

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 that set out to try and influence government policy. However some people see pressure groups as a threat to democracy. In this essay I intend to discuss the arguments for and against this view.

The way in which some pressure groups try to get their point across can sometimes be seen as undemocratic, for example if they are marching in protest against a certain policy, and the march becomes violent. This is not democratic, and happened in the anti-capitalism protest.

Another way that pressure groups can be a threat to democracy is that they do not promote public stability. Pressure groups can actually cause conflict between groups of people instead of trying only to influence government policy. It is not democratic for a country to be fighting amongst themselves.

Pressure groups can also be seen as undemocratic in the way in which they choose their leaders. Leaders of pressure groups are very rarely voted in, and as a result, many people believe that the pressure groups do not put forward the views of all their members. This was believed to be the case in the Snowdrop Appeal. It was suggested that only the views of the leaders of the Appeal were put forward. This in itself is a threat to democracy.

On the other hand, pressure groups can be seen as good for democracy. The pluralist view is that it is undemocratic if the only way in which the public are involved in the running of the country is voting every five years. Pluralists believe that pressure groups are very good for democracy.

This is the case with pressure groups who provide information and expertise to the government regarding certain policies, for example the BMA. These pressure groups are very influential, and therefore are good for democracy. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents provided the Government with information when deciding the law on wearing seatbelts in the back of cars.

Pressure groups are also good for democracy, in that they allow people to put their views forward to the government, although this does not always influence the government's decision. Thousands of people turned up for the Stop the War Coalition, although the government still went ahead with the war in Iraq. This was not a successful protest, but if pressure groups did not exist, people would have had to wait 2 years before putting their point forward in the next election.

In conclusion, pressure groups can be both good and bad for democracy, however pressure groups are very successful, otherwise they would not exist. I believe them to be a positive thing for democracy as they allow normal people to have their say, people who otherwise would not have a political voice.

Commentary

The candidate has a good understanding of the issue and has fashioned a well-structured, succinctly argued answer. Commendably, the candidate takes on the challenge of the question from the beginning by focusing on the view that pressure groups are considered a threat to democracy. This response features development, exemplification and balance. This is a good B pass.

Mark 10/15