

Gramsci's "Jacobin Prince" and Leading Light Communism

-Jacob Brown

Part 2/3 of a series on Leading Light Communism and the Writings of Antonio Gramsci

(llco.org)

In Greek Mythology, there is a story about how humanity received fire. The Titan Prometheus stole fire from the gods to give it to humans. Prometheus went the home of the gods on Mt. Olympus with a stalk of fennel, and inside it hid a spark from one of the thunderbolts of Zeus, the king of the gods. The Titan quietly departed Mt. Olympus and gave the smoldering stalk of fennel to humanity, so that humanity could free themselves from the tyranny of the gods that ruled over them. Infuriated at Prometheus' solidarity with humanity against their cruel reign, the gods punished Prometheus:

"Here is Prometheus, the rebel:

Nail him to the rock, secure him on this towering summit

Fast in the unyielding grip of adamantine chains.

It was your treasure that he stole, the flowery splendour

Of all-fashioning fire, and gave to men - an offence

Intolerable to the gods, for which he now must suffer." (1)

The myth tells how Zeus, the king of the Gods, would send an eagle to eat Prometheus' liver. Being an immortal Titan, his liver would grow back every night. Day after day, the eagle would return to torment Prometheus by eating his liver yet again. However, Prometheus was successful, and humanity began to free itself from the rule of the gods. Much later, a child of Zeus and a mortal human by the name of Heracles would come to free Prometheus and kill the eagle tormentor.

In the 1901 pamphlet "What Is To Be Done?", Lenin points out the need to bring the science of revolution out of the bourgeois academy and to the proletariat through professional vanguard communist party. (2) Antonio Gramsci points out

in his “Prison Notebooks” how the communist party is like Niccolò Machiavelli’s “Prince” but with a Jacobin rather than a conservative character. This Jacobin Prince enables the proletariat to replace the cultural hegemony of the bourgeoisie with proletarian cultural hegemony. In discussing Machiavelli’s book “The Prince”, Gramsci writes:

“Throughout the book, Machiavelli discusses what the Prince must be like if he is to lead a people to found a new State; the argument is developed with rigorous logic, and with scientific detachment. In the conclusion, Machiavelli merges with the people, becomes the people; not, however, some “generic” people, but the people whom he, Machiavelli, has convinced by the preceding argument — the people whose consciousness and whose expression he becomes and feels himself to be, with whom he feels identified.” (3)

The myth of Prometheus can be viewed as an allegory for the role of the vanguard communist party, or Gramsci’s Proletarian Jacobin interpretation of Machiavelli’s Prince, in the early stages. Without access to the revolutionary science that the Bourgeois World keeps for itself, the Proletarian World cannot free itself from the rule of the Bourgeois World. Leading Light Communists from inside the Bourgeois World are like Prometheus in Greek mythology, who give science to the Proletarian World, that they may unite and make revolution against the Bourgeois World. Like Prometheus, Leading Light Communists in the Bourgeois World face the wrath of their own bourgeois society. Some have made great sacrifices for the sake of empowering the proletariat, including capture and torture in the dungeons of the Bourgeois World. This is the self-sacrifice of our comrades within the Bourgeois World for the masses of the Proletarian World.

In addition to the bourgeois intellectuals who act in solidarity with the masses through the communist party, there are the proletarian “organic intellectuals” that arise from within the masses. As Gramsci had explained, these organic intellectuals from the proletariat make the cultural hegemony of the proletariat in society possible. The knowledge and practice of the organic intellectual of the Proletarian World is superior to the “formal intellectual” of the Bourgeois World, as the latter is divorced from the lived experiences, ancestral knowledge, religious traditions, and customs of the masses. The formal intellectuals are better strategically placed to give the masses the weapon of revolutionary science, whereas organic intellectuals from the masses can better use the weapon of revolutionary science. These organic intellectuals of the Leading Light inspire

the masses to smash the old powers and build the New Power.

So-called “post-colonial” thinkers who wax poetic about “the subaltern” have attempted to divorce Gramsci’s ideas from revolutionary science (4), from Leading Light Communism. They regard any attempt to scientifically look at how the world is divided up between the Global Rich and the Global Poor (the subaltern in this case), the antagonistic social relationship of those groups, and how we can make revolution as “elitist representation” of the subaltern groups. These subjectivist narrative-obsessed “post-colonial” thinkers of today are not unlike syndicalist Georges Sorel, of which Gramsci writes:

“A study might be made of how it came about that Sorel never advanced from his conception of ideology-as-myth to an understanding of the political party, but stopped short at the idea of the trade union. It is true that for Sorel the “myth” found its fullest expression not in the trade union as organisation of a collective will, but in its practical action—sign of a collective will already operative. The highest achievement of this practical action was to have been the general strike—i.e. a “passive activity”, so to speak, of a negative and preliminary kind (it could only be given a positive character by the realisation of a common accord between the various wills involved), an activity which does not envisage an “active and constructive” phase of its own. Hence in Sorel there was a conflict of two necessities: that of the myth, and that of the critique of the myth—in that “every pre-established plan is utopian and reactionary”. The outcome was left to the intervention of the irrational, to chance (in the Bergsonian sense of “*élan vital*”) or to “spontaneity”.” (5)

The organic intellectuals of the Leading Light are like the mythical Heracles, as they will lead the world’s masses to defeat the old powers and free Prometheus from his capture and torment. This is correct orientation towards developing the revolutionary communist leaders of the future. Prometheus may be a Titan who sacrificed himself to give humanity the fire of revolutionary science. However, it is Heracles who is the Hero of legend, who overcame all of his struggles with the Gods by wielding the fire of revolutionary science.

The New Power of the Leading Light, in its early phase in the Proletarian World, is the fertile soil from which the organic intellectuals of the Leading Light must grow. In turn, these organic intellectuals of the Leading Light can lead the masses to challenge the old powers, while expanding and deepening the roots of the New

Power. The Leading Lights of the Bourgeois World betray their own material interests to provide the spark of revolutionary science and resources to the masses, in solidarity. In turn, the Leading Lights of the Proletarian World apply the mass line (6), to unleash a torrent of revolution that paves the way for the victory of Global People's War! In the long run, it is the Leading Light comrades and masses of people in the Proletarian World who are the center of the World Revolution, but those exceptional Leading Light comrades in the Bourgeois World can and will make glorious contributions to speed up the motion towards complete victory!

We have the line, we have leadership, we have the organization to raise up the next generation of communist leadership for the 21st century -Leading Light Communist leadership! Join us on this New Long March towards total human liberation!

Notes:

1. Aeschylus, "Prometheus Bound"
2. V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?"
3. Antonio Gramsci, "Selections from Prison Notebooks: The Modern Prince", p. 319
4. Marcus Green, "Gramsci Cannot Speak: Presentations and Interpretations of Gramsci's Concept of the Subaltern"
5. Antonio Gramsci, "Selections from Prison Notebooks: The Modern Prince", p. 319-320
6. Mao Zedong, "Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong", Chapter 11: The Mass Line