

# Ideology and Power

by Barbara A. Kohl

## The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology

by Goran Therborn, London: Verso, 1980, 133 p.

Therborn's aim is to develop concepts and propositions for understanding how ideology operates in the organization, reproduction and transformation of power relationships in society. The conception of ideology adopted in this book although found in Marx and Engels' work is one not traditionally emphasized. It refers to the medium through which men and women become conscious actors and make their own history. Two basic concerns dominate this perspective and serve as Therborn's major theoretical tasks: first, the explanatory and material determinants of specific ideologies, and second, struggles between different class ideologies and their relations to non-class ideologies.

Beginning with a critical assessment of Althusserian concepts on the formation of human subjects, Therborn's ensuing discussion goes beyond Althusser and base/super-structure debates. A dual ideological process of interpellation is set up which he calls "subject-qualification." Humans are subjected to a particular order which encourages certain behavior and capacities and sanctions others. Men and women are simultaneously qualified to assume certain roles in this order, while also becoming qualified in turn to 'qualify' these roles, i.e. specifying them and modifying their range of application. While there is always a basic correspondence between subjection and qualification in the reproduction of any social order, contradictions between the two dimensions may emerge: "New kinds of qualifications may be required and provided, new skills which clash with traditional forms of subjection. Or, conversely, new forms of subjection may develop that clash with the provision of still-needed qualifications." (p. 17)

Next, Therborn identifies three fundamental modes of subjection-qualification: what exists (and does not exist); what is good/right (and its opposites); and what is possible (and impossible). A typology of the basic constituents of ideological interpellation is organized along two axes: one referring to 'being' consisting of

existential and historical meanings, and the other, to 'in-the-world' consisting of inclusive and positional meanings. The four dimensions are then concretized: inclusive-existential, related to being a member in the world; inclusive-historical, historical social worlds (forms of tribe, nation, village, kin group, etc.); positional-existential, usually gender and life cycle distinctions and forms of individuality; and positional-historical, e.g. distinctions implying a hierarchical ordering in a given historical context, such as occupation, education, political position and class.

Therborn goes on to consider the material matrix of ideologies and the problem of ideological change. His most interesting propositions concern the historicity and related material affirmations and sanctions of any given ideology, the articulation of different class ideologies, and changes in fundamental social structures, demographic conditions and the ecological environment that give rise to ideological change. A section on the articulation of class ideologies with non-class ideologies is probably the weakest section of the book, lacking the conceptual rigor which characterizes the discussion elsewhere. The treatment of gender ideology in relation to class ideology is particularly disappointing. Therborn argues that while the ideological universe is not reducible to class ideologies, non-class ideologies are nonetheless class-patterned. Class-patterning in the case of gender would mean that subjection-qualification processes of male versus female behavior and forms of individuality are different according to social class. Empirical analyses have in fact established that forms of sexism differ from one class to another. Yet in my opinion, the articulation between gender ideologies and class ideologies must have a broader focus, one that will elucidate *societal* effects. For instance, gender and familial ideologies in advanced capitalist societies relegate women to the sphere of child care and home maintenance, nurturance and emotionality, and the material matrix of these assumptions is seen in women's secondary and subordinate position in the labor force and in the sexual division of labor in the household. Marxist feminists have convincingly argued that gender relations have become embedded in capitalist relations of production with effects that capital can benefit from, not the least of which is a major political division of the working class along sex lines. A marxist theory of the articulation of class with non-class ideologies must be equipped to explain the interpenetration (overdetermination) of these

---

*Barbara A. Kohl is working on the effects of state policies on agrarian labor relations and productive structures in Latin America, and the ideologies and political practices of the Latin American peasantry, farmers and women.*

ideologies and thus the equally overdetermined material matrix through which they are sustained and modified.

In a subsequent section theoretical development of the ideological constitution of classes is centered on the minimum subjection-qualification necessary for a given class of persons to perform their economic roles. Therborn then outlines class ego (dominant) ideologies and alter (secondary) ideologies for selected social classes. There is some elaboration of the discursive order and material apparatuses which regulate the formation and change of class ideologies.

Next Therborn turns to problems of ideological domination and state power. He identifies six types of ideological domination, defined as mechanisms of subjection which ensure that the ruled obey the rulers: accommodation, sense of inevitability, sense of representation, deference, fear, and resignation. This fascinating schema of ideological domination is both a critique of, and an alternative to the usual problematics of force/consent, legitimacy/illegitimacy, and true (revolutionary)/false consciousness.

Finally, in an account of ideological mobilization for political transformation, Therborn examines the complexity of these processes which are never reducible to revolutionary class consciousness. In all successful revolutions that have changed the class nature of the state elements of class ideologies have fused with other ideological mobilizations, such as national or religious mobilizations.

This book is a jewel; it is a work of incredibly succinct brilliance, but with a range and depth that will be a cutting edge in the study of ideology for many years. Therborn does not provide systematic answers to many present concerns about the operation and the promise of ideological discourse in any concrete society. Rather his accomplishment is to provide us with some tools to ask relevant questions, and more importantly, to discriminate among normative versus historical material determinants in ideological struggles through which we reconstitute and transfigure our selves.

Barbara A. Kohl

---

continued from 8

his concept of the party) entail regarding the true nature of Capitalist crisis and proletarian revolutionary strategy. Novel among these implications is, of course, Gramsci's emphasis on the need for the proletariat to gain the loyalty and support of other social classes in an advanced Capitalist context and, in order to do so, the need to overcome class dogmatism and interest-based corporatism. No longer has the cataclysmic notion of Capitalist crisis a place in truly revolutionary Marxist theory, as Gramsci's concepts have brought a more realistic picture of the class struggle to our eyes. Indeed, Gramsci deserves much recognition in rectifying Marxist theory after its temporary degeneration at the hands of the mechanistic Marxists of the Stalin period and the revisionist "Marxists" of the Second International. In the dialectical materialist tradition of Marx and Engels,

Gramsci's "philosophy of praxis" (despite any historicism) has re-delivered to the working class a more powerful theoretical weapon with which it is well equipped against the capitalist class in the class struggle. There remains only the conscious making of history in the hands of the proletariat.

<sup>1</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (California: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>7</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, p. 180.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>10</sup> John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, p. 202.

<sup>11</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, p. 197.

<sup>12</sup> John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, p. 202.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, p. 203.

#### Bibliography

Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*. London: New Left Books, 1977.

Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.

Bukharin, Nikolai. *Historical Materialism*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969.

Cammett, John W. *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*. California: Stanford University Press, 1967.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Laclau, Ernesto. *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*. London: New Left Books/Verso Editions, 1977.

Luckacs, Georg. *History and Class Consciousness*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971.

Mouffe, Chantal, ed. *Gramsci & Marxist Theory*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.

---

continued from 26

<sup>11</sup> *FM*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>12</sup> *FM*, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, 1976, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> Therborn, 1976, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> This raises the question of why communists would consent to such constraints and remain in such a party, if they have substantial disagreements with its dominant line. Hasn't the long history of defections from the CPUSA, and the relative