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CURRENT RESEARCH

The Passau-Project on Historical Electoral Research: Old Problems and New Perspectives.

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Abstract: The Passau Electoral History Project focused on elections and election campaigns in Imperial Germany. Time-series of micro-level elections returns have been reconstructed and a multi-level data base for comparable analysis has been built up. The results shed new light on the fundamental politicization process of German society.

1. Introduction

This paper is intended to serve two purposes. First, it shall present a short report on a research project on historical elections at the University of Passau. As it only will give a quick survey of data, methodology and theoretical prospects of our project, those readers who are interested in our empirical results in greater detail are referred to the papers mentioned hereafter. Secondly, I would like to link this account with more broadly based consideration and review some main themes of historical social research.

I will start with some comments on historical sociology that might help to get a better understanding of our research intention. Section three will describe our efforts on data sources. Then will I proceed to present a discussion of our contribution to German electoral history.

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2. Participation Theory and Historical Research

Historical social research represents an intersection of history and political sociology. While this stance may reveal important research questions, it is certainly an uncomfortable position concerning methodological standards since it will draw criticism from either discipline. Charles Tilly may serve here as a good example. (See Hunt 1984: 266-268)

Notwithstanding the ongoing controversy on the possible range of historically drawn hypothesis, it seems to me a common place that it is especially important for this kind of research to have a conceptual guidance at hand to start with. Statistically »significant« results yielded by cross-sectional correlations lumping together different cases, times, places, and levels of aggregation are mere chance when they are not judged by hypotheses. This was the crux of the early macroquantitative research. Since then there was a lot of disillusionment and there a probably not so many that share Monkkonen's (1984) epistemological confidence concerning quantitative history. There is even not too much agreement within quantitative approaches themselves (Jarausch 1985: 4). Still, I don't see any feasible and communicable way but to start with theoretically derived hypotheses and to see how they work in the light of historical »facts« (1).

This all is rather trivial hopefully. Nevertheless, I have made this insertion because it might be worthwhile to be recalled once in a while. As a matter of fact, this common ground is unfruitfully disputed in polemical controversies over new approaches like popular history (2). While it is true that history has to spell out the »double constitution of historical processes« (Medick 1984: 295) that is - to use Tenfelde's (1984: 394) bright phrase - the »dialectic of afflicted and being afflicted« (*Betroffen und Betrojensein*), this is true for the other social sciences well (3). It should be just a mere necessity of division of labour that some dedicate themselves more to one side of this web of conditions, which is only analytically separable, and others more with the complementary side.

As far as our research is concerned we found it useful to stick to a historically modified sort of modernization theory. This modification gets rid of some of the normative or deterministic evolutionism but still enables one to check the historical particularity against theoretical models (Steinbach 1986; Immerfall 1987a). It might be helpful to distinguish between »modernization« and »modernity« (*Moderne*). The former is a catch term for multiple societal changes after the late 18th century and the latter denotes a hope about a prospected core of these processes. While depicting modernization processes inevitably entails normative suppositions, the alleged principle of them - or to speak in a linguistic metaphor: »performance« and »ground rule« - should not be confused with these processes.

I think this distinction is rather helpful to grasp the concrete mixture of multicentered »realities«. This is what Bloch talks about with his famous *Ungleichzeitigkeit des Gleichzeitigen*.

However, one has to keep in mind that to talking about »unevenness« and »irregularities« is only an ex post perspective. For the »aborigines« there is no such thing as a »dominating process«. For example, the Andersons (1967) in their influential study on institutional change have described the nineteenth century as a showdown between the »two societies«, with the new one to win out, of course. Recently Arno Mayer has opposed this account to hold up the opposite and painted a picture of a victorious »old society«. Otto Biisch (1974: 212-15) has translated this dichotomy into a cleavage model in which the parties of the industrial revolution stand against the pre-industrialistic parties.

Neither was *really* the case. All there was are individual and collective actors with concrete plans and interests. It is even an essentialistic fallacy as Wiesenthal (1987) recently has shown in his analysis of the conflict on work-time to consider power inferiority as causal for failures. Such actor and strategy centered analysis are the remedy for the reification of historical models. Unfortunately, hints like the ones given by Almond and others (cf. Almond et al. 1973) have not been pursued to much further in historical research.

As far as our research projects is concerned, we have been attracted by the subtle coverage of the European nation building by Stein Rokkan (Rokkan 1975), his account of the processes of extension and mobilization (Rokkan 1970), and his concept of territoriality and centre-periphery (Rokkan/Urwin 1983) (4). Based on this considerations we tried out a new look on German electoral history, namely neither to analyze at the electoral movements from the end result, that is the consolidated national state nor to stick to the region as sole unity of explanation but rather to capture the interactive relationship of regional specificity and overall nation building. The notion of »region« has to be temporalized so it can be used to differentiate nation-wide processes (5). This intention can be summed up in questions like:

- how did the »methods of secondary integration« work on the electoral movement?
- how can regional electoral studies comparatively be linked with the national level?
- did the fragmented, regionally, and socially based political cultures become integrated into an new emerging national culture?
- how did the traditional communication structures and mental orientations become transformed through new forms of political involvement?

3. Efforts and Obstacles of Building up Data Resources

As outlined our project concentrates on historical election data as indicators of long-term processes of nationalization, politicization and democratization especially of the the regional variations of nation-building process in Germany. To take full advantage of political data masses as a source of evidence, however, technical infrastructure becomes an important prerequisite for reliable analysis. For this purpose we are organizing the files in a SIR-based data bank. This will allow us to link up disparate statistics at different levels of aggregation and different kinds of data (6).

We have data on four kinds of level:

- 1) On the national level all election returns in the 397 constituencies (Wahlkreise) in 13 Reichstag-elections; also adapted data on social protest incidents; the political map of Germany has also been digitalized on the level of constituencies and using SAS/Graphics we will be able to visualize interesting variations;
- 2) on the state level (besides pure aggregated data) a few scattered election returns in Prussia, Lübeck, Braunschweig and Lippe;
- 3) election data on the intermediate level (*Stadt, Landkreis, Urostei* and so on), which for the most part are aggregations of the
- 4) borough level. We have reconstructed time-series of precinct and ward turnouts in 12 Reichstag-constituencies making up for more then 10 000 election results.

For our research questions it is obviously necessary to furnish this »raw« electoral data base with ecological data. We have started to supplement the election returns with ecological data (7), but it is very unevenly distributed. Up to this we have put up ecological data collections:

- 1) On the national level we have socio-structural data on all of the 397 constituencies;
- 2) on the state level some data on agricultural structures and on the state of Lippe; a few scattered election returns in Prussia and Lippe;
- 3) on the intermediate level some data of the urban structure;
- 4) on the borough level only sparse data on population and religion.

Of course, for social research it is not enough to rely on data masses. Statistical-quantitative analysis has to be amended by qualitative inspections. For this purpose we have been collecting regional party statements, studied political articulation through local papers, and checked out available historiographic accounts on regional developments (8).

We think it very important to recognize the growing inclination of the »Landesgeschichte« to incorporate modern political and sociological methods, (cf. Hauptmeyer 1987) The new regional historiographic accounts are going to be an impressive source for background information, that has

not yet properly been tapped by election researchers. Also the renewed interest of geographers in matters of territory and territoriality (9) will open up new paths in interdisciplinary efforts.

But still, being such a small research group (10), we found it impossible to dig very deeply into the micro analysis of regional electoral history and its social background. This has impeded the joint analysis of precinct and national level electoral movements. We are hoping to cooperate with historians to compensate on this matter and furnish the small scale analysis with a quantitative layered national context, but we have not gone very far on this front unfortunately (11).

4. Problems of Electoral History in Emperor Germany

It has been argued, that the German election returns have decisively been controlled from above. Especially Bismarck is said to turn elections into »caesaristic plebiscits«. Later on Wilhelmine patriotism should have been successfully misused in electoral campaigns in order to guarantee particular politics.

This image does not seem to conform with the electoral performance of those groups like *Sozialdemokratie*, and *Fortschritt* and last not least *Zentrum* that commonly had been under heavy attack as »*Reichsfeinde*« (Immerfall/Steinbach 1987: 73-78). On this issue we would side with William Clagett et al. (Clagett et al. 1982), who very intelligently have shown that the important cleavages had been put on the road by Bismarck but that they had been entrenched before. Apt politicians are a necessary but not sufficient condition for potential conflicts to find expression in opposing groups.

Now, we do not argue, that manoeuvres by state bureaucrats and others did not have any effect. We know about successfully staged campaigns. There was a lot of black money involved and good connections to the press as well (Naujoks 1979). This all sounds quite familiar, by the way. Rather, it seems that this activities triggered processes that could eventually not be controlled by those that unleashed them. (Immerfall/Steinbach 1987: 77).

What is at work here are contra-intentional processes, a type of dynamic interaction which have not found proper acknowledgement in historiography (Immerfall 1988). Elster (1981: 167-74) rather calls them »contra-final« processes to remind us that it is not ignorance on the odd-end-chain, that leads to unwanted consequences. Bismarck knew very well what he was doing when battling the Liberals with custom regulation issues. In a certain way he was even successful because he was able to split the Liberals. But politicians that Bismarck had manipulated so masterfully eventually turned parliament into a political arena that hardly could be managed within the realm of the imperial power balance.

The manipulations of the domestic scene were not so effective in installing a workable parliamentary majority but they may very well have helped to pervert political conflict. As first shown by Schieder (1961), patriotism did not serve as social bonding for political competitors but as tool for reciprocal excommunication. The most narrow-minded and intransigent ones but also the most inspired in methods of modern propaganda were of course the Conservatives. Looking at the 1909 tax reforms Schorske (1981: 219) holds that the Conservatives could only understand the threat of force, could respond in the last consequence only to fear. In this situation, Steenson (1981: 231, 235) rightly adds, the desires on the matter of reform or revolution that was stirring the SPD actually made little difference because there was precious little room for action in the political system and neither course could have reduced the party's radical image.

These aggressive ignoring each other claims has been backed up by the diverging socio-structural profiles of the parties. This is true of other party systems as well but in Germany this socio-structural ties even were getting stronger (Immerfall 1987d). And even worse, cultural and socio-economic cleavages usually did not run across each other.

It all made up to what Suval (1985: 6ff., 55ff.) has called »affirmative voter«. This arrangement does indeed guarantee stability for a given space of time but also is unable to meet severe challenge and adapt in times of crisis. The only party formation that did not have such basis, the Liberals, did not found it rewarding to hold up their »universalistic« stand. This weakness of liberalism should become a burden for Weimar.

As a result of our research we can give an impression of the deep entrenchment of the parties on *both* the economic and the religious front (12). Thus, there is a point for Büsch's dichotomy for calling attention to this fierce defence of the status quo. There simply has not been the resignative and forward looking nobles of a Henry Peel but a determinate and somewhat paternalistic *Junker* like Oldenburg-Janaschau who held it be the *Kaiser's* prerogative to shoot down an indignant Reichstag. But on the other hand this means, first, to neglect the modernization of the party system as a whole (Immerfall 1987d) and also of single parties (Nipperdey 1962) and, second, to underestimate the internal differences within each parties. Liberals present themselves in a regional extraordinary varying way, the Zentrum lived through several severe transformations, and even for the party, that is thought to be most monolith, regional variations have been shown (Saldern 1984).

So - at the risk of oversimplification - one could say that each party (but the Liberals) found »secure« niches for surviving. It seemed safer to attack from there than wage the break-out into another camp or even try to seize governmental power through parliament. This is a rather comfortable po-

sition for the Conservatives but even the Social democrats have found consolidation in the presumption that time is inevitable on their side. This is in accordance with Ritter's (13) analysis of the ideological development of the German parties.

Mutually exclusive social bases of parties are, of course, not unique to Imperial Germany. And it is certainly not a matter of good or bad. Like we said above, the immobilism may have both helped to resist onslaughts from above (This is the thrust of Steinbach seminal work on Lippe) *and* prevented adaptation as well. We have to entangle a complex and tense mixture of diverging interests *and* transmitted value conceptions that hardly could coexist for a long time. For this reason, Eley and others (14), who insist on the similarity of German socioeconomic development with other advanced capitalist states run into the risk neglecting the fact that slight distinctions in political and cultural conditions at a given point of time *can* make large differences in the course of history. I think, we need more conceptions to capture analytically these diverging conditions and to bring forward testable hypotheses about their effects (Immerfall 1987c). Otherwise it is even more impossible to avoid the fallacy of »omniscient descendants«.

One distinction to western neighbours is the timing and the degree of the mobilization of the German electorate. The impulse initially came from above: the Prussian bureaucratic elite, to which the local elite reacted either nationally hostile or nationally enthusiastic. These were the high-days of Liberalism, but turned loose a wave of mobilization that eventually became an agent of breaking but not replacing traditional deference. As Margaret L. Anderson (1986:113f.) puts it, looking at the effects of the *Kulturkampf*: »In the longer run, the democratization of ecclesiastical authority surely limited the hierarchy's confidence in their ability to lead the faithful where the faithful did not want to go. Knowing Germany's twentieth-century history, we may regret this. But we either like emancipation or we do not. We can't have both ways.«

5. Next Steps and Open Questions

Someday, hopefully, it will be possible to integrate all data efforts from researchers like Falter, Mann, Best, and others to a comprehensive German historical election data base. The student of electoral history should eventually be able to track down a certain region all along from the present to the national assembly in 1848. Incorporation and other furnish is with necessary steps and find some solution to boundary solution.

These sounds great but is not very realistic in the moment. Until then we have to concentrate ourselves on smaller programs. I will present a

subjective list of problems to be tackled next with yielding results.

1.) We have been able to show, that it is possible to reconstruct randomly time series election returns. Thus we have a huge amount of data mass which are not properly tapped yet. There is a closer cooperation between history and historical sociology a *sine qua non* for further progress.

2.) On all level of aggregation boundary change is the rule. But there is no concentrated statistical research effort on this problem (15). Most urgent are automatic probability procedures for constructing stable units through time. The recent advancements in ecological regression (cf. Thomsen 1987; Falter/Zintl 1988) should be applied here.

3.) Social historical scientists have concentrated themselves on quantitative data. Data basis should furnish qualitative data to a greater degree. Thus causal pathways of historical development could be spelled out more testable. For example, we are experimenting with qualitative data to see if regional party variations could be accounted for by historical preconditions.

4.) Critics of historical social science are correct insofar as the central concepts are usually not »translated« into everyday perspective. What really means a »religious cleavage«, how to spell »region« out? To show social basis quantitatively is not to presume the existence of a »milieu«. The latter can be very different in different places. One has to test if the necessary abstract term catch the multiple realities. The task is set by Max Weber's foundation of social science as a conjunction of understanding and explanation.

Notes:

- 1) This »facts« are of course not so »factual« at all - this is the thrust of all major concepts for social research but orthodox marxism (cf. Bogumil/Immerfall 1985).
- 2) An example was the podium discussion at the meeting of the German historians in 1984 (Briiggemeier/Kocka 1987).
- 3) This is spelled out clearly in Giddens 1984.
- 4) Cf. my summary review in *Neue Politische Literatur* 32/3 (1987). Steinbach and me are preparing a German edition of Stein Rokkan.
- 5) Steinbach, P., 1986: *Politisierung und Nationalisierung deutscher Regionen 1865-1933*. (= Working-Paper).
- 6) Our efforts have been impaired by the fact, however, that the University of Passau is financially not able to place the necessary software at our disposal. Therefore we have to use software in Munich which is time-consuming and costly. The more costly social research gets the more problems smaller institutes are going have.

- 7) Here we have also tried to fit alien data **efforts** into our data base. The researchers who generously provided data were:
 - Krause (1984) and **Blotevogel on city structure** (cf. **Blotevogel/Hommel/Schöller 1982**),
 - Tilly and Hohorst (1976) **on social protest**
 - the »Section for the **Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte bei der Historischen Kommission zu Berlin**« on sociostructural data, with which we have a joint agreement for further publications (cf. Nöcker 1987a,b; Neugebauer-Wölk 1987).
- 8) It is planned to publish a bibliography on historical election sources and a compilation of regional party statements.
- 9) For Germany, see the discussion on **territoriality and regional identity** in *Berichte zur deutschen Landeskunde* 1984, Bd.58, pp. 29-54, 1986, Bd.60, and *Geographische Zeitschrift* 1987, Bd.75.
- 10) One assistant and two studentic collaborators, Birgit Westermeyer and Paul Thurner. Westermeyer is working on Scandinavian comparative research, Thurner on French ecological research.
- 11) We started cooperation only with one regional historian. This is Robert Leicht who is writing a thesis on Rosenheim.
- 12) Cf. Immerfall, S., 1988: *Social Cleavages of Wilhelmine Party-System*. (= Working-Paper).
- 13) See his still **superb introduction to an important** reader in German party history (Ritter 1973).
- 14) The latest and **finally rather moderate** discussion on the peculiarities of Wilhelmine society can be found in Kocka (1987).
- 15) For diverging procedures, cf. Nöcker (1987a,b) and Alvhelm/Olausen/Sande (1984); for a discussion my review on Nöcker in *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* 1988, H.2.

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