right-wing forces and their champion, Sir Keir Starmer.

In exploring the development of capitalism and poverty in Britain, Silver reaches the conclusion that the Attlee government's reform direction might be resumed. He acknowledges that "capitalism will continue to produce poverty as long as it exists" but asserts that "(p)overty can be minimized, by doing still more of what the 1945-1951 Labour governments began to do." (255)

I would agree with Silver on the link between capitalism and poverty but I question the prospects for a continuation of the work of the Atlee government. The record of social democracy rather suggests that it will, at best, only do as much as capitalism allows and capitalist classes tolerate. Silver correctly points out that the Attlee government proceeded with its reform agenda in the face of very considerable economic difficulties. Still, the period in which it operated was marked internationally by relatively high levels of class compromise that are now long gone. The downhill slope from Attlee to Blair and on to the disgraceful Starmer isn't simply a matter of the degeneration of a political party. It reflects very major changes in capitalism, the proliferation of poverty, and the boundaries within which social policy decisions are made.

In saying this, I anticipate the objection that the eventual attainment of socialism is cold comfort to those facing poverty at the present time. However, in rejecting the possibility of Attlee style reforms at the hands of a rejuvenated social democracy, I'm far from suggesting that we wait for socialist pie in the sky. United working-class movements may win substantial gains in alleviating poverty if they are powerful and determined enough. Such movements may also find their electoral expression and implement very significant improvements. However, in these uncertain and volatile times, with a cost of living crisis underway and a global slump looming over us, I simply can't share Silver's optimism that major progress in challenging poverty is likely to take the form of a strengthened social democratic backbone.

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Jean-Yves Frétigné, *To Live Is to Resist: The Life of Antonio Gramsci,* translated by Laura Marris (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021)

Antonio Gramsci is a figure whose cross-sect popularity on the left is perhaps matched only by that of Luxemburg and Lenin. Yet simplistic hagiography is intellectually useless and of minimal political utility, and Gramsci's stature demands that he be better and more widely understood. In this regard, Jean-Yves Frétigné's *To Live is to Resist: The Life of Antonio Gramsci* is a welcome contribution, illuminating Gramsci through liberal citations from his less well-known early work, his correspondence, and his medical records.

Frétignés compelling new biography of the Italian revolutionary details the material circumstances in which Gramsci lived as well as his maneuvering in Italian and international communism. Nothing had more of an impact on Gramsci than growing up on Sardinia, at the time an under-developed island west of the Italian peninsula—Gramsci's first concrete political act was to sign a 1913 petition against protectionism, which argued that the Italian ruling class was sacrificing the country's south to, as Frétigné puts it, "enrich the bourgeoisie and Italy's northern proletariat." Sardinia was impoverished and "backward" but, the author shows, the notion that Gramsci's parents were poor peasants is a politically serviceable myth traceable

to Palmiro Togliatti, Gramsci's successor as leader of Partito Comunista d'Italia, (PCd'I). Gramsci's father, Franceso, had an advanced education and his mother, Giuseppina, could read and write Italian well, a rarity amongst Sardinian women at the time. Francesco was a parliamentary elector and something of an influential local elite. At the same time, it would be a mistake to deduce that Gramsci had a pampered upbringing. His father was imprisoned for more than five years on petty corruption charges. Giuseppina made as much money as she could doing laundry and sewing but the family endured extreme financial hardship slightly mitigated by the island's charitable social customs. Francesco was released and regained social status by getting a job at the tax office but lost Giuseppine's inheritance in a failed poultry venture.

Gramsci faced terrible illnesses throughout his life and Frétigné's writing is at its most vital when he is elucidating Gramsci's torments. When Gramsci was eighteen months old, a tumor appeared on his spine and the village doctor could not halt its growth. At a specialist's urging, Gramsci wore a corset of sorts from which he hung from a ceiling rafter for hours in a failed attempt to straighten his spine. When Gramsci was four, he collapsed, convulsing, and had a hemorrhage; the convulsions went on for three days. He was wrongly diagnosed with epilepsy and his mother ordered a tiny coffin—decades later, in prison, a doctor established that Gramsci actually had a rare form of spinal tuberculosis. Over the years, Gramsci endured tics, excessive sweating, trembling, involuntary grimaces, insomnia, and memory loss.

As a student, Gramsci deepened his intellectual-political engagement. He undertook his studies in Turin in the immediate pre-World War One era, as Italy was lurching rightward and had invaded Libya. He joined the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) in 1913. Gramsci's point of entry into organized politics was a cultural group for Socialist students, which is fitting in that the relationships between culture and politics were themes to which he would return again and again over the course of his life. Once the Great War was underway and Italy was poised to join the bloodletting, Gramsci published his first article, a piece that dubiously opposed "absolute neutrality," the operative anti-war position in Italy at the time. He opposed the war but doing so in this muddled fashion earned him an unfair early reputation as an interventionist and a Mussolinist. Gramsci's failure to understand the war, as Lenin later would, as an imperialist bloodbath is better understood, as Frétigné contends, as an ideological limit that the young revolutionary had at the time and fortunately would eventually move beyond.

Gramsci embraced the October Revolution and his December 1917 article "The Revolution Against 'Capital'" earned him renown in the socialist movement and national prominence in Italy. He cofounded the newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo* and became more directly involved in PSI activities. Gramsci spent time on the executive committee of the Turin section of the PSI and worked as a journalist and editor-in-chief for the city's edition of the PSI paper *Avanti!*. He was a lead organizer of factory councils in Turin and theorized that these could be revolutionary organs equivalent to the soviets in Russia.

By 1920, Gramsci's theories of revolution won acclaim internationally—garnering praise from the COMINTERN and from Lenin himself—even as they were marginal in the PSI and in Italy as a whole. A year later, Gramsci joined Amadeo Bordiga and Nicola Bombacci (who would later become a Fascist) to found the PCd'I. Initially, Bordiga controlled the party. The COMINTERN pressured him to adopt the united front

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strategy but Bordiga refused, arguing that it could only lead to a bourgeois government that would betray working-class interests. At first, Gramsci sided with Bordiga. However, while Gramsci was in Russia—where he was on a prolonged visit because Italy's Fascist authorities had a warrant for his arrest and where he met Julia Schucht, who he would later marry and with whom he would have two children—he reflected on the challenges facing the Italian left and shifted his position. The move was difficult for Gramsci, given his long-term relationship with Bordiga. Gramsci was elected to the Italian legislature and, with the (temporary) benefit of parliamentary immunity, he returned to the country.

Following the crisis ignited by Fascist kidnapping and murder of the widely respected reformist socialist politician Giacomo Matteotti, the PCd'I went on the offensive. They called a partially successful general strike in June 1924. That fall, Gramsci travelled the Italian peninsula, clandestinely meeting with activists and seeking to win them to the PCd'I. Frétigné's relays the following account of Gramsci undertaking these conversations, the book's most vivid portrait of the revolutionary:

> With his stained jacket, his worn and dirty shirt, hatless, his beard poorly groomed, his hair combed every which way (…) , Gramsci was the antithesis of what a conventional deputy waws supposed to look like.… Gramsci remained, above all, a militant devoted to his engagement, refusing any compromise with bourgeois values. Even if he hadn't experienced prison, it is unlikely that he would have become an apparatchik profiting from privileges.

Gramsci would go on to become the leader of the PCd'I. While Gramsci didn't take the Trotskyist's side in their the struggle within the Soviet leadership, Gramsci wrote a letter criticizing Stalin's treatment of the Trotskyists. Togliatti gave it to Bukharin, who shared it with the Politburo but not the Central Committee. As a result of the missive, Gramsci and PCd'I more generally fell out of favour in Moscow. Gramsci would, of course, be arrested by the Fascist authorities and die in prison at age 46.

As Frétigné notes, Gramsci's thinking and writing continues to resonate well-beyond the communist movement. Gramsci cared deeply about language. He studied linguistics, translated texts, and refused to modify his writing style in an attempt to reach a broader working-class audience. Readers hoping for a sustained engagement with or assessment of Gramscian thought will be disappointed. Frétigné offers details about the process by which *The Prison Notebooks* were compiled but little of substance about their contents. Hermeneutics generally is not the purview of biography but working in this genre does not preclude a vigorous exploration of ideas, particularly when the subject was—among other things—a philosopher. Instead, *To Live is to Resist* offers rather cursory explorations of such concepts as hegemony, civil society, and War of Position, and of Gramsci's analysis of the social role of intellectuals.

That Frétigné provides only a perfunctory account of these theories is a missed opportunity because the book is lucid and concise in its treatment of so much else. It provides a granular account of Gramsci's life and of three crucial decades of the Italian left from which even audiences acquainted with these subjects can learn. Notwithstanding its shortcomings, *To Live is to Resist* renders Gramsci three-dimensional, an essential service as the Italian revolutionary remains profoundly relevant to twenty first century political and intellectual life.

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