

A PARTICIPANT IN SOCIAL PROTEST. WHO IS HE AND WHY DOES HE PROTEST? AN ATTEMPT AT ANALYSIS

Patrycja Lipold, PhD
National Defense University, Poland

Abstract

According to many studies and popular belief, it is a role of the global civil society, with its variety of actors, to act as an opposition to state which breaks all the rules. Taking state's interests into consideration, lack of any counter-strategy towards growing power of citizens' opposition can be disastrous. Citizens differ entirely from workers in the 19th century and this is what makes their power of opposition so dangerous for state. Today parliamentary democracy is supplemented by participatory democracy - participation of citizens. The problem lies in the fact that, while discouragement is typical for lower classes of society, the reaction of middle class is outrage and society expresses outrage but does not offer any alternatives. This division of the society into the discouraged and the outraged is very dangerous for democracy. Neither society nor modern democracy can exist without trust. Distrustful societies are a barometer for democracy. When everything goes well they form basis of new movements which consequently change into new ideas and projects. It is very difficult to use the potential of society but it is not impossible. Social protest is an inherent part of democracy but without an attempt to channel it, it is very dangerous.

Keywords: Social protest, participatory democracy

Introduction

Today all social and political identities are formed, to a greater or lesser extent, by the state. Some identities stem from the aspiration of the state to draw certain borders while other are grounded in aspiration to define and control people. Borders are liminal zones within which inhabitants, citizens and states constantly question their roles and nature. Therefore, the identity of borders and people living within them has been changing and multiplying in a way that can be described as "multivocal" and "multilocal" (Rodman 1992) but which is formed, to a certain degree, by structures of the state.⁴⁹

In this day and age globalization has two meanings. A new game has begun where rules and basic terms of a previous game no longer apply, even though they are still referred to. At least, it is very unlikely for the old game to be the only existing game with all its different names: nation state, national industrial society, national capitalism or even national welfare state. Globalization has acted as a spur to the development of a new area of activities and their framework: politics is no longer restrained by borders or states, and as a result, additional players appear, as well as new roles, new resources, unknown rules, new contradictions and conflicts.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Hastings Donnan, Thomas M. Wilson. *Granicetożsamości, narodu, państwa (Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State)*. WUJ: Kraków 2007, page 92.

⁵⁰Ulrich Beck. *Władza i przeciwwładza w epoce globalnej. Nowaekonomiapolitykiświatowej (Power in the Global Age: A New Global Political Economy)*. Scholar: Warszawa 2005, page 23.

According to many studies and popular belief, it is a role of the global civil society, with its variety of actors, to act as an opposition to state which breaks all the rules. Taking state's interests into consideration, lack of any counter-strategy towards growing power of citizens' opposition can be disastrous. Citizens differ entirely from workers in the 19th century and this is what makes their power of opposition so dangerous for state.⁵¹

Protests in the 19th century

Aversion and hostile atmosphere towards capital were common in the 19th century, especially in textile industry, and what was characteristic of that time, they were directed at machines. In the book "Ziemia Obiecana" (The Promised Land) by Władysław Reymont, which action takes place over 20 years after the protest of weavers in the city of Łódź in Poland, we can read a characteristic conversation between Karol Borowiecki, director in Herman Bucholc's plant at that time, and one of the workers. The worker, worried by gossips about layoffs in the plant, enquires if it is true. Borowiecki confirms: „Tak. Ustawią nową maszynę, której ludzini niepotrzebują do obsługi co stare”. (Yes. New machines will be placed which don't need to be operated by so many people as the old ones). Then he adds: „Cóż ja wam poradzę, kiedy maszyna was nie potrzebuje, bo zrobi sama”. (It can't be helped; the new machine doesn't need you because it can do everything itself). Reaction of the upset by their own fate was as follows: „Robotnicy spojrzeli na siebie w milczeniu, niepokój świecił im w oczach, niepokój przedzyciem bez roboty, przednędzą. – Ścierwy, niemaszyny. Psy, psiakrew – szepnę robotnik Kinal z nienawiścią w bok jakiej maszyny”. (Workers were looking at one another in silence, fear reflecting in their eyes, fear of life without work, fear of poverty. -Scum, not machines).⁵²

The rebellion of weavers in Łódź in 1861, whose rage was vented on machines, and the later anger of their future colleagues brings to mind one of the first organised mass movements of workers opposition, that is English Luddites. The Luddites referred to folk culture and carnival convention. They used irony, symbolic violence and black humour. For example they used quasi-legal language to write and publish verdicts of death sentence for machines, they dressed up, wore masks or female clothes, in other words, they drew on well-known forms of folk opposition for inspiration. They referred to Robin Hood and his social crime. Sharewood forest and Robin Hood's cave was their postal address.⁵³

The rebellion of weavers is mainly connected with economic reasons. The mop consisting of several thousand people, armed with crowbars, sticks and poles, gathered around 11 p.m. on the then deserted Wodny Rynek square in Łódź, in front of Karol Wilhelm Scheibler's plant. In 1855 Karol Scheibler started the first spinning mill equipped with selfactors and in 1858 built one-storey weaving plant where, as the second manufacturer after Ludwik Geyer, he installed weaving machines (30 of them). Steam engine was applied for propulsion. The weaving plant operated until 22-April 1961. A protest rally took place before direct attack. There were shouts against poverty and exploitation of workers in the plant. Edward Szulc called Scheibler a fraudster claiming that his packs of yarn were lighter by 1.5 pound than they should be. He shouted: „Kto w taki sposób szuka – to może być wielkim panem i mieć dużo warsztatów”. (Who cheats this way can be a big lord and have many workshops). Speakers were quick-tempered. Using their crowbars the mop broke the factory gate and started destroying the weaving plant. Windows were smashed, 28 workshops were broken, wrap threads and transmission belts were torn, ready cloth was cut.

⁵¹Ibidem, page 28.

⁵²Krzysztof Kedziora. *Przeciwko maszynom niesprawiedliwości* [in:] *Bunt, masa, maszyna. Protesty łódzkich tkaczy w kwietniu 1861 roku (Against machines and injustice[in:] Rebellion, mass, machine. Protests of weavers from Łódź in April 1861)*. Łódzkie Towarzystwo Naukowe: Łódź 2011, page 27.

⁵³Ibidem, page 29.

The destruction was controlled, so no plunder nor damages took place in the weaver plant. Seweryn Liesel and Antoni Matzner were on the top of the committee. When the owner of the plant arrived during riots, weavers felt slightly disconcerted. Scheibler wanted to mollify them by offering beer and vodka but then Matzner shouted: don't accept any food or drink because he may poison you. Devastation was continued. All window panes were smashed and there was an attempt to dismantle the steam engine but, as its aiming device had been broken and steam started getting out, the troublemakers were scared off. When the rebels finally left Scheibler's plant, the crowd gathered again on Wodny Rynek square lit by torches. There were speeches, songs were sung, and leaflets were distributed. The march was staged, headed by one of the weavers, Ernest Hanne, with an unfolded flag in his hand. Eventually the mob was dispersed by police and Cossacks. Reinforcements arrived. 120 people were arrested and part of them was sent to prison in Łęczyca while the rest was released on their own recognizance. Some were placed under police supervision. Regular army unit was sent to Łódź. The president promised that public works would be organized, in order to improve economic situation of the poor, and that he would also ask wealthy manufacturers to employ unemployed weavers, particularly those with families. The situation in the city was brought under control but the plague of fires that lasted until mid-September 1861, was linked to revenge of the arrested and their families, especially that there were mainly wealthy foreman's houses and barns that were set on fire.⁵⁴

Students against the war in Vietnam

Another manifestation of social rebellion was the protest of American students against the war in Vietnam in the 20th century. According to research conducted at 4 universities, the Ivy League was under strong influence of the Republican Party, mainly at Yale and Dartmouth with strong representation of the Democrats at Harvard and Cornell. On the one hand, the students declared themselves pacifists and considered military service as a necessary evil, on the other, they believed there are some reasonable grounds for military action in Vietnam. The young people saw a solution to the conflict in strong leadership, deterring the USSR and in free market, but also in sympathy for citizens of other countries, emphasis of spiritual values and social system planning.⁵⁵ Meetings were organized and newspapers were published as protest had peaceful character then. It was the decision of President Johnson from 1965, concerning direct involvement in the war taking place in Vietnam, which increased the political character of the students' movement. Earlier activity was focused more on spreading information than on revolutionary actions, and its main purpose was to investigate society's reaction to the war and whether it could be a ground for wider coalition of reforming circles. Seminars that had been organized since 1965 were not aimed at changing American foreign policy but at expressing delicate but firm opposition against it, based on the premise that the policy's final effect would be a widely spread social aversion towards the war.⁵⁶ Initially the students used methods worked out at Berkeley, in particular, organization of seminars, this time not just informative but of more political nature directed at taking anti-war action. It took form of open letters published in press and disclosure of the fact that the Ivy League cooperated with the Department of Defence concerning combat arms program. Within 1966-67 moderate actions were more often

⁵⁴ Alina Jabłońska. *Ślady buntu łódzkich tkaczy obecne w dzisiejszej Łodzi – miejsca, ludzie, wydarzenia* [in:] *Bunt, masa, maszyna. Protesty łódzkich tkaczy w kwietniu 1861 roku (Traces of the rebellion of weavers present in contemporary Łódź - places, people, events* [in:] *Rebellion, mass, machine. Protests of weavers from Łódź in April 1861*). Łódzkie Towarzystwo Naukowe: Łódź 2011, pages 32-37.

⁵⁵ Włodzimierz Batóg. *Protesty studentów uniwersytetów Ivy League przeciw wojnie wietnamskiej 1965-1970 (The Ivy League students' protests against the war in Vietnam 1965-1970)*. Kielce 2008, page 34.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, page 322.

accompanied by the appearance of more radical circles which claimed that the war in Vietnam is the result of American imperialism being an integral part of the political system of the United States. It was the beginning of take-overs and demonstrations against military school and visits of the army representative recruiting on campus students interested in professional army, even against some university departments which analysed socio-economic situation of other countries for the CIA. A student activist movement called Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was involved in the large number of protest as well as activities all over the world, and thus its role on the political stage in the USA grew significantly that time. A breakthrough moment for protest was the strike at Colombia University in 1968. It was the climax of trends that had been developing for two years - growing frustration of young activists who realised that peaceful protests did not bring expected results. Revolutionary anger was often expressed through acts of vandalism, initially in the Columbia University's din's office, which then paved way for numerous arsons and bomb attacks. Within 1968-69 young activists concentrated, on the one hand, on forcing universities to cease cooperation with all symbols of power which they despised, and on exposing racial issues and persuade universities to change their position towards the black minority, on the other. The period of 1968-69 was the time of violence and public order offence especially at private universities. Demonstrations took part in 70% of American universities and the Ivy League simply confirmed this tendency.⁵⁷

On 27 March 1968 National Council of SDS met in Lexington where it was going to discuss details regarding the agenda of Ten Days of Resistance, although at that time strong divisions in the organisation had already been seen. The peaceful movement had never been so close to achieving its goals than a couple of days after the meeting. On 31 March 1968 President Johnson, in his speech to the nation, declared that bombardment of targets in North Vietnam would be stopped, with exclusion of a demilitarized zone where there was still threat for American and South Vietnamese armies, and he repeated his proposal to begin peace talks. In the final part of his speech the President said: "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President."⁵⁸ Johnson's declaration and a possibility to support McCarthy in the coming elections significantly changed feelings among anti-war student activists and strengthened their believe that the action planned for April was justified and could lead to a presidential nomination and a victory of a candidate who would be truly inclined to end the war in peaceful way. Students' strike was planned on 26 April and around 300 people took part in protest rallies while 40-50 people took part in discussions.⁵⁹

Groups of pacifists from the University of Pennsylvania became more visible in the beginning of March 1968 when demonstrations against the use of napalm were organized. There is no information regarding the number of people taking part in demonstrations, but their organizers signed a joint anti-war declaration. According to the list of signatories, quoted by Daily Pennsylvanian, there were mainly small groups focused on local problems.⁶⁰

In the second half of 1968 the influence of SDS in campuses decreased. In November Richard Nixon won presidential election while the opposition against the war in Vietnam was growing. The war was brought to its end over the course of few years. Since 1969 peace talks with North Vietnamese government had been held in Paris which resulted in signing the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973.

⁵⁷Ibidem, pages 322-323.

⁵⁸*Johnson's Says He Won't Run.* „New York Times”, 1 April 1968.

⁵⁹*Students Strike: Spring Weekend.* „Brown Daily Herald” 1968 z 16.04.: Speak –Out on College Green to Climax Strike for Peace.

⁶⁰Włodzimierz Batóg, op.cit., page 80.

Today's protests

Today's protests, just like it was before, are an expression of rebellion and citizens' involvement in creation of state policy, the form of direct democracy, often used to call attention to the fact that representatives of society, elected in democratic way, distance themselves from the society. Demonstrations are attempts to discipline them and put the policy on the right track, the one that the society desires most. Today mostly men participate in protests; unemployed or having a part-time job, independent professionals, students, teachers, priests and, what is quite surprising, pensioners and retired people.⁶¹ Among today's demonstrators there are no representatives of families with small children where both parents work, as they definitely have no time to take part in social protests. However, when parents take part in protests, they are usually recent school graduates with no perspectives for employment and with pre-school children. The reason behind participation of senior citizens in social protest is free time at their disposal irrespective of their hobbies or interests. Their engagement is also often viewed as an aspiration to continue an active live through the third age.⁶² George Bernard Shaw wrote that the elderly are dangerous as they are indifferent towards future.⁶³ Senior citizens often take part in happenings though they do not march at the head and do not carry flags. Happenings are actually an area of 24-40-year-olds. Online protests are different though, as the main group here are 14-20-year-olds, a very specific young generation which organises new, original forms of protest and political engagement. There is also the group of old-school activists, who oppose capitalism and support radical left, which we saw in the 70s of last century. Less politically engaged, but fitting in the above mentioned groups, are also organizers of protests directed at investment projects in regions of exceptional natural environment - the environmentalists.⁶⁴

Political beliefs of the majority of pensioners and the retired formed in childhood and at young age. Stubbornness in participation, as well as conscious rebellious activity against authorities and the power are not considered proper social model behaviour. The political identity of seniors formed within the 70s through cultural changes, revolts at universities, protests against nuclear energy and mid-range missiles. Experts do not agree as to what motivates senior citizens and what they expect participating in protests. Not all of the experts support the argument that the elderly do not want to be pushed onto the margin of society but instead they want to stay active as long as possible and that way avoid isolation. Those experts believe that the elderly have the right not to be engaged in anything, not to play roles they have played in society and are entitled to rest after all that engagement, as the time has come for "vita contemplativa" (contemplative live) after "vita activa" (active life).⁶⁵ However engagement in a protest movement allows them to use their life experience, be active, take initiatives and at the same time enjoy their independence and qualifications. People taking part in today's demonstrations, as oppose to the past, are not only marginalized persons, victims of economic restructuring but also people with steady income and firm social position with active working life. Participants of demonstrations in the 70s were students of sociology and political science, sociology professors, social workers, people from theatre and playwrights.⁶⁶ Young users of the Internet are on the right track to become one day similar participant of protests. Participation in protests has become a catalyst of inequality. Today,

⁶¹ Franz Walter. *Bürgerlichkeit und Protest in der Misstrauensgesellschaft*, [in:] StineMarg, LargGeiges, Felix Butzlaf, Franz Walter (Hg.). *Die neue Macht der Bürger. Was motiviert die Protestbewegungen?* Rowohlt Verlag GmbH: Hamburg 2013, page 302.

⁶² Konrad Gregor. *Und wohinmit unserer Wut, Bürger?* [in:] „Der Standard“ (Wien), 21. November 2011.

⁶³ Gerhard Matzing mentioned it in the talk with "Tagesanzeiger" (Zürich), 28. Septemeber 2011.

⁶⁴ Franz Walter, op.cit, page 305.

⁶⁵ Albert Hirschmann. *Engagement und Enttäuschung*. Frankfurt am Main 1984, page 13.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, page 312.

participatory democracy does not support civil-social participation but instead increases differences between top and bottom classes of society, deepens social inequality.⁶⁷ Engagement in social problems from an early age greatly influences development of a young person. People, who are active and socially engaged early in life, become more self-confident, optimistic and are able to manage and take part in projects. Participation in protests can teach us some useful skills, as protests organizers have to be qualified and talented, be able to create structures of an organization, handle media, speak in public and hold talks with public institutions. In the past mainly men participated in protests but it has been changing now, although professional career and children are main factors behind women's lower engagement in protests.

In a participatory society, which treats protests as an expression of its will, there are often accusations that democracy is only on the surface. This is a typical signal sent by a mistrustful society in which any talks about political parties trigger a torrent of scorn and contempt, as parties are considered a cost-generating mixed bunch of incompetent people unable to do anything. Citizens' engagement is based on knowledge, information, ideals and energy which should be of benefit to the state. When it comes to a critical moment, all these details cannot be ignored in the false hope that a conflict can be solved through peaceful de-escalation. Civil society is also connected with pathological fear and aggression, social and ethnic isolation, cynicism and contempt for democratic process. Number of citizens and their awareness has risen so much that any mistake can provoke citizens' insubordination.

A new form of social protests took place during the recent protests in Ukraine which began in November 2013. The protests broke out with Ukrainian government's decision to pull out of an agreement for closer ties with the European Union and led to the resignation of Mykola Azarov and his government. After these initial political changes, the protesters demanded further political changes and resignation of President Victor Yanukovich. On 30 November 2013 the militia units brutally dispersed the protesters which led to outrage and changed protests into a mass movement. Protests spread across the country while the Independence Square in Kiev was dubbed Euromaidan and changed into a place of permanent protest rallies. The climax of protests took place on 1 December 2013 when the number of protesters in Kiev reached 800 000 people. After that the number fluctuated between 50 000 and 200 000. While in the Western part of the country protesters took over offices of local and government administration, in the East support for similar attempts were limited. Street fights, taking place between 18 and 20 February 2014, resulted in hundreds of casualties and became a turning point for the development of the situation. Under the pressure from the Western countries and a wave of outrage inside the country, President Victor Yanukovich decided to reintroduce the constitution of 2004 and call snap election. On 21 February the militia was removed from the streets of Kiev and Yanukovich left the capital. On 22 February the parliament voted to remove him from his post. The participants of protests in Kiev were people from the middle class, pensioners and the retired. Young people, including students, were more visible in the most dangerous places. They were well prepared, had helmets and masks to protect them from gas. Protests in Ukraine prove that main groups of society taking part in today's demonstrations are senior citizens and young people who use the Internet to communicate and organize themselves. At the same time protests engage the middle class which is the largest social class in almost every state.

⁶⁷Ibidem, page 309.

Conclusion

We can talk about double democracy as parliamentary democracy is supplemented by participatory democracy - participation of citizens.⁶⁸ The problem lies in the fact that, while discouragement is typical for lower classes of society, the reaction of middle class is outrage and society expresses outrage but does not offer any alternatives.⁶⁹ This division of the society into the discouraged and the outraged is very dangerous for democracy. Neither society nor modern democracy can exist without trust. Distrustful societies are a barometer for democracy. When everything goes well they form basis of new movements which consequently change into new ideas and projects.⁷⁰ It is very difficult to use the potential of society but it is not impossible. Social protest is an inherent part of democracy but without an attempt to channel it, it is very dangerous.

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⁶⁸ Hans Vorländer. *Spiel ohne Bürger*, [in:] „Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung“, 11. June 2011.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, page 335.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, page 337.