



CHAPTER 2

Political Power, Authority, and the State

Chapter 2 focuses on the concepts of power and authority, and on a range of understandings as to how they come into play in the state. It is noted that power is often associated with coercion, while authority is more closely associated with legitimacy. This observation by itself does not answer the question of what legitimacy is or how it is determined. To this end, Max Weber's three types of authority are introduced. The chapter continues by addressing a series of questions: Is power the same as force? Does it need to be exercised deliberately? Is power a good thing and, if not, can we eliminate it entirely? The chapter concludes with a discussion of the three faces of power identified in the work of Steven Lukes.

Chapter Outline

- **Power and Authority**
- **Conceptual Questions about Power**
 - Is Power the Same as Force?
 - Must Power Be Exercised Deliberately?
 - Is Power a Good Thing?
 - Can We Eliminate Power?
- **Power and Theories of the State**
- **Pluralism and Lukes's Three Dimensions of Power**
- **Interests and Power**
- **Socialism and Power**
- **Conclusion**

Key Terms

Authority
Constituency
False consciousness

First Nations
Hegemony
Indigenous peoples

Methodology
Power

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between power and authority? Is it possible to have one without the other? How is power played out in the state?
2. There is a saying that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Do you agree? Is power something that should be eliminated from society? Explain.
3. Explain Gramsci's concept of hegemony. To whom is Gramsci responding? Is Gramsci's concept of hegemony relevant in today's world? Why or why not?
4. Is the use of force an expression of power, or an indicator that power has failed? Does power require force? Is there a continuum of power in a state?
5. Is false consciousness more common in an authoritarian state under a charismatic leader?
6. In 2008–9 the fortieth Canadian Parliament went through a prorogue process. Is a prorogue part of a strong democracy or is merely partisan politics?
7. Why was the idea of democratic socialism popular during the 2016 presidential election in the US?
8. The Cold War has ended. Why has socialism as defined by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels largely disappeared?
9. Michel Foucault examined power and argued that it was everywhere. Is power everywhere?

Further Resources

- <http://www.marxists.org/>
Resource page for a range of Marxist thinkers including (among many, many others) Gramsci and Marcuse—Also contains links to material on Max Weber
- <http://www.pluralism.ca/>
Global Centre for Pluralism homepage
- <http://www.michel-foucault.com/>
Web page dedicated to Michel Foucault

- <http://www.opendemocracy.net/author/steven-lukes>
Page containing a number of links to recent work by Steven Lukes
- <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-power/>
Feminist perspectives on Power