

Gramsci, Antonio, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971.

dencies. That a State can exist politically based simultaneously on the plutocracy and on the "ordinary folk" is not in any case entirely contradictory, as is proved by the example of France, where the rule of finance capital could not be explained without the political base of a democracy of petit-bourgeois and peasant *rentiers*. For complex reasons, however, France still has a relatively healthy social composition, since there exists there a broad base of small and medium-sized farming properties. In other countries, on the other hand, the savers are cut off from the world of production and work. Saving in these countries has too high a social cost, as it is obtained with a level of existence for industrial and especially agricultural workers which is far too low. If the new structure of credit were to consolidate this situation, in reality it would be a turn for the worse. If parasitic savings, thanks to State guarantees, were to be rendered exempt even from the general hazards of the normal market, then on the one hand parasitic landed property would be strengthened and on the other hand industrial debentures, with legally determined dividends, would undoubtedly impose an even more crushing burden on labour.

#### AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN CIVILISATION

In an interview given to Corrado Alvaro (*L'Italia Letteraria*, 14 April 1929) Luigi Pirandello declares: "Americanism is swamping us. I think that a new beacon of civilisation has been lit over there." "The money that runs through the world is American (?!), and behind the money (?!) runs the way of life and the culture." (This is true only of the scum of society, and it is this cosmopolitan scum that Pirandello, and many others with him, thinks makes up the whole "world".) "Does America have a culture?" (It would be more to the point to say: does it have a unitary and centralised culture, i.e. is America a nation of the French, German or English type?) "It has books and customs(?). Its customs are its new literature, which penetrates through the best fortified and defended doors. In Berlin you do not feel the gap between the old and the new Europe, because the structure of the city itself offers no resistance." (Today Pirandello could no longer say the same thing, so it is to be understood that he is referring to the Berlin of the night clubs.) "In Paris, where there is an historical and artistic structure, where the evidence of an indigenous civilisation is present, Americanism is as strident and jarring as the make-up on the face of an aging *femme du monde*."

The problem is not whether in America there exists a new

civilisation, a new culture, even if only as a "beacon", and whether it is invading or has invaded Europe. If the problem were to be posed in that way, the answer would be simple: no, it does not exist, and indeed all that they do in America is to remasticate the old European culture. The problem is rather this; whether America, through the implacable weight of its economic production (and therefore indirectly), will compel or is already compelling Europe to overturn its excessively antiquated economic and social basis. This would have happened anyway, though only slowly. In the immediate perspective it is presented as a repercussion of American super-power. In other words, whether we are undergoing a transformation of the material bases of European civilisation, which in the long run (though not all that long, since in the contemporary period everything happens much faster than in the past ages) will bring about the overthrow of the existing forms of civilisation and the forced birth of a new.

The elements of a "new culture" and "new way of life" which are being spread around under the American label, are still just tentative feelers. They are not due to a new "order" deriving from a new basis, because that has not yet been formed, but are due to the superficial apish initiative of elements which are beginning to feel themselves socially displaced by the operation (still destructive and dissolutive) of the new basis in the course of formation. What is today called "Americanism" is to a large extent an advance criticism of old strata which will in fact be crushed by any eventual new order and which are already in the grips of a wave of social panic, dissolution and despair. It is an unconscious attempt at reaction on the part of those who are impotent to rebuild and who are emphasising the negative aspects of the revolution. But it is not from the social groups "condemned" by the new order that reconstruction is to be expected, but from those on whom is imposed the burden of creating with their own suffering the material bases of the new order. It is they who "must" find for themselves an "original", and not Americanised, system of living, to turn into "freedom" what today is "necessity".

The criterion then is that both the intellectual and moral reactions against the establishment of the new methods of production, and the superficial praises of Americanism, are due to the remains of old, disintegrating strata, and not to groups whose destiny is linked to the further development of the new method. This criterion is extremely important, and explains how it is that some elements in responsible positions in modern politics, who base their fortunes

on the organisation of middle strata of the population as a whole, do not wish to take up a position but remain "theoretically" neutral, and resolve practical problems by the traditional methods of empiricism and opportunism. (Compare the various interpretations of ruralism given by Ugo Spirito, who wants to "urbanise" the countryside, and by other writers blowing on their panpipes.)

In the case of Americanism, understood not only as a form of café life but as an ideology of the kind represented by Rotary Clubs, we are not dealing with a new type of civilisation. This is shown by the fact that nothing has been changed in the character of and the relationships between fundamental groups. What we are dealing with is an organic extension and an intensification of European civilisation, which has simply acquired a new coating in the American climate. Pirandello's observation on the opposition that Americanism encounters in Paris (but in Le Creusot?) and on the immediate welcome that it supposedly had in Berlin proves, in any case, that the difference between it and "Europeanism" is not one of nature but of degree. In Berlin the middle classes had already been ruined by the war and by inflation, and Berlin industry has very different characteristics overall from that of Paris. The French middle classes did not undergo either occasional crises, like the inflation in Germany, nor did they suffer the organic crisis of 1929 with the same intensity as Germany. For this reason it is true that in Paris Americanism can appear like a form of make-up, a superficial foreign fashion.