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R o m a n T O K A R C Z Y K

"Participatory Democracy" in the Doctrine of the American New Left

„Demokracja uczestnicząca” w doktrynie Nowej Lewicy amerykańskiej

„Участвующая демократия” в доктрине Новых левых сил Америки

THE CONTENTS OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

The idea of participatory democracy developed on the basis of youth movements in the 60's and found its fullest expression in the ideology of communes connected with the American New Left Thought. The youth communes, being in favour of such ideals as authenticity, liberty, easy manners, spontaneous mode of life, and specifically understood equality, have been looking for the possibilities of the realization of these values in participatory democracy.¹

The New Left thought and practice ascribed the double meaning to the idea of participatory democracy. First, it was understood as an autonomous social and moral value, which made possible the achievement of other values. Secondly, it was given a political sense — as a principle organizing the co-existence of the members of the communities. Both as a social and moral value and as an organizing principle, it was supposed to fill a specified role in the process of decision making by the communities, co-ordinating the postulates of equality and liberty and the search for the authentic self.²

One of the best characteristics of participatory democracy is found in the "Port Huron Statement" — the main programmatic document of

¹ T. E. Cook, P. M. Morgan [eds.]: *Participatory Democracy*, San Francisco 1971.

² Cf. L. T. Sargent: *New Left Thought*, Homewood 1972.

the American New Left: "As a social system we seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individuals share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation."³ The quintessence of this argument is made by the principle of direct and common participation of men in political processes.

In the opinion of the ideologists of the New Left, this principle reveals the causes of the weakness of the classical conception of a liberal democracy, and is also supposed to point out these assumptions of the participatory democracy which determine its power. The deepest sense of a democracy cannot be reduced to the freedom of expressing the political opinions: the essence of a democracy finds its expression first of all in the personal contacts between people exchanging, adjusting and shaping their social convictions. The authentic democracy requires that the mutual relations between people in various social dimensions be developed and maintained, that is not only the relation between "a worker and another worker, an employee and another employee, a teacher and another teacher".

These requirements are fulfilled neither by the conception nor by the practice of the bourgeois representative democracy. According to its assumptions, it is a form of an indirect democracy in which a group of individuals is represented by an individual in political processes. If the community is a closely-knit group this individual represents, to some degree, the political convictions of its members. This is not the case in the contemporary United States, the country — according to the ideologists of the New Left — of deep isolation between men, which seriously weakens the mechanism of a representative democracy. This isolation must have caused the decline of the significance of social groups, thus forming a firm basis for the development of the élites of power and money.

Participatory democracy would replace the bourgeois system of a bourgeois democracy with such a political mechanism in which the political mediation would be excluded. In the most radical formulations of the American New Left it would be the society composed of many communities, whereas one more level, that of the environmental power, should be added to the present political structure of the United States, and its competence be substantially extended. In both solutions, however, a politically mature individual would represent only himself in his matters.

³ The Port Huron Statement [in:] P. Jacobs and S. Landau: *The New Radicals, A Report with Documents*, New York 1966, p. 155.

The principles of participatory democracy were accepted by the majority of the New Left communes in the open voting with the participation of all members of the community. A similar procedure would not be possible in a large society, so after a period of experience, the New Left positively declares for the small community, sometimes even with the precisely limited number of members. The principles of participatory democracy were applied to be adjudicating of disputes resulting in the community. In the first place, physical and psychological pressures were excluded as a means of enforcing decisions of the community.

The liberty of an individual became the chief value, it was assumed that each sensible member of the community would simply accept the decisions and would not require external pressure, since he participated in the process of decision making. The ties of friendship and love, uniting the members of the community, should smooth over most disputes. If this weren't the case, the reasons of the people at odds should be thoroughly reconsidered and it should be decided whether the community had made an error in the original decision. To have confirmed the decisions of the community, also in the matter of dispute, would mean to put the people at odds in front of an alternative: either to subordinate to the decision of the community or to leave it.

It can be easily noticed that, according to this conception, the right functioning of participatory democracy depends upon the correct operation of the community. Both participatory democracy and the community in their functioning are conditioned by the proper correlation of the postulates of equality and liberty. On the one hand, the proper functioning of participatory democracy and the community depends upon the confirmation made by the behaviour of all its members, that they equally undergo the duties accepted in it, and similarly can profit from its rights. On the other hand, both participatory democracy and the community should provide the fullest liberty for all their members to express human authenticity. Until these requirements — though difficult to put to practice — are not fulfilled, one cannot speak, in the light of this conception, about the proper operation of either participatory democracy or the community.

THE FORMS OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Within the New Left ideology three forms of participatory democracy have gained fairly wide acceptance: consensus, decentralization and worker's control. Consensus is related to the operation of participatory democracy within small groups, mainly communes. Decentralization as-

sumes the modification of the hitherto existing structures of the capitalist political and economic system, in accordance with the assumption of participatory democracy; it was related to the ideas of student power, black power, women's power and so-called alternative institutions. Worker's control is a specific case of decentralization, related mainly to the economics and work relations.

Consensus is a key element of all the forms of participatory democracy and, at the same time, its autonomous form. It means such consideration of various possibilities in the discussion of a decision, so that this decision is the result of all people's unanimous and freely achieved agreement. The discussion should last as long as the disagreements are considered unimportant by the minority. Such a procedure of a political decision making, compatible with the notions of equality and liberty, requires that the individual members be patient, tolerant and consistent; it also requires the conviction about the value of commonly formulated decisions. Here is the procedure of reaching an agreement at the meeting of one of the New Left communities, working consistently with the notions of participatory democracy: "At an Underground Press meeting, the 'hippies' sat around in a circle and spoke in turn, arbitrarily. No procedure was followed. Some spoke articulately, others stupidly and irrelevantly. Eventually the most articulate and intelligent were heard and evolved as natural leaders rising to meet the occasion [...], no consolidating power or looking to secure a selfish personal control over the group were attempted." ⁴

One can easily notice that from the quoted fragment there evolves an age-long problem of a direct democracy; how to reconcile the natural inequality between people, for instance within the sphere of intelligence, with the postulate of equal participation of all participants? The author of the above text does not, however, pose this problem clearly.

In spite of some reservations in the New Left movements, consensus was looked upon as the best form of participatory democracy. The process of the common adjusting of the desires of the participants of consensus was initiated by themselves in a way "from below", and it remained at that level until its full achievement, or even its practical realization, was reached, as distinct from the political processes realized within the bourgeois democracy, accepting the decisions of the representative power separated from society and thus going as if „from above". Consensus does not recognize the division between those who rule and those who are ruled by others; the natural differences of skills between

⁴ J. Kornbluth [ed.] *Notes from the New Underground, An Anthology*, New York 1968, p. 190.

people do not have to form the basis for such a division, since love and respect of the participants of consensus can neutralize them successfully.

While consensus gained wide acceptance in the New Left movements as a method of decision making, decentralization was looked upon as the proper principle of power structure. Three basic functions were ascribed to it. First, it expressed the ideological protest against centralization, concentration and monopolization of power by the social élites of the United States. Secondly, it was supposed to fill a role of a specific way of the reorganization of power within the American system where it was possible. Thirdly, decentralization was to be the basic structural principle of the new society whose shape was outlined by the ideologists of the American New Left.

In the detailed provisions of the "City Charter of Oakland", formulated for the communities acting in this part of California, decentralization was accepted as a form of participatory democracy. The control of the authority of a given community was admitted to be the most essential element of decentralization. For example: the activity of the police situated in the area of the community would be under its constant control. This would make the police sensitive to the needs of the community and arouse the regard and esteem for the work of the police in the community.⁵

The New Left, in its reasoning on the subject of decentralization, referred also to the experience of some of New York schools being under the control of the parents of the pupils attending them. It approved of their assumption that the parents are most directly aware of their children's needs and of the problems of their neighbourhood. It attempted to overcome the practical difficulties that resulted from the subordination of the teachers to the different levels of educational authorities, whose decisions sometimes fell in conflict with the opinions of parents' educational councils.⁶

Decentralization would be the structural principle of the new model society appearing in the light of the statements of the ideologists of the American New Left. It is the vision of the society without a large metropolis made up of small quarters surrounded by green belts and agricultural areas. Each of such centre would aim at a relative economic self-sufficiency. The variation of the living arrangements in particular quarters would be assigned to encourage face-to-face contacts and heightened

⁵ Cook, Morgan: *loc. cit.*

⁶ Cf. M. R. Berube and M. Gittel [eds.]: *Confrontation at Ocean Hill-Brownsville, The New York School Strikes of 1968*, New York 1969.

interpersonal relations. Economic deglomeration united with political decentralization would form a model of the society carefully avoiding centralization.

The model of decentralized power, outlined by the ideologists of the New Left would be the ultimate result of the basic changes of the economical and political structure of the contemporary American society. Among the concrete projects of the urban and spatial treatments, adequate for the society with decentralized power, a dominating model is that with the concentration of people in the shape of a large circle, with the streets running radially towards the middle of it, with the residential districts in forms of concentric circles alternating with the green circles, water reservoirs and public institutions.⁷

According to the authors of the American New Left, decentralization in the United States should be initiated nowadays. It would consist in the deconcentration and redistribution of power controlled by the small élites of power, big business and the army, first among the representatives of the environments having power, but gradually, extending over wider and wider masses of citizenry in order to come, eventually, to people, that is to all the members of the community concentrated in communes. It was explained, though, how to make the present élites of power agree to the deconcentration and then decentralization of their power. Therefore, one is justified to raise objections to the lack of practical realism.

Worker's control, as a specific form of the decentralization of power, would be applied to the economy. It would tend to bring the working conditions under the constant control of workers. Worker's control, identified with the participation in policy making in the factory, would overcome the difficulties connected with work. This idea assumes that the workers have gained a great deal of professional knowledge and a high level of political awareness. It postulates that the decisions related to the important matters of the factory express the will of the whole body of the workers.⁸ While forming a model of the future economic system, the ideologists of the New Left rejected the materialistic and consumptive attitudes. Being in favour of the natural restraint in this aspect, they did not want to give up borrowing information from the developed technology. They admitted that technology, and most of all automatization, increases the amount of leisure and facilitates the organization of interesting forms of entertainment. Declaring themselves for the development of economy and the decentralization of power, they considered the

⁷ For more information see periodical "Utopus Discovered", Arlington, Texas.

⁸ R. Tokarczyk: *Utopia Nowej Lewicy amerykańskiej*, Warszawa 1979.

organization of many small productive and agricultural centres in the neighbourhood of the residential districts to be the best solution.

EQUALITY AND LIBERTY

Equality and liberty belong to the elementary components of each conception of a democracy. According to the New Left thought the main reason of the weakness of the previous conception of a democracy was the conflict between the postulates of equality and liberty, which, on the basis of them, was irremovable. Forming the conception of participatory democracy, it believed in the possibility of a unity equality and liberty in society. Admitting equality and liberty as social values, it emphasized, however, that liberty is an individual rather than social value, while equality is a social rather than individual value. It related the former mainly with the search for the authentic self by individuals, the latter — with the ideals of the commune and the conception of participatory democracy, that is with social matters.

Tending to include both equality and liberty in its conception, the New Left considered different cases of possible conflicts between them.⁹ These considerations were based on a series of distinctions: between artificial (social) equality and artificial (social) inequality, and natural (biological) inequality, between equal liberty and absolute liberty, between the equality of opportunities and the equality of satisfaction, and between variety and unity.

The frequent source of tension between social equality and liberty is natural inequality. People are not equal to one another as far as biological characteristics — strength and skills — are concerned. The liberty of making use of natural inequalities results in unequal achievements, causing in turn social inequality. The tendency to reach social equality requires some restrictions of the liberty of those who have greater strength and skills, so it strikes at natural inequalities. As opposed to the socialist thought, in the New Left conceptions, natural inequality causes more serious political difficulties than does social inequality. The former is irremovable always and everywhere. The latter is related to those types of social systems which were not accepted by the New Left which, in turn, tended to overcome it in its communes.

The levelling of the financial differences between the rich and the poor, resulting from the postulate of social equality, must conduce to the restriction of the liberty of the rich and then there evolves the con-

⁹ Cf. D. D. Raphael: *Tensions between the Goals of Equality and Freedom* [in:] G. Dorsey [ed.]: *Equality and Freedom*, New York 1977.

flict between social equality and full liberty. In the opinion of the authors of the New Left, in capitalism social inequalities are much more social than natural. Therefore, the critics of capitalism regard social inequalities as the only source of the conflicts between the ideals of social equality and liberty. The New Left emphasized that natural inequalities make also the harmonizing of the postulates of social equality and liberty difficult.

The difficulties are complicated by the fact that both equality and liberty may assume different shapes. Some of the forms of liberty may clash with other forms of it, while simultaneously they may be in agreement with particular forms of equality. According to the authors of the American New Left, the concept of "equal liberty" expressed by the postulate of the similar measure of liberty for every member of the community is a clue to solve these difficulties. At the same time "equal liberty" is both an important aspect of social equality and a relevant aspect of liberty. It would be supposed to serve both of these two values without producing conflicts between them. "Equal liberty" clashes, however, with "absolute liberty", because it sets certain restrictions on it.

The concept of "equal liberty" is very close to the deepest meaning of the New Left thought; it appears in this thought as a key value which is to co-ordinate social equality and liberty. The slogan about the equality of chances, which free competitive capitalism is familiar with, is a remarkable form of "equal liberty". It runs, however, into a conflict with the inequality of satisfaction of people who formally enjoy liberty to the same degree, but who — because of natural and economical inequalities between one another — have unequal social achievements. The equality of chances, stimulating natural inequalities between people, leads to social inequalities.

The American New Left confirms that inequality cannot be identified with dissimilarity. Inequality is a difference within the same kind, particularly the human species, and may be natural or social. When one compares the height of a tall man with the height of a short one, he deals with natural inequality. On the other hand, social inequality occurs when one compares the financial status of a wealthy person with that of a poor one. But there are also natural differences between people which do not imply natural inequalities. According to the authors of the New Left, biological distinctions of sex and race do not point out natural inequalities, so they should not be mentioned if one is going to present his justification for social inequalities. Similarly, some of the social differences between people such as, for example, the difference between their occupations, should not result in social inequalities.

In the light of this view, basic social inequalities (for instance class

distinctions) do not find any justification in natural inequalities. In spite of this, in many types of class political systems the essence of which lies in keeping social inequality alive, such justifications are applicable. Social inequality, as opposed to natural inequalities, is an artificial inequality, which may be eliminated by means of particular social actions, for example, by means of social or political reforms or revolution. On the other hand, natural inequalities can be reduced, but not altogether and in special cases only. Nevertheless, for the authors of the New Left, it is beyond all questions that natural inequality still prevents bringing the postulates of equality and liberty into harmony.

In the constitutions of bourgeois-democratic republics one may find such statements as: "all people are free and equal by nature". In agreement with the interpretation embodied in the New Left thought, such statements are normative and they indicate that people should be free and equal in society. Actually, in capitalistic conditions of living not all the people benefit from the privilege of liberty and equality. The conflicts between the postulates of equality and liberty in normative sense, and capitalistic reality which shatters them, is a political conflict just as a possible conflict between liberty and authority. However, a clash of equality and productive efficiency is of an economic character. The American New Left is convinced that participatory democracy, a principle of political functioning of the community, gives a possibility to overcome this first possible conflict. The second conflict is less relevant to the New Left, because the catalogue of its values does not comprise the possible increase in productive efficiency.

Contemporary democratic thought is based on the fundamental slogans of liberty, equality and brotherhood. Free-competitive capitalism, based on the principles of freedom and individualism, annihilated such values as equality and brotherhood losing, in this way, its democratic character. Yet, imperialism strengthened the split existing already between individual and social values. The American New Left believes that the commune is the very form of the organization of society in which mutual love of the members of the community would be able to smooth away tensions between liberty and equality, already accumulated.

While love is connected with equality, variety corresponds with liberty. In the American New Left thought, variety is manifested by the challenge to look for human authenticity under the banner of "do your own thing". According to the New Left thought, variety does not have to clash with equality, but it is in disagreement with uniformity. In this light many authors are made responsible for muddling equality with uniformity or even indentifying these two things. As a consequence of this, they make a mistake claiming that equality always disagrees with variety.

From the connection between variety and liberty they are ready to draw a conclusion that the conflict between uniformity and variety is the conflict between equality and liberty.

According to the New Left thought, there is, however, a certain connection between equality and uniformity when they refer to identity. Uniformity means identity visible from every point of view, whereas equality expresses identity only in some points of human status. But in the light of this no one can assume that already achieved aspect of equality means the next step towards uniformity. The New Left rejects such an argumentation, because this argumentation would clash with the slogan put forward by it — the slogan of the presence of variety even in the conditions of full equality. Distinguishing equal chances from uniformity, the New Left emphasizes that equal chances release natural inequalities and eventually lead to variety. So there is a certain correlation between equal chances and variety and between equal chances and liberty. Social equality usually turns against natural inequalities even before it changes into uniformity. In the opinion of the ideologists of the American New Left, striving after the recompense of natural inequalities with social equality would be against nature and would throw away the variety of the forms of the manifestation of human freedom.

SOME PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES

The practice of the American New Left communes has shown how difficult it is to realize the postulates arising from the idea of participatory democracy. For example, the postulate of equal participation of all the members of the community in political processes has to meet with the barrier of political predominance of outstanding individuals. Mass media go a long way to bring out and then to fix the position of leaders and political stars in people's memory. In this way those leaders and political stars gain the advantage over the rest of the community.¹⁰

Natural inequalities and dissimilarities between people, as it appears from the experiences of the New Left communes, belong to the main causes which tear the community ties apart. The vast range of talents, the gift to produce new ideas, the ability to speak suggestively, and finally the predominance of physical charm, are able to annihilate declarations about equal participation of all the members of the community in its life. Conscious self-limitation of natural predominance of individuals who have this predominance is not always possible in practice. Besides, in the case of the American New Left this self-limitation would be at vari-

¹⁰ Tokarczyk: *op. cit.*, p. 173—198.

ance with the slogan of human authenticity expressed by advice "do your own thing" and shared by the New Left.

Because of these reasons (among others), the attempt to root out all the manifestations of political leadership from the New Left communes has not been fully successful. However, as opposed to bourgeois representative democracy in which the authority of political leaders who create the élite has gained the dignity of value, this authority has not found a place for itself in the catalogue of values which are held by the advocates of participatory democracy. If the bourgeois concept of representative democracy keeps exclusive forms of authority alive or even develops them, the advocates of participatory democracy have been looking for such measures which would make the elimination of those forms possible.

The problem of the co-ordination of the partnership of communities, as far as the exchange of material goods is concerned, gave rise to certain doubts. The authors of the New Left, shaping the programs of the functioning of the communities, assumed that the self-sufficiency of the communities would be partial, and that these communities would be self-sufficient only in the field of elementary goods. In practice, however, contrary to expectations, many communes were forced to keep the closest relations not only with other communes, but also with economic and trading companies. Therefore, the inevitable need for shaping those relationships in such a way so that the principles of participatory democracy did not suffer from that, began to appear. The problem of the co-ordination, rankling the hearts of the ideologists of the American New Left, had been taken up earlier by the communist anarchists, but unsuccessfully.¹¹ However, this second-level problem has not been directly faced by the New Left, either. It tends to be assumed that men of goodwill can recognize the mutual benefits resulting from the co-operation of the communities, and can willingly co-operate.

The approval of the idea of the co-operation of the communes demanded that at least some elementary administration should be established. This, however, did not want to agree with the principles of participatory democracy. The members of some of the American communes decided to establish such a level of administration, but, at the same time, they did not give up the ambition to obey the principles of participatory democracy. Therefore, this level of administration was to operate on participatory democracy like any other level. That administration which had been chosen there by the principle of an agreement between com-

¹¹ For enlargement see C. Berneri: *Peter Kropotkin, His Federalist Ideas*, London 1942.

munes, was to represent the will of their members and to realize decisions made by the communities. In some of the groups of communes the administration was given fairly detailed instructions by the members of the communities; in some others it was assumed to be able to function as a representative of the group without any specific directions, due to its intimate knowledge of problems which were to be solved. In every case there appeared a problem of the protection of the interest of the community in its relationships with other communities, alien to the spirit of the New Left ideology, but remaining actual by the right of inevitable economic necessity. Nevertheless, a desire for the real co-operation, functioning also as an ideological and programmatic opposition to all the forms of evil resulting from economic and political competition characteristic of capitalism, was predominating. The real co-operation was to create conditions to develop mutual tolerance and to harmonize mutual relations between people.

As T.S. Cook and P.M. Morgan have suggested, there are four possible formulations of the concept of participatory democracy. These are:

1. A co-determination structure confined to rule-implementation authority; the principles of it are defined by the members of the community together with one particular authority connected with the hitherto existing form of government, or according to the selected norms of the system.

2. A co-determination structure including rule-making authority; such a structure can be established according to the principles defined by the members of the particular community together with the members of other communities, or according to the structures of authority existing in those other communities.

3. A self-determination structure confined to rule—implementation authority.

4. A self-determination structure including rule-making authority.¹²

Having presented all these possibilities of establishing the principles of participatory democracy, no one should doubt that the focus of the majority of the New Left thought is on the fourth of these models or formulations. Main difficulties which had appeared in case of this solution, were connected with the situation in which the independence of the members of the community in defining the principles of participatory democracy was limited by the necessity of taking into account different political structures of other communities or states, because of the desire to keep in touch with them. But it should be pointed out that the New Left communes accepted relations with states out of necessity only.

¹² Cook, Morgan: *op. cit.*, p. 6.

They treated them as a solution accepted for the time being. At the same time they claimed that all the formulations of the principles of participatory democracy should result from concrete social conditions and not from arbitrarily established rules.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

The ideas of participatory democracy belong to the most interesting and original elements of the ideology and experience of the American New Left. In spite of some specific features, they can be included in the vast trend of democratic thought which has been developed from time immemorial. This thought, complex as it is, accepts the assumption that in case of direct or participatory democracy it is possible for the whole human community to be in authority; whereas in case of representative democracy the same is possible for the representatives of the communities. This thought is based on the belief in the propriety of the realization of these values which are expressed by means of the slogans of freedom, equality, justice, love, brotherhood and social harmony.

Participatory democracy is, in its nature, close to general assumptions characteristic of direct democracy. However, if the well-known (historically) forms of direct democracy manifested specific aspects of the structure of the authorities, participatory democracy, having rejected those forms of authority which are based on the state, gives power to a stateless commune. If direct democracy embraces a relatively big — in respect of quality — circle of the subjects of authority, participatory democracy narrows this circle to the members of the quantitatively small commune which can count several people or, at most, tens of them. If in direct democracy political ties are the main binder joining the elements of the mechanism of authority, in participatory democracy any manifestations of mutual relations between people are to play a role of such a binder. If in direct democracy pressure plays an important role in the process of exacting the performance from the decisions made by the collective subject of power, in participatory democracy any pressure would be eliminated. If direct democracy is the principle of a political organization, first of all, participatory democracy is expected to perform twofold functions — the function of social and moral principle and that of the principle of political organization.

As the social and moral principle, participatory democracy is expected to form attitudes accepting, on the one hand, the equality of rendered duties, on the other hand, the equality of obtained values. The authors of participatory democracy, among the conditions necessary for shaping

these attitudes, mention such conditions as: rejection of relations of political and economic domination connected with the state; depreciation of material scale of values; social and emotional solidarity of the members of communities; proper level of culture, including especially patience, modesty, tolerance and mutual loyalty (straightforwardness).

As the principle of political organization, participatory democracy was expected to fulfill some of the functions of the substitute for rejected authority. While giving the characteristics of it, one can find Engels's words about the conditions for authority falling into decay very true: "becoming, eventually, a real representative of whole society, the state makes itself unnecessary".¹³ Contrasting authority with liberty, and raising liberty to the summit of the hierarchy of values, the concept of participatory democracy is a specific attempt of the transition from "the kingdom of necessity into the kingdom of liberty". Accepting the will of the community as the basis of power existing in this community, it tends to the identification of rulers with their subjects.

The authors of the concept of participatory democracy are, without any doubt, inspired with eagerness for bringing the notion of a democracy back to the deepest meaning of it, etymologically expressed in the slogan "Power to the People". This eagerness does not result, by any means, from the presupposition about the value of power as such, even if it is wielded by all, capable of doing this, members of a given community. It rather acknowledges the necessity for some elementary form of power in order that the community could work. The eagerness in question implies the gradation of the valuation of authority and assumes, without argument, that a system in which the members of the community could create and control the conditions of existence as well as the functioning of a social system organizing their lives and activities, is better than any other system.

The concept of participatory democracy contributes to enriching of mutual relations between liberty and equality. Granting primacy to liberty, it confirms that it is in agreement with the spirit of all democratic thought. The concept of participatory democracy ascribes an ancillary function to the distinguished forms of equality. This function is to be ancillary in relation to constant striving after as wide range of liberty as possible. However, the concept of participatory democracy does not make light of the problem of equality, knowing from practical experiences of American communes, that most often it is equality which decides what the very existence of the community should look like. The following words express this difficulty quite well; "Our submission to

¹³ F. Engels: *Anty-Dühring*, Warszawa 1948, p. 328.

the principle of equality is an act of the compromise of our personal aspirations and an urge of our individuality to assume appropriate inner life (yet our "I" expresses itself in the feeling of our distinctiveness and our different nature) with social necessity to accept in practice other people's ambitions and other people's individuality."¹⁴ The practice of the American New Left communes has again testified, that achieving such a compromise it belongs to the most difficult tasks participatory democracy is to face.

In its ideological functions, the concept of participatory democracy, ignoring the values of socialistic democracy, seemed not to notice the existence of it. On the other hand, it turns positively against both theoretical formulations and practical deformations of bourgeois representative democracy. For instance, distinguishing removable social inequalities from irremovable natural dissimilarities between people, it emphasizes that capitalism bases its persistence on social inequalities which are condemnable. Following in footsteps of Marxist thought, it points out the limitation of the bourgeois concept of liberty and individualism, which are reduced to small groups of the bourgeoisie. Demanding that the circle of the subjects of authority should be enlarged, the concept of participatory democracy shakes the myth about the wide participation of the capitalistic society in political processes. In the fact that in capitalism the right of taking the most important political decisions belongs to the closed élite of power and richness, it notices the source of dislike for such participation. Ignoring a role of the class perspective in the operation of political phenomena, it weakens the shaft of its own critique concerning bourgeois representative democracy.

The history of the communal movement is too short to formulate opinions on the practical usefulness and importance of the concept of participatory democracy, merely on the basis of it. It goes without saying that it has played a significant role, as far as this movement is concerned, as a temporary form of social and political experimental mechanism. It was possible to state that the members of communes felt better than in their previous conditions, the communal movement would deserve a name of a successful social and political experiment; then the ideas of participatory democracy would deserve a careful analysis. On the other hand, the fantasies concerning the transformation of the political structure of the contemporary American capitalism with the help of the gradual bringing the ideas of participatory democracy into practice, were quite naïve. First of all, the American New Left did not find any tre-

¹⁴ A. Burda: *Demokracja i praworzędność*, Wrocław—Warszawa—Kraków 1965, p. 64 and next.

mendous power of motivation which would be able to force conservative American society to take the new course of politics. It was the main reason of the failures of the New Left movements. Whether it was also the reason of the fiasco of the idea of participatory democracy — the future course of events will show.

Considerations and practical experiences of the American New Left, as far as participatory democracy is concerned, have shown once again that a capitalistic form of government is not based on very humanitarian principles. That is why, the American youth was trying to espouse a desperate cause against this system and tending towards the tradition into a completely new form of the communal system. In practice their attempts and visions turned out to be utopian. Nevertheless, these attempts and visions should not be completely ignored by the American society, for they refer to the negation of these basic principles and values on which the contemporary structure of this society is based. This negation has been undertaken, first of all, by young people who decide what the future directions of the development of American society will look like. The society in which the principles of government antagonistic to those in force are being born, must reexamine the political system in which it lives and the catalogue of values which it declares.

STRESZCZENIE

Idee „demokracji uczestniczącej” (*participatory democracy*) oceniane są jako jeden z najciekawszych i najbardziej oryginalnych elementów myśli Nowej Lewicy amerykańskiej. Mają one dwojakie znaczenie. Po pierwsze — były celem politycznym działalności uczestników ruchu — wartością, której osiągnięcie warunkuje możliwość uzyskiwania innych wartości. Po drugie — były zasadą organizacyjną przestrzeganą w większości wspólnot Nowej Lewicy amerykańskiej. Zarówno jako cel i wartość, jak i jako zasada organizacyjna spełniły między innymi funkcje metody podejmowania decyzji, zasady politycznej organizacji wspólnot, zbioru reguł zapewniających realizację równości i wolności oraz ich uzgodnienia, a także warunku właściwego przebiegu procesu poszukiwania autentycznego „ja”.

Idee demokracji uczestniczącej nawiązują do niektórych cech wcześniejszych koncepcji demokracji. W szczególności jednakże skierowane są przeciwko sformułowanym i praktycznym wypaczeniom burżuazyjnej koncepcji demokracji liberalnej, a najbliższe są chyba wzorom demokracji bezpośredniej.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Идеи „участвующей демократии” (*participatory democracy*) считаются одним из наиболее интересных и оригинальных элементов мысли Новых левых сил Америки. Они имеют двойное значение. Во-первых, они были политической це-

лю деятельности участников этого движения, ценностью, достижение которой обуславливает возможность достижения других ценностей. Во-вторых, они были организационным принципом, соблюдаемым большей частью групп Новых левых сил. Оба значения — как цель и ценность, так и организационный принцип — выполнили функцию метода принятия решения, принципа политической организации групп, сборника правил, гарантирующих реализацию равенства и свободы, а также условия для процесса поисков собственного „я”.

Идеи „участвующей демократии” имеют нечто общее с ранними концепциями демократии. Но в основном они направлены против формулировок и искажений буржуазных концепций либеральной демократии, а ближе всего они образцам непосредственной демократии.

