

Managed Hegemony: Why Resistance Fails to Consolidate under Conditions of Collapsing Realizability

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Contemporary debates on hegemony and resistance are often organised around moments of rupture: revolutionary breaks, counter-hegemonic mobilisation, or the exhaustion of capitalist legitimacy. Yet across many advanced societies marked by stagnating living standards, institutional erosion, and widening inequality, sustained resistance frequently fails to consolidate. This paper approaches the present conjuncture not by asking why resistance should occur, but by examining why it so often does not, and how hegemonic stability persists without either consensus or overt repression.

The paper argues that contemporary hegemony increasingly operates through the management and redirection of social pressure rather than its ideological neutralisation. Discontent is not eliminated, but channelled away from collective, visible forms of resistance toward individualised exits such as withdrawal, addiction, and self-destructive trajectories. These outcomes are commonly framed as moral failure, depoliticisation, or psychological pathology. This analysis instead situates them as structurally produced effects of constrained political and social choice under conditions of prolonged systemic adaptation.

Central to this process is the collapse of realizability: the erosion of credible pathways through which political participation, collective action, or dissent can plausibly alter outcomes within an individual's lived time horizon. As realizability declines, voice mechanisms lose efficacy, participation costs rise, and collective strategies increasingly appear irrational from the standpoint of actors themselves. Under such conditions, hegemonic

order does not require ideological consent or intensified repression. Stability emerges through inertia, necessity, and the gradual internalisation of exit.

By modelling resistance failure, withdrawal, and episodic violence as alternative outputs of a single decision structure shaped by time horizons, exit availability, and payoff expectations, the paper reframes social control as a process of pressure dissipation rather than domination alone. Power is maintained less by defeating counter-hegemonic movements than by preventing their consolidation through non-eventful, non-collective forms of disappearance.

This approach situates contemporary capitalist resilience not as the triumph of ideology, but as a brittle configuration sustained by systemic adaptation and the redirection of political energy. It engages critically with traditions of Marxist and post-Marxist thought, including debates on total subsumption and recuperation, while shifting attention toward the temporal and structural conditions under which resistance becomes unsustainable. In doing so, the paper offers a framework for understanding social stasis not as the absence of conflict, but as the managed deferral of breakdown.