

Marxism, Hegemony and the Cooperatives of the Filipinos

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We are in an interregnum. The crisis is not to be resolved by wishing away the problems or harking back to a past era. It is necessary to create a radical alternative, and to provide the progressive forces with a new sense of direction. Neither the worship of old prescriptions nor the incantation of that which we find most reassuring will necessarily serve as well.

Geoff Hodgson, 1984

Marxist socialism in a number of varieties has certainly had a drastic effect on the political history of the 20th century; and if the effect has been somewhat different from that initially hoped for and advertised, there is always the future to be called in to redress the balance of the present.

John Dunn, 1993

Introduction

Central to Antonio Gramsci's considerable contribution to Marxism is his theory of hegemony which is based on the premise that ideas can have the weight of the material force. The ideological

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struggle in terms of hegemony characterizes a system of order and various means of control wherein the working class absorbs the ideas of the dominant group. For Gramsci, the ideal ideological circumstance should be popular control and argues for counter-hegemonic mediations identified by a long and protracted process in the designated social sphere, patiently advancing for political association and participation, from one stage to the next.

This paper explores the relationship of Gramsci's Marxism and a cooperative movement that deserve greater recognition and more careful analysis to reflect their significance in the lives of the Filipino people. The movement's expanding base from microfinance, health, and housing to agribusiness, presents a critical perspective, not always found in mainstream texts, with which to understand and explain an emancipatory, social phenomena in contemporary Philippine society. It considers the cooperatives of the Filipinos as representing a distinct alternative that exists within capitalism. To what extent then can cooperatives, built from the bottom up, help create the conditions in the country for a counter-hegemony? What has been the significance and implications of the cooperatives in terms of civil society being a precondition to the democratic process?

Marxism, cooperatives and Gramsci

Marxism nourished a sense of human collectivity, of humanity capable of confronting inequity and oppression. It is a science of tendencies and includes struggle, strategy and choice. Traditional Marxism believed that political control follows directly from economic control and that state power was fundamental to the continuing dominance of a ruling class. The unequal distribution of economic wealth, goods and power sustains a capitalist system that produces and reproduces itself as an antagonistic structure of class relations – primarily between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. To understand the state of play in the relations of these class forces is to understand such relations in its contradictory form where bargains are struck and coalitions are formed, indicating how powerful the consequences of the political to the economic. Constantly, Marxism reaffirmed the necessity of the political movement as a means to the emancipation of the working class. It draws together powerful ideas for the development of a mass party capable of taking on a direct assault on state power. Necessarily, the more the theory of state power is developed, the more critical becomes the role of the political.