

convinced that the primitive is a metaphor for the more advanced situation. The reversal at the end is breath-taking.

In reading such experimental work there is the temptation to overdo the concentration on influences. In the case of Cortázar it is interesting and valid to consider them. While a number of European influences are clearly indicated, it is two compatriot authors who strike this reader as most important to Cortázar's growth: the classic Machado de Assis and, most significantly, the great modernist Jorge Luis Borges. Cortázar has lived and worked in Paris since 1951. He writes with all the sophistication of an expatriate. And, like Borges, he often combines elements of the essay with the fictional elements of his stories. Here is the author commenting on the reaction of a character to the unaccustomed availability of luxuries:

(For the files: note, following Ortega, the contact between the common man and technology. Exactly where one would imagine a cultural shock, there is, on the contrary, a violent assimilation and enjoyment of the progress. Mauro talks about refrigeration units... with the self-sufficiency of the Buenos Aires inhabitant who firmly believes he has everything coming to him.)

He shares with Borges, also, a pervading sense of the mysteriousness of natural objects and banal daily life. Cortázar writes with all the ambiguity, irony

and attention to objects, common to Gunter Grass, Butor, Robbe-Grillet: the most *nouveau* of the *nouveau*. The difference is that Cortázar, in these stories, knows precisely when to stop. Brevity, in the land of advanced writing attains to a kind of morality. Not that serious work must necessarily be short; but it must have those virtues common to briefer works: careful selection of detail, the rightness of the particular form, and the compelling sense that what has been left out is playing an important part in the final work of art.

These factors are, to some extent, absent in *Hopscotch*. Deliberately, judging from some remarks the author made in a recent interview. "The novel," he states, "is like a chain of mountains. It can go on and on." But the concept of the novel as a great catchall, from which the reader takes what he wishes, is old-fashioned and no longer pertinent. The use of indeterminacy and shuffling of sequence (as in *Hopscotch*) is simply the catchall notion dressed up in fancy clothes.

In any case the present volume contains enough rewards for the most difficult and suspicious of readers in search of demanding pleasures and dark delights. The translation, by Paul Blackburn, is properly colloquial, elegant and eloquent, and is flavored with just enough touches of Spanish and French phrases to spice the narrative. At this point in the development of a freer form for prose writing, Cortázar is indispensable.

Introduction to Gramsci

ANTONIO GRAMSCI AND THE ORIGINS OF ITALIAN COMMUNISM.
By John M. Cammett. Stanford University Press, 306 pp. \$8.50

ERIC HOBSBAWM

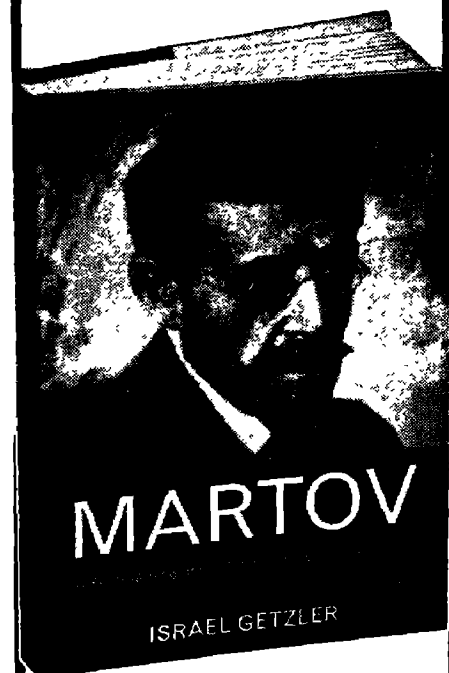
Mr. Hobsbawm is the author of *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (World), *Primitive Rebels* (Praeger) and *Labouring Men* (Basic Books).

Antonio Gramsci's reputation outside Italy is now quite considerable. It has increased sharply over the past ten years, but most of it still rests on hearsay. Until recently, practically all that was available in English was an inadequate volume of selections of Gramsci's work, four or five articles of uneven quality, and a few observations by the livelier historians of ideas such as Lichtheim and Stuart Hughes. This even though Gramsci was one of the most original Marxist thinkers of this century, the inspirer and leader of the Italian Communist Party, and a man

who is accepted in his own country as a major figure in Italian culture, apart from politics. John Cammett's book is the first full-scale treatment of him published in our language. It is a fairly short work—the text amounts to barely more than 220 pages—and the author does not claim that it exhausts the subject. Still, it provides us with an excellent introduction to the man and his achievement, and this is more than any other work in English has so far done.

In spite of Gramsci's importance in the politics of his country, his chief significance is as a theorist and teacher. This is not to make a sharp distinction between theory and practice. Gramsci's thought was almost as completely dominated by the practical tasks of transforming society as Lenin's, and the remarkable successes of the Italian Communist Party have been largely due to his ideas. But he had neither the temperament nor some of the gifts of the political operator, which his fellow

MARTOV



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student and successor Palmiro Togliatti so obviously possessed, and even if his career as a politician had not ended in 1926 (he died shortly after his release from jail eleven years later) he would probably not be remembered as an outstanding practical strategist and tactician.

Thus, he lives mainly through his writings, in the *Ordine Nuovo* of Turin (which he edited), in the “Lyons theses” which laid the foundations for subsequent Communist policy in Italy and, above all, in the almost 3,000 pages of the *Prison Notebooks* which he wrote, under fascism and the multiple handicaps of permanent illness, prison brutality and chicanery, restricted reading and censorship, in the last ten years of his life. Cammett is undoubtedly right in thinking that these “may eventually be recognized as one of the masterpieces of twentieth-century political thought.”

Gramsci's writings are extremely Italian, and to the extent that most of us are unfamiliar with his intellectual context—for instance with the role played during his lifetime by the philosopher Croce—they are not easily accessible to foreigners, though for the same reason they make an immediate and vivid appeal to Italian intellectuals of all political persuasions.

Gramsci belonged to that international generation of revolutionaries who rebelled against the passive opportunism of the pre-1914 social-democratic movements, and the extreme determinist and evolutionist version of Marxism with which writers like Kautsky disguised this passivity. At the same time—and perhaps because they recognized the absorption of these elements in Kautskyism—he belonged to those who rejected the positivist commonplaces of late 19th-century thought. Politically, Gramsci belongs with Lenin (whose views he, almost alone in Italy, developed in 1917); with Luxemburg and what Lichtheim has called the “central-European left”, and insofar as they also rejected social-democracy, with the syndicalist rebels, though he rejected anarchism and “spontaneity” (He was, however, notably kinder to Sorel than most Marxists.) Ideologically he was, at any rate initially, very much more critical of the public corpus of Marx's writings than, say, the Russian Left. He shared with many of the contemporary anti-social-democratic Left a dislike of determinism and a taste for Hegel, but it may be argued—it has lately been so argued by Althusser and others—that his historicism, voluntarism and philosophical idealism went beyond what most Marxists would find acceptable, or at least that he never entirely reconciled this original bias with the mature reflections of the *Prison Notebooks*.

FOREIGN POLICY

1. I see a stomach without eyes, something
that travels along the ground eating,
glancing up, occasionally,
to look at the light.
2. It is a shovel without a handle,
throwing up dirt steadily,
the blade returning, doing well now,
almost down to the grave.

ROBERT BLY

Gramsci's thought undoubtedly became Marxist, but his relative independence from the received text of Marx and Engels allowed him to explore freely several aspects not normally dealt with at length in the Marxist writings of his time, notably in the field of culture and political theory. His case is particularly relevant to those who think of the historic development of Marxism as essentially the elaboration or extrapolation of classical texts, for it demonstrates that this is not in fact the way the major Marxist thinkers operated. Even those who find this immensely original thinker most congenial, should be prepared to exercise their critical faculty on him. It is one of the merits of the Italian Communist Party that it has never resisted such critical analysis of its leading theorist.

Gramsci also belonged to a country which was both industrialized and backward, economically independent and colonial. He himself was a Sardinian—and there are few more impoverished and backward areas in Europe—but his experience in Turin, the Italian Detroit, also gave him an insight into the problems of a fully industrialized society. Gramsci's background allowed, and indeed obliged, him to see revolution not simply in terms of the proletariat, but of working-class predominance within a much wider movement, in fact one of national liberation and rebirth. Piero Gobetti, the brilliant boy who inspired so much of Italian liberal anti-fascism, saw the *Ordine Nuovo* (with which he cooperated) as a movement capable of regenerating Italian life through the agency of the working class; and this is very much what the Communist-centered resistance movement actually was to achieve after 1943.

Such an insistence on the broad character of working-class leadership or "hegemony," to use the term central to his analysis, meant more than the mere assertion of the primary importance of the peasantry and the role of intellectuals as a special social group, though Gramsci analyzed both with remarkable acuteness. Unlike most other Marxists, Gramsci's political theory consistently operates not only in terms of the "state" but of "civil society," that is, the sum total of nongovernment-

al institutional and private manifestations of society, of its culture and moral climate. A socio-economic system was not merely an economic base maintained by the superstructure of the ruling-class government and coercion but also implied the "hegemonic" predominance of one social group operating through "civil society," or the element of consent that other classes gave to it. The task of the labor movement, especially in Western countries, was to make the proletariat a "hegemonic" class even before it seized power; and indeed in such countries its victory was improbable unless it established such hegemony, and won acceptance as a potential dominant class.

Politically, the most interesting aspect of this analysis is that it provides an answer to the prize question of all revolutionary movements, namely what to do when a seizure of power is not in prospect (or after it has succeeded or failed). At such times, Gram-

sci argued, a "war of position" must necessarily succeed a "war of maneuver," that is, the struggle for hegemony must supplement or replace the struggle for power. (Incidentally, the Gramscian analysis also appears to offer the prospect of a nontotalitarian communism, without retreating into the dream world of anarcho-syndicalism or utopia.)

Theoretically, his analysis led him into a variety of remarkable insights into the way in which political societies operate, the function of culture and intellectuals within them, and the development of his own nation. In both theory and practice it provided the Italian Communist Party with an unusually flexible approach to its political tasks: it is, after all, the party which succeeded both in organizing the most successful partisan war in Western Europe and in functioning most effectively under conditions of capitalist prosperity. Not the least surprising thing about it is that it maintained its "Gramscianism" intact through the most monolithic and sectarian periods of Stalinism. However, this is probably due less to Gramsci himself than to the exceptional political gifts of his friend Togliatti.

Cammett's book will surely attract many radicals in the United States and Britain to this impressive and stimulating thinker. At present they will still have to learn Italian to read most of his work. Fortunately a larger selection of it is being translated now. It is to be hoped that it will soon be available.

A Signal Danger

STORY OF AN ACCUSATION. By Terence Reese. Simon & Schuster. 246 pp. \$5.95. Paper \$1.95.

DAVID CORT

Mr. Cort's most recent book is *The Glossy Rats* (Grosset & Dunlap).

Bridge is a game of signals, legally limited to signals that can be understood by all the players. Tournament bridge is also a deadly competition for fame and riches, especially for American players. Thus an invisible, tabooed magnetic pull might be assumed, to invent additional secret signals, and break the game wide open. One elbow on the table might signal two good suits of the same color; the other elbow something else; a throat-clearing something else; all timed during the bidding. The check on this is that the play exposes all the cards in due course. When the same kind of hand is twice accompanied by the same secret signal, the fun is over.

And so two British champions, Ter-

ence Reese and Boris Schapiro, were accused by their American opponents, B. J. Becker and Dorothy Hayden, of holding their cards in such a manner that the number of fingers outside corresponded to the number of cards in the heart suit—a crude, unimaginative, limited and detectable stratagem for two such highly ingenious gentlemen. Two British officials, Swmer and Butler, hastily accepted the slander. In case your newspaper did not recognize the sinister international potentials of this event, it took place at the international matches in Buenos Aires in 1965 among Italy (the habitual champions), Britain, the U.S. and Argentina. Now Terence Reese tells it all, complete with bridge hands, bidding, suspicions and rebuttals.

What is chiefly revealed by the episode and by this book is the rankling cattiness that suffuses championship bridge. To an indifferent outsider the Americans look especially smug, silly and small time, possibly because they

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