

Handout on Visible, Hidden and Invisible Power – Three Scenarios

Visible, Hidden and Invisible Power

What can we learn about power from the following examples? How do the three different views of power shed light on the nature of power in these examples?

Example A

On December 5th, 1994, the members of parliament of Tobostan voted 200 to 150 in favour of a bill permitting the right to have an abortion.

Example B

The town of Penningscale is situated 30 kilometers from a nuclear plant. The residents are very concerned about the high incidence of cancer in the community and have raised the issue on many occasions with their local representatives. Whilst the local representatives are sympathetic, they are also aware of the employment opportunities created by the plant. The issue was tabled for discussion at the last local government meeting but due to an unexpectedly lengthy debate on local taxation, the matter was not discussed.

Example C

In the province of Tuzal in the country of Sutuzania 80% of land is owned by 10% of the population. Most farmers have a small plot of land for subsistence purposes but also work as labourers in the fields of landowners. The landowners remunerate their workers with a small wage, sufficient to buy basic necessities such as soap and cooking oil. They also provide their workers with clothing and special food on religious occasions. In some districts landowners have contributed towards the costs of basic primary schooling. Compared to the neighbouring country of Portania, there has been little political unrest.

(source: Jude Howell, from her course on Empowering Society, IDS, 2002)