Also by Yves Mény

ADJUSTING TO EUROPE (*co-edited with P. Muller and J.-L. Quermonne*)

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS IN WESTERN EUROPE (*3rd edition, with Andrew Knapp*)

LA CORRUPTION DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE

PAR LE PEUPLE, POUR LE PEUPLE: Le Populisme et les Démocraties (*with Yves Surel*)

THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN WELFARE: A New Social Contract? (*co-edited with M. Rhodes*)

Also by Yves Surel

L'ANALYSE DES POLITIQUES PUBLIQUES (*with Pierre Muller*)

L'ÉTAT ET LE LIVRE

Democracies and the Populist Challenge

Edited by

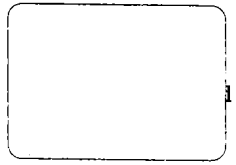
Yves Mény
Former Director of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
and
President of the European University Institute
Florence
Italy

and

Yves Surel
Professor of Political Science at the IEP
Grenoble
and
Research Associate at the Centre d'étude de la vie politique française
Sciences Po
Paris

With the editorial assistance of
Clare Tame and Luis de Sousa

palgrave



12

In the Name of the Peasantry, the Proletariat, and the People: Populisms in Eastern Europe

Cas Mudde

Introduction

In the last decade, many scholars have proclaimed the re-emergence of populism in European politics. In Western Europe the term is generally used to denote postmodern or 'more moderate' types of 'Extreme Right' or 'Radical Right' parties, but in Eastern Europe it is considered to be a more general phenomenon, spread across the ideological spectrum.[1] Like nationalism, populism has become a catchword for both the western media and the academic community that deal, often only in passing, with the post-communist East. For example, as early as 1990 *Time* ran a story under the title 'Populism on the March' (Walsh 1990), while seven years later the journal *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* published an article entitled 'Slovakia and the Triumph of Nationalist Populism' (Carpenter 1997).

In this chapter I will critically evaluate the general claim that populism has returned to the centre of Eastern European politics. However, rather than looking at one specific interpretation of populism, I will discuss three different types in order to discover whether populism is relevant at all in the post-communist context, if so, to assess which populisms are relevant, and finally to assess the role of the 'Leninist legacy' (Jowitt 1992) in contemporary Eastern Europe.

The concept of populism

I will not dwell on the well-worn observation that populism is a highly contentious concept with more enemies than friends in the social sciences (Piccone and Ulmen 1995; Taguieff 1995; Knight 1998). The fact is that populism is a term frequently used in both social science and

public debate to denote a specific form of politics. Leaving the normative discussion aside, much can be said about what 'populism' means or should mean. The most important question in 'populism studies' is whether there is a single overarching form of populism or (only) different populisms (see Ionescu and Gellner 1969; van Niekerk 1972; Canovan 1981; Conniff 1982b; Ernst 1987; Weyland 1999b).

The claims of a resurgence of populism in Eastern Europe have often been made on the basis of a variety of implicit definitions, and it is arguable that a more flexible framework may clarify more than it obscures. I will examine three ideal-types of populism most often mentioned in the literature, the two broad categories of agrarian and political populism cited in Margaret Canovan's classic 1981 text, and a third category, that of economic populism, primarily based on populism in Latin America. These categories tend to overlap in both theory and practice and should be used as theoretical tools to help provide better insight into a complex situation rather than as a definitive conceptual response to the question of how to define populism.

Agrarian populism

The origins of agrarian populism are found in two rather different movements from the end of the nineteenth century: the People's Party, a political movement constituted mainly though not exclusively by farmers in the 'heartland' of the United States (Hofstadter 1969; Wilson 1995), and the *narodniki*, a cultural movement of mainly urban intelligentsia in Tsarist Russia (Walicki 1969). What these movements shared was an anti-elitist ideology in which the peasant was considered the source of morality and agricultural life, the basis of a well-functioning society (MacRae 1969; Breitling 1987; Held 1996b). Agrarian populists are vehemently opposed to the urban elites and the centralising tendencies and materialist basis of capitalism, and they strive for the preservation of small family farms by founding co-operatives, for strengthening (rural) communities, and for self-governance (Piccone and Ulmen 1995). Often misperceived as defensive or backward-looking (Wilson 1995; Lackó 1996; Brass 1997), agrarian populism also had a progressive side (Goodwyn 1991; Bozóki 1994). For example, populists demanded radical economic reforms to maintain the position of small farm agriculture as the backbone of the entire economy, and fought to 'raise' the peasantry, by increasing and improving educational and health facilities in rural areas.

Political populism

The more recent notion holds that populism is, first and foremost, a particular *style* of politics, referring to 'the people' (*'das Volk'*) as a homogeneous entity, proclaiming a direct link between the people and the populist actor, and using a distinctly plebeian *Stammtisch* discourse (Pfahl-Traughber 1994; Ernst 1987; Canovan 1999).[2] For good reasons, this definition has been attacked because of its generality and vagueness, which suggest that political populism is virtually identical to basic political campaigning techniques. To make political populism more distinct, I define it here as a political style that builds on the rigid dichotomy between the 'pure people' and a 'corrupt elite'. It is important to note that these categories are not defined in strictly formal terms – rather they are moral constructs. The fact that both categories are 'imagined' is less relevant than the centrality, consistency, and rigidity of this dichotomy. Rather than being truly 'anti-political' (Schedler 1997), populists have an ambiguous relationship towards politics; on the one hand, they consider it a 'dirty job', characterised by the amoral elite, while on the other hand, they need it to return the power to 'the people'. In short, political populists are reluctantly political (Taggart 2000), considering politics to be a necessary evil. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, they are among the staunchest believers in the primacy of (national) politics, rejecting any alleged limitations set by international pressure or economics. In terms of policies, they support forms of direct democracy, such as referenda. However, rather than presenting alternative policies, political populism politicises already existing or newly created emotions and sentiments, most notably resentment and rancour (Ernst 1987; Betz 1994; Tismaneanu 1996).

This type of 'politicians' populism' (Canovan 1981) has been predominantly linked with the right wing, most notably in recent studies of the phenomenon in Western Europe (see, inter alia, Betz 1994; Pfahl-Traughber 1994; Taggart 1995). Indeed, political populism's reference to the undivided people sits well with nationalists' belief in 'the nation', and the two are often mixed in the dichotomy of the 'national people' versus the 'anti-national elite' (Germani 1978; Taguieff 1995). However, this is not necessarily so, because non-nationalist and left-wing political actors have at times also excelled in political populism.

Economic populism

The heyday of this phenomenon dates back to Latin America in the 1920s, with a second upsurge in that region in the 1970s (see discussions in, for example, Conniff 1982a; Drake 1982; Weyland 1999a). In the Latin American tradition, populism is described as being 'a multi-class political movement, characterised by personalist, charismatic leadership, *ad hoc* reformist policies, and a repudiation of revolution' (Knight 1998, 237). This definition is only partly useful outside that tradition, especially when applied to post-communist Europe. For example, the 'multi-class political movement' is the norm in an area which has been 'de-classed' after decades of Communism. Moreover, the feature of 'personalist, charismatic leadership' has little discriminatory value in post-communist politics, particularly in the first decade, given the embryonic stage of party development and the general choice of party organisation (Kopecky 1995). Therefore, I define economic populism in the chapter in a broader manner, focusing on the *economic* dimension. Trying to achieve a 'Third Way' between capitalism and socialism, the core values of the economic populist programme in Latin America between the 1920s and the 1960s have been described as 'growth' and 'moderate redistribution' (Cardoso and Faletto 1979), with its core programme being 'import-substitution industrialisation' (Writh 1982). Generally speaking, populist economic policy includes a proactive role for the state in setting up protective tariffs, transferring income from the export to the domestic sector, redistributing wealth among the population, creating a supportive infrastructure, expanding consumption and welfare facilities, and coercing the social partners into co-operation (Cardoso and Faletto 1979; Drake 1982; Greskovits 1998).

The broad definition of economic populism is that of a phenomenon not restricted to a recent past or a specific area. At the same time, it is more distinct than contemporary usage of the term suggests. As Torcuato Di Tella (1997, 188) notes, 'in recent years [it] has become almost a by-word to imply irresponsible economic policies'. For example, the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan has declared that populism is one of the three types of backlash against globalism, the other two being nationalism and illiberalism. According to Annan (1999), economic populism, in the form of a host of protectionist measures, is increasingly used by 'embattled leaders' in a rhetorical sham fight with globalisation.

The similarities between political, economic and agrarian populism are, however, paralleled by clear differences. First of all, 'the people' are defined (or rather, 'imagined') in different ways: agrarian populists define 'the people' *exclusively* in terms of one group, the peasantry; political populists include virtually the entire population, with the

notable exception of 'the elite'; while economic populists use a broader definition, though their critique favours the experience of the urban proletariat. Consequently, in contrast to agrarian populism, economic and political populism do not *exclusively* refer to the agricultural economy. Indeed, their sympathy does not go much further than a call for state support for the agricultural sector (through subsidies and tariffs), which has at least as much a nationalist (national independence in food production) as a populist component. The same applies to the overlap between economic and political populism, which is substantial, but not absolute. Moreover, the protectionist policies of contemporary 'national populist' parties have their origin in nationalism, as the economy is in general considered to be of secondary importance, subordinate to the overriding goal of protecting the rights of 'the nation' (Mudde 2000a).

The relevance of these three different notions will be assessed on the basis of a critical but necessarily superficial analysis of the past and present political situation in Eastern Europe. The main focus is on whether populism is a relevant feature of post-communist politics, and, if so, whether a special approach is taken to additionally evaluate the importance of the 'Leninist legacy' on the specific phenomenon of post-communist populism.

Agrarian populism in Eastern Europe

The Eastern Europe of the pre-communist period was largely backward, rural, and only marginally democratic. This meant that for most of the time agrarian populist movements were severely restricted in their attempts to mobilise supporters or influence politics. Not surprisingly, the first movements were mainly regionally organised, mobilising farmers in parts of the country in opposition to the often deplorable situation of the rural population. Given the authoritarian structure of the Eastern European regimes at the time, these actions generally involved clashes with the government authority, such as in Bulgaria at the turn of the century (Bell 1996).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the political situation in most Eastern European countries improved somewhat, as the feudal nobility increasingly allowed some forms of democratic participation while still retaining power for themselves. Not surprisingly, 'where the majority of the population were peasants, peasant parties came to power' (Worsley 1993, 731), and agrarian populism became the dominant ideology. While in some countries, such as Hungary, the populists' influence was mainly intellectual or cultural (Bozóki 1994; Lackó 1996), most Eastern European populists developed action-oriented political movements (Ionescu 1969; Held 1996a). These movements, however, were very broad and encompassed both intellectual and peasant leaders, right-wing and left-wing ideologies, pro- and anti-regime wings, and so on. What all agrarian populists had in common was:

> [t]he philosophic foundation ... that the peasants were biologically and morally the healthiest stratum of society and that they were destined to create a society more balanced and more just than the existing system ... dominated by the urban bourgeoisie and a corrupt bureaucracy dependent upon its favours. (Dziewanowski 1996, 171)

In practice this led to the demand for an 'agrarianist' programme, in which agriculture was seen as the foundation of the entire economic system, and small farms were to be rescued from fragmentation through the formation of rural co-operatives (Ionescu 1969; Dziewanowski 1996). Like their counterparts in the United States, Eastern European populists were strongly anti-capitalist and anti-liberal (Hanák 1996). However, in addition to the usual critique of the anti-social and materialist features of capitalism, Eastern European populists also criticised its 'alien' roots. Capitalism was seen as a foreign element forcefully implanted in Eastern European societies by anti-national elites. In virtually all countries, the usual suspects were the Jews (Csepeli 1996; Treptow 1996) who the Eastern Europeans considered as archetypal speculators, making money without actually producing anything.

Despite resistance from the bourgeois elite and the aristocracy, populist agrarian parties gained overwhelming electoral victories across Eastern Europe in the early twentieth century (Ionescu 1969; Held 1996a), but their governments were generally short-lived, falling prey to authoritarian *coups d'état* in the 1920s and 1930s (for example, in Bulgaria and Poland). The consequence was a split in, rather than the demise of, the agrarian populist movement, with one part opposing the new rulers and the other collaborating with them. This process repeated itself when the Communists seized power after the Second World War. Though various populist leaders had originally believed in a sincere co-operation with the Communists, they were soon disappointed and more often than not landed in prison for 'subversive activities'. Once the Communists had taken full power in a country,

peasant organisations were either forcefully integrated into the ruling Communist Party (as happened in Bulgaria), or co-opted as so-called 'bloc' or 'satellite' parties (as was the case in, for example, Czechoslovakia and Poland). These parties were more communist-oriented than populist or even agrarian, functioning as the Communist Party's 'transmission belt to the masses' (Dziewanowski 1996, 182).

After the fall of Communism, peasant parties reappeared in all Eastern European countries. These included some 'historic' parties – that is, those dating back to the pre-communist period (such as the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, BANU, or the Slovenian People's Party, SLS), some reformed bloc parties (for example, the Polish Peasant Party, PSL), and some completely new parties (such as the Latvians Farmers' Union, LZS). With a few notable exceptions, agrarian parties have not been particularly successful in post-communist elections and those that have been successful have not followed a populist agenda – for example, the PSL.[3] Among the few successful populist agrarians we find two very different parties, the Hungarian Independent Smallholders' Party (FKgP), and Self-Defense in Poland.

The FKgP, lead by József Torgyán, started as a 'quasi-historic party' (Tóka 1997), referring in its label, symbols and ideology to the pre-war rural party of the same name. Initially, the party championed the rights of all people that had been 'robbed' and 'looted' by the former Communist regime and subsequently by the post-communist elite (Kovács 1996). In the 1990 'founding elections' the FKgP gained 12 per cent of the vote and joined a coalition government with the national-conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), and the Christian-Democratic People's Party (KDNP). However, Torgyán acted as the leader of a semi-oppositional party, which led to a split in the party in 1992. After the split the FKgP increasingly resorted to agrarian (and political) populism, although the party and its leader are too politically superficial and unreliable to be labelled as agrarian populist (Bozóki 1994). In 1998 the FKgP again joined the government, this time with the liberal-conservative Federation of Young Democrats-Hungarian Civic Party (FIDESZ) and the MDF. Although the FKgP has now regained the Ministry of Agriculture, it seems to have toned down its stance, implementing some agricultural reforms aimed at EU accession rather than at the exclusive defense of the small Hungarian peasantry.

The only post-communist country in which agrarian populism has truly survived – and indirectly even defeated – the Communist regime, is Poland. There, 'the populist movement still speaks for nearly four million individual peasants as well as a group of skilled professionals,

and a large number of peasant-workers who maintain their link with the countryside' (Fischer-Galati 1996, 246). However, it is not so much the parliamentary agrarian party, the PSL, which is the mouthpiece of populism – this party had already lost its populism under Communism, when it operated as the bloc party United Peasant Party (USL) – but the radical extra-parliamentary organisation, Self-Defense, which has on various occasions rallied disenchanted farmers in violent protest against government policies (Ost 1999). Its charismatic leader, Andrszej Lepper, has become a hero among small farmers, and Public Enemy No. 1 for the Polish government. With its action-oriented political style, Self-Defense places itself in the rich tradition of agrarian populist revolt in Poland, which includes violent strikes in the 1930s as well as successful opposition to collectivisation during Communist rule (see Narkiewicz 1976; Dziewanowski 1996).

Finally, elements of agrarian populism, such as the myth of the honest peasant, can be found among some old-style fascist organisations in post-communist Eastern Europe.[4] For example, the Russian National Unity (RNE) of Alexandr Barkashov attaches great importance to the 'rebirth of the Russian peasantry', which it considers to be 'the healthiest and genetically purest part of the Nation' (Shenfield 2001). This link between 'fascism' and the 'peasant myth' dates back to Hitler's *'Blut und Boden'* (blood and soil) philosophy, which the Nazis had taken from the popular *völkische* ideologies of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German thinkers. Having said this, fascism (including national socialism) is not truly populist – for example, its elitism and totalitarianism are in sharp contrast with the more egalitarian and regionalist populist ideal of self-governance (Wiles 1969).

The marginalisation of agrarian populism in Eastern Europe is, as in the West, closely related to the process of industrialisation and the consequent demise of the peasantry in the region (Fischer-Galati 1996; Held 1996b).[5] But unlike the West, where the capitalist 'survival of the fittest' merely decreased the number of individual farms, in the East the Communists' process of collectivisation was like a 'tornado [that] swept the traditional family farm off the face of the earth' (Havel 1988, 385). The collective farm (*kolkhoz*) had little in common with the old family farm, and peasants became rural workers with little personal relation to the land they farmed. This rural proletariat is now more susceptible to the socialist ideal of a 'workers' paradise' than to the populist ideal of the 'peasant society'. Consequently, rural areas in many post-communist countries form the backbone of (not so) reformed communist successor parties, or of non-populist peasant parties which

function as special interest groups rather than a support base of agrarian populist parties (Bell 1996; Kligman and Verdery 1999). Not surprisingly, agrarian populism only survived in those post-communist societies where collectivisation was either successfully resisted by the rural population (as in Poland; see Dziewanowski 1996), or moderated by 'goulash socialism' (as in Hungary; see Agócs and Agócs 1994).

Economic populism in Eastern Europe

Economic populism is a relatively modern phenomenon, dating back to the Latin America of the 1920s, and it did not play a key role in pre-communist Eastern Europe. Moreover, with economic policy at the core of the Communist model, economic populism was one of the many unacceptable alternatives to the official 'socialist economic policy'. However, Communist policies entailed some important overlap with economic populist policies (Drake 1982; Greskovits 1998).

With the fall of Communism, many western observers warned of the emergence of economic populist politics in the East. Not surprisingly, neoliberal economists were at the fore, arguing for the rapid introduction of neoliberal policies so as block the potential advance of the populists followed by social scientists who warned of a 'populist threat', but did so in reaction to the increasingly unpopular neoliberal policies (Greskovits 1998). Only a few scholars actually focused on the populists themselves and those that did so noted the marginal nature of economic populism in post-communist politics. With the probable exception of Slovakia (Carpenter 1997), economic populism rarely gained a foothold in Central and Eastern Europe. It remained by and large a rhetorical phenomenon (even in Slovakia), in economic terms closer to other (non-populist) political strands of post-communist politics than to traditional Latin American populism (Greskovits 1998). In the post-Soviet context the situation has been much the same, albeit often for entirely different reasons. Possibly one of the closest fits is Belarus, though this may be due to the many similarities between Communism and populism. In addition, Central Asian countries appear to be more prone to populist leadership.

Béla Greskovits (1998) explains this absence of 'a populist episode' in post-communist Eastern Europe through a comparison with Latin America of the 1970s–1980s and the 1990s. It is particularly the latter period which helps us to discern what is occurring in Eastern Europe. While the economic crisis in Latin America led to violent protests and

neopopulist leaders in the 1970s–1980s, a more or less similar economic situation in the 1990s did not lead to either in Latin America or Eastern Europe.[6] He sees the explanation in term of the worldwide domination of neoliberal theory and practice in the 1990s, not least through the powerful Bretton Woods organisations, on the one hand, and a far less favourable socioeconomic breeding ground in the East than in the South, on the other.

Greskovits concludes that '[w]hile there has as yet been no convergence of political and economic factors favourable to populism, this may occur in the future' (Greskovits 1998, 100).

This is even more probable if one takes into account the importance of socioeconomic *values* among the masses. Largely as a result of the 'Leninist legacy', a significant potential for economic populist measures exists at the mass level in contemporary Eastern Europe. Socialised under the Communist regime, which claimed to take care of the people from the cradle to the grave, Eastern Europeans have become accustomed to the idea of a protective welfare state. Surveys show that the support of extensive state involvement in providing welfare is far higher in Eastern Europe than in the West (for example, Rose and Haerpfer 1996; Plasser, Ulram and Waldrauch 1998).

In addition, the main defences against economic populism are crumbling. Though still strong, the international consensus on neoliberalism has come under increasing attack, both from the centre and the periphery. In Eastern Europe itself, various political actors have started to openly question the former dogma, calling for a 'middle way'. More radically, the introduction of market capitalism, and the specific way in which it has developed in the region, have given way to 'social polarisation' (Williams 1999). Most notably, in the lesser developed parts of Eastern Europe, such as the Balkans and the former Soviet Union, this could create a situation similar to those of the heyday of Latin American populism, when '[g]roups disadvantaged and alienated by modern urban, oligopolistic capitalism and foreign penetration looked to the state to restore the protection and cohesion of older communities' (Drake 1982, 236–67).

Political populism in Eastern Europe

Political populism has been considered to be a particularly powerful phenomenon in post-communist Europe. As noted by western media and academics, 'right-wing' or 'national' populist parties have gained

some striking electoral successes in post-communist elections (Mudde 2000b). The 23 per cent won by Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) in 1993, the 18 per cent of Volislav Seselj's Serbian Radical Party (SRS) in 1996, or the 15 per cent of Joachim Siegerist's Popular Movement for Latvia (TKL) in 1995 are evidence of this.

What is most stunning, given the particular concern about 'national populism' in Eastern Europe, is that, in electoral terms, the situation is similar to that to be found in the West. For example, these electoral results have been matched by similar parties in Western Europe, such as Jörg Haider's Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), or Gianfranco Fini's *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) in Italy. Moreover, and contrary to many writings, as in the West, contemporary national populism is not a 'ghost from the past', but a modern phenomenon. The successful parties are all new parties with their ideological and organisational origin in the post-communist period. Indeed, very few national populist parties with a pre-communist or communist identity have gained any significant success at the polls (Mudde 2000b).

What does set the two parts of Europe apart is the way in which national populism is treated by the political environment. Contrary to the situation in most of Western Europe, where national – and to some extent all political – populists are considered to be political pariahs, like-minded parties in Eastern Europe are often looked upon as potential coalition partners (*koalitionsfähig*). For example, the Greater Romania Party (PRM), the Party of Romanian National Unity (PUNR), the Slovak National Party (SNS), and Serbia's SRS all profit from the fact that political populism, broadly defined, plays an important role in the Eastern European political mainstream (von Beyme 1996). The key is once more found in the historical legacy.

Although Eastern Europe had many right-wing nationalist regimes in the pre-communist period, their influence on post-communist politics in general, and post-communist populism in particular, has been marginal. This is not surprising, as most regimes, both fascist and authoritarian, were highly elitist in both social composition and ideology and sit uneasily with the strong egalitarian composition and values of post-communist societies. It is instead the Leninist legacy that has made post-communist societies particularly prone to political populism. On the one hand, it reinforced long-standing anti-political sentiments at the mass level (Jowitt 1992; Tamás 1994), and on the other it gave rise to an intellectual variant of populism. This also explains the most significant difference between the East and the West – that is, not so much the potentially or allegedly higher levels of electoral success of populist parties, but rather the success of political populism at the elite level in the sense that while 'politicians' populism' is mainly the weapon of the outsider in Western Europe, in the East it is pursued by intellectuals (such as György Konrád), and even presidents (such as Václav Havel and Lech Walesa).

Communist rule created a perfect social environment for the mass support of political populism. As many authors have noted, 'real socialism' created nihilistic and atomised societies in which egalitarianism mixed with deep-rooted social envy (Tismaneanu 1996; Ulc 1996; Braun 1997). This, in combination with the stained reputation of 'state and party institutions, which were, rightfully at the time, considered identical to the Communist regime', created a deeply felt dichotomy between 'the moral non-Communist people' and 'the corrupt Communist elite' – incidentally, very similar, if not identical, to the dichotomy between (moral) 'civil society' versus (corrupt) 'state' (Tamás 1994; Sztompka 1998).

What most authors do not note, however, is that, intellectually speaking, this dichotomy has been highlighted by the discourse of famous dissidents. Because the Communist systems left little space for political opposition, dissidents tried to voice their opposition while officially staying away from 'politics' (Tamás 1994). Against the all-encompassing politics of the Communist Party, dissidents developed the concepts of 'anti-politics' (Konrád 1984) and 'anti-political politics' (Havel 1988). Together with many other key concepts in the writings of Eastern European dissidents, such as 'Central Europe' or 'civil society', 'anti-politics' was a rather vaguely-defined term and while this was not particularly problematic in the 'virtual reality' in which dissidents lived under Communism, it did become an immediate and clear problem in the post-communist period. What could 'anti-politics' add to democracy, given that it was defined as 'the political activity of those who don't want to be politicians and who refuse to share in power' (Konrád 1984, 230), or as 'one of the ways of seeking and achieving meaningful lives, of protecting them and serving them' (Havel 1988, 397)?

However, the populist element of 'anti-politics' is not so much its voluntary separation from classic politics in terms of government, or its 'watchdog' attitude towards 'real politics', but its claim to political propriety in politics, on which 'the people' exert pressure 'on the basis of their cultural and moral stature alone, not through any electoral legitimacy' (Konrád 1984, 231). This position is understandable under

Communism, if only because electoral legitimacy was impossible to achieve for dissidents, but 'moral anti-politics' (Schedler 1997) was never meant to apply solely to the communist regime. In the words of Konrád (1984, 321):

> If the political opposition comes to power, anti-politics keeps at the same distance from, and shows the same independence of, the new government. It will do so even if the new government is made up of sympathetic individuals, friends perhaps; indeed, in such cases it will have the greatest need for independence and distance.

After the fall of Communism, many dissidents were initially very active in practical politics during the transition period (see Bozóki 1999), and often shared key convictions, such as a belief in 'moral politics', a strong anti-elite rhetoric, and a deep hostility to political parties, with populists. Virtually all anti-communist umbrella organisations that defeated the old Communist Party in the first post-1989 elections defined themselves explicitly as 'movements' rather than parties. The argumentation was captured in the slogan of the Czech Civic Forum (OF) when they declared that 'Parties are for party members, [the] Civic Forum is for everybody' (Kopecky 2000).

Though most dissidents were pressured out of leading positions shortly after the first free elections, either by more skilled 'old-style' politicians or by straightforward electoral defeat, their legacy of anti-politics increasingly gained ground. Ironically, while anti-politics had been the exclusive territory of a small group of isolated dissidents under Communism, in the transition to democracy it achieved large-scale popularity under democracy. Moreover, captured by opportunists and anti-democrats, anti-politics was stripped of its rather naïve positive underpinnings and reduced to its more negative features. The struggle of the post-communist anti-political actor is not so much *for* something – such as a private space free from political or state intervention – but primarily *against*.

Post-communist political populists contest 'the power monopoly of the political class', arguing that the revolution has been stolen by former Communists and opportunists. In opposition to 'the political class' stand 'the people', which, in the tradition of both political populism and anti-politics, have a higher moral stature than amoral politicians (Greskovits 1998; Weyland 1999a). This fits well with the mood of Eastern European society, which can be defined as that of a 'victimised majority' eager to 'absolve itself from the need for normal

political intercourse and compromise' (Braun 1997, 150; Tismaneanu 1996). Consequently, in line with both communist and anti-communist practice and morality, post-communist politics is to a large extent a struggle of good against evil, of all or nothing, in which compromise is not accepted.

In this atmosphere of polarisation and conspiracy, the rhetoric of the 'stolen revolution' is a fertile breeding ground. Its populist variant is mostly represented by right-wing rather than left-wing populist parties. The reason is simple: in most cases the argument is that the revolution has been stolen by former Communists, which fits well with the traditional anti-communism of the right. A good example are the Czech 'Republicans' (SPR-RSC) of Miroslav Sládek. Originally, the party had campaigned on a platform that included a call for very severe legislation designed to 'purge' former Communists. Later, the party broadened its 'politics of anti-politics' by targeting 'imaginary communists' (Dvoraková 2000). This led to the absurd situation of Sládek, a former Communist censor, accusing Havel, the former leading dissident, of being a 'traitor to the velvet revolution'.

Some Communist (successor) parties have also taken up the 'stolen revolution argument' against the new elite. Having disposed of, or at least toned down, their traditional elitist theory of class struggle under a Communist vanguard, they now defend 'the people' against 'the elite'. Obviously, this strategy is most successful in countries where former Communists are not particularly visible as such in post-communist politics and economy. In the Czech Republic, for example, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) has made a stunning comeback with such a populist campaign. In other countries, former Communists are highly influential in post-communist politics, but no longer affiliate themselves with the Communist Party. Good examples are Russia and the Ukraine, where they have formed corrupt oligarchies, masquerading as defenders of democracy and the free market. Marginalised by the (super)presidentialist system in these countries, parties such as the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) have resorted to populism rather than class politics in an attempt to gain a larger slice of the electoral cake (Gregor 1998; Hashim 1999).

Another way in which Communism has facilitated populist success in Eastern Europe is by its breakdown. Both economic and political crises reveal strong linkages with populism (Ernst 1987; Knight 1998). Moreover, as the democratisation movement in many countries fought two struggles at the same time – for freedom and against Communism

and for national independence and against Soviet domination – the powerful combination of 'national populism' (Germani 1978; Taguieff 1995) surfaced in many countries. Though its nationalism has often been overstated, there is no doubt that the largest party in Slovak politics, the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), is a populist party. Centred on its charismatic leader, Vladimír Meciar, the 'quintessential populist demagogue' (Ulc 1996), the HZDS has from the outset championed the interests of 'the Slovak people'; first against 'the Czech elite', and later against 'the anti-Slovak elite' (Carpenter 1997; Leff 1998). This example also shows that populist politics in Eastern Europe is not purely an oppositional phenomenon, since Meciar's HZDS has been the major governmental party in independent Slovakia.

Studies have pointed to the positive relationship between presidentialism or semi-presidentialism and political populism (for example, Philip 1998; Weyland 1999a), particularly evident when populism is defined first and foremost as 'personalised politics'. Some post-communist presidents have at least used political populism, claiming to defend the general interest of 'the people' versus the special interests of the parties. Frequently noted examples of such populist presidents are Lech Walesa in Poland, Leonid Kuchma in Ukraine, and Boris Yeltsin in Russia (von Beyme 1996; Weyland 1999a), all of whom are functioning in semi-presidential, presidential or even super-presidential systems. However, presidents in parliamentary systems have also used political populism, including Václav Havel in the Czech Republic or Árpád Göncz in Hungary. In most cases, it had less to do with the *type* of political system than with the *maturity* of the system. The first decade of post-communist politics was characterised in most countries by a struggle over and between political institutions (Kopecky 1999). In their struggle against parliaments and political parties, presidents often choose to present themselves as the 'defenders of the whole people' rather than the 'defenders of special interests'.

However, as party systems, particularly in Eastern and Central Europe, increasingly resemble their western counterparts the phenomenon of populist politics is also changing. More of the leading intellectuals and mainstream party leaders are moving away from overt populist rhetoric, leaving it, as in the West, increasingly to the parties on the political fringe. According to Daniel Chirot (1996), this is because 'the forces of reaction' cannot find viable intellectual models in the West. This is highly debatable, since many national populist parties in Eastern Europe, such as the Hungarian Justice and Life Party

(MIÉP) and the Slovak SNS, are influenced by the ideas of the French *Front national* (FN).

Rather than having a lack of ideological inspiration from the West, I believe a more 'down-to-earth' political reason lies behind this recent conversion. Because most Eastern European countries are highly dependent on financial support from western-dominated organisations, and consider membership in the EU and NATO to be their highest foreign policy goal, they have to abide not only by the West's economic rules but also by its political norms. This only works when the institutions do not lower their standards and when EU membership is considered feasible in the short or medium term by local elites. In countries that will not be among the first wave of EU candidates, most probably Bulgaria and Romania, a populist backlash at both the mass and elite level is very likely to arise (Tanase 1999).

Conclusion

> It is the immediate past – the period since 1945 – together with the way in which the Communist era has been subsequently handled, that holds the key to an understanding of current developments. (Sunley 1996)

As in many other studies, any attempt to explain contemporary populism in Eastern Europe with reference to an 'age-old legacy' in the region is not particularly useful. What some scholars seem to underestimate is the profound way in which Communism has changed Eastern European societies and, consequently, their politics. But this 'Leninist legacy' is not as straightforward as is often assumed. This can also be seen in this short survey of different forms of populism in the region.

Agrarian populism was the leading political ideology among the people in pre-communist Eastern Europe. While the collaboration of leading figures of agrarian populism with both the right-wing authoritarian and the Communist regimes damaged its image among the people, the Communist policy of collectivisation transformed 'the people' so profoundly that there is virtually no space left for agrarian populism in post-communist Eastern Europe. Today, farmers in the region are 'rural workers' rather than 'peasants', and they give their support to (former) Communist parties rather than populist peasant parties.

As far as economic populism is concerned, this was not particularly relevant in pre-communist Eastern Europe, given the rural and backward character of most of the region. Communism changed this, not just through its radical industrialisation policies, but also through its welfare provisions and egalitarian rhetoric. At the same time, the reasonably equal division of (a lack of) goods among the people (excluding the *nomenclature*), as well as some other socio-economic features (such as the rise of the so-called 'grey society'), erected barriers to economic populism. But some of these barriers are already crumbling, as the market is rapidly dividing people into 'winners' and 'losers', 'haves' and 'have-nots', while it puts increasing strains on the old welfare state system. This, in combination with the strong support for equality and a strong welfare state at the mass level, is a fertile breeding ground for economic populism in post-communist Europe.

Finally, political populism, albeit that is was not prominent in the pre-communist era, is not entirely new to the region. As in the West, Eastern European populists in the 1920s–1930s generally fell prey to more specific ideologies, fascism and Communism, which both used populism to establish elitist regimes. Nevertheless, the period of Communism did leave an important legacy with regard to political populism, in the form of the 'anti-political politics' of the dissident movement. This intellectualised form of popular resentment against the Communist regime and its totalitarian politics only gained real notoriety in the *post*-communist period when it blended in perfectly with another 'Leninist legacy' – the myth of the 'victimised majority', cumulating in the rhetoric of the 'stolen revolution'.

Despite the fertile breeding ground for both economic and political populism, both forms have been only moderately successful in post-communist politics and this is attributable not to the historical legacy or the character of post-communist politics, but, to a large extent, to external factors. The post-communist 'triple transition' (Offe 1991) is a formidable task, in constant need of the support of regional leaders, of the regional masses, and the international environment. Most notably, the economic transition can only succeed with extensive funds from western states and international financial organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank. In return for financial support, Eastern European governments have to follow a rather strict economic policy that leaves little room for a policy of economic populism. A similar dynamics is at work in the political arena. Most Eastern European governments see EU membership as the highest foreign policy goal,

accepting severe limitations in their political actions and style in order to achieve their ultimate aim.

Populism nevertheless plays a much more prominent role in contemporary Eastern European politics than in the West. The main problem in assessing its current role in more detail is twofold: the lack of clear-cut definitions for use in empirical research; and the shortage of empirical studies of populist praxis. For example, although Meciar's regime in Slovakia has almost unanimously been described as 'populist', the few studies made of the phenomenon of 'Meciarism' hardly use any clear conceptual or theoretical framework (for example, Leskó 1996; Fish 1999). This is, unfortunately, typical of the approach to the study of populism in general in which populism is used as a static label to vaguely qualify – and more often, to disqualify – a political actor. Yet were populism approached as a dynamic political phenomenon, it could arguably tell us much about both the political and the cultural environment in which it operates and which, in turn, generates it.

Notes

1. See, for example, Tismaneanu's (1999) collection of classic texts on the revolutions of 1989. A dissenting voice is Charles H. Fairbanks (1997, 97), who writes that 'The absence of *open* populist appeals is a distinctive feature of post-communist anti-politics; at a time when open populism, after the Cold War, is rising in the West, it is declining in the post-communist world'.
2. Some authors add an organisational feature, i.e. the fact that populists work outside the framework of political parties or within weakly organised (that is, personalised) parties (see, for example, Taggart 1995; Weyland 1999a, 1999b). However, as certain organisational and socioeconomic features accompanied populist politics in earlier periods, weakly organised political parties are more a sign of the times than a defining feature of political populism. Moreover, this organisational feature better describes the core of (related) phenomena such as 'charismatic leadership' or 'personalised politics'.
3. In the case of the Christian-Democratic Union-Czech(oslovak) People's Party (KDU-CSL) one may even doubt its description as a peasant party (rather than as a Christian Democratic party).
4. Tom Brass (1997) argues that the roots of agrarian populism can also be found in virtually all forms of 'postmodern theory', including ecofeminism, new social movements, post-Marxism, post-capitalism and so forth. I have not examined this claim in the post-communist context, as the similarities between agrarian populism and these movements, as described by Brass, are at such a high level of abstraction that it hardly still justifies the term 'agrarian populism'.

5. This also explains why in pre-war Eastern Europe, the Czech lands (notably Bohemia), then one of the most industrialised areas in Europe, was the only area in the region where agrarian populism was a marginal phenomenon (Ionescu 1969; Ulc 1996).
6. Authors claiming a resurgence of 'neopopulism' in Latin America in the 1990s, generally admit that these new populists differ significantly from their 'predecessors', associating 'neopopulism' instead with 'free-market economics' (Philip 1998), a particular political style (for example, Knight 1998), or both (Weyland 1999a).

Bibliography

Abromeit, H. (1998) *Democracy in Europe*. New York and Oxford, Berghahn Books.

Agócs, P. and Agócs, S (1994) '"The Change Was but an Unfulfilled Promise": Agriculture and the Rural Population in Post-Communist Hungary', *East European Politics and Societies*, 8 (1) 32–57.

Ahtisaari, M., Frowein, J. and Oreja, M. (2000) *Report*. Paris, mimeo.

Almond, G. A. and Verba, S. (1963) *The Civic Culture*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Anderson, B. (1991) *Imagined Communities*. London and New York, Verso.

Anderson, C. J. (2000) 'Economic Voting and Political Context: a Comparative Perspective', *Electoral Studies*, 19 (2/3), 151–70.

Anderson, P. (2000) 'Editorial: Renewals', *New Left Review*, (II) 1, 5–24.

Andeweg, R. B. (1999) 'Towards Representation *Ex Alto* and *Ex Post*?', paper presented at the conference on Multi-Level Party Systems, European University Institute, Florence.

Annan, K. A. (1999) 'The Backlash Against Globalism', *The Futurist*, 33 (3), 27.

Ashby, W. R. (1956) *An Introduction to Cybernetics*. London, Chapman & Hall.

Aylott, N. (1999) 'Paradoxes and Opportunism: the Danish Election of March 1998', *Government & Opposition*, 34, 70.

Barber, B. (1990) *Strong Democracy*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Barney, D. D. and Laycock, D. (1999) 'Right-Populists and Plebiscitary Politics in Canada', *Party Politics*, 5 (3), 317–39.

Barry, B. (1965) *Political Argument*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Bartolini, S. (1999) 'Collusion, Competition, and Democracy, Part I', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 11 (4), 435–70.

Bartolini S. and Mair, P. (1990) *Identity, Competition, and Electoral Availability: the Stabilisation of European Electorates, 1885–1985*. Cambridge, CUP.

Beetham, D. (1992) 'Liberal Democracy and the Limits of Democratization' in D. Held (ed.), *Prospects for Democracy, Political Studies*, 40 (Special Issue), 40–53.

Bell, J. D. (1996) 'Populism and Pragmatism: the BANU in Bulgarian Politics' in J. Held (ed.), *Populism in Eastern Europe*. Boulder, East European Monographs, 21–61.

Benz, A. (1998) 'Postparlamentarische Demokratie? Demokratische Legitimation im kooperativen Staat' in M. T. Greven (ed.), *Demokratie – eine Kultur des Westens?* Opladen, Leske + Budrich, 201–22.

Berlin, I. et al. (1968) 'To Define Populism', *Government & Opposition*, 3 (2), 137–79.

Betz, H.-G. (1988) '"Deutschlandpolitik" on the Margins', *New German Critique*, 44, 127–57.

Betz, H.-G. (1994) *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*. New York, St Martin's Press – now Palgrave.