

International Workshop

Radical left organisation: challenges, opportunities, implications

Left Radicalism Specialist Group at the Political Studies Association

Radical left parties (RLPs) across Europe and beyond have experienced significant organisational developments over the last two decades – with potential to impact on each of the three faces of party organisation. RLPs have increasingly found themselves in power, through participating in governing coalitions or through providing parliamentary support to other parties. Some RLPs have also attempted to promote participation within their organisations – potentially increasing levels of diversity within RLP organization. For example, some have sought to innovate or to democratise their internal structures and procedures through introducing new technologies and forms of direct democracy, deliberation, and organisation. Some parties, however, have centralised their organisations around their leader(s). Several have attempted to function as broad or pluralistic parties which offer space for revolutionary left groups and factions. In this context, various models of party organisation have been associated with RLPs ranging from the ‘digital party’, the ‘movement party’ and at the same time, the ‘catch-all’ and ‘cartel party’.

RLPs have also experienced significant changes in their relations with wider society and social movements. Unlike the archetypical mass communist party of earlier decades, contemporary RLPs do not have, for the most part, tight links to trade unions. While membership numbers are dwindling, RLPs have demonstrated the ability to forge and sustain new, progressive social coalitions and forms of societal linkage with potential to strengthen their electoral support. With such developments ongoing, it is necessary to analyse their formation and longevity while also viewing them in historical context. Radical left groups also continue to operate within mainstream parties (often centre-left parties) and at times have gained in influence e.g. through promoting the election of left-of-center leaders or shaping policy positions. There are at the same time, a myriad of extra-parliamentary radical left organisations often of Trotskyist and Marxist-Leninist orientation.

To understand the complexity of this picture, this workshop aims to analyse the organisational forms of RLPs, their interaction with ideology, national/local context, and strategy. It provides an opportunity to discuss the challenges and opportunities of contemporary organisational development. Along these lines, the workshop aims to: bring together researchers discussing radical left organisations in Europe and beyond; to explore the forms and dilemmas of radical left organisation: and to assess the implications of organisational adaptation for electoral mobilisation. We encourage both single-case studies and comparative approaches geared towards understanding the contemporary radical left.

Format:

The workshop will be organised for one day and will provide the space for an academic debate in which several scholars can present the most recent findings of their research. The workshop seeks to attract a mix of established scholars, early-career researchers and PhD students. To increase the exchange of ideas, each presenter will serve as a discussant for another paper. Each presenter will be allocated 45 minutes: 20 minutes to present the paper, 10 minutes for the discussant and 15 minutes for general discussion.

Date and time:

10am-4pm, Friday, 20 November 2020

Planned outcomes, costs and application procedure:

Depending on the homogeneity of the papers, the organisers plan a special issue in a peer-reviewed journal or an edited book with an important publisher. This will be discussed at the end of the workshop.

There is no participation fee. Authors should send a 200 word abstract with a title of their proposed paper, their name and affiliation. The address is Petar.Bankov@glasgow.ac.uk or charalambous.gi@unic.ac.cy and the deadline is 18 October 2020 (23:59). The organisers will inform the participants about the outcome of the selection process by 15 October.

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On behalf of,

Left Radicalism (sg),

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