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**NEOLIBERALIZM
I SPOŁECZEŃSTWO OBYWATELSKIE**

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Summary

Neoliberalism and Civil Society

The book brings together an analysis of the sociogenesis of two neoliberal phenomena – the discourse on the civil society and the phenomenon commonly called the third sector. Author shows that their origins and functions are to great extent independent from each other.

On the contrary to what most authors interpret nowadays, from a historical perspective there is no single developing discourse on civil society. Instead of following the intellectual trends, the author points out that there are three distinguished homonyms depicting premodern, modern and post-modern way of using the term “civil society”. Classical republicanism since ancient times till the French Revolution referred to the civil society as a political community, the state. This extremely rich and broad tradition is not presented thoroughly in the book, which concentrates exclusively on modernity and postmodernity. With the dawn of modern liberalism, the new way of using the concept of civil society was established by G. W. F. Hegel, who became a great revolutionary within a field of the political philosophy. However, many authors treat Adam Smith as the inventor of the new usage of the concept of civil society, though it is definitely questionable as in his economical works he did not refer to that concept at all. Simultaneously, in his book on the moral sentiments he referred to that concept in the very classical republican way as his all other contemporaries in the age of classicism.

Hegel in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* from 1820 openly attacked fundamental for classical republicanism concept of the political contract (since Rousseau known as “social contract”), treating the state as an abstract existence, and not as a result of any agreement. This first modern approach to the concept of the state influenced his understanding of the civil society as a sphere of individualistic needs, private interests, economic competition and class differences. Thus Hegel should be treated as the father of modern liberal understanding of the civil society as the market society, and describing it as the “system of needs” – of the consumers. Hegelian argument was later repeated by John Stuart Mill, who in 1869 claimed in *On Liberty* that “society is not founded on a contract”.

Hegelian way of understanding the concept of civil society is also present in the works of Alexis de Tocqueville, especially in *Democracy in America*. Comparative analysis of the translations of this work into English and Polish revealed that it is fundamentally misunderstood due to mistakes of translators. Henceforth it is not widely accepted that Tocqueville did not use the concept of civil society in different way than invented by Hegel and later used by his other contemporaries, namely Karl Marx and Ferdinand Tönnies. Above all, it is the concept of *association civile* that is the most problematic for the readers of Tocqueville. It is so because, as performed analysis revealed, the civil association for Tocqueville was not a gathering of the citizens but a form of business entrepreneurship. This form of business company is present in the Civil Code introduced by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1804 – thus unknown in the common law tradition countries.

However, the work of Tocqueville is not devoted exclusively to the civil society but primarily to the political society and the political associations, as even a simple glance at the table of content may reveal. He wrote about the civil associations only in one chapter focused on the relations between civil and political associations. This chapter is thus crucial to comprehend the complexity of the relations between civil society and political society, or between economy and politics, as Tocqueville recognized them. On one hand, Tocqueville pointed at antirevolutionary and depoliticising effect of civil associations, which is the influence of the economic activity on political life. On the other hand, he treated political associations as the grand gratuitous schools of cooperation, teaching skills that can be later used in business entrepreneurships - civil associations - where one has to risk own money and property. Due to the constant mistake in English translations, thanks to which one must read about “grand free schools” instead of “gratuitous”, this claim was misread in a form of completely false but nowadays very popular statement that for Tocqueville associations were grand free schools of democracy.

In a similar way Karl Marx made crucial for his analyses the relations between civil society and political society in his early manuscript *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* from 1843, published posthumously. However, his way of thinking departed both from Hegel as well as from Tocqueville, while for him it is the civil society that is the basis of a political struggle, the class one, so it is actually the political society. Thus for him distinction between the civil society as the economic basis and the political society as the political superstructure was questionable. This problem led later Antonio Gramsci to very ambivalent, incoherent and imprecise way of using the concept of civil society, derived from mixing both fascist and communist

perspectives on the social reality and its political status in the age of modernity, which resulted in his popularity due to the interpretative flexibility.

The contemporary revival of the concept of civil society cannot be devoted to the ideological activities of anticommunist opposition, as it is commonly assumed. As the research shows, there is no empirical evidence for such claim. The analysis of the documents and the programs of Solidarity movement in Poland revealed utter lack of knowledge and usage of this concept by the oppositionists at the time. Instead, the first Solidarity in 1981 developed its own neorepublican vocabulary of “self-governing Republic”, which authorship should be attributed to historian Bronisław Geremek. The concept of the self-governing Republic is now forgotten and displaced by the neoliberal discourse on the civil society. On the contrary to what is assumed, analysis of the official press shows that it was the communist propaganda that had the most vague influence on the invention and popularization of the new postmodern concept of civil society – in order to legitimize the neoliberal transformation of the economical system in 1989 and suppress the demand for a fully pluralistic and democratic political society. Civil society became a substitute for the political society as a result of premeditated ideological work of communists during a first phase of the transformation. Political transformation in Poland started only two years later, after the first democratic parliamentary elections in 1991 due to the dynamics of the newly recreated political field.

The discourse on civil society as a freedom to associate became connected in early 1990s with the neoliberal phenomenon of the third sector. In this form it was mistakenly adopted into the neorepublican philosophy of communitarianism, which, thanks to Robert Putnam mainly, misread liberal accounts of Tocqueville as the eulogies of the civil society. The neoliberal characteristics of the postmodern discourse on civil society originate from the purposes of communist propaganda at the time of economic transformation in Poland and the nature of the phenomenon of the third sector itself. Neoliberal project of “building and strengthening of the civil society” became a key factor of the third sector development.

The origins of the third sector reach back to the 1973 oil crisis, following the 1973–1974 stock market crash and the subsequent economic recession, giving an end to the post-World War II economic boom. At that time, the process of neoliberal restructuring of the welfare state systems of OECD countries into a more elastic, less politically accountable system consisting of the multitude of organisations financed from the public funds and dependent on them, started. Such welfare organisations are com-

monly referred to as “non-governmental” regardless of their questionable independence from governmental control.

After 1989 collapse of the dichotomous cold war system, the process became globalized through structural adjustment programs of IMF and World Bank acting as a framework for the conditionalised loans. Among the most important conditions of structural adjustment policies is reduction of social spending leading to circumscribing of the local welfare systems. This practice led to replacement of the state administration in poor countries with welfare organisations financed by OECD governments and accountable to them. One of the first countries where structural adjustment policy was introduced was Poland, where it was named the Balcerowicz Plan. By surpassing local administration as a guarantee and a provider of social services, the welfare organisations weaken sovereignty and legitimacy of local governments.

From the perspective of the organisational theory, every organisation, regardless of how altruistic were motives for its establishment, has to strive for its own organisational survival – to find resources for its activities. This leads to the search for external resources and as the statistics show, it is rarely philanthropy. By and large welfare organisations turn to governmental funding and towards commercialisation through various forms of fees. Welfare society thus is not a space between the market and the state but a hybrid of them, mixing their features in a free market competition for the public grants.

What in the official rhetoric is called a subsidiarity or auxilliarity, looks rather like a responsibility ceding. Thanks to dispersion and concealment of the political responsibility through plethora of welfare organizations, the official political line may differ from the projects and activities performed in reality. Welfare organizations serve rather as the buffers separating recipients of social policies from political decision-making than the intermediary bodies, as one may conclude from the official language. Thus the practice of the third sector is far from democratic ideals as the welfare organisations are not the democratically elected bodies, but the groups of various and often conflicting interests. The welfare organisations are not democratically accountable to local communities and are not subjects to democratic control.

While in popular language the third sector is presented as free, decentralised, uncoordinated, amorphous, even chaotic entity, the welfare organizations form a system of the cascading hierarchies of financial dependencies and obligations. From international and national organisations to grass-root service providers, welfare organisations constitute the multi-layered structures of administrative hierarchies separating further policy makers

from their recipients. Thus characteristic for the third sector is centralisation of the financial resources in the hands of big, “umbrella” organizations serving as transferring bodies – leading to the consolidation of power within the sector.

From a global perspective system of welfare organisations forms now a global apparatus of redistribution and allocation of financial resources, serving as an administrative tool for global governance. In the system of global governance USA serve as a global gendarme while EU acts as a global social worker. After every American military intervention it is Europe that provides most of the humanitarian aid, stabilisation operations, and reconstruction and development programs – in a functional diversification of the uncertain control over politically and economically unstable territories. European Union is the biggest world donor to the third sector nowadays.

Through the externalisation of the social services to the welfare organisations the welfare systems changed their modes of functioning from uniformity, equality, consistency, and standardization of activities characteristic for the modernity to individualisation, control of differences, and flexible adaptation to various localities. Welfare organisations do not work towards integration of social conflicts and cohesion of their repression apparatus, as in the case of the modern welfare state systems. Instead, they work as a mechanism of controlling the differentiation among the separated and segmented social forces through individualisation of the systems of management and power. Universality and uniformity were typical aims for modern nation states whereas the new system of welfare organisations enhances individuality and suitability of activities for its specific goals. Welfare society does not work towards social integration, treating everyone in the same way, but towards differentiation and dispersion, treating each one differently. Instead of resolving the social problems, the new system serves to manage them, that is to make them tolerable. Elasticity, adaptability, and fluidity of the welfare organisations are the most important features of the welfare society. The system of welfare organisations may be conceptualised as a new disorganised bureaucracy.

The author criticizes the theory of the institutionalisation of the social movements as the source of third sector development, pointing that there had never been so many movements to explain such a rapid growth of so massive sector of the welfare organizations as one may currently observe. As the history shows, social or rather political movements typically institutionalise into political parties, just as the religious, national, worker, communist, socialist, and environmental movements did. Instead, the theory of the restructurization of the welfare state systems explains the

phenomenon of the third sector on the ground of the organizational and public policy theories.

In the end, as a discursive strategy author proposes replacement of the normative and idealistic concept of the civil society with the more descriptive and objective concept of welfare society and calls for a revival of the idea of political society as a remedy for the depoliticising effect of the neo-liberal civil society discourse.

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