

ဘယ်အပိုင်းကို ဖတ်ချင်သလဲ

English



Winning the War of Ideas

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The success of neoliberalism is not just a result of economic and political forces, but also because the right has understood the importance of cultural hegemony – something the left has yet to learn.

စာရေးသူ

Susan George



Coca Cola poster

For those who may not be familiar with the great Italian Marxist philosopher Gramsci, he forged the concept of "cultural hegemony" and was among the first to see that ideas were not just icing on the economic cake but crucial to the success of any political project. This is what the right has understood and the left, sadly, has not.

In Greek the hegemon is the leader, and from there it's just a linguistic hop, skip and jump to the notion of rule, authority and dominance expressed by the word "hegemony". Traditionally, the term was reserved for States. In the 1920s and 1930s, the great Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci took the concept further, using it to explain how one class could establish its leadership and authority over others through ideological dominance. Whereas orthodox Marxism explained nearly everything by economic forces, Gramsci added the crucial cultural dimension. He showed how, once ideological authority - or "cultural hegemony" - is established, the need for revolution or the use of violence to impose change can become superfluous.

Today, few would deny that we live under the virtually undisputed rule of the market-dominated, ultra-competitive, globalised society with its cortège of manifold inequities and everyday violence. Have we got the hegemony we deserve? I think we have, and by "we" I mean the progressive movement, or what's left of it. Obviously I don't deny the impact of economic forces or of political events like the end of the Cold War in shaping our lives and our societies, but here I intend to

concentrate on the war of ideas which has been tragically neglected by the "side of the angels". Many public and private institutions which genuinely believe they are working for a more equitable world and institutional funders in particular have contributed to the triumph of neo-liberalism or, at the very least, have passively allowed this triumph to occur.

Fighting words? No doubt. However, if this judgment sounds harsh, positive conclusions may still be drawn from it. The present Rule of the Right is the outcome of a concerted, long-term and highly effective ideological effort on the part of identifiable actors. If we recognise that a market-dominated, iniquitous world is neither natural nor inevitable, that it has not arisen ex nihilo but is a conscious creation, then it should be possible to set in motion counter-forces and build a counter-project for a different kind of world.

Exclusion and Ideology

The late 20th century could be dubbed the Age of Exclusion. It's now clear that the "free market", which increasingly determines political and social as well as economic priorities, cannot embrace everyone. The market's job is not to provide jobs, much less social cohesion. It has no place for the growing numbers of people who contribute little or nothing to production or to consumption and thus act as a drag on an aerodynamic world economy. Globally, as in each particular country, the market operates for the benefit of a minority.

The Age of Exclusion engenders myriad social ills with which various humanitarian and charitable agencies, established in an earlier era, vainly attempt to cope. Vainly, because they have so far failed to understand that their projects and programmes exist in an ideological context which systematically counters their aims. So long as this context prevails, their task is hopeless, their well-meaning works will wither and their efforts will ultimately be swept away by the tide of the times.

The now-dominant economic doctrine, of which widespread exclusion is a normal and necessary element, was not revealed on Mount Sinai, it did not descend from heaven and it is not the result of spontaneous generation. It has, rather, been carefully established and nurtured over decades, through thought, action and propaganda; bought and paid for by a closely-knit fraternity (they mostly are men) who stand to gain from its rule.

An earlier version of this doctrine was called "laissez-faire"; today Americans speak of neo-conservatism, Europeans of neo-liberalism and the French of "la pensée unique" (the dominant or single mind-set). I shall use "neo-liberalism", bearing in mind that the modern version of the doctrine is far removed from that of such great "liberal" political economists as Adam Smith or David Ricardo. Neo-liberals pretend to follow these illustrious predecessors, but in fact betray their spirit and ignore their moral and social teachings.

A Half Century's Century

The victory of neo-liberalism is the result of fifty years of intellectual work, now widely reflected in the media, politics, and the programmes of international organisations. Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Fall of the Wall are often credited (or blamed) for this state of affairs and they have, indeed, made neo-liberals more arrogant, but there is much more to the story than that.

Fifty years ago, in the wake of World War II, neo-liberalism was ultra-minoritarian and had no place in the mainstream political debate. Its few champions preached to each other or in the desert - everyone else was a Keynesian, a social/Christian democrat or some shade of Marxist. Overturning that context required intellectual tenacity and political planning - but it also took the benign neglect and passivity of a self-satisfied majority. If there are three kinds of people - those who make things happen, those who watch things happen and those who never knew what hit them; neo-liberals belong to the first category and most progressives to the latter two. The left remained complacent until, suddenly, it was too late.

The American founding fathers of neo-liberalism thus held few cards at the outset but they believed in a crucial principle: Ideas Have Consequences - the title of a 1948 book by Richard Weaver which was to have a long and fruitful career.

Weaver's conservative writings were published by the University of Chicago, as were the works of the exiled Austrian philosopher- economist Friedrich von Hayek (i.e. his deeply influential Road to Serfdom) and books by a brilliant young economist called Milton Friedman. Today the "Chicago School" and the "Chicago Boys" are famous: their economic, social and political views have spread throughout the world. In General Pinochet's Chile, Chicago-trained economists were the first to apply el tratamiento de chock (shock treatment) based on freedom for business but repression for labour.

Clearly, Ideas Have Consequences - after all, Margaret Thatcher proudly proclaimed her allegiance to the ideas of Hayek and most economics students who go on to occupy policy positions have been trained in the neo-liberal curricula. One conservative scholar sums up the doctrine thus: "Individual freedom is the ultimate social ideal; governmental power, while necessary, must be limited and decentralized. Interventionism is baneful and dangerous. Economic freedom, that is, capitalism, is an indispensable condition for political liberty".

Neo-liberals reject the notion that individual freedom might possibly depend on democracy and the rule of law, guaranteed by the State. For them, such "guarantees" are nothing but chains. To be free is to be free from the State. The individual is entirely responsible for his economic and social fate; this implies that disparities will necessarily exist. But this is good. As Ms. Thatcher so pithily put it, "It is our job to glory in inequality and see that talents and abilities are given vent and expression for the benefit of us all".

In the early days of the neo-liberal renaissance, giving "vent and expression" to such ideas in practice and in law was utopian, since these ideas were antagonistic to the letter and the spirit of the New Deal or the Welfare State. Neo-liberals understood, however, that to transform the economic, political and social landscape they first had to change the intellectual and psychological one. For ideas to become part of the daily life of people and society, they must be packaged, conveyed, and propagated through books, magazines, journals, conferences, symposia, professional associations, student organisations, university chairs, mass media and so on.

People who do research, think, write, speak, publish, teach, inform, educate must be encouraged to get on with their work and be properly, indeed generously paid for doing so. If some ideas are to become more fashionable, more attractive and more operational than others, they must be financed: it takes money to build intellectual infrastructures and to promote a particular worldview.

When these foundations have been carefully laid and built upon, views that once seemed minoritarian, elitist, even morally repugnant will gradually become widespread and predominant, especially among decision-makers. Press, radio and television can be guided to follow the lead of the more specialised or erudite media. Imperceptibly, nearly everyone will come to feel that certain ideas are normal, natural, part of the air we breathe.

Manufacturing Ideology

The neo-liberals thus conceived their successful strategy, recruiting and rewarding thinkers and writers, raising funds to found and to sustain a broad range of institutions at the forefront of the "conservative revolution". This revolution began in the United States but, like the rest of American culture, has spread worldwide and influences politics throughout Europe and elsewhere. The doctrines of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation are indistinguishable from those of the neo-liberal credo. Here are some capsule profiles of some of the most influential intellectual institutions or think-tanks.

- The American Enterprise Institute was founded in 1943 by a group of anti-New Deal businessmen. It pioneered intellectual public relations in the 1950s and 1960s, working directly with members of Congress, the Federal bureaucracy and the media. In the 1980s, AEI's average budget was \$14 million; it employed some 150 people. One of its most successful fund-raising campaigns was launched by the Defense Secretary in the Pentagon dining room. In the 1990s, the annual budget has dropped to around \$8-10 million but AEI still produces a steady stream of books, pamphlets and legislative recommendations and its pundits are frequently heard from in the mass-media.
- The Heritage Foundation is the best known think-tank because of its close association with Ronald Reagan. A week after his electoral victory, Heritage's director handed Reagan's staff a thousand page document of policy advice, called Mandate for Leadership, fruit of the labours of 250 neo-liberal experts. Their recommendations were duly distributed throughout the new administration; most became law.

Heritage, the collective brain behind Reagan and Bush, was founded in 1973, spends a third of its \$18 million annual budget on marketing and produces some 200 documents a year. Its Annual Guide lists 1500 neo-liberal public policy experts in 70 different areas - the harried journalist need only telephone to get a quote... President Reagan himself launched a major Heritage fund-raising drive, telling the audience that 'Ideas do have consequences: rhetoric is politics and words are action'.

- Heritage's success has inspired the creation of 37 mini-Heritages across the US, creating synergy, an illusion of diversity and the impression that experts quoted actually represent a broad spectrum of views. Heritage also has ramifications in

Britain.

Some other, smaller, think-tanks include the venerable Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, founded at Stanford University in California in 1919 to study communism. In 1960, it added an economic programme to its Cold War vocation. The Cato Institute in Washington is libertarian, advocating minimalist government and specialising in studies on privatisation; the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, founded in 1978 by William Casey, later director of the CIA, specialises in the critique of government income-redistribution programmes.

A revolving door between government and conservative think tanks allowed former Nixon or Reagan/Bush staffers to find a home during the Carter or Clinton presidencies (although one wonders why they need move: Clinton's position on welfare is virtually indistinguishable from that of the neo-liberal think tanks, constituting another victory for them).

Outside the USA, the neo-liberal network is less formal but no less effective in ideological guerilla tactics (in the UK, they called themselves "Ms. Thatcher's commandos"). London houses the Centre for Policy Studies; the anti-Statist Institute of Economic Affairs, and the Adam Smith Institute which has probably done more to promote privatisation than any other institution anywhere. The ASI brags that over 200 measures developed in its "Omega Project" were put into practice by Mrs. Thatcher. Its experts have also advised the World Bank extensively on privatisation programmes in the Bank's client countries.

Arguably, the most important think-tank of all has no fixed address. The Mount Pelerin Society, founded in 1947 by Friedrich von Hayek, first brought American and European conservatives together in a village near Lausanne. It has remained a low-key, international club for neo-liberal thinkers ever since; its 400-strong membership met most recently in Vienna in 1996. Milton Friedman says "Mount Pelerin showed us that we were not alone" and served as a "rallying point", inspiring friendships, networks, joint programmes, projects and publications. Membership in the Society is by invitation and members' names are not disclosed; it is, however, known that Vaclav Klaus (the Czech prime minister) the former French finance minister Alain Madelin, Boris Yeltsin's chief advisors and Margaret Thatcher belong.

Financing Ideology

Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent over the past fifty years to keep these, and many other neo-liberal institutions alive and well. Where does the money come from?

In the early days, the William Volker Fund saved the shaky magazines, financed the books published at Chicago, paid the bills for the influential Foundation for Economic Education and funded meetings in US universities. Americans at the first Mount Pelerin Society meeting travelled to Switzerland on Volker money.

This Fund could not, however, cover all the needs of a growing movement, which sought other financial backers early on. The director of the American Enterprise Institute was jubilant when in 1972 he convinced the prestigious Ford Foundation to give AEI \$300,000 - a significant sum at the time. This grant opened doors to other institutional funders.

For at least a quarter-century, numerous conservative American family foundations have poured money into the production and dissemination of their ideas. Although smaller than philanthropic elephants like Ford, these funders use their money strategically. The Bradley Foundation spends nearly all its annual income (\$28 million in 1994) on promoting neo-liberal causes, including major gifts to Heritage, AEI, conservative magazines and journals. As the Foundation's director puts it, "We're in this for the long haul". According to the Foundation's literature, the Bradley brothers believed that "over time, the consequences of ideas (are) more decisive than the force of political or economic movements".

Foundations like Coors (brewery), Scaife or Mellon (steel), and especially Olin (chemicals, munitions) finance chairs in some of America's most prestigious universities. Their occupants are carefully chosen, in the words of critic Jon Weiner, to "strengthen the economic, political and cultural institutions upon which... private enterprise is based". Olin has spent over \$55 million on these efforts and the list of its grantees reads like a Who's Who of the academic right.

An anecdote recounted by Weiner illustrates how the ideological self-promotion system works. In 1988, Allan Bloom, Director of the University of Chicago's Olin Center for Inquiry into the Theory and Practice of Democracy (\$3.6 million grant from Olin) invites a State Department official to give a paper. The speaker proclaims total victory for the West and for neo-liberal values in the Cold War. His paper is immediately published in *The National Interest* (\$1 million Olin subsidy) edited

by Irving Kristol (\$376,000 grant as Olin Distinguished Professor at New York University Graduate School of Business).

Kristol simultaneously publishes "responses" to the paper: one by himself, one by Bloom (as above); one by Samuel Huntington (\$1.4 million for the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard). This completely artificial, engineered "debate" is then picked up by the New York Times, the Washington Post and Time Magazine. Today everyone has heard of Francis Fukuyama and *The End of History*, a best-seller in several languages.

Even in the early 1970s, William Simon, then president of the Olin Foundation, was exhorting his business associates to support "scholars, social scientists, writers and journalists" and to give "grants, grants and more grants in exchange for books, books and more books".

Simon knew what he was talking about: not only can well-targeted money create "debates" out of thin air; it can also define which areas deserve study and which do not; it can promote personal notoriety and ready access to decision-makers and to the media for selected neo-liberal spokespersons; it can also blanket the media with its own views of political and economic issues. The editor of the Heritage Foundation's Policy Review appears to find this almost unseemly:

"Journalism today is very different from what it was 10 to 20 years ago. Today, op-ed pages are dominated by conservatives. We have a tremendous amount of conservative opinion but this creates a problem for those who are interested in a career in journalism... If Bill Buckley were to come out of Yale today, nobody would pay much attention to him. He would not be that unusual... because there are probably hundreds of people with those ideas and they have already got syndicated columns."

Between 1990-1993, four neo-liberal US magazines received \$2.7 million from different foundations (The National Interest, The Public Interest, New Criterion, American Spectator). In contrast, four progressive US magazines with a national audience (The Nation, The Progressive, In These Times, Mother Jones) were given ten times less over the same period.

In the war of ideas, any movement is in trouble if it cannot renew its ranks of professional researchers, thinkers and writers. Neo-liberals don't mind financing white men if white men happen to be best at delivering the intellectual goods. But they are also funding a great many women, African-Americans and other minority thinkers and writers; as well as dozens of college newspapers, thousands of graduate students and a small armada of journals. Literally hundreds of millions of dollars are spent every year on purchasing present and future right-wing intellectual clout.

Who's Who, and What?

A somewhat astonishing conclusion can be drawn from all this: the right is a hot-bed of Marxists! Or at least of Gramscians. They know full well that we are not born with our ideas and must somehow acquire them; that in order to prevail, ideas require material infrastructures. They know, too, that these infrastructures will largely determine the intellectual superstructure: this is what Gramsci meant by capitalism's "hegemonic project". Defining, sustaining and controlling culture is crucial: get into people's heads and you will acquire their hearts, their hands and their destinies.

Alas, as a friend of mine says, progressives can't seem to tell a hegemonic project from a hedgehog. What has the "side of the angels" been up to all these years? Has it spent its time and money promoting and defending the ideas it professes to believe in? Precious little. Not only do progressive institutions appear complacent as to their side's intellectual superiority, but they've been cruising along as if there were no need to justify their positions, nor even to worry about the nearly hegemonic intellectual hold of the right.

The "angels" have, rather, seen their task as funding projects and programmes for the poor and disadvantaged; focusing on the grass roots, enhancing "community empowerment". Laudable goals all - but what happens when governments subscribe, instead, to structural adjustment which utterly devastates the lives of the poor in the South, or pass anti-welfare, anti-worker legislation in the North? What happens when the World Trade Organisation has more to say about community survival than the communities themselves? Or when public funds for health, education, housing, transport, the environment, etc. etc. dry up?

Without intellectual ammunition to defend them and to create the context in which they can flourish, worthy projects and commendable programmes collapse. They cannot exist in a vacuum.

Practical Implications and the Plague of the Project

So far, I've not bothered to declare an interest. I assume readers know or have guessed I have one, since I am a professional researcher, writer and, when I can manage it, thinker. So yes: I have all too often heard or read the dread phrase, "Your proposal is very interesting but we don't fund research and writing!"

The point is not, however, private disappointment but mass denial. Progressive donors have sent out stacks, vanloads of rejections in response to proposals for intellectual work; their refusals positively litter the landscape. I have no reason to doubt that the goals of these donors are social equity, poverty alleviation, human rights, conflict resolution and sustainable development: such people, such institutions do, thank God, exist. I have always felt, too, that progressives are not just more decent but more interesting and more intelligent than people of the neo-liberal persuasion: this may be, selfishly, the ultimate reason behind my own choices and friendships. So I am mightily perplexed by their behaviour.

- Why, I am driven to ask, do progressive funders devote so much of their time, attention and money to 'projects' and so little to intellectual infrastructure and institution building?
- Why, for that matter, do so many progressive, "activist" organisations which are already receiving money for their own projects nonetheless assert that research, thinking and writing should get zero money, so that more is left for them? This strikes me as short-termism at its most suicidal.
- Why have we not learned from the single-mindedness of the right? Why can we not see that, for example, the destruction of welfare in the US or the threats to trade union achievements in Europe would have been impossible without the creation of an intellectual climate making such onslaughts appear not morally repugnant and regressive but natural and inevitable?
- Why is the "project" approach not seen as self-defeating? As neo-liberalism dismantles the gains of the past fifty years and ever greater numbers of its victims are cast adrift, the pressure to fund only "projects" will grow intolerably, pushing us into a self-reinforcing and unending procession towards the definitive dysfunctional society.

Just in case...

In Spanish they say *no protestas sin propuestas*, or, freely translated, quit complaining if you don't have anything to offer. Well, obviously I propose that progressive foundations and any other financing sources begin, as of right now, to devote large amounts of money to regaining our lost intellectual initiative. They should sit at the feet of the neo-liberals who have proved they know how the game works: let us learn from the masters!

Assuming that this all-encompassing, over-riding proposal is somehow recognised and acted upon, I have several subsidiary recommendations for those who are ready and willing to fund intellectual work. The first is a bit hard to swallow, I admit, so I may as well say it straight out: funders are not the best judges of the work that progressive intellectuals and research or policy institutions ought to be doing.

Why not? Because they are likely to be attracted to issues which have already reached the mainstream and the public consciousness. I have witnessed this again and again, for instance when I first tried to attract financing for work on third world debt. It was then too early, although five or ten years later, numerous organisations were falling over each other to work on the issue. The task of the progressive thinker is to be outside the mainstream, to foresee and to prepare for developments that will become crucial in the future.

A good progressive intellectual worker is someone who produces subversive knowledge. This knowledge, by definition, will be unwelcome to the Establishment and to the mainstream. Yet someone does have to pay for the months or years of work before the books come out (assuming that they somehow do); before the 'hot topics' are recognised and the "subversive knowledge" becomes part of the debate. Funders should accept a division of labour and trust the intellectual workers they choose to support without trying to define their agendas. Otherwise, they will inadvertently and unwittingly prevent those workers from doing their job properly.

Funders should give up the "project" approach in favour of institution building. Donors, understandably and quite rightly, want to discuss the substance and the politics of a project with the person who will be carrying it out, not with a professional fundraiser. But for that person, this process can be counter-productive, preventing him or her from getting on with the intellectual work. Drafting several project proposals, defending them separately, in different countries, before

different audiences, by mail and in person; following up with correspondence, additional information, progress reports, accounts - all this is hugely time consuming.

When I was fundraising for the Transnational Institute (on "projects", naturally, since no other approach would have been accepted in the donor community) I published only short pieces. Sustained endeavours like books are (at least for me) impossible when time is constantly broken up with fundraising activities. Researchers, writers, and speakers who have to cater to this mentality in order to get any work done at all are prevented from devoting their energies to research, writing and speaking, and from renewing their own arsenal of ideas. Project funding, as opposed to institution building, offers no hope for an end to the cycle of low productivity.

Donors should fund not just the intellectual work itself but the means for making sure it will be widely used. The Heritage Foundation spends fully a third of its comfortable budget on outreach, yet few progressive funders want to pay for spreading the word. Consequently, ideas-producing institutions which are only allowed to spend for items specified in the project budget (with a modest overhead) can't afford translations, can't develop a "Features Service" for a network of newspapers and magazines in many countries, can't turn articles into radio programmes, books into TV films, etc.

Grants for institution building are also important because they alone allow progressive researchers and writers to prepare for the future and keep up the momentum. Smart, dedicated, idealistic young people often want to work for progressive organisations and are willing to make material sacrifices to do so, but the core funds to employ them simply aren't there. They may not be (or not yet be) engaged in work donors find compelling. They have not necessarily learned how to write or speak for a mass audience and should be offered workshops led by their more experienced colleagues. Unfortunately, it's now next to impossible to find financing for these "non-project" or "core" activities on which the prospects of the left nonetheless depend.

By focusing almost exclusively on projects, progressive funders have helped to insure right-wing dominance of the debate. The pernicious consequences of not taking Gramsci seriously are amply described above. We used to laugh at the idea that market mechanisms could solve social problems: such things are now said every day with a straight face. Issues we used to take for granted, including the third world itself, have almost vanished from the debate.

It's going to be uphill work and it may not happen at all, but we have to hope that donors can make the leap of faith from projects to institutional and intellectual movement building.. They can identify institutions and individuals in both North and South who are producing original and distinguished work and whose record shows they can be trusted - and then trust them. This includes research/policy institutes, journals, and independent intellectual workers inside or outside of universities.

Remarkable institutions and individuals deserve long-term support which alone can allow them to do their best work. Donors should set aside a respectable portion of their disposable funds to endow worthwhile institutions. Various formulas are possible: the donor can perfectly well retain the capital with the income accruing to the grantee on a foreseeable basis and for a reasonable period (3-5 years). Formulas providing guarantees and flexibility to both donor and recipient could be readily negotiated.

And finally...

What if we lived in a society in which the system of justice rested on the postulate that only two-thirds, or nine-tenths of its members were fully human; the remaining third or tenth not deserving of the same rights, except when arbitrarily granted? Such a society would spontaneously and instantly - at least in the West - be called unjust today.

The exclusion of a tenth or a third or more of their members is, however, precisely the situation that obtains in societies regulated almost exclusively by the "laws of the market". There is a dangerous semantic slippage from "law" to "laws of the market"; from the body of democratically established rules for the proper functioning of society to the blind operation of economic forces. Neo-liberals want "market law" to become the sovereign judge of the rights of persons and of societies as a whole.

The nineteenth century philosopher G.W.F. Hegel claimed that the only thing history teaches us is that nobody ever learns anything from history. Recent history, if we are attentive, might still teach us that a society can go from law based on the equality of persons to the laws of the market; from relative social justice to deep and chronic inequalities within a few short

years. The neo-liberals' onslaught continues and their intellectual hegemony is almost complete. Those who refuse to act on the knowledge that Ideas Have Consequences end up taking them.

*This piece was published in the Summer 1997 issue of the excellent American quarterly **DISSENT**, one of the few truly progressive journals available in the US.*

Global economy

“If we recognise that a market-dominated, iniquitous world is neither natural nor inevitable, that it has not arisen ex nihilo but is a conscious creation, then it should be possible to set in motion counter-forces and build a counter-project for a different kind of world.”

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The War of Ideas is a clash of opposing ideals, ideologies, or concepts through which nations or groups use strategic influence to promote their interests abroad. The "battle space" of this conflict is the target population's "hearts and minds", while the "weapons" can include, inter alia, think tanks, TV programs, newspaper articles, the internet, blogs, official government policy papers, traditional as well as public diplomacy, or radio broadcasts.

