raggio argues that Bukharin adopted the idea of 'relative stabilization' from Marx. E. Ragionieri, 'Il Problema Bucharin', *Studi Storici* 13:1, January-March 1972, 173.

²¹ See, for example, Trotsky's speech at the Third World Congress of the Comintern in 1921. L. Trotsky, 'Report on the World Economic Crisis and the New Tasks of the Communist International, Second Session, June 23, 1921', in: *The First Five Years of the Communist International, Volume I* (New York, 1972), 200/207-8/223.

²² N. Harding, 'Bukharin and the State' in: *The Ideas of Nikolai Bukharin*, ed. A. Kemp-Welch (Oxford, 1992), 92-6.

²³ K. McDermott and J. Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke, 1996).

²⁴ Weitz, 'Bukharin and "Bukharinism" in the Comintern, 62-4.

was now much stronger and would be able to fully exploit any chink in the Soviet armour.²⁵ In Bukharin's view, such problems were fundamentally related to the ability of the Soviet system to avoid the kind of *disequilibrium* in its economic and political structures that might threaten the onward advance towards modernization, stable growth and ultimately socialism. For these alone would ensure that the masses - and particularly the poorer and middle peasantry - would not abandon their support for the regime again and contemplate a conversion to an increasingly attractive capitalist model.

This was indeed a recurring and central theme in Bukharin's acrimonious disputes with the Left Opposition and especially Preobrazhensky, Trotsky and Tugan-Baranovsky. He consistently accused them of putting the economic and political future of Soviet Russia at risk by advocating sectarian policies that involved exploiting the peasantry to finance a massive industrial drive. For Bukharin the upshot of such policies would be an economic disequilibrium as increased production would lead to a glut of consumer goods that an impoverished peasantry would be unable to absorb, while political disequilibrium would also follow with the alienation of an exploited and discontented peasantry from the regime. Ideal conditions, in fact, for the disintegration of the *smycha* and a second Kronstadt - possibly supported by the reinvigorated forces of international capitalism - which Bukharin feared above all.²⁶

While disequilibrium was the main concern in Soviet Russia for Bukharin where the Revolution had to be cautiously defended and advanced, in the West capitalist stabilization led him to a different conclusion. The European Communist parties would now have to be confronted with the task of genuinely organizing into unified mass political movements and actually implementing the United Front strategy that had been advocated by the Comintern since 1921, but was paid little more than lip-service by many communist parties including the PCF and the PCd'I.²⁷ This organizational drive which Bukharin played such a central role in during his tenure as head of the Comintern between 1925-27 was conducted under the epithet of 'Bolshevization', and Bukharin insisted that without it there was little hope of overthrowing a reinvigorated capitalist system, even in the advent of a second wave of economic crisis as had occurred in the aftermath of the First World War. Unfortunately, Bolshevization has been subsequently reduced by many historians to little more than a Stalinist agenda to bring all of the international communist parties under the central control of the Russian Party.²⁸ However, this is again to neglect Bukharin's key role in *the early phase* of this process and the emphasis that the strategy initially laid on organizing national communist parties into effective political and propaganda machines that could permanently win over the masses from social democracy

²⁵ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 169.

²⁶ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 160-212.

²⁷ P. Spriano, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano, Vol I* (Torino, 1967).

²⁸ McDermott and Agnew, for example, define Bolshevization as 'a trend towards Russian dominance of the Comintern and its member sections'. McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, 42.

and avoid the catastrophic failures suffered by vanguardist style parties in the early 1920s whose principal weakness had been their failure to organize the masses effectively. From 1925 to 1926 Bukharin and his followers in the Comintern placed this problem at the very top of the agenda of every European Communist Party and Gramsci, by then leader of the PCd'I in Italy, proved particularly willing to take up this Bukharinist challenge.

There can be no doubt, moreover, that Gramsci was thoroughly acquainted with Bukharin's thought in this post-'*Saggio*' period. As is well-known, Gramsci was appointed as PCd'I Representative of the ECCI in May 1922 and although he spent much of his first six months in Moscow recuperating from mental exhaustion, he returned to work in time to attend the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in November and December of that year. Lenin was already too ill to make any major contribution to the debates at this Congress, but it is to be noted that in his short address he defended robustly NEP as no longer simply 'a retreat' but the correct strategy for the transition to socialism in Russia.²⁹ It is indeed significant that it was precisely at this first Comintern congress attended by Gramsci that Bukharin emerged as the principal defender of NEP among the Bolsheviks,³⁰ and the PCd'I Representative would have heard Bukharin for the first time commend the gradualist, conciliatory and pragmatic principles of NEP as the essence of Bolshevism and Leninism - as he would do so on innumerable occasions in the years ahead. Between 1922 and 1926 Gramsci had ample opportunity to imbibe and integrate Bukharin's version of Leninism that was now in the ascendancy in Russia for he remained in Moscow until November 1923 where he was in constant contact with Bolshevik leaders including Bukharin. In fact, he soon became the Comintern's preferred and willing candidate to lead the PCd'I out of its sectarian and abstentionist phase under Bordiga which had caused so much friction in the International due to the Italian Party's refusal to implement United Front tactics. In this role Gramsci of course kept himself constantly in tune with Comintern directives that were increasingly drafted on Bukharinist principles. His move to Vienna in November 1923 was actually instigated by the Comintern so that he could liaise closely with the PCd'I in Italy on its behalf and draw it towards a full commitment to the United Front. On his return to Italy in May 1924 Gramsci's rise to the top of the PCd'I was also facilitated and encouraged by the Comintern's representative there - Jules Humbert-Droz - who was a committed Bukharinist and who undoubtedly ensured that the new leader of the PCd'I was well-informed of the Comintern line under Bukharin. Indeed, Gramsci was to return to Moscow in April 1925 to attend the Fifth Enlarged Executive Meeting of the Comintern where he and all the other European Communist leaders were fully briefed on the organizational work that was required to execute the Bolshevization of the Party now under Bukharin's direct control. By this stage, moreover, the influence of the latter was

²⁹ V. Lenin, 'Five Years Of The Russian Revolution And The Prospects Of The World Revolution: Report To The Fourth Congress Of The Communist International, November 13, 1922' in V. Lenin, *Collected Works, Vol. 33* (Moscow, 1965), 415-432.

³⁰ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*.

quite apparent in Gramsci's writings as he now began to think seriously about the very concerns and obstacles that Bukharin had identified as essential to overcome for revolutionary success.

This path of bringing Bukharinism to bear on Italian conditions was already set by Gramsci in a series of letters he wrote to PCd'I leaders from Vienna in 1924 when he made clear his intentions to challenge Bordiga's leadership of the Party 'and take the doctrine and tactics of the Comintern as the basis for an action programme for our activity in the future.'³¹ It was no surprise then that some of Gramsci's most important writings of the 1924-26 period including the 'Lyons Theses' – co-authored with Togliatti – and his 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question' took up the Bukharinist challenge of attempting to theorize in Italian conditions just how the Party could win over the peasantry and the masses. Indeed, in July 1925 Gramsci expressed some satisfaction that the Party had 'succeeded in growing as an organization and in extending its influence notably among the working-class and peasant masses' and he explicitly related its organizational tactics – following Bukharin – to 'the relative stabilization of capitalism' which meant that 'the problem of Bolshevization must be confronted.'³² In addition to the problems of building mass support among the peasantry, organizational work and confronting the challenge of the stabilization of capitalism, Gramsci also adopted from Bukharin in this period a concern for maintaining a balance or 'equilibrium' among the burgeoning party forces. Just as Bukharin argued in Russia that the Soviet State would have to address the concerns of the peasants fairly, so too Gramsci maintained in the Lyons Theses that 'agitation around a programme of immediate demands and support for partial struggles is the only way of reaching the broad masses and mobilizing them against capital' which in turn would make 'the crisis of capitalism more acute' accelerating its fall subjectively...insofar as it shifts the unstable economic equilibrium upon which it bases its power today.'³³ There can be little doubt then that just prior to his imprisonment – largely through the channels of the Comintern - Gramsci's political thought was significantly shaped by Bukharin's analysis of the problems which confronted the communist revolution in mid-1920s Europe. However, it is only when we turn to some of Gramsci's most well-known concepts within his theory of hegemony that we can fully appreciate the extent of the later Bukharin's influence on Gramsci's work.

Part II

Relations of Forces: The Necessity to Transcend Sectarianism

³¹ A. Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings, 1921-26* (London, 1978), 175.

³² Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings, 1921-26*, 293.

³³ Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings, 1921-26*, 370.

It is of course a commonplace among scholars of Gramsci that what sets his theory of hegemony apart from the Marxist ideas of many of his contemporaries was its sophisticated character, typified by an analysis of the battle between capitalism and communism that incorporated a whole series of intermediate strata whose support was crucial in the struggle for hegemony. Bukharin, in fact, in a series of articles in 1925 in which he sought to defend NEP's approach to the peasantry from its critics advanced a similar analysis of the political terrain in Russia,³⁴ and he not only distinguished it from the sectarian attitudes of the Left Opposition, but like Gramsci, related it to the concept of hegemony. The crude economic determinism and class reductionism of the author of the *Saggio Popolare* is signally absent in this work, as Bukharin indeed mocks the Opposition's demands that the Soviet Union proceed directly to a fully planned economy: 'These things' he cautioned, 'will not happen immediately, but will result from a process of gradually squeezing out, overcoming, and reshaping a whole series of intermediate forms.'³⁵ Bukharin in fact analysed the course of Russian history as a shifting relation of forces between bourgeoisie and proletariat in which the battle to win over the peasantry played a crucial part in the Bolshevik success in October 1917.³⁶ Moreover, he made clear that this struggle was continuing in contemporary Russia where the 'ideological domination of the peasantry by the bourgeoisie' was far from surpassed and 'the struggle between the working class and the bourgeoisie for influence over the peasantry is still continuing.'³⁷ NEP had, he argued, created 'a new relationship of forces ...and a new combination of economic relations'³⁸ that would have to be protected and consolidated in the movement towards a socialist society. And in an argument that Gramsci would later take up, Bukharin derided those who adopted 'a shop-centred ideology, which has "nothing to do" with other classes and does not care about the basic problem of proletarian policy, the problem of the worker-peasant bloc and proletarian hegemony within the bloc.'³⁹ In sum, for Bukharin the battle for hegemony required a careful analysis of intermediate strata among the peasantry in order to win them over to the proletarian cause, and an equally important determination to transcend this sectarian mentality among the proletarian forces without which there was little hope of success in the former.

Although Bukharin's deployment of the concept of 'relations of forces' appears to have been limited to the peasantry and the petty bourgeois intelligentsia, there can hardly be any debate about the centrality of this idea in the development of Gramsci's theory of hegemony. In a passage of *Notebook 4* that is regarded as

³⁴ See, in particular, N. Bukharin, 'A New Revelation', 'Concerning the New Economic Policy and our Tasks' and 'The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance' in: *Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism*, ed. R.B. Day (Nottingham, 1982), 151-288. All of these articles first appeared in 1925.

³⁵ Bukharin, 'Concerning the New Economic Policy and our Tasks', 190.

³⁶ Bukharin, 'The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance', 213-226.

³⁷ Bukharin, 'The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance', 224, 228.

³⁸ Bukharin, 'Concerning the New Economic Policy and our Tasks', 194.

³⁹ Bukharin, 'A New Revelation', 181.

a crucial staging-post in his thinking,⁴⁰ the notion of hegemony is actually developed by Gramsci in considering three levels of 'the relations of forces' - the socio-economic, political and military. In two clear echoes of Bukharin's work Gramsci insists that not only is the 'the degree of homogeneity, self-awareness, and organization attained by the various social classes' (Bolshevization) a crucial factor in determining the 'political' relation of forces, but indeed, if a social group is to advance its position it must 'transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class' and take 'the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures'; a phase in which 'the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a "universal" plane...thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups.'⁴¹

Hegemony: Forging and Leading a Mass Alliance

It is in fact this notion of a mass alliance and the manner in which to forge it that lies at the very heart of Gramsci's conception of hegemony, and once again the fundamentals of this idea can be found in the post-Saggio Bukharin. As Cohen points out, it was Bukharin who emerged in Lenin's wake 'as the most convinced and consistent defender of the inviolability of the *smychka*'.⁴² It is not simply, however, that Bukharin's analysis of the 'relations of forces' was time and again related to 'alliances' and 'blocs', it is also the fact that Bukharin analysed bourgeois hegemony in exactly the same terms and thus suggested to Gramsci the more general application of the concept. In a position that Gramsci would later adopt in relation to Italy, Bukharin actually wrote that the worker-peasant bloc had replaced the bourgeois-landlord bloc in Russia, a bloc which 'the bourgeoisie leads' as it 'leans upon the landlords and is supported by them.'⁴³ This element of 'leadership' was to appear again and again in Bukharin's work in the mid-1920s and just as Gramsci would later do, Bukharin made the contrast between 'leadership' and 'domination' insisting that 'The proletariat rules over the bourgeoisie...But the proletariat leads the peasantry, using its concentrated power for this purpose.'⁴⁴ Bukharin, moreover, did not lose sight of the economic foundations of hegemony; a point on which Gramsci would later follow him. Bukharin in fact related it to his wider economic programme of coordinating the industrial and peasant markets and persuading the peasantry to adopt collective methods. He thus argued:

...it is not difficult to understand that in the period when the working class is in power, its political hegemony and political leadership cannot be stable unless it rests upon a basis of economic hegemony. And this economic

⁴⁰ C. Mouffe, 'Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci', in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, ed. C. Mouffe (London, 1979), 178.

⁴¹ A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith. (London, 1971), 181-2.

⁴² Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 146.

⁴³ Bukharin, 'A New Revelation', 164.

⁴⁴ Bukharin, 'A New Revelation', 162.

hegemony can be realized in no way other than by adaptation of industry to the peasant market, taking gradual possession of this market...⁴⁵

While it should be recognised that Bukharin did not employ the concept of hegemony in his work to the same extent as Gramsci, his consistent emphasis on the necessity for the proletariat to 'lead' a mass 'alliance' with the peasantry forming its major mass base was undoubtedly known to Gramsci through the channels of the Comintern, and it forms an important backdrop to Gramsci's own development of his political thought in this area.

It is surely no coincidence, for example, that Gramsci's first major text – 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question' – which deployed the concept of hegemony specifically related it to the central theme of Bukharin's work. Indeed, we know that the peasantry had become a major concern for Gramsci throughout 1925-6, and indeed, that he was working on Bukharin's Comintern directives in this area just before his arrest in Rome in November 1926.⁴⁶ In this important milestone in Gramsci's thinking that owes much to Bukharin he thus defended the actions of the *Ordine Nuovo* group in 1919-20, asserting:

The Turin communists posed concretely the question of the "hegemony of the proletariat": i.e. of the social basis of the proletarian dictatorship and of the workers' State. The proletariat can become the leading [*dirigente*] and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of class alliances which allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State.⁴⁷

Gramsci's main concern here was what Bukharin called the *smycha* and transferring it to the Italian context. Gramsci thus insisted on the need to create in Italy 'a general revolutionary action of the two allied classes, under the leadership of the industrial proletariat.'⁴⁸ Although he would develop this notion of alliance in a much more ideological and historically grounded manner in the *Prison Notebooks*, it is worth pointing out that far from endorsing an abstract and mechanical approach as Gramsci would later claim, Bukharin in the very Comintern theses that Gramsci was reading at the time in some ways set the agenda for this ideological and historical work that forms such a central part of the *Notebooks*. For here Bukharin related the peasant question to 'colonial' and 'national' questions and insisted that 'The most fundamental task to be accomplished by the communist parties is to study the agrarian problem in their own country', reminding them that 'communist parties form a bloc with small peasant parties, and aim at bringing them *under their ideological influence* [my Italics]; they propagate the idea of the necessity of an alliance of workers and

⁴⁵ Bukharin, 'A New Revelation', 175.

⁴⁶ A. Gramsci, *Lettere dal Carcere*, ed. Paolo Spriano, (Torino, 1971).

⁴⁷ A. Gramsci, 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question', in: *Selections from Political Writings, 1921-26*, ed. Q. Hoare (London, 1978), 443.

⁴⁸ Gramsci, 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question', 443.

peasants as the indispensable prerequisite for the victorious struggle of the working people against the exploiters.⁴⁹

In the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci would take up precisely this ideological and historically sensitive agenda, by transforming Bukharin's 'leadership' into 'intellectual and moral leadership' - which is again contrasted with 'domination' - and coming up with the novel principle related specifically to the West that:

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.⁵⁰

Just as the ideological dimension of leadership and alliance was developed significantly, so too was the 'organizational' aspect that was also a central plank of Bukharin's theory. Thus Gramsci never loses sight of the fact that to carry out this ideological transformation of the peasantry and other social groups in order to form a compact alliance an organisational structure is essential. His historically rich analysis of Italian history and the conflict between Moderates and the Action Party in the Risorgimento thus does not fail to ask of the former if it had succeeded in establishing 'the apparatus (mechanism) of their intellectual, moral and political hegemony.' What is more, in a clear echo of Bukharinism, Gramsci is in no doubt that the failure of the Action Party to take the initiative in the Risorgimento lay in their inability to devise 'an organic programme of government which would reflect the essential demands of the popular masses, and in the first place of the peasantry' which would have to be "organized" according to a plan.⁵¹

Equilibrium: Compromise and Mutual Stable Development

It was obvious then that for Gramsci the Party's organized plan or programme would have to be based on a willingness to *compromise* or balance its interests with the other anti-capitalist forces, and indeed, a belief that all of their demands and interests could be developed in a mutually beneficial manner. This faith in the advantages of compromise and *mutual stable development* of course lay right at the heart of Bukharin's conception of equilibrium. His disputes with the Left Opposition in Russia were in fact fought precisely on this terrain as he condemned Preobrazhensky's 'corporatism' exemplified in his willingness to exploit the peasantry, and Trotsky who he believed wished to use the state apparatus to launch 'a third phase' revolutionary assault on the 'Nepmen' and the

⁴⁹ N. Bukharin, 'Extracts from the Theses of the Fifth ECCI Plenum on the Peasant Question', in *The Communist International 1919-1943 Documents: Vol. II*, ed. J. Degras (London, 1960), 201-4.

⁵⁰ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 57-8.

⁵¹ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 61.

'petty-bourgeoisie'⁵² Bukharin, by contrast, insisted that the compromise with the peasantry and the commitment of the Soviet State to address their demands was essential. 'Accumulation in socialist industry cannot occur for long without accumulation in the peasant economy' was his consistent refrain in the mid-1920s, and he criticized the Left Opposition for failing to recognise the *interdependence* between the different economic sectors, and especially the rural and urban sectors which were "a single organism."⁵³ In these conditions 'stability' and 'proportionality' would have to be maintained in the growth of industry and agriculture and he accused the Left of advocating a policy that would result in 'systematically breaking socially necessary proportions.'⁵⁴

Gramsci would take up these Bukharinist themes of compromise and mutual stable development in the *Prison Notebooks* in particular, and give them a much greater political and ideological inflection. Although he did not always associate them with equilibrium theory, his endorsement of compromise and mutually beneficial balanced development were consistently related to critiques of the Left - in Italy and in Russia - and its faith in fatalistic economic laws and the salutary power of the central state apparatus in economic and political affairs. While the early Gramsci shunned *compromise* and limited its application to purely tactical situations, by the *Prison Notebooks* it had become a central assumption of his theory of hegemony. In one of his most celebrated quotes from these writings the Bukharinist emphasis on compromise and balance is thus particularly evident:

Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed - in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind.

Although Gramsci would go on here to warn that such 'sacrifice and compromise cannot touch the essential',⁵⁵ like Bukharin he would go on to condemn 'intransigent theories' for their 'rigid aversion' to 'compromises'. He argued that 'this aversion on principle to compromise is closely linked to economism' and the 'belief in a predetermined teleology', as well as a predisposition to 'rely blindly and indiscriminately on the regulatory properties of armed conflict.'⁵⁶ What is more, Gramsci followed the logic of Bukharin's theory of equilibrium by endorsing a strategy that served the mutual development of all the parties in the alliance and especially the peasantry. He thus eulogized the Jacobins who not only served the 'immediate needs and aspirations of the ...French bourgeoisie' but also represented the revolutionary movement as a whole, as an integral historical

⁵² Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 32.

⁵³ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 182.

⁵⁴ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 182.

⁵⁵ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 161.

⁵⁶ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 167-8.

development'.⁵⁷ Indeed, in another important passage of the *Notebooks* Gramsci again related this mutual and stable development to Bukharin's concept of equilibrium and his distaste for 'corporatist' solutions, maintaining that:

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. In other words, the dominant group is co-ordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups, and the life of the State is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups - equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point, i.e. stopping short of narrowly corporate economic interest.⁵⁸

But it was above all the new ideological nature of these compromises that set Gramsci's work apart from other Marxists of his day, even if there is good reason to believe that Bukharin too played a considerable role in bringing Gramsci to an understanding of the crucial role that ideological struggle played in revolutionary success.

Cultural Revolution-Ideological Struggle: Winning the Consent of the Masses

While Bukharin is frequently accused by Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks* of reducing ideology in the *Saggio Popolare* to a mechanically evolving superstructure that was 'determined' by the relations of production,⁵⁹ this approach bears little resemblance to how Bukharin's thinking on ideology had actually developed throughout the 1920s. Indeed, Gramsci was well aware of Bukharin's thought in this area because it suffused the literature of the Comintern during Bukharin's tenure of leadership in 1925-26 and especially the directives on Bolshevization. This was the period in which Bukharin called for the Russian and its international sister parties to launch a 'cultural revolution' to transform the consciousness of the popular masses - and especially the peasantry - in a great campaign of persuasion that would gain their consent in a pedagogical process.⁶⁰ While Lenin had in some respects set this agenda in his last writings⁶¹ - which Bukharin employed as vital political support - Bukharin in particular developed the idea of cultural revolution and *ideological* struggle in a manner which placed great emphasis on the organizational work that would be required in order to achieve it, and the *transformative* potential that this *educational* campaign

⁵⁷ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 78.

⁵⁸ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 182.

⁵⁹ See, in particular, *Notebook 11* in A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere: Vol II*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Torino, 2007), 1363-1509.

⁶⁰ Biggart, 'Bukharin's Theory of Cultural Revolution'.

⁶¹ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 13; P. Ferdinand, 'Bukharin and the New Economic Policy' in: *The Ideas of Nikolai Bukharin*, ed. A.Kemp-Welch (Oxford, 1992), 49.

possessed in relation to the masses who were not to be simply exploited in an instrumental manner but actually integrated into the socialist bloc as equal partners.

The theses on Bolshevization developed under Bukharin's stewardship thus strongly endorsed the launch of an 'agitprop' department by each European communist party that would set out to win over the masses from capitalist and especially social-democratic ideology. Its key objectives were to carry out 'agitation work among the masses', creating 'party schools' and 'a genuinely popular press' which would only be successful if the parties developed new cadres who 'must live and work among the masses in the factory, in the shop or mine.'⁶² This switch to ideological and cultural struggle was not only a reflection of the need for a change of strategy in the period of 'relative stabilization' in the West, but also, the belief that Bukharin had come to hold in their long-term effectiveness in the conditions of Soviet Russia where he constantly opposed any initiative by the Left to mount a second 'frontal assault' declaring in 1925 that 'It is now necessary to outgrow command-administrative methods. We need a decisive, complete, and unconditional switch to methods of persuasion.'⁶³ It was, however, the educational and transformative tenure of Bukharin's faith in ideological struggle that marked a radical break with many of his fellow-communist travelers, and puts paid to the myth that all Bolshevik leaders simply saw the peasantry and masses as useful 'exploitable' and expendable 'allies.' For Bukharin argued in one of his most important texts of the period that:

The real task of the working class is to reform the broad popular strata, the peasantry in particular. Unwaveringly approaching this objective, and drawing the rest of society in its wake, the proletariat must re-educate the peasantry in a socialist manner, constantly elevating it and pulling it upward to the same material, economic, and cultural-political level as that of the leading strata of the proletarian population. As broad strata of the peasantry are reformed and re-educated, they will increasingly become comparable with the proletariat, merge with it, and be transformed into equal members of socialist society.⁶⁴

It was this radical strain in Bukharin's thought that Gramsci would now take up in the *Prison Notebooks*.

The centrality which Gramsci accorded to ideological struggle and the manufacture of consent among the masses in his immediate pre-prison writings and especially in the development of his theory of hegemony in the *Prison Notebooks* has of course long been recognised. However, in the attempt to disassociate Gramsci from 'suspect' theorists of the Comintern it seems to me at

⁶² 'Extracts from the Theses on the Bolshevization of Communist Parties adopted at the Fifth ECCI Plenum', in ed. J. Degras, *The Communist International, 1919-1943, Vol II* (London, 1960), 188-200.

⁶³ Bukharin, 'The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance', 273.

⁶⁴ Bukharin, 'The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance', 265-6.

least that some of the key aspects of that theory have been somewhat overlooked since their relationship with the Comintern and Bukharin's thought in particular are especially striking. The two dimensions of Bukharin's cultural revolution explored above – organisation work and the education of consent – stand out above all.

Thus Gramsci's work on intellectuals in the *Notebooks* is framed within the Bukharinist theme that without a massive and meticulous organisational drive in the party (Bolshevization) there was little hope of achieving the crucial ideological transformation among the masses that both Gramsci and Bukharin envisaged. Indeed, Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks* 'actually defines the organic intellectuals in terms of organisational activity and technical specialisation'.⁶⁵ It is here of course where Gramsci's taste for the organizational principles of Taylorism is especially evident, as he now proposes in a move that was obviously inspired by Bukharin's taste for 'technical' organization that the Party (i.e. the revolutionary party) must develop different cadres of intellectuals *specialized* to take over the tasks of the capitalist in all three spheres of production, politics and civil society. Gramsci, in fact, in elaborating his theory of the Party intellectuals proposes a functional division of labour in line with these categories, with a cadre of economic intellectuals responsible for 'organizing the social hegemony of a group,' another for organizing the 'domination of the state' and yet another responsible for organizing 'the consent that comes from the prestige attached to the function in the world of production.'⁶⁶ This meticulous concern for 'organising' hegemony undoubtedly owes much to Bukharin's programme of Bolshevization, although it has been barely noted in the literature on Gramsci to date, and especially in relation to his work on the intellectuals.

Finally, there is the crucial *educational* dimension that Gramsci attributes to the manufacture of consent which also owes much to Bukharin. It is notable, in particular, that even those authors who point to Gramsci's immediate pre-prison interest in forming a 'party school' seem reluctant to acknowledge that this was in fact part of a Comintern strategy devised by Bukharin who in this very period (1925-6) was in the process of creating his own school of cultural revolution in Moscow.⁶⁷ It is not surprising in this light, then, that Gramsci should argue in the *Prison Notebooks* of the 'cultural State' that 'every State is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces.'⁶⁸ For Gramsci, indeed, this 'cultural battle to transform the popular "mentality"' was an integral part of the struggle for hegemony which was always 'educational'⁶⁹ since a hegemonic state or party not

⁶⁵ A. Showstack Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics*, (London, 1988), 139.

⁶⁶ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks: Vol. II*, pp.200-201.

⁶⁷ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 217.

⁶⁸ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 258.

⁶⁹ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 348-50.

only requests consent 'but it also "educates" this consent.'⁷⁰ What is more, Gramsci like Bukharin realized that this cultural battle would have to go hand in hand with a real determination to meet the economic demands of the masses, arguing:

Intellectual and moral reform has to be linked with a programme of economic reform - indeed the programme of economic reform is precisely the concrete form in which every intellectual and moral reform presents itself.⁷¹

While there is no doubt that Gramsci developed these ideas beyond Bukharin, it should nonetheless be acknowledged that Bukharin contributed enormously to their germination and elaboration that not neither Gramsci nor scholars of Gramsci have fully acknowledged to this day.

Conclusion: The Attack on Bukharin in the Quaderni

This lack of interest in a Bukharinist dimension to Gramsci's theory of hegemony is no doubt related to the sustained attack which Gramsci mounted on Bukharin's *Saggio Popolare* in the *Prison Notebooks*. How, after all, could it be argued that Bukharin had any influence on Gramsci's mature thought when Gramsci makes clear that hegemony is to be understood as the antithesis of the kind of economism that he associated with Bukharin's thought? As I have indicated at the beginning of this paper, however, the latter interpretation of Bukharin's thought can only be sustained by adopting an ahistorical and selective reading of his work that ignores the development of his ideas throughout the 1920s. Yet this is precisely the picture of Bukharin that Gramsci himself has bequeathed to Gramscian studies today. There can, I believe, only be one conceivable reason for this selective and unwarranted treatment of Bukharin in the *Prison Notebooks*.

Gramsci, we know, had become alienated from the course set by international communism by the time he began to write the *Notebooks* in 1929-30. Reports by prisoners such as Athos Lisa make clear that he did not support the so-called 'Left turn' that the Comintern under Stalin had launched in 1928-29 which envisaged a new era of capitalist crisis and a revolutionary onslaught by the proletariat in a war of 'class against class' to the bitter end. These tactics were of course absurd in Italy where in the conditions of the late 1920s fascism had tightened its reign on power and would easily repel and obliterate the remaining residues of Italian communism if they attempted any such assault on the Italian State with their meagre resources. While history has now left us with no doubt that Stalin led this change of direction, it was reasonable for Gramsci to assume that Bukharin was principally responsible, since it was in his name that it began at the Sixth Congress in 1928. At that Congress Bukharin finally succumbed to

⁷⁰ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 259.

⁷¹ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 133.

Stalinist demands for a partial change of direction from United Front tactics which were later reinterpreted by Stalin and his supporters to embark on a completely new Comintern programme. What is more, like many of his contemporaries, Gramsci appears to have underestimated Stalin considerably, assuming that Bukharin was the real leader in both Russian and Comintern affairs given the latter's much higher profile in both political and intellectual circles. This misunderstanding was of course reinforced by the absence of any formal break between Bukharin and Stalin after his demise within the Party, not to mention Gramsci's lack of information about affairs in Russia due to his incarceration. In these conditions it appears likely that Gramsci found his explanation for the change of Comintern direction in the notion that Bukharin had undergone a reversion to his earlier position at the beginning of the 1920s expounded to some extent in his most famous work of the period: the *Saggio Popolare*. While Gramsci may well be forgiven for entertaining such a misunderstanding given his predicament, contemporary scholars of Gramsci can hardly claim a similar defence. This paper, it is hoped, will give some impetus to opening the Bukharin-Gramsci relationship to a closer analysis, as it has for too long remained something of an unexplored area in the field of Gramscian studies.