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Weber, Gramsci and Capitalism

Asok Sen

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Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta
10, Lake Terrace,
Calcutta-700 029.

Weber on Capitalism

Weber's analysis of the relation between the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism is in some senses akin to a project of hermeneutics.¹ It is a significant example of the application of the Dilthey-Rickert approach to an understanding of the spirit of industrial capitalism. Dilthey distinguished between the sciences of nature and the sciences of the spirit, the subject of the latter being social reality. For him, positivism offered no adequate insight into the nature of society. The central issue was related to the Kantian question of uniting logic and ethics, the areas which involved a separation in the realm of pure reason. Dilthey emphasized the importance of analysing consciousness as the only means by which one could proceed from merely egoistic experience to an understanding of the unique spirit characterizing each specific form of 'human' culture arising in history.

Rickert maintained that there were two methods in science. The natural sciences dealt with materials which are the same everywhere and which could therefore be comprehended in universal laws covering all space and time. This is the method of generalized abstraction. The other method is one of individualized abstraction which Rickert considered to be appropriate for the historical sciences. It enables us to understand (Verstehen i.e. 'understanding') the relations between phenomena and moral values, the nexuses most pertinent for comprehending the infinite variety of human culture "each one of which has to be grasped by a particular understanding of its own uniqueness. What is thus grasped is a life style, a special form of human living, its modes of thought, its ethical norms, its aesthetic achievements."²

Thus, Rickert's methodological observations and Dilthey's search for the 'unique spirit' are combined in what is mentioned above as the 'Dilthey-Rickert' approach of Weber. My reference to hermeneutics should be subject to several qualifications if we bring in the claims and counter-claims of the empirical method, scientific knowledge and

hermeneutical cognition. More relevant for our present theme is the point that "Dilthey's main contribution to social scientific thought consists, of course, in his exposition of the method of Verstehen in the 'historical Geisteswissenschaften' which occupied Max Weber's methodological reflections and which provided the models for all subsequent approaches concerned with the understanding of 'action'".³

Weber aims at exploring the factors which motivate and sustain the capitalist system. An exposition was necessary which would bear upon the rich congruency of such diverse aspects of a culture as religion and economics.⁴ Neither in The Protestant Ethic, nor in his General Economic History, did Weber postulate a theory of generalized historical evolution. He was not proving a causal relation between protestantism and capitalism. His main concern lay in an investigation of the influence of certain religious ideas on the emergence of the ethos of an economic system. This should be clear from the following observations in The Protestant Ethic :

We have no intention whatever of maintaining that the spirit of capitalism ... could only have arisen as the result of certain effects of the Reformation, or even that capitalism as an economic system is a creation of the Reformation... In view of the tremendous confusion of interdependent influences between the material basis, the forms of social and political organization, and the ideas current in the time of the Reformation, we can only proceed by investigating whether and at what points certain correlations between forms of religious belief and practical ethics can be worked out.⁵

Again,

Asceticism was in turn influenced in its development and its character by the totality of social conditions, especially economic. The modern man is in general, even with the best will, unable to give religious ideas a significance for culture and

national character which they deserve. But it is, of course, not my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and of history.⁶

Weber's point of arrival rests on the recognition that the elements which combine to make a society are too complex and too numerous to yield any neat formula for its causal comprehension, Further an "action is 'social' insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course."⁷ Identification of human purposes and motives is inseparable from our understanding of social structure and events. Further, the potential for change and transformation calls for an understanding of things which have not yet occurred and do not yet exist as actual events. Thus, it becomes impossible to have a scientific system inductively based on the observed frequency of the same causes and the same effects. For Weber then, purely economic factors were indispensable, but not by themselves sufficient for understanding the nature of capitalism. One has to take account of 'subjective factors' for a causally sufficient explanation. The subjective factors are shaped by ideas nurturing special psychic traits. Such ideas act complementarily with habitual social conduct to produce the personality types with a distinct orientation towards certain determinate 'maxims' or rules. The subjective meaning will be called valid "if the orientation to such maxims includes, no matter to what actual extent, the recognition that they are binding on the actor or the corresponding action constitutes a desirable model for him to imitate."⁸

Considering social sciences as historical and admitting the crucial importance of subjective influences on causality, Weber faced the task of clarifying the most significant specifics of a social system. The 'ideal type' device was used for constructing numerous elements of reality into logical and meaningful categories. It reminds us of Marx's statement that "In the analysis of economic forms, neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both."⁹

The 'ideal type' abstraction consists in what Weber indicated "by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized view points into a unified analytical construct."¹⁰

There remains the question of the elements constituting such abstraction, such accentuation and one-sidedness. It cannot but be related to an investigator's view of the problematic, to the selection of the essential questions which a historian and a social scientist must always make, "since they necessarily approach reality from certain points of view which are determined by their value-orientation."¹¹ Such presuppositions do not by themselves ensure conceptual precision. This is where the function of the 'ideal type' comes to have critical significance. It does not imply anything good or noble. Nor does it indicate an extremely novel method of analysis. An 'ideal type' meets the purpose usually served by a hypothesis or a model to explain a social system in terms of its central agencies and relations, its intentions and activities. Though not exactly exemplified in reality, an 'ideal type' helps to clarify the action parameters and also the elements of human motivation absorbed in them which govern the significant causal processes of society. Such is this tool of placing in focus the social phenomenon and its full meaning.

In specifying the various components of capitalism, Weber pointed to the division between property-owning capitalists and property-less workers, and to the exclusive opportunities the owning class secures for exploiting services on the market, control over the means of production, capital funds and marketable commodities. The workers are deprived of all such opportunities. Their wages are kept at the minimum. The workers can have no other choice since the system eliminates their occupation of own plots of cultivable land and also ~~with~~ the possibility of their craft-work with own tools. To sum up, the essential conditions are

(i) unrestricted struggle between autonomous economic groups in the market, (ii) money economy, (iii) formally free labour, (iv) unrestricted market freedom, (v) expropriation of the workers from the means of production, (vi) individual ownership.¹²

In all this however Weber sees neither the elements of contradiction leading to economic crises, nor the role of the class struggle acting for the supersession of the system. For him, capitalism is based on rational pursuit of wealth and it "is present wherever the industrial provision for the needs of the group is carried out by the method of enterprise, irrespective of what need is involved. More specifically, rational capitalistic establishment is one with capital accounting, that is, an establishment which determines its income-yielding power by calculation according to the method of modern book-keeping and the striking of a balance."¹³

One commentator rightly points out that "Weber's pious reverence for the ledger makes it the sacred book of the religion of making money. When one first reads the above passage the sudden descent from the sublime to the banal comes with a slight shock — 'book-keeping and the striking of a balance'."¹⁴ I have noted already how Weber cautioned against overestimating the role of protestantism in the genesis of capitalist society. But his presupposition about the 'ideal type' of capitalist rationality, which Weber also regarded as the value inherent in the subjective choices of the system placed the highest premium on the idea of calvinist calling as "not a condition in which the individual is born, but a strenuous and exacting enterprise to be chosen by himself, and to be pursued with a sense of religious responsibility."¹⁵ The emphasis such 'calling' places on this-worldly asceticism fits with the capitalist pursuit of profit for accumulation.

Thus, the spiritual affinity of a particular world-view with the capitalist economic practice and its achievement-orientation was central to Weber's arguments about bourgeois rationality. He applied the

distinction between 'traditionalism' and the spirit of capitalism not only to capitalist entrepreneurs and their business-ethic, but also to workers. Traditionalism is characterized by workers who prefer less work to more pay, seek maximum of comfort and a minimum of exertion, and lack the ability and willingness to adapt themselves to new methods of work.¹⁶ Weber elaborated a typology of gainful pursuits to focus on the nature of economic activity thriving on long-range capital investments, application of science-based technology and improvements in productivity. Those were the directions of rational pursuit of economic gain distinct from purely speculative profiteering.¹⁷

But whether he idealized the aspiring bourgeoisie or revealed the innermost subjective motivations of capitalism, Weber admitted in the concluding pages of The Protestant Ethic :

Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history. To-day the spirit of religious asceticism -- whether finally, who knows ? -- has escaped from the cage. But victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer. The rosy blush of its laughing heir, the Enlightenment, seems also to be irretrievably fading, and the idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs.¹⁸

Further, General Economic History concluded on the following note :

"The religious root of modern economic humanity is dead; today the concept of the calling is a caput mortuum in the world Economic ethics arose **against** the background of the ascetic ideal; now it has been stripped of its religious import. It was possible for the working class to accept its lot as long as the promise of eternal happiness could be held out to it. When this consolation fell away it was inevitable that those strains and

stresses should appear in economic activity which since then have grown so rapidly."¹⁹ Such statements notwithstanding, the historical prospects for transcending capitalism had no place in Weber's theory. His tone remained rather pathetic "trying to understand the meaning of all existences, individual or collective, endured or chosen, without concealing either the weight of social necessities pressing on us or the inelucatable obligation to make decisions which can never be scientifically demonstrated."²⁰

The issues become more complicated as Weber proceeds to explain the structure of legitimate capitalist domination in terms of rationality. Among his three 'ideal types' of power, rational domination abides by belief in legal ordinances and rests also on the belief in the legality of those who administer power. Weber considered such legal authority as the essential element of the modern rational state. Apart from bureaucracy, parliamentary administration and all sorts of collegial authority would be covered by this type. The idea of rational action in relation to a goal is inextricably connected with the concept of rational domination. The other two types, traditional and charismatic, are associated with sentiment and emotion respectively. Weber did not however rule out the possibility of the mixing of types in a particular kind of real authority.²¹

As observed by Weber, bureaucracy promotes expertise, connects job security with regular and consistent performance of duties which are clearly defined, builds a coherent system of authority and subordination and ensures the right of the superior to regulate the work of his subordinates.²² Given the Weberian propositions about capitalist rationality, such a system unceasingly strives for creating conditions which would allow a maximum of productivity and a maximum degree of efficiency. Correlatively, the further advance of capitalism was inevitably tied up with the rise of ever more efficient bureaucracies, and an even greater degree of formal rational organisation on all levels of social interaction.²³

No doubt, the political conditions of Germany in the post-Bismarckian era influenced Weber's formulations regarding the role of bureaucracy in the expansion of industrial capitalism. The unification of Germany under the leadership of Prussia was attained at a premium on the latter's semi-feudal autocracy resting upon Junker landlordism, the civil service bureaucracy and the officer corps. In 1848, Marx characterized the bourgeoisie of his own fatherland as being "without initiative, without faith in itself."²⁴ About half a century later in 1895, Weber felt : "The threatening thing in our situation ... is that the bourgeois classes, as the bearers of the power-interests of the nation, seem to wilt away, while there are no signs that the workers are beginning to show the maturity to replace them. The danger does not ... lie with the masses. It is not a question of the economic position of the ruled, but rather the political qualification of the ruling and ascending classes which is the ultimate issue in the social-political problem."²⁵ Perhaps this explains why Weber needed an 'ideal type' bureaucracy to fulfil what he considered the rational conditions of capitalist development.

One can note a deep tension in Weber's writings as his theoretical system ends up in what was characterized by him as a 'cage of bondage' for men who were supposed to act freely and rationally in keeping with the Weberian 'ideal types'. A process of rationalisation working in society was built into Weber's system, point by point, as the essential condition of capitalism. The capitalist dynamics, its internal contradictions and conflicts, led to consequences which, apart from the questions of exploitation and misery of the multitude, could not even be reconciled with the rationale for pursuing more and more profits. As noted already, Weber himself observed that "the idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs."

For Weber again, bureaucratic domination results from the requirements of the division of labour, of technological and professional expertise which are indispensable for the implementation of rational technology in production. This is the point Weber uses to argue that socialist transformation would not do away with bureaucratization. Bureaucratic domination corresponds to an inescapable techno-economic law in Weber's scheme of things. Only this can ensure a full implementation of all the elements listed under Weber's type of pure legal rule; they are now "administered by an almighty bureaucracy in accordance with a closely knit network of laws and regulations of a purely formalistic nature, which would leave little or no space for individually oriented creative action."²⁶ To obviate extreme oppression and routine stagnation under such systems, Weber of course admitted the possibility of their fusion with some charismatic elements (viz. his concept of plebiscitarian democracy).

Weber's own portrayal of such a state of things was dark enough :

No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For the last stage of this cultural development it might well be truly said "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved."²⁷

Weber refrained however from 'judgements of value and faith' and could not perceive the 'spirit' of any civilisation beyond capitalism. To the extent Weber started from the conviction that social actions expressed a deeper reality of subjective intentions and ethic, he was trying to adopt an emanative approach in his understanding of the capitalist system. This was evident in his concern for the 'spirit' and also in the construction of his 'ideal types' of rational behaviour. The rest of Weber's system

takes recourse to analytic logic (empiricism, rationalism, positivism) and offers causal explanations of human actions without adding anything to their external aspect.²⁸

Moreover, Weber used reason to close and enclose the world in a rigid system of capitalism working for its profits. And science was supposed to ensure that the world would be tidied up in order that reason could prevail in the 'ethical' pursuit of private profits. This world had its classes, strata, institutions of domination and modes of expropriation. But all this is subsumed under rational calculation, which shapes into a kind of economic determinism to transform "what previously was only a 'means' (rational pursuit of gain in a specialised vocation) into the 'end' of human activity."²⁹ There is indeed an element of paradox in this journey from the calling of this-worldly service to God, to an inexorable economic determinism, expressed as follows: "This masterless slavery in which capitalism enmeshes the worker or the debtor is only debatable ethically as an institution. In principle, the personal conduct of those who participate, on either the side of the rulers or of the ruled, is not morally debatable, as such conduct is essentially prescribed by objective situations. If they do not conform, they are threatened by economic bankruptcy which would, in every respect, be useless."³⁰ Capitalism can work 'but not without its satanic wheels.

While Weber's 'ideal types' are all immersed in protestant ethic and bourgeois consciousness, his method of analysis rules out that contradictions within capitalism generate the forces to resolve such contradictions. All his concern for religious ethic notwithstanding, Weber bases himself on the premise of human individuals as self-contained atoms and finds no clues to collective consciousness as something more than an arithmetical sum of autonomous and independent unities. His 'ideal types' are not understood in terms of a dialectical interaction within the totality of relations, the whole and its parts. And so Weber's categories did not enable him to identify the potential for superseding capitalism,

even though he once declared that "the fact that the maximum of formal rationality in capital accounting is possible only where the workers are subjected to domination by entrepreneurs, is a further specific element of substantive irrationality in the modern economic order."³¹

II

From Weber to Gramsci

We have pointed to the paradox and pessimism of Max Weber's analysis. The strength of his position lies, no doubt, in not abstracting the socio-economic experience of capitalism from its basic value-system. He knew capitalism as he found it and also in terms of the absolute presuppositions inherent in the bourgeois ethic. Weber made it clear that the overthrow of capitalism would require a change in the very ethos of human social action which made sense to individuals in terms of their belief in an 'oughtness'. He stressed the correspondence between a set of moral principles and a particular social and historical context. In his appraisal of the Marxian theory, however, Weber took a position assailing economic determinism and the so-called prediction of 'increased pauperisation', criticisms which would not apply to Marx's system except in its vulgarized and mechanistic versions.

For Marx, the way to founding a new mode of production depends on its validity as an entire social alternative. The faculty of a class to become really revolutionary and eventually the ruling power, in society and state, has to emerge and achieve hegemony in this process of validation. The building of such hegemony comprises all the dimensions of human social living, not only the instruments of enriching a particular class, but also the whole complex of advancing social production, ideas and ethos, whereby the gains of a particular class can acquire the leverage of historical progress.

This concept of progress does not hang on a purely metaphysical belief. It is based on the comprehension of history as a significant movement which is subject, in its cunning passages, to aborted opportunities, reversals, or even denials, but also provides the criterion by which production forces and production relations could be reorganised in terms of a perspective envisaging the end of all exploitation of man by man and the human social preference for life, health and sustenance rather than death, disease and alienation. All this is man's making and unmaking and relates human consciousness to the course of history. While progress is possible and necessary in history, it cannot be realized without conscious human action.

Another part of Weber's diagnosis has more lasting relevance for our understanding of social transformations through the present century. As noted already, Weber argued that socialism would provide no solution for the problem of bureaucratic domination. While most of Weber's observations had a necessary connection with his logic of the consistent working out of the bourgeois ethic, increasing bureaucratization was caused by the needs of developed industrialism which, in Weber's view, would become stronger under socialism. Indeed, Weber's perspective for the future, which he set forth in reaction to bureaucratic absolutism in imperial Germany, amounts to what has been called an "early formulation of George Orwell's 1984":

It is horrible to think that the world could one day be filled with nothing but those little cogs, little men clinging to little jobs and striving towards bigger ones -- a state of affairs which is to be seen once more, as in the Egyptian records, playing an ever-increasing part in the spirit of our present administrative system, and especially of its offspring, the students. This passion for bureaucracy ... is enough to drive one to despair. It is as if in politics ... we were deliberately to become men who need

"order" and nothing but order, who become nervous and cowardly if for one moment this order wavers, and helpless if they are torn away from their total incorporation in it. That the world should know no man but these : it is such an evolution that we are already caught up, and the great question is therefore not how we can promote and hasten it, but what can we oppose to this machinery in order to keep a portion of mankind free from this parcelling out of the soul, from this supreme mastery of the boureaucratic way of life.³²

And Weber's premonition is confirmed in what responsible and committed sociology of our day considers to be a major problem : "I do not know the answer to the question of political irresponsibility in our time or to the cultural and political question of the Cheerful Robot. But is it not clear that no answers will be found unless these problems are at least confronted ?"³³

Weber's observations cannot belie the marxist understanding of the capitalist contradictions and their revolutionary supersession in history. This is not to ignore the changes which result from new technological revolutions, the increase in the weightage of skilled personnel among the working class, and the expansion of the service / ^{sector.} No less important are the points of coalescence between bourgeois state power and the world of oligopolies in the stage of state monopoly capital. There is also the permanent ~~arm~~ economy which uses up, better say squanders, an enormous amount of resources that capitalism cannot direct towards the production of 'instruments of life'.³⁴ Such are the ways and means of late capitalism to concede a part of the trade union demands and to make up for the extremes of unemployment with a growing tertiary sector and chronic inflation.³⁵

But post-keynesianism and the so-called 'supply-side' masks notwithstanding, capitalism shows little evidence of becoming free from recurrent recessions and the persistence of considerable unemployment even at the peak of each cyclical boom. In its international dimension, the experience is even ^{more} sinister when one takes account of the endless

squabbles over common or exclusive markets and of the economics and politics of neo-colonial rampage in the poor countries of the world. Thus, even in conditions of maximum 'prosperity' under late capitalism, the capitalist contradiction between private property and social production still proves insoluble within the structural limits of that system.³⁶

The issues are more complex when we take up the question of the proletariat becoming a 'class for itself', of its clarity of awareness and conscious commitment to change the world. For Marx of The Communist Manifesto, the inexorable contradictions and conscious revolutionary action by the exploited would come together, since he had reasons to assert that capitalism did lack even the competence "to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery". But capitalism today engineers an economy of armaments and waste to give to its workers "the place of the slave within his slavery", a process aiming to reduce the working people to the atrophy of Marcuse's 'one-dimensional man'. This has a critical bearing on the pattern and orientation of the working masses, including among them the new middle-class variant of professional workers and white-collar employees.

Such are the historical circumstances that must have influenced the state of things which Perry Anderson interprets in his survey of developments in 'Western Marxism' since 1920: "No matter how otherwise heteroclitic, they share one fundamental emblem: a common and latent pessimism. All the major departures or developments of substance within this tradition are distinguished from the classical heritage of historical materialism by the darkness of their implications or conclusions. ... The confidence and optimism of the founders of historical materialism, and of their successors, progressively disappeared. Virtually every one of the significant new themes in the intellectual roster of this epoch reveals the same diminution of hope and loss of certainty."³⁷

No less pertinent are Perry Anderson's observations regarding the historical context: "Born from the failure of proletarian revolutions in the advanced zones of European capitalism after the First World War, it

developed within an ever increasing scission between socialist theory and working-class practice. The gulf between the two, originally opened up by the imperialist isolation of the Soviet State, was institutionally widened and fixed by the bureaucratization of the USSR and of the Comintern under Stalin."³⁸

We should then consider the emphasis that Antonio Gramsci placed on the struggle for class hegemony, for cultural and moral predominance prior to the capture of state power by the working class. Related to the theme of this paper, some of Gramsci's ideas become all the more relevant because of the apparent similarity between his emphasis on the superstructure and what is often understood as the primacy of religious and cultural factors in Weber's interpretation of history. This has to bear upon the different interpretations of the base-superstructure relationship.

Further, with reference to the problems of retarded working class consciousness and Perry Anderson's picture of pessimism, we must remember Gramsci's own experience of the failure of the proletarian revolution in the countries of advanced capitalism, the emergence of the Fascist state, the 'New Deal' type reforms of capitalism from above following the world slump of 1929, and the aggravation of contradictions in the course of socialist construction in the Soviet Union. No elaborate discussion of Gramsci's thought is intended in this paper. Let us simply focus upon the central issues of building socialist counter-hegemony under conditions of late capitalism and also in the more underdeveloped stages of contemporary history. In view of the nature of the problem I have already stated, such tasks not only mean the posing of a real historical antithesis to Weber's premonition, but are also indispensable for a reversal of the mood of pessimism which concerns many marxists like Perry Anderson and which again is implied in the analysis of a thinker who is not anti-marxist by calling or commitment : "Bureaucratic terror and the cult of personality are just another expression of the relation

between the constituent dialectic and the constituted dialectic, that is to say, of the necessity that a common action as such (through the multiple differentiation of tasks) should practically reflect upon itself in the untranscendable form of an individual unit."³⁹

For Gramsci, hegemonic power is not only coercion, but also 'directing' by the token of consent obtained from the governed. Civil society defines the sphere where such a 'directing' role is achieved. It encompasses significant ethico-cultural dimensions which are not amenable to adequate understanding in terms of the economic factor alone. This is not to ignore the criterion of advancing production forces since "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."⁴⁰

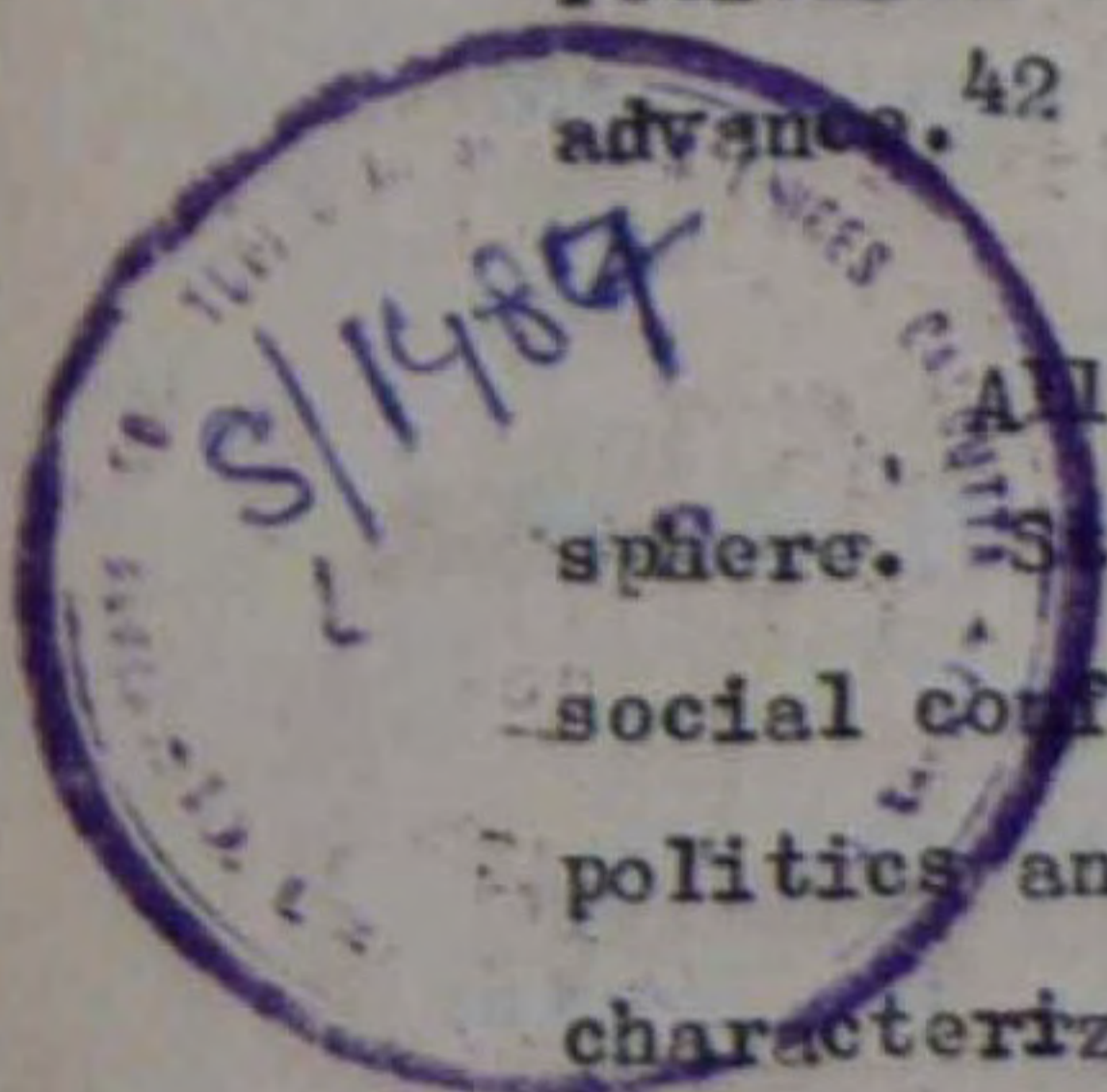
The political struggle of the proletariat and its party has to aim therefore at an alternative hegemony. The question of social hegemony had its vital place both in earlier marxian writings and in Lenin's statement of the total task in "What Is To Be Done". The latter embraced its own specifics of tactics, strategy and organisation in the historical context of Czarist Russia typifying state omnipotence and immature civil society. The importance of the ethico-political and cultural factors was writ large over the entire evolution of Gramsci's politics and philosophy of praxis. For example, while focusing upon workers' productivism in the Turin factory councils, Gramsci was never simply advocating improved industrial management per se. He strived to initiate the factory councils for critical ethico-political mediations of proletarian values and a new cultural totality in making.

It should be clear to communist orthodoxy that Gramsci was moving with historical reality by not placing the entire emphasis on the contradiction between production forces and production relations or, in other words, on capitalist production relations being outpaced by the advance

of production forces. In his comments on 'Americanism and Fordism', Gramsci clarified the directions of advanced capitalism to newer manoeuvres of assimilating wage-workers to 'scientific' management and advancing productivity.⁴¹ Such tendencies have assumed a multiplicity of forms in the development of capitalism since the Second World War. Consequently, the development of productive forces is combined with an enormous growth of differential practices within the working class. These are the processes which fragment and parcellize the proletariat under the sway of advancing technology. Moreover, an expanding volume of 'institutionalised waste' — exemplified by the growth of the tertiary sector securing cultural domination of capital and its commodity fetishism — is realized with the support of huge profits from technological advances.⁴²

All this coincides with increasing state intervention in the social sphere. State monopoly capitalism leads to extensive politicization of social conflicts. By its work in the economy, the state transforms politics and influences the class structure and its dialectic. Gramsci characterizes as 'passive revolution' those tendencies and their contribution to forming a mass consensus in favour of capitalism. It amounts to a restructuring of capitalism through state initiative to consolidate bourgeois domination by means of new forms of mass integration.⁴³ Against this complex of capitalist domination Gramsci's concept of hegemony, his 'war of position'⁴⁴ to evolve a 'historical bloc'⁴⁵ and his emphasis on ethico-cultural mediation in civil society sets the political task of the communist struggle in its totality.

While Gramsci's 'philosophy of praxis' is obviously more relevant to the historical context of advanced capitalism, it is noteworthy that "... so far from being marginal, the concept of passive revolution as a critical corollary of the marxian problematic of transition possibly allows for a new, global interpretation of the involvement of politics in the overthrow of a mode of production. If we take the study of politics



of transition to consist in a critical analysis of the dialectic between historical bloc and institutional forms, then passive revolution emerges as 'a general principle of political art and science'⁴⁶. Gramsci contraposed the struggle for social hegemony against state expansion and the passive revolutions of capital.

Coming to our proximate national experience, an analogy is visible in conditions of relative underdevelopment when bourgeois domination endeavours to continue its rule through an amalgam of expanding state sector, bureaucratic power, and populist mobilization.⁴⁷ This may be combined again with the political slogan of justice for the poor, while in reality extreme inequalities characterize an economy infested with corruption, black money, slow and uneven growth, and, above all, the conditions of duality in which about 20 per cent or a little more of the population are increasingly assimilated into the realm of capitalism, the rest being abandoned to a peripheral wilderness. Amidst such historical circumstances, socialist and national motivations can fuse only at a level where anti-imperialism also resolves to struggle against internal capitalist expansion. On the contrary, as those conditions of duality take shape, the politicians, the officials, the experts and even the working people and their agencies are engrossed in the segment of capitalist assimilation. There is only a passive participation in the continuous extension and growing legitimacy of the institutional processes of the capitalist state order. They all move in the vicious circle of private or corporative egoism and bureaucracy, and act through their ignorance, their greed, their 'formal reason' and ethic of self-seeking divorced from the premises and ends of an alternative hegemony.

Under such conditions again, marxism is required to take up the task of combining with its political goals the social and ethico-cultural initiative which Gramsci considered to be of vital importance. Thus, the characteristic contradictions may call for the same level of praxis in countries of advanced and backward capitalism, even though their socio-economic conditions are so widely different. While admitting the need for different programmes, such variations will justify the same concern for the task of alternative social hegemony.

Coming back to Weber's despair about the hiatus between formal reason and substantial rationality, we can now link it to the general problem of social hegemony and power in the stages of historical transition. It should then be possible to recognise Gramsci's 'passive revolution' "as a potential tendency intrinsic to every transitional process."⁴⁸ As regards the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the on-going debate through the recent decades makes it clear that Marx's 'two ways' are associated with the variants of absolute monarchies, their different mercantilist policies and the role of a nascent bourgeoisie in building its own social hegemony.⁴⁹ We have noted earlier the interaction between the specific context of German history and Weber's identification of bureaucracy as the institution of rational domination for the advance of industry and technology. A reference can also be made to Gramsci's reflections on the experience of a 'passive revolution' in the history of capitalist transition in Italy.⁵⁰

The three couples in Marx's theory, viz. production forces/production relations, base/superstructure and civil society/state, still serve as vital elements in our understanding of historical processes. Gramsci's use of categories like 'social hegemony', 'historical bloc', 'passive revolution' and /or manoeuvre' clarify with several examples the interaction of those vital elements in specific conjunctures of history. And, what is perhaps of more importance for avoiding a positivist proclivity of marxist orthodoxy, Gramsci's analysis

reveals how, in the logic of dialectics, the reality of interaction and praxis prevails over causal primacy and determinate reduction.

Thus, the metaphor apart, the relation of the base to the superstructure must not be considered as that of two different planes where the former determines the latter. In his letters and notes on the historical role of ideologies, Engels made clear that a historical factor can react upon its own conditions. In his famous historical writings Marx never reduced the multiplex reality of revolution and counter-revolution to a scheme of economic determinism. His reflections on civil society encompassed the totality of economic and non-economic factors in their continuous reciprocity. For Marx, "History, to be intelligible, must show the economic and social origin of events in their oecumenical validity."⁵¹ Gramsci's concept of social hegemony is rooted in the same necessity for validation.

The emphasis on reciprocity does not ignore the crucial role of the mode of production in marxian analysis. No such default creeps in when we duly recognise that the base/superstructure couple clarifying our understanding of the mode of production is complementary to the state/civil society relation in our total comprehension of historical processes. There obtains the dialectic of the parts and also of the parts and the whole in the totality of a decentred structure. This should take us to the crucial problem of mediation in marxian theory which points not only to the genesis of a new stage within the 'womb' of the old order, but also to the role of a rising class and its consciousness in such a making of history. We can then answer the question of a dichotomy between 'scientific' and 'critical' marxism raised in one incisive sociological analysis of our time.⁵²

Indeed, the orthodox understanding of the base/superstructure relationship may have been influenced by some peculiarities of the emergence of capitalism in history. The origin of the bourgeoisie

within the feudal mode of production instantly objectifies some alternative forms of production and circulation. It can even suggest a priority of the economic base in the general course of historical transition. Lenin pointed out the other experience associated with the transition from capitalism to socialism :

One of the fundamental difference between bourgeois revolution and the Socialist revolution is that for the bourgeois revolution, which arises out of feudalism, the new economic organizations are gradually created is the womb of the old order, gradually changing all the aspects of feudal society. ... the difference between Socialist revolution and bourgeois revolution lies precisely in the fact that the latter finds ready forms of capitalist relationships; while the Soviet power -- the proletarian power -- does not inherit such ready-made relationships, if we leave out of account the most developed forms of capitalism, which, strictly speaking, extended to but a small top layer of industry and hardly touched agriculture.⁵³

In fact, even the most highly developed capitalist concentration is quite different from a system of socialist relations, while the advance of capitalist production both in terms of forces and relations was often significant within the feudal order. Analysing the role of class consciousness in history, Lukacs also noted that "Capitalism already developed within feudalism, thus bringing about its dissolution."⁵⁴ Again, "The rival systems of production will not co-exist as already perfected systems (as was seen in the beginning of capitalism within the feudal order). But their rivalry is expressed as the insoluble contradiction within the capitalist system itself : namely as crisis."⁵⁵ Gramsci realized how the dominant bourgeoisie aimed at absorbing this crisis in a passive revolution. His counter-strategy placed emphasis on the 'war of position' for achieving alternative social hegemony. It followed that ethico-political mediation would have a premium in that strategy. There is therefore little reason to hold that Gramsci works

out an inversion of the base-superstructure relationship. True to the marxian tradition, he, in fact, implied no one-way reduction of the superstructure to the base or, vice versa, of the base to the superstructure.

On a more elaborate analysis it is possible to discover some ambiguities and antinomies⁵⁶ in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks written under obtrusive conditions and extraordinary circumstances. The central point of his arguments remains extremely valuable insofar as it immensely enriches the content and perspectives of marxist praxis by locating the element of consent in the material structure and cultural components of class rule and exploitation. It is a more complex question to answer how such mediation will take place. No less complicated is the real task of avoiding reformism and adventurism in giving effect to the strategies of the 'war of position' and the 'war of manoeuvre'. Gramsci himself would even evoke an 'optimism of the will' against the 'pessimism of the intellect' and he did conceive of the task of counter-hegemony long before 'passive revolution' emerged as a general phenomenon of contemporary capitalism.

We cannot ignore the unknowns and uncertainties of real history. While there is evidence to indicate that 'Eurocommunism' in Italy promises the new to be born,⁵⁷ one cannot wish away the practical and ideological factors accounting for the differences between 'Gramscians of the left' and 'Gramscians of the right'.⁵⁸ The very fact of passive revolution can lead to a duality between two types of endeavour -- one to achieve hegemonic structural reforms based on mass support and the other to secure significant strength within the existing parliamentary system.

Again, at a different world pole, the maoist empathy for 'revolution from below' and for the critical role of the peasant communes appears to have produced results not quite consistent with its goals.

One need not be blind to the achievements of socialism through this century in order to give Sartre's diagnosis its due — the danger of scarcity being schematized as the universal crystallization of bureaucracy after every socialist revolution in the backward countries.⁵⁹ Capitalism provides a far worse alternative for such countries. We can perceive Gramsci's aim to prevent "the proletariat of Western Europe and the United States from being kept quiet by bread and circuses, passively waiting for decadence and destruction".⁶⁰ Things are not improved when in our own circumstances we can have circuses even without bread for the multitude.

This has been a long journey from Weber's 'pessimism of the intellect' to Gramsci's 'optimism of the will'. Even then the point of arrival may require more clarification in the light of what is conventionally known of politics as the art of the possible. Let us not miss the dangerous portents faced by mankind today by its passage to a technological stage where even the threat of nuclear destruction can be a tool of wild imperialist strategy. In all probability, we may have completely exhausted the political process which, in Weber's view, "is a complete parallel to the development of the capitalist enterprise"⁶¹ and where "the internal premiums consist of the satisfying of hatred and the craving of revenge."⁶² For Weber again, such reflexes of class struggle were associated with the immutable bourgeois ethic and its external premiums of incentives and returns.

Gramsci proposed to reach beyond the very limits of the bourgeois rules of the game in his calling for ethico-political mediation. The real issues of such praxis take us once again to what Marx observed about the distinct goal of his materialism: "The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society or socialized humanity."⁶³ It is something more than mere philosophical affinity that links Gramsci's ethico-political mediation with Marx's social humanity.

In Weber's vocabulary, the identity is one of a new ethic, of a new Weltanschauung. True to that identity Gramsci's challenge of alternative social hegemony acquires immense significance when capitalism manages to live on an involution of expanding production forces which can thereby advance and also perpetuate the exploitative production relations. Such manoeuvres do not remain confined to the advanced capitalist countries only.

There are the questions of mediation, of its form and content encompassing what Marx and Lenin considered the task of 'educating the educators'. Gramsci could not live to work out the practical directives of a new programme for his 'modern prince'. "It is necessary to appreciate that Gramsci's emphasis on the superstructure is not in opposition to marxism but a development of the tradition committed to changing the world. No less significant is the historical tendency toward passive revolutions in many conjunctures of transition from both developed and underdeveloped capitalism. But no ready answers automatically follow for many critical questions of mediations or of the principles and style of organisation suitable for Gramscian politics. This, surely, is the terrain on which Gramsci is to be deployed most usefully⁶⁴; the ground on which his philosophy of praxis can be conducted for the elimination of capitalism. Capitalism evolves new ways of domination by bringing the masses into politics. In this process, capitalism functions today as an 'artful perverter of joy and keen exploiter of strength' by binding man to be an animal "that has learned to survive 'in a fashion', to multiply without food for the multitudes, to grow up healthily without reaching personal maturity, to live well but without purpose, to invent ingeniously without aim, and to kill grandiosely without need."⁶⁵ Here lies the crucial import of Gramsci's resolution to fulfil sufficiently the socialist function of mediating historical advance towards a human renewal. He strove to achieve mass initiative for unceasing ethico-political action which would create a consciousness with the will and ability to transcend capitalism, that Weberian cage of 'cowardly' 'little men'.

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