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POLITICAL CONFLICT IN WESTERN EUROPE

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***Political Conflict in Western Europe*, Edgar Grande, Hanspeter Kriesi, Martin Dolezal, Swen Hutter, Bruno Wüest, Marc Helbling, Dominic Höglinger, Cambridge University Press, 2012, 368 pp.**

In this book, which is a major new study in the field, the authors conceive of the contemporary transformation of territorial boundaries as a new «critical juncture», questioning the ongoing transformation of political conflict in Europe at both the national and regional levels in four parts and eleven chapters.

What are the consequences of globalization for the structure of political conflicts in Western Europe? How are

political conflicts organized and articulated in the twenty-first century? And how does the transformation of territorial boundaries affect the scope and content of political conflicts? This book sets out to answer these questions by analyzing the results of a study of national and European electoral campaigns, protest events and public debates in six West European countries. While the mobilization of the losers in the processes of globalization by new right populist parties is seen to be the driving force of the restructuring of West European politics, the book goes beyond party politics. It attempts to show how the cleavage coalitions that are shaping up under the impact of globalization extend to state actors, interest groups and social movement organizations, and how the new conflicts are framed by the various actors involved.

The second set of questions refers to the territorial scope of the new cleavage. How national is the new cleavage? Does it only affect national political systems or can it be observed at European or transnational levels as well? In our previous study we argued that there are good reasons to assume that the formation of political identities, the articulation of political preferences, and the organization of political activity mainly take place at the national level. Despite the establishment of powerful supranational, transnational, and international political institutions, the national level continues to exercise a strong influence on such processes. Of greatest importance is that citizens' political rights remain (almost) exclusively attached to the nation state. Except for the direct elections to the European Parliament, there are no institutionalized channels for citizen participation in political decision-making beyond the nation state. In addition, given the heterogeneity of the groups of «winners» and «losers» created by globalization, we assume that it is very difficult to organize their interests at supranational, transnational, or international levels. Indeed, the organization and articulation of political interests are characterized by what the authors have called the *political paradox of globalization*.

The third set of question refers to the political and organizational scope of the new cleavage. How relevant are political parties and the electoral arena in articulating and mobilizing political conflict? In our previous study, we studied electoral campaigns, and identified the driving force for forming the new cleavage in the new populist parties

of the radical right. However, this is not to say that political parties are the only political actors capable of organizing the new cleavage or that the electoral arena –whether at the national or the European level– is necessarily the most relevant arena for mobilizing political conflicts. Spectacular protest events, such as demonstrations against WTO summits, G8 meetings, and the like or mass protests against the Iraq War, as well as the literature on new social movements in Western societies, suggest that all kinds of social movement actors forcefully articulate new cleavages. Moreover, new conflicts are not only articulated in institutionalized campaigns, political parties, and spectacular events, but also in everyday public debates that give large numbers of actors an opportunity to intervene and articulate political claims.

Finally, the authors extend their analysis from the electoral arena at national and European levels to the arena of public protest as well as to public debates that take place in various arenas. They also study three issue-specific

debates that are closely related to the new cleavage: on immigration, economic liberalization, and European integration.

According to *Herbert Kitschelt, George V. Allen Professor of International Relations, Duke University*: «This book innovates in the analysis of European political realignments in multiple regards. In substantive terms, it places issue divisions about the interface between domestic politics and its regional and global embeddedness front and center. In terms of scope of political participation, it investigates the relationship among different modes of political mobilization. And in terms of data collection, it advances quantitative content analysis as a source of information about political alignments and brings frame analysis to bear on it. This book will clearly be essential reading for anyone hoping to contribute to this subject area».

Aude Jehan