

he has done little more than rationalizations promoted by the powerholders to justify their use of power. In particular, they argue that Parsons has failed to appreciate that power is frequently used to further sectional interests rather than to benefit society as a whole. These criticisms will be examined in detail in the following sections.

POWER – A MARXIAN PERSPECTIVE

A Marxian analysis of power provides a radical alternative to Parsons's functionalist approach. It rejects the view that power is a societal resource held in trust and directed by those in authority for the benefit of all. Instead, power is seen to be held by a particular group in society at the expense of the rest of society. This is a constant-sum concept of power since a net gain in the power of the dominant group represents a net loss in the power of the rest of society. The dominant group uses power to further its own interests. These interests are in direct conflict with the interests of those subject to its power. This is very different from the picture presented by Parsons in which rulers and ruled pull together for the benefit of society as a whole, undivided by any fundamental conflicts of interest.

From a Marxian perspective, the source of power in society lies in the economic infrastructure. In all stratified societies the forces of production are owned and controlled by a minority, the ruling class. This relationship to the forces of production provides the basis of its dominance. It therefore follows that the only way to return power to the people involves communal ownership of the forces of production. Since everyone will now share the same relationship to the forces of production, power will be shared by all members of society. As previous chapters have indicated, ruling class power is used to exploit and oppress the subject class. Thus in capitalist society, much of the wealth produced by the labour power of the proletariat is appropriated in the form of profit by the bourgeoisie. From a Marxian perspective, the use of power to exploit others is defined as coercion. It is seen as an illegitimate use of power since it forces the subject class to submit to a situation which is against its interests. If ruling class power is accepted as legitimate by the subject class, this is an indication of false class consciousness.

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Ruling class power extends beyond specifically economic relationships. In terms of Marxian theory, the relationships of dominance and subordination in the infrastructure will be largely reproduced in the superstructure. For example, in capitalist society the unequal relationship between employers and employees will be reflected and legitimated in the legal system. A range of legal statutes protect the rights of property owners and in particular their right to a disproportionate share of the wealth produced by their employees. The various institutions of society are largely shaped by the infrastructure. Thus a capitalist infrastructure will produce a particular kind of educational system, a particular form of family structure and so on. These institutions will serve to reinforce the power and privilege of the ruling class. This chapter will be mainly concerned with the state in capitalist society. Marxian views on other institutions will be examined in later chapters.

A problem common to all perspectives on the nature and distribution of power in society involves the measurement of power. The American sociologist Robert A. Dahl argues that the measurement of power requires a careful examination of actual decisions. By this method it is possible to determine which individuals and groups realize their objectives and therefore to specify who has power. Dahl argues that, 'I do not see how anyone can suppose that he has established the dominance of a specific group in a community or a nation without basing his analysis on the careful examination of a series of concrete decisions'. However, the problem with this approach is that it ignores the possibility that those with power can prevent many issues from ever reaching the point of 'concrete decisions'. For example, it has often been argued that the principle of capitalism has never been seriously questioned in Western societies and as a result the question of alternatives to a capitalist economy has never reached the point of actual decision. This can be seen as evidence of the power of the capitalist class. Dahl's approach, with its emphasis on decision making, would fail to reveal this aspect of power. As John Urry states, Dahl 'ignores the processes by which certain issues come to be defined as decisions and others do not. The study of decisions is the failure to study who has the power to determine what are decisions'.

Westergaard and Resler provide an alternative to the decision making approach in their study of class in Britain. They argue that power can only be measured by its results. Thus if scarce and valued

resources are concentrated in the hands of a minority, that group largely monopolizes power in society. Westergaard and Resler maintain that 'power is visible only through its consequences; they are the first and final proof of the existence of power'. Put simply, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Whoever reaps the largest rewards at the end of the day holds the largest share of power. Thus Westergaard and Resler claim that the marked inequalities which characterize British society 'reflect, while they also demonstrate, the continuing power of capital'. The concentration of wealth and privilege in the hands of the capitalist class therefore provides visible proof of its power. The absence of any serious challenge to its position is a further indication of the power of capital. Ruling class ideology promotes the view that private property, profit, the mechanisms of a market economy and the inequalities which result are reasonable, legitimate, normal and natural. If this view is accepted then the dominance of capital is ensured since 'no control could be firmer and more extensive than one which embraced the minds and wills of its subjects so successfully that opposition never reared its head'. Westergaard and Resler claim that because of the pervasiveness of ruling class ideology, the capitalist class rarely has to consciously and actively exercise its power. Capitalism and the inequalities it produces are largely taken for granted. A capitalist economy guarantees a disproportionate share of wealth to a minority and generates an ideology which prevents serious questioning of the established order. As a result, issues which might threaten the dominance of capital are usually prevented from reaching the point of actual decision. The capitalist class is therefore able to enjoy advantage and privilege 'merely because of "the way things work", and because those ways are not open to serious challenge'.

In *The State in Capitalist Society*, Ralph Miliband examines various ways in which the subject class is persuaded to accept the status quo. He refers to this as 'the process of legitimation' which he regards as a system of 'massive indoctrination'. Miliband argues that the capitalist class seeks to 'persuade society not only to accept the policies it advocates but also the ethos, the values and the goals which are its own' the economic system of which it is a central part, the "way of life" which is the core of its being'. Miliband illustrates his argument with an analysis of advertising by means of which capitalist enterprises promote both their products and the acceptable face of capitalism.

He argues that all advertising is political since it serves to further the power and privilege of the dominant class. Through advertisements, giant, privately owned corporations such as ICI, BICC, Unilever, ITT and the major banks and oil companies promote the view that their major concern is public service and the welfare of the community. Profits are a secondary consideration and portrayed mainly as a means of providing an improved service. The image of the corporation and its products is made even rosier by association in advertisements with 'socially approved values and norms'. Miliband argues that capitalism and its commodities are subtly linked via advertisements to 'integrity, reliability, security, parental love, childlike innocence, neighbourliness, sociability'. With these kinds of associations, the exploitive and oppressive nature of capitalism is effectively disguised. Finally, advertising promotes the view that the way to happiness and fulfilment involves the accumulation of material possessions, in particular the acquisition of the products of capitalism. The individual is encouraged to 'be content to enjoy the blessings which are showered upon him' by the 'benevolent, public-spirited and socially responsible' capitalist enterprise. Miliband argues that advertising provides one example of the ways in which capitalism is legitimated. He regards the process of legitimation as essential for the maintenance of capitalist power. If successful, it prevents serious challenge to the basis of that power, the private ownership of the forces of production. In the following chapters, further aspects of the process of legitimation will be examined in detail.

The capitalist state – a Marxian perspective

Traditionally, the study of politics has focussed on the state. This