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## Radicalism or Reformism? Socialist Parties before World War I

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**A Measure of Reformism/Radicalism**

We conceive *reformism versus radicalism* as a continuous dimension ranging from the demand for incremental change within a regime to the demand for its revolutionary transformation. We break this down into three domains. The first two domains, orientation to the political system and orientation to the economic system, refer to the substantive character of the demands made by labor, social democratic, and socialist parties concerning the institutions they regard as decisive. The final domain refers to the means by which they pursued these demands.

- **Orientation to the political system.** To what extent is representative democracy regarded as legitimate? Is representative democracy worth reforming, or must it be abolished?
- **Orientation to the economic system.** To what extent is capitalism regarded as legitimate? Is it worth reforming, or must it be abolished?
- **Method.** Does the party advocate conventional methods of representation or the violent overthrow of the regime?

Our unit of analysis is the political party at a particular point in time, but we are keenly aware that political parties harbor dissenting factions. We adjust for this by evaluating the strength and ideological orientation of opposition *within* a party.

We focus on the dominant ideological orientation of the party leadership as expressed in founding documents, party manifestos, leadership speeches, and printed materials. There are secondary literatures on each of the parties of concern, and we rely on these extensively.

Political parties are never monolithic, except by force. Parties are not simply organizations that compete for authority; they are institutional terrains for internal contestation. Their programs and tactics are often subject to debate and disagreement, especially in socialist parties. Even a party as reformist as the British Labour party contained Marxist voices. In 1906, one of 29 newly elected Labour MPs reported that *Das Kapital* had the greatest influence on his

thinking. He was alone, however. The Bible was most commonly chosen, followed by *Pilgrim's Progress* (Stead 1906). Most political parties have a dominant ideological orientation, and this is the focus of our coding.

We regard the three domains noted above as logically and conceptually distinct. It is possible, for example, for a socialist party to regard representative democracy as legitimate but advocate for the complete abolition of wage labor. Or, a party could advocate for revolution as a means to set up representative democracy. Such positions are logically coherent but empirically rare. In general, a party that takes a radical position in one of these domains takes a radical position on the others.

This logical coherence increases the reliability of our coding; we can combine coding across the three domains to create a composite index of reformism/radicalism. Unless our coding is systematically biased, mistakes in coding a party in one domain are averaged across three domains. To the extent that coding errors across the domains are random, they will tend to negate one another.

Our first step is to conceptualize scales for each domain that meaningfully summarize the variation in orientations while minimizing ambiguity (Hooghe, Marks, and Schakel 2008). Below, we examine cases in each category to illustrate the distinctions we make.

**ORIENTATION TO THE POLITICAL SYSTEM**

- 1 = representative democracy is legitimate and does not require major reform;
- 2 = representative democracy is legitimate and requires major reform;
- 3 = representative democracy is illegitimate, requiring major reform; and
- 4 = representative democracy should be abolished and replaced by a dictatorship of the proletariat.

Orientation to liberal democracy is a litmus test for the reformism or radicalism of socialist, social democratic, and labor parties. Did the party demand liberal democracy (i.e., representative democracy) in which political parties compete in free elections based on male (later, universal) suffrage? Or did the party reject

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representative democracy as a bourgeois institution?

The Australian Labor party campaigned for electoral reform, within the context of liberal democracy. It demanded that residential requirements be relaxed to allow transient workers, such as sheep shearers, to vote. The Labor party campaigned for a variety of incremental reforms, all of which it believed could be achieved under liberal democracy. They saw conflict between workers and employers as inevitable under capitalism, but they regarded the state itself as a neutral player.<sup>1</sup> [Score = 1]

The British Labour party was established in 1900 as the *Labour Representation Committee* to gain greater representation of workers in the House of Commons. As its name suggests, the party accepted liberal democracy as the frame for its substantive demands. Reform of the political system was a low priority. The party's 1900 manifesto called for 16 reforms, the final four of which were shorter parliaments, adult suffrage, registration reform, and payment of members of parliament. These demands were almost identical to the Chartists' unfulfilled demands more than half a century earlier. Now, however, they were regarded as an extension of established principles that were already in place.<sup>2</sup> [Score = 1]

The legitimacy of republican government was a major issue for French socialists around the turn of the twentieth century. The divergent positions of Jean Jaurès and Jules Guesde illustrate the distinction we make between the intermediate values on our scale. From the late 1890s, Jaurès regarded French Republican institutions as the

foundation for socialist success. Locked between Marxists who regarded republican democracy with indifference and a revanchist right that wished to destroy it, Jaurès threw himself into the defense of the Third Republic. Just as the republic grew out of a progressive conception of popular sovereignty, so too would socialism, with its concept of economic sovereignty, grow out of the republic. Jaurès's notion of republicanism was a radical version of liberal democracy. It contained the notion of inevitable socialist victory and the possibility that the working class would have to engage in extra-parliamentary tactics, such as a general strike, should the ruling class revoke workers' rights.<sup>3</sup> [Score = 2]

Jules Guesde and the *Parti Socialiste*, by contrast, viewed the Third Republic as illegitimate. They saw it as a capitalist institution incapable of ameliorating economic exploitation. Its essential virtue was that, by obliterating feudalism, it intensified the clash of the proletariat and bourgeoisie, thereby accelerating revolution. In the words of Guesde: "All French socialists are republicans because the republic is the only governmental form that places the classes against one another in the brutality of their economic opposition" (Guesde 1891, quoted in Steenson 1991:157; see also Derfler 1998; Howarth 1983).<sup>4</sup> [Score = 3]

Among the parties we examine, only the Finnish and Russian Bolshevik parties took the extreme position that representative democracy expressed the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie that would have to yield to a dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin had a clear conception of the transitional political order that would replace the bourgeois order: a dictatorship of the proletariat that "imposes a series of restrictions on the freedom

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of the neutrality of the state underpinned the Labor party's proposal for state arbitration of labor disputes.

<sup>2</sup> The 1900 Labour Party General Election Manifesto contained the following demands: adequate maintenance from national funds for the aged poor; public provision of better houses for the people; useful work for the unemployed; adequate maintenance for children; no compulsory vaccination; public control of the liquor traffic; nationalization of land and railways; relief of local rates by grants from the national exchequer; legislative independence for all parts of the empire; abolition of the standing army and the establishment of a citizen force; the people to decide on peace or war; graduated income-tax; shorter parliaments; adult suffrage; registration reform; and payment of members of Parliament.

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<sup>3</sup> "Finally, if the governing class were mad enough to lay hands on the poor liberties that have been won, the wretchedly insufficient means of action of the proletariat, if they threatened or attacked universal suffrage, if by the persecution of employers and the police they made the right to unite in trade unions and the right to strike empty forms, then a violent general strike would be certainly the form that a labour revolt would take" (Jaurès 1906; Chap. 12).

<sup>4</sup> The apparent success of Guesde and his allies in setting the terms of unification of the two socialist parties in 1905 was pyrrhic. The unified party came closer to Jaurès's position in the years preceding World War I, as reflected in our coding.

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of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists. We must suppress them in order to free humanity from wage slavery, their resistance must be crushed by force; it is clear that there is no freedom and no democracy where there is suppression and where there is violence” (Lenin 1917).<sup>5</sup> [Score = 4]

**ORIENTATION TO THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM**

1 = capitalism is legitimate and can be improved by piecemeal reform;  
2 = capitalism is legitimate but requires basic reform;  
3 = capitalism is illegitimate and reform can be justified only as a step toward its abolition; and  
4 = capitalism is illegitimate and all reform short of its abolition is unproductive.

Except for the first labor party platform in Queensland, the early Australian labor parties demanded incremental economic reforms, such as a land tax, maximum hour and minimum wage legislation, and industrial hazard legislation. They accepted the principles of wage labor and private ownership of the means of production. [Score = 1]

Likewise, the British Labour party campaigned for slightly expanded government responsibilities within a capitalist economic system that it regarded as legitimate. The first five demands of the party’s general election manifesto of 1900 were “adequate maintenance from national funds for the aged poor, public provision of better houses for the people; useful work for the unemployed; adequate maintenance for children; and no compulsory vaccination” (Labour Party of the UK 1900). [Score = 1]

Despite its revolutionary reputation following World War I, in its early years, the Norwegian labor party viewed itself as a “practical, political people’s party” concerned with “the demands of the day.” “It joined the Second International, and faithfully included the basic tenets of social

democracy in its annual statements of policy. But socialism was primarily a slogan and a vague hope for the future” (Galenson 1949:58–59). The party made basic demands for political regulation of working hours and wages, but these steps were defended in their own terms, irrespective of whether they would lead to the abolition of the system of wage labor.<sup>6</sup> [Score = 2]

In comparison with the Norwegian party, the Swedish party was more radical. It viewed ameliorative economic reforms from the standpoint of abolishing capitalism. According to its principal historian, Herbert Tingsten (1973:697), “Swedish Social Democracy was certainly not critical or opposed to social reforms of limited scope. . . . But it is characteristic of the early debate that all improvements to this kind were regarded as comparatively unimportant. . . . Social welfare measures were regarded as palliatives whose greatest value was often said to be that they spurred the workers on to new and more fruitful efforts.” [Score = 3]

The Bolshevik and Finnish socialist parties anchor the radical extreme. Whereas the Menshevik party conceived of economic reforms as useful steps on the path to socialism, the Bolshevik party conceived of economic reform as a distraction from the revolutionary struggle. Lenin (1902:5) ridiculed the notion, dear to orthodox German Marxists and Mensheviks alike, that trade union organization bolstered socialist consciousness: “The pompous phrase about ‘lending the economic struggle *itself* a political character,’ which sounds so ‘terrifically’ profound and revolutionary, serves as a screen to conceal what is in fact the traditional striving to *degrade* Social-Democratic politics to the level of trade union politics.” [Score = 4]

Although Swedish and German socialism influenced the Finnish socialist party more than Bolshevism, the party was similarly radical. It regarded unions and labor market activity not only as subsidiary to the political tasks of the party, but as futile. The leadership of the Finnish socialist party procrastinated in forming a union wing. When the party eventually established a union federation in 1907, it saw unions as

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<sup>5</sup> We can find no reference to a dictatorship of the proletariat in Guesde’s writing. In a brutal attack on Kautsky in 1918, Lenin wrote that the fundamental task of the proletariat was “‘smashing’ the bourgeois state machine” and quoted Marx to the effect that “Dictatorship is rule based directly upon force and unrestricted by any laws” (Lenin 1918).

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<sup>6</sup> Radical Marxists and syndicalists gained support within the party prior to World War I, but they controlled the party only toward the end of the war.

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subordinate to the party (Knoellinger 1960:47). [Score = 4]

**METHOD**

1 = the party advocates conventional political activity;

2 = the party advocates unconventional alongside conventional political activity to defend basic political rights;

3 = the party advocates unconventional alongside conventional political activity as part of a revolutionary strategy; and

4 = the party rejects conventional political activity and advocates the violent overthrow of the existing regime.

Most labor parties, including the British, Canadian, and New Zealand parties, advocated conventional liberal democratic methods, including nonviolent mass demonstrations, distributing propaganda, pressuring and petitioning governments, and campaigning in elections. Prior to 1905, when the party began its turn to the left, this category of reformist parties included the Norwegian labor party. After suffrage was extended to all Norwegians over age 25 in 1898, the Norwegian labor party advocated a conventional political strategy. While not abandoning its socialist principles, the party focused on “the demands of the day and the realizable possibilities, the tactics of relationships with the Liberal Party and the possibility of establishing contact with the masses” (Koht et al. 1937:170, quoted in Galenson 1949:58). [Score = 1]

Despite its revolutionary rhetoric, the Spanish socialist party adopted cautious political methods. The tension between formal ideology and actual practice was perhaps more acute in Spain than anywhere else. In the early 1900s, the party predicted imminent revolution, yet it was intent on protecting its organization from repression by adhering to strictly legal methods. In *Evolutionary Socialism*, Eduard Bernstein cites Pablo Iglesias, the leader of the Spanish socialist party, for abandoning revolutionary violence: “‘The bourgeoisie, of whatever shade of opinion it may be,’ declared lately the Spanish socialist, Pablo Iglesias, ‘must be convinced of this, that we do not wish to take possession of the Government by the same means that were once employed, by violence and bloodshed, but

by lawful means which are suited to civilisation’” (Vorwärts 1898, quoted in Bernstein 1899). [Score = 2]

After 1912, the Italian socialist party moved from a similar reformist position to extreme revolutionism in the belief that “it was a matter of certainty that the revolution would eventually take place and that it would be generated by the fury of proletarian violence” (Sassoon 1996:75). Mussolini was then a leading maximalist who condemned the aging moderate leadership in the party and tried to summon a wave of revolutionary violence that would topple the regime. In 1924, Gramsci recollected that as a young socialist he was himself a maximalist who “saw a solid wall upon which to turn the full weight of our forces with an energetic act of will. All or nothing, isn’t that what we said?” (Craver 1996). [Score = 4]

**DISSENTING FACTIONS**

–1.0 = a large moderate wing or moderate social democratic party confronts the mainstream of the party;

–.5 = a small moderate wing or moderate social democratic party confronts the mainstream of the party;

+ .5 = a small radical wing or radical social democratic party confronts the mainstream of the party; and

+1.0 = a large radical wing or radical social democratic party confronts the mainstream of the party.

All socialist parties contained factions that opposed the strategic or ideological choices of the leadership. In some cases, these factions broke into small competing parties. Most parties had both radical and reformist factions, but at any given time one wing or the other was usually ascendant. We recognize this in our coding by adding .5 or 1.0 to a party’s score where the dominant faction is radical in relation to the party leadership. We subtract .5 or 1.0 from a party’s score where the dominant faction is reformist. We code faction scores +1.0 or –1.0 where the secondary literature reports that the faction commands a third or more of delegates to the party congress in the year of evaluation, or if the faction is perceived to threaten the tenure of the party leadership.

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**Chief sources for coding the dependent variable:**

Australia: Burgmann 1985:196–198, 180–181; McKinlay 1981:3–8,12–14, 19; Patmore 1991:80–83.

Austria: Knapp 1980:41, 42, 60–61, 72, 153, 189–202; Sassoon 1996:21; Shell 1962:9–11, 22; Steenson 1991; Sully 1982:13–18, 22.

Belgium: Dodge 1979:51; Fitzmaurice 1996:27–29, 181–182; Henig and Pinder 1969:72; Liebman 1979:111, 128, 130–134, 145, 149, 163; Mabile 1992:201–202; Strikwerda 1997:111, 272.

Canada: Heron 1989:47–49; Palmer 1983:149–150, 158–161.

Denmark: Calleson 1990:131–61; Galenson 1952:149; Sassoon 1996:11–13.

Finland: Alapuro 1988:103–04, 122–27; Nousiainen 1971:21–26; Puntila 1975:70–74; Sassoon 1996:11–13; Soikkanen 1978:348.

France: Brunet 1989:21–22; Derfler 1973:67, 70–73, 1998; Eley 2002:87–88; Geary 1989:78–79, 86; Goldberg 1962:66, 261; *Jaurés et la classe ouvrière*:91; Judt 1986:118–19; Kruezer 2001:25–30; Moss 1980:90; Ridley 1970:54–44, 92–93; Sassoon 1996:11–13; Steenson 1991; Williams 1983:4–7, 14–25.

Germany: Eley 2002:68; Fletcher 1987:24; Geary 1989:129; Groh 1973; Henig and Pinder 1969:35; Kruezer 2001:25–27, 30–32; Osterroth and Schuster 1975:50ff; Sassoon 1996:11–13; Schorske 1981; Steenson 1991.

Great Britain: Eley 2002:64, 89–90; Marks 1989; Rubinstein 2006:11–50; Sassoon 1996:15–18; Thomson 2006:10–76.

Italy: Davis 1989:182–94; de Grand 1989:17–19, 25, 423; Henig and Pinder 1969:193–196; Hilton-Young 1949:42–49, 55, 72–75; Neufeld 1961: ch. 8; Steenson 1991.

Netherlands: Buitting 1990:57–84; Eley 2002:68; Henig and Pinder 1969:263.

New Zealand: Gustafson 1980:13, 39, 70–76, 82, 84; Olssen 1990:609–622.

Norway: Galenson 1952:149–51; Sassoon 1996:11–13.

Russia: Brovkin 1987:2; Fineberg 1934:36–50; Galenson 1952; Gooding 2002:34–61; Hildermeier 2000:51–89; Read 1989:153–54, 180.

Spain: Gillespie 1989:8–9, 17, 25–35; Heywood 1989:231–35, 263, 247–56, 1990:7, 11–15.

Sweden: Eley 2002:67; Galenson 1952:150–51; Sassoon 1996:1–13, 21; Tingsten 1973:149, 150, 168, 192, 378, 396, 422.

Switzerland: Biucchi 1973:627–53; Henig and Pinder 1969:365, 376; Kohler 1977:28, 46; Lang 1977:140; Masnata 1963:107–114.

United States: Chester 2004:39–83; Esposito 1997:34–36, 45–78, 221–50; Lipset and Marks 2000; Shannon 1955:78–79.

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