

finance holding politics to ransom. These experts are in charge only because no one else knows the way out of the cave that they led us into.

The new technocracy sometimes appears to rely less on technical expertise than on networking skills. One thing the finance elite has that everyone else lacks is connections with each other. Working at Goldman Sachs doesn't guarantee that you know how to run the world; but it does guarantee that you know how to talk to other people who worked at Goldman Sachs in a language they will understand. Among the credentials of Monti and Papademos for crisis government was their good relationship with Mario Draghi, the chairman of the European Central Bank and another Goldman Sachs alumnus. High finance is an arcane business, which makes it important that the people who know its secrets can talk to each other. This isn't knowledge as power. It's obscurity as power.

The problem comes when the technocrats have to translate their rarefied talk back into a language that everyone else can understand. In politics, once you've made what you think is the right decision, you still have to convince other people of your right to make that decision. Being more knowledgeable than everyone else doesn't ensure political legitimacy, any more than being more violent does. Legitimacy is, as Weber said, a claim to power, and everything depends on whether people buy that claim. This is where technocrats tend to struggle. Their special knowledge is a hard sell, especially at election time.

Democratic technocrats are caught in a bind. Aloofness doesn't work. 'Trust me, I understand things you couldn't possibly understand' is a bad campaign slogan. But when technocrats try to pass themselves off as regular politicians it doesn't work either. 'Trust me, I'm not really an expert' is another very poor slogan. Monti discovered this when he campaigned for election in Italy in 2013. He sounded cold and detached when he talked economics. But he sounded empty and fake when he didn't. He struggled to present himself as a man of the people: he looked uncomfortable around children and animals, the stocks in trade of a political campaign. In the end he was trounced by the professional politicians. He was even trounced by Beppe Grillo, a comedian. That's why technocrats tend to avoid elections.

Along with soldiers, another profession Weber thought ill suited to politics was academics (a category that includes economists). The trouble is that academics are used to assuming that the best argument will win, and to supposing that they have the best argument. This makes them touchy and impatient when confronted with the mess and confusion of the real world. In politics there is no guarantee that the best argument will win. Nor is there any guarantee that other people will agree on what counts as the best argument. To succeed in politics requires a tolerance for uncertainty and an understanding of confusion. Above all, it requires a readiness to accept you can't win all the time, even when you think you are right. All politicians have to learn how to lose the argument and then come