

acquires a sense of social responsibility, and becomes a citizen who is active in deciding the destiny of his country. Power and awareness are passed on, through the agency of this hierarchy, from one person to many: society is such as has never before appeared in history.

This is the *élan vital* of the new Russian history. In what way is it utopian? Where is the pre-established plan that people want to bring into operation, even against the grain of economic and political conditions? The Russian revolution is the triumph of freedom; its organization is based on spontaneity, not on the dictates of a 'hero' who imposes himself through violence. It is a continuous and systematic elevation of a people, following the lines of a hierarchy, and creating for itself one by one the organs that the new social life demands.

But is it then not socialism? ... No, it is not socialism in the ridiculous sense that these philistines with their grandiose blueprints give the word. It is a human society developing under the leadership of the proletariat. Once the majority of the proletariat is organized, social life will be richer in socialist content than it is at present and the process of socialization will be continually intensified and perfected. Socialism is not established on a particular day – it is a continuous process, a never-ending development towards a realm of freedom that is organized and controlled by the majority of the citizens, the proletariat.

Signed A. G., *Avanti!*, 25 July 1918  
SPWI, 48-55

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## II WORKING-CLASS EDUCATION AND CULTURE

### Introduction

Questions of education and culture were always of central importance to Gramsci. His early educational thinking revolves around the problem of how working-class people can become intellectually autonomous. If this can be achieved they can lead their own movement without having to delegate decision-making to 'career intellectuals'. They can then be capable of acting as a ruling class.

Educational opportunity and provision for working-class and peasant children, despite some progressive reforms in the Giolitti period, remained woefully inadequate in Italy during the early years of the century. The state school system was badly under-resourced. Teachers were poorly paid and demoralized. Compulsory schooling ended at the age of nine. Post-primary education since the 1859 Casati Act had been divided into three main streams: *ginnasio* and *liceo* (akin to the American junior high and high school), *scuola tecnica* or *professionale* (for the lower professions and white-collar jobs) and *scuola normale* (where primary teachers were trained). The upper tiers (*liceo* and university) received a disproportionate amount of the funding and the system as a whole discriminated against children from the working class. In addition illiteracy rates in Italy were among the highest in Europe, rising steeply as one moved from the larger towns to rural areas and from north to south. The 1911 census recorded illiteracy rates for people over the age of six as 11 per cent in Piedmont, 13 per cent in Lombardy, 37 per cent in Tuscany, 58 per cent in Sardinia, and 70 per cent in Calabria.

The Italian labour movement, and notably the reformist wing of the PSI, had responded to this situation since the 1890s by making education a central plank of its programme. The Socialists set up their own evening and day schools for both adults and children, and campaigned in and outside parliament for the eradication of illiteracy and for the introduction of compulsory, free, lay

education – the last of these in order to check the educational influence of the Catholic Church. By and large, however, and despite progressive intentions, the reformists' conception of socialist education reproduced a bourgeois-paternalistic model of teaching as the dissemination of a body of knowledge to the unenlightened masses and the 'elevation' of this mass to 'culture'. In many cases, moreover, the content of what was taught was either a simplified socialist propaganda, a literature of moral and political edification, or it was identical to the traditional curriculum.

Gramsci's approach is in many ways more radical. He starts from the assumption that 'everybody is already cultured' but in a primordial and undisciplined way (SCW, p. 25). He begins, in other words, not from the point of view of the teacher but from that of the learner, and he emphasizes that the learning process is a movement towards self-knowledge, self-mastery and thus liberation. Education is not a matter of handing out 'encyclopaedic knowledge' but of developing and disciplining the awareness which the learner already possesses. Gramsci consequently criticizes the Popular Universities (often PSI-sponsored, similar to university extension in Britain and the *universités populaires* in France) for dispensing 'bits of knowledge' without taking account of the different needs and background of a working-class public. He also repeatedly criticizes as paternalistic the reduction of socialist ideas into a simple language and argues that complex ideas cannot be vulgarized without falsifying their meaning: workers active in a political movement have to make the effort necessary to grasp them (see for instance 'Culture and Class Struggle' in SCW, pp. 31-4). In the political party, education plays a central role for Gramsci because through it working-class members can develop a critical understanding of their own situation and of the revolutionary task and so liberate themselves from their dependence on an upper stratum of intellectuals who tend to deflect their class demands towards reformist solutions.

Two further themes represented here indicate the direction of Gramsci's thinking on education and culture at this time. The first is his twin vindication of a kind of school which can form a modern proletariat ('Schools of Labour') and of a school able to provide workers with an education in the humanities rather than just vocational training ('Men or Machines?'). These two positions,

which appear to be at odds with one another, are perhaps reconciled in his vision of a 'new educational tradition' emerging in post-revolutionary Russia, one in which the working class fuses 'manual labour and intellectual labour' (see 'Questions of Culture'). A 'common school' in which a broad general education is offered prior to specialization was always central to Gramsci's conception. It is these ideas which he will later expand in 'Americanism and Fordism' and in the prison notes on education (see Sections IX and X below) when he talks of the need to found 'new relations between intellectual and industrial work' and to create 'a psycho-physical nexus of a new type'.

The second theme is that of revolutionary culture. Writing in 1921, Gramsci maintains that the Italian avant-garde movement Futurism is revolutionary because of its 'productivism' and its iconoclastic hostility to the mummified traditions of bourgeois art ('Marinetti the Revolutionary?'). Although Gramsci himself was later to modify this judgement quite radically (compare 'A Letter to Trotsky on Futurism' in SCW, pp. 52-4), the 1921 article remains striking for its contrast with contemporary conceptions of socialist culture as edification or as a proletarian 'inheritance' of bourgeois culture and it reveals Gramsci's affinity with pro-avant-garde Soviet positions of the time.

Certain aspects of Gramsci's educational outlook – notably his recurrent emphasis on discipline, his defence of the traditional curriculum, his insistence on the virtues of 'sweating at' grammar and logic in order to learn to think critically – have been described as 'conservative' and have been the object of criticism from several quarters. There is certainly some justification in this view. Gramsci's educational writings do constitute a problematic legacy for the left. But their conservative aspects need to be understood both in relation to the culture of Gramsci's time and to his own experience as a 'scholarship boy' from Sardinia. They also need to be weighed against the radical democratic and liberatory aspects which are present in his educational thinking as a whole and which emerge clearly in these early pieces.

## 1 Socialism and Culture

A short time ago an article by Enrico Leone came to our attention, where in that nebulous and convoluted style he all too often indulges in he repeated a few commonplaces on culture and intellectualism in relation to the proletariat, opposing to them *practice* and the *historical fact* that the working class is building its future with its own hands.<sup>1</sup> We believe it would not be unproductive to return to this theme, one which has been aired before in *Il Grido [del Popolo]* and which in the youth federation's *Avanguardia* received a more rigidly doctrinal treatment in the polemic between Bordiga from Naples and our own Tasca.<sup>2</sup>

Let us recall two passages. The first comes from a German Romantic, Novalis (who lived from 1772 to 1801), and says: 'The supreme problem of culture is that of gaining possession of one's transcendental self, of being at one and the same time the self of oneself. Thus it should not surprise us that there is an absence of feeling or complete understanding of others. Lacking a perfect comprehension of ourselves, we can never really hope to know others.'

The other, which we summarize, is from Giambattista Vico, who (in the 'First Corollary concerning the speech in poetic characters of the first nations' in his *Scienza Nuova*) gives a political interpretation of the famous dictum of Solon which Socrates subsequently made his own in relation to philosophy: 'Know thyself'. Vico maintains that in this dictum Solon wished to admonish the plebeians, who believed themselves to be of *bestial origin* and the nobility to be of *divine origin*, to reflect on themselves and see that they had the *same human nature as the nobles* and hence should claim to be *their equals in civil law*. Vico then points to this consciousness of human equality between plebeians and nobles as the basis and historical reason for the rise of the democratic republics of antiquity.

We have not chosen these two fragments entirely at random. In them we believe the writers touch upon, though admittedly in a vaguely expressed and defined manner, the limits and principles governing the correct comprehension of the concept of culture even in relation to socialism.

We need to free ourselves from the habit of seeing culture as encyclopaedic knowledge, and men as mere receptacles to be

stuffed full of empirical data and a mass of unconnected raw facts, which have to be filed in the brain as in the columns of a dictionary, enabling their owner to respond to the various stimuli from the outside world. This form of culture really is harmful, particularly for the proletariat. It serves only to create maladjusted people, people who believe they are superior to the rest of humanity because they have memorized a certain number of facts and dates and who rattle them off at every opportunity, so turning them almost into a barrier between themselves and others. It serves to create the kind of weak and colourless intellectualism that Romain Rolland has flayed so mercilessly, which has given birth to a mass of pretentious babblers who have a more damaging effect on social life than tuberculosis or syphilis germs have on the beauty and physical health of the body. The young student who knows a little Latin and history, the young lawyer who has been successful in wringing a scrap of paper called a degree out of the laziness and lackadaisical attitude of his professors – they end up seeing themselves as different from and superior to even the best skilled workman, who fulfils a precise and indispensable task in life and is a hundred times more valuable in his activity than they are in theirs. But this is not culture, but pedantry, not intelligence, but intellect, and it is absolutely right to react against it.

Culture is something quite different. It is organization, discipline of one's inner self, a coming to terms with one's own personality; it is the attainment of a higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one's own historical value, one's own function in life, one's own rights and obligations. But none of this can come about through spontaneous evolution, through a series of actions and reactions which are independent of one's own will – as is the case in the animal and vegetable kingdoms where every unit is selected and specifies its own organs unconsciously, through a fatalistic law of things. Above all, man is mind, i.e. he is a product of history, not nature. Otherwise how could one explain the fact, given that there have always been exploiters and exploited, creators of wealth and its selfish consumers, that socialism has not yet come into being? The fact is that only by degrees, one stage at a time, has humanity acquired consciousness of its own value and won for itself the right to throw off the patterns of organization imposed on it by minorities at a previous period in history. And this consciousness was formed not

under the brutal goad of physiological necessity, but as a result of intelligent reflection, at first by just a few people and later by a whole class, on why certain conditions exist and how best to convert the facts of vassalage into the signals of rebellion and social reconstruction. This means that every revolution has been preceded by an intense labour of criticism, by the diffusion of culture and the spread of ideas amongst masses of men who are at first resistant, and think only of solving their own immediate economic and political problems for themselves, who have no ties of solidarity with others in the same condition. The latest example, the closest to us and hence least foreign to our own time, is that of the French Revolution. The preceding cultural period, called the Enlightenment, which has been so misrepresented by the facile critics of theoretical reason, was not in any way or at least was not entirely a flutter of superficial encyclopaedic intellectuals discoursing on anything and everything with equal imperturbability, believing themselves to be men of their time only if they had read the *Encyclopédie* of D'Alembert and Diderot; in short it was not solely a phenomenon of pedantic and arid intellectualism, the like of which we see before our eyes today, exhibited most fully in the Popular Universities of the lowest order. The Enlightenment was a magnificent revolution in itself and, as De Sanctis acutely notes in his *History of Italian Literature*, it gave all Europe a bourgeois spiritual International in the form of a unified consciousness, one which was sensitive to all the woes and misfortunes of the common people and which was the best possible preparation for the bloody revolt that followed in France.

In Italy, France and Germany, the same topics, the same institutions and same principles were being discussed. Each new comedy by Voltaire, each new pamphlet moved like a spark along the lines that were already stretched between state and state, between region and region, and found the same supporters and the same opponents everywhere and every time. The bayonets of Napoleon's armies found their road already smoothed by an invisible army of books and pamphlets that had swarmed out of Paris from the first half of the eighteenth century and had prepared both men and institutions for the necessary renewal. Later, after the French events had welded a unified consciousness, a demonstration in Paris was enough to provoke similar disturbances in Milan, Vienna and the smaller centres. All this seems

natural and spontaneous to superficial observers, yet it would be incomprehensible if we were not aware of the cultural factors that helped to create a state of mental preparedness for those explosions in the name of what was seen as a common cause.

The same phenomenon is being repeated today in the case of socialism. It was through a critique of capitalist civilization that the unified consciousness of the proletariat was or is still being formed, and a critique implies culture, not simply a spontaneous and naturalistic evolution. A critique implies precisely the self-consciousness that Novalis considered to be the purpose of culture. Consciousness of a self which is opposed to others, which is differentiated and, once having set itself a goal, can judge facts and events other than in themselves or for themselves but also in so far as they tend to drive history forward or backward. To know oneself means to be oneself, to be master of oneself, to distinguish oneself, to free oneself from a state of chaos, to exist as an element of order – but of one's own order and one's own discipline in striving for an ideal. And we cannot be successful in this unless we also know others, their history, the successive efforts they have made to be what they are, to create the civilization they have created and which we seek to replace with our own. In other words, we must form some idea of nature and its laws in order to come to know the laws governing the mind. And we must learn all this without losing sight of the ultimate aim: to know oneself better through others and to know others better through oneself.

If it is true that universal history is a chain made up of the efforts man has exerted to free himself from privilege, prejudice and idolatry, then it is hard to understand why the proletariat, which seeks to add another link to that chain, should not know how and why and by whom it has been preceded, or what advantage it might derive from this knowledge.

Signed Alfa Gamma, *Il Grido del Popolo*,  
29 January 1916. SPWI, 10-13

## 2 Schools of Labour

Returning to his professorial chair at the Sorbonne after the war of 1870, Gaston Paris, with that liberty of spirit characteristic of sovereign minds, wove a magnificent eulogy of German

universities, which had moulded the character and the energy of the new Germany, and he proposed to his pupils and colleagues as an example of how to achieve the transformation of France the model of its abhorred rival.

After more than forty years it has taken a new and terrible war to direct attention back to the school, to the education system as a whole, and make people realize that an enormous disproportion exists in our country between the mass of those who study the liberal arts and those who study the art of production, of labour. Many people are ashamed even to quote the figures, to set out the statistics. The state, with that blindness characteristic of the backward Latin bourgeoisies who hate anything new, has turned its attention exclusively to the creation in the middle categories of the petty bourgeoisie of a legion of lawyers, doctors and white-collar workers with a leaving certificate from the *liceo*, or the technical school. It has done nothing to give the proletariat, the enormous mass of citizens who form the backbone and the vital force of the nation, the chance to improve themselves, raise themselves up, acquire that professional culture from which spring the forces that animate industry, commerce and agriculture.

The school of labour has been sacrificed to the school of the service professions and occupations. The bureaucracy has murdered production. The minister, Casati, who fifty years ago drafted the legislation on Italian education with wide criteria that could have borne fruit, did not find successors able to adapt the law to new circumstances, although its dispositions lent themselves to such adaptation. The technical school also became a factory for white-collar workers, even though Casati, who had planned it, had seen its aim as 'to give young people who intend to dedicate themselves to specific careers in public service, industry and commerce and in the conduct of agricultural affairs the appropriate general and specific education'. Casati was concerned that lessons should be imparted 'with respect to their practical results, and particularly to the applications that can be made of them in the natural and economic conditions of the state'. But the production of new wealth derived no benefit at all from all these dispositions: the spheres of administration and distribution expanded enormously at the expense of all the rest. Now, after the lessons of the war, people are realizing that it is not enough to know how to administer and distribute, but that one needs

especially to produce. A country's potential comes from the wealth it produces, and the way it produces, not from the tittle-tattle of its lawyers and the clever inventions of its geniuses. The genius is too bizarre a product, too much beyond the control of any will, for plans to be based on him. Assiduous work, small-scale competence, the spread of a professional culture: these alone can become indices of well-being, diplomas of historical merit.

Italy lacks schools of labour. The little that has been done is due to chance, to the blind impulse of a necessity which throws up, alongside solid organisms, useless, unhealthy, harmful ones as well. In Italy labour, despite the essays schoolchildren are given to write, is not held in civil or social esteem. A chief technician is considered inferior to a lawyer, a mechanic inferior to a professor. The state makes 50 million lire available for the high schools and only 2.5 million for professional schools. Every high-school student costs the state about 1000 lire a year, according to former education minister Rava. And yet, while for every thirty vice-magistrate's jobs there are 300 applicants and 15 who are suitably qualified, our workshops are forced to import technical personnel, commerce falls into the hands of foreigners, and money, in the form of savings, leaves the country, and instead of increasing the nation's wealth and spreading well-being and jobs in our territory, it serves only to worsen the exchange rate, stimulate base egoism and atrocious jingoistic enthusiasms.

It is the proletariat which must demand, which must impose the school of labour. Everything which serves to intensify, to improve production is of particular interest to socialism and the proletariat. We must be in agreement on a plan whereby our industries and Italian commerce employ Italian skilled labour and where this should be equal in value and competence to the best skilled labour of other countries. No exclusions for the purposes of economic war, no protectionism even for the proletariat, but honest competition of abilities, contest for a greater exploitation of the products of the mind, so that everyone is given all the means necessary for their own inner improvement, for the valorization of their own good qualities. The proletariat must constrain the state to cut out of the national organism many universities, suppurating sores which produce prattlers and misfits, as well as many *licei* and *ginnasi* which cost a fortune and give neither culture nor

dignity. It must replace these old producers of administrators incapable of administering with schools of labour, out of which can swarm the new generation of producers, who will give the country fewer sonnets and novels and more machines and factory chimneys.

Unsigned, *Avanti!*, 18 July 1916.\* (CT, 440-2)

### 3 Men or Machines?

The brief discussion which was held at the last council meeting between our comrades and some representatives of the majority, on the subject of vocational education programmes, deserves some comment, however brief and succinct.<sup>3</sup> Comrade Zini's observations ('There is still a conflict between the humanistic and vocational camps over the issue of popular education: we must endeavour to reconcile these currents, without forgetting that a worker is above all a man, who should not be denied the possibility of exploring the widest realms of the spirit, by being enslaved from his earliest youth to the machine') and Councillor Sincero's attacks against philosophy (philosophy finds people opposed to it especially when it states truths that strike at vested interests) are not just isolated polemical episodes: they are necessary clashes between people representing fundamentally opposed interests.

1. Our party has still not settled on a concrete educational programme that is in any way different from traditional ones. Until now we have been content to support the general principle of the need for culture, whether it be at an elementary, or secondary-technical or higher level, and we have campaigned in favour of this principle and propagated it with vigour and energy. We can state that the reduction in illiteracy in Italy is due not so much to the law on compulsory education, as to the intellectual awakening, the awareness of certain spiritual needs that socialist propaganda has succeeded in arousing amongst the ranks of the proletariat in Italy. But we have gone no further than that. Education in Italy is still a rigidly *bourgeois* affair, in the worst sense of the word. Middle and high schools, which are state-run and hence financed from state revenues, i.e. direct taxes paid by the proletariat, can only be attended by the children of the bourgeoisie, who alone enjoy the economic independence needed

for uninterrupted study. A proletarian, no matter how intelligent, no matter how fit to become a man of culture, is forced either to squander his qualities on some other activity, or else to become a rebel and autodidact – i.e. (apart from some notable exceptions) a mediocrity, a man who cannot give all he could have given had he been completed and strengthened by the discipline of school. Culture is a privilege. Education is a privilege. And we do not want it to be so. All young people should be equal before culture. The state should not be financing out of everybody's money the education even of mediocre and gormless children of wealthy parents while it excludes the able and intelligent children of proletarians. Middle and high schools should be only for those who can demonstrate that they are worthy of it. And if it is in the public interest that such forms of education should exist, preferably supported and regulated by the state, then it is also in the public interest that they should be open to all intelligent children, regardless of their economic potential. Collective sacrifice is justified only when it benefits those who are most deserving. Therefore, this collective sacrifice should serve especially to give the most deserving children that economic independence they need if they are to devote their time to serious study.

2. The proletariat, which is excluded from the middle and high schools as a result of the present social conditions – conditions which ensure that the division of labour between men is unnatural (not being based on different capacities) and so retards and is inimical to production – has to fall back on the parallel educational system: the technical and vocational colleges. As a result of the anti-democratic restrictions imposed by the state budget, the technical colleges, which were set up along democratic lines by the Casati ministry, have undergone a transformation that has largely destroyed their nature. In most cases they have become mere superfetations of the classical schools, and an innocent outlet for the petty bourgeois mania for finding a secure job. The continually rising entrance fees, and the particular prospects they open up in practical life, have turned these schools too into a privilege. Anyway, the overwhelming majority of the proletariat is automatically excluded from them on account of the uncertain and precarious life which the wage-earner is forced to lead – the sort of life which is certainly not the most propitious for fruitfully following a course of study.

3. What the proletariat needs is an educational system that is

open to all. A system in which the child is allowed to develop and mature and acquire those general features that serve to develop character. In a word, a humanistic school, as conceived by the ancients, and more recently by the men of the Renaissance. A school which does not mortgage the child's future, a school that does not force the child's will, his intelligence and growing awareness to run along tracks to a predetermined station. A school of freedom and free initiative, not a school of slavery and mechanical precision. The children of proletarians too should have all possibilities open to them; they should be able to develop their own individuality in the optimal way, and hence in the most productive way for both themselves and society. Technical schools should not be allowed to become incubators of little monsters aridly trained for a job, with no general ideas, no general culture, no intellectual stimulation, but only an infallible eye and a firm hand. Technical education too helps a child to blossom into an adult – so long as it is educative and not simply informative, simply passing on manual techniques. Councillor Sincero, who is an industrialist, is being too meanly bourgeois when he protests against philosophy.

Of course, meanly bourgeois industrialists might prefer to have workers who were more machines than men. But the sacrifices which everyone in society willingly makes in order to foster improvements and nourish the best and most perfect men who will improve it still more – these sacrifices must bring benefits to the whole of society, not just to one category of people or one class.

It is a problem of right and of force. The proletariat must stay alert, to prevent another abuse being added to the many it already suffers.

Unsigned, *Avanti!*, 24 December 1916.  
SPWI, 26-7

#### 4 The Popular University

I have in front of me the programme for the Popular University (*Università Popolare*) for the first period 1916-17. Five courses: three devoted to natural sciences, one to Italian literature, one to philosophy. Six lectures on various subjects: only two have titles giving some guarantee of seriousness. I sometimes wonder why it

has not been possible in Turin to develop a solid institution for the popularization of culture, why the Popular University has remained the poor thing it is and has been unable to win the public's attention, respect and love, why it has not succeeded in forming a public of its own.

The answer is not easy, or it is too easy. There are clearly problems with organization and with the criteria which inform the university. The best response should be to do better, to show concretely that it is possible to do better and to gather a public round a cultural heat source, provided it is alive and really gives off heat. In Turin the Popular University is a cold flame. It is neither a university, nor popular. Its directors are amateurs in matters of cultural organization. What causes them to act is a mild and insipid spirit of charity, not a live and fecund desire to contribute to the spiritual raising of the multitude through teaching. As in vulgar charitable institutes, they distribute food parcels which fill the stomach, perhaps cause some indigestion, but then leave no trace, bring about no change in people's lives. The directors of the Popular University know that the institution they run has to cater for a specific category of people who have not been able to follow regular studies at school. And that is all. They are not bothered about how this category of people might be drawn most effectively to the world of knowledge. They find a model in the existing cultural institutions: they copy it, they worsen it. They reason something like this: people who attend courses at the Popular University are the same age and have the same general background as people who go to the state universities; so let us give them a surrogate of the latter. And they ignore everything else. They do not consider the fact that the state universities are a natural point of arrival of a whole activity of previous work; they do not consider that when a student arrives at university he has passed through the experience of high school and this has disciplined his spirit of research, has bolstered his amateurish impulsiveness with a methodical approach. In other words he has been through a process of *becoming*, he has been made alert gradually and gently, falling into error and pulling himself up, taking wrong turns and getting back on course. These directors do not understand that bits of *knowledge*, plucked out from all this previous activity of individual research, are nothing other than dogmas, absolute truths. They do not understand that

the Popular University, as they run it, is reduced to a form of theological teaching, a new version of the Jesuit schools, where knowledge is presented as something definitive, self-evident and unquestionable. Not even the universities are like this. There is now a common conviction that a truth is fecund only when one has made an effort to master it, that it does not exist in and for itself but has been a conquest of the spirit, and that each individual must reproduce in himself that state of anxiety which the scholar passed through before arriving at it. This is why the truly magisterial teachers give great importance in their teaching to the history of their subject. Taking one's audience through the series of attempts, efforts and successes through which men had to pass in order to attain the present state of knowledge has far more educational value than a schematic exposition of the knowledge itself. It forms the scholar, it gives his mind that elasticity of methodical doubt which makes an amateur into a serious person, which purifies curiosity (in the popular sense of the word) and turns it into a healthy and fecund stimulus towards ever increasing and more perfect knowledge. The author of these notes speaks partly out of personal experience. The courses he remembers most vividly from when he started at university were those where the lecturer made him feel the active effort of research over the centuries to bring the research method to perfection. In the natural sciences, for instance, we were shown all the effort it cost to liberate the human spirit from prejudices and *a priori* religious or philosophical notions in order to arrive at the conclusion that sources of water originate from atmospheric precipitations and not from the sea. In philology we saw how the historical method was arrived at through the trials and errors of traditional empiricism and how, for example, the criteria and convictions that guided Francesco De Sanctis in writing his history of Italian literature were nothing other than truths which had emerged through tiring research, truths which liberated the spirit from the sentimental and rhetorical dross that had polluted the study of literature in the past. And so on for the other subjects. This was the most living part of studying: this spirit of re-creation, which enabled encyclopaedic items of information to be assimilated and fused them into a flame burning with new individual life.

Teaching done in this way becomes an act of liberation. It has the fascination of all vital things. It needs particularly to

demonstrate its effectiveness in the Popular Universities, whose audiences lack precisely that intellectual preparation one needs in order to arrange the individual items of one's studies into an organized whole. For them, particularly, what is most effective and interesting is the history of research, the history of this immense epic of the human spirit which slowly, patiently, tenaciously takes possession of truth, conquers truth. How from error one arrives at scientific truth. This is the road that everyone must follow. To show how it has been followed by others is the lesson that produces the best results. And it is, besides, a lesson in modesty, which avoids the formation of those irritating know-it-alls who believe they have plumbed the depths of the universe when their memories are fortunate enough to pigeon-hole a few dates and some random bits of knowledge.

But the Popular Universities, like that of Turin, prefer to run useless and unwieldy courses on 'The Italian Soul in the Art of Literature in Recent Generations' or give lectures on 'The European Conflagration as Judged by Vico', where more care is taken to impress than to teach effectively, and the pretentious little lecturer outstrips the efforts of the modest teacher, who at least knows he is talking to uneducated people.

Unsigned, *Avanti!*, 29 December 1916.\* (CT, 673-6)

## 5 Illiteracy

Why are there still so many illiterate people in Italy? Because in Italy there are too many people who restrict their lives to their village and their family. They do not feel a need to learn the Italian language because dialect will do for their local and family life, because all their life of relationships is filled up with conversations in dialect. Literacy is not a need, and it therefore becomes a torment, something imposed by the wielders of power. In order for it to become a need, the general life would have to acquire greater fervour, it would have to draw in an ever increasing number of citizens and therefore make the sense of need arise spontaneously, out of the necessity for reading and writing and for the Italian language. Socialist propaganda has done more towards literacy than all the laws on compulsory schooling. The law is an imposition: it can oblige you to go to school but it cannot oblige



you to learn, or, once you have learned, not to forget. Socialist propaganda directly arouses a sharp sense of not being just an individual within a little circle of immediate interests (the local community and the family), but a citizen of a wider world, with whose other citizens one needs to exchange ideas, hopes and sufferings. Culture, literacy, has thus acquired a purpose, and for as long as this purpose remains alive in people's consciousness, love of knowledge will be a compelling force. It is a sacrosanct truth, of which the Socialists can be proud: illiteracy will disappear completely only when socialism has made it disappear, because socialism is the only ideal which can make citizens, in the best and fullest sense of the word, out of all the Italians who at present live exclusively on their little personal interests, humans born only to consume the fruits of the earth.

*La Città futura*, 11 February 1917.\* (CF, 17)

## 6 The Problem of the School

[...]

The problem of the school (like any other problem which concerns a general activity of the state, a necessary function in society) must be studied as part of the sphere of action of the state of workers' and peasants' councils.<sup>4</sup> We are aiming to stimulate a mentality of construction, of comrades already ideally organized in the state of the Councils, already ideally active and at work in evoking all the organs of the new social life. The educational propaganda conducted so far by the Socialists has been largely negative and critical: it could not have been otherwise. Today, after the positive experiences of our Russian comrades, it can and must be otherwise if we want to ensure that their experiences have not been in vain for us. We must develop these experiences critically, paring away from them what is specific to Russia, dependent on the particular conditions in which the Soviet Republic found Russian society when it came to power. We must pick out and establish what in them is of permanent necessity to communist society, dependent on the needs and aspirations of the class of workers and peasants exploited to the same degree in all parts of the globe.

The problem of the school is at once both technical and political.

In a parliamentary-democratic state there can be no technical and political solution to the problem of the school. Ministers of education are placed in office because they belong to a political party, not because they know how to administer and direct the educational function of the state. It cannot even in all honesty be claimed that the bourgeois class moulds the school to its own ends of domination. If this were to happen, it would mean that the bourgeois class had an educational programme and was carrying it out with single-minded energy: the school would then be a living thing. This is not the case. The bourgeoisie, as the class which controls the state, takes no interest in the school. It lets the bureaucrats make or destroy it as they are able and allows the education ministers to be chosen according to the caprice of political competition, through partisan intrigue, so as to attain a happy balance of parties in the cabinet. In these conditions the technical study of the educational problem is a pure exercise of mental chess, a matter of intellectual gymnastics rather than a serious and concrete contribution to the problem itself: when, that is, it is not a tiresome lamentation and rehashing of old banalities about the excellence of the educative role of the state, the benefits of education, etc.

In the state of the Councils, the school will represent one of the most important and essential of public activities. Indeed, to the development and success of the school is linked the development of the communist state, the advent of a democracy in which the dictatorship of the proletariat is absorbed. The present generation will be educated into the practice of the social discipline necessary for the realization of communist society, with assemblies and direct participation in deliberation and the administration of the socialist state. The school will have the task of rearing the new generations, those who will enjoy the fruits of our sacrifices and efforts, those who will reap, after the transitional period of national proletarian dictatorships, the fullness of life and development of international communist democracy. How will the communist schools carry out this task? How should the educative function of the state be organized in the overall system of the Councils? What administrative duty will need to be carried out by the primary and secondary teachers' union? How will universities and polytechnics be transformed and co-ordinated in the general cultural activity? Once the constitution is changed and the

fundamental principles of the law have been altered, what character should the Faculty of Law possess? Our review numbers among its subscribers and readers a strong contingent of young students, artists and teachers of different levels who have the ability and the training to pose these problems critically and try to solve them. We appeal to their good will, to the active desire they feel for useful co-operation towards the advent of the new order of communism.

Unsigned, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 27 June 1919. SCW, 39-40

## 7 [Questions of Culture]

The proletarian revolution cannot but be a total revolution. It consists in the foundation of new modes of labour, new modes of production and distribution that are peculiar to the working class in its historical determination in the course of the capitalist process. This revolution also presupposes the formation of a new set of standards, a new psychology, new ways of feeling, thinking and living that must be specific to the working class, that must be created by it, that will become 'dominant' when the working class becomes the dominant class. The proletarian revolution is essentially the liberation of the productive forces already existing within bourgeois society. These forces can be identified in the economic and political fields; but is it possible to start identifying the latent elements that will lead to the creation of a proletarian civilization or culture? Do elements for an art, philosophy and morality (standards) specific to the working class already exist? The question must be raised and it must be answered. Together with the problem of gaining political and economic power, the proletariat must also face the problem of winning intellectual power. Just as it has thought to organize itself politically and economically, it must also think about organizing itself culturally. Although through such organizations it is not yet going to be possible (no more than in the economic and political sectors) to obtain positive creative results before the system of bourgeois domination has been broken up, it should still be possible to pose the fundamental questions and outline the most characteristic features of the development of the new civilization. According to our Russian comrades, who have already set up an entire network

of organizations for 'Proletarian Culture' (Proletkult), the mere fact that the workers raise these questions and attempt to answer them means that the elements of an original proletarian civilization already exist, that there are already proletarian forces of production of cultural values, just as the fact that the workers create class organizations in order to carry out their cultural activity means that these values too, unlike in the bourgeois period, will be created by the working class on the basis of organization.

Do the workers have their own 'conception of the world'? The conception of the world specific to the working class today is that of critical communism which bases historical development on the class struggle. Yet because of this very conception of the world, the working class knows that its conquest of political and economic power will mark the end of the period of class-divided societies. Will there no longer be historical development, will the machine of progress be broken once classes have been abolished and the class struggle suppressed? Many workers have undoubtedly asked this question, just as some of them have undoubtedly felt anxiety because they have been unable to find an answer. The working class, therefore, has its own 'metaphysical needs' which are proper to it alone. Even a bourgeois can conceive the world from the standpoint of the class struggle, but since he cannot but imagine this struggle as perpetual, he does not ask himself, 'And after the abolition of classes?' The abolition of the class struggle does not mean the abolition of the need to struggle as a principle of development. There will still be the struggle against the brute forces of nature, and this struggle will be applied on a scale never before seen. But what notions, what particular ways of seeing, thinking and feeling does this form of struggle, which does not set living beings against each other, presuppose in order for one to imagine the same conquering spirit in people, the same expansive energy that one finds today in the class struggle?

On this basis, then, we can begin to think that in the fullness of its autonomous historical life the working class will also have its own original conception of the world, some of whose fundamental features can already be delineated.

Tomorrow, like today, the school will undoubtedly be a crucible where the new spirits will be forged. Indeed, tomorrow the school will be immensely more important than it is now. In the various

educational organizations (near home or at the workplace) in Russia, one studies up to the age of fifty. In the way schools have been organized in Russia, a Marxist principle has been applied in practice: the dominant class reflects in its social life the relations that characterize its particular modes of existence. The Russian school reflects the way of studying characteristic of the working class. The worker studies and works; his labour is study and study is labour. In order to become a specialist in his work, the worker on average puts in the same number of years that it takes to get a specialized degree. The worker, however, carries out his studies in the very act of doing immediately productive work. Industrial progress tends to annihilate the 'studies' proper to the worker in that it tends to destroy specialized trades. Having become dominant, the working class wants manual labour and intellectual labour to be joined in the schools and thus creates a new educational tradition.

One can easily foresee that when the working class wins its liberty, it will bring to the light of history new complexes of linguistic expressions even if it will not radically change the notion of beauty. The existence of Esperanto, although it does not demonstrate much in itself and has more to do with bourgeois cosmopolitanism than with proletarian internationalism, shows nevertheless, by the fact that the workers are strongly interested in it and manage to waste their time over it, that there is a desire for and a historical push towards the formation of verbal complexes that transcend national limits and in relation to which current national languages will have the same role as dialects now have.

For those who have the will to solve them or to try to solve them, there are an endless number of problems of this order. Is it a waste of time to be concerned with these problems? Our Russian comrades say that not only is it not a waste of time but that, on the contrary, if the working class is not concerned with them, it means that it has not yet reached that stage of revolutionary development in which it truly understands the full implications of the notion of 'ruling class'. In order to help in this field too the working classes that have not yet liberated themselves from the political yoke of the bourgeoisie, our Russian comrades want to establish relations between the Proletkult and the proletarian cultural organizations that already exist in embryonic form throughout the world.

Unsigned, *Avanti!*, 14 June 1920. SCW, 41-3

## 8 Marinetti the Revolutionary?

This incredible, enormous, colossal event has happened, which, if divulged, threatens completely to destroy all the prestige and reputation of the Communist International: during the Second Congress in Moscow, comrade Lunacharsky, in his speech to the Italian delegates (a speech given, mark you, in Italian, excellent Italian even: so that any suspicion of a dubious interpretation must *a priori* be rejected), said that in Italy there lives a revolutionary intellectual by the name of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. The philistines of the workers' movement are extremely shocked. It is now certain that to the insults of being called 'Bergsonian voluntarists, pragmatists and spiritualists' will be added the more deadly one of 'Futurists! Marinettians!'<sup>5</sup> Since such a fate awaits us, let us see if we can raise ourselves to a self-awareness of our new intellectual position.

Many groups of workers looked kindly towards Futurism (before the European war). It happened very often (before the war) that groups of workers would defend the Futurists from the attacks of cliques of professional 'artists' and 'littérateurs'. This point established, this historical observation made, the question automatically arises: 'In this attitude of the workers was there an intuition (here we are with the word intuition: Bergsonians, Bergsonians) of an unsatisfied need in the proletarian field?' We must answer: 'Yes. The revolutionary working class was and is aware that it must found a new state, that by its tenacious and patient labour it must elaborate a new economic structure and found a new civilization.' It is relatively easy to outline right from this moment the shape of the new state and the new economic structure. In this absolutely practical field, we are convinced that for a certain time the only possible thing to do will be to exercise an iron-like power over the existing organization, over that constructed by the bourgeoisie. From this conviction comes the stimulus to struggle for the conquest of power and from it comes the formula by which Lenin has characterized the workers' state: 'For a certain time the workers' state cannot be other than a bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie.'<sup>6</sup>

The battlefield for the creation of a new civilization is, on the other hand, absolutely mysterious, absolutely characterized by the unforeseeable and the unexpected. Having passed from capitalist

power to workers' power, the factory will continue to produce the same material things that it produces today. But in what way and under what forms will poetry, drama, the novel, music, painting and moral and linguistic works be born? It is not a material factory that produces these works. It cannot be reorganized by a workers' power according to a plan. One cannot establish its rate of production for the satisfaction of immediate needs, to be controlled and determined statistically. Nothing in this field is foreseeable except for this general hypothesis: there will be a proletarian culture (a civilization) totally different from the bourgeois one and in this field too class distinctions will be shattered. Bourgeois careerism will be shattered and there will be a poetry, a novel, a theatre, a moral code, a language, a painting and a music peculiar to proletarian civilization, the flowering and ornament of proletarian social organization. What remains to be done? Nothing other than to destroy the present form of civilization. In this field, 'to destroy' does not mean the same as in the economic field. It does not mean to deprive humanity of the material products that it needs to subsist and to develop. It means to destroy spiritual hierarchies, prejudices, idols and ossified traditions. It means not to be afraid of innovations and audacities, not to be afraid of monsters, not to believe that the world will collapse if a worker makes grammatical mistakes, if a poem limps, if a picture resembles a hoarding or if young men sneer at academic and feeble-minded senility. The Futurists have carried out this task in the field of bourgeois culture. They have destroyed, destroyed, destroyed, without worrying if the new creations produced by their activity were on the whole superior to those destroyed. They have had confidence in themselves, in the impetuosity of their youthful energies. *They have grasped sharply and clearly that our age, the age of big industry, of the large proletarian city and of intense and tumultuous life, was in need of new forms of art, philosophy, behaviour and language.* This sharply revolutionary and absolutely *Marxist* idea came to them when the Socialists were not even vaguely interested in such a question, when the Socialists certainly did not have as precise an idea in politics and economics, when the Socialists would have been frightened (as is evident from the current fear of many of them) by the thought that it was necessary to shatter the machine of bourgeois power in the state and the factory. In their field, the

field of culture, the Futurists are revolutionaries. In this field it is likely to be a long time before the working classes will manage to do anything more creative than the Futurists have done. When they supported the Futurists, the workers' groups showed that they were not afraid of *destruction*, certain as they were of being able to create poetry, paintings and plays, like the Futurists; these workers were supporting historicity, the possibility of a proletarian culture created by the workers themselves.

Unsigned, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 5 January 1921. SCW, 49-51