

**Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"**

**Faculty of Philosophy**

**Department of Political Science**



Abstract of the Dissertation :

# **Prerequisites for the radicalization of the social democratic movement in Bulgaria, 1891-1923**

The Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (Narrow Socialists) – from social democracy to communism

**Professional field:** 3.3. Political Science

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## 2. General characteristics of the dissertation

### 2.1. Subject and object of the study

The primary subject of the dissertation is the political radicalization of the social democratic movement in Bulgaria at the beginning of the 20th century. The dissertation attempts to broaden the focus beyond a reductionist understanding of political radicalization, which emphasizes only acts of terrorist activity, by defining the subject in a broader direction, placing radicalism within the framework of overall changes in the ideology and political activity of political parties and social movements in the modern era. The dissertation defines the phenomenon of "political radicalization" as an evolution in the ideology, theory, and worldview of a given social agent that leads efforts for comprehensive transformation of society, challenging the established state power and social hierarchy, and the justification of the use of politically engaged violence directed against political competitors (Miller, 2013; Dronzina, 2023). The incorporation of political violence as a pivotal component within the conceptualization of the radicalization process introduces a dual emphasis. Firstly, it encompasses the ideological evolutions that culminate in the formulation of political theories and language that justify and encourage the utilization of political violence as a component of a postulated project of social transformation and the realization of declared group interests. Secondly, it encompasses the actual application of violence as a form of protest and a method of addressing political adversaries.

The focal point of this inquiry lies in the examination of the radicalization of the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party - Narrow Socialists (BRSDP - t.s.), a process that occurred during the party's transition from the social democratic to the communist model in the interwar period. The analysis's focal point lies in examining macrosocial mechanisms, conceptualized as "factors," that culminated in the radicalization of the BRSDP (t.s.). The chronological scope of the dissertation encompasses the period from the transfer of socialist ideology from Western and Central Europe to Russia in the 1890s, marked by the establishment of the Bulgarian Socialist Workers' Party (BSDP) as the first social democratic party in Bulgaria in 1891, and the creation and radicalization of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) in the post-war period, a process that culminated in the organization of the September Uprising in 1923. The transition from social democracy to communism is characterized by significant nuances in individual

European societies, yet it is marked by a universal process of radicalization of the socialist Left across Europe that followed the catastrophic consequences of the First World War (Eley, 2002, pp. 123–152, 176–200). This ideological reorientation is characterized by a rejection of the reformist and evolutionary paradigm of social change and the construction of a socialist society that was promoted by all congresses of the Second International between 1891 and 1912. Following 1918, this reorientation led to the adoption of the authoritarian Soviet model (Popivanov, 2015, pp. 68–71).

## 2.2. Theoretical framework of the study

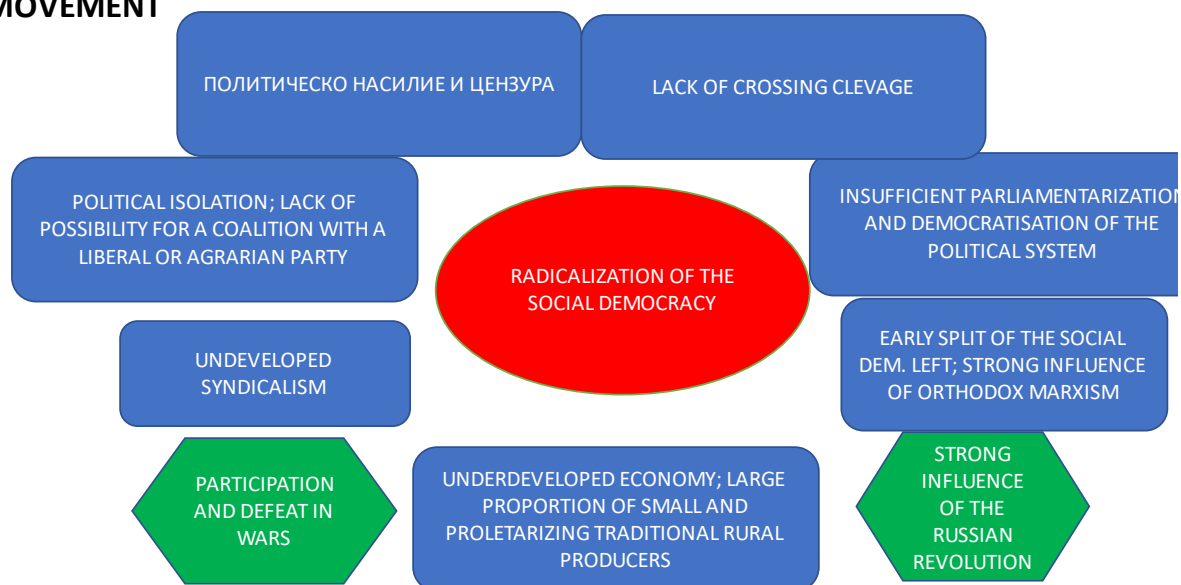
The dissertation's theoretical framework draws upon interdisciplinary models from the fields of political sociology and political science, as well as contemporary trends in social and political historiography. These models are employed to contextualize the problem within a broader interdisciplinary framework. The dissertation specifically focuses on the radical politics of the early 20th century.

At the core of modernization theories lies the examination of the dynamic interplay between two fundamental elements: (1) the influence of societal transformation on the rise of social discontent; and (2) the pivotal role of the political system in mediating discontent and transforming it into collective protest action, which has the potential to escalate into violence. In this regard, modernization studies have traditionally centered on the evolution of protest repertoires, underscoring the pivotal role of civil society and political party development, which catalyzed the rise of mass politics and the advent of novel forms of citizen political mobilization during the 19th century (Bermeo and Nord, 2000; Hoffmann, 2006, pp. 1–11). These entities are regarded as pivotal conduits of the structural social cleavages (cleavage) that emerged as a consequence of the modernization process. Through the electoral representation of collective interests within centralized state institutions, these political parties fostered the emergence of novel forms of political mobilization and identity (Rokkan and Lipset, 1967, pp. 20–65; Mair, 2006, pp. 63–75; Lyubenov, 2021a, pp. 23–63). In the dissertation, the analysis of political radicalization is predicated on the study of the dynamics of class cleavage. Traditionally, class cleavage has structured the development of both social protest and the emergence and behavior of social democratic and communist parties in Europe in the 20th century. (Kirchheimer, 1966, pp. 182–184; Duverger, 1978, pp. 61–130). The most authoritative study of the development of class cleavage and the dynamics of expansion and

contraction of communist parties is carried out by Stefano Bartolini in his book "The Political Mobilization of the European Left, 1860-1980" (Bartolini, 2000), where he proposes a model to explain the emergence and relative strength of communist parties in individual European countries. Bartolini's model emphasizes three groups of structural factors and two global crisis events that determine the electoral strength of communist parties in Europe (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.**

### **PREREQUISITES AND FACTORS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF A STRONG COMMUNIST MOVEMENT**



Firstly, the modernization model associated with the delayed and decelerated progression of industrialization and urbanization contribute to the sustenance of the traditional agrarian economy's significance. This economy was characterized by extensive agriculture and self-sufficiency, as well as by traditional culture, which was founded on communal municipal organization, values, and way of life. These factors played a pivotal role in the establishment of robust communist parties. The preservation of the traditional economy and social life in underdeveloped rural areas, where the majority of the population resides and anti-modernist attitudes predominate, has resulted in the formation of a substantial "electoral reservoir" for communist parties. These parties are able to adapt their criticism of the bureaucratic state and capitalist market to the moralizing ideas embedded in the political culture of the peasant masses (Bartolini, 2000, pp. 542–543). A notable illustration of the efficacy of communist parties

among the peasants is evident in France and, particularly, Italy, where the less developed regions in the southern parts of the country have been observed to generate a strategically significant vote for the communists (Tarrow, 1967; Bulaitis, 2008).

Secondly, according to Bartolini's model, a number of political factors play a role in the formation of strong communist parties in Europe. The absence of alternative intersecting cleavages that could impede class mobilization is the underlying factor contributing to the emergence of an electorally influential communist party. In a comparative European context, the emergence of competing forms of political mobilization among workers and small peasants, linked to ethnic, religious, or class identity, leads to a weakening of the electoral potential of communist parties. For instance, the rise of a pronounced religious cleavage in Italy and Germany gave rise to the emergence of Christian democratic parties, thereby weakening the potential influence of social democratic and communist parties among workers and peasants. A similar dynamic is evident in Ireland, where the class division is intersected by a prominent ethnic mobilization among workers and peasants.

According to Bartolini, a political factor influencing the formation of communist parties is the nature of the party system. The strong political isolation of social democratic parties stimulates the process of ideological radicalization and the withdrawal of voters towards far-left alternatives. In party systems characterized by multiple cleavage lines, the isolation of the social democratic party, and the inability to identify potential coalition partners among liberal, farmer, or Christian democratic parties, which would enable the formation of a government through parliamentary means, resulting in the erosion of workers' confidence in the social democratic parties and the strengthening of radical attitudes among voters. The weakening of communist parties' influence, evident in the cases of Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, is attributable to the formation of stable coalitions. In these countries, social democrats collaborated with liberal and agrarian parties, enabling them to assume government through parliamentary processes and implement a series of social reforms (Bartolini, 2000, pp. 486–502).

In addition to the party system, the nature of the political regime is a political factor for the formation of communist parties. According to Bartolini, authoritarian regimes or those with an insufficiently high degree of consolidation of democratic institutions create prerequisites for radicalization of the labor movement and stimulate the redirection of an increasing number of voters from moderate social democratic parties to extreme communist parties (Bartolini, 2000,



pp. 532–537). The absence of robust democratic mechanisms that facilitate the accumulation of political influence through legal organization and public discourse, thereby enabling access to power through elections, results in the erosion of the persuasiveness of the reformist vision of gradual mastery of state institutions among the public and fosters rationality in electoral support for a radical parties oriented towards the forceful achievement of its ideological goals. The presence of authoritarian and weakly consolidated democratic regimes fosters the radicalization and rise of communist parties, either through the direct involvement of the state in repressive measures against the opposition or through the inability of institutions to regulate political conflicts in society, thereby allowing them to escalate into violence. The escalation of political violence, in turn, has the effect of weakening the moderate social democratic majorities and fostering the growth of more radical communist factions within the party.

In addition to structural factors related to the modernization model and the political system, Bartolini's study outlines the influence of the First World War and the Russian Revolution as situational contexts that influenced the radicalization of social democratic parties in Europe. The First World War resulted in significant human and material casualties for the involved societies, thereby stimulating the emergence of political instability and profound protest waves, ultimately leading to revolutions and the collapse of political systems. This tendency was particularly evident in the countries that lost the war, which had to endure a change of political regime, a reduction in territory, and substantial reparations. According to Bartolini, countries that were defeated had heightened propensity for radicalization and the formation of prominent communist parties compared to those that won the war or maintained a neutral stance. The reasons for this phenomenon are multifaceted, including the rise in protest sentiments triggered by the war and defeat, as well as the emergence of favorable conditions that enabled the Russian Revolution to exert significant influence over the labor movement.

The factors delineated by Bartolini, pertaining to the modernization model, the political system, the role of war and revolution, are corroborated by other studies. Notable political scientists such as D. Della Porta, K. McCauley, and S. Moskalenko have placed a central emphasis on the political mechanisms related to political violence and isolation, which lead to the radicalization of extreme individuals, groups, and political organizations (Della Porta, 2006, pp. 187–217, 2013, pp. 283–294; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008, pp. 415–433). The radical demands of communist parties for comprehensive social change, coupled with the threat of initiating a revolution aimed at establishing a communist dictatorship, have led to a legitimization of the use of violence as a form of political protest. This has in turn set in motion

a series of state preventive repressive measures, leading to a spiral of securitization of public life, censorship, and police control. This dynamic has further isolated and radicalized communist parties and their supporters. The ongoing viability of such a political apparatus fosters an environment wherein both the state and radical groups legitimize the utilization of physical force, engendering a context of political uncertainty. In this milieu, the apprehension of preemptive and disproportionate violence by other actors within the political system prompts radicalization and the transformation of violence into a pivotal component of political strategies (Lindekilde, 2014, pp. 51–71; Rapoport, 2022, pp. 109–110). A protracted intensification of conflict, coupled with mounting pressure from the state, frequently gives rise to a schism within communist parties. This schism stimulated the emergence of two factions: a more moderate wing that advocates for a return to legal politics and an extremist wing that gravitates toward the initiation of increasingly extreme and violent actions. It is the extremist factions within communist parties that are the most frequent agents of ongoing escalation, including decisions to employ terrorism and armed violence, thereby legitimizing the repressive measures of the state against communists. Consequently, the intertwining of increasingly extreme forms of protest by the aforementioned extreme wing and the escalating repressiveness of the state apparatus engenders a radicalization mechanism, thereby endowing political radicalization with stability and momentum.

The methodological framework of the analysis is a case study of the radicalization of the Bulgarian Socialist Workers' Party (BSDP), based on the broader comparative perspective. The factors proposed in the study to explain the political radicalization and the electoral size of the communist movement in Bulgaria are based on borrowing from analogous studies of other cases in Europe. A substantial portion of the study involves an examination of the electoral outcomes of the Bulgarian Socialist Workers' Party (BSDP)/BCP during the period 1894–1923. These electoral results are utilized as a metric to assess the political efficacy of class mobilization initiatives undertaken by the Left. The electoral structuring of the class cleavage in post-liberation Bulgaria serves as a pivotal macro indicator of the efficacy of social democracy and communism in mobilizing protest sentiments within society. The present electoral research will focus on the logic of the regional distribution of votes, emphasizing both the more general division between the urban and rural votes. Secondly, the research is based on an analysis of the party program and other program documents of the BRSDPL /BCP, representing the ideology of the party. The utilization of these documents enables a

comparative analysis and the identification of trends in the evolution of party positions and ideologies.

Thirdly, the study employs a range of historiographical methods to analyze archival materials and original documents that provide empirical information about the development of each of the factors studied. The archival sources utilized encompass documents from state institutions, including reports, official correspondence between institutions, and notes. These documents offer expert assessments and various summaries from the perspective of political and military elites. A significant portion of these documents pertains to police, judicial, and military reports on the political situation, public opinion, and the activities of communist groups. These reports offer insights gathered during deliberate investigations and surveys. Another salient aspect of the archival documents underscores the individual perspective of participants in the process who occupied a subordinate position in society, such as poor peasants, workers, women, and representatives of ethnic minorities. These individuals not only provide information that elites overlooked, but also offer insights into the experiences of the lower classes and marginalized groups, emphasizing their personal involvement in the political process and the accompanying crisis events. Memories and letters, in particular, are of central importance as they offer a subjective account of experiences that can be analyzed from a "bottom-up" perspective, focusing on the role of ordinary individuals in the social democratic and communist movements. This approach transcends the limited viewpoint of the elites, who were primarily concerned with maintaining "law and order" and the political and social hierarchies embedded within it.

Fourthly, the analysis of the public press (newspapers, magazines, etc.) plays an instrumental role in the dissertation, as it provides valuable information about the events and offers a means to study the political language of the BRSDPL (retd.)/BCP. This analysis enables us to transcend the "grand narratives" established in theoretical and programmatic texts and instead to focus on the manifold meanings and modes of functioning of the ideology, as it is manifested in everyday political practice. The analysis of the content of the political press endeavors to identify the messages and "political proposals" inscribed in the mass press of the BRSDPL (retd.) and the BCP, related to the adaptation to the political culture and context of the diverse range of potential social addressees.

The dissertation endeavors to align the Bulgarian case with Bartolini's model of the rise of communist parties by proposing the following hypotheses:

- (1) The protest vote, arising from both modernization pressure and the adverse outcomes of the protracted war period, catalyzed an "electoral search" for radical political propositions.
- (2) The persistent political isolation of the BRSDPP (n.s.) intensifies political radicalization.
- (3) The rise of political violence has been identified as a catalyst for the radicalization of the Left.
- (4) The central role of the Russian Bolsheviks in the international communist movement has been identified as a catalyst for the radicalization of the BRSDPP.

To examine the hypotheses proposed, the dissertation focuses on an analysis of six general lines of social dynamics in the national context: (1) the protest vote; (2) the political isolation of the Left; (3) the influence of extreme nationalism; (4) the role of the Balkan Wars and the First World War; (5) the impact of the October Revolution and Soviet Russia; and (6) the context of increased political violence after 1918. The dissertation is structured into six chapters, each addressing a specific topic through the examination of a select series of case studies and processes drawn from Bulgarian social and political history.

### 3. Rural protest politics as a factor in the political radicalization of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (BRSDP)

The second chapter of this dissertation delves into the impact of modernization and the formation of social protest among the peasant communities over an extended historical period. The chapter commences with a delineation of the Ottoman social model within a comparative European framework, providing a foundational context for the subsequent examination of two waves of modernization. The initial wave transpired in the mid-19th century within the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat era, while the subsequent wave unfolded in the late 19th and early 20th centuries within the context of the Bulgarian state. The two modernization waves led to significant changes in both social and economic life in rural areas, but even more so in the relationship between rural municipalities and the "big society," represented by the development of capitalist trade and the bureaucratic tax state. The dissertation undertakes a comprehensive analysis of the diverse strands of social protest that emerged among the peasantry in the Balkan countries during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In this period,

the traditional agrarian sector maintained a preeminent status, with the economy depending exclusively on the export of agricultural products to fund the development of modern infrastructure and industry, as well as to finance the establishment of state institutions, such as the military, which consumed a substantial portion of the national budget. However, this economic model did not result in substantial modernization of the country. This dynamic has given rise to a state of tension between the Balkan countries' elites, who aspire to emulate the constitutional and ideological European models in establishing modern institutions, and the traditional interests of the peasants in preserving their municipal autonomy and resisting the demands of modernization.

The dissertation focuses on the emergence of protest electoral behavior in rural areas against the consequences of modernization and the mechanisms by which various political parties, including social democrats and farmers, attempted to channel social protest within the framework of electoral politics. The analysis delineates the process of massification of political participation and the rise of protest electoral behavior, emphasizing its impact on the institutionalization of the social democratic party family in Bulgaria. In this section, the dissertation highlights the series of dilemmas confronting social democracy in Bulgaria, particularly concerning its adaptation to the prevailing petty rural social structure and the significant electoral influence of rural votes in national politics. Initially, the analysis delves into the ideological discourse surrounding the "Agrarian Question." The dissertation's analysis of the evolution of rural electoral support for the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (BRSDPL) after 1894 illuminates the ideological rifts within the party. A central tension was evident in the party's approach to aligning with the ideological influence of Germany or adapting to the specificities of the Bulgarian context. The analysis underscores the significance of rural electoral support in shaping the party's position and its potential impact on expanding social support. The analysis engages into a lesser-known polemic between two prominent figures within the party: Nikola Gabrovski, a leader from Tarnovo area who advocated for adapting the program to the demands of small farmers, and Dimitar Blagoev, the leader and theoretician of the movement who insisted on adhering to Marxist orthodoxy.

The analysis in this chapter endeavors to contextualize ideological disputes within the framework of ongoing electoral politics, wherein rural votes become a decisive factor for a party's parliamentary representation. Consequently, the electoral dynamics serve to reinforce ideological polemics, thereby giving rise to novel political considerations, and exerting influence on the ideological shaping and adaptation of the BRSDPL to the Bulgarian context.

A significant aspect of the analysis entails an in-depth examination of the political landscape in Tarnovo, where the group led by Gabrovski initiated a mobilization of the rural population, establishing a novel left-wing populist discourse that transcends the conventional Marxist political framework. The dissertation delves into the political functioning of left-wing populism within the rural social environment, underscoring the adaptability and potential for variation of Marxism in the context of public politics. The dissertation demonstrates that the populist discourse of the Tarnovo social democrats combined social criticism of both rural and urban underprivileged groups—small farmers, artisans, shopkeepers, servants, and workers—by introducing a series of concepts such as "the working people," and "the toilers." Through these concepts, the party sought to build the political unity of all the "poor" and "oppressed" in the post-liberation social order. In this manner, the Tarnovo socialists supplanted the exclusive role of urban workers as the social base of the party, thereby placing the struggle of the "poor people" for "justice" and "liberation" at the forefront. The culminating focus of the chapter is the electoral competition between the BRSDPL and the BZNS for rural protest votes in various regions of the country. The calculations demonstrate that despite the success of the socialists in adapting to the rural social environment, the populist discourse of the socialists was gradually displaced by the more convincing ideology of the BZNS in most regions of the country.

#### 4. Ideological clashes with nationalism and militarism as a factor in the radicalization of the BRSDP

The third chapter of the dissertation posits that the advent of ethno-nationalism and militarism in Bulgarian society prior to the First World War functioned as a catalyst for the proliferation of novel forms of violence and political alienation. This process precipitated the disassociation of the BRSDPL from the prevailing national consensus and the gradual radicalization of the party. The dissertation situates this issue within the broader context of a political clash, stimulated by an aggressive irredentist policy, leading to waves of political violence and national opposition in Macedonia. In their endeavor to augment their dominion over the region, the Balkan countries endorsed para-military groups that functioned within Macedonia's borders, while concurrently furnishing military backing to rival national agendas. This antagonism culminated in an intensifying cycle of violence that eluded the eroded the Ottoman state's control over the territory. The reverberations of this political violence and national

animosity in Macedonia have manifested in the domestic political sphere of neighboring countries, including Romania, Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria. This has engendered a politicization of ethnicity, leading to the perception of ethnic minorities as a potential "fifth column" that might support the national interests of other countries.

The third chapter places significant emphasis on the role of radical ethno-nationalism in Bulgaria and its impact on the formation of a mass nationalist movement, thereby legitimizing potential pressures and violence against ethnic minorities and socialists. The primary focus is on the evolution of the Internal Macedonian-Adriatic Revolutionary Organization that functioned as agent of mobilization within the nationalist discourse. The dissertation traces in detail the initiatives of the Internal Macedonian-Adriatic Revolutionary Organization to attract public support and to legitimize the aggressive irredentist policy through a series of actions. These actions gradually transformed the organization into a powerful factor in the public life of the country.

The study examines the success of nationalist associations in initiating the so-called "anti-Greek movement." This movement led to mass rallies and pressure against the Greek minority in the country in 1905-6. These attacks were in response to the violence of the Greek paramilitary militias in Macedonia against the Bulgarian communities there. The analysis meticulously examines the various stages of the development of the nationalist campaign, demonstrating that its primary initiators were Macedonian activists and associations, who functioned as organizers of the political violence prevalent in Macedonia towards Bulgaria. The anti-Greek movement led to the expropriation of the property of the Greek municipalities and increased public pressure against Greek culture. It also led to manifestations of physical violence, the clearest signs of which were the pogrom over the Greek neighborhood in Plovdiv and the arson of the town of Anchialo in the summer of 1906.

The second part of the third chapter explores the emergence of early anti-Semitism in Bulgaria at the turn of the 20th century. Anti-Semitic factions within Bulgarian society attributed various social ills to the Jewish minority, thereby perpetuating long-standing stigmas and prejudices. This led to incidents of violence, notably the events in Lom and Kyustenil at the dawn of the 20th century.

The central focus of the chapter is the position of the socialists as a defender of minority rights, a position that led to the exacerbation of relations with nationalist groups, culminating in violence against the Left. A recurring theme in the study of ethno-nationalist mobilizations is

the anti-socialist ideology that underlies them, leading to the stigmatization of the Social Democrats as "national traitors" for their advocacy of minority rights.

The final segment of the third chapter delves into the nationalist campaigns that led to the declaration of war on the Ottoman Empire due to the violence perpetrated against Bulgarians in Macedonia. This section meticulously examines the role of nationalist civil society in legitimizing the declaration of war. Conversely, the section interrogates the impact of the military campaign in exacerbating the estrangement of the BRSDP, culminating in its characterization as "national traitors." This stigmatization, in turn, engendered a radicalization of the Left, leading to its further marginalization.

#### 4. Wars as a factor in the radicalization of the BRSDP

The fourth chapter of the dissertation delves into the role of the protracted war period, during which Bulgaria remained in a state of intermittent warfare from 1912 to 1918, as a predominant catalyst for the radicalization of the socialists. The analysis emphasizes how the wars led not only to the strengthening of the political isolation of the social democrats, but also to a significant increase in social conflict and political violence, which resonated with the ideology and political practice of the socialists.

The chapter is structured in two sections, reflecting the actual division of Bulgarian society between the war front and the rear during the war. The initial segment examines the intertwining of mounting social protest and the political radicalization of the narrow socialists in the rear. In this section, the dissertation delves into the mechanisms by which the protracted war period gave rise to a series of profound social crises, interconnected not solely with the deteriorating economic situation and the horrors of war, but also with the waning legitimacy of the state and the emergence of protest mobilizations among the population left behind. The dissertation asserts that the escalating discontent was precipitated not only by the pervasive hunger and destitution engendered by economic distress but also by the mounting sense of injustice stemming from the exacerbating social inequalities. The fourth chapter's primary focus is on the manner in which class inequalities and status privileges incited widespread protest. The analysis examines the factors that contributed to the escalating discontent, which stemmed from the incongruity between the nationalist mobilization initiated by the government



and the intelligentsia during wartime, which demanded sacrifice and endured the hardships associated with the war effort, and the prevailing reality in which the upper classes retained their privileges. While the protest movement originated from various social problems, the agenda soon expanded to address a global political question: the end of the war.

The fourth chapter of the dissertation places significant emphasis on the entanglement between the escalation of protest social and the opposition activities of the socialists during the war. The BRSDP's stance deviated from the prevailing national consensus in favor of maintaining the war, prompting the organization of a series of anti-war initiatives. These events included the distribution of leaflets, the formation of groups, and the orchestration of protest rallies. These actions served to direct social tension and support towards radical objectives, as articulated by left-wing socialist groups across Europe. The intertwining of popular discontent and the anti-war initiative of the socialists allowed the socialists to accumulate serious public support for their program for social transformations, merging it with popular demands for achieving peace and redistribution of scarce economic resources.

The central focus of the first part of the fourth chapter is the wave of women's hunger riots in the rear in the spring and summer of 1918. The analysis focuses on the events in Sliven and Plovdiv, where the largest hunger riots occurred. The analysis demonstrates how the Bulgarian Revolutionary Social Democratic Party (BRSDPL) effectively channeled social discontent, leading not only to the politicization of the protests but also to their escalation into violence. This process was initially denied by the party leadership but was subsequently adopted by the younger generation of socialists who radicalized during the war.

The second part of the fourth chapter focuses on the intertwining between the soldiers' protests at the front and the anti-war opposition activities of the socialists during the war. Contrary to the government's initial assumptions that the war was nearing its conclusion, the Bulgarian army found itself engaged in a protracted military conflict, thereby placing considerable strain on the nation's political and economic resources. The analysis delves into the circumstances experienced by the soldiers, emphasizing challenges such as inadequate material provisions, the arduous conditions in the trenches, and the separation of families. In this section, the study endeavors to establish a correlation between the multifarious challenges confronting the soldiers and the burgeoning popularity of socialist propaganda. A particularly critical juncture occurred from 1917 to 1918, when anti-war sentiments within the armed forces surged, thereby establishing the preconditions for the BSDP's escalating political radicalization. The analysis

underscores the exacerbated perception of social injustice among soldiers, stemming from the perceived violation of the proclaimed national solidarity by the nation's political and economic elites. The dissemination of information regarding the deteriorating situation in the rear had a demobilizing effect on soldiers at the front, thereby weakening the primacy of the "national cause" by posing other intersecting lines of social conflict stemming from the unequal distribution of the burden of war. This dynamic is analogous to the emergence of anti-elitist protest attitudes among women and youth in the rear. The state's apparent indifference and tolerance of various forms of class inequality and economic exploitation among soldiers at the front eroded their confidence in the war effort, thereby undermining the legitimacy of the wartime political order.

## 5. The international communist movement as a factor in the radicalization of the BRSDP/BCP

Chapter Five explores the impact of the international communist movement on the Bulgarian Socialist Workers' Party (BSDP)/BCP. Initially, the analysis delves into the ideological crisis that plagued the Second International, which commenced with the advent of World War I. This crisis culminated in a schism within the global social democratic movement, giving rise to the so-named Anti-War Left - an assemblage of radical left-wing groups that vehemently opposed the war. The chapter examines the gradual divergence of the Bulgarian Socialist Workers' Party from pre-war ideological authorities, such as the German Social Democratic Party, and its subsequent rapprochement with extreme groups, including the Russian Bolsheviks, during World War I. Second, the chapter delves into the role of the Comintern as a political factor in the radicalization of the communist movement in Bulgaria after 1918. It traces the ideological and organizational mechanisms that led to the subordination of the BCP to directives emanating from Moscow. The chapter analyzes the manner in which the Communist International (Comintern) influenced the ideological development of the recently established communist parties across Europe, inciting them to engage in political violence by underscoring the predominant forms of pressure. Initially, this involved the incorporation of explicit demands for immediate nationalization of the economy and the replacement of monarchical and parliamentary regimes with the model of a Soviet republic into the official congress documents and party program. Secondly, a comprehensive transformation of political discourse occurred, giving rise to aggressive, stigmatizing, and militant rhetoric, thereby fostering social opposition

and political conflict. Thirdly, there has been a principled reinterpretation of fundamental Marxist concepts, such as the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and "social revolution," which have been imbued with a more direct connotation of armed struggle, violence against opponents, and authoritarian rule.

A pivotal element of the political undertakings of the Comintern during the 1920s pertained to the endeavor to transform the post-war social crisis that prevailed in multiple regions of the world into a global revolution. The objective of this transformation was to facilitate the actualization of communist ideology beyond the confines of the Soviet Union. In this context, the chapter delineates two lines of influence of the Comintern on the Bulgarian Communist Party. Firstly, the Comintern promoted ideological extremism and a militant political language. Secondly, the chapter delves into the repercussions of the Comintern's actions on the Bulgarian Communist Party, particularly in the period leading up to the September Uprising, which emerged as a consequence of the party's ambivalence following the coup of June 9, 1923.

## 6. Political violence in post-war Bulgaria as a factor in political radicalization

Chapter Six explores the role of persistent political violence in the radicalization of the BRSDPL (t.s.)/BCP following the conclusion of the long war period in Central and Eastern Europe. The primary objective of this chapter is to elucidate the manner in which the "unfinished world war" context, characterized by the persistence of political violence even after the cessation of the First World War in Central and Eastern Europe, gave rise to a sequence of interstate wars, civil wars, ethnic cleansings, revolutions, and uprisings, resulting in elevated levels of repression and violence. The chapter endeavors to situate the Bulgarian case within this regional context by underscoring two predominant forms of societal violence. Firstly, the dissertation focuses on "non-political" violence, arising from various forms of escalation of social tension in group conflict. Such forms include the emergence of clashes between rural communities and the state, as well as the rise of banditry. These phenomena lay the foundations for political instability and reveal the diminished capacity of state institutions to regulate conflicts in society.

Secondly, the chapter examines various forms of political violence, realized both through state repression of the opposition and through a series of armed actions by radical groups such as communists, farmers, and nationalists who challenge the legitimacy of state institutions. The analysis sought to elucidate how the escalation of political violence gave rise to various mechanisms that culminated in the securitization of public life and state repression. These mechanisms, in turn, precipitated the radicalization of the communist movement and exerted a decisive influence on the fortification of the extreme wings, legitimizing revolutionary politics and, subsequently, terrorism within the BCP. The intensification of social conflicts in post-war society and their periodic escalation into violence stimulated radicalization by strengthening anti-system attitudes among voters, a process leading to the transformation of parties such as the BZNS and the BCP into leading political forces in the country. The proliferation of violence engenders a climate of political uncertainty, which exerts a direct influence on the propensity of political actors to legitimize the use of violence against their adversaries. The analysis in this chapter focuses on the securitization of public life, a process that leads to the identification of various protest initiatives by the communist party as a threat. This threat is then used as a justification for the use of preemptive and disproportionate repression against the communist party. A central example that the dissertation focuses on is the numerous protest demonstrations organized by the Bulgarian Communist Party, against which the government uses repressive measures leading to human casualties. A critical component of the securitization mechanism pertains to the ongoing characterization of the Bulgarian Communist Party as a national security threat. This stigmatization is intricately intertwined with the sequence of communist revolutions that transpired in Central and Eastern Europe, thereby engendering apprehensions regarding a potential coup attempt and the party's role as a conduit for the revolutionary agenda of the Soviet Union. Conversely, the securitization mechanism has been shown to exacerbate the ongoing processes of radicalization within the communist movement, thereby reinforcing the most extreme elements that advocate for the transcendence of democratic politics and the engagement of the party in armed struggle. The objective of the present analysis is to demonstrate that mutual distrust and the legitimization of violence against political opponents, within the broader context of escalating social conflict and tension, result in a deviation from the norms of democratic politics. This deviation engenders incentives for phenomena such as state repression, uprisings, and civil war.

## 7. Conclusions

The analysis of the transformation of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party from a social democratic to a communist party and ideological model during the First World War, and the Bulgarian Communist Party's increasing involvement in political violence in the interwar period, illuminates the operation of a series of interconnected social prerequisites and macrosocial factors that stimulate the emergence of three political mechanisms producing political radicalization in the Bulgarian context:

- (1) Radicalization generated by electoral demand.
- (2) Radicalization generated by the pressure exerted by the Comintern.
- (3) Radicalization following the securitization of political life.

The initial and fundamental driving force that stimulates the factors and mechanisms leading to political radicalization is the dynamics of social tension. The dynamics of social tension play a pivotal role in shaping the intensity of the protest vote, which exerts a considerable influence on the political system. The dynamics of social discontent in Bulgaria are determined by two groups of factors:

(1) Structural factors following the entry of the centralized nation-state, capitalist market relations, and demographic pressure; (2) Situational factors following crisis processes triggered by the long war period between 1912 and 1918, and the subsequent post-war crisis. The analysis reveals that the structural factors determining the dynamics of social discontent stem from the modernization of post-liberation society, which stimulates conflict between the traditional rural economy and the emerging modern institutions.

Secondly, the analysis reveals that the situational factors constituting the dynamics of social discontent in the Bulgarian case are the influence of the long war period between 1912 and 1918 and the severe post-war crisis. The Balkan Wars and the First World War precipitated grave economic and social ramifications for Bulgarian society.

The drastic increase in social discontent during the 20th century, particularly in the context of wars and the subsequent post-war years, can be attributed to the interplay of two distinct groups of structural and situational factors. The proliferation of societal discontent gives rise to collective expressions of protest. The elections, serving as the primary conduit for collective protest, witnessed the rise of a mass protest vote, thereby catalyzing the radicalization of the Bulgarian Communist Party. In response, the Communist Party adopts strategies that involve the public expression of extreme ideologies and militant rhetoric, aligning with the prevailing political culture and protest attitudes of the electorate, predominantly comprising small peasants. The escalating protest sentiments during the post-war period prompt the Bulgarian Communist Party to address the voters' discontent by proposing radical policies, including the expropriation of essential goods, nationalization of industry, redistribution of land, and a crackdown on the political elites who had previously governed the country during the war. In an effort to address the mounting tension and radical demands of the electorate, numerous policy proposals put forth by the BCP transcend the confines of the established constitutional framework, even invoking violence.

The second primary factor stimulating the establishment of a mechanism for radicalization of the left in Bulgaria is the dynamics of political violence. The escalation in violence can be attributed to two interrelated factors: (1) the transition in collective protest mobilizations from peaceful forms such as rallies and marches to violent ones like armed demonstrations, occupations, and riots, and (2) the rise in authoritarianism and repressive measures employed by the state as a means to maintain political order.

The initial cause of the intensification of these protest mobilizations into acts of violence is the state's inefficiency in addressing the mounting demands for economic assistance and an end to the war. Secondly, the politicization of these mobilizations has led to their perception by the state as a threat to its political order and national security. This has resulted in the legitimization of repression against protestors. The interplay among the rise of protest mobilizations, the success of the Bulgarian Communist Party in politicizing spontaneous social and anti-war protests, and the intensification of state repression generates a spiral of violence that propels the political system toward chronic instability and polarization. In the post-war national context, political instability is characterized as a state of uncertainty among political agents regarding adherence to the fundamental constitutional frameworks of the political process, which guarantee respect for rights and the peaceful conduct of political struggles. The escalating violence and the ambiguity surrounding constitutional guarantees have been shown

to lead to a deterioration in political trust, thereby intensifying the polarization between political parties within the nation.

Thirdly, the dissertation reveals how the post-war context stimulated the formation of a radicalization mechanism, built on the influence of the Russian Communist Party (RCP) on the Bulgarian communist movement. This transformation of the Bulgarian Communist Party into an element of Soviet foreign policy is a key finding of this study. The implementation of this influence mechanism occurred through the structures of the Comintern, which exerted pressure on the Bulgarian Communist Party to adopt a more radical Bolshevik orientation. This process entailed the imposition of militant and authoritarian ideological forms of Leninism, as well as the adoption of illegal tactics related to terrorism and armed struggle. The Comintern's influence on the Bulgarian Communist Party was twofold: first, it led to the public defense of radical Leninist ideas, such as the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and the "socialist revolution"; and second, it resulted in the practical training and engagement of Bulgarian communists in political violence. Between 1919 and 1923, the Comintern took advantage of the political instability and acute social conflict in Bulgaria to strengthen extremist tendencies in the Bulgarian Communist Party. The Comintern demanded an end to the legalist course and the initiation of preparations for armed struggle.

Secondly, the post-war context promoted the establishment of a radicalization mechanism that was founded on the securitization of political life. Securitization can be defined as a process of categorizing the political activity of the BRSDP/BCP as a national security problem, thereby exceeding the established norms of tolerance for opposition political activity. The subsequent identification of the Left as a threat to national security legitimizes state repression against it. The prevailing context of heightened societal polarization, instability, and pervasive violence serves to legitimize the state's use of repression against those who are identified as a threat to national security, particularly those affiliated with the BRSDP/BCP. This identification becomes a rationale for the preventive and disproportionate application of force against peaceful protest demonstrations. Consequently, the state repression of communist protest actions has led to the emergence of extreme left-wing groups that reject the possibility of forming a government through democratic processes. These groups have resorted to terrorism and armed struggle, forcing the party to adopt similar tactics in response. The securitization of political life and the persistent characterization of communist politics as a national security threat are rooted in two factors. These factors contribute to the stigmatization of the BRSDPP (retd.)/BCP as a disloyal party to the Bulgarian state and an agent of foreign influence.

## 8. Publications related to the dissertation

К. Стефанов, Между идеологическата лоялност и политическата адаптация селският въпрос в развитието на БРСДП, 1891-1899 – В: Мартенски студентски четения. Том 9, Велико Търново, 2022.

К. Стефанов, Предпоставки за селската протестна мобилизация след Освобождението – В: Б. Манов, С. Кръстева, П. Стойкова и кол. (ред.) Докторантите в науката, Том 5, Благоевград, 2022, с. 273-299.

К. Стефанов, Адаптация на ранния социализъм в България: влиянието на електоралната структура и междупартийната конкуренция върху политическото развитие на БРСДП (1899-1911) – В: Докторантски четения на Философски факултет, Том 5, София, 2023, с. 301-325.