



The resurgence of populism in Latin America

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Abstract

Contemporary manifestations of “neopopulism” are situated in an analysis of the role of political institutions in capitalist societies, and the idea of structural and institutional crisis. It is argued that “populist” and “neopopulist” discourse alike must be understood in terms of their relationship to specific conjunctural projects for the reorientation of capitalist reproduction. This approach directs attention back to the contrasting conjunctures in which classical populist and contemporary neopopulist political projects were launched. It also provides a basis on which contemporary projects which adopt elements of populist strategy and discourse can be compared and evaluated. © 2000 Published by Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Behind the concern provoked by the resurgence of populism in Latin America is the fear that the consolidation of democracy will be imperilled if citizens abandon political institutions in moments of crisis, and turn instead to individuals who make a direct appeal for their support. This entirely conventional point of view, central to conceptions of representative democracy, feeds off a literature critical of the dangers of forms of mass politics in which unscrupulous demagogues stimulate mob rule. If appropriate institutions are not interposed between citizens and rulers, the theory goes, rulers will lack the insulation from direct popular pressure that they require in

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order to govern:

Effective democratic governance involves clear and consistent subordination of the military and the police to civilian political institutions, especially parties, that are autonomous, stable, and powerful enough to express and aggregate social interests and also to constrain self-aggrandizing power grabs by the executive. It implies the organizations and procedures of civil society, of intermediary institutions engaging in the interests and values of diverse individuals and groups. Yet for democratic governance to work well, government officials must also have enough authority and legitimacy to take and implement decisions that are intended to privilege public and national interests over those of sectors, regions, or private actors. The tension between effective authority and accountability is built into democratic governance and provides a constant challenge, even in those societies where democracy has been most fully achieved (Lowenthal & Dominguez, 1996, p. 6).

Such composite statements of this standard theory abound in the literature on political development generally, and in the current literature on Latin America in particular (Cammack, 1997). In line with it, theorists of the consolidation of democracy and the construction of democratic governance in the region and elsewhere emphasise the need for institutionalisation, and in particular for institutionalised party systems. For Diamond, such systems “increase democratic governability and legitimacy by facilitating legislative support for government policies; by channeling demands and conflicts through established procedures; by reducing the scope for populist demagogues to win power; and by making the democratic process more inclusive, accessible, representative and effective” (Diamond, 1997, p. xxiii); this view is echoed in Mainwaring and Scully’s study of Latin American party systems (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995) and in a rapidly growing literature in a similar vein (Linz & Stepan, 1996, pp. 7–10; Hagopian, 1998, pp. 101–102; Norden, 1998, pp. 424–427). In this scenario, new and old democracies are currently haunted by the prospect of populist leaders who flourish on the basis of “solemn promises, made directly to the people, to solve national problems virtually single-handed and without political parties” (Hagopian, 1998, p. 104). At the same time, in the context of a parallel endorsement of broadly neoliberal economic reform packages as the only option for the region (Williamson, 1990), Latin American populists of the post-war period have been demonised out of historical context as reckless and extravagant spendthrifts bent on economic suicide (Dornbusch & Edwards, 1991), just as an earlier literature misrepresented the *politics* of Latin American populism in order to bolster orthodox theories of political development (Kenworthy, 1973; Roxborough, 1984). In these circumstances, any assessment of the issue of populism in contemporary Latin America must take account not only of the “appeal to the people” which characterises populism in general terms, but also of the particular character — specific to the time and place — of post-war populist projects in Latin America.

I address the issue of whether we are currently witnessing a resurgence of populist politics in Latin America, then, with three related questions in mind. First, is there currently a marked or increasing tendency for politicians to make direct appeals to the

people which by-pass existing political institutions, and particularly established political parties? Second, are these direct, extra-institutional appeals linked to viable political projects? And third, if so, how do they compare to the classical populist projects?

2. Approaches to Latin American populism

In fact the literature on Latin American populism reflects and in some ways divides over the two objects of enquiry identified above — specific populist projects and appeals to the people. One approach is concerned with the politics of specific Latin American regimes in a specific historical period. It initially identified populism with such characteristics as nationalism, mass politics, a personalist leader, a cross-class political alliance incorporating the urban working class, and an anti-status quo ideology (Di Tella, 1965). Its key point of reference was the developmentalist alliance between the state, the working class and the industrial bourgeoisie which promoted import-substituting industrialisation in the wake of the depression. At the institutional level, it placed emphasis upon the prominence of the leader, the relative weakness of parties and the legislature, and the use of corporatist institutions to organise business and to mobilise and control labour. Perón's regime in Argentina between 1946 and 1955 is the central point of reference here, with Cárdenas and Vargas making up the trio of classic Latin American populists. As other regimes have been added to this core trio, commentators have debated the balance of similarities and contrasts between them and the extent to which the model captures or distorts their class content and political dynamics (Ashby, 1967; Baily, 1967; Conniff, 1982; Drake, 1978; Erickson, 1977; Roxborough, 1984; Stein, 1980). A recent composite definition sees the “populism” which is the focus of this debate as

A political movement characterised by mass support from the urban working class and/or peasantry, a strong element of mobilisation from above, a central role of leadership from the middle sector or elite, typically of a personalistic and/or charismatic character; and an anti-status quo, nationalist ideology and program (Collier & Collier, 1991, p. 788).

The emphasis here, then, is upon the *structure* (or political economy) and *institutions* of certain specific Latin American regimes in a specific (post-depression) *historical conjuncture*. In contrast, a second approach examined the *discourse* of populism and concentrated on the character and implications of the direct appeal it made to “the people”. The starting point here was Laclau's rejection of the first approach on the grounds that it was simultaneously too specific in its attempt to tie the concept to a particular stage of development, and too imprecise in its assertion that involved an appeal to the people. His own strikingly different definition ran as follows:

Our thesis is that populism consists in the presentation of popular-democratic interpellations as a synthetic-antagonistic complex with respect to the dominant ideology (Laclau, 1977, pp. 172–173).

Secreted in this somewhat forbidding formulation were two straightforward and important suggestions, to which I shall return below. The first was that the emergence of populism was historically linked not to a crisis typical of a specific stage of development, but to “a crisis of the dominant ideological discourse which is in turn part of a more general social crisis”. The second, arising from the fact that it started “at the point where popular-democratic elements [were] presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the dominant bloc”, was that it carried with it a palpable risk for any fraction of the dominant bloc which sought to develop it:

The populism of the dominant classes is always highly repressive because it attempts a more dangerous experience than an existing parliamentary regime: whilst the second simply neutralises the revolutionary potential of popular interpellations, the first tries to develop that antagonism but to keep it within certain limits (Laclau, 1977, p. 174).

The risk was all the greater, of course, in the case of a “populism of the dominated classes” which confronted the dominant bloc as a whole, and sought the maximum fusion between democratic interpellations and socialist discourse.

This approach, characterising as populist all appeals to the people which are antagonistic to the dominant ideology, retained and refined the idea of opposition to the status quo, while it broke the link with a specific state-developmental form of regime at a particular historical conjuncture. At the same time, it situated the analysis of discourse squarely in the context of class politics and social crisis. This gives it greater analytical power than contemporary approaches which treat populism as a political strategy by reducing it to a set of practices not connected to any such idea of crisis, such as the “purely political notion of populism” advanced by Weyland (1996, p. 5).

I seek to retain Laclau’s emphasis on the particular significance of “appeals to the people” in the context of capitalist society and institutions, through an integrated analysis of *discourse*, *institutions*, and *political economy*, in a specified *historical conjuncture*. Rather than contrast discourse on the one hand and structure on the other, as has become fashionable, an effort should be made to capture the logic of the conjuncture as a whole, with renewed attention to a middle term of institutionalisation. Just as much attention should be paid to the *institutional* implications of populism as to its structural and discursive content: a full analysis will operate simultaneously at the three levels of structure, institutions, and discourse, and the relationship between these three elements will reflect the character of the historical conjuncture.

This perspective leads me to argue that the “populist moment” of direct appeal to the people is a brief one, reflective of a conjunctural crisis of political institutions, and that (to borrow from Garretón) its fortunes will depend on its ability to move from a reactive or “defensive” posture through a direct appeal to the people to a foundational project which gives rise to the creation of a new institutional order (Garretón, 1986, pp. 145–148). Before I can proceed further, though, some analysis is required of the status of “appeals to the people” in the context of capitalist society and institutions.

3. Appeals to the people

If a common element in all forms of populism is a direct “appeal to the people”, it should be understood, where the context in which it appears is capitalist, in relation to the role played by political institutions in mediating between rulers and citizens in capitalist societies. What role do such institutions play in the reproduction of capitalist society, and what are the implications when direct appeals to the people become a staple part of politics?

The role of political institutions in the reproduction of capitalism is quite specific. It arises from the limitations placed upon the attributes of citizenship by the separation of the economic and the political which is unique to capitalism, and the need for political (and social) institutions which ensure that the limits necessary for the reproduction of capitalism are respected. In principle, once the economic power of the propertied classes no longer depends upon extra-economic status, all members of society can be admitted to citizenship. But because capitalist reproduction depends upon the maintenance of the social and economic disciplines which compel the propertyless majority to sell their labour to survive, political equality must not encroach upon this fundamental social and economic inequality upon which capitalism depends. In these circumstances, unconstrained majority rule represents a danger. One of a number of essential roles of political institutions under capitalism, therefore, is to mediate between the minority who rule and the majority who must not, to block the direct enforcement of the interests of the propertyless majority, and to work to make it more likely that people will actually make political choices which respect the practices and disciplines which capitalism requires. Hence the danger to which Laclau alludes in the development of a “populism of the dominant classes”, which seeks to play upon the antagonism between classes in capitalist society, but to do so in order to reconstitute dominant class hegemony.

The dominant modern theory of liberal democracy incorporates the same insight, but from the managerial perspective of the ruling class: it argues that governments should be drawn from an elite political class by periodic elections, and exercised through institutions which provide insulation from direct mass pressure. Schumpeter’s “revisionist” reduction of democracy to an “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (Schumpeter, 1943, p. 269) required voters to observe a sharp division of labour between themselves and the politicians they elected, and even to refrain from lobbying their representatives between elections. In the same spirit, Dahl’s *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Dahl, 1956), was written in opposition to the “populistic” democracy of unconstrained majority rule, which it rejected in favour of polyarchy, that system in which elections and continuous political competition obliged leaders to take the preferences of a plurality of minorities into account in making policy choices, but at the same time allowed them a substantial degree of autonomy.

Above all, the revisionist theorists of liberal democracy feared situations in which the majority could bring their shared interest as dispossessed individuals to bear directly upon governments. Kornhauser’s nightmare vision of a “mass society”, in

which “there is a paucity of independent groups between the state and the family to protect either elites or non-elites from manipulation and mobilisation by the other” (Kornhauser, 1960, p. 41) led him to contrast democratisation along liberal lines directly with “populist” democratisation:

Democratization along liberal lines requires a capacity on the part of ruling groups to accommodate new social elements, and progressively to share political rights and duties with them. Democratization along populist lines characteristically follows upon the failure of pre-existing governing groups to accommodate additional social elements, which thereupon seek the destruction of the old ruling groups and the institutional basis for their authority (Kornhauser, 1960, p. 132).

Hence the fear with which populist appeals are greeted by ruling classes, and the energy which modern theories of liberal democracy seek to contain the implications of government “of the people, by the people, for the people”. Both from a Marxist perspective, and from the managerial perspective of contemporary theories of liberal democracy, then, the emergence of a form of politics centred on a direct appeal to the people indicates a *crisis of existing political institutions*, and itself constitutes and extends a crisis of *political and institutional mediation*.

At the same time, the fact that crises do come about reminds us that it is one thing to say that in a capitalist society the role of political institutions is to mediate between leaders and citizens in order to ensure that the limits to citizenship and the disciplines essential to capitalism are observed, and another to guarantee that they will do so. It is no easy task, and it is always possible, for various reasons, that the existing institutions will begin to fail. When they do, it is possible that they will break down, often with unforeseeable and uncontrollable circumstances. At the same time, it may well be vital to capitalist interests themselves that a failing institutional framework should be disrupted, as a step towards the reconfiguration of new institutions more likely to secure the conditions for capitalist reproduction. In these circumstances direct appeals to the people are likely to arise in different political quarters, as one mechanism by which new political options are created outside the institutional system.

Thus a direct appeal to the people — bypassing existing institutions — can sometimes play a significant role in overcoming an existing institutional crisis. This is most likely when the political system as a whole is in crisis, rather than when a particular government has become incompetent or unpopular, but an alternative is available within the system. Institutions do not change smoothly and continuously in line with the environment in which they operate and the challenges which they face. On the contrary, they tend to ossify, or to be captured by the particular interests of the individuals who operate them. It requires considerable conflict, effort and mobilisation to change them, and the impetus for change must frequently come from outside.

To summarise, a direct appeal to the people provides one means (among others) of effecting the perhaps beneficial disruption of existing institutions, but it carries with it at the same time a greatly increased risk that essential mechanisms of discipline and control will be lost. As a consequence of this specific threat, appeals to the people have a special, structurally determined, character in a capitalist society (Wood, 1995). This is the *general* perspective within which the analysis of populism should be addressed.

In comparing classical and contemporary populism, we are not comparing two different manifestations of a mode of discourse, but two different *conjunctures*. It follows that the term “populist” is better used as an adjective than as a noun — a qualifier of some substantive political project and its related ideology — and that in relation to the character of populist discourse what matters is its relationship to specific conjunctural projects for the reorientation of capitalist reproduction, or models of accumulation.

4. Models of accumulation

The need to maintain political institutions which mediate between citizens and rulers and manage the disciplines essential to the reproduction of capitalism is only part, and not the essential part, of the story. States in the global capitalist system also need to pursue a model of *accumulation* which is viable within that system, and to adapt it as the global environment changes. In this context, the emergence of direct appeals to the people is most significant when the crisis of institutions is itself a part of a deeper structural crisis affecting the reproduction of capitalist accumulation and the political hegemony of capital. It seems plausible to argue that populist appeals are most likely to attract support, and hence to be most prominent and significant in the context of a crisis of institutions, when that crisis is itself a reflection of fundamental crisis of accumulation. In other words, populist discourse may be ubiquitous, but it is of greatest significance in these relatively rare conjunctures (never defined discursively, but in terms of political economy, institutions, and the complex relations between them). It follows that populist appeals should be interpreted in the context of the dynamic relationship between political economy and political institutions in a given conjuncture, and emphasis should be placed on identifying the type of conjuncture in which they are likely to appear and flourish.

On this analysis, then, populism becomes prominent — appeals to the people become a significant part of politics — when significant deep structural changes are taking place in patterns of accumulation, and existing social and political institutions are failing in one way or another to cope. And populist projects will differ from place to place and time to time in accordance with the specific conjunctural logic of capitalist accumulation and class politics.

In this perspective, an immediate contrast appears between classical and contemporary populism. Whereas classical populism aimed to disrupt the institutional nexus constituted by *economic liberalism* and *oligarchy* (Laclau, 1977, pp. 177–194), contemporary populism emerges in the wake of a successful neoliberal challenge to the nexus constituted by *state-led developmentalism* and *classical populism*, at a moment when both the foundational project and ideological hegemony of neoliberalism seem well established. Its character is ambivalent, seeming to aim itself against a newly hegemonic institutional nexus constituted by *neoliberalism* and *revisionist liberal democracy* at one moment, only to come at another to propose itself as a means of establishing their hegemony where it is lacking. This is the crucial difference in *conjuncture* between the two, and the basis upon which they should be compared. Where classical populism

offered itself as a solution to a global and regional problem of failed liberal institutions, contemporary populism challenges or turns to promote neoliberal institutions which have widely come to be seen as themselves providing the global and regional solution to a previous crisis — the “solution” in each case being the resumption of capitalist reproduction in a new institutional setting, and in the context of a new model of accumulation. Classical populism found a viable (albeit second-best) alternative to a model of accumulation and a set of social and political institutions which had become a hindrance to capitalist development, while contemporary populism only affects to challenge or resist a neoliberal model deemed “ideal” for ensuring capitalist development. Proving impotent to resist the dynamics of an overwhelmingly neoliberal global conjuncture, it tends to turn its resources to the task of easing the transition to it. Classical populism had its internal contradictions, but it offered a way forward at a time when “politics as usual” had stopped working. The difficulty facing contemporary populists is that they face what is widely held to be a very viable way forward indeed. The ubiquitous logic of TINA (there is no alternative) — contestable of course — works for neoliberalism and against contemporary populism insofar as it opposes the neoliberal project, just as it worked against liberalism and for classical populism.

5. Classical populism

In the period of classical populism an ideology of national developmentalism was in the ascendancy in the larger Latin American economies with the perceived potential for industrial development — Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. In regional terms this was a consequence of the collapse of export-oriented development after 1929. But just as important, it reflected a global weakening of the ascendancy of laissez-faire capitalism, as a consequence not only of the crash and the depression, but also of the apparent success of state-centred development in Italy and Germany in the 1930s and of the Soviet model through to the 1960s, and the general post-war commitment to/acceptance of interventionist, corporatist or dirigiste state action in the promotion of recovery, development and welfare provision in the West. These conditions continued into the 1960s, by which time the prevailing “common sense” was that state involvement in the promotion of development was essential. The institutions created by export-led development and liberal oligarchy in Latin America before 1930 were vulnerable to the national developmentalist challenge because (a) they had lost legitimacy after 1929, (b) they could not offer a more convincing alternative economic model, and (c) they had failed to capture the majority of the population, who were therefore available for counter-mobilisation. Populists were indeed able to appeal directly to the people bypassing established political forces (and institutions).

But no less important, the “moment” of unmediated populist appeal to the people was short-lived. Where populist projects were successfully installed it was from a position of previously acquired state power — Cárdenas, Perón and Vargas all constructed their regimes from within the presidency. They succeeded by creating new institutions, and shaping new political forces from within the state — the familiar

state-controlled labour movements and political parties founded on and backed by the resources of the state. Insofar as the populist “moment” was extra-institutional, then, it was brief indeed. The exceptions were provided, precisely, by those cases in which populists never or only briefly came to power. What is more, even in the interim in which established political forces were being by-passed, improvised transitional solutions were found which limited and repressed alternative “popular” projects. This was the case in different ways with military government in Argentina, 1943–1946, the *Estado Novo* in Brazil, and the post-revolutionary decade 1919–1928 in Mexico.

Consistently with its statist and national-developmentalist project, traditional populism appealed to *national* identity as opposed to either *class* identity or the *individual* civil rights of the individual. These were *constitutive* oppositions arising out of the project itself, and were reflected in its discourse and the counter-discourses it provoked. At the same time, the national developmentalist project itself tended to be undermined over time by (a) the changing global context, characterised from quite early in the post-war period by the process of internationalisation of capital, which was lethal to the integrity of national developmentalism (hence the structural contradictions bred by economic development focused on the internal market, and the discursive problems posed by the turn to foreign capital from the early 1950s), and (b) in the cases of Argentina and Brazil, the consequences of the only partial establishment of the institutional autonomy of the state from the dominant and far from effectively modernised capitalist classes.

6. Contemporary populist projects

Today, in contrast, neoliberalism is in the ascendancy, as a result of the regional collapse (and literal bankruptcy) of state-led developmentalism, and the global context in which alternative models to capitalism are alleged to have failed. The economic project which is seen to embody the spirit of the age is market-oriented globally competitive capitalism. The effort to implement it has been accompanied by the creation of new political institutions deemed to be particularly appropriate to it, replacing the authoritarian regimes which dominated from the mid-1960s on. These, of course, are the strengthened executives and well-behaved political parties of highly institutionalised liberal democracy, Schumpeter-style. These changes have certainly created social crises of varying intensity, but it cannot be argued too easily that the new institutions are vulnerable to the neopopulist challenge either because (a) they have lost legitimacy, or (b) they cannot offer a convincing economic model, or (c) they have failed to capture the majority of the population. A lot depends, then, on whether neoliberalism can succeed in the medium- to longer-term in establishing successful capitalist development in Latin America. Where it can, the prospects for neopopulism may not be that good. Where it can't, a project based upon statist social democracy (limited, in other words, to a populist effort to disrupt but reconstitute dominant class hegemony) may not do that much better. If neopopulist political strategies are to generate an alternative, they require to (a) mount a convincing challenge to the legitimacy of their new rivals, (b) propose an alternative project, and (c) both bypass

the new institutions they challenge, *and* create new ones capable of mobilising citizens into a new social order. My assumption is that they cannot do this within the framework of a “populism of the dominant classes” — in other words, within a framework which respects the limits imposed by capitalist regimes of accumulation. If that is right, they might have the “negative potential” to impose electoral defeat upon unpopular liberal projects, but in the present global conjuncture they will not have the capacity to generate an alternative project, even of a second-best character, unless they take a more radical turn. It follows that neopopulism must either collapse into incoherence, or revert to neoliberalism, or radicalise and transmute into a genuinely socialist project. The last is the least likely in terms of the immediate plausibility of the dynamics which might bring it about, but it remains the only outcome which has the potential to remove the fundamental tension between the egalitarianism of appeals to the people and the structural inequalities central to capitalism.

With this in mind, I now return to the questions posed at the outset. Is there currently a marked or increasing tendency for politicians to make direct appeals to the people which by-pass existing political institutions, and particularly established political parties? Are these direct, extra-institutional appeals linked to viable political projects? And if so, how do they compare to the classical populist projects?

Ten cases may be considered: Menem in Argentina; Fernandez and Palenque in Bolivia; Collor in Brazil; C. Cárdenas in Mexico; García and Fujimori in Peru, and Pérez, Caldera and Chávez in Venezuela. All but Chávez are dealt with in detail in contributions to this collection. Of the nine, five (Menem, Collor, Fujimori, Pérez and Caldera) have attempted to by-pass existing parties — their own in the cases of Menem and Pérez) in order to introduce neoliberal projects from the presidency. All but Collor have done so after initially putting themselves forward as opponents of neoliberalism. They can certainly be seen, therefore, as making an “appeal to the people” which by-passes the existing party system, either by creating a new party as a vehicle, or seeking to turn an old one in an entirely new direction. In doing so, they have used the institutional strategy of the classical populists. Perón, Vargas and Cárdenas, after all, instituted their populist projects from within the presidency, and used executive power to shape and control their own parties as much as to manage relations with the opposition to their projects. This group, therefore, reflects a classical populist strategy turned to a neoliberal purpose. In contrast, García and Cárdenas have sought to advance the classical populist project of state-led developmentalism (or something approximating it), through an existing party in the case of García and APRA, and through a new party (emerging from a split in the PRI) in the case of C. Cárdenas and the PRD. These two reflect an attempt to pursue a classical populist project through institutional (party) means, though with heavy use of presidential authority, and increasingly in opposition to party sentiment in the case of García. Neither Fernandez nor Palenque, in contrast, had a programme for government. Palenque mobilised a following attracted by his radio and television work in opposition to Bolivia’s neoliberal project, and clearly qualifies as appealing to the people outside the existing political institutional framework, while Fernandez equally rallied a following outside the party political framework, but was absorbed into the hegemonic neoliberal project in 1993 with his entry into the coalition government. The two,

in contrast to the first six cases, may be classified as personal followings, hostile to neoliberalism in one case and supportive of it in the other. The remaining case, Chávez, clearly resembles the first set in his challenge to the existing party system and his mounting of a new project from within the presidency. The orientation it will adopt towards neoliberalism remains to be seen, but it is likely, on first appearances, to accommodate itself to the neoliberal context much as previous apparent challenges have done.

The first conclusion this suggests is that the “neopopulists” relate to different aspects of classical populism in different ways, and should not be considered as a single homogeneous group. The second is that by far the most significant aspect of contemporary populism is the phenomenon of individuals who seek to pursue neoliberal projects from a position of executive power, either in defiance of their own party history, or without the benefit of a well-institutionalised party at all. The cases of García and Cárdenas so far at least, suggest that the prospects for advancing a classical populist project are poor. Of the rest, Collor failed spectacularly, Pérez and Caldera failed individually while nevertheless carrying forward a neoliberal project, and Menem and Fujimori succeeded in establishing a neoliberal project and to some degree (more in the second case than the first) in changing the institutions in order to make the project more secure — notably by changing the rules for presidential succession. Thus whereas classical populism offered itself as a solution to the problem of failed liberal institutions, contemporary populism, by and large, first challenged then turned to promote neoliberalism. Neopopulists have not yet demonstrated that they have any project other than neoliberalism.

7. Conclusion

The classical populists pursued political projects and models of development which succeeded in neutralising more radical class-based alternatives, in the context of the global and regional collapse of export-oriented development and liberal hegemony. Whether or not a revolutionary threat existed, it remained the case that the displaced oligarchies of the previous period were in no position to win popular support for a return to liberal models of development and rule. It was for that reason, above all, that in the larger Latin American states with the potential for development based upon the internal market, populism was able to proceed from a reactive to a foundational project. It did so, by and large, by using and abusing executive authority, with scant regard for classical liberal democratic and civil rights, and with indifference or hostility to independent political parties rooted in civil society. In line with the character of the populist project, it stressed national as opposed to class or individual identity.

The contemporary context of the resurgence of populism is quite different. The neoliberal model of development is hegemonic in the region and outside, and attempts to return to a version of classical developmental populism have not prospered. Proponents of the neoliberal model aspire to advance it, in the long run, in a stable institutional framework to which a competitive party system is central. And in view of

the international orientation of the neoliberal model, they stress individual as opposed to class or national identity. They benefit here from the global consensus among relevant elites that neoliberal projects offer the best prospect both of neutralising the threat of radical mobilisation from below, and of giving rise to a new phase of capital accumulation.

Before this new order can be founded, however, the old order and the institutions through which it was sustained must be disrupted. The evidence here is unequivocal — it is difficult to obtain a clear electoral mandate for neoliberal projects, and they are most successfully implemented when they are imposed by executive authority. The paradigmatic case here is not Pérez' Venezuela, nor Menem's Argentina, nor yet Fujimori's Peru, nor even Salinas' Mexico, but — obviously — Pinochet's Chile. It is tempting, therefore, to see some resurgent populists at least as second-best alternatives where authoritarian interventions have faltered without leaving neoliberal projects clearly in place, playing the role of midwives to a new neoliberal regime which will eventually be sustained by well-behaved party systems. However, this perspective may give too much credence to the supposed fit between institutionalised party systems and neoliberal models of capital accumulation. I argue elsewhere that such projects may only be kept in place by mobilising available resources of state power — both coercive and clientelistic — to exclude alternatives which might win support in a competitive system genuinely based upon wide-ranging civil liberties (Cammack, 1998). If this is so, the anti-democratic practices of populism that tend to attract hostility from the proponents of democratic consolidation today may attract more positive re-evaluations in the future.

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