

Introduction to Antonio Gramsci

Watcharabon Buddharaksa

บทวิจารณ์หนังสือ (Book Review)

Antonio A. Santucci: *Antonio Gramsci*. New York, Monthly Review Press, 2010

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Applying Antonio Gramsci's social and political theories to the study of social and political phenomena has been widely accepted in various academic fields for several decades. The study of Gramsci's thought in the English-speaking world had been accelerated by the work of Hoare and Nowell Smith¹ in 1971, whilst the pioneers in Gramsci's biography were the works of Fiori² and Davidson.³ Nearly half a century after the first wave of the work on Gramsci, there are a number of books and articles focusing on the various aspects of Gramsci's life and ideas. Antonio Santucci's book simply entitled 'Antonio Gramsci', originally published in Italian in 2005, is one of the numerous books on Gramscian studies. However, Santucci's small book (207 pages) places itself as an outstanding combination of Gramsci's biography and political theory. The book comprises four main sections including Political Writings, Letters from Prison, the Prison Notebooks and End-of-Century Gramsci. Although the book is

¹ Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

² G. Fiori, *Antonio Gramsci: Life of a Revolutionary*, translated by T. Nairn (New York: Dutton, 1971).

³ A. Davidson, *Antonio Gramsci: Towards an Intellectual Biography*, (London: Merlin Press, 1977).

divided into four sections, Santucci devotes most of this small book to the first section on the pre-prison political context and writings of Antonio Gramsci.

The first section of the book contains ten sub-sections which address both Gramsci's pre-prison political life and his theories. Those who seriously study Gramscian political thought know that there is no philosophical break between his pre-prison and later political concepts. On this issue, Santucci argues that Gramsci's broad theoretical position was rooted in his early experience as a socialist journalist (p. 60). Therefore, Santucci provides more details in this section than in the others. In this section, he draws a picture of Gramsci's political practices since his early days in Turin University and as a journalist at *Avanti*, *Il Grido del popolo*, and especially at the *Ordine Nuovo* (the new order). At *Ordine Nuovo*, Gramsci contributed a very crucial idea of the factory council as a new social relation to counter bourgeois democracy and formal political organisation. His idea of the factory council led to the real and energetic movements and workers' strikes between the 'two red years' (Biennio Rosso), 1919–1920, and the workers' factories occupation in 1920. Nevertheless, the most interesting in this section, in my opinion, is the last sub-section which focuses on Gramsci's Southern Question. The last (and unfinished) political writing before his imprisonment entitled 'Some Themes on the Southern Questions' is important to understand later Gramscian concepts of hegemony, intellectuals and the historical bloc (p. 101–108).

The second section, named 'Letters from prison', obviously offers Gramsci's biography in prison rather than focusing on any political philosophy. Santucci argues that Gramsci's prison letters

help us realise Gramsci's difficulties and his emotional sphere that might reflect on his prison writings (p. 112). In addition, this section, in my view, is crucial for the reader to understand not only what was in Gramsci's head but also the circumstances surrounding his physical life.

The next section considers the 'Prison Notebooks', the most well known work by Antonio Gramsci, however, within a brief span of 24 pages. In this section, Santucci focuses more on theoretical stance than other sections. He attempts to show that Gramsci's ideas were inherited from some preceding thinkers such as Marx, Labriola, Machiavelli and Lenin. Some of Gramsci's vital political theories are discussed in this section, for example, the concept of common sense and the critique of common sense or good sense. Santucci argues that in order to win a large section of people over to new ideas, it is necessary to begin from a critique of old common sense (p. 140), and in order to do that, the concept of intellectuals as the organisers of hegemony should be considered.

The most important idea in this section is Gramsci's refinement of Marx's idea of unity between theory and practice. Following Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach' in which he states that 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it'.⁴ Santucci sees that Gramsci was a distinct Marxist thinker who could combine both theory and practice because he had direct experience in the socialist struggle in Turin (p. 147). Moreover, other important ideas of Gramsci have been discussed later in this section,

⁴K. Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>

for example, the concept of critique of economism, the concept of dialectical composition between the base and superstructure which Gramsci called the ‘historical bloc’, and the concept of hegemony. Santucci’s presentation in this section shows that Gramsci was a theoretician who had a holistic view of political reality because he showed in each concept that all factors, both material and ideological, are related.

The last section entitled ‘End-of-Century Gramsci’ provides theoretical legacies of Gramsci for both academic scholars and social and political movements. In this section, Santucci argues that in Gramsci’s ideas and theories, the common feature is the struggle for the emancipation of the subordinate classes (p. 165). To emancipate the subaltern from the bourgeois hegemony, I found an intriguing idea of Santucci on hegemony and truth (p. 168–169) in which he argues that the subaltern should gain ‘active–direct’ consent rather than a ‘passive–indirect’ consent. To achieve this consent, the subaltern should use the method of ‘telling the truth’ (p. 169) which could take place from the masses movement and it could take the long term project.

In short, Antonio Santucci’s *Antonio Gramsci* is a lively introduction to both Gramsci’s life and thought. This book provides a good and concise biography of Gramsci’s political life, which paves the way for the reader to comprehend his difficulties and poor circumstances that might reflect on his thought. Nevertheless, the book also considers some crucial and complex theories and uses a comfortable writing style.