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Editor

A Reflection on  
Sraffa's Revolution in  
Economic Theory

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*Editor*

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# Antonio Gramsci's Letters that Piero Sraffa did not Forward to the Italian Communist Party

*Nerio Naldi*

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I would like to thank Giancarlo de Vivo, Donatella Ianelli, Eleonora Lattanzi, Luisa Righi, Alessandro Roncaglia and Shoshanna Zuckerman. If not otherwise stated, letters of Antonio Gramsci, Piero Sraffa, Tatiana Schucht and of other members of the Gramsci-Schucht family mentioned in the paper are conserved in Rome at Fondazione Gramsci (until 1982 it was called *Istituto Gramsci*). The Piero Sraffa Papers are conserved at the Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge and are available on line at <https://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/db/node.xsp?id=EAD%2FGBR%2F0016%2FSRAFFA>. Translations of Gramsci's letters have been taken from Gramsci (1994); other translations are mine. The following abbreviations will be employed: SP (Piero Sraffa Papers), FG (Fondazione Gramsci), PCI (Partito Comunista d'Italia). Most of the letters referred to have been published in Sraffa (1991), Gramsci (1992, 1994), Gramsci and Schucht (1997). Additional correspondence between Tatiana Schucht and Piero Sraffa and letters exchanged with other correspondents mentioned in this paper are due to be published as part of the *Edizione nazionale degli scritti di Antonio Gramsci*.

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## I PIERO SRAFFA AND ANTONIO GRAMSCI

Even though his position as an elected Member of Parliament should have meant he was protected by parliamentary immunity, Antonio Gramsci, the foremost leader of the PCI at the time, was arrested on 8 November 1926 and shortly afterwards sent to the island of Ustica in internal exile. In the days immediately following his arrival, he wrote to Sraffa (11 December 1926) asking him to send him “some books”, and in particular “a good treatise on economics and finance”. A few days later (21 December 1926), evidently upon receiving news from Sraffa that he had sent or was about to send him books and open an account for him in a Milan bookshop, Gramsci answered thanking him and telling him that he had already put in “quite a large order, certain that I wasn’t being indiscreet, for I know your kindness” (Gramsci 1994, pp. 44, 52–3). From Ustica, Gramsci wrote at least four letters to Sraffa between 11 December 1926 and 2 January 1927 (Gramsci 1994, pp. 44, 45, 52–4, 57–9). None of Sraffa’s replies have come down to us, but it emerges quite clearly from Gramsci’s letters that Sraffa’s immediate concern was to satisfy Gramsci’s explicit or implicit requests: besides sending books, Sraffa also set out to supply Gramsci with both material and financial support. Sraffa must have realised that these efforts were not without some risk. We know that there were consequences to his sending Gramsci, on 10 January 1927, a postal order for a thousand lire:<sup>1</sup> the Palermo Police Department contacted their colleagues in Milan, and Sraffa was interrogated. Evidence of this is to be found in the police file dedicated to Sraffa in the *Casellario Politico Centrale* (*Central Political Records*, Archivio Centrale dello Stato), and it was on this occasion that the police began keeping a record of Sraffa’s doings (see Lattanzi and Naldi 2018, pp. 74–5).

As far as we can judge from his letters, the period that Gramsci spent in Ustica was relatively trouble-free, but all too soon, on 20 January 1928,

<sup>1</sup>On 21 December 1926 Gramsci had written to Sraffa: “Our financial situation is still good: they give us, the political prisoners, ten lire a day: the *mazzetta* of the common detainees at Ustica amounts to four lire a day [...] six of us [...] live in a small house that costs us ninety lire a month each, all services included” (Gramsci 1994, p. 53). On 2 January 1927 he had come again on the same subject: “I’ve received the books that you mentioned in your penultimate letter and a first batch of the ones I ordered. So I have plenty to read for some time. I thank you for your great kindness, but I would not want to abuse it. Yet I assure you that quite frankly I will turn to you whenever I am in need of something. As you can imagine, there is no opportunity to spend much here, just the opposite; sometimes one can’t spend one’s money even when the purchase is necessary” (Gramsci 1994, p. 57).

an arrest warrant arrived and he was transferred to Milan, where he was to be interned in the prison of San Vittore pending conclusion of the preliminary investigation that would lead to his trial before the *Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato* (*Special Tribunal for the Defence of the State*) with the accusation of having organised armed insurrection. When he got wind of it, Gramsci sent telegrams to Tatiana Schucht and Sraffa announcing the imminent unexpected transfer (Gramsci and Schucht 1997, p. 42 n.1; Sraffa 1991, p. LI n.20), representing further evidence of just how crucial Gramsci the prisoner saw these contacts to be.

Some light on Sraffa's position in these circumstances is cast by a letter and some observations by Camilla Ravera (Sraffa 1991, pp. XXIV–XXV, LI; Ravera 1973, p. 267), who was then in charge of the underground office (based in Genoa) of the PCI.<sup>2</sup> From a letter by Camilla Ravera to Ruggero Grieco and Palmiro Togliatti (Togliatti virtually became the leader of the PCI from the moment of Gramsci's arrest; Grieco was another prominent figure in the PCI) dated 29 January 1927 and from the memoirs of Ravera herself we learn that just prior to that date, therefore only a few days after Gramsci's telegram about his transfer, Sraffa, who was not acquainted with her, went to see her accompanied by Felice Platone, another leader of the PCI. Thus it seems to have been Sraffa himself who informed the PCI underground office of Gramsci's transfer. So it was that, at a time when the PCI found itself going underground and suffering a great many arrests, Sraffa—even though in a letter to Gramsci in 1924, shortly before their acquaintance evolved into a close friendship, had described himself as *an undisciplined communist*—<sup>3</sup> assumed the role of liaison between Gramsci and the PCI, doing so on the strength of certain pre-established contacts and by making further contacts with members of the by now clandestine party. In the meantime the party and its members were being subjected to new legislative measures involving, among other things, capital punishment for assassination attempts against the highest representatives of the State, attempted organisation of insurrection and crimes of espionage. It was against this background that Camilla Ravera wrote that Sraffa “was sharing in our troubles and worries, and wanted to know if it was possible to do anything that might help Gramsci to endure the hardships of imprisonment” (Sraffa 1991, p. XXV).

<sup>2</sup> See also note 8 below.

<sup>3</sup> See Sraffa (1924, p. 4) (English translation in Naldi 2000, pp. 106–7).

For a better understanding of the climate at the time and the position taken by Sraffa, let us also recall that in February 1926, while he was still teaching at the University of Perugia, he came under fire from the local fascist newspaper (*L'assalto*) subsequent to having suggested adopting a book by Francesco Saverio Nitti (former Minister of the Treasury and Prime Minister who had fled Italy to escape fascist persecution) as a textbook for his course on Public Finance. In the spring of 1927, Sraffa came under further attack in the fascist journal *Libro e Moschetto*, intent on preventing his nomination to a professorship in Genoa. But in the same period Keynes, whom he had met in 1921 thanks to the good offices of Gaetano Salvemini and Mary Berenson (Naldi 1998a), suggested he move to Cambridge for a few years. Sraffa took up the proposal and at the beginning of June the University of Cambridge appointed him to a teaching post for a period of three years.<sup>4</sup>

Subsequent to contact with the above-mentioned underground office of the PCI, the first evidence we have of Sraffa taking steps in support of Gramsci was the visit he was allowed to make to Gramsci in the San Vittore prison, as mentioned in a letter written by Gramsci himself to Tatiana Schucht dated 14 July 1929 (Gramsci 1994, p. 277). The decision to apply for this visit was most probably made upon agreement between Sraffa and Camilla Ravera, or other exponents of the PCI, and we can assume that it took place in the first three weeks of June or the early days of July (Naldi 2000). Not long before Sraffa had made two journeys to Switzerland in April, and one to Tunis in May (SP A1/6). From a letter in which the historian Domenico Zucaro summarises the issues dealt with in a meeting with Sraffa, we can deduce that the purpose of the visit to San Vittore was to discuss the line in defence to be taken by Gramsci and other communist leaders awaiting trial (letter from Domenico Zucaro to Sraffa, 8 November, 1962, SP C343).

Setting out from Italy at the beginning of July bound for Cambridge, Sraffa stopped off in Paris for a few days, where he met the communist leader Angelo Tasca. With respect to Sraffa's efforts to support Gramsci, this meeting was to lead to publication in the daily *Manchester Guardian*,

<sup>4</sup>Sraffa's position had already been extremely dangerous and difficult in December 1922, when Mussolini (who had been nominated Prime Minister less than two months before) tried to force him to retract the content of a short article on the state of Italian banks he had published in a supplement to the *Manchester Guardian Commercial* edited by Keynes (Naldi 1998a, b; Lattanzi and Naldi 2018, pp. 69–70).

on 24 October 1927, of a letter entitled *The methods of fascism. The Case of Antonio Gramsci* (see Naldi 1998a). The idea of appealing to British public opinion to raise awareness of the case of Gramsci had been advanced to Sraffa by Tasca in the month of September (Angelo Tasca to Sraffa, 21 September, 1927, SP C309). The letter had been written by Tasca himself and translated into English with the help of Maurice Dobb (SP F1/9/1-5), Sraffa's colleague at Cambridge and friend since his first stay in England, in 1921–1922, and a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Over and above the letter in itself, however, a point worth stressing is that, subsequent to its publication in the *Manchester Guardian*, Sraffa found himself in the uncomfortable position of being threatened with application of the Italian *special laws* enacted in 1926 as engaged in activities that might *harm the prestige* of the country, facing, among other measures, a ban on returning to Italy, on penalty of immediate arrest. In fact, due to an editorial error, the letter which was meant to be published anonymously appeared in a form that implicated association with Sraffa. The letter was signed “An Italian in England”, but Sraffa's name appeared on an index page where also the letters were listed (Naldi 1998a).<sup>5</sup>

Sraffa does not appear to have suffered as a result of the editorial error made by the *Manchester Guardian*, but this was most probably a matter of sheer luck. The letter had not escaped the attention of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which sifted through foreign press in search of *anti-Italian* publications. Italian officers (as shown by documents from the Italian ministries for foreign and internal affairs dated to October–November 1927 and conserved in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato and in the Archivio Storico Diplomatico—see Lattanzi and Naldi 2018, pp. 77–8) had hit on the letter as early as 25 October; yet they evidently failed to make the connection between the letter and the name published on another page of the newspaper and any further investigations that might have been made do not appear to have led to any consequences. Prudently, Sraffa neither left England nor returned to Italy during the Christmas holidays of 1927. When he eventually did so, in the Spring of 1928, he did not come up against any particular difficulties.

In 1928 Sraffa returned to Italy for the Easter holidays, and a note in his diary (SP E1) suggests that on 29 March he met a lawyer (Giovanni Ariis) who had been in touch with both Gramsci and Tatiana Schucht for some time. Sraffa's visit to Ariis might have had to do with developments

<sup>5</sup> For further details, see Naldi (2012, p. 1405) and Lattanzi and Naldi (2018, pp. 77–8).

in the trial against Gramsci, who had designated Ariis as his defence lawyer, but it is also possible that Sraffa was simply trying to make contact with Tatiana Schucht. Be that as it may, on the evidence of various documents we can place the first meeting between Sraffa and Tatiana Schucht since Gramsci had been arrested in the second half of September 1928, and more precisely between the 17 and 27 September (SP A1/6/1; letters by Tatiana Schucht to Gramsci, 15 and 17 September, 1928 and 5 and 6 October, 1928—Gramsci and Schucht 1997, pp. 259–62, 267–68). Gramsci made no response to Tatiana Schucht’s mention in her October 6th letter to him of the meeting she had had with Sraffa. He may have avoided mentioning Sraffa as a matter of prudence.

## 2 PIERO SRAFFA, TATIANA SCHUCHT AND GRAMSCI’S LETTERS

Gramsci’s wife, Julia Schucht, had been living in Russia since 1917, when her exiled family had left Italy to return to their home country and join the Soviet revolution. Tatiana Schucht was the only member of the Schucht family who had decided to postpone moving to Russia and remain in Italy. While it was in the Soviet Union, in 1922, that Julia Schucht met Gramsci, Tatiana met her brother-in-law in Rome, most likely in late January 1925.<sup>6</sup> After Gramsci’s arrest, Tatiana immediately began providing him assistance, first during his imprisonment in Rome, then during his internal exile on the island of Ustica, continuing during his imprisonment in Milan, his trial in Rome, his imprisonment in Turi and eventually when he was moved to a clinic.

The purpose of the September 1928 meeting between Sraffa and Tatiana Schucht was almost certainly focused on establishing an efficient liason (which had clearly been lacking) between Gramsci—already serving a 20-year sentence—and his party.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the following winter Sraffa began to liase regularly between Tatiana Schucht, who visited and

<sup>6</sup>See the letter from Antonio Gramsci to Giulia Schucht of 2 February 1925 (Gramsci 1992, pp. 412–13).

<sup>7</sup>See Sraffa to Angelo Tasca (not to Togliatti, as stated by the editor), 26 December, 1928, in Spriano (1979, pp. 169–71).

corresponded with Gramsci in prison, and the *centro estero* (*external centre*) of the Italian Communist Party (PCI).<sup>8</sup>

As far as we know, Tatiana Schucht prepared a copy of each letter she received from Gramsci and sent it or handed it to Sraffa. He, in turn, forwarded it to the *centro estero*. After having prepared another copy of each letter, Tatiana sent the original to the other family members Gramsci had addressed it to, or, if the letter had been addressed to herself, to her sister Julia. Indeed, we know that this method was extremely effective, in terms of both the conservation and the transmission of Gramsci's letters. However we also know that on some occasions originals and copies of the letters were not forwarded to the usual receivers. In particular, as highlighted by Giancarlo de Vivo through a comparison of lists of Gramsci's letters prepared in various years as well as from other documents (de Vivo 2017, pp. 38–52), it is quite clear that between the end of 1932 and the end of 1933 Sraffa refrained from forwarding a significant number of copies of letters which he normally would have sent to the *centro estero*. First among these, following explicit requests formulated by Gramsci, were copies of two crucial letters that Gramsci had sent to Tatiana Schucht, one on 5 December 1932 and the other on 27 February 1933 (Gramsci 1994, pp. 236–9, 274–8). Then, a few months later, Sraffa withheld copies of almost three-quarters of the 30 letters (including a telegram) from Gramsci to Tatiana which he likely received between mid-April and early December 1933. As far as we know, no specific request had been formulated by Gramsci in this case. Indeed, in 1974 those copies were still in Sraffa's hands.<sup>9</sup>

His decision to withhold so many of these letters was certainly intentional and important. The list of Gramsci's letters prepared by Togliatti between 1937 and 1941 shows that copies of virtually every letter Gramsci

<sup>8</sup> After it had been declared illegal the PCI was forced to move its main headquarters abroad. These offices (first based between Switzerland and France, then in Paris) were conventionally called *centro estero*.

<sup>9</sup> In 1962, writing to Camilla Ravera, Sraffa hinted at the copies of Gramsci's letters he still had with himself (SP C342/2). de Vivo's analysis was substantially based on a list of Gramsci's letters prepared by Palmiro Togliatti between May 1937 and January 1941. Togliatti presumably studied the copies of the letters forwarded by Sraffa to *centro estero* as well as letters held by Gramsci's wife in Moscow (Daniele and Vacca 2005, pp. 233–88). de Vivo also drew on the list of photocopies of documents relating to Gramsci that Sraffa gave to Giorgio Napolitano in 1972 (SP C115/5/25/1-7), and on the lists of copies of Gramsci's letters that Sraffa gave to Elsa Fubini in 1974 (FG, "Gramsci dopo la morte 1970–1977" and SP C115/5/13/1-4).

had written to Tatiana Schucht between December 1928 and November 1932—126 letters out of 128<sup>10</sup>—had reached Togliatti, quite likely having been forwarded by Sraffa to the *centro estero*.<sup>11</sup> The available documents further suggest that Sraffa continued giving *centro estero* copies of all Gramsci's letters for some months also after December 1932 and February 1933.

In the next Section we will provide information concerning the content of the two letters which Gramsci had intended exclusively for Tatiana and Piero. Section 4 will put forward an explanation of why Sraffa may have modified the well-established praxis of over four years and, beginning in April 1933, withheld a substantial number of Gramsci's letters from the *centro estero*. Focusing on those addressed directly to Tatiana Schucht, we will identify two sets of unforwarded letters among those sent by Gramsci after 27 February, 1933. The first set comprises Gramsci's letters written between mid-April and mid-July 1933. The second set comprises those from the end of September to mid-November 1933.<sup>12</sup> As we shall see, the

<sup>10</sup>The exceptions, justified by their unique characteristics, are the letters dated January 4 and November 6, 1932 (Gramsci 1994, pp. 123–4, 224–5). In the first of these, in answer to a question posed by Sraffa himself based on a query from a friend, Gramsci discussed the transcription of Russian names into Italian. It is therefore possible that upon receiving his copy Sraffa forwarded it just to this friend, and not to the *centro estero*, and that Tatiana Schucht did not forward it to Giulia. On the other hand, it is likely that the 6 November letter (formed by two parts, respectively addressed to Tatiana and to Julia) was never sent to Tatiana Schucht. Indeed, the subsequent letter of 9 November opens with a phrase suggesting that Gramsci had asked prison authorities to re-write the letter he had written few days before: “Dearest Tania, on Sunday I had already written a letter for you with a section for Giulia, but I have asked [prison authorities] to please let me do the letter over again because it was too much under the influence of a telegram sent me by Carlo that gave credibility to the wild rumors circulating among the prisoners [on potentially upcoming release]” (Gramsci 1994, p. 226—an amnesty law had actually been enacted, but the sentence Gramsci had to serve was only marginally reduced).

<sup>11</sup>Strictly speaking, any letter included by Togliatti in his list could have been forwarded by Sraffa or shown him by Julia Schucht. Therefore, that list can only tell us which letters Sraffa did not forward (possibly underestimating their number); it cannot tell us which letters Sraffa did forward. However, additional evidence allows us to extend our assessments, with a certain degree of confidence, also to the latter set (see, for instance, Sraffa to Togliatti 4 May 1932, where Sraffa explicitly mentioned letters he was forwarding to Togliatti (Sraffa 1991, pp. 224–5).

<sup>12</sup>Over the course of the years following 1933, when he was no longer in jail but in a clinic, Gramsci penned only two letters to Tatiana Schucht, on 22 July and 11 August, 1935 (Gramsci 1994, pp. 348–9, 350–1).

reasons why Sraffa did not forward the letters written in those two periods may be connected to what he himself described as “two first class disasters”.

### 3 THE LETTERS OF 5 DECEMBER 1932 AND 27 FEBRUARY 1933

In the letter dated 5 December 1932, the first of Gramsci's letters written between December 1932 and December 1933 which were not on Togliatti's list (hence, *a fortiori*, not received by the *centro estero*), Gramsci commented harshly on a letter he had received while incarcerated in Milan in February 1928 from Ruggero Grieco. Gramsci had already touched on Grieco's letter writing to his wife on 30 April, 1928 (a letter which was included in Togliatti's list), and had spoken about it with Tatiana Schucht.<sup>13</sup> In June 1930, he also mentioned it to his brother Gennaro, who had been visiting him in Turi, describing it as extremely harmful to his position.<sup>14</sup> But on 5 December, 1932, Gramsci's remarks were even stronger than before. He wrote that the letter had been presented to him by the pretrial judge, accompanied by these disquieting words: “you have friends who undoubtedly want you to remain in prison for quite some time” (Gramsci 1994, p. 237). And he added:

Was this a wicked act or an act of irresponsible superficiality? It is hard to say which. Perhaps both at the same time; perhaps the person who wrote it was only irresponsibly stupid and someone else, less stupid, induced him to write. But there is no point in racking one's brain over such questions. There remains the objective fact that has its significance. (Gramsci 1994, p. 238)

Why did Gramsci believe that Grieco's letter warranted such a strong reaction? From what Tatiana Schucht sent to her relatives in Moscow on 12–14 May, 1928 (Gramsci 1994, pp. 201–2), we may infer that Gramsci

<sup>13</sup>See Gramsci to Giulia Schucht, 30 April, 1928 (Gramsci 1994, pp. 201–2) and Tatiana Schucht to Giulia Schucht 12–14 May, 1928 (Rossi and Vacca 2007, p. 82; Vacca 2012, p. 55).

<sup>14</sup>See the notes Gennaro submitted to the *centro estero* a few weeks later (Rossi and Vacca 2007, pp. 209–17). The original of Grieco's letter is not extant, but a picture taken by Italian police in 1928 is conserved at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, 1929, b.196); the latter has been reproduced (with minor imprecisions) and translated in Spriano (1979, pp. 151–3) (see also de Vivo 2009).



believed it provided Italian authorities with information which could be used against him. We know from Gennaro Gramsci's account that in the summer of 1930 Antonio had told him that Greico's letter became the main *capo d'accusa* at the trial where he was sentenced to more than twenty years. But while the first hypothesis is supported by the fact that Italian political police photographed the letter, Gramsci's trial's court report offers no evidence to support the latter statement. In January 1933, however, Gramsci also maintained that this letter had been instrumental in effectively obstructing a Soviet-coordinated effort towards his release—this effort involved approaching the Italian government by means of communication with the Vatican.<sup>15</sup> Gramsci most certainly reiterated this assessment to Tatiana Schucht, and likely to Piero Sraffa as well, in their meetings during his stay in the clinics, when he was permitted visitors, albeit still under strict police surveillance.<sup>16</sup>

In the second of the letters of the period in question which were not on Togliatti's list, that of 27 February 1933, Gramsci once again made reference to Grieco's February 1928 letter, but extended the blame:<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See the letter from Tatiana Schucht to Piero Sraffa written on 11 February 1933 (Sraffa 1991, p. 228). That Gramsci did not communicate this view before 1933 does not necessarily mean that he had not conceived of it earlier. The restrictions he had to face in his communication (his letters were read by prison censors and his conversations with relatives always took place under strict surveillance by prison agents) certainly made it extremely difficult for him to express the notion that Ruggero Grieco's letter had significantly contributed to the failure of a Soviet government attempt to obtain his release. Recent research has argued that the view Gramsci had adopted is contradicted by documents kept in both Russian and Vatican archives (Fabre 2015, pp. 115–17). However, it has also been argued that in Gramsci's view his release was a dossier constantly open between Soviet and Italian governments, but that it would have had no chance of positive development if the PCI presented it as its own initiative—which could be read in Grieco's February 1928 letter (Vacca 2012, pp. 239).

<sup>16</sup> See Tatiana Schucht to Piero Sraffa 16 and 28 September 1937, and Piero Sraffa to Tatiana Schucht 18 September 1937—forthcoming (see also Tatiana Schucht to Giulia Schucht 5 July 1934—Edizione Nazionale, forthcoming, and Sraffa 1991, pp. 187–8).

<sup>17</sup> In this letter Gramsci referred to his wife with the nickname *Iulca*. It has been suggested that Gramsci may have been using this variation of her name as a code word, with *Giulia* actually referring to his wife and *Iulca* to indicate the PCI. Although close examination of Gramsci's letters does not reveal evidence to support such an hypothesis, it is nevertheless noteworthy that when Tatiana Schucht sent Sraffa the February 27 letter, she described it as “an Aesopian masterpiece” (Tatiana Schucht to Sraffa, 9 March, 1933—Gramsci and Schucht 1997, p. 1228) and that on the following day she added: “I wrote to him to let him know that I understood perfectly what he meant by referring to either *Iulca* or *Giulia*, (naturally using carefully selected wording)” (Tatiana Schucht to Sraffa, 10 March 1933, Edizione

it is certain that during all these years I've always thought about certain events (in the specific instance about a series of events that can be symbolically summarized in the famous letter mentioned to me by the pretrial judge in Milan and of which I talked to you recently), but it is also certain that in the last few months these thoughts have, let me say, intensified, perhaps because there dwindled away in me any thought of being able to clarify them personally, to deal with them «philologically», to go back to the sources and arrive at a plausible explanation. What I want to tell you today is this: that I connect the external manifestations of my relationship with Julca with this series of events. That is, that to this series of preoccupations are linked certain letters that I wrote to you a long time ago and that perhaps you have not forgotten, all the way down to the last that you sometimes refer to as «notorious» and that is not very distant in time.<sup>18</sup> In any case, I am convinced to this day that in my relations with Julca there exists a certain equivocation, a false bottom, an ambiguity that prevents us from seeing clearly and being completely frank; my impression is that I am set aside, that I represent so to speak «a bureaucratic dossier» to be annotated and nothing more. I assure you that I am the first to believe that I have made mistakes, but my impression is that these are not the errors involved but other things that escape me and that I am unable to identify with precision. On the other hand, as you can imagine, although I live in jail, isolated from all sources of communication, direct or indirect, you mustn't think that elements of judgement and reflection don't still reach me. [...] I know how to select, distinguish, tone down intentional exaggerations, integrate,

Nazionale, forthcoming; see also Tatiana Schucht to Gramsci, 10 March, 1933—first letter—Gramsci and Schucht 1997, p. 1227). It is our opinion that Gramsci was not employing a code in his February 27, 1933 letter, but was superimposing considerations about his wife with those about the PCI, thus expressing himself on both a private and a political level—and one can easily discern a reference to Party leaders, with no need to resort to any prearranged code, while the reference to his wife can also be understood in the light of other letters written by Gramsci from prison which we shall not go into at this time (see the letters from Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht on 3 October, 1932 and from Tatiana Schucht to Gramsci October 11, 1932—Gramsci 1994, pp. 214–5; Gramsci and Schucht 1997, p. 1093; see also Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht 6 March, 1933 and Tatiana Schucht, to Gramsci, 10 March, 1933—Gramsci 1994, pp. 278–81; Gramsci and Schucht 1997, p. 1227; see also Gramsci to Giulia Schucht, 16 June, 1936—Gramsci 1994, pp. 357–8).

<sup>18</sup>The *last letter* Gramsci was referring to is most certainly his letter to Tatiana Schucht written on 14 November, 1932 (Gramsci 1994, pp. 228–30). We are unable to identify a group of letters akin to that one written in earlier years. Even though Gramsci's prison correspondence contains several critical analyses of the relationship between his wife and himself, and on several occasions he stated he would have not written again to his wife unless she had first sent him some letters, no letter is equally dramatic to the one written on 14 November, 1932.

etc. There obviously must be a few mistakes here and there, I'm ready to admit it, but they are not decisive, not such as to impart a different direction to the course of my thoughts. Besides, there are other things that I don't consider appropriate to write to you. You know my way of thinking: what is written acquires a «moral» and practical value that far transcends the mere fact of being written, which is still a purely material thing ... The conclusion, to put it summarily, is this: I was sentenced on June 4, 1928 by the Special Tribunal, that is, by a specific collegium of men, which could nominally be indicated by name, address, and profession in civilian life. But this is a mistake. Those who sentenced me belong to a much vaster organism, of which the Special Tribunal was only the external and material expression, which compiled the legal documents for the sentence. I must say that among the «sentencers» there was also Julca, I believe, indeed I'm firmly convinced she was there unconsciously, and then there is a series of less unconscious people. This at least is my conviction, by now irremovably anchored in me because it is the only one that explains a series of facts that are successive and congruent with one another. (Gramsci 1994, pp. 275–6)

We know that the original of the first letter—that of 5 December, 1932—is still preserved in a file housed at the RGASPI Archives, in Moscow,<sup>19</sup> because it had been sent to the Komintern as part of the documentation accusing Togliatti of orchestrating attempts to sabotage negotiations for Gramsci's liberation. This accusation arrived into the hands of a member of the Secretariat of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from the Schucht sisters, presumably in the first months of 1939, shortly after Tatiana's re-entry into the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup> This same letter, not on Elsa Fubini's January 1964 list of Gramsci's letters held by Istituto Gramsci,<sup>21</sup> was in fact first published in 1965. The publication reproduced a typed copy that Tatiana Schucht had evidently prepared and kept for herself, while sending Sraffa a carbon copy of the same typescript (the carbon copy was still in Sraffa's possession in 1974).<sup>22</sup> Gramsci's 27

<sup>19</sup> See Canali (2013, pp. 174, 251–4).

<sup>20</sup> See Pons (2004, pp. 92–5 and 106–10), Daniele and Vacca (2005, pp. 19–20), Vacca, pp. 348–9 and Canali (2013, pp. 174–5).

<sup>21</sup> See Daniele and Vacca (2005, pp. 191–8).

<sup>22</sup> Today, both copies are housed in the Fondazione Gramsci; a photocopy of the one belonging to Sraffa, with his handwritten note identifying it as “second photocopy,” is preserved in SP C115/1/167/1-2. We have no information regarding any “first photocopy,” but we may speculate that it was sent to the Gramsci Institute in a dossier entrusted to Alessandro Roncaglia in 1973–1974, before July 1974 (see Naldi 2020, pp. 258–66).

February, 1933 letter to Tatiana Schucht, on the contrary, was already on the list drafted by Maria Teresa Lanza de Laurentiis in 1956,<sup>23</sup> and was published in the book *2000 pagine di Gramsci* in 1964. Tatiana Schucht's typewritten copy of the letter of December 5, 1932 (presumably already in Togliatti's possession or in the archives of the PCI for a number of years) was probably not delivered to the curators of the editions of Gramsci's letters until 1964. The decision to publish it was presumably made by Togliatti himself, or by his successor at the helm of the PCI, between 1964 and 1965. While Togliatti's concern about the letter's content could have been a major factor in hindering its publication, the fact that the original manuscript was not available to corroborate its authenticity may have also discouraged an earlier disclosure.

This body of information regarding the content of these two letters and the circuitous route they travelled before publication can be supplemented with some additional facts and conjectures.

First of all, we can identify some indications that Tatiana Schucht did not send to Sraffa the December 5, 1932 letter as soon as she received it. We base this affirmation on the inference that Sraffa on 19 December, writing after receiving Gramsci's December 12 letter,<sup>24</sup> was making no reference to the contents of that of the 5th. He does seem to reference it, however, in a subsequent letter to Tatiana on 5 January, 1933, expressing alarm over her missed visits to Turi: "Unfortunately, we are now realizing how disastrous it was that you did not visit him in 1932!" (Sraffa 1991, p. 105) This was a point in Gramsci's 5 December, 1932 letter and we may surmise that Tatiana did not give Sraffa this letter until he had already returned to Italy.<sup>25</sup> It is plausible that she did not think it prudent to forward it to England. Perhaps she feared that Sraffa would have delivered it along with those from preceding months to the *centro estero* as he was passing through France, as there was no indication in it that he should not have.

But we may also note that Sraffa's 5 January 1933 letter, even though explicitly lamenting that Tatiana Schucht had not visited Gramsci in 1932, made no mention to the other themes in the 5 December letter. We may then presume that the sentence from Sraffa's 5 January letter quoted

<sup>23</sup> This list, first examined by de Vivo (2017, p. 46), is kept in SP C115/1/182/1-10.

<sup>24</sup> Compare Sraffa's 19 December 1932 letter to Tatiana Schucht (Sraffa 1991, pp. 100–1) with Gramsci's 12 December 1932 letter to Tatiana Schucht (Gramsci 1994, pp. 239–41).

<sup>25</sup> Sraffa left England for the 1932–1933 winter holidays around 15 December.

above was the effect of his reading of Gramsci's letter of 19 December (Gramsci 1994, pp. 242–4), where the lack of any visit by Tatiana Schucht in 1932 was also stressed. We may then assume that on 5 January 1933 Sraffa was still unaware of Gramsci's letter of 5 December 1932, and that it was handed in to Sraffa only when he met Tatiana Schucht in Rome, between 8 and 11 January 1933 (we know that he positively received it from references in his letter to Tatiana of 7 February 1933 and in Tatiana's letter to Sraffa of 11 February 1933, Sraffa 1991, pp. 108, 228).

It is also interesting to note that Gramsci gave no specific indication regarding who should have received the 5 December letter. It appears like that Schucht and Sraffa decided to ask Gramsci explicitly whether the *centro estero* should also receive a copy. Sraffa got his answer in a letter from Schucht dated 11 February, 1933, where she disclosed what Gramsci told her when she visited him in prison on 19 January: "When I remarked that we believed Nino's letter should not be passed on, he answered, 'Of course not.'" (11 February, 1933 letter from Tatiana Schucht to Piero Sraffa—Sraffa 1991, p. 228—"we believed" may certainly be understood to mean *Sraffa and I were of the opinion that...*). This leads us to assume that Gramsci trusted Tatiana and Sraffa to evaluate which of his letters were to be forwarded to the PCI, but that they generally considered this relay to be standard practice, as per his instructions. On the other hand, perhaps as a result of this request for clarification, Gramsci specifically indicated to whom his 27 February, 1933 letter was directed in the body of the letter itself: "What I am writing here is meant for you only [Tatiana Schucht] and for the attorney who is handling my affairs [Piero Sraffa]" (Gramsci 1994, p. 277).

Both Sraffa and Tatiana Schucht adhered to these requests. However, the information available suggests that Sraffa did not respect Gramsci's request to keep his Italian comrades in the dark regarding his petition that Soviet government tried to secure his release by negotiating with the Italian government. This can be deduced from information suggesting that, in addition to the copies of Gramsci's letters to Tatiana Schucht, Sraffa also usually transmitted the letters he himself was receiving from her to the *centro estero*.<sup>26</sup> While he did not forward to *centro estero* Gramsci's 27 February, 1933 letter, he seems to have submitted Schucht's 5 March,

<sup>26</sup>This question is considered in detail in Naldi (2020, pp. 258–66).

1933 letter, which allowed Party leaders to get wind of the potential negotiations pressed for by Gramsci (Sraffa 1991, pp. 442–5), and also to understand how Gramsci's 6 March 1933 letter to Tatiana Schucht (Gramsci 1994, pp. 278–81) hinted at that crucial theme. This, we may presume, may have been a result of the understanding that it would have been impossible for PCI leaders to be kept in the dark on such matters.<sup>27</sup> But we may also note that it would have happened before Sraffa's trust for PCI leaders was shaken by the "two first class disasters" which led him to withhold a large number of Gramsci's letters.

#### 4 TWO DISASTERS

As mentioned in Sect. 2, Sraffa not only complied with Gramsci's explicit request that his December 5, 1932 and February 27, 1933 letters to Tatiana be not forwarded to the *centro estero*, but he apparently also withheld a far greater number of Gramsci's letters to her composed between mid-April and early December, 1933—and no specific instructions about those letters have come to light. There were about 22 or 23 of these unforwarded letters<sup>28</sup> compared to the 29 or 30 that Tatiana had copied and forwarded to Sraffa. Similarly, from the list of documents of Gramsci-related material which Sraffa gave Giorgio Napolitano in 1972 and from Fubini's lists of the documents she had received from Sraffa, we may gather that in the 1970s Sraffa still had in his possession the copies of at least 18 (more likely, 22)<sup>29</sup> of the letters coming from the periods between mid-April and mid-July, and from the end of September to November-December 1933. Conversely, an analysis of the available lists suggests that up to mid-April 1933, notwithstanding his retainment of the December 5 and February 27 letters, Sraffa continued his usual practice of providing the *centro estero* with copies of all Gramsci's letters. In fact, only one of Gramsci's letters to Tatiana is lacking from Togliatti's list for the period between the end of December 1932 and mid-April 1933: the one dated 21 March 1933,<sup>30</sup> in which Gramsci provided further details about the

<sup>27</sup> A similar point was to be raised by the Soviet ambassador in Italy (V.P.Potëmkin) in summer 1933 (see letter from Tatiana Schucht to Sraffa 27 August 1933—Gramsci and Schucht (1997, p. 1343).

<sup>28</sup> See Table 18.1.

<sup>29</sup> See Table 18.1.

<sup>30</sup> See note 35 below.

state of his health following the serious episode he had suffered on the 7 of March and after his medical examination by Dr Uberto Arcangeli. This is further corroborated by Fubini's lists, from which we may surmise that Sraffa had none of those letters in his possession in 1974. In particular, we may assume that Sraffa had even sent the *centro estero* the letter dated March 6 which not only dramatically compared his situation to a shipwreck and referred to his own transformation on a "molecular" level, but also somewhat vaguely hinted at notions that Gramsci himself had labeled "secret" (*riservata*) which, taken together with the contents of the already mentioned Tatiana's March 5 letter to Sraffa, revealed Gramsci's desire for the Soviet government to intervene on behalf of his liberation by negotiating with the Italian government.

A reconstruction of events which may explain why the two aforementioned blocks of letters were not forwarded to the *centro estero*, while those prior to and between those two periods were duly submitted may be connected to what Sraffa himself described as "two first class disasters".<sup>31</sup> The first of these referred to the publication in the newspaper of the French Communist Party—*l'Humanité*—of the report Dr Arcangeli had filed on Gramsci's medical condition after visiting him in prison. The second was the Fascist police seizure of a PCI directive outlining how incarcerated communist militants should proceed when applying for parole.

Both episodes had dire consequences. The Fascist regime saw them as challenge to its prestige and power. Consequently, Fascist repression of political prisoners escalated. The effects on Gramsci's life were particularly disastrous, as they obstructed Sraffa's efforts to get his sentence reduced. In March of 1933, at Sraffa's request, attorney Saverio Castellett had filed an appeal with the Special Tribunal. In order to apply the amnesty law enacted 5 November 1932, each criminal conviction of a prisoner had to be reviewed individually. Castellett applied for one of Gramsci's sentences to be overturned on the grounds that the article of the 1889 Penal Law Code for which Gramsci had been sentenced to serve three years and four months (art.134) was not included in the new, 1931 Penal Law Code. This appeal, if granted, would have significantly reduced Gramsci's

<sup>31</sup> "Due disastri di prim'ordine" are the exact words used by Sraffa in a letter to Paolo Spriano on 18 December, 1969 (Sraffa 1991, pp. 271–2); similar words can be found in a couple of Sraffa's notes cited by de Vivo (2009, pp. 90–1)—the original documents can be found in SP E44 and J13.

sentence in addition to the benefits of the amnesty law, and would have allowed him to apply for parole within a few months. Initially, Sraffa had been confident that the appeal could be won and that parole could be granted,<sup>32</sup> but after the “two first class disasters” it was rejected and, as a matter of fact, no communist militants were ever granted parole.

#### 4.1 *The First Disaster and Gramsci's Letters from mid-April to mid-July 1933*

The notion that there may be a link between the publication of Dr Arcangeli's medical report and the fact that Sraffa did not send the PCI any copy of Gramsci's letters to Tatiana Schucht written from end of April to mid-July 1933, hinges on two fundamental elements: (1) Sraffa learned of the effect the publication of the report had on the examination of Castellett's petition (and probably of the very publication of the report) in a letter from his father Angelo sent from Switzerland on 23 May, 1933;<sup>33</sup> (2) the first letter of the block that were not forwarded was dated 17 April 1933, thus probably received by Sraffa towards the end of that same month, when he was already in Cambridge. While we may assume that Sraffa intended to accumulate a number of copies of letters before forwarding them to the *centro estero*, or to hand them all over at once in the summer when he could deliver them personally in Paris, we may also speculate that once he had been apprised of the publication of the medical report and its ramifications, he began to wonder whether it was advisable to continue sending them at all. In fact, if we compare the list of letters compiled by Togliatti between 1937 and 1941, the list of documents of Gramsci-related material which Sraffa gave Giorgio Napolitano in 1972 and the lists of letters he gave Elsa Fubini in 1974 (see Table 18.1),<sup>34</sup> we

<sup>32</sup> See the letter from Angelo Sraffa to Piero Sraffa, 11 June 1933 (FIG, Fondo Sraffa; photocopy in SP C115/1/153). The reduction of Gramsci's sentence by 3 years and 4 months' detention, based on article 134 of the 1889 Penal Code, meant that his release date would have been January 19, 1936 instead of 19 May, 1939. The documentation on Castellett's petition to the Court is held in ACS, Tribunale Speciale, Esecuzioni, 1927–1943, 14, 394).

<sup>33</sup> The letter has been reproduced (albeit wrongly dated 29 May) in Spriano (1979, pp. 175–6). From a letter from Togliatti, dated 24 May (Spriano 1979, pp. 173–4) we also know that Sraffa had written to him on 19 May, not yet informed of the publication of Arcangeli's report (this letter from Sraffa to Togliatti does not seem to have been preserved).

<sup>34</sup> The documents Sraffa gave to Napolitano in 1972 included only one letter from Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht: the letter dated 5 June 1933.



**Table 18.1** Letters from Antonio Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht (December 1932–December 1933)

<i>Letters from Antonio Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht (December 1932–December 1933)</i>	<i>Date (known or guessed) when Tatiana Schucht forwarded it to Piero Sraffa</i>	<i>Palmiro Togliatti's list (1937–1941)</i>	<i>Elsa Fubini's lists (1974)</i>	<i>First published in</i>
5 December 1932	8–10 January 1933		•	1965
12 December 1932	18 December 1932	•		1947
19 December 1932	December 1932–1933	•		1964
26 December 1932	January 1933	•		1964
2 January 1933	8–10 January 1933	•		1965
9 January 1933	30 January 1933	•		1964
22 January 1933	30 January 1933	•		1988
30 January 1933	13 February 1933	•		1947
6 February 1933	13 February 1933	•		1964
13 February 1933	22 February 1933	•		1964
20 February 1933		•		1965
27 February 1933	3 March 1933		•	1964
6 March 1933	10 March 1933	•		1964
14 March 1933	22–23 March 1933	•		1947
21 March 1933 <sup>a</sup>				1964
27 March 1933	18 April 1933	•		1964
3 April 1933	18 April 1933	•		1947
10 April 1933	18 April 1933	•		1947
17 April 1933			•	1965
23 April 1933 <sup>a</sup>				1988
30 April 1933 <sup>a</sup>	4 May 1933	•	•	1965
8 May 1933	10 May 1933		•	1964
16 May 1933	18 May 1933		•	1965
22 May 1933			•	1964
29 May 1933	31 May 1933		•	1964
5 June 1933	7 June 1933		<sup>b</sup>	1965
11 June 1933	16 June 1933		•	1965
18 June 1933	21 June 1933		•	1964
2 July 1933	5 July 1933		•	1964
6 July 1933	9 July 1933		•	1964
10 July 1933	14 July 1933		•	1964
17 July 1933	20–21 September 1933	•		1947
24 July 1933	20–21 September 1933	•		1947

*(continued)*

**Table 18.1** (continued)

<i>Letters from Antonio Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht (December 1932–December 1933)</i>	<i>Date (known or guessed) when Tatiana Schucht forwarded it to Piero Sraffa</i>	<i>Palmiro Togliatti's list (1937–1941)</i>	<i>Elsa Fubini's lists (1974)</i>	<i>First published in</i>
1 August 1933	20–21 September 1933	•		1965
8 August 1933	20–21 September 1933	•		1964
23 August 1933	27 August 1933	•		1947
28 August 1933	11 September 1933	•		1965
3 September 1933	11 September 1933	•		1964
25 September 1933	22 October 1933		•	1965
1 October 1933	22 October 1933		•	1965
3 October 1933	16 October 1933		•	1965
24 October 1933	28 October 1933		•	1965
29 October 1933	5 November 1933		•	1965
5 November 1933	17 November 1933		c	1965
12 November 1933	17 November 1933		•	1965
17 November 1933 <sup>d</sup>	17 November 1933		•	1991
20 November 1933	1 December 1933		c	1965
27 November 1933	1 December 1933		c	1965
4 December 1933 <sup>e</sup>				1965

<sup>a</sup>See note 35

<sup>b</sup>Sraffa handed in his copy of this letter to Giorgio Napolitano in March 1972

<sup>c</sup>These copies, even though not explicitly mentioned in Elsa Fubini's 1974 lists of copies of Gramsci's letters she had received from Sraffa, may be assumed to have also been given to her by Sraffa (for a detailed analysis of this issue see Naldi 2020, Tabella 1)

<sup>d</sup>Telegram (not preserved) sent by Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht on 17 November 1933 known to us from the transcription Schucht sent to Sraffa in her 17 November letter (given by Sraffa to Elsa Fubini in 1974)

<sup>e</sup>It is likely that Tatiana Schucht did not prepare a copy of this letter

can see that in the early 1970s all of Gramsci's letters from 17 April to 10 July, 1933 were in Sraffa's hands and that Togliatti could not have seen any of them neither through the *centro estero* nor at the Schucht residence.<sup>35</sup>

In short, we could maintain that Sraffa, passing through France on his way back to England following spring break in 1933, had consigned all the copies of Gramsci's letters he had received while in Italy, along with a copy of Dr Arcangeli's report, to the *centro estero*, but that once he returned to England, he held on to all the copies he received from Tatiana Schucht, not even handing them over when he next travelled through France the following summer. Clearly, the publication of information meant to be kept private kept Sraffa from forwarding letters containing equally sensitive information about Gramsci's dire health conditions and his request to be transferred to a different prison infirmary or to a clinic.<sup>36</sup> The same letters also contained references to two letters that Sraffa was

<sup>35</sup> One letter from Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, the one of 30 April, 1933 (Gramsci 1994, p. 292), is on both the list compiled by Elsa Fubini in 1974 and that of Togliatti drafted between 1937 and 1941. The reason for this may be that, although Sraffa did not forward it to the *centro estero*, Togliatti may have been able to read and transcribe it at the Schucht residence. There is another notable element to be seen in comparing the two lists: neither of them contain Gramsci's 21 March, 1933 letter to Tatiana Schucht (Gramsci 1994, pp. 282–3). In it Gramsci spoke about the state of his health, following his health crisis on 7 March and Dr. Arcangeli's medical visit to him in prison. Schucht most likely received this letter while she was still in Turi, in the same period that Sraffa was there, or managed to show it to him when they met in Rome sometime between March and April. We may presume that this letter was absent from both lists because Schucht did not transcribe it, due to all the worrisome and arduous occurrences and undertakings going on at the time. In fact, no transcription of the letter exists among the archives, only the original itself. Another letter missing from the lists, for obvious reasons, is that of 23 April, 1933 which Schucht never received, as it had been confiscated by the Turi prison authorities (Gramsci 1994, pp. 289–92—this letter is now housed in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato).

<sup>36</sup> We may provide two instances from letters written at the beginning and at the end of the relevant period: "My condition has somewhat improved, but the least little thing is enough to make me ill again. From one day to the next, due to the merest trifle, I fall back into serious prostration" (Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, 17 April 1933—Gramsci 1994, pp. 288–9); "You must initiate an urgent petition for my transfer as soon as possible from the Turi prison to the infirmary of another prison where there are specialists who can examine me thoroughly enough to establish what combination of ailments I am afflicted with and can take an x-ray of my lungs that will solve the doubts of both Professor Arcangeli and the prison inspector Dr. Filippo Saporito. I beg you to believe that I cannot bear it anymore. The pain in cerebellum and my cranium drives me wild. The difficulty in using my hands has increased and increases progressively, and this cannot simply be due to arteriosclerosis" (Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, 6 July 1933—Gramsci 1994, p. 307).

expected to have written to Soviet diplomats,<sup>37</sup> about which the PCI was not be apprised, as per Gramsci's request, as well as to Greico's letter, which he had so harshly criticized.<sup>38</sup>

#### 4.2 *The Second Disaster and Gramsci's End of September to End of November 1933 Letters*

In the period following this moratorium on forwarding Gramsci's letters, by comparing the list of Gramsci's letters prepared by Togliatti in 1937–1941 to the records of documents Sraffa gave to Istituto Gramsci in 1972 and 1974, we may affirm that between July 17 and September 3, 1933 the copies Sraffa received from Tatiana Schucht during his summer stay in Italy were once again delivered to the *centro estero*, as those received during the Easter holidays had been.

This delivery most likely took place in early October, when Sraffa was passing through France on his way back to England. Even though the letters mentioned Gramsci's request to be transferred to another prison's infirmary, the tone was sufficiently less dramatic than the previous ones, which may have contributed to allow Sraffa to reconsider his previous doubts about confiding this information to the *centro estero*. However, the following block of letters (from the end of September to the end of November 1933) were again withheld. The reason for this can be understood in the light of another letter Sraffa received from his father. The letter was sent on December the 1st, once again from Switzerland.<sup>39</sup> Sraffa was in Cambridge in early December, planning to return to Italy for winter break, and presumably planning to hand over the October–November letters as usual on his way. The letter from his father, however, informed him of the behind-the-scenes motivations for the Special Tribunal's refusal to grant Saverio Castellett's appeal. Although Sraffa already knew that *Procuratore Generale* Carlo Fallace's proposal to deny the appeal had been

<sup>37</sup> "I want to remind you again and urge you about the two letters to be written that I mentioned to you already in January. I don't understand why the attorney, who had not rejected the idea, was then so dilatory" (Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, 10 July 1933—Gramsci 1994, p. 311).

<sup>38</sup> "In 1927–1928 [...] the pretrial judge was right to say that it really seemed as though my friends were collaborating to keep me in prison as long as possible" (Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, 16 May 1933—Gramsci 1994, p. 295).

<sup>39</sup> The 1 December, 1933 letter from Angelo Sraffa to Piero Sraffa is kept in SP C300/4 and partially reproduced in Spriano (1979, p. 89, n.17), cfr. de Vivo (2017, p. 49).

accepted by the Special Tribunal on 13 October,<sup>40</sup> he was probably unaware that during the summer Fascist Police had confiscated a document instructing Communist political prisoners on how to behave should they have an opportunity to appeal for parole,<sup>41</sup> and that this document had been instrumental in definitively blocking Castellett's efforts. Before that incident, thanks to the intervention of Sraffa's uncle, Mariano D'Amelio, First President of the highest court of justice in Italy (*Corte di Cassazione*) at the time, there was every indication that the outcome would have been positive, despite the setback caused by the publication of Arcangeli's medical report. We have no doubt that Sraffa considered it obvious that the PCI needed to handle the flow of information regarding such a delicate matter with the utmost protection, in particular in view of how extensively the Fascist Police had been able to infiltrate anti-fascist organizations. And we may surmise that the news he received from his father deeply disappointed him. The fact remains that evidence suggests that on his trip through France in mid-December, Sraffa did not deliver the copies of the letters he had been receiving in Cambridge since October. These copies were also among his papers in 1974 and once again we can see that they touched on subjects which could justify his decision to withhold them, out of fear that the *centro estero* might have shared information better kept under wraps. These letters informed about the Special Tribunal's rejection of Castellett's petition and, more importantly, that the request to be transferred to a nursing facility had been granted to Gramsci, and that many obstacles to this outcome had been surmounted.

## 5 LOOKING OUT FOR GRAMSCI'S BEST INTERESTS

In recapitulation, our study of the circumstances surrounding Sraffa's neglect to forward to the PCI two substantial groups of Gramsci's letters to Tatiana Schucht, written between 17 April and 4 December, 1933, allows us to see how the dates of these letters correspond to Sraffa's realization that the PCI's *centro estero* could not guarantee that delicate information would be treated with all the necessary caution. Publication of information contained in these letters could have been particularly

<sup>40</sup> See the letters from Tatiana Schucht to Piero Sraffa of 5 November, 1933 (Gramsci and Schucht 1997, pp. 1370–1) and 9 November, 1933 (forthcoming) and those from Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht of 29 October and 5 November, 1933 (Gramsci 1994, pp. 330–2, 334–5).

<sup>41</sup> See Naldi (2013, pp. 383–4).

damaging to Gramsci's situation. It could have interfered with his chances of improving his conditions as an inmate or of getting even adequate medical care. We may therefore conclude that Sraffa, making a distinction between fulfilling agreements with the PCI and actually looking out for Gramsci's best interests, decided that withholding these letters was the best option for protecting his friend.

These conclusions have been supplemented by other observations related to the letters of 5 December, 1932 and 27 February, 1933. Gramsci specified that these letters were to be read only by Tatiana Schucht and Piero Sraffa, thus were not to be communicated to the *centro estero*—and Sraffa adhered to this request. However, the information available suggests that Sraffa also transmitted the letters he himself was receiving from Tatiana Schucht to the *centro estero*, in addition to the copies of Gramsci's letters to her. This leads us to deduce that he did not respect Gramsci's request to prevent the PCI from learning about his petition to the Soviet government to try to secure his release by negotiating with the Italian government. In fact, while he did not forward to *centro estero* Gramsci's 27 February, 1933 letter, he seems to have submitted Schucht's 5 March, 1933 letter,<sup>42</sup> which allowed Party leaders to get wind of the potential negotiations pressed for by Gramsci. This decision may be seen under different perspectives. On the one hand, Sraffa probably made it with the understanding that it would have been effectively impossible for PCI leaders to be kept in the dark on such matters. On the other hand, we may see it as a measure of Sraffa's trust in Party leaders, with whom he maintained direct contact on Gramsci's behalf—trust which between March and April 1933 had not yet been shaken by the aforementioned “two first class disasters”.

We may also add that nothing of what we have said is meant to imply that either Gramsci's or Sraffa's or Tatiana Schucht's faith in socialist ideals and in the parties and international movements they inspired was shaken by these experiences. There is no doubt that the lack of trust each of them (in different occasions and degrees) may have felt was only directed towards some of the people in the structures which governed those parties and movements, not towards those very parties and movements. This can be appreciated by studying their extant correspondence after 1933 up to Gramsci's death and other documents and testimonies dating to subsequent years.

<sup>42</sup> See Naldi (2020, pp. 258–66).

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