

NEWSLETTER OF THE  
**Comparative & Historical SOCIOLOGY**  
SECTION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Spring 1996

Vol. 8, No. 3

**Feature Article**

**The Sociology of Nazism:  
Social Class or Market Interests?**

**William Brustein  
University of Minnesota**

There appears to be a growing consensus among social scientists that class-based models of political behavior no longer offer an accurate explanation of political behavior (e.g. voting). Inglehart (1987) posits that there is a tendency in political behavior for postmaterialist motivations to supplant economic self-interests or class-based motivations as advanced industrial society emerges. Inglehart adds that whereas at one time the politics centering on ownership of the means of production that engendered class-based polarization between a working class and a middle class were salient, that is no longer the case in present day advanced industrial societies.

Inglehart may or may not be correct about the motivations of voters in contemporary advanced industrial societies but implicit in his argument about political behavior is an assumption that class-based models provided explanatory value of political behavior in earlier historical periods. Inglehart's assumption is indeed consistent with the claims of Lipset and others (Lipset 1981; Minkenberg 1992; Weakliem 1993) who observe that the rise of industrial capitalism and democracy resulted in social class replacing religion as the strongest predictor of voting behavior.

What is the class-based model of political behavior? Marx (1959) employed the concept of class to demarcate groups in terms of their location within the productive process. While Marx realized the presence of many subclasses he concentrated on the emergence within different historical epochs of two opposing classes--

opposing by virtue of their relationship to the means of production. Within the bourgeois or capitalist mode of production Marx identified the nonowning working class or proletariat and the owning middle class or bourgeoisie. For Marx, individuals' social class stood for more than their location within the productive process; Marx believed that people's social being, that is, their social outlook, values, beliefs, and behavior were all shaped by their social class. As individuals within a class began to recognize their common socioeconomic interests and became determined to change or defend them, they affiliated with political parties or organizations that they perceived reflected their common or (class) interests (Marger 1987, p. 35). This kind of political behavior came to be referred to as class-based. On the other hand, individuals within a class who failed to vote for or join their class party were seen to as possessing a "false consciousness."

However, traditional class-based models fail to capture the complexity of individuals' material interests and, consequently, their political behavior. People's relationship to the means of production (class) is a necessary but not sufficient determinant of their political behavior; individuals' political preferences are also largely shaped by additional structural locations. Following Weber, the Marxist class or economic model of political behavior ignores a person's relationship to the marketplace (Collins 1986, pp. 132-38; Kerbo 1991, pp. 110-11). In my usage  
(Continued on page three)

**Comparative & Historical Sociology**, published quarterly, is the official newsletter of the Section on Historical and Comparative Sociology of the American Sociological Association.

**Chair**

Andrew Abbott  
University of Chicago

**Past Chair**

Ann Orloff  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

**Secretary-Treasurer**

Harland Prechel,  
Texas A&M University

**Council**

Edwin Amenta

New York University

Karen Barkey

Columbia University

Kathleen M. Blee

University of Kentucky

Rogers Brubaker

University of California-

Los Angeles

John R. Hall

University of California- Davis

Robin Stryker

University of Iowa

**Newsletter Editor**

Carole Turbin

Empire State College/ SUNY

Address correspondence to:

Editor, Historical and Comparative Sociology, Carole Turbin,  
Empire State College/ SUNY,  
223 Store Hill Rd., P.O. Box 130,  
Old Westbury, NY 11568  
Email: cturbin@sescva.esc.edu

Submissions other than short notices should be submitted via email or on 3-1/2" diskette with wordprocessing format specified.

**FUTURE PUBLICATION DEADLINES:**

**Summer: June 1, 1996**

**Fall/Winter: October 1, 1996**

**Submissions Requested for Sociology and Disability Studies**

Submissions are being accepted for an ASA Teaching Resources Guide on "Sociology and Disability Studies." Materials may include, but are not limited to: syllabi, course outlines, handouts, exercises, assignments, review essays of relevant resources (texts, films, and other course matter), or any other written submissions applicable to the inclusion of disability-related issues in teaching sociology. We also are interested in reflections on the nature of disability studies and its relevance for sociology. Deadline for submission is April 30, 1996. Contact Lynn Schlesinger, Department of Sociology, SUNY Plattsburgh, NY 12901; (518) 564-3004; fax (518) 564-3333; Email:

schlesl@splava.cc.plattsburgh.edu

or Diane E. Taub,

Department of Sociology, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Carbondale, IL 62901-4524; (618) 453-7628; fax (618) 453-3253 email: dtaub@siu.edu

**Recent Books of Interest**

**Liberalism and Social form: Industrial Growth and "Progressiviste" Political in France, 1880-1914**, by David M. Gordon, Greenwood Press, 1996. This book examines the heroic spirit of French Industrial Capitalism prior to World War I, and the role certain industrialists played in ensuring the success and stability of the country's economic and political order.

**Who Rules Japan? The Inner Circles of Economic and Political Power**, by Harold R. Kerbo and John A. McKinstry, Praeger Publishing, 1996. The authors explore the postwar and present-day Japanese upper class and the giant corporate conglomerates, the bureaucratic and political elites, and the orchestration of culture, education, social change, and labor.

**Constructing the Nation-State: International Organization and Prescriptive Action**, by Connie L. McNeely, Greenwood Press, 1995. This book analyzes the nation-state as part of a global political-cultural system.

**A Note on a Research Resource:**

**The History of Labor and the Labor of History**

**Dan Brook**

**University of California-Davis**

The Labor Archives and Research Center, associated with San Francisco State University, allows San Francisco Bay Area labor history to come alive. Besides 3500 books

(including 600 on women's history), LARC holds manuscripts, diaries, newspapers, pamphlets, minutes, cartoons, negotiation materials, handbills, photos, cassettes, and many other gems of Bay Area Labor history. LARC also sponsors celebrations, programs, and exhibits. It is located at 480 Winston Drive, San Francisco, CA 94132  
Tel: (415) 564-4010  
Fax: (415) 564-3606  
email: larc@sfsu.edu



**Sociology of Nazism (from page one)**

of marketplace, I refer to the forms of economic production in which individuals are engaged and the extent to which these forms are market-oriented and profitable, i.e., produce a surplus. My argument is that individuals' market location plays as important a role in shaping their political choices as does their social class.

In previous writings I demonstrated the utility of market interests in explaining regional variation in peasant participation in anti-state rebellion in France, Spain, and England between 1500 and 1700 (Brustein 1985; Brustein and Levi 1987), the persistence of rightwing voting patterns in Western France and leftwing patterns in Mediterranean France (Brustein 1988a), and regional variation in support of interwar fascist movements in Belgium and Italy (Brustein 1988b; Brustein 1991). As an alternative to a class-based explanation, in forthcoming research I will attempt to demonstrate the appropriateness of market interests as an explanation of the social origins of the Nazi Party joiners between 1925 and 1933 (Brustein 1996).

The reigning class-based theory of Nazism holds that German Nazism was a reaction of the German lower-middle class (independent artisans, shopkeepers, farmers, and white-collar employees) to the growing influence of big labor and big business in Germany. Lipset (1981) posits that associated with every social class or stratum is an extremist form of political expression: Communism or Peronism in the working class, traditional authoritarianism in the upper class, and fascism or Nazism in the lower-middle class. For proponents of the lower-middle class thesis of Nazism the strain from the processes of concentration and centralization of production resulting from the late 19th and early 20th century modernization in Germany was primarily responsible for

this class' embrace of Nazism. However, individual-level data on Nazi Party joiners collected from the Nazi Party's official Masterfile reveal that the Nazi Party was not strictly a lower-middle class party but instead a catchall party gaining adherents from all social classes. Moreover, in terms of support for the Nazi Party the data demonstrate significant intraclass variation. For example, although independent German grape growers and livestock farmers owned property, some blue-collar workers held jobs in export-oriented industries (e.g. chemicals and electrotechnical), and others held jobs in domestic-oriented industries (e.g. foodstuffs, construction, and woodworking), these groups frequently held divergent views on important issues like free trade and tariffs. That the Nazi Party during the Weimar period consistently presented itself as the anti-free trade and pro-protectionist party explains why some groups more than others adhered to the party. Indeed many livestock farmers and domestic sector industrial workers opposed free-trade and were more likely to join the Nazi Party, while many wine-producing farmers and export sector industrial workers favored free trade and were less likely to join the Nazi Party (Brustein 1996). That the Nazi Party recruited successfully across all social classes and that particular groups within specific social classes diverged significantly with respect to joining the Nazi Party point to obvious weaknesses in a class-based explanation of Nazi Party joiners.

A market-interest model of political behavior should provide important explanatory keys to other kinds of comparative issues of political development. For instance, among the three strands of late 19th century U.S. populism, the trans-Mississippi movement has been the focus of much attention, largely because of the electoral successes of this movement during the 1890s. A market-interest model may help explain the phenomenal  
(Continued on page four)

### Membership in the Section for Historical and Comparative Sociology, American Sociological Association

**MEMBERSHIP INCLUDES:**

- \* Newsletter
- \* Party at ASA
- \* Sessions and roundtables  
At ASA meetings

Cost for ASA Members  
\$10 (\$5 for graduate students)

To join, please fill out the information on the reverse,  
Tear off, and mail to:

American Sociological Association  
1722 N. Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20036

**Sociology of Nazism (from page one)**

regional success of the Populist party in North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas and its electoral failure in Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin. Similarly, a market-interest model of political behavior may have utility as an explanation of popular participation in revolutionary struggles. By way of illustration, the market-interest model should offer clues to why in 1905 and 1917 the highest frequency of peasant attacks on Russian gentry property occurred in the Central Agricultural/Middle Volga region of Russia while few antiseigneurial outbreaks took place in south-western Russia, especially in Bessarabia and the southern counties of the Chernigov and Mogiliev provinces.

**REFERENCES**

Brustein, W. 1985. "Class Conflict and Class Collaboration in Regional Rebellions, 1500-1700." Theory and Society 14:445-468.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1988a. The Social Origins of Political Regionalism: France, 1849 to 1981. Berkeley: University of California Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1988b. "The Political Geography of Belgian Fascism: The Case of Rexism." American Sociological Review 53:939-950.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1991. "The Red Menace and the Rise of Italian Fascism." American Sociological Review 56:652-654.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1996. The Logic of Evil: The Social Origins of the Nazi Party, 1925-33. New Haven: Yale University Press.

\_\_\_\_\_ and M. Levi. 1987. "The Geography of Rebellion: Rulers, Rebels, and Regions, 1500-1700." Theory and Society 16:467-495.

Collins, R. 1986. Max Weber. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Inglehart, R. 1987. American Political Science Review 81: 1289-1303.

Kerbo, H. R. 1991. Social Stratification and Inequality, 2nd. ed. New York: McGraw Hill, Inc.

Lipset, S.M. 1981. Political Man Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Marger, M.N. 1987. Elites and Masses, 2nd edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Marx, K. [1859] 1959. Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy. Lewis Feuer (ed.) Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Minkenberg, M. 1992. "The New Right in Germany: The Transformation of Conservatism and the Extreme Right." European Journal of Political Research. 22:55-81.

Weakliem, D. 1993. "Class Consciousness and Political Change: Voting and Political Attitudes in the British Working Class, 1964 to 1970." American Sociological Review 58:382-397.

## Comparative and Historical Sociology, ASA Section (22) Membership Form

Please check one:

\_\_\_\_\_ Please register me as a member of the Comparative and Historical Sociology Section. I am a member of the American Sociological Association and have enclosed \$10 (\$5.00 for graduate students) for 1996 section membership dues.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please send me information on how I can join ASA and the Comparative and Historical Section.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_