Democracy and Populism in the Process of Modernization

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The concept of modernization and the concept of social mobility contained in it constitute the principal categories in understanding the nature of populism. There are many theories of modernization that foreground different impulses for development and factors determining the pace, process and the final shape of the process under discussion. The functional approach and the evolutionary approach are among the most important ones. Social participation is important element of democracy but perceived in different way by supporters of direct and indirect democracy. Delegative democracy may be transformed into Robert Dahl's poliarchy system. The process of social mobilization constitutes a part of a big transformation, since it presents the mechanism of rapid inclusion of large social groups in the new system of values. This mechanism assumes the coexistence of modern and traditional sectors. In populism the expansion of rights tends to occur as a result of compromise within the framework of class alliances or through a system of co-opting marginal groups to the system. Social mobilization constitutes a complicated process combing the disintegration of the existing structure of the system and the final reintegration of the society.

Key words: democracy, delegative democracy, populism, modernization, social mobilization, social participation

Social modernization

The aim of this presentation is to comment upon the ideas of democracy and populism in the process of modernization. I have formulated several theses. First, the concept of the capitalist modernization is crucial category in understanding the nature of populism. Second, the uneven social participation in the process of modernization is a frequent cause of tensions and conflicts between the ruling elites (both political and economic) which are perceived as alienated from the society and different social groups. Third, social participation is important element of democracy but perceived in different way by supporters of direct and indirect

democracy. Fourth, delegative democracy may be treated as the inheritance of totalitarian or authoritarian regimes all over the world and it may be transformed into Robert Dahl's poliarchy system.

The concept of modernization and the concept of social mobility contained in it constitute the principal categories in understanding the nature of populism. There are many theories of modernization that foreground different impulses for development and factors determining the pace, process and the final shape of the process under discussion. The functional approach and the evolutionary approach are among the most important ones. The functional approach is derived from Bronisław Malinowski's and Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown's functionalism and other theories of social change (Wróbel, 1988: 107-133; Szacki, 1981: 304-310; 695-712). The main representative of this tendency is Neil J. Smelser, for whom modernization denotes a process of structural transformations spread out in time from the moment of the appearance of the impulse for change until the adaptation of the system to the conditions changing under the influence of technological and economic transformations (Smelser, 1968). Some scholars understand the concept of modernization as referring to economic development denoting industrialization combined with the restructuring of the system as a whole (More, 1974). Others point out to the proliferation of roles functionally connected with industrialization, even though, as they stress, the latter is not a necessary condition of the appearance of modernization (Apter, 1965). In this formulation modernization denotes a system of changing values. The evolutionary conception is derived from Herbert Spencer's and Lewis H. Morgan's classical nineteenth-century sociology of evolution (Szacki, 1981: 296-350). It assumes the linear development of societies as a universal process that every society goes through. According to the evolutionists, different levels of development result from uneven development and will disappear as a consequence of modernization (Rostow, 1960: 4-12). The main elements of the modernizing process include economic development, urban development, differentiation of political structures, rise in the level of education and social-political activity, social mobilization, development of mass media, developed political recruitment (La Palombara, 1963; Shils, 1962). A particular role in the process of modernization is played by the elites (Eisenstadt, 1966). They constitute the centres of modernization encompassing the social groups that are peripheral from the point of their distance from the political and economic centre. Uneven participation in the process of modernization is a frequent cause of tensions and conflicts between the ruling elite and different social groups.

The concept of social mobilization denotes the process of destroying the old social, psychological and political structures, enabling the masses to adopt new forms of behaviour (Deutsch, 1961: 493-514). In terms of this approach, mobilization becomes the main aspect of modernization and one of its key components. The process of mobilization constitutes a part of a big transformation, since it presents the mechanism of rapid inclusion of large social groups in the new system of values. This mechanism assumes the coexistence of modern and traditional sectors. Modernization also denotes the process of expanding social and political rights to include all citizens of a given state, which most often occurs as a result of increasing conflicts, or even revolutions. The lower strata obtain these rights against the interests of the upper strata or privileged social sectors and groups.

In populism the expansion of rights tends to occur as a result of compromise within the framework of class alliances or through a system of co-opting marginal groups to the system. Social mobilization constitutes a complicated process combing the disintegration of the existing structure of the system and the final reintegration of the society. In this context I would like to examine some problems of social participation (Marczewska-Rytko, 2000a: 119-125).

Social participation as an element of democracy

Jean J. Rousseau maintained that we are deprived of our humanity by the very fact of functioning under governments that we cannot control (Rousseau, 1948: 86).[1] And it does not matter whether the government is lenient or repressive. What is essential is the fact that only the government run by the people takes into account the principle of the common good. It follows that the government belonging to the people should be run by the people. This view is subscribed to by the supporters of direct democracy (Marczewska-Rytko, 2001; Marczewska-Rytko, 2000). They believe that direct democracy is superior in terms of value to indirect democracy. Following J. J. Rousseau they emphasise that supremacy cannot be represented. Even if we accept this position, we must consider the arguments advanced by the supporters of representative democracy (Tinder, 2004: 118).

Advocates of indirect democracy advance several arguments which seem to be difficult to ignore from the point of view of the situation of mass societies in the contemporary world (compare Marczewska-Rytko, 2004:131-148). Firstly, on the one hand, the representative system makes it possible to give power to those who distinguish themselves in terms of intellect, experience, or interest in politics. On the other hand, it gives the final say to the people, to be expressed, for example, during the following elections. Secondly, the

representatives can devote all their time to governing, which the people as a whole cannot do. Moreover, the situation of the Athenian polis was very unique in this respect. Only free citizens were engaged in political affairs. At any rate, indirect democracy can ensure real control over everyday problems of exercising power. In the situation of the contemporary world, even the citizens of the smallest country could not attend a general meeting more often than once in a few weeks. Thirdly, representative bodies ensure more peaceful proceedings than general meetings of all the people. The very presence of a crowd makes the proceedings more emotional and even provokes the voicing of extreme views. Moreover, citizens attending a mass meeting are more susceptible to momentary emotions than a small group of representatives (Le Bon, 1986: 47-92). Fourthly, direct democracy can function only in territorially and demographically small societies. On the other hand, indirect democracy opens the possibility of political integration on a large scale.

Supporters of direct democracy seem to advance arguments of a different kind (Tinder, 2004: 119; Littleton, Byron, Coudert, 1928: 282-285). They emphasise their positive attitude to the people themselves. They share the hope of the future realisation of their visions. First of all, the vision of self-governing people is very close to their hearts. In other words, the people can ponder upon the order of their life and establish it. Direct democracy gives every individual the hope of participating in this all-encompassing power. On the other hand, indirect democracy, in practice, equals passive citizenship. The establishment of a new order occurs only at the moment of participating in the elections. Secondly, they project a vision of a community which transcends the limits of indirect democracy. Indirect democracy seems to reduce the division between the governing ones and the governed but does not eliminate it. Direct democracy promises to transcend this division. In practice all people will be rulers, everyone will govern.

On the basis of the views presented above we can suggest that the arguments of the supporters of indirect democracy refer to the contemporary situation. Their opponents most often look forward to an indefinite future, emphasising the deficiencies of this form of government. This raises a number of problems and questions. First of all, direct democracy demands more time and attention than a citizen would be prepared to devote to political affairs. The supporters of this form of government seem to believe that the fullness of life is closely connected with public activity. Secondly, bureaucracy constituting a part of the basis of the system of indirect democracy is treated by the supporters of direct democracy as a privileged ruling group, alienated from the society and realising its own needs at the expense of the people. The same applies to managers and technocrats. There is also an implicit

suggestion that the solution of political problems does not require specialised knowledge. Thus, the citizens themselves are capable of solving them efficiently. However, the complexity of the problems facing a modern state seems to go beyond the capabilities of ordinary citizens. The supporters of direct democracy see the solution to this problem in education and increased participation of the people in the political process.

The problem of the competence of the people in governing was often raised in different historical periods. Most often the argument of incompetence has been raised by enemies of democracy or followers of its representative variety. For example, Emile Faguet claimed that democracy essentially means government of the laymen (Faguet, 1922: 3). Even if that form of government were to become useful, it would be only as a method of conducting opinion polls. On the other hand, Emile A. Chartier, writing under the pseudonym of Alain, expressed a different view on the matter, reflected in the following words: "It is true that in most cases a deputy does not know anything apart from his own profession. Let us observe, however, that if he is a solicitor he knows the law, the procedures and the defects of the judicial system, if he is a merchant he knows the accounts and economics; if he is an entrepreneur, he can make reasonable comments on public works. That is why, when people talk of the ignorance and incompetence of the deputies, I can only regard it as an easy and meaningless argument. I would not pay that much attention to knowledge, but rather to honesty and simplicity of personal manners" (Alain, 1978: 445). He argues further: "It is said that a common man is uneducated, that he is mistaken as to his own interests, but how many ministers and kings were mistaken as to their own interests! The quantity should correct these mistakes. The mass of voters in which individual errors are opposed and cancel one another out, ought to finally give a precise image of the common interest" (Alan, 1978: 447). Even Hans Kelsen (1936), hardly a supporter of direct democracy, declared: "On the other hand one should not be necessarily a pessimist and believe in Ibsen's bitter words that the majority is never right, and that the nation is totally incapable of understanding its needs; it is enough to question the view that the Truth and the Good reveal themselves only to the nation, only to the majority, to maintain at least a sceptical attitude towards the claims of democracy" (Kelsen, 1936: 123-131).

Essentially, both forms of democracy lead to the view that the ultimate power must belong to the people. However, there are different approaches to this problem. Indirect democracy does not overcome the alienation of the ruling and the ruled, focusing on the problems of controlling the ruling elites by the citizens. On the other hand, direct democracy turns against this alienation and thus its rhetoric comes close to the postulates of the populists

(Marczewska-Rytko, 1995). We may observe that the followers of indirect democracy emphasise the importance of the skills, qualifications, and accountability of political elites. Thus, they pay much attention to the proper use of knowledge and skills of managers and experts. On the other hand, the adherents to direct democracy stress direct participation of citizens in the process of making political decisions.

The properly functioning representative democracy can be a component of direct democracy and vice versa. Even the critics of representative democracy share this point of view. Benjamin Barber observed that the institutions of strong democracy proposed by him should complement the institutions of representative democracy in modern societies (Barber, 1984: 262). Carol C. Gould takes her considerations a step further adopting a view that the institutions of representative democracy are an essential part of a larger system of direct democracy proposed by her (Gould, 1988: 262). Thus, we should rather become acquainted with the mechanisms of the functioning of indirect democracy than regard its solutions as wrong. The American society, despite its disappointment with the practical functioning of indirect democracy does not reject it. This is demonstrated by Thomas E. Cronin's studies on the mechanisms of direct democracy such as citizens' initiative, referendum, and recall (Cronin, 1989).

On the basis of data from public opinion polls, Cronin maintains that the Americans would support the decision-making by the ruling majority even if they had a greater possibility of making use of the mechanisms of direct democracy. He writes: "Although experts still argue about the consequences, most would say that direct democracy has not weakened our regular legislative processes. Even in areas where these devices are used, 98 or 99 percent of the laws remain the responsibility of legislators. Legislatures are more important today than ever, as growing population and growing demands on government force them to assume greater responsibilities. Americans overwhelmingly endorse leaving the job of making laws to their elected representatives and view direct democracy devices almost entirely as a last alternative to the legislative process" (Cronin, 1989: 228). Of course, we may accept the suggestion that tensions and difficulties in the decision-making process complicate the functioning of representative democracy in practice. The questions that arise include the following: how can the elected representatives be sure of social preferences; can the citizens have the guarantee that their representatives will act in accordance with those preferences. There are no simple and unambiguous answers to the questions posed in this way. Nevertheless, the mechanisms of representative governments seem to be a practical necessity in big modern societies. This does not mean, however, that they will not be subjected to

verification, if only under the influence of impulses connected with the spread of revolution in telecommunications. Problems connected with democracy are complex, especially in the processes of globalization. One of them relates to the so called delegative democracy.

Delegative democracy

The conception of delegative democracy formulated by Guillermo O'Donnell is particularly characteristic of the states which rejected the system of authoritarian rule (O'Donnell, 1997: 66-77; 1996: 34-51). The author formulated some fundamental theses pertaining to the models of democracy functioning in literature. Firstly, he decided that theories and typologies of democracy refer to representative democracy existing in the highly developed capitalist countries. Secondly, some of the newly established democracies in the post-colonial or post-communist countries fulfil the criteria of democracy defined by R. Dahl within the framework of the model of polyarchy. Thirdly, in most cases these states are not representative democracies. At the same time they are characterised by features which allow the author to describe them as delegative democracies. Fourthly, these democracies do not belong to institutionalised (consolidated) democracies. Fifthly, the functioning of delegative democracies is determined by the effects of the social and economic crisis inherited from the authoritarian governments.

According to O'Donnell, in the functioning of contemporary societies political institutions ensure a fundamental level of communication and aggregation between different social groups and between structural factors and individuals. The institutional level affects, in a fundamental way, the model of the organisation of the society: some participants in the political process become its representatives, others are excluded from it. The author observes the costs of institutionalisation in the form of excluding some participants of the political process or bureaucratisation. He finds an alternative in subordinating social and political life to the principles of the prisoner's dilemma (the institutions aim at turning cooperation into rational choice, and the prisoner's dilemma appears when the rejection of others' decisions and refusal to cooperate become rational) (Marczewska-Rytko, 1996: 92-93). Non-institutionalised democracy is characterised by a limited scope, weakness, and limited number of political institutions. Their place is occupied by the practice of clientelism, mono-party system and corruption.

Delegative democracy is based on the principle granting full liberty to the winner of the presidential elections. He is only constrained by the interrelations between different

powers and the constitutionally defined term of office. The president is treated here as the embodiment of the will of the nation and the principal guardian of its interests. His political base is a political movement eliminating all factions and conflicts usually associated with the functioning of political parties. In this kind of democracy, the president appears as a person who is above all divisions resulting from party conflicts or rivalry of different interest groups.

Delegative democracy is largely a majority democracy. This means that a majority elevating an individual to power constitutes itself in the elections. The elected individual becomes the embodiment of the highest national interest for the duration of his term of office. The question arises as to the difference between delegative and representative democracy. Representative democracy entails two kinds of accountability: vertical and horizontal. Vertical accountability consists in the accountability of the elected representatives towards their electorate. Horizontal accountability denotes the functioning of a network of different, independent institutions which may question the actions of the rulers, or even punish them. In delegative democracy we are faced with vertical accountability and the lack or limited functioning of horizontal accountability.

Both types of democracy are also differentiated by the criterion of political decision-making. In representative democracy, policy is conducted by different, relatively autonomous forces. Thus, on the one hand, the process of decision-making is prolonged. On the other hand, however, this situation provides protection against serious errors and allows the division of accountability among different forces. In delegative democracy, the president enjoys the privilege of bearing practically no horizontal accountability. He can make quick political decisions, although at the price of a higher probability of committing a serious mistake. In this situation accountability is associated with one person. The president, as it were, cuts himself off the majority of institutions and organised interest groups, assuming full accountability for the result of his policy. Consequently, the popularity of the president in such a system is constantly oscillating between enthusiastic support and total rejection. These plebiscitary tendencies of delegative democracy can be observed in many Latin American, Asian, African, and post-communist countries (Kubicek 443). This kind of government has been analysed within the framework of studies on authoritarianism and given the name of Caesarism, Bonapartism, or populism (Marczewska-Rytko, 1992). According to O'Donnell, delegative democracy does not contribute to the constructing and strengthening of political institutions, and the economic policy conducted in such a system does not have to be perceived as wrong (O'Donnell, 1993: 1355-1369).[2]

Modernization and populism

Populism emerged, among others, in the modernized United States, when in the 1890s the economic depression provoked protests in the industrially neglected areas (Pollack, 1962; Hofstadter 1969; Rotgers, Harrington, 1981; Ostler, 1993; Argersinger, 1974). The inhabitants of these areas felt themselves exploited by the newly formed capitalist monopolies. Similar perturbations appeared in the world economy at the time of the First World War (for example in Chile), the depression of the 1930s (particularly in Peru and Brazil), the Second World War (mainly in Argentina), and after the fall of the countries of the so-called real socialism, in the epoch of globalization (*Latin American Populism…; Obstacles to Change…;* Ianni(1970); Davis (1973); Mendes (1977); Vargas(1938-1947; Dobrzycki (1989); Furtado (1972); Klaren (1973); Torre (1931); *No intervention…;* Peron (1948); Germani (1971); Laclau (2005)). In this sense, populism constitutes a reaction to the expanding capitalism. O'Donnell distinguished three historical types of political systems characteristic of Latin America: the oligarchic type, the populist type, and the bureaucratic-authoritarian type (O'Donnell, 1973). The populist system was characterised by economic and cultural nationalism. The state supported the initial phase of industrialization oriented towards the development of enterprises producing durable consumer goods. This was done directly by assisting national industry and indirectly by increasing the role of the public sector. The most characteristic examples of such measures were the systems created by Getulio Vargas (1938-47) and Juan D. Peron (1948). Populist coalitions formed during that period constituted a model of the stabilisation of social relations, even though at the price of a temporary loss of autonomy on the part of economic and political elites. By uniting different, often antagonistic, interest groups and, to some extent, taking into account the interests of the people, the populist state kept the people away from the structures of power. At the same time, it opposed, or made impossible, the transformation of the people into a social group integrated around its own interests. In other words, populist movements became a political form of social control between the oligarchy and the mass society. Providing the forms of structural participation in political life to the working class, they began to function as institutional inhibitors of the activity of the social strata with the highest potential for social explosion.

In the United States, the dissatisfaction of the farmers increased as a result of the dominant influence of corporations on the policy of the state, which led to corruption. One of the critics of those times wrote that in the same way as equality before the law is a canon of political liberty, equal access to railways should become a canon of liberty in the industrial

age (Hicks, 1961: 68). American agriculture failed to adjust to urban culture and industrial modernization which produced a sense of helplessness in the face of the interests of the capital favoured by the state. The balanced development of the rural and urban sectors was disturbed in the system undergoing the process of modernization. At any rate, the electoral campaigns of the new populist party were represented as the struggle between the masses of ordinary people and a handful of millionaires, called the plutocrats. This mode of perceiving the world has survived until today. A characteristic feature of the populist image of the world was the belief in the potential of the "government of the people" and the desire to strengthen the federal government. The Wall Street, treated as a symbol of oppression, became the object of attack. It was claimed that the Wall Street does not rule in the interest of the people but in the interest of the monopolies enslaving the ordinary people. Unlimited issue of silver coins was called for as well as the introduction of progressive income tax and governmental control over the areas monopolised by all kinds of corporations. Other demands included the imposition of restrictions on immigrant labour, reduction of work hours in industry, low interest federal loans, direct elections of senators, and the adoption of the form of citizens' initiatives and referendum. Many of these postulates were realised in practice in the first half of the twentieth century. Although the populist movement from the end of the nineteenth century dispersed itself, merging with the Democratic Party, populism in the broad sense of the term, as one of the currents of American social thought, continues to exist. Populist rhetoric and appeals to the people based on the social distrust of the traditionally understood politics can be observed in the social movement of McCarthy, or in the political campaigns of George Wallace, George S. McGovern, James Carter, Ross Perot, or James Buchanan (Newfield, Greenfield, 1972; Rogin, 1967; Kaufman, 1993; Church, 1992: 22-28; Barrett No. 45, 1992: 22-24; No. 30:28-29; *Plutocratic Populist;* Shapiro, 1992: 23-27; Novak, 1995: 33-36; Com 913-916; Bacevich 31-43; Judis, Lind, 1998: 19-27; Cooper, Friedman, 1991: 34-40; *Cover Story* 72-78).

We can distinguish two main interpretation of populism. The first one, characteristic of, among others, L. Goodwyn (1978), identifies populism with the discovery of democratic means of participation in political life by ordinary people. The second one presents populism as a nursery of fascist movements (Goodwyn, 1978; Hofstadter, 1955).[3] In my opinion the second interpretation of populism is characteristic of the present situation in Europe. The confused citizens subscribe to visions promoting xenophobia, separatism, and isolation from the global market. It is enough to mention the success of populist politicians. Although populist movements emerged as a reaction against capitalist dislocations, this does not mean

that they were consistently anti-capitalist. Both for the new elites searching for a new social power base and the workers and peasants demanding participation in the new system, populism offered a promise of reducing the shock caused by capitalist development. As a result of the development of capitalism and expanding processes of globalization, the underdeveloped or alienated groups turned their attention to the state which was to restore the coherence of the earlier systems and provide protection. They also turned their attention to strong leaders who create their image of defenders of national identity and national isolation. It must be observed that populism, arising as a logical response to the acceleration of the process of modernization, becomes at some point a factor of stagnation. Hence, the suggestion that populism oscillates between development and stagnation seems justified (Populizm na przełomie, 2006).

Concluding, we can say that these problems are very complex, especially in the epoch of globalization. It may be described by means of symbols from the Thomas Friedman's book *Lexus and the Olive Tree* (2000). Lexus as a very good car means here modernity, industrialization, progress. The olive tree symbolises our roots, national identity, national tradition. Populism seems to fight about the olive tree but – in my opinion – we need to be rooted as persons to build better Lexus.

Notes

[1] It is enough to quote J. J. Rousseau's characteristic observation: "The people of England regards itself as free; but it is grossly mistaken; it is free only during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing."

[1] More on the subject of the problems connected with the relations between delegative democracy and socio-economic crises can be found in G. O'Donnell.

[1] Perhaps the best known advocates of different views with regard to the evaluation of populism are Lawrence Goodwyn and Richard Hofstadter.

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