RITUALIZATION AS SUBSTITUTION

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Introduction

THE term 'ritual' has traditionally been used in the analysis of religious phenomena (see, for example, Durkheim 1954 [1912]). In modern symbolic anthropology it is also used to describe other fields of behaviour where it has proven to be relevant (see, for example, Firth 1972; Goody 1961; and Skorupski 1983). However, traditional ideas relating ritual to the sacred are also useful in analysing the ritualization of political behaviour. In this essay I will attempt to show how rituals can substitute for the traditional, instrumental meanings of these types of behaviour, rather than highlighting them or indicating their social significance. The extension of 'ritual' as a term to characterize attitudes, beliefs, things and actions in various spheres of human life results in conceptual confusion (Leach 1968). Taking this into account I shall try, as an initial step, to outline a conceptual framework suitable for my analysis of political ritualization.

First of all, we cannot discuss ritual without introducing an obviously arbitrary distinction between 'technical' (or 'rational') and 'symbolic' actions. Behaviour is technical when, in the judgement of the observer, it is a necessary means whereby a human individual or group achieves a specific end. Behaviour is symbolic when, according to this same judgement, it is not necessary from a

technological, causal point of view. Some actions serve to do things, that is, to alter the physical state of the world, while others serve to say or communicate something. The problem arises when the same individual human activity (for example, crafts like basketry or pottery) serves both to do and to communicate something at the same time (see, for example, Benedict 1949; Goody 1961: 159; La Fontaine 1972; Leach 1968: 523; and Turner 1982: 19). A more important problem arises when we are interested in social actions that intentionally aim at changing the social world, that is, at changing the actions or attitudes of other people. In this kind of behaviour, we can distinguish only instrumental and symbolic aspects. Systems of meanings (or symbolic actions) surrounding instrumental or technical actions may themselves exert influence on these instrumental or technical actions (or aspects of actions). Symbolic activity (or aspects of activity) gives an additional significance and highlights the technical or social-instrumental action or relationship that is itself important for the given social group. It is 'marketing' or making widely known what is ceremonialized (Mair 1971: 209; Skorupski 1983: 161).

Secondly, ritual is for anthropologists a system of prescribed, standardized, formalized behaviour regulating and controlling a social situation. Ritual provides an image of how, according to tradition (or to its organizers) things should be, what the social order should look like. Ritual allows the conceptual control of the environment, motivates individuals towards active participation in the social life of a group, and facilitates the concentration of attention on the requirements of unusual situations (see, for example, Firth 1972: 3; La Fontaine 1972: 160; Skorupski 1983: 91; Parker 1984). Performances of ritual must be regarded, then, as phases in a broad social process that has to be analysed in order to determine the meanings of this specific ritual (see, for example, Turner 1982: 45).

Thirdly and lastly, the distinction between rites of passage and calendrical rituals (Van Gennep 1960) has proved useful in studies of political phenomena. The present essay deals only with this second type of ritual, referring almost always to large groups and quite often embracing whole societies (Turner 1977: 68-9).

Having outlined a conceptual and theoretical framework arising out of contemporary anthropology, I can return to the subject of this essay, which is devoted to just one function of the ritualization of social behaviour. The ritualization of behaviour means, for the purposes of this analysis, the extensive development of its symbolic aspects, without simultaneously developing its instrumental aspects, which according to tradition, the pledge of its participants, or the judgement of the observers, constitute its basic social significance. My thesis is that the ritualization of collective behaviour may serve not only to highlight, to 'market' the meaning of its instrumental aspects in a symbolic way, but also to substitute them after eliminating them or altering their traditional meaning. Ritualization as substitution will therefore be discussed later.

The phenomena I am talking about result, in my opinion, from simultaneous acceptance, or rather pledge of acceptance, in a given social system, of two

incompatible supreme values. This may occur in many spheres of human life. I shall limit myself to political phenomena. We are dealing in this case with, on the one hand, the sacralization of democracy, that is, the sovereignty of the people and only of the people, and on the other hand the sacralization of another centre of political power. These two ideas of the sacred are not consistent with one another in real political life. There is a way out, however, namely the attempt by the stronger centre of power to ritualize certain political actions, creating a symbolic 'over-reality' that would substitute the traditional, instrumental meaning of the centre of power that is weaker in this political system. This interpretation follows, to a certain extent, Merton's analysis of ritual: 'the ritualistic type of adaptation...involves the abandoning or scaling down of the lofty cultural goals...to the point where one's aspirations can be satisfied. But though one rejects the cultural obligations...one continues to abide almost compulsively by institutional norms' (Merton 1968: 203-4).

The kind of ritualization I discuss may take place in different types of society. It may occur in a type of society in which the centre of real power is a pluralistic parliament elected by the citizens, but in which there also exists a centre of apparent though once real power. Great Britain may serve as an example. The acceptance of the sovereignty of the people as a supreme value results in the fact that the House of Commons has the real political power. The acceptance of the monarchy as a symbol representing a continuity of historical tradition that the society does not want to give up results in tensions between the two political institutions:

> No British statute states or implies that the people are exercising a sovereign function when they choose representatives. However, as the Queen must rule through ministers who are responsible to the House of Commons, that House must presumably derive its authority from some source, and this can be surely none other than the people who have chosen it. (Bromhead 1974: 167)

The tension is solved, in my opinion, through a ritualization of the monarch's political activities. The same rituals that in the past highlighted the monarch's real power now only replace it. Also significant from the point of view of this essay is the fact that the tension mentioned above exists solely at the level of the political constitution and has no important consequences for social consciousness.

Phenomena that take place in pluralist states are not, however, the subject of this discussion. I am interested in political behaviour in those monocentric states where the Communist Party's monopoly of power was officially regarded as sacred, but where a democratic rhetoric was extensively used for purposes of legitimation. Democratic arguments served also to justify the monopoly of the Party's power: the Party recognized the 'objective interest' of the proletariat which constituted the vast majority of society. But the sovereignty of the people was also accepted (or, better, was pledged as accepted), independently of the fact that the Party 'objectively' represented the majority. Both the sovereignty of the people and the leading role of the Party were constitutional rules declared to be inviolable.

Since these rules were incompatible, and real power was in the Party's hands, it compelled the ritualization of the sovereignty of the people.

Here I shall discuss only post-war Poland, limiting myself to the period that ended in the mid-1980s, and I shall present several examples of public, collective behaviour, the ritualization of which substituted its traditional, instrumental meanings. I must stress once again, though, that these phenomena occurred not only in Poland, and that we could also deal with other functions of the ritualization of political behaviour, of which the most widespread are religious rituals.

My first two examples concern activities that in similar external form also occur in pluralist countries, while the following examples are unique to 'socialist' political systems.

First Example: May Day Celebrations

Let us begin with May Day celebrations. Since the end of the nineteenth century these had been organized regularly wherever the left-wing workers' movement was strong enough. The celebration consisted mainly in the 'demonstration' parade. The behaviour of the participating individuals was thus highly formalized. The parade was originally intended as a demonstration against the brutality of the capitalist state, but later it turned into a manifestation of the international solidarity of the working class in their demands for an eight-hour day. Eventually it came to express the unity of the proletariat in its support for political progress and for the political programme of left-wing parties, and to represent a protest against economic and social crises resulting from the capitalist mode of production. The issues around which the celebrations were organized were of real social signifi-cance. The parade itself, and the attendant speeches, slogans, banners, flags and picnics, may be treated as the ritualization of political class struggle conducted by the left. This ritualization was intended to indicate the special significance of the struggle, to highlight it. Symbols used by the left were easy to understand, both for participants of the event and for its opponents. Finally, we should mention that the May Day celebrations expressed the participants' belief in a happy future when all the needs of the working class would be met.

The situation changed after the abolition of capitalism. May Day celebrations were maintained, but actions very similar to those of the past now served to celebrate victory over the bourgeoisie (for the Soviet Union see, for example, Lane 1981; for Cuba, Aguirre 1984). After a few years there was no trace of the bourgeoisie, the eight-hour working day was in being and the party which considered itself the heir of the original left monopolized political power. Retaining the May Day ritual might be interpreted as a continuous renewal of the support of the working class for the new government, i.e. a symbolic stressing of its legitimization, but this hypothesis proves false. First, there exist independently

of the government no organizations of the proletariat that could organize the ritual (by the government or authorities I mean here the whole political centre, whatever its real and usually unknown composition, controlled by the Communist Party). It was organized by the authorities themselves in order to vest themselves with legitimacy. In countries under communist rule, any other authentic proletarian May Day demonstrations would serve to deprive the government of its legitimacy. In 1982 in Warsaw and in 1983 in Wrocław, Solidarity, by then already banned, organized counter-parades that expressed proletarian protest against the politics of the government, whose reaction did not differ from the reactions of bourgeois governments at the turn of the century. All such counter-parades were suppressed by the Zomo (riot police). I shall return to other aspects of these events later. Secondly, spontaneous working-class demonstrations against the communist authorities, like those in East Berlin in 1953, or in Poland in 1956, 1970, 1976, 1980 and later, show that we can hardly talk about the continuous support of the proletariat for the government. Thirdly, participation in official May Day parades was for many years obligatory. New developments in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in participation ceasing to be compulsory, but many people treated it as if it still were. Therefore, an alternative hypothesis seems to be more appropriate, namely that ritual existed to substitute what it had formerly expressed: spontaneous, authentic proletarian support for the left. The problem as to whether or not the organizers of the ritual were subjectively attached to the anniversary celebrated by the ritual will not be discussed here.

The May Day ritual had several important aspects. It was performed once a year, in the spring, always on the same day. Apart from the parade and the speeches that participants had to listen to, there was also the opportunity to take part in dancing and entertainments in the parks, to buy relatively cheap sandwiches with coveted but rarely available ham, to meet acquaintances and colleagues informally, to introduce one's children to them, and to take the children to see shows, sports events, entertainers, folk groups, and large and almost always very amusing puppet shows with figures representing the leading politicians of Western imperialist countries. Thus, even if it was obligatory, participation in the ritual itself might be rewarding. Ritualization motivated people to participate in this event whose real political meaning need not actually be identified during periods in which the political system was stable; attention was focused on the event.

Signals issued by the organizers of the May Day ritual concerned two different levels of phenomena simultaneously. On the one hand, they interpreted participation as the people's political support for the supreme value, namely the political system and those who represented it. On the other hand, participation was represented as a celebration of work, which was also a supreme value. The signal was probably received on the second level by those who, paying attention mostly to its popular and entertaining character, participated in the event voluntarily, and on the first level by those who, interpreting it in political terms, decided to take the risk (never very high) of not participating, by those who participated but saw their participation as compulsory, and by those who accepted the political system

totally. I must also add that in checking the list of participants in the 1950s and 1960s, the organizers were made totally aware that their ritual did not reflect authentic, spontaneous support for their politics. They saw no reason to seek it. It was enough for them to organize the ritual and to demonstrate what the reality would have been like if the support had actually existed. They forced people to participate in the ritual, participation that was then interpreted as an activity legitimizing their rule. The actions of the authorities, who demanded certain kinds of collective behaviour but did not actually punish those who deviated from it, could also be interpreted as ritualistic. I shall return to this problem below.

Whether voluntary or not, participation in the May Day ritual that resulted from a willingness to celebrate work or the political system as values, created a tension between the declared sovereignty of the people and the actual state of affairs, a tension well expressed by the necessity of marching in front of a grandstand, on which representatives of party and state authorities received greetings and flowers from the designated representatives of the people. The tension could be reduced through one's total identification with the political system, i.e. by the acceptance of being 'objectified'. For those who reacted to the ritual in this way, it fulfilled an instrumental as well as a substitutional purpose. Symbolic substitution was a means of subordinating society to the political system.

Let us return to the May Day counter-demonstrations. Participation in them was obviously voluntary and even involved the very real risk of being arrested. During these parades, national rather than Communist symbols were used, their role being to express the feeling that government policies were not only anti-proletarian but also anti-national. The counter-demonstrations were not only a manifestation of the delegitimization of the political system but also in a sense a deritualization of the May Day celebrations, an attempt to get back to their original meanings.

It is interesting to note that in 1981 the Polish Communist Party authorities organized a demonstration in Warsaw which was hardly ritualized at all, voluntary, small, quiet, with no grandstand. The next year, under martial law, the situation became in a sense normal again.

Second Example: Elections

The second type of ritual I shall discuss is also similar in its performance in both pluralistic and some monolithic states, namely municipal and national elections. The origin of the idea of the general election is connected with the acceptance of the sovereignty of the people and of representative democracy. In pluralist political systems elections are first of all (but obviously not only) an instrumental kind of activity. Although there are many different electoral systems, the sense of the electoral process is common and depends upon the influence of the citizens (direct-

ly or through political parties) over whose names appear on the ballot and on the selection, from among the candidates, of the citizens' representatives. The act of putting up candidates and then voting is surrounded by additional actions and symbols that highlight the significance of the election process. This is actually a most important political act: within the framework of the constitution it can change the ruling group and the policy of the government quite radically. Elections take place regularly every fourth year or so, are completely formalized, and must be carried out strictly according to voting regulations. Both for the candidates and for the constituents they are a way of realizing their supreme value—representative democracy.

The election process had a quite different meaning in communist Poland. We must begin with a consideration of the dynamics of the voting regulations. The common element in these regulations was that there was only one ballot and that an umbrella organization controlled by the Communist Party held the monopoly of decision-making concerning the putting up of candidates and establishing the order in which they appeared on the ballot paper. A common but non-legal element was the political and disciplinary pressure not to cross any names off the ballot paper. In this case, according to the voting regulations, persons whose names were put near the beginning of the list on the ballot won automatically. From 1948, when the communist political system was established in Poland, there were only a very few cases where persons whose names were put at the end of the ballot paper were elected.

Some details in the voting regulations were changed. Before 1957, the number of candidates named on the ballot was equal to the number of seats in any given constituency. Between 1957 and 1980, the number of names exceeded the number of seats by a third. After 1984, two candidates 'competed' for each seat, though their order of precedence was actually established by the umbrella organization. Voting practice also changed to some extent. Between 1948 and 1980, the turnout was always, according to official figures, over 99%, but in 1984 it was only 75%.

Although, from the formal point of view, it had been possible since 1957 for the voter to indicate which candidate he preferred, this possibility had never existed in practice on a larger than individual scale. We cannot, then, regard municipal or national elections in Poland between the end of the Second World War and the mid-1980s as instrumental behaviour involving the influence of citizens on the shape of the political life of their country. The elections had merely a symbolic character. The ritualization of this phenomenon was to grant it a special significance, to motivate the people to participate in it, but the phenomenon itself did not actually mean what it meant in pluralistic political systems nor what its organizers declared. Elections were to replace the sovereignty of the people, not to emphasize it. There existed, however, an instrumental sense in the elections, for by means of them the authorities could change a part of the administrative apparatus. Obviously, it would have been much simpler and cheaper to appoint new officials, but here too the supreme value of the sovereignty of the people would not be recognized.

The authorities attached unusual significance to the proper performance of the electoral ritual.   For them a turnout very close to 100% meant their total legitimization.[1]   The turnout, as I have already mentioned, was more important than anything else, since in practical terms there was no way for a candidate whose name was at the bottom of the ballot paper to win. It was not even legally possible for a person not accepted by the authorities to become a candidate. The legitimating role the elections had for the political system and the ruling group was shown, for instance, by the fact that during the national elections at the beginning of 1980 the turnout was (according to the official figures) around 99.9%, and Party leaders received more than 99.9% of valid votes. A few months later, without special elections or a revolutionary change in the political system, they found themselves totally and unanimously condemned, thrown out of parliament and political life.

The ritualization of the election process did not always take the same character. Elections were always organized in such a way that the authorities kept them under control without any risk and at the same time stressed the enormous influence of the citizens on the results, that is, on who their representatives in local councils or in parliament would be. In a politically stable situation, when the people were passive through having internalized the pressure applied by the authorities, elections were just one of a number of periodic ritualized acts. When social tensions, even latent ones, were strong, the situation was different. The municipal elections of 1984 may serve as an example. The legitimization of the political system was shaken in the Solidarity period, and the legitimization of the ruling group was shaken by the necessity of introducing martial law and the harsh repression that followed it. In this situation, combining the idea of the leading role of the Communist Party with the idea of democracy needed a particular effort when the electoral ritual was organized.

Performance of the ritual had to be successful, and certain conditions had to be met. First, the ritual was delayed until a relatively quiet moment presented itself. Secondly, municipal elections were organized first. Thirdly, the ways of performing the ritual (i.e. the voting regulations) were changed a little, so that in the opinion of the authorities it could be presented as an instrumental activity. Certain methods of citizens' control were introduced into the voting process, but these obviously did not affect the basic rules. Moreover, the only 'democratic', although in practice dead rule, which had allowed groups of citizens to register their own candidates and to put them on the ballot paper, was withdrawn. Fourthly, an unprecedented campaign, even using television commercials, something very new to Poland at that time, was undertaken in order to motivate the people to vote. The main argument of the organizers was that 'only those who

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1.   It seems that on one occasion this really was the case. The national elections following the crisis of 1956 were of the nature of a plebiscite that, with the active support of the Primate of the Roman Catholic Church, Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski, legitimized a new ruling group under Władysław Gomułka.

are present are right': those who did not turn up at the polls deprived themselves of any influence on the shape of the local councils. I have already stressed that the voters were also deprived of influence. Fifthly and lastly, in public the authorities presented their conviction that their legitimacy would not be endangered even if the turnout was lower than usual. After the elections, the average turnout of around 75% was considered high enough, because it was close to similar statistics in Western democracies. The fact that in many working-class suburbs of the big cities the officially offered figure was only slightly higher than 50% was quietly forgotten. Under these conditions the performance of the ritual was highly successful: the government regarded its own legitimacy as having been confirmed.

Let us look at the election process as the voters saw it. The very few published sociological findings available (Bereza 1959; Gostkowski 1961; Borkowski, Ekiert and Mucha 1986; Raciborski 1989) provide evidence that the organizers of the elections failed completely to take into account its role in selecting the candidates and then choosing the representatives of the people. Moreover, neither during the municipal elections after the crisis of 1956, nor in 1984 did the citizens know (although the information was readily available) the names of candidates for local council seats, or the programme of the official candidates for their municipalities. In 1984, voters were hardly aware of the role of the local councils in the Polish political system and in solving local problems. They did not know the voting regulations. They considered the Polish electoral system to be rather undemocratic and their own influence on the electoral process non-existent. None the less, the vast majority went to the polls. Moreover, those who went voted mainly in the open, despite the fact that both the law and organizational arrangements gave them the opportunity to vote in private. They came to the polls with their families, just after Sunday mass. The motive they usually gave for voting was the obligation 'to do one's civic duty', which reflected precisely the main electoral slogan used for many years by the authorities.

Others were afraid of the negative consequences of their absence from the polls. Participation in the voting ritual was voluntary, but in the opinion of many their absence would call the authorities' attention to them. It was a holiday, something that happened only once every four years, something that enabled the people to present themselves to their children in the role of political sovereigns. It also communicated to the authorities that a particular person was a loyal citizen who did not oppose the state. Absence from the polls was considered to be not so much abstention as active support for the 'boycott', or at least failing to do one's civic duty.

Therefore, the electoral process, seen from the sides both of the organizers and of the voters, turns out to have been an activity that replaced the sovereignty of the people, not expressed it. The more ceremonial the election process, on the part of both organizers and participants, the less important its original instrumental meaning. The instrumental meaning did not disappear totally, however: the ritual highlighted not the sovereignty of the citizens but their 'objectification'. For those who remembered or who were told about severe discrimination as a result of not

voting in the early 1950s, the election also had an 'instrumental' character: by going to the polls they defended themselves.

The next two examples of the ritualization of public behaviour have no counterparts in Western democracies. Thus, the purpose of these ritualizations cannot be compared with Western examples, but only to the declared aims of the behaviour associated with them.

Third Example: Subbotnik

The third example, then, is the *subbotnik*. This has a long tradition in communist countries, and in the Soviet Union has been organized since 1919 (Lane 1981: 116-19, 212; Smith 1980: 363-401). There were various kinds of *subbotnik* in Poland. I shall discuss only one in this essay, an all-national *subbotnik* organized on the same Sunday throughout the country. Once or twice a year, in the spring or early autumn, millions of factory- and office-workers, voluntarily but with their participation supervised, would work for four hours, producing goods, cleaning, digging the ground, or painting. Factory workers were allowed to use their machines, but office employees had to engage in manual labour. At the end of the day, the value of the work done was calculated. In the evening, the national television news announced the total value and by how much the country was now richer; it also showed the leaders of the state and the Party planting flowers in the capital's botanic gardens. According to the signals sent by the organizers, the *subbotnik* had a double meaning. First of all, it was a kind of economic activity—it contributed to the growth of the nation's wealth. Secondly, as the flags, banners and slogans stressed, it was a ritual act that emphasized the significance of work itself, of the sovereignty of the people giving their labour free during their normal hours of leisure in order to enrich the nation, that is themselves. During periods of economic trouble (in other words, almost always) the *subbotnik* was intended to demonstrate this particularly strongly.

It is a moot question whether or not the *subbotnik* was of real economic importance. Even if everybody worked efficiently during the four-hour period, the fraction of the national product additionally produced would be small and would hardly exceed the cost of flags, banners, transportation of the people involved, and so on. The work was not efficient, however, and everybody was totally aware of this. Even the official newspapers used to stress after each *subbotnik* that there was no economic sense in planting grass or flowers where two days later the excavating machine would dig a hole for the foundation of a building, or in clerks painting a bridge when they did not know how to do it, wasted paint, and so on. So only the symbolic sense remained, but not even the organizers believed that the *subbotnik* added any splendour to work as a value, since they must have known, from experience, its real meaning. This meaning was also known to participants.

This common knowledge resulted in the fact that before each *subbotnik* the mass media would announce that now everything would be much better organized than last time. The *subbotnik* did not call the citizens' attention to economic problems since it added to them, and everybody was aware of it. It did not express the spontaneous willingness of the people to improve the economy, since it was organized from above and participation was checked. In a situation where the people had no chance to influence the economy of their country, but in which their sovereignty was treated officially as a supreme value, a ritual was organized which was to substitute for a while for the real influence. There was, however, an instrumental sense to the *subbotnik*: it forced people to behave as if they recognized an ideological reality as an actual one. In surrendering themselves to the fiction, they gave up their own sovereignty.

As with the May Day celebrations, people often participated in the ritual for reasons other than the fact that it was compulsory. As well as the general, national level of signals, we are dealing here with micro-scale signals: whatever happens with the *subbotnik* on the national level, it may be necessary to lend a hand in our own factory or office. Moreover, during the work or the activity masquerading as work it was possible to talk informally with colleagues or supervisors, to introduce them to the children and the children to them, and the children also to the 'efficiency' of their parents' work. And while the signal on the macro-social level was a fiction, both for senders and receivers, and was transmitted only in order to pay homage to a declared ideology, the signal on the micro-level seems to have been meaningful, and because of that was accepted from time to time.

The economic absurdity of nationwide *subbotnik* generated strong social resistance in the 1970s that resulted in changes in its character. The nationwide *subbotnik* was replaced by the Party *subbotnik*. On the one hand, this was because Party members were more easily mobilized, and on the other the Party itself wanted 'to take pains' to save the economy. Finally, even this ritual did not prove to be either useful or necessary, so it was abandoned.

Fourth Example: Social Consultations

My last example of the ritualization of collective political behaviour is that of 'social consultations', which emerged in Poland in the 1970s. Since then they have referred to a situation in which the authorities asked the people questions, usually giving also variants of the answer, on public matters considered to be of importance. They were connected mainly with the structure of state-regulated prices, but also covered proposals for certain bills, the voting regulations being an example. Public discussion over these questions was expected but—and this is very important—social consultations did not have the nature of referendums. Nobody counted the votes, and the authorities were not obliged to follow the

results of the consultation. The government's appeal to public opinion, strongly stressed in political speeches and in numerous programmes on state-controlled radio, television and in the press, was intended to prove the sovereignty of the people, whereas the open declaration that the government would do whatever in its own opinion was for the good of society revealed the real power relationships.

Like the *subbotnik*, social consultations might, in a sense, be regarded as instrumental actions. Just as the *subbotnik* might result in the cleaning up of an office or factory, so social consultations might result in corrections being introduced in the authorities' proposals. They could not bring about significant changes, however, and after all, society was not consulted on truly important matters. A typical example of the sort of problem that was offered for public discussion was the need to modify the voting regulations before the national elections in 1985. In the Polish situation, the really important problems were who would be allowed to put up candidates and how, and what the voting rules were to be. The problems actually raised for discussion and widely discussed in the media were, however, the minimum age at which one might become a candidate for a seat in parliament and the number of seats there should be in the house. Both consultants and consulted were well aware of the fact that what was being discussed was of no social significance. For the good of the idea of the sovereignty of the people, however, the discussion continued.

The fact that social consultations were an activity of which the original and obviously undeclared sense was solely symbolic was well demonstrated by two examples of the deritualization of these actions. In June 1976, the Prime Minister declared in parliament that he was putting price rises, the extent of which proved to be enormous, up for consultation. All the parties represented in parliament supported the idea of the rises, as did the parliament itself unanimously. New price-lists were printed and distributed in advance, and the stores were thoroughly prepared for the changes. The social consultation was to last for one day, in other words it was not to exist at all. This only meant that society approved the rises and at the same time confirmed its sovereignty. What is interesting about this example is that society really did confirm its sovereignty, coming out against the rises in a huge wave of strikes and demonstrations, which were brutally suppressed. Ritual was turned into instrumental action, into a real 'consultation', the course and results of which were quite different from those planned by the Prime Minister and parliament. The rises were cancelled by the Prime Minister himself, who on this occasion did not care to discuss the problem with parliament but declared on television that the social consultations had proved that the proposal had been premature.

Another example of social consultation also concerned prices, but its effect was very different. At the very beginning of 1985, the government wanted to raise the prices of food, heating, electricity and so on, and simultaneously to abandon their rationing. The proposal was put to long and varied social consultations, which could be taken to mean that it was a real, instrumental activity. At the end of March 1985, the umbrella organization of 'new' trade unions, which emerged

after the dissolution of Solidarity and the so-called 'old' unions, took the floor and pronounced very strongly against the government's proposals. Simultaneously, underground Solidarity called for a fifteen-minute strike. After direct negotiations between the representatives of the 'new' official unions and the representatives of the government, the authorities declared that they would postpone the rises and modify them. Underground Solidarity called off the strike. The 'new' unions were very proud of their first political success. Two days later the government declared immediate implementation of the first stage of three of the rises. What the government did might have been the result of economic pressure, but that does not change the significance of this social consultation.

The two instances of social consultation discussed here show that their results were not taken into account by those who started them and who made the political decisions. The ritual was carried out only to solve the tension between the Party's monopoly of power and the idea of the sovereignty of the people. The authorities expected the people to accept the symbolic character of the consultation, whose de-ritualization by their participants in a situation that the government was able to handle in a political way, showed very clearly that it was intended to 'objectify' the citizens. The de-ritualization of the consultations by their participants in a situation which the government was *unable* to handle in a political way also showed the intended sense of the ritual. But it transformed itself into the temporary sovereignty of society, though its costs were enormous.

Fifth Example: The 'Red Skullcap'

Finally, I shall present another, quite different example of the substitutive ritualization of public behaviour. In 1981, when certain Solidarity leaders thought that they were on the verge of taking over real power, but that for geopolitical reasons the thesis of the leading role of the Communist Party could not formally be challenged, the idea of the 'red skullcap' emerged. According to this idea, real power would be in the hands of a new house of parliament controlled by Solidarity, but to give the impression that the Party still played a leading role the existing house (with its permanent Party majority) would be retained, with only a limited, purely ceremonial role. The red Communist skullcap would 'decorate' the real power structure. Political ritual connected with the activities of the Party would replace its real significance.

Conclusions

I have discussed in this article a few examples of ritualized collective behaviour. It is now necessary to remind readers of the actions of the authorities and of the organizers of the rituals. Quite often, they openly demanded certain kinds of behaviour but did not actually penalize those who deviated beyond certain limits tacitly drawn by the authorities. We can interpret this situation by using at least two theories that may be true in different contexts. According to the first, the behaviour of the authorities was both instrumental and realistic. They were aware of the fact that it was impossible to enforce the homogeneity of human reactions and so aimed merely at maximum possible compliance. According to the second theory, their behaviour was first of all ritualistic: they presented unrealistic demands in order to satisfy their ideology rather than to obtain total obedience.

According to the thesis presented above, many public actions have much more of a ritual than an instrumental character. I have put forward several examples taken from Polish political life that could be interpreted as instrumental actions, but which were in fact symbolic. They were standardized and formalized actions, giving an impression of how, in the opinion of their organizers, things should be and what the social order should look like, related to the sphere of supreme values, to the sphere of the sacred. They were, then, rituals in the sense given in the introduction to this article. The ritual character of these actions depends not so much on granting a special significance to the instrumental aspects of actions as on providing a substitute for their original instrumental meaning.

Two examples, one at the beginning of the article taken from Great Britain and one at the end taken from the Poland of 1981, show that the problem does not have to be communist-inspired. All the examples discussed in this article show that explanations for such situations should be sought in attempts to achieve a symbolic reduction of the tension between two sacred concepts of social order, simultaneously declared as untouchable, that are in real life incompatible. We could even speak of an attempt to reduce tension between two cultural systems that are different but exist at the same time in the same country. It is also possible to try to interpret the ritualization of political behaviour within the framework of sociological role theory. Most people play different social roles simultaneously, and in many cases it is impossible to meet the demands of all of them. Several ways of coping with this sort of conflict have been presented (see, for example, Goode 1960, Kahn *et al.* 1964). To reduce tensions in playing multiple roles, ritualization of a less important but otherwise necessary social role may be suggested as a way of coping with it.

In dealing with the types of ritualization of collective social behaviour discussed above, I would agree with Malinowski (1931) that the genesis of rituals may be tied to the fact that humans are periodically faced with important tasks or crises where knowledge and skills provide little assurance of success. It would, however, be difficult not to agree with Radcliffe-Brown (1952: 148-9), according to whom: 'if it were not for the existence of the rite and the beliefs associated with

it the individuals would feel no anxiety...the psychological effect of the rite is to create in them a sense of insecurity and danger'. This second aspect of the situation has not been dealt with in this essay, but its significance is demonstrated by the examples of attempts to deritualize certain behaviour and to reduce tension by total subordination to the dominating political system.

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