

GRAMSCI and ADULT EDUCATION¹

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SUMMARY

Gramsci's significance for education lies in two realms. First, his notion of hegemony provides a way of understanding in which informal educators function and it gives us the possibility of critique and transformation. His theory of organic intellectuals provides a more detailed place of adult education in his thought. The intellectuals have a crucial role in creating counter-hegemony. The second realm is in a wider context in which he discusses the traditional education and schooling and describes the education for the proletariat. This essay will focus on the importance of Gramsci's thoughts on adult education. To do this, the essay firstly will deal with his philosophy and political thoughts which has a close relationship with his ideas on adult education. Then, this relationship and his theory of education and intellectuals will be elaborated.

Keywords: Gramsci, Education, Adult Education, Hegemony, Civil Society,

INTRODUCTION

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was an intellectual, a journalist, a major theorist, and a leading Italian Marxist. Gramsci, born in Sardinia Island, spent his last eleven years in Mussolini's prison. It was the same prison where he wrote his famous notebooks. During his time of prison, he completed 32 notebooks, containing 3000 pages. They were published in Italy after the second war, in English in 1970s. The central theme of the Notebooks was a new reading, a new formulation of Marxism, which was quite 'anti'-Marxist.

It is very difficult to systemize Antonio Gramsci's thoughts since they were written separately as notebooks (letters) and since he was in prison, he used a symbolic language in order to pass the censorship. He was dealing with the problems that no other Marxist dealt with. He was not asking as "a traditional Marxist would ask how fascism came to power" instead he was asking how they (communists) had been defeated. He found answers in the root of Marxism, which has many problems, inadequacies, and inconsistencies. While seeking answers he utilized Machiavelli, the great politics theoreticians –Machiavelli's effect is very obvious on Gramsci, in fact, he symbolized Communist Party in his writings as *The New Prince*, B. Croce who was an Italian, humanist Hegelian philosopher. Croce's influence is very crucial on Gramsci to rethink Marxism and to see its problems. In fact, Gramsci's use of the concept of 'civil society' has a very close relationship with Hegel's notion of 'civil society'.

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Gramsci in *Prison Notebooks* simply says they had been defeated because they had misunderstood the politics in the sense that they had tried to explain the social and the political in terms of economism. Gramsci does this rethink under the effect of Croce in Hegelian lines. Thus, Gramsci rejects the instrumental conception of state prevalent among classical Marxists and “he offered that the bourgeoisie was able to maintain its economic advantage over subordinate classes” (Martin, 1998: 65). Furtherly, Gramsci argued the economic base did not entirely determine the political and ideological superstructure. So, Gramsci tried to formulate a new theory of power. For Marx, power always presupposes domination (Marx, 2000: 190). He overemphasizes domination. Marx’s theory of state can simply be formulated as; The state = Power = Force (Coercion, Domination). Gramsci does not agree with this formulation. He says power relations in the modern age cannot be explained by this formulation. For Gramsci, the State = Political Society + Civil Society (Gramsci, 1971: 55, 80, 171, 263).

1. CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil Society is the basis of modern political democratic consensus (David Forgacs, 1988: 28). The consensus is extremely important for Gramsci because in the end Mussolini and Hitler came to power through popular consensus. That the consensus is ‘the civil society’ which Marx eliminated from his theory is a vital error for Gramsci. It has the force (political society) behind it. More precisely Gramsci defines political society as; “the realm of the state conceived as an institutional apparatus which employs force,” and civil society as; “the realm of social life outside the state apparatus that is not strictly economic” (Martin, 1998: 46).

Political society was identified with the exercise of coercion and civil society was identified as the realm in which hegemony was exercised through spontaneous consent (Martin, 1998: 69) Therefore it is the hegemony that you have in civil society and force that you have in political society. In order to have the power in political society, firstly you have to have hegemony in civil society. The way of establishing hegemony is via consensus. The way of winning consensus is related to education, which will be elaborated later.

Thus, after formulating his theory of the state, Gramsci proposes two revolutions for different kinds of states. In the East says Gramsci “the state is everything, civil society is primordial and gelatinous” (Gramsci, 1988: 229). In such countries, the way of revolution is the “frontal attack” to the state, to the political society. This is the “War of Maneuvers.” Actually, this is what happened in Bolsheviki’s revolution. On the other hand, in the West where “there is a proper relation between political and civil society and relative freedom and freedom of expression” (Gramsci, 1988: 229). The frontal attack is not the way of revolution.

For developed countries, the way of revolution has two facets: War of Positions and War of Maneuvers. In developed countries, you are not in a position to address the question of power directly. You cannot make a frontal attack. Here the frontal attack leads to only defeats. Gramsci indicates that firstly, by working in civil society, by gradually growing, playing roles in the organization of civil society, the war of positions is being carried out. Once the war of positions is gained, the problem of power can be addressed. In the war of position, the question of consent is addressed. Let’s say the war of position is gained, then what has been achieved. It is not the domination but it is hegemony that has been achieved.

Hegemony is extremely important because it involves active mobilization of consensus of the ruled by the ruling force (Forgacs, 1988: 24-25). Hegemony is another term, which is closely related to adult education. Here the hegemony is established by the means of moral leadership. Moral leadership is the 'job' of intellectuals.

2. GRAMSCI ON EDUCATION

Gramsci's significance for education lies in two realms. First, his notion of hegemony provides a way of understanding in which informal educators function and it gives us the possibility of critique and transformation. His theory of organic intellectuals provides a more detailed place of adult education in his thought. The intellectuals have a crucial role in creating counter-hegemony. The second realm is in a wider context in which he discusses the traditional education and schooling and describes the education for the proletariat.

Before discussing the first realm, it is necessary to note that P. Mayo's (1999) review in which he summarizes works on Gramsci and Education is a valuable reference to have a primary idea about works on Gramsci and education. In the first realm, Gramsci's concern for education is due to his notion of hegemony. By hegemony, Gramsci refers to a new political logic. Gramsci states that social control takes two basic forms: one is external to behavior and the other is internal." Such internal control is based on hegemony, which refers to an order in which a common social-moral language is spoken, in which the concept of reality dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behavior" (Adamson, 1980: 24).

It follows that hegemony is established via consent rather than force. "And whereas domination is realized, essentially, through the coercive machinery of the state intellectual and moral leadership is objectified in, and mainly exercised through, civil society, the ensemble of educational, religious and associational institutions" (Femia, 1981: 24). Hegemony means that the majority of people accept what is happening in society as "common sense." Gramsci was well aware of why the European working class had failed to develop revolutionary consciousness after the First World War and instead, they had turned to conservatism and in some countries to fascists. This was a matter of hegemony, which Gramsci diagnosed correctly.

Gramsci theorizes that this ideological hegemony has to be broken and it is needed to build up counter-hegemony of the ruling class. It is at this point in which he turns to intellectuals. Gramsci saw the role of intellectuals as a crucial one in the context of establishing counter-hegemony. Gramsci's notebooks are quite clear on the matter. For Gramsci, all men are intellectuals (and presumably women):

[A]lthough one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist...There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: homo fiber cannot be separated from homo sapiens. Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carry on some form of intellectual (Gramsci: 1988: 321).

Thus, Gramsci makes a further distinction for intellectuals. Rather than seeing intellectuals as intellectuals and non-intellectuals, he sees intellectuals as traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals.

3. TRADITIONAL INTELLECTUALS VS. ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS

Gramsci defines the traditional intellectual as “every ‘essential’ social group which emerges into history out of the preceding economic structure, and as an expression of a development of this, has found (at least in all of history up to present) categories of intellectuals already in existence and which seemed indeed to represent a historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms” (Gramsci, 1988: 302). Gramsci notes that the most typical type of these intellectuals is ecclesiastics (Ulema).

Ulema are organically bound to the landed monarchy. They have their own power. Their activities are towards the preservation of status-quo. They are essentially conservative allied to and assisting the ruling group in society. On the other hand, organic intellectual is described as:

[E]very social group, coming into existence of the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields (Gramsci, 1988: 301).

For Gramsci, it is important to see what they are. They are produced by the educational system to function for the ruling group. The ruling class maintains its hegemony in civil society through this group. Gramsci asserts that the working class has to create its own organic intellectuals in order to create its own hegemony in civil society. Hegemony is very unstable and the working class’s organic intellectuals are instruments of establishing counter-hegemony.

The role of the organic intellectual is essentially, then, a political one: that is, it is a role which requires the constant modeling of self-reflective practice and the initiation of social critique as a vital component of Gramsci's "war of position". Gramsci's view that, in adult political education, carried out within the context of a revolutionary movement, the task of intellectuals is to facilitate the process whereby learners move from 'common sense' to 'good sense' (Mayo, 1999: 7). Accordingly, “adult education” is certainly not confined to formal encounters but is to be viewed as synonymous with “cultural struggle”.

Gramsci was also interested in schooling and traditional education. Gramsci did not write much in his notebooks on the school system. However, his own writings concerning Factory Council Movement and his journals in various newspapers are conceived as a politically educative movement among many scholars.

In these writings, Gramsci especially deals with specialization in the Italian educational system. In one of his essays, Piedmont edition of *Avanti*, 24.12.1916, under the banner “Socialists and Education”, he explicitly discusses the matter. In this essay, Gramsci firstly makes a critique of the Italian educational system. Then he describes the proletariat school. Gramsci discusses the illiteracy and exclusion of proletariat children from the school system:

We can state that the reduction in illiteracy in Italy is due not so much to the law on compulsory education, as to the intellectual awakening, the awareness of certain spiritual needs that socialist propaganda has succeeded in arousing amongst the ranks of the proletariat in Italy. But we have gone no further than that. Education in Italy is still a rigidly bourgeois affair, in the worst sense of the word. Grammar schools and higher education, which are State-run and hence financed from State revenues, i.e. by the direct taxes paid by the proletariat, can only be attended by the children of the bourgeoisie, who alone enjoy the economic independence needed for uninterrupted study (Gramsci, 1916).

Gramsci notes that the state should not be financing the education of the children of bourgeoisie while it excludes capable children of proletarians. Gramsci asserts that all young people should be equal.

Grammar-school and higher education should be open only to those who can demonstrate that they are worthy of it. And if it is in the public interest that such forms of education should exist, preferably supported and regulated by the state, then it is also in the public interest that they should be open to all intelligent children, regardless of their economic potential.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Gramsci’s philosophy emerges from the problems of Marxism. He rethinks Marxism as a Hegelian historian. Thus, he is able to identify the problems of Marxism. He disagrees with Marx’s conception of base and superstructure and develops a genuine conception of politics. For him, everything cannot be explained by economism. He uses Hegel’s concept of civil society to purify problems in Marxism.

Political identity is shaped by hegemony and civil society. To get political power, one needs to get hegemony in civil society via consensus. To get a consensus, one needs to get the education system. Gramsci discusses what the proletariat needs. He asserts that proletariat is in need of an educational system that is open to all. A system in which the child is allowed to develop and mature and acquire those general features that serve to develop character. The school will not determine the child’s future. This school will not turn children into the ‘machines. It will be “[a] school of freedom and free initiative, not a school of slavery and mechanical precision” (Gramsci, 1988: 64). These children should be in the most productive way for both themselves and society.

Gramsci is a major thinker for informal educators. His importance lies in the critical self-awareness, on critical social awareness, on the intellectual being part of everyday life and on the transformational possibilities of education.

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