

Western Politics is Pakistan's Politics 'Who gets What, When and How'

Harold Lasswell defined politics as 'who gets what, when and how' and this definition of politics has encapsulated political behaviour around the world, with politicians being driven by political positions, resource distribution and out-competing their competitors. This has led to much political apathy around the world, along with the corporatisation of the state, with vested interests penetrating political systems and having a large say over policy and legislation formulations.

Professor Gidens from Princeton University, in his work 'Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America,' makes this point: "with vested interests penetrating and dominating the US political system, with the views and the needs of the citizens becoming insignificant compared to that of vested interests. This overtaking of the state by vested interests, is a natural outcome of capitalism, with real power being held in the hands of the corporate sector that has the capital weight to fund political parties, the campaign of politicians and to put excessive capital behind lobbying campaigns to ensure their interests are met in formal political circles." This link between capital and politics has been a close one ever since the birth of the Western nation state and the secularisation processes, with previous vested interests dominated by kings and religious classes being replaced by a new set of vested interests, that of capitalists that were able to create much more surplus value through economic enterprises and heightened colonialism in the 17th and 18th centuries. And this class was able to shape the nature of economic development, through determining where to invest capital, the type of goods produced and urban-rural shifts.

The British capitalists in colonising India did the exact same thing, with the colonialists enforcing a new capitalist development model that would benefit the centre and leave the periphery in a state of continuous economic shocks and crises. A clear example of this is the series of famines which India suffered, with millions perishing as basic foodstuffs were not being produced and at the same time stocks were being prevented from being released on to the market, as they were to be shipped to the centre for its needs. At the same time, one saw an emphasis on urban areas, ports and raw material exports that suited capitalist development of the centre. This capitalist development model did not end with the creation of Pakistan but continued, with colonial vested interests being taken over by feudal, industrial, military and bureaucratic interests that have continued with rapid urbanisation; focus on low value products for exports, allowing the Pakistani market to be a dumping ground for surpluses from the capitalist centre and hindering industrialisation that would upset the capitalist balance institutionalised since the time of the British.

Given this reality, with vested interests existing and dominating Pakistan, the political class has become a key component in the continuation of capital

accumulation and surplus values through creating the environment for them to do so through legislation and policies. For example, the privatisation policies of successive governments have transferred assets into the hands of vested interests that have been able to extract immense surplus values, but at the same time inflict hardship on the people through employment cuts and price hikes. Another example are the excessive loans that are granted to vested interests for capital accumulation purposes but in many cases, the loans remain unpaid, only for the deficits to be made up by increased levels of taxation on the people. The winners are the vested interests, whereas the losers are the people that continue to suffer from one problem after another- whether that is a gas or petrol shortage. The political class has become a means for vested interests to continue to grow in their financial clout and have themselves taken on board the capitalist mantra of politics as defined by Lasswell of 'who gets what, when and how', with their motivations being like that of the vested interests -what do they get out of being in politics?

The political class has benefited from the same system of personal gain, leading to the creation of a symbiotic relationship between the political class and vested interests, with both becoming interdependent on one another. The political class that depends on vested interests for bankrolling election campaigns and political party activities in return pays back the favours through legislation and policies that create ground for vested interests to thrive.

This is one of the fundamental reasons why in Pakistan, problems continue to snowball as the focus is on interests that can be secured through politics and ties with vested interests. Therefore, politics has become a tainted word in Pakistan and so hated amongst the public as they see it being played out on TV screens daily. For example, the recent Senate elections, is a case in point where 'horse trading' was witnessed with political parties bribing provisional assembly members voting in the elections to vote for their candidate. Billions of rupees were spent on this process for political power in the Senate, whereas these same political parties dismiss investment in fundamentals that are required for the people to survive. In Pakistani politics over the decades, pragmatism, self-interest, power, resources, influence and prestige have triumphed over 'Naziriyah' politics: meaning no politics, no solutions, no principles, no vision, no ideas, but an avalanche of problems that keep on growing and imposing immense tension and stress on a population that has been and is drowning in a sea of misery while the political class and vested interests continue to prosper from their wealth, assets and resources.

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