Differentia: Review of Italian Thought

Number 1 *Autumn* Article 23

1986

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It seems safe to assume that the traditional view of consent has followed one of two broad paths in Western thought. The first perspective portrays consent as an unexamined assumption; it is a voluntary act of political participation on the part of rational individuals in liberal society. These people, through their acceptance of the State, constitute civil society. Another view of consent found in the traditional literature focuses on an absence of voluntary participation, and instead, stresses the reality of State force via legislation, the National Guard, and any other tool of coercion. Thus, the dichotomy remains clear—consent either rests upon the voluntary participation of atomized individuals, or it is forced upon the populace through the coercive power of the State. Gramsci, however, provides a far more subtle view of consent via the hegemonic principle of strategic political leadership, a tenet which is not reducible to naked State power, assertions of mass acceptance, or even mere socialization. In the process, Gramsci offers the possibility of an alternate road to socialism in Western society.

DIFFERENTIA 1 (Autumn 1986)

Gramsci's conception of consent is multi-faceted and quite complex; unlike the traditional presentations, it does not isolate a particular kind of consensus which serves to reproduce a social system and hence, provide for voluntary participation. Instead, Gramsci offers a two-dimensional model of consent which can be categorized as passive/indirect or active/direct.[1] In the first instance, he is referring to those historical moments in which changes are instituted regardless of popular wishes. This is not the same as crude State coercion, however, for Gramsci defines the State as "the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules. . . ."[2] Thus, Gramsci is presenting the outline of a process in which consent is attained via a leadership not overtly dependent on force. Voluntary participation is granted by Gramsci, but unlike the traditional views which present voluntary participation as an unexamined given, Gramsci explains such consent as a learned process guided by State leadership through such institutions as the school.

In his idea of active/direct consent, Gramsci speaks of a participatory relationship between the ruling elite and the people. At this point, Gramsci introduces us to the cornerstone of not only consent, but further, of hegemony itself. For him, a central feature of active/direct consent is an expansiveness which is devoid of the bureaucratic repression evident in, say, Mussolini's Italy. In this regard, Gramsci makes a clear distinction between working-class leadership and bourgeois dictatorship under fascism. Bourgeois dictatorship, Gramsci argues, is characterized by its repressive nature. But in the case of active/direct consent, or proletarian expansiveness, there is a groundswell of direct action from the subordinate classes which has no need for a Stalinist brand of revolution from above. Acquiescence under Giolittianism, which Gramsci equates with State domination through bureaucratic centralization and authoritarian paternalism, is contrasted with the factory councils, that embodiment of democratic producers. In an unsigned letter to *L'Ordine Nuovo* dated February 10, 1921, Gramsci argues for the strategic necessity of active/direct consent:

> Through the fight for control—which does not take place in Parliament, but is a revolutionary mass struggle and a propaganda and organizational activity of the historic party of the working class, the Communist Party—the working class must acquire, both spiritually and as an organization, awareness of its autonomy and historic personality. This is why the first phase of the struggle will

> present itself as the fight for a specific form of organization. This form of organization can only be the Factory Council, and the nationally centralized system of Factory Councils. . . . This struggle must be waged in such a way as to show the great mass of the population that all the existential problems of the present historical period . . . can be resolved only when all economic power, and hence all political power, has passed into the hands of the working class . . . it must be waged in such a way as to organize all the popular forces in revolt against the capitalist regime around the working class, so that the latter really becomes the leading class and guides all the productive forces to emancipate themselves by realizing the communist programme.[3]

Active/direct consent, or the expansive nature of proletariat leadership and agitation, is a democratic movement with roots in the subordinate classes. Hegemony is, at least in this regard, an anti-Statist force. Gramsci is markedly different from Lenin in that the small cadre of professional revolutionaries, albeit well-suited to the peculiarities of Russia in 1917, is replaced by a strategy which emphasizes active consent through the self-organization of the masses. This self-organization is to take place in the major institutions of civil society—the school, the workplace, and the family. Gramsci argues that such working-class assertion has as its goal the creation of a "collective will"; a new national/popular identity which rejects bourgeois institutions and culture. As a result, a new type of State, indeed, a new type of person, waits to be born out of the expansive tendencies of working-class leadership.

What we see here is the creativity of Gramsci's Marxism. While traditional Marxists up to Gramsci had relied heavily on the notion of repressive class domination, Gramsci instead stresses the forms of class leadership characteristic of advanced capitalist societies. "A social group can," wrote Gramsci in *Notes on Italian History*, "and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power; it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well."[4] This is probably the most crucial area of Gramscian theory. Hegemony is not the same as repressive force. In a society which is characterized by force through bureaucratic repression, hegemony is more or less absent.

Hegemony, then, is not the product of forcible conquest. Rather, it is the far more subtle result of intellectual and moral teachings which unite various subordinate classes (i.e., the urban working class and the peasantry) in an alliance for socialist agitation. Because there is what Gramsci terms an "intellectual and moral reform," the working class, as the emerging hegemonic class, is different from the bourgeoisie in that the former class

goes beyond mere material interests. In other words, the working class goes past the point of narrow economic demands, and instead, tends to universalize its intellectual and moral teachings from a position of leadership. This blend of economic and political concerns becomes, through the process of leadership, the concerns of other subordinate classes. Together, these subaltern groups form a "historic bloc" which signifies its importance as a hegemonic class during a slow and often painful process of revolutionary transformation. This stands in stark contrast to the violent and elitist tendencies inherent in Leninist political strategy.

Gramsci was thus acutely aware of the necessity of developing a fundamentally different approach to the implementation of socialism; one which offered an alternative to the Leninist model. The difference between the Gramscian road to socialism, and Lenin's immediate seizure of the governmental apparatus at strategic locations, lies in the relative complexity of civil society in the West. The legacy of a comparatively autonomous civil society in the West (when compared with Tsarist absolutism), and its diffusion of power, necessitates the prior absorption of civil society into socialist values through political and intellectual/cultural leadership.

This is the struggle for the hearts and minds of the people via one of Gramsci's favorite military metaphors—the "war of position."[5] Here Gramsci argues that before the attainment of formal political power, class struggle has to be waged in the "trenches" of civil society. Accordingly, this battle takes place on a wide range of fronts—educational, parliamentary, governmental, in the church, and even in architectural design. It is a direct assault on the political power of the bourgeoisie as that power is exercised in civil society. Only after a decisive victory is achieved on this level, Gramsci argues, can a "war of movement," or a frontal assault on formal political institutions, be concluded in favor of the working classes.[6]

The contrast between these two strategic measures enables Gramsci to disentangle the often complex web of relationships between coercive domination and hegemonic leadership. He is able to do this because of an insistence on grounding political theory in specific historical locations and moments. Passive/indirect consent is seen in conjunction with the notion of "passive revolution."[7] By this, Gramsci refers to those historical moments in which change is necessary in order to maintain what is there; society therefore seems to change, but its most fundamental features nevertheless remain constant. This process is accomplished through a revolutionary thrust above the people which is devoid

of popular initiative. The ruling classes are thus preserved despite sweeping ideological, political, and socio-economic changes. For example, Gramsci examines the Italian Risorgimento, in which, he argues, the Piedmontese State ushered in a new historical epoch despite an absence of popular action. Consequently, the leadership which so characterizes active/direct consent was replaced by the weight of bureaucratic oppression. As he so insightfully put it, this was a "dictatorship without hegemony."[8] The State, in this scenario, eventually replaced the class which brought it to power, and developed its own interests and administrative/police apparatus.

But Gramsci's analysis is not relevant only to Piedmont. It is equally useful in a study of Stalinism. Further, it is an indispensable tool in any historical analysis of the bourgeois monopoly of State institutions. From this vantage point, it is plausible to argue that twentieth-century capitalism has, at least in America, Germany, Italy, and possibly Vichy France, spawned a discernible rearrangement of the balance between hegemony and domination. This disequilibrium has not only revealed the crisis of bourgeois hegemony, but furthermore, it has illustrated the steady implementation of passive revolution.

We therefore return to Gramsci's assertion that consensus cannot be adequately comprehended unless it is rooted in an analysis sensitive to class structure, geographic location, and specific historical moments. Hegemony cannot be analyzed as an ahistorical concept; its very nature, and the forms which it takes, depend totally on the class from which it emanates, and the historical context which serves to determine its many cultural forms. To make this argument even more precise, Gramsci reminds us that the hegemonic program of the proletariat can only be positioned, by its own definition, against that of the bourgeoisie. That is to say that it is only through a process of active/direct consent that the working classes can establish themselves as an "historic bloc" which leads through a struggle against the forces of passive/indirect consent.

In order to make this clearer, Gramsci outlines some very specific characteristics of both passive/indirect consent and active/direct consent. The former is, as I have mentioned, noted for its lack of popular initiative, along with its bureaucratic repression. The bourgeoisie dominates through its monopolization of the State's coercive machinery, and this class also maintains close control of the few hegemonic channels still in operation. Finally, passive/indirect consent is characterized by the strengthening of a powerful State in all of its manifestations, both civil and political.

Active/direct consent is also clearly outlined by Gramsci. Not surprisingly, the elements which constitute such a social system stand in stark contrast to the outline enumerated above. A lack of popular initiative is replaced by direct, active consent given direction through self-organization. Bureaucratic repression yields to an expansive, or democratic, hegemonic leadership. The bourgeoisie is subordinated to the working classes. Passive revolution from above gives way to a democratic revolt initiated by the subaltern classes. Finally, consent takes on a distinct anti-Statist tone.

While these characteristics help to clear up the confusion surrounding the model of consent devised by Gramsci, it also leads one to invert the whole scheme so as to test its strength. As I have already pointed out, Gramsci depicted those instances in which coercion was evident. In such cases, hegemony was by and large absent. We are therefore justified in asking whether hegemony can be present without the accompaniment of repression.

Gramsci, through his presentation of active/direct consent, noted that hegemony essentially points to an anti-Statist perspective. But Gramsci also utilized the concept of hegemony in a very different way. In his critique of those commentators who viewed the State as a mere instrument of repression, or, in the case of liberal writers, as a "night watchman," Gramsci spoke of an "integral" or extended State. By this, he seems to mean the combination of those forces that I have already discussed—that complex array of administrative and educational/theoretical elements which constitute the State, both political and civil.[9] As this relates to faulty political strategy (as Gramsci argues was practiced by the PSI), he notes that:

> In politics the error occurs as a result of an inaccurate understanding of what the State (in its integral meaning: dictatorship + hegemony) really is.[10]

Perry Anderson, in "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci," has argued that this dual function of hegemony reveals a fundamental contradiction in Gramscian theory.[11] This quandary is rooted, Anderson argues, in the simultaneous role of hegemony as both a Statist force and an anti-Statist force. But does Anderson miss the point here? I must side with such scholars as Buci-Glucksmann and argue that he does, because this alleged "contradiction" in Gramscian theory confuses the main thrust of Gramsci's argument—that hegemony, as a political strategy, is

possible because of the transformation of the State within a specific historical context. Gramsci, whether he is dealing with Italian Fascism or Roosevelt's New Deal, is concerned with State intervention in the economy—a profound ideological abandonment of classical liberal theory. Politics is thus presented not as a Weberian "profession," but rather, within a framework of issues all orbiting around a central question—how does consent become legitimate?

Gramscian theory, therefore, departs from earlier mechanistic Marxist thought on domination. Gramsci takes a hard look at the political results of the international monetary crisis of the 1920s and 1930s, and attempts to explain those solutions as a bourgeois response to the structural dysfunctions of the capitalist economy. These solutions, whether they be the New Deal or the Blackshirts, all tended to undermine prior notions of hegemony as it was organized according to the classical liberal model. This vantage point of Gramsci's enabled him to take into account a whole host of transformations in bourgeois society—the emergence of a "Brain Trust" who attempted to control the cyclical tendencies of the capitalist economy, the growth of mass political parties, and finally, the incursion of the formal political State into previously sacrosanct areas of civil society. This is especially applicable to the United States from the New Deal era on; in this regard Gramsci suggests that

> It is possible to imagine the coercive element of the State withering away by degrees, as ever-more conspicuous elements of regulated society (or ethical State or civil society) make their appearance.[12]

He goes on:

> The previous ruling classes were essentially conservative in the sense that they did not tend to construct an organic passage from the other classes into their own, i.e., to enlarge their class sphere "technically" and ideologically: their conception was that of a closed caste. The bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level. The entire function of the State has been transformed; the State has become an "educator," etc.[13]

The dilemma of modern bourgeois society which Gramsci isolates is the tension between capitalist modification of the State (passive revolution) and the liberal institutions and ideology designed for the night watchman State. Beginning with the crisis of liberalism in postwar Italy, and moving through an analysis of

"Fordism" (I refer here not to Gramsci's consideration of Ford's attempt to counter the declining rate of profit, but rather, his company's regulation of employees' lives outside of the workplace), Gramsci deals with liberalism through an analysis of the organization and implementation of hegemonic channels.[14] As a result, he is able to capture the fragile nature of parliamentary forms of government. He avoids the pitfall of simplistically criticizing the State in light of its class nature; i.e., the bourgeois republic is synonymous with middle-class dominance.[15] Instead, Gramsci focuses on the ways in which the State reproduces itself in the midst of a deep economic crisis subsequent to the First World War. Because of this perspective, he supplies us with some possible explanations for its continued existence.

A key to this persistence is the delicate balance between consent and overt force. Gramsci isolates several factors which serve to maintain this equilibrium. Among these are an ideology of economic individualism, colonial expansion, and the perfection of nationalist sentiments through universal suffrage.[16] These conditions contribute to an organized consent of the integral State through such institutions as schools, political parties, and the mass media.

If we consider Gramsci's views on the United States, he is not suggesting a separation of overt force and consent (he does not suggest this for any other parliamentary country either). The constitutional separation of powers between the judicial, the legislative, and the executive branches is not merely a formal separation between civil and political society. Quite the contrary—this "separation" represents the embodiment of coercive power as it is exercised by the leading members of the bourgeoisie. While formal political power appears to be segmented, there is, in reality, an interpenetration of power which tends to unify and strengthen the State.[17] Furthermore, the consent to this arrangement which is exercised via the vote is simultaneously vulgarized by the reality of unequal wealth throughout society. These "separate" spheres of authority are, then, an organized center of coercion and indoctrination.

Throughout Gramsci's analysis of consent we see his preoccupation with this balance between force and consent. We also see his attempts to understand how this homology becomes institutionalized. He argues that this balance was seriously disrupted by the Bolshevik Revolution, imperialism, and the growth of monopoly capitalism:

> In the period following the World War, cracks opened up

> everywhere in the hegemonic apparatus, and the exercise of hegemony became permanently difficult and aleatory.[18]

Gramsci is speaking here of a crisis of consensus in capitalist societies. There was a crisis of beliefs, a crisis of authority: in other words, a weakening of the integral State. One could possibly argue that this process is still very much with us. The balance between consent and overt force has not been adequately recovered. As a result, the bourgeoisie has become increasingly compelled to resort to other means of consensus building, such as authoritarian Statism, technocracy, or even fascism with a human face.[19]

Looking at hegemony from this angle, it appears to be the possible setting for an increasingly complex socio-cultural panorama. Maybe even more so, it is the basis for active/direct revolution. An enlargement of the integral State means, according to Gramsci, not simply an extension of the formal political machinery. Rather, the struggle for hegemony takes place on a wider range of fronts. Gramsci's conception of consent goes beyond the traditional two-sided model enumerated at the beginning of this essay. Through his notion of the war of position, he argues that there can be no non-Leninist transition to socialism in advanced capitalist societies without the development of active/direct consent. His analysis is of striking importance to any historian concerned with the political meanings of popular folklore and cultural dissent. Needless to say, Gramsci has provided socialists in advanced capitalist societies with an alternative to the Leninist model of revolutionary transformation. Despite the assertions of such scholars as Walter Adamson that Marxism, as a serious political ideology, is an anachronism, the work of Gramsci stands as an example of its continuing applicability to the present stage of capitalist development in the West.[20]

1. See "The Concept of Passive Revolution" and "Elements of Politics" in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York, 1983), pp. 106-14, 144-47. Also consult Christine Buci-Glucksmann, "Hegemony and Consent: A Political Strategy," in *Approaches to Gramsci*, ed. Anne S. Sassoon (London, 1982), pp. 122-23.

2. Gramsci, "Sociology and Political Science," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 244.

3. "Workers' Control," in *Selections from Political Writings* (1921-1926), ed. Hoare (New York, 1978), p. 11.

4. "The Problem of Political Leadership in the Formation and Development of the Nation and the Modern State in Italy," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 57-58. On this issue of strategic working-class leadership, see the report of E. Berlinguer to the Central Committee of the PCI (December 10, 1974), entitled "The Historic Compromise," in *The Italian Communists Speak for Themselves*, ed. Don Sassoon (Nottingham, 1978), pp. 141-58.

5. Refer to "The Transition from the War of Maneuver (Frontal Attack) to the War of Position—In the Political Field as Well," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 238-39.

6. Useful analysis of this aspect of Gramscian theory is found in Thomas R. Bates, "Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36 (1975), pp. 351-66; Paul Piccone, "Gramsci's Marxism: Beyond Lenin and Togliatti," *Theory and Society*, 3 (1976), pp. 485-512; and Lamberto Borghi, "Educazione e scuola in Gramsci," in *Gramsci e la cultura contemporanea*, Volume I (Rome, 1969), pp. 207-38.

7. "The Concept of Passive Revolution," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 106-14.

8. "The Function of Piedmont," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 106.

9. See Gramsci's discussion of this in "Sociology and Political Science," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 243-45.

10. Gramsci, "Politics and Military Science," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 239. Also see his polemic against the Socialists in *L'Ordine Nuovo* (March 12, 1921), entitled "Socialists and Communists," in *Selections from Political Writings* (1921-1926), pp. 25-26.

11. In the *New Left Review*, 100 (1976-1977), pp. 5-78.

12. "The State," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 263.

13. Ibid., p. 260.

14. See his section entitled "Rationalisation of Production and Work," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 301-06.

15. Advert to Hal Draper's argument against this notion of the State in "The State Is Not Simply a Class Plot," in *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution: State and Bureaucracy*, Volume I (New York, 1977), pp. 245-49.

16. Gramsci, "Financial Autarky of Industry," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 293; "Subversive," pp. 274-75; and "Number and Quality in Representative Systems of Government," pp. 192-95.

17. "Hegemony (Civil Society) and Separation of Powers," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 245-46.

18. "The Problem of Political Leadership in the Formation and Development of the Nation and the Modern State in Italy," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 80 (see note 49).

19. Buci-Glucksmann has also elaborated upon this theme, as has Walter Adamson. Refer to Buci-Glucksmann, "Hegemony and Consent," and Adamson's *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory* (Berkeley, 1983).

20. Adamson, *Marx and the Disillusionment of Marxism* (Berkeley, 1985).