

for the reproduction of capitalism. Mies (1998 [1986]), for example, argued that women play a central role in the maintenance of capitalist relations. There is, she argues, a sexual division of labour: first, in the developed world as housewives, whose labour is unpaid, but vital in maintaining and reproducing the labour force; and second, in the developing world as a source of cheap labour. Women, she later argued, were the 'last colony' (Mies et al. 1988), a view that can be traced back to Luxemburg's claim regarding the role of the colonies in international capitalism.

Gramscianism

In this section we discuss the strand of Marxist theory that has emerged from the work of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's work has become particularly influential in the study of international political economy, where a neo-Gramscian or 'Italian' school is flourishing. Here we shall discuss Gramsci's legacy, and the work of Robert W. Cox, a contemporary theorist who has been instrumental in introducing his work to an International Relations audience.

Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) was a Sardinian and one of the founding members of the Italian Communist Party. He was jailed in 1926 for his political activities, and spent the remainder of his life in prison. Although he is regarded by many as the most creative Marxist thinker of the twentieth century, he produced no single, integrated theoretical treatise. Rather, his intellectual legacy has been transmitted primarily through his remarkable *Prison Notebooks* (Gramsci 1971). The key question that animated Gramsci's theoretical work was: why had it proven to be so difficult to promote revolution in Western Europe? Marx, after all, had predicted that revolution, and the **transition** to socialism, would occur first in the most advanced capitalist societies. But, in the event, it was the Bolsheviks of comparatively backward Russia that had made the first 'breakthrough', while all the subsequent efforts by putative revolutionaries in Western and Central Europe to emulate their success ended in failure. The history of the early twentieth century seemed to suggest, therefore, that there was a flaw in classical Marxist analysis. But where had they gone wrong?

Gramsci's answer revolves around his use of the concept of hegemony, his understanding of which reflects his broader conceptualization of power. Gramsci

Key Points

- Marxist theorists have consistently developed an analysis of the global aspects of international capitalism—an aspect acknowledged by Marx, but not developed in *Capital*.
- World-systems theory can be seen as a direct development of Lenin's work on imperialism and the Latin American Dependency School.
- Feminist writers have contributed to the analysis of international capitalism by focusing on the specific role of women.

develops Machiavelli's view of power as a centaur, half beast, half man: a mixture of coercion and consent. In understanding how the prevailing order was maintained, Marxists had concentrated almost exclusively on the coercive practices and **capabilities** of the state. On this understanding, it was simply coercion, or the fear of coercion, that kept the exploited and alienated majority in society from rising up and overthrowing the system that was the cause of their suffering. Gramsci recognized that while this characterization may have held true in less developed societies, such as pre-revolutionary Russia, it was not the case in the more developed countries of the West. Here the system was also maintained through consent.

Consent, on Gramsci's reading, is created and recreated by the hegemony of the ruling class in society. It is this hegemony that allows the moral, political, and cultural values of the dominant group to become widely dispersed throughout society and to be accepted by subordinate groups and classes as their own. This takes place through the institutions of **civil society**: the **network** of institutions and practices that enjoy some autonomy from the state, and through which groups and individuals organize, represent, and express themselves to each other and to the state (for example, the media, the education system, churches, voluntary organizations).

Several important implications flow from this analysis. The first is that Marxist theory needs to take superstructural phenomena seriously, because while the structure of society may ultimately be a reflection of social relations of production in the economic base, the nature of relations in the superstructure is of great relevance in determining how susceptible that society is to change and transformation. Gramsci used the term

'historic bloc' to describe the mutually reinforcing and reciprocal relationships between the socio-economic relations (base) and political and cultural practices (superstructure) that together underpin a given order. For Gramsci and Gramscians, to reduce analysis to the narrow consideration of economic relationships, on the one hand, or solely to politics and ideas, on the other, is deeply mistaken. It is the interaction that matters.

Gramsci's argument also has crucial implications for political practice. If the hegemony of the ruling class is a key element in the perpetuation of its dominance, then society can only be transformed if that hegemonic position is successfully challenged. This entails a counter-hegemonic struggle in civil society, in which the prevailing hegemony is undermined, allowing an alternative historic bloc to be constructed.

Gramsci's writing reflects a particular time and a particular—and in many ways unique—set of circumstances. This has led several writers to question the broader applicability of his ideas (see Burnham 1991; Germain and Kenny 1998). But the most important test, of course, is how useful ideas and concepts derived from Gramsci's work prove to be when they are removed from their original context and applied to other issues and problems. It is to this that we now turn.

Robert Cox—the analysis of 'world order'

The person who has done most to introduce Gramsci to the study of world politics is the Canadian scholar Robert W. Cox. He has developed a Gramscian approach that involves both a critique of prevailing theories of international relations and international political economy, and the development of an alternative framework for the analysis of world politics.

To explain Cox's ideas, we begin by focusing on one particular sentence in his seminal 1981 article, 'Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory'. The sentence, which has become one of the most often-quoted lines in all of contemporary international relations theory, reads as follows: 'Theory is always for some one, and for some purpose' (1981: 128). It expresses a worldview that follows logically from the Gramscian, and broader Marxist, position that has been explored in this chapter. If ideas and values are (ultimately) a reflection of a particular set of social relations, and are transformed as those relations are themselves transformed, then this suggests that all knowledge (of the social world at least) must reflect a certain context, a certain time, a certain space. Knowledge, in other words,

cannot be objective and timeless in the sense that some contemporary realists, for example, would like to claim.

One key implication of this is that there can be no simple separation between facts and values. Whether consciously or not, all theorists inevitably bring their values to bear on their analysis. This leads Cox to suggest that we need to look closely at each of those theories, those ideas, those analyses that claim to be objective or value-free, and ask who or what is it for, and what purpose does it serve? He subjects realism, and in particular its contemporary variant **neo-realism**, to thoroughgoing critique on these grounds. According to Cox, these theories are for—or serve the interests of—those who prosper under the prevailing order, that is the inhabitants of the developed states, and in particular the ruling elites. Their purpose, whether consciously or not, is to reinforce and legitimate the status quo. They do this by making the current configuration of international relations appear natural and immutable. When realists (falsely) claim to be describing the world as it is, as it has been, and as it always will be, what they are in fact doing is reinforcing the ruling hegemony in the current world order.

Cox contrasts problem-solving theory (that is, theory that accepts the parameters of the present order, and thus helps legitimate an unjust and deeply iniquitous system) with **critical theory**. Critical theory attempts to challenge the prevailing order by seeking out, analysing, and, where possible, assisting social processes that can potentially lead to emancipatory change.

One way in which theory can contribute to these emancipatory goals is by developing a theoretical understanding of world orders that grasps both the sources of stability in a given system, and also the dynamics of processes of transformation. In this context, Cox draws on Gramsci's notion of hegemony and transposes it to the international realm, arguing that hegemony is as important for maintaining stability and continuity here as it is at the domestic level. According to Cox, successive dominant powers in the international system have shaped a world order that suits their interests, and have done so not only as a result of their coercive capabilities, but also because they have managed to generate broad consent for that order, even among those who are disadvantaged by it.

For the two hegemonies that Cox analyses (the UK and the USA), the ruling hegemonic idea has been 'free trade'. The claim that this system benefits everybody has been so widely accepted that it has attained 'common sense' status. Yet the reality is that while 'free trade' is very much in the interests of the hegemon (which,

as the most efficient producer in the global economy, can produce goods which are competitive in all markets, so long as they have access to them), its benefits for peripheral states and regions are far less apparent. Indeed, many would argue that 'free trade' is a hindrance to their economic and social development. The degree to which a state can successfully produce and reproduce its hegemony is an indication of the extent of its power. The success of the USA in gaining worldwide acceptance for neo-liberalism suggests just how dominant the current hegemon has become.

But despite the dominance of the present world order, Cox does not expect it to remain unchallenged. Rather, he maintains Marx's view that capitalism is an inherently unstable system, riven by inescapable contradictions. Inevitable economic crises will act as a catalyst for the emergence of counter-hegemonic movements (see **Case Study 1**). The success of such movements is, however, far from assured. In this sense, thinkers like Cox face the future on the basis of a dictum popularized by Gramsci—that is, combining 'pessimism of the intellect' with 'optimism of the will'.

Case Study 1 Occupy!

it... it's been a case of 'privatise profits and socialise risks; save the