

Civil Society in Limbo Between Democracy and Hegemony: Neo-Corporatist Strategy and the Role of Civil Society in Manufacturing Consent for Educational Policies

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Abstract

This study aimed to present a political analysis on how the political power uses the neocorporatist strategy while generating consent to education policies and what role civil society associations such as educational associations and unions play in generating consent to the education policies implemented in Turkey.

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Key Words: *Education Policies, Neo-corporatism, civil society, hegemony*

Introduction

The phenomenon of civil society has evolved over a long historical process. In the Aristotelian framework, civil society is considered inherent to political society (Aristotle, 1998). However, in the modern period, as the state mechanism gained power, the contrast between the political society (*societe politique*) inherent in the state and the natural society (*societe naturelle*) meaning the field of economic relations came to the fore (Cohen & Arato, 1992).

In this context, until the late modern period, including Hegel, civil society was understood as bourgeois civil society (*Bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) in which the working class was not socially involved or which excluded the oppressed (Kean, 1988). For this reason, Marx sees civil society as a liberal development on the one hand, and as an economic-political substructural area on the other (Marx & Engels, 1951). Although it is a liberal phenomenon,

the concept of civil society is also accepted as a historical democratization development in terms of creating a civilian pressure mechanism against the totalitarian state (Cohen & Arato, 1992).

However, Gramsci, who had a Marxist suspicion of the phenomenon of civil society, developed the concept of the Integral (expanded) State, based on Hegel's idea of the devotion of bourgeois civil society to the universal state mechanism through co-corporatism, and has seen civil society as a field of consent production that expanded the state's administrative control and hegemony construction area. (Gramsci, 1999).

So, considering the historical process, what kind of perspective should we have towards civil society today? Civil society as a source of democratic oxygen that can remain outside the purview of the state (Cohen & Arato, 1992)? Or should it be understood as an area of control and consent construction of the State and power through a network of neo-corporatist relations or legal associations developed with administrative mechanisms as a power strategy in the age of late capitalism (Neocleous, 2015)? Or should civil society be seen as a pendulum that swings between democracy and hegemony, sometimes even producing both? How can a real oppositional political subjectivity that manages to fight against the government for its rights be possible within the boundaries of legal civil society?

In the light of these questions, when we think about the issue in terms of the field of education, we can see that civil society can sometimes be a real opposition political subject in the implementation of the education policies put forward by political powers, and at times it can connect the masses to the power through the social representation system as legal associations within the system and become a tool for gaining consent to education policies. We can also witness it. Therefore, it is necessary to think about what kind of stance and role civil society can have in the processes of making the education policies of the political power accepted by the society, based on some current examples. Particularly, considering a period of biopolitics (Foucault, 1990) in which the boundaries of the political spread throughout the social sphere, it is a matter of question what kind of political stance civil society has, for example, in processes of consent building towards neo-liberal and neo-conservative education policies. For example, how does the process of manufacturing consent for education policies or displaying an oppositional political subjectivity work by education unions or parent associations?

Therefore, this study aims to present a political analysis of what role civil society, embodied in parent and educational associations and unions, has in manufacturing consent for the Education Policies implemented in Turkey, as well as its potential to produce an egalitarian democracy.

Method

As a theoretical study, this study used the literature review method, which is one of the qualitative research approaches and allows interpreting different empirical examples from a specific theoretical framework (Balci, 2018).

Civil Society, Government and Education Policies

The phenomenon of civil society should be understood based on a long political history. In ancient Greece, within the Aristotelian framework, civil society was used as the political society of citizens who were considered free and equal within the system of laws and was considered inherent to the political society. In other words, each member of civil society was seen as a natural member of the city's decision-making mechanism (Kean, 1993: 40-48). However, in the modern period, with the complexity of social relations and the idea of a strong and autonomous state, a social space separate from the political society was formed, and the opposition between the political society and the civil society in which economic relations took place occurred (Cohen & Arato, 2013). In this context, a separation of civil society, disconnected from the political, has emerged. This distinction continues in a unique way in Hegel.

Because Hegel puts civil society, which is the socioeconomic one, as an atomized sphere of interests whose basic character is bourgeois, against the "political state" expressed as political society. However, civil society is understood as bourgeois civil society. But, for Hegel, this distinction should be overcome in an ideal "universal state" in which spiritual history matures itself (Hegel, 1991). In Marx, although there is still a distinction between civil society and state, the state is perceived as an intermediary for the hegemony of bourgeois civil society (Marx & Engels, 1987). Although we can say that the working class was not yet included in the definition of civil society because it was not yet recognized historically and legally until the early 1800s, the working-class struggle also enables us to

see civil society as an area of economic contradictions, that is, an infrastructural area (Kean, 1993). For Marx, the main thing is to overcome the civil society-state duality within the category of "Social" through the struggle of the working class. Category of Social pointed out a social ideal in which the state was abolished, and all individuals gained the right to speak and became politicized with the principle of equality (Marx, 1976; 2009; Marx & Engels, 1987).

Gramsci, on the other hand, was influenced by both Marx and Hegel in different ways while creating his own understanding of civil society. As we have noted, Hegel sees a distinction between the political state (parliament or political society) and civil society. However, his understanding of the state is a dialectical process and is not complete. The political state is a stage and is distinguished from civil society, but the "universal state" is different from this. And in terms of the universal state, family, civil society and political state are moments for the "ideal state" to realize itself. And in this respect civil society was included by the state. It is a complement, a stage for its realization (Hegel, 1991). In this respect, civil society is seen as a field of corporations integrated with the state through a series of interlocking mechanisms. Its main characteristic is that it is bourgeois. Corporations form a cooperation network that complements both each other and the power of the powerful state (Neocleous, 2015). In this sense, the strong tyrannical state, which we are used to seeing especially in fascist regimes, uses the idea of corporatism that serves itself, including the corporation of all parts (Öztan, 2015).

It is this Hegelian holistic understanding of the state and the position of civil society here that really influenced Gramsci. As a matter of fact, Gramsci saw that civil society had turned into a mechanism that expanded the hegemony of the state. Because, for Hegel, corporations (for example, commercial bourgeois civil society associations) serve the state's influence on civil society as a complement to the state system, and on the other hand, they represent the influence of civil society on the state by participating in the state decision-making mechanism through the Estates Assembly. This process enables the expansion of the state's sphere of influence by gathering two separate mechanisms together under a corporation (Neocleous, 2015).

Because a corporation can only exist within civil society if it is legally established. Thus, the field of civil society comes under the control of the political state and non-governmental

organizations function as a management mechanism. However, these corporations also penetrate into the state through class assemblies, just like in Polatzans' state theory, and turn the state and its bureaucracy into a field of struggle. While this creates a democratic view that enables the public to participate in the decision-making mechanisms of the state, it also operates the dialectical process of connecting civil society to the state through legal governance mechanisms. Thus, a group, such as the union bureaucracy, which is an organ that regulates the relations between the government and the people, acquires a political position within the state. From another perspective, the state absorbs social power and struggle within an administrative form (pp. 20-30).

When we look at the situation from the perspective of the working class, the working class was just at the beginning of the process of struggling with civil society, which, historically, was essentially bourgeois. And the working class did not have the right to legal recognition and therefore to form civil society associations in the early 1800s. This of course made the struggle of the working-class illegal. It was both illegal and the working-class struggle potential for the bourgeoisie and the state was dispersed and uncontrolled (p. 30).

However, with their struggles, the working class, of course, managed to gain legal recognition along with some rights in the process, and thus entered a process of legal struggle for rights against the system through legal associations in the form of civil society associations, such as trade unions. However, although legal recognition had many positive consequences in terms of rights acquisition, there was also another side of the coin. Workers who had an uncontrolled revolutionary potential in an illegal position faced the risk of being tied to the administrative control mechanisms of the state through legal unions. Thus, a historical moment occurred for the working class. Gain and loss, the step of getting rid of the chain but also the dialectic of surrendering one end of the chain to the power, this entire process appeared as two different aspects of the same historical development¹.

Indeed, for the working class, the state had the opportunity to restructure civil society in the process of granting recognition as a blessing. The class struggle was being accommodated

¹ For this very reason, there has been a long debate in the Marxist literature about whether a real revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie and the state can be carried out within legal limits or not (Lenin, 1989). For many revolutionary theories, the revolutionary struggle can only be illegal for this reason (Savran, 2022).

by the state, which led to the possibility of suppression of the struggle and forced the working class to integrate with the bourgeois social order (Neocleous, 2015).

It is in this context that Gramsci's concept of the integral (extended) state should be understood. Thinking around the concept of hegemony, the state, on the one hand, has an effort to crush the working-class political struggle organs (sometimes based on force), and on the other hand, there is an effort to keep the working class under control by creating a management mechanism that includes it. Thus, the effort to grind economic resistance organs such as labor unions and cooperatives within the bourgeois state machine will mean the expansion of the state space with the help of legalities and the establishment of hegemony from within.

In this context, the concept of hegemony is used to first establish leadership and then expand it to establish a way of life. The meaning of leadership was primarily used to mean the establishment of leadership by the proletariat in the Russian revolution. However, from this point on, Gramsci also examined how Italian fascism was established and used the concept of hegemony to understand the state apparatus and to explain the process by which the bourgeoisie and the state apparatus were able to establish a mass that was loyal or able to adapt to the regime (Gramsci, 1999; Thomas, 2010; Sassoon, 2012).

In this framework, we can argue that every political regime strives to organize a mass by hegemonizing its own political mass. However, the government will need to develop a strategy for social elements opposing the system. It aims to keep the oppositional revolutionary energy under control by either completely excluding these elements and suppressing them by force, which is a strategy that does not fit the definition of hegemony, or by grouping them under several legal administrative mechanisms by using a strategy of inclusion rather than exclusion. This is how the idea of an integral state, which expanded the limits of control of the state thanks to the civil society associations with which it could be in constant negotiation and communication and their legality, and thus the strategy of turning civil society into a hegemony device, was formed (Jessob, 2008).

In other words, for Gramsci, a hegemony organized by the state is a hegemony established from within the civil society itself and based on the relationship with civil society. The idea of corporatism serving the state power that we encounter in Hegel, when we approach it

within the framework of Gramsci's understanding of hegemony, turns into a neo-corporatist strategy in which the state keeps civil society associations under control through legal administrative mechanisms and strengthens cooperation by involving them in continuous communication and decision-making mechanisms. This process, which can also be called a new form of management or governance, appears as operating with more top-down and populist subordinations, rather than being more participatory and democratic, depending on how democratic the system operates.

For example, the ways in which the state, employer associations and labor unions are brought together in neo-corporatist cooperation may work differently in the democracy of the European Union or in the democracy of developing countries. But a fundamental insidious logic operates in both, the process of hegemonizing oppositional energy through participation or inclusion. This appears as a neo-corporatist strategy that works as a contemporary and democratic way of the Hegelian understanding of corporatism.

Workers are kept together through unions, and unions are held together in the form of confederations, and they engage in rights bargaining with the employer and the state with the help of an arbitration committee composed of the state and employers, with emphasis on the representative union (Cizre, 1992a; 1992b). From the perspective of the opposition forces, it is possible that this will turn into a real struggle for political hegemony, but from the perspective of the government, this process is used as the most humane strategy to keep the opposition forces under control through democracy. For this reason, we tend to portray the appearance of neocorporatist functioning in European civil society integration as an exemplary democracy (Schmitter, 1974). However, this process is actually nothing more than a democratic view of the process of governing in favor of the oligarchy through inclusion, participation and governance. In countries like Turkey, this process is more hierarchical, its participation is partial, and it fails to be based on democratically organized, grassroots real participation.

Civil Society, State and Neocorporatist Strategy

We have stated that the most basic political process of hegemony construction takes place through civil society. What role can political associations such as political parties or unions in the field of civil society or civil associations such as various associations and organizations

play in the construction of hegemony by the political power? This role can be understood in the context of the concept of "neocorporatism", which can be explained as the negotiation of civil society associations with the system or their participation in the management process as a cooperation within the system and reproducing the system (Olson, 1986). In this framework, neocorporatism can be understood as a form of articulation with state intervention through a kind of political representation (Jessop, 2008; p. 153). In this sense, interpreting the form of cooperation and discursive partnership that unions establish with the state by being included in the management mechanism of political power within the framework of the concept of neocorporatism (Schmitter, 1974) is an important point in understanding the hegemony process.

We can also understand the concept of neo-corporatism based on the concept of corporatism. As a system of representation that integrates particular interests, corporatism can be understood as a particular combination of political representation and state intervention. In this sense, in one sense, it refers to the representation of interests that are authorized to represent, under the control of the state, in the articulation of demands and supports and in the selection of leaders (Jessop, 2008). While a hierarchical and authoritarian "state corporatism" is seen in some countries and historical periods, a more democratic, participatory and pluralistic new form of corporatism emerges in some countries. Schmitter, for example, argues that Euro-Corporatism, which has a pluralistic civil society structure in the structure of the European Union, is a form of neocorporatism or social corporatism that functions within the framework of neofunctionalism, which provides a civil society integration that operates with democratic participation in decision-making mechanisms instead of state corporatism (Schmitter, 1991; p. 142).

P. Schmitter claimed that the 20th century was still the age of corporatism and described the reshaping of civil society-state integration by expanding the borders of the state as neocorporatism (Schmitter, 1974). L. Panitch, on the other hand, argues that Marxist theorists have not yet been able to establish a state theory that shows how civil society associations, especially unions, are included in the new form of capitalism (Panitch, 1981; p.23). According to Panitch, "corporatism is a political structure in which socioeconomic groups are integrated into advanced capitalism through mutual cooperation at the level of representation and leadership in order to achieve social control of mass mobility" (p.24).

Schmitter, on the other hand, argues that the political future will now be based on a new form of corporatism operating within unionism rather than a state corporatism (Schmitter, 1974). According to Panitch, this new form of corporatism should be seen as a kind of political structure that contributes to the effort to build hegemony with the mechanism of incorporating unions into the system. At this point, the point that will be of vital importance for unions is whether they will be able to protect themselves as a structure belonging to the working class that is autonomous and independent of the state, and in this context, whether they will become an extension of the state corporatist structure that reproduces the system or not (Panitch, 1981; 27-40).

As a matter of fact, the capitalist state and the capital class aim to damage union independence with the help of the corporatist model and to keep the workers under mass control with the help of the representation relationship through the labor aristocracy. For this reason, the fact that unions are divided due to problems such as loss of union independence and wage suppression caused by corporatism should not be overlooked (Panitch, 1977).

In this respect, corporatism is functional for the capitalist state. Because the capitalist state organizes social classes, for example the anti-capitalist working class, unions, trade unions, professional organizations, etc. organizations as politically equivalent communities represented by corporations and requiring their compromise and cooperation as a condition for effective intervention.

In this sense, neocorporatism becomes a tool of social control that aims to ensure that central labor organizations such as unions are integrated into the system and make demands that will not shake the political sovereignty of the bourgeoisie (Cizre, 1992a; 1992b).

In this context, some concrete examples can be given from Turkey of the political power's production of consent to education policies with the help of neo-corporatist strategy.

For example, Eğitim Bir Sen education union, representing its members, supported the increase of religious lessons in schools (Eğitim Bir Sen, 2014). In addition, this union supports the government's cooperation with religious foundations and communities, and has even participated in the "Education Support Platform" (EDP) meetings, which are formed by the combination of various religious non-governmental associations, at an institutional

level in every province (Bursa.gov.tr, 2019). . Thus, with the help of neo-corporatist strategy, the perception can be created that the religious education policy in question operates not as a process imposed by the political power on the society, but as a democratic process demanded by the civil society from the grassroots. Or similarly, Eğitim Bir Sen union expressed the following opinion before the privatization policies of the political power were put into practice: "The fact that the rate of private schools in Turkey is around 3% and the number of private educational institutions is higher should be seen as an opportunity rather than a threat" (Eğitim Bir Sen 2019). By arguing that the number of private schools should be increased on the grounds of increasing competition and quality in education, this Union can create the appearance of having built a (albeit passive) consent towards privatization policies.

Or, the Türk Eğitim Sen union supported and produced consent to the hijab policy of the political power in schools, even during the periods when it was most opposed to the political power and followed an opposition policy (Türk Eğitim Sen Haber Bülteni, 2012). Even the Education Sen union, which follows left-wing policies, indirectly contributed to the generation of consent to the hijab policy of the political power due to its attitude that one should be democratic and liberal in choosing clothing or lifestyle (Memurlar.net, 2006). In this context, we can see that the neocorporatist strategy can sometimes succeed in gaining consent even from the opposition civil society.

In addition, the neo-corporatist style relationship process between unions and the political power on many issues such as collective contract negotiations, development of vocational education policies compatible with capitalist policies, private school student incentive loans, Bologna process, university-industry cooperation, market-compatible performance-oriented vocational education law, Sometimes the trade unions contributes to the production of consent to the education policies of the political power, sometimes an explicit and/or implicit consent is produced, and sometimes they fight against these policies.

Discussion

Based on the theoretical framework in the study (Cizre, 1992a; 1992b; Panitch, 1981; Schmitter, 1974) and some concrete examples, neo-corporatist strategies are used in

generating consent for education policies and trade unions have a role that causes the expansion of the state mechanism. It is seen that they can produce consent by persuading society.

For this reason, one of the main discussion points in this study is the question of how it is possible for civil society associations that have to be connected to the state apparatus through legal associations to organize a real, independent and democratic political process, taking into account their organizational order and functioning. The creation of a civil society that is economically and legally independent and can be organized democratically within itself should be discussed (Panitch, 1981; 1977). It can be stated that if a democratic and free civil society understanding cannot be established, democracy is suspended, and it is very difficult to eliminate the situation of being faced with a society with a muted voice that has to live within the phenomenon of a unilaterally expanded state.

Conclusion

As a result, based on some concrete examples reflecting civil society, it is seen that many unions have a role in manufacturing consent for the education policies of the political power, causing the expansion of the state mechanism and administrative processes. This role of civil society in manufacturing consent for education policies shows that oppositional or non-oppositional civil society associations within the framework of neocorporatist strategy may have the potential to gain consent to political power policies and therefore reproduce power. It is seen that the political power's structuring of its relations with civil society with the help of neo-corporatist strategies and the failure to create an understanding of civil society that is economically and legally independent and can be organized democratically within itself, may lead to gaining consent for these policies from civil society associations such as unions while producing education policies.

Recommendations

Even though civil society associations and unions have legal entities that are a legal part of the system and can open their associations and unions within certain limits and laws and are structurally controlled by the political power, they have managed to loosen or break their organic and economic ties with the political power and system and To the extent that they

were able to establish a democratic organization within themselves, they may have been able to display a real opposition and come close to waging a real struggle with the system.

As Claus Offe argues, the expansion of power towards the field of civil society through various strategies, that is, expanding its borders, is a breakthrough for the power, and on the other hand, it also brings about the constant and rebirth of resistance at the very heart of power. Just as Ranciere, on the one hand, and Hardt and Negri, on the other hand, have determined, sovereignty is not a unilateral act. Since sovereignty will necessarily have to include the dominated pole, the last word will not be spoken in the process of sovereignty until the oppressed pole has its say. Therefore, if we read this strategy of expansion of power from, for example, a Foucauldian perspective, wherever the power is, there will be resistance. In this sense, it can be said that the boundaries of the political have expanded considerably and even the private has become political. Therefore, it can be argued that breaking the structural trap in which unions are held through corporatism or through populist strategies can only be possible if the political operates outside the structural boundaries, in the field of particularities, and the resistance can spread everywhere. For this reason, only an understanding of civil society that questions and deconstructs its own structural political processes and is open to the politics of particularities instead of the cult of leaders can be considered a step towards a truly independent and democratic civil society understanding.

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