THE ANTI-SYSTEMNESS OF THE PROTEST PARTIES*

by Bartłomiej Michalak

A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

Last decades of the past century, as well as the current one, may be characterized by the increase of political role of the movements that are called "the protest parties." Scholars, journalists and politicians put a lot of attention to that phenomenon. However, it is focused just on selected elements of the problem. Beginning from the 1980s European public opinion may observe the rise and development of groups of ecologists. The unexpected electoral success of the new type of party is called "the New Populism." Back in the 1990s it caused many concerns, opinions and discussions on the issue whether such parties are harmful for modern and stabilized western European democracies. At the turn of the century the political scene has been dominated by new forms of activity, which are the anti-globalization and alternative globalization movements.

The presented circumstances have convinced many researchers to analyze the issue. Among others some very successful ones must be men-

tioned – Lipset and Rokkan (1965) freezing theory of the European party systems, realignment of cleavages, crisis of the conception of the welfare state, growth of the populist, rhetoric in western political discourse, increasing volatility of electoral behaviors due to the domination of political marketing and the emergence of the cartel party in Western European which has been described by Katz and Mair (1995).

Such a rapid interest in the issue led to some serious confusions between certain notions. The research category – "protest party," if understood as the antithesis of the traditional, stabilized, political party, has various meanings (Herbut 2002:135). As a result one may point some misunderstandings and hasty judgments. Frequently columnists and analysts claim that such parties have a destabilizing influence on the democracy. Commentators, who show higher political involvement, threaten the public opinion with the return of fascism and even more – the call the society to protect the values of liberal democracy. Such comments sometimes have notable effects. For example, in 2000 the Freedom Party of Austria (*die Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* – FPÖ) – party included in the New Populist, was invited the People's Party of Austria (*die Österreichische Volkspartei* – ÖVP) to create a coalition government. In reaction to that, both the state and the new government were boycotted by the EU and the ambassador of Israel has left the country.

Due to all of that events expressions such as "ultra-leftism" or "populism" have become political labels – epithets used in political fights. If somebody uses any of these he probably is willing to discredit his adversary. What is more important here, he can also express that way a more or less hidden judgment of values. In other hand, the use of these expressions, once as epithets and some other time as a political science notions, leads to extension of the protest parties category. Therefore, the term loses both its meaning and its cognitive sense.

FEATURES OF THE PROTEST PARTIES

Trying to counteract the described trend and looking for appropriate definition of the concept, it should be noted that the protest parties are

relatively young, low institutionalized, frequently not deep-rooted within their party systems, where there is no "grand ideology," as it is traditional families of political parties.

Secondly, their genesis is related to deep structural and mental trans-formations, which have begun in Western Europe in the second half of the 20th century. The process of intergenerational changes of values has had a significant impact on the transformation of the cultural norms of advanced industrial societies. The return from the material issues – including economic development, social security, social progress – to the values which have been named by Ronald Inglehart, (1970, 1990) as "post-materialism" has focused attention of the public opinion on new policy issues. It has given the new social movements an impulse for action. It divided the existing traditional political parties, created new ones and modified the criteria according to which people judge their own individual sense of welfare. It began the New Politics. These new values characterize by more "qualitative" dimension of human life-style or increasing individual possibilities of political participation by the citizens.

Thirdly, emergence and future electoral success of the protest parties were a consequence of the crisis of democratic representation. The tradi-tional political parties were afflicted by the crisis. This was an effect of unbinding relations between the political parties and civil society, a domination of political marketing and a shift of political competition from centrifugal to centripetal. The socialists have accepted the capitalism as the proper economic system and the liberals and the conservatives have agreed on equal and fair policy of growth. This meant expansion of insti-tutions of the welfare state in Europe. Key decisions regarding the manage-ment of politics were made by main political actors. It also meant that the voters often had no knowledge about the mentioned deals. It has limited the arena of political competition and was subsequently institutionalized in the form of inter-parties consensus on "the most important state issues." The consensus prevented traditional political parties from doing true politics based on a democratic conflict. It forced them to make continuous deals. This is the way they have lost a significant part of their ideological core and alienated from groups which they should represent. Thus a dis-

like for existing political parties speared within the society, which was discouraging to participation in the whole political process. In the meantime, new political parties and social movements have offered a new kind of collective forms of political identification.

Fourth, the protest parties exceed (in some measures) traditional model of inter-party competition, closed within the left-right dimension. The essence of the protest parties is that they protest against specific elements and mechanisms of the political system and discord in the general application of consensus outlined in the sphere of political conflict, the existing procedures, institutions and actors. Protest of the material sphere depends on the ideological family that the party shall be associated with as well as what issues are discussed by the party. Other features may also be important, but it always has to be directed against the current order and the traditional parties which represent that order. In that sense they are neither leftist nor rightist, but "anti-systems." The main features of each protest party are: (l) political anti-consensualism reduced to rejection of the state's policy in the chosen areas of its activity (e.g. previous immigration policy or welfare state); (2) using the anti-party formula as an alternative way of practicing politics; (3) strong expression of its message which is manifested by using diverse, innovative, and often controversial and surprising forms of political activity and by the use of sharp, based on negation, and not infrequently on aggression, political language; (4) populism protest that is based on populist methods and slogans which is to apply outbidding propaganda and delegitimizing rhetoric during the election campaigns and other current political activities; (5) social mobilization orientation, which makes protest parties similar to the traditional social movements, (6) low level of institutionalization (low number of rules, weak interior organization, relatively high rotation of members, weak members' attachment to party's structures) and last but not least (7) anti-systemness (see Michalak 2008: 24–37). Now it shall be asked what does the anti-systemness means and in what context this applies to the protest parties? I will try to answer to these questions in next part of my article.

THE ANTI-SYSTEMNESS AS THE THEORETICAL CATEGORY

The term "anti-system party" in the political science literature has appeared and been propagated but not created by Giovanni Sartori who is an Italian scholar. It was in the early 1960s. The anti-systemness category was an important element of his theoretical conception of the polarized pluralism. This theory achieved full completion in Sartori's book *Parties and Party System. A framework for Analysis* (Sartori 1976, see also 2005). At that time the term appeared also in papers of other authors, who used anti-systemness category to describe particular kind of parties (first of all the fascist, Nazi and communist parties) calling them sometimes as "participated in order to destroy." In more general sense the concept of the anti-systemness has been used for a party or a group with non-democratic ideals or whose supporters or members engage in unconventional, illegal or even violent behavior (Capoccia 2002: l0-l2). The starting point for Sartori was to identify the parties in the political arena (especially Italian communists and fascist), which can be described as an opposition to the political system in which they operated. The opposing was not limited only to criticize the government, which is quite usual situation in a democracy, and to present the alternative solutions to important social issues, but it was more comprehensive. We have to remember of Otto Kirchheimer's classical conception. He distinguished between two forms of oppositions, the "loyal opposition" which pursues its goals in harmony with the rules of a system which they operated in and the "opposition of principle" which is trying to realize incompatible goals with the constitution requirements of a given system (Kirchheimer 1966: 237). The opposition against actual government will be only one of the many objections to all participants of the political competition in that case. This anti-establishment feature is an epiphenomena of the essence criticism against the whole political system. This kind of opposition focuses itself on political mechanism and its principles and rules on which Western democracies are based. Sartori (2005: 117–118) has pointed that anti-system can be conceptualized in a broad and a narrow (he has said "strict") sense. Over time the degree and the intensity of an "anti-attitude" are tended to vary. He has claimed furthermore that not all the anti-system parties are

such in a same sense. The negation may cover a wide span of different attitudes ranging from "alienation" and total refusal to "protest." The protest parties can be less or more temporary and durable and surely they are less anti than the parties expressing an alien or alienated ideology. The anti-system parties have similar nature and they create the same political consequences in spite of many differences, which can be a significant. This consequences can lead for example to decrease of level of political legitimacy of the democracy, increased polarization of the party system and its radicalization and so on. The minimal common denominator of this kind of parties, what is characteristic for such groups, it is a like Sartori has said "delegitimizing impact" on the political system which they operate in. In this meaning the category of the anti-systemness can be defined as a political activity towards "undermining the legitimacy of the regime it opposes." The narrow definition of the anti-systemness, in turn, focuses on the ideological character of that party. The opposition concerns the principles of the system and the rules on which it is based on. In the latter case the anti-system party isn't interested in a normal alternation of power even if they have such possibility but they want to change the whole political system which they operate in. The anti-system party in the strict definition represents an extreme ideology in comparison to existing traditional political parties.

The conception of the anti-systemness which has been proposed by Giovanni Sartori is characterised by gradualism. We shall determine then the range of the anti-systemness, which should be used then to build the scale and intensity of the opposition against the political system. This opposing can be put on the continuum from total refusal to mild defiance of the system. These two demarcation points have certain an analytical meaning. Total rejection of the system prevents legal activity of any political party. It changes the status of political parties to rebel or terrorist organization. However, with the opposite point of the scale there is a problem with indication of its designates. It is completely useless if we do not clarify them. The mild defiance of chosen elements of the system is usually present inside political programs of all parties. It concerns especially those organizations which are right now in a opposition. The change of some part of the social and political reality, which is not functioning well is one

of the main goals of every opposition political party. In their opinion the system could always functioning better. In practice it means that demarcation points of our scale are unacceptable. In the first case the anti-systemness is so strong that it prevents a practical and legal activity. This means exclusion of such party from the system. In the second case it is so weak that we might ask the question if such attitude is still proper with the meaning of the anti-systemness.

Some scholars have claimed that category of the anti-systemness can be specified by relating to the "strength" of a anti-system. Some of them prefer only the "strong" meaning. They indicate the name "protest party" only those parties whose wishes and behaviors are characterized by a high degree of delegitimization of the political system. These groups undermine legitimacy of the regime and the main values of the democracy. They are dysfunctional for democracy indeed (some of the communist parties, in particular the traditionally Marxist oriented ones, leftist or fascist). On the opposite we have a concept of "weak" anti-systemness. It is not rejection of the liberal-democracy regime but of some of political competition rules, which concerns primarily to the functioning of the party systems and the directions of state's policy in selected areas. The second type of the anti-systemness characterizes the protest parties while the first is *par excellence* extremists (Herbut 2002: 134–135). This does not mean, however, that "strong" anti-system party (strict definition of anti-system like has been explained by Sartori) is always revolutionary party. Such a party is surely anti-system but an anti-system party does not need to be, in any certain sense and even less in actual practice, extremist and/or revolutionary. This is because such attitude may apply to long-run goals and particularly to verbal goals. It is enough that this kind of party is anti-system verbally (Sartori 2005: 118).

It is also important that an ideology content does not determine an anti-system party. Giovanni Capoccia has clearly pointed that content relates to the basic values of the regime within which the party operates. This means that anti-systemness need not to be outlined by an objective and predetermined ideology. It may be a contextual and settled at the realities and rules of the regime. In this way you can make another distinction of anti-systemeness category: "situational" (Capoccia calls it "Rela-

tional Anti-systsemness") and "ideological." In Capoccia's conception an attribute of a party's relational anti-systemness are: (1) distal spatial location of its electorate form that of neighboring parties; (2) low coalition potential; (3) outbidding propaganda tactics and delegitimizing messages which means using something what Pierre-André Taguieff has called the protest populism (1995: 32). A principle opposition does not necessarily relate to the democratic system. It could concern any of the regime. Moreover, the opposition against some of the system's principles of the system does not mean an automatic refusal of the basic values of democratic competition. This is the most important feature of the Relational Anti-systemness (Capoccia 2002: 14–17).

To sum up these considerations can be noted that broad (otherwise weak or relational) anti-systemness means that there is relevant ideological distance (in contra to ideological proximity) between an anti-system party and the other competitors. The narrow meaning of that category (otherwise "strict" or ideological anti-systemness) assumes the opposition (in the form of propaganda or/and certain policy activities) to the entire system within such party operates.

WHAT IS THE ANTI-SYSTEMNESS OF THE PROTEST PARTY

There is no doubt that protest parties are characterized by the anti-systemness. The question is what kind of anti-system it is. However the essence of this anti-systemeness determines the character of these parties and theirs functionality or disfunctionality within the democratic system. It has been mentioned earlier in this article that it may lead to serious political consequences even on the international arena as we have seen in a case of Austria. Some of the political observers and journalists use the strict meaning of the anti-systemness and in this way they combine the protest parties with extremism, anti-democratic and generally right wing movements. In similar way these parties have been presented by the traditional parties. We cannot be surprised if we realize that the protest parties have much more relevance in their party systems from decade to decade (see more Michalak 2008). Traditional actors are afraid

of losing their supporters because they may vote for new parties. There-
fore they try to give the anti-democratic or at least the irresponsible label
to the protest parties. This rhetoric is aimed at discrediting these parties
among voters. It can use many different language measures to achieve
this goal. The terms which we may use take the form of the sneering to
a very strong and negative valuation. If we want to ridicule the opponents
we may use many adjectives describing their behavior. We may say that
the protest party is for example: funny, frivolous, pathetic, irrelevant,
irresponsible. But if such party has some supporters and we can't ridicule
it, we always may delegitimize this party. In such situation it is better to
appeal to the emotions including fear. The attempt to discredit the pro-
test parties in front of the public opinion is based on using many words
which have negative connotations. The protest party can by described as
"extreme" (like the extreme left or the extreme right), "radical," "ideo-
logical," "outbidding" or even "fascist," "anarchist" and so on. Thus using
such emotional expressions traditional dominating parties want to
inform the society that voting for such parties can be dangerous for the
political system. In that case the citizens must not vote for protest parties
unless they want a collapse of the democracy. Meanwhile, as it has been
pointed by Andreas Schedler (1996) those groups should be described
as an "anti-political-establishment parties." Schedler has counted a vari-
ety of parties ranging from Jean Marie Le Pen's *Front National* in France,
Republikaner in Germany to Ross Perot's *Refform Party* in the USA. In
turn Hans-Georg Betz (1994) has called such parties as a "radical right
wing populism" and Piero Ignazi (1992) "extreme right-wing parties."
However, Paul Taggart (1995: 38) has noted that many issues which have
been pointed by these parties are a consequences of the same reasons
that underlie the New Politics. In many ways, as Taggart has written, the
New Populism lies across the same fault lines which have given rise to
the New Politics. Their political program is different but they share the
same anti-system orientation and they are a consequence of the postwar
settlement crisis. This settlement bases on such ideas as social democracy,
conception of the welfare state, corporatism and Keynesianism which
have dominated in most West European countries following the end of
the Second World War. It is not opposition against the democratic values

and rules but against some of political principles of the system under which these parties operate. It is Realtional Anti-systsemness which has been described by Capoccia. Examples of such anti-system parties were, among others: *Finanna Fáil* – The Republican Party in Ireland, Progress Party (*Fremskridtspartie*) in Denmark, de Gaulle's Rally of the French People French (*Rassemblement du Peuple Francais*) in French Fourth Republic. The first of these parties was opposed to the agreement with Great Britain on the division and status of the Irish State, the second appealed against the welfare state conception, the third was opposed to the regime of the Fourth Republic. All of them differed clearly from others parties in theirs system. They were characterised by a large spatial distance and were marginalized in a parliament and eliminated in a public debate by the others competitors. In this way their coalition potential was reduced and pushed toward the use of outbidding propaganda tactics and delegitimizing messages during the electoral campaigns which further facilitated their isolation. The most crucial point here is that none of these parties was an anti-democratic (Capoccia 2002: 16–19).

The problem with unambiguous identification of these parties is a result of a chameleonic character of the protest parties. They have an ability to assume various political faces, depending on tradition, political culture and actual problems existing in a specific state. A New Populism parties have a lack of core values. It means that attributes of the context in which populism occurs will spill into the form that populism takes. This is not to say that the contextual attributes hide the "real" nature of populism, but is simply to observe that populism is de facto substantially contextually contingent (Taggart 2004: 274–275, 280–282). Such parties do not take any actions – with the exception of theirs language and rhetoric – with the aim of radical changing the political system. This means that they are not ideological anti-system parties. A political life cycle of many protest parties has shown that if such parties own relatively' high degree of blackmail potential, they are able to force traditional parties to take coalition negotiations and cooperate on the parliamentary or even governmental arena. In consequence such parties have tend to adapt to the rules and principles of the system against which they protested. Some of them — as for example Democrats 66 (*Democraten 66* – D'66) or *List Pim Fortuyn*

(LPF) in Netherlands, North League (*Lega Nord* – LN) and National Alliance (*Alleanza Nazionale* – AN) in Italy, The Greens (Bűndnis 90/Die Grűnen) in Germany, The Freedom Party of Austria (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* — FPÖ), Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland (*Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej*) — which had been certainly anti-system parties in the past would be able to compromise with at least one of the pro-system parties. Thus they participated in government. Part of them started the routinzation process which would lead finally to theirs deradicalization and to obtain a systenmess. They have gained approval (like D'66, Grűnen, AN, PPG) from traditional dominant political parties not only to participation in one coalition but also as future partners in government. Thus these parties have lost their original anti-system attitude. All that proves that the protest parties, although they are anti-systemness by its nature, do not endanger the democratic system and may even be functional for it. They introduce to the area of political discourse important issues and social matters, ignored so far by the traditional parties. The same way they also break the monopoly on political representation. After all, the essence of democracy is a conflict, dispute about how should be the politics and its principles. All the protest parties contains in this meaning of the democracy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Betz Hans-Georg (1994), *Radical Right-wing Populism in Western Europe*, New York.

Cappocia Giovanni (2002), *Anti-system Parties. A Conceptual Reassessment*, "Journal of Theoretical Politics" 14 (2).

Herbut Ryszard (2002), *Teoria i praktyka funkcjonowania partii politycznych*, Wrocław.

Ignazi Piero (1992), *The Silent Counter-Revolution: Hypotheses on the Emergence of Extreme Right-wing Parties in Europe*, "European Journal of Political Research" 22 (1).

Inglehart Ronald (1977), *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics*, Princeton.

Inglehart Ronald (1990), *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society,* Princeton.

Katz Richard S., Mair Peter (1995), *Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy The Emergency of the Cartel Party*, „"Party Politics" 1 (1).

Kirchheimer Otto (1966), *Germany: The Vanishing Opposition*, [in:] *Political oppositions in Western Democracies*, ed. Robert Dahl, New Haven.

Lipset Seymour Martin, Stein Rokkan (1967), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments. Cross-National Perspectives*, New York.

Michalak Bartłomiej (2008), *Partie protestu w Europie Zachodniej. Analiza relewancji politycznej*, Toruń.

Sartori Giovanni (2005), *Parties and Party Systems. A framework for analysis*, Wivenhoe Park.

Sartori Giovanni (1976), *Parties and Party Systems. A framework for analysis*, Cambridge.

Schedler Andreas (1996), *Anti-political-establishment Parties*, "Party Po1itics" 2 (3).

Taggart Paul (1995), *New Populist Parties in Western Europe*, "West European Politics" 18 (1).

Taggart Paul (2004), *Populism and Representative Politics in Contemporary Europe*, "Journal of Political Ideologies" 9 (3).

Taguieff Pierre-André (1995), *Political Science Confronts Populism: from a Conceptual Mirage to Real Problem*, "Telos" 103.