
THE DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL RESTRUCTURING IN WESTERN EUROPE AND MALTA

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Introduction

'Left' and 'Right' have become clichés in political discourse: in popular and academic circles alike, the terms *left* and *right* are simplistic antithetical representations of a cluster of outlooks which may be said to represent political ideology. This is the pattern of beliefs which determine man's vision of the world both as it is and as he would like it to be. The term *left* conjures up such diverse political forms as 'pink' Euro-Communism, the welfare capitalism of Swedish social democracy, and the giants of Lenin and Mao. *Right* brings to mind a set of equally unhappy bedfellows: the autocratic regime of South Africa, and Italy's and West Germany's Christian Democrats as well as Thatcher and Reagan, the stalwarts of the 'New Right'.

The usage of *left* and *right* as explanatory tools is associated with their representation on a hemispherical spectrum which can therefore differentiate between various shades of moderacy and radicalism (See Figure 1). The analogy is in fact of French provenance: in the French Parliament, Communist deputies are obliged to occupy the extreme left set of seats, followed by the Socialist and the Social Democratic deputies and so on, with the extreme right seats reserved for the fascist-oriented parliamentarians.

Until the early 1970s, it appeared that West European politics was being characterized by either stable fragmentation of voter preferences or else by the decrease of the existing fragmentation. The spread of *left-right* electoral preferences appeared either ossified¹ or otherwise as taking a moderate, centrist orientation, with hardline extremist political parties of both *left* and *right* consistently losing ground.² However, such a case could not be made in the epoch which

1. Lipset & Rokkan (1967) argued that West European politics had coagulated, with religion, region, community, and social class persisting as the cardinal dimensions of political cleavage. A similar conclusion was reached by Rose & Urwin (1969) from an examination of persistence and change in 19 democracies between 1945 and 1968. Wolinetz (1979) concluded that most party alignments in post-war Western Europe were indeed stable until the 1970s with the exception of (i) fluctuations in the elections of the immediate post-war period – usually the result of temporary surges by Communist parties – and of (ii) France, which passed through the social upheaval of the Fourth Republic and witnessed the Gaullist phenomenon.
2. Kirchheimer (1966) proposed a dynamic model, suggesting an evolution of established political parties into 'catch-all' parties which would seek nationwide potential constituencies, trading off hard and fast ideological principles for the sake of capturing wider electoral interests. This would also result in smaller ideological differences between extant parties. This model was influenced by the 'end of ideology' thesis – see Bell (1961) – as well as by the US political system which has been described as the only pure catch-all two-party system in the Western World (Rose & Urwin 1969, p. 36).

followed: in the two last decades, it has been more correct to speak of a 'defreezing' of the West European party system.

The process which abruptly presented itself in the West European political system has been called one of political defreezing, realignment, or restructuring. Essentially, the process represents a rehabilitation of political party systems in the face of the changing class basis and perceptions of upcoming electorates and of the emergence of new issues of political cleavage other than the traditional segmental and economic ones. The reorientation has involved a general increased fragmentation of representative bodies, both within and outside the party system. It has also led to a shift in basic strategy by political parties as they have sought to adjust to the new political environment.

The Dynamics of Restructuring

a) One condition which has led to a restructuring of political systems in Western Europe has been the *reaction against the politics and policies of the post-war Welfare State*. This has apparently been catalysed by the so-called economic crisis of the 1970s. By a combination of circumstances, the post-war Western Governments had become increasingly responsible for the management of the economy.³ As a result, these Governments became increasingly held responsible for the well-being of the entire society. Providing full employment, controlling inflation, and sustaining economic growth became seen by electorates (and accepted by parties of both Left and Right) as a Government duty. All went well in the affluence and prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s; but a generation of high expectations succeeded: voters began to regard material security, increased prosperity, and continuing improvements in the quality of life as natural and automatic. Meanwhile, public expenditure had shot upwards and Governments began to find it increasingly more difficult to expand, or even maintain, pre-existing levels, social policy programmes without unacceptable increases in taxation. This led to the eruption of the crisis situation of the 1970s: Governments in Western Europe proved unable to control inflation, maintain full employment, and ensure a high level of economic growth.

The reaction has been a general revival of interest in 'old' Christian Democratic/Conservative values. Criticism has been voiced against the high costs of Government bureaucracy, exorbitant taxation, and excessive constraints on private enterprise, including unbridled trade union activity. These outcries are supported not only by an appropriate scientific and

3. These circumstances include the Great Depression and the Keynesian reaction; prolonged exposure to state economic intervention and planning under Fascism and wartime; the sharp increases in approval for Welfare State concern; and the necessity to plan for and even furnish the capital for re-investment in the period of reconstruction (Lipset, 1964).

ideological basis;⁴ but also by the long, prior experience of a mismanaged, inefficient public service which had cast the latter into general disrepute. The successes of the right-wing counter-movements was thus assisted by such and similar unsatisfactory performances of Keynesian economic policy (Chaloupek, 1985; Abel-Smith, 1985).

b) The dynamics of restructuring also came about as a result of a *well-observed sociological phenomenon*. The long epoch of political freezing had reduced the appeal of sectarian tendencies; some of these had been resolved in any case by the post-war politics of consensus, while persisting issues had lost much of their appeal to younger generations of voters anyway. Thus, parties had softened their political platforms to widen support and maintain a *raison d'être*. The institutionalization of parties in this manner has tended to moderate them and therefore to reduce the political-party ideological divides. This makes the parties concerned more indistinguishable in the eyes of upcoming voters for whom the issues which had led to the formation of the parties in the first place may be obsolete and totally irrelevant. This leads to reduced partisan loyalties with the established order and foments a tendency to look for alternative representative bodies which are more contemporary in outlook and at the same time may be better able to mobilize discontent and fulfil expressive functions.⁵

c) This process is enhanced by the parallel *decline of party allegiances*. Out of traditional dimensions of political cleavage, the economic *class* cleavage has tended to persist as a post-war major parameter. But evidence seems to suggest that even class criteria do not seem to have remained all – powerful determinants of political party choice.⁶ Reasons for this weakening may be found in the changes undergone by the Western advanced industrial societies: the inheritance of parental partisanship tastes has been diluted because of increased social mobility and exposure to wider, more

4. These include supply-side economics and such texts as Friedman & Friedman (1979) and Hayek (1976).
5. The decreased relevance of long-established institutions to younger generations leading to the foundation of more expressive, democratic structures which, if successful, become institutionalized in their turn . . . This process has been called 'the iron law of degeneration' (Meister, 1973).
6. Rose (1982) shows that since 1964, no more than one-fourth of British voters have persistent political loyalties tied to class. Zuckerman (1982) argues that class-based divisions cannot be said to be persistent and widespread. Rose & Urwin (1969) consider ethnicity and religion to be stronger determinants of party allegiance than social class in Western Europe.

diverse sources of information and communication. The traditional working class has made social, political, and economic gains through the extension of citizenship rights and franchise (Bendix, 1969), the growth of redistributive practices (Lipset, 1964), high levels of economic expansion, and improvement in factory conditions (Goldthorpe *et alii*, 1969). The resulting *embourgeoisement* has led to an increased readiness by members of the lower social classes to associate readily with middle-class values and therefore middle-class parties of the Right.

d) Furthermore, *the working class itself is undergoing structural change*: The phenomenon of industrialization, the uprooting of rural workers, their proletarianization and their bringing together in large numbers to undertake routinized work processes had led to the growth of trade union consciousness and of mass leftist support (Mann, 1973) and to a decimation of the Christian Democratic/Conservative vote (Irwing, 1979). The process is still underway in a number of countries or regions where industrialization has been a late-comer. By and large, however, in most of the industrialized nations, the process is now reversed: the industrial environment has reached a saturation point and is subsequently in decline, with the traditional working class retreating under the composite impact of new technology, cheap imports, rationalization, robotization, and structural unemployment.⁷ Over and above this, the remaining production units which engage human labour are increasingly being parcelled out into 'island production' sites where small size, relative isolation, and paternalist management techniques diffuse class and trade union consciousness to a minimum.⁸ The classical strongholds of unionism and leftist support – transport workers, dock workers, miners, and shipbuilders – are amongst the worst hit by this blind process. The working class seems to be dwindling to a small minority, especially if defined in terms of manual, non-supervisory workers who produce surplus value directly (Poulantzas, 1975). In such a situation, it seems that a continued appeal by parties of the Left directed only at the residual working class would lead to political suicide.

e) The decline of the traditional working class is accompanied by the *emergence of a 'new middle class'* – clerks, technicians, salesmen, bureaucrats, middle management, professionals – generally well-educated workers engaged in tertiary sector service occupations whose attitude to

7. On de-industrialization see, for example, Bluestone & Harrison (1982) and Thirlwall (1985).

8. See, for example, Mitter (1986) and Solinas (1982) for insights into this process in the United Kingdom and Italy respectively.

work and to authority tends to be more deferential, compliant, and conformist than proletarian, rebellious or class and power-conscious (Lockwood, 1966; Merton, 1968; Goldthorpe *et alii*, 1969). This is understandable because those workers fortunate enough to form part of 'core' staff are encouraged to commit themselves to the enterprise ethic and associate themselves with the interests of capital. This is achieved by comfortable salaries, ample job discretion, and autonomy, promotion prospects, job security, and professional status (Rus, 1984). The process finds expression today in the increasing disposition of such higher-salaried personnel to set up their own trade union organizations, separate and independent from their more proletarian counterparts.

f) A further explanation for the restructuring phenomenon in contemporary Western European politics is the effect which rampant, structural unemployment has had on ethnic relations. Chronic shortages of employment possibilities has led to outbreaks of *resentment and friction with minority groups* in many societies. The victims of this feeling are invariably the ethnic communities, with millions of members spread over the industrial cities of Western Europe. They had come from Portugal, Southern Italy, Yugoslavia, and other areas of the Mediterranean littoral at a time when Western Europe was experiencing a labour shortage. Then, the influx of workers willing to work without expecting too high a compensation was very welcome. Unwittingly, these workers tend to fall into the lowest rungs of the occupational ladder, indirectly contributing to the upward social mobility and *embourgeoisement* of the indigenous workforce. Today, with around 20 million unemployed in Western Europe, these immigrant workers are perceived as 'job thieves' by the locals. These immigrants also tend to serve as convenient scapegoats of community and urban violence and unrest. The resulting outcome, then, is a sprouting of both anti-immigrant sentiment as well as a demand for better law enforcement policies, both of which are championed by the parties of the Right.⁹

In spite of what has been described above, the composition and strength of the Left on the new class map may not be so despairing. It is true that the 'new middle class' is growing; but this labour segment is not homogeneous and most of it may be seen as occupying a 'contradictory class location' which makes them potential voters of the Left (Olin Wright, 1976). Also, the expansion of white-collar jobs has been accompanied by a pervasive process of de-skilling and routinization of such white-collar labour

9. Such effects are poignantly documented by Johnson (1981) with respect to France.

(Braverman, 1974). The new middle class may therefore be seen to hold the promise of being indeed a new working class (Parkin, 1968; Mallet, 1969; Touraine, 1971). Nevertheless, this potential new working class would *not* tend to be attracted by the traditional leftist battlecries of nationalization, extreme vertical redistribution of wealth, and universally applicable cradle-to-grave welfare provision.³ The rhetoric of class struggle and capitalist exploitation does not resonate so much in their ears.

The Political Consequences of Restructuring

Given these dynamics of restructuring, how were Western European party systems affected by these processes?

a) *Political fragmentation and the growth of small interest groups.* The decline of old partisan loyalties and the reaction against the politics and policy of the Welfare State both created fluid electorates which gave some support to new interest groups. Such interest groups lacked the financial and organizational strength of the larger political parties but they nevertheless operated with some effect owing to the increased access to the mass media in the democratic pluralist environment of the West. They also have the added attraction of being relevant to specific and contemporary issues. They do not have to adopt compromising attitudes for the sake of wooing other citizens under the organization's umbrella. They are therefore able to mobilize mass participation but, being interest specific, they tend to have glorious but short, meteoric careers.

Many such interest groups (such as the CND in Britain, the Nuclear Disarmament Movement on the Continent, the Feminist Movement, the Anti-Apartheid Movement) are organized outside the parliamentary system. The members' activism (if not also their votes) is therefore a loss to political parties. Indeed, the apolitical nature of such interest groups may have come about because the established political structure is perceived not to have responded (or not to have responded sufficiently) to a specific issue.

Within the political party arena, the increase in political fragmentation has been nevertheless remarkable mainly as a result of a plethora of new issues: membership in the European Economic Community (this was a major political issue in election campaigns in Britain, Norway, and Denmark); protest against a high level of taxation (Denmark); ecology (in nine West European countries); demands for further democratization (Britain, The Netherlands); and even an anti-ecology sentiment (The Auto Party in Switzerland). More interestingly, a fair number of new parties have emerged which represent a reawakening of traditional political cleavages which had been thought close to being defunct: language (Belgium); regional-

ism (Britain, Spain, France, Belgium, West Germany, and Italy); and also rural interests (the Farmers' Party in the Netherlands).

b) *A shift towards the Right in electoral preferences.* The changing composition of the electorate in social class terms and the impact of the macro-economic 'crisis' have both contributed to an increase in support for Rightist parties in West European elections in the last decade or so. The appeals of class reconciliation, concern for the security of the individual, rolling back the State machine, tax reliefs or other more extremist policies (such as tough anti-immigrant legislation and class revenge) have contributed to an overall, significant shift to the Right in electoral preferences across Western Europe during the 1980s. (See Appendix I).

c) *The Reorientation of the Left* – Indeed, for a time, it seemed that the arguments of the Left were dated and old-fashioned, belonging to an age when the concerns to build a welfare state and the assurance of union rights were important issues amidst the ruins of war and the immediately following period of reconstruction. Apparently, both the period of affluence and that of 'crisis' had reduced the Socialist appeal.

The correction adopted has been to present a more moderate Left – arguing less for nationalization, rampant redistribution, and revolutionary anti-capitalism. The spent force of the extreme left, Communist parties all over Europe (except in Italy, Portugal, Greece, and San Marino) is evidence of this (See Appendix I). Ideological emphasis on the class struggle is reduced – the appeals have shifted from a traditional working class to a wider, national basis; the language has also tended to shift from being radical and confrontative to being depolarizing and reformist. Sometimes, one has to had to fight it out with more extremist hard-liners in order to make the transition to a more moderate image.¹⁰ Socialist parties have indeed strengthened their electoral base and have assumed a catch-all look in Spain, France, the Netherlands, and Greece.¹¹ Their status as 'natural parties of government' in Scandinavia since the 1920s has not waned (Castles, 1978).

There are of course serious dangers in Socialist parties becoming more

10. Examples in this respect include the recent attempts at policy re-deployment by the British Labour Party and the defeat of the extreme-left faction at the 1979 Spanish Socialist Party Congress. (Share, 1985), p. 93 – 6.
11. In Italy, 'catch-all' status on the Left is still held by the Communist Party, the largest in Western Europe. It has, however, succeeded in being so by adopting a more moderate platform since the events of the 'hot autumn' of 1969. See Hine (1978).

centrist, Social Democratic, in orientation. They may lose the votes of ideological leftists who will perceive them as too soft on key issues, or as having outrightly sold out to capitalism. The newly-formed social democratic entities may nevertheless not attract or maintain votes from the new working class. And in the coming of a post-industrial and leisure society, the labouring condition itself may lose its priority as a key social experience which moulds the political expectations and beliefs of citizens.

d) *The politics of de-structuring* – Another problem facing all political parties in Western Europe – but more seriously those of the Left – is the growing extent of the apoliticization of potential voters. Expanding political competences and resources of contemporary electorates are reducing the need of the dependence on partisan cues, consequently leading to a decline of partisan, often lifelong, attachments. This process brings into existence a large pool of apolitical individuals who lack party ties. The growth of citizen action groups and apolitical protest movements are indicators of this process. One consequence of such destructuring is that small, issue-specific parties may be further strengthened and increased pressures may be brought to bear on established parties to respond more faithfully to public opinion and to introduce a stronger degree of accountability to electorates (Dalton, 1984; Flanagan and Dalton, 1984). A ‘post-materialist’ generation of citizens is apparently emerging which, armed with a higher level of formal education and freed from the threat of material deprivation and war, will assign a higher priority to non-material higher order needs (Maslow, 1954; Inglehart, 1977). Such priorities include democratization of political structures and industrial democracy (Levin, 1981) as well as ecology (Lauber, 1983).¹² Such post-materialists do not tend towards hard and fast partisan loyalties but most are likely to identify ideologically with the Left (Muller-Rommel, 1985; Savage, 1985). This implies a further potential loss of leftist votes going either to small parties or being lost altogether to extra-parliamentary allegiances, increasing further the relative strength of the Rightist vote.

The Maltese Condition

How does the Maltese condition fit into this picture? Malta’s two major

12. This is an important explanation behind the spectacular growth of environmental or ‘green’ pressure groups and political parties in Western Europe. Green parties have become a significant minority in the Luxembourg, West German, and Austrian Parliaments (See also Appendix 1).

political parties have crystallized their support over the last twenty years. They have become 'catch-all' parties sufficiently institutionalized and involved in grassroots organization to remain dominant forces in the democratic contest and to thwart all attempts so far at establishing significant alternative political parties.¹³ Both the Malta Labour Party (MLP) and the Nationalist Party (NP) have emerged from rather rigid social class and regional positions and expanded to appeal to all potential voters in Malta and Gozo, trading off in time hard-and-fast ideological principles for the sake of capturing wider electoral interests. Intense feelings of partisan sympathy may, in fact, reflect a closing ideological divide between the two parties and, therefore, a greater theoretical possibility of voters switching allegiances across party lines. Since the magnitude and direction of such 'floating' is probably what nowadays determines eventual local election outcomes, there is a continuous concern (especially by party officials) for preserving and cultivating the loyalty of the converted.

The local labour market situation has also undergone rapid change. Rural-to-urban migration and industrialization (particularly the very rapid increase of manufacturing employment and the corresponding exponential decline of full-time agricultural work) contributed to an expansion of the traditional working class. This labour market condition may therefore be seen as a contributor to the leftist majorities achieved in Maltese general elections ever since the granting of universal suffrage in 1947 up till 1981.¹⁴

It is probably coincidental that the Nationalist majority obtained in the 1981 general elections corresponded to the apex of manufacturing employment in the Maltese economy. The vulnerable export-oriented industries fell victim to an international recession. Subsequently the share of private manufacturing employment has fallen from 24.1 per cent of the total local labour force in 1980 to 21.9 per cent in 1988.¹⁵ In spite of contrary market indicators, the Socialist Governments of 1971 – 87 invested considerably in

13. Other than the MLP and NP, seven other political parties successfully obtained seats in the Maltese Parliament since the 1947 general elections. Of these, four survived only one election campaign. Only the Democratic Action Party and the Constitutional Party succeeded in electing deputies in two successive general elections. The largest and longest-lasting alternative was Boffa's Malta Workers' Party, a splinter from the MLP in 1949 which was, however, totally re-absorbed within the MLP by 1955 (See Appendix 2).
14. This excludes the 1962 and 1966 elections, which are problematic to analyse in view of the 'mortal sin' condition.
15. Computed from the Economic Survey. See Economic Division – OPM (1980) p. 72 and (1988) p. 48.

parastatal manufacturing, shiprepair and shipbuilding sectors which now provide employment to almost 10,000 workers. Was this an explicit attempt to preserve or cultivate sites of traditional proletarianization and, therefore, of leftist-oriented voter-workers?

In the meantime, tertiary sector, service-oriented activities have expanded and now account for practically half of Malta's jobs (excluding the burgeoning underground economy). Apart from a steady 25,000-strong civil service, most of the new employment opportunities are found in the private sector and are directly or otherwise involved in tourism. Most consist of self-employment or family concerns. Such entrepreneurs are more likely to support and press for trade liberalization and tax breaks than to clamour for egalitarian, restrictive, and 'big government' practices. This is, however, a very sweeping generalization: given the widespread underground economy, many wage and salary earners in the formal economy are self-made own account workers after working hours. Is the result a schizophrenic class location, with proletarian sentiments coloured by formal work experience juxtaposed to a more liberal, conservative emanating from the informal labour process?¹⁶

The Welfare State in Malta is, generally speaking, not under threat. Rather, its defence and upkeep appear to be a priority for parties of both, left and right. The public expenditure to maintain the Welfare State has, however, invariably spiralled upwards over the years.¹⁷ The increase in cost has been partly maintained by increases in revenue from income and expenditure tax, income from property, and profits from public enterprise.¹⁸ Tax rate increases may, however, become an unavoidable issue in view of the increasing proportion of senior citizens and a longer life expectancy which together act to increase demand for old age pensions.¹⁹

The improved quality of life – the standard of living has apparently

16. Although this issue begs much further research, it may be related to the existence of two levels of normative reference – a consensual one and a conflictual one – identified by British action sociologists from the study of industrial relations. See Parkin (1982) p. 95, and Batstone *et alii* (1976). A similar dichotomy is reflected in Maltese perceptions of class structure and class relations. See Zammit (1984).
17. Public social security and health expenditure doubled in real terms between 1977 and 1986. See Central Office of Statistics (1988), p. 26.
18. *Ibid.* See discussion in Briguglio (1988), Ch. 7.
19. The 65+ age group constituted 9.9% of the Maltese resident population in 1985. This percentage is expected to increase to 15.5% by the year 2000. See the latest available Census Report in Central Office of Statistics (1986), p. 56.

doubled in real terms over the last thirty-odd years²⁰ – has been credited as the prime cause of embourgeoisement and the resulting heightened preference by working class citizens for middle class political leaders and electoral programmes. Over and above this, better educational services and the satisfaction of lower order, survival needs via minimum wage legislation, welfarism, equal wage for equal work for women, and other such measures, has apparently contributed to an increasing concern for post-materialist considerations by the Maltese electorate. Most evident at the present time is the environmental issue: the proliferation of new building sites, the destruction of natural habitats and historical monuments, the building of the new power station are some of the topics which consistently show that, even in Malta, the political agenda appears to be increasingly turning green.²¹

Another post-materialist consideration which may gather momentum in the next few years is the demand for greater democratization at work and in society. Profit sharing, worker directors, and civic councils are aspects of this movement beyond lower order 'bread and butter' issues. The extent to which these calls for participatory management and politics are co-optative ploys by established power structures and not a reflection of genuine grass-root demands and sentiments remains as yet an open subject for debate.²² All the same, even if such initiatives are mere cosmetics of democratization, they nevertheless provide useful experiences which are in themselves educational for those involved and which may generate a spill-over effect in the sense that they may trigger demands for still further democratization.²³

Finally, Malta is apparently lucky to be blessed with the absence of religious, racial, or tribal conflict. There is, however, much to support the proposition that the Maltese people are today two 'nations'. In spite of many policy convergences by the MLP and NP, perceived outcomes of policy decisions as well as the political behaviour of partisan supporters is more consonant to the analogy of ethnic conflict: the 'Reds' and the 'Blues' are amongst us, each group armed with its particular economic, religious,

20. This statistic was computed with the assistance of Dr Lino Briguglio, economist.

21. That 'green' is the world's new political colour is proclaimed, for example, in *The Economist*, 15 October 1980. See also Apap Bologna (1980), Ch. 1.

22. Witness the contributions of political party and trade union representatives during a seminar on worker participation held at the University of Malta in September 1988. These have been subsequently published. See Zammit, ed. (1989), *passim*.

23. The transformative versus co-optative potential of participatory schemes is discussed by Stephens (1980), Chapter 1.

and moral values, each with a fully-fledged cultural industry to ensure preservation and self-reproduction (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1975). Given the two-party structure of Maltese politics, sympathizers of the party in opposition tend to view themselves as an oppressed ethnic group.²⁴

There is a second parameter of internal division, a geographical one, apart from the partisan divide. The 25,000 inhabitants of the sister island of Gozo, tend to identify themselves as Gozitans rather than Maltese. Apart from the very obvious physical separation – an 8-kilometre isthmus – Gozitans have consistently protested that they are the perennial losers in Maltese politics.²⁵ This general feeling of discrimination coalesced into political expression when the Jones Party and the Gozo Party contested the 1947 general elections on behalf of Gozitan interests. The latter party declared that Gozitans were tired of political adventurers who went to their island at election time and then disappeared.²⁶ Although ‘Gozitanism’ has not reared a political head since then, both major parties must constantly stave off the threat by political mobilization and/or appeasement.²⁷

A Logic of Industrialism?

The approach adopted in this paper approximates closely the ‘Logic of Industrialism’ thesis propounded by eminent American political scientists almost three decades ago (Kerr *et alii*, 1960). The argument is itself highly ideological and seeks to provide a scientific, almost evolutionary and deterministic justification for the demise of the Left as a relevant social and political movement in advanced democratic states. The model takes the USA’s current political party structure as the shape of things to come in other democratic states, trailing behind the US in economic (and therefore also political) maturity. If the USA presents ‘the image of the European future’ (Lipset, 1964, p. 272) then the logic’s general postulate appears confirmed by the rightward shift in European politics which finds its alleged

24. For a recent contribution on this theme, see Serracino-Inglott (1988), pp. 365 – 373.

25. A recent statement on Gozitans as a minority has also been pronounced by the Bishop of Gozo. See *Il-Ġens*, 6.1.89.

26. *The Times of Malta*, 21 April 1947, quoted in Pirota (1987), p. 73.

27. It is likely that Gozo as a district sees the highest concentration of party mass meetings during electoral campaigns. One may add that the red-blue partisan divide appears to be taking a physical, regional form with respect to the south and north of Malta respectively. The MLP obtained 57.4% of votes cast in the southern districts (I to VII) during the 1987 general election, the NP 61.9% of votes cast from northern districts except Gozo (VIII to XII).

ultimate destination in the contemporary development of the 'New Right' movement in both US Republican and Democratic parties where anti-establishment populism and 'law and order' sentiments are the order of the day (Schneider, 1987).

The major criticism levelled at the Logic of Industrialism thesis is that no significant social and political movement allows itself to be exclusively determined by economic change. There is a complex interplay between social movements and their political and economic contexts, such that pressure groups, trade unions, and political parties initiate their own reforms to counter and adapt to newly emergent labour markets and the associated cultural and political conditions. This is indeed the crucial lesson to be learnt by political movements seeking to remain relevant forces in the democratic contest: to face upcoming challenges rather than invest in anachronistic confrontations and the tactics which may have paid off in the past. The Social Democratic successes in Scandinavia are possibly heavily indebted to their singular achievement in advancing labour interests within the general advance of Big Capitalism.

Synthesis

The decline of partisan loyalties, the changing structural composition of the labour force, and the catalysing effect of the socio-economic 'crisis' have together led to a de-freezing of long-enduring partisan alignments and the emergence of neo-conservatism, small issue-specific parties and non-parliamentary interest groups. Class-based political cleavages appear to be progressively intercepted by a new political dimension based on materialist/post-materialist considerations over the quality of life. In the face of this contemporary deterioration of traditional leftist appeal, a number of leftist political parties have adopted a more moderate, reformist image with apparent success. Ideologically, this involves a shift to a more centrist platform, replacing the revolutionary elimination of capitalism with the evolutionary reform within capitalism as a major rallying call. This can make leftist parties successful at co-opting the expanding cadres of middle-class, service-employed, and post-materialist citizenry. Such a tendency is, as expected, most visible in the northern, more developed, countries of Western Europe.

Comparative developments in Malta lag behind in time and momentum. Such lags are the result of a number of reasons. Firstly, Malta's development status is, speaking relatively to Western Europe, certainly not yet of age. Secondly, the large public sector distorts free-market dynamics and the associated cultural and political changes. Thirdly, the small size of the

island and its astronomically high population density preserve the influence of family, partisan sympathies across generations, in spite of a nuclearization of the basic family unit. Finally, the same geographical conditions of size and human density make it easier for the political parties to cultivate blind respect by an elaborate grassroots organization which can provide almost cradle-to-grave exposure to partisan socialization. This, by and large, perpetrates partisan dogmatism, which is very much insensitive to changing environmental, socio-cultural, or economic conditions.

Still, in spite of these lagging devices, one may all the same hypothesize that a certain amount of re-structuring on the lines of other West European nations is already taking place in Malta and that this re-structuring is influencing the local political party arena. It may be argued that the increasingly better educated and affluent voting population is developing (albeit so far imperceptibly) a new political culture and is exerting new pressures on the established political structure. New issues – such as ecology, democratization, accountability of power holders, and efficient public sector management – are being introduced into the political cauldron. Whether the MLP and NP succeed in reconciling themselves to these new ingredients, or whether the latter will become the launching pads of new, more interest-specific political parties, remains yet to be seen.

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APPENDIX 1 'Left' – 'Right' Shifts in West European Elections

An analysis of 19 general elections in 19 West European countries between 1983 and 1987 reveals the following trends when results are compared with those of the immediately preceding national election:

*Communist and extreme left parties lost votes percentage-wise in *all* cases. The most spectacular communist decline occurred in France (from 16.2 per cent of the vote in 1981 to 9.8 per cent in 1986).

*New parties contesting elections on a right-wing platform (tax cuts, law & order, pushing back the Welfare State, anti-immigration and other such measures) were generally successful. In particular the National Front in France (9.7 per cent of the vote in 1986), in Iceland (the Citizen Party with 10.9 per cent of the vote in 1987) and in Greenland (the Issittrup Partii with 4.5 per cent of the vote in 1987). *No* new left-wing party contesting elections for the first time in the period under review registered a significant proportion of votes.

*Environment, ecology, or simply 'green' parties registered increases in *all* elections where they contested. Spectacular successes were achieved in Luxembourg (5.2 per cent of the vote in 1984) and Austria (4.8 per cent in 1986) where these parties contested for the first time.

*Electoral shifts towards parties of the Right have been observed in Denmark (1984), France (1986), Greenland (1987), Spain (1986), Portugal (1987), and Sweden (1985). Centre-Right majorities were preserved in Italy (1987), the United Kingdom (1987), the Netherlands (1986), West Germany (1987), and Malta (1987) where there has been little preferential shift between elections.

*Electoral shifts towards parties of the Left have been observed in Luxembourg (1984), Norway (1985), Iceland (1987), and the Faroe Islands (1984). Centre-Left majorities were preserved in San Marino (1983) and Austria (1986) where there has been little preferential shift between elections.

*Belgium (1985) and Switzerland (1983) remain multi-party centrist political systems with no generalized distinguishable trend or ideological preference.

Source: *Keesing's Archives*, various issues, 1983 – 87.

The Outcome of Maltese Post-War National Elections: 1947–1987
 (The number in brackets stands for the number of parliamentary seats gained)

	1947	1950	1951	1953	1955	1962	1966	1971	1976	1981	1987
Registered Voters	140703	144516	151979	148478	149380	166936	161490	181768	217785	238341	246292
Actual Voters	106116	106941	113368	119328	121243	151595	144873	168913	206843	225700	236720
Valid Votes	105494	106129	112625	118453	120651	150606	143347	168059	205440	224151	235169
Nationalist Party (NP)	19041 (7)	31431 (12)	39946 (15)	45180 (18)	48514 (17)	63262 (25)	68656 (28)	80753 (27)	99551 (31)	114132 (31)	119721 (35)
Malta Labour Party (MLP)	63145 (24)	30332 (11)	40208 (14)	52771 (19)	68447 (23)	50974 (16)	61774 (22)	85448 (28)	105854 (34)	109990 (34)	114937 (34)
Malta Workers Party (MWP)	—	24616 (11)	21158 (7)	14000 (3)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Constitutional Party (CP)	—	10584 (4)	9150 (4)	1385 —	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other Parties and Independents	23308 (9)	9166 (2)	2163 —	5117 —	3694 —	36370 (9)	12917 —	1858 —	35 —	29 —	511 —

Source: *Il-Qawmien* (Social Action Movement Publication), No. 647, June 1987, p. 7.