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REVISTA DE HUMANIDADES
Y CIENCIAS SOCIALES

Homenaje a

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**ECONOMIC WELFARE AND CIVIC ACTIVITY
BIENESTAR ECONÓMICO Y ACTIVIDAD CÍVICA**

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Abstract

The article deals with some of the most important factors for the individual's political behavior in the modern world - the economic ones. They largely predetermine its civic activity - its goals, intensity and forms. The subject of the analysis is the civic activity of the Bulgarians after 1989. The analysis shows that the main tendencies and regularities in this sphere are characteristic for the Bulgarians as well. But due to some specificities of the development of political life in Bulgaria, there are also some specifics of the civic activity of Bulgarian citizens.

Keywords

Poverty – Unemployment – Fears – Opacity – Uncertainty

Resumen

El artículo trata sobre algunos de los factores más importantes para el comportamiento político del individuo en el mundo moderno - los económicos. Predeterminan en gran medida su actividad cívica, sus objetivos, intensidad y formas. El tema del análisis es la actividad cívica de los búlgaros después de 1989. El análisis muestra que las principales tendencias y regularidades en esta esfera también son características de los búlgaros. Pero debido a algunas características específicas del desarrollo de la vida política en Bulgaria, también hay algunas características específicas de la actividad cívica de los ciudadanos búlgaros.

Palabras Claves

Pobreza – Desempleo – Miedos – Opacidad – Incertidumbre

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The economic well-being of people is a major factor in their political behavior. Its characteristics and dynamics determine the goals, intensity and forms of their civic activity.

The analysis of the civic activity of the Bulgarians after 1989 shows that the main tendencies and regularities in this sphere are characteristic for the Bulgarians as well. But due to some specificities of the development of economic and political life in Bulgaria, there are also some specifics of the civic activity of Bulgarian citizens.

Part of the economic factors are destabilizing civic activity. Others stimulate it.

Some of the factors are common to societies during the post-industrial development phase, to globalizing capitalism.

There are fewer industries. Personnel services are developing, more people are doing homework¹. The percentage of "white collars" in small businesses is growing. There is decreasing control over the private sector and that prevents trade unions activity - this makes difficult workers' informing, organization and unity. These and other reasons lead to the degradation of the trade unions as a basic form of protection of the interests of non-elites. Due to the degradation of „blue collars“, as well as trade unions as their advocates, workers' protests often come down to the most immediate things – payment of salaries or the risk of dismissal. Protests about poor working conditions, violations of labor law, and injustice in pay for labor are minimized.

There is a boom in the informal economy all over the world - dozens of percentages of the population are involved in this economy. Particularly in combination with a transition period, as in the former "socialist" countries, the importance of this factor is increasing. Throughout the period both leftist and right-wing political parties stimulated the informal economy, both in its most criminal mafia sectors and in its more "legitimate" branches - for example, in many professions there are not conditions for income regulation and taxing - for dentists, doctors, teachers and other service providers. The other typical example is the mass non-insurance or the mass insurance of workers on the basis of the minimal salary, not on the real salary. This prevents the active social policy, worsens the social situation not only of the exploited in this informal economy but also of all other working people. Prostitutes do not strike because they are illegitimate. Illegal immigrants also do not protest. In this sphere it is difficult to protest.

The main trend is the growth of poverty, the marginalization of "redundant people"². These people do not have the consciousness of the proletariat, its ability to organize and fight for various causes. The right explanation of poverty in postmodern societies is dominant and makes them a victim of the right interpretation of their problems. And it is related to the search for the causes of poverty and marginalization in the person of the poor and the marginal, but not in the characteristics of the social environment. All this interferes with their activity.

Material shortages and economic uncertainty either stimulate civic activity, or hinder it. Economic problems either stimulate people for struggle for better working conditions, or force them to resign, fearing unemployment or other sanctions. Which

¹ R. Riych, Trudat na natsiite, UI „Sv. Kl. Ohridski“, Sofia, 1992.

² V. Prodanov, Sistemni tsikli i badeshteto na istoriyata: nakade varvi svetat?, Izd. «Zahariy Stoyanov». Sofia: 2018.

strategy they will choose depends on other factors. People from less massive professions, from those who have less influence on the functioning of the society, from those who are less able to unite, from more "female" professions, and so on are usually easier to discourage and harder and later mobilize for civilian struggle.

Rising unemployment is characteristic of development during globalizing capitalism. But in combination with a transitional period, the trend becomes even more painful. Too much unemployment, long-term unemployment humiliates, demotivates, the unemployed are difficult to organize, so some of them go on individual ways to solve their problems or fall into helpless and apathetic states. Unemployment worsens family ties, makes people break up with their trade unions and interest groups, leads to political alienation and closure themselves ("blank individualism"), increases criminality³. If they can not fight in other ways with other people, part of the unemployed people start coping with life making crimes.

Unemployment makes people take on more and more unsteady and unwanted work. Fear of hard-to-find work paralyzes activity. Often, these people have a low educational level, filled with pessimism and low self-esteem, which is an obstacle to participation and the effectiveness of the protest. The unemployed are not too willing to participate in organized protest actions aimed at tackling unemployment and its consequences. They are not defined and mostly left-wing political spectrum. Often, they support right-wing formations⁴. They do not have the class consciousness of the working class.

Workplace fears and unemployment are key factors in refraining from civil appearances. On the other hand, the fear of unemployment or simply the deterioration of the economic situation is driving the xenophobic phenomenon. The presence of migrants intensifies economic fears, they emerge faster and can turn into civil activity because they are directed against a weak, defenseless migrant group, unlike the class of employers. In addition to the economic fears of competition for few jobs in such situation fears of illness, terrorism, etc. are activating.

Since the autumn of 2013, more and more towns have been threatened with refugees and immigrants. The fears of the population are well-grounded, the „enemy“ and the problems are real, they are already felt, they are not invisible like some other problems. And people, massively, organizedly and jointly involve in protests in many places.

Extreme poverty is usually accompanied by a lack of other resources to fight and therefore often leads to apathy or to primary forms of struggle related to physical violence, the destruction of material goods. Higher income usually goes hand in hand with other resources to fight, such as education, knowledge of principles of public reality and so on and provide greater choice for more adequate protest behavior.

Economic interests stimulate protests of higher-paid layers too. Very often the reason for this may be income degradation, bad prospects or a desire to return to power the political subjects representing them, and so on - like the „summer protests“ of 2013 – 2014 against the government of Oresharski. Similar are the protests of the people who

³ Al. Gluhova, Politicheskata konfliktologiya mezhdu starite i novite podhodi, v: Ponedelnik, 2001.

⁴ N. Genov, Transformatsiya i risk v Iztochna Evropa, v: Ponedelnik, 1998, br. 4-5.

benefit from skiing /on the ski slopes/ or those who benefit from smoking in the restaurants, etc. Even their intolerance and protest activity may sometimes be more significant than poor and unemployed people' activity. Because degradation of economic welfare and uncertainty in the economic position is even more difficult to accept than the constant low level of well-being.

For example, in the movement for peace and civil rights in the USA in the 1960s, students and representatives of relatively high-yielding classes were active, who could lose more from war than win. Adding to this the relatively higher self-esteem of people from the more prosperous social strata, their stronger sense of personal efficacy, there have more and more important motives for activity⁵. It is not by accident that students are active layer among all youth layers in Bulgaria too.

In the modern world, the degree of economic uncertainty is growing. In the dynamics of the economic status of the individual or the layman, especially in the loss of positions and prosperity, the pain is more acute and the readiness to fight to preserve the old status increases. "There is no protest on the Wall Street neither of the proletariat nor the beggars, but the American middle class. For 30 years of neoliberal upsurge, the iddle class degraded drastically and sank into debt"⁶

The need for retraining increases uncertainty. In deindustrialisation, grows the risk from higher and better occupational positions to get into worse positions and worse working conditions. While in industrialization the process is usually in the ascending line. This is further reinforced in the transition when there is not just deindustrialisation, but also the restructuring of the economy. The relationship between education and work is torn - highly educated people work in positions of less educated people - tension is increasing. Impossibility to work according to education and qualifications increases disappointment and insult. Economic uncertainty increases the intolerance to the demands of others, and makes it more difficult to work together with other needing from help and civil activity social strata.

The ability of people to protest repels foreign investors. They are looking for quiet places. Consciousness of this further discourages workers in foreign firms. It's true that part of them receive better wages than the rest of population and this relative benefit has kept them from protest, even though they know about their lower reward from reward for workers in developed countries. But in some other cases, it is about foreign companies in smaller settlements that provide poor working conditions and low wages to their workers. But because of a lack of job choices employees in them are forced to humble themselves with these conditions. An incentive factor is that the production activity itself becomes the arena of employee involvement in the management of production. Through various forms such as bilateral and trilateral cooperation, participation in the planning of production activities, through worker and management counseling, increases the awareness, self-esteem and willingness of workers to take part in the decision-making not only in the economic but also in the political sphere.

⁵ E. Darren; T. Sherkat and Jean Blocker, "The Political Development of Sixties' Activists: Identifying the Influence of Class", *Gender and Socialization on Protest Participation, Social Forces*, Vol: 72 num 3 (1994): 824.

⁶ V. Naydenov, Svetovnite protesti sreshtu alchnostta na elita imat poveche osnovanie u nas, v. „24 chasa“, 17 oktombri 2011.

Both in the industrial and post-industrial period the economic activity of women is high. The high degree of economic activity of women, including Bulgarians, is an incentive factor for civic activity. By entering into professional life, they become more interested in protecting themselves their interests, more knowledgeable and more experienced, more sympathetic to the protest activity of the men around them.

The transition from one political regime to another strengthens the influence of some of the factors, characteristic of the post-industrial period in general. And another part is more specific to the countries of the former "socialist" camp.

Perhaps a specific factor is the fact that the Bulgarian society emerges from a totalitarian political regime, characterized by a lack of political democracy, trade union pluralism and civic activity in the forms of civic activity of the population from the developed capitalist countries. This, in turn, required time for trade union transformation and redirection of workers to new ways of protecting their interests in the economy as well as in politics.

During the entire transitional period in Bulgaria and others former "socialistic" countries there is a situation of massive violation of labor rights. The fear of dismissals and sanctions has increased many times. Employed people are subject to great exploitation and multiple discrimination - employers use illegal redundancies, false social insurances, increased working hours and reduced and non-transparent remuneration. Deindustrialisation has led to an increase in the percentage of small-scale, family-run business with endless working hours and reduced control over the working conditions in it.

Fear of unemployment, as I said above, is an increasingly widespread phenomenon in the world. This regularity is even more valid for countries like Bulgaria. And if men and women are to be compared, unemployment affects women more strongly, and therefore fear of unemployment is stronger for them⁷. This fear in Bulgaria over the past 30 years has increased due to the worsening of the economic situation. Women are more likely to suffer from dismissals, discrimination due to maternity, sexual harassment at work, and so on.

So their fear affects them even harder, puts them in an even more disadvantageous position and divides them. Unemployed women are even more difficult to solidarize and organize. Unions do not fight enough for working women, much less for the unemployed.

Poverty and return in the sphere of households became a characteristic of the existence of many women of the Bulgarian ethnic group, and more so of women from other ethnic groups. This removed them from civic activity and increased the grounds for opposition and separation between them.

The host is less organized and active, has less ambition, skills and interest in civic activity. "The goals of neoliberalism are clear: to always give more weight to the power relations, which are already very unequal, between the owners of capital and the workers.

⁷ K. Stoyanova and Alla Kirova, *Sotsialno-ikonomicheska infrastruktura i garantsii za ravnopostavenost na zhenite v Balgariya*, Fondatsiya „Tsentar za izsledvaniya i politiki za zhenite“, Sofia, 2004.

Neoliberalism feeds on (and at the same time creates) inequality between social groups, between states, between men and women. It is known that in most cases women receive lower wages. When the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank forces indebted countries to shut down public services related to education, healthcare, kindergarten, crèches, school and workstations, etc., women are the ones who play the role of "social buffer". In addition to their day-to-day duties, they are also forced to deal with tasks that are no longer a public concern. In addition, neo-liberalism drives into society individual behaviors that are customary for men - a struggle for power and money, competition and aggression, - at the expense of valuation as solidarity and mutual assistance"⁸.

Companies favor one and discriminate other age women's groups. They are artificially opposed by age and by the sign of "beauty". For the first time in decades, after 1989, age and beauty are a huge barrier or key to development. The presence of this distinction provoked until recently unfamiliar generational antagonisms, tensions and conflicts. This hinders solidarity of women.

The problematic economic situation is tolerated by men and women in a different way. For men, the percentage is higher (compared to women) those who are unwilling to tolerate it, and are looking for ways to improve it - sometimes with criminals and sometimes with protest actions. For women, the percentage of those who tend to tolerate longer is higher.

During the transition an important management mechanism of the elite became the increase of the opacity in the labor relations. It's about lack of transparency about the company's activities, its present and future, regarding the remuneration of employee participation in the company. As far as possible, the goal is for workers not to receive such information. This opacity was introduced into one of the most important moral norms of labor ethics. The desire to be informed about the various aspects of the company's business, especially for some of them, is characterized as immoral, as an expression of unnecessary and ugly curiosity.

The reasons and justifications for this opacity are very different.

In the beginning, an argument for imposing and adopting it was the desire to move away from the practices of the recent past when it was clear how much salary the worker gets. In this line, the new elite wanted to imagine itself devastated and unrelated to the practices and thinking of the past. Other important ideological reason for introducing opaque payability was that it is normal for "normal" countries. And for Bulgaria to be normal, this norm had to be introduced. But, in fact, the more important reasons would be reasonable to search in more important and up-to-date interests of economic subjects. When the sources of income are illegitimate or semi-legitimate, of course, there is interest from opacity of the company's business. At the stage of chaos, the illegitimate and even criminal assignment of state ownership after 1989, the owners and managers were interested in everything being utterly opaque. Not to report to the relevant financial institutions. To conceal the widely used illegitimate sources of income. This allowed them not to pay taxes and at the same time to build the image of legal players. This was particularly important until they become rich, until they become more secure on the economic scene.

⁸ Attac – Frantsiya, Da razrushim 7-te osnovni stalba na neoliberalizma, v: Novo vreme, 2007, br. 4.

When it is necessary not to qualitatively work, but to restructure, buy and resell companies, the cadres are selected not by their qualification but by their family and friends connections to owners and managers of firms to distribute ownership behind the scenes. In a situation where business owners were interested in bringing active businesses into bankruptcy in order to be able to buy them at a priceless price, it is naturally at this stage that the "normal" recruitment mechanisms such as competitions, interviews, tests and more become unwanted and the appointment and firing is maximally opaque and concealed. Even when competitions take place, they are often organized so that people with links can be hired. When it comes to normal production, economic subjects are interested in higher quality of staff, so they also make more transparent competitions.

Many of the so-called "ordinary people" also accepted the „normality“ of this norm without realizing its very serious negative consequences for their own present and future, their own prosperity. Many employees perceived it as normal and even ethical not to know their colleagues how much they get, whether they are on a labor contract, whether they are insured, why they are dismissed or appointed, and so on. And when they dismiss them without clear arguments or with illegal ones, they face a moral dilemma. Whether to waste time and nerves and to alert control authorities for the illegal behavior of the company's rulers, to protest and create problems besides themselves, but also of the other people working in the company. Or to keep silent and give the law-infringers the chance to continue to violence the law and the victims continue to fear and vegetate.

In the vast majority of cases the decision taken by the dismissed workers is to be silent. This is probably the result for many reasons - the lack of the necessary degree of civic solidarity and the activity of many Bulgarians in such situations; the existence of a great deal of mistrust in the respective control bodies, that they will adequately and quickly intervene in; the lack of reflex, desire and money to prosecute; the fear of repression because of protest activity, etc., etc.

Opacity hinders the use of the contractual principle in the name of greater social justice, limiting the appetites of owners and managers to allocate a disproportionate part from profit of their own enrichment. Awareness in relationships makes it possible to reduce the employer's greed to leave more of the company's profit for itself. When employees know what the company's financial situation is, what pay employees are, they may want their pie to be much more confident and justifiable. When they do not have official information, things resist gossip, "intelligence" activity, and can not be a solid basis for requests, questions and protests. The rulling nomenclature in the years of state capitalism, called "socialism", in other ways minimized the claims of employees for higher pay. One of the mechanisms was the smaller distance in their pay. This also involved paying for herself nomenclature. This calmed the people somewhat, there was no reason to worry that some would receive a little, and others – more, there was no reason to protest like today. Today, when there are many times greater disparities in pay, the question of why that is so much arises. And in order to minimize its assignment, it is a convenient way to declare the question unethical and abnormal. The lack of transparency in contractual relations creates conditions for increased exploitation and increasing social inequality; for unreasonably lowering the pay of one, if more is paid for the same work for others; for improper impoverishment of people whose professions do not allow for illegitimate earnings and the unjust enrichment of others whose professions allow it.

Lack of transparency gives less opportunities for business workers to orient themselves properly in the environment, to be able to look for shortcomings in the behavior of their owners and managers, to rumble and seek their rights. Opacity in labor relations is the basis for the atomisation of employees in the company. It creates conditions to minimize their capacity for resistance to subjectivism and discrimination in labor.

The availability of timely and accurate information about the state of the company and its future, the resulting changes in the economic situation, the changes in the company's participation in the national and international economic processes also allow proper planning of future personal behavior.

An extremely important aspect of company transparency is related to compliance with health and safety requirements. The importance derives from the fact that more and more productions and professions are characterized by the possibility of permanent damage to the human organism, that more and more people become disabled. So awareness of this aspect of work is of utmost importance – for the individual, for the local public, for the state as a whole.

Important is the awareness of the employees of the company's relations with the territorial and labor community in the settlement, the region, the country. This enables them to better assess local problems and the company's ability to help resolve them. It makes them more close with other local community citizens, more sensitive to solving their problems. From the point of view of the whole society, it is better for workers in each company to form and maintain conscious attitude, concern about local, regional, etc. problems regarding the role of the company's activity for their solution. It would be good if they were loaded with intolerance towards such a company activity, which badly affects the environment, the development of the village as a whole, the life of the rest of the people in it.

But very often, in the name of the company's profit, the personal survival and prosperity of its employees, the company's owners and managers do not provide the necessary information about the negative effects of the company's activity on the territorial community. For their part, workers also too often have personal selfish reasons or do not want to have such information, or interpret it in a proper, sedative way and do not take measures to inform the public. Because of fear of unemployment, they are not involved in protests against the environmentally damaging productive activity. They are sometimes even included in back protests - to maintain environmentally-unfriendly activities.

Providing the necessary information about the company's development is too often undesirable for the owners and the management team in the company. Especially for the more greedy and short-haired ones. They always try to prevent such requests and interference from employees when they have opportunity. Even when the company is prosperous, especially when it has problems with its existence and development. That is why the divisions between workers are being sown, the foundations of their solidarity are undermined, they are motivated to solve their problems individually, to behave with egoism and dishonesty, the extreme individualism. The greatest is the opacity in the sphere of the informal economy. Given that Bulgaria is about a few tens of percent of economic activity, it is clear what a huge problem is the lack of transparency in resolving people's social problems, for developing social justice and moral values. In this sphere,

opacity reaches maximum dimensions. It becomes an obstacle to consuming the most basic labor rights of individuals, to placing them in a working environment in which human moral values either have no or have a much reduced application, obstruct solidarity.

In general, opacity is one of the obstacles to the development of trade union activity, to the formation of solidarity between workers. And this, in turn, stimulates corruption, individual problem solving, cronyism. Not receiving the necessary information, the trade unions can not adjust their activities, plan counter-measures, can not organize forms of resistance. They can not prepare well enough themselves for the negotiation process, for their participation in bilateral and trilateral cooperation, i.e. they can not optimally protect the interests of the workers.

Opacity in company policy, in work, leads to an increase in opposites and conflicts between people, to the stimulation of unhealthy competition between them. And ultimately it stimulates disrespect, backstory games and dishonesty, malice and envy between workers. In this regard, I would like to express my absolute disagreement with the thesis that the most important characteristic of the Bulgarian is that he is malicious and jealous. Such a thesis is not based on real facts and, unfortunately, is an effective mechanism for lowering the self-confidence of the Bulgarian, from which he has no benefit but only harm. Such a nihilistic-masochistic suggestion fits well into the injurious tactics of stimulating disrespect, even hatred of the other. Together with tactical techniques such as opacity of company policy and other similar techniques, passivity, pessimism and reconciliation with the existing economic situation are assured.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the economic prosperity, its dynamics and characteristics determine to a great extent the civic activity of the individual, including the Bulgarian citizens. It is utopian to expect that citizens are driven more by common causes than by their personal interests in their political behavior. The analysis of the protest activity of the Bulgarians proves once again the fact that civil activists are only a part of the people and that this activity is predestined to the greatest extent by their personal interests and perceptions. And on this characteristic they are not different from other peoples in the world.

Another characteristic of the civic activity of Bulgarian citizens is that it is increasing gradually and logically in the years after 1989. More and more citizens see that without their activity in defense of their own rights and opportunities for development their future is threatened. This is a very motivating factor for lowering their tolerance threshold, to increase their political activity.

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