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LJST 231

20 September 2020

"Know Your Enemy": Both a Wartime and Social Movement Strategy

By definition, social movements involve "ordinary" citizens acting in unison for extraordinary, widespread change. Though these non-state activists account for the largest proportion of a country's population, they hold the least power. For example, they seldom hold power over how they are studied (and thus seen), much less over the legal sphere. They may have the moral upper hand, inspiring slogans, determination, and talented leaders. However, to the activists' target, their only definite, intimidating asset is their strength in numbers. Meanwhile, those in more selective classes (such as politics and academics) often observe activists from a distance. People in these smaller classes hold power over lives (law) and minds (education), yet rarely move in the same circles as those they are studying and serving. Thus, activists face an uphill battle. How can they ever succeed if they have little influence and few chances to persuade? Perhaps, they must tread onto enemy territory and follow the age-old adage of "knowing one's enemy."

In order to understand their opponent, activists can read academic theories. One such theory, the state of intermediary, comes from a set known as the "theories of the state" (171). Immediately, these pedantic phrases may deter activists from even reading past the name; they may think, "*How can a dry, out-of-touch theory have anything useful to say about the real world?"* Therein lies a victory for the state. By deterring activists, this jargon helps retain the status quo. If activists never push past their disdain, then they may never understand the state.

They may never learn its strengths and weaknesses, or discover where best to strike. Thus, in order to succeed, activists should devote themselves to understanding their opponent.

To illustrate this hypothesis, one can use the previously mentioned theory as an example. According to Beuchler, the theory suggests that "the state stands as an intermediary between...social movements...and an advanced capitalist formation" (169). The state caters to the needs of dominant groups while lending an ear to the minority. Given that it exists in an interest-driven society, it is in the state's best interest to serve the resource-laden former. It need not cater to the latter. Therefore, the state will "[pose] formidable obstacles" to keep the status quo (169). If activists subscribe to this theory, then they have discovered that their obstacles lie in the name of self-interest. Consequently, the relationship between the movement and the state shifts to accommodate for each group's desires. Activists may now "align movement goals with capitalist interests," or donate to politicians with similar ideals (170). Once activists understand that they live in a "give-and-take" society, then they can modify their strategies accordingly.

Other useful ideas encapsulated in rather confusing academic terms are "state politics" and "social politics." While the former may inaccurately evoke images of untouchable politicians in the capital, the theory actually involves social movements "directed towards influencing state policy and leaders" (165). In contrast, the latter involves social movements that "challenge power relations without an explicit focus on the state" (177). If activists do not understand these terms, then they may be unable to correctly categorize their movement, thus costing them effective strategies. Though all movements "contain both political and cultural elements," the theories reveal critical distinctions on where activists should target (163). For example, movements in the realm of "state politics" focus their resources on centralized power (such as the state); meanwhile, those in the realm of "social politics" desire change in the decentralized

power that "saturates the fabric of everyday life" (177). Should activists target the state or the culture? These theories can provide guidance.

In the area of feminism, the suffrage movement is an ideal example of a "state politics" movement. It aimed to earn women the right to vote, and succeeded with the passing of the 19th Amendment. While the movement had cultural components (such as presenting women in a new light), it largely revolved around the state. By contrast, the present-day feminism movement is a "social politics" movement. As the movement reaches into numerous areas of *everyday* life, from the workplace to the home to the individual consciousness, it becomes increasingly difficult to pinpoint its tangible goals. While this new movement does have political components (such as demanding equal pay under the law), it mainly aims to change culture, not the state.

Had the suffrage movement misunderstood itself as a "social politics" movement, it would have failed. Changing the culture would have, at best, misdirected its focus and stalled the movement. At worst, the movement would have failed. On the other hand, if the present-day feminism movement misunderstands itself as a "state politics" movement, it also will stall or fail. After all, it is nearly impossible for the state to regulate such miniscule and personal aspects of everyday life. Therefore, by understanding their own social movement in academic terms, activists can correctly identify their opponent and more effectively strategize.

In conclusion, the age-old wartime strategy of "knowing your enemy" may be useful to current activists. Though the jargon of isolated spheres (such as academics) often deter activists from understanding the state, they should utilize their opponents' theories to discern how best to act. Discovering the inner workings of the opponent, or even which one to target, may make activists as successful as the armies who followed this strategy in eras past.