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DIFFERENT FORMS OF POWER

Social Analysis of power cannot be confined to the realm of 'political power'. Economic and ideological forms of power should also be taken into account as they play an important role as the support-bases of political power. It is, therefore, necessary to distinguish between these three major forms of power.

Political Power

According to Alan Ball (*Modern Politics and Government*, 1988), "the concept of political power . . . is a key concept in the study of politics for if politics is the resolution of conflict, the distribution of power within a political community determines how the conflict is to be resolved, and whether the resolution is to be effectively observed by all parties." In order to identify the nature of political power it is essential, at the outset, to distinguish between the formal and informal organs of such power. Legislature, executive and judiciary are the traditionally recognized organs of power in a state; they represent the formal organs. The obedience secured by these organs, backed by sanctions, is an important form of political power. Executive and Legislature, taken together, make laws, policies and decisions regulating the allocation of values in a society. They impose taxes and use a vast machinery for the collection of taxes. They issue licences, permits, and regulate a large variety of citizens' actions, such as, keeping vehicles and arms, running certain businesses, maintaining the quality of products, working conditions of the labour, building of houses, etc. There is police to catch hold of offenders, courts to try the offenders and settle disputes, and prisons to punish the convicts. Then military is meant to deal with foreign aggressors. In short, formal organs of political power play an effective role in a given territory.

Informal organs of political power not only take the form of political parties in power and in opposition, but also a large number of pressure groups, public opinion, popular movements, etc. Thus, political power is not the sole prerogative of the formal organs of the state but these organs themselves are responsive to the 'inputs' received from the 'environment'. This may be illustrated with reference to three cases: (i) in independent states, public opinion, popular movements and organized interests directly influence the decision-making; in democracies, the ruling party is bound to seek a fresh mandate from the people at regular intervals; (ii) in the colonies, dependencies and dictatorships, the struggle for independence and strong popular movements are sooner or later able to secure not only substantial concessions but even to win their independence; and (iii) in the international sphere, organized groups of nations do exercise their influence on the 'authoritative allocation of values'. The constant pressure exercised by the 'third world' countries on the super powers to change their economic and foreign policies is a case in point.

Economic Power

Economic power is the power emanating from the possession of material things, especially the major means of production and distribution. It is a potent factor behind politics. For instance, big landlords, industrial tycoons and business magnates are able to influence public decisions regarding the fixation of priorities in economic development in a liberal democracy. In India itself the organized economic interests have been able to secure priority of colour TV for the urban rich, over drinking water for the rural poor.

The possessors of economic power in a liberal democracy exercise their influence. These groups are stronger, more

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organized and more vocal. For instance, in India, the chambers of commerce and industry are very strong, the workers' unions are not as strong, peasants' unions are less strong and consumers' organizations are the weakest lot. The major newspapers are owned by a handful of big business houses who take full advantage of this medium to promote opinion which suits their interests. Besides, the big business houses extend a large amount of financial help to political parties, often clandestinely, and to the candidates seeking elections. The recipients of such help play a dual game—they pay lip-service to the interests of the masses but are secretly committed to safeguarding the interests of their financiers.

Ideological Power

Ideological power provides a more subtle base of political power. The ideas upheld and promoted by the ruling class in a given society regarding the 'best system of government' constitute political ideology. Ideology may be defined as 'a systematic set of arguments and beliefs used to justify an existing or desired social order' (Joseph Dunner, ed., *Dictionary of Political Science*; 1965). An outstanding feature of political ideology is that it provides legitimacy to the ruling classes and helps them maintain their stronghold on political power. When people are made to believe that a particular system of government is the best system, they will not be inclined to challenge the authority of the ruling classes. When people have learnt to respect their laws, the need for coercion to secure their obedience would be eliminated or at any rate, minimized.

Political ideology involves not only a set of beliefs, it is always action-oriented. It puts forward a 'cause' for which people are prepared not only to fight but to make a lot of sacrifices. As Alan Ball (*Modern Politics and Government*) has elaborated: "Individuals are prepared to fight for causes, often realistically hopeless causes, or to undergo ill-treatment and torture in the belief that some political values are superior to others." Ideology is often devoid of reason. It picks up certain convenient formulae and elevates them to the level of 'absolute truth' by exploiting people's sentiments. Thus, some ideas are held sacrosanct by a particular group while others remain indifferent or even disdainful toward those very ideas.

Ideological power represents the manipulative power of the dominant class which holds sway on the thinking and emotions of the people. Ideology even creates an illusion of 'consent'. Under an ideological spell, the people express their approval to the rule of particular persons and policies. They are led to believe that they are being governed with their 'consent' while they actually continue to be governed according to the designs of the dominant classes. Marx and Engels (*The German Ideology*; 1846) had noted that 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas'. According to them the class which owns the means of material production in any society also controls the means of mental production. Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), an Italian Marxist, gave the concept of 'hegemony' to explain the phenomenon of ideological domination, particularly of the capitalist class, in the contemporary society. Hegemony, in this sense, denotes a form of rule where power is apparently exercised with the consent of the ruled.

According to Gramsci, the spiritual and cultural supremacy of the ruling class in the capitalist state was accomplished through the manipulation of 'civil society', particularly through the mechanism of socialization, such as the church, the school and the mass media. Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' also explains why the working-class parties have only achieved a relatively moderate degree of success in the open competition for political power in the capitalist countries. Gramsci, therefore, insisted that revolution in the economic sphere was not enough to end the capitalist domination. It was necessary to reinforce revolution in the cultural sphere in order to achieve this end.

A Critical Appraisal

The chief merit of the power approach lies in its ability to identify the motive force operating behind politics. Moreover, it can be applied to an analysis of domestic as well as international politics. However, this approach suffers from several drawbacks. In the first place, it lacks precision. As Vernon Van Dyke has elucidated: "Power is said to derive from sources ranging from tacitly accepted rules of politeness to the possession of spaceships; and it is said to manifest itself in situations ranging from a request that the salt be passed at the dining table to a situation in which states are exchanging all-out thermonuclear blows." (*Political Science—A Philosophical Analysis*; 1960). This sort of imprecision in the concept of power itself defies any classification or quantification of data for the purpose of political analysis.

Secondly, this approach seeks to reduce all politics to a struggle for power, and ignores other important purposes for which men have recourse to politics. As Dyke has further elaborated: "Political actors rarely, if ever, struggle for power alone. They pursue other purposes, too. The theory that politics is a struggle for power does not say how much power is desired or what price political actors are willing to pay for it in terms of other values. The thoughtless assumption that all political actors constantly seek a maximization of power at any price is obviously false."

Finally, all struggle for power in different social situations cannot be treated as a subject-matter of politics. For instance, competition among film-actors to win popular applause or that between textile-manufacturers to control consumer choices do involve struggle for power, but that is hardly a manifestation of politics. Politics is concerned only with a struggle for power to control public affairs, that is, to have access to positions of taking decisions for the allocation of public goods, services, opportunities and honours. Any deviation from this focus will make the power approach a futile exercise.

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THE STRUCTURE OF POWER

The student of politics is chiefly concerned with identifying the centres of power in a given society or in an international setting and relating them to the mode of authoritative allocation of values prevailing in that setting. This approach to the