Robert Michels, Political Sociology, and the Future of Democracy

Juan J. Linz

Edited with a bibliography by H. E. Chehabi

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Contents

Author's Note

These essays would not have appeared in English without the initiative, commitment, and efforts of my friend, former student, and sometime co-author, Professor Houchang Chehabi. He undertook the task of translating not only one of the essays but the many quotations in different languages dispersed in my English manuscripts, some of which were prepared for publication in Italian. He also looked for the correct references in English and edited the text. The compilation of the bibliography was a painful task which I could never have undertaken myself. I could not be more grateful for his enthusiasm and his efforts.

I also wish to thank my friend Irving Louis Horowitz and Transaction Publishers for their readiness to publish this book at a time that publishers are everyday less ready to take risks for the sake of scholarship.

Editor's Preface

This book contains four articles by Juan J. Linz that have been relatively inaccessible. They represent four of Linz's main interests: the classics of sociological theory, comparative politics, Spain, and the role of intellectuals in society.

One of Linz's great merits as a scholar and teacher is his in-depth knowledge of the classics of political sociology. His courses on this topic were popular at both Columbia and Yale, but unfortunately Linz has found time to write only on Robert Michels. The article published here was commissioned by the Italian publisher Il Mulino for a reedition of Michels's classic book on political parties. Linz wrote it in English, but it came out only in Italian translation at the time[1]; a Spanish translation was published years later in Mexico.[2] The version published here has been prepared on the basis of Linz's own English typescript as well as the Italian and Spanish translations.

The next article, "Time and Regime Change," was also available only in Italian and Spanish translations until now, although various English versions of it circulated in what Linz's friends and colleagues affectionately call the "Linzian underground." The ideas contained in it were first presented in 1976 at the tenth congress of the International Political Science Association in Edinburgh, and the edited Italian version, which I used as the basis for the rewritten version presented here, was published a decade later.[3] The piece contains the kernel of many later works, most notably the discussion of the dilemmas facing provisional governments in periods of regime transition, which led to a co-authored book to which other scholars contributed articles as well.[4]

"Tradition and Modernity in Spain" was first presented at a conference held by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1972. For personal reasons Linz could not meet the publication deadline, and so the proceedings of the conference were published without it.[5] The article was written in the twilight years of General Francisco Franco's regime, and reflects the soul-searching of those years. Since the successful transition to democracy in the late 1970s, Spanish society has evolved at such a startling pace and Spain has so thoroughly been integrated into the West European mainstream that the thinkers, problems, issues, and dilemmas discussed in this piece will seem like ancient history to many. This is precisely one reason to publish this article: it questions the simplistic two-Spains framework in the study of Spanish his-

tory—and the ideological positions derived from it—by highlighting the different political, social, and ideological dimensions of change. The successful incorporation of Spain in the new Europe of stable and prosperous democracies should not lead one to ignore this historical legacy. The other reason this article is important lies in its contribution to the criticisms of modernization theory that had begun appearing in the mid-1960s. While its title seems to indicate an acceptance of the tradition/modernity dichotomy prevalent until the 1960s,[6] the article actually questions that duality from the very outset. The subsequent analysis combines political, social, cultural, and intellectual history to prove how unilinear conceptions of modernization are misleading, a point made by later critics of the modernization paradigm. Linz's rare familiarity with conservative thought allows him to show that many of the traditions invoked by political actors and thinkers on the right side of the political spectrum have little to do with "tradition" and are in fact innovations. Linz's use of such terms as "pseudotradition," "neotradition," and even "created tradition" anticipates Eric Hobsbawm's now famous discussion of "invented traditions."[7] Therefore, this article is more than just a contribution to an understanding of Spanish history: the methodology implicit in it can be of great help to those who try to understand non-Western societies' attempts to catch up with the West.

The last article, "Freedom and Autonomy of Intellectuals and Artists," is unusual among Juan Linz's writings in that it is an intellectual's think piece. Outside North America scholars are also often public intellectuals, a role Linz has played above all in his native Spain, but also elsewhere: his views on the merits of parliamentary democracy have spawned debate in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and East Asia.[8]

The essay presented here in English translation was first presented at a seminar on the role of intellectuals in society that was held in Madrid in March 1978, when Spain's democracy was young.[9] Its relevancy to an American audience is not self-evident, as the United States has few self-defined intellectuals: intellectuals deal with generalities, and Americans have, as Tocqueville pointed out, only limited affinity for general theories and ideas. The ideologically divided sociopolitical milieu that was the background to this essay no longer exists, and few people today would question the role of market forces in shaping cultural production. Linz's thought experiment is not obsolete, however, for the postmodern dystopia that he depicts has been realized in cyberspace, where anybody can say anything and be assured of an audience.

While I have extensively rewritten the four articles, the new versions and my translations of the non-English quotations they contain have been seen and approved by Juan Linz, who has also selectively updated his essays. Finally, I wish to thank Rocío de Terán and Jeff Miley, whose help was crucial when the preparation of the manuscript was in its final stages.

H. E. Chehabi

Notes

1. "Michels e il suo contributo alla sociologia politica." Introductory essay to Roberto Michels, *La sociologia del partito politico nella democrazia moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1966), pp. viicxix.
2. Juan J. Linz, *Michels y su contribución a la sociología política*, trans. Eduardo L. Suárez (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998).
3. "Il fattore tempo nei mutamenti di regime" in *Teoria politica* 2 (1986): 3-47. This was followed by a Spanish translation done in Mexico: Juan J. Linz, *El factor tiempo en un cambio de régimen*, trans. Ariella Aureli (Mexico: Instituto de Estudios para la Transición Democrática, 1994).
4. Yossi Shain, Juan J. Linz et al., *Between States: Interim Governments and Democratic Transitions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Another essay that grew out of this piece is Juan J. Linz, "Democracy's Time Constraints," *International Political Science Review* 19 (1998): 19-37.
5. S. N. Eisenstadt, *Post-Traditional Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), originally published as *Daedalus* 102 (Winter 1973).
6. Most famously contained in Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1958).
7. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
8. Juan Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, eds., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).
9. "Libertad y autocontrol de los intelectuales," *Cuenta y Razón*, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 7-27.

1

Robert Michels and His Contribution to Political Sociology in Historical and Comparative Persepctive

To S.M. Lipset, friend and teacher

Author's Note

Since this essay, first published in 1966, has entered into the intellectual debate on the work and life of Robert Michels in the present form, it did not seem right to publish a substantially revised version incorporating the literature published since. Moreover, I did not feel the need to change the basic argument, since with few exceptions subsequent writings largely concur with the analysis presented here or focus on other problems.

The main later publications on Michels are David Beetham, "From Socialism to Fascism—the Relation between Theory and Practice in the Work of Robert Michels," *Political Studies* 25 (1977): 3-24 and 161-181; David Beetham, "Michels and His Critics," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 22 (1981): 81-99; Pino Ferraris, "Roberto Michels politico (1901-1902)," *Quaderni dell'Istituto di Studi Economici e Sociali della Facoltà di Giurisprudenza di Camerino* 1 (1982): 51-162; Pino Ferraris, "Ancora sul Michels politico attraverso le lettere di Karl Kautsky," *Quaderni dell'Istituto di Studi Economici e Sociali della Facoltà di Giurisprudenza di Camerino* 4 (1985): 44-63; Gian Biagio Furiozzi, ed., *Roberto Michels tra politica e sociologia* (Florence: Centro Editoriale Toscano, 1984); Joachim Hetscher, *Robert Michels: Die Herausbildung der modernen politischen Soziologie im Kontext der Herausforderung und Defizit der Arbeiterbewegung* (Bonn: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1993); Arthur Mitzman, *Sociology and Estrangement: Three Sociologists of Imperial Germany* (New York: Knopf, 1973); Frank R. Pfetsch, "Einführung in Person, Werk und Wirkung," in Robert Michels, *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1989), pp.

XVII-XLI; P. P. Portinaro, "Roberto Michels e Vilfredo Pareto. La formazione e la crisi della sociologia politica," in *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Einaudi* 11 (1977): 99-141; Wilfried Röhrich, *Robert Michels. Vom sozialistisch-syndikalistischen zum faschistischen Credo* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1972); Wifried Röhrich, "Der Elitegedanke in der modernen Demokratie," in Wifried Röhrich, ed., *Macht und Ohnmacht des Politischen. Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Michael Freund am 18. Januar 1967* (Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1967); Wifried Röhrich, "Robert Michels," in Dirk Käsler, ed., *Klassiker des soziologischen Denkens* (Munich: Beck, 1976); Francesco Tuccari, *I dilemmi della democrazia moderna. Max Weber e Robert Michels* (Bari: Laterza, 1993); H. A. Winkler, "Robert Michels," in Hans Ulrich Wehler, ed., *Deutsche Historiker*, vol. 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), pp. 65-80. Hetscher summarizes and reviews the contributions of Röhrich, Beetham, Mitzman, and Pfetsch. F. Tuccari's book is the most complete and intelligent of the recent works and includes references to the Italian literature on Michels and interesting comparisons with Pareto and Mosca.

Introduction

Robert Michels (1876-1936) occupies a prominent place among the founders of sociology. His fame is due mostly to his "iron law of oligarchy," which he formulated in a brilliant monograph first published in German in 1911.[1] As a theorist, Michels did not attain the stature of such figures as Karl Marx (1818-1883), Max Weber (1864-1920), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), or Georg Simmel (1858-1918), but because his work analyzes the oligarchical tendencies in group life, an issue that is of concern to students in many fields besides political sociology, it has become a classic.

Michels belonged to the generation that followed the founding fathers of sociology. These scholars strove to apply the insights and suggestions of the earlier generation in order to understand the changes that Western society underwent in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Like his contemporaries—Joseph A. Schumpeter, Theodor Geiger, Karl Mannheim, György Lukács, Henri de Man, José Ortega y Gasset[2]—Michels was concerned with democracy, socialism, revolution, class conflict, trade unions, the masses, nationalism, the role of the intellectuals, elites, and imperialism. He emphasized some of these problems, such as working-class politics, more than other scholars did, and he touched some other themes that were not of interest to other members of his own generation, such as eugenics, feminism, sex, and morality. More passionate than his peers, and with a strong inclination toward an ethic of ultimate ends as opposed to an ethic of responsibility,[3] he found himself deeply involved in the ideological and national conflicts of his time, and his work probably suffered from this involvement. Part I of this essay will discuss Robert Michels's life and output in the context of the political and intellectual trends of his time; Part II will focus on his greatest achievement, his book *Political Parties*; Part III will examine various dimensions of democracy that Michels touches upon; and Part IV will conclude with Michels's impact on scholarship.

PART I

THE LIFE AND OEUVRE OF ROBERT MICHELS

Biographical Sketch

Michels's family history and career were far more cosmopolitan than those of many of his colleagues. Born in 1876 in Germany into a family of Franco-Germano-Belgian background, he became a *libero docente* at the University of Turin in 1907 and spent the war years as a professor of political economy at the University of Basel in Switzerland, but later returned to Italy, where he was appointed professor at the University of Perugia in 1928.

Michels had spent some of his student days in England and in Paris, and was in close touch with intellectual and political life in Belgium and France. Although he spent the academic year 1927-1928 teaching at Williams College in Massachusetts and at the University of Chicago, his interest in and understanding of the Anglo-Saxon world always remained limited, in contrast to such contemporaries of his as Schumpeter, Mannheim, and even Geiger. He remained a continental European, and became a Latin-European in many of his views about life and politics. In fact, his name appears closely associated with the school that James Burnham aptly called "Machiavellians": Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Georges Sorel (1847-1922), and Vilfredo Pareto,[4] a school of mostly Italian writers that Mosca, apologizing for the neologism, termed "a-democratic."[5] His identification with Italy went farther than mere intellectual affinity: as early as 1914 he dedicated his apologia of Italian imperialism to his children "acciocchè imparino a essere giusti e ad amare l'Italia,"[6] a love that led him in 1925 to write about his feelings:

> [Though I am] originally from that part of the world that in some ways is in between Germany and France, namely the [Rhineland, I am] full-heartedly, and without reservation, a citizen of Italy. Therefore while my origin guarantees my intellectual affection for France and Germany, on questions that touch [Italy], my Italian citizenship, freely chosen and freely professed, means that I cannot consider matters of Gaul and Germany except from a strictly Italian perspective.[7]

This strong identification with Italy, which was criticized in his native Germany when it led him to side with his adopted country in foreign policy matters, helps explain Michels's transition from a syndicalist-socialist and pacifist to attitudes that led Fascists to claim him as "one of us."[8] Michels's idiosyncratic experience of nationality, i.e., the fact that he chose to be an Italian rather than a German, separates him from his elders, who either, like Weber and Durkheim, unambiguously identified with only one fatherland, or, like Pareto, felt that any national, religious, or political identification was an obstacle to the true vocation of a sociologist.[9] In view of his later Italian nationalism, it is ironic that in the first decade of the century, when Michels was a young socialist interested in the Italian labor movement, he started formulating his critical views about the German social democratic party by comparing its concessions to nationalism unfavorably with the internationalism of other countries' socialist parties at a time when many socialists advocated antimilitarism and called for a general strike in case war broke out.

The tendencies that Michels would later find in all parties and organizations were first detected by him in German socialism, and he ascribed them to the influence of the social and political situation of Germany, which he analyzed in terms that were not that different from Weber's.[10] By the time he wrote *Il Partito Politico*, however, the external environment, while still mentioned, receded in importance behind organizational and psychological factors, and the latter were the only ones he included in the "sketch for an outline of the etiology of the oligarchy in democratic parties" (*abbozzo di schema per l'eziologia dell' oligarchia nei partiti democratici*).[11] Modern critics tend to emphasize the specifically German aspects of which the earliest Michels—the socialist critical of his socialist German compatriots—was not unaware, but which he later chose to neglect.[12] We may say that this was to his advantage as a sociological theorist since it allowed him to put the emphasis on basic structural factors.

Michels's Family Background

Michels came from a bourgeois-patrician family of Cologne.[13] His great-grandfather, Mathias, had built a prosperous wool and textile business at the time of the Napoleonic wars, a business that Mathias's son Peter expanded. Peter Michels also played a prominent role in civic and political life, as evidenced by his representing the interests and sentiments of Cologne's bourgeoisie to King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia in 1848. Peter's wife, Constanze van Halen (Robert Michels's grandmother), came from the Limburg province of the Netherlands, but as Catholics her family identified with Belgium. (A cousin of hers, Juan van Halen, went to Spain, fought in the War of Independence [Peninsular War] against Napoleon, but got into trouble with the Inquisition and served in Russia. He then was one of the leaders of the 1830 rebellion in Brussels, only to return to Spain where, under the progressive regime of

Baldomero Espartero, he became Captain General (commander of the military region) of Barcelona and in 1841 was given the title of Count of Peracamps. Constanze's mother was of French Huguenot origin but converted to Catholicism. Her husband, i.e. Robert Michels's grandfather Peter Michels, was a man of exemplary religiosity and morals: he was a major supporter of Adolf Kolping, the founder of the Catholic Artisans association, and founded a nuns' convent. The eight children of Peter Michels received between 800,000 and a million marks each in the 1870s and 1880s, and the family remained in the textile business at least until the late 1920s.

The tension between the Catholic Rhineland, a recent addition to Prussia, and the predominantly Protestant Prussian state affected the family. In 1875, a son-in-law of Peter Michels was ousted as mayor of Bonn by Bismarck in the *Kulturkampf*, but other members of the family fared better under Bismarck: one of Robert Michels's uncles became an officer with the *Husaren* (an elite regiment), two married into the nobility, and another sat in the Prussian upper house as a National Liberal. The anti-Prussian sentiments that were strong during the war of 1866 and even felt in 1870 were probably only a memory when Robert Michels was young; one relative of his even married a Protestant.

The Michels family continued to be part of the social elite of Cologne, and young Robert, after attending the French *Gymnasium* in Berlin (many years later attended by Albert O. Hirschman[14]), decided in 1895 to enlist in the Imperial German Army's Großherzog von Sachsen (Grand Duke of Saxony) Regiment. He then traveled to England and to Paris and from there to Munich, where he attended the lectures of Luigi von Brentano, the prominent social science professor. In 1897 we find him in Leipzig studying with, among others, Karl Lamprecht, the pioneer of cultural history, and a year later in Halle with the economic historian Johannes Conrad, the literary historian Rudolf Haym, the philosopher Hans Vaihinger, and the historian Theodor Lindner, whose daughter he would marry. He completed his dissertation under the direction of Johann Gustav Droysen on Louis XIV's 1680 incursion into Holland.[15]

Robert Michels's stable and traditional family background, steeped as it was in the business world and in Roman Catholicism, even his academic interests, would not lead us to suspect that only a few years later he would, as a young lecturer (*Dozent*) at Marburg, engage in public debates as a socialist, and that he would find himself barred from German academia because of his political ideas and his refusal to have his children baptized.[16]

Early Years in the Socialist Movement

It was in Marburg that Michels came into his own as an intellectual and a social scientist. Tracing the influence of Michels's intellectual forebears on the development of his thought is difficult, for unfortunately we have only fragments of his correspondence with Max Weber and no record at all of his

conversations with Mosca and Sorel. But his experience as a political activist in the local Marburg section of the German socialist party (SPD) provides the background to his most famous work.

After Michels had moved to Marburg, a five-cornered election to the Reichstag in 1903 led to a run-off between Helmuth von Gerlach, a National Social follower of Friedrich Naumann and the only candidate of his party with a chance at being elected, and a Conservative. The National Social party stood for *Demokratie und Kaisertum* (democracy and monarchy), opposed both Junkers and revolution, and espoused a social program that aimed at drawing workers away from socialism.[17] Under the influence of a group of intellectuals, among them Michels, the local Marburg SPD organization, conforming to the decisions of the 1902 Munich party congress which instructed members to support only candidates who were against increased military spending, called on socialists to abstain, since von Gerlach was not against it. This would have handed victory to the Conservative. The SPD party organ *Vorwärts*, however, called on socialists to vote for von Gerlach since his position on tariffs, an issue affecting the price of bread and therefore of great importance to the working class, was preferable to that of his opponent. An SPD deputy and friend of von Gerlach's, Wolfgang Heine, informed him of the *Vorwärts* note, and, strengthened by this support, von Gerlach won the election.

At this point the leader of the SPD, August Bebel (1840-1913), got involved. In a letter to Michels, he supported the Marburg local party organization, and asked that the question be brought up at the 1903 Dresden congress. On that occasion Michels, with the support of the members of the Marburg party organization, 80 to 3, presented a censure motion against Wolfgang Heine, whom he rebuked for having meddled in the internal affairs of the local party in favor of a political opponent who was a personal friend of his. As for Heine's assertion in *Vorwärts* that he had "wanted the party to avoid making a fool of itself," Michels asked how complying with the resolutions of a party congress could be thought of as making a fool of oneself.

Michels's speech came right after Bebel himself had launched a massive attack on the reformists, and therefore the "mass psychology of the situation" made it highly likely that the congress would vote in favor of Michels's motion censoring Heine and *Vorwärts*, the more so since such prominent radicals as Rosa Luxemburg, Arthur Stadthagen, and Georg Ledebour were encouraging Michels. Remembering that day, Michels wrote: "There was no question: the fate of German Social Democracy, perhaps even much more, was at stake."[18] Given the state of excitement that characterized the congress, acceptance of the motion of censure would probably have led to a split in the party. But at the last moment, Michels resisted the urge to present his motion. Instead, he made an emotional appeal against suspiciousness, "which kills all life," and for "unity and brotherhood." He gave his motives for the last-minute change of heart in his diary:

> Two reasons compelled me to be cautious. Given my youth, I felt I could not become responsible for the exclusion of so many outstanding men. Moreover, I considered it ungenerous to take advantage of the hatred that the so-called radicals felt for the revisionists (their spiritual and intellectual superiors), a hatred that was not always devoid of personal motives, even if its purpose was of a higher order.

Michels later recalled that when he refused to precipitate the split in the SPD he was conscious of his conscience forbidding him to play the role of an agitator, he was conscious of his youth, and he was conscious of the negative fanaticism of many in the the party's left wing. But perhaps there was something else too. Perhaps, he added, "he no longer felt sufficiently rooted in the nurturing soil [of the movement] to take steps of such consequence, [perhaps] his thoughts were already in some other place."[19]

The failure of the Ruhr strike of 1905, due to the fact that many trade union officials were also members of parliament, made Michels aware of the dichotomy between the SPD's revolutionary phraseology and the cautious policy it actually pursued.[20] The inability of a party of three million to influence politics led him to liken it to "a giant who is unable to impregnate a virgin," a phrase that Mussolini would use in a speech in Genoa in 1914. Gradually Michels came to see democracy as a cult of incompetence animated by a despicable fear of any type of manly responsibility. Increasingly, he came to consider that parliamentarism had become the illegitimate ruler of party life, and that the calculations to which it gave rise led the party to renounce all strong ideas and energetic actions.[21]

These ideas were reinforced by contacts Michels had established since 1902 with the young economists Arturo Labriola and Enrico Leoni, and, more importantly, by the friendly intellectual ties he had developed beginning in 1904 with the French syndicalists Georges Sorel, Hubert Lagardelle, Edouard Berth, Paul Delesalle, and Victor Griffuelhes. Michels became a contributor to the journal *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, and in a series of articles expressed his misgivings about the course of the SPD.[22] At the home of Lagardelle he met Eduard Beneš, the Czech politician and future president of Czechoslovakia, the Italian sociologist Alfredo Niceforo, and several Russians, one of whom, C. Racowski, would later become the Soviet ambassador to Paris. While Michels claims that he was not fully committed to such syndicalist ideas as *action directe* and the myth of the general strike, he wrote on the German party:

> You realize that, in such a milieu, there is no room for syndicalism, direct action, general strike. Democratic preoccupations on the one hand, and on the other hand the love of organization for its own sake and purely parliamentary tactics are not exactly favorable to the various kinds of revolutionary working-class activity. Not to mention that the "well behaved" character of our masses, who are anxious to copy the "good manners" of the peaceful bourgeoisie, cannot produce a psychology of moral revolt and a sense of the brutal opposition between classes.[23]

This text certainly supports the interpretation of Michels as a disillusioned romantic revolutionary rather than a disillusioned democrat. Some of the main themes of his more scholarly efforts in the years to follow are stated in this brief pamphlet, where he denounces the bourgeois values and aspirations of the masses and their rejection of moral indignation and all-out class struggle.

At that time he was attracted by the idea of enhancing the power of the labor movement by fusing the ideas of Marx, Proudhon and Pareto. His relation with Sorel must have been close,[24] since Sorel offered to write the preface to a book of his but warned him of the boycott it would suffer from the official socialists. His misgivings about parliamentary politics notwithstanding, Michels ran as an SPD candidate for the Reichstag in the Alsfeld-Lauterbach constituency of Upper Hesse, and the hopelessness of this quest allowed him to engage in pure *Weltanschauungsarbeit*, i.e., ideological work.

At SPD congresses Michels's efforts were limited and directed at strengthening all those positions that were considered Marxist. For example, at the 1905 congress in Jena he supported a move to deprive members of parliament of their vote at party congresses on the grounds that their mandates came from the voters rather than from the party's membership.[25]

While Michels's views were in some ways congruent with those of Bebel and his Marburg friends, in the long run their alliance could not last. At the end of the day Bebel was for Michels a typical "majority politician" who lacked faith in the force—and even less in the rights—of intellectual or voluntaristic (*willensmäßiger*) minorities. Also, Bebel's philosophical materialism led him to see things differently from the younger hotheads. His loyalty to the German nation was tantamount to indirect support for the Kaiser's foreign policy, and for Michels and Werner Sombart this was incompatible with the principles of socialism—a view with which many foreign socialists agreed.[26] Michels's love-hate relationship with Bebel is reflected in *Il partito politico*, which makes constant reference to Bebel, and in a long obituary Michels wrote for the socialist leader.[27]

At Marburg, Michels and his friends turned against parliamentarism. They exalted youth, went to agitate among the students, and organized public debates with politicians representing the Catholic *Zentrum* and the National Liberals, debates that were attended by such faculty members as the neo-Kantian philosopher Paul Natorp and Heinrich Sieveking. Debates on such topics as nationalism, imperialism, class struggle, and the proper political role of students lasted through the night.[28]

> Often the instinctual dominated, but that need not be politically damaging. It was a youthful reaction not only against the bourgeois world, the government, but also against the labor movement as it had turned out to be . . . a struggle of ideology against the organization turned into an end in itself.[29]

This effervescence brought Michels and his group in contact with Max Weber, who left a profound impression upon him. For one thing, Weber showed a great deal of personal interest in the young Michels, and admitted him to what he facetiously called the *salon des refusés* in Heidelberg. Weber also expressed himself very strongly on the German universities' refusal to habilitate Michels. In a personal letter to Michels (24 January 1906) and in a letter to the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (20 September 1908) he referred to the "so-called academic freedom at German universities," and called the rejection of Michels a shame for a *Kulturnation*, not only by comparison with France or Italy but even by comparison with Russia.[30]

In 1906 Weber invited Michels to write for his famous *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*. This invitation turned Michels to more scholarly pursuits. In a long and well-documented article that provoked the ire of August Bebel and Viktor Adler, he discussed the SPD's ideological position, particularly in relation to pacifism and the use of a general strike to prevent war, and then, by an adroit confrontation of texts, exposed the contradiction between radical statements and actual policy.[31]

In spite of his increasing disenchantment with the international socialist movement, in 1907 Michels still attended the international congress in Stuttgart as a member of the syndicalist faction of the Italian Socialist Party, having moved to Turin in the meantime.[32] There he met with Sorel's disciple Berth and other syndicalists and introduced them to Sombart, in whom he had aroused an interest in syndicalism. Since in Germany there was no chance for either a syndicalist tendency in the trade unions or an intellectual elite of the Sorelian type, he was closest to the left-revolutionary Marxist wing of the SPD, which explains his friendship with the labor editor Konrad Haenisch,[33] and his good relations with Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg. The "ethico-aesthetic" point of view of the radical Kurt Eisner (the head of the Bavarian revolutionary government who was assassinated by a right-wing aristocrat in 1919) brought a rapprochement between him and Michels's group of friends.[34] A few months after the Stuttgart congress Michels resigned his membership in the Italian Socialist Party, probably in the company of several other syndicalists. He had been an active member of international socialism for five years, from 1902 to 1907.

Michels's experiences as a member of socialist organizations had a deep impact on his subsequent scholarly work, and this is how he himself summarized the political and intellectual evolution that led to *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens*:

> Lacking ambition and being a pure idealist, more suited to the scientific analysis of politics than to its practical application, he slowly, and in a process of which he himself was well nigh unconscious, came to submit the party to a vivisection, a painful cutting up of something alive that he began putting in writing in his work on party organization.[35]