

Seminar in Contemporary Political Theory: Antonio Gramsci and Anglo-American Ideas

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Professor Reid has taught a number of courses dealing with Gramsci's ideas. The following is a description of a seminar he conducted during the Fall semester of 1990.

This course will focus on and take as its point of departure the political thought of Antonio Gramsci, especially as reflected in his famous prison notebooks. This Italian Marxist helped to found the Communist party in Italy. Yet, he is widely regarded as "the greatest of western Marxists," to use Tom Nairn's words. In short, he took up Leninism but went beyond it to contribute to a critical, democratic tradition of socialist theory that sometimes is called Western Marxism. His significance in this context lies in his unique attempt to develop a philosophy of praxis out of a philosophy of history. Nairn, nevertheless, stresses the national context of Gramsci's political theory and his confrontation with the "Italian catastrophe." Yet, Nairn's skepticism about what can be distilled out of his work "as abstract political theory or revolutionary strategy" is leavened by the counsel to follow "Gramsci's example within one's own society, employing the innumerable clues and inspirations of the Prison Notebooks to do so." This key problematic of the Gramsci legacy is one of the questions to be explored in this seminar. The current work of American theorists such as Aronowitz, Boggs, Boyle, Cocks, Epstein, and Evans offers one milieu illustrating the Gramsci reception in the English-speaking world which is, as Geoff Eley has put it, "one of the more remarkable intellectual phenomena of the 1970s."

Three or four areas of the influence of Gramscian ideas in the past 20 years will be of chief concern. There has been a rethinking of socialist political theories and strategies including some particularly interesting ideas about democracy and the problem of "transition"; about the new social movements and the problem of "class"; and about intellectuals and the problem of "professionalism." We have seen the development of a critical cultural studies movement with new theories of media and mass communication based upon a recognition of Gramsci's concept of hegemony as "one of the major turning points in Marxist cultural theory" (Williams). In the AngloAmerican context, the current work of Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, George Lipsitz, and Todd Gitlin is exemplary and blends interestingly with another sphere of Gramscian influence, the field of "social history." Eugene Genovese has been joined by a number of scholars including Alan Dawley, Jackson Lears, and Leon Fink to promote a rethinking of American history forging new analyses of class, gender, labor, community, and culture. In all of these areas, controversy and debate have abounded, for orthodox notions such as class and culture have not lacked defense from opposite poles of the ideological spectrum. While these polemics will have our attention, more interest will be given to the possibility of Gramsci's contribution to a new post-Marxist theory oriented in terms of socialist pluralism, ecology, feminism, and related concerns. Our aim will be to evaluate the claim of two political theorists (Piccone & Cavalcanti) that Gramsci "provides one of the few meaningful models on the basis of which the emancipatory heritage of marxism can be reconstituted and politically articulated."

Required Texts:

1. Antonio Gramsci AN ANTONIO GRAMSCI READER edited by David Forgacs (Schocken pbk).
2. Photocopy Set of Assigned Articles (about 25)
3. Anne Showstack Sassoon, GRAMSCI'S POLITICS, 2nd ed. (U. of Minnesota pbk, 1987).
4. Anne Showstack Sassoon, Editor, APPROACHES TO GRAMSCI (Writers & Readers pbk, dist. by Norton).
5. Joan Cocks, THE OPPOSITIONAL IMAGINATION: Feminism, Critique, and Political Theory (Routledge pbk).
6. Raymond Williams, MARXISM AND LITERATURE (Oxford U.P. pbk).
7. Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe, HEGEMONY AND SOCIALIST STRATEGY: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics (Verso pbk).

Recommended Texts:

1. Antonio Gramsci, SELECTIONS FROM THE PRISON NOTEBOOKS edited by Q. Hoare & G. Nowell-Smith (International pbk).
2. Carl Boggs, THE TWO REVOLUTIONS: GRAMSCI & THE DILEMMAS OF WESTERN MARXISM (South End Press pbk).

Session I

1. T.J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony..."
2. Alan Dawley, "Workers, Capital, and the State in the Twentieth Century:"
3. Herbert Reid, "American Liberalism, Authority, and the Corporate State..."
4. Jackson Lears, "A Matter of Taste: Corporate, cultural Hegemony in a MassConsumption Society"

Session II

1. Sassoon, GRAMSCI'S POLITICS, preface thru p. 104
2. Forgacs, Ed., GRAMSCI READER, foreword thru p. 185
3. Stuart Hall, "The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism among the Theorists"
4. Ceoff Eley, "Reading Gramsci in English..."
5. Sassoon, "Gramsci's Subversion of the Language of Politics"

Session III

1. Sassoon, GRAMSCI'S POLITICS, pp. 109-231
2. Forgacs, Editor, GRAMSCI READER, 189-402. NOTE: Please make use of the "Glossary of Key Terms" at 420-431

Session IV

1. David Forgacs, "National-Popular: Genealogy of a Concept" [END PAGE 24]
2. Remo Bodei, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method"
4. Review key ideas of Gramsci's Prison Notebooks (see III)

Session V

1. Sassoon, GRAMSCI'S POLITICS, pp. 249-281, "Postscript: "The People, Intellectuals, & Specialised Knowledge"
2. Leonardo Salamini, "The Intellectuals and the Dynamics of Historical Blocs"
3. Mark E. Kann, "Political Education and Equality: Gramsci Against 'False Consciousness'"
4. Michael Walzer, "Antonio Gramsci's Commitment"

Session VI

1. Giuseppe Vacca, "Intellectuals and the Marxist Theory of the State," 37-67 in APPROACHES...ed. by Sassoon
2. Sassoon, "Hegemony, War of Position & Political Intervention
3. Guci-Glucksmann, "Hegemony and Consent" and
4. Sassoon, "Passive Revolution and the Politics of Reform," all 3 in APPROACHES TO GRAMSCI, Part II, ed. by Sassoon.
5. Tom Nairn, "Antonu Su Gobbu," pp. 159-179 in APPROACHES...
6. R. Radhakrishnan, "Toward an Effective Intellectual: Foucault or Gramsci?" to be published

Session VII

1. Joan Cocks, THE OPPOSITIONAL IMAGINATION

Note: our focus will be on the Introduction, Part I, and the Conclusion; especially her analysis of Gramsci, Williams, Said, Foucault, and Feminist Theory

Session VIII

1. Raymond Williams, MARXISM AND LITERATURE

Note: we will give particular attention to Parts I and II, "Basic Concepts" and "Cultural Theory."

Session IX

1. Leslie T. Good, "Power, Hegemony, and Communication Theory"
2. Charles Conrad, "Work Songs, Hegemony, and Illusions of Self"
3. George Lipsitz, "The Meaning of Memory: Family, Class, and Ethnicity in Early Network Television"
4. John Tirman, "Doing Time" and Marc Gunther, "Left Almost Shut Out of Political Talk Shows"
5. Peter Madsen, "History and Consciousness: Cultural Studies Between Reification and Hegemony"
6. Articles by Tony Bennett and Stuart Hall, in POPULAR CULTURE AND SOCIAL RELATIONS, preface thru p. 49

Session X

1. John Stephens, "Rethinking the transition to Socialism"
2. Barbara Epstein, "Rethinking Social Movement Theory"
3. Harry Boyte & Sara Evans, "Strategies in Search of America: Cultural Radicalism, Populism, and Democratic Culture"
4. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, "Recasting Marxism: Hegemony and New Political Movements" (Oct. 1981)
5. Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and the Integral State in Gramsci: Towards a New Concept of Politics"

Session XI

Laclau and Mouffe, HEGEMONY AND SOCIALIST STRATEGY

Session XII

Laclau and Mouffe, HEGEMONY AND SOCIALIST STRATEGY

(NB. Many of the individual essays referred to in this course description could be easily located through J. Cammett's *Bibliografia Gramsciana*.)

Note: This syllabus appeared in the first issue of the *International Gramsci Society Newsletter* (March, 1992). http://www.internationalgramscisociety.org/igsn/articles/a01_6.shtml