

If Robert Cox is right, nobody is necessarily winning in the world, but chances are that a new global, civil society could win over contemporary hegemonic ideologies.

Cox, a neo-Marxist, distinguishes between a critical awareness of potentiality for change and utopian-planning, a trap Karl Marx fell into with economic determinism. For Marx, humans were inevitably involved in production relations that shaped history relatively independent of mankind's strategic intentions or wills. This resulted in periodic clashes between the prevailing superstructure and the development of material life. Only a revolution by the proletariat would deliver improvements and lasting freedom for mankind, with the end result being communism. Cox instead claims that the consequences of action aiming at change are unpredictable, as historical movements, shaped by material possibilities of their society and resistance to their course, almost never realize their inherent expectations in practice. Therefore, "winning" has a different connotation in regard to Cox's writings than in regard to Marx's writings, but chances are that a more participant, global, civil society could decide the next round of structural change in its favour. It is a strong possibility, as the next paragraphs ought to explain. In general, structural change is shaped by structural dialectics – as all historical structures contain both coherence and elements of contradiction or conflict.

Contemporary practices obstruct a now-possible shift in the balance of human effort away from tasks of mere physical reproduction toward opportunities for social development. In a Gramscian sense, many of these contemporary practices are the result of cultural hegemony, as the bourgeoisie's interests and values have become common sense values of all through the construction of hegemonic culture. This consensus culture consists of unnatural behaviour patterns such as consumerism and excessive individualism, and as long as these obstructions towards new social mass movements cannot be overcome, the inevitable revolution by civil society is postponed. This postponement is the safeguard of the status quo. Marketing efforts create false needs. Noam Chomsky rightfully observes that many people quite regularly use their common sense and intellectual skills, but do so in meaningless areas. Discussions around mass spectator sports often reach levels of a high degree of thought and analysis, but simultaneously people know shockingly little about international or even domestic affairs. They reside in fantasy worlds, displaced from serious problems they perceive as unchangeable as the power to do so lies elsewhere. But, as Robert Cox observes, people are no longer as fully absorbed as they were by the tasks of physical survival in past days. Recent economic upswings have proven this by the phenomena of jobless growth. Theoretically, the increasing automation of means of production and even services are opportunities for social development, as the preoccupation with survival becomes less of a burden and people are able to observe the contradictions of contemporary world affairs more fully.

And there is much to be observed. Writing in 1987, Robert Cox observed a first transitional threshold during the economic crisis of 1973. The neo-liberal hegemonic world order continuously lays out the foundation of its own undoing by its own practices, which results in unsolved problems such as stagflation, the fiscal crisis of the state and the international debt crisis. In retrospect, OPEC's muscle flexing in 1973 cannot be considered as a first step towards lasting change in world affairs, but it could be argued that the response of the dominant system laid out the foundation for an even worse, yet to come, crisis. After 1973, most counter-hegemonic movements, especially in the North-South or East-West context, were "solved" by institutions such as the IMF, World Bank or World Trade Organization. Another contradiction leading to a world of post-globalism in economic terms or even a post-Westphalian political order on the state-level can be found in climatic change, as the neo-liberal land of utopia with "a car in two" and rising living standards, based on material consumption, cannot be reconciled with 6,5 billion affluent customers on a finite planet. Additionally, the phenomena of jobless growth might result in mass migration by the peripheral body of fragmented employees. The marginalization of the Third World has put 60 to a 100 million people on the move, as Cox writes, and the move of the marginalized is significantly increasing.

Contemporary attempts at problem-solving, as advocated by economists as Jeffrey Sachs, the author of "End of Poverty", just fasten capitalism's likely – but not inevitable – demise. More and better aid might stop the threat of mass migration and public outrage over worsening conditions for many of the world's poor, but the ecological trap remains. Neo-liberalism just becomes more neo-liberalistic under tension, as there appears to be no alternative. It is the "Dark Victory" of the North, concludes Walden Bello, who observes not only a rising gap in North-South relations, but also within Northern societies themselves.

All these contradictions of current world affairs become visible upon a certain detachment from its pseudo-coherent ideology. Robert Cox sees first steps towards a post-hegemonic world in the upswing of cultures such as Islam, which might lead to a world containing a plurality of visions regarding world order, not necessarily grounded in consumerism or Western pop-culture. He also observes the possibility available to people no longer preoccupied with their own survival to initiate a counter-hegemonic social development; in other words, to kick off a global movement of movements from below, leaving behind the Westphalian state system and other elements of the status-quo. This bottom-up reconstruction of society and political authority would focus on capacities for collective action inspired by common purpose, not elitist, capitalist interest. Cross-cultural understanding and a sense of collective responsibility for world affairs have to be fostered. The rich have to be freed from their excessive, affluent consumption in the face of wide-spread poverty and famine in a world which's technological achievements theoretically allow a life worth living for each and everyone, regardless of artificial borders and constructed, hegemonic cultures. If Cox is right, this vision might become reality, or it might not. Even though action is purposive, end results rarely match utopian planning, he clarifies.

In conclusion, Robert Cox does not necessarily pretend to have a clear understanding of the future. Therefore, even though he does not 'guarantee' anything to happen, he declares an upswing of global, civil society from below as likely. His approach towards history is historical dialectic. Each period contains elements of coherence and contradiction. Contrasting alternative structures arise within existing dominant structures. Capitalism is full of contradictions and therefore not the 'end of history' alongside the democratic state. If Cox is right, the true nature of the winner is relatively unpredictable, as actions aiming at change are unpredictable. Global, civil society, a 'One World/Many Worlds' scenario appears most logic if mankind overcomes contemporary cultural hegemony. Even without a clear picture of the 'winner', capitalism in its current, increasingly globalized form seems to be a predictable loser.