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Paper Proposal

Reshaping of Class Alliances: How Welfare Regimes and Responses to Deindustrialization Reshape Social Base of Voting in Advanced Industrial Economies

As societies moved from phase of high industrialism toward postindustrial society, the importance of structural cleavage was perceived to be declining. While numerous studies explained new developments as a decline in the levels of class voting, others argued that it was change in patterns of structural voting rather than the decline that took place. Change mostly affected class structure and resulted in changes in patterns of voting behavior of different classes/occupations. This paper would argue that structural and behavioral change taking place was more complex than the existing theories of class/occupational voting would have it. On the one hand we can observe comprehensive restructuring of class and occupational structure as the consequence of social and economic changes (deindustrialization and the growth of the service sector being the most notable), while on the other hand we observe a rise of new political issues which are restructuring patterns of political competition. These developments produced divisions within what can be considered as middle and working classes and made it difficult to combine elements of what was previously considered as homogenous classes into viable electoral coalition. They also forced parties to try to forge more complex cross-class coalitions of middle and working class segments and adjust their message to new issues. This produced pattern of voting behavior where different elements of working class can be found among the electorate of extreme right and mainstream left parties, at the same time we can find middle class voters among the electorate of new left, mainstream left and mainstream right parties. Changes of this magnitude substantially changed the concept of class or occupational voting and require a new analytical model to explain them. Apart from class and occupation, position in a new social structure is a product of an interaction between occupation, sector of employment and exposure to market risk. It is the way these variables interact that produces patterns of cross national variation in electoral cleavages. But apart from changing structural underpinnings of politics, the advent of postindustrial societies also changed the meaning of political cleavages where issues of economic redistribution are now equal or superseded in importance by sociocultural issues.

The exact electoral manifestation of cleavages in postindustrial societies depends on a set of particular national conditions, both structural and political, that make some lines of divisions more prominent than others. Postindustrial pattern of cleavages and differences within it, is primary a consequence of different paths in development of the welfare state and in the ways societies handled deindustrialization and the advent of service economy. On the one had these structural transformations were partially shaped by the need to build viable electoral coalitions, but on the other hand structural transformation produced different opportunity structures for political actors engaged in the active formation of electoral coalitions.

Need to respond to deindustrialization provided politicians with an opportunity to nudge social and economic developments in a direction that advances their electoral opportunities. Social democrats expanded public sector, deepening the welfare state to provide services to middle class and include women in labor force. In the process these policies created a large constituency that would be the natural electoral base for the party. Conservatives and liberals broke the power of unions, deregulated economy and engaged in widespread privatization that also resulted in the broadening of their base among middle class. Christian democrats reacted by implementing selective labor force reduction policies, shifting

the burden of deindustrialization away from employers and generously subsidizing the exit from the labor market. Their policies effectively catered to their core constituencies, retired, skilled industrial workers and the self employed and small business owners.

Deindustrialization and service sector expansion created opportunities for new parties on the left and right by bringing in divisions within middle and working class. Two constituencies, unskilled workers in services and industry and service professionals, did not fit in the existing pattern of political divisions and served as a long term base for new political parties of new left and new right party families. This split within middle and working class coincided with the rise of new sociocultural issues that became principal mobilizing dimension of new left and new right. Even those new right parties in Norway, Denmark and Austria that started as antiestablishment protest parties turned into, or were superseded, by parties that mix focus on cultural homogeneity with antiestablishment appeals. On the other hand, some green parties, most notably those in Germany and Austria, slowly adapted their appeal and became parties of service professionals.

While in countries where public sector was strong and social democrats catered to private sector middle class voters and skilled workers and technicians, new left represents mainly public sector employees. In countries where public sector was weak and new middle class was employed mainly in private sectors, new left represents higher and lower sociocultural professionals in private and non-profit services. While new right in countries with extensive taxation at first represented self employed and small business owners, now it mainly represents unskilled workers and small business owners who do not have either skills or capital to adapt to social and economic changes.

Combination of preexisting social conditions and actions of political actors produced variations in patterns of political divisions across countries. This variation manifests itself both in structural and attitudinal cleavages and for this reason empirical analysis should focus on both of these levels.

First step in the analysis is to identify the importance of individual ideological and structural divisions in particular countries. In a set of pair wise comparison I will test the importance of above indicated electoral divisions, both ideological and structural, in a number of advanced industrial countries. These pair wise comparisons will as dependent variable use vote for parties classified in party families and as independent variables measures of sociostructural position such as occupation, sector of employment and education, individually and in combination, as well as variables measuring issue positions. Alternatively, structural variables can be combined in a way that they do not measure one structural characteristic, but a combination of them. In this way we could compare differences between hypothesized groups, such as unskilled manual and service workers with skilled industrial workers, or sociocultural professionals and semi professionals employed in private sector against managers and business professionals employed in business sector services.

In pair wise comparison values of interest are substantive impact of structural and issue variables on voting behavior, their relative importance to each other and comparison of the importance of these differences across countries.

Pair wise comparisons will be conducted through multivariate analysis where the impact of all variables will be controlled for. Also, the analysis will use different subsets of variables so that it could isolate relative contribution of individual variables or subsets of variables in comparison with other variables or subsets of variables.