

## 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 are organisations which try to change policy to benefit their cause without seeking political power for themselves. Some people believe that pressure groups are a threat to democracy and in this essay I intend to discuss to what extent this is true.

Pluralists believe that democracy is undermined by the fact that the public only have their say once every 5 years at the elections. Therefore pressure groups are good for democracy as they provide more opportunities for the public to be involved. However this is based on the view that a balance exists between groups competing for power but this is not true because there are insider groups who have more influence. This is not fair and so is a threat to democracy.

Pressure groups can provide expert information to help policy development for example the BMA advise policy makers on issues regarding the NHS. However this is not democratic because the more privileged groups like the BMA have better resources and are more structured than those who represent the disadvantaged. This means they have a better chance of influencing government.

Pressure groups give people the opportunity to voice their opinions outwith the elections for example the Stop the War coalition would not have been able to put their views across until the next election, which was held in 2005, had it not been for pressure groups. On the other hand most policy making still goes on behind closed doors and pressure groups do not effect their decisions. This was the case with the Stop the War coalition as even though there were mass protests the war in Irak still went ahead. This yet again proves that pressure groups are not democratic.

Another benefit of pressure groups is that they provide a voice for minority groups for example in 2001 lorry and truck drivers were able to campaign against the rising costs of fuel. This is good for democracy as it shows that everyone can have their say. However some groups do not protest peacefully. Some groups such as the Anti-capitalism groups actually cause conflict in society by performing dangerous and sometimes illegal activities for their cause. This does not provide political stability and undermines the idea of democracy and how everyone should have their say but peacefully.

In conclusion pressure groups provide a voice for people outwith the elections and can provide information to help form better policies but there are divides between insider and outsider groups, some groups carry out violent acts and most policy development continues to be made behind closed doors despite the protests. All these factors have led me to believe that pressure groups are a threat to democracy.

### **Commentary**

This response features good development, exemplification of, and balanced comment on, the Pluralist view. There is a loss of focus in paragraph four in which the candidate addresses the issue of effectiveness, whilst the final sentence does not enhance the answer. The point in the next paragraph about “*dangerous and sometimes illegal activities*” is well made but cries out for further development. The concluding paragraph raises questions about the extent of the candidate’s understanding of the issue. Nevertheless, this is a basic pass.

**Mark 8/15**