

A black and white historical photograph of a parliament chamber, likely the Reichstag in Berlin. The room is grand, with high ceilings, ornate chandeliers, and rows of desks for members. A speaker is visible at a podium in the background. The image is partially overlaid by a blue graphic of a map of Europe in the bottom right corner.

# Social Democracy and State Formation Georgia





Plenary Session of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia  
Foto: Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University, Library, Research Center –  
Library for Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) .

## Introduction

After the First World War, several new independent republics emerged in Eastern Europe. Social democratic movements actively participated in the political constitution of many of the new states. Unexpectedly, the first social democratic government in Europe was created not in one of the western industrial nations, but in Georgia, an agricultural country formerly in the Russian Empire, adjoining the Near East.

The design of socialism and thus social democracy in Georgia was always profoundly influenced by its unique conditions. While the nineteenth century was deeply imprinted by Tsarist oppression of Georgian culture and people, the first democratic movements were nationalistic and elitist as Georgia was an agricultural country with only a small industrial proletariat. It is therefore not surprising that only in 1892 the first left-wing group was formed in Zestafoni, one of the biggest industrial centres in Georgia at the time. The first manifesto of the Georgian left was published in 1894, written by Noe Zhordania, the future leading figure among the Georgian social democrats. The manifesto

already exemplifies the distinct character of Georgian socialism, recognising the lack of an industrial proletariat and the need to include the peasants and other non-bourgeois classes by democratic means.

After achieving independence in 1918 the social democrats were the leading force of the fledgling Georgian republic, winning more than 80 per cent of the votes in the first democratic elections. Due to their inclusivity they created a state that was contrary to Bolshevik ideas and instead followed the lead of the German SPD and Karl Kautsky in particular. Equal rights, emancipation of minorities and women, decentralisation and a mixed economy favouring social justice were the pillars of the newly founded republic. The living conditions of workers and peasants alike were to be improved not by revolution, but through gradual progress. But the biggest challenge for the social democratic republic was the foreign threat from Bolshevik Russia, the Ottoman Empire, Armenia and Soviet Azerbaijan. In this hostile environment the social democratic government's goal was to stay neutral but still defend its territorial integrity.

Although the Social Democratic Republic of Georgia was internationally recognised and lauded as a spearhead of social democracy by many representatives of the Second International, such as Karl Kautsky, Ramsay MacDonald and Emile Vandervelde, it nevertheless succumbed to Soviet Russia in 1921 and lost its independence. Today the social democratic past is a distant memory for many Georgians. During the regimes of Shevardnadze and Saakashvili and the current government led by the 'Georgian Dream' party, Georgia's focus has been on neoliberalism and a 'free market economy'. Despite the fact that „Georgian Dream“ describes itself as a social democratic party and is registered as an observer with the European Party of Socialists, it does not portray itself as inheritor of the social democratic past.

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## 1 | THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT BEFORE INDEPENDENCE



Presidium of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia. Foto: Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Library, Research Center – Library for Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921)

## 1.1. Origins of the Social Democratic Movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

In 1801 the Russian Empire abolished the monarchy in eastern Georgia. This meant the end of sovereignty for the country and Georgia became part of the Russian Empire. Supporters of the Bagrationi Monarchy, members of the royal family and local nobles protested the decision of St. Petersburg. From 1801 to 1832 several military rebellions were organised in different parts of Georgia, though all of them failed. The Georgian Conspiracy of 1832 was planned by Georgian nobles, but was discovered beforehand by the secret service of the Tsarist regime. Some participants were arrested and exiled, others were given military and bureaucratic positions. All the political rebellions organised at the beginning of the 19th century came from monarchists, nobles and those from the upper classes. Lower social classes were not represented in the national liberation movement. Peasants and those from lower classes working in big cities were not thought of as a considerable political force by the nobles.

After the failure of the attempted rebellion in 1832, a period of pessimism and conformism started in Georgia. The opposition could not organise their activities against the Tsarist system. The policy of Russification was strengthened because there were no opposition forces and newspapers in the country. Potential political actors were integrated into the state system. The Georgian language was used only to communicate in everyday life. It was barred from the civil service and public establishments, schools, theaters and churches. Publication of books in Georgian was stopped. The Russian language became dominant in the local press and all the main characteristics of Tsarism were enforced in Georgia – censorship, political repressions, a violent police system and the non-existence of democratic institutions. Social economic conditions for the Georgian people were hard. In the 1860s serfdom was abolished in Georgia. Before the abolition of serfdom, Georgian peasants were a constituent element of nobles' fortune. Peasants had no access to independent activities and opportunities for development. Only in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were the minimal standards of an eight-hour working day and labour rights obtained by people in the Caucasus region.

In the 1860s, intellectuals returned from Russia and ended this period of pessimism in Georgia. The famous Georgian thinker Ilia Chavchavadze, led a group of writers, poets and journalists, whose priorities were establishing a Georgian social-political and literary press, creating independent Georgian elementary and secondary schools, and developing political awareness by reminding people of their history.

These public figures were in favour of independence or autocephaly for the Georgian Orthodox Church from the Russian Orthodox Church. They were also in favour of establishing elective institutes of national self-government throughout Georgia. These representatives of democratic nationalism rejected the theory of class antagonism: They did not see different classes, but only one Georgian nation and called on people to maintain national integrity to counterbalance Tsarist policies. Thus, the first democratic wave in Georgia in the second half of the 19th century was mainly cultural. Democratic thinkers avoided discussions about economic issues and focused on language, history, literature and religion<sup>1</sup>.

The activities of Ilia Chavchavadze and his followers did not have much in common with social democratic ideals, though they had an important influence in the creation of the left-wing movement in Georgia. The future Georgian Social Democrats received their education in schools founded by Chavchavadze's group. They familiarised themselves with illegal books in the libraries of these schools. They read about global policy and literature in newspapers founded by Georgian writers and poets. Most importantly, graduates of the Russian Universities set the precedent for social activism and resistance against the Russian political-military administration. They set the standard for future political leaders scattered in different regions of the Caucasus.

1. Lortkipanidze Gr. (1995), "Thoughts about Georgia", TSU pp. 100-137.

## 1.2. Social Democratic Group Formation and the Main Ideological Priorities of the Movement

The first left-wing group in Georgia was formed in 1892. It became known as the Third Group<sup>2</sup>, or “Mesame Dasi” in Georgian. The constituent conference was held in a little settlement called Kvirila in western Georgia. Kvirila is now a borough located in the city of Zestafoni. Zestafoni, with its ferro-alloys factory, is one of the biggest industrial centers in Georgia. In order to deceive the police, the conference was held over Christmas and disguised as a Christmas event.

The Kvirila conference was attended by around 10 people. They were village teachers, revolutionary students of the Tiflis Theological Seminary, journalists and writers (e.g. Noe Zhordania, Isidore Ramishvili, Egnate Ninoshvili, Mikha Tskhakaia, etc.) who gained fame with the help of the press created by Chavchavadze’s group. Some of the conference delegates had a past in the “Khalkhosnuri” movement. This was the Georgian equivalent of the Russian “Narodniks” – i.e. “men and women of the people” – who idealised country life and saw a return to living in a village community as a way to reaching a better, socialist society. During the first meeting the participants could not agree on the main statutes of their programme. The meeting participants assigned Noe Zhordania (who had studied in Warsaw and became a member of socialist discussion circles there) to write a manifesto for this new political movement.

The first political manifesto of the Third Group was published in 1894. Noe Zhordania called his programme “Economic Success and Nationality”. The manifesto included several fundamental Marxist ideas. Namely, the author focused on urbanisation, industrialisation and the necessity of capitalist development. The future Prime Minister of Georgia could not imagine the advance of socialism without a transition from feudalism to capitalism. By refusing to omit capitalism, the Georgian Social Democrats made a distinct boundary

2. In the 1890s Georgian publicist Giorgi Tsereteli, father of Irakli Tsereteli – one of the prominent members of the State Duma – established the term “Third Group” (“Mesame Dasi”) to denote the group of Georgian Social Democrats.

between the followers of “Khalkhosnuri” Socialism and themselves<sup>3</sup>.

Third Group members contradicted one of the main statements of the 1860s national cultural-democratic movement. According to this thesis, democratic nationalists denied class antagonism. The Third Group’s manifesto clearly identified a conflict in society that was caused by economic inequality, exploitation and oppression. Arguments of economic determinism had a significant place in the first programme for the Georgian Social Democrats. They tried to convince the Georgian population that, when explaining any political or cultural event, economic issues and the problems of welfare distribution had to be taken into consideration.

The main characteristic of the Georgian social democratic movement was that it appealed to various social groups. Revolutionaries from agrarian and non-industrialised regions understood that only depending on the working class alone would not be useful as this class was not large enough. The Third Group was in favour of a political struggle based on the coalition of rural and urban working classes. They argued that, around their political agenda, the working class had to bring together the following groups: peasants without land, small traders in big cities, sole proprietors, progressive intellectuals and upper class representatives of the feudal society - bankrupted by moneylenders. Third Group leaders believed that the working class had to be at the vanguard of revolutionary activities, though it would not be wise if they tried their chances in politics without partnership from the others.

From 1892 to 1903, the Georgian social democratic movement was an independent political unit. Third Group members determined their political agenda without interference from any other structures within the Russian Empire. In 1903, the Third Group joined the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP). After joining the RSDLP, the Georgian Social Democrats were more actively involved in the international left-wing discourse. The position of the Russian and European Social Democrats were clear for the followers

3. Matsaberidze (edit.), (2015), “Chrestomathy of the Georgian Leftism”, Tbilisi, pp 157-232.

of the Third Group, who subsequently made the following demands: the introduction of an eight-hour working day, protection of workers security norms, absolute elimination of unemployment, carrying out a state wide employment policy, equal rights for women, strengthening of local self-government, and support of collective and state ownership structures. The main disagreement between the Georgian and Russian Social Democrats was about how to manage the revolutionary movement and national issues.

From the very beginning, the vast majority of the Georgian Social Democrats followed the Menshevik wing of the RSDLP. The Mensheviks disagreed with Lenin's idea of „democratic centralism“. They thought it would not be good if only a small group of people took responsibility for managing a party that covered the whole Russian territory. They were in favour of a bottom-up organisational structure for the party. Before the First Republic was established, the whole of Georgia was covered by new organisations of the Social Democratic Party of Georgia (SDPG). By voting on different levels, these organisations had a significant influence in creating a unified position for the RSDLP Caucasus Bureau.

One of the most complicated problems for the Georgian social democratic movement was the issue of national identity, although the matter did not have much importance for Russian leftists. However, for citizens living under national oppression in this peripheral region of the Russian Empire this issue was a great challenge. The SDPG had differing views about national identity and there were four contradictory positions in the party<sup>4</sup>:

- The radical internationalist wing of the party did not consider national identity problems as politically crucial. They believed there was only one significant issue – solving the obstacles of the proletariat. They argued that, after eliminating economic oppression, national independence and self-awareness problems would be solved naturally. The proletarian internationalist group was led by the future leader of the State Duma, Irakli Tsereteli.

4. Iremadze Irakli (2016) Ideological Transformation of the Georgian Social-democratic Party (“Third Group” “Mesame Dasi”) in 1892-1905, TSU.

- In his public letters, Noe Zhordania spoke out about the decision made at the Second Congress of the RSDLP. The decision concerned the development of local district self-government. At this stage of the social democratic movement, Zhordania considered that strengthening of self-governance was a way to build national self-awareness.

- The first Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Akaki Chkhenkeli was in favour of the national programme of the Social Democratic Party of Austria. Chkhenkeli strived to adjust the five articles of the Brno programme to the Russian Empire and its nations.

These articles are:

1. Austria must be transformed into one democratic federal state of nations.
2. Instead of historical crown lands, self-government bodies having national boundaries are created. Their legislation and governance is formed by national chambers. Elections of the chamber are based on universal, equal and direct suffrage.
3. All the self-governing territories of one and the same nation form a unified national association, that autonomously regulates its own national affairs.
4. The rights of ethnic minorities are protected by a special law that is to be adopted by the Imperial Parliament.
5. We negate any national prerogative. Thus, we dismiss the request of one state language. The Imperial Parliament will determine the necessity of one intermediate language<sup>5</sup>.

5. Chkhenkeli Ak. (2000). Nation and We (first published in 1915). Tbilisi, Meridiani, p. 41.

In the 1900s, a small group emerged inside the SDPG. In an open and direct manner, the group demanded political autonomy for Georgia with a view to independence.

Within the SDPG there was no consensus about the national issue. In spite of this, discussions of the national programme never created a risk of the party dividing.

### 1.3. The Main Pillars of the Georgian Social Democratic Movement (1892-1917)

From 1892 to 1917, the SDPG developed into the main and dominant political force in the country. Progress made by the SDPG was the result of institutional activities and other events. Below, we explain the main institutions and events that had a decisive impact on the development of social democratic ideas throughout Georgia.

**The Tiflis Theological Seminary.** In the second half of the 19th century, Georgian students had several options to continue their studies after finishing secondary education. Rich citizens went to universities in Russia and Europe. For poor students, the only way to continue their education was to study at the Tiflis Theological Seminary. There was a strict regime at the Seminary. Beating students and discrimination on the grounds of nationality were common. Students were also not allowed to speak in their native language, read non-religious literature or leave the Seminary surroundings and dormitory territory without permission. Not surprisingly, the students did not obey these rules and strived to make their everyday routine more interesting and exciting. Disobedience was punished by exile, arrest or deprivation of their right to continue their studies in other institutions. This violent regime created resistance. Students formed secret groups, connected with revolutionary (at first, mainly “Khalkhosnuri”, then Marxist) intellectuals and acquired prohibited publications from them. The absolute majority of the future leaders of government and parliament in the Democratic Republic of Georgia first encountered political socialisation

in the Theological Seminary and received their first experiences of resistance there<sup>6</sup>.

**The newspaper “Kvali”.** In 1897 the most well-known Georgian Marxist publicist at that time, Noe Zhordania, became the editor-in-chief of the weekly political newspaper “Kvali”. It was the first legal socialist newspaper in the Russian Empire. At the end of the 19th century this newspaper was the only and most effective way of communicating for social democrats. By creating their own media platform, social democrats had opportunities to present and develop new writers, journalists and columnists. The “Kvali” was also actively used as a way to counter Tsarist and nationalist publications. Because of this publication, the majority of Georgia’s literate population learnt about the first social democrats. The publication also clearly presented a social democratic alternative and caused class issues to become part of public discussions. However, at the beginning of the 20th century, the Tsarist regime decided to censor the publication and the “Kvali” was closed. Through the experience they gained by running the “Kvali”, the party leaders managed to launch several new periodical publications before an independent Georgia was restored. However, like the “Kvali”, most of these publications did not survive for long under imperial policies censoring freedom of speech.

**The Peasant Movement in Guria and the Bakhvi Manifesto.** The launch of the social movement in Guria has its origins in a set of unsuccessful strikes in Batumi. Between 1900 and 1902, workers in Batumi demonstrated against the owners of large factories, the Rothschilds and other nobles, who had control over the oil industry in the city. The aim of these demonstrations was to improve the workers’ social conditions and get a right to participate in factory management. Unfortunately, the protesters were defeated. After numerous bloody raids, the district management exiled the workers from the city. These people, who had experienced many years of revolutionary conflict and received their education in non-formal circles, left Batumi for their hometowns in Guria and became agitators for social and political change. They travelled between villages and talked with people about the need to abolish lease fees and church taxes. Propagandists also called

6. Jones, Stephen F. (2007). *Socialism in Georgian Colors*. Tbilisi, Ilia State University, pp. 174-261.



on the population to hold demonstrations and demand the right to use water and forest resources for free.

The Gurian people joined the social movement because they were deprived of many rights. At that time there were no advisory bodies at the village and community level. Senior leaders, administrative officials and nobles were not accountable to the local population and took decisions that were useful only for themselves. Local people could not fight against social oppression through legal means.

The launch of the social movement in western Georgia was due to high levels of education among the local people. There was a surprisingly high number of public schools and students in the district of Guria. Almost every big settlement had a post office that received local and imperial newspapers. The Batumi workers used their experience and established non-formal revolutionary educational circles<sup>7</sup>.

Not surprisingly, the peasant movement in Guria was partly triggered by the bad harvest from 1901 to 1903 and economic fluctuations after the Russo-Japanese War<sup>8</sup>. Finally in 1905 after the first Russian Revolution, the social movement in Guria reached its peak. The local population showed an extraordinary ability for self-organisation. Without permission from the Viceroy of the Caucasus, they established village councils – bodies of direct democracy. The councils elected peasant courts, community governors and other officials. Each council created its own police force. The whole region elected a common revolutionary committee to fight against Tsarism.

7. "Social Movement in Georgia: Guria in 1905 and the Bakhvi Manifesto" (2016), editorial article of the journal CIVICUS.

8. Jones, Stephen F. (2007). Socialism in Georgian Colors. Tbilisi, Ilia State University.

## NOE ZHORDANIA (1868-1953)



Foto: Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Library, Research Center – Library for Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921)

One of the founders and the leader of the social democratic movement of Georgia. Also, a famous Georgian publicist, Marxist theoretician and the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Georgia.

Zhordania was born in Lanchkhuti, a provincial town of Georgia. He graduated from the Tiflis Theological Seminary and studied at the Warsaw Veterinary Institute. From 1893 to 1897, he attended lectures in the universities of Geneva, Munich and Berlin.

From 1892 to 1894, he helped to establish the first left-wing movement in Georgia – the „Third Group“. He was an author of the first Georgian Marxist manifesto. Noe Zhordania was an editor of the “Kvali” – the first legal socialist weekly newspaper in the Russian Empire.

From 1901 to 1903, Zhordania served prison sentences at different Georgian penitentiary establishments for revolutionary activities and supported the Batumi workers’ strike committee. In 1903, he was sentenced to exile in Vyatka Governorate. He emigrated to Europe before being exiled.

From 1903 onwards, Zhordania was a member of the Caucasian Committee of the RSDLP. He was elected a delegate of the II, III, IV, V Congresses of the RSDLP. In 1906, he was elected a member of the State Duma of the Russian Empire and one of the leaders of the social democratic faction. After the collapse of the first Duma, he was a co-author and one of the signatories of the anti-tsarist “Viborg Call”.

Before 1917 he was arrested several times for being a member of a revolutionary movement. After the February Revolution of 1917, he headed the Council of Workers and Deputies of Tbilisi. Since 1918 he was one of the leaders in announcing the independence of Transcaucasia and later, the independence of Georgia. In 1918, Zhordania was elected the head of the SDPG and the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Georgia.

Between 1921 and 1953, he lived in Paris, and headed the exiled Government of Georgia. He also participated in anti-Bolshevik campaigns. After his death, the Social Democratic Party Bureau in Exile and the Emigrated Government of Georgia ceased to exist as political entities.

With the support of the revolutionary committee of Guria, each village published its own manifesto. The first was from a little settlement called Bakhvi. According to the Bakhvi Manifesto, the rebellious population demanded the abolition of ranks, equal distribution of lands among village collectives, the establishment of a universal educational system, democratic local self-government, creation of parliamentary governance based on the universal right to vote and progressive taxes. After two years of fighting, the peasant movement in Guria was defeated by Tsarist military forces in a bloody battle.

The existence of a democratic manifesto, transformed peasants into a revolutionary class. Their traumatic experience during the bloody repression became a part of the Georgian social democratic narrative and determined future political activities.

**The State Duma of Russia.** Before establishing the First Republic of Georgia, members of the social democratic movement used all possible methods in their political struggle throughout the Caucasus region. They participated in demonstrations, strikes and May Day parades; worked among students of different institutions; supported the organisation of trade unions and peasant movements; and published legal and illegal press. At the same time, members of the Georgian social democratic organisations actively participated in elections. After the 1905 Russian Revolution, a representative body, the State Duma, was created within the Russian Empire. The State Duma was a body that advised the monarch and shared legislative powers with him. It mainly had a symbolic function and was not a threat to the Russian absolute monarchy. From 1905 to 1917, elections for the State Duma were held four times. In all the four indirect elections carried out, the SDPG won the majority of seats in Georgia.

During these four elections, the SDPG managed to win all but one of the seats allocated to Georgia. This seat was won by the non-Marxist leftist party, the Social Federalists. The success of the leaders of the RSDLP Caucasian Bureau was the result of their strategy to create a coalition that represented all lower classes of society. Therefore, the SDPG managed to not only gain support from the working classes but also from peasants and a small number of bourgeoisie. This is what helped to generate their electoral success.

Throughout the Empire, the RSDLP was the most successful in pre-industrial, agrarian Georgia. Representatives of the RSDLP's Caucasian Bureau dominated in the social democratic faction of the State Duma. For years, SDPG members – Isidore Ramishvili, Akaki Chkhenkeli, Nikoloz (Karlo) Chkheidze and Irakli Tsereteli led the group of RSDLP parliamentary representatives.

The social democratic faction spoke up for the working class, ethnic minorities and the peripheral regions of the Empire. Faction members often challenged ministers of the Empire, who came to attend Duma sessions. Often, this courage was met by reprisals from the police. From its activities in the State Council, the SDPG gained experience of campaigning during elections and recognition and influence in the Empire and abroad. By the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917, the SDPG was the strongest political force in Georgia.

## 2 | THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF GEORGIA IN THE FIRST REPUBLIC

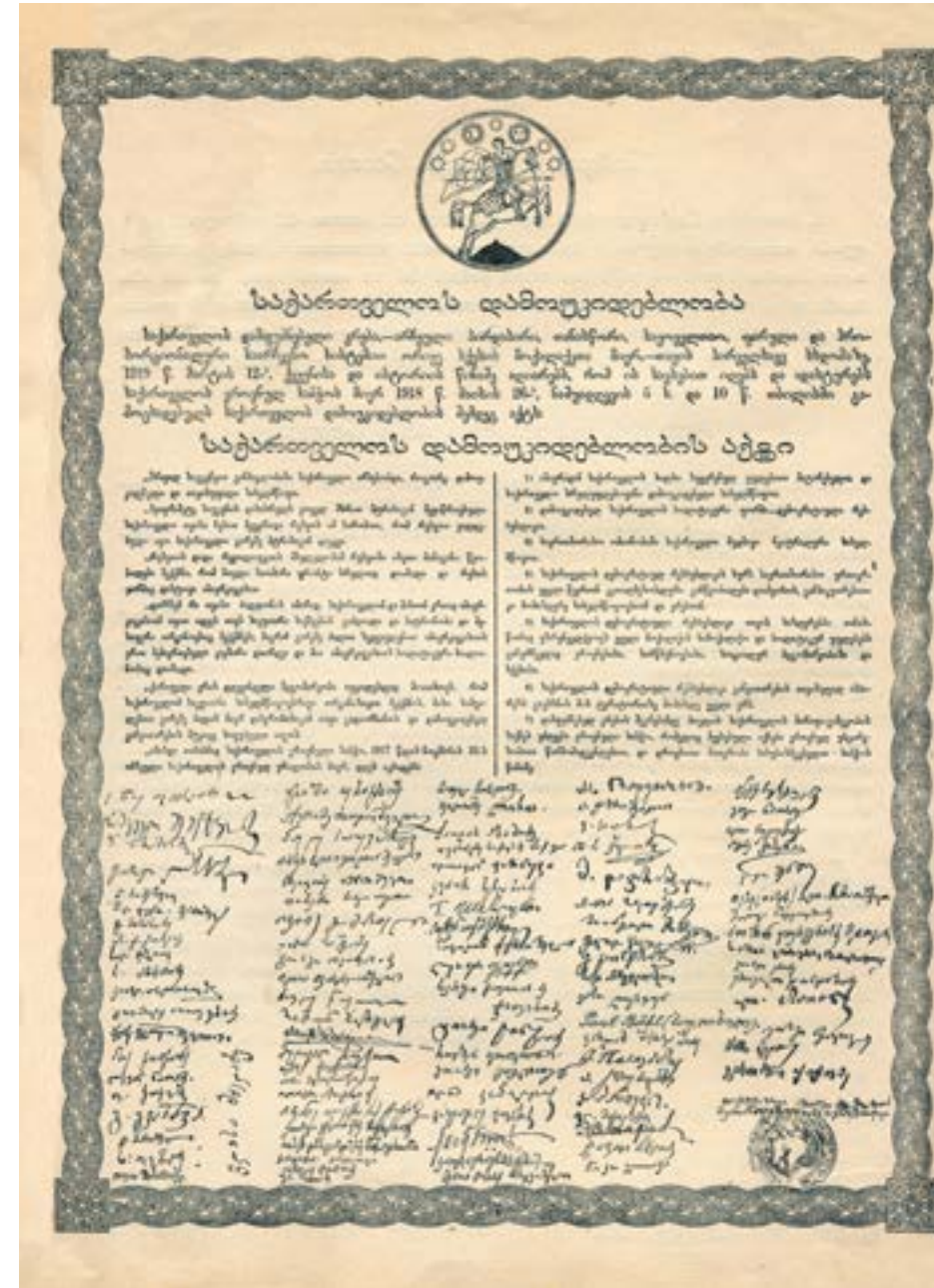


Karl Kautsky at the Meeting with the Members of the Government of Georgia, in Tbilisi. Foto: Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Library, Research Center – Library for Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921)

## 2.1. Proclamation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia

The SDPG were at the forefront of the February Revolution in 1917. They actively participated in demonstrations against the Tsarist regime. The people in Tbilisi viewed the revolution with hope. Nikoloz (Karlo) Chkheidze led the Petrograd Revolutionary Soviet of workers, peasants, soldiers and sailors. After the February Revolution, the Petrograd Soviet functioned as the main representative body in Russia. In some cases, it had executive along with legislative functions. After establishing the Provisional Government, Irakli Tsereteli – the leader of the social democratic faction of the State Duma was elected Minister of Posts, Telegraphs and Communications. Apart from Chkheidze and Tsereteli, other Georgian Mensheviks also hoped the Russian State would manage to adopt a democratic constitution that ensured equal opportunities for development for the working class and ethnic minorities. The SDPG thought the future of Georgia was in the democratic commonwealth of Russia. Yet, the events that followed this period were against a democratic Russia. The October Revolution drastically altered the plans of the SDPG. The party was strongly against the overthrow of the Russian provisional government carried out by the Bolsheviks and the establishment of the Soviet regime. The Caucasian social democrats had to change their plans. The South Caucasian deputies of the Russian Constituent Assembly founded a provisional parliamentary structure for the region – the Transcaucasian Sejm. The leaders of the SDPG formed the majority in the Sejm. In spring 1918, the Sejm announced the independence of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic. It was clear that foreign policy visions of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan radically differed from one another. Armenians hoped to receive the support of the Anglo-American world, while the SDPG planned to protect the country from Bolshevik aggression with the help of the German Empire. Azerbaijan planned to integrate into the Ottoman Empire that still existed at that time. Co-existence of these three nations in one state became impossible and on 26 May 1918, Georgia adopted the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration of Independence of Georgia of 26 May 1918, was adopted at a Georgian National Council session. After the October Revolution, the National Council of Georgia was



Declaration of Independence of Georgia, signed by more than 100 Social Democrats  
 Foto: Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Library, Research Center –  
 Library for Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921)

elected as an advisory body by the National Congress of Georgia. Two thirds of the seats in the National Council of Georgia were controlled by the Georgian Mensheviks. Later, the National Council became the Parliament of Georgia and was assigned to carry out preparatory activities for elections. The National Council also elected the first Government of National Unity of Georgia, headed by the famous Georgian revolutionary, party organiser and social democrat Noe Ramishvili. Several months later, the Government of National Unity was replaced by a social democratic cabinet. Noe Zhordania – the ex-editor of the “Kvali” - was elected Prime Minister of Georgia. Thus, the announcement of independence of Transcaucasia and Georgia was entirely dependent on SDPG members, as they controlled the absolute majority in each representative body.

### **What was the situation in the Caucasus region in spring 1918?**

The independence of Georgia was declared against a very complicated geopolitical background. To the west of the country a civil war in Russia was launched. In this war conservative forces (the White Army) and the Bolshevik military forces (the Red Army), formed after the October Revolution, fought against each other. Independence for Georgia was unacceptable for both sides, as they considered the Caucasus an indivisible peripheral part of the Russian territory. Until 1920, and before the end of the civil war, the Red and the White Armies both tried to use Georgia as a base. The SDPG refused to help both parties militarily or politically. However, the Democratic Republic of Georgia was a shelter for the Bolsheviks who fled from the White Army of General Denikin. The Government of Georgia had to use enormous human and financial resources to protect its western border from Civil War participants.

Turkey also had its interests in the area around Batumi in south western Georgia. In spring 1918, the Turkish army took several parts of the Black Sea coast of Georgia. Earlier, during World War I, they started moving towards the main cities of western Georgia, as they negotiated with German military representatives.

One more threat for the Democratic Republic of Georgia was the soldiers who had demobilised from the Russo-Turkish front during World War I. They were going back to the far provinces of Russia, were defeated, disorganised and had no other means of sustaining themselves than to rob the local population.

Two revolutions and the fate of World War I, that was still undecided, blocked Georgia in the very first months of independence. The Georgian economy was isolated as it had been completely dependent on the Russian economy. This isolation made life very hard for the majority of people who lived on low incomes.

The SDPG started to form the Democratic Republic of Georgia against a background of numerous military threats and economic poverty. However, state formation began under conditions of high-level legitimation with the SDPG holding entire control over the government and parliament.

## **2.2. The Democratic Republic of Georgia and the Main Achievements of the Social Democratic Party**

The Democratic Republic of Georgia and its social democratic government managed to govern the country for only three years or 1028 days. Independence was stopped by the Bolshevik occupation and establishment of the Soviet regime. The short life of the Republic was characterised by three political ideas.

### **Pluralist Democracy – An Alternative to Bolshevism**

At the crossroads of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, most of the Marxist theoreticians argued that a society had to go through several stages of development before reaching socialism. They believed that the perfect establishment of capitalism was a precondition to adopting a socialist system. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leftists expected socialist revolutions in regions where large-scale industry, high levels of labour and workers’

movements could be found. Though, what happened next was the opposite of what they had expected. The Socialist Revolution won in Russia – a poor country that was mainly populated by peasants and was lagging behind in industrial development. The authors of the 1917 October Revolution decided to experiment. The beginning of the socialist system was formed with brutal bureaucratic and military discipline, forced labor and introduced new forms of slavery. Straight away, the Bolsheviks banned opposition parties, freedom of speech, expression and association. Leninists blamed the European social democrats and Russian Mensheviks for betraying socialism. Parliamentary democracy and all attempts of changing the government in a peaceful way were perceived as a moral compromise and the position of the enemy<sup>9</sup>.

The SDPG decided to build an alternative regime to bolshevism or, in other words, to find another way to achieve socialism. According to the first Constitution of the Republic, Georgia had a parliamentary government. There was no President in the Republic. The Head of the Government was the Prime Minister, who was elected by Parliament. The Prime Minister was elected once a year and the same person could only be elected as a Prime Minister twice within a one-year term. The constant change of Prime Ministers aimed to maintain the Constituent Assembly that was elected every three years, as the permanent center of power. The Constituent Assembly was selected on the basis of a proportional electoral system. Right after announcing independence, a universal election code was enacted in Georgia. Any twenty year old citizen could exercise their active and passive electoral rights. In 1918, the electoral census on the grounds of gender and wealth was abolished. In February 1919, during Constituent Assembly elections, the SDPG received more than 80 per cent of the vote. Eventually, after a series of additional elections, in mid 1920, five other parties also had won seats in the Parliament. One of these parties was a political organisation representing an ethnic minority, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation or “Dashnaktsutyun”. It should be noted, that only eight deputies from 130 members of the Constituent Assembly belonged to the National Democratic Party – the only right-wing political force in the legislative body. Socialist forces also dominated in the opposition. Namely, these forces were: the

9. Karl Kautsky (1920), *Problems and Perspectives of Socialism in Georgia*, Tiflis, SDLPG.

Socialist Revolutionary Party that was in favour of the “Khalkhosnuri” ideas and followed agrarian socialism and the left-wing patriotic movement, the Socialist Federalists Union<sup>10</sup>. The parliamentary majority, constituted by the SDPG, also included representatives from all the ethnic minorities of Georgia. Among its members of the Constituent Assembly were Abkhazians, Ossetians, Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Russians, Jews, Greeks and Germans. In addition, five revolutionary women from the SDPG were elected to the Constituent Assembly. One of them – Kristine Sharashidze, became a member of the Assembly Presidium.

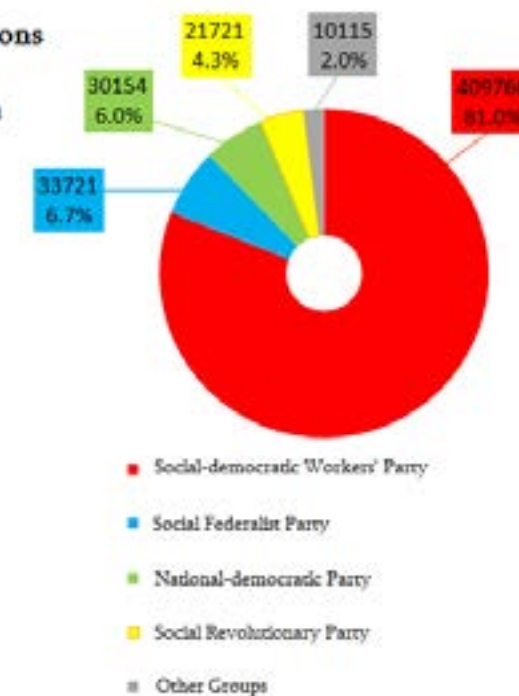
### Results of the Elections of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia

(14-16 February 1919)

The Central Election  
Commission Approved:

**505477**  
Ballot Papers

One Deputy Needed  
**3748** Votes to Become a  
Member of the  
Constituent Assembly

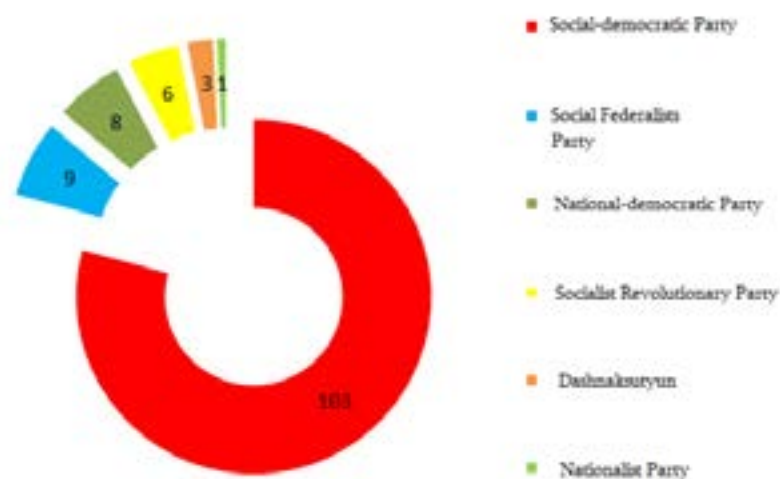


Under the direction of the SDPG, a two-level self-government system was established in Georgia. This system constituted both a village level and a “mazra” (district) level. Simultaneously, the local self-government members had an opportunity to work in Parliament. Thus, members of Parliament could be the heads of local self-government

10. Gaiparashvili, Z. (ed., 2017): *First Universal Democratic Elections in Independent Georgia*, Tbilisi, p. 96

bodies. Parliamentary representation gave additional political influence to the leaders of local self-government bodies. During the three years of independence, several elections of local self-government bodies were held throughout Georgia. Elections were held in different regions at different times, with the political parties working within a permanent electoral regime.

### Distribution of Deputy Mandates in the 1919 Constituent Assembly



The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia ensured the right to multi-level referendums and legislative initiatives driven by citizens. On the grounds of citizens' requests, referendums could be held at the village level as well as at the unified national level. In the case of gathering the number of signatures that was necessary to get a parliamentary mandate, a citizens' group had a right to present a draft law in the Constituent Assembly.

In the Democratic Republic about two hundred regional and national newspapers and journals were published. Political parties, public organisations, religious and national unions had their own press. It is not necessary to write much about trade unions, as every

professional association had been a constituent part of the SDPG since the 1890s.

The articles of the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia about the rights of ethnic minorities were very progressive compared with international standards at the beginning of the 20th century. According to the Constitution, ethnic minorities had the opportunity of free social and cultural development. This involved the right to print in own languages, carry out activities, learn in their mother tongue and establish national unions and organisations. Ethnic minorities had equal rights to gain positions in state, civil, military or national institutions. In a region with a 20% or more ethnic minority population, the language of this minority received official status in addition to Georgian. Under the frameworks of a unitarian republic and powerful local self-governments, the SDPG also founded three autonomous units within Georgian territory – Abkhazia, Muslim Georgia (Adjara) and Saingilo (now part of Azerbaijan).

In the democratic system, created by the SDPG, only one political force could not find its place. Before May 1920, until the signing the Treaty of Moscow (the agreement of recognition) between the Democratic Republic of Georgia and the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic, Bolshevik organisations were not allowed to carry out their activities on Georgian territory. Georgian law-enforcement bodies pursued Bolshevik groups, as the Bolsheviks target was to collapse the constitutional system of the Republic. On several occasions at alternative May Day parades, the Bolshevik groups tried to provoke street riots and fights at the barricades.

The Government also engaged in armed conflicts with the Ossetian population living in the northern part of the Shida Kartli region. Bolshevik ideas were extremely popular among Ossetians.

### A Mixed Economy for Social Justice.

The establishment of a mixed economic system was a significant achievement for the Government of the Georgian Republic. The SDPG was against creating an economy that was entirely centralised and controlled by the state, though it also prevented the implementation

of a market model. One of the main characteristics of the mixed economy was a diversity of ownership types. The SDPG nationalised useful minerals, means of transportation, ports, railways, forests and vast plots of land. In addition, it gave new cooperatives of peasants and workers the opportunities of collective ownership of small and middle-sized factories. Most important, however, was the agrarian reform. According to the reforms implemented by the Minister of Agriculture, Noe Khomeriki, the agricultural lands of Georgia were officially documented. After this, peasants received lands for agricultural needs in private ownership<sup>11</sup>.

The second part of the mixed economy was the High Economic Council. This Council was an ad hoc institute created by the Constituent Assembly and its aim was to develop plans for different spheres of the economy. According to the SDPG vision, economic relationships were not regulated by markets. Factories, that were based on different structures of ownership, had tight relations and coordinated amongst each other. The strategy, developed by the state, was the basis of their coordination.

The Labour Code, developed by SDPG members in the Constituent Assembly of Georgia and the thirteenth chapter (about social economic rights) of the Constitution provided a clear picture of the balance between capital and labour in economic relationships. The labour policy of the Republic set out:

- introducing an eight-hour working day;
- establishing labour inspection and sanitation supervision systems;
- setting standards for minimum wages and overtime allowances;
- ensuring involvement of factory-level trade union organisations in factory management; and

11. Jones S. (2014), Between ideology and pragmatism: social democracy and the economic transition in Georgia 1918-21, Caucasus Survey Vol.1, No.2, April, 63-81.

## ISIDORE RAMISHVILI (1859-1937)



Foto: Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University, Library, Research Center – Library for Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921)

One of the founders of the „Third Group“, a Georgian social democratic movement. He was also a famous Georgian teacher, deputy of the State Duma of Russia and the Constituent Assembly of Georgia.

Isidore Ramishvili was born in Guria, a poor province of Georgia. He graduated from the Tiflis Theological Seminary. With the help of the “Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians”, he built three secondary schools in Georgia’s regions. He led the educational processes in these schools. When the educational processes were finished, political discussions and meetings were carried out in the schools. With the use of the schools’ resources, Ramishvili strived to engage pupils and adults in political socialisation.

Tsarist Russia arrested Isidore Ramishvili for being a member of the revolutionary movement. In 1906 he was elected to the first State Duma of the Russian Empire. Ramishvili was the first Georgian deputy on the State Duma tribune. He ended his speech, that was interrupted several times, with these words: “All the steps taken by the Government are crimes against people... We should start investigations against the robbers, against all the representatives of the administration, former and current Ministers and the Prime Minister!” Ramishvili’s radical speech shocked the political elite and local journalists of St. Petersburg. It was the first time, that the issue of legal responsibilities for Government members became so critical for the official establishment.

In 1909-1917 Ramishvili lived in exile in Astrakhan and Samara districts.

From 1918 he was one of the leaders and moral authorities of the SDPG.

He did not emigrate after the Russian occupation in 1921. Between 1921 and 1937 he was exiled to different regions of the Soviet Union. In 1937 he was killed in a Soviet prison of Tbilisi.



- introducing unemployment compensation and developing an employment agency.

Operating in an environment of economic isolation, permanent military conflicts and high rates of inflation, made it hard for the SDPG to realise its labour policy aims. However, society was aware of the main aims of the state policies and supported them, the press hoped that the labour policy would improve the economy once greater stability came to the region<sup>12</sup>.

### **Peace: The Main Objective for the Social Democrat's Foreign Policy**

The years of the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) coincided with a complicated period in terms of international policy. During these three years, the SDPG had to face approximately 10 armed conflicts. The Republic had military conflicts with Armenia, Soviet Azerbaijan, Denikin's White Army, military units of the Bolshevik Red Army, Ottomans and Kemalist armies. The Republic never initiated a conflict and took a position of self-defence. In spite of the permanent threat of military attack, peace was the main objective for the SDPG. This foreign policy was based on several principles:

1. An unbiased position and permanent neutrality during international conflicts and wars.
2. Use of military forces only for self-defence and security reasons.
3. Supporting integration of the Caucasian states and creating good neighbourly relations in the region.

The SDPG tried its best to follow all these three principles. The Democratic Republic of Georgia did not interfere in the Russian Civil War and never supported any party of the war. Georgian military activities were only initiated for self-defence. Before Armenia and Azerbaijan became Soviet, the Georgian Government initiated two unified conferences

of the Caucasus. The conferences were meant to conclude by signing an agreement of military cooperation between the South Caucasian republics. According to this document the republics would agree not to attack each other. Unfortunately, cooperation was not achieved, as the Armenian Nationalists and the Bolsheviks from Baku were actively aiming to change the status quo in the South Caucasus through violent means.

Naturally, the Democratic Republic of Georgia needed to get "de facto" and "de jure" recognition. European republics and their leaders did not know much about the new Georgian Republic. The SDPG invited their old friends and partners to their homeland in order to assess their democratic reforms and to inform the world about the country. In 1920 a representative delegation of the "Second International" arrived in Georgia. The delegation was formally headed by the patriarch of the international democratic socialist movement, the famous Marxist theoretician Karl Kautsky. Due to ill health, Kautsky only arrived in Georgia after the delegation had already left. Among the delegation was the future first Labour Prime Minister of Great Britain, Ramsay MacDonald, the future Minister of Justice of Belgium, Emile Vandervelde, and the representative of the British Labour Party, Ethel Snowden. The member parties of the "Second International" tried to protect the political positions of Georgia in European parliaments. The European social democratic press made efforts to positively promote Georgia in the West.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the members of the "Second International" published articles in the European press. These articles show the efforts made by these people. For example, the leader of the Socialist Party of Belgium and the future Minister of Justice Emile Vandervelde wrote in the French newspaper "Le Peuple":

"If we had made a question in the first years of the War: "Where, in which European city will the first socialist government be built? – Some would have named London, others – Paris, Berlin, Stockholm or Brussels. But who would think about the capital city of Georgia – Tbilisi? In this very city was the first socialist flag raised and started the formation of a real democratic system..."

12. Alexandre Bendianishvili (2001), "First Republic of Georgia", Ivane Javakishvili Institute of History and Ethnology, pp. 220-257.

After travelling in Georgia, Ramsay MacDonald told the newspaper “Nation”:

“A real democratic state, governed by a socialist government, is being built... If the words “freedom of nations” really have their meaning, if any nation deserves freedom, it’s the Georgian nation. It showed its high culture and political readiness to all mankind.”

Karl Kautsky’s book “Georgia – A Social-Democratic Peasant Republic”, published in 1921, is significant in this context. The book announced Georgia as a real bastion of democratic socialism and told the world about the progressive state created in an unknown peripheral region of Russia.

### 2.3. Occupation of the Republic of Georgia

At the beginning of February, 1921, Georgia celebrated “de jure” recognition of the republic by international actors. Despite this success, the future of the Caucasian region was easy to foresee. Georgia was surrounded by a hostile circle. Bolshevik governments ruled Azerbaijan and Armenia. Both states of the Northern Caucasus – the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus and the Kuban People’s Republic - were entirely controlled by Soviet Russia. The communists celebrated their victory in the Russian Civil War. At the south western border of Georgia, the Kemalist army was taking up positions. Apart from that, in May 1920, the British military forces left Batumi Port. The fact that the British military contingent controlled Batumi Port and the Caucasian railway, was the only thing that protected the country from Russian occupation. By leaving the Caucasus region, these international forces recognised that the region was under Russian influence.

The Bolsheviks rushed into the country from four directions. The Democratic Republic of Georgia managed to resist only until the end of March 1921. At the end of March several members of the Government and Parliament emigrated. They refused to sign the capitulation documents and to give any source of legitimacy to the Bolsheviks. More than 100 members of the Constituent Assembly stayed in Georgia. Almost all of them became

victims of Soviet repression during the 1920s and 30s.



Agitation Paper of the SDPG in Four Languages for the 1919 Elections. Foto: Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Library, Research Center – Library for Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921)

სმას გაძლევა  
 საქართველოს სოციალ-დემოკრატულ  
 მუშათა პარტიის სი

**3 | SOCIAL-DEMOCRACY AND MODERN GEORGIA**

СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ ДЕМОКРАТИЧЕСКАЯ  
 Рабочей Партии Грузии  
 ზაჲს ჲმ თაჲრჲ  
 ჲრასათანჲ სოცჲალ-დემოკრატულ  
 მუშათან ჩანსორათან ჲოლს  
 გოლქანან გოლგათქან  
 جنان اجتماعيون عاميون فله فرقه

Since 1921, when the Government of Georgia was overthrown, the country was ruled by many different governing parties. None of the governments promoted the social democratic past of Georgia.

The Communist Government of Georgia declared the social democrats their enemies and fought against them. Apart from political repression, the memory of the Democratic Republic of Georgia was suppressed during the Soviet era. The three-year period of the First Republic was almost completely removed from the Soviet historiography. The leaders of the First Republic – Noe Zhordania, Nikoloz Chkhenkeli and Irakli (Kaki) Tsereteli – were considered as representatives of bourgeois democracy. They were denounced as opportunists and betrayers of socialism.

The first government of post-Soviet Georgia actively supported a radical ethnonationalist ideology. They considered the leaders of the 1860s national liberation movement as the most important historical figures. The Third Group were the main opponents and critics of Chavchavadze's group of nationalist intellectuals. Therefore, under the first post-Soviet government of Georgia social democrats and communists were considered as enemies of almost equal importance. Research and analysis of the experience of the First Republic was not an important issue for an independent Georgia.

During the regimes of Shevardnadze and Saakashvili, the Georgian governments entirely focused on the ideas of a free market economy, aggressive privatisation, deregulation and a minimal state. In post-Soviet Georgia, they would not promote the mixed economy model created by the Georgian Social Democrats. This was not useful for their political priorities.

The current governing party of Georgia – „Georgian Dream” - is a member of the Progressive Alliance and has an observer status at the Party of European Socialists. It is written in the party's declaration, that it is a political organisation with a left-wing centrist direction. In spite of this, the attributes associated with the First Republic experience cannot be found at any political event of the “Georgian Dream” party. The party leaders

## ELEONORA TER-FARSEGOVA (1875- ?)



Foto: Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Library, Research Center – Library for Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921)

A Member of the SDPG and member of the Constituent Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Georgia.

She was born in Tbilisi, into the family of a rich Armenian merchant. She received her education in the Women's Boarding School of Tbilisi and Women's Gymnasium. At the beginning of the 1900s, she moved to Sukhumi. She was a teacher at one of the city's institutions. She founded a social democratic organisation in Sukhumi. During the 1905 Revolution, the city managed to be independent from the Tsarist government for months. Eleonora Ter-Farsegova was one of the leaders of the protest movement in Sukhumi during the 1905 Revolution. She was also one of the organisers of the free self-government of Sukhumi.

Between 1908 and 1917 she was arrested four times for being a member of the SDPG.

In March 1919, she was elected a member of the Constituent Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. She worked in the legislative body commissions of labour and public health. As deputy, she was one of the co-authors of the progressive labour legislation and policy in the Republic.

After the occupation in 1921, she headed the central committee of the illegal organisation of the SDPG. In 1925 she was the acting head of this illegal organisation. In 1926 she was exiled from Georgia. She returned to Tbilisi in the 1930s. The date, place and reasons for her death are currently unknown.

never speak about the possible connections between the Georgian Social Democrats of the first half of the 20th century and themselves. The current governing party of Georgia does not try to associate itself with the social democratic past of the country.

It should be noted, that the SDPG, after the death of Noe Zhordania and other members of the government, ceased to exist as a political organisation. Several social democratic parties were created in post-Soviet Georgia, though they do not have any influence over political events.

Between 2010-2017, 343 people died and 678 people received injuries at the workplace. The Government of Georgia has recently decided to re-introduce labour inspections that had been abolished in 2006. The re-introduced labour inspection is not an effective institution. It does not have sufficient funds or enough employees. It does not yet have a right to check factories without prior warning and can not impose relevant sanctions on the people who violate the law. According to the law of Georgia, the minimum wage is 20 Gel (8 Euros). The most important sectors of the economy are tourism and the financial sector. The real sector of the Georgian economy is extremely reduced. Thus, it can be assumed that the mixed economy concept of the SDPG should be the most discussed matter in modern Georgia.

From 1918 to 2018, each Georgian government managed to gain a constitutional majority in the legislative body during one electoral cycle. In the first Republic, the SDPG also did not need to get even minimal support from the opposition to implement their own political agenda. Out of 130 members of the Constituent Assembly, 102 members belonged to the SDPG. The weakness of the opposition can be perceived as one challenge of the First Republic.

In spite of its short life, poverty and constant military attacks, the Democratic Republic of Georgia is the first non-monarchist regime in the history of the Caucasian people. The First Republic started the tradition of Georgian parliamentarism and electoral democracy. One hundred years ago, for the first time, the issue of the emancipation of Georgia's oppressed lower classes made it onto the Georgian political agenda. This issue became crucial. Therefore, the SDPG played the leading role in Georgian history as the first advocate for emancipation and democracy in Georgia.

## Summaries of the country studies



## Austria

The Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria (Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Österreichs, SDAP) became a decisive political force within a few decades after the unification party congress at Hainfeld in 1888/1889 and in the wake of the 1907 elections was the second largest party in the Imperial Council (*Reichsrat*) of the Cisleithanian (northern and western) part of Austria. Under the leadership of Victor Adler there was a change of course towards a peaceful transition from the wartime Habsburg dictatorship to a democratic republic and the transformation of the state bureaucracy at central-state and federal level towards the end of the war in 1918. Although after the 1911 elections the Social Democratic MPs were the weaker grouping in the provisional National Assembly, over against the Christian Social Party and the German National Party, Karl Renner was nevertheless elected state chancellor on 30 October 1918. The central departments in the areas of foreign relations and social affairs were taken by Social Democrats Victor Adler and Ferdinand Hanusch. Otto Glöckel and Julius Deutsch were dominant undersecretaries in the areas of home affairs and the armed forces. Karl Seitz served as both president of the National Assembly and state president.

Cooperation with the centre-right parties worked surprisingly well because of the extreme external pressure exerted by worries about a communist revolution and because the problems involved in transforming parts of the former Cisleithania were virtually unmanageable. Given the economic dependence on the Entente powers and the centrifugal trends in individual conservative-dominated Länder such as Salzburg, Tyrol and Vorarlberg to leave the federated state again a socialist revolution seemed an illusion. Despite its revolutionary wing the majority of the SDAP remained loyal to a coalition with the Christian Social Party even after the successful elections of February 1919, in which it garnered around 40 per cent of the vote. At the same time, Julius Deutsch was able, with the help of Friedrich Adler, to channel the anarchist-revolutionary tendencies in the army and to implement some of the most progressive social policy legislation in Europe. An eight-hour working day and a law on a chamber of labour and works councils are only a few examples of their achievements. Nationalisation projects such as in coal mining, the

iron industry and the large forest estates were planned but were unable to command a majority.

It did not prove possible to integrate the German-speaking territories of the newly established Czechoslovakia into the new federated state on the basis of President Wilson's 14 Points or to bring about union (*'Anschluss'*) with Germany. The territorial claims of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to parts of Carinthia, however, were averted by military means and by a referendum. In the end, the German-speaking South Tyrol was affiliated to Italy in the peace accords.

Already under the Habsburg Monarchy, the SDAP's orientation was pan-German, entirely in the spirit of the 1848 revolution, whose political symbolism had been adopted by the liberals, and despite its Marxist rhetoric the party was politically pragmatic and sought to stabilise democracy. Despite the resignation of Otto Bauer, who had taken over from Victor Adler – who had died on 11 November 1918 – as secretary of state for foreign affairs, and the collapse of the coalition in June 1920, a collective constitutional compromise was achieved in parliament on 1 October 1920. This still provides the basis for the current constitution of the Austrian Republic, with amendments.

Although, despite the severity of the circumstances, the SDAP was able to influence social issues, introduce social policy innovations, prevent a communist revolution and help shape a democratic parliamentary constitution, it ultimately ran aground on the national question; in other words, the attempt to create a pan-German state including all German-speaking territories together with the German Reich. The peace treaty of Saint Germain-en-Laye in 1920 set in stone the small independent state of Austria and prohibited the name 'German-Austria' and the 'union' with Germany.

## Belarus

It is impossible to recount the history of the Republic of Belarus without taking into account the country's socialist movement. The Belarusian Revolution started after an attempt to create the Belarusian Revolutionary Party in 1902 and the establishment of the Belarusian Socialist Hramada (BSH) in 1903 (*'hramada'* means '*commune*' or '*community*'). The Party's first manifesto described its strategic goal, which became the objective of the whole Belarusian movement in the twentieth century and remains that of democratic forces in Belarus in the twenty-first century, namely the establishment of an independent democratic republic. The period from 1902 to 1917 can be characterised as one of ideological revolution.

The BSH, which was the only Belarusian party at that time, remained a faction of Marxists and *narodniks* ('populists') until 1 May 1918. Social democrats played a major role in the Party. Aliaksandr Burbis, Vaclaŭ Ivanoŭski, Ivan and Anton Łuckievič and Aliaksandr Ułasau were close to the Central Committee elected in January 1906. Social democrats źmicier żyłunovič, Jazep Dyła and Arkadz Smolič were in the forefront of the Party in 1917–1918. As the Belarusian nation was still not completely formed by the early twentieth century, the Party had to perform a culture- and nation-forming function as well. At the same time the Belarusian movement became part of the liberation movement of peoples in the Russian Empire, an active participant in the Socialist movement in Russia.

The political stage of the Belarusian Revolution started after the fall of Tsarism. The Party initiated the Congress of Belarusian Organisations in March 1917 and the Congress of Belarusian Organisations and Parties in July of the same year. BSH adherents played a leading role in the Central Council of Belarusian organisations established in July, as well as in the Great Belarusian Council, which commenced activities in October.

Belarusian socialists called for the autonomy of Belarus in the Russian Democratic Federal Republic. The Party did not welcome the Bolshevik takeover. The Great Belarusian Council launched an initiative to hold an All-Belarusian Congress in Minsk. The same initiative

was also proposed by the Belarusian Regional Committee at the All-Russian Council of Rural Deputies. The All-Belarusian Congress (5–18 December 1917) supported unity with democratic federal Russia and decided to form the All-Belarusian Council (Rada) of rural, soldier and worker deputies from its ranks. Bolsheviks in the 'Western region' (as they called Belarus) and the war front broke up the Congress, but its delegates, who held a meeting at the Minsk depot of the Libava-Romen railway, transferred power in Belarus to the All-Belarusian Congress. The majority of seats in the Rada went to BSH members.

BSH members played the decisive role in declaring the Belarusian People's Republic (BPR) on 9 March 1918. The Rada of the All-Belarusian Congress on 19 March, became the BPR Rada after representatives of ethnic minorities joined it. On 25 March, with the help of the BSH members' votes, the BPR Rada declared Belarus independent. The Republic was seen by its founders as a democratic social state based on the rule of law. The Great Powers, however, first of all France, saw no interest in Belarus and Ukraine seceding from Russia.

In autumn 1917, some BSH members left it because they supported the Bolshevik manifesto. First, they established the Belarusian Social-Democratic Worker's Party, and from 1918 onwards they started to set up Belarusian sections of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). Ex-members of BSH initiated the declaration of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Belarus (SSRB) on 2 January 1919. The SSRB, proclaimed as an alternative to the BPR, did not last long. After its existence had been declared for the second time on 31 July 1920 it became a predecessor of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR), which was legitimised in 1927. On 25 August 1991, the BSSR became a de facto independent state. On 19 September that year, the Republic of Belarus appeared on the map. On 10 December, after renunciation of the Agreement of 1922 on the Establishment of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Belarus became a de jure independent state.

## Estonia

At the beginning of the twentieth century, urban social democratic organisations were formed in Estonia, which belonged to the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party. The Russian Social Democratic Workers Party famously split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks; in the case of Estonia, there was a similar split into Federalists and Centralists. By 1917, however, Estonian social democrats had established some sort of coexistence between nationalism, parliamentary democracy and class consciousness. The Estonian political parties with a social democratic orientation played a decisive role in the development from province of the Russian empire to autonomous province to independent state.

By the end of 1917, the idea of Estonian autonomy among social democrats had developed into a strong conviction that Estonia should become an independent state. The first definite concept of Estonian independence was declared by the Estonian Socialist and Revolutionary Party in the memorandum on the Workers' Republic of Estonia. The first practical steps for announcing the republic in February 1918 were made by politicians of the Estonian Labour Party, with Jüri Vilms at the forefront. After the German occupation, on 11 November 1918, the Estonian Provisional Government was able to re-establish itself and the Estonian Socialist Workers' Party took part in it. In a difficult war situation it was important for the consolidation of the people.

The Estonian Constituent Assembly of 1919, in which social democratic parties played a leading role, laid the foundation for the Estonian state and society. Land reform was adopted; manorial lands belonging to Baltic Germans were expropriated and given to farms. Peace was concluded with Russia. The educational laws adopted by the Constituent Assembly introduced the principle of the comprehensive school, the church was separated from the state and its importance in public life declined rapidly.

The Estonian Constitution, which was adopted in 1920, was created primarily by social democrats and the Estonian Labour Party. The Constitution established a parliamentary republic and universal suffrage (in other words, including women). Among other things,



the Constitution granted cultural autonomy to national minorities. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Estonian Social Democrats' platform remained unchanged; the main focus was on reforms to improve workers' social and economic situation. As the years went by, however, tactics became more flexible; it was no longer considered a problem to be in a coalition with right-wing parties. The Social Democrats made progress. From 1926 to 1932, the Estonian Social Democratic Workers' Party was the largest parliamentary group. Although in the second half of the 1930s the influence of the Social Democrats in Estonia was small, important steps were taken in terms of Estonian statehood.

## Finland

Social democracy entered Finland in its German form via Scandinavia at the turn of the twentieth century when Finland was an autonomous Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire. The breakthrough to a real mass movement in what was still a very agrarian country was boosted by the 1905 revolutionary turmoil that led to a radical democratic reform.

The labour movement was the driving force in pushing through a unicameral parliament, elected by universal suffrage, including women. In the first elections in 1907 the Social Democratic Party won 37 per cent of the vote and 80 out of 200 seats. The reformist way forward was halted, however, by the autocratic Tsar, who could refuse to verify proposed bills and dissolve parliament at will.

The Russian revolution of March 1917 opened up opportunities to strive for the dual objective of national and social liberation. A new all-party coalition government was formed in Finland, and Oskari Tokoi became, in effect, the first socialist prime minister in the world. National unity did not last. The middle class did not trust the socialists, who were radicalised by worsening living conditions and revolutionary Russian comrades. Military guards were formed and armed on both sides. Independence was declared in

December 1917, but the nation was trapped in a vicious circle of inner hostilities. Finland drifted into civil war.

After three months of bloody fighting the socialist revolution ended in a devastating defeat. Those reds who were exiled to Soviet Russia founded the Finnish Communist Party, which operated in Finland under the cover of front organisations and trade unions. The labour movement was split, the Social Democrats retaining approximately two-thirds of its public support during the 1920s. 'White' hegemony continued, but alongside punitive measures towards labour there were also integrative forces. The Social Democrats were needed to battle both domestic communism and the foreign Soviet threat. From 1926 until 1927, Väinö Tanner even led a Social Democratic minority government that included the first woman, Miina Sillanpää, to hold a ministerial post.

Tougher laws outlawing communism were adopted in 1930, but otherwise Finnish democracy endured the challenges of right-wing radicalism. Thus the political system developed in the opposite direction from its counterparts in central and eastern Europe. The dividing line from the Civil War was crossed in 1937 when the two mass parties, the Social Democrats and the Agrarians, formed a coalition government. Finland took its place as the fourth member of the Nordic family. The 'red-soil' cooperation and Nordic neutralism did not save Finland from two wars with the Soviet Union, although they did make the country strong enough to avert military occupation. This made it possible for the Finns to follow the Scandinavian path after the Second World War instead of landing in the Soviet-led communist bloc.

The Nordic (very social democratic) model of the welfare state provided a road map for Finland, which by international comparison has achieved top rankings in almost every category. What is more, the Finns achieved the dual objective of national and social liberation that the vanguard of early social democracy dreamt about. The challenge remains how to carry the national story of success into the ever-more globalised twenty-first century.

## Hungary

The Hungarian labour movement sought to emulate its German counterpart and its leaders were influenced by the ideas of Lassalle, Kautsky and Bernstein (the name of Lenin was unknown in Hungary until 1917). The Social Democratic Party of Hungary (Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt, MSZDP) – which was founded in 1890 – commenced its political activities in accordance with the directives of the Second International.

The aim of the Hungarian Social Democrats was not a revolutionary takeover, but becoming a mass party and entering the Hungarian parliament. The MSZDP easily became a mass party, but their most important demand, the universal, equal and secret ballot, was rejected. For this reason, the MSZDP, which wanted to achieve its demands in a democratic way, did not manage to get even one MP into the Hungarian Parliament until 1918, even though it had become the strongest and most organized party of Hungary by then, with a rapidly growing membership. Membership of the party soared after 1917, reaching almost 1 million by autumn 1918.

After the defeat in the First World War and the 'Aster Revolution' on 30–31 October 1918, the opposition came to power and the Social Democrats were included in the government under the leadership of the so-called 'red count', Mihály Károlyi. Ernő Garami, leader of the MSZDP, became Minister of Commerce and later on other Social Democrat politicians entered the government. The MSZDP firmly demanded that the independent Hungary became a republic, and on 16 November 1918 Hungary was proclaimed a 'people's republic' with a unicameral parliament (without a House of Lords).

The MSZDP wanted a universal, equal and secret ballot for every citizen over the age of 20, regardless of gender. But this demand was only realised to a limited extent: only men over 21 got the right to vote and literate women over 24. After transforming the 'people's republic' into a Soviet Republic with the collaboration of the Communists in the spring of 1919, everyone over 18 got the right to vote, but the so-called 'reactionaries' (including clerics and 'kulaks') were excluded.

The issue of land was the other hot topic in Hungary at that time. The Social Democrats demanded the nationalisation and collectivisation of medium-sized and large estates, but they were unable to prevail in the civic democratic Károlyi regime. The old demand of the MSZDP, the nationalisation of factories, was not accomplished either during the period of coalition government. Only later, during the Hungarian Soviet Republic, every factory employing more than 10 workers was nationalised.

The Social Democratic Party of Hungary had hostile relations with the Party of Hungarian Communists ('Kommunisták Magyarországi Pártja', KMP). They only resumed after an interlude of rapprochement in the wake of the revolutions of 1918–1919. When a hostile occupation by the entente powers threatened Hungary in March 1919, the Social Democrats and the Communist party were unified under the name of the Socialist Party of Hungary ('Magyarországi Szocialista Párt', MSZP), in order to create a 'worker unit' to defend Hungary in alliance with Soviet Russia. The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was proclaimed. Although the Social Democrats and Communists worked together successfully in the Revolutionary Government Council, the Hungarian Soviet Republic was short-lived due to the catastrophic internal and external situation, which could not be managed either peacefully or with violence. When the dictatorship of the proletariat failed, the Communists and the left-wing Social Democrats emigrated from Hungary.

The moderate Social Democrats, who remained in Hungary, formed the Peidl government, but it was overthrown by a right-wing coup after only a week on 6 August 1919. A 'White terror' started – persecution of leftists who played a role in the revolutions of 1918–1919 – and for this reason, the MSZDP boycotted the election of 1920. The Social Democrats participated only in the election of 1922, after the new Social Democratic leader, Károly Peyer, made a pact with the rightist prime minister István Bethlen. The MSZDP became the legal leftist opposition of the Horthy regime for two decades.

## Iceland

Social democrats in Iceland founded the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Icelandic Confederation of Labour in 1916, both of which remained under one rule for four decades. Following the SDP's founding, significant strides were made in spreading and increasing the influence of social democracy and trade unionism.

Frequent splits and conflict within the SDP would later hamper its efforts to retain political power, but it still exerted a major influence in shaping Icelandic society, including the enactment of legislation on fishing vessels' working hours, social security and workers' dwellings in the party's earliest years and during the first years after Iceland regained sovereignty. The SDP formed various coalitions with other parties, thereby implementing a range of social democratic policies.

The party split five times, first of all in 1938 when one of its most prominent members joined the Communists. From that time onwards, there was always a powerful party to the left of the SDP, fragmenting the left wing of Icelandic politics until the parties reunited as the Social Democratic Alliance at the end of the twentieth century. The labour-based parties' combined share of the vote, excluding the Progressive Party, ranged between 35 and 40 per cent, compared with the SDP's average share of 15 per cent until the formation of the Alliance.

The biggest milestone on Iceland's journey towards sovereignty and independence was achieved in 1918 when the „Act of Union“ with Denmark was passed. Up to that point, Iceland had been part of the Kingdom of Denmark. Through the „Act of Union“, Denmark officially relinquished its claim to Iceland and declared it a free and sovereign state in a personal union with the Danish king. Although this formally ended foreign control over Iceland, the last step, namely the founding of a republic completely independent of Denmark and with an Icelandic president as head of state, remained.

During the First World War, a new, class-based party system emerged in Iceland. All the parties avoided making electoral promises concerning the relationship with Denmark,

and Iceland's first coalition government, formed in 1917, can be said to have settled the issue without party-political conflict. The resolution of the sovereignty issue was thus not a party-political issue for the new class-based parties.

The SDP, and Icelandic social democrats in general, had a substantial influence on the conclusion of the „Act of Union“ and the sovereignty agreement with Denmark. The contributions made by representatives of the fledgling social democratic movement were also critical for reaching an agreement with the Danish negotiation team. The greatest of these contributions was made by the SDP member Ólafur Friðriksson, who travelled to Denmark to win support from members of the Social Democracy party.

Different views on the founding of the Republic of Iceland during the Second World War were to prove problematic for the SDP, whose approach as to how and when to found the republic was opposed by the majority of Icelanders and all the other parties. The debate was not about whether to found a republic, but how and when, with Denmark under German occupation. At the centre of the debate was the choice between a rapid separation between the two countries or a divorce along legal lines based on the 1918 Union agreement, with the SDP favouring the latter option.

The Social Democrats in Iceland have a proud and colourful history reaching back to the SDP's founding over a century ago. They have had a profound influence on many aspects of Iceland's social model, shaping it in the form of classical social democracy despite becoming fragmented into two to three parties for over six decades.

## Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes

There were several social democratic parties in the territory of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, a complex state that came into existence on 1 December 1918 with the unification of the Kingdom of Serbia, Montenegro and the lands inhabited by South

Slavs within Austria-Hungary. The oldest was the Social Democratic Party of Croatia and Slavonia (founded in 1894). In Serbia, the Social Democratic Party of Serbia had existed since 1903, while in Slovenian territory and in parts of Istria inhabited by Croats, the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party had been active since 1896.

The last to be founded was the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1909). Workers' parties were relatively small and weak in countries that were minimally industrialised, predominantly agrarian and poor. The role of social democrats was thus relatively invisible when Austria-Hungary began to disintegrate and a new country emerged. Soon, as in the rest of Europe, impressed by the October Revolution and then by the activities of Béla Kun in Hungary, the Left experienced a split between the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) and social democrats. The KPJ, which had attracted a large number of members, was banned in 1921 following its success in the first general elections, after which it had become the third strongest party in the parliament. Politicians who were more inclined to parliamentarianism and opposed to revolution entered the government and were attacked as 'sterile ministers'. One faction of the social democratic parties united in 1919 to form the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party (JSDS), while in 1920 another group founded the Social Democratic Party of Yugoslavia (SDSJ), which had somewhat fewer supporters.

The two social democratic parties began negotiations in the summer of 1921 and finally merged at the end of that year as the Socialist Party of Yugoslavia (SPJ). This was a united social democratic party led by Dragiša Lapčević and Vitomir Korać (as political secretary), whose platform was decidedly against revolution and against communism. Although it profited materially when the authorities distributed all the property of the outlawed communist parties and their trade unions to the social democrats, the effects were small.

Though illegal, the KPJ continued to operate through trade unions and organisations that were de facto under its control, causing a rift among social democrats, who had difficulty reaching the working class. The SPJ never became a significant factor in the political life of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), although

it fought for the interests of workers and participated in the theoretical debates of that time.

## Latvia

The Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party (LSDSP) was the main Latvian political movement before the First World War and its role in state-building has previously not been fully evaluated. Of course, relations between Social Democrats and independent nation-statehood have often been problematic, not only in Latvia, but in most Central and Eastern European countries. Nationalists and socialists have opposed each other fiercely and relations between class and nation were often seen as contradictory, even antagonistic. In practice, however, there have been multiple overlaps and forms of cooperation; the support of Leftist forces for new the establishment of a nation state has often been crucial.

The Latvian socialist movement was born out of a split in the Latvian nationalist movement, when the energetic younger generation of intellectuals, such as Eduards Veidenbaums, Jānis Pliekšāns-Rainis, Pēteris Stučka, Aspazija and others, found themselves unwilling to remain within the conservative structures dominated by the Riga Latvian Society (RLB). The „New Current“, as they called themselves, was not a Marxist party. It included many facets of European modernism of the time, including realism in literature, Darwinism in science, various democratic, leftist and feminist ideologies coming from both Western Europe and the big Russian cities of Moscow and St.Petersburg. The „New Current“ was crushed by the Tsarist authorities, however, and henceforth the underground movement became increasingly social democratic.

The LSDSP was established in 1904 as a social democratic party for Latvians; ideologically, it followed the German SPD and Karl Kautsky. In political terms, however, it joined forces with Russian Social Democrats, especially after the Revolution of 1905, when the party had its first experience in mass organizing. Despite the strong influence of Lenin, the LSDSP retained its independence and did not split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks until 1917. In that year, after the February Revolution in Russia, the Latvian Bolsheviks

split off and prepared themselves for an armed insurrection in order to overthrow the Provisional Government. The Latvian Mensheviks, however, established an independent party and planned for a democratic, autonomous Latvia. Their support was decisive for the establishment of Latvian statehood in 1918; they were the only Latvian political force that enjoyed something like mass legitimacy.

The LSDSP, led by Fricis Mendērs and Pauls Kalniņš, played a prominent role in the first period of democracy. It helped to draft a democratic, parliamentary constitution (*Satversme*), adopted in 1922. The party also made an important contribution to the defence of workers' rights and social justice. Despite having the largest faction in all three inter-war convocations of the Latvian parliament (*Saeima*), however, the LSDSP did not join any ruling coalitions (except for two brief periods) and was mainly in opposition. Probably for this reason, the party was unable to prevent the 1934 coup d'état by the right-wing agrarian Kārlis Ulmanis. After the coup, the party merged with the communists and went underground, only to re-emerge briefly after the Soviet occupation of 1940. Some Social Democrats collaborated with the Soviets. Many, including the leaders Mendērs and Kalniņš, joined with other democratic politicians and called for the restoration of a democratic Latvian state. Many Social Democrats fought for the restoration of 1918 Latvia, both as severely repressed Soviet dissidents and exiles living in the West.

## Lithuania

The emergence and development of social democracy in Lithuania at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth was influenced by the rise of social democratic movements in various countries, as well as the specific circumstances in Lithuania: the agrarian nature of the country, the delay in capitalist development, the diversity of the ethnic composition of the urban population, the presence of Lithuania in the autocratic Russian empire, the latter's policy of national oppression, as well as emerging processes of national regeneration and national movements.

The ideology and programme of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP), as the representative of Lithuanian social democracy, at the turn of the twentieth century, was characterised, like those of many other social democratic parties at that time, by the primacy given to Marxism. For most of the period, however, national liberation was presented as a precondition for social liberation.

As a result, Lithuanian social democracy became an integral part of the Lithuanian national liberation movement, and in 1905, when the „national revolution“ began in Lithuania, the LSDP was the most active „political“ force in the ensuing events. The defeat of the revolution dealt a severe blow to the LSDP's organisation, operational capabilities, influence on society and programme. However from 1907 until the First World War, the LSDP advocated autonomy from the Russian Empire.

The beginning of the First World War and the German occupation of Lithuania meant that the social democrats' vision for the future of Lithuania had to be adapted. LSDP members, in anticipation of the possibility of war-driven changes in the political map of Europe, began to call for an independent democratic Republic of Lithuania based on democracy, and actively promoted it (including in its publication *Labour's Voice* in 1917–1918), through joint action by various political currents.

Social Democrats Steponas Kairys and Mykolas Biržiška, elected together with two other left-wing members of the Lithuanian Council, Jonas Vileišius and Stanislovas Narutavičius, were the main opponents of Lithuania's „strong and everlasting union“ with Germany and proclaimed a resolution of the Council of Lithuania on 11 December 1917 which in turn was established by four conventions. They were also, the main authors of the „Lithuanian Independence Act“, which was adopted on 16 February 1918. Protesting against the decision by the right-wing majority of the Lithuanian Council to proclaim Lithuania a monarchy and elect a king, the Social Democrats withdrew from the Council of Lithuania, arguing that it had transgressed its powers.

Although from 1917 to 1919 some Lithuanian Social Democrats, especially outside

Lithuania, became communists, those who remained faithful to the ideological tradition of social democracy, during the creation of Lithuanian statehood in 1918, in the autumn of 1919 and then in the period of the establishment of statehood, from 1920 to 1922, constantly emphasised the necessity of a free democratic state in Lithuania, but also a democratic approach to creating such a state. They had no illusions about the ideology and political practices of the Russian Bolsheviks and entered the Lithuanian government to fight the Bolsheviks over Lithuania's independence. They also clearly opposed the aspirations of Polish land owners to annex Lithuania to Poland. In 1919, 1920, 1922 and in subsequent years, the Social Democrats protested unequivocally against undemocratic tendencies in the ideology and actions of right-wing political currents and strove hard to achieve the radical democratization of Lithuanian society and to make the Republic of Lithuania as democratic and socially just as possible.

## Poland

After the failure of the January Uprising in 1864, many Polish political emigrants joined the international workers' movement. Socialists from various countries therefore supported the Poles' independence efforts. The International Working Men's Association was established in the same year (often called the First International), on a wave of solidarity with the January Uprising. The greatest advocate of Polish independence was Karl Marx himself. The closest collaborator of the author of *Capital*, Friedrich Engels, wrote that 'Polish independence and the Russian revolution are conditional upon each other' and in a letter to Karl Kautsky in 1882 stated emphatically:

*The Polish socialists, who do not make the liberation of their country the key point of their programme, remind me of the German socialists who do not demand, in particular, the abolition of laws against socialists, the freedom of the press, association and assembly. To be able to fight, you first need ground beneath your feet, air, light and space. Otherwise everything is just hot air.*

The Polish Socialist Party (PSP), founded in 1892, was the first Polish workers' group that made the fight for its country's independence a political priority. The PSP combined the national-independence demand with a programme of radical social and political reforms aimed at establishing socialism and parliamentary democracy. This programme led to disputes at the heart of the socialist movement. The issue of moving the fight for independence to the forefront caused arguments from the Left of the party, for whom revolution was supposed to be the solution to national oppression. The difference of opinion led to splits in the party.

Among all the political movements, the PSP was most consistent in its position on independence. Conservatives favoured a loyal approach to the foreign occupiers, while the National Democrats (right-wing nationalists) were in favour of Polish autonomy within the Russian Empire. These differences became evident during the 1905 revolution, when militia associated with the right-wing nationalists attacked socialists from the PSP and the revolutionary left-wing movement.

In 1904 the PSP created its own militia organisation, which was supposed to form the nucleus of revolutionary army, according to its supporters in the party management. On the day before the First World War broke out, Józef Piłsudski, then leader of the PSP, began to create military organisations with a wider political platform than a socialist one, to fight alongside the Austro-Hungarian empire.

In the first days of Poland's independence in 1918, the socialists took the political initiative by creating the Provisional People's Government of the Republic of Poland, with Ignacy Daszyński at its head and a progressive manifesto demanding political and social rights. The cabinet of the socialist Jędrzej Moraczewski – nominated by the new head of state Józef Piłsudski, introduced a democratic electoral law (including the right of women to vote), equal rights for ethnic and national minorities, an eight-hour working day, social insurance and institutions to protect jobs.

In the following years, due to the country's agricultural basis and thus the huge number of rural voters, PSP was unable to count on mass support, so it defended the country's

independence and parliamentary democracy as an opposition force. In 1920, the socialists were involved in the defence of the country against the Red Army. They protected democratic institutions from the right-wing nationalists and the political groupings focused around the former socialist Józef Piłsudski, who created an authoritarian political system in the 1920s. The wide influence of PSP on society continued through the trade unions and social organisations (for young people, education, women, housing, culture and sport).

## Czechoslovakia

### Slovakia

Prior to 1914, Slovak social democracy was formed in cooperation with Hungarians in Budapest, Germans in Bratislava and Czechs in Vienna. Its contacts with the Czech social democracy in the Austrian part of the monarchy contributed substantially to the growth and implementation of the idea of Czecho-Slovak mutuality and, ultimately, the idea of a common Czecho-Slovak state.

After the Czechoslovak Republic (or Czechoslovakia) was established in October 1918, the Czech social democratic party merged with its Slovak counterpart in December 1918 to form the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers Party. Unified Czecho-Slovak social democracy became firmly embedded in the political structure of the new state. It participated in the drafting of the Constitution, the electoral law and other laws related to public administration, unification and the rights of ethnic minorities. Even though the leaders of the social democratic movement used revolutionary rhetoric in response to the post-war radicalisation of broad swathes of the population, they pursued reform policies in political and social practice.

The first elections of the Chamber of Deputies in Czechoslovakia were held on 18 April 1920. The social democratic party emerged as the strongest political party in Czechoslovakia.

In Slovakia, social democrats achieved electoral victory as well. They obtained 39.4 per cent of the valid votes and, combined with the votes for the Hungarian-German Social Democratic Party, more than 46 per cent. Social democracy played a major role in the creation of the first common state of Czechs and Slovaks. Between 1918 and 1920, the first two social democratic governments laid the foundations of a modern and democratic political system, functioning parliamentary democracy and democratic political culture.

### Czechia

Czech social democracy, as an ideological current, broad social movement and political party (ČSDSD) was formed in the last third of the nineteenth century. It developed along similar lines to social democratic movements in the other industrialised countries of Central and Western Europe. During the First World War, the Social Democrats abandoned their original aim, namely the democratic transformation of Austro-Hungary in favour of the creation of an independent democratic state, the Czechoslovak Republic (ČSR). They made a significant contribution not only to the creation and stabilisation of the ČSR, but during the whole period of its existence they provided it with firm support, even in the face of the decision by one wing of the party to split off and form the Communist Party, which then competed fiercely with the Social Democrats.

Social democratic ideas on political democracy played a significant role in shaping the constitutional order of the new state, and for most of the period from 1918 to 1938 the Social Democrats were participants in coalition governments. The party was the driving force behind projects such as the new system of health, invalidity and old age insurance and pensions, land reform, the eight-hour working day, days off, unemployment insurance, health and safety at work, a number of education reforms and the introduction of a modern civil code. In the 1930s, this developed into an attempt to cope with the Great Depression and its mass unemployment. The Social Democrats also exerted influence through their strong representation at the regional and municipal level and their broad base resulting from the cooperation with enterprises and the unions.

The ambitions of the social democratic movement were greater than this, however. They wanted democracy to penetrate economic relationships, or more precisely, the sphere of production, as well as social relationships in general. In this, however, the ČSDSD was not as successful as it had hoped; its policy was realised only in certain areas or for short periods of time. The Social Democrats also believed that while social democratic policy should issue from sovereign states, it should not be confined to their borders. Still, the movement undertook more international activities than any other political force in the ČSR. However, here too, it was more a question of beginnings and unrealised visions.

The complicated relations between minorities in the ČSR, which were the legacy of previous historical developments, at first hindered cooperation between social democratic currents, especially the Czech/Czechoslovak and the German ones. However, attempts to find common solutions gradually grew stronger, and by the end of the 1920s, the German Social Democrats in the ČSR had become a governing party. At the same time there were increasing attempts to find a new order that would allow Czech Germans to see Czechoslovakia as „their own“ state, while preserving its democratic character and its existing borders. The opportunity to impose more of a social democratic imprint on the ČSR that existed in the early 1920s was not to be repeated in later years.

The Czechoslovak Republic of 1938 to 1938 represents the first major attempt in the Czech lands to implement social democratic ideas in practice. It is an attempt that is still inspirational today, both where it succeeded and where it remained unfulfilled.

## Ukraine

The history of the Ukrainian Social-Democratic movement can be traced from the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party (1899) in the Austrian part of Ukrainian ethnic territories and the Ukrainian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (USDRP) in the Russian part. In their activities, both parties tried to combine social and national issues. This combination led to conflict with the neighboring Polish and – even more so – with Russian Marxists. Above all, this conflict manifested itself during the revolution of 1917, when, after the Bolshevik coup d'état, revolutionary Russia and revolutionary Ukraine went to war.

Even though the Ukrainian social democrats were never the largest party in the revolutionary Ukrainian government, they played a leading role. This reflected their longer political experience and higher level of sophistication compared with other leaders of the Ukrainian revolution. Thanks to the Ukrainian Social Democrats the Ukrainian national government managed to make significant progress in mobilising the peasantry and securing rights for national minorities.

It is reasonable to assume that if revolutionary Ukraine had been left alone, it would have constituted itself as a social democratic state. In the event of 1917–1920 the Ukrainian ethnic territories became the focus of several conflicts, which resulted in a kind of „war of all against all“. Under such dire external and internal circumstances, the Ukrainian revolution was defeated. However, its defeat cannot be considered to have been complete. In particular, the USSR was created as a socialist federal state by Lenin and the Bolsheviks largely in response to the challenges of national movements in the borderlands, among which the Ukrainian revolution proved to be one of the strongest.

The Ukrainian Social Democrats had to pay a heavy price for their defeat. They disappeared as a party from the Ukrainian political scene and remain a „great unknown“ in the Ukrainian historical memory. One can only hope that the current Ukrainian crisis can provoke the emergence of a new Ukrainian Social Democratic Party, which, in turn, may restore public interest in the history of Ukrainian social democracy.



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