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EUROPEAN POLITICS IN TRANSITION

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European Politics in Transition

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For Amrita and Kris

Preface

We wrote this book because of a growing awareness that it has become difficult to teach courses on European politics or on comparative politics more generally that are comprehensive, comprehensible, and attuned to the dramatic contemporary changes in European society. We confess that we are sometimes envious of colleagues teaching American politics who may have an entire term to study a single branch of one government. In contrast, we must introduce whole societies, draw comparisons among entire political systems, and acquaint students with a range of often unfamiliar institutions, political problems, and intellectual approaches.

Increasingly, we comparativists have had to rely on articles and papers that are often too complex for students and always too scattered for instructors, or we have had to settle for textbooks that reflect a narrow and often out-dated understanding of European politics. Some mainly provide treatments of institutional arrangements. Many are limited to the “big four” — Britain, France, Italy, and West Germany — or treat whole regions of Europe without attention to the specificity of each country. Few are sufficiently up-to-date to explore the political implications of the economic recession and the policy responses that followed the energy crisis of the 1970s. None successfully bridges the gap between Eastern and Western Europe in addressing problems of democracy and economic coordination in complex industrial societies.

European Politics in Transition aims to provide an accessible and comprehensive introduction to European politics by presenting the political systems of Europe in terms of change and adaptation to new economic challenges and the increased social pressures that influence the processes of government. After an introductory essay that develops these themes, each of five Western European polities — Britain, France, West Germany, Italy and Sweden — is explored in a comprehensive and readable manner.

In separate chapters within each country unit, the authors trace the emergence of the modern constitutional order, the rise and fall of the postwar settlement, state institutions, social and political forces, and contemporary developments. These units are tied together thematically by a focus on the growth and decay of political consensus in postwar Western European politics and by attention to the growing tension between market processes and democratic demands. We are confident that, as a result, students will view political institutions and political behavior as integrally related to the lifeblood of political competition and conflict. We provide full coverage of institutions, even as we stress political processes, political economy, and the connections among social movements, party politics, and state policy formation.

The inclusion of a substantial unit on the Soviet Union makes the book particularly useful, as we consider in separate chapters the emergence of the Soviet state, the rise and fall of Stalinism, bureaucratic conservatism in the post-Stalinist era, state and party institutions, and the social forces at play in contemporary Soviet life. We also consider the examples of Poland and the Solidarity experience, the peace and environmental movements of East Germany, and other important East European cases. The Soviet unit concludes with an analysis of the Gorbachev team, highlighting potential economic reforms and new foreign policy directions.

Because of its comprehensive institutional, thematic, and geographical coverage, *European Politics in Transition* is appropriate for Western European politics courses designed with a variety of emphases: historical processes, the evolution of political institutions, political economy, political culture, and contemporary public policy. Due to its scope and approach, this textbook suits the design of many Introduction to Comparative Politics courses as well.

The writing is straightforward, and the chronology of events is clear. Terms and concepts are explicated in the text and concretely presented, since we assume students to have no prior background in European politics. The book is amply illustrated with maps and graphic presentations of important data, and selected bibliographies are provided for each unit and for comparative European politics more generally. The thematic emphasis reveals the continuities and contrasts in European politics, illuminating for students the advantages of a comparative approach. We hope that the consistent incorporation of recent scholarship in the field will catch the interest of teachers and excite students to further study.

* * *

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M.K.

J.K.

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Contents

PART I: *European Politics in Transition* 1 *Mark Kesselman • Joel Krieger*

- Industrialization, State Formation, and the Great Divide 3
- The Rise of the Postwar Settlement 9
- The Fall of the Postwar Settlement 17
- Conclusion 22
- Bibliography* 24

PART II: *Britain* 25 *Joel Krieger*

1. *The Emergence of the Modern British State* 26
 - The Principles of British State Formation 27
 - The Evolution of the Constitutional Order 37
 - The Implications for Contemporary British Politics 40
2. *The Rise and Fall of the Postwar Settlement* 44
 - The Rise of the Postwar Settlement 45
 - The Fall of the Postwar Settlement 53
3. *British State Institutions* 65
 - The Principles of British Government 65
 - The Executive 67
 - The Legislature 70
 - The Judiciary 77
 - Local Government 79
 - Para-Public Agencies and the Policy Process 80
4. *Social and Political Forces* 84
 - The Party System 85
 - Electoral Behavior 91
 - Interest, Class, and Party 97
 - Race, Gender, and New Social Movements 100
5. *British Politics in Transition* 104
 - The Emergence of the Thatcher Government 105
 - Contemporary British Politics: The Search for a New Accord 111

Thatcherism: The Institutional and Policy Implications	112
British Politics and the Thatcher Experiment	118
<i>Bibliography</i>	124

PART III: *France* 127

Mark Kesselman

6. <i>The Emergence of the Modern French State</i>	128
Principles of French State Formation	129
The Implications for Contemporary French Politics	141
7. <i>The Rise and Fall of the Postwar Settlement</i>	144
The Rise of the Postwar Settlement	144
The Fall of the Postwar Settlement	158
8. <i>State Institutions</i>	166
The Principles of French Government	166
The Triple Executive	170
The Truncated Parliament	178
The Constitutional Council	184
The Economic and Social Council	185
Local Government	186
Para-Public Agencies	187
The Policy Process	188
9. <i>Social and Political Forces</i>	191
The Party System	192
Interest Groups	205
Political Attitudes and Culture	210
10. <i>French Politics in Transition</i>	214
The Emergence of the Socialist Government	214
From Lyrical Illusions to a Socialism of Governance	220
The Conservative Backlash	223
<i>Bibliography</i>	225

PART IV: *Federal Republic of Germany* 227

Christopher S. Allen

11. <i>The Emergence of the Modern West German State</i>	228
The Principles of West German State Formation	229
The Implications for Contemporary West German Politics	245
12. <i>The Rise and Decline of the Postwar Settlement</i>	247
The Rise of the Postwar Settlement	247
The Decline of the Postwar Settlement	258

13. <i>State Institutions</i>	269
Principles of West German Government	269
The Executive	271
The Legislature	273
The Judiciary	276
Regional and Local Government	278
Para-Public Agencies	279
The Policy Process	280
14. <i>Social and Political Forces</i>	282
The Party System	282
Electoral Behavior	290
The Labor Movement	291
The Organization of Business	292
Interest Groups	294
Social Movements	295
Political Culture	297
15. <i>West German Politics in Transition</i>	300
The Emergence of the Kohl Government	300
Contemporary Politics: The Search for a New Accord	302
Institutional Implications	306
New Policy Implications	310
Transitional Tensions	313
Bibliography	315
PART V: <i>Italy</i>	319
Stephen Hellman	
16. <i>The Emergence of the Modern Italian State</i>	320
The Principles of Italian State Formation	320
Economic and Class Relations	324
Italy in the International Context Through World War I	330
Liberal Italy's Political Contradictions	332
Fascism's Rise to Power	336
The End of Fascism: The Implications for the Republic	340
17. <i>The Rise and Fall of the Postwar Settlement</i>	344
The Rise of the Postwar Settlement	344
The Fall of the Postwar Settlement	366
18. <i>State Institutions</i>	383
The Principles of Italian Government	383
The Executive	385
The Legislature	387
The Judiciary	390

Local Government 393
Public Administration and Para-State Agencies 396
Policy Processes: Continuity and Transition 400

19. *Social and Political Forces* 403

Italian Politics: Between Subcultures and Secularization 403
The Party System 405
The Organized Labor Movement 418
The Church 420
Social Movements 422
Political Culture: Continuity and Change 427

20. *Italian Politics in Transition* 430

The Emergence of the Craxi Government 431
The Search for a New Equilibrium 433
New (and Old) Policy Directions 441
Bibliography 447

PART VI: *Sweden* 451

Jonas Pontusson

21. *The Emergence of the Modern Swedish State* 452

The Principles of Swedish State Formation 452
Preindustrial Class Relations 456
The Industrial Revolution 459
The Evolution of the Constitutional Order 463
The Implications for Contemporary Swedish Politics 467

22. *The Rise and Fall of the Postwar Settlement* 471

The Postwar Settlement and Labor's Reformist Achievements 472
The Erosion of the Postwar Settlement 485

23. *Swedish State Institutions* 494

The Executive 494
The Legislature 499
The Judiciary 503
Local Government 505
Interest Groups and Corporatism 508

24. *Social and Political Forces* 513

The Labor Movement 514
The Bourgeois Parties 519
White-Collar Unions 523
Organized Business 525
New Social Movements 527
The Ideological Hegemony of Social Democracy 529

25. *Swedish Politics in Transition* 533

The Socialist Offensive 534

The Bourgeois Offensive 540

The New Social Democratic Government 541

Back to the Middle Way? 543

Bibliography 548

PART VII: *The Soviet Union* 551

Joan DeBardeleben

26. *The Emergence of the Soviet State* 552

The Principles of Soviet State Formation 552

The Old Order 556

The Revolutionary Movement 562

The Revolution and Its Dilemmas 569

27. *The Rise and Fall of Stalinism* 580

Stalinism and Revolution from Above 581

De-Stalinization: Transition to the Modern State 594

28. *Bureaucratic Conservatism and the Post-Stalinist Settlement* 600

The Post-Stalinist Settlement 601

The Decline of the Post-Stalinist Settlement? 608

29. *State and Party Institutions* 620

Principles of Soviet Government 620

The Party: Policymaker and Pacesetter 626

The State: The Administrative and Soviet Structures 636

The Policy Process 644

Local Government 645

Prospects for Democratization 647

30. *State and Society* 656

Shaping the New Soviet Person 656

Social Forces 664

Eastern European Examples 677

The Soviet Union: A New Socialist Culture? 688

31. *Soviet Politics in Transition* 692

The Gorbachev Team 692

Contemporary Politics: The Search for a New Accord? 698

New Policy Directions 701

Reflections on Change in the Soviet Union 716

Bibliography 719

Index 722

Maps

Europe 4

Britain 29

France 131

Federal Republic of Germany 231

German Unification under Bismarck 233

Italy 323

The Unification of Italy, 1859–1870 325

Sweden 455

The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe 554

Imperial Russia's Expansion in Asia 561

PART

I

*European Politics
in Transition*

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Joel Krieger

European Politics in Transition



Today European politics is in ferment, as it emerges from a period of unusual stability that characterized the first two decades of the postwar era. The last twenty years have also seen changes: fiscal crisis and stagflation; the decline of old parties as the standard-bearers of belief and the introduction of new, untraditional parties; and the resurgence of old Left ideologies and the emergence of new Left and new Right forces. The fragmentation of the international economic order strains domestic political coalitions; regional trading blocs, multinational corporations, and international financial institutions weaken the nation-state. The future direction of European politics can be discerned only by understanding the evolution of European societies and appreciating the diverse problems confronting them today.

This text seeks to go beyond “textbook” understandings. Politics in the narrow sense of governmental institutions and formal political processes (i.e., politics as “how a bill becomes a law”) is only part of a far more complex story, which involves not only political parties, voting behavior, and the institutions of government, but also the emergence of powerful forces in society outside the government. European politics involves social movements — from the English Chartists of the 1830s and 1840s, who demanded rights of political participation and democracy (some of which still have not been achieved), to the West German Greens Party today, who struggle for nuclear disarmament and ecological concerns and who reject domination by big government and big business. European politics also involves class conflicts between working people and the financial and business elite, conflicts that force the state to in-

tervene in the economy by regulating market forces, managing industrial conflict through political negotiations, and determining how the wealth of society is divided among competing social groups. European politics today involves regional, ethnic, racial, and gender divisions, and includes a range of governments with divergent policy orientations.

Today, Europe is a laboratory in which few political experiments are succeeding as planned and where no positive results seem easily replicated. The Western European states we cover in this text — Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, and Sweden — are in their third phase of political evolution since World War II. The first and longest phase, lasting from the late 1940s to the late 1960s, was a golden era of sustained economic growth and political stability; the second phase, which began in the late 1960s and lasted until the early 1980s, was marked by economic recession, resurgent class conflict, and anti-statist protest on both the left and right of the political spectrum. The third phase is under way today, as political fragmentation defies traditional lines of opposition: Left vs. Right; working class vs. bourgeoisie; socialism vs. capitalism. In the present period, political cleavages centering around class divisions, which were formed a century ago during the emergence of industrial capitalism, are being joined by new axes of political conflict whose outlines are not yet clear. Key issues include a revolt against the oppressive weight of public and private bureaucracies; growing conflicts and inequalities among generations; and struggles over the character, pace, costs, and benefits of technological change.

The Soviet Union has also undergone major political shifts in the postwar era: 1953 marked a crucial transition from Stalinism to the bureaucratic conservatism of Khrushchev and Brezhnev; and there is considerable speculation that the new generation of leadership represented by the Gorbachev team may bring a new, technocratic approach to problems of economic governance, international security, and the mobilization of political support.

To understand this contemporary period of uncertainty in European politics we need to examine earlier moments of transition, when European countries broke with the past and when political institutions were recast in new forms that have shaped the contemporary experience.

⤴ ***Industrialization, State Formation, and the Great Divide***

While it is common now for students, scholars, and policymakers to think of two Europes, East and West, this was not always the case. The

