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POST-DEMOCRACY. REMARKS ON APPLICATION POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS OF THE CONCEPT IN THE CZECH CONTEXT

The concept of *post-democracy* is often used to describe the state liberal democratic regimes of the so-called West have currently reached. But is it possible to apply the notion broadly to any country? Does labeling a particular country as post-democratic always mean the same thing? Is there not a risk that the incorrect use of this term leads to an erroneous analysis of the state of democracy in the country in question? The text first focuses on the concept of post-democracy and its various definitions in the works of political theorists, while paying crucial attention to Colin Crouch's and Jacques Rancière's approaches. In the second part, the text tries to find out which of the concepts is more justified in the Czech context. Emphasis is placed on the criterion of the historical presence/absence of the socio-economic cleavage.

Keywords: post-democracy, Colin Crouch, Jacques Rancière, liberal democracy.

1. INTRODUCTION

A decrease in the level of trust in politics, a decrease in political participation and satisfaction with liberal democratic regimes, these are the most frequently mentioned accompanying manifestations of the crisis of liberal democracy in a number of European countries (Urbinatti, 2006). Whether there is a gradual transformation of democratic institutions in the countries concerned (Poland, Hungary) or the strengthening of anti-systemic political parties (Germany, Northern European countries), one thing seems indisputable – liberal democracy is no longer celebrating the triumph, as it appeared at the beginning of the 21st century.

In response to this development, some theorists began to talk about the so-called *post-democratic state* (Rancière, 1995; Crouch, 2000; Crouch, 2004; Mouffe, 2005; Mouffe, 2019; Habermas, 2012). The term *post-democracy* is intended to refer to a situation in which democratic political institutions and mechanisms formally remain, however, their

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gradual transformation takes place, reflecting decreasing participation in the political sphere (Rancière, 2004) or the interference of external actors in the political process (Crouch, 2004). In this situation, for example, Swyngedouw (2018) talks about the proximity of post-democratic models to authoritarian regimes.

The concept of post-democracy has naturally received diverse applications; when describing the reduction in the quality of representative democracies in general, without territorial distinction (Augustín, 2017), liberal democracies of the Western world (Crouch, 2004), countries of the European Union (Hrubec, 2005) or, finally, democracies in Central Europe (Kovács, 2010; Kantor, 2019).

In order not to consider the concept of post-democracy as a buzzword (as Augustín suggests; Augustín, 2017, 94), German political scientist Klaus von Beyme (2017) tried to clarify the possibilities and limits of its use by summarizing the approaches to date. He defined four basic mechanisms that exist in post-democratic societies. They are: (1) the oligarchizing of democracy, (2) the disruption of the separation of powers, (3) the rise of populism and (4) corporatism in the sense of the entry of economic actors, especially large (transnational) corporations, into the political process and influencing it (Beyme, 2017).

In the Czech environment, the debate on the topic of post-democracy has not developed much. The most comprehensive text is offered by the already mentioned Michael Augustín (2017), who seeks a solution to the post-democratic crisis of representative democracy in more inclusive forms of political participation and representation. An older debate on the concept of post-democracy in the collection of texts of the Centre for Economics and Politics (Brokl, 2006) brought a consensus that in post-democratic societies there is a restriction of citizens' access to the political sphere, which results in a decrease in satisfaction with the liberal democratic regime and an increase in frustration with politics as such. Doubts about the applicability of the concept to Czech, or however, the Central European policy was not formulated in the mentioned texts.

And it is precisely to this problem that the basic questions of this text concern:

- *Is the concept of post-democracy, or the concepts of post-democracy by different authors, conceptually linked exclusively to the environment of Western Europe?*
- *Is it possible to apply it to the Czech Republic?*

2. “EMPTIED” DEMOCRACY – COLIN CROUCH’S CONCEPT OF POST-DEMOCRACY

In order to answer these two questions, it is naturally necessary to conceptualize the notion post-democracy. In general, Colin Crouch's concept of post-democracy receives the most attention, according to which contemporary liberal democratic regimes are characterized by (1) the reduction of the influence of elected governments as a result of political and economic globalization, (2) the influence of economic actors within the political process, and (3) weak relationship between people/social groups on the one hand and political parties on the other; according to him, these symptoms are supposed to represent the post-democratic state in societies, which is manifested by numbness and dissatisfaction with politics³.

³ However, it must be added that the concept of post-democracy in Crouch's concept does not represent one pole of the binary concept of democracy – post-democracy. In Crouch's view, democracies and post-democracies are seen as ideal types between which individual countries oscillate, based on whether or not the following causes occur and to what extent they are represented in societies.

And why do liberal democratic societies transform into post-democracies? According to Crouch, three basic causes can be traced:

- [1] There is a numerical and influential weakening of the working class, which is the key supporting actor of liberal democratic regimes. This weakening reflects the processes of automatization, digitalization and robotization of industry that have been underway since the 1970s and 1980s.
- [2] The relationship between the electorate and political parties is changing. In particular, parties on the left had to respond to the transformation of their traditional electorate, now targeting heterogeneous interest groups, abandoning the primary emphasis on welfare-state policy and the inclusion of workers in the democratic process. In other words, the socio-economic cleavage is weaker and weaker (Crouch, 2012, 31).
- [3] Large (transnational) corporations are gaining more and more influence on the political decision-making of elected representatives. They can influence decisions on the amount of taxation or the setting of the labour code through their “blackmail” potential. In order to attract capital to the country and the associated creation of employment opportunities, elected representatives set rules that are favourable to companies – often without regard to the real needs of citizens, which may be in opposition to the needs of large corporations (Crouch, 2004).

This concept was originally applied by its author to the countries of Western Europe and North America, namely Great Britain and the United States of America. Later, it was used by him himself (see e.g. Kantor, 2019) and by some theorists (see above) to describe the state of liberal democracy in other countries as well. Nevertheless, or precisely because of this, the question arises, how justified is the widespread use of this term?

To understand Crouch's concept of post-democracy, it is necessary to show and understand how the author understands democracy itself. Crouch sees democracy not only as a set of procedures and institutions, but as a normative aspect of the life of the relevant political community. For him, the value of political participation is key, which he understands not only as active or passive participation in elections, but also, for example, as a meaningful political discussion (Crouch, 2012). This idealistic conception of democracy then serves as a model for evaluating real societies that should aspire to achieve such an ideal.

Some authors draw attention to a certain idealization of the history of democracy in Crouch's texts (e.g. Kalev, 2011). Crouch refers to the period of the late 40s and 50s of the 20th century in the environment of Great Britain (i.e. the post-war period) as a certain democratic *peak* (Crouch, 2004)⁴. According to him, this period was characterized by two key features – on the one hand, the strong participation of the working class in politics, and on the other hand, the associated large-scale government interventions in the economic sphere, motivated by the Keynesian concept of public policies. This means that Crouch understands democracy as a living phenomenon that undergoes changes over time. The above-mentioned processes and their impact on democratic regimes currently lead to the fact that the quality of democracy decreases and returns to the level it was at historically. Crouch's conception of democracy thus resembles a “parabola” (Crouch, 2004), where the quality of democracy oscillates over time. Thus, while in the case of Great Britain the

⁴ In other countries, Crouch identifies a different time period – for example, in North America and Scandinavia already before the Second World War (Crouch, 2004).

democratic curve was at its imaginary peak in the period after the Second World War and in the 1950s, it is currently on the opposite side of the axis.

The metaphor of the parabola helps us to understand the meaning of the prefix *post-*, which in democratic societies indicates the imaginary movement of the curve of the development of democracy towards negative values (whereas he does not work with the value zero in his theory). It can help us to divide the history of the development of phenomenon X into three periods (Crouch, 2004). The first period can be called the pre-X period; denotes the state when society lacks the X we are monitoring. This period is followed by period X, which denotes a state in which there is a high level of X in society. This period can be clearly defined in time, since the changes by which X affects society which X has not yet received are obvious. The third period is the period that we can describe as post-X. In it, other “qualities” enter society, which are responsible for the fact that the influence of phenomenon X on society decreases. X nevertheless left its mark on society. And Crouch claims that in the third period, i.e. the post-X period, society will begin to resemble the state in which it was in the pre-X period, but certain traces of X's influence on it will remain present in society.

At the same time, Crouch equates the parable of the development of democracy with the development of the working class; he places the pre-democratic period in the period when the working class gradually strengthened and fought for better living conditions. At this time, the legal anchoring of trade unions and their gradual transformation into politically active organizations takes place – generally in the countries of Western Europe, this is the period of the end of the 19th century (Crouch, 2004). At this time, there is also a struggle for political rights, with these struggles taking different forms in different countries. In general, it can be said that the pre-democratic era gradually brings political rights to all people, regardless of their class position, while the struggle of trade unions and the working class to win these rights plays no small role.

The subsequent democratic period comes at a time when the working class is the dominant social class; it is the support of a democratic political regime and governments promoting Keynesian policies and a strong welfare state. People are actively interested in politics and participate in it, because they see that their demands find a real response in the system. The standard of living of the working class is gradually increasing. Since the 1960s, however, along with the gradual transformation of industrial production and the strengthening of the consumer society (see e.g. Marcuse, 1991), the working class has been weakening, as part of them is moving to other sectors – primarily services. The fragmentation into several sectors and the weakening of the working class means that they are no longer able to organize themselves effectively in the fight for their rights and for a strong welfare state (Crouch, 2004). Socialist and social-democratic parties can no longer rely on the support of the homogeneous working class in the past, so they try to appeal to other groups of the population; but with uncertain results. Since the end of the 20th century, social policies and the welfare state in general have been weakening. Neoliberal policies are gaining momentum along with the entry of big capital into the political sphere. And it is precisely this period that Crouch calls post-democratic. People become politically apathetic because they do not see any party or organization in the political system that can represent their interests. The level of political participation is decreasing and the quality of democracy is increasingly moving away from the participatory ideal.

At the same time, according to Crouch, post-democratic society is in many ways similar to pre-democratic society; that is, a society in which the element of participatory citizenship is not sufficiently developed and in which participatory democratic mechanisms do not

fully function (Hrubec, 2005). Of course, there are many differences, but there is a clear parallel between the poor state of the working class (fragmented, less organized than in the past, without strong representation) and the insufficient level of political participation in society (although in the post-democratic era this level has a different cause).

This conclusion can lead us to the idea that we can find the possibility of solving the post-democratic state in history – that is, in the time when democracy was successful in society. It can be argued that if we want society to return to a state where democracy was in a satisfactory condition, it is appropriate to bet on recipes that helped society to transform from a pro-democratic state to a democratic one – i.e. mass organizing and strengthening of the working class and efforts about a policy leading to an increase in their standard of living.

This effort led “from below” (as opposed to systemic change promoted by the elite) would also limit the penetration of capital and neoliberal policies into public life. This could lead to a reduction in political apathy, an increase in interest in politics and an increase in political participation – because people would see that their political demands are being answered in the system. This would reverse the movement of the imaginary democratic parabola.

3. JACQUES RANCIÈRE'S HISTORICALLY UNANCHORED POST-DEMOCRACY

Jacques Rancière (2004), like Colin Crouch, places democracy and post-democracy in a certain historical framework. According to him, we can talk about post-democracy in the period after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the collapse of the Soviet bloc, which in the Cold War era represented the enemy of democracy in the form in which it manifested itself in the Western Hemisphere (Rancière, 2004).

However, this historical framework is not primary for him. The important thing is that together with the loss of the main enemy should come the end of politics (Augustín, 2017) – thanks to the discourse that democracy has proven to be the most effective way of governing public affairs. Basically, Rancière understands democracy as an agonistic framework for the exchange of views; but this very concept of democracy is declining in the era of the end of politics. On the contrary, consensual and formalistic practices that suppress dissent in society are gaining importance (Rancière 2004). Post-democracy is thus manifested on the one hand by suppressing the critical opinions of citizens (and thus actually the opposition as such) through emphasizing the necessity of managerial administration of public affairs, and on the other hand by emphasizing the efficiency or economic well-being that (liberal) democracy brings to people. At the same time, Rancière notes the key role of the rich elite (Rancière, 1999), which has a great influence on the political sphere and uses it to define and diminish the role of the poor.

In short, the basic thing that happens in post-democratic regimes is the gradual disappearance of the political sphere (Augustín, 2017). And finally, it is precisely the political sphere that forms the content of politics as such. Without it, as Olivier (2015) reminds, for example, politics is a meaningless administration of public affairs.

This interpretation is not fundamentally different from the one Crouch is working with. For him too, one of the important elements is the possibility of political participation and meaningful political communication. However, this is getting less and less in post-democratic societies – the political debate is dominated by political marketing, which diverts people's attention from important problems and systemic questions to marginal

ones. The possibilities of political participation are further reduced by the transformation of political parties, within which the possibilities of participation decrease and where the leader or a narrow group of people acquires more and more decision-making powers.

Nevertheless, it makes sense to talk about two different conceptions of post-democracy in Crouch and Rancière. The distinguishing aspect is the already mentioned concept of the relationship between the transformation of democracy into post-democracy and the previous historical development. While for Crouch, the development of democracy in post-democracy is firmly tied to time and history (similarly, Martel, 2015), for Rancière, post-democratic practices appear in connection with the state of democracy. The latter may be influenced by historical circumstances, but these circumstances are not the primary guide to the democratic “crisis” and the emergence of post-democratic practices. The primary cause is the disappearance of politicians from democratic regimes.

Although both authors identify similar symptoms in the case of post-democracy, in Rancière's concept we do not encounter the problem of applying the concept to a different environment. This indicates the possibility of applying his concept of post-democracy also to the environment of the Czech Republic, and possibly also to the entire Central European area. A key criterion could be the socio-economic cleavage, which in Central Europe did not develop continuously during the 20th century, but was renewed only after the fall of the Iron Curtain, and thus could not fully establish itself in the dimensions to which it developed in the modern era in Western European countries.

4. CONCEPT OF POST-DEMOCRACY AND MODERN CZECH POLITICS

Following on from the previous passages, this text broadly identifies post-democracy as the state of democratic development that liberal democratic societies have begun to reach in the last two decades. Within this state, formal changes in the liberal democratic setting do not occur, but the quality of democracy decreases in the sense of diminishing the influence of citizens on politics. That is, what Donatella della Porta refers to as a “minimalist version of the liberal vision of democracy” (della Porta, 2015), when liberal democracy is perceived in a strongly elitist way (della Porta, 2015) and the political participation of citizens is narrowed only to the act of elections itself (della Porta, 2015). At the same time, beyond the concept of a minimalist version of liberal democracy, the influence of economic actors is amplified in societies through the increase of their political power (Crouch, 2004; similarly, Rancière, 1999).

However, different authors define the causes of the establishment of the post-democratic state and its historical anchoring in different ways. And that is why it makes sense to ask the question which of the concepts of post-democracy presented above is better applicable (if at all) to the Czech environment, with an emphasis on the degree of compatibility of the Czech model of democracy with the Western one. As an analytical criterion, we will use the presence of a socio-economic conflict line, with the presence of which both Crouch (2012) and Rancière (1999) count on in “healthy” liberal democratic societies.

We stated above that, according to Crouch, the main force behind the maintenance and expansion of liberal democratic practices was the working class. At the moment of its weakening, the weakening of the support of parties of the political left, and at the same time the weakening of the socio-economic cleavage (Crouch, 2004), there is a decline in the quality of liberal democracy and the rise of post-democratic tendencies. In order to be able to apply this thesis to the Czech environment, we must first verify that in the Czech

context the conditions of the decline of the working class and the reduction of the importance of the socio-economic conflict line specified by Crouch are present and that they are related to each other.

According to Jiří Šafr (2008), after the fall of the communist regime, there was a drastic decrease in the number of people in blue-collar professions, and thus also a decrease in the number of manual workers. While skilled and unskilled workers made up over 62% of the Czech population in 1988, in 2006 it was just over 36% of the population (Šafr, 2008). Šafr also notices that along with the decline of the manual labour class, there is an increase in the number of people we describe above as the non-manual labour class. While in 1988 it represented 9.5% of the Czech population, in 2006 it was already 19.8%; its number practically doubled.

And more recent data shows that this trend continues. Fialová and Želinský (2019) state that between 2006 and 2016, the number of manual workers continued to decrease, which is supposed to be a consequence of the transformation of the industrial and agricultural sectors. On the contrary, the proportion of people who can be described as non-manual working class is constantly increasing. We thus see that the changes in the social structure of society, which Crouch pretends in his theory, also exist in Czech society. However, it is questionable to what extent these changes actually cause the weakening of traditional left-wing parties.

In Crouch's British example, the criterion of changes in the class of manual workers is linked to the development of the socio-economic cleavage. However, while in the countries of Western Europe the socio-economic cleavage continued to exist even after the Second World War, in Central and Eastern Europe it was artificially suppressed after the establishment of the communist regime. Four decades of totalitarianism, or the post-totalitarian regime then caused such a strong disruption within social classes and a high degree of levelling of society that it is impossible to talk about a socio-economic cleavage in such a form as in the countries of Western Europe.

Hloušek and Kopeček (2004) therefore talk about the fact that in post-communist and newly transforming societies, the conflict on this axis takes place between the so-called winners and losers of the transformation. That is, between those who profited from the fall of the (post)totalitarian regime, and those who found themselves in a disadvantaged social position after the transformation (Hloušek, Kopeček, 2008). Nevertheless, in the last decade of the twentieth and in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the socio-economic cleavage of transformation is approaching the standard socio-economic cleavage. It corresponds to the continuation of the economic and political transformation of society, the greater intensity of the issues of wealth redistribution, etc., on which these cleavages are built in the countries of Western Europe.

In general, it can be said that the significance of the socio-economic cleavage of transformation has gradually increased in Czech society since the beginning of the democratic transformation (Bureš et al., 2012). While the main cleavage of transformation in the first free elections in 1990 was the form of the regime, later, together with the economic transformation and the transformation of the ownership structure in society, the socio-economic cleavage of transformation in society is becoming more important for voters. Since the parliamentary elections of 1992, Bureš et al. (2012) identifies a sharp division of Czech society into supporters of the left and the right, which reflects the projection of voters' interests into their electoral preferences. Vlachová states:

Gradually, as significant reforms were carried out and society returned to a more peaceful state with the everyday problems of a country of democratic capitalism, people, especially on the left and in the centre, brought their subjective orientations closer to the objective values and political programs embodied by their political representatives (...) Left-wing voters are starting to differentiate themselves more and more from right-wing voters (Vlachová, 1998).

Based on the cleavage of transformation in the Czech party system, two main poles gradually crystallized: the Civic Democratic Party as the main pole on the right (representing the interests of the so-called winners, see above) and the Czech Social Democratic Party as the main pole on the left (representing the interests of the so-called losers). These poles are clearly visible since the elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic in 1996, when the party spectrum is simplified and both parties occupy the position of hegemon in their part of the party spectrum (Šimoník, 1996; Vlachová, 1998; Maškarinec, 2019).

Subsequently, the socio-economic cleavage of transformation already holds its privileged position in the Czech party system, all relevant political parties are clearly defined on the left-right axis (Bureš et al., 2012), at the same time, voters are gradually beginning to identify themselves on the right-left scale. According to Vlachová (2002), 95% of the Czech population could be placed on this axis in 1996, even in the 1998 elections this number remained practically the same. The above-mentioned ability of voters to identify themselves within the right-left scale points to the existence of class consciousness among voters and their corresponding voting behaviour.

However, socioeconomic cleavage was not the only determining criterion of the voting behaviour of individuals (Kunštát, 2007). A personal class affiliation was one of the factors influencing voter behaviour (Linek, Voženílková, 2017), but not the only factor. Although there are doubts about the validity of the thesis about “democratic class struggle” – that is, sociologically conditioned class voting in post-communist countries (see e.g. Smith, Matějů, 2011), we can say that together with how economic reforms and changes in the ownership structure in society brought the Czech countries of Western Europe. In other words, we can no longer fully talk about the specific environment of a post-communist country. This is confirmed, for example, by the just-mentioned research by Smith and Matějů, who pointed out that since the 1998 parliamentary elections there has been a strengthening of class-based voting behaviour, namely a greater inclination of the working class to vote for left-wing parties (Smith, Matějů, 2011; Večerník, 2009).

After the 2010 parliamentary elections, the hegemons on both sides of the political spectrum are gradually weakening; both the ČSSD on the left and the ODS on the right are losing voters who seek representation of their interests in other parties. While in the parliamentary elections in 2006 the combined electoral gain of the ODS and ČSSD was over 67%, in the 2013 elections it was just over 28% and in the 2017 parliamentary elections the combined gain of the two former hegemons was roughly 18.5% of the vote.

If we look at this transformation through the lens of a spatial analysis of election results (Maškarinec, 2019), we will see that the voters of these parties resorted to new political entities. Regions inclined to vote for the ODS and the right in general – i.e. regions more developed (Maškarinec, 2019) and less industrialized – recorded higher support for new center-right parties (TOP09 or the ANO movement in 2013; see Pink, Voda, 2014), while industrial, peripheral and less developed regions that have historically voted for the left –

especially ČSSD and KSČM – recorded higher support for Úsvit, SPD or ANO (the latter underwent a change in voter orientation) in 2017 (Pink, Voda, 2014).

We can thus see that voter support has moved away from the ODS and ČSSD, but it has not gone in the same direction. According to Pavel Maškarinec, it can be concluded from this that the socio-economic background of the voters still plays a role, at least to a certain extent, in which parties they vote for – at least if we consider that in “poor” regions more often people who can be classified into lower social classes live, while in “rich” regions, those that we can classify as a higher social class. Using this example, however, we cannot reliably demonstrate whether the extent to which the parties elected by them promote their class interests is still a decisive factor for individual classes, i.e. whether the socio-economic cleavage plays a major role in their decision-making for these voters, or whether they make decisions on the basis of something another – for example, the leaders of individual parties (Crouch, 2004) or their perceived competence to deal with current issues.

In any case, we have shown above that in the Czech environment we can trace both the breakdown of the historical class composition of society, where more than half of society was made up of members of the manual labour class, as well as a significant decrease in support for the traditional left, which, according to Crouch's thesis, represents the interests of this class.

However, it must be emphasized: although these two trends may be related from today's point of view, we cannot trace this correlation in time. The decline of the manual labour class was fairly constant over time; we can trace its beginnings to the turn of the 80s and 90s of the 20th century and it continues until today. However, the development of voter support for the traditional left shows a gradual and constant negative trend only in the last ten years⁵.

The data show that voter behaviour in the Czech environment is still influenced to some extent by class affiliation (Maškarinec, 2019). However, this does not clearly show that the socio-economic cleavage of the transformation itself has an effect on the voting behaviour of voters. Different voting behaviour can also be explained by other mechanisms. According to Marcela Voženílková (2018), in the Czech environment, the leader effect plays a large role in voter decision-making – people decide which party to vote for, on the basis of who heads the political party. According to her, this was particularly important for voters of the ČSSD and ODS parties. Voženílková states:

Since the election of the ČSSD and ODS is programmatically different and reflects a different side of the class conflict line, the effect of the leaders could have been “hidden” under the label of programmatic left-right voting. Voters without ties to political parties, and therefore potentially volatile voters, had only stable parties to choose from in previous years due to the frozen party offer. But as soon as the offer changed, those voters who previously made decisions based

⁵ If we look at the development of where people are placed on the imaginary axis of right-left political orientation, we will see that, paradoxically, most people identified themselves as left-oriented in 2013 (over 40% of voters; CVVM 2019). Since then, the number of people who align themselves with the left has been decreasing, in the first quarter of 2019, only 23% of voters aligned themselves with the left. In proportion to this, the number of people who aligned themselves with the centre or the right gradually increased.

on leaders among stable parties began to make decisions for new, populist parties (Voženílková, 2018).

This explanation finds support in the data. A post-election analysis of voter decision-making in the 2017 parliamentary elections (Median 2017) shows that the personality of candidates and their perceived morality and honesty is the most important parameter for voters. The perceived competence of the parties on individual issues shows a similarly high value. The classification of parties on the right-left scale and specific proposed solutions from party programs are less important for voters. And according to Voženílková (2018), for example, in the case of the personalization of electoral decision-making, it may not be a new phenomenon.

In summary, if Crouch reflects on the development of British society and the gradual erosion of the socio-economic cleavage since the end of the Second World War in his thesis on the post-democratic state, it gives him the opportunity to observe both the rise of the manual working class and its influence after the Second World War, as well as its gradual decline. At the same time, this development is not interrupted in Britain, because the democratic regime continues. This leaves the possibility of the existence of an authentic class conflict in society and the subsequent reaction of the political parties to the given cleavage. The socio-economic cleavage in British society also corresponds to the standard theoretical definition and other variables do not enter into it (such as the consequences of economic transformation – see the Czech case).

In contrast, the post-communist situation is different. Moreover, due to the development of party systems and cleavages of transformation in Central European countries, the possibilities of applying Crouch's concept are rather debatable. Hloušek and Kopeček (2004) point out that electoral volatility within the party systems of post-communist countries is significantly higher than in the party systems of Western Europe; the different understanding of the concepts of right and left and the associated value orientation of political parties is also problematic. The socio-economic cleavage, on the weakening of which Crouch bases his argument, takes on a different form than in the British environment due to the different historical anchoring and organization of party systems in (not only) the Czech environment; last but not least, it is due to the levelling of society brought about by the communist regime. Because of this fact, there is no pure and long-term form of class conflict in the Czech environment. In the Czech environment, this conflict is renewed at the beginning of the 1990s, bringing with it an ethos of coming to terms with economic transformation, which disturbs the “purity” of class struggle in the form that we can trace in the British (and generally Western) environment.

The different form of class conflict and its anchoring in the economic transformation of Czech society at the beginning of the 1990s, plus other variables entering into the voting behaviour of the Czech population, which we mentioned above. These are the reasons why the concept of post-democracy, which Crouch builds on the weakening of the relationship of the manual working class to traditional left-wing parties and the weakening of the socio-economic conflict line at the expense of other conflict lines, cannot be applied without problems in the Czech environment.

However, does this mean that using the concept of post-democracy in the Czech environment is not possible at all? Not. As we have shown above, the concept does not need to be derived from a particular historical context. The concept of post-democracy, as understood by J. Rancière, appears following the disappearance of the “political” dimension from the political sphere. This means that, like Crouch, post-democracy is not

limited to a certain setting of the socio-economic conflict line or a pure form of class conflict. According to Rancière, one can talk about post-democracy when discovering a certain type of political practice in which political conflict is dampened (similarly see Wilson, Swyngedouw, 2014), which we must understand within his perception of democracy as an agonistic framework for the exchange of opinions.

For Rancière, the fact that a new consensus on the basic settings of its functioning and basic political issues is gradually deepening in a given society is key, which manifests itself in the gradual distancing of citizens from the political sphere (see Wilson, Swyngedouw, 2014). Politics is then presented as an exclusive space for technocratic decision-making by experts who, after all, have better knowledge of the functioning of society than ordinary citizens. The political competence of the citizen is thus diminished in favour of expertise (by the way, similarly see Crouch above).

Can we talk about a similar trend in the environment of Czech politics? In recent years, a number of political scientists have pointed to the phenomenon of technocratic populism (e.g. Havlík, 2019) or business parties (e.g. Hloušek, Kopeček, 2017) in Czech politics. Both point to the existence of a post-democratic state, as perceived by Rancière and partly by Crouch (see above).

Let's start with business parties and stick to the basic conceptualization of business parties as presented by Hloušek and Kopeček (2017). They understand them as parties created on the basis of the efforts of their leader, who comes from a business environment, to create a tool to influence the political situation in society to his advantage. The activity of such a party is strongly centralized, it does not rely on a broad membership base, nor can it rely on pre-existing political influence in state structures during its creation. Business parties are also generally united by their ideological flexibility and treatment of political issues and personalities as marketing products (Hloušek, Kopeček, 2017). The authors point to the repeatedly successful ANO movement as one of the examples of such a party.

This is also noticed by Vlastimil Havlík (2019), who talks about similar characteristics in connection with the ANO movement. Havlík also develops the concept of technocratic populism, or of technocratic governance, which he associates with the ANO movement (Havlík, 2019). Among other things, it is characterized by centrism, ideological openness and anti-political rhetoric (Havlík, 2019; similarly see Giglioli, Baldini, 2019).

The technocratic rhetoric of the ANO movement favours “expert” solutions to problems; the movement itself relies on the person of a leader who, in the logic of his reputation as a successful businessman, wants to run the state as a (family) business (Babiš, 2017). Political debate and political problem-solving tend to be assigned negative connotations, they are referred to as ineffective (Havlík, 2019). Experts from the business sphere, who are presented as a contrast to standard politicians, are often called in to solve problems (Havlík, 2019).

This rejection of politics as a conflict of ideas and the idea that there is only one correct and effective way of managing politics, which takes over centralized practices from business, is the essence of post-democracy. External actors enter the political structures, who with their anti-political approach push the conflict outside the standard political framework and reduce the sphere of the political with their rhetoric and activity; at the same time, the drive for centralized decision-making and state management, identified as the opposite of classical politics, helps suppress critical voices (Havlík, 2019).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The final statement thus appears to be justified, that if we perceive post-democracy as a state caused by the absence of certain features in the liberal democratic regime, we can also respond more easily to the absence of these features and aim for their addition – this can then take place with respect for the context of the emergence of this state in each individual political municipality in which it occurs. We have shown above that Crouch's “historical” method of the concept of post-democracy is not suitable for application to the Czech context, due to its anchoring in the different historical development of the Western European environment, on which Crouch bases his concept. In contrast, the concept of post-democracy of J. Rancière appears to the authors to be suitable for application to the Czech environment. This concept is not conditioned by a specific historical context, but is based on the current socio-political setting and analysis of the behaviour of actors present in the political sphere.

We have also shown above that there are actors in the Czech environment who bear certain post-democratic characteristics; however, their very existence is not in itself a confirmation that we can speak of Czech politics or society as post-democratic; after all, that was not even the goal of this text. However, if we recognize that we are in a post-democratic state, and if we want to look for a way out of it, referring to the above, it is not appropriate to look for this way in history, as it would follow from Colin Crouch's concept of post-democracy. We have to discover the way out of the post-democratic state ourselves.

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