UNDERSTANDING POLITICS · CHAPTER 5

Power, Class and Domination

Reading Marx and Engels, with Arendt and Fanon

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OPENING PUZZLE

The issue that never reaches a vote

The preference

Most residents want stronger controls on air pollution.

The outcome

The proposal keeps disappearing from the council’s agenda.

Ask: where is the power, and what evidence would show it?

> *“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”*

Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, part I

Engels’s 1888 note restricts this to written history.

> *“All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life.”*

Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, part I

Discuss: criticism, celebration or both?

> *“The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”*

Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, part I

Read ‘common’ and ‘whole’: a committee need not obey every capitalist.

MARX AND ENGELS · A CONCESSION

> *“This organisation of the proletarians into a class … is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves.”*

Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, part I

Even the *Manifesto* admits class position does not produce unity automatically.

> *“The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.”*

Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, part II

The root of Lukes’s third dimension: power that shapes what people believe.

THREE FACES OF POWER

Where to look for power in the puzzle

Decisions

Who wins open conflicts? (Dahl)

Agendas

Who keeps issues from a vote? (Bachrach and Baratz)

Preferences

Who shapes what people want? (Lukes)

Each face demands different evidence: votes, agendas and drafts, or how preferences formed.

STRUCTURAL POWER

Influence without lobbying

Dependence

Governments need investment, jobs and revenue.

Anticipation

Officials drop proposals they expect investors to punish.

Testing it

Is the threat credible? Were alternatives explored?

Opposites, not degrees

Power

The human ability to act in concert; it lasts while the group holds together.

Violence

Instrumental force that can destroy power but cannot create it.

A regime with weapons but no cooperation has violence, not power (*On Violence*, sec. II).

FANON · COLONIAL DOMINATION

Order built on force and hierarchy

The colonial world

A compartmentalised world, divided by force and race (‘On violence’).

After independence

A national bourgeoisie acting as intermediary, not transformer.

Discuss: why need independence not complete liberation?

COMPARISON

Arendt and Fanon on violence

	Arendt	Fanon
Starting point	Power as acting together	Colonial order constituted by force
Violence	Destroys power, cannot create it	Part of how colonial order is made and contested
Danger	Mistaking force for power	Elites replacing colonisers without transformation

SEMINAR TASK · 25 MINUTES

Why does the pollution proposal never reach a vote?

1. Group A investigates as pluralists: who won which decisions?
2. Group B investigates agenda control and structural dependence.
3. Group C asks whether residents' preferences were shaped.

THIS WEEK'S ESSAY

Does economic power necessarily produce political power?

Plan

Read the state passage precisely and name the mechanisms.

Test

Weigh pluralist evidence against agenda control and dependence.

Judge

Replace 'necessarily' with the conditions under which it holds.

1,500 words maximum · Student Pack: essay questions