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# Selections From The Prison Notebooks



## Synopsis

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## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is not light reading. It really is for academics and people interested in political resistance and theories of social and political protest. There's much in here that provides insight into perspectives on theories of sociocultural oppression and challenges to status quo thought and action. I have to take my time reading through it, and I continue to return to Gramsci's work. I recommend this text to graduate students and scholars interested in culture, social theory, and how different conceptions of power shape and work in the world.

This is quite a dark work, through and through. As Gramsci says, Machievelli's Prince is "a live work," and is certainly alive and well in Gramsci. His persistent attention to tactical detail and strategy - when to ally oneself with those on the left, and when to ally oneself with those on the right; when to lay in wait and lick one's wounds, and when to go on the attack - is cold as ice and sharp as steel. In the sense that Machievelli felt that the republic was the best form of government as it fostered civic spiritedness, so Gramsci understands the importance of cultivating his a citizen's inner commitment to the cause. This is achieved by melding civil society with the state. There should be no difference betwixt the two. Your sex life will be regulated. No drinking! Being tied all day to the assembly line won't dehumanize you; in fact, you'll have all the more time to think, to daydream. As

Gramsci tells us, all men are intellectuals, insofar as they engage in intellectual and muscular-nervous activity. An assembly line replete with philosophers! All of the actual political implications aside, let us be honest, he is not so much a philosopher of Marxism as he is of power: how to take it and how to maintain it. I guess there's something called neo-Gramscianism out there in int'l relations schools, and this isn't surprising at all. The Hegelian-Marxist method is a wonderful tool for understanding how history unfolds and "historical blocs" are formed but, like anything, is dangerous in the wrong hands. Anyway, that stuff aside, Gramsci was a genius and this shows on every page. The insight and erudition is sparkling and his understanding of the dialectic, praxis, consciousness, historical context, class relations is second to none. The edition itself is also good, with excellent footnotes do a good job on expounding on the names and concepts Gramsci drops throughout the text.

There are masses of political history of Italy here, which I did not bother with. However, I was interested in his theory that everyone is a philosopher, i.e. everyone thinks about the circumstances of his life. On these grounds he believed that "the proletariat" could be organized to change the system. He speaks of "passive revolution," which is when the revolution occurs without violence, or, it occurs because of a massive change in world view. What he does not address at all is how the proletariat ordered government which will be the result will operate.

Antonio Gramsci is one of the political writers to read in order to understand the development of Socialism/Communism in industrial Western Europe and the Red Scare in the United States. Unfortunately, he died during his imprisonment during the Fascist regime and he did not witness the collapse of Communism and the triumph of a free Western Europe.

To read his thoughts and understand Gramsci's circumstance at the time of the writings is one of the most profound literary experiences of my life.

Excellent intro, to Gramsci and to the history of politics in Italy. Some can be dry but very factual. His life is tragic but he carried on.

Best way to buy books for school.

This volume was the first to present a coherent selection of Gramsci's thought in English. However,

it was published over 40 years ago and times have certainly changed, making it necessary to complement it with other writings. In the first place this was translated at a time when the critical edition of Gramsci's Notebooks did not exist even in the original Italian. Thus the excerpts here are taken from many different volumes of his writings, some of which had different editors and hence different priorities. Initially the Notebooks were brought out in part to facilitate the Italian CP's transition to reformist strategy after the war, so the reader should bear this in mind. Scholarship on Gramsci has advanced to the point as to discredit the editors' introduction and most of their notes. Hoare and Nowell Smith maintain that Gramsci's often obscure style was born out of a desire to hide what he was writing about from the prison censors, a widespread misconception that spread in English at least partly from their notes and partly from the influential essay by Perry Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci." More recently it has been noted that given Gramsci's career it was highly likely he was writing about Marxism, and even his fascist guards would have realized this. His literary style has been deeply underestimated because of this conception. While he was constrained by material limitations such as not having access to a library and only being able to keep a certain number of notebooks in his cell at one time (plus the fact that they were notebooks, rather than fully fleshed-out works he intended for publication immediately), his writing is much clearer than he is given credit for. Another limitation of this volume is the translators often seem to misunderstand Gramsci's philosophical and political thought. At the time they were working this was understandable, as his concepts were often veiled behind the academic and political needs of his successors in the CPI and European communist movement. Gramsci is using a lot of concepts from thinkers like Machiavelli, Vico, Spinoza, Labriola, Croce, Gentile etc that require some work on the part of the reader to parse. In the notebooks he usually says how and why he is using different concepts to frame a particular understanding. But the selection here is necessarily limited so it diminishes his clarity at times. Given their objective limitations, the parts these editors have included from the notebooks are a pretty good selection. "Notes on Italian History" is a superb application of Marx's historical method to the unique historical development of the Italian peninsula, from where he introduces the concept of passive revolution, which historians have found quite useful elsewhere. "The Modern Prince" and "State and Civil Society" remain brilliant and fertile works on the nature of the bourgeois state and its overthrow. Despite attempts by Eurocommunists and others to read reformism into these works any objective reading of Gramsci will put the lie to this, even in such a limited volume. Somewhat odd is the inclusion of Gramsci's essay on "Americanism and Fordism," which deploys an idealized conception of American capitalism in the early 20th century and tries to contrast it with less developed economies like that of Italy. Unlike other pieces this has not inspired

significant work or debate within Marxism and history. Michel Foucault remarks that Gramsci is one of those thinkers having the dubious honor of being cited much more often than he is read. In this respect one of the tragedies of the absorption of his thought into academia is that his work is abstracted from the revolutionary Marxist tradition which he intended his notebooks as a specific part of. Readers should therefore be willing to engage with and read Marx, Engels and especially Lenin if they want to really understand Gramsci's thought. Overall I would say this is not a bad place to start. It is only just now that the full breadth of Gramsci's work is coming to be appreciated in the English-speaking world. The Notebooks are now being fully translated into English (the first eight, about a third of the total, are already out), and we have seen the publication of biographies and exegeses that speak directly to Gramsci's vitality and relevance to anyone seeking to both understand the world and to change it. I highly recommend in particular Peter Thomas' "The Gramscian Moment" and Carlos Nelson Coutinho's "Gramsci's Political Thought," the latter of which is forthcoming in the Historical Materialism book series. Everyone interested in Gramsci should take a look at these as well.

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