



SOCIOLOGY

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

SOCIOLOGY LECTURE-33

POLITICS AND SOCIETY-THEORIES-ELITE-BUREAUCRACY,PRESSURE GROUPS etc.

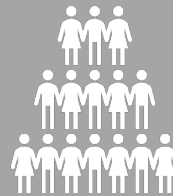
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THEORIES OF POWER



Sociologists often distinguish between two forms of Power-

AUTHORITY-
legitimate
COERCION-
illegitimate to
those who
face it



Power- ability of individuals or groups to carry out their will, even when opposed by others.

Theory of Power



The most common definition comes from **Max Weber**, who defined it as the ability to control others, events, or resources; to make happen what one wants to happen in spite of obstacles, resistance, or opposition.



Power is a thing that is held, coveted, seized, taken away, lost, or stolen, and it is used in what are essentially adversarial relationships involving conflict between those with power and those without.



In contrast, **Karl Marx** used the concept of power in relation to social classes and social systems rather than individuals. He argued that power rests in a social class's position in the relations of production. Power does not lie in the relationship between individuals, but in domination and subordination of social



A third definition comes from **Talcott Parsons** who argued that power is not a matter of social coercion and domination, but instead flows from a social system's potential to coordinate human activity and resources in order to accomplish goals.

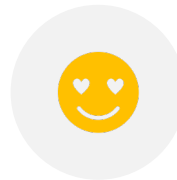
MARX's Theory of Power



Source-Lies in
economic
Infrastructure



Dominant group
exercises power over
others



Social
Superstructure help
in promoting this.



Solution- communal
ownership of forces
of Production

MARX's Theory of Power

- Karl Marx said there is a limited amount of power in society, which can only be held by one person or group at a time. Marx said these “groups” are the working and ruling classes. Under capitalism the ruling class hold all the power and use it to exploit the working class. This is the cornerstone of Marxism.
- Marx believed the structure of society is determined by the nature of its economy, or its “economic base”. So if the economy is capitalist, the rest of society will act under capitalist values. This is because capitalism dictates the ruling class will own the means of production, meaning they can control their workers, this is why many countries have all the power concentrated in the hands of the ruling class. Ralph Miliband said the political power in society was also held by those who control the economic base.
- **Stephen Lukes’** was a Marxist, and his 3 faces of power help explain how the ruling class maintain control of power in society. However, it is the 3rd face of power which Marxism especially focuses on. Marxists say that the ruling class use their power to socialize the working class into believing something which goes against their will, the ruling class ideology. This is known as a “false consciousness” as the working class don’t realise they have accepted the ruling class ideology as their own, allowing the values and morals of the ruling class to be universally accepted in society, ensuring the ruling class retain power.

MARX's Theory of Power

- **Criticisms of the Marxism**

- – Marxism is based upon the idea that the ruling class own the means of production. However, some critics point out that in some societies there has been a separation of ownership and control. This is where the person who owns the business hires a manager, rather than running it themselves. This questions whether the ruling class actually own *and* control the means of production.
- – Another example of how the ruling class might not own and control the means of production is that many large companies are owned by shareholders, many of whom are working-class, so the working class now own some of the means of production, this contradicts the Marxist perspective.
- However, John Scott argues against these two points, saying that even when ownership of a company is fragmented, one ruling class member can still have dominant control, something which the working class don't have the money to be able to do.
- – Marxism fails to acknowledge any of the other forms of inequality other than the class divide. For example, Marxism doesn't talk about women's, gays or ethnic minorities rights.

WEBER's Theory of Power

- **Max Weber's views on Power: A Constant-sum View:**
- Max Weber defined power as “the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action”. Defined thus, power is, therefore, power over others and, as such, power is an aspect of social relationships.
- Nobody can hold power in isolation. “This is a very broad definition of power since it enters into every aspect of social life. It extends from parents assigning domestic chores to their children to teachers enforcing discipline in the classroom, from a manager organising his workforce to a political party enacting legislation. In each case, an individual or group have power to the degree to which others comply with their will. Many sociologists argue that ‘political sociology’ is the study of power in its broadest sense”.
- Weber's definition of power represents a view which is sometimes known as a ‘constant-sum’ concept of power. The reason is that according to Weber's definition those who hold power do so at the expense of others. If some hold power, others do not. The underlying assumption is that the amount of power is constant.

Functionalist Theory of Power

- **Views of Talcott Parsons: A Variable-sum Approach to Power:**
- Talcott Parsons, on the other hand, rejects the 'constant-sum' view of power. In his view, power does belong to an individual or a group but to the society as whole. This social power is utilized or employed for the attainment of goals of the society, for the furtherance of collective interests.
- The power of the society is, thus, contingent upon the efficiency of the society in achieving its goals. The greater the efficiency, the greater is the power and vice versa. This view is sometimes known as a 'variable-sum' concept of power inasmuch as power is not constant or fixed, but variable in the sense that it may increase or decrease.
- Parsons' views on power are developed from his general theory of society. He assumes that consensus among members of society with regard to values is essential for social stability. The next step is to have common goals which they all share. The power of the social system lies in the extent to which the society is able to realise these goals.

Functionalist Theory of Power

- The more able a society is to realise these goals, the greater is the power that resides in the social system. Parsons also assumes that since goals are shared by the collectivity, the power of the society will be used toward the furtherance of the interest of the collectivity and not toward the furtherance of sectional interests.
- Parsons' analysis of the basis of political power in Western democracies provides a typical illustration of his views on the nature of power. 'Political support', he says, **"should be conceived of as a generalized grant of power which, if it leads to electoral success, puts elected leadership in a position analogous to a banker. The 'deposits' of power made by constituents are revocable, if not at will, at the next election"**
- Just as money is deposited in the bank, members of society deposit power in political leaders. Just as the depositor can withdraw his money from the bank, so the electorate can withdraw its grant of power from political leaders at the next election.
- In this sense power resides ultimately with members of society as a whole. Finally, just as money generates interest for the depositor, so grants of power generate benefits for the electorate since they are used primarily to further collective goals.. In this way power in society can increase.

ELITE Theory of Power

- **Elite Theory of Power:**
- The Elite Theory holds that in each society power is possessed and used by a small group of persons, the elite, which takes all decisions and rules the society. In each society, the power is really in the hands of the elite (called the Power Elite).
- The Elite is a small group of persons which takes all major decisions and is the centre of power in society. The ruling elite are always a minority of the people which uses power.
- Even in a democracy the power is really in the hands of the elected elite of dominant political leaders' or the chosen element of society.' The government of the people really means "Government of the elite sprung from the people." (Duverger)
- Pareto, Mosca, Robert Michels, C. Wright Mills, O.Y. Gasset, and James Burnham have been the major protagonists of the Elite Theory of Power. Each of them holds that power in each society is in the hands of a minority (A small group of people) or some particular social groups which are powerful not only because they are well organized groups but also because they possess some special qualities (ruling ability, wealth, skill, knowledge or social status). The struggle for power in each society is really a struggle among elites for getting the power to make all major decisions in society.

ELITE Theory of Power

- The membership of dominant elites keeps on changing but the elite rule is the law of each society. Some elite theorists like Mitchell advocate faith in the “Iron Law of Oligarchy” which lays down that society is always and continuously ruled by an elite- the power elite, and each section of society is also dominated by a particular elite.
- In other words, the Elite Theory advocates the view that power in each society is always used by elites – by a minority of people which uses political power by virtue of its organisation, ideology, wealth, ability or royal status. Each social class or a section of society is really dominated by an elite.

PLURALIST Theory of Power

- **Pluralist Theory of Power:**
- The Pluralist Theory of Power rejects both the Class theory of power as well as the Elite theory of power. It holds that power in each society is really used neither by one class nor by any elite but by several different groups. In every society there are present several groups of people each of which represents a major interest or some interests.
- These are competing groups which compete for sharing power and influence in society. These share and use their activities of influencing and determining all decisions and policies of society and its government. Sovereignty is exercised by social groups and associations and it is not the monopoly of the state.



THANKYOU
