

Social Movements, Social Class, Interest Groups and Political Parties

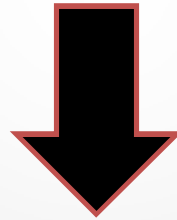
Social Organization and Political
Cleavages

Politics in Action

Politics as a form of human communication about the condition of their lives and society?

Politics as struggle for power?

Politics as public/authoritative decision-making?



All definitions beg questions of formation of common identities and interests among people and possibility for creating organizations to promote their interests

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: Can The Masses be Organized?

- **Social movements** are purposeful forms of political participation that often remain unorganized
- Such movements have “sympathizers” as opposed to “members”
- Social movements tend to be more diffuse and less hierarchical than other avenues of political participation and organization

SOCIAL CLASS

- **Social classes** are major social groups formed by relationships to the means of production in society
- In pre-capitalist societies where central means of production was land – social classes reflected divisions between those with landed entitlement (kings, emperors, shoguns, knights and so on) and those without it who worked the land (slaves, peasants, vassals, serfs and so on)
- Intermediary classes such as craftsmen, service performers also existed in pre-capitalist societies

Capitalism and Social Class

- Social classes in capitalist society are the bourgeoisie or capitalist class which owns the means of production, working class and capitalist landowners that rent the land to independent farmers
- Each major social class is conceptualized in terms of an economic category – capitalists = profits, workers = wages, landlords = ground rent
- One problem with theories of social class is how to capture variations within classes (so-called class “fractions”) and the diversity of groups tied to “non-productive” activities – professors, lawyers, artists, maids/butlers.....

Class Consciousness: Will the Class come to Order?

- Bourgeoisie common identities formed through business practices in urban areas and developed common interests in struggle against old order of landed entitlement
- Karl Marx claimed with development of capitalism which brought workers into cooperation in mass production on factory floors, workers would develop a class identity and recognize their common interests opposed to capital
- Divisions among workers such as rise of “aristocracy of labor” and rapid growth of the service sector challenged Marx’s views

INTEREST GROUPS

- Democratic theories claim social cleavages give rise to group identities and that these find expression in organizations
- One such organization is the **interest group** = private organization which seeks to influence public policy
- Interest groups “articulate” the interests of their members
- Also known as “pressure groups”

Influence of “Special Interests”

- Countries like US with federal system of government, which divides power, many access points for political influence exist and interest groups proliferate
- Countries with unitary systems of government like Britain have less access points for political influence

Antagonistic vs. Cooperative Interests

- **Pluralist systems** of interest group aggregation and articulation group membership is voluntary and groups tend to single-mindedly press their demands – groups are adversarial
- **Corporatist systems** – interest groups synthesize demands and take broader approach to problems and solutions – tend to promote consensus – bargaining between government and interest groups prevents posturing and pandering to voters which makes compromise difficult

Political Parties

- **Political parties** connect social groups to the state – but rather than seeking to influence government, political parties want to **be** the government
- James Madison argued “In every political society, parties are unavoidable”.
- E. E. Schattschneider argued “The political parties created modern democracy and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties”.

Why Parties?

- Parties bring together diverse groups of people and ideas under umbrella of some broader ideological position
- Party organizations bringing these groups and ideas into a wider group establish the means by which democratic majorities can rule
- If parties did not provide candidates and agendas for politics – political process would be too fragmented to get anything done
- But, because parties bring groups and ideas together the differences and factions within them prevent “tyranny of the majority”
- Parties encourage democratic competition as long as elections create opportunity to evict ruling party from power

Party Formation

- Internally created parties – founders already held political office and developed loose policy programs outside legislatures
- Externally created parties – founded under conditions of increased suffrage and industrialization/urbanization
- Growth of working class led to formation socialist, social democratic, communist parties
- Agricultural interests formed “conservative” agrarian or religious parties
- Changing economy and global circumstances gives rise to new parties – Greens, New Labor/Left, Right-wing ultra-conservative parties