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Reflection #4

This week, I felt that I needed to step outside the assigned readings to make sense of the content. The selections in the textbook were a bit dispersed and insufficient to bring substance to my thoughts. We also read fewer pages and only read from one person’s repertoire. During the class before last, a student had pointed out that in the here and now, both in larger and in revolutionary society, some voices are privileged over others. Whether or not it was applicable for that moment, it’s a valuable thing to keep in mind. I wonder if we feel an impact from reading Gramsci separately, from focusing on this thinker for the week. Are we in a sense privileging one set of ideas over others? We might respond that this was simply a matter of chance – the last section of the book had to be left to another week, and that section happened to contain Gramsci’s texts. Doesn’t this reflect how often and how easily theory and practice part ways, for practicality, for chance, for convenience?

The alternate and more convincing response is, of course, that it was *intended* that a reading towards the end of this branch of the class would be short *so that* one might look to other sources and begin to broaden their scope, and because one needs the freedom to think to draw connections between all the other ideas to which one has been exposed. Certainly, I experienced this. Gramsci seems to echo Marx more than any other thinker. He talks of certain critical moments in time that act as junctures for the social structure, “decisive” moments wherein the masses become conscious and rise as an unshakeable power, events of a “universal fatality” that “no human will can create” (284). This is Marx’s inevitability rather than Lenin’s or Trotsky’s manufactured revolution. He appears to move even further from Lenin in *Leader* when he calls any attempt to govern (even a vanguard party) ultimately futile. He suggests an irreconcilable contradiction “so long as a State is necessary, so long as it is historically necessary to govern men” (288). Such a State will require a leader who has an organic and natural relationship with the working class, even as the leader will invariably be “one who is endowed with greater ability and greater perspicacity” (288). He praises Lenin as such a leader with both qualities, but such leaders are few – Gramsci points to Mussolini and to Romulus and Caesar. I finally feel that I have become familiar enough with the linguistic mannerisms that I have begun to spot the differences between the various thinkers’ ideologies.

Either way you slice it, these are internal conflicts that we must have and evidently socialists in each location and era had continuously. We decry the Democratic Party for its internal squabbling that fails to produce an outcome, but these differences are important and necessary to ensure that we continue to move in the direction we aim to, or else change aims (as Trotsky notes). I would gladly participate in this internal squabbling that criticizes the aimlessness the Party seems to have reached with respect to much of its contributions today. I myself feel almost validated having now discovered the origin of the concept of hegemony and its original use and its relation to past revolutions. The time spent to advocate for identity politics and intersectional issues and against certain aggressions towards minorities aren’t commensurate to their impact on people, particularly in comparison to other issues. They are simply issues that are easy to grasp and relatively easy to fix without disturbing the existing structure. In other words, they are the false consciousness of the bourgeoisie! If my peers and I trumpet our love for the environment in theory and commit ourselves to sustainable careers, but drink coffee in paper cups for convenience after class, we are participating in the ideological hegemony, saying what we need to say to move ourselves up the ranks and passively (or actively?) hold a revolution at bay.

We must engage in these conflicts and point out the hypocrisy in any and all spaces we see them. If we see [money laundering and corruption in one of the biggest worker’s unions](https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2018/10/29/lake-o29.html) in North America, that should be pointed out. One of the most interesting recent pieces on the *World Socialist Website*, after having taken a seminar on fake news, was its take on the issue. *The New York Times* considers itself at the journalistic forefront of identifying fake news (in an act of defiance towards the Trump administration, for instance). In one of many such articles, it summarizes the newest study in the spread of fake news and tells us how to curb it ([Lohr, 2018](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/08/technology/twitter-fake-news-research.html)). WSWS, on the other hand, having been blocked as fake news by Facebook and Google, condemns the same act as censorship to silence viewpoints that “challenge the establishment” ([Damon, 2018](https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2018/10/22/pers-o22.html#pk_campaign=sidebar&pk_kwd=mostread)). As clear as the notion of hegemony seems, it becomes convoluted at the point of application. Are Trump’s declarations hegemonic and the NYT counter-hegemonic? Or is NYT the hegemony here and WSWS the counter-hegemony, making Andre Damon, organizer of resistance to internet censhorship the organic intellectual?

“’Polarization… has turned out to be a great business model’” (Lohr, 2018). Indeed.

References

Damon, Andre (2018). “War, censorship, and the invention of “fake news”. *World Socialist Web Site*. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2018/10/22/pers-o22.html>

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Lohr, Steve (2018). “It’s True: False News Spreads Faster and Wider. And Humans Are to Blame”. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/08/technology/twitter-fake-news-research.html>