

## Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method\*

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Some time ago I began reading Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. In these fragments, written in a fascist prison between 1929 and 1935, the former leader of the Italian Communist Party was concerned with the problem of understanding capitalist societies in the 1920s and 1930s, and particularly with the meaning of fascism and the possibilities of building an alternative form of state and society based on the working class. What he had to say centred upon the state, upon the relationship of civil society to the state, and upon the relationship of politics, ethics and ideology to production. Not surprisingly, Gramsci did not have very much to say directly about international relations. Nevertheless, I found that Gramsci's thinking was helpful in understanding the meaning of international organisation with which I was then principally concerned. Particularly valuable was his concept of hegemony, but valuable also were several related concepts which he had worked out for himself or developed from others. This essay sets forth my understanding of what Gramsci meant by hegemony and these related concepts, and suggests how I think they may be adapted, retaining his essential meaning, to the understanding of problems of world order. It does not purport to be a critical study of Gramsci's political theory but merely a derivation from it of some ideas useful for a revision of current international relations theory.<sup>1</sup>

### *Gramsci and Hegemony*

Gramsci's concepts were all derived from history—both from his own reflections upon those periods of history which he thought helped to throw an explanatory light upon the present, and from his personal experience of political and social struggle. These included the workers' councils movement of the early 1920s, his participation in the Third International and his opposition to fascism. Gramsci's ideas have always to be related to his own historical context. More than that, he was constantly adjusting his concepts to specific historical circumstances. The concepts cannot usefully be considered in abstraction from their applications, for when they are so abstracted different usages of the same concept appear to contain contradictions or ambiguities.<sup>2</sup> A concept, in Gramsci's thought, is loose and elastic and attains precision only when brought into contact with a particu-

lar situation which it helps to explain—a contact which also develops the meaning of the concept. This is the strength of Gramsci's historicism and therein lies its explanatory power. The term 'historicism' is however, frequently misunderstood and criticised by those who seek a more abstract, systematic, universalistic and non-historical form of knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

Gramsci geared his thought consistently to the practical purpose of political action. In his prison writings, he always referred to marxism as 'the philosophy of praxis'.<sup>4</sup> Partly at least, one may surmise, it must have been to underline the practical revolutionary purpose of philosophy. Partly too, it would have been to indicate his intention to contribute to a lively developing current of thought, given impetus by Marx but not forever circumscribed by Marx's work. Nothing could be further from his mind than a marxism which consists in an exegesis of the sacred texts for the purpose of refining a timeless set of categories and concepts.

### *Origins of the Concept of Hegemony*

There are two main strands leading to the Gramscian idea of hegemony. The first ran from the debates within the Third International concerning the strategy of the Bolshevik Revolution and the creation of a Soviet socialist state; the second from the writings of Machiavelli. In tracing the first strand, some commentators have sought to contrast Gramsci's thought with Lenin's by aligning Gramsci with the idea of a hegemony of the proletariat and Lenin with a dictatorship of the proletariat. Other commentators have underlined their basic agreement.<sup>5</sup> What is important is that Lenin referred to the Russian proletariat as both a dominant and a directing class; dominance implying dictatorship and direction implying leadership with the consent of allied classes (notably the peasantry). Gramsci, in effect, took over an idea that was current in the circles of the Third International: the workers exercised hegemony over the allied classes and dictatorship over enemy classes. Yet this idea was applied by the Third International only to the working class and expressed the rôle of the working class in leading an alliance of workers, peasants and perhaps some other groups potentially supportive of revolutionary change.<sup>6</sup>

Gramsci's originality lies in his giving a twist to this first strand: he began to apply it to the bourgeoisie, to the apparatus or mechanisms of hegemony of the dominant class.<sup>7</sup> This made it possible for him to distinguish cases in which the bourgeoisie had attained a hegemonic position of leadership over other classes from those in which it had not. In northern Europe, in the countries where capitalism had first become established, bourgeois hegemony was most complete. It necessarily involved concessions to subordinate classes in return for acquiescence in bourgeois leadership, concessions which could lead ultimately to forms of social democracy which preserve capitalism while making it more acceptable to workers and the petty bourgeois. Because their hegemony was firmly entrenched in civil society, the bourgeoisie often did not need to run the state themselves. Landed aristocrats in England, Junkers in Prussia, or a renegade pretender to the mantle of Napoleon I in France, could do it for them so long as these rulers recognised the hegemonic structures of civil society as the basic limits of their political action.

This perception of hegemony led Gramsci to enlarge his definition of the state. When the administrative, executive and coercive apparatus of government was in effect constrained by the hegemony of the leading class of a whole social formation, it became meaningless to limit the definition of the state to those elements of government. To be meaningful, the notion of the state would also have to include the underpinnings of the political structure in civil society. Gramsci thought of these in concrete historical terms—the church, the educational system, the press, all the institutions which helped to create in people certain modes of behaviour and expectations consistent with the hegemonic social order. For example, Gramsci argued that the Masonic lodges in Italy were a bond amongst the government officials who entered into the state machinery after the unification of Italy, and therefore must be considered as part of the state for the purpose of assessing its broader political structure. The hegemony of a dominant class thus bridged the conventional categories of state and civil society, categories which retained a certain analytical usefulness but ceased to correspond to separable entities in reality.

As noted above, the second strand leading to the Gramscian idea of hegemony came all the way from Machiavelli and helps to broaden even further the potential scope of application of the concept. Gramsci had pondered what Machiavelli had written, especially in *The Prince*, concerning the problem of founding a new state. Machiavelli, in the fifteenth century, was concerned with finding the leadership and the supporting social basis for a united Italy; Gramsci, in the twentieth century, with the leadership and supportive basis for an alternative to fascism. Where Machiavelli looked to the individual Prince, Gramsci looked to the Modern Prince: the revolutionary party engaged in a continuing and developing dialogue with its own base of support. Gramsci took over from Machiavelli the image of power as a centaur: half man, half beast, a necessary combination of consent and coercion.<sup>8</sup> To the extent that the consensual aspect of power is in the forefront, hegemony prevails. Coercion is always latent but is only applied in marginal, deviant cases. Hegemony is enough to ensure conformity of behaviour in most people most of the time. The Machiavellian connection frees the concept of power (and of hegemony as one form of power) from a tie to historically specific social classes and gives it a wider applicability to relations of dominance and subordination, including, as shall be suggested below, relations of world order. It does not, however, sever power relations from their social basis (*i.e.*, in the case of world order relations by making them into relations among states narrowly conceived) but directs attention towards deepening an awareness of this social basis.

### *War of Movement and War of Position*

In thinking through the first strand of his concept of hegemony, Gramsci reflected upon the experience of the Bolshevik Revolution and sought to determine what lessons might be drawn from it for the task of revolution in Western Europe.<sup>9</sup> He came to the conclusion that the circumstances in Western Europe differed greatly from those in Russia. To illustrate the differences in circumstances, and the consequent differences in strategies required, he had recourse to the military analogy of wars of movement and wars of position. The basic differ-

ence between Russia and Western Europe was in the relative strengths of state and civil society. In Russia, the administrative and coercive apparatus of the state was formidable but proved to be vulnerable, while civil society was undeveloped. A relatively small working class led by a disciplined avant-garde was able to overwhelm the state in a war of movement and met no effective resistance from the rest of civil society. The vanguard party could set about founding a new state through a combination of applying coercion against recalcitrant elements and building consent among others. (This analysis was particularly apposite to the period of the New Economic Policy before coercion began to be applied on a larger scale against the rural population.)

In Western Europe, by contrast, civil society, under bourgeois hegemony, was much more fully developed and took manifold forms. A war of movement might conceivably, in conditions of exceptional upheaval, enable a revolutionary vanguard to seize control of the state apparatus; but because of the resiliency of civil society such an exploit would in the long run be doomed to failure. Gramsci described the state in Western Europe (by which we should read state in the limited sense of administrative, governmental and coercive apparatus and not the enlarged concept of the state mentioned above) as 'an outer ditch, behind which there stands a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks'.

In Russia, the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed.<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly, Gramsci argued that the war of movement could not be effective against the hegemonic state-societies of Western Europe. The alternative strategy is the war of position which slowly builds up the strength of the social foundations of a new state. In Western Europe, the struggle had to be won in civil society before an assault on the state could achieve success. Premature attack on the state by a war of movement would only reveal the weakness of the opposition and lead to a reimposition of bourgeois dominance as the institutions of civil society reasserted control.

The strategic implications of this analysis are clear but fraught with difficulties. To build up the basis of an alternative state and society upon the leadership of the working class means creating alternative institutions and alternative intellectual resources within existing society and building bridges between workers and other subordinate classes. It means actively building a counter-hegemony within an established hegemony while resisting the pressures and temptations to relapse into pursuit of incremental gains for subaltern groups within the framework of bourgeois hegemony. This is the line between war of position as a long-range revolutionary strategy and social democracy as a policy of making gains within the established order.

### *Passive Revolution*

Not all Western European societies were bourgeois hegemonies. Gramsci distinguished between two kinds of societies. One kind had undergone a thorough

social revolution and worked out fully its consequences in new modes of production and social relations. England and France were cases that had gone further than most others in this respect. The other kind were societies which had so to speak imported or had thrust upon them aspects of a new order created abroad, without the old order having been displaced. These last were caught up in a dialectic of revolution-restoration which tended to become blocked as neither the new forces nor the old could triumph. In these societies, the new industrial bourgeoisie failed to achieve hegemony. The resulting stalemate with the traditionally dominant social classes created the conditions that Gramsci called 'passive revolution', the introduction of changes which did not involve any arousal of popular forces.<sup>11</sup>

One typical accompaniment to passive revolution in Gramsci's analysis is caesarism: a strong man intervenes to resolve the stalemate between equal and opposed social forces. Gramsci allowed that there were both progressive and reactionary forms of caesarism: progressive when strong rule presides over a more orderly development of a new state, reactionary when it stabilises existing power. Napoleon I was a case of progressive caesarism, but Napoleon III, the exemplar of reactionary caesarism, was more representative of the kind likely to arise in the course of passive revolution. Gramsci's analysis here is virtually identical with that of Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: the French bourgeoisie, unable to rule directly through their own political parties, were content to develop capitalism under a political régime which had its social basis in the peasantry, an inarticulate and unorganised class whose virtual representative Bonaparte could claim to be.

In late nineteenth century Italy, the northern industrial bourgeoisie, the class with the most to gain from the unification of Italy, was unable to dominate the peninsula. The basis for the new state became an alliance between the industrial bourgeoisie of the north and the landowners of the south—an alliance which also provided benefits for petty bourgeois clients (especially from the south) who staffed the new state bureaucracy and political parties and became the intermediaries between the various population groups and the state. The lack of any sustained and widespread popular participation in the unification movement explained the 'passive revolution' character of its outcome. In the aftermath of the First World War, worker and peasant occupations of factories and land demonstrated a strength which was considerable enough to threaten yet insufficient to dislodge the existing state. There took place then what Gramsci called a 'displacement of the basis of the state'<sup>12</sup> towards the petty bourgeoisie, the only class of nation-wide extent, which became the anchor of fascist power. Fascism continued the passive revolution, sustaining the position of the old owner classes yet unable to attract the support of worker or peasant subaltern groups.

Apart from caesarism, the second major feature of passive revolution in Italy Gramsci called *trasformismo*. It was exemplified in Italian politics by Giovanni Giolitti who sought to bring about the widest possible coalition of interests and who dominated the political scene in the years preceding fascism. For example, he aimed to bring northern industrial workers into a common front with industrialists through a protectionist policy. *Trasformismo* worked to co-opt potential leaders of subaltern social groups. By extension *trasformismo* can serve as a strategy of assimilating and domesticating potentially dangerous ideas by adjust-

ing them to the policies of the dominant coalition and can thereby obstruct the formation of class-based organised opposition to established social and political power. Fascism continued *trasformismo*. Gramsci interprets the fascist state corporatism as an unsuccessful attempt to introduce some of the more advanced industrial practices of American capitalism under the aegis of the old Italian management.

The concept of passive revolution is a counterpart to the concept of hegemony in that it describes the condition of a non-hegemonic society—one in which no dominant class has been able to establish a hegemony in Gramsci's sense of the term. Today this notion of passive revolution, together with its components, caesarism and *trasformismo*, is particularly apposite to industrialising Third World countries.

### *Historic Bloc (Blocco Storico)*

Gramsci attributed the source of his notion of the historic bloc (*blocco storico*) to Georges Sorel, though Sorel never used the term or any other in precisely the sense Gramsci gave to it.<sup>13</sup> Sorel did, however, interpret revolutionary action in terms of social myths through which people engaged in action perceived a confrontation of totalities—in which they saw a new order challenging an established order. In the course of a cataclysmic event, the old order would be overthrown as a whole and the new be freed to unfold.<sup>14</sup> While Gramsci did not share the subjectivism of this vision, he did share the view that state and society together constituted a solid structure and that revolution implied the development within it of another structure strong enough to replace the first. Echoing Marx, he thought this could come about only when the first had exhausted its full potential. Whether dominant or emergent, such a structure is what Gramsci called an historic bloc.

For Sorel, social myth, a powerful form of collective subjectivity, would obstruct reformist tendencies. These might otherwise attract workers away from revolutionary syndicalism into incrementalist trade unionism or reformist party politics. The myth was a weapon in struggle as well as a tool for analysis. For Gramsci, the historic bloc similarly had a revolutionary orientation through its stress on the unity and coherence of socio-political orders. It was an intellectual defence against co-optation by *trasformismo*.

The historic bloc is a dialectical concept in the sense that its interacting elements create a larger unity. Gramsci expressed these interacting elements sometimes as the subjective and the objective, sometimes as superstructure and structure.

Structures and superstructures form an 'historic bloc'. That is to say the complex contradictory and discordant *ensemble* of the superstructures is the reflection of the *ensemble* of the social relations of production.<sup>15</sup>

The juxtaposition and reciprocal relationships of the political, ethical and ideological spheres of activity with the economic sphere avoids reductionism. It avoids reducing everything either to economics (economism) or to ideas (idealism). In

Gramsci's historical materialism (which he was careful to distinguish from what he called 'historical economism' or a narrowly economic interpretation of history), ideas and material conditions are always bound together, mutually influencing one another, and not reducible one to the other. Ideas have to be understood in relation to material circumstances. Material circumstances include both the social relations and the physical means of production. Superstructures of ideology and political organisation shape the development of both aspects of production and are shaped by them.

An historic bloc cannot exist without a hegemonic social class. Where the hegemonic class is the dominant class in a country or social formation, the state (in Gramsci's enlarged concept) maintains cohesion and identity within the bloc through the propagation of a common culture. A new bloc is formed when a subordinate class (*e.g.*, the workers) establishes its hegemony over other subordinate groups (*e.g.*, small farmers, marginals). This process requires intensive dialogue between leaders and followers within the would-be hegemonic class. Gramsci may have concurred in the Leninist idea of an avant-garde party which takes upon itself the responsibility for leading an immature working class, but only as an aspect of a war of movement. Because a war of position strategy was required in the western countries, as he saw it, the rôle of the party should be to lead, intensify and develop dialogue within the working class and between the working class and other subordinate classes which could be brought into alliance with it. The 'mass line' as a mobilisation technique developed by the Chinese Communist Party is consistent with Gramsci's thinking in this respect.

Intellectuals play a key rôle in the building of an historic bloc. Intellectuals are not a distinct and relatively classless social stratum. Gramsci saw them as organically connected with a social class. They perform the function of developing and sustaining the mental images, technologies and organisations which bind together the members of a class and of an historic bloc into a common identity. Bourgeois intellectuals did this for a whole society in which the bourgeoisie was hegemonic. The organic intellectuals of the working class would perform a similar rôle in the creation of a new historic bloc under working class hegemony within that society. To do this they would have to evolve clearly distinctive culture, organisation and technique and do so in constant interaction with the members of the emergent block. Everyone, for Gramsci, is in some part an intellectual, although only some perform full-time the social function of an intellectual. In this task, the party was, in his conception, a 'collective intellectual'.

In the movement towards hegemony and the creation of an historic bloc, Gramsci distinguished three levels of consciousness: the economico-corporative, which is aware of the specific interests of a particular group; the solidarity or class consciousness, which extends to a whole social class but remains at a purely economic level; and the hegemonic, which brings the interests of the leading class into harmony with those of subordinate classes and incorporates these other interests into an ideology expressed in universal terms.<sup>16</sup> The movement towards hegemony, Gramsci says, is a 'passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures', by which he means passing from the specific interests of a group or class to the building of institutions and elaboration of ideologies. If they reflect a hegemony, these institutions and ideologies will be universal in form, *i.e.*, they will not appear as those of a particular class, and will give

some satisfaction to the subordinate groups while not undermining the leadership or vital interests of the hegemonic class.

### *Hegemony and International Relations*

We can now make the transition from what Gramsci said about hegemony and related concepts to the implications of these concepts for international relations. First, however, it is useful to look at what little Gramsci himself had to say about international relations. Let us begin with this passage:

Do international relations precede or follow (logically) fundamental social relations? There can be no doubt that they follow. Any organic innovation in the social structure, through its technical-military expressions, modifies organically absolute and relative relations in the international field too.<sup>17</sup>

By 'organic' Gramsci meant that which is structural, long-term or relatively permanent, as opposed to the short-term or 'conjunctural'. He was saying that basic changes in international power relations or world order, which are observed as changes in the military-strategic and geo-political balance, can be traced to fundamental changes in social relations.

Gramsci did not in any way by-pass the state or diminish its importance. The state remained for him the basic entity in international relations and the place where social conflicts take place—the place also, therefore, where hegemonies of social classes can be built. In these hegemonies of social classes, the particular characteristics of nations combine in unique and original ways. The working class, which might be considered to be international in an abstract sense, nationalises itself in the process of building its hegemony. The emergence of new worker-led blocs at the national level would, in this line of reasoning, precede any basic restructuring of international relations. However, the state, which remains the primary focus of social struggle and the basic entity of international relations, is the enlarged state which includes its own social basis. This view sets aside a narrow or superficial view of the state which reduces it, for instance, to the foreign policy bureaucracy or the state's military capabilities.

From his Italian perspective, Gramsci had a keen sense of what we would now call dependency. What happened in Italy he knew was markedly influenced by external powers. At the purely foreign policy level, great powers have relative freedom to determine their foreign policies in response to domestic interests; smaller powers have less autonomy.<sup>18</sup> The economic life of subordinate nations is penetrated by and intertwined with that of powerful nations. This is further complicated by the existence within countries of structurally diverse regions which have distinctive patterns of relationship to external forces.<sup>19</sup>

At an even deeper level, those states which are powerful are precisely those which have undergone a profound social and economic revolution and have most fully worked out the consequences of this revolution in the form of state and of social relations. The French Revolution was the case Gramsci reflected upon, but we can think of the development of US and Soviet power in the same way. These were all nation-based developments which spilled over national boundaries to become internationally expansive phenomena. Other countries have received the

impact of these developments in a more passive way, an instance of what Gramsci described at the national level as a passive revolution. This effect comes when the impetus to change does not arise out of 'a vast local economic development . . . but is instead the reflection of international developments which transmit their ideological currents to the periphery.'<sup>20</sup>

The group which is the bearer of the new ideas, in such circumstances, is not an indigenous social group which is actively engaged in building a new economic base with a new structure of social relations. It is an intellectual stratum which picks up ideas originating from a prior foreign economic and social revolution. Consequently, the thought of this group takes an idealistic shape ungrounded in a domestic economic development; and its conception of the state takes the form of 'a rational absolute'.<sup>21</sup> Gramsci criticised the thought of Benedetto Croce, the dominant figure of the Italian intellectual establishment of his own time, for expressing this kind of distortion.

### *Hegemony and World Order*

Is the Gramscian concept of hegemony applicable at the international or world level? Before attempting to suggest how this might be done, it is well to rule out some usages of the term which are common in international relations studies. Very often 'hegemony' is used to mean the dominance of one country over others, thereby tying the usage to a relationship strictly among states. Sometimes 'hegemony' is used as a euphemism for imperialism. When Chinese political leaders accuse the Soviet Union of 'hegemonism' they seem to have in mind some combination of these two. These meanings differ so much from the Gramscian sense of the term that it is better, for purposes of clarity in this paper, to use the term 'dominance' to replace them.

In applying the concept of hegemony to world order, it becomes important to determine when a period of hegemony begins and when it ends. A period in which a world hegemony has been established can be called hegemonic and one in which dominance of a non-hegemonic kind prevails, non-hegemonic. To illustrate, let us consider the past century and a half as falling into four distinguishable periods, roughly, 1845–1875, 1875–1945, 1945–1965 and 1965 to the present.<sup>22</sup>

The first period (1845–75) was hegemonic: there was a world economy with Britain as its centre. Economic doctrines consistent with British supremacy but universal in form—comparative advantage, free trade and the gold standard—spread gradually outward from Britain. Coercive strength underwrote this order. Britain held the balance of power in Europe, thereby preventing any challenge to hegemony from a land-based power. Britain ruled supreme at sea and had the capacity to enforce obedience by peripheral countries to the rules of the market.

In the second period (1875–1945), all these features were reversed. Other countries challenged British supremacy. The balance of power in Europe became destabilised, leading to two world wars. Free trade was superseded by protectionism; the gold standard was ultimately abandoned; and the world economy fragmented into economic blocs. This was a non-hegemonic period.

In the third period, following the Second World War (1945–65), the United States founded a new hegemonic world order similar in basic structure to that

dominated by Britain in mid-nineteenth century but with institutions and doctrines adjusted to a more complex world economy and to national societies more sensitive to the political repercussions of economic crises.

Sometime from the later 1960s through the early 1970s it became evident that this US-based world order was no longer working well. During the uncertain times which followed, three possibilities of structural transformation of world order opened up: a reconstruction of hegemony with a broadening of political management on the lines envisaged by the Trilateral Commission; increased fragmentation of the world economy around big-power-centred economic spheres; and the possible assertion of a Third-World-based counterhegemony with the concerted demand for the New International Economic Order as a forerunner.

On the basis of this tentative notation, it would appear that, historically, to become hegemonic, a state would have to found and protect a world order which was universal in conception, *i.e.*, not an order in which one state directly exploits others but an order which most other states (or at least those within reach of the hegemony) could find compatible with their interests. Such an order would hardly be conceived in inter-state terms alone, for this would likely bring to the fore oppositions of state interests. It would most likely give prominence to opportunities for the forces of civil society to operate on the world scale (or on the scale of the sphere within which hegemony prevails). The hegemonic concept of world order is founded not only upon the regulation of inter-state conflict but also upon a globally-conceived civil society, *i.e.*, a mode of production of global extent which brings about links among social classes of the countries encompassed by it.

Historically, hegemonies of this kind are founded by powerful states which have undergone a thorough social and economic revolution. The revolution not only modifies the internal economic and political structures of the state in question but also unleashes energies which expand beyond the state's boundaries. A world hegemony is thus in its beginnings an outward expansion of the internal (national) hegemony established by a dominant social class. The economic and social institutions, the culture, the technology associated with this national hegemony become patterns for emulation abroad. Such an expansive hegemony impinges on the more peripheral countries as a passive revolution. These countries have not undergone the same thorough social revolution, nor have their economies developed in the same way, but they try to incorporate elements from the hegemonic model without disturbing old power structures. While peripheral countries may adopt some economic and cultural aspects of the hegemonic core, they are less well able to adopt its political models. Just as fascism became the form of passive revolution in the Italy of the inter-war period, so various forms of military-bureaucratic régime supervise passive revolution in today's peripheries. In the world-hegemonic model, hegemony is more intense and consistent at the core and more laden with contradictions at the periphery.

Hegemony at the international level is thus not merely an order among states. It is an order within a world economy with a dominant mode of production which penetrates into all countries and links into other subordinate modes of production. It is also a complex of international social relationships which connect the social classes of the different countries. World hegemony is describable

as a social structure, an economic structure, and a political structure; and it cannot be simply one of these things but must be all three. World hegemony, furthermore, is expressed in universal norms, institutions and mechanisms which lay down general rules of behaviour for states and for those forces of civil society that act across national boundaries—rules which support the dominant mode of production.

*The Mechanisms of Hegemony: International Organisations*

One mechanism through which the universal norms of a world hegemony are expressed is the international organisation. Indeed, international organisation functions as the process through which the institutions of hegemony and its ideology are developed. Among the features of international organisation which express its hegemonic rôle are the following: (1) they embody the rules which facilitate the expansion of hegemonic world orders; (2) they are themselves the product of the hegemonic world order; (3) they ideologically legitimate the norms of the world order; (4) they co-opt the elites from peripheral countries and (5) they absorb counter-hegemonic ideas.

International institutions embody rules which facilitate the expansion of the dominant economic and social forces but which at the same time permit adjustments to be made by subordinated interests with a minimum of pain. The rules governing world monetary and trade relations are particularly significant. They are framed primarily to promote economic expansion. At the same time they allow for exceptions and derogations to take care of problem situations. They can be revised in the light of changed circumstances. The Bretton Woods institutions provided more safeguards for domestic social concerns like unemployment than did the gold standard, on condition that national policies were consistent with the goal of a liberal world economy. The current system of floating exchange rates also gives scope for national actions while maintaining the principle of a prior commitment to harmonise national policies in the interests of a liberal world economy.

International institutions and rules are generally initiated by the state which establishes the hegemony. At the very least they must have that state's support. The dominant state takes care to secure the acquiescence of other states according to a hierarchy of powers within the inter-state structure of hegemony. Some second-rank countries are consulted first and their support is secured. The consent of at least some of the more peripheral countries is solicited. Formal participation may be weighted in favour of the dominant powers as in the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, or it may be on a one-state-one-vote basis as in most other major international institutions. There is an informal structure of influence reflecting the different levels of real political and economic power which underlies the formal procedures for decisions.

International institutions perform an ideological rôle as well. They help define policy guidelines for states and to legitimate certain institutions and practices at the national level. They reflect orientations favourable to the dominant social and economic forces. The OECD, in recommending monetarism, endorsed a dominant consensus of policy thinking in the core countries and strengthened those who were determined to combat inflation this way against others who were more concerned about unemployment. The ILO, by advocating tripartism, legitimates

the social relations evolved in the core countries as the desirable model for emulation.

Elite talent from peripheral countries is co-opted into international institutions in the manner of *trasformismo*. Individuals from peripheral countries, though they may come to international institutions with the idea of working from within to change the system, are condemned to work within the structures of passive revolution. At best they will help transfer elements of 'modernisation' to the peripheries but only as these are consistent with the interests of established local powers. Hegemony is like a pillow: it absorbs blows and sooner or later the would-be assailant will find it comfortable to rest upon. Only where representation in international institutions is firmly based upon an articulate social and political challenge to hegemony—upon a nascent historic bloc and counter-hegemony—could participation pose a real threat. The co-optation of outstanding individuals from the peripheries renders this less likely.

*Trasformismo* also absorbs potentially counter-hegemonic ideas and makes these ideas consistent with hegemonic doctrine. The notion of self-reliance, for example, began as a challenge to the world economy by advocating endogenously-determined autonomous development. The term has now been transformed to mean support by the agencies of the world economy for do-it-yourself welfare programmes in the peripheral countries. These programmes aim to enable the rural populations to achieve self-sufficiency, to stem the rural exodus to the cities, and to achieve thereby a greater degree of social and political stability amongst populations which the world economy is incapable of integrating. Self-reliance in its transformed meaning becomes complementary to and supportive of hegemonic goals for the world economy.

Thus, one tactic for bringing about change in the structure of world order can be ruled out as a total illusion. There is very little likelihood of a war of movement at the international level through which radicals would seize control of the superstructure of international institutions. Daniel Patrick Moynihan notwithstanding, Third World radicals do not control international institutions. Even if they did, they could achieve nothing by it. These superstructures are inadequately connected with any popular political base. They are connected with the national hegemonic classes in the core countries and, through the intermediacy of these classes, have a broader base in these countries. In the peripheries, they connect only with the passive revolution.

### *The Prospects for Counter-Hegemony*

World orders—to return to Gramsci's statement cited earlier in this essay—are grounded in social relations. A significant structural change in world order is, accordingly, likely to be traceable to some fundamental change in social relations and in the national political orders which correspond to national structures of social relations. In Gramsci's thinking, this would come about with the emergence of a new historic bloc.

We must shift the problem of changing world order back from international institutions to national societies. Gramsci's analysis of Italy is even more valid when applied to the world order: only a war of position can, in the long run, bring about structural changes, and a war of position involves building up the

socio-political base for change through the creation of new historic blocs. The national context remains the only place where an historic bloc can be founded, although world-economy and world-political conditions materially influence the prospects for such an enterprise.

The prolonged crisis in the world economy (the beginning of which can be traced to the late 1960s and early 1970s) is propitious for some developments which could lead to a counter-hegemonic challenge. In the core countries, those policies which cut into transfer payments to deprived social groups and generate high unemployment open the prospects of a broad alliance of the disadvantaged against the sectors of capital and labour which find common ground in international production and the monopoly-liberal world order. The policy basis for this alliance would most likely be post-Keynesian and neo-mercantilist. In peripheral countries, some states are vulnerable to revolutionary action, as events from Iran to Central America suggest. Political preparation of the population in sufficient depth may not, however, be able to keep pace with revolutionary opportunity and this diminishes the prospect for a new historic bloc. An effective political organisation (Gramsci's Modern Prince) would be required in order to rally the new working classes generated by international production and build a bridge to peasants and urban marginals. Without this, we can only envisage a process where local political élites, even some which are the product of abortively revolutionary upheavals, would entrench their power within a monopoly-liberal world order. A reconstructed monopoly-liberal hegemony would be quite capable of practicing *trasformismo* by adjusting to many varieties of national institutions and practices, including nationalisation of industries. The rhetoric of nationalism and of socialism could then be brought into line with the restoration of passive revolution under new guise in the periphery.

In short, the task of changing world order begins with the long, laborious effort to build new historic blocs within national boundaries.

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#### REFERENCES

\* An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Panel on Hegemony and International Relations, convened by the Caucus for a New Political Science at the 1981 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York, September 1981.

1. For citation here, I refer where possible to Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and trans. by Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), hereafter cited as *Selections*. The full critical edition, *Quaderni del carcere* (Torino: Einaudi editore, 1975) is cited as *Quaderni*.

2. This seems to be the problem underlying Perry Anderson's 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', *New Left Review* (No. 100, November 1976—January 1977) which purports to find inconsistencies in Gramsci's use of concepts.

3. On this point see E. P. Thompson, 'The Poverty of Theory' in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978) which represents an historicist position analogous to that of Gramsci in opposition to the abstract philosophical marxism of Louis Althusser. For Althusser's position see, 'Marxism is not Historicism', in Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* trans. by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1979).

4. It is said that this was to avoid confiscation of his notes by the prison censor, who, if this is true, must have been particularly slow-witted.

5. Christine Buci-Gluckmann, *Gramsci et l'Etat: Pour une theorie materialiste de la philosophie* (Paris: Fayard, 1975) places Gramsci squarely in the Leninist tradition. Hughes Portelli, *Gramsci et le bloc historique* (Paris: Fayard, 1972) and Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *Pour Gramsci* (Paris: Fayard, 1973) both contrast Gramsci with Lenin. Buci-Gluckmann's work seems to me to be more fully thought through. See also Chantal Mouffe and Anne Showstack Sassoon, 'Gramsci in France and Italy—A review of the literature', *Economy and Society* (Vol. 6, No. 1, February 1977), pp. 31–68.

6. This notion fitted well with Gramsci's assessment of the situation in Italy in the early 1920s; the working class was by itself too weak to carry the full burden of revolution and could only bring about the founding of a new state by an alliance with the peasantry and some petty bourgeois elements. In fact, Gramsci considered the workers' council movement as a school for leadership of such a coalition and his efforts prior to his imprisonment were directed towards building this coalition.

7. See, Christine Buci-Gluckmann, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

8. N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Norton Critical Edition, edited by Robert M. Adams (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), pp. 49–50; and Gramsci, *Selections*, pp. 169–170.

9. The term 'Western Europe' refers here to the Britain, France, Germany and Italy of the 1920s and 1930s.

10. Gramsci, *Selections*, p. 238.

11. Gramsci borrowed the term 'passive revolution' from the Neapolitan historian Vincenzo Cuocco (1770–1823), who was active in the early stages of the Risorgimento. In Cuocco's interpretation, Napoleon's armies had brought a passive revolution to Italy.

12. Christine Buci-Gluckmann, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

13. Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. IV, p. 2632.

14. See Sorel's discussion of myth and the 'Napoleonic battle' in the letter to Daniel Halevy which introduces his *Reflections on Violence* trans. by T. E. Hulme and J. Roth (New York: Collier, 1961).

15. Gramsci, *Selections*, p. 366.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 180–195.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 264.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

22. The dating is tentative and would have to be refined by enquiry into the structural features proper to each period as well as into factors deemed to constitute the breaking points between one period and another. These are offered here as mere notations for a revision of historical scholarship to raise some questions about hegemony and its attendant structures and mechanisms.

Imperialism, which has taken different forms in these periods, is a closely related question. In the first, *pax britannica*, although some territories were directly administered, control of colonies seems to have been incidental rather than necessary to economic expansion. Argentina, a formally independent country, had essentially the same relationship to the British economy as Canada, a former colony. This, as George Lichtheim noted, may be called the phase of 'liberal imperialism'. In the second period, the so-called 'new imperialism' brought more emphasis on direct political controls. It also saw the growth of capital exports and of the finance capital identified by Lenin as the very essence of imperialism. In the third period, which might be called that of the neo-liberal or monopoly-liberal imperialism, the internationalising of production emerged as the pre-eminent form, supported also by new forms of finance capital (multinational banks and consortia). There seems little point in trying to define some unchanging essence of imperialism but it would be more useful to describe the structural characteristics of the imperialisms which correspond to successive hegemonic and non-hegemonic world orders. For a further discussion of this as regards *pax britannica* and *pax americana*, see Robert W. Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (Vol. 10, No. 2, Summer 1981), pp. 126–155.