



THE FORMATION OF INTELLECTUALS: GRAMSCI AND THE POLITICS OF CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

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ABSTRACT:

This paper explores Antonio Gramsci's conception of the intellectual as articulated in "*The Formation of Intellectuals*." Gramsci challenges the notion of the intellectual as an autonomous or detached figure, proposing instead that intellectuals are produced within specific class structures and serve the political and economic interests of those classes. The essay examines Gramsci's idea that every social group, as it consolidates its position, creates its own stratum of intellectuals who articulate and legitimize the class's worldview. These intellectuals not only define the identity and function of their class but also play a crucial role in organizing consent and maintaining hegemony. Gramsci's distinction between "being" an intellectual and "functioning" as one underscores his argument that intellectual activity is universal, yet the function of the intellectual remains tied to social power and class dominance.



In his essay "*The Formation of Intellectuals*," Antonio Gramsci conceives of intellectuals as a "specialized" category that does not exist autonomously. Intellectuals, he argues, are not connected to society merely on the social plane but also on the political and economic ones. Their existence and function are inseparable from the class relations that define a given historical moment. Gramsci discusses how intellectuals are formed and how they emerge from the conditions of class development. They come into being as a class begins to consolidate itself. For example, the rise of a new class of entrepreneurs brings with it a new stratum of intellectuals. These intellectuals both *elaborate* the role of the emerging class in society and are, in turn, *elaborated* by it. They articulate the class's purpose, endow it with a sense of homogeneity and identity, and help define its historical function. The entrepreneur, to some extent, must also act as an intellectual—possessing technical knowledge, practical know-how, and the capacity to organize society in ways that serve the class's interests. Yet, it is the intellectuals who perform the essential function of mobilizing public opinion and generating consent in favor of this dominant class.

According to Gramsci, there is a distinction between the *being* and the *function* of an intellectual. While everyone is, in some sense, an intellectual—since all people think, have opinions, and exercise a sense of taste—not everyone performs the function of an intellectual. Even those engaged in manual or physical labor participate in forms of intellectual activity, albeit in a limited way. However, those intellectuals who perform the crucial function of *elaboration*—the development and dissemination of ideas that sustain the class structure—are the ones who facilitate and perpetuate the dominance of the class that produces them.

1.

Are intellectuals an autonomous group? Are they independent social groups?

Or

Do intellectuals spring from /work for a social class at a given time in history?

Intellectuals are a "specialized" category. Specialized in both the technical and political sense.

For Gramsci each class that comes into existence and establishes itself "creates" alongside itself "organically, one or more strata of Intellectuals".

What is the significance of "one or more strata"? One kind of intellectuals could be technicians and another that would theorize and give validity to the actions of the entrepreneur, that is, the actions of the class. A stratum would be the "industrial technician" another would be "specialist in political economy" a third would be "organizers of a new culture" that is the thinking group. All these strata of intellectuals are meant to elaborate and spread the ideas of the class that has appointed them but also given them specific roles to play in society.

All these strata are organically linked to the class. The role of the industrial technician is created alongside the class that needs him/her. It is not created in vacuum but is created in concrete history. Same is the case with political economist and organizer of a "new culture". A new culture must show its seeds or beginnings which one can organize.

This group of intellectuals has the function of giving the class that birthed them so to speak identity and unity of purpose that is homogeneity. The intellectuals elaborate to the class what it is and what its role is. The intellectuals give the class "an awareness of its own function". The class becomes conscious of itself with the help of intellectuals that give it a consciousness and intellectuals tell them of their "own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields".

Intellectuals first have the job of telling the class what it is and what its function is in society. Later in the essay Gramsci would extend the role for the intellectual as one that must convince society the usefulness and the ethical nature of this class. These intellectuals would turn would Marx called class ideas into "universal" ideas and also the rational ideas of the age.

Thus two very important roles the intellectuals have --one elaborate the ideas of the class for the class itself and two elaborate them to convince the rest of the society.

2.

At a specific point of time in history, believes Gramsci, the **entrepreneur** comes up in history as an active agent. How is he recognized and interpreted? For Gramsci, he is a new entrant with traits of his own. He is powerful enough to wield influence and dictate terms. He is visualized as one equipped with many skills that might establish in the long run as a presence to reckon with, a creator and an inspirer of new trends. What specific skills does he carry? We are told that,

The [capitalist] entrepreneur *himself* represents a higher level of social elaboration, already characterized by a certain directive [*dirigente*—Directive in the hegemonic (not the dominating) sense] and technical (i.e. intellectual) capacity: he must have a certain technical capacity, not only in the limited sphere of his activity and initiative but in other spheres as well, at least in those which are closest to economic production. He must be an organizer of masses of men; he must be an organizer of the "confidence" of investors in his business, of the customers for his product, etc.

Here, the first point relates to the description of a "higher level of social elaboration" than the individuals he would employ for his work. This is crucial to our understanding. The entrepreneur knows what his aim is, what is it that he wants to achieve. More, he has the capability, in the linguistic

sense, to explain with lucidity his intent, his purpose and the direction the activity is to take. Words such as “directive” and “direction” are to be kept in mind particularly. The phenomenon he is to create would be under his guidance and to meet parameters that he would set. He is to be the “organizer” of other people, not merely in the physical sense that he contacts them and talks to them for participating in the venture he would control, but at the mental level as well. He shares with them his perspective which is also in the middle of forming itself. This is meant by Gramsci when he says, “[the entrepreneur] must be an organizer of the ‘confidence’ of investors in his business, of the customers for his product.” Thus the entrepreneur is the reigning person here who involves others in dreaming his dream, as it were. Let us keep in mind that the main intellectual in the case is the entrepreneur. It is explained lucidly and in detail by Gramsci thus:

[Entrepreneur] must have the capacity to be an organizer of society in general, including all its complex organism of services, right up to the state organism, because of the need to create the conditions most favorable to the expansion of their own class, or at the least they must possess the capacity to choose the deputies (specialized employees) to whom to entrust this activity of organizing the general system of relationships essential to the business itself.

3.

When Gramsci discusses the **formation of intellectuals**, he does so in a context. It is that of the actual conditions at a given moment that produced specific climate for the intellectuals to emerge and play a role. He takes up for discussion of the issue the “typical” category of “**ecclesiastics**” who for a whole phase of history “held a monopoly of a number of important services: religious ideology, that is the philosophy and science of the age, together with schools, education, morality, justice, charity, good works, etc.” The point of focus in this description is “the landed aristocracy” that thrived in the early medieval period.

First, the use of “services”. It denotes something extraneous to the social class, something that was brought in for running the system from a distance. Squared asked, what would be the need of these activities for productivity of the age? In **services** enumerated by Gramsci are “religious ideology” and “the philosophy and science of the age.” The former is of giving a belief system, an item of great use, and the latter is of concrete production of ideas. **Education** too would get attached to the latter. These services might remain beyond their time and utility, when a new era starts with a different social class at the helm of affairs. For this reason, it may be said that initially the providers of these “services” would be **organic intellectuals** of the class under whose control they operate, and later in another epoch, they would be active as **traditional intellectuals**. In such a situation, the two categories of intellectuals would collide and coalesce simultaneously depending on needs and forces of the time.

4. So, according to Gramsci the entrepreneur “himself represents a higher level of social elaboration” which includes having a “directive” capacity along with the “technical” one. “Directive” here suggests “political” and “hegemonic” that is, control that works invisibly, while “technical” is the specialized know-how. The entrepreneur must have both qualities according to Gramsci. And, “If not all entrepreneur, at least an elite among them must have the capacity to be an organizer of society in general”. The *elite* among the entrepreneur must take up the job of *organizing* society.

What constitutes this organizing? Gramsci gives us a list:

It includes “all its (society’s) complex organism of services, right up to the state organism” which means the entrepreneur must know how to work with state agencies and control them, the

entrepreneur must steer the state machinery in its favor. This is not an easy task. One would require ones' own people in bureaucracy, in the executive, in political parties—all those people who are attached to the functioning of the state would have to be organized and regulated by the entrepreneur. Why? Gramsci says “because of the need to create the conditions most favorable to the expansion of its class”.

Either the entrepreneurs do this job or at least they must have the “capacity to choose the **deputies**” which Gramsci calls “**specialized employees**” in other words the **intellectuals**, to whom it can “entrust this activity of organizing the general system of relationships external to the business itself”. Note that the intellectual is “external” to production and to business itself. This intellectual group is crafted to purely further the interest of the class while certain benefits are extended to it by the dominant class. This category of intellectual would be called “**organic intellectual**” in Gramsci’s scheme of thing. Again who is an organic intellectual? “The organic intellectual” is one “which every new class creates alongside itself and elaborates in the course of its development”, and which are actually “specializations” of the “new social type which the new class has brought into prominence”.

5. Gramsci next takes the historical example of the feudal lords who in their day of ascent were “possessors” of “technical capacity and military capacity”. They had “directive” (that is hegemonic and technical) control over the state organism. And it is only when the “aristocracy loses its monopoly of techno-military capacity”, that is, when their knowledge and capacity becomes outdated and is overtaken by a new technical capacity (for instance wind mill overtaken by steam engine and so one with the advent of capitalism) to repeat, it is only when aristocracy loses this monopoly of “techno-military capacity that the **crisis of feudalism** begins”.

What about the organic intellectuals of feudalism? Who are they?

For the aristocracy the organic intellectuals are the ecclesiastics who later when feudalism declines become traditional intellectuals in the era of capitalism. By traditional intellectuals Gramsci means the religious group those who hold rank and office in the church whom he would call the ecclesiastics in the essay.

Gramsci says “it is to be noted that the mass of the peasantry, although it performs an essential function in the world of production, does not elaborate its own “organic” intellectuals”. The peasantry is a part of the production process (just as workers are under capitalism”) but the peasantry did not have its own organic intellectuals. Interestingly however, Gramsci notes that the peasantry gave to “other social groups” intellectuals—“although it is from the peasantry that other social groups draw many of their intellectuals and a high proportion of traditional intellectuals are of peasant origin”. For instance, the parish priest whose parents may have been peasants and who has been able to study and rise up to the rank of a local priest.

--Note that Gramsci in the essay is working on a historical model and talks about its variations that may exist and in fact that have existed in the past. He does not predict models of society. He shows how societies have developed and while there is a rule that he gives us, there are always exceptions to the rule as well. While he explains certain things he leaves out certain others for he finds them a digression. But Gramsci is aware that he has opened a new window for study. Often you would note that he states in the essay “the problem is a complex one” or it “is a question to be examined separately” and “must be studied concretely”. These instances tell us that Gramsci is still formulating a theory and is largely open-ended in the essay. In fact, he starts with observation and builds a theory around it.

For instance, in the next paragraph point no. 2 he says “every ‘essential’ social group which emerges into history out of the preceding economic structure ad as an expression of a development of this structure, has found (At least in all of history up to the present) categories of intellectuals already in existence”.

Here the emphasis is on what has been seen in history and what has been “found”.

Now come to what he is really saying here—that even as economic structures change which means the mode of production changes, it has been found that certain intellectual social groups that

emerge with one class may not entirely die when that class is wiped off by another one. This is more than evident in the case of the ecclesiastics. Now the church intellectuals clearly in the time of feudalism were its organic intellectuals. But Gramsci claims that when capitalism displaced feudalism, this group of intellectuals, the ecclesiastics, refused to die with its parent class as it were and became traditional intellectuals as opposed to the new group of intellectuals who would support the cause of the bourgeoisie. They stood their ground and continued to garner considerable support even when the class that created them became obsolete and redundant.

Let's use some quotations from the essay to substantiate the point:

"The category of ecclesiastics can be considered the category of intellectuals organically bound to the landed aristocracy". This group in the heyday of feudalism "held a monopoly over important services" which included "religious ideology, that is the philosophy and science of the age, together with schools, education, morality, justice, charity, good works etc". All these functions were carried on by the church and its scholars. Importantly, all these services are required for effective hegemony over the masses and for the feudal lords to maintain their status quo.

However, Gramsci notes, even in that period the special group of ecclesiastics showed some independence of will and often came in conflict with the class it belonged to—"it had equal status juridically with the aristocracy", the ecclesiastics also owned land and property, thus the "monopoly held by the ecclesiastics in the superstructural field was not exercised without a struggle or without limitations, and hence there took place the birth, in various forms (to be gone into and studied concretely) of other categories" to support the monarch. This means that even aristocracy had to build up more categories of intellectuals to support their domination. It could not depend solely on the ecclesiastics. Thus feudalism created a set of intellectuals to expand the strength of the "central power of the monarch". These other categories of intellectuals included, "the formation of the *nobles de robe*, with its own privileges, a stratum of administrators, etc., scholars and scientists, non-ecclesiastical philosophers etc".

Thus with the fall of feudalism, every social intellectual group attached to it also crumbled down. But not so in the case of the ecclesiastics who had been able to get relative independence from the feudal class early on. They enjoyed what Gramsci calls an "uninterrupted historical continuity" and with their "special qualification, they put themselves forward" in the new times "as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group". They retain their individual character even when capitalism, the new mode of production, comes to the fore in society. At this stage the ecclesiastics turn into **traditional intellectuals**.

6. New point raised by Gramsci: "What are the 'maximum' limits of acceptance of the term 'intellectual'?" Can "diverse and disparate" intellectuals be put under one category? Also is there a category of intellectuals and non-intellectuals in society? All these questions can be answered according to Gramsci by not looking into the "intrinsic nature of intellectual activities", that is, not in the domain of civil society /culture where intellectuals operate but in the base i.e. "within the general complex of social relations".

How do we define a worker? Is the worker "characterized" by the work he does in the factory? Does "manual" work define and characterize him? According to Gramsci that is not the case. A worker is characterized by "performing this work in specific conditions and in specific social relations". He also adds that no work is "purely physical labour". All of us use both physical and mental labour in any and all activity. Thus in any "physical work, even the most degraded and mechanical, there exists a minimum of technical qualification, that is, a minimum of creative intellectual activity". This is as true for the worker as it was for the entrepreneur as discussed earlier as the latter must have certain intellectual know-how that is "qualifications of an intellectual nature" even as his basic function in society is not that of an intellectual, his part in society is determined by "the social relations which specifically characterise" and place him in "the position of the entrepreneur within industry".

The conclusion thus reached by Gramsci is this seminal point of the essay (oft quoted and asked in examination)—

“All men are intellectuals, one could say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals”.

What does this mean? First, all of us think, analyse and act. Secondly that one can speak of intellectuals and non-intellectuals only when referring to the “professional category of the intellectuals”—where one may have the ‘profession’ of an intellectual and the job involves “intellectual elaboration”. Contrarily, one might exert as profession “muscular-nervous effort”. However, in life and in society there is no category of non-intellectuals. As Gramsci says “non-intellectuals do not exist” and “*homo faber* (the productive man working with skills) cannot be separated from *homo sapiens* (the thinking man)”. This is because—

Each man, finally, outside his professional activity carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a ‘philosopher’, an artist, a man of taste. He participates in the 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, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought.

Gramsci suggests that each person by definition is an intellectual because one is ever involved in affairs of society, family, culture among others. One is constantly defining, shaping/reshaping ideas related to moral code of conduct, the right and wrong, art and culture, custom and tradition. One is ever engaged in the conception of the world and in furthering its ideas or modifying it when they become outdated. Finally one works towards bringing in “new modes of thought”.

Now why has Gramsci brought in this point? Let’s connect the dots.

He has been speaking about the emergence of a new system, a new mode of living that corresponds to the base where in the present case in capitalism the entrepreneur has come into existence and has brought along a whole new system. The entrepreneur brings along a group of intellectuals who would elaborate and spread the ideas of the new class in a positive way so that the reign of the entrepreneur is established, nurtured and maintained. There would be a group of traditional intellectuals who may not die with the class that once brought them into existence. Such a group is known to have existed in societies in the form of the ecclesiastics. The focus shifts back to maintaining the status-quo of the capitalist class. Now since “all men are intellectuals” and are engaged in the conception and modification of the world they live in, it is the job of capitalism to ensure that all groups in society remain content with the working of the new system and that they must not be driven to change it or rebel against it. Thus ideas that support this class must remain ever active and acceptable in society because their validity and requirement is being constantly checked and regulated by “*homo sapiens*”. This also underlines the important role that the organic intellectuals of the class play in the spread of these ideas. These ideas as Gramsci would show later would contribute to the “hegemony” of the class in question.

The second part of the quote-- “but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” takes us to the category of intellectuals whose job and function it is to elaborate the ideas of a particular class specifically. While all men may be intellectuals in the general sense there are some who take up the function of this specialized intellectual in society.

Gramsci finds that under capitalism the definition of the intellectual is itself skewed. It necessarily creates division between the muscular-nervous (physical labour) and the intellectual-elaborative functions, making the latter appear elitist and refined. In his words,

The traditional and vulgarized type of the intellectual is given by the man of letters, the philosopher, the artist. Therefore journalists, who claim to be men of letters, philosophers, artists, also regard themselves as the ‘true’ intellectuals.

In Gramsci's scheme of things, a desirable society is one where "the muscular-nervous effort itself" which is "perpetually innovating the physical and social world, becomes the foundation of a new and integral conception of the world". People engaged in manual work are the ones who are actually in touch with the base, that is the arena of production which is continually changing and innovating itself and thereby society. The 'intellectuals' on the other hand are far from this sphere. Ideally then according to Gramsci it is those with muscular-nervous effort who should be prioritized. However, in capitalist societies the inverse is the case. Accordingly, when those with physical labour take the lead a new equilibrium would be found between the physical and the intellectual work where the "muscular-nervous" function which too is to some degree intellectual would take precedence over the pure intellectual and in fact guide it. As he puts it:

In the modern world, (that would replace capitalism in the coming times), technical education, closely bound to industrial labour even at the most primitive and unqualified level, must form the basis of the new type of intellectual.

7. This "new type of intellectual" would be the intellectual of the proletariat. Gramsci defines "The mode of being" of this new intellectual as one that

Can no longer (note that it was the case earlier under capitalism) consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passion, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator.

What he means is that this intellectual must believe in the very cause one is fighting for. One must believe in its ideals and therefore work with a genuine zeal for society and not be driven by selfish interest or vanity. One must not look for rewards as was the case under the capitalist mode of living. The need of the hour according to Gramsci is to proceed from "technique-as-work to "technique-as-science". Now "science" in Marxism carries a different meaning. Marxism in fact is understood as a scientific outlook. Science here is not seen as an isolated practice but as integrally linked to history and its progression. Marx "viewed science as a progressive, potentially and actually liberating force in increasing man's power over nature and his own destiny"--from the pdf shared earlier *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* p.491.

To return to Gramsci's discussion, such an intellectual then needs to move towards "technique as science" and work towards "the humanistic conception of history". A "humanistic conception of history" necessarily involves the well being of all human beings. To build a new world one must have a conception of the past seen as history which means as conflict of forces that have been active in the historical past. The realization that comes from such evaluation is –

Thus only humans, of all living organisms, communicate in symbols and think conceptually. Life in peace, freedom and creativity has made accelerated evolution and the flowering of culture possible. Aggressiveness and destructiveness brought about periods of stagnation and decay. While these are all recognized as constituents of actually existing human nature, the potential of praxis is the ideal end which gives a sense of direction to human self-creation in history. (*A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* p.246)

In this sense, the present according to Gramsci must be built on ideas of humanism. Without these attributes the intellectual would remain "specialized" but not "directive (specialised and political)". Note the difference between the two words. Importantly, the new intellectual according to Gramsci must have on one hand the technical capacity and intellectual specialization (like the intellectual of the capitalist class) and on the other political perspective. Put briefly, being political and specialized, in one word directive, is what characterizes the new intellectual of the proletariat. Needless to say one must have a humanistic conception of history and a scientific temper. This broadly defines

the organic intellectual of the new class that Gramsci visualizes for the future that is still forming itself, the proletariat.

8. Gramsci returns to the concept of the intellectuals and outlines the attributes of this stratum.

Note –

- They are “historically formed specialised categories” meant for “the exercise of the intellectual function”
- “They are formed in connection with all social groups”
- But specially in “connection with the dominant social group”
- They undergo “extensive and complex elaboration in connection with the dominant social group”
- Any class (Gramsci uses the word “group”) “developing towards dominance” must “struggle to assimilate and to conquer ‘ideologically’ the traditional intellectuals” and the task of “this assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group (class) in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals”.

9. Gramsci observes that the societies that emerged from medieval times onwards gave particular importance to intellectual functions and categories. From then on to the modern times attempt has been made to “multiply and narrow various specializations”. Educational institutions with all their levels and hierarchies in modern societies stand testimony to this development.

In the context, Gramsci initiates the discussion on “schools”, their importance in society and the role they play in building the base for intellectuals. He notes, “School is the instrument through which intellectuals of various levels are elaborated”. However he doesn’t explore at length the nature of the institution and its working in society. This aspect would be picked up for extensive discussion later by another Marxist theorist in your course Louis Althusser. In fact a lot of what Gramsci discusses in this part of the essay would become the subject of discussion for Althusser later. Now let’s return to Gramsci’s idea of the school.

“The number and gradation of specialized schools” says Gramsci tells us how advanced a society is. The “more extensive the ‘area’ covered by education and the more numerous the ‘vertical’ ‘levels’ of schooling, the more complex is the cultural world”. So if education is both extensive and intensive in a society one would consider it a highly evolved state. The example offered by Gramsci here is of industrialization—“the industrialization of a country can be measured” first “by how well equipped it is in the production of machines with which to produce machines” and secondly “in the manufacture of ever more accurate instruments for making both machines and further instruments for making machines”. The point here is again specialization—measuring how evolved is the area of specialization of knowledge in a country. When a country begins to produce not products but machines, that is, when machines produce machines of production, you know that civilization has really evolved in such a society and “can be regarded as the most complex in the technical-industrial field”.

Gramsci applies the same principle in the case of intellectuals. Here too “quantity and quality” both matter. You need to have primary education the “widest base” to expand the dissemination of knowledge. From this base “selection and elaboration of top intellectual” takes place. Finally, “the varying distribution of different types of school (classical and professional)” and the “varying aspirations of different categories within these strata determine, or give form to, the production of various branches of intellectual specialization”. This is how Gramsci explains the process of formation and specialization of intellectuals that happen, one, historically when a new economic force comes into being and two, through specific structuring of the education system.

Next, Gramsci notes that “the relationship between the intellectuals and the world of production is not as direct as it is with the fundamental social groups” but it is ‘mediated’ by the “whole fabric of society and by the complex of superstructures, of which the intellectuals are precisely the ‘functionaries’”. (Refer to our discussion on the base and superstructure model where the civil society is distant from the base and constitutes social forms and practices--that are higher up in the superstructure).

10. Gramsci divides the superstructure into two distinct levels—one he calls “civil society”, the “private” sphere and the other “political society” or “the State”. Both these levels “correspond to the function of ‘hegemony’” that is they contribute to maintaining the hegemony of the dominant group /class and at the same time correspond to “direct domination” that is control by the State ensured with the help of its branches that is the “juridical government”. The state exercises control through orders and commands, imprisonment and penalty that is through physical means.

Gramsci discusses both these levels separately tagging them as points 1. and 2. in the discussion. In short, this is what he means--

1. Spontaneous consent given by masses
2. The apparatus of state coercive power which enforces discipline on those who do not ‘consent’.

These are the two levels of superstructure according to Gramsci where hegemony gets exercised. It is when spontaneous consent fails that the second “coercive power” comes into action and takes over the situation of crisis by imposing command. Note that spontaneous 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”. Thus when this group/class ceases to hold that position, the consent and sanction it receives from the superstructure would also diminish.

The intellectuals contribute to this function of “organizing social hegemony and state domination”—“the intellectual’s are dominant group’s ‘deputies’ exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government”.

Hegemony (Civil Society) and Separation of Powers

This is a short piece written around 1930-32 during Gramsci’s prison years, and included in *Prison Notebooks*. The discussion on hegemony in the book revolves around the intellectual hegemony of the ruling class. Gramsci emphasizes that there must be “hegemonic activity” even before a potential class comes to power. This entails that intellectual work must go on to prepare grounds for the new class that would become the dominant class. When it comes to power it should be seen as acceptable to the masses. People in general should see its ascent as natural and give spontaneously consent to it.

Specifically in the piece in question, Gramsci briefly dwells on the idea of “Hegemony” and its connection with the State and its institutions. He notes:

1. “The separation of powers” (the executive, legislative and judiciary functions) “is a product of the struggle between civil society and political society in a specific historical period”. Civil society is the space for intellectual activity where hegemony is exercised and political society constitutes the State and its wings.
2. In history, an “unstable equilibrium between the classes” occurs when social forces are in the process of change, when the new ruling class is yet to consolidate itself and the old dominant class has not completely faded from the scene. At such times “certain categories of intellectuals” are “still too closely tied to the old dominant classes”. Consequently, Gramsci notes, there occurs a conflict between civil society (which belonged to the previous era and carried its ethos) and the State (which has come into being vis-à-vis the new class).
3. The State or political society monopolized by the new ruling class actively works to “absorb” the old intellectuals symbolized by the Church in the discussion, in order to preserve its monopoly.
4. The Liberal ideology of the ruling class (which includes economic and political liberalism) is facilitated by the principle of “separation of powers”. It is also the source of its weakness—it is through bureaucracy that the state monopolized by the ruling class “exercises coercive power and at a certain point it becomes a caste” (that is, it becomes a position of power).
5. Finally the important point is that “all three powers”—the executive, legislative and judiciary—are not independent of each other and the ruling class. They are all “organs of political hegemony”. They differ in degree and “hegemonic apparatus is more sensitive in this sector”.

Elsewhere in *Prison Notebooks* in “Modern Prince” Gramsci explains the idea of hegemony in the following way:

Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed. (161)

In other words, the leading group should make space for and if necessary sacrifice some of its economic interests without compromising on the essential interests, that is, it should maintain economic supremacy in production. Hegemony according to Gramsci is complete when the larger interests of the ruling class are taken care of and its leadership maintained along with certain minor giveaways that are provided to other sections of society.