



Populism is all about retrieving our glorious past and securing a blue-sky future: people-friendly leaders doing the right thing by their adoring fellow citizens. Or is it? This is an over-simplification, as well as a massive deception. Life wasn't meant to be that easy.

Populism in its broadest sense symbolises downtrodden masses tackling unscrupulous overlords. This can be viewed from the political left as workers claiming their rights from the market-driven, capitalist elites that oppress them; or from the other extreme, as capitalist elites venting fury on centralist government systems that impede market forces ... thus stifling industry (and consequential employment for workers). It's a never-ending mouse treadle, where Communism equals Fascism and vice versa. Which version of populism any one individual prefers, probably describes their political leaning, possibly their heritage ... and most likely, their character.

Currently, the populist descriptor is used to call out leaders on the right who rail against obstructionist government systems that limit progress for 'the people'. Their firebrand, rhetoric, personifies xenophobia (i.e.: chauvinism, racism, and nationalism) cloaked in

the more user-friendly term of *populism*. Today's world sees a significant move towards this approach, particularly amongst larger nations, where the populist flagbearer frames politics as a herculean battle between ordinary people and overbearing systems, that are in turn supported by a fake media. The irony is that these leaders are themselves overbearing to the extreme, while the news they peddle is often fake. Trump in the US and Johnson in Britain are prominent examples.



Image: researchgate.net

“We’re Locked and loaded,” shouts Donald. *“I’ll die in a ditch,”* quips Boris. *“Lock her up,”* cries Donald. *“We’ll take back control of £350m a week,”* barks Boris. Inflammatory remarks, and they’re meant to be just that: rabble-rousing verbosity to stir the pot and bring ‘the masses’ to heel.

It’s almost as if we have come to regard such things as normal, when the President of the United States takes a common term for loading a bullet into a gun, ready to pull the trigger, and equates this to US policy; the implication being that the US is on a war footing and ready to shoot! Is that a good message to send out to children in primary schools ... or the next mass-murderer, that the Commander in Chief has his massive armaments trained on the target, prepared to kill in multiple numbers?

Yet millions voted for Trump in 2016, and a healthy majority supported Johnson in the UK’s ‘Brexit election’. This support for such populist leaders could mean one of two things: (1) their supporters have been fooled by the seditious and divisive oratory, or (2) they hold similar, ill-advised views, with regard to the way the world should work.

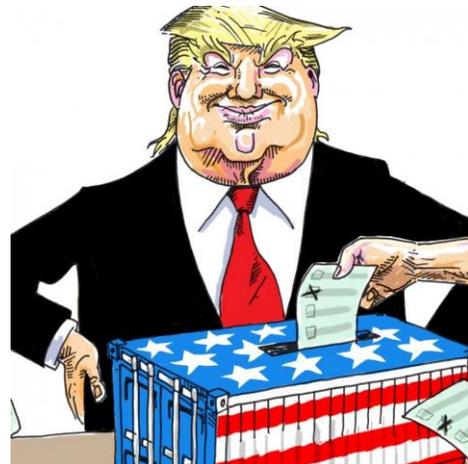


Image: scmp.com



Whether it's the USA, Britain, China, Russia, India, Brazil, Turkey, The Philippines, or any other nation run by a self-aggrandizing oddball, it's a malodorous fact that we, the people, have elected them, and that they in turn, are failing us ...and failing us very badly. In particular, they are failing the youth of today: the generation that will have to pick up the pieces and make the best of a very bad job tomorrow, after this current crop of so-called leaders, are all dead and buried in their own ditch!

But there is hope on the horizon; hope that people are waking to the fact that we are being misled by those at the top of the pile: people who should know better, but who often seem to operate with the understanding and awareness of a six-year-old. Our hope today comes in the form of young leaders such as Greta Thunberg, the 17-year-old from Sweden - and global icon for the push to get real about climate change - who shows a maturity way beyond her years, while our supposed nation heads bumble around in a quagmire of fossil fueled industry and personal profits!

While the argument against Brexit has fallen victim to the truth-spinners who rule the Conservative Government, there is hope building on the other side of the Atlantic that

Trump will not be given a second term in office. This at least would herald the beginnings of a return to relative normality, where foreign policy is no longer tweet-based or personally motivated, and ways of negotiating do not rely on deal-or-no-deal, or the blame game.

It is perhaps no coincidence that two countries which have performed very poorly in terms of tackling the coronavirus - The United Kingdom and the United States – each have leaders who adopt a populist style. Their minds are more focused on other criterion such as: profits (for themselves and the big guys), politics (dominance by their party) and personality (their ego). One of the very few positives to spring from Covid-19 could be that voters in the middle ground finally become aware that leaders such as Trump and Johnson are not all what they seem; that there is in fact, a vast gulf between what they say and what they do. And in the end, that their policies are built on foundations of untruths and indeed ... fake news.

Think of the possibilities if the next generation of frontrunners – as we emerge from this dangerous and untimely flirtation with populism - could herald a new breed of unblinkered realists, who operate in a more bipartisan manner for the benefit of people and planet, rather than the inequitable populist stance which supports the elite and continues to fill rich men's pockets. Perhaps more than at any other time in the history of humankind, our world needs change-makers, who can see past their own mirror image and beyond their own nation's borders; leaders who can fully comprehend the challenges which face this blue planet, that when seen from afar so captivated our trail-blazing astronauts. The last thing we want at this point in history is nationalism. We 'Make America Great Again' ... Yes, but at what cost to the planet the rest of us live on?

If today's coronavirus pandemic had occurred in 2009 - with Obama and Brown in power on either side of the Atlantic - the first approach would have been to arrange a G20 meeting, including China, as the starting point for building a cohesive global policy to tackle the impending spread of the virus. On the agenda would have been agreement

to support UN and WHO initiatives, not to impair them; off the agenda, threats on trade deals and blame for the cause of the virus, that could only cause disagreement and inflame the situation. Currently, President Trump is doing the exact opposite of all this!

In these perilous times we need bold visionaries who can muster the courage to confront those more hidden, 'slow burning' challenges; issues which in the long run have potential to be much more disruptive to life as we know it, than coronavirus will ever be. Leaders who can ensure that the carbon polluters of the last fifty years, become the zero carbon drivers of the next fifty; thinkers who can confront the plight of the poor, so that flight from war and poverty becomes a thing of the past in this 21st Century. Inspirational people who can work together to tackle nuclear proliferation and the all-consuming power of artificial intelligence.

Above all we need leaders who 'have a dream' that puts social and environmental well-being before material wealth and economic growth: leaders who value planetary concerns above national interests.

Here are a few frontrunners for the post:



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