

REVIEW

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of the dissertation of Kristian Stefanov on the topic "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"

for the award of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the professional field 3.3. Political Science (Political Science - National Political Process)

1. Structure, content and results of the dissertation

The dissertation work is dedicated to the prerequisites for the radicalization of the social democratic movement in Bulgaria, with an addition in the part for an appropriately selected historical period. The text consists of 272 standard pages, including an introduction, six chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. The dissertation is printed with the volume of literature and the analyzed documentary and archival sources.

The subject of analysis is the key concept of political radicalization, which is defined as a worldview or practice, recognized with the self-affirmation of a certain political actor who seeks to achieve a comprehensive systemic transformation in politics and/or society with the help of various tools, including the use of violence.

The object of analysis is the radicalization of the BRSDP (n.s.), considered as the multi-layered process of the party's evolution from social democracy to communism, for which several factors are at play, some of which are in the paradigm of historical

institutionalism and critical junctures in history. Therefore, the central importance in the dissertation is the theory of cleavages, and particularly the class cleavage, associated with the creation, development and affirmation of workers' parties in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century.

The conceptual framework is presented in the first chapter of the dissertation. The analysis follows the theoretical propositions proposed by Stefano Bartolini, which allow for the operationalization of the factors contributing to the electoral outcome of the social democratic and communist parties in Europe, among which the leading role was played by the First World War as a critical moment.

The dissertation has chosen an appropriate methodology, combining various research methods such as electoral analysis of election results, analysis of party programs and documents, review and analysis of the press.

Four hypotheses have been derived based on the main factors for radicalization of the labor movement, which are analyzed in the theoretical part of the dissertation. The first hypothesis makes a connection between radicalization as supply and electoral demand among the population because of the negative impact of the wars. The second hypothesis explains political radicalization with the permanent isolation into which the Bulgarian Socialist Workers' Party (n.s.) fell due to its anti-war positions. The third hypothesis considers radicalization as a response to political violence and the imposed policy to guarantee internal order and security. The fourth hypothesis seeks an explanation for radicalization in the role of the Comintern. The hypotheses are argued based on the presented theoretical debate. The chapters in the dissertation are structured in view of the added hypotheses.

Chapter two is dedicated to the rural electoral mobilization of the BRSDP (n.s.). The dissertation should be congratulated for an electoral analysis of the rural vote - a laborious but extremely fruitful work, which for the first time makes a distribution of the distribution of the rural vote between the BRSDP (n.s.) and the BZNS. This makes it possible to follow the electoral effect of the two main cleavages that structure inter-party competition in the rising wave of political mobilization in the post-war period - the class cleavage and the "urban-rural" cleavage.

Chapter three examines the ideological clashes between various nationalist currents and the labor movement, which are analyzed as prerequisites for radicalization. The political effect of various events, conflicts and clashes that are placed in the isolation of the BRSDP (n.s.) due to its anti-militaristic positions on the solution of the "national question" is studied. Each individual case is appropriately chosen, reinforcing the argumentation and creating conclusions.

The fourth chapter examines the impact of the two Balkan wars and the First World War on the radicalization of the BRSDP (n.s.). The dissertation examines the war period as a factor in the ideological transformation of the party. The main emphasis is placed on the socio-economic and food crisis, leading to the radicalization of large social groups, which maintains the legitimacy of most parties. The reasons for the dissatisfaction of the population, which has difficulty bearing the heavy social cost of the wars, are analyzed in detail and in depth. This analysis makes it possible to report on the electoral demand and mobilization in support of the cause of the labor movement.

Chapter five examines the role of the international communist movement and the Comintern as a factor in the radicalization of the BRSDP (n.s.). The analysis is based on a large documentary base, which allows for a comparative study of the processes of division in the workers' movement in Europe, the ideological debate and radicalization of the communists, the central role of the Comintern in "taking the revolution abroad". This chapter clarifies why the October Revolution was a critical process that led to a final division in the workers' movement and the delineation of a new cleavage between social democrats and communists.

The sixth and final chapter of the dissertation is dedicated to political violence in post-war Bulgaria and the securitization of the policy pursued by the Bulgarian state.

The dissertation has an undeniable contribution in terms of understanding the processes of radicalization of the social democratic movement in Bulgaria from the perspective of the political cleavages that emerged in the country after the First World War.

The doctoral candidate should have been bolder in indicating the contributions in his work, especially in the conclusion. It is also the main weakness of the work, and not because the conclusions and assessments made there are not correct. The conclusion should simply have a different nature. Figure 10, which schematically presents the mechanisms of radicalization and the conclusions regarding this process, should rather be presented in the presentation. The conclusion should summarize and present the extent to which the initially set goals have been achieved and whether the four hypotheses derived have been confirmed.

I would evaluate the electoral analysis of the rural vote and the presented mechanism for radicalization of the Bulgarian Socialist Workers' Party (n.s.) as a flawless contribution.

2. Evaluation of the publications on the dissertation

Three publications on the topic of the dissertation work have been presented, which meets the minimum requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree of "doctor".

3. Evaluation of the abstract

The dissertation work deserves a better written abstract. The one presented for the purposes of public defense does not correspond to the accepted academic standards for writing such a text. It was written in a hurry, which is evident from the numerous spelling errors, which are of a technical nature.

In terms of structure, some weaknesses are also observed. It is unclear why the content is numbered with point 1. Lack of a bibliography indicating the cited sources in the abstract. A significant drawback is also the lack of a separate section with the contributions of the dissertation, which is a basic structural element of each abstract.

4. Critical notes and questions

Overall, the work is written in good academic language. Critical remarks can be made about some terms used, which are not selected in the most appropriate way and require clarification. In places in the dissertation, concepts such as “common people’s protest”, “populist protest”, “left protest parties”, “left communists”, which need additional meaningful argumentation and clarification of the reasons for their use are used. For example, is the term “left communists” a distinguishing category, and are there then “right communists”?

I would take the liberty of asking the following questions to the dissertation candidate:

- 1.) The theoretical part deals with the topic of so-called cross-cutting cleavages. To what extent are the class cleavage and the “urban-rural” cleavage cross-cutting? How does this affect the electoral competition and in general the relations between the BZNS and BRSDP (n.s.)?
- 2.) Can any of the factors for the radicalization of the Bulgarian Socialist Workers’ Party (BSS) be identified as leading?
- 3.) How did the introduction of compulsory voting in 1919 affect the results of the Bulgarian Socialist Workers' Party (n.s.)?

5. Conclusion:

I know Kristian Stefanov as an excellent student and doctoral candidate. In his scientific work, he has always demonstrated dedication and thoroughness. He has actively participated in the scientific life and work of the Department of Political Science. His publication activity in recent years is impressive and many times exceeds the minimum requirements for doctoral defense. His articles have been published in authoritative indexed journals.

The dissertation presented for public defense is a thorough study that meets all scientific standards. All previously set goals and objectives have been fulfilled, and the main hypotheses have been convincingly defended.

Therefore, I will support the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the professional field 3.3. Political Science (Political Science - National Political Process) to Kristian Stefanov.

05.02.2025

Sofia

Signature:

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