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SPP221: Social and Political Philosophy

The Power Nexus: Student Affairs and Institutional Power

Introduction

 "Where there is power, there is resistance." Michel Foucault's statement reflects the daily struggles that we experience within our campus environment. The institution appears to be focusing on learning, growth and collaboration however if we dive deeply into the matter there is a very complex network of powerful interactions who create policies to repress opposition and sustain any imbalances that occur during the process. There are problems such as unfair hostel allocations, suppuration of student opinions, mandatory mess coupons, and random fines imposed on the students are not only simple mistakes in the administration but they reveal the deeper issues that recedes in the campus life and administration. In this report we are going to explore how power is distributed in the campus using ideas from political thinkers like Robert Dahl, Antonio Gramsci, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Michel Foucault. By researching and examining these issues it will help us understand why these unfair practices are continuing in the campus and how we can overcome these challenges by working as a team. Here are some most prevailing issues in the campus environment:

Campus issues-

 Talking about the campus issues, campus mess has no cleanliness or hygiene at all but students are forced to buy mess coupons and have their meal in the campus mess only willingly or unwillingly. Students are left with no room for their own choice where they can eat whatever they want and wherever they want. This whole system of mess coupons highlights Robert Dahl's concept of 'power as domination, where students are forced to comply with the policies regardless of their preferences. It creates suspicion and dissatisfaction among students by prioritizing administrative convenience over student freedom. Hostel allocations might also be unfair with students as the students with good prior connections with the faculty or the administration can get the best rooms in the campus leveraging the benefits of their connection while students which are new to place or do not have any prior connection to the administration can not get the room of their choice. This is a classic case of Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony that explains how these biases are normalized in the society which makes unfair practices unavoidable. So the students who do not have any connection to the college faculty or administration might feel cheated. There are cases where students are fined heavily for the activities that they don't even have control for. For example an unintentional breakage of some commodity in the hostel room due to some external factor. These fines can cause a major problem for the students, especially those who have a weaker financial background.Here, Karl Marx's criticism of economic exploitation is clear: those who have the least frequently bear the highest costs. These fines are defended as ways to "maintain order," in the campus but in reality they are just new ways to earn money from students. The administration is weak and inefficient, there is delay in processing the applications, certain rules are unclear and the administration gives dismissive responses to any query raised by the students. This might seem a minor inconvenience but it makes a student's academic journey really challenging. Max Weber's concept of rational-legal authority emphasizes how important it is to maintain transparent and fair systems to establish trust in institutions. However, these inefficiencies weaken that trust on

our campus, making students feel neglected and ignored. When students try to raise their voice against the administration they are forced to be silent by either rusticating them from the institution or by imposing other types of punishments. Michel Foucault's concept of power/knowledge focuses on how the institutions control the narratives to suppress the students and maintain the status of the institution. Despite all these difficulties and challenges the students attempt peaceful protests and hope for change.

Pathways to Bring in Positive Change

Students can forge change to unfair campus practices through various means. Such voices of change reflect Gramsci's ideas and Marx's views on raising voices against wrong. In this section, we propose solutions to the issues identified in the last section.

a) Potential Solution to Mess Coupon Issue

As part of this project, we discussed with the mess vendor and learned that mess coupons are mandatory since expected profits are proposed to them beforehand. Therefore, the coupons have been made compulsory to meet the seller's sales expectations.

While this makes overall monetary sense, it should be complemented with strict quality checks; strict fines should be imposed on them if they don't follow specific hygiene standards so that the students do not feel cheated, and it keeps all parties happy. If the food quality is maintained, the students will automatically want to eat more in the mess, which makes it a win-win situation for everyone.

b) Potential Solutions to Hostel Allocation Issue

Hostel allocations should be strictly prioritized for students with genuine concerns such as distance. Rigging the hostel allotment process happens at multiple levels, from the warden favouring sure students to going right to the top level. Regularly checking the database of students to whom hostels have been allotted should be done. Swift action is not taken even when anomalies are found since managing refunds is a hassle. Hence, the students using unfair means try to get in somehow once without fear of getting removed throughout the semester. The fees should be collected in smaller instalments, like 10 days at a time; then, it will be easy to make dynamic changes to the allotment process, which is possible. It will also reduce the process's first come, first served nature and prioritize students in genuine need

c) Maintaining a System of Checks and Balances

We believe that issues such as arbitrary fines, administrative inefficiency and silencing of student dissent are more complex to tackle as compared to the other problems since the administrative authorities make these decisions, the same authorities who are in charge of deciding right or wrong in different functions of the university and going against something which they feel is wrong is quite challenging for the students. This issue can be tackled by assigning faculty volunteers from the academics department to administration and student committees since they will have a more neutral standpoint on the problems. They would better understand

the pain points of students due to lack of any biases, e.g., monetary bias is created in the student affairs authorities due to the revenue it generates for the university and can create a bias in its favour even if it is causing a lot of problems to the students.

Professors also have much higher authority regarding what they say in policy-making; their words also carry more weight than those of a student, which can help ensure a system of checks and balances with the authorities from the administration.

We interviewed some students from other universities, and similar policies were followed there, wherein teaching faculties were allocated to some of the administrative departments of the university. The students we interviewed were in total favour of it, stating that sometimes the administration doesn't relate to the issues and doesn't find the student's opinions important enough. Still, if the faculty supports and understands their problem, their opinion is much more likely to be heard.

d) Empowering Change Through Awareness

Change can only happen if it starts from somewhere. Hence, students need to know their rights, understand right and wrong, and be informed about where to share their concerns. Organizing regular workshops and campaigns is necessary to educate them on this subject beyond just creating new policies. These are ineffective unless students are aware of them—no matter what is in place, it's useless without those who can use it. Therefore, fostering awareness is crucial. Students should be encouraged to speak out against inequalities and given platforms to voice their dissent.

Conclusion

Just like the age old adage which states that "Small changes can transform the world", this vision is not an unattainable goal. Through clarity, courage and collaboration, we can bring about a change where our campus reflects a place of equality and opportunity, where ideals of fairness and justice are laid as the basis of every outcome. We are optimistic that together, these changes can pave the way for meaningful transformation and make our IIIT Delhi campus a space that values fairness for everyone.

References

1)https://knowdemia.com/ebook/political-theory-an-introduction-rajeev-bhargava-and-ashok-acharya/-Course textbook