

# Gramsci's Arrest: Letter by Tania Schucht

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**Source:** *L'Unità*, November 7, 2008;

**Translated:** for marxists.org by Mitchell Abidor.

This important letter, recently discovered by Gramsci's grandson, was written in Russian by Gramsci's wife in the days after his arrest on the night of November 8-9, 1926. Accusations have been made that Gramsci had been intentionally prevented from attending a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Italy on the Trotsky-Stalin split, he being thought to be on the outs with the new Soviet leaders. Even more, some party leaders have been accused of having done nothing to hinder Gramsci's arrest and have been accused of actively conspiring in it.

In the following letter we see instead that when he left Rome Gramsci was unaware of the assassination attempt on Mussolini carried out in Bologna on October 31; that he didn't attend the Central Committee meeting because – as a result of the stepped-up police activity after Anteo Zamboni's attack – he was told by his comrades to return to Rome in order to avoid the police in Milan; that he had nevertheless been cautious in the previous days and had “tidied up” his papers, having them hidden; and that party lawyers and the Soviet embassy worked for his release after his arrest.

The references in the letter to Tania's work are to her position at the Soviet embassy, which she obtained thanks to her husband, and where her work was being cut back because of the ever increasing scrutiny on the part of the Fascist regime.

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My Dear Ones;

I received mamma's and Julia's letters and Asja's postcard. At least for you things are improving and I hope that everything will turn out fine and that the children will return home. I think that Julia has already received Nedolya's [?] letter, in which she wrote a bit about the political happenings here. For the moment we don't have any idea what the charges against the arrested deputies will be. Unfortunately Antonio hadn't been able to leave. He left for Milan the evening of the day of the attack on Mussolini in Bologna. We hadn't had any news of this because it had happened on Sunday; moreover, the editors of opposition newspapers had already for some time been excluded from the press room. During the day Antonio had dined with me as usual, given that these last days the atmosphere wasn't peaceful and I didn't want to him to go about in the city. He then returned to my place and left almost immediately and, as he later told me, for a half an hour he walked with a comrade near the station and heard nothing about the attack; otherwise he never would have left. And so, upon his arrival at the station in Milan he was told that he had either to return to Rome or present himself at police headquarters. They [the comrades who met him at the station – tr.] had him return to Rome. You certainly heard of the crimes they carried out for several days. For a week Antonio didn't go anywhere, had lunch and dinner at my place; even the day before he was arrested he was at my place until 10:15, when he went out, saying it was time to leave. They were already waiting for him in the apartment, so that they directly stumbled upon the friends. We learned of this the next morning. I naturally took care to see to it that he had food, which Marietta brought to him. Coffee, sugar, fruit, egg, a chicken. Starting yesterday I've decided to order him his dinner at a restaurant and to bring it during visiting hours. As a precautionary measure this will be best. I hope that the lawyer will finally get permission to see the prisoners and he'll give them news from home on Delio's recovery, etc. It might well be that they will release him before the two weeks required for presenting the charges, and perhaps

when the lawyer will have the right to see him. Perhaps their imprisonment enters under the definition of “arrest.” They were taken on the eve of the opening of parliament.

I think that Antonio feels strong and lively because he perfectly understands the situation and had foreseen the possibility of arrest and a search. Over the course of the week he had “tidied things up” and had succeeded in taking away the last of his things before the arrest. They have organized material aid for everyone so that no one lacks for anything. As soon as he is freed I will write to you. As for us, given the widespread fear, there is almost no work, and I was told that I will have none for a couple of weeks. I’m not particularly worried, because I hope to organize something either here or in some other way.

It is said that Kamenev should be coming for the post of plenipotentiary and that his wife is a very interesting person who will perhaps occupy herself with the question of the International Institute. Naturally, I still have money, but permit me not to send you anything for this month since, having mamma’s reserves I’ll feel easier and will not unnecessarily worry myself, and perhaps everything will yet go well.

If Antonio were to be freed I could work for him, but I haven’t even had the time to tell him about my conversation with the leaders, which happened on the very morning that we learned of his arrest. I already have the passport and everything is peaceful for us, at home there are no troubles. As for money, I pray you to be patient because naturally I had to spend a good deal of it both for Antonio and to deposit some in his prison account so he can buy something. I repeat: the party is taking an interest in them and will think of them in a material sense and in other ways, so maybe we will see you soon. And so, if this doesn’t cause you too many problems for the moment I will keep your money here instead of sending it to you. I, as you know, spend little and if I have to remain without work

for some time this won't trouble me much, since I have a small reserve. I hope to soon be able to arrange things and will perhaps soon have work. I will then immediately send you the money. Here, since your departure, Glebova is still working. She has already been laid off; and just as Janson Stefan has left for Moscow, Abram will soon leave, and in about three weeks the typist will also leave. When it comes to translations only Chusik can compete with me. I don't know what the leaders will do: will they give him work or me? Anyway, all of this is silliness: in one way or another I will get by. It's a pity that for you, my dear ones, instead of meeting Antonio in Moscow, you should instead hear news that is so unhappy, but this too shall pass. Take care of everything, for example, don't let his books be lost, take them from our place so that they be safe. Above all, Julka, take courage from the fact that I send Antonio the food he likes and I've also decided to send him medicine, Glycero-phosphate; that certainly won't do him any harm. But I still hope that they will be able to release him at any moment, as they have already released many comrades from among those who were arrested at the same time. Julka, have you become a Muscovite? And who is Julianchik? Write me if you remember the ricotta, and how many times Tatanka bought it. And tell me, where are your curls? Sing me who has been touched by your curls, your blonde curls. And what is your pony doing with the apples? And tell me what you are looking at now, and what you aren't looking at. And do they remember the pigeons and the black boats? Have you spoken of them to Mamma Lula? And do they remember the mosquitoes? How they caught them and crushed them against the wall with their shoes, and lit the little sticks that put them to sleep.