Money, The Key To The Kingdom: Transcript

In discussing "broken congress" and fairness in legislation, the topic of interest groups is a recurring theme. It is evident that in today's America the corporate world holds significant power over legislation and politics. This account will discuss important issues such as the importance of money in lobbying, the topic of corporate domination and how this contradicts the notion of key liberal democratic values such as equality.

The dominant theory used in defending interest groups' position in democracy is that of pluralism. Pluralism, when discussing interest groups, argues that they are contributors to democracy. It states that interest groups all have equal opportunity and rights as one another through a non hierarchical system (Schmitter:96); the idea that 'countervailing centres of power will balance each other' (Dye et al. 1970). An opposing theory, which is what this presentation will focus on, is that introduced by the likes of Schmitter in 1985 (Schmitter 1985) and Schattschneider in 1960: Corporatism. Corporatism is the understanding that there are many interest groups, however, those at the top end of the pecking order sing with 'upper-class accent', Schattschneider says. (Schattschneider 1960). And so lobbying operates in the corporate world's favour; there is a significant bias that allows corporations to advantage above smaller organisations of other categories of interest (Schlozman et al. 2012).

So what sets corporations above all else? Well - money gets results. There is no question that money plays the largest part in obtaining lobbying success. Financial expenditure is key in asserting one's lobbying interests above others' as it enhances opportunity for success (McKay 2013). It is widely understood that financial contributions permit individuals and groups to have a say in legislative and government matters; it allows for them to get a foot in the door. PACs are one way that groups and individuals can 'buy access' (Smith 1995: 93) to have their say in legislation and ensure their voices are heard and wanted by Congress. It is better to have a seat at the table than no seat at all (Schlozman et al. 2012). As a quote from Wright states: 'Representatives may "hear you better"… when a contribution precedes lobbying' (Wright 1990: 418).

The financial spendings of some of the top corporate spenders are shown in the table on the poster. What is interesting is that one would think that the coronavirus pandemic, through 2020, would have a detrimental effect on the financial spendings of lobbying groups. However, 3 out of the 4 corporations shown actually spent more through 2020 than in 2019. One could argue that this demonstrates the power of the corporate world to be above the economical consequences of the pandemic.

The corporate domination over legislation is not only due to their boundless financial contributions but also due to Congress' dependent relationship that they have established with corporate lobbyists. This interdependence has lead the corporate world to 'outsize influence and power over the legislative and political process' and therefore neglect core democratic values. Corporate dominance over legislation, Drutman says, distorts 'the information and experts in the political system' (Drutman 2015 cited in Lee 2017). And through this reliance Congress' accountability to their constituents is tainted as legislation is twisted to fit corporate interests rather than parochial interests of constituents' (Raja 2020). Democracy therefore is dismantled in favour of the corporate world; the question thus stands if Congress, of today, acts as a mere smokescreen as the corporate world twists and, on occasion, entirely dictates legislation.

And so, liberal democratic values have been dismissed as a consequence of the prioritisation of money, and as shown the corporate world now has a tight grip on the reins of American politics. In light of corporatism, values of social equality and mobility have been neglected; lobby groups standing for issues of climate, social policy and justice have taken a backseat. Donald Trump, who describes himself to be "a businessman doing business" (Trump 2020), becoming president in 2016 is a primary example of how the corporate world has infiltrated the American political sphere; the line between the corporate world and the political sphere has become, and continues to be more and more, blurred. Saez and Zucman in their book 'The Triumph of Injustice' discuss the regressive tax system promoted by Trump; it is shown in their study that in 2018 billionaires paid less tax than the working class (Saez et al. 2019); these finding coincide with the Tax Cuts and Job Act of 2017 (Maldando 2017; Tamir cited in Oxfam 2018).

Interest groups that act as a channel of representation for the nation, in particular minority groups, are denied access as a consequence of promoting Wall Street demands and the economy above all else (Pahnke 2020). Congress members do not need these groups in the same way that they need advocates of the corporate world. Lobbying therefore, due to corporate domination, has become another tool that can be utilised by the elites to promote own interests above the entirety of the nation and more importantly, the voices of minority groups continue to be drowned out.

In conclusion, as a consequence of the corporate world's dominance over American politics legislation has been shifted to prioritise the interests of the rich above all else. The argument that interest groups strengthen democracy and create another channel for projecting the voices of the nation is neglected in light of prioritising everything money. As made clear in this presentation: money is the gatekeeper of American politics (Raja 2020) - and so therefore is the key to the kingdom.