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de Beus, J.

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Chapter 4

Populist leadership

Jos de Beus

The populist revival

Populism is a technical term for mobilisation of resistance against a ruling class alias establishment, pursuit of absolute majority rule (with contempt of deliberation and compromise), display of popular and militant nationalism, electoral opportunism (following polls and the given policy preferences of relevant voters), and manipulation of the public - either stirring up dangerous emotions of the crowd or pleasing an irrational crowd (Canovan 1981, 1999, 2005; Riker 1982; Taggart 2000, 2002; Mackie 2003; Mudde 2004; Stoker 2006: 132-45).

Populism seldom advances as a unified force. Its features contradict each other. An anti-establishment agenda may polarize the electorate rather than accumulate support of the middle class. Popular nationalism may hinder foreign policy success. Rejection of comprehensive ideologies, carried by mainstream parties, turns populists into chameleons. Some of them are left-wing, others right-wing; yet others defy such categorizations as they seek to redefine the political space (Kazin 1995; Phillips 2003).

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Populist conservatism became legitimate in the United States due to the innovation of President Reagan, the realignment of the Republican Party, and the combativeness of President George W. Bush (Wilentz 2008). To date, it is resented by mainstream parties in Western Europe, mainly out of an aversion steeped in Europe's dark mid 20th century history (Rifkin 2004; Lukacs 2005; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008).

Political scientists draw a distinction between populism by outsiders with a claim to representation of oppressed and excluded members of the polity (grassroots populism) and populism by insiders with a claim to use of the state apparatus in accordance with the will of ordinary citizens (government house populism). Some argue that stable liberal democracies are marked by alternation of populism and pragmatism (Hirschman 1982; Unger 1987; Notermans 2000). Pragmatism is non-populism in the sense of continuation of rational public policy, liberal pluralism (respect for minorities and dissidents), elitist administration of the nation state, politics as professional business insulated from the cycle and buzz of elections, and control of the public by means of mitigating rhetoric and moderation.

Populism will be articulated by new politicians seeking office via offensive campaigning and radical change, and by old politicians whose office holding is losing the support of major constituencies and who stick to power by defensive campaigning and preservation of the status quo. Pragmatism will be articulated by cooperative and flexible leaders of opposition parties as well as by incumbent politicians whose office is both vested and popular. For example, during the crisis of stagflation and overload of the Keynesian welfare state in the 1970s populist leaders preferred growth of public expenditure and social entitlements to austere fiscal policy and balanced budgets, while

pragmatic leaders made the opposite choice (Buchanan and Wagner 1977; Frey 1978; Goldthorpe 1984).

Political theorists draw a distinction between authoritarian and democratic populism (Spengler 1928; Habermas 1992; Rawls 1993, 1999: 97; Chambers 2004, 2005; Dworkin 2006). Demagogues and dictators are false friends of the people who apply the dirty means of plebiscitary politics to shape hegemonic power and make plans that can only be realized in a regime without the rule of law and civil rights. Liberators and statesmen are true friends of the people who apply the noble repertoire of deliberative politics to create public authority and make plans that are conducive to closure of the gap between the democratic ideal and the real world. Populism indicates either liberal democracy's corruption and decline or its promise and resilience (Dahrendorf 2002; Panizza 2005). In a perspective of decline, populism is modelled as a backlash against cartel behaviour or excessive convergence among vested parties (Katz and Mair 1995; Aucante and Dézé 2008).

This chapter introduces a perspective of resilience. It discusses the contemporary revival of the populist aspect of leadership in Western democracies by focusing on the office seeking and office holding of prominent politicians in two-party systems (the American President Clinton, the American presidential candidate Perot, the British Prime Minister Blair) as well as in multiparty systems (the Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi, the German Chancellor Schröder, the Dutch candidate for parliament Fortuyn). All these men entered politics in order to become leaders of national government and tread in the footsteps of great leaders in the universal history of democracy, say Roosevelt, Churchill, De Gaulle, Attlee, or Adenauer. They renewed political communication by turning the

political party and the executive branch of government into machines for continuous and sophisticated campaigning in a public sphere with highly competitive parties and media outlets. They drew on spray-on charisma, that is, dramaturgical competence and aura on the television screen (Rieff 2007: 3-13). All of them were, and still are, controversial politician-celebrities (see further 't Hart and Tindall, this volume). Some of them were accused of weak leadership, marked by private money, deceit, gesture politics, narcissism, and impotence as to running the public sector and improving its performance.[1] They seem to fit in Bonald's old sketch of the theatre king, 'who lays down scepter and diadem after the show and who, having returned to his original estate, blends the habits of a servant with the grandiloquent language of his role' (De Bonald 1796, 1845, 126-7).

There are good reasons to track populist leadership in unexpected places, that is, respectable capital cities of Western countries today. First, the standard claim of political science that populism is a viable option for radical new politicians and besieged old ones (yet an inferior option for leaders of regular opposition and successful incumbent leaders) warrants fresh evidence on a par with such evidence about emergent nationalist persuasion by rival elites in processes of transition from autocracy to democracy (Snyder 2000; Mansfield and Snyder 2005). Does it still hold for mature democracies that populist opponents are unable to govern wisely, while pragmatic incumbents are unwilling to enchant the public mind?

Second, the dispersal of agents and sites of credible popular representation in mature democracies - networks of public advocacy, journalists as spokespersons, independent authorities and nongovernmental associations both domestic and across the

border, corporations and lobbyists going public - may go in tandem with diffusion of populism among all eligible and elected politicians. Populism is no longer limited to third party challengers in the United States, *personalismo* in Latin America, and recurrent movements of discontent in post-totalitarian Europe. It may well become durable in the 'audience democracy' and 'populist-bureaucratic regime' that characterise established democracies today. In fact many observers of contemporary presidents and prime ministers note that they rely on a plebiscitary mode of public policy-making (Manin 1997: 218-35; Skowronek 1997: 53; Keller 2007: 3).

Third, the realist view of leadership needs testability and falsification. In realism, national leaders are populists by definition. They invent popular interests, mobilize large masses, and organize their unified power. They leave the administration of party and government to trusted and like-minded agents. They compete with other (potential) leaders in state and community building. Realists neglect the significance of pragmatism for administration of complex institutions and the making of cohesive coalitions backstage, out of the eye of journalists, voters, and opponents (Burnham 1943; Mansfield 1996; McCormick 2001, 2006; Samuels 2003).

Fourth and finally, the idealist objection against contemporary right-wing populism needs qualification. Some scholars argue that individualisation and mediatisation of society promote a cynic and fanatic populism that fears and hates libertarians, secular believers, immigrants, profiteering welfare state clients, owners and managers of global corporations, cosmopolitans, supporters of European integration, and greens (Elchardus 2002; Mény and Surel 2002, Mazzoleni 2003; Davies 2008; Hall Jamieson and Cappella 1997, 2008). I disagree. Neoconservatism does not coincide with

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populism. Some neoconservatives try to temper populism, while some new progressives try to imitate it. Antiglobalism, including dissatisfaction with multicultural policies, is not an exclusive privilege of telegenic radicals of the right.

Populist office seeking

The process of office seeking comprises the path to professional politics, candidacy and first gain in national campaigning. All my cases involve leaders who tried to end the reign of an establishment. Clinton in 1992 wanted to break the rule of Republicans since 1980 and the unraveling of New Deal Democrats and liberalism since Johnson's retreat in 1968. Perot, a dissatisfied Republican and rival of Clinton, wanted to dismantle the Washington consensus on globalisation. Berlusconi in 1994 wanted to abolish the post-war *partitocrazia* of Christian Democrats, Socialists and Communists and its capture of the public sector and protection of vested industries.

Blair in 1997 wanted to break the rule of Conservatives since 1979 and the implosion of Labour in the clash between cadre radicalisation and the crisis management by Prime Ministers Wilson and Callaghan (1974-1979). Schröder in 1998 wanted to break the rule of Kohl's Christian Democrats since 1982 and transcend a protracted division and confusion within the German Social-Democratic Party with respect to German unification and welfare state reform. Fortuyn in 2002 wanted to dissolve a 'cartel' of mainstream parties in the Netherlands, manifest during two lib-lab cabinets since 1994, and get rid of the Dutch consensus on multiculturalism and Europeanism.

But there are major differences between the hard populism of Perot, Berlusconi and Fortuyn – three angry businessmen with a simple message – and the soft populism growing out of a search for popularity by third way modernisers such as Clinton, Blair and Schröder, three members of a new generation of party politicians (Clinton and Schröder as state governors, Blair as Member of Parliament). For example, Perot and Fortuyn loathed polling and campaign consultancy, while the others tried each new development in public opinion research. Let me first turn to the hard populism of Perot, Berlusconi, and Fortuyn.

Ross Perot

Ross Perot was an independent candidate during the American presidential elections of 1992 with 19 percent of the popular vote (Kazin 1995: 269-86; Posner 1996; Wilentz 2008: 315-17, 320-22). He was a former manager of IBM who made his fortune by selling computers to the federal government and gradually committed himself – in an effort to counter the movement against the Vietnam war- to the cause of prisoners of war, war veterans, young dropouts and chronic drugs users. Perot left the Republican Party because of his rejection of the war in the Persian Gulf. He cultivated a public reputation of national heroism and non-partisan statesmanship. He tried to perform as a plain-speaking common man rather than charmer or crisis manager. Focusing on American workers and middle class households as alleged victims of global free trade (NAFTA) and military interventionism, he presented himself as a rich capitalist who felt guilty and ashamed about economic failure, social corruption, and political opportunism of many of

his own class and who would reform the rule of federal agencies and big corporations without class warfare.

Perot organized *United We Stand*, a national movement of volunteers, with an agenda for balancing the federal budget (through expenditure cuts rather than increased taxes), winning the war on drugs, protectionism, and direct democracy by means of 'electronic town halls'. On moral issues, Perot was not the sturdy, reactionary Texas rancher. He did not see abortion as a criminal act and supported gay rights and gun control. His policy ideas in the best-selling *United We Stand: How We Can Take Back Our Country* (1992) seemed strongly influenced by a classical liberal morality. Perot did not warm to Christian fundamentalism.

Perot faced fierce opposition from Reaganite media such as Limbaugh's talk radio and *The Wall Street Journal*. His liabilities in the press, his own campaign team and his fluid constituency were paranoia, obstinacy, patronization of black Americans, and bullying. Perot's methods to overcome such obstacles and achieve the best third-party result since Theodore Roosevelt in 1912 were anti-Washington rhetoric, spokesmanship for a moderate, non-ideological majority of citizens, patriotism, simple and funny messages ('We own the country', 'I am Ross and you are the boss', 'It's just that simple'), and considerable debating skills. Perot's campaign was a parade of cable television appearances in both serious and frivolous programs, facilitated by free television time and unlimited personal funds.

Silvio Berlusconi

At the time of writing, Silvio Berlusconi is Prime Minister of Italy in his third term. Between 2001 and 2006 this mogul from Milano presided over Italy's longest administration since World War II. He needed two campaigns, in 1994 and 2001, plus an instructive failure of his first and short-lived cabinet in 1994-5, to reach the political top. Berlusconi was the richest man in his country and a famous owner of a conglomerate of television channels, print media, telecommunication, soccer and real estate. His political commitment was rooted in visceral anticommunism, a belief in the American model of free enterprise and consumer sovereignty, and the intuition that Christian Democracy was exhausted and could no longer preserve Catholic values and institutions. Berlusconi presented himself as smart businessman with many talents and good luck, caring father of the Italian clan writ large, ruthless saviour of the national economy and national prestige, and naughty Italian male (Ginsborg 2004; Stille 2006).

Berlusconi created his own formation *Forza Italia* and forged an alliance with Northern separatists and Southern neofascists without a specific agenda. His first campaign boiled down to the claim that only he could clean up the mess of leftist state failure, treason, and immorality, and then restore the post-war spirit of economic miracle, European unity and American cordiality. His second campaign was the opposite and promised a detailed mandate on the rise of old-age pensions, halving the unemployment rate, public works, cutting taxes, and lowering the crime rate.[2]

Berlusconi had to deal with certain risks and liabilities: energetic judges in antitrust and criminal law cases, Mafia infiltration in his projects, his membership of a secret Masonic lodge, lack of experience and agreement in his movement and party coalition, and conflict between his private interests and public policy purposes.

Berlusconi's methods to turn necessity into virtue and lead the largest bloc of

governmental parties in 1994 and 2001 were: a cultivated self-image of the lonely,

honest, disinterested, responsive and eternally young outsider; a quasi-majoritarian

arrangement of continuous presence on primetime television, exploitation of news

monopoly, and shrewd coalition building backstage; nationalism without remorse about

the fascist past or shame in the picking of friends (such as Putin's Russia) and of enemies

(courts, the European Commission, immigrants, Muslim societies, gypsies); advanced

public opinion research as integral part of corporate marketing; and omnipresence in the

public sphere via campaigning techniques, such as the soccer metaphor.

Pim Fortuyn

Pim Fortuyn was a Dutch academic and pundit who financed an extravagant life style by

means of polemic books, columns, and public lectures on the state of Dutch society and

politics (Pels 2003; Wansink 2004). He presented himself as a prophet and entrepreneur.

In 2002, he became leader of *Leefbaar Nederland*, a union of local protest parties. After a

quarrel concerning Fortuyn's main message about the danger of Islamisation of the West

and an electoral victory in Rotterdam as leader of the local party branch, Fortuyn and his

sponsors in real estate began the *List Pim Fortuyn* (LPF). On May 15, 2002, this party

gained 26 out of 150 seats in the Dutch lower house; by that time Fortuyn had been dead

for 9 days, assassinated by a member of the extreme animal liberation movement. Yet his

political vehicle, LPF, joined a center-right cabinet with four ministers. Although the

cabinet lasted for only 87 days and the LPF faded away in two successive general

elections, Fortuyn's wake-up call and his liquidation stand for a critical juncture in the Netherlands, comparable to September 11 in the United States.

After serial flirts with all mainstream parties, Fortuyn began to express a basic critique of consensus democracy during the 1990s. He referred to the core of Dutch government and business as a conspiracy of 'our sort of people' that constituted the real enemy of ordinary citizens. Such citizens were victims of multiculturalism, corporatism, Europeanism, cosmopolitanism and, most menacing, Islamism. They comprised the self-employed, employers of small firms, the middle class in social and public services (policemen, nurses, teachers), and, last but not least, self-reliant immigrants outside the mosque.

Fortuyn's agenda was articulated in a book, *The Ruins of Eight Years Lib-Lab*. This was a mixture of electoral manifesto, autobiography, vilification of opponents, and cultural studies. It contained broad visions and detailed proposals on health care, schools, security, welfare reform, agriculture (with infrastructure and public utilities), administrative reform, immigration policy, and foreign policy (with defence and European integration). Fortuyn advocated strict border control, strong government, and renationalisation of European policies. He welcomed commercialisation of public services and internationalisation of corporations, while rejecting the cult of managerialism and scale enlargement within organizations.

Fortuyn was demonized by nearly all his rivals and observers in the press as a pupil of Mussert (the leader of Dutch Nazi's during the German occupation) and a kindred spirit of the European radical right today (Dewinter, Haider, Le Pen). His liabilities were open homosexuality, lack of experience in parliament and public

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administration, and a lukewarm approach of the popular royal House of Orange.

Fortuyn's ultimately effective methods to cope with all of this included: intimate

knowledge of the flaws of the elite consensus and the problems of the mass of voters; an

explicit and reflexive idea about the Dutch nation; mercurial performances, eloquent

rhetoric ('At your service!', 'the left church'), superb debating skills, and a secret pact

with the Christian Democrat Jan-Peter Balkenende, the Dutch prime minister since 2002.

Bill Clinton

Turning now to the three 'soft populists' discussed in this chapter, I begin with Bill

Clinton, a tenaciously ambitious governor of a small southern state, prominent

moderniser of the Democratic Party, and champion of flexible synthesis between

liberalism and conservatism. Clinton became the forty-second American President - with

43 percent of the popular vote - after a protracted struggle in bumpy primaries and

cutthroat contests with two contenders, President George H.W. Bush and Perot (Hamilton

2003, 2007; Wilentz 2008: 317-27). Clinton, a policy wonk par excellence in many social

issues, endorsed a novel view of the centre-left based on the acceptance of free trade,

balanced budgets, expansive monetary policy, workfare (forced labour participation of

the poor, called 'empowerment'), public regulation of the markets for social services,

particularly education and healthcare, and repressive policies of criminal justice.

Announcing his candidacy in October 1991, Clinton argued that 'People out here don't

care about the idle rhetoric of 'left' and 'right' and 'liberal' and 'conservative' and all the

other words that have made our politics as a substitute for action'. His manifesto *Putting*

People First made a minor pragmatic case for public deficit reduction and a major populist case for a tax cut for the middle class, a surge of spending on public works, and $60 billion of outlays in healthcare, education and childcare.

Clinton was adept at exploiting his assets: his intelligence, natural persona and superb communication skills, good looks, stamina and lust for campaigning, team of first-rate consultants (including his wife Hillary), and network of rich sponsors. His constraints were equally diverse. The Democrats after Reagan and the end of the Cold War were still in need of a policy program and linkage with their old constituency that suffered from low wages, unemployment and healthcare costs yet disliked the dominant Democratic approach to race, rights, and taxes. The issue of character was raised, both with respect to decadence of the '1968' generation of baby-boomers which Clinton epitomised (Fortuyn, Blair, and Schröder had to account for similar sins of youth) and through the course of his life (slick, adulterous, draft-dodging, smoking but not inhaling pot). There were doubts of fellow Democrats and leading journalists about the vagueness of Clinton's words and proposals. Hence, Clinton was widely portrayed as a populist of the wrong kind, a pandering politician without moral compass.

Clinton had to inject some populism of the right kind. His approach included simplification ('It's the economy, stupid'), a competent running mate (Al Gore), informal campaigning (bus tours, talk show appearances, and town hall meetings), avoidance of libertarianism (sticking to the death penalty, accusing hip-hop artist Sister Souljah of inciting racist violence), and lots of empathy face-to-face and into-your-face (television) based on chats, stories, simple emotional arguments, simple statistical data, and biographical stuff (playing with black kids and attending black religious services).

Tony Blair

Tony Blair, an Oxford graduate in law from Scotland, social liberal, Christian moralist, and maverick in the British socialist tradition, won his first national campaign as Labour Party leader in the spring of 1997, and remained Prime Minister until the summer of 2007, based on two more electoral victories (Seldon 2001, 2007; Seldon and Kavanagh 2005). Blair wanted to end the post-empire period of national decline since the 1950s and complete Thatcher's reform of class society and the welfare state. He sought to prepare his compatriots – the widest constituency in a procedural sense – for globalisation by restoring British capitalism in the current informational revolution, improving the focus of the public sector on the preferences and opportunity sets of citizens, and redefining a moral mission of community building in domestic politics and foreign policy.

Blair's leadership of the opposition since 1994 had been revisionist. Clause IV of the party's constitution on nationalisation of basic industries was rewritten and New Labour invented. Blair abolished the block vote and introduced the rule of one member, one vote. New Labour buried the history, ideology, and organization of the labour movement. It created a centralised campaign party, adapted to the new market economy, media, and post-Thatcher generations.

Could Blair beat the Tory Prime Minister Major, a cautious and colourless rival, and mobilise, on the one hand, repugnance against exhausted conservatism, and, on the other, enthusiasm for New Labour? Many Members of Parliament chose Blair for selfish

reasons. They expected a man with energy, charm, and good looks to restore their power and promote their careers. Could he stop the end of organized socialism and turn the party into a winner in the middle of the electoral space? Could he break the hegemony of conservatism and replace it with moderate and practical policies by the left?

Blair had a number of assets. First, his faith and family life made him acceptable to core constituencies of both his own party and conservatives. Blair articulated certain widespread complaints about excessive individualisation of the nation. Restoring the British urban community was neither left nor right, but common sense. Second, Blair's resolute will to abolish left traditionalism and modernise Labour was widely acclaimed by mainstream media and favourably impressed the electorate. Blair's middle way between the old left and new right entailed salient yet undisputed values: equal worth, opportunity for all, personal responsibility, and community. Third, Blair's youthfulness, flair, rhetoric and seemingly natural knowledge of urgent popular concerns were conducive to the credibility of his goals, standpoints, and proposals. As some of his early supporters put it: 'The image of the young man in denim jeans and casual shirt sitting with his family at the kitchen table at home in the fashionable London district of Islington was just what they wanted' (Stephens 2004: 45). Finally, Blair abandoned the view of capitalists as arch-enemies of the working class. He stressed the values and functions of a strong market economy, albeit within the bounds of decency, tolerance, and fairness. He met with captains of industry. He created a widening circle of rich supporters, friends, and party sponsors.

Blair's first and crucial campaign achieved the largest party victory since the 1930s with a New Labour majority of 178 seats. With hindsight, we may observe a joint

product of Blair's dual anti-establishment view (against Tories, against trade unions), will to shape New Labour's entry in British state institutions, communitarianism, opportunism ('tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'), and selling of policy ideas. The campaign was based on imitation of Clinton's techniques of soft populism of, by, and for an intended vital centre. New Labour started a permanent and militant campaign in the media based on targeted mailing, voter focus groups, candidate media training, adequate intelligence, and instant response to the policies and statements of rival candidates.

According to Blair's closest advisors, party victory involved a change of language and tone. Labour needed to connect with the voters by using a non-political tone and stressing patriotism. As a symbol, the party chose a bulldog because they saw it as an animal with a strong sense of history and tradition. New Labour wanted to articulate the shared understandings of the British nation. Blair's speeches included sentences like 'I love my country' and 'I am a patriot'. The campaigners positioned New Labour as the coming people's party in a cohesive and creative society. The identity of the centre-left, its leader, and the country boiled down to youth and its virtues of entrepreneurship, optimism, and upward mobility.

One of the crucial consequences of the 1997 election campaign was that the Labour Party was tamed ideologically, becoming chiefly a vehicle for the leader's politics of communication during party conferences, meetings with the press, televised meetings with the people, public policy announcements, local visits, international trips, and, of course, Lower House debates. Blair's famous performances, such as his reactions to the murder of the young boy Bulger in February 1993, and, later, the death of Princess Diana in August 1997, and the London subway bombings in July 2005 - came across as

brilliant idiosyncratic improvisations. In point of fact, they were well-prepared, well-organized, and thoroughly professionalised acts of leadership to reach the hearts and minds of well-examined audiences. The Labour Party started to make extensive use of opinion polls and focus groups, both during and between elections. Great events and crises in daily politics were occasions for Blair to give meaning and direction to his government, display populism of the centre, make short-term issues in the media central to the agenda setting of all ministries (his 'eye-catching initiatives'), and legitimise a quasi-presidential mode of decision-making. Communication was the means by which Blair gained absolute power in party, parliament, cabinet, civil service, and local government majorities.

Gerhard Schröder

Gerhard Schröder, a libertarian lawyer with a lower labour class background, was the first Social Democrat in the chancellery of Berlin between 1998 and 2005 (Meng 2002; Hogreve 2004; Egle, Ostheim, Zohlnhöfer 2003; Egle and Zohlnhöfer 2007). His first and successful campaign was the outcome of a long march through the bastions of the SPD - the oldest mass-membership party in the world and an integral part of the establishment of post-war Western Germany. First, local party activist, then chairman of the radical Young Socialists, then backbencher in the *Bundestag* (the Lower House in Bonn), then chairman of the Hannover party district, and, finally, Minister-President of Lower Saxony, and member of the party presidium and shadow minister. Candidate Schröder insisted on the world's recognition of Germany as a 'normal nation-state' and

self-confident member of the European Union, NATO and the United Nations. To reduce unemployment, control costs of German unification, and break through the aversion to reforms during the last terms of Kohl's administration (*Reformstau*), Schröder reformulated the Bad Godesberg orthodoxy of the SPD. He joined Blair's Third Way in a *Neue Mitte* and promoting overhaul of the welfare state and – to a lesser extent – the corporate economy in Rhenish capitalism.

Schröder engendered considerable hostility. In Lower Saxony, he had invented a specific style. On one hand, Schröder became the pragmatist and public sector Chief Executive Officer who depoliticised trade-offs between economic growth, employment, social justice, and the environment (no speed limits for cleaner cars). On the other hand, he became the populist who sold regional protectionism as the new mode of post-socialism (what is good for business exports is good for progressive citizens). Schröder's performances were sometimes sensitive, sentimental, and provincial. But they could also be tough, calculating, provocative, and anti-bourgeois. The results were equally ambivalent. Schröder turned into a national politician-celebrity and exemplified a new generation of modernisers in German – indeed, Western – social democracy. Nevertheless, Schröder's open pursuit of hegemony, opportunism and realism also engendered major resistance and scepticism among fellow leaders and the rank and file of the SPD as well as in mainstream liberal media. How did Schröder overcome the massive rejection of his chameleonic behaviour, that is, changing masks in front of distrustful voters and impertinent journalists?

First, Schröder allied himself to Lafontaine, the influential and popular chairman of the party who rejected the Third Way and advocated control of supercapitalism and

reinforcement of the role of central government in Germany and the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU).[3] Second, he tried to convey the message that he was a winner and the first contender who could beat the great Kohl – after three SPD defeats in a row. Schröder sported tailor-made Italian suits, red and white ties, and expensive cigars. He presented himself as a "*Genosse der Bosse*" (comrade of the bosses). There was a distinct transformation in outward appearance, facial expression, phonation, gestures, and locomotion. Here stood a potential national leader (Dieball 2005: 84-94, 115). In April 1998, more than 93 percent of the party members chose Schröder as their chancellor candidate. Their confidence in his electoral prowess was greater than their suspicion of his programmatic credentials.

Finally, Schröder's campaign was well-orchestrated. He promised a new Berlin Republic, substantive reduction of the 4 million unemployed, economic recovery, fairness of welfare state reforms, continuity of foreign policy, and administrative competence. He avoided the issue of European integration (such as the abolition of the German Mark) and resisted the temptation to disqualify his petrified opponent. The campaign itself was personalised ("*Deutschland braucht einen neuen Kanzler*") and based on the campaigns of the left American and British modernisers, such as the introduction of rapid rebuttal units at party headquarters. The SPD attained 40.9 percent of the vote and 44.5 percent of the seats in the Lower House. Schröder won in both the East and West. He drew support from many economic groups, except for the self-employed and farmers, who remained loyal to the losing Christian Democrats.

Populist office holding

Office holding by leaders of national government comprises recruitment of strong and loyal ministers and officials, implementation of distinctive and problem-solving policies, obtaining support and compliance of influential elites and major organized groups of citizens, and maintenance of international standing and prospects of re-election. In mature democracies, the demands of office holding include the capability to govern (effectiveness) in an unruly and multiform public sphere as well as responsiveness (taking the electoral mandate seriously), accountability (explaining hard choices afterwards), and credibility (eliciting popularity and positive public opinion between elections).

All three cases discussed under this rubric (Perot and Fortuyn never made it executive office) involve protracted government, namely, Clinton's two terms, Blair's three terms, Berlusconi's five years – a feat of arms in Italy, and Schröder's two terms. Such stability suggests a daily diet of pragmatism and inevitable containment and dilution of populist passions and dreams within the real world of international relations, bureaucracy, business, and conventional morality. What is left, then, of the constructive impulse and promise of 'change' that populist leadership entails? To answer this question, I analyze below how these three leader-centered regimes cope with moments of leadership crisis, when either new legitimacy is warranted or existing legitimacy is weakened.

Bill Clinton

Clinton survived two crises: the triumphant control of Congress by the Republican firebrand Gingrich in 1994-95 after Clinton's squandering of the public's backing of a grand health care plan; and the impeachment procedure during the Lewinsky scandal of 1998-99 (Jacobs & Shapiro 2000: 75-152; Wilentz 2008: 323-407). The mid-term election of 1994 was a disaster. Clinton and his party were shocked and demoralised. Not since 1952 had Democrats lost control of Congress. Major television networks granted presidential airtime to Gingrich, not to the guy in the White House. Nevertheless, 1995 and 1996 became a moment of grace in Clinton's leadership, resulting in his re-election, the first Democratic President since Roosevelt. The terrorist bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma, which killed 168 people, was a turning point. Clinton gave a moving speech at the memorial service and defined the case against extreme anti-federalism (militias). He joined a budget battle with the Republican establishment of Gingrich and Dole and called their bluff during a shutdown of federal government buildings in Washington in the Christmas period of 2005.

More generally, Clinton turned necessity into virtue by what he and his consultants called 'triangulation'. He crafted policies and messages with respect to salient issues at a distance from ideological and overstretching politicians in both parties, such as the bill on workfare, a follow-up of Reagan's Family Support Bill of 1988. Clinton became the national leader of opposition against the usurpation of Gingrich, the quasi-presidential leader of the House of Representatives. This tactic of role reversal worked. In

1996 Republican Dole received 41 percent of the popular vote, independent Perot 9 percent, and Clinton won more than 49 percent, with 379 electoral votes to Dole's 159. A more focused Clinton emerged in 1997, campaigning for further reduction of the federal budget deficit, earned-income credits, environmental rules, and pacification in the Balkans, the Middle East, and Northern Ireland. Clinton tried to sell bipartisan plans, or, to put it bluntly, he adopted Republican ideas and framed them as a coherent public philosophy of New Democrats.

The second crisis began, of course, in January 1998 with the revelation of his affair with Lewinsky, a White House intern, by the writer of the online *Drudge Report.* This became the greatest trial to date of the politics of authenticity that politician-celebrities make. Most Republicans and media outlets promoted a climate of opinion in which Clinton would be forced to resign, either voluntarily or via impeachment. Clinton tried to control the bad news by clever statements, crowded substantive agendas, and reinforcement of his ties with constituencies in race and gender issues. Public opinion remained strikingly unperturbed and sophisticated in its distinction between private evil (the harm to his wife, daughter, and young mistress) and public good (Clinton's low-key control of the economic cycle). After the crisis, Clinton tried to restore his prestige by confessions of guilt and shame as well as by shaping a legacy (such as the failed meetings in Camp David with Barak (Israel) and Arafat (Palestine Authority)).

It is hard to rate the strategy of a spent leader in his final quarters and compare it with his strategy of comeback in 1995 and 1996. It boiled down to disciplined management of a booming, globalizing US economy (creating a public budget surplus, reducing income and wealth inequalities) and due reluctance to use of military force in

foreign affairs (e.g. in Rwanda and, for a long time, in former Yugoslavia, yet in the end bombing and sanctioning Serbia and Iraq). Both after Gingrich and after Lewinsky, Clinton relied on soft populism in an era of optimism about peace and the democratic future of failing poor states and intelligent authoritarian states, with the modal American voter longing for prudent guardianship and accommodation rather than aggressive ideology and polarisation.

Tony Blair

Blair survived one crisis during 2002 and 2003. It concerned his early, full, principled, and unflinching support of the unpopular American war against the dictator Saddam Hussein and the start of a bloody occupation of Iraq with a prominent role of British soldiers. On many other contested issues, such as British entry of the EMU, Blair used to anticipate the mood of the public, exploit occasional agreement with the weakened Conservative Party, and win by delay, adaptation, and personal earnestness, magnetism, and office power. The Iraq crisis was different. Blair was accused of lying, misleading parliament and the British people, politicisation of intelligence and diplomatic services, propaganda and manipulation of free news media, subjection of the British nation to an American empire, and provocation of domestic terror by radicalized Muslim immigrants. Leading Labour politicians disputed Blair's leadership. New Labour's victory in 2001 had been less impressive than its first one. Hence, Blair's militarism began to jeopardize the electoral base and unity of Social Democrats, irrespective of the prolonged ongoing economic miracle in Britain.

Blair responded by stretching the constraints of government house populism. He used each opportunity in parliament and on television to spell out his new strategic doctrine of national interest (connecting antiterrorism with the Palestine question and the global fight against nuclear armament, genocide, poverty, and organized crime) and demonstrate his moral integrity and love of truth ('doing the right thing'). He accounted for his foreign policy in front of reluctant party representatives and several special commissions of scrutiny. He laboured all the harder to promote Labour's domestic agenda in education and improvement of public services. His last campaign in 2005 was called the 'masochism strategy' – putting himself into situations where the public could vent their anger (Mulgan 2006: 203). He won mainly because the Conservatives still looked unelectable, but the thrill was gone.

In his short and difficult last term (2005-2007), Blair tried to mitigate the unexpected negativism with respect to his political personality. Forced by an increasingly vocal and impatient faction of 'Brownites' within his party, he announced and clarified his moment of departure. He publicly supported his successor notwithstanding relentless publicity about their years of alleged rivalry. He explained the irreversibility and long-term, steady-state net benefits of British globalisation (also compared to the post-war experience of loss, retreat, and instability). And he continued to push a new agenda (African development, Middle East and British Islam pacification, global warming, nuclear energy). On certain occasions, such as the eventful July 2005 week that saw the Live 8 concert, the London Olympic bid succeeding, and the bomb attacks by young home-grown terrorists, Blair showed his Churchillean gift of defining the situation. But overall, Blair could not stop the rot in his self-made constituency. His farewell tour of

speeches and visits in the spring of 2007 was met with lukewarm responses. He had clearly overstayed his welcome.

Silvio Berlusconi

Berlusconi's case is special since he did *not* face a leadership crisis when in office, with simmering corruption allegations never quite fully catching up with him.

He tinkered with media ownership systems, popular elections, and criminal law in accordance with his personal interests. The most important laws of his second administration concerned labour market liberalisation, school innovations, tax reform, abolition of compulsory military service, large infrastructural projects, bans of public smoking and embryonic stem cell research, and strict assignment of driving licenses to promote traffic safety. One of Berlusconi's peaks was the new (2004) Constitutional Treaty of the European Union signed in Rome. Yet only one promise to his people was honoured: raising minimum old-age pensions. Many observers pointed at the poor design of welfare state reforms and the stagnation of the Italian economy during Berlusconi's reign (an average of 0.7 percent economic growth). So why and how did Berlusconi avoid a leadership crisis, while he arguably did not deliver the goods? (In April 2006, he suffered defeat against Prodi's rambling left bloc by the narrowest margin. In April 2008, he made a comeback.)

First, there were no leaders waiting in the wings in Berlusconi's party and cabinet, no Lafontaine to taunt him or Brown to haunt him. Second, Berlusconi showed that grassroots populism could turn into government house populism. Many voters saw

his policy record as satisfactory – whether in domestic policy (migration control) or in foreign policy (anti-terrorism), without illusions about Berlusconi's megalomania as well as his vulgar jokes, blunders, and tricks.[4] Third, many citizens accept corruption as a fact of life in a nation of intelligent and inventive individuals. Fourth, the opposition of left-wing parties and social movements was weak in terms of both policy substance and access to news media. Finally, Berlusconi had strong allies in the United States and the European Union who remembered the failure of the Haider boycott of Austria (2000) and were willing to neglect his abuse of power.

Gerhard Schröder

Schröder experienced two crises of leadership, one in the early stages of his campaign for re-election and one in the process of reform of the labour market. In the summer of 2002, the *Medienkanzler* was lagging in the polls due to his failure to reduce unemployment and speed up economic recovery and the prestige of the Christian Democrat candidate Stoiber as governor of the booming Bavarian economy. Yet he managed to exploit the Elbe flood and the public's mood of pacifism and anti-Americanism during Bush's preparation of regime change in Iraq to turn the trend around (Bytzek 2008). He blew up the alliance with fellow moderniser Blair and shaped one with the Gaullist Chirac, and was therefore accused of opportunism in international relations. But Schröder enforced continuity of his government coalition, albeit with a narrow margin. The SPD lost 2.4 percent of the popular vote, while the Christian Democrats and liberals won. Yet, the gain of his ally Joska Fischer's Greens turned out to be sufficient to deliver Schröder's

redgreen coalition a narrow majority in parliament: 50.7 percent of the seats versus 48.9 percent for the black-yellow coalition of Christian Democrats and Liberals.

Schröder's second crisis involved his masterpiece as a policymaker in 2003, namely, *Agenda 2010*, a set of measures to reduce benefits for the unemployed and poor, liberalise dismissal of employees, centralise wage bargaining, improve vocational training, modernise crafts, rationalise healthcare systems, and efficiently tax households, corporations, and municipalities. Public outlays for social policies did not decrease in the short run, while macroeconomic advantages of reform surfaced in the long run (indeed, in the period of Chancellor Merkel who presided over a booming economy in 2006 and 2007). However Schröder had to face alienation among his party members, rejection among his potential voters, increasing unity and obstruction of right-wing opposition parties (strengthened by the gradual decline of regional red-green cabinets and the federal constitution of Germany), the establishment of a new party combination on the left (with the help of Schröder's estranged former ally Lafontaine), growing distrust of media as to his macho style of celebrity politics, and irritation of some governments in Germany's many neighbouring countries.

Schröder's final act of leadership was a Clintonian role reversal and a characteristic and effective one, taking his dire circumstances into account. During the election campaign of 2005, he behaved as if he were leader of the opposition party and Merkel (his main contender) responsible for all public policy disasters. He acted as if he were the outsider in Germany's media system and Merkel the real insider. His final campaign was manic rather than panicky. He attacked Merkel's proposed Minister of Finance in a negative campaign, arguing that the Christian Democrats concealed their

real intention of introducing ruthless American capitalism in a unified Germany. Schröder managed to reduce the loss of his party to 3.5 percent of the national vote and 29 seats in the *Bundestag*. On election night, he even claimed victory over the opinion polls and primacy in the coming process of cabinet formation vis-à-vis astonished leaders of other parties and moderating journalists. In the end, he faced the fact of his own political expendability and facilitated a relatively swift transition towards a great coalition between Christian Democrats and Social Democrats.[5]

Conclusions: causes and credentials of the new populism

In this chapter I attempted to demonstrate that populism is not only a leadership style of radicals and fools at the margins of the democratic space, but also a leadership style of both dissident and mainstream politicians in the heart of the legitimate and constitution-based process of office seeking and office holding in Western mature democracies. I did not, however, intend to claim empirically and historically that populism dominates pragmatism today, nor that populism is rising with some speed and pattern of diffusion without break or backlash.

Nevertheless, it is striking to find current varieties of populism (grassroots and government house, hard and soft, left and right) in two of the oldest democracies of the world (the hegemon United States and the small state the Netherlands) and in two of the world's core states with a totalitarian past (Germany, Italy). Such variety requires some concluding considerations about the causes and credentials of the new populism.

I note a cluster of causes. Globalisation of commerce, labour, news, entertainment, disease, terror and crime goes in tandem with the politics of national identity and the politics of group fear, two breeding grounds of grassroots populism. International and supranational governance of globalisation, such as European integration, is a process of scale enlargement that strengthens the representative role of heads of government, hence government house populism. Governance has also become an important method of domestic politics. It is marked by delegation of competences to independent authorities, networks, and regulated markets. The impersonal and technocratic nature of governance engenders a reaction of grassroots populism.

Furthermore, mass membership parties (the American Democratic Party, the German SPD, British Labour) are turning into campaign parties, while new formations start *tabula rasa* as campaign parties (United We Stand, Forza Italia, the Dutch LPF). Leaders in the regime of mass-membership parties were organization men, insiders, trustees of the people, and paternalists with an interest in, and talent for pragmatism. Leaders in the regime of campaign parties (Manin's model of audience democracy) are entrepreneurs, outsiders, delegates of the people, and marketing experts, willing and able to win by means of populism. Finally, the new public sphere with capital intensive modes of collective action, competing media outlets and the web, and the new political culture of authenticity as a clue for voters in electing politicians (rather than ideological consistency) are conducive to populist representation and participation.

Populism will undermine liberal democracy when winning populist leaders reveal themselves as demagogues and dictators who crush minority voices and concerns, and abolish the checks and balances in the system of popular sovereignty. Populism will

revitalize liberal democracy when they turn out to be liberators and statesmen who lead

the emancipation and inclusion of second-rate citizens. To date, populist leadership

seems to display neither medium dictatorship nor postmodern statesmanship, but rather

something intermediate and mediocre.

Notes

[1] There are important restrictions to my concise comparative study. A local politician such as the Californian Governor Schwarzenegger is excluded. Furthermore, I set aside populist leadership during original democratic revolutions and later breakthroughs of liberal democracy (parliamentary democracy, parties' democracy). I do not consider older contemporary cases, such as Kohl in Western Germany, Gonzales in Spain, Mitterrand in France, Reagan in the United States, and Thatcher in Great Britain. I leave out pioneers in one-party systems, like the Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi and the Mexican President Fox. I do not discuss populist leadership in new democracies of the 'Third Wave' in Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Nor do I include topical cases, such as the French President Sarkozy or the British shadow PM Cameron, and counter-intuitive cases, like Balkenende in the Netherlands, Brown in Great Britain, Merkel in Germany, and Prodi in Italy.

[2] The third campaign in 2008 was relatively moderate, indeed somewhat pragmatic, because of the dismal record of performance of Berlusconi's second cabinet and the soft populism, conciliatory tone and basic substantive agreement of his opponent Veltroni.

[3] Lafontaine started as superminister of Finance and Economic Affairs in Schröder's first administration, but retreated and was dumped soon, in the spring of 1999. He would leave the SPD and establish a new and successful left party as a response to Schröder's capture of the party and 'neoliberal' policies.

[4] In November 2006, Berlusconi orchestrated a faint during a rally in a Tuscan village, which resulted in a massive demonstration of the Italian right against Prodi's second administration a week later.

[5] A private man again, Schröder immediately began to maximize the private commercial potential of his political reputation by, among other things, joining a Russian oil and gas conglomerate. The publicness of such *enrichissez-moi* may be normal in American and British politics. It is, however, new in continental European democracies.