Outline

• Life and Work
• Some key concepts
• Three sources of Marxism
• Three Italian analogies
• Three sources of Gramsci’s Marxism
• Contemporary Relevance
Life - I

• 22 January 1891: born in Ales/Alas (Sardinia)
• Arbëreschë (ethnic Albanian) family
• Secondary schooling: Cagliari/Casteddu (Sardinia)
• Student at University of Turin (1911-15)
  – Studies philology and encounters Hegelian Marxism
• Turin’s economic and political significance
  – Industry, migrant labour, workers’ councils (1919-20), centre of syndicalism, socialism and communism
• Joined *Partito Socialista Italiano* (PSI) in 1913
Life - II

• Journalism and political education
  – *Il Grido del Popolo* (Cry of the People) (edited it 1914-18)
  – *Avanti!* (1916-20) (official organ of PSI, co-edited Piedmont edn)
  – *L’Ordine Nuovo* (1920-24) (near Bolshevism, workers’ councils)
  – *L’Unità* (1924-26) (PCI’s official paper)

• Helped to form *Partito Communista Italiano* (PCI) in 1921, became party leader in 1924
Life - III

- Also backs the anti-fascist Arditi del Popolo in 1921
- Went to Moscow (1922) to represent PCI, returned 1923
- MP for PCI in 1924 (fascists already control government)
- **Lyons Thesis (1926)**: United Front to restore democracy
- Arrested Nov 1926, imprisoned, died 27 April 1937

Arditi axe breaks fascist *fasces*
A difficult thinker?

• Early writings are accessible (many are written for left-wing journals) and wide-ranging, covering economics, politics, social question, cultural matters

• *Prison Notebooks*: 30 notebooks, 3000 pages, written 1929-35 (begun 3 years after his incarceration)

• Smuggled from prison in 1930s, published in 1950s

• *Prison Notebooks* are difficult:
  – concepts in process of emergence
  – use of circumlocution
  – not intended for publication
  – subsequent editorial work for publication
Some Key Concepts

- *L’Egemonia* (hegemony)
- *Lo Stato Integrale* (integral state)
- *La Società civile* (civil society)
- *La Guerra di posizione/di movimento* (war of position, war of maneouvre)
- *Il Blocco storico* (historical bloc)
- *L’Antieconomismo* (anti-economism)
- *Gli Intellettuale* (intellectuals)
- *Il Senso comune* (common sense)
- *La Filosofia della prassi* (philosophy of praxis)
- *Il Storicismo assoluto* (absolute historicism)
Three Sources of Marxism

• **English Economics**
  – Classical political economy
  – Including Scottish Enlightenment thinkers

• **German Philosophy**
  – Hegel
  – Young Hegelians

• **French Politics**
  – French Revolution
  – French socialism
Three Analogies

• **German Philosophy (Hegel)**
  – as appropriated through Mondolfo, Gentile, and, in particular, Croce

• **French Politics (Jacobinism)**
  – reflections on the French revolution
  – its relevance to Italy

• **English Economics (Ricardo)**
  – and the influence of Piero Sraffa

• **Note different ordering of influences**
Or Three Other (Italian) Sources

• **Italian Idealism (Benedetto Croce)**
  – Idealist philosopher, lifelong liberal senator (1910-52)
  – Absolute historicism, focus on lived experience

• **Ragione dello Stato (Niccolò Machiavelli)**
  – Autonomous theory of politics
  – Practical concern with Italian state formation

• **Italian Linguistics (Mattero Bartoli)**
  – Philology as topic, analogy, and method of inquiry
  – Diachronic, spatial approach (centre-periphery)
Implications of these Sources

• Gramsci belonged to the Marxist tradition – as mediated via Italian influences (which extend beyond this tradition)
• He engaged with the challenges of building democratic, socialist Italy and how these challenges change across economic, political, and ideological conjunctures. This requires a “modern Prince”, i.e., a collective agent able to articulate and promote national will to unification
• Note his training in philology (as substantive science and as method) and how Bartoli’s historical (and spatialized) linguistics shapes his approach to political analysis
The Italian Background

• Advanced Liberalism, Backward Society
• Problems of forming Italian nation-state
  – “Fatta l’Italia, bisogna fare gli Italiani”
  – “L’Italia è fatta. Ora bisogna fare gli Italiani”
  – “Abbiamo fatto l’Italia. Ora si tratta di fare gli Italiani” (Massimo D’Azeglio)
  – In sum, now Italy is made, we must make the Italians
• Piedmont-led top-down revolution, non-mass-based, unification based on successive compromises between aristocracy and rising industrial bourgeoisie – not ruptural, popular, Jacobin revolution
Contemporary Relevance

• Still a major reference point in humanities and many social sciences and in diverse cross-disciplinary analyses
• The hegemony of neo-liberalism and its relation to organic intellectuals who engaged in war of position
• Unstable equilibria of forces and exceptional regimes (for Gramsci, fascism; for us, authoritarian statism)
• Mediatization of politics, i.e., growing importance of mass media in shaping common sense, world-views, political imaginaries, politics as art of possible …
• Gramsci and subaltern and post-colonial studies
• Gramsci and nature-society relations (political ecology)