

## Power – Lecture 1 (29/2/16)

### Defining and Understanding Power

- “the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events” – Oxford dictionary, one or 200+ different definitions
- **Interpersonal dimensions of a power relationship:**
  - **Exercise of power** – to direct or influence another
  - **Deference** – to yield to another
  - **Resistance** – to refuse to yield to another

### Examples of resistance

- David Bowie – refusing to be knighted (peaceful resistance)
- Sex Pistols – God Save The Queen; middle finger to the monarchy and the power they exert
- Guy Fawkes – Attempt to overthrow the government by blowing up Houses of Parliament (resistance by force)

**The exercise of power is contingent upon the willingness of another to be deferent, and deference is influenced by the way power is wielded.** Aspects of power are **relational**.

**Resistance to the exercise of power is contingent upon the way power is exercised; if exercised badly, resistance is more likely.**

### Structural dimensions of power

- **Economic** – ownership of the means of production
- **Political** – the state
- **Ideological** – the media
- **Spatial** – control of territory and borders

**Orthodox Marxist Theory – one of the core concepts in relation to power**

## Power – Lecture 2 (2/3/16)

### Foundational Perspectives – Marx

- Born in Germany, 1818
- Jewish by descent, married into an aristocratic Prussian family
- Philosopher, economist, socialist – made a living as a journalist (*New York Tribune*)
- Context and focus of writing – the collapse of Feudalism and the rise of Capitalism as the dominant economic system
- Main benefactor – Friedrich Engels – from a Capitalist family, involved in a taboo affair with a laborer from one of his family's mills which drove his interest in the emancipation of the lower classes
- Ambiguous ideas due to writing style (most works began as drunken letters to the editor of newspapers)
- Fundamental ideas of Marxism come from different interpretations of his works, which leaves them ambiguous

## Historical Materialism

### Materialism

- **(1) The Primacy of the Social** The main theorists of Capitalism's success were Utilitarian thinkers such as J.S. Mill and Jeremy Bentham, who attributed the success of Capitalism to the ability of individuals to make their own way
- Marx on the other hand believed that productivity of an individual is a myth, and humans must enter into relationships with others to produce economic output
- **(2) Materialism** – the necessity to produce the means of subsistence
- **(3) The Hegelian Inversion** – rather than human society being a product of ideas, ideas are a produce of society (Georg Wilhelm Friederich Hegel)

### Historical

- **(1) Mode of Production (Base)** – the sum total of productive activities in any given society

**Production is made up of** (according to **Louis Althusser**):

- **Forces of production** – human knowledge (science, technology, etc.) employed in any productive activity
- **Social relations of production** – the ways in which labour is organized within a productive activity (has changed from isolated, in-home production to a **Fordian** production-line system)
- **Means of production** – the tools and machinery employed in a productive activity

### The Base/superstructure distinction:

**Base** refers to the sum total of productive relations. **Superstructure** consists of the **ideological aspects** of a society (e.g. **media, religion, law, politics**).

Ideology refers to the representation of reality in a way that conceals the true nature of that reality. For example, the concept of '**free market**' capitalism conceals the inequality of access to resources within them. Also, religion represents the suffering of the poor as part of a moral life that is repaid after death (the concept of heaven/hell). "*Religion is the opium of the masses*" – Marx.

*"The mode of production of material life **conditions** the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."* In other words, "*base determines superstructure **in the last analysis.***"

### Progression of modes of production through human history

- **Primitive Communism (tribal society)**
- **Ancient Feudalism (slavery)**
- **Feudalism**
- **Capitalism**
- **Socialism (Communism)**

- **(2) Dialectical Materialism**

**Dialectics** – all matter creates its own opposite, but eventually destroys it. **Dialectical materialism** is the principle of dialectics applied to analysis of the mode of production. The key dialectic that transforms a mode of production is the **class struggle**.

According to Marx, a **class** is – **a group of people defined by its relationship to the means of production**. For example, under **Capitalism**, there are two key classes into which all others can be broadly put. These are:

- **Bourgeoisie** – the owners of the means of production (Capitalists)
- **Proletariat** – non-owners of the means of production, workers whose labour the bourgeoisie rely on

Marx theorized that the Bourgeoisie created the Proletariat, but would eventually be destroyed by them (**dialectical relationship**).

The dialectical relationship between the classes is shown through the principle of **surplus value** – the **new value** created by workers **in excess of their own labour cost (profit)**. It is in the nature of Capitalism to increase the amount of surplus value it extracts from workers, which leads to the gap between the wealth of the bourgeoisie and the Proletariat increasing. *“political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another.”* (Marx)

Eventually, **consciousness ceases to be determined by ideology**. The Proletariat becomes **class conscious**. That is, it becomes aware of:

- **(a) its exploitation**
- **(b) its existence as a social group defined by its relationship to the means of production**
- **(c) unity in struggle, its existence as one class rather than many groups characterised by ethnicity, age, gender.**

**Capitalism creates and sows “the seeds of its own destruction” (dialectic relationship between the bourgeoisie and the Proletariat).**

### **The Orthodox Marxist View of Power**

**Structural** determinants of power are emphasised most in the Orthodox Marxist view, rather than **inter-personal** determinants. Power is essentially an economic concept, that is, power is determined by ownership of the means of production – **owners control the ideological realm of society**. E.g. religious and media organisations are controlled by the bourgeoisie.

Power is exercised through **ownership of the means of production, and control of the ideological realm**. Those who hold power are able to keep their subjects downtrodden through **the increasing immiseration of the working class brought about by the intensification of the process of surplus value extraction** (increasing profits in relation to wages). The immiseration of the Proletariat is compounded by ideological factors and the concept of **false consciousness**. In a simplistic view, ideology inverts the truth fully (the concept of the **free market**, where markets are actually highly controlled by owners of

resources). At a more subtle level, ideology twists the truth slightly to present a very different view to what is actually happening.

In the Orthodox Marxist view, power is **resisted** as a **mechanical process**; an **outcome** of the **dialectical tension between classes** that is **exacerbated by the increasing extraction of surplus value**, which results in the **increasing 'class consciousness'** of the **working class** and **ends in revolution** and the **transformation** of the mode of **production**.