Social pacts, Coalitions, and Changing Welfare States

John Myles
School of Public Policy and Governance
University of Toronto
Outline

- Social pacts as metaphor
  - Social pacts and systems of interest group representation: corporatism vs. pluralism

- A more expansive conception of “social pacts:”
  - social pacts as coalition engineering
Outline

- Three lessons for aspiring *coalition engineers*:
  - Trade-offs and positive-sum solutions
  - The socially desirable vs. the historically feasible
  - No social pact is forever

- Social pacts in an age of austerity
Corporatist vs. Pluralist Systems of Interest Group Representation

- **Corporatist Social Pacts**
  - **Social Pacts** are “... formal policy contracts between the government and social partners over income, labour market or welfare policies that identify explicitly policy issues and targets, means to achieve them, and the tasks and responsibilities to achieve them.” (Avdagic 2008:11)
  - The “social partners” refer to peak organizations of business and labour.
Pluralist Politics

- A marketplace of competing and fragmented interest groups

- Cross-cutting cleavages and the democratic balance of power
From “social pacts” to “coalition engineering”

- Coalition building restructures power relations
- Coalition building and the welfare state
  - In the United States
  - In Canada
- Coalitions as mechanisms of
  - Social inclusion
  - Social exclusion
Three Lessons for Aspiring Coalition Engineers

- Trade-offs and the search for positive-sum solutions
- Distinguishing between the socially desirable and the politically feasible
- No social pact is forever: the limited time horizon of social pacts
New Challenges in the 21st Century

- Coalition building has become more difficult in an age of austerity.
- “Retrenchment” and backsliding do not mean we are going back to the past.
- Social pacts are temporary and always in need of recalibration.
- But social rights are enduring
“The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.