Principles of Sociology

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Political Sociology: Forms of Government and Social Movements

Politics, Government and Power

Politics and Government

- Politics refers to the processes by which people and groups acquire and exercise power.
- Politics is not confined to the domain of government, but also it can be exerted in social relations across all social fields and institutions (family, peer groups, education, science, religion, economy workplace).
- The sphere of government is the sphere of political power.
- Political power refers to this kind of power that is organized and wielded by the state.
- The state as a major political institution holds the monopoly in the use of physical coercion within a specific territory.
- State's authority is supported by law and exerted by governmental apparatus
- Modern states as nation-states are characterized by:
- *a) Sovereignty* (authority over a distinct territory)
- *b) Citizenship* (the quality of being citizen – a bearer of rights and duties)
- *c) Nationalism* (the sense of belonging to a large national community/ ideology that cultivates these feelings)

Sociological Perspectives on the State

- ***Origins of the two major perspectives on the state***

- **A)** ***Thomas Hobbes*** (1588–1679)

- According to Hobbes, human beings are characterized by an inherent trend towards destruction and violence.

- In order to stop the devastating situation of "each against all" [*Bellum omnium contra omnes*], humans voluntarily entered into a social agreement providing for central authority and collective defense.

- This representation of the state underpins the functionalist perspective on the state, as a social institution that is indispensible for the human society's survival.

B) *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1712–1778)

- According to Rousseau, the state of nature of human beings is characterized by peace, love, nobility, openness, spontaneity (noble savages).

- The distortion of human qualities is due to the private property and the political institution of state, that consists of a mechanism of property rights' establishment and protection.

- Rousseau's view on the state inspires the conflict perspective on the state.

- **The Functionalist Perspective on the State**

- To Functionalists, the state ensures the maintenance and reproduction of social order, peace , stability and general welfare.

- State performs four major functions:

- **1)** *Planning and Direction*

- **2)** *Enforcement of Norms*

- **3)** *Arbitration of Conflicting Interests (Mediation)*

- **4)** *Protection Against Other Societies*

- **The Conflict Perspective on the State**

- To conflict theorists, the state is an apparatus that serves ruling elites' interests.

- The state is an instrument of violence, oppression, exclusion and exploitation.

- State's police power defends the existing division of labor and allocation of social wealth.

- According to *instrumental theorists*, the state is an instrument of the capitalist class, whilst structural theorists argue about a relative autonomy of the state concerning its connection with the ruling economic (capitalist) class.

- The maintenance of social peace and order is a main but hard task for the state mechanism.

- Social, class, private, corporate conflicts set a vast range of issues, with which the state has to deal.

Totalitarianism

- The term totalitarianism refers to a "total state".

- In a "total state", government control almost all social, political, economic, educational, cultural institution and each aspect of social life.

- A totalitarian society typically has three characteristics: a monolithic political party, a compelling ideology, and pervasive social control.

- All powerful social positions are occupied by ruling political party's members.

- A totalitarian ideology is utopian in nature. It stipulates grandiose schemes for social reconstruction and societal betterment.

- The enforcement and the reproduction of this political order is relied on strong ideological propagation and stifling social control by means of education, mass media, police, secret services and military.

Authoritarianism

- In *authoritarian states popular participation is denied or* substantially restricted.

- In authoritarian societies, types of opposition to government is extremely limited.

- An authoritarian political system is characterized by a low-degree of free public debate and narrow limits for social-public action.

- **Democracy**

- The etymology of word "democracy" refers to the greek term "demokratia", that is composed by words "demos" (people) and "kratos" (rule).

- The democratic political system is relied on people's power and rule.

- In relation to different political-philosophical views, democratic system has been established and organized in various forms.

- Typical goals of this political system are the following:

- **a)** political equality

- **b)** personal and collective liberty and freedom

- **c)** common interest

- **d)** general welfare

- **e)** promotion of moral self-development

- **f)** reinforcement of public participation in decision-making processes and public sphere.

- The two major historical types of democratic political system are a) *direct-participatory* and b) *representative* **democracy**.

- **Global problems and governance**

- Globalization's repercussions set severe problems to national governmental systems and people: unemployment, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, pollution, environmental destruction, international financial crises, terrorism.

- National governments have little power over the activities of global and multinational corporations within the global economy.

- According to sociologist Daniel Bell (1997), national government is *too small to respond to the big questions* and *too big to deal* with the small questions.

- National politics is under pressure due to global risks and people indifference and dissatisfaction.

- **Proposed answers to national politics' distress in a globalized world**

- **A) "Less government, more free market":**
- National governments cannot face the new challenges that our globalized world engenders.
- Market forces are the only capable agents to arrange and enable this world to function efficiently.

- **B) Global social democracy:**
- Deepening and enrichment of democracy at all levels (local, national, global)
- To D. Hell, global social democracy will be achieved through multi-layer governance in which many organizations (non-governmental organizations, social movements) will co-operate at different levels.
- Democratic accountability of all organizations consists of the central condition for the global social democracy.

Power

- Power is one of the major subject matter of political sociology.

- The meaning, nature and distribution of power consist of central issues in this field of social science.

- **Max Weber's view on power**

- Power refers to "the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a command action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action".

- Different forms of power: a) **coercive** and b) **legitimate** power.

- *Coercive type of power* is relied only on force and physical violence.

- *Legitimate power* refers to the type of power that is invested with authority.

- Legitimacy is the social justification of power and can take various forms.

- **Weberian "ideal types" of authority**

- The sources of authority's justification: tradition, charisma and rationality-legality.

- **1)** *Traditional authority* is power legitimized by the sanctity of age-old customs.

- **2)** *Charismatic authority* refers to the leader's right to rule on the basis of his/her special, unique qualities.

- **3)** *Rational-legal authority* is power that is legitimated through legally enacted rules and regulations.

- **M. Foucault's view on power**

- Foucault proposed to abandon the views that approach power as being centralized and exerted from top to the bottom.

- Power is not concentrated in one institution, such as the state, or held by specific socially, politically or/and economically dominant groups.

- According to Foucault, power operates at all levels of social interaction, in all social institutions, by all people.

- To Foucault, power and knowledge are closely tied together, and serve to reinforce one another.

- Foucault describes the development of 'discourses', which provide ways of discussing power and knowledge.

Social movements

- Political parties, elections and parliaments consist of the "normal", "formal" framework of politics.

- Political action is not restricted to this framework, but it is extended to other non-orthodox forms of political protest and social struggle.

- Non-orthodox forms of political action are social revolutions and social movements.

- *Social revolution* has the main goal of overturn the established political, social and economic order through massive and, many times violent, social mobilization. The overthrow of the existing socio-political order purports the establishment of a new type of social organization.

- Social movements consist of collective attempts to promote and defend a common interest .

- **Main general characteristics of social movements:**

- *a)* Members of social movements act outside the sphere of established institutions.

- *b)* They tend to participate in the process of social change and purport to bring about change on a public issue

- *c)* They are participants in a collective activity and they develop the sense of being part of a community.

- *d)* A set of ideas defines movement's identity, political goals, and is the equipment for critique against dominant ideas and existing social arrangements

Types of Social Movements

- **Revolutionary movements**

- Revolutionary movements claim the overall overthrow of prevailing values and social order.

- These movements look for the radical transformation of society and, consequently, the building of a new social system.

- **Reform movements**

- Reform movements pursue social changes within the existing social arrangements.

- These movement do not dispute the dominant system of values and established social order, but they fight for the betterment of the existing social system.

- **Resistance movements ('reactive' and 'progressive' direction)**

- Organized efforts called resistance movements arise not only for the purpose of instituting change but also to block change or to eliminate a previously instituted change.

- **Expressive movements**

- These movements do not target the social system and political order. They are concerned with individuals' salvation in times of extreme distress.

Sociological theories of social movements

- *Earlier social movement theories*
- The Chicago School of Sociology is often seen as the first to systematically chart forms of collective behavior and to turn these into a specialist field of inquiry in sociology from the 1920s.
- According to this sociological tradition, social movements are both products and agents of social change.
- *Scholars of Chicago School investigate social movements' activities that were developed outside the framework of formal politics*
- *Herber Blumer supported that social movements are motivated by* dissatisfaction with some aspects of current society. Their main goal is to propose and build a "new order of life".
- Social movements' action can have two directions:
- **a)** *outward/active action*: aiming to the social transformation
- **b)** *inward/expressive action*: aiming to change subjectivities of participants
- Most social movements involve both active and expressive elements.

- ***Life-cycle of social movements***

- The successive stages in life-cycle of social movements:

- 1) The stage of "social ferment"

- 2) The stage of "popular excitement'"

- 3) The stage of effective organization and action

- 4) The stage of "institutionalization"

- **Modern approaches on social movements:**

   American and European perspectives

- American perspectives utilize rational choice theory for studying social movements.

- These theoretical and analytical scheme assume that individuals proceed to rational decisions, on the basis of rational assessment of the available choices.

- The main question is how social movements become organized

- European perspectives pursue to give prominence to the relation between social movements and social classes .

- Their analytical prism is the social change.

- Their research orientation refers to the social, political, economic, historical reasons for the social movements emergence.

- **Resource Mobilization Theory**

- This theory developed in the late 1960s and 1970s, as a reaction to the image of social movements as "irrational" social phenomena, an image that was largely constructed by social unrest theories.

- Resource Mobilization theorists supported that social movements set specific goals and their members' action is rationally organized.

- Capitalist societies bring about a constant discontent amongst segments of population.

- The main question is which is this factor that contributes to the transformation of discontent to social mobilization and to organized social collective action.

- RTM theorists believe that this crucial factor is the availability of the necessary resources to support effective campaigns that dispute the existing social arrangements.

- This theory talks about a "social movement industry", in order to describe a competitive field of movements, as the scarcity of important resources (members, funding, media promotion etc.) leads social movements to a mutual competition.

- **New Social movements**

- Since the late 1960s there has been an explosion of social movements in many countries around the globe.

- Some of the most important new social movements were the following:

- a) student movements in the 1960s

- b) civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s and '70s

- c) anti-nuclear and ecological movements of the 1980s

- d) gay movements of the 1990s

- The fields of new types of social protest and struggle refer to protection of environment, non-nuclear energy, abandonment of nuclear weapons, identity politics, eradication of gender and race discriminations, animal rights

- There was a transition from industrial politics, that focused on social wealth production and distribution, to post-industrial politics, that promoted post-material claims.

- The origins of post-material, post-industrial politics concern:

- *a)* new generations' experience and socialization into an relatively affluent western society

- *b)* new generations' occupational experience in service sector of economy

- **New Social Movements' organization**
- Many of new social movements were characterized by a rejection of centralized and strict type of organization.
- These movements adopt the organizational form of networks, namely different groups were connected with one another in the perspective of their socio-political-cultural goal.
- We have to do with polycephalous structures.
- This type of organization provided movements with a flexibility against strict law's implementation and formal social control.
- This organizational form signaled a symbolic rejection of the aggressively masculine, bureaucratic power politics of the industrial age, typified by some trade unions and party politics.
- These movements did not pursue to seize the state power apparatus, as labor and radical socialist movements did.
- They were working mostly at the cultural level. This strategy has been described as a "self-limiting radicalism".
- **New Social Movements' participants/supporters**
- Public demonstrations seem to attract a 'rainbow coalition' of retired people, students, first-time protesters, feminists, anarchists, socialists, traditional conservatives and many more.

- **The types of New Social Movements' action**

- NSMs use a range of protest actions, from political lobbying, to sit-ins and alternative festivals

- Most of the times, their actions are symbolic and non-violent.

- The choice of non-violent action expresses their effort to test in the present new forms of social organization and new social relationships.

- Many NSM actions have a critique target, namely they try to make visible those hard aspects of society that are previously invisible and unknown.

- New Social Movements utilize largely the communication chances that are offered by mass media and social media.

- **Global Social Movements**

- The stage of social action is radically changed due to processes of globalization Social movements now operate in a very different set of historical circumstances from those of earlier movements.

- The overcome of national borders is achieved by technological tools.

- In our current information age, social movements around the globe are able to join together in huge regional and international networks.

- By utilizing new technological means, social movements can organize and promote their campaigns at all levels (local, national, global).

- These electronic networks now have the unprecedented ability to respond immediately to events as they occur, to access and share sources of information, and to put pressure on corporations, governments and international bodies.

- We have to do with a historical transition from the nationally bounded social movements of the past to new social movements without borders.

- **On line movements and netwars**

- A new kind of contest (war) has been emerged, in which the object of the antagonism is public opinion.

- Participants in netwars use the media and online resources to shape what certain populations know about the social world.

- The targets of these on line assaults are private companies, global corporations, government bodies, international political and economic agreements.

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