**CHAPTER FOUR**

**PRESSURE GROUPS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

1. KEY CONCEPTS

As we saw in Chapter one, a key way in which citizens can participate in the political process is by joining or supporting pressure groups and social movements. So what are they?

**Definition**

**Pressure groups** are organisations which seek to *influence* those in government, rather than seek to be in government. They are usually *single issue* groups. Examples would include Greenpeace, Liberty, the Law Society and the British Medical Association.

Perhaps surprisingly groups like the AA and the RAC are pressure groups, acting on behalf of motorists. The National Trust is a pressure group which seeks to preserve historical houses and landscapes. The RSPB is a pressure group seeking to preserve bird habitats. Locally, in 2009, there was the ‘Save Shirley High Street’ campaign, which was dedicated to preventing the ASDA store opening in Shirley, and the ‘Stop HS2’ campaign, which continues to fight against the construction of the High Speed 2 rail link through communities such as Meriden. There are therefore many different kinds of pressure groups.

In contrast, political parties are organisations which seek to be in government. They are not single issue organisations, presenting policies on all areas of government (foreign affairs, defence, the economy, health, education, etc).

Sometimes pressure groups can become political parties. This happened to the Green movement in the UK which, in the 1960s, formed the Green Party.

**Social movements** are a more recent phenomena in UK politics. They are internet based groups which are more loosely organised that pressure groups and which spring up in response to an issue and disappear equally quickly. They are therefore *transient* (temporary) and sometimes have no formal leadership. They often aim to instil new moral values in society which accord with their aims and which sometimes bring them into conflict with the authorities. Their favoured strategies are protest marches/rallies and sit-ins (occupations). Examples include the Occupy movement and Anonymous.



***Occupy*** began as a movement in Wall Street (the financial district) in New York, but quickly spread to other major cities across the world, including the financial district of London. It was a response to the financial crash of 2008, blaming the greed of bankers and the capitalist system. Their argument was that those responsible for the crash had not been made to pay, whereas most ordinary people were suffering austerity as a consequence of their actions. It advocated an end to capitalism, a less hierarchical society and the end of social and economic inequality.

***Anonymous*** is an internet based group of activists and ‘hactivists’ (computer hackers). Sympathisers wear Guy Fawkes masks to preserve their anonymity. It is opposed to a wide range of issues, including internet censorship and control (especially by governments), taking a moral stance on rights and civil liberties. There is no leader, so no action can be attributed to the organisation as a whole, and they have supported the Occupy campaign and Wikileaks campaigns. Their aims are unclear and they are unpredictable in their actions. Open membership means that anyone can join as long as they state they are a ‘member to the collective’.

**The classification of pressure groups**

Pressure groups can be classified in two ways. Both of these methods (or **typologies**) are flawed.

The first pressure group typology emerged in the 1950s. This was the **cause/sectional** (or cause/promotional) typology established by J.D. Stewart. It proposes that there are two types of pressure groups:

1. **Cause/promotional groups:**

These are pressure groups which fight for a particular issue or cause. They have open membership (anyone can join if they pay the subscription) and seek to influence policies which relate to that cause.

Examples would include Greenpeace. Their cause is to combat environmental damage caused by companies and governments. Another example would be the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) which seeks to protect endangered species. Cause groups, sometimes called promotional groups, can be further sub-divided into those that represent a particular group in society (sectional cause groups, such as Shelter), those that try to change attitudes in a particular area of policy (attitude cause groups such as Greenpeace) and those that look to secure a set of clearly defined political objectives (political cause groups such as Unlock Democracy).

1. **Sectional groups**

These groups seek to represent the interests of their members. Examples include trade unions and professional associations, such as the National Union of Teachers (NUT) or the British Medical Association (the BMA), or the Law Society. They therefore have closed membership. For example, only teachers can join the NUT, only students can join the National Union of (NUS) and only medical professionals can join the BMA. These groups try to improve the pay and conditions of their members and advance the sector in which they are involved (education, medicine, etc).

**A problem with the cause/sectional typology: the MENCAP example**

An issue with the cause/sectional typology is that some pressure groups may feature in both categories. For example, MENCAP is the charity established to look after the interests of people suffering from mental illness. In providing day care and support services for such people it fits the definition of a sectional group. But, it also strives to raise public awareness of mental health issues and to fight the cause of those suffering from mental illness. It also has more open membership than sectional groups. Consequently, it fits the definition of a cause group.

It would therefore seem possible to be both a cause and a sectional group.

Given the flaw with cause/sectional typology, in the 1980s a new typology was developed by a political scientist by the wonderful name of **Wyn Grant**. This was the **insider/outsider** typology.

1. **Outsider groups:**

Insider groups are those groups which work closely with governments. They are on the ‘inside’ of the policy-making process and are consulted by governments. They therefore do not use strategies which are likely to upset or embarrass governments, such as demonstrations, but instead offer their specialist services in helping to shape government policy and legislation. They include the BMA and the Law Society.

1. **Outsider groups:**

Outsider groups are those groups which are not consulted by government because the government does not agree with their aims or because they do not agree with their methods. They are kept at arms’ length from governments. Examples include Greenpeace (which deliberately shuns involvement with governments), the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), the Animal Liberation Front, and Fathers4Justice. Their preferred methods include marches, demonstrations, rallies, and other forms of ***direct action*** (see below). This is because, being outsiders, they are excluded from the policy-making process and they feel the need to attract media attention to their cause to try to win public support.

**A problem with the insider/outsider typology: two examples:**

**Example 1: Trade Unions**

In 1964 the Trade Union movement was regarded as an insider group by Harold Wilson’s Labour government. They were regarded as crucial in helping to manage the economy and were invited for a weekly meeting at No. 10 Downing Street, with beer and sandwiches! However, by the mid-1960s industrial unrest and vocal opposition to government policy meant that they were increasingly regarded as outsider groups. In the 1980s, under Margaret Thatcher, they definitely became outsiders! This demonstrates that it is possible for groups to shift between insider and outsider status.

**Example 2: The Howard League for Penal Reform**

The Howard League has often been critical of successive governments’ justice policy. This would make it an outsider group. The Conservative led coalition proposed that prisoners should not receive gifts of books from relatives (in their view prisons were as much about retribution as reform). The Howard League condemned this policy. However, the Liberal Democrats consulted the Howard league on this matter and were supportive of the League’s stance: so in this instance they were treated as an insider group.

At different times it would therefore seem possible to be both an insider and an outsider group.

**2. DISCUSSION: Which methods do pressure groups use and which are successful?**

**Successful methods:**

1. The most successful method a pressure group can use is to become an **insider group** and to be invited by governments to advice on policy formulation. This method is used by groups such as the BMA and the Law Society. In order to do this a pressure group needs to be respectable in the eyes of a government. There is criticism that some of the more successful groups are organised by people who are from a narrow socio-economic elite: middle class, public school and university educated, professional and part of the same social strata from which senior government members and senior civil servants are drawn. This is arguably true of both the BMA and the Law Society.
2. **Public sympathy** is another factor affecting pressure group success. If a pressure group can win public sympathy it can put pressure, via the electorate, on governments. This was the case with the ***Snowdrop Campaign*** and ***ASH.*** The *Snowdrop Campaign* was formed after the Dunblane massacre. It called for tighter gun controls. *ASH* (Action on Smoking and Health) was formed to ban smoking in public places, such as pubs and restaurants, because of the proven dangers of passive smoking. The Department of Health was happy to work with *ASH* in promoting public awareness about the need for legislation to ban smoking in public places.
3. **Clear aims:** pressure groups with clear aims do better than those whose aims are vague. For example, *Snowdrop* clearly wanted tighter gun controls. On the other hand the *Occupy* movement (see above) wanted to end capitalism, but how this should be done and what replaces it was much less clear. Similarly, some *Anonymous* (see above)supporters are less than clear about the reason for the demonstrations they are attending.
4. **Celebrity Endorsement** can also improve the chances of pressure group success. For example, Joanna Lumley successfully supported Ghurkha justice campaigners in overturning Labour immigration policy in 2009 which prevented Ghurkha families from migrating to the UK. The issue was an unforeseen consequence of Labour’s immigration policy and caused government embarrassment as the Ghurkhas’ were soldiers loyal to Britain. However, the success of celebrity endorsement is largely linked to the ability of celebrities to a) engage ***public sympathy***, often through the ***media***, and b) persuade politicians of their cause. Several celebrities have supported CND (Shikari, Marcus Brigstock, etc) but to no avail. The Ghurkha campaign is indicative of the influence of the ***media*** on some pressure group campaigns.

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**Less successful methods:**

***Conventional methods:***

1. Securing **mass membership** does not guarantee success. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was able to mobilise large crowds and the ‘Stop the Iraq War Campaign’ had over three million supporters rally in Hyde Park in 2003, but neither was successful.
2. Securing significant **funding** can help success, but is no guarantee. For example, the international environmental pressure group Greenpeace is well-funded, but its campaigns have had only limited success. For example, their campaign to shame the Japanese government into ending whaling has only seen the introductions of quotas.
3. **Petitions.** Often campaigners like to collect signatures in support of their cause in order to demonstrate to politicians the strength of public feeling. For example, Animal Rights activists sometimes collect signatures on a petition in Birmingham New Street and the ‘Stop HS2’ and ‘Save Shirley High Street’ collected signatures for petitions in support of their cause.
4. **Lobbying** is when pressure groups seek contact with politicians at local, regional, national or European level. In order to do this they use ***access points***(points of contact). These range from telephone calls, emails, letters and letters to formal and informal meetings, and attendance at committees to give evidence in support of their cause or to be ***consulted*** on their expertise. Some groups may hire professional ***lobbyists*** (organisations which can be hired to lobby representatives). In the United States the use of professional lobbyists is big business and, as a strategy, it has more success than in the UK.
5. **Legal Action** is used where a government can be argued to breach legislation. Legal Action has been mounted by environmental groups who work with partners across the EU to form ***Eurogroups*** (groups of like-minded pressure groups within the European Union). Legal challenges have been made against member states who appear to infringe European directives on the environment.

The ***‘Stop HS2 Action Alliance’*** campaign mounted a series of legal challenges in the High Court in 2014 and lost their challenge in the Court of Appeal. They accused the government of unlawfully failing to carry out a ‘strategic environment assessment’ (SEA). The court ruled that an SAE was not required at the particular juncture that the challenge was mounted.

***Non-conventional methods:***

1. **Direct Action** encompasses a wide range of strategies which arises because ***conventional methods*** of influencing the policy making (lobbying, consultation, petitions, legal action) are unsuccessful and more visible, direct protests are needed to attract media attention, raise public awareness and, through that put pressure on politicians. It includes **marches, demonstrations, rallies, blockades and strikes**.

For example, in 2008 the ***Road Hauliers Association*** mounted ***fuel protests*** against the increasing cost of fuel tax in the UK. They claimed that the tax was putting lorry drivers out of business. They organised a slow-moving convoy through central London which created gridlock and brought traffic to a standstill.

Another example of direct action can be found in the activities of ***Fathers4Justice***, a pressure group founded in 2002. In an attempt to draw media attention to their cause (and to win public sympathy) Fathers4Justice campaigners dressed in superhero costumes and climbed prominent public buildings in London (Buckingham Palace, Tower Bridge, and the London Eye). Their campaign sought to improve access for fathers to their children in divorce cases. They claimed the courts favoured access for mothers, but disadvantaged fathers. They dressed as superheroes because they believed that dads are superheroes. Their media stunts attracted a great deal of attention and even the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, stated he had some sympathy with their cause. The campaign was headed by their self-styled leader, Matt O’Connor, and they were an internet-based group. In 2004 they caused a major alert in the House of Commons when Fathers4Justice protestors threw purple-dyed self-raising flour in condoms at the Prime Minister from the public gallery. In 2006 a splinter group hatched a plot to kidnap the Prime Minister’s 5 year old son, Leo Blair, but the security services learned of the plot and arrested those involved. The group can claim some modest success. Although the law was not changes, evidence suggests that some judges began to take into account the arguments of the group in their rulings.



At its more extreme, direct action can include ***illegal activity***.

For example, in 2008 ***animal rights activists*** threatened staff working at Huntington Life Sciences, where animal experimentation was taking place, including bomb threats.

Between 1999 and 2004 animal rights activists also targeted a Guinea pig farm in Staffordshire, creating the ‘Save the Newchurch Farm Guinea Pigs’ Campaign’. The farm was breeding Guinea pigs for animal experimentation. Activists broke into the farm to film the conditions in which the Guinea pigs were kept, but they also exhumed the freshly-buried body of the farm-owners grandmother and threatened not to return the body until the farm ceased working. Four activists were arrested and later imprisoned, but eventually the farm was closed by the owner’s family. This represents a modest success for direct action.

However**,** generally direct action is ineffective. Direct action includes civil disobedience.

1. **Civil disobedience** involves refusing to comply with orders given by the state. It involves non-violent protest and was used effectively by black Americans in the 1960s. In the UK, anti-poll tax protesters in 1988 refused to register for the poll tax, and the Occupy movement (see above) establishing a protest camp outside St Paul’s cathedral are examples of civil disobedience.

The group ***UK Uncut*** did have some modest success with their mass occupations of stores such as Starbucks, Vodaphone and Top Shop in 2011. These companies were not paying sufficient corporation tax to the UK and the group’s argument was that the public sector funding cuts and austerity measures implemented by the government could be largely offset if companies paid the tax that was due to the Inland Revenue. Their arguments won some ***public sympathy***. This prompted George Osborne to raise the matter with other EU finance ministers and to seek ways to tighten regulations on the global avoidance of corporation tax by multi-national comoanies.

**3. DISCUSSION: Are pressure groups good for democracy?**

***Yes they are (the pluralist view):***

Pressure groups are arguably good for democracy for the following reasons:

1. They give a voice to a minority group which might otherwise be ignore. For example, the views of residents who live along the proposed route of the HS2 deserve to be heard and the ‘Stop HS2’ campaign helps to articulate this view to the government and in the courts.
2. They provide specialist information and expertise to the government. For example, the RSPB is sometimes consulted where major government building projects might affect wildlife habitats.
3. They allow citizens to articulate issues which might not be a priority in an election (eg the environment).
4. They provide a means by which people can participate in the democratic process between elections.
5. They provide an important check on government power, particularly when a government has a large majority in parliament. They ensure a healthy, balanced debate about policy-making in society.
6. They also educate citizens by raising awareness of the issues and causes which they seek to promote or challenge.

***No they are not (the elitist view):***

1. Pressure groups allow those with the **loudest voice** or the most resources or key social contact with policy makers to influence the policy-making process. Poorer groups which do not have the connections of, for example, the BMA or the Law Society, are less likely to be successful.
2. The leaders of pressure groups are often middle class. With the possible exception of trade unions, pressure groups do not provide a good forum for the working class. They are therefore **unrepresentative**.
3. Pressure groups often have **poor internal democracy**. Fathers4Justice, for example, was run by their self-styled leader Matt O’Connor.
4. One of Thatcher’s senior ministers, Douglas Hurd, called them ‘serpents that strangle efficient government’. If successful, they can skew the policy-making process and **can produce a lack of joined-up government**. For example, if a government sets about public sector cuts across the whole public sector, but the BMA is successful in persuading the government to protect the NHS from those cuts, it could be argued that one pressure group has changed the overall government strategy.
5. Pressure groups are **unaccountable** to the electorate.
6. Many of their members are simply ***‘cheque book members’*** who pay a subscription, but do not actively participate in the group. This means that many members are not involved in the decision-making processes within the group, which can sometimes skew group policy in favour of the ideas of a radical minority.
7. Direct action can be sometimes seen as an attempt to **undermine a democratic state.**
8. They often express only the narrow self-interest of their members rather than wider national or regional interests. For example, it could be argued that the ‘Save the Shirley High Street’ campaign arose largely from the narrow self-interests of local retailers and residents without regard to the job opportunities which the introduction of ASDA and related outlets created.
9. They undermine parliament, bypassing the representative process and making policy through secretive channels of influence.
10. If successful they can exert undue influence on one government department. This might weaken ‘joined up’ government.

HARD STUFF

Core insiders are groups that work closely with government and are regularly consulted, such as the BMA.

Specialist insiders are groups, such as the World Wildlife Fund, that can bring specialist expertise to the policy making process.

Peripheral insiders are those groups which are rarely consulted because of their narrow area of expertise, for example The Dog’s Trust.

Potential insiders are groups that might achieve insider status with a change in government.

Outsiders by necessity are those groups with which governments would not wish to be associated, for example Fathers4Justicde.

Ideological outsiders are groups, such as Greenpeace, who would not wish to work with governments because they believe governments do not share their values.

**Access Points**: are any points of contact between members of a pressure group and a political representative (or civil servant). This can be at local, regional, national or supranational level (as with the EU). Access points include phone calls, meetings, consultation, providing expertise to hearings, or attending policy-making committees. They are the point at which pressure groups access the policy making process. In more federal systems, where there are, for example, regional assemblies, more access points are provided. Federal systems are where power is dispersed between different tiers of government. For example, in the UK pressure groups may have access to local authorities, regional assemblies, national government and the European Union.

Insider pressure groups may become involved in **policy networks** (networks of civil servants, politicians and interest groups), whereby they are consulted by government and their opinions and expertise are regularly sought. They may also become involved in **policy communities**, which are stronger, more formal and more permanent groups of government advisers.

**Countervailing groups**: are pressure groups which oppose each other. Examples include the Countryside Alliance and the League against Cruel Sports (over the issue of fox hunting) and the TUC and the CBI over workers’ pay and conditions.

CASE STUDIES

***An Insider Group: The British Medical Association (BMA).***

The British Medical Association (BMA) represents doctors from all branches of medicine in the UK. It has around 130,000 members and is regularly involved in lobbying the government and the European Union. It can commit extensive financial resources to campaigning, given the wealth of its members, and commands respect from politicians because of the high status which doctors have in the UK. Many of its senior members are arguably from the same social elite as politicians (having attended the same schools and universities and often mixing in the same social circles). This ‘social capital’ gives them an added advantage in lobbying politicians.

Consequently, the BMA is regarded as one of the most influential and effective of the pressure groups. It is an insider group, often called upon to advise governments in policy formulation. It has a specialist Parliamentary Affairs team which briefs politicians and advises its members on how to lobby ministers and senior civil servants. Its other professional committees include the Board of Science, Medical Ethics and International Committee. These support public health initiatives, such as a ban on smoking in public places. It also campaigns on improvements to the NHS and, as a sectional group, on improving the pay and conditions of work for its members.

***An Outsider Group: Amnesty International***

Amnesty International is an outsider group by necessity: it often criticises governments over human rights issues. It was founded in London in 1961 and fights for political prisoners across the world. It tries to mobilise public opinion to put pressure on governments in those countries where human rights abuses occur. In 2015 it challenged the British government in a tribunal, claiming that the government security agency, GCHQ, had illegally spied on its electronic communications. It is not the first time that Amnesty has challenged the British government. In the 1970s it criticised the government for the internment (imprisonment without trial) of suspected IRA terrorist in Northern Ireland.

Among its international successes was the liberation of the Burmese opposition leader, Aung Sann Suu Kyi, from house arrest in 2010, after the group campaigned tirelessly for her release. In 2013 it supported a campaign to allow prisoner voting rights in the UK incompliance with EU law.

The group currently has over seven million members worldwide.