

## **Hegemony**

Gramsci used the concept of hegemony to refer to how a dominant class maintains its rule through ideological, moral and intellectual leadership. A class can be said to merely 'dominate' antagonistic social groups when it resorts to open or veiled coercion through State power to impose its will. It can be said to be 'hegemonic' when it also provides 'intellectual and moral leadership' over allied groups in civil society. Hegemony thus involves ideologically transcending narrow sectional interests and advancing universally acceptable notions while maintaining class rule. Among subordinate social groups a struggle for hegemonic leadership ensues during 'a crisis of authority'.

If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer leading but only 'dominant', exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.

The idea of hegemony almost became hegemonic itself in the 1980s in various political projects for 'historic blocs' associated with the 'post-Marxism' of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and in the disciplinary claims of Cultural Studies.

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