

## STUDY THEME 1B – DECISION MAKING IN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

### Question

Critically examine the view that pressure groups are a threat to democracy. (15 marks)

### Response

Pressure Groups can be considered as a threat to democracy as they are responsible for providing the government with vital information or facts about certain issues. Therefore they are capable of influencing government policy. For example the British Medical Association provides the government with information regarding the NHS. However the fact that pressure groups are a threat to democracy can be criticised. People tend to think that Pressure Groups play a large part in the decision making process and that their views are extremely important and influential however many steps in the decision making process take place behind closed doors, an example of this would be the decision to go ahead and fight in the war in Iraq.

A second reason why pressure groups are considered to be a threat to democracy is because they allow people to express their views on democracy out with election. The Pluralist view believes that democracy is undermined as a voters only role is to vote once every five years. This can be extremely inconvenient if something major happens during the five years for example a war. However pressure groups can bring people together during the five year period to express their views in order to influence government decision making. An example of this would be the "Stop the War" coalition who were able to express their views in 2003 about the war in Iraq. As a result of this an election was brought forward to 2005 when it had actually been planned for 2006. However not all pressure groups are thought of as a threat. The pluralist view has also attracted many criticisms. Only some pressure groups are considered a threat, these tending to be insider groups. This is because insider groups tend to represent the wealthy in society. They become more influential as they have more money to help them do so. Other pressure groups who represent the disadvantaged in society do not always have the same success. This is undemocratic and many people disagree with it.

Pressure Groups also act as a threat to democracy as they allow minority voices to be heard. For example the fuel protests in 2001 caused many people to speak out about their struggle to get to work without fuel. This can sometimes influence government decisions but can often prove to be unsuccessful. Pressure Groups however are not always thought of as a threat to democracy. They do not provide political stability and their work can also cause conflict in society. For example the Anti-Capitalism protest created violence and damage in society. Also pressure groups can create conflict

within their individual groups. This is not going to be influential over the gov. Not only does leadership of the groups cause conflict but collecting the views of all members on issues can cause problems.

On many occasions statement made by pressure groups can often be the views of leaders and not the views of the entire group. An example of this would be the "Snowdrop Appeal" where conflict was caused over statement being release which were mainly the views of the leaders and not the opinions of all of the members.

From the points I have discussed above, my opinion is that pressure groups can often be extremely helpful in influencing democracy however they can also cause more harm than good in certain cases.

## **Commentary**

The first paragraph in this answer requires very careful reading (and re-reading) on the part of the examiner. There is a point in there about the real decisions being made by the elected Government, irrespective of the input from pressure groups.

However, the answer is punctuated with 'confused' statements:

*A second reason why pressure groups are considered to be a threat to democracy is because they allow people to express their views on democracy out with election.*  
(Paragraph 2)

*Pressure groups also act as a threat to democracy as they allow minority voices to be heard.* (Paragraph 3)

*Pressure groups however are not always thought of as a threat to democracy. They do not provide political stability and their work can also cause conflict in society.*  
(Paragraph 3)

Overall, this is a response that examiners would describe as "coming in and out of focus". Despite the confusion, the candidate does demonstrate an awareness of some of the issues pertinent to the question: the provision of expert information to Government; the Pluralist view; insider groups; providing a voice for the disadvantaged; the threat to the rule of law; the minority nature of pressure group membership; accountability. There is development, exemplification and attempted balance, but not quite enough to merit a pass.

**Mark 7/15**