



which edition are you using? since it became "stable" how many many editions have been published? ①

Robert Michels' Political Parties was originally published in 1912 in Germany. The English edition was published in 1915 with a preface and an added chapter on Party Life in War Time. The first 300 pages of the book expose the very deep opportunism in the Second International in the first decade of the century. Michels claims this is "conclusive proof of the existence of immanent oligarchical tendencies in every kind of human organization." *RF 122*

Michels shows how the leaders become rulers when they get hold of the administrative machine. Over and over we are shown that the trade union leaders, the political leaders, whether intellectuals or workers, are separated from the rank and file as soon as they become bureaucrats. His argument is the following: Democracy leads to oligarchy no matter what your theory, because the problem of democracy is a practical, administrative one. When the initial spontaneous action is over, new leaders arise because of mass's incompetence, and their worship of leaders. Leaders become rulers due to their superiority in administration, politics and culture. Leadership is stable Struggles among leaders end up usually to the detriment of the masses. All opposition is crushed. The organization is itself the creator of petty bourgeois layers.

In the final section Michels ties this to the "conservative basis of organization", i.e., organization takes on a life of its own and principles are sacrificed. And in the final chapter he denies the possibility of social development without a "politically dominant class". Class struggle is degenerated to the struggle among cliques. "Marx's theory of state", affirms this in that it recognizes the state as the ruling class's executive committee. The contention that abolition of private property leads to abolition of proletariat, ignores that the new state will become bureaucratic and a new class will emerge. Social revolution does not accomplish anything. *at least bourgeoisie* Michels criticism directed towards Marx is really an affirmation of Lasalle's remark to Bismarck about the workers inherent tendency towards dictatorship. From the very first paragraph of the preface Michels lays the ground for his conclusion, when he singles out three fundamental problems in the following manner. The first two are economic and nationality. Both are readily solved with Lasallean



Romy Cyrus

November, 29, 1985

Dear Raya,

The edition I used for the summary of Michels' Political Parties is (1962; Collier, Pp371). It includes an introduction by Seymour M. Lipset which is about 25 pages long, from which you can see that it was indeed the Bible for a lot of intellectuals who broke with the CP, especially in the early 40s and mid 50s. Political Parties was originally published in 1912. The first english translation was in 1915, with chapter added on WWI.

Bukharin's reference to Michels is in the final 3 pages of his work Historical Materialism, under the section The Classless Society of the Future, which I am enclosing (pp 309-11). Stability of leaders which Bukharin also points out in Michels, is the title of a chapter. Here Michels discusses how the German SD's leaders all go back several decades; then states that this often leads to establishment of cliques; and efforts to remedy this such as short term of office, or "reduction of leaders to simple executive organs" is useless. Here is a quote:

"The sentiment of tradition, in cooperation with an instinctive need for stability, has as its result that the leadership represents always the past rather than the present. Leadership is indefinitely retained, not because it is the tangible expression of the relationships between the forces existing in the party at any given moment, but simply because it is already constituted." p 121

The quote on Michels' claim that this is "conclusive proof of the existence of immanent oligarchical tendencies in every kind of human organization", is on page 50.

On Cultural-linguistic, Raya, I had made a mistake. This is how the quote reads:

The so-called principle of nationality was discovered for the solution of the racial and linguistic problem which, unsolved, has continually threatened Europe with war and the majority of individual states with revolution (Preface, page 5)

The references to Marx and to Luxemburg follow:

p.76, "Marx and his followers regard parliamentary action as one weapon, theoretically, but in practice employ this alone...they recognize perils of representative system, even when based upon universal suffrage, but add that the SP is free from it." (ftn.: Cf Kautsky, Luxemburg and Marx's Revolution and Counter Revolution in Germany)

p.89 refers to letter from Marx to Schweitzer on the need to teach German workers to walk by themselves; Oct-13, 1868. Michels says here that Eduard Bernstein shares this attitude with Marx.

p.93-96 In the chapter entitled "cult of veneration among the masses" although the discussion is about Lassalle, he acts as if Marx was the same.

p 194-5 Discusses the 1st Int'l alongside of Lassalle's party, and dismisses it as being "subject to the iron will of one individual, and ridicules Marx's designation of it as "common leadership",

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Handwritten initials: B, Y, M, CL

Handwritten note: The... Lassalle...

Handwritten note: Wrong again

Handwritten note: common leadership

p.217 refers to a letter by Marx, that Michels says 'deploras leaders who ask to receive special respect', but in fact the letter is about the attitude of Parliamentarians to criticism as if it is a crime (sept 19, 1879) and two pages later p.219, he quotes from Luxemburg, "On no account must the faith of the people be disturbed...all lively criticism of the objective errors of the movement are stigmatized as an attack on the movement itself..."

p.228 Cites the Communist Manifesto to "prove" that socialist consciousness comes to proletariat, because the bourgeois has to fight reaction.

p.239 refers to Marx's children as exceptions, but as a rule children of bourgeois socialists become bourgeois, says Michels.

p.263 Cites Marx's differentiation of working class into mental and manual workers, and the formation of an elite

p.285 cites Marx to prove that workers never make good theoreticians: "workers who become professional writers make a mess of the theoretical side",

p.286 & 291 refers to Marx's opinion of British T.U leaders to "prove" that worker leaders are always less revolutionary etc...

p.314 Taking issue with Marx's connotation of "Declasse" in referring to the Russian revolutionaries

p.336 & 339 To prove his point about the "conservative basis of organization" he refers to Engels' "timid legalism" in the 1895 edition of Marx's Class Struggle in France; and to Kautsky's introduction to the CGP in Neue Zeit that "Marx closed his eyes to serious faults of the GSD".

p.346-49 In these last pages of his book he starts talking about Marx's "theories", such as "Marx's affirmation of immanent necessity for the perennial existence of the 'political class'", . Next he defines "Marx's theory of state" and refers to CGP as proof that dictatorship as means can not be reconciled with democracy as aim. and finally: "the defects of Marxism are patent directly as we enter the practical domain of administration and public law, without speaking of errors in the psychological field and even in more elementary spheres." (page 349)

This last quote mentions "administrative", but there are several others throughout the book, actually a whole section with six chapters is called Technical and administrative causes of leadership.

Raya would you like me to do more work on this? I am not really planning any academic involvement. Did you think I should also follow up on Chomsky's ideas as you had mentioned them? *mw*

Yours, *Ayrus*