**Springboard to Politics: Week 2, Citizenship, homework (MID)**

We have seen that defining what Citizenship means politically is complex and full of inherent contradictions, e.g. we need the state to pass laws to protect our freedoms, but all law implicitly limits our freedoms!

 

**Task: Read this passage and answer the questions (full sentences/short paragraphs, using the questions as subtitles).**

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| **‘Politics gone mad’?**  On July 1st, 2007, a new law came into effect banning smoking in virtually all enclosed public spaces and places of work in England. This followed earlier smoking bans in Scotland (March 2006), Wales and Norther Ireland (April 2007). Opponents of the smoking ban argued that this legislation was an example of ‘politics gone mad’. Smoking had become a political ‘issue’ in the most obvious of ways: the government had stepped in and stopped its citizens from doing it. From this point onwards owners of pubs, clubs, restaurants and theatres can be fined for allowing people to smoke on their premises. But is this a proper use of ‘politics’?  Why did many people criticise the smoking ban? Its opponents argue that it is yet another example of government invading the freedom of the individual. Smoking, they argue, should be a matter of personal choice, not an issue for government legislation. After all, whose body is being damaged? Surely, if ‘consenting adults’ choose to smoke in enclosed public spaces, society should have no right to stop them. Where could this end? Once smoking was banned in public places, it could be banned at home, or bans could be imposed upon other areas of private life, like eating cakes (to tackle obesity), or engaging in ‘dangerous’ sports.  Supporters of the ban take a very different view, however. They argue that such law is justified by the fact that smoking effects other people. Smoking can never be regarded as a purely ‘private’ act. Through ‘passive smoking’, it affects work colleagues, waiters, bar staff, and so on. And by causing illness and premature death, it affects families and work and puts pressure on the health service, which costs everyone in an increased tax burden. Some even go further. They argue that government has a duty to ‘save people from themselves’. In other words, government should act in the best interests of its citizens, on a utilitarian\* basis, even when those citizens may not agree. |

*\* From utilitarianism - the doctrine that actions are right if they are useful or for the benefit of a majority.*

**Questions:**

**1. What does the smoking ban tell us about the nature of ‘politics’?**

**2. Why did/do some people criticise the smoking ban?**

**3. How can the smoking ban be defended?**

**4. Should the government be able to ‘save us from ourselves’?**

**5. In your opinion what area of private life should the government NOT be able to legislate on. Say why?**