

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2019 · 20 marks

According to Gramsci, 'hegemony is primarily based on the organisation of consent.' Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 Marx's missing revolution → Gramsci's answer is hegemony → rule by organised, manufactured consent, not force alone
- R2 hegemony = control by cultural means → consent produced, not freely given → "organisation" is the operative word

Body flow

civil society (family / school / church) → existing order as common sense → intellectuals: traditional (falsely independent) + organic (voice of their class) → philosophy for masses → bourgeoisie unquestioned → consent also organised by accommodation (subaltern demands absorbed → particular interest as general) → Gramsci's inversion of Marx: belief is the basis of state power, not the reverse → Anderson: state as instrument of socialisation, shaping minds

Counter-view

"primarily" not "wholly" → coercion never disappears → Gramsci (p. 12): apparatus disciplines those who do not consent → force as the armour behind persuasion → consent itself uneven → Jackson (p. 570): "contradictory consciousness" — approbation/apathy, resistance/resignation

Conclusion routes

- R1 rule rests first on organised consent (civil society + intellectuals) → force held in reserve
- R2 consent primary because organised into common sense → coercion the backstop, not the foundation

For Antonio Gramsci, the central puzzle was why the revolution Karl Marx predicted never arrived in advanced capitalist societies. His answer was hegemony - the rule of the bourgeoisie not by force alone, but by the active organisation of consent. The word "organisation" is decisive. Consent here is not freely given; it is produced.

Gramsci locates this work in civil society - the family, the school, the church - which teaches respect for the existing order as common sense. Traditional intellectuals believe themselves independent, yet uphold the dominant ideology; organic intellectuals articulate the worldview of their class. Consent is also organised by accommodation: the ruling class absorbs some subaltern demands, so that its narrow interest appears as the general interest.

The consent is primary follows from Gramsci's inversion of Marx - belief and agreement become the basis of state power, not power the basis of belief. According to Perry Anderson, the Gramscian state becomes an instrument of socialisation, shaping minds rather than only enforcing order.

Yet "primarily" is not "wholly". Coercion never disappears. The state's apparatus, Gramsci writes, "enforces discipline on those groups who do not consent"; it is the armour standing behind persuasion. Consent itself is uneven - Jackson calls it a "contradictory consciousness" mixing approbation and apathy, resistance & resignation.

The statement therefore holds. Bourgeois rule rests first on organised consent, secured through civil society and intellectuals, with force held quietly in reserve.