

# From Class to Culture<sup>1</sup>

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This article contends that class politics has receded in advanced capitalist societies during the last century, while cultural politics has increased, and it focuses on social and political institutions, rather than on occupational structure, to explain the shift. Participation in solidary groups has consequences for the social bases of politics, and the political salience of such groups is affected by social institutions that are independent of occupational structure. The first such institution is direct rule. Whereas indirect rule tends to promote class politics, direct rule favors cultural politics. Rapid expansion of direct rule since the 1960s has muted class politics and increased cultural politics. This relationship is not deterministic, however; other institutions can mitigate the effects of direct rule on the social bases of politics.

## INTRODUCTION

Not long ago, an intriguing piece of junk mail found its way to my office mailbox. Whereas most of the advertisements I receive there are for books, this one broke the mold. *The Sovietski Collection: Treasures from a Bygone Era* features items such as Soviet Army generals' visor caps and map

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cases, the USSR flag (just \$19), and the Orders of the Red Banner of Labor and Red Badge of Honor (both for \$49), among many others. It is safe to say that this catalog—a self-exemplification of capitalist commodification, if a deliciously ironic one—would cause Marx and Lenin to spin in their graves. But the *Sovietski Collection* is intriguing for quite another reason. It suggests that the Great October Revolution and its once-mighty offspring, the Soviet state, are now regarded, at least in this country, with something approaching nostalgia.

For Americans to be nostalgic about the USSR is novel, to put it mildly. At its inception and for many years thereafter, the mere existence of the Soviet Union had the leaders of Western countries quaking in their boots. Hitler's efforts managed to rehabilitate the reputation of the Soviet Union during World War II, but soon thereafter, the worst name one could be called in most American circles was "communist." McCarthyism cast a pall on political dissent in all walks of life in the United States for decades. Even progressives dreaded that nuclear war might break out to halt the spread of communism in all corners of the world. Bomb shelters and missile silos seemed to be as prevalent as compost heaps. During the Cuban missile crisis, the fear of nuclear holocaust reached fever pitch.

The roots of this antipathy to Soviet communism lay in the expansionist ambitions of its ideology. Not only did it aim to abolish private property—a concept that mortified the privileged in all capitalist societies—but it also appeared to pose strong challenges to democracy, the family, the church, and other hallowed social institutions.

Indeed, the history of the workers' movement throughout the world has been marked by struggle. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, workers' attempts to win political and economic rights often resulted in violent clashes with employers and state authorities. The owners of property feared that if workers were given the franchise, they could use the ballot box to foment a social revolution.<sup>2</sup> Revolutionary political parties (foremost among them, the Russian Bolsheviks) arose to threaten the social order the world over. Fears—and, among some, hopes—of revolution grew

<sup>2</sup> Thus, one of the critics of the Second British Reform Bill (1867) suggested that if workers were given the franchise, the working classes "therefore have in their hands the power, if they know how to use it, of becoming masters of the situation, all the other classes being, of necessity, powerless in their hands" (Lowe 1867, p. 145). Karl Marx concurred with this assessment: "Universal Suffrage is the equivalent of political power for the working classes of England. . . . The carrying of Universal Suffrage in England would, therefore, be a far more socialistic measure than anything that has been honoured with that name on the Continent. Its inevitable result, here, is the political supremacy of the working class" (quoted in McKenzie and Silver 1968, p. 4). Given the prevalence of these views, it is, of course, puzzling to explain why a government dominated by the landed class would ever risk its own power by enacting universal suffrage (for a recent analysis, see McLean [2001, chap. 3]).

apace. The spectre of socialist revolution continued to hold sway long after the founding of the USSR.<sup>3</sup> According to one recent analyst, “Class conflict is mostly responsible for the similarity of ‘party landscapes’ across Europe. It was the only social conflict to be mobilized in every European country, contributing to the standardization of party systems. The ubiquitous presence of socialist and communist parties is indeed the most visible common feature of European party systems” (Bartolini 2000, p. 10).

Nowadays, however, the political landscape has been quite transformed. Class politics has largely receded from view. Since class is one of those sociological abstractions subject to an uncomfortably large number of different meanings, there are many different definitions of class politics as well. This article is ultimately concerned with the implications of social divisions for collective action; as a consequence, it employs a solidaristic conception of class. In this conception, class politics emanates from *Klasse für sich*.<sup>4</sup> This comprises action, ranging from voting to participation in collective action, taken by people who have common interests with respect to economic production. Their subjective awareness of these common interests impels them to act in support of outcomes—such as the redistribution of income, wealth, and political power—that further the welfare of their class (cf. Sartori 1969).<sup>5</sup>

What determines the relative salience of membership in any kind of group? According to social identity theory (Mullen, Brown, and Smith 1992; Tajfel 1982; Turner et al. 1987; Van Knippenberg and Ellemers 1993), individuals seek to maximize their self-esteem, and one important means of doing so is by striving to achieve a positive social identity. The individual’s multiple social identities may be ranked hierarchically. The

<sup>3</sup> “Liberal theorists, even in the 1960s, still retained fears that in Europe, if not in the United States, working-class movements and parties that had not accepted social-democratic ‘revisionism’ might undermine democracy or otherwise disrupt the appropriate developmental pattern of industrial societies” (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992, p. 7).

<sup>4</sup> This solidaristic view of class (Kingston [2000, chap. 2] refers to it as “realistic”) differs from Weber’s ([1921–22] 1978, pp. 926–40) definition of class, which is based solely on an individual’s objective relationship to the market. I have adopted it in order to be analogous to Weber’s definition of status groups, which are characterized by variable degrees of closure (see Giddens 1975, chap. 2). Marshall et al. (1988, pp. 202–6) suggest that such a conception is mistaken. On their account, the working class has always been heterogeneous and subject to internal conflict. Despite this lack of solidarity, they claim that the working class has often been able to engage in class-conscious collective action. Why the members of a group that is internally divided might yet be capable of engaging in collective action is a mystery that these authors do not resolve.

<sup>5</sup> Whereas the distinction between behavior motivated by what Lenin termed *economism*, or rational egoism, and *class consciousness* is clear enough at the conceptual level, these two types of behavior are often difficult to disentangle empirically.

higher a group's rank, the greater the self-esteem conferred by membership in it. Social identity theory suggests that individuals will identify with highly ranked groups because this identification contributes to their self-esteem. Likewise, individuals will avoid identifying with low-ranked groups for the same reason, unless there are objective or psychic barriers to so doing. When individuals cannot exit from a low-ranked group—and hence must depend on it for support and other resources—they will have an interest in changing the attributes of their group in a positive direction. This implies that people are especially likely to identify with a group when membership is determined ascriptively and the prospect of exit is slight (Wright, Taylor, and Moghaddam 1990).

The differential stratification of groups and their relative permeability, therefore, are key determinants of the relative salience of social identities. When people are treated by others as members of a distinctive group, they identify with others similarly treated (Brewer 1979; Tajfel 1981). The greater the consequences of a given marker for individual welfare, the greater the salience of the marker; and the larger the number of people who identify with a given marker, the more advantageous it is for others to identify with it, as well. Finally, social identities attain political salience when they are associated with a group-specific ideology.

From these principles, class politics can be seen to rest on a trinity of preconditions: the impermeability of class boundaries, the strength of class organizational capacity, and the salience of class consciousness. Class-based group formation is maximized when the social boundaries between classes are impermeable and class isolation is at a maximum. Class organizational capacity is greatest in societies with strong trade unions and left-wing political parties, and class consciousness is high to the degree that individuals view their own interests as inextricably linked with those of other members of their class.<sup>6</sup> Under these conditions, the members of a class constitute a community of fate (Stinchcombe 1965).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> This requirement means that responses to survey questions about self-placement in a class scheme (such as those in Vanneman and Cannon [1987]) are insufficient indicators of class consciousness.

<sup>7</sup> A prototypical example of such a community is the Yorkshire mining village described in Dennis, Henriques, and Slaughter (1956, pp. 84–88): “Ashton is a community of its own, geographically and to some extent socially separated from other communities. Furthermore in Ashton most working-men are miners. The result is that the miner who did not join the union, unpopular because solidarity is recognized as being the basis of the union's bargaining power, could be made to feel the full weight of the community's displeasure. That this displeasure was not expressed in mild or some might say, even civilized ways, can be seen from the following advice, given by the secretary of the Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association in the *Y.M.A. Journal*, 1923. He advises the member of the trade union to tell the nonunionist: ‘. . . that we want his help, his co-operation, and not his hostility, in the great work which confronts us. . . .’

*The Sovietski Collection* is merely one of a number of signs of the demise of class politics. Other signs include a weakening salience of class for voting behavior, a rightward shift in the platforms of socialist and labor parties, a decline in working-class social isolation, and diminishing working-class organizational capacity.

The waning of class politics has ended neither ideology nor political conflict. Instead, there appears to have been a rise in political conflict between groups defined on the basis of status (*Stände*) rather than economic affinity. That status politics may be gaining in recent times is suggested by the increasing political salience of ethnicity, religion, nationalism, gender, and sexual orientation.<sup>8</sup> True, there are notable differences between such groups—Weber ([1921–22] 1978, p. 932) acknowledged that *Stände* comprise a set of groups “of an amorphous kind.” Yet despite their evident diversity, status groups are alike in at least one respect. Political action on the basis of status unites individuals who have a common interest in consuming culturally specific goods and who are attributed with a specific degree of social honor on this account. The association between status and culture is explicit: “Status honor is normally expressed by the fact that above all else a specific *style of life* is expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle. Linked with this expectation are restrictions in social intercourse” (Weber 1978, p. 932). Status politics rests on the same foundations that class politics does, that is, the impermeability of cultural boundaries, the organizational capacity of cultural groups, and the salience of cultural consciousness.

Analytically, class and status are cross-cutting principles of group formation. This is because classes may be composed of individuals of diverse status, whereas status groups may be composed of individuals of diverse classes. Social classes whose members are of different status groups are

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Tell him that his mates look upon him with suspicion, with disgust, with contempt. . . . Tell him he is an Ishmael, an alien, an outsider, a parasite, a social leper, a scab. . . . If he still remains obstinate, then by all that is just and right and sweet and clean under heaven, tell him that he must ‘get’. Must clear out of the . . . community of clean thinking men . . . that as far as you are concerned, you will shun him as you would the plague.”

<sup>8</sup> In this formulation, both class and status politics are treated as latent variables that are imperfectly measured by a number of distinct indicators. Class politics, i.e., is imperfectly measured not only because of measurement error—which is likely to be severe due to the subjective nature of the phenomenon—but also because its various indicators cannot be expected to have high covariance over time. The fundamental reason for this lack of covariance is that the institutional environment in the developed societies has undergone major shifts in the period under consideration. For example, labor violence is likely to be greatest prior to the institutionalization of unions, whereas strike activity is likely to have the opposite pattern. Moreover, socialist party voting is not necessarily highly correlated with class consciousness or unionization because it is affected by factors (like electoral systems) that are independent of class politics.

less likely to be class-conscious than homogeneous ones; by the same token, status groups whose members are of different classes are less likely to have cultural consciousness. The degree to which class and status actually do compete in given societies varies (Hechter 1978). In a society where castes are relatively impermeable and occupationally specialized, each caste is simultaneously a class and a status group. In social formations having ample prospects for occupational mobility, however, class and status are more likely to be mutually competitive. For this reason, the two principles of group formation are more likely to be substitutes than complements in the advanced industrial societies with which this article is concerned.

Shifts in the relative salience of class and status politics ultimately reflect differences in the solidarity of classes and status groups. The fate of classes and status groups, in turn, is due to a small set of general tendencies that are common to societies of a certain type, as well as to a larger set of particular historical circumstances, or initial conditions. Theory can only aspire to illuminate commonalities, not case-specific particularities. If, indeed, there has been a shift from class to status politics over time, theory can help explain the forces that are responsible for it and the direction it takes. A complete explanation of cross-national variations in the social bases of politics, however, also requires historical analyses that take into account both the particular differences in initial conditions and the specific environmental constraints that each country faces.<sup>9</sup> That task lies well beyond the aspirations of the present effort.

The argument proceeds as follows. The next section surveys evidence about the changing social bases of politics in advanced capitalist countries. (Readers who are already persuaded that status has gained political salience at the expense of class are advised to skip this section.) The third section discusses the shortcomings of prior explanations. The fourth section presents a new theory of the shift, and the fifth section offers the theory's major empirical implications. The sixth section introduces some apparent empirical anomalies, and the final section provides a conclusion.

## THE SHIFTING SOCIAL BASES OF POLITICS

### Trends in Class Politics

The evidence that has been marshaled on trends in class and status politics is unsystematic, uneven, and controversial. Prior to the 19th century in Western Europe, large-scale political conflicts of any kind were few and

<sup>9</sup> For more elaborate discussions of this point, see Goldstone (1998, pp. 832–37) and Goldthorpe (2000, pp. 232–33).

far between. Conflict between ambitious state-building rulers and traditional authorities, usually with respect to higher taxes and military service, dates from the 14th century. The typical forms of collective action—food riots, charivaris, and attacks on machines—tended to enlist notables as indispensable allies (Laslett 1984; Tilly 1983). The most frequent form of conflict occurred around the supply of food: peasants engaged in food riots directed against centralizing states (Tilly 1975). In this respect, the food riot resembled the antitax rebellion, the defense of the commons, the revolt against conscription, and the violent resistance to state control over local churches.

This is not to claim that there was no political conflict between people interacting on a face-to-face basis. Peasants expressed their grievances to landowners and to the providers of essential services (like the millers, who were widely reputed to gouge their peasant customers) by engaging in tactics of everyday resistance.<sup>10</sup> This kind of resistance minimized the punitive sanctions that could be readily imposed on peasants by local authorities having great control capacity (Cobb 1970; Randall and Charlesworth 2000; Scott 2000). Conflicts that were rooted in local ties were not likely to spread elsewhere (Tarrow 1994, pp. 60–61).

By contrast, modern collective action is statewide rather than local, challenges authorities—especially central ones—in the name of a given interest group or social movement, and relies on statewide organization rather than on informal social networks (Tilly 1998, p. 14). This well-known shift in the *forms* of conflict is paralleled by a corresponding, but less appreciated, shift in the *social bases* of politics. Unlike local conflicts, statewide conflicts occur within imagined rather than face-to-face communities (Anderson 1983). To unite people anonymously in some common cause across disparate communities involves an enormous cognitive and conceptual leap (Simmel [1922] 1955). This feat of imagining unites individuals who share a given relation to the means of production, or a given cultural attribute, into a potentially solidary group. It requires a new set of abstract concepts, such as *class* and *status group*, buttressed by matching ideologies. New concepts and ideologies do not just float down from the ether to take root in receptive minds;<sup>11</sup> on the contrary, they arise and are promulgated in groups and organizations.

The prevalent pattern of local conflict was upset by the growth of direct rule—that is, the increasing power and scope of central authorities. Feudal

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., the “Reeve’s Tale” in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*.

<sup>11</sup> Although explanations relying on diffusion mechanisms have become popular of late in a variety of sociological literatures, the requirements that must be met in a successful application of diffusion mechanisms are exceedingly stringent and, hence, difficult to meet (Palloni 2001).

Europe rested on a system of indirect rule wherein central rulers delegated governance to traditional authorities in their localities. The push toward direct rule began very early—in the 14th and 15th centuries in some places—but it proceeded fitfully and took four or five centuries before culminating in its first peak, the French Revolution (Elias [1939] 1994, pp. 185–352). The advent of direct rule was responsible for the birth of the social movement: “The interests and organization of ordinary people shifted away from local affairs and powerful patrons to national affairs and major concentrations of power and capital. As capitalism advanced and national states became more powerful and centralized, local affairs and nearby patrons mattered less to the fates of ordinary people. Increasingly, holders of large capital and national power made the decisions that affected them. As a result, seizures of grain, collective invasions of fields, and the like became ineffective, irrelevant, obsolete” (Tilly 1983, p. 468).<sup>12</sup>

If the growth of direct rule is responsible for changing forms of collective action, it is also an unacknowledged cause of the shift from class to status politics. Initial state-building, in tandem with industrialization, tended to foster one predominant type of collective action—class-based movements—rather than an entire field of movements. And subsequent state-building—especially the height of direct rule as entailed in the modern welfare state—has decisively strengthened status politics at the expense of its class alternative.<sup>13</sup>

Class became the *predominant* basis of politics only after the triumph of market society and industrialization. The prevalence of class consciousness in any society is like an exotic tropical plant that can only survive under unusual hothouse conditions. (As the previous discussion suggests, one of the key conditions is a relatively high level of cultural homogeneity.) The term “class” itself was novel, only emerging in the period between 1720 and 1840.<sup>14</sup> Even though Marx and Engels were the

<sup>12</sup> This account ignores the technical preconditions for mass mobilization, such as advances in communications capacity.

<sup>13</sup> If, as is argued here, advances in the technology of communication are a necessary condition for the expansion of direct rule, this article makes no attempt to endogenize technological development.

<sup>14</sup> “Development of *class* in its modern sense, with relatively fixed names for particular classes . . . belongs to the period of the Industrial Revolution and its decisive reorganization of society. . . . The crucial context for this development is the alternative vocabulary for social divisions, and it is a fact that until [the early 18th century] and residually well into [the 19th] and even [the 20 century], the most common words were *rank* and *order*, while *estate* and *degree* were still more common than *class*. In virtually all contexts where we would now say *class* these other words were standard. . . . The essential history of the introduction of *class* as a word which would supersede older names for social divisions relates to the increasing consciousness that social position is made rather than merely inherited” (Williams 1983, p. 61; my emphases).



archetypical class analysts, they were well aware that there was precious little class consciousness in precapitalist Europe. As the *Communist Manifesto* makes plain, the social divisions in precapitalist societies were exceedingly complex. Indeed, one of Marx's greatest theoretical contributions was his explanation of working-class formation as a by-product of capitalist development. This conclusion was also reached by Weber (1978, p. 938), who contended that "every technological repercussion and economic transformation threatens stratification by status and pushes the class situation into the foreground." Perhaps because the discipline of sociology emerged out of the crucible of late-19th-century Western Europe, many sociologists are still inclined to view class as a, if not *the*, fundamental determinant of individual life chances, social identity, and political affiliation.

By the late 1950s, however, some observers began to herald a decline in the political salience of class (Nisbet 1959). Since then, a growing chorus has arrived at the same view. The reasons are not hard to find. Consider the preconditions for any type of group politics: the impermeability of boundaries, organizational capacity, and the salience of group consciousness.

*The impermeability of class boundaries.*—The evidence suggests that the impermeability of social classes has decreased substantially across the board. Thus, the effect of class origins on life chances in the United States and Europe—indicated by the extent of interclass inequalities in income, life expectancy, stature, and weight—was far greater in the 18th and 19th centuries than in the 20th (Fogel 2000, chap. 4). Then, too, working-class social isolation has decreased due to occupational shifts and greater educational opportunity. Whereas social interaction between the classes in early capitalism was quite limited (this, after all, was the *leitmotif* of the Victorian novel), these boundaries have been notably loosened in the 20th century. In most industrialized countries, for example, class endogamy has been declining (Kalmijn 1998, p. 411). Recent analyses estimate that the correlation between husbands' and wives' class origins is about 0.30 (Kalmijn 1998, p. 408). A comparative analysis of the United States, Canada, Sweden, and Norway in the 1970s and 1980s reveals relatively high rates of interclass friendships (Wright 1997, chaps. 7 and 8). A review of several other American studies reaches similar conclusions (Kingston 2000, pp. 149–52).

*Class organizational capacity.*—Working-class organizational capacity has been eroding since the end of World War II. This is best gauged by considering the two kinds of institutions that are the most important bases of class politics—trade unions and left-wing political parties. Both have been in decline. The proportion of the unionized labor force has generally fallen in advanced societies since 1950 (Golden and Pontusson 1992). Party

identification and partisanship has also tended to decrease across the board in advanced capitalist societies. Increasing electoral volatility and fragmentation have been the result. In addition, turnout is also falling in the vast majority of these societies. Finally, confidence in political parties has been waning, as well. In sum, political parties of all stripes—not least, left-wing ones—have experienced declining organizational capacity (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000).

Even if left-wing parties continue to survive in Western Europe, most no longer promote a traditional working-class ideology. Instead, they are more apt to court private investment and claim that their policies will spur (capitalist) economic development. As a result, there have been major shifts in party platforms by many (especially left-wing) parties around the world away from issues of class and toward new appeals, stressing the environment, gender, and lifestyle issues (Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Kitschelt 1995, p. 15; Lipset 2001). While it is much more difficult to quantify, the ideology of class has also fallen on hard times. The days when “The Internationale” was a popular working-class hymn are long past. Marxism, which once provided an elaborate and sophisticated ideological justification for class politics, is hardly in evidence these days (i.e., outside universities), and no viable substitute for it has yet to emerge.

*Class consciousness.*—Given all these developments, it should be no surprise that class consciousness should suffer as well. Perhaps the most systematic evidence about class consciousness comes from the “Comparative Project on Class Structure and Consciousness,” which provided a snapshot from the late 1970s to the 1980s. The advanced capitalist countries had relatively low rates of class consciousness, with the exception of Sweden (Wright 1997, chap. 14). In related studies, class consciousness had little salience in Australia (Baxter 1991) and some, albeit limited, salience in Britain (Marshall et al. 1988, p. 187).

If impermeability, organizational capacity, and class consciousness are the preconditions for class politics, then these trends should culminate in a general decline in class-based political demands. Much of the relevant evidence comes from studies of class voting and party platforms. Class voting is often taken to reveal the political salience of class, but it is not a particularly good indicator of it. An individual’s class position (however this is measured) is merely one of a number of potential social identities. Just as everyone may regard themselves as a member of a given class, so they can also be members of ethnic, linguistic, religious, gender, and age groups, each of which is likely to have distinctive political interests. How then can the relative salience of these various identities (and their corresponding interests) be assessed? Students of voting behavior consider the association between class position and party vote to be a key indicator

of the political salience of class. Yet this is true only if voters have the opportunity to cast their ballots for candidates representing *each* of their various social identities. In such circumstances, electoral results indeed would provide some evidence of the relative political salience of these different social identities.<sup>15</sup> Yet the degree to which party systems correspond to the full range of available social identities in a given country varies widely. For example, unlike countries with multiparty systems, the United States has no class, ethnic, or religious parties. Hence a vote for the Democrats or Republicans cannot reveal much about the relative salience of these identities to voters.<sup>16</sup>

Despite its inadequacy as an indicator of class politics, a great deal of attention has been lavished on class voting. Whereas elections once were thought of as the democratic instantiation of the class struggle (Lipset 1960, p. 221), this metaphor now strikes some researchers—but not all—as misguided.<sup>17</sup> Despite the ready availability of evidence about class voting,<sup>18</sup> there is little consensus on how best to measure the concept (Manza Hout, and Brooks 1995). There are two different research traditions. Studies of *traditional* class voting focus on the relationship between social class and left-wing voting. In these studies, class voting is considered high to the degree that a large proportion of the working class votes for left-wing parties, while middle and upper classes vote for right-wing parties. In the broadest comparative study of traditional class voting, the Scandinavian countries and Britain had the highest levels of

<sup>15</sup> Reasonably strong evidence, but far from perfect. Voting behavior is also affected by many other factors than interest affinity, including electoral systems (Zielinski 2002) and the respective candidates' personal attractiveness, or likeability.

<sup>16</sup> Nor is voting the only means of exerting political influence in a democracy. Collective action can exert influence quite apart from its effects on balloting. In the United States, for example, lobbying and fundraising provide ample political influence while circumventing electoral mobilization: government policy with respect to Israel is affected by AIPAC rather than by the relatively small number of Jewish votes, as policy toward Cuba is affected by refugee political action committees. Likewise, the increasing influence of the Christian Right in the Republican Party is due not to its successful electoral mobilization, but rather to its success in fundraising activities (Leith 2002). These successful lobbying and fundraising activities, in turn, ultimately rest on networks of solidary groups. Thus, the Christian Right, which relies on a network of church groups, has been much more successful in mobilizing its adherents than the environmental movement, which principally relies on direct mail to recruit members (Putnam 2000, p. 160).

<sup>17</sup> For a small sampling of recent literature contending there has been a decline of class voting, see Bartolini (2000), Clark and Lipset (2001), Inglehart and Baker (2000), Franklin, Mackie, and Valen (1992), Kingston (2000), Pakulski and Waters (1996), and Lipset and Marks (2000).

<sup>18</sup> Since the 1970s, comparative studies have been able to rely on comparable data, measures of class position, and measures of class voting from more than a few countries.

class voting following World War II, while the United States and Canada had the lowest (Nieuwbeerta and De Graaf 1999).<sup>19</sup> In all the countries where class voting had once been strong, there are substantial declines in the period following 1945; Finland, Norway, and Denmark had the strongest declines.

Studies of *total* class voting assess the significance of class divisions for voting, regardless of the party that members of a particular class support. In these studies, class voting is considered high to the degree that class position predicts votes for all parties, regardless of their ideological stance. These studies reveal no general tendency for class voting to decline since 1945 (Manza et al. 1995; Manza and Brooks 1999; Evans 1999). Whereas total class voting has declined markedly in some countries (particularly in Scandinavia), in others, it has not. At the same time, in countries like the United States, there has been a realignment of class voting: some classes (or class fragments) have switched their support from one political party to another. The existence of such realignment—as revealed, for example, in the emergence of the Reagan Democrats in the 1980s—is a sign that this kind of class voting now cannot be regarded as the democratic translation of the class struggle.

Total class voting is a better indicator of economism (in Lenin's sense)<sup>20</sup> than class consciousness. Since traditional class voting is closest to the definition of class politics used in this article, the relevant data suggest that there has been an overall decline in class politics since 1945, if an uneven one. Moreover, since left-wing parties tend to stand for different policies than they once did, a vote for such a party means something different now than it did previously. Strike activity has decreased as well. In the mid-1990s, industrial conflict in the 22 OECD countries fell to its lowest level in over 50 years. From 1990 to 1995, the annual average of working days lost to labor disputes per 1,000 employees in the OECD countries was 100, compared with 145 from 1985 to 1990, and 200 in the 1970s (Pakulski 2001).

In light of this evidence, it is safe to conclude that class politics has receded in advanced capitalist societies. Naturally, this decline has been more modest in countries where class was never very politically ascendant, like Canada and the United States. In countries where class has had great political salience, however, the rates of decrease vary. This variation de-

<sup>19</sup> This study measures voting as a dichotomous choice between left- and right-wing parties. In 1980, for instance, Denmark, Sweden, and Great Britain had the highest levels of class voting, followed by Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, Norway, and Australia. Countries with low levels of class voting were the Netherlands, Germany, France, Finland, and Italy.

<sup>20</sup> See n. 4 above.

mands explanation. It has been suggested that the determinants are to be found in “particular institutional configurations and politics of individual countries” (Manza et al. 1995, p. 147). Although this conclusion has the ring of truth, it provides scant guidance.

This decline in class politics is interesting in its own right. Moreover, it seems to be associated with a concomitant rise in status politics.

#### Trends in Status Politics

Systematic cross-national evidence about status politics and its preconditions is in much shorter supply.

*The impermeability of status-group boundaries.*—The degree to which individual life chances are affected by membership in a status group is variable. In long-standing societies of immigration like the United States, education and occupational attainment generally increase with each successive generation (Lieberson and Waters 1988). Yet this is much more true of European immigrants than of African-Americans. One of the best sources of evidence on the relative closure of status groups comes from studies of endogamy. Recent national estimates of raw endogamy rates for different ethnic groups in the United States are 95% for African-Americans, 75% for Asian subgroups, 65% for Hispanic subgroups, and 25% for European subgroups (Kalmijn 1998, pp. 406–7). Statistical models that take differential group size into account show that virtually all ethnic subgroups have a higher rate of endogamy than would be expected if marriages had occurred at random. Religious endogamy is also statistically significant and varies by denomination. Analyses reveal that both Catholics and Protestants have a tendency to marry within rather than outside their religious group in the United States, the Netherlands, Germany, Australia, and Switzerland (Kalmijn 1998, p. 408). More generally, a recent review based on cross-sectional data concludes that the most impermeable social networks in industrial societies are defined by race and ethnicity, followed, in descending order, by age, religion, education, occupation, and gender (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). Further, status-based endogamy rates tend to be trending downward, except for recent immigrants and conservative Christian groups (Kalmijn 1998, p. 410).

*Status-group organizational capacity.*—Although unions and political parties are the principal organizational bases of class politics, given their amorphousness a host of different kinds of groups can serve this role for status politics. Whereas there is reasonably good cross-national data about membership in religious groups, information about other potential seedbeds of status politics—such as mutual benefit associations, fraternal organizations, athletic clubs, and literary societies—is much harder to come by. The strongest evidence comes from the United States, although even

here accurate estimates of secular shifts in participation rates in American voluntary associations and social movements are lacking (Putnam 2000, p. 166). The most comprehensive data—marshaled by Putnam in *Bowling Alone*—suggest that there has been a decline in participation in many of the kinds of voluntary associations that could serve as bases for the emergence of status politics.<sup>21</sup> The main culprits in this story of secular decline appear to be work (two-career families), urban sprawl, television, and generational change (Putnam 2000, pp. 283–84). This picture would seem to imply that in this country *both* class and status politics may have declined at the expense of political atomization.

Other analyses, however, find no such general decline in participation in American voluntary associations (Paxton 1999). Putnam himself acknowledges important exceptions to this supposed downward trend both in the United States and elsewhere. American participation in conservative religious groups has increased sharply. Unlike the members of national social movements, “religious people are enmeshed in webs of local churches, channels of religious information, and networks of religious associations that make them readily available for mobilization” (Putnam 2000, p. 162). Evidently, the organizational capacity of American religious groups has increased in the postwar years. Putnam’s extensive data-dredging effort has yet to be duplicated elsewhere. Since the United States is famously exceptional with respect to voluntary association activity, there is no warrant to regard his evidence as representative of advanced capitalist societies in general. Indeed, Putnam himself (2002, p. 410) concedes that the existing comparative evidence suggests that these countries have *not* experienced any secular decline in voluntary association participation.

If class ideologies have waned, status ideologies—and status-group consciousness—spawned by ethnic and national groups (McAdam 1982; Gurr 1994) and by the so-called new social movements (Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield 1994) appear to be burgeoning. These ideologies attempt to justify multiculturalism (Kymlicka 1995), environmentalism (Carson 1962), gay and lesbian rights (D’Emilio 1998), and various forms of religious fundamentalism (Smith and Emerson 1998).

*Status-group consciousness.*—Whereas studies of adults’ attitudes and beliefs about minority status groups abound (Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo 2000), hardly any of these measure the kinds of conduct that are required to indicate status-group consciousness. Despite this, ethnocentrism and

<sup>21</sup> Although the size of national social movements has increased sharply, most members of these groups are recruited by direct mail. As a result, participation in such groups (and the corresponding obligation entailed by membership) is mostly confined to occasional check writing. Smelser and Alexander (1999) likewise suggest that accounts of the rise of the culture wars in the United States have been overdrawn. For a contrasting view, see Legee et al. (2002).

in-group bias have long been a favorite subject in social psychological research (Hewstone, Rubin, and Willis 2002). Experiments have repeatedly shown that undergraduate subjects engage in in-group bias at the slightest provocation. Of course, the real-world incentives to exhibit in-group bias and out-group derogation are much stronger than those available in laboratory settings. This suggests that, depending on the nature of the context, one or another kind of status-group consciousness is likely to be relatively strong. At the same time, membership in religious, ethnic, and racial group membership often is such a socially and politically charged issue that—unlike evidence on class—many countries fail to enumerate it in census data. This failure to enumerate provides no little evidence of the political salience of these categories.

What about status politics? Political conflicts based on ethnicity and nationality have grown steadily since 1945 (Gurr 1994). Although most observers expected the political salience of religion to decrease with economic and social development, this does not seem to have occurred (Gill 2001). And new political movements have arisen to champion the interests of a variety of other kinds of status groups. Even those who voice skepticism about the decline of class politics (like Weakliem and Heath 1999, p. 305) concede that “the widespread movements related to the environment, gender equality, and the rights of ethnic minorities suggests that non-material issues have generally been more important in recent years.”

Whereas many of the groups responsible for developing and promulgating status-group ideologies draw their support from particular segments of the occupational structure, they do not recruit members by appealing to their class interests. In Germany, for example, the principal base of the Green Party lies in certain service occupations—experts and the providers of social and cultural services. By the same token, working-class voters are strongly opposed to the Greens (Müller 1999). That these movements might have disproportionate support from a given social stratum does not qualify them as class-based because they do not define themselves in terms of class. Nor do these movements seek to represent the interests of a class-homogeneous constituency. Many religious parties also draw disproportionate support from particular segments of the class structure, but this does not qualify them as class parties.

On the contrary, these movements have arisen on the basis of new or previously weak social identities rather than on the basis of class. They tend to be concerned with personal and intimate aspects of life.<sup>22</sup> All told,

<sup>22</sup> “These new conflicts arise in domains of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization. . . . The issue is not primarily one of compensations that the welfare state can provide, but of defending and restoring endangered ways of life. In short, the new conflicts are not ignited by distribution problems but by questions having to do with the grammar of social life” (Habermas 1987, p. 392).

the new social movements “focus on cultural and symbolic issues that are associated with sentiments of belonging to a differentiated social group where members can feel powerful . . . [they] arise ‘in defense of identity’” (Johnston et al. 1994, pp. 6–10).<sup>23</sup> Most important, Green and nationalist political parties have arisen in many of the advanced capitalist countries.

Taken altogether, therefore, the evidence—fragmentary though it may be—suggests that many advanced capitalist countries witnessed an increase in class politics from the late 19th century to the middle of the 20th. Thereafter, class politics seems to have declined. At the same time, status politics has become more prominent. The reasons for this greater prominence are unclear. On the one hand, the salience of status politics may be gaining in absolute terms. On the other, status politics may be stable or declining at a much slower rate than class politics. Whatever the situation, status politics has become *relatively* more salient than class politics.

As with class politics, the salience of status politics varies across groups (religion is more important in some contexts, ethnicity in others) and countries. Thus, according to one study, participation in status politics in Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland was four times greater than in France from 1975 to 1989 (Kriesi et al. 1995, p. 22).

#### PRIOR EXPLANATIONS OF THE SHIFT

The most obvious explanation is political. Surely, the appeal of the *Sovietski Collection* has much to do with the evaporation of the Soviet threat after 1989. The existence of the Soviet Union provided material support to communist parties abroad (recall Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*), as well as a demonstration effect about the viability of socialism as a socio-economic system. After all, the collapse of the USSR was followed, in short order, by the disappearance of communist regimes and parties the world over. As the communist parties in countries like Italy and France were a principal base for the development of class consciousness, their disappearance surely cannot have aided the cause of class politics in the West.

That is true enough, but class politics began to decline well *before* 1989. Consider class organizational capacity. A review of cross-national trends in union density in 13 advanced capitalist countries reveals peaks in the periods 1917–22 and 1945–47, each followed by clear declines thereafter

<sup>23</sup> On one view, the identity afforded by affiliation with such groups provides a public signal about an individual’s social status. This signal, in turn, provides a private good in that it enables these individuals to receive the social rewards owing to that status (Friedman and McAdam 1992).



(Bartolini 2000, p. 278). In countries with large socialist parties, membership begins to decline around 1945 (Bartolini 2000, p. 266). The decline in communist party membership dates from the period between 1948 and 1953 (Bartolini 2000, p. 269). Downward trends in party identification and voter turnout also date from this period (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000).

What about trends in the salience of class ideology? So far as I am aware, no systematic comparative evidence exists. Indirect evidence of the appeal of class ideology can be inferred from political party platforms. Here too the declining salience of class in political party platforms (adverted to above) dates from the 1950s. And the appeal of communist ideology began to erode after the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Prague in 1968—thus, well before 1989.<sup>24</sup>

Systematic comparative evidence about class social isolation is also difficult to come by. Once it was thought that industrialization and the expansion of education necessarily would invariably melt the class structure, but recent analyses of social mobility have cast doubt on this expectation. Granted, service occupations have grown at the expense of agricultural and manufacturing jobs in the advanced countries, but this has not led to universal increases in relative (or exchange) mobility (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992). The expansion of higher education, which should inhibit working-class solidarity by fostering social mobility, long preceded 1989. Moreover, evidence about the prevalence of interclass marriage and friendship networks antedates 1989 as well.

At the same time, left-wing parties lost support and became less radical. Aggregate electoral support for left-wing parties in 13 European countries declined after 1989 across the board (see Bartolini [2000, table 2.3] until 1989; thereafter, see <http://www.parties-and-elections.de>). The greatest drop-offs occurred in Italy (−21%) and France (−15%); in most of the other countries, leftist party support decreased by only 8% or less. To some extent, Green parties profited at the expense of communist and socialist parties. However, aggregate voting for left parties had already begun to decrease in 1966 in every one of these countries (save Ireland, which never had much leftist voting to begin with).

All told, the demise of the Soviet Union probably did dampen class politics. Yet the downturn in class politics preceded 1989; if the various indicators of class politics were combined into an index, that index would begin to decrease long before the last days of the Soviet Union.

Most explanations of the waning of class politics are structural: they attribute its decline to factors like the shift in occupational structure and

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, that influential intellectual renunciation of communism *The God That Failed* (Crossman and Koestler 1950) had already been published in 1950.

the expansion of education.<sup>25</sup> These trends are not only considered to be universal in the advanced countries, but implicitly they are also thought to be irreversible. After all, what social forecaster envisions a return to rust-belt manufacturing or labor-intensive agriculture?

Yet despite their similar social structures, the dynamics of class and status politics in the advanced countries vary considerably. To take merely one example, union density—a key determinant of class politics—is currently 15% in the United States and 90% in Denmark. This suggests that structural theories are insufficient to account for this political shift.

Moreover, an adequate theory of political shift must seek to explain the *simultaneous* decline of class and rise of status politics. Whereas most structural theorists have little to say about the rise of status politics, scholars of the “new social movements” have addressed the issue head-on (Castells 1997; Habermas 1987; Melucci 1996; Melucci, Keane, and Mier 1989; Offe 1985; Touraine 1985). Despite their individual differences, these writers agree that the flourishing of social movements concerning peace, nuclear energy, local autonomy, homosexuality, and feminism in the 1970s and 1980s in Western Europe cannot be explained by class location. For them, postwar changes in social structure are responsible for the decline of class, *as well as* the rise of status politics. The new social structures considered responsible for the shift are variously labeled “post-industrial,” “informational,” and “network.” In retrospect, however, “new social movement theories proved better at raising questions about the sources of movement identities than at answering them. Their explanations for how shifts in material production have affected social movements were not entirely clear and sometimes risked tautology, with new social movements taken as both evidence and consequences of a new social formation” (Polletta and Jasper 2001, pp. 286–87). In light of this assessment, it should be no surprise that much of the writing on new social movements does not lend itself to operationalization, let alone to empirical testing.

One prominent line of analysis is exceptional in this respect. Inglehart (following Bell [1973]) argues that unprecedented postwar economic prosperity led to the substitution of postmaterialist values favoring cultural concerns for material values favoring concerns about class (Inglehart and Baker 2000). According to this theory, postwar prosperity released people from mundane concerns about their material survival, allowing them to devote greater attention to existential concerns about identity and self-expression. Although this theory does purport to explain the shift from class to status politics, it is questionable on theoretical and empirical grounds. Theoretically, it rests on the assumption that the material re-

<sup>25</sup> Evans (2000) enumerates the most popular explanations of the decline of class politics.

quirements for survival are fixed, rather than being social constructions that change according to context (see Fourastié 1960). In most American cities, for instance, owning an automobile is now a necessity, whereas it was once a luxury. The postmaterialist thesis has also faced empirical criticism. Although the evidence for the growth of postmaterialist values seemingly is buttressed by a wealth of survey data, the value scales used in these studies lack construct validity (Haller [2002] is the latest in a long string of critiques of this research program). Moreover, the only direct test of this hypothesis failed to support it.<sup>26</sup>

Thus class politics came to the fore during early industrialization, but something about advanced capitalism seems to have curtailed it and has given status politics greater salience instead. The leading theories of this transformation in the social bases of politics are structural and deterministic; they imply a certain universality and irreversibility about the shift. Although it is undeniable that the social transformations following World War II have had important political implications, structural theories of the shift from class to culture are untenable.<sup>27</sup> This article proposes an alternative solidaristic theory, which suggests that a key to understanding these offsetting trends lies in the changing social composition of solidary groups.

## A SOLIDARISTIC THEORY OF POLITICAL SHIFT

### Premises

Class and status politics emanate from solidary groups, not atomized individuals. The attainment of group consciousness on any basis at all is

<sup>26</sup> The theory predicts that postmaterialists who grew up in prosperous conditions should be highly satisfied with the quality of their lives and less concerned about material acquisitions. Yet a study of British university students that distinguished between those with materialist and postmaterialist value orientations found that the latter were as much, if not more, individually acquisitive than their materialist counterparts (Marsh 1975).

<sup>27</sup> "The translation of class interests, based on one's position as a landowner, shopkeeper, worker, or capitalist, into subjective political dispositions and collective political action depends on a political process in which institutions, such as political parties, and ideologies . . . play a key role. These institutions and ideologies are not independent of material conditions and class forces, nor are they capable of simply creating interests out of discourses, unconstrained by material realities. Structural positions within production (i.e., class positions) define a constellation of interests that can serve as a potential basis for collective political action. Such action depends on the building of political organizations and creation of identities that are not simple reflections of objective positions in class structures or of the interests that can be imputed to such positions. Definitions of class identities and interests are typically contested in a political arena with rules that constitute opportunities and constraints and with multiple possible enemies and allies. This means that class factors alone never fully determine just how such interests will be defined in political programs and coalitions or how politically salient class-based interests (rather than nonclass interests rooted in racial, ethnic, or gender stratification) will become" (Aminzade 1993, p. 9).

problematic. Social identity—that part of the individual’s self-concept deriving from membership in groups—is not fixed; different ones come to the fore in different contexts and stages of the life course. Although the term “identity politics” is bruited about endlessly these days, few ask why people primarily identify with one kind of group—say, a class—rather than another—say, a nation. Whereas some culturally distinct groups develop separate identities, others do not. Large societies are inherently diverse. They comprise people of varying age, gender, wealth, education, class, religion, sexual orientation, and language. They also include people of different height, weight, hair, and eye color. In principle, a social identity can crystallize around any one of these distinctions, or categorical markers. Since social identities imply membership in imagined communities (Anderson 1983), what mechanism is responsible for the imagining?

That people objectively share a common attribute has no necessary implications for their subjective awareness of this fact, for their desire to identify with others in a similar position, or for social outcomes like collective action. For the most part, social identities are parasitic on face-to-face interaction. People are most likely to identify with those with whom they interact. Groups usually form in two disparate but mutually reinforcing ways: on the basis of values and propinquity (Simmel 1955). Although the end point of each process is often the same, the starting points are different. In the first kind of group formation, people who already share some common value seek one another out and establish a social network to provide them with a commonly valued good. In the second kind of group formation, people who already share a common location in social space establish a social network on that account.<sup>28</sup>

Interaction is a necessary starting point, but group consciousness also has cognitive and motivational prerequisites. Cognitively, people have group consciousness only when they understand that their own position in society derives, at least in part, from sharing a unique attribute of that group. The covariation of an individual’s fate and his or her possession of a categorical marker is facilitated by ideology. No doubt English factory workers of the early 19th century found their lot to be a hard one, but not until Marx came along did any of them think to attribute this fate to capitalism. Members of a group can be said to share an ideology to the degree that their political beliefs and attitudes are internally consistent, rather than random (Converse 1964).

However important cognitive awareness is to group consciousness, it is still insufficient. There is also a motivational problem. Even when

<sup>28</sup> Thus new patterns of residential segregation produce new social networks, social identities, and patterns of collective action (Gould 1994).

people are aware that they are in the same boat, this need not lead to any action on behalf of their common interests. Instead, they can opt to free ride (Olson 1965) and let others do the work. Since the free-rider problem impedes the ability of a group to act collectively and organize, under what kinds of conditions can it be overcome?

Collective action on the basis of any categorical distinction ultimately depends on the solidarity of individuals sharing the relevant attribute. Variations in dependence (in the costs of exit) and control (monitoring and sanctioning) capacity are critical determinants of group solidarity (Hechter 1987). Dependence and control are maximized in *organizations* rather than in informal groups, which usually have lower control capacity. Organizations nurture social identities, ideologies (Barnes 1966; Martin 2002), and, sometimes, collective action.<sup>29</sup> Industrial trade unions provide the solidarity that is necessary (albeit insufficient) to mount class-based collective action in industrial societies;<sup>30</sup> a wide variety of voluntary associations—churches, literary societies, and athletic groups, among others—perform the same role in the emergence of collective action based on similarity of status.<sup>31</sup>

All such organizations conquer the free-rider problem in several discrete stages. Many of them are formed to provide their members with *private goods* like insurance against sickness and injury (Van Leeuwen 1997; van der Linden 1996), education (Hroch 1985; Rose 2001), entertainment (Clawson 1989; Beito 2000), or merely the companionship of like-minded individuals (Blau 1977). Since these groups' rationale is the provision of private goods, they are not threatened by free riding. For example, people

<sup>29</sup> "The culture infused into primary groups includes norms concerning the extent of solidarity, norms about whose troubles one has to worry about and to contribute to alleviate. It includes cultural heroes who provide ego ideals for people within the group" (Stinchcombe 1965, p. 187). "People who are in a similar situation and who have identical interests often find themselves in competition with one another. . . . Thus the division of society into classes does not necessarily result in the organization of politics in terms of class. . . . Political parties—along with unions, churches, factories, and schools—forge collective identities, instill commitments, define the interests on behalf of which collective actions become possible, offer choices to individuals, and deny them" (Przeworski 1985, pp. 100–101). Groups that are organized for one specific purpose can transform themselves into very different kinds of groups (Goffman 1983, p. 10). The literature on nationalism is replete with examples of athletic clubs, cultural societies, churches, and other kinds of voluntary associations that, at some later date, come to embrace nationalist politics.

<sup>30</sup> For a classic description of union solidarity, see Lipset, Trow, and Coleman (1956). Voting studies consistently show that members of trade unions are more likely to vote left (e.g., with their class) than nonunionists are.

<sup>31</sup> By the same token, to the degree that membership in voluntary associations is *categorically heterogeneous*, this inhibits collective action on the basis of the relevant categories (Varshney 2002).

who seek to exploit an insurance group—say, by claiming sick benefits if they are not really sick—are likely to be detected and denied the benefit, if not expelled altogether. Likewise, poker players who renege on their debts will not be invited back. These groups, however, are small and highly localized. Those that transform themselves into large, nationwide organizations do so by federating (Chai and Hechter 1998; Skocpol and Fiorina 1999; Hedström, Sandell, and Stern 2000).

I suggest that the shift from class to cultural politics is a product of the same kinds of social forces. If so, it results, at least in part, from a change in the relative prevalence of class- and culturally based voluntary associations. This essay focuses on the role of *direct rule* on the social bases of politics. It contends that the onset of direct rule tends to influence the relative solidarity of class and status groups. By doing so, direct rule is associated both with the decline of class and with the rise of status politics. Yet, this relationship is not deterministic: a number of other institutions can act to mitigate it.

### The Theory

The solidaristic theory is presented in three parts. The first briefly discusses how industrialization promotes the emergence of insurance groups, and—especially in relatively culturally homogeneous societies—the rise of unions, class politics, and direct rule. The second argues that, once established, direct rule inhibits class politics. The third argues that direct rule increases status politics.

### *The Rise of Class Politics*

The advent of market society and rapid technological development increased the political salience of class in the industrial world.<sup>32</sup> Market society ushered in massive gains in personal freedom, but these gains occurred at the expense of much personal and familial security (Polanyi 1943). Technological change and market expansion exposed many people

<sup>32</sup> This statement obscures the enormous difficulties that had to be overcome in forming class consciousness—difficulties that are greater in the case of class than of more traditional, competing social identities. The advocates of class consciousness had to mobilize their constituency in opposition to local, ethnic, and religious social identities, to say nothing of the entrenched antagonism of political authorities. For this reason, societies having major cultural cleavages preceding industrialization were less likely to develop class consciousness than more culturally homogeneous societies. See below for further discussion of this issue.

to unprecedented levels of uncertainty.<sup>33</sup> To be sure, uncertainty had been a permanent feature of social life since time immemorial due to natural disasters, vicissitudes of climate, and periodic invasions. Traditionally, the demand for insurance against losses due to these kinds of events was met by a variety of local institutions that effectively constituted a moral economy (Thompson 1971).<sup>34</sup>

The rapid development of new production technologies had two important social consequences. On the one hand, it led to a shift in patterns of residential segregation. The preindustrial city tended to have low residential segregation by class. Most work went on within households and neighborhoods that were socially heterogeneous. As industrialization proceeded, however, work became separated from the household and neighborhoods became class segregated. As a result, social networks became more class-homogeneous. This shift in patterns of residential segregation fostered class consciousness.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, this development fostered entirely new kinds of uncertainty. Technological change threatened to displace workers in outmoded industries (famously, in the English case, the handloom weavers). Business cycles also caused strong fluctuations in unemployment. Increasing numbers of urban workers found themselves bereft of the institutional safety nets that had sustained them in the countryside. The massive increase in uncertainty resulting from these changes stimulated a strong demand for insurance to protect against unemployment (a by-product of

<sup>33</sup> Uncertainty differs from risk. Under risk, agents can assess (or believe they can assess) the probability (from 0 to 1) that a given event will occur; under uncertainty, no such probability assessment can be made (Knight 1971).

<sup>34</sup> For example, clans and chiefdoms and empires all provided some security from invasion. Funeral and sickness benefit societies were known in ancient Greece and Rome (Rys 1964). Churches have dispensed welfare since at least Roman times (Stark 1996); the medieval Catholic church maintained an elaborate voluntary system of welfare to aid the poor. In feudal English villages, serfs were provided insurance against unemployment, sickness, and old age by their liege lords (Maitland [1921] 1987, p. 42; De Schweinitz 1947, p. 2). As early as the 14th century, groups abounded in English villages giving alms and regular pensions to members who fell into distress (Webb and Webb 1927). Guilds and workers' brotherhoods sprung up in the growing cities of the late feudal period in Europe. And the Russian *mir* was a self-governing community of peasant households that provided its members with social insurance.

<sup>35</sup> "In their increasingly segregated communities, separated not only from their workplaces but also from merchants and individual capitalists, workers controlled these institutions. They were free to develop new organizations as they saw fit, and those they did create belonged exclusively to them. Together with the labor organizations that workers were beginning to diverse at work, these neighborhood institutions provided the possibility for the development of an independent working-class culture" (Katznelson 1981, pp. 51–52).

ever-new means of production),<sup>36</sup> sickness (exacerbated by unsanitary conditions in the fast-growing cities) and death, labor competition, and anomie. More recently, technological development has increased the demand for new forms of uncertainty reduction, such as insurance to compensate employees for their investment in asset-specific skills (Estevez-Abe, Iversen, and Soskice 2001).<sup>37</sup>

Initially, this demand for uncertainty reduction was met by the establishment of mutual benefit associations (Beito 2000; Clawson 1989; de Swaan 1988; Kaufman 2002; van der Linden 1996).<sup>38</sup> The initial pre-eminence of these groups was no accident. Trade unions and other groups established to provide collective goods, such as improvement in the wages and working conditions of entire categories of laborers, are highly vulnerable to free riding. Mutual benefit associations have no such liability *because their rationale is the provision of private goods* (Hechter 1987, chap. 6). Like all insurance groups, mutual benefit associations rely on individual monetary deposits into a common fund that can be drawn upon in the case of demonstrable need. Since they do not have to overcome the free-rider problem, such groups face fewer threats to their survival than others seeking to provide collective goods. This does not mean that the demand for uncertainty reduction alone is sufficient for the formation of mutual benefit associations, however. Since the group's assets are concentrated in a common fund, there is always the risk that the administrators of the fund will abscond with it to the detriment of members. Hence, to survive, such groups must be socially exclusive—formed by individuals who share a common culture, know one another well, and have mutual trust.<sup>39</sup> Mutual benefit associations pioneered the delivery

<sup>36</sup> Although technological change often led to the creation of new jobs, these jobs were seldom filled by those workers who had been laid off.

<sup>37</sup> I am not referring here to the technological sources of uncertainty that affect everyone on the planet such as global warming and the depletion of the ozone layer, as discussed by writers like Beck (1992) and Giddens (1990).

<sup>38</sup> In addition, some trade unions (especially those evolving from guilds of skilled workers) and evangelical religious groups provided similar benefits.

<sup>39</sup> Although there is renewed interest in voluntary associations among social scientists, there is very little systematic historical evidence about them. The best quantitative study I am aware of tracks the density of voluntary association membership in a sample of American city directories in 26 cities and towns from 1840 to 1950. Even though the study considers all types of voluntary associations, a similar pattern is found for all types: there is faster, longer-lasting growth in associational density in smaller towns and cities. The authors speculate that “associations are created and sustained most easily in communities that are relatively small and homogeneous. In these places, where residents are more likely to know one another, the cost of not participating regularly in voluntary activities is probably higher than in a big city: free riders are more subject to social and economic sanctions. Consequently, fearing sanction, small-town residents would be more likely to organize and join associations than big-city residents” (Gamm and Putnam 1999, p. 551).



of insurance benefits before the development of private insurance markets.<sup>40</sup> Once established, these associations often developed into trade unions.

Why do trade unions matter for this story? They matter because they are the most important organizations that promote class consciousness in industrial society (Alford 1963, p. 292).<sup>41</sup> In culturally homogeneous societies, these local unions often federated into statewide unions, leading to the formation of socialist political parties. As unions grew, class politics flourished—and with it the apparent prospects for some kind of socialist revolution. The years 1880–1940 defined the high-water mark of class politics in world history (Mann 1993). At the end of the 19th century, mass strikes were on the rise and working-class political parties proliferated in nearly every corner of the globe (Hobsbawm 1994). To be sure, the form and intensity of class politics varied substantially across market societies.<sup>42</sup> Despite these differences, an increasing number of violent clashes with authorities occurred throughout the industrial world. Revolutionary activity increased for a short time after the victory of the Bolsheviks in Russia; more sustained class-based political action was inspired by the Great Depression of the 1930s.

#### *Direct Rule and the Fall of Class Politics*

To preserve the social order that sustained them, central authorities sought some means of combating the growing impact of class politics, which they regarded as a contest pitting groups of rational individuals with opposing interests against one another for control of the state and civil society. This conception suggested one particular strategy for containing class politics. If workers could be weaned from the working-class political parties and the trade unions supporting them, then the revolutionary potential of class conflict would be undermined and the existing social order would prevail.

How could this task be accomplished? Prior to industrialization, the central rulers of expansive territories were compelled to rule indirectly,

<sup>40</sup> Insurance could not be successfully marketed before the development of actuarial science and before the collection of sufficient data on risks to estimate optimal premia. Most of the requisite data were first provided by studying the experience of mutual benefit associations. Once private insurance markets were established, this lowered the demand for membership in mutual benefit associations.

<sup>41</sup> Labor and socialist political parties also promote class consciousness but—unlike unions—they offer fewer private goods to the average member. Patronage is the principal private good afforded by political parties.

<sup>42</sup> The strongest working-class political party emerged in Germany, and socialist parties were ensconced in most other Western European countries as well, but in the United States there was no working class political party at all (Katznelson and Zolberg 1986; Lipset and Marks 2000).

by delegating power to agents charged with the responsibilities of extracting revenue and providing military service for them. These agents, in turn, afforded their subjects security, dispute resolution, and, in times of trouble, welfare benefits. This was the bargain that essentially constituted the moral economy.

By dramatically lowering communication costs, industrialization made possible more direct forms of rule. All forms of rule rest on the provision of collective goods—such as national defense, justice, public health, and welfare (Weber 1978, p. 905). Yet there is a fundamental distinction between indirect and direct rule (Hechter 2000). Whereas under indirect rule most of the rights and responsibilities of governance in geographically remote territories are relegated to local political and ecclesiastical elites, under direct rule central authorities amass these rights and responsibilities for themselves. This *displacement of collective-goods provision* from local to central authorities occasioned great political conflicts (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, p. 15; de Swaan 1988).<sup>43</sup>

Since states are extremely complex institutions, direct rule is a multi-dimensional concept. At a minimum, it is composed of at least two independent dimensions: *scope* and *penetration*. The scope of a state refers to the quantity and quality of the collective goods it provides (note that this category includes state regulations in the economy, polity, and civil society, for these are collective goods). Socialist states have the highest scope, laissez-faire states the lowest. Scope induces dependence: the greater the scope of the state, the more dependent groups and subunits are on it for access to collective goods. In contrast, penetration refers to the central state's control capacity—that is, the proportion of laws and policies that are enacted and enforced by central as opposed to regional or local decision makers. The tentacles of the modern state have penetrated deep into civil society, breaching even the innermost walls of the household (e.g., by regulating sexual behavior between adults and between them and children).<sup>44</sup> Scope and penetration often covary, but not necessarily. For example, federal states with similar scope have less penetration than unitary states.

Although the French Revolution marks an early stage in the devel-

<sup>43</sup> The rise of direct rule also provided “targets for mobilization and cognitive frameworks in which challenging groups could compare their situations to more favored constituencies and find allies” (Tarrow 1994, p. 66).

<sup>44</sup> Thus, Wildavsky (1993, p. 52) notes, “In decades past, a term such as ‘spousal rape’ was unknown (at least I never recall hearing it). Marriage presumably meant that a woman had given her consent. Yet we all know that since time immemorial married women have been forced. Only they had no legal redress. Nor could they, except in very unusual circumstances, expect sympathy. Quite the contrary. ‘You made your bed, now lie in it’ was the norm.”

opment of direct rule, the modern welfare state represents its quintessence. Although substantial differences divide them, all welfare states attempt to stabilize the flow of income and basic services for substantial proportions of population at risk of serious loss (Hicks 1999, p. 13). Welfare states provide two basic types of collective goods (Moene and Wallerstein 2001): they redistribute income to some of the disadvantaged, and they reduce the uncertainty of job loss and job investment (Iversen 2003). To a remarkable extent, all industrial societies had instituted welfare regimes by the middle of the 20th century.<sup>45</sup> The scope of welfare in advanced societies, as indicated by welfare effort (i.e., the amount of government expenditures on social services as a percentage of the gross domestic product), grew rapidly from 1965 onward (Huber and Stephens 2001, table A4). Is it a coincidence that this period also corresponds to an era of declining class politics?<sup>46</sup>

Unions and working-class parties had emerged in market society to offer their members the same kinds of benefits—including protection against sickness and unemployment—that had disappeared with the demise of the *ancien régime*. As early as 1881, Bismarck offered German industrial workers social insurance and other benefits as incentives to lure them away from his socialist opponents (Manow 2001). Analogous social insurance schemes were soon employed, to varying degrees, in nearly every industrial society.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, advances in actuarial theory permitted private insurance markets to develop. Many of the private goods that unions once provided to their members became available elsewhere.

<sup>45</sup> In this respect, the Japanese experience is often regarded as an exception. Japan is an advanced capitalist society that heretofore has had *neither* much of a welfare state *nor* high rates of participation in insurance groups (Curtis, Baer, and Grabb 2001, p. 801). However, on closer inspection, Japan is not quite such an outlier. Uncertainty reduction was attained there by reliance on the extended family and supplemented by institutions such as permanent employment and government policies that reduced intergroup income differentials. These social institutions, therefore, are substitutes to, or functional alternatives of, welfare regimes and insurance groups (Campbell 2002). For a view of Japanese society as a network of solidary groups, see Miller and Kanazawa (2000).

<sup>46</sup> Whereas a vast body of research has been devoted to the *determinants* of (various types of) welfare regimes, little is known about their *consequences* for political outcomes (personal communication, Evelyne Huber, July 19, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> The Soviet Union went farther in this respect than any other country, but the difference in the extensiveness of its welfare provisions was quantitative rather than qualitative. Some of these schemes were initiated top-down by authoritarian rulers (like Hitler). Some were put into place by capitalist entrepreneurs: thus, Henry Ford and other captains of industry built company unions in the United States (Fantasia 1988), and company unions are pervasive in today's Japan. The welfare regimes of democratic societies were voted in bottom-up by electoral majorities (Korpi 1983).

In consequence, membership in unions fell, as did class consciousness and—ultimately—class politics.<sup>48</sup>

By providing many of the same benefits that unions once exclusively purveyed, the welfare state prospered, which led to the erosion of key incentives for union membership. Since group consciousness arises from group membership, the subsequent near-universal decline in union membership had the effect of weakening class politics in society at large.

*Direct Rule and the Rise of Cultural Politics*

What, then, accounts for the shift from class-based organizations to those based on status? Whereas the rise of market society (and associated technological development) initially fostered class-based organizations, its long-run effects tended to promote organizations based on cultural similarity. This trend, as well, has its roots in the substitution of direct for indirect rule. Since the provision of welfare as an entitlement lowers the incentives for union membership, this by itself reduces the salience of class politics relative to that of culture.

Yet direct rule also fosters cultural politics independent of its effects on class. This occurs for two different reasons. On the one hand, as direct rule advances, geographically concentrated ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups that were accustomed to a large measure of self-determination under indirect rule become subject to alien cultural dictates due to the increased scope of central authorities.

Direct rule has been adopted in all kinds of polities, but it emerges in a bottom-up fashion in democracies, whose legislators must respond to the demands of the median voter. Since these days most polities are multicultural—in part due to a rapid expansion of international migration since the 1980s (Castles and Miller 1993)—just who is this median voter? The answer depends to some degree on the electoral rules. In proportional representation systems, there may be no median voter per se; in such polities, cultural differences tend to be institutionalized in the party system (Lijphart 1977).<sup>49</sup> This in itself is sufficient to account for the salience of cultural politics in such systems. In a plurality/majority electoral system,

<sup>48</sup> State-produced welfare also reduced membership in other kinds of voluntary associations that had once relied on welfare provision as a membership incentive, such as religious groups. Thus, there is a strong negative relationship between welfare spending and religious participation, net of economic and cultural differences between countries (Gill and Lundsgaarde, in press).

<sup>49</sup> The earliest movements for proportional representation arose in the most ethnically heterogeneous countries: Denmark (to accommodate Schleswig-Holstein), as early as 1855, the Swiss cantons from 1891 onward, Belgium from 1899, Moravia from 1905, and Finland from 1906 (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, p. 32).

however, the median voter belongs to the cultural majority: he speaks the dominant language, attends the dominant church, and lives in a core rather than a peripheral region. The governments in majoritarian democracies, therefore, tend to produce collective goods that are earmarked for the electorally dominant cultural group.

Many of the collective goods demanded by the median voter benefit everyone in the polity, such as national defense, transportation, communications and financial infrastructures, public health programs, and public parks. At the same time, some of the collective goods provided by the central authorities (in response to the demands of the median voter) are likely to be culturally exclusive. Public education, for example, is usually carried out in one national language, which puts speakers of minority languages at a disadvantage. Judicial proceedings are likely to do the same. The adherents of minority religions may also be adversely affected.<sup>50</sup>

These kinds of cultural disadvantages are historically novel. This is because cultural minorities in systems of indirect rule usually were accorded substantial amounts of self-determination. But direct rule changes all this. It puts minorities increasingly at the mercy of central authorities for access to collective goods. But to the degree that the minority's interests diverge from the median voter's, central authorities have a correspondingly reduced incentive to take them into account.<sup>51</sup> Direct rule therefore threatens the interests of two kinds of elites in minority groups: local political elites and elites accustomed to wielding authority in educational and religious realms. Moreover, even if direct rule leads to investment in peripheral regions, this may produce a cultural division of labor relegating the members of cultural minorities to inferior jobs (Hechter 1978). This division of labor makes status distinctions highly salient for individual life chances. All told, these conditions foster the formation of voluntary associations among cultural minorities.<sup>52</sup>

At the same time, the penetration characteristic of direct rule also spurs cultural politics. As the central authority increasingly intrudes into once autonomous realms—from the family and intimate relationships to local schooling—its policies divide groups adhering to different norms and values. If some agency of the central state enacts laws, or changes long-

<sup>50</sup> Just because a country like Switzerland has proportional representation and corporatist institutions that promote multiculturalism need not imply that its government will respond to the demands of other minorities, such as immigrants (Wimmer 2002).

<sup>51</sup> This is not to deny that minority interests may be pursued through log rolling and similar vote-trading mechanisms.

<sup>52</sup> Hroch (1985) documents this process for national minorities in the smaller European democracies in the 19th century.

standing ones, concerning civil rights (McAdam 1982, pp. 83–86), abortion (Luker 1984), homosexual activity (D’Emilio 1998), or the environment, this intervention spurs new bases of conflict.

Consider the American civil rights movement, the model for many of the other new social movements in developed societies. Two events instigated by central authorities—a presidential order to desegregate the armed forces in 1948 and the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)—were decisive for subsequent mobilization both for and against the expansion of civil rights. In similar fashion, conflict was generated following the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion. Overall, then, the rise of direct rule—and especially its full flowering in the modern welfare state—simultaneously leads to the waning of class and the waxing of cultural politics.

Direct rule is a creature of the modern world: at its inception, for the first time in history, large populations became governed by rulers who knew little about their subjects’ particular interests, and could care less. The advent of direct rule considerably antedates the establishment of the welfare state. Early state-building resulted in a host of measures that increased market efficiency, such as the standardization of weights, measures, and currency, and the abolition of internal tolls and tariffs. These economic measures were accompanied by cultural ones, such as the standardization of language and—in some cases—religion (Rokkan 1970). In both cases, the builders of states attempted to wrest authority from local elites and amass it in political centers. Naturally, the process encountered resistance—some of it quite fierce. Rapid urbanization was another major impetus to direct rule: as it proceeded, risks to public health and social order increased dramatically. States responded by enacting new measures to mitigate these risks, establishing sewer systems and police departments, among other municipal services (Baldwin 1999).

In brief, the solidaristic theory of political change suggests that the massive uncertainty unleashed by the growth of markets, technological change, and urbanization spurs the formation of new insurance groups. In democratic societies, these insurance groups provide an organizational base for the establishment of trade unions and working-class political parties—hence, of class politics. In large part, this politics aims to provide social insurance and income redistribution for the benefit of the working class. Direct rule, in the form of the welfare state, increases as a result. But since increasing welfare benefits undercut the incentives for membership in class-based organizations, such as trade unions, class politics suffers apace. Meantime, the growth of direct rule promotes organizations and collective identities based on the demands of minority cultural groups—for access to high-paying jobs, for schooling in their own language, for services in their own religious tradition, or for their civil rights.

As a result, conflicts between groups defined on the basis of culture overtake those between classes in these societies.

#### EMPIRICAL IMPLICATIONS

The solidaristic theory has a number of empirical implications. In the first place, it implies that *class and status politics are largely competitive rather than complementary*. This leads to several propositions about the effects of status heterogeneity on a variety of outcomes.

PROPOSITION 1.—*Status heterogeneity should promote culturally based insurance groups at the expense of class-based groups.*

In the relatively ethnically and religiously homogeneous societies of Scandinavia, mutual benefit associations often provided the organizational crucible from which trade unions crystallized. In immigration societies like the United States, however, mutual benefit associations tended to be segregated according to status. In exceptional conditions, such associations could federate into inclusive unions (Katznelson 1981, p. 55; Carsten 1988). During its heyday, the white Knights of Labor welcomed African-American recruits (Gerteis 2002), if not those of European immigrants. More commonly, however, status-segregated mutual benefit groups inhibited class consciousness by dividing the working class into separate ethnic and religious fragments (Voss 1993; Kaufman 2002, p. 31).<sup>53</sup> This led to an exclusive rather than inclusive type of unionization (Lipset and Marks 2000). Indeed, the absence of left-wing political parties in the United States has often been attributed to its ethnic and religious diversity.

Belgium offers another example of the effect of status heterogeneity on the social composition of insurance groups. Belgian mutual benefit associations emerged with advancing industrialization during the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Verbruggen 1996). But 19th-century Belgium was rent by conflict over religion. As a result, separate insurance groups were formed among Catholics and their liberal anticlerical and socialist opponents. The Catholics provided sickness funds on a parish basis, lead-

<sup>53</sup> In the United States, fraternal associations facilitated collective action among businessmen as well as workers (see Kaufman [2002] on “competitive voluntarism”). In some instances, American religious groups also provided social insurance to their members (Fogel 2000, p. 124), and some religious groups also helped to promote trade unions. Religious groups in the United States, which had no established church, were more likely to respond to these demands because established churches were less dependent on their parishioners’ demands than their counterparts in competitive religious economies (Finke and Stark 1992).

ing to a class-heterogeneous membership.<sup>54</sup> The liberal anticlericals and socialists countered with insurance groups of their own, the latter being the most class-homogeneous.<sup>55</sup> Corporatist power-sharing agreements between the three camps led to the famous “pillarization” characterizing Belgian (and Dutch) society in the 20th century.

PROPOSITION 2.—*Status heterogeneity should decrease rates of unionization.*

This theory suggests that strong unions foster class consciousness and strong social democratic parties. Status heterogeneity should have the opposite effect. Indeed, ethnic and linguistic diversity are associated with low levels of trade union membership (Stephens 1979, table 4.7). Immigration provides another window on this relationship. The theory predicts that immigration should vary inversely with unionization. This expectation is confirmed in a comprehensive analysis of the effects of immigration on union density in 16 OECD countries from 1962 to 1997. Immigration rates have strong negative effects on union density, net of the effects of standard economic and political determinants of unionization (Lee 2003).

PROPOSITION 3.—*Status heterogeneity should decrease class voting.*

Evidence that cultural diversity depresses class voting is abundant. For example, the consistently negative relationship between religious and linguistic heterogeneity and leftist voting in 13 Western European countries from the late 19th century to 1970 (Bartolini 2000, chap. 4) supports the proposition. Moreover, cultural divisions are associated with weaker and more fragmented working-class parties (Huber and Stephens 2001, p. 19).

PROPOSITION 4.—*Status heterogeneity should decrease direct rule.*

The theory predicts that class politics should promote direct rule. Since direct rule substitutes centralized provision of social insurance for local provision, one of its key dimensions is the size of the state’s contribution to individual welfare. This is usually indicated by “welfare effort,” a variable consisting of a country’s expenditure on social security benefits taken as a percentage of gross domestic product. Since status heterogeneity is negatively associated with class politics, it ought to decrease welfare effort.

<sup>54</sup> The Catholics exercised the greatest influence over Belgian social insurance; their antipathy to the modern secular state encouraged the policy of subsidiarity (Esping-Andersen 1990).

<sup>55</sup> “Through a process very similar to the one . . . for the Socialists parties, these church movements tended to isolate their supporters from outside influence through the development of a wide variety of parallel organizations and agencies: they not only built up schools and youth movements of their own, but also developed confessionally distinct trade unions, sports clubs, leisure associations, publishing houses, magazines, newspapers, in one or two cases even radio and television stations” (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, p. 15).



This is because the essence of the welfare state is communitarian, and status differentiation inhibits citizens' conception of their polity as a community.

The logic of the welfare state implies the existence of boundaries that distinguish those who are members of a community from those who are not. . . . The welfare state requires boundaries because it establishes a principle of distributive justice that departs from the distributive principles of the free market. . . . The welfare state is a closed system because a community with shared social goods requires for its moral base some aspect of kinship or fellow feeling. The individuals who agree to share according to need have to experience a sense of solidarity that comes from common membership in some human community. . . . The preservation of the advantages of the welfare states entails limited access to their benefits. (Freeman 1986, pp. 52–53)

In 1989—the high-water mark for welfare expenditure in the advanced societies—welfare effort varies substantially (Australia has the lowest rank, Sweden the highest). The most up-to-date analysis of this relationship reveals that cross-sectional and longitudinal variations in the strength of working-class organization are the most important determinants of welfare effort (Huber and Stephens 2001, p. 20).

In light of this finding, it is surprising that the relationship between status heterogeneity and welfare effort has seldom been analyzed systematically. In one exceptional study, ethnic diversity is associated with less expenditure on public goods in American cities circa 1990 (Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999). The authors explain this finding by suggesting that voters choose to provide fewer public goods when tax revenues collected on one ethnic group are used to provide benefits shared with other ethnic groups. Even though this study does not include controls for a number of standard determinants of public spending, it is true that relatively culturally diverse societies like the United States, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom provide less welfare effort than the relatively homogeneous Nordic welfare states.

PROPOSITION 5.—*Direct rule (as indicated by welfare effort) should increase status-group organizational capacity relative to that of class.*

The solidaristic theory implies that welfare effort decreases the incentives for membership in class-based groups, such as unions, and increases those for status-based groups. Since welfare effort has increased in all advanced industrial societies, union density—the proportion of the labor force that is unionized—should decline everywhere. In general, the evidence with respect to union density is largely consistent with this expectation. For the members of the European Union as a whole, rates of union density begin a long secular decline in 1977 from 50% to 32% (Visser

2002, fig. 1). Decreasing rates of union density date from 1973 in the United States and Japan and from 1981 in Australia and New Zealand (Western 1997, table 2.2). There are, however, significant exceptions to this generalization, which are discussed below.

Comparable data on trends in status-group density are simply unavailable.<sup>56</sup> This means that any conclusions about the issue must be regarded as tentative. The best existing evidence is contained in a recent collection of essays on the dynamics of social capital in several countries (Putnam 2002). As the solidaristic theory predicts, analyses conducted for Great Britain, France, and Sweden—all relatively strong welfare states—find that status-group membership rates have been increasing in the last three decades. In fact, Worms (2002, pp. 144–47) specifically claims that expansion of the welfare state is responsible for heightened levels of status-group mobilization in France. The data for the United States and Japan—two countries having relatively weak welfare effort—are mixed. This too is consistent with the theory's expectations.

PROPOSITION 6.—*Status politics should be more salient than class politics in countries with direct rule.*

This derives from the previous five propositions. One of its empirical implications concerns federalism, which is a form of indirect rule. Moreover, in countries (like the United Kingdom, Spain, France, and Canada) having territorially concentrated cultural minorities with an established internal homeland, the salience of class politics should be significantly weaker in federal than in centralized political regimes.<sup>57</sup>

Consider Switzerland, a country that combines a rather skimpy welfare state (Hicks 1999, chap. 8) with an extreme degree of indirect rule. Not only is the Swiss central government exceptionally feeble (Linder 1994), but most of the country's welfare benefits are provided by the cantons,

<sup>56</sup> There is some evidence that argues that cross-national differences in rates of voluntary association membership are affected by different types of political regimes (Janoski 1998, pp. 129–33). Traditional corporatist democracies (Austria, France, and Italy) lag behind the other types in forming voluntary associations. Liberal and social democratic regimes have high rates of voluntary association formation, but for different reasons. In liberal democracies, high levels of voluntary association participation (excluding unions) apparently substitute for a strong welfare state. A cross-sectional analysis of 33 democracies in the 1990s finds that liberal democracies have significantly higher rates of membership commitment in nonunion voluntary associations than social democratic welfare states (Curtis et al. 2001, table 3a). Unfortunately, the analysis does not control for status heterogeneity (which is correlated with regime type), nor does it permit longitudinal analysis of the effect of shifts in welfare effort on changes in commitment to unions and other kinds of voluntary associations.

<sup>57</sup> That there are many different *kinds* of federalism (Watts 1999) makes this a difficult proposition to assess empirically. Note further that the proposition refers principally to political systems that provide decentralized provision of culturally specific collective goods, such as education and religion (e.g., the absence of an established church).

which are relatively culturally homogeneous. The interaction of these factors—the relative paucity of Swiss welfare benefits and the high degree of indirect rule—should give a greater edge to class politics in Switzerland than in comparable European countries. As expected, Switzerland is the only European country in which class voting did *not* decline from 1980 to 1990 in Nieuwbeerta and De Graaff's sample (1999, p. 40, table 2.6).

Overall, therefore, the theory's implications appear to be consistent with a broad range of empirical evidence. Nevertheless, there are also a number of anomalies, and these offer the important lesson that institutions other than direct rule can mitigate the relationship between welfare effort and the social bases of politics.

#### EMPIRICAL ANOMALIES

One apparent anomaly concerns unionization. This is a well-studied outcome that is affected by a welter of determinants, including the business cycle, the political cycle, changes in the social structure, changes in values and employer strategies, globalization, and a variety of social institutions. For reasons that are as yet unknown, this welter of factors is correlated with *expanding* rates of union membership from 1950 to 1975 and with *declining* ones from 1975 to 1995 (Ebbinghaus and Visser 1999, p. 138). The solidaristic theory suggests that direct rule ought to be inversely related to union density. That is, countries that rank high in welfare effort ought to rank low in union density, and vice versa. By contrast, those with middling levels of one factor ought to have middling levels of the other. The cases of the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, France, Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and, to a lesser extent, Italy are consistent with theoretical expectations.

Yet despite their high levels of welfare effort in 1989, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Belgium also have high rates of union density, and unionization continued to increase in these countries (save in Belgium) even in the period of union decline from 1975 to 1995. From the perspective of the solidaristic theory, this high rate of union density in the presence of high welfare effort rule is anomalous.

What accounts for the anomaly? There is a simple institutional explanation. These four countries have adopted the Ghent system for distributing welfare benefits (Western 1997, chap. 4). Under this system, central authorities cede a portion of welfare provision to unions, thereby increasing employees' dependence on the unions. Unions can make it difficult for nonunion members to obtain insurance. They exercise great influence over the definition of the kind of job an unemployed person is required to take in the unemployment scheme. And union administration of un-

employment insurance translates into control over the labor supply (Rothstein 1992). Since the Ghent system is a type of indirect rule providing incentives for union membership, the solidaristic theory predicts that it should promote class politics. Indeed, the Ghent institution turns out to be a significant determinant of union density independent of a host of control variables (Ebbinghaus and Visser 1999). Limited evidence also suggests that class consciousness is greater in Ghent countries (Wright 1997).<sup>58</sup> And Ghent countries have the strongest left parties and the highest rates of leftist voting (except in culturally divided Belgium).

But Ghent is not the whole story. At least three other institutions are also associated with union density. These provide unions with access to representation in the workplace, recognition by employers through nationwide and sectoral corporatist institutions, and closed-shop rules that make membership compulsory (Ebbinghaus and Visser 1999). These institutions increase union density by supporting member recruitment and retention, and by guaranteeing union influence with employers, politicians, and civil servants. Since these institutions—like Ghent—also act to increase the private benefits of union membership, these findings turn out to be consistent with the solidaristic theory rather than anomalous.

There is one other apparent anomaly. The theory predicts that in culturally homogeneous countries industrialization increases class politics and, ultimately, direct rule (welfare effort) as well. Consistent with these theoretical expectations, three of the four countries with the least welfare effort are all culturally heterogeneous: Australia, the United States, and Switzerland. These countries also have low levels of class politics. Yet Japan's appearance on this list is surprising. In addition to its meager welfare effort, Japan also has low levels of class politics (the Liberal Democratic Party has had a virtual monopoly since postwar American occupation), despite being one of the most culturally *homogeneous* societies in the world. If cultural homogeneity is predicted to be related to class politics and welfare effort, why then does Japan have so little of each?

Since trade unions are the principal organizational base of class politics, perhaps something is distinctive about Japanese unions. Sure enough, rather than organizing workers by industry, Japanese unions organize them by firm (Dower 1999). Whereas industrial unions in Western countries foster class consciousness, company unions in Japan foster firm consciousness, complete with distinctive uniforms, songs, and logos. This kind of union organization thus serves to transform profit-making firms into

<sup>58</sup> The effects of the Ghent system on union membership are far better appreciated than the conditions that were responsible for its emergence. Apparently, many of these national systems were adopted by governments of different political hues following economic recessions (Alber 1981, p. 170).

something akin to status groups with high exit costs.<sup>59</sup> By so doing, Japanese unions perform something little short of a sociological miracle: they have helped to transform a highly culturally homogeneous work force into one divided by status groups named Toyota, Sony, Mitsubishi, and Canon. For this reason, if no other, Japanese cultural homogeneity has not led to high levels of class politics.

Japan is not quite such an outlier in terms of welfare effort, either. Although the extended family has provided much uncertainty reduction, permanent employment and government policies that flatten intergroup income differentials also mitigate the effects of uncertainty in Japan.<sup>60</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Whereas violence once swirled around workers' attempts to gain suffrage and the right to form trade unions, today's headlines are more likely to be about nationalist, religious, and other forms of cultural politics. Most explanations of this shift in the social bases of politics focus on social structural determinants, such as changing occupational structures. These structural theories tend to imply that the social bases of politics have undergone universal and irreversible change. By contrast, this article presents a new solidaristic theory suggesting that the impetus for the shift primarily arises from institutional determinants. Among these, the growth of direct rule plays a key role. Under direct rule—which was itself spurred in democratic societies by class politics—centralized provision of welfare benefits is substituted for more local provision.<sup>61</sup> By providing many of the same kinds of benefits that unions once nearly monopolized, direct rule undercuts workers' incentives to join unions. Class politics invariably suffers as a consequence.

Direct rule also has much to offer to dominant status groups. At the same time, it stimulates distinct identities in minorities by making cultural distinctions more politically salient. In this way, the growth of direct rule reduces the resources of local elites, giving them a motive to mobilize minority status groups in opposition to central authorities. In some cases, this mobilization culminates in nationalism; in others, it culminates in religious fundamentalism, environmentalism, and gay mobilization. Thus, the very same institutions and policies that have largely succeeded in muting class politics are, at least in part, responsible for the increase in

<sup>59</sup> Thus, in spite of their lower levels of job satisfaction, Japanese workers are more likely to remain with their firms than American workers (Aoki 1988, p. 63).

<sup>60</sup> See n. 45 above.

<sup>61</sup> This is not to deny that other interested parties, such as employers, also helped foster direct rule in some instances (Swenson 1989).

cultural politics since the 1950s. Class politics was the victim of its own success.

The scope of the theory is limited to advanced capitalist societies with freedom of association.<sup>62</sup> The theory suggests that the shift from class to cultural politics is neither universal nor permanent. The key causal variables advanced here are the relative salience of class- versus culturally based voluntary associations in each country. The claim that these competing patterns of group affiliation are largely influenced by direct rule suggests, instead, that future bases of political conflict will continue to be affected by existing institutions, as well as by government policy. Since the institutions and policies in the advanced democracies vary significantly, the theory does not predict a convergence of political trends. If the United States enacts legislation permitting religious organizations to distribute welfare benefits (as in George W. Bush's "faith-based initiative"), this should strengthen status politics at the expense of class politics. Liberal immigration policies are also likely to spur status politics. However, future cutbacks in welfare benefits (accentuating a trend noted by Korpi and Palme [2003]) should help class politics to revive.

Thus, this article cannot be read either as an epitaph for class politics or as a prediction of coming culture wars. Those trinkets from the *Sovietski Collection* may well have enhanced value somewhere down the road.

<sup>62</sup> The theory raises questions about the implications of globalization for class and status politics. On the one hand, since globalization has led to a migration of industrial jobs to low-wage countries, it has both sparked labor protest in developed societies and weakened unions. As a result, globalization has increasingly become the focus and target of class politics in the West and has also raised the ire of participants in many of the new social movements. On the other hand, as industrialization penetrates less developed countries in the absence of state-provided welfare, this heightens class politics. Moreover, the increasing subjection of less developed countries to international financial institutions may be conceived as a move toward direct rule in the international system. Local authorities in these countries are under pressure to comply with Western demands—to establish secure property rights, constrain government expenditure, limit corruption, and institute economic transparency, among other things—so as to attract foreign investment. These demands, in turn, spur anti-Western reactions among those who had profited from the traditional arrangements. The rise of political Islam possibly might be understood in these terms. A careful examination of the implications of globalization for class and status politics remains to be done.

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