

SEEKING GRAMSCI IN THE WORK OF BRIAN SIMON*

Buscando a Gramsci en la obra de Brian Simon

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Abstract. This article examines the results of research on the work and career of Brian Simon (1915-2002), one of the leading historians of English education. It shows the theoretical inspiration for comprehensive school in Soviet psychology and the original way of interpreting Marxism by Brian Simon, that is, anti-determinism, and conviction in education as a factor of change. In addition to the collection in four volumes of *Studies in the History of Education*, the autobiography, *A life in education*, and other books by the author, the survey was based on documents and unpublished writings found in the Brian Simon Archive at the Institute of Education/UCL. The conclusions are as follows: 1. The influence of Gramsci could be found in articles and reviews, as well as the courses Professor Simon was involved in from the 1970s onwards; 2. By defending educational reforms that favored the working class, Brian Simon adopted the Marxist view of Gramsci even before knowing the main translation of his work into English (1971); 3. Although a supporter of the Soviet Union, Brian Simon's reformist protagonism suited Gramsci's rejection of the Soviet road to socialism since, for him, this was not the appropriate path for "western" countries and for non-revolutionary periods. Finally, the article indicates perspectives of new studies on Marxist intellectuals from different countries whose common interest was Gramsci.

Keywords: Brian Simon; Antonio Gramsci; Comprehensive school; Soviet psychology; Marxism.

Resumen. *Este artículo examina los resultados de la investigación sobre el trabajo y la carrera de Brian Simon (1915-2002), uno de los principales historiadores*

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de la educación inglesa. Muestra la inspiración teórica de la escuela comprensiva en la psicología soviética y la forma original de interpretar el marxismo de Brian Simon, es decir, el antideterminismo y la convicción en la educación como factor de cambio. Además de la colección en cuatro volúmenes de Estudios en Historia de la Educación, la autobiografía, Una vida en la educación y otros libros del autor, la encuesta se basó en documentos y escritos inéditos encontrados en el Archivo Brian Simon del Instituto de Educación/UCL. Las conclusiones son las siguientes: 1. La influencia de Gramsci se puede encontrar en artículos y reseñas, así como en los cursos en los que participó el profesor Simon desde la década de 1970 en adelante; 2. Al defender reformas educativas que favorecieran a la clase trabajadora, y no la vía soviética al socialismo, Brian Simon adoptó una teoría gramsciana incluso antes de conocer la traducción de su obra principal al inglés (1971); incluso antes de conocer la principal traducción de Gramsci al inglés (1971); 3. Aunque partidario de la Unión Soviética, el protagonismo reformista de Brian Simon concordaba con el rechazo de Gramsci a la vía soviética hacia el socialismo ya que, para él, esta no era la vía adecuada para los países "occidentales" y para los períodos no revolucionarios. Finalmente, el artículo indica perspectivas de nuevos estudios sobre intelectuales marxistas de diferentes países cuyo interés común fue Gramsci.

Palabras clave: *Brian Simon; Antonio Gramsci; Escuela comprensiva; Psicología Sovietica; Marxismo.*

INTRODUCTION

In 2010 in Brazil, during a lecture by Professor Gary McCulloch, the English historian of education, I became aware of the work of Brian Simon (1915-2002), one of the leading historians of education in England. During his talk, dealing with Brian Simon's campaign for the comprehensive school, I could identify intellectual connections between him and Mario Alighiero Manacorda (1914-2013), an Italian historian of education and interpreter of Gramsci who became well known among Brazilian Marxist researchers in the second half of the 1980s. Manacorda strongly upheld that every teenager has the right to a training course in the humanities, in contrast with the belief that education in general culture should only be granted to a privileged minority, while the bulk of the students should be given an early professional training that is designed to prepare them for the workplace. According to Manacorda, a new kind of humanism should combine these two phases of education - humanism and the principles of work.

As for Brian Simon, authors such as Gary McCulloch and Tom Woodin, have already written about his intellectual and political background, as well as his leadership in the fight for the comprehensive school.¹ Therefore, my intention in this article is to add an aspect that caught my attention since the beginning of my studies at the Institute of Education: the particular influence of Antonio Gramsci's thought in Brian Simon's educational work.

The research began in 2011 during my Postdoctoral in History of Education at the IoE/UCL (2011-2012) and has been continuing for shorter periods at Brian Simon Archive, which has custody of his research notes, drafts, letters, photographs, reviews, education plans, unpublished articles, and much of his unpublished autobiography. Managing this set of sources, my initial motivation was the similarity of the intellectual trajectories between these two Marxists: Brian Simon and Mario Alighiero Manacorda because the political and intellectual careers of them were very similar. They were typical intellectuals of the Left in the 20th Century who embraced Marxism in their youth and displayed a resistance to Fascism and the Nazis in the 1930s. Manacorda was involved in the cultural and educational sectors of the Italian Communist Party. He was also a journalist who published articles in *L'Unità*, the official organ of the Italian Communist Party, and devoted several works to the ideas of Gramsci.

Brian Simon pursued a career as a teacher and lecturer and became the most important historian of English education during the tense period of the Cold War. He reached the highest positions in the leadership of the Communist Party in Great Britain and remained an active supporter until the end of the 1970s, unlike many intellectual contemporaries of his who left the Party after the Nazi-Soviet pact between Hitler and Stalin in 1939. The soviet invasion on Hungary (1956) also provoked further ruptures with the Communist Party of Great Britain. From 1950 to 1980, Brian Simon lectured at the University of Leicester, where he moved up the career ladder to the highest post in 1966 and eventually becoming Emeritus Professor in 1980. He was a prolific writer and undertook a wide array of critical studies from a liberal perspective, including

¹ Gary McCulloch, Antonio Francisco Canales and Hsiao Yu Ku are about to publish the book *Brian Simon and the struggle for education*. UCL Press.

the comprehensive *Studies in the History of Education* in four volumes, the last of which (1991) included a cogent criticism of the educational policies of Margaret Thatcher.

As is well known, Simon also stood out for his organizational skills in the field of the History of Education. In 1967, he was a co-founder of the History of Education Society (HES). In 1978, he helped set up the International Standing Conference for the History of Education (ISCHE) and became its first President (1978-1982). By being in this position, he was close to the Soviet Bloc and was able to arrange a cultural exchange between historians of education in Western Europe and East Europe.

My initial inspiration, however, did not prove fruitful to conclude that both adopted the same vision of Marxist to defend, respectively, the single school in Italy and the comprehensive school in England although both proposals had points in common. With an initial focus on the comprehensive school, I also focused on the way of employing Marxism by Brian Simon and could identify common points with Manacorda, mainly the following: anti-deterministic view of Marxism; importance of educational reforms in favour the working class; understanding of education not exclusively reproducing social inequalities but also as transforming the individual and society. Both authors fought, at the same historical time, for educational reforms in their respective countries, having as a common point the extension of secondary school to the working class. However, for that campaign, each one of them drew on different theoretical inspirations from Marxism. Manacorda, born in the homeland of Antonio Gramsci, from a young age joined Gramscian Marxism and used his educational principles to defend the single school (*singola scuola*) in Italy. He died a communist but equidistant from the Bolshevik conception of Revolution. On the other hand, Russian Learning Psychology inspired Brian Simon, an advocate of the comprehensive school since the 1930s. In the visits he made to the Soviet schools, he sought to learn personally about the application of this theory as well as programs, curricula and the functioning of those schools. Through these visits, he and Joan Simon became friends with Alexander Luria whose work they translated into English.

Thus, being faithful to the steps taken in the research, this article will seek to contribute with two points: 1. The inspiration in Soviet Psychology

as the theory used by Brian Simon in defense of the comprehensive school;
2. The presence of Gramsci's thought in his work.

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITIES AND MARXISM: A POWERFUL INFLUENCE ON BRIAN SIMON'S IDEAS ABOUT EDUCATION

Considering that the circumstances of Brian Simon's entry into the Communist Party of Great Britain are already well known, I will come back to a few of them since his adherence to Marxism and, later, the fight for comprehensive school, resulted from this turning point in his life.

As is well known, Brian Simon came from a wealthy family whose principles and convictions were embedded in the liberal tradition. Both his parents were committed to undertaking civic responsibilities and belonged to the upper-middle class which sent their sons to expensive public schools and then, if possible, to Oxford or Cambridge.

As a child, Brian Simon had a personal experience occasioned by the rise of Nazi-fascism in Europe when, in 1920, he was a student in a school in the South of Germany. According to him, the pedagogical aim of the Director Kurt Hahn was to discover the artistic, intellectual and physical potential that he believed could be found in *each* and *every* student (Simon's italics), as well as the means that these abilities could be fostered and fully established. However, very soon after the rise to power of the Nazi Party in 1933, troops from the Brown Shirts (SA) surrounded the school and brutally imprisoned Kurt Hahn. Simon recorded these student experiences as well as his revulsion at seeing the Director being beaten. In his autobiography, he states how these experiences had a powerful influence on his ideas about education, particularly its emphasis on potential human capacities:

I knew Hahn in his capacity as a director for a short period between January and March 1933, but his style as a director; his individual attention to the student, and the feeling we had that anything might happen at any time (e.g. a sudden order – the whole school is going to ski right now) has remained with me forever.²

² Brian Simon, *A life in education* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998), 9.

Years later, while Brian Simon became a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain at the University of Cambridge (1935), his mother, Shena Simon, became Chair of the Education Advisory Committee of the Workers' Educational Associations in Manchester. She joined the Labour Party in 1935 in direct reaction to the educational policies of the Conservatives and remained an active member for 40 years. As a key figure, she was one of the signatories of the Spens Report in 1938, on secondary schools in the UK. Later, she published *Three Schools or One?* in which she propagated the concept of a single secondary school.

As for his father, Sir Ernest Simon, he brought up his children in accordance with his liberal convictions, especially by setting an example in teaching them to devote at least a half of their time to public works and rejecting an extravagant life-style. In 1934, in the belief that citizens could be trained to be leaders, he established the Association for Education in Citizenship and declared that at that time nothing was more necessary than training students to carry out public responsibilities in citizenship, with a view to forming a democratic State. These principles can be better understood in the light of the turbulent period in Europe that, by 1945, had undergone two World Wars during which the liberal democracies had been threatened by German militarism and then Fascism. His concern about the growth of authoritarianism and restoring belief in democracy, led Ernest Simon to believe that the educational system should be more attentive to preparing students to act as citizens with a social responsibility and love of freedom.

Because of this conviction, Ernest Simon believed that every man or woman who had reached the age of 21, should feel an obligation to strive towards assisting in the process of forming public opinion. In the view of McCulloch and Woodin, this usually involved a scheme based on the liberal ideal of traditional human education in the 1930s. These authors state that, in his diary, Ernest Simon criticised an aristocratic education that made men and women indifferent to public life, by laying stress on the fact that: "There is nothing I like more than seeing my three children wholeheartedly entering public life and I would like to see them suitably educated for this purpose".³ Since he was convinced

³ Gary McCulloch and Tom Woodin, "Learning and liberal education: the case of the Simon family". *Oxford Review of Education*, v. 36:2, (2010): 192.

that his sons Roger and Brian were public-spirited and men of integrity, when they joined the Communist Party, he was afraid that this might hamper them in pursuing their careers, but despite this, he encouraged them to believe that this was a commitment to their unshaken belief in the importance of public life.

It was while he was a student at Cambridge that Brian decided to become a teacher. According to what he says in his autobiography, *A life in Education*, it was an easy decision because of the influence of his parents. After deciding to become a secondary school teacher and fulfil his ambition of pursuing a career in the world of education, Brian Simon carried out post-graduate studies at the Institute of Education, London University (now IoE/University College London). As well as taking the necessary measures to give lessons to secondary school pupils, which was his case, he ran courses and held discussions about matters more broadly related to education such as social phenomena, his educational goals, procedures and organisation, including psychological, historical and sociological analyses. In his view, this kind of syllabus reflected the thinking of the 1930s rather than the 1980s, where there had begun to be a greater emphasis on administration. While at the Institute, Simon was elected President of the National Union of Students (1938-1939) and during his tenure the 2nd World War broke out. As he states in his autobiography, this required adopting a firm stance, since there was a growing determination among the students not to allow universities in any part of the world to fall victims to the Fascist or Nazi ideology of the continent. What had occurred in Germany where there was little resistance to the Nazi government or in the Fascist government in Italy and occupied France, which were allied to the Nazis, should be avoided at all costs.

Since Brian Simon believed the Communist Parties of that time should play a key role in combating Fascism and the Nazis, after completing his post-graduate studies he enlisted in the army (in the Dorsetshire Regiment and Royal Corps of Signals) and delayed pursuing his career further until December 1945 after the end of the war.

Thus at the age of 30, Simon embarked on a career as a teacher and gave lessons at Primary, Secondary Modern and Grammar schools. By being involved within the State school system, he came to know the real

problems of education, “learning and teaching in schools maintained by the local authorities”.⁴

THE SOVIET PSYCHOLOGY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR A SINGLE SECONDARY SCHOOL IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Brian Simon was concerned with secondary education and its problems since he was teaching at this level and had acquired a good deal of experience of several types of secondary schools including the Secondary Modern and Grammar models. He himself related the circumstances that led him to begin to disagree with what he called “the common illusion” about the intelligence tests practiced by the British educational system. Refuting criticisms that attributed his defense of the comprehensive school to political reasons, he replied that, on the contrary, it was born of his experience as a teacher, which enabled him to understand the injustices of a closed educational system.⁵

During the time he spent as a secondary school teacher, he noted that there were a number of ideological factors involved in the theories and psychology of education by means of which the bourgeoisie were able to spread their view of the world. In the same way, he believed that key ideological issues in the history of education pervaded the lesson content, teaching methods and organisation of schools. In light of this, if there was one failing in progressivist studies in which a Marxist approach was needed, it was in the area of Intelligence Tests.

His campaign for equal opportunities for every child in secondary education did not just lead to a new interpretation in this area. It resulted in a controversial analysis which attracted support for his views but also gave rise to a good deal of criticism and raised problems that were described as a kind of “Cold War in the academic world”.⁶ England began to experience its first years of educational reform after the passing

⁴ Brian Simon, *A life in Education* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998), 47.

⁵ The English educational policies of the 1920s and 1930s were based on a hierarchical pattern that was later known as “the 11 plus”, that is a test set for 11 year-olds at the end of primary school to determine whether or not they can go on to a Grammar school.

⁶ Gary McCulloch. “A people’s history of education: Brian Simon, the British Communist Party and Studies in the History of Education, 1780-1870”. *History of Education* (2010): 445.

of the Education Act (1944) which required secondary education to be given to every child free of charge. However, there continued to exist different types of secondary schools: Secondary Modern and Grammar Schools and Technical Colleges. In view of this, reforms in secondary education were a key feature of educational policies in Britain after the War: in 1944, the school-leaving age was raised to 15; and in 1972, this was increased to 16, which represented a significant increase in the numbers attending secondary school and enabled this trend to gather momentum.⁷

However, since this universal provision of education still maintained a selective procedure for secondary education, Simon believed that only a single secondary school would be able to establish a system based on the principle of equal rights for every student. In view of this, he challenged the optimistic view of the liberal-minded through a counter-argument based on the class struggle and the deep-seated inequalities of the educational system. This analysis, as well as his arguments in favour of comprehensive schools, attracted a good deal of criticism from conservative sectors, but not only from them because in the Communist Party itself the proposal was not a consensus. Moreover, his campaign was launched at a difficult period for the Communist Party as it occurred at the height of the Cold War. In the post-war climate of polarisation between capitalism and communism.

In a certain sense, the campaign for comprehensive schools had a political origin because in the opinion of Simon, it had arisen from a social context that maintained a flawed educational system in Britain. As a member of the Communist Party, he had a direct and decisive influence on the degree of importance that the Party had been able to confer on education since the Second World War. A number of pamphlets, invitations to meetings, lectures and demonstrations on behalf of this campaign have been documented, which can be found in the Archives of the IoE/UCL and are proof of this importance, as well as the views of the Communist Party on the question of national and local powers. This last

⁷ See Hsiao-Yuh Ku recent articles: Defending Comprehensive Education: Brian Simon's response to Margaret Thatcher's governments (1979–1990). *British Journal of Educational Studies* (2021): 1-24; Ideological Struggle in Education: Brian Simon and Comprehensive Education Movement (1946-1965), *History of Education*, v. 51:N. 2, (2022): 266-285 and *The crisis in education: Brian Simon's battle for comprehensive education (1970-1979)*, *Paedagogica Historica* (2022):. 1-23.

point was valued by Simon as an indispensable factor in preserving the autonomy of teachers and for enabling each community to establish its own comprehensive school and not just a different kind of secondary school.

Other documents testify to the fact that the campaign was the outcome of his personal effort in warning the Marxists of the need to conduct an analysis of the real purpose of schools in a capitalist society. In 1937, he had expressed it in an essay during his academic year at the Institute of Education by arguing that “schools must always play a role in society and cannot be radically distinguished from it since they form a part of it”.⁸ Based on the studies that he undertook in the aftermath of the War, Simon concluded that the English schools of the 19th Century had provided a cheap kind of education for the working-class. According to him, since 1870, when the Elementary Education Act was approved, the bourgeoisie, through the mediation of the State, has dominated the educational system, both in terms of its structure and teaching content.

Brian Simon opposed the Intelligence Tests that were applied to select pupils for Grammar schools and thus shaped the future lives of eleven-year old children. In 1952, he was the main speaker at a conference about secondary education, held by the Communist Party, and appealed for an end to the distinction between humanities and technical colleges by abolishing Intelligence Tests and introducing comprehensive schools.

The campaign against Intelligence Tests was accompanied by a series of articles and books published by Simon from about 1950 onwards. At this time, Soviet ideas about the Psychology of Learning began to be known in the West and their fundamental principles formed a theoretical framework established by Simon, who knew the work of Soviet psychologists as he had made contact with them, in particular Alexander Luria, who became a friend. This line of interpretation questioned the theoretical understanding of intelligence adopted by the bourgeoisie by contrasting two assumptions about reasoning: people are born with skills which make them as they are or in contrast our development is mainly due to our education and experiences of life? According to Simon, the second assumption raises a challenging task for education, or

⁸ Brian Simon. “The function of the school in society”, 1937, p. 4. SIM/5/2/5. IoE/UCL.

rather, imposes a social obligation to provide as valuable an educational experience as possible, particularly for the young, so that they can develop their potential skills both for their own benefit and for that of society. Supporting this argument meant confronting a tradition rooted in the idea that intelligence is something that is inborn.

At a conference at the University of Vancouver, in Canada, on The IQ Controversy, Simon recalled the way in which he had been concerned with this problem at the end of the Second World War:

After being demobbed in 1945, I gave a lecture in Manchester and Salford, on primary and secondary modern schools as well as selective schools that only accepted 25% of the intake of pupils attending secondary schools. I was shocked by the rigidity of this hierarchical structure – especially because the Education Act of 1944 had seemed to stick to its promise of revising and humanising the school system. [...] From the age of seven, only a Grade A in the classification of rankings would provide a child with the chance of success at eleven years old and thus be selected for a place in a humanities (i.e. Grammar) school which monopolised the road to higher education [...]. There was only one means of altering this system and that was to establish a single and common secondary school for every child – the comprehensive school, as it is now called.⁹

In his view, the system seemed to be untouchable as it had practices rooted in tradition which a) underpinned the dominant theories and b) allowed ‘selectivity’ to be entrenched. Despite the attempt to introduce educational reforms during the Second World War, these mental tests that were designed for selection, continued to be practised in British schools at the end of the 1940s. For this reason, Simon decided to confront the theory and practice of Intelligence Tests or what seemed to him iron law of psychometrics, because they were wholly based on scientific principles that nobody at that time questioned. While challenging them on the basis of heredity, Simon examined the Soviet theory of learning (Vygotsky, Luria, Leontiev) to find the essential principles for forming an interpretation that contrasted with the system of selectivity. And so

⁹ Brian Simon, *Does Education Matter?* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985), 113-114.

doing, “he helped to inspire a generation of political activists first to change their own attitudes to testing, then to change those of other education professionals and parents”.¹⁰

In the 1950s, Brian and Joan Simon investigated, described and publicized the views of Alexander Luria and L. S. Vygotsky, founders of cultural-historical psychology in the Soviet Union. Letters held in the Brian Simon Archive show their commitment to translation into English the book *Psychology in the Soviet Union*. In November 1957, Joan Simon wrote: “Dear Professor Luria. I am sending the first installment of the translation of your book. [...] We have adopted the system we found most reliable before, that is we had a literal translation made and I have written this up in what I hope is good, readable English”.¹¹ In December, Luria replied:

My dear Mrs. Simon. How can I thank you for the work you have done in translation this little book? The translation is excellent; I have consulted some pages with our linguists and made some very small corrections. Now it is all right. I send you a Preface for the English edition – and you can put it instead of the Russian one. And thank you immensely for all you have done for me! Alexander Luria.¹²

With an Introduction by Brian Simon, *Psychology in the Soviet Union* was published in England (1957) by Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. At the same time, Simon published articles against unscientific intelligence tests and the ending of “eleven-plus”, as we can read: “The decisive factor has been the growing anger of parents and increasingly firm pressure from the Labour movement. But the unscientific nature of intelligence testing and selection has also become more generally understood”.¹³

Referring to Alice Heim’s book *The appraisal of Intelligence*, which was extremely critical both of the methodology and theoretical assumptions underlying testing, Brian claimed it was more relevant in 1970

¹⁰ Deborah Thom. “Politics and the people: Brian Simon and the campaign against intelligence tests in Britain schools”, *History of Education*, v. 33, n. 5, (2004): 515.

¹¹ Brian Simon, Visits Abroad. SIM/6. IoE/UCL.

¹² Brian Simon, Visits Abroad. SIM/6. IoE/UCL.

¹³ Brian Simon. “Towards ending 11- plus”, *Education today and tomorrow*. v. X, September/October, (1957): 1-2.

than when it was first published in 1954. Based on this recognition and on Marxism, Brian Simon argued against the unfairness of the English education system, which “appeared to be (as indeed it was) run on the assumption that no child could ever rise above himself, that his level of achievement was fatally determined by an IQ – *his* IQ was it was generally to be”.¹⁴ Relying on Soviet psychology, he states then “while animals learn only through individual experience, the human child learns through joint practice and speech with other human beings; it is by means of the language he acquires, the tools he learns to handle, and so on, that the achievements of the human species are embodied and handed on”.¹⁵ He claims that such an approach was familiar to those who had contact with Luria’s writings, who also made clear the extent to which Soviet research had concentrated not only on what might be called external evidence of learning but also on investigation of its inner mechanism. Then he refers to a writing by Luria that was not translated into English – *Voprosy Psiklogii*:

It is now generally accepted that in the process of mental development there takes place a profound qualitative reorganization of human mental activity, and that the basic characteristic of this reorganization is that elementary, direct, activity is replaced by complex functional systems, formed on the basis of the child’s communication with adults in the process of learning. These functional systems are of complex construction and are developed with to close participation of language, which is the basic means of communication with people simultaneously one of the basic tools in the formation of human mental activity and in the regulation of behavior.¹⁶

Brian Simon’s interest in special schools was also a theme in the correspondence between him and Luria, who had written a book on the subject. In 1956, he states in a letter: “so far I know, and I have studied

¹⁴ Brian Simon, *Intelligence, Psychology and Education: a Marxist critique*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971): 15.

¹⁵ Brian Simon, *Intelligence, Psychology and Education: a Marxist critique*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 140.

¹⁶ Brian Simon, *Intelligence, Psychology and Education: a Marxist critique*, 140.

recent English and American books in this field – it is a different approach to the problem”.¹⁷

In the late 1940s, when comprehensive schools first appeared in England and Wales, there was a fierce debate about their value and it was claimed that opposition to these new schools could be attributed to Soviet interests that attracted hostility to Simon. Even so, Brian’s visits to Soviet schools continued. In total there were five and they are recorded in detail in his papers. About the 1961 visit, for example, there is a diary framed with a postcard from Leningrad and in which, on one of the pages, Brian Simon wrote in his small handwriting: “Monday, Sept. 11, in the evening went to Luria for dinner”.¹⁸

The intellectual relationship and friendship between Brian Simon, Joan Simon and Luria lasted until his death (1976) as attested by the letters in the Brian Simon Archive/IoE/UCL (1957-1976).

At the same time that Brian Simon was promoting Soviet psychology in England, his brother Roger Simon was engaged in the translation and publication of Antonio Gramsci.

ANTONIO GRAMSCI’S WORK OUTSIDE ITALY

Articles and texts of a more ephemeral character, which were written on a day-to-day basis for the Communist Party without any idea of publication, preceded Gramsci’s writings in prison. When he was isolated in prison, he thought that for the first time he would write something in a disinterested way or, in other words, something that would last forever. This gave rise to the idea of the Notebooks that were written from 1929 to 1935. As Gramsci never published any book in his life, to some extent, his ideas only reached the public after his personal tragedy and the battle for his 33 notebooks, which lasted from the time of his death (1937) to the 1950s. The translations into other languages and the breadth of his scope, were conditioned by these historical circumstances.

¹⁷ Luria, Alexander, “Letter to Simon”. June 25, 1956. Brian Simon Archive. SIM/6/1. IoE/UCL.

¹⁸ Brian Simon, “Diary”. SIM/6/1. IoE/UCL.

The publication of the Notebooks was a difficult and tortuous process not only because of the intrinsic features of the work but also because of the political conditions of the time – Italian Fascism, the Second World War and the post-war period. After Gramsci died, his sister-in-law Tatiana saved his writings, and at his request sent them to Moscow where Julia Schucht, his wife, lived. The dispatch took place after a consultation with Piero Sraffa, a great friend of Gramsci, who recommended his wishes should be complied with. Thus, in July 1937, she delivered the Notebooks to the Soviet Embassy in Rome. However, they only reached Moscow a year later, where Palmiro Togliatti, (who had succeeded Gramsci as the leader of the Italian Communist Party in 1926, when he was in prison), began to publish them, together with the Party leaders of the Communist International. At the outset, there were clear signs that it was difficult to persuade the leaders of the Communist International of the importance of this work, as Gramsci had evolved his own theory about the Russian Revolution since he had left Moscow in 1923. After initially adopting a Leninist stance, he moved on to clarify divergences from the Bolshevik methods, such as those outlined by Carlucci and Balestreri: “This factor corresponded with a draft that made clear his own dissatisfaction with the methods of the Bolshevik leaders, which Gramsci had only expressed with greater clarity in 1926, in the letters of 14th and 26th October”.¹⁹

Thus in the midst of all kinds of difficulties at the end of the War, Togliatti managed to start off by publishing the *Letters from Prison* (1947) by the publisher Einaudi who, despite being a member of the communist movement, was a prestigious publisher of wide-ranging material and had a wider influence than the Communist International. At the same time, in collaboration with Felice Platone, Togliatti decided to publish the Notebooks by adopting thematic criteria: Historical materialism and the philosophy of Benedetto Croce (1948); The intellectuals and organization of culture (1949); The Risorgimento (1949); Notes about Machiavelli, politics and the modern State (1949); Literature and national life (1950) and Past and Present (1951). In the opinion of Carlos Nelson Coutinho, one of the leading translators of Gramsci in Brazil, although this edition might have inevitably led readers to think that

¹⁹ Carlucci and Balestreri. *The first months spent by Gramsci in Russia* (June-August 1922), 2015, 4.

Gramsci had written six different “books” with these titles, no-one can deny the achievement of Togliatti in disseminating the ideas of his friend and comrade. For, “without this endeavour perhaps Gramsci would only be known today as a martyr in the struggle against Fascism, rather than one of the most lucid thinkers of the 20th Century”.²⁰

Although this achievement had great historical value, in 1958, the Gramsci Institute, a cultural center set up by the Italian Communist Party, took steps to arrange a new publication which, this time, would reproduce the Notebooks in the exact order in which they were written. Valentino Gerratana, a well-known academic, was assigned the task, which with a team of researchers was effectively completed in 1975 (Einaudi publisher, four volumes).²¹ According to Carlos Nelson Coutinho, this edition became the basis for new translations of Gramsci in different languages such as French, English, German, Spanish and Japanese.

Given the fact that the publication of Gramsci’s writings took so long, in a certain sense they can be regarded as posthumous works. The words of Eric Hobsbawm can thus be understood when he noted that the delay in translating Antonio Gramsci into English meant that they did not exert an influence on left-wing intellectuals during the 1930s and 1940s. He stated that during this time for all practical purposes, Gramsci remained unknown outside of his own country. In fact, “even the attempts to make the *Letters from Prison* known to the public in Britain and the U.S. resulted in failure. Without the assistance of people who kept personal contact with him in Italy and who spoke Italian – mostly Communists – his name could not have existed on the other side of the Alps”.²²

Others authors, as Max Shock, for example, highlight the fact that even before the translation of the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci thought

²⁰ Carlos Nelson Coutinho, Introduction. *Antonio Gramsci. Letters from Prison* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1999), 26-27.

²¹ In an explanatory note in his edition of the Cadernos [Notebooks], Carlos Nelson Coutinho quotes the words of Gerratana, who thought that Gramsci might have adopted the thematic criterion, if he had had time to arrange his writings in an orderly way. However, Gramsci did not make this choice and this should be taken into account in the reading and interpretation of the notebooks.

²² Eric Hobsbawm. “Gramsci and political theory”, *Marxism Today*, (July 1977/1977): 205.

was already circulating among the Marxist British left. He informs that the first English translation of Gramsci's work was Lawrence and Wishart's *The Modern Prince*, published in 1957. Besides, New Left intellectuals Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson could read Italian, and so could draw on Gramsci directly. According to him, in the early 1960s, Gwyn A. Williams, a Welsh historian "explained Gramsci's concept of hegemony in English and how the application of this concept could be strategically useful for the left in modern, industrialised and affluent societies where the dominant class achieved a high level of popular consent".²³ Fundamentally, however, he continues, the most important English translation of Gramsci's thought was "Selections from the Prison Notebooks, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith and published by Lawrence and Wishart in 1971: from this point onwards, Gramsci became particularly prominent in British left-wing debate".²⁴ As he states, the inspiration and validation of Gramsci's thought among the New Left was largely due to his contribution to the understanding of Thatcherism as an ideological project that had a high degree of consensus.

In turn, David Forgacs claims that although Gramsci's work did not go completely unnoticed in Britain in the two decades after his death, it made a negligible impact before it first appeared in book form in 1957, in Louis Marks's edition of *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*. He added that, in 1956, the manuscript had been presented to the publishers, Lawrence and Wishart, whose managerial board was at that time directly accountable to the higher committees of the Communist Party of Great Britain, who blocked it. The events of 1956 – Khrushchev's speech, the Polish and Hungarian crises, the consequent resignations from the CPGB, reversed the block and the edition finally appeared in 1957. According to him, outside Italy, nowhere more than in Britain have Gramsci's writings exercised so prolonged, deep or diversified an influence, especially for having freeing Marxism from the economism:

the parts of the Gramscian corpus that have been most creatively drawn on have been those dealing with the mechanisms of political stabilization and regulation in advanced capitalist societies,

²³ Max Shock. "Renewing Left-Wing Ideas in Late Twentieth-Century Britain", *Marxism Today*, (1977-1994): 21.

²⁴ Max Shock. "Renewing Left-Wing Ideas in Late Twentieth-Century Britain", 24.

their resources of cultural and ideological ‘hegemony’, the dynamic and flexible nature of political alliances, the recognition of civil society as a terrain of political organization and struggle, and the need for the Left to break out of an ‘economic–corporate’ outlook and construct a hegemonic politics of its own.²⁵

With a different approach, Tom Steele, in the article ‘Hey Jimmy! The Legacy of Gramsci in British Cultural Politics’, makes a critical assessment of the use of Gramscian concepts by the British Marxist intelligentsia concluding that “It’s now almost 50 years since the first translations of Gramsci’s work were made but still the ‘war of position’ and the ‘organic intellectual’ read as enigmatic metaphors rather than political realities”.²⁶

For obvious reasons, the book of Roger Simon *Gramsci’s Political Thought: an Introduction* (1982) must be added to this brief overview. Roger Simon had joined the British Communist Party one year after his brother Brian, on becoming acquainted with Piero Sraffa.²⁷ He oversaw the translation of the work of Gramsci in England and as a result of his initiative and supervision, the edition of *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* came to the attention of the public in London in 1971; it was a work which had taken several years to prepare and without his extreme dedication, might have taken even longer. As is made clear in the Preface, this publication included a selection based on the subject-areas covered in the Italian edition (Togliatti and Platone) with additional texts after consultations with Gerratana at the Gramsci Institute. Roger Simon’s close relationship with Gramsci’s work was widely praised in British intellectual circles. The following note by the publisher appears on the jacket cover: “Roger Simon, economist, currently engaged in studies on Trade Unionism, played a key role in translating the work of Gramsci into English for Lawrence and Wishart Publishers”.²⁸ Also, in

²⁵ David Forgacs. “Gramsci and Marxism in Britain”, *New Left Review*, n. 176 (1989): 6.

²⁶ Tom Steele, “Hey Jimmy! The Legacy of Gramsci in British Cultural Politics”. *New Left, New Right and Beyond* (1999): 26.

²⁷ Piero Sraffa (1898-1983) was a close friend of Gramsci and a lecturer of Economics at the University of Cambridge. He acted as a go-between with the intellectuals of the Italian Communist Party and was the person who suggested Roger Simon should study the works of Marx when both got to know each other at a meeting in the Political Economy Club run by John Maynard Keynes.

²⁸ Note on jacket cover. *Gramsci’s political thought: an introduction*. (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1982), 2.

the Acknowledgments, we can read: “The initiative for the publication of this volume came from Roger Simon and Steve Bodington, who have supervised its progress throughout, making many invaluable suggestions, and without whose stimulus the work would have taken longer to complete”.²⁹

In his work, Roger Simon mainly draws a comparison between the Gramscian and Soviet pathways to Socialism. He states that Lenin, rightly evolved a critical stance that was opposed to the economics-based view of Marxism, while at the same time giving prominence to this policy, even though he thought there were serious limitations to Marx’s approach. According to Roger Simon, the great theoretical breadth of Marxism was owing to Gramsci who had formulated the concept of hegemony, which had been employed by Lenin in a pioneering spirit. He stated that in the view of Gramsci, mechanistic determinism tended to induce a passive attitude where people just waited for the inevitable economic collapse of capitalism, which discouraged the workers from taking any personal initiative. When analysed the particular situation of Britain, Roger Simon stated that Marxism-Leninism had not been able to formulate a suitable theory to explain the relationship between class struggles and people’s democratic conflicts in non-revolutionary periods – in other words, in times when capitalism is found to be relatively stable. He proceeds by arguing that the theoretical solution to the question of the nature of democracy and the relationship between socialism and democracy lies in Gramsci’s concept of hegemony. Based on this concept, it would be necessary to recognize that the popular struggles and the parliamentary institutions that the communists helped to establish did not necessarily have a class basis – it was a terrain for a political struggle between the two largest classes – the workers and the bourgeoisie.

When seeking to attain their goal of progressing towards socialism, the workers’ movement should find a way of binding their popular and democratic struggles to their socialist objectives by forming an alliance that gives them the opportunity of obtaining a position in national leadership (i.e. hegemony).

²⁹ Hoare, Quintin; Smith, Geoffrey Nowell. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 2007), vii.

As a critic of the pathway followed by the Soviets and Marxism-Leninism, Roger Simon showed concern about the decline of influence exerted by the British Communist Party and mentioned two factors that had seriously constrained its course of action. These were the Soviet invasions of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan: at a time when the world was largely divided into two blocs (an international phenomenon) and its relations with the Labour Party following an internal dispute with when the Communist Party was founded in 1920 (a national phenomenon)). From this perspective, Roger Simon recommended that the British communists should be committed to the defense of parliamentary democracy and not act in a simply tactical way or regard parliament as “a pure expression of capitalist domination”.³⁰ In his view, this interpretation had been partly outlined and resolved in the program adopted by the British Communist Party in 1951 in its pamphlet “The British Road to Socialism”, which expressed the belief that “the British parliament should be transformed into a Socialist State Parliament instead of being replaced with a Soviet kind of State”.³¹ In 1977, this Program was revised and maintained but Roger Simon argued that as well as adopting a program, it would be necessary to change the practical politics of the workers’ movement to overcome the shortcomings of the economic viewpoint. He also thought that understanding the political ideas of Gramsci was essential when making this transformation.

In short, Roger Simon claims that, after the Revolution of 1917, when the Soviet government dissolved the Constituent Assembly in favour of the soviets, Lenin’s writings on the state became an integral part of the orthodoxy of Marxism-Leninism. For Roger Simon, on the contrary, parliamentary regimes were not instruments of bourgeois domination and the defense of parliamentary democracy was not only tactical. Instead, Communists must be “permanently committed to parliamentary democracy”.³² According to him, the solution given by the *British road to socialism* which declared in favour of a parliamentary road to socialism and not the Soviet road had been a big step forward in relation to Leninist theory, but had left the theoretical issue of the nature of democracy

³⁰ Roger Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought: an Introduction* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1982), 17.

³¹ Roger Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, 17.

³² Roger Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, 17.

and the relation between socialism and democracy unsolved. “Gramsci’s concept of hegemony provided the solution”.³³

BRIAN SIMON AND GRAMSCI’S THOUGHT IN BRITISH EDUCATION

Documents from the Brian Simon Archive shows how contacts were eventually made between English and Italian intellectuals. Dario Ragazzini’s mimeographed study; “The educational theory of Gramsci in English” reveals that, by 1977, in the English-speaking world and in Britain in particular, there began to be “a growing interest in Gramsci, together with the dissemination of his political and cultural essays on Italian Marxism. This is significant because the English-speaking world is familiar with the reflections on the mechanism of character formation and is also aware of the spread of Gramscian concepts and categories in educational theory”.³⁴

According to Ragazzini, it was at this time that the first ideas of Gramsci on education appeared in English. Although in 1965, the *New Left Review* had published a translation of “In Search of an Educational Principle”, this had not been a landmark in studies on Gramsci in England, nor had it aroused any interest in the educational implications of his thinking. Ragazzini stated that: “When comparing the problems of current educational theories with Marxism, in 1976, Brian Simon devoted several pages to the pedagogical aspects of Gramsci’s ideas, and these can be characterised as an initial and well-balanced presentation”.³⁵ This examination was the first time Gramsci’s ideas on education had been disseminated in English.

The pages referred to by Ragazzini were published in *Marxism Today* (1976) under the title “Contemporary Problems in Educational Theory”³⁶ and mainly addressed the principles of “active schools”. Simon

³³ Roger Simon, *Gramsci’s Political Thought: an Introduction* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1982), 18.

³⁴ Dario Ragazzini, “The Educational Theory of Gramsci in the English Language”. SIM/6/3/2, p. 3. Brian Simon Archive. IoE/UCL.

³⁵ Dario Ragazzini, “The Educational Theory of Gramsci in the English Language”, p. 4.

³⁶ This article was published again in the book *Intelligence, Psychology and Education. A Marxist Critique*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1978, 264-281.

adopted a methodological approach by giving excerpts from Gramsci and then considering each of them and stating whether he agreed with the points or questioned them; in general, he stressed the importance of Gramsci's theories for understanding education as an instrument of social change. This can be illustrated by the following: "Gramsci laid great emphasis on the role of teachers and argued that the transformation of education was both a question of people, teachers, whom they were, and the complexity of society as a whole, and entailed introducing new curricula and methods – or in other words, new programs and projects".³⁷

In Simon's view, although activism reflects a key educational principle, it does not diminish the role of the teacher. In his article, he regards Gramsci as one of the major Marxist theorists in his deep concern for the nature of education and quotes from his writings about single schools, as a means of clarifying the importance of his campaign for comprehensive schools. He states that in Gramsci's view, the aim of a regular school should be to become a "creative school", that is, it should be structured as a "collective" and designed to develop the skills required for intellectual creativity and practice. He envisaged the school as a "collective" and participative process, although, as Simon points out, he did not endorse the theory that postulates that teachers cannot predetermine the way an activity is carried out. In his interaction with the ideas of Gramsci, he follows a list of numbered quotations, which are given below, as they originally appeared in the article:

- 1) "The responsibility of the regular school he [Gramsci] says is to educate new generations; the purpose of a primary school is to bring about what he calls 'dynamic conformism' (an assimilation of cooperative kinds of social behaviour?) – and to prepare the students to become autonomous, creative and responsible human beings".³⁸
- 2) "Their objective [referring to primary schools] is to become what he [Gramsci] calls 'creative schools'- structured as "collectives" and developing skills for a) intellectual creativity and practice and b) for individual initiative and a sense of direction. (Incidentally,

³⁷ Brian Simon, "Contemporary problems in educational theory". *Marxism Today* (1976): 169-177.

³⁸ Brian Simon, "Contemporary problems in educational theory", 176.

it can be presumed that Gramsci was speculating here about the nature of education and schooling in a socialist society”;³⁹

- 3) “Gramsci refers to the need for ‘true and active participation’ by students in school. The relationship between the teacher and student is seen as both reciprocal and active, to such an extent that each teacher is a student and vice versa”;⁴⁰
- 4) (In my view this difficult but stimulating Gramscian conception of the nature of the educational process derives from the central idea of Marx outlined in “Theses on Feuerbach”, and in particular, where Marx refers to the his dialectical theory of social change – ‘the educator must be educated)’”;⁴¹
- 5) Again stressing the active nature of regular schools, Gramsci wrote: ‘Regular schools are active schools although it may be necessary to curb the libertarian ideologies in this field’ and he goes on to strongly emphasise the responsibility of adults to ‘shape’ them further. (Out-of-date perhaps but definitely correct, BS);⁴²
- 6) “Gramsci established that ‘active schools’ are still in a romantic phase in which features of the struggle against Jesuit and technical schools are becoming exaggerated – since he wished to make a clear distinction between them for political reasons. He added that there is a need ‘to enter the classical and rational stage and find the necessary sources to develop appropriate methods and forms’. (This paragraph in my view is of vital importance because it is by exercising this policy that the progressivist forces of the left are currently engaged in our country”);⁴³
- 7) “Like Lenin, Gramsci was a critic of what he also called ‘old schools’. But, also like Lenin, he denied that education should only be based on the so-called culture of the working-class. Both sought to detach

³⁹ Simon, “Contemporary problems in educational theory”, 176.

⁴⁰ Simon. “Contemporary problems in educational theory”, 176.

⁴¹ Brian Simon. “Contemporary problems in educational theory”. *Marxism Today* (June, 1976): 176.

⁴² Simon. “Contemporary problems in educational theory”, 176.

⁴³ Simon. “Contemporary problems in educational theory”, 177.

what was best – what was essential – from the old schools and transform it, while maintaining strict and high academic standards and intellectual performance (Gramsci particularly warned against the temptation to throw away this dimension of education).⁴⁴

In a subsequent article, “Marx and the crisis in education”, in which he rejects determinism and addresses the links between the base and superstructure of society, Simon warned against adopting a mechanistic view of the relationship between these two levels. As he wrote: “He [Marx] recognised that the class struggle is reflected in an ideological conflict in which new classes establish their own ideological viewpoints and fight to achieve hegemony (to use a fashionable expression), exactly as the French encyclopedists did before the French Revolution and the Marxists in Russia before 1917”.⁴⁵ It is worth noting the expression “to use a fashionable expression” which is clearly included by Simon as a recognition of the current influence of the Gramscian principle (the concept of hegemony) on left-wing intellectual circles.

On the occasion of the publication of *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative schooling for radical politics*, by Harold Entwistle (1979), Simon returned to the work of Gramsci. This book, which was based on Italian interpretations, was one of the first studies of the educational concepts of Gramsci that was published in English. Entwistle addresses classical concerns about Gramscian pedagogical theories by examining factors related to the question of “anti-spontaneity” as a conservative feature of the Italian Marxists. This interpretation provoked Simon to make the following criticism: “Entwistle centred his book on a non-question: the paradox of a conservative school for a radical policy!”.⁴⁶ In addition, he criticised the fact that in his analysis, Entwistle was confined to reading interpretations and not consulting the work of Gramsci himself. He then proceeded to quote the following extract from Entwistle:

It is at this point that we run up against a paradox: the formulation of a radical educational policy through the pedagogical principles of a traditional curriculum. If the school is the main

⁴⁴ Simon. “Contemporary problems in educational theory”, 177.

⁴⁵ Brian Simon, “Marx and the crisis in education”. *Marxism Today* (1977): 198.

⁴⁶ Brian Simon, *Visits Abroad* (Australia). 1981, p. 7. SIM/6/3/2.

hegemonic institution and dominated by the ruling class, how can a counter-hegemonic change come about except through a radical curricular reform and a liberal pedagogical system?⁴⁷

Simon responded to this by saying: “This is Entwistle’s problem, not Gramsci’s!”⁴⁸

This criticism was made at the same time that Roger Simon, who had been studying Gramscian ideas since the 1950s, was engaging in the translation of Gramsci.

It’s hard to say to what extent Roger Simon’s book, as well as his commitment to disseminating Gramsci’s work in England influenced his brother’s conception of education. Some papers at the IoE/Archives, however, allow us to state at least that he used these works. One of the folders contains teaching material from a course run by him at the University of Melbourne (Australia) in 1981, in which a section was devoted to Gramsci and his concept of hegemony. In the bibliography, there is a chapter by Roger Simon for a book that was never published and an article by him with the title “Gramsci’s concept of hegemony” (which appeared in *Marxism Today*, 1977). Also, on topic “Educational Development in Britain, 1940-1980: new interpretations”, we can read: “It will focus specifically on British educational developments following World War Two, and will then examine these developments in the light of recent interpretations of the relations between education and society by Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean- Claude Passeron, Antonio Gramsci”.⁴⁹ This shows that Gramsci became an essential author for Brian Simon in his criticisms of the determinist view of Marxism and a resource conducive to his defense of education as a factor of change.

For these reasons Clyde Chitty’s testimony that “Gramsci was Roger Simon’s concern not Brian’s”⁵⁰ should not be understood as a lack of interest on the part of Brian Simon. And this is because, in addition to his brother’s commitment, Gramsci’s thought renewed the Marxist approach,

⁴⁷ Harold Entwistle, *Antonio Gramsci*. Conservative schooling for a radical politics. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 78.

⁴⁸ Brian Simon, “Visits Abroad (Australia)”, p. 9. SIM/6/3/2. IoE/UCL.

⁴⁹ Brian Simon. File SIM/6/3/1. IoE/UCL.

⁵⁰ Clyde Chitty. Interview. Institute of Education /UCL(2012).

contributed to the anti-determinist view and was fundamental to British Marxist intellectuals embrace conjunctural analysis, through which Thatcherism “was understood as an ideological project aimed at ‘hegemony’ – political and moral leadership of society based on consent, not simply coercion”.⁵¹

Something must also be said about the four volumes of Brian Simon’s series on the history of education: *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure, 1780-1870*; *Education and the Labour Movement, 1870-1920*; *The Politics of Education Reform, 1920-1940*; *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990*. From 1960 to 1974, he wrote two volumes, while more than twenty years passed before he published the fourth volume in the series (1991). In the whole of his four books, only in the last volume Gramsci is mentioned once. This lack of citation, however, is not proof that the ideas of the Italian Marxist were not important to Brian Simon and not even that they were not underlying his interpretation of the history of education. Instead, it is necessary to understand the theoretical methodology employed by Brian Simon in this set of books, that is, his work as a historian, was deeply grounded in primary sources. As he states in the Introduction of the last volume, the sources used were newspaper clippings that he and Joan Simon carefully selected from the *Times Educational Supplement* in the 1940s when this newspaper “under Dent’s leadership began to play a crucial role in expressing and mobilising educational opinion in preparation for fundamental legislative change”.⁵² These cuttings, filed and reorganised with much labour, have provided the spine, or to use the modern idiom, the database for the book. According to Brian Simon:

the topics selected for discussion, analysis and interpretation are those which have appeared, over these 50 years [he means from 1944 to 1990] as of major importance to participants concerned primarily with the schools at all levels. [...] The main focus of the book is on policy making, both on a national and a local

⁵¹ Max Shock. *Renewing Left-Wing Ideas in Late Twentieth-Century Britain: Marxism Today* (1977-1994): 8.

⁵² Brian Simon. *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990*. Introduction (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991), 17.

level, on the battles, or differences of view, surrounding these – indeed more generally on the politics of education.⁵³

This description confirms Kavanagh's analysis. According to him, the guidelines of the British Communist Party after the Second World War determined that "communists should avoid thinking in terms of an ideal socialist education policy. Rather, they should use a Marxist analysis of the causes and nature of the present situation to determine immediate reforms in educational content appropriate to the stage of development British society had reached".⁵⁴

The four volumes of Brian Simon's main work are characterized by this objective. All of it is dedicated to knowing the history of British education in order to propose and elaborate educational policies favorable to the working class; it is not a work to project an ideal socialist education in England. Instead, Brian Simon displays an original interpretation of Marxist theory and applies it to the concrete analysis of the educational English system. In *Education and the social order* (1991), the only citation to Gramsci appears briefly after an analysis of the educational policy adopted by the Labour Party during the years 1947 to 1951. According to Brian Simon, then, any measures that could lead to an imbalance in the labour market were kept under control, and hence social instability, no challenge of any kind threatened the citadels of power in the world of education. Moreover, this at a time when the labour movement was experiencing remarkable electoral success, perhaps unique in its history. Then he quotes Gramsci that way: "The explanation, perhaps, lies at a deeper level than covered in this analysis – in terms of the historical role of Education in the assimilation, in a Gramscian sense, of subaltern (or subordinate) classes within the social complex".⁵⁵

⁵³ Brian Simon. *Education and the Social Order*, p. 17.

⁵⁴ Matthew R. Kavanagh. "British Communism and the Politics of Education (1926-1968)" (Doctoral Thesis. University of Manchester, 2015), 82.

⁵⁵ Brian Simon, *Education and social order*, 143. This citation requires a brief explanation of the terms "subaltern (or subordinate) used by Gramsci. As stated in the Preface of *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, due to the circumstances of the Fascist prison, Gramsci had to use linguistic tricks to face the censorship, and, therefore, he avoided the classic terms such as "class", "Marxism", and even the names Marx and Lenin. Besides, non-hegemonic groups or classes "are also called by Gramsci 'subordinate', 'subaltern' or sometimes 'instrumental'. Here, again, we have preserved Gramsci's original terminology despite the strangeness that some of these words have in English" (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks* Preface. Xiv).

This brief quotation related to an intricate situation as the one described by Brian Simon demonstrates how much he knew Gramsci's thought on education and how powerful it was to understand situations of struggle for hegemony.

In the IoE/UCL Archives there are also papers that show the common interest in Gramsci between Simon and Olga Salímová, a Russian historian of education who had collaborated with him since 1955. She acted as an intermediary for the publication of his articles in the Soviet Union, as well as arranging visits to Russian schools and for translations to be made of Russian educational psychologists in England. In one of these letters, Olga wrote:

I am in Italy and intend to stay here for 30 days [...] I came to see my Italian friend who is a teacher of Russian at the University of Naples. Her father, Felice Platone, was one of Gramsci's best friends. [...]. I will be very pleased to find out about his opinions – does it make sense to seek some common trends in the development of Marxist theory in recent times? I have been told that my article is the first step in attempts to do research into these problems. Perhaps you know some other examples? I hope to get to know the theorists here at the Gramsci Institute, because I am planning to publish some of Gramsci's works on education.⁵⁶

Two factors draw one's attention in this letter: the first regards Olga's relationship with intellectuals who had been close to Gramsci, such as Felice Platone, who, in the period 1948-1951, had worked in a supervisory capacity with Togliatti in editing the Notebooks in six scholarly tomes for the Einaudi publisher. The second factor was Olga Salimova's intention to publish the works of Gramsci in the Soviet Union, a question that continued to be mentioned in subsequent letters. In one of these, she states that she has submitted her texts to the Department at her university in Moscow and persisted in carrying out a study of the different interpretations of education from a Marxist perspective. In November 1982, Brian wrote to her the following:

⁵⁶ Olga Salimova, "Letter to Brian Simon", 1980, SIM/2/4. IoE/UCL.

I am really interested in your publication on Gramsci. Well done and many congratulations! Please send me a copy [...] of everything you have written about Gramsci. By the way, my brother Roger has just published a book on Gramsci – an Introduction. I will send you a copy so you can have it at hand as it's just been published.⁵⁷

However, the series of letters does not reveal whether or not Olga Salímova published the work as planned.

At this crossroads between Marxist intellectuals from different countries, I return to my initial inspiration, that is, the similarity of path between Brian Simon and Mario Alighiero Manacorda. In 2012, that inspiration took me to Rome to meet Manacorda in person and tell him about my hypothesis. On that occasion, he briefly recounted his disagreements with the Bolshevik model of revolution, his intimacy with Gramsci's thought and his life in the Italian Communist Party. Besides, he was curious about Brian Simon and commented that the history of English education was very different compared to the Italian one, largely because of the religious reform of the sixteenth century. When he heard about Brian's campaign against intelligence tests and in favour of the comprehensive school, he happily exclaimed: "Bravo!", and then he realized "but, unfortunately, I didn't know him".⁵⁸

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions will be presented considering two orders of factors: 1. the reception of Gramsci's thought in England and the interest in him in Brian Simon's environment; 2. the influence of Gramsci's thought on Brian Simon.

The first aspect concerns Hobsbawm's remark about the fact that they had been delayed "on the other side of the Alps". Perhaps less importance should be attached to this delay, given the difficulties that Gramsci's own companions had had in bringing all the prison notes to

⁵⁷ Brian Simon, "Letter to Olga Salimova", 1982, SIM/2/4. IoE/UCL.

⁵⁸ Mario Alighiero Manacorda. *Interview*. Rome, June 2012. An unexpected detail of this incredible visit was that, when I enter his apartment, he was doing Russian grammar exercises. He died months later, in February 2013.

the attention of the public. The Notebooks only came to be known in the future because they had reached Julia and Togliatti. As is well known, when Gramsci was in Moscow in 1922, he was elected to the Executive Committee of the Communist International, married the Russian Julia Schucht and lived in the Soviet capital. After he returned to Italy, he was imprisoned by the Fascist regime of Mussolini and Julia returned to Moscow where his two sons grew up.⁵⁹

Still regarding the interest in Gramsci, let us going back to the Russian context and Olga Salímovna's search for Gramsci several decades later, a fact that has only become known from the letters exchanged between her and Brian Simon. It was impossible to make clear the outcome of this matter since the series of letters does not mention it.⁶⁰ However, his interest in Gramsci can help us piece together and better understand the relationships and setbacks caused by the political tragedies that have characterised the 20th Century. These letters were surprising because they have enabled us to find traces of Gramsci in the work of Brian Simon, as well as signs of the theoretical concerns of a Russian historian. In light of this, they can allow us to reflect on the way knowledge between intellectuals circulated during the Cold War and the uncertain conditions in which an intellectual lived under the ideological constraints of the Stalinist regime.

The second point concerns the core of this article: to what extent did Gramsci's thought influenced Brian Simon?

As the campaign for a comprehensive school system and the struggle against psychometric tests preceded the translations of Gramsci into English, a direct Gramscian presence on Brian Simon's work from 1940s to 1970s would be impossible. As we have seen, Gramsci's influence can be clearly discerned from the 1970s onwards. The book *Selections from*

⁵⁹ In one road very close to the Kremlin, in the heart of Moscow, there is a plaque on the façade of one of the houses with large letters (in Cyrillic script): "Antonio Gramsci lived in this house from 1922 to 1923 – he was a leader of the Italian Communist Party".

⁶⁰ Reading these letters gave me a feeling of being an intruder in a world that belonged only to them. The calligraphy, the photos in black and white of their children and the whole world that surrounded them reached me through the Archive of the IoE/UCL. The feeling of invading their past led me to decide to write a letter to Olga in 2012, telling her about my situation as a researcher. However, I received no reply. Had she changed her address? Had she died or was it simply that she did not wish to return to these pages of her past?

the Prison Notebooks was published in England in 1971, and in the following years, other publications about Gramsci appeared. However, given that his ideas had been circulating among British Marxists since the 1950s, including Roger Simon, who had been devoted to these studies and was the overseer of the most important translation of Gramsci into English, it is unlikely that Brian Simon had not been familiar with Gramsci's thought since then.

Therefore, on the one hand, Soviet psychology was the theory that underpinned Brian Simon's campaign for the comprehensive school, on the other hand, the campaign itself aimed at educational reforms in a capitalist country. This reforming role of Brian Simon was in line with the Marxist view committed to parliamentary democracy, not to the Soviet road to power. His campaign for the comprehensive school in particular and for educational reforms in general, since the 1940s, therefore, long before Gramsci's main work was translated into English, shows proximity to the conception of hegemony elaborated by Gramsci in prison. Brian Simon did not have an economic view of Marxism and, therefore, did not subordinate politics and culture to the economy. On the contrary, he understood that there was relative autonomy of these spheres and such was the understanding of Antonio Gramsci.

At this point, it is useful to remember Gramsci's distinction between revolutionary strategy in the East and the West countries. According to him, in the West, civil society was far more developed than it had been in Tsarist Russia in 1917 (the East). As a result, to subvert the domination of the ruling class, a 'war of position' was necessary for revolutionary strategy in the West. Let's add here the clarity which Roger Simon interpreted this issue by saying that it was Gramsci who formulated a suitable theory to explain the relationship between class struggles and people's democratic conflicts in non-revolutionary periods.

It was exactly under these historical circumstances that Brian Simon developed his campaign for the comprehensive school and it was under this context that he revealed his reforming role. This aspect is of paramount importance so that we do not fall into reductionisms. And why? This is because, on the one hand, he was inspired by Soviet Psychology to act against Intelligence Tests and defend the comprehensive school. However, on the other hand, this inspiration fueled his reforming

protagonism and his personal effort in warning the Marxists of the need to conduct an analysis of the real purpose of schools in a capitalist society, as he had written in 1937. Therefore, he acted under the conditions of a non-revolutionary period, namely, the English case, as Roger Simon had interpreted Gramsci. Moreover, even if he believed in the Soviet way, by leading reforms, he walked the Gramscian path on the construction of hegemony and the war of positions.

In summary, the theoretical basis of Brian Simon's formulation of the comprehensive school were Soviet ideas about the psychology of education, as he needed a potent scientific theory to do so. Nevertheless, at the same time, he was a Marxist whose *praxis* contributed decisively to democratizing English education in favour of the working-class and, therefore, to building hegemony in the sense of Gramsci, that is, based on the recognition that popular democratic struggles and the parliamentary institutions do not have a necessary class character. Due to his anti-determinist Marxism and his reforming protagonism, Brian Simon embodied Gramsci's thought and proved him right when he formulated the theory on how to apply Marxism in a non-revolutionary period.

Would Brian Simon have been a Gramscian before the *Prison Notebooks* were translated into English? Perhaps, and this is because the original way in which Brian Simon used Marxism to advocate for educational reforms allows us to verify that his practice as a reformer coincided with the Gramscian postulates on the construction of hegemony. For that reason and in that sense alone, we could say that Brian Simon was a Gramscian before knowing the thought of Antonio Gramsci.

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