

Considering Cultural Conflict
Class Politics and Cultural Politics in Western Societies

Cultureel conflict overwogen
Klassenpolitiek en culturele politiek in Westerse samenlevingen

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Preface

I like reading book prefaces; it tells you something about the personal reasons researchers have for starting their studies. So why did I start the research reported in this book? I could tell you about a conversation I heard on the radio that took place somewhere on the streets of Rotterdam during the 2002 election campaigns for the Rotterdam local council. A journalist interviewed two people who voted for Pim Fortuyn, an older woman and her son, to find out what attracted them to this new politician, whose popularity was rising remarkably. The supporters of Fortuyn's new right party mentioned issues such as 'increasing crime rates', 'norms and values', 'restoration of social order', and 'increasing problems with immigrants' as reasons for their support. The interviewer, surprised upon discovering that the woman was entirely dependent on the state for financial support, asked the woman whether she thought she would be better off supporting a leftist party to secure her economic interests. She dismissed this idea passionately: the aforementioned problems were much more important and needed to be taken care of right now!

As in a great number of other Western countries, the Dutch political landscape was rapidly and tumultuously changing: New political parties were emerging on the right, unbolting new electorates that, much to the surprise of journalists and social scientists, did not necessarily originate from the traditional electoral base of right-wing parties, the economically better off. Instead, lower income groups and those dependent upon government support also seem to be attracted to these new right-wing parties. So why this research project? I could tell you that I shared the journalist's amazement about the voting behavior of these people and that I wanted to study this phenomenon in more detail, but the real reason is much more down to earth.

One Saturday morning, sometime in the autumn of 2001, I found an e-mail from Dick Houtman. In this e-mail, Dick explained he was looking for a PhD-student, and that he was wondering whether I would be interested in doing research on the decline in class voting. I liked the idea very much, and not long after I started working at the sociology department at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, which has been my working environment ever since.

I could not have completed this thesis without the help and support of a great number of people. First, I would like to thank my supervisors Godfried Engbersen and Dick Houtman for their support during the past few years. Godfried, thank you for creating the freedom in which it has been a pleasure to work. Dick, for your never-ending energy in discussing sociological matters and for your comments and suggestions, given frankly and constructively, I thank you very much. Your virtuous way of combining serious sociology, working hard, and having fun at the same time, makes working with you interesting, educational, and fun, all at the same time. I enjoyed working with you and I trust our collaboration will continue in the future.

Thanks also to my colleagues and friends Stef Aupers, the living sociological imagination, Willem de Koster, bald-headed linguistic miracle, Peter Mascini, phone-loving critical mind, and Jeroen van der Waal, first working-class and working first-class sociologist, for the numerous lunch breaks, constructive Lobocop meetings, TIOS talks, email conversations, and meals at local Chinese restaurants that are now closed for hygienic reasons. I would not have wanted to miss them. I also wish to thank my new colleagues of *Arbeid, Organisatie, and Management* for including me in their new research group. I look forward to working with you on the project and I trust we will achieve some beautiful and remarkable results.

I would like to thank Miranda Aldham-Breary for being so kind as to make my English comprehensible. Thanks also to my friend Andrea Straathof who provided her picture of 'Contemplating Cormorants' (*Aarzelende Aalscholvers*) that is now on the cover of this book. Special thanks to my oldest friend, Marcel van Breugel, and my newest friend, Lennart Kaslander, for their friendship and support.

My family, which has more members than I have space for on these last few lines, has always supported me in various and equally important ways, and I thank each and every one of you. Most of all, I would like to thank Dagmar for her love and trust in me. I love you and I can't wait to meet our daughter, Pippi, who will soon be born into this world.

Kudelstaart

September 2006

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 A DECLINING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLASS AND VOTING BEHAVIOR?	2
1.3 EXPLAINING THE DECLINING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLASS AND VOTING BEHAVIOR	5
1.4 RESEARCH PROBLEM	8
1.5 DATA.....	9
1.6 OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK.....	10
2 'UNNATURAL' VOTING BEHAVIOR	11
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	11
2.2 'UNNATURAL' VOTING BEHAVIOR.....	13
2.3 DATA AND MEASURES	17
2.4 RESULTS.....	23
2.5 CONCLUSION	28
3 THE COMING OF A NEW POLITICAL CULTURE?.....	31
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	31
3.2 A NEW POLITICAL CULTURE?.....	34
3.3 MEASURING THE OLD AND NEW POLITICAL CULTURE	36
3.4 ARE NEW CULTURAL ISSUES BECOMING MORE IMPORTANT? AND: WHAT ABOUT CLASS ISSUES?.....	37
3.5 THE END OF LEFT AND RIGHT?	41
3.6 ASSESSING THE CONVERGENCE OF LEFT AND RIGHT	43
3.7 MEASURING LEFT-RIGHT POLARIZATION	45
3.8 IS THERE A PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION GOING ON?	47
3.9 CONCLUSION	54
4 THE MALADIES OF MODERNITY AND THE RISE OF THE NEW POLITICAL CULTURE	57
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	57
4.2 ON THE ORIGINS OF THE NEW POLITICAL CULTURE.....	58
4.3 MEASUREMENT OF SECULARIZATION AND LEVEL OF PROSPERITY	60
4.4 AN EXPLANATION FOR DIFFERENCES IN POLITICAL CULTURE	61
4.5 CULTURAL ISSUE SALIENCE AND THE TWIN MALADIES OF MODERNITY	64
4.6 DATA AND MEASURES	67
4.7 RESULTS.....	68
4.8 CONCLUSIONS	69

5	CLASS VOTING IN THE NEW POLITICAL CULTURE.....	71
5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	71
5.2	CLASS-PARTY ALIGNMENTS IN THE NEW POLITICAL CULTURE.....	72
5.3	DATA AND MEASURES	76
5.4	RESULTS.....	78
5.5	CONCLUSION	85
6	WOBLING AND FLOATING IN A POST-CLASS SOCIETY?.....	87
6.1	THE RESEARCH PROBLEM	87
6.2	CHANGING ANALYTICAL LENSES.....	90
6.3	LIVING IN A POST-CLASS SOCIETY?.....	92
6.4	WOBLING AND FLOATING ELECTORATES?	94
	NOTES	97
	REFERENCES.....	129
	SAMENVATTING	147
	CURRICULUM VITAE.....	152