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Beata B. RYBCZYNSKI

The State Centered Approaches on Revolution and Civil Conflict

Rola państwa w procesie rewolucyjnym

There are multiple ways to look at conflict and revolution. Since revolutions are usually spectacular occurrences in history, almost everybody who studies them attempts to find the key to their understanding. Presented here are three attempts to 'open' revolution by looking at the role of the state in revolution. Theda Skocpol¹ devoted her study to structures from which the revolutions come. Charles Tilly² saw the state as a contender in the struggle for power. Finally, Jack Goldstone³ aspired to create a synthesis of the tangible (state crisis) and the intangible (ideology) to explain revolution.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

THEDA SKOCPOL – A STRUCTURALIST APPROACH

A basic premise of the structuralist approach to revolution is that they are not made but come naturally and inevitably from the system. Structure of the state determines if and when the revolution will happen. According to Skocpol, a leading theorist of structural-deterministic approach to revolution, "states – understood as potentially autonomous organizations located at the interface of class structures and international situations – [need to

¹ Skocpol, T., "States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China", Cambridge University Press, New York, 1979.

² Tilly, C., "From Mobilization to Revolution", Random House, New York, 1978.

³ Goldstone, J., Gurr, T.R., Moshiri, F., eds., "Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century", Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford, 1991.

be moved] to the very center of attention"⁴. Skocpol saw a state "as a macro-structure" and identified its parts as "administrative, policing, and military organizations headed, and more or less co-ordinated by, an executive authority"⁵. The organizations operate "in the context of class-divided socio-economic relations, as well as, within the context of national and international economic dynamics"⁶. In the analysis of revolution, Skocpol focused on the competition of autonomous organizations with dominant classes set in the international context. She observed that the state encounters conflict on two levels related to its basic functions as an order-keeper and as an international contender. Domestically, the state is faced with the rivalry of its autonomous organizations and the dominant classes competing over appropriating available resources. Internationally, the state guards its interests on the global arena. State's power lies in the ability to stabilize its internal functions and to maintain its international position. When the state cannot balance its roles, the revolution occurs. Skocpol, following Marxist line of reasoning, claimed that the state is inherently reactionary, interested in maintaining the status quo within the realm of existing economic relations. In the absence of conflict, it is equally advantageous for the state and the dominant classes to keep the subordinate classes where they are. At times, however, the state's interest in maintaining order and physical security forces it to make concessions to the demands of subordinate classes at the expense of dominant classes. If the structure of the state is not strong enough to withstand the competition of interests, a revolutionary potential increases. But, Skocpol argued, all of it happens in the international context. When the state is unable to compete internationally, either economically or militarily, it uses up resources normally allocated for domestic purposes to maintain its status abroad. Such situation occurs with a state which is backward or underdeveloped in, what Skocpol called, a "world time" or the global historic context. About revolutions she argued that they happen "in the countries situated in disadvantaged position within international arena"⁷. Skocpol assumed that there is always a possibility of revolution to happen. What prevents it is a firm state structure and strong standing of a particular state on the global arena. When state weakens economically or militarily, it structures begin to crack and the revolution occurs. Revolutions, therefore, are functions of structure rather than a consequence of popular grievances and demands. Skocpol described revolutions as "rapid and basic transfor-

⁴ Skocpol, *op.cit.*, p.33.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.29.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.29.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.23.

mation of society's and class structures [...] accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below"⁸. She added that social revolutions occur as "the coincidence of societal structural changes with class upheaval, and the coincidence of political with social transformation"⁹. In other words, when state is frail, the subordinate classes rebel and such process brings change in the political and social structures of the state. Based on Skocpol's definition, a revolution can be assessed only after it is completed. One has to look at the results in order to see what happened at all. Following Skocpol's logic, it can be concluded that state building is embedded in the revolutionary process. New state structures emerge during the revolutionary transformation. A new state which emerges after the revolution is "more centralized, bureaucratic, and autonomously powerful at home and abroad"¹⁰. The analysis of outcomes in Skocpol's theory is based on case studies of three revolutions: French, Russian and Chinese. Without looking at and comparing selected cases it is impossible to make a theoretical model of a 'state after the revolution' from Skocpol's inferences about the pre-revolutionary situation. The only assumption which can be made is that one set of structures will be replaced by another set of, probably, different structures. Without the benefit of formal data one cannot see what will be the standing of the state on international arena after its internal transformation is completed. Skocpol's theory of structural determinism has two primary problems. One is a complete dismissal of the role of the individual in societal transformations and a negligence of processes of mobilization. As far as 'people' are concerned she does not go beyond the assessment of 'class-based revolt' and the assumption of a revolutionary potential of the masses. Since these problems are more universal for all state centered approaches, they will be addressed later. One can only add that Skocpol very strongly rejected any relevance of voluntaristic influences on revolution. She dismissed any psychological or ideological claims to revolution as trivial and beside the point¹¹. The second problem of Skocpol's theory is her overall 'post-mortem' approach to revolution. She assumed that potential for revolution is omnipresent and that only strong state structure can quell it. She analyzed instances of historic revolutions for which both the outcomes and the international standing at the moment of their eruption was already

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.285.

¹¹ Skocpol modified her definite position on the subject in the article "Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution", published in *Theory and Society* (11/1982), where she admitted that people and their ideology do matter in making revolutions.

well known. While one can accept that the international position of the state is somewhat relevant to the state's domestic policy, it is really difficult not to question Skocpol's theory of the post-revolutionary potency of the state. From Skocpol's work one could expect that revolutions are necessary to the modernization of states. This very Marxist notion of progress, with revolutionary transformation intrinsic to a system, does not account for the evolutionary processes of change. Skocpol's theory is overly deterministic and places too much power on the side of the state. It allows for changes to occur only when state's self-controlling mechanisms become obsolete and have to be 'modernized'. Her theory, however, has one merit. The linkage she found between state's international standing and the domestic outlooks is important for the assessment of instabilities and potentially revolutionary situation.

CHARLES TILLY – THE POLITY MODEL

Although Tilly did not place state at the center of the revolutionary transformation the way Skocpol did, his polity model is nevertheless important. Tilly saw the state as one of the rivals in the power struggle. In his polity model¹², he identified the government, the contenders, the polity and the coalitions. The government controls "the principal concentrated means of coercion"¹³. Contenders are either members of polity if they have "routine, low-coast access to resources controlled by the government"¹⁴ or challengers if they do not. The coalitions form when any of the groups decide to co-ordinate their efforts and to act jointly. Conflict comes as a result of competition among and between groups. Conflict is a function of societal structures which include everybody in the polity – members, challengers and government alike. What makes Tilly's model interesting is its relative dimension. From power, which is gained relatively by one group vis-a-vis another group, to mobilization described as "the extend of resources under the collective control of the contender"¹⁵ everything is fluid. Although the government has control over most resources – which gives it an obvious advantage over other groups– it still has to compete with them to stay in power. Tilly distinguished between a revolutionary situation, in which the government is challenged by contenders or their coalition, and a revolutionary outcome. The revolutionary outcome is characterized by "the displacement

¹² Tilly, *op.cit.*, chapter 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.52.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.52.

of one set of power holders by another"¹⁶. What it means for the polity is that the structures or institutions do not have to be changed or altered. Simply, a new elite emerges and controls more resources than other groups. One could describe Tilly's model as self-contained. On the outside polity does not change, all movement is accommodated inside. However, while making interesting inferences about power struggle and mobilization, Tilly refrained from the discussion of individual motivations for competing for power. He did not make any international implications in his polity model.

JACK GOLDSTONE - THE STATE IN CRISIS

A most comprehensive yet multifaceted model of state's role in the revolution was one of Goldstone. Goldstone considered the breakdown of a state structure as an important, but not exclusive, conditions for revolution. He identified three conditions, which when in conjunction, will lead to the revolution. He looked at: economic pressures, disunity and alienation of the elites and mass mobilization. Goldstone limited, probably too narrowly, the resource crisis to just the fiscal crisis. According to his analysis, the crisis of state resources occurs when state expenses outrun the revenues. For a while the state may avoid crisis by borrowing funds. The problem comes when the debt mounts and there is no new money to pay it off. In result, "as money becomes both more essential and harder to find, the state grows more dependent on the goodwill of its creditors, and its freedom of action diminishes"¹⁷. The power of the state declines when its elites are alienated from the government and divided by their internal quarrels. According to Goldstone, the divided elites do not pose threat to the government. He pointed out that only the united elites are dangerous to the government because they "can simply stage a coup d'etat and then alter government policies"¹⁸. Nevertheless, the elites have a distinctly destabilizing influence upon the state. Some trends in elite divisions increase revolutionary potential (one being a weak state unable to withstand a challenge of broad anti-state elite coalitions). Third condition of the state breakdown is mass mobilization. The processes are usually generated by "the combination of adverse trends"¹⁹ with peasant or urban groups expressing their grievances and demanding changes. Goldstone argued that only the combination of three conditions necessary for the state breakdown will

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.192.

¹⁷ Goldstone, *op.cit.*, p.38.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.38.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.40.

create revolution. He maintained that the state may attempt to borrow more money, play the elites against each other or use coercion to quiet the popular unrest, but, if all of these happen at the same time, the revolution is inevitable. While he identified some particular factors which induce state crisis – population growth, price inflation, superpower influence, ethnic identity, etc.²⁰– he stressed the need of case studies in forecasting and assessing revolutions. Goldstone made an important innovation to the state-centered approaches when he expanded his analysis to include ideology as an additional cause of revolution. He saw ideology as a particular expression of grievances. When dissatisfaction is expressed in symbols it becomes more powerful. He pointed out that attention should be paid to radical ideologies of salvation (communism, fundamentalist Islam) because of their potential to rally masses around a cause.

INDIVIDUAL AND REVOLUTION – CRITIQUE OF STATE CENTERED APPROACHES

A most common fault of the state-center approaches to revolution is their neglect to see that the revolutions involve people. While Tilly and Goldstone pay attention to group mobilization and try to identify causes of collective action, Skocpol believes that only cracks in the structure will cause revolution. Contrary, the theory of Relative Deprivation²¹ centers on psychological causes of revolution. It looks at the individual and his or her perception of the world, from village to the global outlook, to see why revolutions happen. In synopsis, the relative deprivation theory is "a perceived discrepancy between man's value expectations and their value capabilities"²². The dynamics of conflict are determined by the width of a gap between what one gets and what one expects to get. A key concept of the relative deprivation theory is perception. State structure and institutions are not what they are but what they appear to be. If the regime is regarded as illegitimate, if the structures are seen as oppressive, people start to feel frustrated and deprived. Even if the state is successful in balancing its domestic and international functions, but people do not perceive such attempts as accomplishments, a problem develops. Of course the road from frustration to revolution has multiple steps, from identification and politicization of discontent to finally acting on it²³, but – nevertheless –

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

²¹ Gurr, T.R., "Why Men Rebel", Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1970.

²² *Ibid.*, p.13.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp.12-13.

the flow of rebellion is from the bottom up; it starts and centers on the individual's impression of reality. Problem with state-centered approaches is that they overlook grievances too easily and concentrate too much on state power. While overly defined on the level of the state, here Skocpol has to take blame for the rigidity of her model, they are overly simplistic at the societal level. They look primarily at social classes (Skocpol) or groups (Tilly) and neglect to identify the reasons why people belong to particular societal clusters. Finally, both Skocpol and Tilly, less Goldstone, placed their analysis in the grand historic context. This certainly allowed them to construct a workable self-contained models of revolutions. However, the dependency on outcomes to assess revolutions seriously undermines the applicability of their models in the recognition of the revolutions 'in progress' or in predicting them at all.

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STRESZCZENIE

Rewolucje są zjawiskiem współczesnym i znanym. Nawet jeśli, jako ich obserwatorzy, przyzwyczajamy się do tej formy przemocy i siły, konieczna pozostaje, z punktu widzenia teorii, analiza społecznego i politycznego kontekstu rewolucji. Rewolucja, rozumiana jako gwałtowna i dramatyczna zmiana ustroju wraz z towarzyszącymi jej zmianami społecznymi, wymaga zbadania jej przyczyn i konsekwencji.

Z wielu istniejących modeli interpretowania rewolucji, te skupiające się na analizie roli państwa mają szczególne znaczenie. Badają one zachowanie się państwa w procesie rewolucyjnym. Poniższe rozważania dotyczą trzech amerykańskich modeli, których autorzy starają się odpowiedzieć na pytanie o znaczenie państwa w sytuacji rewolucji.

Theda Skocpol uważa, że rewolucje są nieuniknione ponieważ ich przyczyny leżą w wewnętrznej strukturze państwa oraz są konsekwencją jego pozycji międzynarodowej. Skocpol głosi deterministyczny pogląd, że państwo ze swej natury jest reakcjonistyczne i tylko rewolucja może przynieść zmianę ustroju. Używając przykładów rewolucji francuskiej, rosyjskiej i chińskiej, autorka skupia się w swojej analizie na sile i mocy państwa, pomijając rolę i znaczenie jednostek oraz grup w procesie rewolucyjnym.

Charles Tilly włącza człowieka do swojej analizy. Dyskutuje on rolę grup i organizacji, z których jedną jest państwo, rywalizujących ze sobą o władzę. Jego model jest spójny i zamknięty, a wszystkie zmiany zachodzą wewnątrz państwa i nie mają znaczenia międzynarodowego. W tym więc widzeniu rewolucja jest problemem lokalnym, pozbawionym konsekwencji na arenie międzynarodowej.

Według Jacka Goldstone'a rewolucja jest konsekwencją trzech równocześnie występujących czynników: kryzysu ekonomicznego, alienacji i podziału elit oraz masowej mobilizacji społeczeństwa. Rewolucja i następujący po niej upadek ustroju państwa są możliwe w warunkach kompleksowego kryzysu. Model Goldstone'a w porównaniu z poprzednimi, jest najbardziej nowoczesny i dynamiczny. Obejmuje on na przykład dyskusję ideologii jako formy wyrażania niezadowolenia przez społeczeństwo.

Trzy przedstawione modele poddane są krytyce, przede wszystkim za ich schematyczność w interpretowaniu rewolucji. Teoria względnej deprawacji, proponowana przez Gurra uwzględnia a nawet podkreśla, że postrzeganie własnych frustracji przez społeczeństwo powoduje jego konflikt z państwem. Teoria ta jest historycznie niezależna i skupia się na analizie roli jednostek w procesie transformacji systemowej.