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SOCIALISM, SOCIAL DEMOCRACY
AND COMMUNISM: HISTORICAL,
POLITICAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC
PERSPECTIVES

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INTRODUCTION

In 1989, the Eastern European Spring was shaking the Marxist Leninist regimes of the region, those regimes which had been installed there since decades. In a matter of only 2 years, the whole Communist Block in Europe including the Soviet Union collapsed, sending seismic waves all over the planet. Francis Fukuyama wrote then his popular and much debated doctrine about the “end of history” and the final point for human ideological evolution, declaring the “universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”¹

More than quarter of a century after, the ideological evolution and struggle are seemingly anything but settled. Western liberal democracy has not been able to rule the world, often being ousted by military dictatorships or semi-authoritarian illiberal, yet elected, popular regimes in various countries of the world. Meanwhile, Communism believed to have been placed in its coffin at the first years of the 1990s was resurrected (if it ever has died at the first place) in the form of Maoist insurgents, Latin American guerrilla fighters, and Communist movements and parties all over the globe. Other forms of more revolutionary and anti-Imperialist Socialism evolved in Latin America with the name of Bolivarianism, what has been perceived by its perpetrators to be the Socialism of the 21st century. Within the Western liberal democratic system, the long-established space for Social Democrats as one of the major political forces in Western Europe and elsewhere is maintained. Ideological evolution is going its various different paths according to how they are being shaped by various forces in operation in different places of our extensive world.

Neither did the deterministic path foreseen by Marx and his prophecies ever materialized. Writing in the 19th century, Marx’s historical materialism led him to anticipate that industrialization and persistent crises systematically suffered by the capitalist bourgeois economies would bring forward the next step in human societies’ development. This would be the dictatorship of the proletariat which would overthrow the capitalist bourgeoisie and set the stage for a classless society and a Communist stage Utopia. But for this to happen, industrialization should have been so immense that it totally succeeded in transforming traditional feudal societies into modern ones; that is to say societies characterized by the centrality of the relationship between the capitalist bourgeoisie and the proletariat. As often remarked, it was in the industrially backward semi-feudal Russia of the early 20th century that a state claiming the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat came to power, despite the weakness of the

existing bourgeoisie and the relatively small proletariat. This, however, never happened in industrially advanced Britain or the United States of America. Path dependency, which was downplayed by the Marxist theoretical framework, played a considerable role in 1917 Russia. At a time of a devastating war, demoralized soldiers and broken order, a series of events and ill-fated decisions from the various contending political players of the time helped the Bolsheviks to grab the opportunity. Communist Bolsheviks would not probably have stood a chance, had any of the players behaved differently, other crucial decisions been taken, or even had the same decisions been taken at a different point of time, probably only few months after. But also, more importantly, the way in which socioeconomic and institutional settings of different societies shaped outcomes proved to be more complex than what Marx had perceived. Inequality, industrialization, urbanization, and frequent economic crises were crucial for the rise of Socialism, but other factors were also in the same equation leading to the emergence of different forms of Socialism with varying prospects of success.

Ideological evolution should not be taken apart from the societies which shape them. No regime, whether democratic or dictatorial, can survive for long without the existence of supporting societal settings. This could mean that the ruling regime is entertaining a positive support in terms of high popularity from a wide segment of the society. But it could also mean, in a passive sense, that the most influential societal forces or leaders are constrained by various impediments rendering them incapable of ousting the system. Institutions and socioeconomic factors shape how societies react to a ruling regime. Democracy versus authoritarianism, industrial transformation, rural–urban divide, ethnic fractionalization, religion, and hierarchical versus non-hierarchical cultural structures are all examples of forces playing such a role. On their turn, societies' reactions are valuable feedbacks for a ruling regime and its ideology. The same is true for any ideological movement whether in power or not. While the space is free for thousands of genuine ideas and ideologies, it is society through its feedback which fosters few of these and brings them to the forefront. Ideologies have also to adapt to entertain a positive societal support; or if ideologues ever have the power and the means for changing societal conditions and beliefs, they would mold society to their belief system. The latter is, however, a long-run process and the probability for its success is arguably much lower than the former.

The case in question here in this book is that of Socialism, and more specifically Marxist Socialism. Starting from the same origin and acknowledging intellectual allegiance to Karl Marx, Social Democracy and Communism developed into different ideologies, even often seeing each other as fierce enemies. Social Democracy stressed on an open mass party structure, democratic procedures of taking decisions at the party congress level, respecting democratic institutions and elections, and gradual reform as a mean for reaching the dictatorship of the proletariat that would prepare society henceforth for the Utopian

Communist stage. On the contrary, Communism or Marxism–Leninism had a centralized and highly hierarchical party structure where decisions were taken by the party center, was less tolerant to differences in views among party members, was more inclined to insurrectionary and revolutionary tactics to reach the dictatorship of the proletariat, and was inherently against democracy even when Communist parties used it to reach power. Chances of success for the two heirs of Marxism in receiving high popularity varied from a society to the other. Understanding the rise of Socialism and why Social Democracy was more popular in some societies than Communism, or the other way round, are questions that transcend political ideology and the historical or spatial context of this study. These are the questions which this book is trying to answer with a special focus on institutional and socioeconomic factors.

The chosen period for this study is the one extending between the 1880s, witnessing the death of Marx and the birth of the Second International, and the end of World War II in 1945. This was the period that witnessed the emergence of contending views on Marxism materializing for the first time in 1903 with the emergence of the Bolshevik faction within the Social Democratic party of Russia. This faction would come to power in 1917 and declare itself a Communist Party and lead an international Communist movement through the Comintern established in 1919; and by this it formed an irredeemable schism with the Social Democratic movement. The Social Democratic movement in many countries kept loyal to Marxism in this period, even while abiding to democratic rules believing in gradual transformation. Things differed after 1945; Social Democratic parties were eventually no longer Marxist, while Communism received a major boost for its popularity with the wide military victory of the Soviet Red Army and the emergence of the Soviet Union as one of the two world superpowers. This what makes the period identified here interesting to investigate and study.

Taken from a socioeconomic and institutional angle, the questions being addressed in this book could be regarded as ones that investigate societies' responses to inequality, modernization, and development as well as the socioeconomic determinants of radicalism. The rise of the popularity of Socialism reflected the increasing calls for a more equitable distribution of income and wealth. But the presence of inequality in itself is never sufficient for triggering societal actions targeting fairness. In retrospect, history has shown how humans could be blinded from seeing realities, realizing their misery, or finding out about the causes of their misfortunes when these causes stand right in front of their eyes and senses. Slavery was not only accepted but was also seen as normal in much of the globe. Discrimination because of race, sex, or religion has been similarly regarded and treated. This is not to mention human sacrifice in flesh and blood provided in ancient civilizations for the gods, public torture, and execution of dissidents in festive celebrating atmosphere, and other practices that would be regarded in our world as extremely bizarre and inhumane. For supporting this social order facilitating injustice, accumulating mountains

of cultural beliefs and values were built over the years and centuries. It is no wonder, thus, that injustice by itself has never been enough for evoking calls for redistribution. Consciousness has always been needed to realize the presence of injustice and high levels of inequality, and to enable seeing through the cultural dark curtains. It is in such context that the Marxist Antonio Gramsci, for instance, spoke about a Socialist revolution as being a battle of ideas, a war against the hegemony of the beliefs and values by which the dominant classes governs society; that is to say a war for consciousness. But if awareness has been detrimental for the popularity of Socialism, such awareness on its turn is a product of certain developmental settings. This points to the crucial role played by human development and modernization. Through expanding literacy and education and propagating knowledge and information, development ultimately brings more awareness and with it calls for more equality.

Modernization and development brought with them also industrialization and urbanization. Industrialization was central for the creation of an industrial working class, the proletariat. This class was working without having any ownership claims over their production or the means of production. It has shared an experience that united large number of people through working in a limited space such as a factory. This was substantially different from the experience of working in land as peasants, even if peasants often worked under the service of the same landowner. It was only perhaps relatively similar to the case of agricultural laborers. Urbanization also piled people in tens of thousands in compacted cities, with people experiencing similar tough conditions being forced to live together and to communicate and realize their shared experience. This was again different than the experience of the relatively isolated peasantry households, even when those peasants were sharing a village. The proliferation of mass media was a further awareness enhancing development. Journals, radios, and books spread knowledge and made it possible for a higher audience to have access for information and intellectual works. Moreover, railways, telegrams, and telephones substantially transformed transportation and communication. This allowed a wide-based Socialist movement to materialize all over more of the national territories of large countries. The increasing popularity of Socialism furthermore reflected the retreat of the role of religious institutions; these institutions were often manipulated by the elites and used to pacify the masses and convince them of accepting inequalities in expectation of after-life reward.

Industrialization brought with it also rapid urbanization. The rural migrants dreaming of material reward were not always satisfied, with an increasing feeling of their relative deprivation in comparison to urban elites. Rapid urbanization went far beyond city capacities and its infrastructure bringing poor living conditions and widespread frustration among poor urban dwellers. Radicalization was the ultimate result; the more rapid urbanization surpassed industrialization, the higher the resulting radicalization. Moreover, the more authoritarian and repressive the regime was, the more radicalized and

revolutionary the response it met. Social Democracy as an ideological movement was no longer a valid option, and Communism with its secretive cells, conspirator, insurrectionist, and less tolerant to ideological differences characteristics gained much popularity. Extreme inequalities and sudden economic hardships, by boosting social frustration, proved also to be additional recruiters for Communism.

Many of the factors that led to the rise of Socialism, however, contributed to the rise of one of its fierce enemies, Nationalism. Literacy consolidated linguistic identity, and educational programs brought to the forefront the conflict on whose language it should be conducted, the language of the dominant ruler or that of the ruled. In other circumstances, it called into attention the presence of others who share the same language, yet, are under the rule of different states and empires. The rise of awareness brought foreign domination under daylight, highlighted individuals' identity, and brought a romanticized view of how life could be in a state designed for all fellows of the same nation, whether identified by language or race. From being subjects under the rule of a king or an emperor, people became citizens whose aspirations and dreams should be accounted for. However, it was true that religion helped in many instances in identifying a nation, as was the case in the Balkans in the independence wars which its nations waged against the Ottomans. It was, however, often the case that the marginalization of religion and the secularization of the state were what opened the door wide for the fall of multinational empires. This was witnessed, for instance, in the Austrian–Hungarian Empire when the people of the big empire tried to identify themselves with language and race. Identifying with linguistic rather than religious identity led also to trans-state nationalist projects based on language, even when religious differences existed, as was the case in Germany. Although Nationalism often mingled with Socialism when the struggle for identity coincided with that of fairness mainly against foreign domination and exploitation, Nationalism was more likely to be in conflict with Socialism. This was more common in the first years of nation building, where the social question was hushed for the sake of safeguarding national independence or for the nation's further expansion. Nationalism was, moreover, responsible for the bitterest of all the enemies of Socialism, the Fascist movement.

Rapid modernization and development unleashed another rival force. This was a force of reaction to rapid change and its resulting socioeconomic upheaval, the force of conservatism. Secularism, the marginalization of religious institutions, and even the attack on religion and its institutions, provoked conservative forces. Marxist Socialism was often connoted to atheism and in some instances to anti-religion. The struggle between religion-based conservatism and Socialism was the fiercest where the Church establishment was still strong. This was more common in Catholic and Orthodox countries, with the Spanish Revolution and Civil War and the Russian Revolution being clear manifestations. Yet, the presence of considerable rural populations amid

industrial transformation was another source for conservatism. A dual economy proved in many instances to pose a great threat for Socialists, many of whom were ideologically and tactfully incapable of opening links with the peasants. Forces of conservatism were able to use the countryside in turning the tables on the Socialists enjoying high popularity in urban centers. Hungary and Austria were clear examples for such a development.

This book is an effort to explore in detail the effect of these institutional and socioeconomic factors that shaped the development of Socialism leading it to its different and even fierce rival ideologies of Social Democracy and Communism, with varying chances of success for each of the two in different societies. Its novelty is attributed to the deep analytical dimension for the issue done between the folds of this book, combining theory, an empirical study made possible by the newly available rich historical data, and a number of important case studies reflecting different dimensions of the issue. The historical narrative and the presentation of different ideological perspectives scattered in various chapters of this book partly depended on my previous work on the history of Communist confrontation with capitalism in the 20th century (Sabry, 2009); this is especially the case in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3. The present book, however, focuses on socioeconomic and institutional explanations while conducting a comparative analysis on the fortunes of Social Democrats and Communists, as heirs of the same Marxist heritage. Even when historical narrative is introduced, this is done for the purpose of reaching a theoretical understanding, one that guides our understanding for whether certain events were part of deterministic or rather path-dependent developments. The investigation done in this book is conducted in five chapters.

In Chapter 1, the story about the rise of Marxism starting from the famous Manifesto, the emergence of Social Democracy, Communism, and the various intellectual perspectives of Marxist ideologues is being told. This chapter briefly covers the different ideas of major intellectuals starting with Marx and Engels and passing by Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxembour, Kautsky, Bernstein, Gramsci, and Stalin. Access to much of the works of these intellectuals was obtained from the highly valuable website of the *Marxist Internet Archive* (2016). This chapter also briefly discusses the socioeconomic, institutional, and political developments of the world in that period up to 1945, passing by the Industrial Revolution, the 1848 Revolution, the First International, the French Revolution of 1871 and the Paris Commune, the Second Industrial Revolution, World War I, the Interwar period, and ending with World War II. A special focus is put on Europe where most of these developments were taking place.

Chapter 2 is the main theoretical chapter of the book. It starts with the literature on the topic. This is followed by a theoretical formulation preparing for the empirical study. The popularity of Social Democracy and Communism is being indicated by their vote shares in the various elections held worldwide in which they participated in the studied period. Their vote shares, being used as dependent variables, are being argued to be the result of a number of

independent socioeconomic and institutional variables suggested by the study, and this is being tested using a number of panel multivariate regressions. In one of the regressions, the used dependent variable measures the ratio of the Communist vote to the Social Democrat vote as an indicator for radicalism. Many of the results obtained provide evidence for the introduced theoretical perspective.

In Chapter 3, Russia, as a case study for a country where Communism was powerful and popular, is being presented. The history of Russia in the last decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century leading to 1917 is being discussed, going over Tsarist Russia's political developments and its socioeconomic and institutional settings. The discussion tries to explain what rapidly transformed Socialism into a major political movement, after starting from marginal levels, and then why Bolshevism gained such strength. This is followed by the story of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and all the political developments leading to the Bolshevik triumph, power consolidation, and then the Stalinist succession. An important question is being theoretically and analytically tackled at the end of that chapter. Was the course of these developments more of a path-dependent evolution where historical circumstances and the various decisions of the different involved players strongly shaped outcomes? Or did these developments rather follow a more deterministic path guided by the socioeconomic and institutional settings of Russia?

In contrast, Germany is being presented in Chapter 4 as a case study for a country having the strongest Social Democratic party in the world before World War I, and where the Social Democrats were one of the strongest political parties up to the rise of the Nazis in 1933. The same scheme as in the previous chapter is followed. Starting with Germany's political developments between the last decades of the 19th century witnessing the German Unification, passing by Bismarck's reign and the Wilhelminian era, and up to the end of World War I, the history of the Social Democrats and the rise of their popularity would be told. Then a closer look is placed on Germany's socioeconomic and institutional settings of that period. After that, the events of 1919 and the developments that followed the establishment of the Weimar Republic until 1933 are being discussed with more focus on the Social Democrats and Communists. This chapter ends with a theoretical analysis on whether the German Social Democrats' rise to power and their demise followed a path-dependent or deterministic course.

Chapter 5 gives brief account of other important case studies. Scandinavia is an example of a region where Social Democrats gained the greatest success in the world in the Interwar period. In democratic and economically advanced Western European countries, Social Democracy evolved as a major political force in the Interwar period with a marginal role for Communism, except in France. Austria and Hungary, separated after World War I, went their different paths where Socialism shaped both of their histories, with a more active role for Communists in the latter and for Social Democrats in the former. The

Southern European Mediterranean and Catholic countries of Italy and Spain experienced a fierce struggle between Socialists, whether Social Democrats or Communists, and forces of Nationalism and conservatism, and they were eventually wiped up by the Fascist tide. Economically backward China and Mongolia were examples of countries where, despite having uninviting socio-economic conditions, an active Communist movement existed. The United States had the unique experience among highly industrialized and urbanized countries of having virtually no Socialism. Finally, Mexico represented the case of a country where a blend of Socialism and Nationalism gained wide popularity.

The book ends up with a conclusion bringing together the whole threads of the analysis done in the various chapters.

NOTE

1. Fukuyama (1989).