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CIVIL LOOP AND THE ABSORPTION OF ELITES

I

1. The classical path of development of a political society consists of five stages: increasing civil alienation, primitive revolution, enslavement, cyclic declassations and cyclic revolutions (Nowak 1987, Nowak *et al.* 1993). This scheme of development assumes that each ideal political society¹ "must" pass through a stage of enslavement and, having found itself in the stage of enslavement, "must" become liberated; in other words, it "must" pass on to the stage of cyclic revolutions. Following these assumptions, one can reach the conclusion that the struggle of Russian seamen and workers in Kronstadt was of a reactionary nature, because it postponed the coming of Stalinism.² The latter was necessary for the subsequent passing on to the stage of cyclic declassations and the ultimate elimination of triple-power (*Ibid.*). Each stage of social enslavement, on the other hand, is of temporary nature and autonomous social relations "must" occur irrespectively of the scale of terror implemented in the society. The model of social development discussed here does assume many alternative paths of social development: the possibility of victorious or lost revolutions, for example. However, victorious revolutions do not significantly change the path of development of a political society; they merely postpone the danger of enslavement. A victorious revolution at the stage of cyclic declassations causes a repetition of developmental sequences of the society. It means a step backwards in the process of political liberation.

2. In L. Nowak's theory, at the basis of social fatalism understood in this way, there lie certain mistaken static assumptions of the materialist theory of politics. Nowak assumes that the process of re-valorization of social bonds depends only upon time. Independent social bonds are renewed in an enslaved society, irrespectively of the degree of terror. The

law of renewal of independent civil bonds can be formulated slightly differently, however. I assume that the process of re-valorization of civil bonds depends upon the degree of social terror implemented by the authorities, rather than upon the duration of enslavement. This difference does not consist merely in a different style, because the greater the terror implemented by the authorities, the longer the process of restoration of independent social relations. The smaller the range of terror, the shorter the process of re-valorization of autonomous civil relations. Therefore, one can imagine (theoretically) a society in which the range of control over social life reaches absolute limits and thus in which, on the basis of the formulated relationship, there appears a blockade of the process of restitution of independent social relations. I call such a state *civil collapse*. Historic societies which underwent civil collapse would have to meet several strong idealizing assumptions. They should be perfectly isolated from external influence, while the political factor would dominate in them in an almost absolute way. Civil collapse is possible in small, rather than large societies. A small number of social variables is easier to be controlled by the authority. Thus, everything indicates that this is the type of society which can be found in, e.g. Albania, where a long-lasting social inertia results from the unlimited power of the Party and an almost perfect isolation from the external world.³

II

1. Revolutions "promote" the process of social development by forcing the authorities into evolutionary changes. They should be lost, because the victorious ones move the process of political liberation backwards as a result of the mechanism of civil loop. That is more or less the contents of one the main theses of the non-Marxian social materialism. Nowak's model provides two alternative solutions of a revolution: a victory or a defeat. Let us, then, consider what determines in our society the possibility of a two-variational outcome of a revolution. In our model, its victory depends upon the scale of revolutionary events. A *large-scale revolution* is one in which the participation of a greater part of the civil class leads to the elimination of the old class of rulers and its substitution with the revolutionary elite. On the other hand, only a small part of the civil class participates in a local revolution; it ends in a defeat. Among other types of revolutions, we should also list a *balanced revolution*, in which the forces of both sides are more or less balanced and the social conflict cannot end in the defeat of one of them. The outcome of such a situation is usually the phenomenon of *elite absorption*. In order to

understand that phenomenon one has to penetrate the structure of the social movement deeper. In our considerations we completely neglect the role of revolutionary tactics and strategy, the influence of charismatic leaders, appropriate means of coercion, etc. They are all important issues but we can neglect them in our first approach.

2. At the basis of revolutionary movements lie, except for their ideological banners and institutional disguise, material means of social self-organization. They include offices, apartments, lecture halls, printing machines, radio transmitters, etc., i.e. everything that makes independent social communication possible. The civil movement always includes people whose influence upon the decision concerning the use of material means of interhuman communication is bigger than that of others. They form the elite of the social movement. In our understanding an elite is not distinguished on an institutional or consciousness level but already on the material level.⁴ Making decisions concerning the use of material means of social communication, the elite coordinates and controls actions of the civil class. It may support certain initiatives but it may also block others. As in any large-scale social movement, there are people here who will want to increase their influence and not only struggle for ideals. After some time the competition for power drives the "devoted revolutionaries" to the outskirts of the social movement, unless they also learn to take care of their own (material) interests. Each revolution is in its essence a process of formation of a network of independent public relations. It is directed against elites, which accumulate in their hands the monopoly for the coordination of social life. Thus revolutions set themselves against all elites, including the underground ones.

The explosion of independent social relationships endangers the positions of "professional revolutionaries". This is because suddenly new animators of social life appear at their side, who are transformed from the only representatives of the society into some out of many representatives. And so the only reaction of the elite is to slow down the impulsiveness of the revolution — needless to say not without effect. They do it in return for concessions from the rulers. It is, above all, against them that the revolution is directed. The absorption of a revolutionary elite by the class of rulers is supplemented with repressions against the civil class or, to be more precise, against the new emerging elites.

3. After some time, the renewed class of rulers starts to extend its sphere of influence anew. The growing state control over social life results in the formation of a network of independent social relationships. A new social elite emerges again in the movement of social protest, which — as a result

of further growth of state control — turns into a revolution. The rulers implement the same strategy. The elite absorbed by the authority causes the impulse of the revolution to slow down. Repressions against the civil class facilitate the ultimate pacification of the society. From that time on, the society undergoes an evolution according to the following scheme: revolution — absorption of elites — growth of state control — revolution — absorption of elites. This scheme of development (revolution — growth of state control) lasts as long as one of the revolutions ends in a victory or defeat of the civil class. A lost revolution poses a threat of enslavement to the civil class. A victorious one merely postpones this enslavement because, as a result of the mechanism of civil loop, the new class of rulers extends the sphere of influence suppressing in the meantime the resistance of the civil class.

Victorious revolutions end in an exchange of political elites. Lost revolutions, on the other hand, eliminate competitive social elites. As a result of balanced revolutions the existing class of rulers is complemented with elites that consist of pretenders to power.

III

A political society may evolve according to the following paths of development:

- (1) classic path of development
- (2) path of development ending in civil collapse
- (3) the path of elite absorption.

The nature of political processes does not allow for a complete elimination of political elites, which determine the antagonistic character of the political society. It is impossible then to reduce the authority to the range of administration permanently. The evolution of a society will fluctuate from a revolution to state control. Lost revolutions are an optimum social solution from the point of view of the interests of the civil class only at certain stage of development of the society — after leaving the stage of enslavement. At the first two stages of development the optimum solution is a balanced revolution, which does not lead either to a civil loop or political enslavement.

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NOTES

¹ The evolution of an ideal political society is not influenced by economic or consciousness factors. Besides that, also the influence of institutions, political consciousness, other societies, etc. is neglected. It is assumed that only two political classes and their material interests exist.

² An approximation of the Stalinist era in the Soviet Union is represented by the stage of enslavement in the model of a political society.

³ All symptoms of civil collapse could be found in the Soviet society in the 1930's, after the elimination of individual farming and orthodox religion. It was not until the Nazi aggression that a certain liberalization of the social system occurred. Another sharpening of social policy after the war brought social resistance, which led to, among other things, riots in labor camps. And so, one may conjecture, the elimination of Stalinism was caused by Hitler, rather than the rebellion of the most oppressed in the labor camps.

⁴ Gwidon Adamski places the concept of elite on the institutional level:

And so, for example in the primary model of the theory of power which refers only to material factors, L. Nowak uses the concept of 'elite'. It raises certain reservations concerning the status of that concept in the model which does not assume any other social stratification except for the division into two political classes, the rulers and citizens. One can rightly suspect that the use of the term 'elite' means an introduction of an institutional factor, from which — declares the author in the idealizing assumptions — the primary model abstracts (Adamski 1987, p. 217).

It seems, however, that it is possible to conceptualize the concept of elite in purely materialist terms.

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