

Civil Society and Theory of Democracy: From the Legacy of the 20th Century

Vladimir Gutorov, Alexander Koryushkin and Konstantin Zavershinskiy
Saint Petersburg State University, 7-9, University, 199034 Embankment,
St. Petersburg, Russian Federation

Abstract: The researchers explore a problem of correlation between institutions of civil society and liberal democracy. More specifically, they examine a phenomenon of “double democratization” (D. Held) that entails a) a separation of the state and civil society as a socially recognized necessity; and b) a consequent interdependent transformation of both the state and the civil society. These social processes are examined within a context of decades-long multifaceted theoretical debates between proponents of the liberal school of political philosophy and neo-Marxist theorists of the Frankfurt school (H. Marcuse, J. Habermas, etc.). Analysis of major stages in this debate shows that despite differences in argumentation, proponents of these two opposing schools of thought share a conviction that an effective policy of the state is capable of overcoming spontaneously emerging crises by directing resources to achieve specific goals. Both schools agree that power in a democratic state depends on endogenous factors: either on an acknowledgement of the state authority (“overload” theorists) or legitimacy (“legitimation crisis” proponents). Finally, representatives of both schools of thought share “fundamental pessimism” regarding a hypothesized decline in authority or legitimacy that emerges due to incongruence between citizens’ expectations of the state and those real possibilities that are at a disposal of the state-bureaucratic apparatus. The authors conclude their exploration of models of civil society and democracy with T.H. Marshall’s discussion of civil identity and civil rights and J. Schumpeter’s concept of “social democracy”.

Key words: Democracy, liberalism, conservatism, marxism, civil society, state, legitimacy, social consciousness, cognitive mobilization, state bureaucracy

INTRODUCTION

An idea that contemporary conception of civil society is not only closely related to democratic theory tradition but its very notion is essentially an equivalent of liberal democracy is an enigma to nobody. “For democracy to flourish today remarks David Held in his famous book “Models of Democracy” it has to be reconceived as a double-sided phenomenon: concerned, on the one hand, with the re form of state power and on the other hand with the restructuring of civil society. The principle of autonomy can only be enacted by recognizing the indispensability of a process of double democratization: the interdependent transformation of both state and civil society. Such a process must be premised by the acceptance of both the axiom that the division between state and civil society must be a central feature of democratic life and the notion that the power to make decisions must be free of the illegitimate constraints imposed by the private flows of capital. But, of course, to recognize the importance of both these positions is to recognize the necessity of recasting substantially their

traditional connotations” (Held, 1996).

This kind of theoretical considerations was a reflection of the very real process that emerged in Western Europe and the USA since the second half of the 20th century. The given process resulted first of all in the basic consensus regarding universal political values, such as equality, civic rights and democratic procedures of taking decisions on the basis of acknowledging existing social and political institutions. At the time, the Western society seemed to have taken the course on the growing stability and interpenetration of the views of representatives of various social classes on the principal socio-political problems and on the gradual dissolving of the conflicts.

HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY OF DEBATES ABOUT NEW MODEL OF DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL PROCESS

While analyzing changes that took place in Britain at the turn of 1960s-1970s, the English political scientists D. Butler and D. Stokes postulated a loss of social

classes' political engagement as the most important feature of this trend of transformation. Just before economic crisis of the middle of the 1970s, they stated that in the frameworks of the post-war prosperity the emerging mass market of goods and services and the "welfare state" had substantially reduced the level of poverty and destitution. Differences in living standards, levels of consumption and social habits between the bulk of the middle class and the bulk of the working class had diminished as well. "Unquestionably social mobility has added to the bridges over the class divide, inclination of the voters to see politics in class term has reduced and the process of the class alignment constantly shifts in England towards the "hard center". Held, D. *Models of Democracy* (2nd edition). Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996, p. 316. Thus legitimacy of the state could no longer be questioned.

Dahl (1989), one of the classics of Political Science, has characterized the major elements of the new democratic model in the following way: "control over governmental decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials; elected officials are chosen and peacefully removed in relatively frequent, fair and free elections in which coercion is quite limited; practically all adults have the right to vote in these elections; most adults also have the right to run for the public offices for which candidates run in these elections; citizens have an effectively enforced right to freedom of expression, particularly political expression, including criticism of the officials, the conduct of the government, the prevailing political, economic and social system and the dominant ideology. They also have access to alternative sources of information that are not monopolized by the government or any other single group. Finally, they have an effectively enforced right to form and join autonomous associations, including political associations, such as political parties and interest groups, that attempt to influence the government by competing in elections and by other peaceful means" (Dahl, 1989).

Such a model of democratic political process was based on a new conception of citizen identity and civil rights, major principles of which were elaborated just after the Second World War in the book of T. H. Marshall "Class, Citizenship and Social Development". In that book, T. H. Marshall introduced a principal difference between political, civil and social parts or elements of the new citizen identity: "The social element is composed of the rights necessary for individual freedom liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts and the right to justice". Political element includes in itself "the

right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body". By social element he meant "the whole range from the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society" (Butler, 1947, 1974).

One should emphasize that the contemporary theory of democracy, as well as theories of democratic political processes and of the adequate conception of civil behavior and identity could become possible only in the 20th century as a result of the powerful spontaneous process which in the last decades the specialists identify as a new democratic revolution. With exception of the USA, by the end of the 19th century just a small minority in Europe could be classified as citizens. As justifyingly remarked M. Janovitz, "citizenship is not a formal and abstract conception. To the contrary, it is an idea loaded with concrete, specific meanings which reflect the changing content of political conflict". In such a sense "elements of citizenship are found in all nation-states, even in the most repressive, totalitarian ones. There is a crucial threshold, however, between democratic and nondemocratic citizenship" (Dahl, 1989). Similarly, one might add, there is a tipping point between the numbers of those who could and could not be classified as democratic citizens in the full meaning of this word.

Despite the fact that democratic civic norms were initially of European origin, historic experience of many European nations testified that the picture of citizenry was not as positive as it was portrayed by optimistic scholars of the second half of the 20th century. Various countries had different reasons for an essentially low level of development of democratic mass communications as evidenced in mass political participation. Revolutionary excesses in France that produced a sense of incivism and hostility to political discussions, aristocratic institutions and tradition of deference towards the higher class in British politics, traditions of authoritarian governance in Germany, etc. slowed down the process of formation of the mass democratic politics in Europe (Dahl, 1989).

Research of political behavior of ordinary Americans conducted by B. Berelson and his associates at the beginning of 1950s gave more than enough reasons for pessimistic conclusions: "Our data...reveal that certain requirements commonly assumed for the successful operation of democracy are not met by the behavior of the "average" citizen...Many vote without real involvement in the election. The citizen is not highly informed on details of the campaign. In any rigorous and narrow sense

the voters are not highly rational". In 1960 these early findings were substantiated by A. Campbell and his colleagues in their study "The American Voter" which documented a lack of ideological understanding in American electorate (Dahl, 1989).

All these peculiarities of the Western mentality facilitated formation of the stable image of "unsophisticated citizen" which appeared to be the basis for an emergence of an elitist conception of democracy. As Dye and Zeigler (1970) point out, "the survival of democracy depends on commitment of elites to democratic ideals rather than upon the broad support for democracy by the masses. Political apathy and mass nonparticipation among the masses contributes to the survival of democracy. Fortunately for democracy, the antidemocratic masses are generally more apathetic than elites" (Dahl, 1989).

The conception of "unsophisticated citizen" had developed the arguments that were put forward earlier. In the early 1940s. Schumpeter (1970) questioned feasibility of realizing the "classical conception of democracy" as not corresponding to the human nature and irrational character of the day-to-day human behavior. In political sphere, Schumpeter asserted, education does not provide any benefits since the sense of responsibility and rational choice which it forms in people does not usually exceeds the limits of their professional duties. The most general political decisions thus appear to be unreachable both for educated classes and for uneducated fillisters. "Thus the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyzes in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes a primitive again". Democratic theory might have practical significance only if it determines a minimal necessary level of participation and provides the right to make major political decisions to the competent elites and bureaucracy (Marshall, 1964).

Radical transformation of mass social consciousness in the West took place in the last three decades of the 20th century. Considerable growth in the educational levels of American and West-European electorate (in 1948 almost half of American voters had a primary education or less while by 1992 the portion of the electorate with some college education grew to outnumber the voters with only primary education by eight-to-one ratio; parallel changes transformed European publics) has changed the mode of perception of politics by developing prerequisites of cognitive mobilization, i.e., citizens' political skills and resources necessary to become independent in politics. Instead of dependence on elites

and reference groups (external mobilization), citizens are now more capable of coping with complexities of politics and making their own political decisions.

Such growth of civil consciousness had stimulated the development of the conception of deliberative democracy Janovitz, M. *The Reconstruction of Patriotism. Education for Civic Consciousness*. Chicago, London: 1985, pp. X,2. in the middle of 1980s. As D. Yankelovich shows, "it is a democracy that revives the notion of thoughtful and active citizenship. Now citizenship is treated like a passive form of consumer behavior. People fail at citizenship not because they are apathetic but because they do not think their actions or views make any real difference. We need to expand the notion of citizen choice now confined to elections to include making choices of the vital issues that confront us every day".¹ Thus, paradoxically, even though the notion of deliberative democracy emerges and postulates higher citizens' involvement, the actual involvement of people in everyday politics remained fairly low.

The models of democracy discussed earlier have one thing in common they emphasize an idea of civic consensus that corresponds with the theory of the "end of ideology" prerequisites of which had also appeared after the Second World War. By the "end of ideology" Lipset (1980) one of the most prominent conservative political scientists meant the sharp decline in support of "waving the red flag" from the side of intellectuals, trade unions and left parties due to the drop of authority of Marxism-Leninism as an attractive ideology (Dalton, 1996a, b). Chatham House Publishers, Inc., 1996, p. 16. Yet at the beginning of this process he pointed out "the ideological issues dividing left and right had been reduced to a little more or a little less government ownership and economic planning. No one seemed to believe that it is really made much difference which political party controlled the domestic policies of individual nations." That meant for the proponents of the given conception that basic political problems related to the class conflicts brought about by the industrial revolutions in the West have been mainly solved: "the workers have achieved industrial and political citizenship; the conservatives have accepted the welfare state and the democratic left has recognized that an increase in over-all state power carries with it more dangers to freedom than solutions for economic problems."

From its very first origins, this theory has found powerful opponents, particularly among theorists of left radicalism. Arguing against the widely spread in 1950-60s views that social and class conflicts give way to the new political discourse and alignment of the living standards of the working and middle classes weakens voters'

commitment to take part in political process in the frameworks of class conflicts, H. Marcuse one of the leading left-radical ideologues suggested another interpretation of the evolution of the Western sociopolitical system in his theory of “one-dimensional society”. Cf. Dalton R.J. *Citizen Politics. Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (2nd edition). Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House Publishers, Inc., 1996, p. 16 .

As D. Held rightfully emphasized, both the theorists of the “end of class politics” and “one-dimensional society” were fairly similar in their attempts “to explain the appearance of political harmony in Western capitalism in the immediate post-war years.” Marcuse pointed at a multiplicity of forces which were combining to aid the management and control of the modern economy. The very development of the means of production, the growing concentration of capital, radical changes in science and technology, the trend towards mechanization and automation and the progressive transformation of management into ever-larger private bureaucracy have stimulated the tendency to regulate the free entrepreneurship by means of the constant state involvement and the broadening of the state bureaucracy. The split of the world into two competing camps as well as the international atmosphere of tension brought about by the “cold war” and fight with the world communism further facilitated his ideas.

According to Marcuse (1964) in the context of global growth of state organizational structures that threatened to engulf social life, the modus operandi of contemporary democracy is “depoliticization”, i.e., eradication of political and moral questions from public life through an obsession with technique, productivity and efficiency. The single-minded pursuit of production for profit by large and small businesses (under the state’s unquestioned support for this objective in the name of economic growth) develops a highly limited political agenda: public affairs become concerned primarily with debating different means because the end was given more and more production. “Instrumental reason” (that is the spread of the concern with the efficiency of different means with respect to pre-given ends) that gave rise to de-politicization emerged through an influence of mass media on the cultural traditions of subordinate classes and minorities that were transformed into the “packaged culture”. In its turn, mass media were under an influence of the advertising industry with its relentless drive to increase consumption even further.

Marcuse argues, that the final point of this process is emergence of the “false consciousness”, that is a certain socio-psychological state in which people no

longer consider or know what is in their real interests. The world of the state and private-corporate bureaucracy in its rush for establishing conditions for profitable production corrupts and perverts human life. The social order integrated in the frameworks of the close link between economy and the state is repressive and highly despicable. And yet the majority of the people resign themselves to this social order.

In his research “One Dimensional Man” Marcuse keeps insisting that the cult of affluence and consumerism creates the corresponding modes of behavior that are adaptive, passive and acquiescent. People get deprived of the choice on which type of production is most preferable, in which type of democracy they would like to take part and, at last which mode of life they would wish to set up for themselves. If they are striving for comfort and security, they have to adapt themselves to the standards of existing economic and political system. Otherwise, they become marginal. Thus the idea of the “rule by the people” appears to be just a myth.

Irrespective of the character of argumentation and differences in approaches to the problem of legitimacy of the political order (genuine in the eyes of the theorists of the “end of ideology” and contrived in the views of the ideologues of “one-dimensional society”), both theoretical camps point out:

- A high degree of compliance and integration among all groups and classes in society
- That the stability of the political and social system is reinforced as a result. Such homogeneity of the views of the proponents of the radically opposite conceptions “suggests that doubt should be cast on both these claims. The research findings reviewed on political attitudes and opinions indicate that neither a system of “shared values” nor one of “ideological domination” simply conferred legitimacy on democratic politics after 1945” (Held, 1996)

The complex crisis processes in economy, politics and culture in 1960-1970s that put under question conceptions of prosperity and welfare society, growing signs of disillusionment with the dominant political parties, electoral scepticism in the face of the claims of politicians all these elements of crisis testified to the serious hardships which the state and political system in the West come across till the present time Cf. Cohen J. and Rogers J. *On Democracy*. New York, 1983; Held D. *Power and Legitimacy in Contemporary Britain // State and Society in Contemporary Britain*. Ed. by G. McLennan, D. Held and S. Hall. Cambridge, 1984. The

growth of the social and political conflicts testified to the fact that the state, having turned into the gigantic governing complex, is far from being monolithic and capable of imposing “one-dimensionality” onto the society as it seemed to H. Marcuse and his supporters. May-June 1968 events in France showed up to what level social tension and the state of conflict might rise. All these points hardly complied with the conception of liberal society where political process were assumed to be relatively quiet and with no conflicts. Explanations present in scholarly literature virtually split into two opposite points of view either they speak about a partial crisis (or a phase of limited instability) or about obvious crisis trends leading to the radical transformation of the entire society, of its political and social order (Margarete and Geuss, 2005).

BETWEEN THE LIBERAL AND NEO-MARXIST THEORETICAL MODELS

Since, 1970-1980s through our days, the discussion on this issue is essentially going on between the liberal political theorists developing various brands of the conception of pluralist politics and authors united around different versions of modified Marxism. The first group elaborated the theory of “overloaded government”. Cf. Brittan S. *Can Democracy Manage an Economy?* // *The End of Keynesian Era*. Ed. by R. Skidelsk. Oxford in 1977, pp. 41-49 (Huntington, 1974; Nordhous, 1975; Rose and Peters, 1977; Berelson *et al.*, 1954). The Political Consequences of Economic Overload // University of Strathelyde Centre for the Study of Public Policy, 1977. The theory of “legitimation crisis” was developed, among many others, by J. Habermas and C. Offer. Resuming critical look at both of these theories presented, for example, in the works of Held (1996). Let us know on the major conceptions of the democratic political process.

The theorists of the overloaded government frequently characterize power relations in terms of fragmentation: power is shared and bartered by numerous groups representing diverse and competing interests. Hence, political outcomes are the result of numerous processes and pressures; governments try to mediate and adjudicate between demands. Growing new market structures, economic prosperity and the influence of mass organizations further complicated political processes in the post-war epoch. Technology of new mass communications (and television in particular) played a significant role in these structural changes. Increased income levels of the population and setting up the system of mass political education from primary school to universities have brought about an effect of “raised

expectations” or entitlements. Inability of the state, revealed up to the middle of 1970s, to meet the increased requirements at the level of the governmental programs (healthcare, education, culture, etc.) has caused a number of crisis phenomena most important of which was the crisis of ideology of entitlement that seriously undermined a belief in the capacity of the state to cope with continuously emerging problems. The growth of ambitious interests of political parties and corporations – trade unions, financial groups, organizations of industrialists and consumers forces politicians to promise much more than they could ever realistically deliver. This process is in its turn instigated by an ever growing competition between political parties. Elaboration of new “appeasement strategies” creates new hardships for state agencies. Increased taxation needed for realizing social programs progressively destroyed a realm of individual initiative, a space for free, private enterprise. Thus a vicious circle emerges that continuously pities “firm political leadership” against open democratic procedures. In other words, the overload theorists argued that the form and operation of democratic institutions were essentially dysfunctional for the efficient regulation of economic and social affairs. This is particularly true for the New Right theorists (Held, 1996).

In contrast to this point of view, proponents of the theory of “legitimation crisis” insist that only by means of analysis of the class relations that it is possible to adequately understand both peculiarities of the political process in the industrially developed countries and reasons for crisis phenomena in contemporary politics. The Marxist paradigm analysts argue that competition of political parties in the fight for power is severely constrained by the state’s dependence on economic resources generated to a very large extent by private capital accumulation. The process of making political decisions compatible with business interests cannot be effectively organized beyond that neutral status on which the state aspires as a supreme arbiter in social conflicts brought about by class interests. Economic crises engendering a need in the state intervention reveal inevitability of such a type of political management that would reconcile antagonistic interests of social groups and classes in a process of formation of large-scale social programs (Feenberg, 2005).

Thus, providing political stability directly depends on broadening the state governing structures regulating contradictions in the frameworks of certain type of budget policy. But it is this very process that almost inevitably leads to the growth of inflation, crisis of the state finance and according to J. Habermas’s definition, emergence of “rationality crisis” or “crisis of rational administration”. In

case if the state apparatus is controlled by the right-wing parties, a clash with trade unions and other pressure groups on issues of social programs' financing is unavoidable. If the power control is exercised by the left-wing parties, the policy of socializing industry undermines the confidence of business to the state. Broadening of the state planning and control outweighs "the invisible hand" of the market thereby increasing politicization of social life and in turn further stimulating the ever rising demands to the state. The state's inability to fulfill these demands gives birth to legitimization crisis. In such a situation of the "strong state" overcoming crisis by means of authoritarian methods engenders again that very vicious circle that was depicted by theorists of overloaded government.

Despite all the differences of argumentation of the theorists of the two conceptions characterized above, they have one essential element that testifies to their certain similarity. Both of them emphasize a principal capacity of the state to conduct an effective policy capable to overcome spontaneously emerging crisis phenomena by means of employing pertinent resources to reach specific ends. Both camps agree that power in a democratic state depends on acknowledging its authority (overload theorists) and its legitimacy (legitimation crisis theorists). Cf. Huntington S.P. *Post-Industrial Politics: How Benign Will It Be? // Comparative Politics*, 1975, vol. 6, pp. 163-192. Both camps are characterized by "fundamental pessimism" since priority is given to the theory of progressive decline of authority and legitimacy brought about by discrepancy between mass expectations and those real capabilities that are in disposal of the state bureaucratic apparatus.

Of course, not everybody shares such pessimism. Sociological surveys regularly conducted in Western Europe and the USA testify to the fact that the widely spread skepticism regarding the traditional forms of politics does not yet presuppose a turn of the major mass of the population in the direction of the radically new political institutions and forms of political participation. A desire to maintain a status quo is also present; consequently, structures of the state and civil society that comply with contemporary views on liberal democracy remain and preserve the main trend of its evolution.

Today, in the age of globalization and transnationalism, societies encounter collisions and dilemmas similar to those of the Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. Yet, it wasn't that long ago, in the mid-1980s that many scholars and political theorists were convinced that a new era of global politics was upon them and that they were entering a "third wave" of democratization. Collapse of communism in the late 80s

and early 90s had initially strengthened a belief in a capacity of liberal institutions to serve as a basis for democratic transformations in countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well as elsewhere in the world. However, at an onset of the 21st century, that initial post-communist euphoria gave way to a profound skepticism. At present, a belief in uni-linear progressive evolutionary schemes of state development from its primitive forms to various models of democracy has shattered. Democracy is no longer perceived as a shining crown of social development. Rather, it is defined as a state order that has entered a post-positivist stage of development at par with traditional authoritarian regimes and multiple hybrids of democracy and authoritarianism of African, Asian and post-communist provenance.

CONCLUSION

In this context, a study of theoretical speculations that took place in the second half of the 20th century is particularly important. An analysis of a historical trajectory of debates regarding the nature of a democratic state and a careful examination of critical disjunctions in views on democracy between the liberal and neo-Marxist theorists and philosophers shows profound changes in concepts of the state, society and citizenship that are not immune to social and theoretical crises.

Liberal theoretical models of the 1960s and 70s that exhibited strong influence of the "cold war" era were fairly defensive and apologetic. Alternative theoretical approaches to democracy that predicated social development as a tool of human emancipation emerged as a reaction to those models. The new theories of deliberative, participative democracy based on new interpretations of citizenship and political participation acquired (especially in the works of the representatives of Frankfurt school) a certain utopian shade of meaning. Revision of a notion of civil society in the frameworks of democratic theory stimulated an interest to a role of new political cultures, civic values, network associations and practices of social struggles. In other words, the debates over democracy as a form of governance and an ontological status of democratic theory that emerged in the second half of the 20th century have laid a foundation to contemporary discussions where both pessimist and optimist forecasts, in the same way as decades ago, keep on balancing each other.

REFERENCES

- Berelson, B.R., P.F. Lazarsfeld and M.W.N. Voting, 1954. *The Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, pp: 307-310.

- Butler, D. and D. Stokes, 1947. Political Change in Britain. St. Martin's Press, New York, USA., Pages: 194.
- Butler, D. and D. Stokes, 1974. Political Change in Britain. St. Martin's Press, New York, USA.,.
- Dahl, R.A., 1989. Democracy and Its Critics. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, Pages: 233.
- Dalton, C.R.J., 1996a. Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies. 2nd Edn., Chatham House Publishers, Chatham, New Jersey.,
- Dalton, R.J., 1996b. Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies. 2nd Edn., Chatham House Publishers, Chatham, New Jersey.,
- Dye R.J. and H. Zeigler, 1970. The Irony of Democracy, An Uncommon Introduction to American Politics. Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, California, Pages: 328.
- Feenberg, A., 2005. Heidegger and Marcuse: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History. Routledge, New York, USA., pp: 47-69.
- Held, D., 1996. Models of Democracy. 2nd Edn., Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, Pages: 316.
- Huntington, S.P., 1974. Post-industrial politics: How benign will it be?. *Comp. Politics*, 6: 163-192.
- Lipset, S.M., 1960. Political Man: The Social Basis of Politics. Doubleday & Company, New York, USA.,.
- Marcuse, H., 1964. One Dimensional Man. Beacon Press, Boston, Massachusetts.,
- Margarete, K. and R. Geuss, 2005. The Early Frankfurt School and Religion. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, USA., Pages: 217.
- Marshall, T.H., 1964. Class, Citizenship and Social Development. Double Day & Company, Garden City, New York.,
- Nordhaus, W.D., 1975. The political business cycle. *Rev. Econ. Stud.*, 42: 169-190.
- Rose, R. and G. Peters, 1977. The Political Consequences of Economic Overload. University of Strathelyde Centre, UK.,.
- Schumpeter, J.A., 1970. Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy. Routledge, London, England, Pages: 285.