

Political Populism in the Twenty-First Century

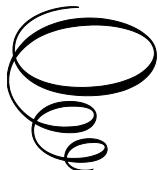
Political Populism in the Twenty-First Century:

We the People

By

Maria Hsia Chang and A. James Gregor

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This book is dedicated to

Patricia Gayle Chaffin

Loving sister, faithful friend, and my shelter from the storm

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PREFACE

A. James Gregor—generous mentor, brilliant professor and the prolific author of some 45 books and monographs—first undertook this project in Spring 2019.

When he passed away on August 30, 2019, he had written three chapters of *Political Populism in the Twenty-First Century: We the People*. To honor my late husband’s commitment to Cambridge Scholars Publishing (CSP), I assumed the responsibility of completing his project.

To that end, I revised and added to one of his chapters, and contributed four additional chapters. It should be noted that Professor Gregor had apprised me of the project from its beginning, and that we were in agreement on the subject of populism and its various manifestations. That being said, the responsibility for this book’s contents is mine alone.

The fulfillment of this project had been challenging, undertaken amidst grieving, a global virus pandemic, as well as unceasing political turmoil, racial protests and riots at home. My work was made bearable by the unconditional love and quiet companionship from my brood, and the kindness, patience and support I received from Dr. Robert Rauchhaus; Professor Anthony Joes; CSP Commissioning Editor Adam Rummens; Jerry Burr; Freydun Gharmanlu; Merrilee Harter Mitchell who, as the coordinator of the Widows/Widowers Grief Recovery of the East Bay, understood better than most that my task was etched with grief; and Judge Patricia Chaffin who took countless weeping phone calls at all hours, to whom this book is dedicated.

Maria Hsia Chang
December 2020

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A. JAMES GREGOR AND MARIA HSIA CHANG

The twentieth century was a time of unmitigated distress, involving two world wars that forever scarred collective sensibilities. It was the bloodiest century in human history, exacting a toll in the hundreds of millions. Many of the lives lost were in armed conflict, but as many, if not more, at the hands of their own government.

R. J. Rummel called those deaths “democide” or “death by government”—the intentional killing of an unarmed or disarmed persons by government agents acting in authoritative capacity and pursuant to government policy or high command. To this day we do not have a certain tally of all democides, but we can be certain that the numbers are staggering. Rummel estimated that in total, during the first 88 years of the twentieth century, 170-360 million men, women, and children were “shot, beaten, tortured, knifed, burned, starved, frozen, crushed, or worked to death; buried alive, drowned, hung, bombed, or killed in any other of the myriad ways government have inflicted deaths on unarmed, helpless citizens.”¹

Most of us have no conception of the character and scope of the destruction that swept away so many. Time has rendered those horrors inconceivable, if not forgotten entirely. And yet, we know what transpired. In his Foreword to Rummel’s *Death by Government*, Irving Louis Horowitz pointed to what he called “one crucial aspect” that stands out above all democides—“The need to revise our sense of the depth of the horrors committed by communist regimes on ordinary humanity.” As Horowitz put it:²

The numbers are so grotesque at this level that we must actually revise our sense and sensibilities about the comparative study of totalitarianisms to appreciate that of the two supreme systemic horrors of the century, the communist regimes hold a measurable edge over the fascist regimes in their life-taking propensities. For, buried in the datum on totalitarian death mills

as a whole is the terrible sense that communism is not “Left” and fascism is not “Right”—both are horrors—and the former, by virtue of its capacity for destroying more of its nationals, holds an unenviable “lead” over the latter in life taking.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the first intimations of what was to come made their appearance when a young Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) dreamed of a universal revolution that would transform the world. It would be a revolution inspired by the theoretical conceptions of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), which would sweep away all oppression, to render human life a fulfillment.

But Lenin’s pursuit of revolution proved difficult. The principal difficulty arose from the fact that Russia, the site chosen for his revolution, was economically underdeveloped, and its population agrarian and largely unlettered. Marxism had anticipated that its revolution would take place in an advanced industrial setting in which the “vast majority” of the population would be *proletariat*—factory workers engaged in commodity production, who spontaneously would rise up in revolt to throw off the yolk of exploitative capitalism. After the revolution, the workers would assume leadership responsibilities in a communist system that would provide abundantly for all, and where government as humanity had known it would melt away, replaced by a genuine self-government.

In other words, Lenin undertook revolution in circumstances that failed to meet the minimum requirements demanded by theoretical Marxism. He acknowledged that the anticipated revolution required that he “creatively modify” the formulae that Marx and Engels had left as directives. By 1902, Lenin maintained that the proletariat—Marx’s prescribed agents of revolution—could not make revolution without the significant intervention of a vanguard of déclassé bourgeois intellectuals who would infuse a “Marxist consciousness” into the proletariat “from without.”

At the time there were other, more orthodox Marxists who anticipated that Lenin’s modification of doctrine might lead to the creation of a “vanguard” political party that conceived itself the repository of revolutionary truth—a circumstance that could well foster a demand, on the part of its leadership, for strict obedience and unqualified conformity to its dictates. As it turned out, Lenin’s Bolsheviks demanded from Russians much more than that. Knowingly or unknowingly, Lenin had set the stage for a series of wholly man-made tragedies that would sear the twentieth century.

During the same period of time, in Southern Europe, another Marxist radical was planning revolution. Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) had declared his Marxist commitment at first maturity. In the course of the next decade, he proceeded to rise through the ranks of the Socialist Party to become an acknowledged revolutionary intellectual and leader of its most radical faction, as well as the editor of the party's journal, *Avanti!* But, like Lenin, Mussolini was a revolutionary Marxist with a difference. Attracted to radicals who gave expression to the syndicalist beliefs of Georges Sorel (1847-1922), he became interested in group psychology and the intricacies of mass mobilization. All of which gave special substance to a doctrine that would cost Italy, and Europe, untold suffering in the evolving century.

In the North, in the first years of the century, another Marxist intellectual, admired by Lenin, had made a discovery. After poring over its original texts for more than a decade, Ludwig Woltmann (1871-1907) discovered racism at the very core of Marxism, Marx having identified *race* as one of the material factors shaping human history. Woltmann went on to draw out the implications of Marx's contention. If socialism was to succeed, he argued, it would have to take race into critical account by advancing itself as a "racial" or "national" socialism. The dialectic of history might well be material, but it was a materialism that incorporated biology. Woltmann's work contributed to the growing volume of contemporary literature devoted to "race science" and probably influenced the revolutionary reflections of a young Austrian radical, Adolph Hitler (1889-1945), who, as a National Socialist, was to bring ruin to Europe and a large part of Africa.

While all of this was transpiring in Europe, it had resonance in Asia. Even before the turn of the new century, Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) had mobilized a growing anti-imperial disaffection in China into a truly revolutionary movement. His followers sought the overthrow of the Qing dynastic rulers in order to institute a program of national economic development. By the second decade of the new century, however, a collection of self-characterized Marxists began to organize in China. With the support of Lenin's Third International, they founded the Chinese Communist Party in 1920. Among the founders was Mao Zedong (1893-1976) who, contrary to all classical Marxist directives but rationalized by Lenin's "creative developments," undertook to mobilize peasants for a Marxist revolution in agrarian China.

In effect, around the time of the end of the First World War (1914-1918), a collection of derivative Marxist movements had undertaken revolutionary initiatives in both Europe and Asia which would dominate the history of the

ensuing century. Academicians and political commentators early settled on classificatory distinctions to be applied to those movements. There were “left-wing” and “right-wing” revolutionary movements, distinguished by uncertain criteria, arbitrarily assigned.

Revolutionary Movements of the Left and Right³

By 1928, following soon after the death of Lenin, his successor, Josef Stalin, settled on a developmental program for Bolshevik Russia which was predicated on the non-Marxist notion of “socialism in one country.” Abandoning Marx’s notion that the liberating revolution would have to be universal, Stalin resolved that the Marxist revolution would bring socialism only to the territories the Bolsheviks controlled.

For the Soviet Union, Stalin proposed a program of intense industrial development to provide the missing material foundation for socialism. It was a developmental program that was distinctive in many ways, the most distinctive feature of which was the absence of a functional market. Industrial and general economic development would proceed without market signals in a command economy. Capital would be extracted from the general economy and disbursed by the central political bureaucracy; subsequent productivity would be governed by directives from the administrative center. Bureaucrats would determine the measure of goods for end-users in both quantities and delivery. The intersectoral transfer of resources and labor would be provided in what were held to be suitable measure. Because theoretical Marxism had opposed commodity production as exploitative of labor, Western intellectuals solemnly maintained that such a system was socialist and Marxist, irrespective of the fact that Stalin’s entire project was undertaken in an environment devoid of the most elementary preconditions prescribed by Marxist theory. Whatever the case, Stalinism was to provide a model for other national developmental dictatorships throughout the remainder of the twentieth century.

There were notable Western scholars who recommended and found benignity in Stalinism. Beatrice and Sidney Webb, George Bernard Shaw, Harold Laski, Walter Duranty, and Romain Rolland, for example, all found in Stalin’s plans potential accomplishment that would result in human liberation. In fact, by the time of the coming of the Second World War (1930-1945) and for some considerable time thereafter, it was held that one of the defining properties of left-wing dictatorship was its benignity, and that the violence and death that marred the history of the twentieth century

was a consequence of right-wing political efforts. According to the apologists, the distinction between left- and right-wing authoritarian systems was that the former remained decent and humane, while the latter fostered mayhem and brutality.

In retrospect, it is surprising how long such sentiments prevailed. Only with the increasing availability of irrefutable evidence and confirmation by the leaders of the Soviet Union itself, did the fiction of Stalin's humanity dissipate.

Some of the realization grew out of the recognition that one of the features of left-wing, mass-mobilizing, developmental revolutions was its readiness to literally destroy everything and everyone that had been the "establishment."

A clear distinction that identified "left-wing," mass-mobilizing, revolutionary, national developmental systems was their disposition to utterly destroy what had previously been the "establishment." In the course of their revolution, Lenin's Bolsheviks extirpated Russia's aristocracy and, in time, destroyed or scattered the imperial military. After the revolution in the new Soviet Union, the ruling Communist Party identified the *kulaks*—peasants deemed advantaged by the possession of a few more acres than their neighbors, or who owned cattle or agricultural mechanical devices—as "class enemies," the proper objects of suppression. Under Stalin, the kulaks had their property confiscated. Some were forced to flee to the urban areas; others were imprisoned or summarily executed.

By 1927, Stalin had hammered out an inflexible doctrine that was imposed on all his subjects. It allowed neither deviation nor resistance, and involved measures designed to preclude any such possibilities. Millions of persons were disappeared, including resistant intellectuals, recalcitrant members of the forced agricultural collectives, untold numbers of the proletariat, as well as thousands of non-Bolshevik socialists labeled "enemies of the revolution." We have no certain statistics on the number of democides that resulted from Stalin's Great Terror, but they have been assessed in the tens of millions.

When any of this was revealed at the time, the lay public was told that it was undertaken in the service of "the working class." It was somehow described as intrinsically liberating and, as such, an embodiment of ennobling "Enlightenment values." A quarter of a century later, with much

the same conviction, Mao Zedong was held to be vested with that same responsibility.

The other variants of revolutionary mass-mobilizing movements of the period, both developmental and non-developmental alike to which allusion has been made, were held to be “right-wing.” Fascists were believed to be in league with the oppressors of society, having risen to power with the seeming approval of the nation’s establishment. On the Italian peninsula, King Victor Emmanuel had invited Mussolini to form a government, and surrendered a representative democracy to an enduring, single-party authoritarianism that would embroil the nation in a catastrophic war that cost the lives of more than five hundred thousand of its young men, together with thousands upon thousands of civilian casualties.

While the advocates of Fascism had spoken of its intention to uplift masses and engender a new civilization, intellectuals in the West simply dismissed those claims as “right-wing” apologetics for a destructive political dictatorship. At the same time, there was little, if any, discussion concerning the character of the “right wing” regime of Adolf Hitler’s National Socialism. Hitler unleashed devastation on Europe of such an order as to consume millions, most completely innocent of any offense. Jews and gypsies, Slavs and the “unfit,” were universally consigned to death camps where they perished.

Since the Second World War, only the revolutionary right is held to be evil. Though born in a time of a dearth of information, the distinctions have remained constant, irrespective of all contrary evidence—only the right is the source of political violence and venom. The term, “Fascism,” has become a staple of ordinary political discourse, employed without qualification as a term whose reference is brutality and hatred. To this day any reference to the “right-wing” conjures up images of death camps and genocide, unmitigated oppression, violence and hatred. But the term’s commonplace and indiscriminate usage obscures the shared properties that render the left- and right-wing movements and regimes of the twentieth century variants of the same political genus.

Revolutionary Mass Movements of the Twentieth Century

The revolutionary mass movements of the left and right that dominated the history of the twentieth century shared significant and well confirmed properties. With the notable exception of Hitler’s National Socialism, all of

they were primarily *developmental* in intent, driven by an imperative to create a fully articulated industrial economy out of one that was essentially agrarian.

Although originally animated by Marxist doctrine that anticipated a revolution in a mature industrial economy, the primitive economic conditions of Russia very quickly converted Lenin to a developmental alternative—the New Economic Policy (NEP). Begun in 1921, the NEP arranged for a system that sought steadily increasing productivity through the agency of a state-controlled but largely market-governed economy—of private property ownership, generous concessions to foreign investors, a regimented labor force, and compulsory doctrinal obedience required of the general population. Though state-owned, factories were governed by more-or-less traditional market signals. What was remarkable with all that was not only the NEP's singularly non-Marxist essence, but its similarity with the system constructed by the Italian Fascists. Except for the differences produced by historic circumstances, the two systems shared features that identified them as variant members of developmental enterprise.

But the Soviet Union did not continue with Lenin's New Economic Policy for long. In the power struggle that followed Lenin's death in January 1924, Stalin at times supported the NEP, and at other times opposed it. By 1928, Lenin's quasi-capitalist economy was replaced by Stalin's command economy, in which private property and market signals were eliminated. Whatever the modifications, however, Stalin's command economy remained one governed by a developmental imperative. It was an essentially non-Marxist program, designed to preclude the possibility of resistance to Bolshevik control. All property was "collectivized," that is, state-owned, so as not to serve as platforms of resistance to Party rule.

As a necessary consequence of Stalin's changes, a market could no longer function. Rather than market signals, production was to respond to bureaucratic directives from the center. The imperative remained production, with a system that was remarkably non-Marxist. There was nothing remotely like workers' control of production: Rather than representative bodies of workers, the *Soviets* served as control agencies of the state. There was no redistribution to assure that each would receive according to need. There was not even the pretense of economic equality, nor any semblance of democracy. It was a centrally controlled developmental system, dominated by a charismatic leader who would rule for life, invested with power over life or death.

This was the form of developmental dictatorship variations of which would emerge in Asia with Mao Zedong and Pol Pot, in Eastern Europe under Soviet occupation, and in the Caribbean with Fidel Castro. It was a system that bore unmistakable similarities with that fashioned by Fascism, the principal difference arising from the continued role of the commodity market permitted in Italy.

Whatever the differences, all these developmental systems, of the left and right, were state- and party-dominant. They were doctrinally fueled, inflexibly authoritarian, and sustained by armed militias. They all sought totalitarian control of opinion, the systematic inculcation of doctrine, and the general uniformity of political behavior.

All of this grew out of the real or fancied requirements of rapid industrialization and economic development. In capital-poor environments, such systems sought to generate capital and transfer it to the requirements of development. That necessitated strict control of consumption, which offset any rise in the standard of living in the course of economic expansion. Iron control of the population foreclosed any possibility of collective resistance.

National Socialism, although itself not a developmental system, mimicked the political forms such systems had assumed. Like other “right-wing” members of the class, National Socialism was a single-party, charismatically-led political system, with a largely market-governed economy. Among none of the major right-wing variants of the developmental dictatorships did either the capitalists or the wealthy dominate. At best, they were junior partners in a party-dominant arrangement, subordinate to the inflexible rule of the “Leader.”

In fact, developmental dictatorships, left or right, varied among themselves in the character of their control, as well as their particular accomplishments and deficits. The Soviet Union, for example, at great cost in material and lives, succeeded in establishing sophisticated heavy industries that produced the military wherewithal to resist Nazi Germany’s invasion until the Western industrial nations could come to its defense. Mao’s China, on the other hand, not only failed at its “great leaps” in economic development, but exacted a cost of at least thirty million lives and the suffering of untold millions more. Similarly, Pol Pot’s Democratic Kampuchea failed in every economic measure, and took the lives of as much as one third of the population.

In the Caribbean, Fidel Castro's attempt at economic development with authoritarian controls never materialized. After more than half a hundred years of one-party rule, Cuba's work force remains predominantly agricultural and service oriented, with only 23 percent involved in industry. While the revolutionary government of Fidel Castro executed hundreds upon taking power in Havana, and has since incarcerated thousands, the system has chosen to exile, rather than execute, its dissidents. More than 10 percent of its total population has either voluntarily or been compelled to flee the island nation. While it has significantly improved education and medical care for a population sharing greater economic equality than in the past, Cuba remains a largely agricultural single-commodity (sugar) economy, with antique cars and hand-crafted tools.

In contrast, Fascist Italy undertook fairly comprehensive economic and industrial development and, for more than a decade, was one of the most successful systems in Europe, with one of the most advanced welfare systems. Its means of controlling its population involved the "internal exile" of dissidents from the metropolitan areas to rural regions. Political executions were rare, and it was only with the coming of the Second World War that Italy became involved in the discrimination against, and detention of, Jews. Only with the German occupation did Fascists become complicit in the murder of Jews. German troops collected Jews from Italian detention camps and executed perhaps seven thousand.

With the end of the Second World War and the survival of developmental dictatorships of the left, a number of authoritarian and developmental systems arose in Africa and the Middle East which identified themselves as "socialist." Allowing private property and with an economy governed by market signals, only the use of uncertain Marxist jargon led some to speak of them as "leftist."

The death of Stalin in 1953 caused immediate political decompression in both Russia and its satellites. There was serious political unrest in the Soviet dominated German Democratic Republic, as well as other similarly circumstanced dependencies. When, a few years later, Nikita Khrushchev revealed the full extent of Stalin's enormities, the unrest spread throughout central Europe.

Within the compass of these developments, the political, economic, and military competition between left-wing revolutionary powers and liberal democracies became increasingly demanding. For most of the time of the

Cold War (1947-1991), Western economists were convinced that the Soviet bloc had the resources to survive the contest. During this period, both the Soviet Union and China developed nuclear capabilities and the vehicles for their delivery. At enormous expense for all concerned, there was nuclear missile competition between the West and the revolutionary Eurasian systems.

In the course of all this, tensions began to develop between the Soviet Union and Mao Zedong's People's Republic of China. It became increasingly obvious that post-Stalinist Russia was seeking some kind of accommodation with the West. At the same time, Moscow sought to improve the overall productivity of the Soviet Union. It was experimenting with economic strategies that simulated the existence of a market. In the effort to improve the general availability and quality of consumer goods, some sectors of the economy were allowed to employ something like the traditional market; others were made subject to experiments with computers, attempting to simulate market signals.

The Chinese Communist Party observed all that with a jaundiced eye. It concluded that Moscow had embarked on systemic revision, giving the appearance of a reversion to capitalism. Mao began to speak of a revisionism in the Soviet Union which not only threatened the security of China, but the integrity of international revolution itself. Still smarting from the failures attendant on the Great Leap Forward and the efforts by his subordinates to limit his power, Mao mobilized the youth of China to a reaffirmation of his revolution. He closed all the institutions of learning and ordered the youth to undertake a "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" in order to destroy the revisionists and "capitalist roaders" who had made their appearance in China, as well as all elements and traces of traditional China—the "four olds" of ideas, culture, habits, and customs. So inspired, millions of Red Guards fanned out over China, destroying temples, libraries, and antiquities, and despoiling the graves of long-dead emperors and historic notables.

All of this was accompanied by continuous anti-Soviet rhetoric. Tensions rose to the point that Sino-Soviet armed conflict became an evident possibility when Chinese and Soviet troops massed along the northern border that separated the two systems and exchanged fire. Although the troops eventually stood down, Mao decided that prudence required an alternative international strategy by making overtures to Washington, which

led to a change in U.S. China policy by the administration of Richard Nixon, resulting in the latter's historic visit to China in 1972.

By that time, the Chinese military had brought an end to the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. After Mao's death in 1976, the twice-purged Deng Xiaoping took control of the party, repudiated Mao's radicalism and, insisting that socialism is not poverty, began a reform to industrialize the Chinese economy.

The communes of Mao's failed Great Leap Forward were dismantled. Farm families were allowed to undertake small manufactories to fabricate agricultural utensils and household goods. Commodity markets reappeared and, as manufacturing increased, foreign sales and investments were allowed in "special economic zones" along the coast which very quickly expanded to other parts of China. Rights akin to private property rights were introduced.

By the turn of the decade, in 1981, China was operating a dual economy of a state-owned sector that remained under the state's bureaucratic control, and a vital and growing sector that responded to individual initiative, the profit motive, and market signals. Foreigners were allowed to invest in China, to introduce modern marketing skills and corresponding technology. As a consequence, China's economy began growing at double-digit rates. Possessed of a hardworking and competent population, as well as abundant natural resources, China very rapidly constructed a suitable infrastructure by implementing the most modern developmental strategies from its industrialized neighbors—Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea.

In 1981, the party undertook a reexamination of the Maoist era at the historic Sixth Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee Meeting of the Chinese Communist Party, and issued its summation, *Resolution on Certain Questions of our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China*. According to the *Resolution*, the almost quarter century of Mao's rule had seriously impaired the nation's development with excessive "leftism." Henceforth, China would undertake development under the Communist Party's "Four Cardinal Principles." Whatever the economic reform, the political system was to remain the monopolistic purview of the Communist Party, with nationalism providing collective impetus.

Throughout approximately the same period, the Soviet Union suffered persistent economic and political pressures that resulted in sclerosis and dysfunction. In the 1970s and 1980s, governed by old and uninspiring Party leaders, the Soviet Union's economy slowly ground down to levels that left the country with diminishing quantities of essential consumer commodities of correspondingly diminishing quality.

During those years, Mikhail Gorbachev (1931-) moved upward through the ranks of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to achieve, by 1985, commanding station as General Secretary of the Party. Unlike many Western specialists, Gorbachev was well aware of the deficiencies of the Socialist command economy. To revive the sclerotic economy, he turned to *perestroika*—a “restructuring” or “reform” of the Soviet Union’s productive system.

In retrospect, it is not certain if Gorbachev had a specific plan for economic reform. The restructuring he proposed was insistent, but without sure content. On occasion he spoke of a decentralization of the system, with regional producers assuming more responsibility in terms of capital formation, product selection, price, and distribution. There were even rare instances when he spoke of introducing market governance of production into the system.

Along with economic *perestroika*, Gorbachev proposed an “opening” (*glasnost*) of Soviet society, in which citizens would feel free to voice their opinions without fear of reprisal. In the climate of increasing political freedom, it was agreed that much of the political rationale produced to justify the extant system had been a fiction. A Congress of People’s Deputies was proposed, which would be popularly elected, endowed with powers that hitherto had been reserved exclusively for the CPSU.

Within the increasing political turbulence, punctuated by the 1986 nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, some of the Soviet Union’s constituent republics began to speak of independence. The Baltic republics of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia complained that their absorption into the Soviet Union as a consequence of an agreement between Moscow and Berlin immediately prior to the Second World War, was fundamentally illegal and constituted an act of unwarranted international aggression. Soon, other republics made similar claims. Armenians sought an ethnically united republic; Ukraine made a demand for increased political independence and the right to fly its own, rather than the Soviet, flag. Moldova, Georgia, Kazakhstan and

Uzbekistan similarly advanced claims of national privilege and sovereign rights.

Gorbachev made efforts to accommodate them all, leading to more and more sweeping claims. In some instances, force was used to attempt to extort compliance, but its employment was never truly successful. Hundreds of thousands of protestors continued to resist Moscow. By the end of 1990, the Soviet Union had largely disaggregated, the Warsaw Pact nations had obtained their independence, as had most of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union.

The CPSU broke into factions, their leaders making themselves heard in the elective Congress of People's Deputies. Boris Yeltsin (1931-2007) was one of the most vocal and popular among them. A member of the CPSU from 1961, he was initially an ally of Gorbachev but, by 1990, had become resolute in his opposition. In 1987, Yeltsin resigned as candidate member of the CPSU's Politburo. Still a leader in the CPSU's regional party in Moscow, he continued to advocate increased political liberalization and began to speak of a market-governed economy.

In 1991, Yeltsin was popularly elected to the newly created post of President of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. When the politically exhausted Gorbachev resigned in December of that same year, effectively dissolving both the CPSU and the Soviet Union itself, Yeltsin became the first president of what became known as the Russian Federation.

Almost the first thing the new president undertook to accomplish was to restore private property and open the nation's productive system to market forces. In the whirlwind of confusion that ensued, state-owned property was selectively distributed and acquired by individuals and groups of individuals, establishing them as system "oligarchs."

By that time, what had been the economy of the Soviet Union had contracted to about half its past productivity—in size and output, its economy compared with that of Italy or California. The numbers enlisted in the military had declined in equal measure; the air force declined in similar measure, for lack of maintenance and spare parts; the naval forces rusted in port. With all that, Yeltsin's popularity plummeted. In October 1998, military forces attempted a coup to stop what they anticipated would be a total disintegration of Russia. Although the coup attempt was thwarted,

Yeltsin was politically spent. In December 1999, he resigned, designating Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin (1952-) as his successor.

The Close of an Era in Europe

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the era of developmental dictatorships in Europe came to a close. By that time virtually every nation on the Continent had attained substantial, if not full, industrial maturity. Though devastated by the Second World War, with their cities reduced to rubble, the major countries of Europe revivified themselves to productive vitality. In such circumstances, and unlike the conditions that prevailed at the end of the First World War, there was no impetus to impose totalitarian controls on entire populations in the effort to achieve economic development.

Those countries that had fallen outside the Soviet orbit at the conclusion of the Second World War simply returned to the forms of representative democracy that had prevailed before the conflict. Germany and Italy behaved very much as though nothing of consequence had intervened. The post-war political systems they assumed looked and functioned very much as those before the advent of National Socialism and Fascism, but with a recognition of what had happened during their respective interregnums of revolutionary dictatorships.

With the disappearance of the Soviet Union, all the states that had been in its trammels were expected, upon release, to revert to representative democratic forms, even in cases where they had never before been representative democracies. So confident were some in the West of a universal prevalence of liberal democracies that they anticipated a world without ideologies. Francis Fukuyama, in a much-publicized and -touted 1989 *National Interest* essay, “The End of History,” which was expanded into the 1992 *The End of History and the Last Man*, celebrated the “unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism” and pronounced that:⁴

What we may be witnessing, is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.

And yet, towards the end of the century, political movements identified as populist began to take shape within the representative democracies of the West. Fukuyama had defined “ideology” as “not restricted to the secular and explicit political doctrines we usually associate with the term, but can include religion, culture, and the complex of moral values underlying any society as well.”⁵ By that definition, the ideas and concerns of populist movements certainly qualify as ideologies.

Defining Populism

By the first years of the twenty-first century, it is said that populism “has spread like wildfire throughout the world.”⁶ For a phenomenon so recent, there are already hundreds of volumes and articles devoted to the subject, and some of the best scholars involved in the enterprise.⁷ The belief is that we are witnessing unusual political developments that require special conceptual definition.

But like so many words in politics, the word “populism” has little consensus in meaning. As political scientists Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser observed:⁸

Populism is one of the main political buzzwords of the 21st century. The term is used to describe left-wing presidents in Latin America, right-wing challenger parties in Europe, and both left-wing and right-wing presidential candidates in the United States. But while the term has great appeal to many journalists and readers alike, its broad usage also creates confusion and frustration.

Adding to the conceptual problem is the intrusion of normative judgment into discussions of populism. As Peter C. Baker of *The Guardian* put it, “Tellingly, most writing about populism presumes an audience unsympathetic to populism,” which is portrayed as “like something from a horror film”—“an alien bacteria” that is poisoning political life and infecting new ranks of easily-manipulated, gullible voters.⁹

An effort to define populism might begin with the word’s Latin root—*populus* or people. Accordingly, the word “people” is prominent in dictionaries’ lexical definitions of populism. As an example, *The Oxford Dictionary* defines populism as “The quality of appealing to or being aimed at ordinary people.”¹⁰

The “populism” label has its roots in the People’s Party, a political party formed in the early 1890s by aggrieved farmers in southern and western United States who felt neglected by politicians and bankers.

The farmers first formed the Farmers’ Alliance to advance their complaints. They held that the major financial institutions in the northeast, with their insistence on maintaining a gold standard for currency, made it difficult to obtain and repay credit. The farmers objected to the railroads charging arbitrary rates for the transport of goods—rates that would vary without warning, which made earning a livelihood precarious. They accused politicians of ignoring their complaints and favoring heavily populated urban areas. They chafed at the political arrangement wherein senators, two of whom ostensibly represented each state, were appointed instead of elected by the people—a situation that the farmers believed led to the senators having little incentive to serve their rural constituencies.

To rectify the wrongs, the farmers called for a progressive income tax, government ownership of railroad and telegraph systems, direct election of senators, and a host of other measures to make government more responsive to their needs. But the ensconced political and financial elites refused to consider the farmers’ demands.

All of this came together in the early 1890s when the Farmers’ Alliance formed a political party that could directly address their concerns in Washington, D.C. The farmers called their nascent party the People’s Party, which colloquially became known as the Populists.

A distinguishing attribute of the People’s Party was its nonrevolutionary character. Unlike the revolutionary movements that marked the twentieth century, the American populists sought neither to radically transform polity and society, nor did they employ violence to achieve their ends. Instead, they were committed to work within the democratic system through legislative intervention, the courts, and the ballot.

Throughout the twentieth century, every revolutionary had claimed to speak for “the people” against their oppressors. Fascists, National Socialists, and Marxists of all and sundry sorts all claimed to defend the “true” people against their tormentors. But the most immediate attribute that distinguished the revolutionaries from populists was the former’s readiness to invoke violence to accomplish their purpose, whereas populists typically eschew

violence, seeking instead to redress specific grievances via the institutionalized processes of electoral democracies.

Twentieth century revolutionaries also differed from populists by the fact that they sought to accomplish *projects*, as distinct from *policies*. The former were grand, transformative undertakings that engaged immense human and material resources over decades in time. Fascist and Marxist developmental nationalists committed their entire populations to economic modernization and industrialization, while National Socialists anticipated the conquest of vast territories, the displacement of entire populations, and the refurbishment of at least a continent.

In contrast, the American agrarian populists and the populists of the twenty-first century were in no way as enterprising. To rectify perceived wrongs, populists think in terms of election cycles in pursuit of *policies* that are limited in time and scope. While there may be instances in which populist policies border on the projects of revolution, they are not so abundant that they create irremediable conceptual confusion.

To realize their transformative ambitions, revolutionaries required and mobilized durable constituencies, whereas populists have little choice other than to try to win the support of fickle voters. Revolutionaries constructed organizations supported by complex ideologies that provided the rationale for their utopian projects. National Socialists made weighty tomes on social Darwinism and race science available to Party members and youth groups to convince them of the necessity for the revolutionary projects. Fascists produced disquisitions on the theory of the state and the complexities of economic and industrial development in the effort to inspire convinced conformity. Similarly, revolutionary Marxists disseminated doctrinal literature to inculcate belief and commitment in both Party members and the masses.

Their commitment to time- and material-demanding projects, in turn, required complex and permanent brick-and-mortar party structures to house, train and sustain a substantial membership, supported with durable funding. Populist organizations, on the other hand, given their transient membership and the currency of their policies, do not require the same investment in a fixed infrastructure or corps of trained cadre. And although both revolutionary and populist movements typically are led by charismatic leaders, populist leaders tend to eschew independently established political

organizations, preferring temporary and less expensive combinations for episodic employment.

These distinctions between revolutionary and populist movements provide a criterial definition of populism, but they miss an essential attribute of populism. There is a simpler way to define populism, which is to define the concept by its opposite—elitism.

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines “elitism” as “The belief that a society or system should be led by an elite” and “The superior attitude or behaviour associated with an elite.” “Elite” is defined as “A group or class of people seen as having the most power and influence in a society, especially on account of their wealth or privilege.”¹¹

Mudde and Kaltwasser pointed out that despite the lack of scholarly agreement on the defining attributes of populism, there is a general agreement that all forms of populism include some kind of appeal to “the people” and a denunciation of “the elite.” In other words, populism views society as separated into two antagonistic camps—“the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite.”¹²

Indeed, the *Oxford Dictionary* identifies elitism as central to the definition of populism. Accordingly, populism refers to “A political approach that strives to appeal to ordinary people who feel that their concerns are disregarded by established elite groups,” while populist refers to “A person, especially a politician, who strives to appeal to ordinary people who feel that their concerns are disregarded by established elite groups.”¹³

Populism is conventionally subdivided into two broad categories: those of the left and those of the right. Left-wing populism conceives “the people” and their oppressors in terms of economic *classes*—there are oppressed and oppressing classes. Right-wing populism tends to speak of “the people” as *the nation*, and their elite oppressors as foreign aliens or domestic anti-nationalist globalists. Nationalism—an ideology of self-determination that demands recognition and autonomy as a separate people¹⁴—is a recurrent, expressed sentiment among many populists, which helps to explain the visceral disdain with which populism is held by the advocates of class politics and by globalists. The present volume focuses on political populism of the right—in Russia, Central Europe (Poland and Hungary), Western Europe (United Kingdom, Italy and France), and the United States.

In summary, populism is defined in this volume as a political movement of an aggrieved population, which is anti-elitist and anti-globalist, non-violent and non-revolutionary, committed to electoral democracy, and seeks to effect change through elections, legislations and the courts. Membership in populist movements is changeable and transient, which makes the movement's duration and impact fleeting instead of enduring.

As a concept, the notion of populism will remain open-textured and loosely framed. Political science is not geometry. Students of the social sciences must tolerate a measure of vagueness and ambiguity in what is largely an ordinary-language discipline. The compensation is that whatever the shortcomings of populism as a concept, it does allow us to store and retrieve information, predict some outcomes, and act with a measure of rationality in complex and demanding situations.

Notes

¹ R. J. Rummel, *Death by Government* (NY: Routledge, 1997), p. 9.

² Irving Louis Horowitz, "Foreword," in *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

³ For further reading, see A. James Gregor, *The Faces of Janus: Marxism and Fascism in the Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press, 2000); *Fascism and History: Chapters in Concept Formation* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 2019); *The Fascist Persuasion in Radical Politics*. (Princeton University Press: 1974); *Italian Fascism and Developmental Dictatorship* (Princeton University Press: 1979); *Marxism and the Making of China: A Doctrinal History* (Palgrave Macmillan: 2014); *Marxism, Fascism, and Totalitarianism: Chapters in the Intellectual History of Radicalism* (Stanford University Press: 2009); and Maria Hsia Chang, *The Labors of Sisyphus: The Economic Development of Communist China* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1998).

⁴ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," *The National Interest*, Summer 1989, p. 1, https://www.embl.de/aboutus/science_society/discussion/discussion_2006/ref1-22june06.pdf. Retrieved July 21, 2020.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶ Barry Eichengreen, *The Populist Temptation: Economic Grievance and Political Reaction in the Modern Era* (Oxford University Press, 2018), <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-populist-temptation-9780190866280?cc=us&lang=en&#>. Retrieved July 23, 2020.

⁷ See, for example, Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*. (Verso, Reprint Edition, 2018); Cas Mudde and Cristoval Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (University of Pennsylvania, 2016); and Paul Taggart, *Populism* (Open University Press, 2000).

⁸ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁹ Peter C. Baker, “‘We the People’: the battle to define populism,” *The Guardian*, January 10, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/jan/10/we-the-people-the-battle-to-define-populism>. Retrieved July 24, 2020.

¹⁰ “Populism,” *Lexico*, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/populism>. Retrieved July 23, 2020.

¹¹ “Elitism” and “elite,” *Lexico*, *op. cit.*, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/elitism> and <https://www.lexico.com/definition/elite>. Retrieved November 13, 2020.

¹² Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

¹³ “Populism” and “Populist,” *Lexico*, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Arthur Keith, “Nationality and Race: From an Anthropologist’s Point of View,” a lecture to the Oxford University Junior Scientific Club (London: Oxford University Press, 1919), p. 6. For more on the definitions of nation and nationalism, see Maria Hsia Chang, *Return of the Dragon: China’s Wounded Nationalism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press), chapter 2: “On Nationalism”.