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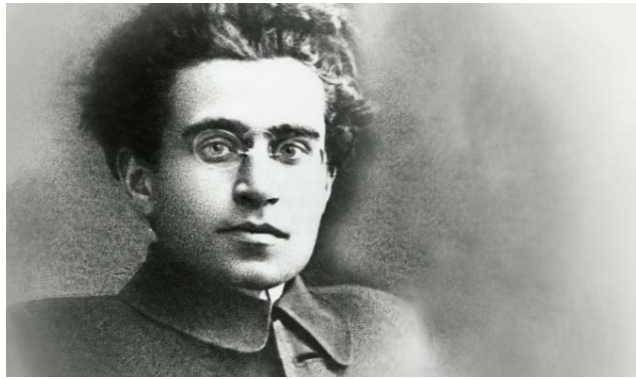
European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY RAMZY BAROUD

26.07.2024

## Dear West: Your ‘Age of Monsters’ Has Begun



Antonio Gramsci, 1921.

Antonio Gramsci was not a professional philosopher. His intellect was refreshingly situated within an inherent bias towards the common people, the ‘subaltern’ classes, particularly the working class.

He argued that all people are essentially intellectuals, in the sense that all people possess the intellectual faculties for rational thinking and deduction, though “not all men have in society the function of intellectuals”.

Thus, intellectualism should not exist for its own sake, but as a direct response to the collective needs of society.

In the same way that change in society is driven by class struggles, intellectuals are also involved in similar struggles, which are intrinsically linked to the cultural, ideological or political spheres.

There are two kinds of intellectuals who define each period of human history, according to the anti-fascist Italian intellectual: traditional intellectuals – often agents of bygone eras who

continue to command some kind of influence over society; and organic intellectuals, who are the natural yield of the collective experiences of their own classes.

The latter group matters most. Quite often Gramsci's 'organic intellectual' is misconstrued to reflect a positive connotation. In fact, any class, even domineering, powerful classes that represent the interests of the few, can have their own 'organic intellectuals', as do the oppressed classes.

Theoretically, each group of intellectuals is on a mission to achieve a degree of cultural hegemony – 'predominance by consent'. When a specific class commands a dominant intellectual and moral leadership over society, in parallel, it also achieves a form of political, economic and cultural hegemony, which naturally leads to popular consent.

Consent, over time, becomes 'common sense', popular attitudes over long periods of time that render them to be permanent, uncontested truths. This 'philosophy of the popular masses' is, on its own, neither good nor bad. It is a predictable outcome of the protracted influence of hegemonic cultural forces, in addition to folklore, superstitions and the like.

Instead of dismissing 'common sense' as an irrelevant social construct, Gramsci believes that it can be rehabilitated into 'good sense', because every common sense embodies its own 'healthy nucleus'.

Though principled to the core, Gramsci believed in exploiting all venues that would allow organic intellectuals, those who represent the oppressed, marginalized and the working class, to achieve the required cultural hegemony needed for lasting change in society.

He believed in critical engagement within all groups that may possess that healthy nucleus, which would convert common sense into 'good sense,' through a process of 'contradictory consciousness'.

Yet, the process towards a fundamental change in society should never be expected to be an easy one. Monumental changes often occur following periods of massive breakdowns – the Interregnum – where "the old is dying and the new cannot be born."

Gramsci, a brilliant, working-class organic intellectual, died young, soon after his release from a fascist prison in Italy, in 1937.

His vision about society, culture and politics, however, will always remain relevant, because he developed his ideas through direct engagement with society and was himself involved in the struggle, which cost him nine years in prison.

I find it important to reflect on Gramsci's understanding of the process of change in society due to the ongoing chaos underway in various western countries: the fragmentation of the so-

called liberal order, the potential return of Donald Trump's popular politics, the rise of the far right, the intensifying war on refugees, migrants and other marginalized groups, and more.

Though it is convenient to, once again, blame a single individual, political party or ideology for everything that is going wrong, the truth is far more complex.

True, Emmanuel Macron is a poor compromise in a highly polarized French society, which has been inching closer towards far-right fascism for years.

It is also true that Rishi Sunak and the Tories proved to be but a duplicate of other self-serving politicians who invested more in fortifying their power and influence than in achieving any degree of social justice in Britain.

It is particularly true that US Democrats have spent far more time smearing the Right's bogeyman, Trump, than in confronting fundamental problems in their economy or truly fixing foreign policy blunders of the past.

There are many other such truths that may imply easy fixes to supposedly singular problems. But the crisis in the West is much deeper than the mistakes of an opportunistic politician or a senile candidate. It is rather a crisis of 'good sense'.

The 'common sense', whether real or imaginary, which unified the west for decades, starting soon after WWII, no longer truly represents common, shared values.

Each side in the ongoing polarization has invested in its own 'common sense', making a claim to its own 'cultural hegemony' without ever achieving the required 'predominance by consent'.

The vast lack of trust in the 'system' becomes the only result of intellectual polarization.

Meanwhile, the 'subaltern' groups remain marginalized and, in some cases, completely irrelevant. This leads to political breakdowns, cultural paralysis and, ultimately, outright conflict.

This potential all-out conflict is Gramsci's Interregnum – the old's final fight for relevance, and the lack of powerful new forces that could serve as alternatives. This is also known as the 'age of monsters'.

The West has already entered this phase, the consequences of which are already felt, not just in the west, but all across the world, from Ukraine to Palestine and beyond.

Ramzy Baroud is a journalist and the Editor of The Palestine Chronicle. He is the author of five books. His latest is "These Chains Will Be Broken: Palestinian Stories of Struggle and Defiance in Israeli Prisons" (Clarity Press, Atlanta). Dr. Baroud is a Non-resident Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Islam and

Global Affairs (CIGA), Istanbul Zaim University (IZU). His website  
is [www.ramzybaroud.net](http://www.ramzybaroud.net)

JULY 25, 2024