

ANTONIO GRAMSCI "THE FORMATION OF THE INTELLECTUALS" (1929-1935)

Gramsci, Antonio. "The Formation of Intellectuals." Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. Ed. Vincent Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 1135-1143.

Gramsci begins by asking whether intellectuals form an autonomous social group (Gramsci's synonym for class), that is, whether they have no link to the class-structure, or whether every social group, or class, has "its own specialised category of intellectuals" (1138). Gramsci terms this problem a "complex one" (1138) because the "real historical process of formation of the different categories of intellectuals" (1138) has assumed a "variety of forms" (1138). For Gramsci, in the final analysis, intellectuals are not independent but, rather, products of the class into which they are born. Gramsci uses the term "'organic' intellectuals" (1138) to denote the intimate bond between the intellectuals and the class of which they are part.

Gramsci argues that intellectuals are formed in two main ways. Firstly, every social group (class)

coming into existence on 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. (1138)

Under capitalism, for example, the capitalist entrepreneur "creates alongside himself" (1138) industrial technicians, economists, lawyers, etc. At least an elite among this group of entrepreneurs must possess the "capacity to be an organiser of society in general, including all its complex organism of services, right up to the state organism" (1138). At the very least, they must "possess the capacity to choose the deputies . . . to whom to entrust this activity of organising the general system of relationships external to the business itself" (1138). (Gramsci leaves to one side the feudal and the preceding Classical periods of history as a "question to be examined separately" [1138].) Secondly, Gramsci points out that every class which "emerges into history out of the preceding economic structure, and as an expression of the development of this structure" (1139) has "found . . . categories of intellectuals already in existence" (1139), something which would seem to indicate an "historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms" (1139).

A good example of the foregoing would be the clergy which for a long time did not only teach "religious ideology" (1139) but also took care of the "schools, education, morality, justice, charity, good works, etc." (1139). The clergy were "organically bound to the landed aristocracy" (1139) with whom they shared "equal status juridically" (1139) and with whom they shared the "feudal ownership of land" (1139). Their "monopoly . . . in the superstructural field" (1139) came to be contested by other categories of intellectuals who were "enabled to expand by the growing strength of the central power of the monarch" (1139). Hence, the rise to prominence of that class of intellectuals which Gramsci calls the 'noblesse de robe,' a "stratum of administrators, etc., scholars and scientists, theorists, non-ecclesiastical philosophers, etc." (1139). Gramsci points out that intellectuals such as these, whether religious or secular, come to think of themselves as "autonomous and independent of the dominant social group" (1139) (i.e. the ruling class whose interests they subtend and to whom they are organically bonded), but that this is all an illusion.

Gramsci's goal is to figure out a "unitary criterion to characterise equally all the diverse and disparate activities of intellectuals and to distinguish these at the same time .

. . . from the activities of other social groupings" (1140). It is a mistake to focus in this regard on the "intrinsic nature of intellectual activities" (1140) rather than on the "ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities have their place within the general complex of social relations" (1140). This is indeed true also of both the worker and the capitalist whose "part in society" (1140) is determined not by his labour or his thoughts per se, but by the "general social relations" (1140) within which he lives and which shape his existence.

Gramsci stresses that "[a]ll men are intellectuals, . . . but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals" (1140). Some perform the "immediate social function of the professional category of the intellectuals" (1140), while others' energy is directed towards "muscular nervous effort" (1140). However, as he put it, "*homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*" (1140). Whatever may be the nature of his particular career, Gramsci writes, each person "carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a 'philosopher,' an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it" (1141). In order to create a "new stratum of intellectuals" (1140), one must seek to nourish the "intellectual activity that exists in everyone at a certain stage of development" (1141). However, what is essential for Gramsci, is that the "muscular-nervous effort itself" (1141) must become the "foundation of a new and integral conception of the world" (1141). His own newspaper called *Ordine Nuovo*, he believed, worked to develop this "new intellectualism and to develop its new concepts" (1141) which "conformed to the development of the real forms of life" (1140). The "mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator" (1141).

Gramsci argues that there are "historically formed specialised categories for the exercise of the intellectual function" (1141) which are "formed in connection with all social groups, but especially in connection with the more important, and they undergo more extensive and complex elaboration in connection with the dominant social group" (1141). Classes "developing towards dominance" (1141) struggle to "assimilate and to conquer 'ideologically' the traditional intellectuals" (1141), but this process is quickened when such classes develop their own organic intellectuals. The main instrument by which "intellectuals . . . are elaborated" (1141) is the school. The importance attached to intellectualism in the post-Medieval world is attested to by the rapid growth of educational institutions. "Parallel with the attempt to deepen and broaden the 'intellectuality' of each individual, there has also been an attempt to multiply and narrow the various specialisations" (1141). The "more extensive the 'area' covered by education and the more numerous the 'vertical' levels of schooling, the more complex is the cultural world, the civilisation, of a particular state" (1141-1142). Gramsci stresses that the "elaboration of intellectual strata does not take place on the terrain of abstract democracy" (1142). Different classes have been more given to becoming intellectuals while different categories within these classes gravitate towards particular specialisations.

Gramsci stresses that the "relationship between the intellectuals and the world of production is not as direct as it is with the fundamental social groups but is, in varying degrees, 'mediated' by the whole fabric of society and by the complex of superstructures, of which the intellectuals are, precisely, the 'functionaries'" (1142). He argues that it should be possible to "measure the 'organic quality' of the various intellectual strata and their degree of connection with a fundamental social group" (1142). It should also be possible to "establish a gradation of their functions and of the superstructures from the

bottom to the top (from the structural base upwards)" (1142). He posits that there are "two major superstructural 'levels'" (1142), what he terms 'civil society' (the "ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private'" [1142]) and 'political society' or the State. Through the former, civil society, the ruling class exercises the "function of 'hegemony'" (1142) while through the State and "juridical government" (1142), it exercises "'direct domination' or command" (1142). Intellectuals are the "'deputies'" (1143) of the ruling class "exercising the subaltern functions of hegemony and political government" (1143). The hegemony of the ruling class is predicated on the

'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (1143)

Political command is predicated on the:

apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively. This apparatus is . . . constituted . . . in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed. (1143)

The function of intellectuals is organise "social hegemony and state domination" (1143). There is a whole hierarchy of intellectuals who perform these two functions and as a result of which there are some intellectuals who devise strategies while others are mere "agents" (1143), some who are the visionaries (the "creators of the various sciences, philosophy, art, etc." [1143]), while others are merely "'administrators' and divulgators of pre-existing, traditional, accumulated intellectual wealth" (1143).