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The Concept of the Social Bloc in Political Economy

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The concept of the social bloc in political economy

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September 2024

Abstract: The notion of ‘social bloc’ is increasingly present in the political economy literature but its different uses do not always correspond to the same meaning. We compare our concept of social bloc with some of the different notions of bloc that one can find in Gramsci’s writings, which are often cited as a reference by scholars who use the notions of social, hegemonic or historical bloc. Stressing the differences between our concept and Gramsci’s historical bloc, we discuss how different notions of domination and crisis are related with our own concept and we conclude by looking at what a historical bloc would be in our own approach.

Keywords: social bloc, hegemony, domination, crisis, Gramsci

JEL: B51, B52

Introduction

The notion of ‘bloc’ or ‘social bloc’ is increasingly present in the political economy literature,¹ and reference to Gramsci most often accompanies these usages. However, a reading of this literature and the related commentaries shows that the notion covers a relatively broad conceptual space and that the ambiguities associated with its use can be the source of misunderstandings and misinterpretations. The reference to Gramsci is itself a potential source of difficulty if we take into account the fact that the Italian theorist, concerned above all with political action, made varied use of the notion of bloc, a characteristic that is found in most of the concepts he mobilised. This probably renders illusory the attempt to find in Gramsci the ‘true’ meaning of the concept of bloc, but it does argue for the elaboration of a definition of social bloc adapted to the object we set out to analyse.

Within the framework of an approach that we have termed ‘neorealist political economy’ (Amable & Palombarini 2005), the notion of social bloc is mobilised in numerous individual or joint works.² The purpose of this article is to return to the concept of the social bloc as we define it, highlighting how it differs from Gramsci’s concept of the historical bloc, and to see how it is used to specify different types of domination and crisis.

After presenting our definition of a social bloc and explaining that our approach is based on a differentiation of three dimensions of domination, we return to Gramsci’s notion of bloc to point out the differences and similarities. We discuss the different types of crisis associated with our definition of domination, and conclude by asking what a historical bloc would look like in the neorealist approach.

1/ The social bloc in neorealist political economy

We call a social bloc a set of socio-political groups unified by a political strategy and supporting this strategy with the aim of gaining and maintaining power. A political strategy proposes a programme for implementing public policies involving, among other things, economic policy decisions (budget, etc.), and aims to achieve a certain configuration of economic or political institutions, leading

¹ For instance in May «et al. (2024).

² From Palombarini (2001) and Amable (2003) to Amable & Palombarini (2024).

to institutional stability or structural reforms. A socio-political group brings together agents who express the same type of expectations of public action, and its support for the political strategy in question depends on the extent to which its expectations are met.

Support can take many forms, and is not limited to voting, but involves all actions likely to promote the implementation of the chosen political strategy or to counteract competing political strategies: voting, mass actions, financial support, expertise, influence, violence, etc. The nature of the actions and their effectiveness depend on the identity of the socio-political groups and their place in the social structure, determining the type of resources, material or otherwise, available to them. Both the nature of the actions and their effectiveness depend on the identity of the socio-political groups and their place in the social structure, determining the type of resources, material or otherwise, at their disposal.

A social bloc is thus in principle heterogeneous: this is the case when several groups consider that their expectations, which may differ to a greater or lesser extent, are sufficiently taken into account by a certain political strategy. A social bloc is hierarchical because the support of certain groups, in whatever form, is generally more important to the success of the political strategy than that of other groups, reflecting the inequalities in political power between social groups that result from differences in position in the social structure. The main expectations of the central groups in the social bloc will then form the core of the unifying political project. The expectations of peripheral groups, on the other hand, will be met to a degree that may vary according to the political and economic situation.

A social bloc is said to be dominant if it is able to politically validate the strategy that corresponds to it, i.e. when the bloc's support ensures the political victory of that strategy. The conditions under which validation occurs depend on the political institutions.

Our concept of the social bloc thus corresponds to the most directly political dimension of social conflict, that which concerns, in a given ideological and institutional context, the links between social expectations and the determination of public policies. But social conflict, which is rooted in the diversity of positions stemming from the economic and productive organisation, does not boil down to this dimension alone: it also concerns the confrontation between the ideological paradigms which guide the vision of the role of the State and the conceptions of public action considered by the majority as feasible, realistic, legitimate, effective, conceivable or desirable, and which therefore condition the formation of expectations as well as that, which derives from them, of socio-political groups. The conflict also concerns social institutions, i.e. the rules which, at different levels, organise the functioning of the overall social structure, and which are only partly under the control of public decision-makers.

The dimensions in which social conflict is articulated (ideological, institutional, 'political' in the strictest sense of the term) evolve by conditioning each other, but according to their own specific logics and temporalities. Thus, our notion of a dominant social bloc (DSB) corresponds to a certain configuration of political power relations, which determine the ability of political decision-makers to direct their actions. However, groups that are part of the DSB, i.e. groups that support the political strategy in power because they believe, each for their own reasons, that some of their main expectations are sufficiently taken into account, may consider themselves penalised by the existing institutional architecture and have expectations of institutional change that can be, at least in part, taken into account in the dominant political strategy. These groups then find themselves in a dominant position in the institutional dimension of the conflict. The expectations, or some of them, of these groups may also be disqualified as illegitimate, unrealistic or contrary to the 'general interest' by the dominant ideological paradigm. In this case, we would be dealing with groups that are politically dominant but in a weak position in the ideological dimension of the conflict.

To avoid any misunderstanding of our approach, a number of points need to be emphasised.

a/ We need to distinguish between social groups that can be identified on the basis of the objective position occupied by their members in the economic and productive structure, and socio-political groups defined on the basis of the expectations they have of public action and the future of society. Thus, the sociological composition of a socio-political group is generally heterogeneous. The division into socio-political groups is not an immediate reflection of a certain productive organisation, because it depends in part on a process of translation which goes from the objective position occupied in the structure to the expectations concerning public action, a translation conditioned by the 'vision of the world' integrated by the agents, itself linked to the existing institutional architecture.

b/ A social bloc is not an electoral bloc. A social bloc is defined by a political project, an electoral bloc is not necessarily. To illustrate this point, we can take the example of the median voter model, where the winning political choice corresponds to the preferences of a tiny minority but nevertheless obtains the votes of a majority. To win, there is no need for political compromise. More generally, historical examples abound of electoral victories that were short-lived because they were achieved on the basis of disparate promises: if the electoral support of certain groups is not accompanied by a genuine integration of their demands into the political strategy, power rests on fragile foundations. The notion of a social bloc, on the other hand, presupposes a political project that functions as a genuine compromise between the expectations expressed by several social groups, in the sense that these groups identify with the same project, even if for different reasons and to a different extent.

c/ The political strategy implemented by political actors, which depends on the institutional and historical context, cannot be reduced to electoral competition, because it is not limited to trying to win elections: the ways of taking or exercising power and maintaining power can be very diverse. Political action takes place at different levels: ideological, organisational, programmatic and strategic.

d/ The identity of political actors also depends on the historical and institutional context. These actors obviously include political parties, at least in democratic societies, but other protagonists in the political conflict may also play an important role: the administration, the army, etc.

2/ The different dimensions of social domination in our approach (political, ideological, institutional)

A social conflict based on dimensions that are linked but differ in terms of the temporality of their evolution, the logic that governs it, and the protagonists of the conflict, implies that the relations of domination that characterise the conflict vary in turn from one dimension to another.

Thus, *political domination* is defined by whether or not one belongs to the DSB; this membership manifests itself through support for the government which, as we have emphasised, can take many forms and is conditional on the satisfaction of the expectations of the groups making up the bloc.

Institutional domination is, in a way, the delayed effect of political domination, its setting in stone (usually in law). It corresponds to the protection that existing institutions offer to the interests of certain groups to the detriment of others.

Ideological domination is linked to the existence of a paradigm in a position of power, which validates certain expectations as realistic, legitimate, moral, etc., and disqualifies others. Ideological power struggles also have repercussions on the perception of institutions as corresponding or not to economic efficiency, social justice, the general interest, and so on.

It should be noted that the ideological aspect is not simply a 'battle of ideas'. Acceptance of a political horizon also depends on political practices. The ideological domination of neoliberalism has not rested solely on the purely intellectual or propaganda activities of organisations such as the Mont Pèlerin Society or intellectuals like Hayek or Friedman. The fact that neoliberal-inspired policies have been implemented by left-wing governments has reinforced the ideological dominance of neoliberalism at least as much as all the intellectual production explaining that there is no alternative. A left-wing government that came to power on an alternative programme and then renounces it in order to implement policies that it had previously denounced and opposed, is demonstrating in practice that the alternative does not exist. The message sent to its social base is that there is no point in expressing expectations of a more or less radical change in economic policy, since even the political forces that are supposed to implement this change are giving up on it.

The three dimensions (political, institutional and ideological) of social conflict evolve together, the dynamics of each having repercussions on the other two, but according to their own temporality and responding to a logic that differs from one dimension to another: the support generated by the different strategies for the political dimension, the possibility of enshrining certain compromises in social rules for the institutions, the ability to translate a paradigm into 'common sense' for the ideology.

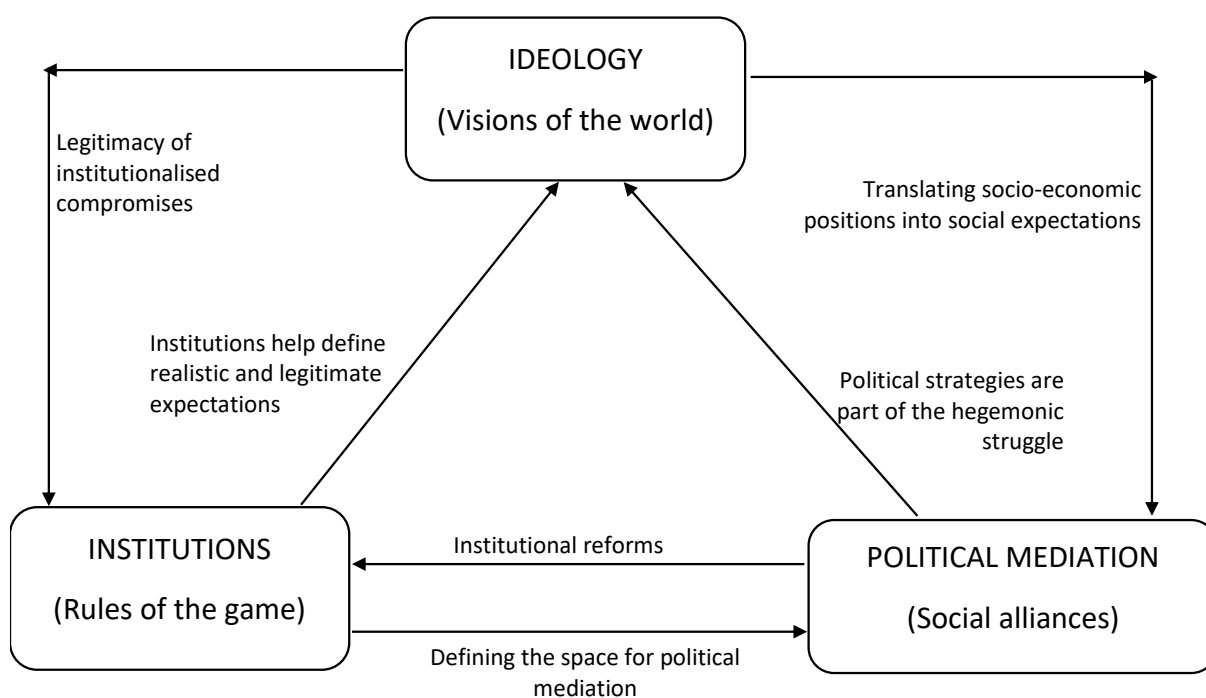


Figure 1. The three dimensions of domination. Source: figure 5.2, Amable & Palombarini (2024).

3/ Gramsci : bloc historique et crises

It is common to link the notion of the social bloc to a Gramscian influence. In our case, this is only partially true, and the connection with Gramsci's various notions of bloc is more complex than it seems.

Gramsci refers to different types of bloc. Douet (2018) points out that in the work of the Italian philosopher we find expressions such as 'social bloc', 'national bloc', 'intellectual bloc', 'urban bloc' and 'rural bloc', 'mechanical bloc of social groups', 'industrial-productive bloc', 'liberal bloc of the right and

centre', 'bloc of all the forces of the right' etc. The central concept in Gramsci's work is that of the 'historical bloc', which can be defined as the dialectical unity of the economic structure and the politico-ideological superstructure. For Gramsci, the notion of the historical bloc concerned the relationship between material forces and ideology, a relationship which, as we know, he saw as in no way deterministic, or the links between theory and practice. The historical bloc should not be confused with the social bloc. The historical bloc corresponds to a provisionally stable configuration of social relations, generated by the hegemonic capacity of a social class³ capable of welding the whole of society around itself in terms of both its 'economic-social content' and its 'ethico-political form', a situation which nevertheless remains characterised by conflict: for Gramsci, the historical bloc is always traversed by conflicting forces, one of which is dominant and maintains its unity (Douet 2018).

As Douet (2018: 251) shows, Gramsci does not define the historical bloc 'as the unity of different collective actors or subjects that would make a "bloc", nor as the "social base" of a mode of production or a regime of accumulation, a type of state or a political regime, and even less as the electoral base of a party coalition.' On the other hand, it is a specific articulation of the relations of reciprocal determination between structure and 'complex superstructure', the expression of a particular hegemony. The historical bloc thus corresponds to a balance of power that goes beyond the political configuration that in our approach corresponds to the existence of a dominant social bloc. It is a particular configuration of stabilisation of social conflict in its various dimensions. Gramsci's canonical example of a historical bloc is the French Revolution, and the paradigmatic bourgeois hegemony is the Jacobin hegemony.⁴ This bourgeois hegemony was able to satisfy certain interests of the working classes, in particular by eliminating the remnants of feudalism, distributing land in a more acceptable manner and introducing universal suffrage. 'These phenomena were accompanied by an intellectual and moral reform' (Douet 2018: 310). Douet (2018) also points out that Gramsci saw the mobilisation of the masses into a 'people-nation' as the main driving force behind Jacobin hegemony. We can thus see that the three dimensions of domination mentioned above are associated with hegemony according to Gramsci.

When Gramsci set himself the goal of a 'new, homogeneous, historical bloc without internal contradictions',⁵ he was not thinking of a specific social alliance or the disappearance of an unsurpassable conflictuality, but of the possible hegemony of the working class, which would unfold coherently (that is what 'without contradictions' means) in the different dimensions of social organisation. A strategy of alliance, which does not exclude the use of coercion and corresponds to a social bloc, is however indispensable in this perspective. Thus, for example, in his notes on the 'southern question', Gramsci wrote in 1926 that 'the proletariat can become the ruling and dominant class insofar as it succeeds in creating a system of class alliances which will enable it to mobilise the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois state, which, in the case of Italy, given the real relations which exist between the classes, means insofar as it succeeds in obtaining the assent of the broad peasant masses'.⁶

It is essential to stress that, for Gramsci, the existence of a historical bloc, i.e. a (dialectical) unity between 'structure' and 'superstructures', an expression of complete hegemony, is far from being

³ Douet (2018: 459): 'the persistence of a historical bloc corresponds to a relative stability of power relations, guaranteed by the hegemony of a given social group.'

⁴ See also Douet (2023).

⁵ Gramsci (1975), Quaderno 13 (XXX), p. 1612

⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Quelques thèmes de la question méridionale*, translation into French by Marie-Gracieuse Martin-Gistucci (https://www.marxists.org/francais/gramsci/works/1926/10/gramsci_19261000.pdf), translation into English is our own.

the rule in a social organisation. On the contrary, in his theoretical vision, the ordinary state of a social system is marked by the absence of syntony between the dynamics of the 'structure' and those of the 'complex superstructures'. The idea of an ever-present crisis is thus central. The same premise lies at the heart of the theory of *régulation*:⁷ the crisis, caused by the lack of coherence of institutional forms, is the starting point; regulation, on the contrary, is a largely unintentional construction. The crisis can, to use Fabio Frosini's words,⁸ be deactivated by social, cultural and political mediation:

'Gramsci comes to completely rethink the relationship between history and crisis, between structure and conjuncture, making history not the premise of a crisis, which would be the explosion of a series of contradictions accumulated in the flat time of 'development', but the successful strategy of its 'deactivation'. Crisis becomes the permanent condition of history, which loses its character as a staged and unitary process [...], to become the complex and always specific interweaving of disposed, intertwined and opposed relations of forces [...] at national and international levels.'

As has been noted, the Gramscian vision of the crisis is also that of the theory of *régulation*:

'In Gramsci we find a certain concordance with the French school of regulation (...). This school works on a reading of capitalism in the always possible and actualisable perspective of its crisis, hic et nunc escaped (...) by virtue of successful social (political) mediations.'⁹

Thus, according to Gramsci,¹⁰ 'immediate economic crises cannot in themselves produce fundamental events; they can only create a more favourable terrain for the spread of certain modes of thought, of ways of defining and resolving the questions which condition the whole future development of the life of the state'. But political crises can always occur as a consequence of mutations that affect both the 'structure' and the 'complex superstructures', and they can deepen to the point of engendering what Gramsci calls a crisis of hegemony or organic crisis:

'the crisis of hegemony of the ruling class [...] occurs either because the ruling class has failed in one of the great political undertakings for which it has forcibly demanded or imposed the support of the great masses (such as war), or because very large masses (especially of peasants and intellectual petty bourgeois) have suddenly passed from political passivity to a certain activity and put forward demands which in their incoherence constitute a revolution. We speak of a 'crisis of authority', and this is precisely a crisis of hegemony, or a crisis of the state as a whole.'¹¹

Gramsci's influence is partly to be found in Regulation Theory, particularly in Alain Lipietz (1988), but with a problematic shift from the notion of the 'historical bloc' to that of the 'hegemonic bloc'. Lipietz defines a social bloc as a 'stable system of relations of domination, alliances and concessions between different social groups (dominant and subordinate)', and considers that a bloc becomes hegemonic 'when its system is recognised as being in the interests of the nation as a whole'. He points out that in a hegemonic bloc, 'the fraction of the nation whose interests are not taken into account at all must be in a very small minority': in his view, the hegemony of a bloc is reflected in its

⁷ Aglietta (1976), Boyer (1988).

⁸ Frosini (2010: 35).

⁹ Maltese (2012:2).

¹⁰ Gramsci (1975), Quaderno 13 (XXX) § (17).

¹¹ Gramsci (1975), Quaderno 13 (XXX) § (23).

ability to take all social interests into account, even if not to the same degree, and thus to make any alternative bloc disappear from the landscape.

Lipietz extends the hegemonic configuration to the economic sphere as follows: 'Insofar as the interests whose consideration is at stake in the consensus on which the hegemonic bloc is built and reproduced are economic interests', a coherence emerges between the hegemonic bloc, the regime of accumulation (a "mode of joint and compatible transformation of norms of production, distribution and use"), and the mode of regulation ('the set of norms, embodied or explicit, of institutions, which permanently adjust individual anticipations and behaviour to the overall logic of the accumulation regime'). Added to this is a 'societal paradigm', which is a 'mode of structuring identities and legitimately defensible interests within the universe of political discourse and representation'. The same idea is found in May et al (2024), who equate the 'hegemonic social bloc' with the 'rare situation' where the 'dynamics of structure and superstructure' operate closely together, with a very high degree of congruence. They conclude that, in a given socio-economic context, there can only be one 'hegemonic social bloc'.

In our view, these analyses confuse two different concepts in their notion of 'hegemonic bloc': the historical bloc as defined by Gramsci, which corresponds to a coherence between, on the one hand, the power relations that characterise the economic-productive structure and the 'complex superstructures' and, on the other hand, the interests of a certain social class, and the social bloc as an alliance between social groups. A certain configuration of the social structure may correspond to the presence of a historical bloc, the existence of which, as we have pointed out and as Gramsci also believes, is far from guaranteed. But by definition, several historical blocs cannot coexist. The same is not true of social blocs: on the contrary, the competition between different political projects, which function as mediators between the existing social expectations, and which thus each correspond to a certain social bloc, is one of the constant characteristics of social conflict.

Among these social alliances, one may assert itself in the long term because of the support it is able to give to the political project on which it is based: in this case we would have a DSB. But on the one hand, a social bloc brings together groups with different interests, and on the other, there is nothing to ensure that the political balance of power that leads to the (eventual) presence of a DSB corresponds to the balance of power that characterises the ideological and institutional dimensions of the social conflict. Politically dominant groups, i.e. those included in the DSB, may have expectations that the prevailing paradigm in the ideological dimension disqualifies, or they may consider themselves penalised by the existing institutional architecture.

Lipietz's approach, like that of May et al (2024), in terms of the hegemonic bloc thus considerably reduces the variety of historical configurations that a political economy must analyse. By reducing the Gramscian notion of historical bloc to that of social bloc, a 'hegemonic bloc' approach condemns itself to severely limiting the empirical cases it is able to analyse. The hegemonic bloc corresponds in fact to a situation in which the DSB has three different characteristics, all of which are empirically exceptional: (1) it is so powerful as to erase from the political conflict any other hypothesis of mediation, and therefore any other social bloc; (2) the groups at the core of the bloc are in a dominant position not only in the political dimension of the social conflict, but also in the ideological and institutional dimensions; (3) and finally the DSB stems from a political strategy capable of taking into account, with a few marginal and negligible exceptions, the expectations of all the existing social groups.

4/ The different types of crisis in neorealist political economy¹²

Neorealist political economy proposes a theoretical framework which enriches the possibilities of analysis well beyond the simple binary opposition between stability corresponding to the presence of a hegemonic bloc and a situation of crisis. We consider that social domination is articulated on different dimensions: the confrontations that mark each dimension respond to factors that are specific to them, but evolve by conditioning each other reciprocally. This makes it possible to characterise precisely the different types of crisis which can affect certain dimensions of the social structure, and which are likely to be transmitted from one dimension to another.

Economic dynamics, and more generally social dynamics, do not take the form of an identical reproduction of structures. It involves changes in the techniques used, in the resources mobilised, in the skills valued, all of which have consequences for the respective positions of agents in the social structure and for the political power of social groups, whatever the medium of that power. These changes are likely to lead to a modification of the political balance of power, to the point of causing the break-up or weakening of the DSB. On the other hand, agents whose political weight increases may be led to call into question certain institutionalised compromises which are the expression of socio-political equilibriums which have resulted from an ideological configuration and past political power relationships.

In the same way, the struggle to impose a certain ideological paradigm as a framework guiding the expectations of social groups, while responding to its own logic and temporality, is conditioned by the balance of power established in the dimension of political mediation and that of social institutions. Thus, an ideological paradigm is strengthened when it corresponds to a definition of social expectations compatible with the stability of a DSB, and if it does not contradict the content of the rules enshrined in the social institutions. The hypothesis, which is empirically probable, of a faulty homology between the balances of power which characterise the different dimensions of social conflict, opens up the possibility of different scenarios: a redefinition of the institutional architecture in the direction dictated by the dominant ideology, if there is a DSB strong enough to support it; a political crisis, if the configuration of expectations corresponding to the hegemonic situation is incompatible with the renewal of the DSB; a crisis of the institutional architecture, if the political crisis cannot be resolved without a profound questioning of the institutionalised compromises; or a crisis of hegemony, which becomes highly probable if the dominant ideology proves incompatible with the constitution of a DSB.

The possible links between the different types of crisis (political crisis, crisis of institutional architecture, crisis of hegemony) can follow very different paths. The participants in the conflict in each of these dimensions - political in the strict sense, institutional, ideological - are not the same, and the determinants of the evolution vary from one dimension to another. These developments define a set of reciprocal influences which mean that there is no mechanical succession of crises, where destabilisation in one dimension would univocally dictate the sequence of events in the other dimensions; but there is always the possibility of a contagion effect which would multiply critical situations.

A crisis of hegemony engendered by a political crisis may in turn aggravate it, by making it more difficult to reconstitute a DSB, just as a crisis of hegemony following a crisis in the institutional structure may hinder the institutionalisation of new compromises, and so on. A crisis that first manifests itself at institutional level can then have repercussions on political mediation strategies and on the hegemonic

¹² The definition of the different types of crisis and the analysis of the possible contagion effects are developed in Amable & Palombarini (2024), chapter 5, a chapter which is partly taken up in this paragraph.

situation. Thus, it is only the concrete analysis of a given historical trajectory that makes it possible to identify the possibility of the spread of a critical situation in one dimension of the social conflict to other dimensions, the type of sequence between different crises and the existence of possible feedback effects, according to the mechanisms summarised in Figure 2, mechanisms that are likely to be at work in a social dynamic.

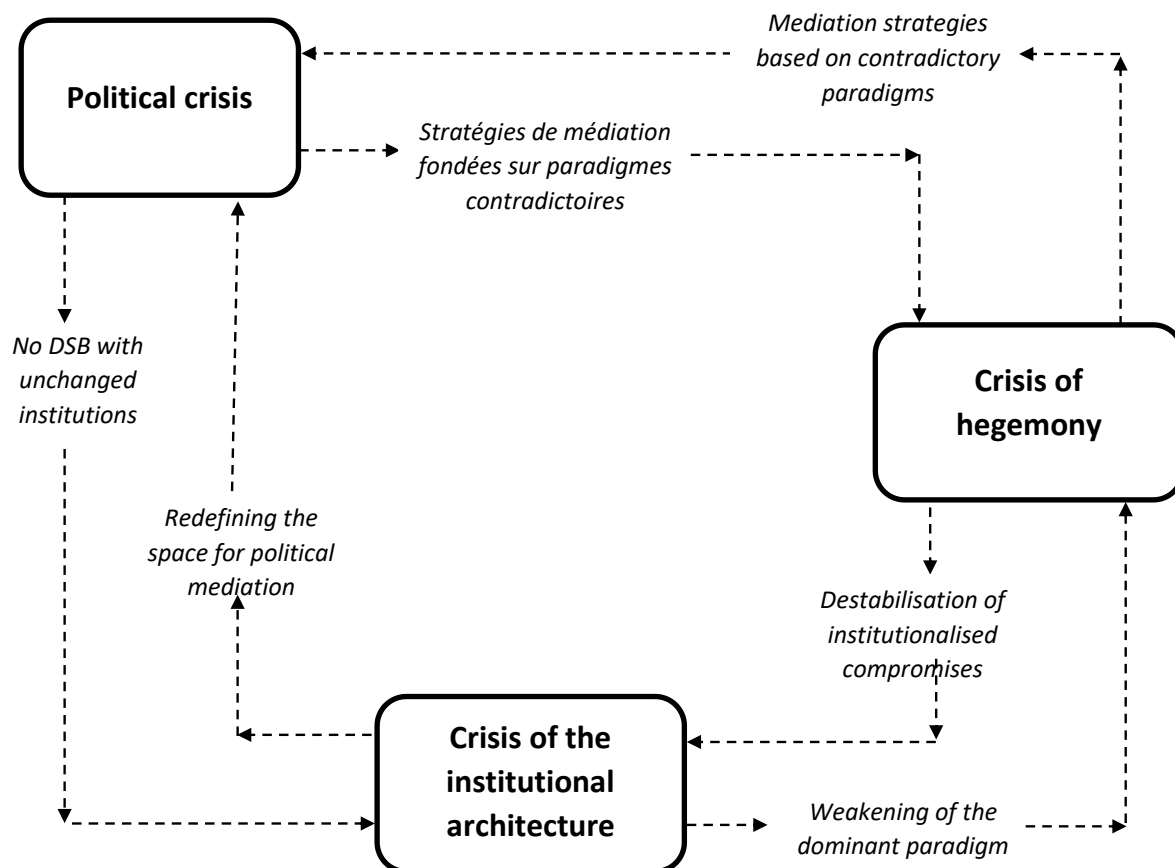


Figure 2. From one crisis to the next, interactions and feedback. Source: Amable & Palombarini (2024).

5/ What would a historical bloc correspond to in our approach?

We can articulate our approach to social conflict with the Gramscian notion of the historical bloc, and show how it differs from that of DSB.

For Gramsci, as we have seen, a historical bloc corresponds to unity, i.e. coherence between the relations of domination which characterise the 'economic structure' and the 'complex superstructures', a unity built around class interests and necessarily 'dialectical' because the different levels of a social system evolve by mutually conditioning each other. As a materialist, Gramsci sees economic relations as the fundamental determinants of political and ideological power relations. However, this is not a strict determination, since different historical configurations leave a margin of autonomy to political and hegemonic struggles, and the outcome of these struggles has a retroactive effect on productive and economic organisation, in other words, on what Gramsci calls 'structure'.

Similarly, we consider that social conflict is rooted in the diversity of positions determined by the economic and productive 'structure'. This conflict finds concrete expression in confrontations of a

political, ideological and institutional nature, each of these dimensions of conflict being governed by its own logic and temporality, resulting in relations of domination that vary from one dimension to another; but since the different dimensions of conflict evolve by conditioning each other, and since they all respond to the same objective differentiation of the positions occupied by the agents in the economic and productive structure, we can at least theoretically envisage the possibility of a homology between the power relations which characterise them.

In such a situation, the overall institutional architecture would conform to the interests of the groups that make up the DSB, i.e. the social alliance that guides public policy, and more precisely to the interests of the groups that are at the heart of the DSB; and these groups would share a vision of the world that would also condition the expectations of the politically dominated groups. A concordance of this kind between the relations of force that characterise the different dimensions of social conflict would, on the one hand, necessarily have repercussions on economic and productive organisation, and would, on the other hand, only be conceivable if economic and productive organisation made it possible: the 'dialectical unity' between 'structure' and 'complex superstructures' would thus be established, and the dominant groups (or, for Gramsci, the dominant class) in all dimensions, 'structural' and 'superstructural', would be at the heart of a historical bloc.

For Gramsci, the historical bloc does not imply the overcoming of social conflict, but only its complete and coherent regulation, so to speak. But for him, as for us, a situation of this kind must be considered exceptional, the rule in social conflict being the lag between the evolution of its different dimensions, which gives logical priority, in Gramsci's approach as in that of the Theory of Regulation and in ours, to the crisis, or more precisely to crises, and which in passing makes it possible for Gramsci to envisage the defeat of the historical bloc of the bourgeoisie through political and cultural action aimed at the construction of a new historical bloc around the working class.

Our concept of DSB, which concerns only one of the dimensions of the conflict, the directly political one, makes it possible to analyse much more varied situations than those corresponding to the presence of a historical bloc. As we have pointed out, it is quite possible to envisage the existence of a DSB which does not recognise itself in the existing institutions, which it would then tend to reform with chances of success which depend on the specific historical configuration, just as it is possible to envisage the existence of a dominant bloc which is contested because it holds a vision of the world which is dominated in terms of ideological conflict.

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