

Specimen Response for Study Theme 1B

STUDY THEME 1B: DECISION MAKING IN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Question

Critically examine the view that pressure groups are a threat to democracy.

(15 marks)

Response

There is a view by some that pressure groups are a threat to democracy. Pressure groups tend to campaign on a single issue. They can be divided into two groups – sectional groups which try to advance the interests of their members for eg Fathers 4 Justice campaigns for fairer treatment for fathers after a family break up. Fathers 4 Justice have trespassed into public buildings and have thrown purple flour at the prime minister. They have won widespread publicity for their argument as a result of their actions. The other type of group is cause groups (or promotional groups) which campaign on the issues which are not directly related to the interests of their members. For e.g the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA). Some groups can be described as insider groups which have a close relationship with decision makers such as MPs and civil servants. The National Farmers Union (NFU) for example has exercised a strong influence on British agricultural policy since the second world war. Outsider groups, on the other hand, have no direct access to the corridors of power. For example the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) won the support of the Labour Party in the 1950s & 1980s but its aim of ridding the UK of nuclear weapons has not yet been taken seriously by an elected government. Pressure groups may be seen as a threat by some but are unaccountable and only represent a tiny minority. Although their use of direct action may be seen as a threat for e.g jail sentences of up to 5 years await animal rights extremists who threatened + intimidate the suppliers of animal testing businesses. Some pressure groups like the animal rights extremists can receive unfavourable coverage from the media and it can be said that the media can make or break pressure groups.

However they are also seen as being essential in a democracy to draw publicity to very serious issues for e.g the fuel protestors in September 2000 stopped all fuel on the move + succeeded in the end as there was a freeze on fuel duties until April 2002. They also offer people a direct immediate and ongoing voice in the democratic process in the period between general elections.

They also provide the government with information + expertise, for e.g the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver provided information through the media about school meals to try and persuade the government to allocate bigger subsidies to school meals. They may gain public sympathy for a cause by using high powered publicity campaigns.

In conclusion pressure groups may be seen as a threat to democracy. As a response to the extreme tactics by the animal right extremists the 5 year sentence by the government may be seen as a bigger threat.

Marking Instructions for Study Theme 1B

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Developed, exemplified, balanced and analytical answers may refer to:

- ◆ pressure groups are, in many cases, unelected, unaccountable organisations with a relatively small active membership
- ◆ actions of some have been outside the law
- ◆ perceived disproportionate influence of insider groups
- ◆ concerns over financial links between some pressure groups and decision makers
- ◆ permit dialogue between governed and the government between elections
- ◆ provide government with information and expertise
- ◆ articulate and defend minority interests
- ◆ check the possible abuse of power
- ◆ compete for policy adoption and/or change
- ◆ provide the expertise, knowledge and funding to get information from government
- ◆ may use the wide range of methods acceptable in a representative democracy
- ◆ other relevant points.

‘Achieve’ answers must feature both knowledge and understanding and analysis.

Comments on Specimen Answer to Study Theme 1B

This candidate understands the question and knows how to answer it. The answer is not perfect – the introduction is over-long and wastes time in explaining insider/outsider groups without tying the explanation into the theme of the question. There is good use of language – e.g. “...close relationship with decision makers...”, “no direct access to the corridors of power.”, “direct immediate and ongoing voice in the democratic process...”. The reference to the role of the media is good and could have been developed.

The candidate also makes reference to the fact that pressure groups represent a minority but that governments can choose to pay heed when it suits them. The last paragraph is slightly confused – in the area of “I think I know what you think you mean” – but does not detract from the critical examination throughout the answer.

This is a succinct answer and therefore could be deceptive. It does not get a higher mark because the candidate has not linked the statements back to the question often enough.

It is a quality answer and scores **13/15**.