Civil Society and State: A Discourse

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ABSTRACT
The intellectual tradition of discoursing the nature of the state and civil society is traced back to the contract theorists—Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, on the one hand, and to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, on the other. Social thinkers like Nicolo Machiavelli have often conceived the state as a product of reason, that is, as a rational society in which human beings can lead a life following the dictates of reason. To Hegel, 'the process of rationalisation of state not only merges with process of statisation of reason', but also the two processes get interwoven; ultimately, when the rationalization of the state reaches its climax, it no longer remains as an ideal model but becomes a reality, that is, a moment in history. This article narrate the discourse between state and civil society based on secondary sources.

Keyword— State and Civil Society based

I. INTRODUCTION

There are three forms in which the process of rationalization of the state manifests itself: (a) the state as a radical negation of the pre-state social existence, or what some contract theorists call 'the natural state of society' (Hobbes and Rousseau); (b) the state as a regulation of natural society, since it is not an alternative but a mode of perfecting the society it regulates (Locke and Kant); and (c) the Hegelian notion of the state, which not only creates but also contains civil society. According to Hegel, the creation of civil society is the achievement of the modern state that unifies the duality of civil life and political life by means of an institutional framework that has a threefold functional apparatus: (a) monarch—a sovereign ruler by birth, independent of the mundane interests of political factions; (b) an extensive bureaucracy—a class of salaried civil servants loyal to the state; and (c) an assembly—a body comprising representatives of the crown, the executive power and the civil society—that deliberates and works out modalities of reconciling the aims and interests of the state and civil society, so that their decisions could be translated into law. The state, according to Hegel, is not only responsible for the creation of civil society, but also for its sustenance. Hegel also highlights somewhat contradictory forms in which civil society manifests itself. On the one hand, civil society has to capture the spirit of modern capitalism that serves the individual interests; on the other hand, being the public sphere of ideas, it has to have an uncompromising commitment to certain collective interests. It is, therefore, a moral order, too.

Marx and Engels do not define the state as a reality of ethical nature. Rather, they view it as the 'concertated and organised force of society'-society that is characterized by certain forms of production and their attendant social relations. Hence, the abstraction-state is basically reified by a committee of the dominant class, that is, the bourgeoisie. Neither is the state a supersession of civil society, nor does it transform civil society into something else. The state incorporates civil society, as it is. Finally, vis-a-vis civil society, 'the state is a secondary and subordinate moment in history'. It is not the state which conditions and regulates civil society, but it is the other way round. That is, the civil society and political society (= state) relationship, as envisaged by Hegel, was turned upside down by Marx and Engels: The state being a transitory phenomenon must therefore, abolish itself after it has first abolished the pre-state natural society'.

More recently, the discourse on state and civil society has focused attention on Antonio Gramsci's political thought, which uses civil society as a key concept that differs from that of Hegel as well as that of Marx and Engels. The critical difference between the ways in which Marx and Gramsci conceive of civil society lies in the fact that, according to Marx, the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in the political economy. As Marx puts it, Civil society embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals within a definite stage of the development of productive forces. It embraces the whole commercial and industrial life of a given stage, and insofar transcends the state and the nation, though, on the other hand again, it must assert itself in its foreign relations as nationality, and inwardly must organize itself as a state. The word 'civil society' emerged in the 18th century, when property relationships had already extricated themselves from the ancient and the medieval communal society. Civil society as such only develops...
with the bourgeoisie: the social organisation evolving directly out of production and commerce which in all ages forms the basis of the state and of the rest of the idealistic superstructure has however, always been designated by the same name.

For Hegel, the state is the armature of civil society and is situated higher than civil society so that it can rule over social and historical developments as a whole. For Marx, the political reality of the state is constituted by the entire economic life-relations of production and the class struggle-for which civil society is the real theatre. Clearly then, Marx terds to reduce the development of civil society to the structure of productive forces and social relations arising out of them. Marx, therefore, stands opposed to any idea of the state as constituting an autonomous tool of management, one that would develop a strong bureaucracy and civil service whose functions are social in some universal way. Since Marx thought statism, centralism and bureaucracy only organize, centralize and institutionalize social and political alienation. Which would, by definition, be antithetical to civil society, he, therefore, considers civil society as belonging to the structural sphere, to the 'base', rather than to the 'superstructure'. To Gramsci, however, civil society belongs to the super structural sphere: it 'comprises not all material relationships, but all ideological cultural relations; not the whole of commercial and industrial life, but the whole spiritual and intellectual life'.

II. CONCLUSION

The second major difference between Marx and Gramsci lies in the theme of 'hegemony', which occupies a central place in the latter's conception of society and political struggle. Gramsci distinguishes between political leadership (which is identified with force-a negative moment of civil society) and cultural leadership (that represents the positive moment of the superstructure). By cultural leadership, Gramsci implies the introduction of moral and intellectual reforms that neither Marx nor V.I. Lenin has accorded any significance to. Therefore, Gramsci's 'hegemony' must not be mistaken as a restatement of Lenin's collective will of political leadership or the dictatorship of the proletariat. For Lenin, dictatorship and hegemony are two sides of the same coin; for Gramsci, the conquest of hegemony precedes the conquest of power. Hegemony, according to Gramsci, implies that a class maintains its dominance or supremacy, not simply through a special organization of force but because it is able to transcend its narrow class interests, exert a moral and intellectual leadership and maintain the desired 'civil society-state equilibrium'.

The class hegemony is, thus, by consent obtained by the dominant class, not through force but by providing moral and intellectual leadership at a junction, or what Gramsci calls a 'historic block' that is autonomous. Hence, the autonomous space of civil society is conceded by Gramsci, who goes beyond viewing the state as a mere instrument of class domination as expounded by Marx and Engels, and Lenin. Similarly, Gramsci does not seem to be fond of the popular phrase 'withering away of the state' that is used in the orthodox Marxist-Leninist tradition. The end of the state is conceived not as supersession of the state, but as reabsorption of the state (that is, political society) in civil society. This enlargement of civil society is the real constitutive moment of hegemony, when the dominant social class succeeds in making its own hegemony so universal that force would no longer be necessary. Civil society then becomes a self-regulated society, since it is now freed from political society as a separate autonomous entity.

REFERENCES

[6] Ibid., p. 97
[7] Ibid., pp. 10-18