Is the Conflict Between Left and Right Still the Best Way to Understand Political Competition in Europe? – A New Perspective on European Politics

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Abstract: The traditional dispute between the left and right wings is the norm of international politics and plays an important role in international relations. With the rapid development of European integration after the cold war and the continuous impact of multiple European crises, various political differences in Europe have become increasingly prominent and deepened. The competition between the left and right wings has indeed become an excellent perspective for understanding modern EU politics. However, if we only have this view, we will lose our overall vision. Therefore, we need to seek a new perspective and look at the competitive relationship between the left and the right more comprehensively. This paper analyzes the disadvantages of the traditional dispute between the left and right wings, tries to put forward a new point of view, and holds that the left wing and the right wing are not invariable but compete and learn from each other, and sometimes they restrict each other. Under specific historical conditions and national conditions, we can even live in harmony and make a country prosperous. This paper will help to provide new enlightenment and views for contemporary international political research.

1. Introduction

Generally speaking, there are usually various views and party disputes in the turbulent and complex European political and economic situation. However, this complication created many difficulties when we tried to analyze current European political events at the visual angle of the Left and Right. Therefore, there is a need to think about whether such a model can be applied to the current shape of Europe. If not, what else models can be used? Thoughts, opinions, and relevant proposals of the problem mentioned above are suggested in this paper.

If we investigate, the two political partisans' leanings apparently are based on opinions from voters. But the position of voters is not completely fixed, as they are more likely to be shifted than that of parties. Whenever there is a shift in the social or international context, a large number of voters would quickly shift their political positions. Even some extreme voters show tolerance at times rather than a deep aversion to centrism all the time. Duane Swank and Hans Georg Betz found that in the process of globalization, with the increase of immigration, the support for radical right parties increased, and the improvement of social welfare level could effectively restrain voters' support for radical right parties [1]. Luke March and Charlotte Rommerskirchen noted that, as the reverse side of globalization, when the anti-globalization and anti-EU sentiment broke out due to economic deterioration, the radical left populist parties were more likely to gain the support of voters. Still, the change in the number of immigrants was not correlated with the electoral performance of the radical left parties [2]. Matthijs

Rooduijn and Brian Burgoon found that populism is easily fostered by poor individual economic status. However, in the same situation, voters with populist orientation are more inclined to support radical left-wing populist parties when the immigration issue is not significant in society. Such voters are more likely to support radical right-wing populist parties when they are in good shape, but their own economy is struggling [3].

2. The drawbacks of the previous perspective in left and right-wing

Due to the brief and systematic concepts of using left and right-wing, it is easy to conclude the major sides of events as leftism or rightism. Simplifying a complicated political issue, the existence of neutral can be seen in trends. However, there are inevitable drawbacks to this methodology.

2.1 Brexit

In the process of Brexit, the main political parties are playing important roles in the referendum. For example, the Labor Party is a party that tends to be left-wing, and it supports to back EU. One of the biggest reasons the party members thought the laborers' rights would be significantly affected and the impact would harm the environmental protection and the manufacturing industry. In contrast, the UKIP and the Conservative, the parties which tend to leave the EU, are right wings. They insisted that Brexit could lead their country to a relatively free trade environment, and the United Kingdom could develop the businesses without inessential monitoring [4].

However, the fact is not that easy to conclude. After the EU referendum, the brexitists in the left-wing parties gradually occurred. The supporters emphasized the oppressed situation for workers under the EU's control. At the same time, the people who wanted to stay in the EU were worried that the increasing difficulty for migration after leaving would affect the workers' rights [5]. The two points are based on workers' benefit, and they are both against elitism, but the ways to interpret their behaviors are not merely based on the left and right wings. Their decisions were affected by many factors, like their own interest and the ways they evaluated the cost and benefits of Brexit.

2.2 The economic prosperity in Luxembourg

The traditional perspective also cannot explain regional prosperity in Europe, especially in small and peaceful countries. In these situations, there are almost no conflicts between political positions instead of cooperation. For these places, good economic conditions promoted the harmony between the left and right parties, and political harmony, in turn, promoted the improvement of economic conditions, thus forming a virtuous circle. Therefore, there are no serious disagreement among the people over economic issues and social wealth distribution issues. Under this circumstance, society appears to be more harmonious, and the degree of compromise between the left and right parties is higher. This is manifested in the fact that the left-wing party has a right-wing tendency, and the right-wing party has a left-wing tendency.

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg was established in 1839. The main languages of the country are German, French, and Luxembourgish. The overall characteristics of the country are economic prosperity and social harmony. There is no obvious ethnic contradiction between ethnic groups using different languages. In the election in Luxembourg, the main parties were the Christian Social People's Party, Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party, and Democratic Party. The Socialist Workers' Party was set in 1902, the voting rate is around 25%, but some of the points the party insisting are not left-wing. The party members claim that it is possible to promote a mixed economy, and they accept the intervention of private sectors in society. The main supporters of the Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party are the middle and lower social classes and trade union members in the city. Still, they are not limited to these social classes [6]. Despite the parties having some conflicting opinions, profit from the geographical features and location, parties still operate in coalition politics [7]. This political situation made the right and left wings in Luxembourg have relatively weak antagonism. Vary political parties and people both approve that the government implements compromised policy. A policy is combined by the right wing and left wing's policies. Luxembourg's government is harmonious because

of its peaceful atmosphere. That kind of cooperation contributes a lot to prosperity instead of left and right-wing conflicts.

3. Traditional left and right wings' perspectives need to be replenished

From the above discussion, we find that using the traditional left and right wings' perspective to regard European political competition in the current life is in-comprehensive. There are some defects in these limited perspectives. Therefore, we provide a few neglected ideas.

3.1 Under the representative, Voters will sway European parties

The Politics in Europe is based on representative democracy. That every voter's preference and the delivery of ballot papers build the existential benchmarks of European political parties. When we focus on the government, the different parties always influence the voters' inference, while the voters change the parties' standpoint. Under the theory, parties divided into left and right do not cling to political ideas forever but evolve their standpoint over time.

The Labour Party in Britain lost the general election in 1979, 1983, 1987, and 1992. As a result, they had to lose a huge number of seats in congress. After that, The Labour Party of Britain was close to the ideas of the Conservative Party to a large extent and even put forward the concept of "New Labour" after 1992. The Labour Party was dissatisfied with the policies that were being pursued from 1964 to 1970. As a result, the Labour Party shifted to the left wing, as reflected in the 'Labour Party's 1973 Programme', which was formulated after 1970 and in the Manifesto of February and October 1974 and the 1976 Platform.

From 1979 to 1997, the Conservatives have been the government party. Margaret Thatcher had let her party spread the theory of neoliberal institutionalism, and the British public gradually approved this kind of ideology. During this period, the British Labor Party suffered a disastrous defeat in 1979, 1983, 1987, and 1992 respectively, losing a huge number of seats. Huge election defeat meant a huge number of swing voters, which in the context of the representative system, undoubtedly mattered for the party's survival. The change of voters' view forced the Labor Party to change its original political statement to win voters' support, making the Party accept neo liberal institutionalism virtually. Before that, the Labor Party significantly moved leftwards in 1964-1970 largely because it was dissatisfied with the policies. This change was reflected in the 'Labor Party's 1973 Program' formulated after 1970 and in the Manifestos of February and October 1974, and the party *Platform* formulated in 1976. Both the 1982 manifesto peace, Work and Freedom- Labour's Platform and the manifesto of the following year showed clearly that the Labour Party had moved to the left wing. Their roots lie in the Declaration of February 1974 [8].

This made Labor's policy idealized and thus out of touch with reality. They wanted nuclear disarmament, Britain's withdrawal from the European Union (EU), and more socialist economic policies. But this was contrary to the objective requirements of British society since the mid-1970. As mentioned in the previous article, in the process of globalization, with the continuous increase of immigration, the support rate of the rabidly right wing increased, and the improvement of social welfare level could effectively restrain voters' support rate. As the reverse side of globalization, when the sentiments of anti-globalization and anti-EUROPEAN union broke out due to economic deterioration, the radical left populist parties were more likely to gain voters' support. Still, the change in the number of immigrants was not correlated with the electoral results of the radical left parties. Therefore, under the influence of the prevailing neo liberal institutionalism, the Labor Party's radical adherence to the left-wing position before 1983 undoubtedly contradicted the mainstream public opinion in Britain. That was why its defeat in the election was predictable [8]. In 1994, Blair's appointment as Labor leader accelerated the party's shift to the right, leading a "New Labor" party whose policies were the opposite of those of the left. The New Labor wanted to squeeze government spending, reform the welfare system, reduce the tax burden on individuals and support the devolution of powers from central Government to local government, namely greater autonomy for Scotland and Wales [7]. All this led to Labor's emergence triumphant in the 1997 general election. From this point,

we can see that under the representative democracy based on voters, left and right political opinions were not firmly held. After the rightward shift of the British Labor Party, its political proposition was close to the neo liberal institutionalism of the Conservative Party.

3.2 Consensus politics

Abdrew Glencross asserts: "There is a model of accountability in the EU, which goes beyond the majoritarianism. The accountable model aims to focus on the quality of deliberation and representation in lawmaking. By integrating a wide range of interests and views within the triangular framework of the Commission, the Council, and the European Parliament, EU decision-making can adopt more experts' opinions to find a better consensus position than the majoritarianism that in the domestic system." [9].This is the model of consensus-like politics, which hides in the antagonism of Europe's most common left-right parties. From the group of international to the party of a country. The left and right are more closely aligned on broader issues or at the topic of a discussion of a particular historical period. Therefore, right and left wings jointly endorse certain policy propositions in the corresponding historical period [10].

Under the circumstance, the positions of the left and right parties will converge to each other. In some moments in history, we can see the two different parties rule the government together and show support for the other one. Broadly speaking, In the face of external pressures together, consensus politics will exist, even at this time, the internal policy, ideology, values of the conflict did not disappear. We can deep analyze the example of the Labour party. Churchill had several Labour ministers in his cabinet during his time in office because of the great external threats from the Second World War. There is a fair degree of consensus on how to take care of their country. However, it has not been kept for a long time. In the absence of external threats, the difference in policy orientation between the two parties still existed. After the failure of consensus politics, it returned to the pattern of left-right competition, followed by the change of the position of the British Communist Party.

After adjusting their political strategies, the emergence of consensus politics is simply the convergence of political positions between the left and the right. It does not mean that the contradictions between left and right ideologies will tend to disappear. Still, less than socialist ideology and capitalist ideology can converge and harmonize with each other.

Therefore, we still discover the core of competition. Or to represent one side of the left and right to compromise with the other, in this way, from a position of the underdog to launch a competition. During the period, the political consensus reached between left and right parties is often not evenly split, nor exactly in the middle, but somewhat biased. In other words, the content of the political consensus always tends to be oriented to the policies of either side of the left or right. For example, after the defeat of the general election, the New Labour Party in The United Kingdom came close to the Conservative Party's position, which led to the emergence of consensus politics based on the right-wing ideology of "neoliberalism." And Luxembourg has "consensus politics" around the left policies of the Christian Social People's Party.

We can treat the European' policy by the viewpoint. It is not difficult for us to find when formulating and implementing certain political policies. European countries tend to reconcile some ideas of the left wing and some ideas of the right wing and carry them out simultaneously. For example, some left-wing parties in France advocate a "mixed economy"; Some right-wing parties in Italy have maintained the left's welfare state. However, the eclectic approach in practice has not resolved the ideological conflict between left and right in theory. The seeds of conflict exist in the soil and are ready to sprout, a process of waiting for quantitative change to qualitative change.

4. Conclusion

A more comprehensive view of the competition between the left and the right may be a useful attempt in international relations. Traditional left-right competition has played a vital role in this system. Due to the rapid development of European integration after the Cold War and the continuous impact of multiple European crises, various political differences in Europe have become increasingly

prominent and deepened. The competition between the right and the left wing is an excellent perspective to understand modern EU politics. However, only using this perspective will overgeneralize the whole body of politics, so that we will lose the overall vision. Some problems will be one-sided for us. It will make some historical events hard to explain comprehensively because of these ideas. Therefore, based on the conflict between the left and right wing, we should also understand that left and right are not static but compete and learn from each other. Sometimes they are mutually contained. In particular historical conditions and national circumstances can even coexist in harmony to make a certain country prosperous.

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