

---

# Antonio Gramsci- Hegemony

---

The relation between  
the concepts of  
Hegemony, Civil  
Society, and  
Intellectuals

---

**Yahya Thabit 2072704087**

---

March 14<sup>th</sup> 2008

**Total Number of Pages: Four (4)**

**Professor: Sabah Alnaseri**

**POLS 4905 3.0 Political Economy and Political Power**

In his Prison Notebooks, political theorist Antonio Gramsci details several theories in which the relationships between the state and its ruling are concerned. Through his discussions, Gramsci focuses on several institutions and social relations in order to **explain the prevalent constructions in which capitalism is able to maintain and control its dominance**. In what follows, I will focus on the **importance of concepts such as hegemony to the bourgeoisie and also illustrate the significant roles that concepts such as civil society, ideology, and intellectuals play in determining the dominant ruling class**. I will pursue to explain such relations in a three-fold process. First, I will present Gramsci's theory of hegemony. This is essential for not only will it help formulate a foundation for understanding Gramsci's ideas, but also because it will assist in identifying the relationships that exist between the concepts I will present in the latter part of my paper. Second, I will indulge in a discussion on the state and civil society with respects to its ties and relationship to the concept of hegemony. Lastly, I will explain the importance of intellectuals and the role that the concept has on the theory of hegemony.

The concept of hegemony is of utter importance to the ruling of the dominant class. In fact, **the ruling of the bourgeois societies is dictated by the hegemonic relationships that are created and maintained**. Before introducing the means by which the hegemony of the dominant class is produced and reproduced, it is essential to focus on the significance of hegemony to the ruling order. **Through hegemonic ruling, the bourgeoisie class is able to maintain its reign of power by indoctrinating their beliefs,**

values, and perspectives onto the working class. Gramsci argues that the **inability of the masses of workers to see past this is what creates a false consciousness**. Such ability to indoctrinate the masses of different classes with a common belief creates a common sense whereby the dominant ideologies of the ruling class are inherited by those being ruled. **Not only does such process legitimize the ruling of the bourgeoisie class but it also creates a subordinate relationship between the haves and have-nots.**

In particular, hegemony can be seen as a means by which the bourgeoisie exercise their ruling power by maintaining their authority in two distinct methods. Both approaches emphasize the involvement of subordinating and subjugating the masses in order to maintain the status quo. **This dominance is practiced either through persuasion and dialogue or through coercive force.** The first approach focuses on promoting the set of ideas that are prevalent to the dominant class in society and ensuring that the subordinated groups come to agreement with such ideologies. Having the governed classes consent to the ideological, moral, political, and cultural values of those in power is how the bourgeoisie are able to maintain rule. The **second approach deals with coercive physical force whereby those who are unwillingly to comply with the common sense and the values of those in power are dealt with. Gramsci explains that every ruling state exercises such methods through institutions such police and military forces. Although such approach may not be as prevalent as the first, it is indeed an available route that is used to maintain order through certain institutions.**

Furthermore, Gramsci focuses on these two forms of political control as the primary makeup of a society. Adding to Marx's base and superstructure theory, Gramsci divides the institutions of the state into political society and civil society. More specifically, government, police, and the armed forces were such institutions that he regarded to as political society as they tended to explore various coercive methods of implementing the hegemony of the dominant class. **Comprised of institutions such as the church, schools, and families, Gramsci characterizes the civil society as a means of non-coercive persuasions.** Moreover, the roles of both the political and civil societies are to be seen as those of an apparatus as they ensure the maintenance of the dominant ideologies and values that exist within society.

Gramsci also makes note that the domination of the capitalist class is also reliant on civil society for several reasons. Most importantly, **civil society is used to preserve bourgeois cultural values which are important in maintaining the hegemony of the ruling class. This is crucial to understand as the values of capitalist societies, that being of a materialistic value system, are not only legitimized but also social and economic inequalities are maintained and implemented as common values shared by all the classes in society.** Thus the ability of the civil society to act as an instrument of class control is important as it helps maintain the capitalist system. Subsequently, not only does the civil society maintain the capitalist system but it also is an important element for the maintenance of class hegemony. Through the various forms of civil society, the bourgeoisie is able to make

compromises with the churches, political parties and the likes in order to gain their consent in a non coercive manner. Thus civil society and the state are mutually reinforcing of each other; civil society functions as a safeguard against any social upheaval, while the state uses coercive power and enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, civil society works to preserve the order that is in the interest of the dominant class.

Lastly, **the concept of intellectuals** is of importance to the hegemony of the ruling class as it **also is an instrument that aide's bourgeois control**. The role of intellectuals in society is of importance as it is an apparatus to further legitimize the ruling of the dominant class. **Although Gramsci mentions that all men are intellectuals, not all men have the avenues to explore and pursue them.**<sup>2</sup> More specifically, **all men have intellect however in a social construction not all are considered intellectuals**. Gramsci furthers by distinguishing the two types of intellectuals, **the traditional and organic**. The **traditional intellectuals are those as professors and clergy who are regarded by the dominant social groups**. Although they may have the will to think how they chose, the traditional intellectuals are essentially helpers who assist the dominant group in society maintain their ruling. The second type of intellectuals of which Gramsci coins the **organic intellectuals** are of importance for a few reasons. Gramsci regards

---

<sup>1</sup> Gramsci, Antonio. Prison Notebooks. Lawrence & Wishart Publishers, London pg 12

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pg 353

the organic intellectuals as essential as they were needed **among the working class to counter the common sense views**. Because these **organic intellectuals are produced by the educational system and the dominant social groups of society they are in return used to maintain the ruling class hegemony over society**. Thus organic intellectuals from the working class must be produced in order to take the role of educating the masses. However, it is important that these intellectuals are seen as part of the same class and not outsiders in order for the masses to develop common ground. Hence in order to develop a counter to the hegemony that exists between classes, the importance of the role that intellectuals play must be acknowledged.

To conclude, the creation of hegemony involves the participation of several institutions that **help legitimize the ruling of the class in power**. The concept of hegemony is created through the social orders in which apparatuses and institutions are used to produce hegemony. Gramsci's theory of hegemony is related to concepts such as civil society as they both are tools relied upon by the dominant class in order to maintain its ruling authority. In addition, intellectuals are used not only to maintain but also produced hegemony. As such, the ruling class uses these various methods to preserve the existing inequalities and the consequential hegemony that they benefit from.