POPULISM: A MARXIST ANALYSIS

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The term «populism» has been a source of almost unending controversy. It has been applied to the Russian Narodniks, to movements of farmers in the American and Canadian West, to Peronism in Argentina, varguismo in Brazil, to Egypt under Nasser, to Maoism, and in fact to an endless variety of movements and leaders running the gamut of the political spectrum. Because of this, some writers have preferred to abandon the term altogether. Yet it continues to be used, particularly with reference to politics in the «Third World»; it seems to have at least some value for describing a certain style or approach to politics: a rhetoric or a discourse, and a pattern of leadership, which differ in important respects from conventional party politics or from other traditional forms of political domination. A populist movement is generally seen as one in which charismatic appeal is prominent; in which there is a strong element of personalism and a cult of leadership; in which lack of organizational structure goes hand-in-hand with a heterogeneous social base of support; in which ideology is ill-defined and even self-contradictory. Populism is associated with protest and with an anti-status-quo ideology; but the precise content of this ideology seems almost infinitely variable. This vagueness or elasticity makes it extremely difficult to arrive at a satisfactory definition; how can one be rigorous about a phenomenon whose salient characteristic, in terms of almost every parameter used to classify political movements (leadership, structure, ideology, social base of support), is flexibility or amorphousness? In fact, as we shall see, populism is not quite as amorphous as it at first appears, although in comparison with any other political movement, it remains extremely elusive. Writers are not even agreed as to whether populism is a movement, a régime, an ideology, or simply a tendency which may appear in movements of different types. Rational analysis has not been furthered by the pejorative connotation attributed to the phenomenon in many

discussions. For liberal writers, populism is either «abnormal» (a deviation from the desirable parliamentary model of development), or primitive (a sign of political and social immaturity);[1] for Marxists, it is generally seen as a specific form of bourgeois rule based on demagogic manipulation; reformist at best and often quite reactionary, it diverts popular energies from the revolutionary path and into nationalist and chauvinist channels.[2] This despite the undeniable fact that a great many social-revolutionary or anti-imperialist movements have had pronounced populist characteristics.

By contrast, in recent years there has emerged an alternative interpretation which presents populism (or some of its variants) in a much more favourable light; proponents of this view argue that populism of the Left, or «of the dominated classes,» can be revolutionary, indeed that it can lead to socialism. «Left» populism is seen as a uniquely flexible and dynamic movement which, substituting for a weak or non-existent Marxist-Leninist party, can carry through a popular-democratic revolution leading onwards to the establishment of a workers' state. The clearest example of this, for these authors, would be Cuba: after all, the Cuban Revolution was organized and led to victory by a movement with a petty-bourgeois personalistic leadership, with a non-class populist appeal to the Cuban masses, and in the face of indifference or hostility (up to the last minutes) from the only organized party of the Left, the Partido Socialista Popular (the pro-Soviet Communist Party). It eliminated the grip of American imperialism in Cuba, destroyed the repressive State apparatus of the previous régime, brought all the major sectors of the economy under public ownership with unprecedented rapidity, implemented a major redistribution of wealth, and then proclaimed its conversion to Marxism-Leninism. In all this, Castro's populist bond with the Cuban people was unquestionably crucial, and it seems clear that in the circumstances no other party or movement could have led such a successful and radical revolution.

In reality, the precise character of the Cuban Revolution, and the conclusions to be drawn from it, are not so simple; but as an example of a revolutionary movement with pronounced populist characteristics, Cuba is almost paradigmatic. Other examples might include the liberation movements in some of the new African States, in particular Tanzania and in the ex-colonies of Portugal: the MPLA in Angola, FRELIMO in Mozambique, and the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau. Another case, particularly interesting in that it took place not in a colonized country but in a European colonial power, is that of the Portuguese MFA (Armed Forces Movement) in 1974-76; although the MFA was not ultimately successful, disintegrating in the autumn of 1975 under the strain of its own internal contradictions, its political project was preeminently

populist, and its proclaimed goal was to abolish all exploitation of man by man and to establish a classless society.[3]

If we accept that these movements and régimes are populist --and, leaving aside for the moment the question of definition, they do seem to share many of its commonly-accepted characteristics--then we have to admit that populism, in certain circumstances and within certain limits, can be revolutionary. For some readers, this suggestion will be anathema. But it is undeniable that in each of the examples cited, a revolutionary breakthrough, a critical rupture in the structure of the bourgeois (or colonial) State, appears to have been brought about by the intervention of an élite of determined activities without partisan affiliation or precise ideological definition. Organized typically in a loosely-structured «movement,» these activists have a resolute anti-fascist or anti-imperialist commitment and a subjective identification with the aspirations of the oppressed, but their political program is vague and changeable. Usually of petty-bourgeois origin, they display a style of political action and a rhetoric which appear typically populist. Through bold action and direct appeal to the masses, disdaining conventional political mechanisms and party structures, the revolutionary populist leadership is often able to «overtake» or outflank established parties and forces of the Left, mobilizing broad popular support, exhibiting remarkable tactical and ideological flexibility and adapting with exemplary rapidity to sudden changes and challenges in a revolutionary conjuncture. Radicalized in the course of struggle, an élite of this type may be able to lead or even to force through a revolutionary transformation for which society is ripe, but which no other political group is immediately capable of realizing. In other words, substituting for a non-existent or ineffective proletarian party, it implements a revolution to which it attributes a socialist character. Many progressive intellectuals in the West believe that this is what happened in Cuba, and, instinctively repelled by what they see as the «rigidity» and «dogmatism» of Communist parties, have hoped for similar developments elsewhere. They have not been disappointed: Angola is only one of a series of such movements in the «Third World» in the past few years, and it is no accident that the MPLA received Cuban support. The fact that these and other such populist-led revolutions have become closely tied to the Soviet Union, scorned as bureaucratic, repressive and totalitarian by many of the same intellectuals who admire Cuba or Angola, is conveniently ignored or else dismissed as a product of geopolitical necessity. As we shall see, there is more to it than this; the attraction of radical-populist régimes to the Soviet orbit raises fundamental analytical questions about the nature of such régimes. But it cannot be denied that many revolutionary movements of recent times, particularly in the «Third World,» have been led by a petty-bourgeois élite of populist style, and we are therefore

›bliged to take seriously the progressive and even revolutionary potential of certain types of populism. It is this potential which I shall now attempt to analyze and lefine more rigorously.

›opulism and Ideology: The Theory of Ernesto Laclau

The most coherent and theoretically ambitious defence f the notion that radical populism has socialist potential s made by Ernesto Laclau.[4] Utilizing an Althusserian nalysis of ideology, Laclau argues that populism is an ssentially ideological phenomenon, and that it is almost biquitous in conditions of hegemonic crisis. There can e both reactionary and progressive populisms, but the latter, hich Laclau describes as «populisms of the dominated classes,» re potentially revolutionary. Conversely, according to aclau any socialist movement, to be really successful, must n fact become populist: it is only by the successful rticulation of «popular-democratic interpellations» (i.e., ›n-class ideological elements of popular culture) into a synthetic-antagonistic complex with respect to the dominant leology»[5] that a socialist movement can become hegemonic. ıclau is not suggesting that all populisms are revolutionary; ıt he maintains that what defines a movement as populist is ıis ideological incorporation of non-class popular ıterpellations into a radical «anti-establishment» discourse. ›vements which achieve this may have very diverse political ıaracteristics, from fascist to socialist, but they all ·ise as a result of hegemonic crisis, and their populist eological synthesis represents an attempt to resolve this isis in one way or another (in the interests of either the minant or the dominated classes) by capturing and mobilizing e latent anti-State, anti-establishment sentiments of the sses. It is this process of appropriate popular anti-tablishment sentiments which in Laclau's view is the key «ideological struggle» for any Marxist revolutionary vement:

> The struggle of the working class for its hegemony is an effort to achieve the maximum possible fusion between popular-democratic ideology and socialist ideology. In this sense a 'socialist populism' is not the most backward form of working class ideology but the most advanced--the movement from the working class has succeeded in condensing the ensemble of democratic ideology in a determinate social formation within its own ideology.[6]

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> In socialism...coincide the highest form of 'populism' and the resolution of the ultimate and

most radical of class conflicts. The dialectic between 'the people' and classes finds here the final moment of its unity: there is no socialism without populism, and the highest forms of populism can only be socialist.[7]

Obviously, if this is the case, it has very profound implications for proletarian strategy and for revolutionary political organization. For Laclau, «popular-democratic interpellations» are the ideological expression not of a class contradiction, but of the contradiction between «the people» and the «power bloc» or the State, which he sees as being qualitatively different from class contradictions as such; it is a contradiction which is constituted at the political level, rather than at the level of the mode of production.[8] This is his theoretical basis for denying that discrete ideological elements have any necessary class character, and hence for asserting that they can and must be incorporated into distinct and even antagonistic class discourses. Where most ruling-class ideologies (conservatism, liberalism, corporatism, etc.) subordinate popular-democratic interpellations to non-popular (bourgeois or aristocratic) interpellations, thus neutralizing any potential for conflict, populism radicalizes the antagonism inherent in popular-democratic interpellations to produce a discourse of protest and contestation. A «populism of the dominant classes» is one which strives to restrain this antagonism within certain limits, but a «populism of the dominated classes» will strive to develop it to the full, in a revolutionary direction.[9] Hence the intimate and confusing relationship between reactionary and progressive populist movements: they both appeal to the same cultural values, but struggle to appropriate them in the service of diametrically opposed political projects.

For anyone who is sensitive to the revolutionary potential of popular culture, and has an appreciation of the volatile and even explosive character of the mass mobilization generated by populist movements, Laclau's thesis has an intrinsic appeal. Despite the traditional distrust of Marxists towards populism, there are legitimate reasons why radical populism should exercise a great attraction for the Left. The exaltation of direct action, of mass mobilization and intervention in the political process, of direct contact between leaders and led, and of popular unity against the «establishment» or the «oligarchy»: all of these are populist values which appear to be shared by socialists. The basic populist challenge to conventional party politics (or «politics» in general), as irrelevant, fraudulent and corrupt, is akin to the Marxist rejection of the bourgeois political process. It seems undeniable that a successful socialist movement must share many such features of populism. Equally, there is little doubt that Marxists have often failed, through sectarianism or dogmatism, to appreciate the progressive potential of populist

movements. But this is not equivalent to saying that socialism should be populist or that populism can be socialist. That is a far more questionable proposition, and raises a number of problems which Laclau chooses to ignore.

In the first place, while there is no doubt that populism as a movement is remarkably flexible, and that the appeal to «national-popular» or «popular-democratic» symbols and values can be articulated with widely-differing political projects, this flexibility is not total. To take a case with which this author is familiar, that of Portugal: one cannot imagine the democratic opposition to Salazar (which ranged from liberal to Communist) appealing to the reactionary cult of Fatima (although this is undoubtedly a popular symbol of great importance in Portugal).[10] Equally, it is inconceivable that Salazar, as the representative of a populism of the Right, could have evoked the memory of the Republican uprising of 31st January 1891, a pre-eminently popular democratic symbol of lasting significance in Portuguese culture.[11] Or, to take an example more familiar to most readers, in France it is at least improbable that De Gaulle, as a populist leader of the moderate Right, would have appealed to the memory of the Paris Commune when seeking to legitimize his role as founder of the V Republic in 1958. In other words, specific populist projects seem to have relatively well-defined class affiliations, and this limits the range of ideological elements which they can utilize. Popular-democratic «interpellations» (a term which also requires closer examination) are not just building bricks to be used at random by the architects of completely antagonistic ideological systems. Certainly, some popular values and symbols are remarkably fluid or malleable, and can be appropriated by both Left and Right; but often this is simply because of their vagueness and lack of precision. (Thus, in France it is hardly surprising that anyone other than a committed monarchist may lay claim to the heritage of 1789; similarly in the U.S.A. with the memory of the American Revolution). But on the other hand if one is committed to the promotion of a specific political project serving distinct class interests, there are strict limits to the values which can be incorporated: a socialist discourse, for example, can scarcely appeal to racial prejudice or to national chauvinism. In many, if not most national cultures, the «popular interpellations» which according to Laclau's model might have to be incorporated into a socialist discourse could include some very unsavoury notions: anti-semitism in Germany, aggressive machismo in Italy or Mexico, strict Islamic morality in Iran or the Arab world.[12] In fact, in attempting to demonstrate that discrete ideological elements are non-class-specific, Laclau actually cites anti-semitism, arguing that in Eastern Europe in late medieval times it was a component part of popular ideology![13] All one can say is that such an assertation demands a closer examination of what defines an ideological element as «popular,» and also

of whether there is any necessary connection between what «popular» and what is «progressive.» The people's sponta self-identification as a collectivity opposed to the domi bloc may indeed incorporate ethnic, religious or archaic themes, but frequently it is precisely these traditionali or chauvinistic elements of popular consciousness which facilitate the subsequent appropriation of a popular move of contestation by a different class fraction of the domi bloc; a good recent example would be the Iranian revoluti against the Shah and its appropriation by the Islamic cle Progressive organizations, while recognizing the genuine element of popular contestation inherent in such movement must surely aim to wean them away from these ultimately reactionary conceptions toward a rational view of the wor

It is difficult not to suspect that a serious applic of Laclau's position would open the door to all kinds of opportunism, and most notably to an uncritical worship of spontaneity in popular movements. Laclau appears to pres himself as a Leninist, but his whole line of reasoning le away from the ideological rigour and organizational disci of Leninist parties. But the matter cannot be left here: Laclau has identified an important problem. It is necess to locate the theoretical flaws in his reasoning, and to some alternative. The question of the nature of ideology and its relationship to class is obviously crucial. When Laclau asserts that not all «interpellations»--or to be m precise, ideological elements, since some of the values h describes as interpellations do not seem to fit into that category--have a class belonging, he is undoubtedly corre It seems undeniable that many such elements, taken in iso can be appropriated by different and even contradictory c discourses. But he is surely wrong when he asserts that class character of an ideology is given by its form and n its content.» [14] However one chosses to interpret this, i very far-reaching implications. The ideology of Nazism w nothing if not revolutionary in form; it consisted precis in the articulation of a whole range of discrete ideologi elements, some progressive, some revolutionary, and some extremely reactionary, into a discourse which appeared ve revolutionary. Laclau might object that this was just wh he was suggesting: that it was the manner of articulatio contradictory elements which made Nazi ideology reactiona But while the manner of articulation of the different ele is significant, I would maintain that it is impossible to demonstrate the true significance of Nazi ideology, other by pointing to the extremely reactionary nature of crucia elements of its content. The same can be said of fascist ideologies in general. To deny that at least some crucia elements of an ideology have a specific class character m it impossible to draw a clear connection between the ideo and the interests it serves.

proletarian ideology has been contaminated in the CPC by the uncritical incorporation of a bourgeois trait: nationalism.

What is true of nationalism is also true of other ideological «elements» which Laclau quotes in his critique of Poulantzas:[19] liberalism, militarism, «statolatry,» authoritarianism--to all of which Laclau denies a class belonging. Of these, liberalism is not an «element» but a full-blown ideology, and its (bourgeois) class belonging is crystal-clear (and generally accepted); Laclau's remark that in Latin America it became «the characteristic ideology of the feudal landowners» confuses form with content, since it is well known that the mimetic adoption of «liberalism» by creole oligarchies in the nineteenth century went hand-in-hand with gross distortion of liberal principles (separation of powers when the executive was omnipotent?--free competition when each oligarchic family enjoyed a de facto monopoly in its own region or economic sector?) Certainly, Latin American oligarchies adopted the rhetoric of liberalism and incoporated its principal doctrines into their public discourse; but there was no transformation of their fundamental world-view, which remained feudal-colonial and patrimonial. Those who really adopted liberalism in nineteenth-century Latin American were the nascent bourgeois groups in the towns; the ideology of the landowners (and of the traditional urban patriciate) remained essentially patrimonial, with only a superficial liberal vaneer. As for militarism, taken as an ideological term (since it can also refer to a phenomenon of political behaviour), it too is clearly bourgeois. The preference for military rule, or military intervention in politics, reflects the interests of certain sectors of the bourgeoisie in conditions of crisis or hegemonic weakness. The importance of armed might in feudal society is something else altogether, since no clear separation existed then between military and civilian authority--to speak of «feudal militarism» is therefore meaningless. And so on. The point is that most of Laclau's examples of «elements» are in fact ideological systems or sub-systems, and as such clearly have a class character; it is only possible to claim that they do not by blurring distinctions or inflating superficial parallels. In essence. Laclau's conception is idealist; his analysis fails to establish a clear relationship between ideology and the material world. True, Laclau does refer to specific cases, and more importantly, does attempt a more detailed analysis of two concrete populist movements: Peronism and varguismo. But these, though suggestive, do not overcome the theoretical weakness of his general approach.

The problem, of course, is not abstraction in itself; the formulation of a new theoretical model necessarily takes place at a high level of abstraction. But Laclau abstracts the ideological features of many very different types of movements (indeed, in some cases he abstracts only some of

their ideological features) from their social and materia
and his analysis does not really return to the other «lev
even after exploring the purely ideological dimension. T
the foundation of his entire theory is that popular-democ
interpellations emerge «on the terrain of the contradicti
between the masses and the State,» which is allegedly not
class contradiction; but this begs the question of why, i
because of class, the masses should be in contradiction w
the State. If it were not for the fact that the State re
the exploiting class(es), one could perfectly well postul
that the State could act as a protecting, benevolent guar
over the masses, or as an institution representing their
interests against «reaction,» domestic or foreign, which,
accidentally, is precisely how it is often presented in p
ideologies! In fact, this is crucial: Laclau's statemen
populist ideologies radicalize the antagonism against the
inherent in popular-democratic interpellations--an affirm
which is fundamental to his analysis--is not strictly tru
most populist ideologies tend to be antagonistic towards
vaguely defined «oligarchy» or «establishment,» or agains
«the rich,» and sometimes towards a particular régime or
of institutions, but not towards the capitalist State as
All too often, they encourage the masses to look to the S
suitably reformed and purged of corrupt and reactionary e
to resolve their problems. Laclau, in other words, has b
seduced by the object of his study: he is providing theo
justification for precisely those illusions most typical
populist ideologies!

Despite these serious weaknesses, Laclau does offer
useful insights into the nature of populism. His emphasi
the progressive potential of some populisms is a useful c
to the superficial judgements too often made on the Left
(although we shall see that his incorrect theory of ideol
leads him to exaggerate this potential). In addition, he
seized correctly on a complex of ideological and structur
features (although he says very little about the latter)
by very different political movements; and he is right in
identifying this complex of features as typical of populi
The value of his approach lies in his attempt to explore
a rigorous way just what it is that such diverse movement
have in common, why it is legitimate to describe both fa
and (say) Castroism as populist. Marxists have tended to
easily to ignore or dismiss the paradoxical similarities
exist, at certain levels, between some progressive and
revolutionary movements, on the one hand, and reactionary
even fascist movements, on the other. Liberal writers ha
often drawn attention to these similarities, and it is no
simply dismissing their observations as the product of bo
preconceptions. It is necessary to explore how real and
extensive these similarities are, and to identify their m
basis. In fact, these similarities are precisely those f
which we have identified as characteristic of populism:

It seems that the source of the error lies in the vagueness of Laclau's analysis of the structure of ideology in general. The Althusserian theory of ideology has offered a number of important insights, but it has serious limitations which Laclau has not been able to overcome. Thus we are told that «interpellation» is the process of constituting individuals as subjects by «hailing» or «addressing» them (as «Englishmen,» «Spaniards,» «entrepreneurs,» «workers»); and that it is the «subject» interpellated and thus constituted by an ideological discourse which constitutes the unifying principle of this discourse. So far, so good: the revolutionary proletariat could be said to be the «subject» interpellated by Marxist-Leninist ideology; the self-determining individual, that interpellated by classic liberalism. But we must surely recognize that in interpellating these «subjects,» implicit reference is made to certain ideological values or principles (which we may agree to call «elements»), and these cannot be purely arbitrary. For Marxism-Leninism they presumably include such values as class struggle, collective discipline, and revolution; for liberalism, free will, private property, and the rule of law. Now it is true that in a fully elaborated ideological discourse, many other values or symbols will appear as well, which may range from moral qualities (honesty, bravery, humility) to cultural characteristics (Latin warmth and vivacity, German efficiency, American candour); and some of these may appear equally in proletarian or bourgeois (indeed, even in feudal or aristocratic) discourses. But these elements are clearly of a different order from the first category; they are secondary elements within the structure of the discourse as a whole, as opposed to the former which are essential or primary.[15] Laclau implies that all kinds of diverse ideological elements can be incorporated into a given class discourse, without considering whether they may be in contradiction with the primary values or organizing principles on which that discourse is based. The point is well made in a recent article by Nicos Mouzelis:

> What this position tends to forget is that when classes are conceptualized, not in an abstract, anthropomorphic manner, but in terms of their internal fragmentation, their political organization and their complex alliances and links with other organized interests, then it becomes obvious that there are strict limits to the types of content that their ideological discourse can have.... For instance, certain ideological themes (whether 'Popular' or not) can be so incongruent with the structural and organizational realities of a class that they cannot become dominant in its discourse.[16]

Indeed, it is possible to refine this position: as well as certain themes or elements which are totally incompatible with the essential character or organizing principles of a

discourse, we can identify many elements which are partially compatible. This surely is the meaning of the traditional Leninist position with regard to bourgeois-democratic rights while the proletarian party must champion democratic demands against repression and fascism, and must also maximize its support by appealing to popular symbols, values and traditic important to other subordinate classes, it cannot integrate these completely into its own class discourse; they will alv remain secondary to the classic Marxist revolutionary themes Otherwise, the whole character of the discourse will change: it will become, in fact, reformist.

But the problem with Laclau's analysis is not limited t the question of the flexibility or adaptability of particul ideological elements. He also seems to confuse ideologies (ideological systems with elements or values which are no mo than component parts of these systems. Thus, having argued that discrete ideological elements have no necessary class belonging,[17] he then goes on to apply this reasoning to gen interpellations or even entire ideologies. This is how he can argue that nationalism, taken «in itself,» has «no clas connotation»;[18] surely, for anyone familiar with Marx, an extraordinary assertion. But the specific examples he give to illustrate this are very revealing. Apart from the use nationalism, as we would expect, by the bourgeoisie (the ca he cites is France, pointing out that the French bourgeoisi used nationalism to fight feudal particularism, and also to neutralize class conflicts), he speaks of a feudal class linking nationalism «to the maintenance of a hierarchical-authoritarian system of a traditional type,» as in Bismarck Germany. But a very strong case can be made for the view t nineteenth-century German nationalism was precisely the reflection of the interests of the rising bourgeoisie which needed a national market and a colonial sphere of influence the feudal element in the Bismarckian Reich was manifested only in certain anachronistic aspects of its State apparatu and ideologically in the excessive cult of military valour and hierarchy-features which gave a distinctive tone to Ger nationalism but which were not themselves the prime source that nationalism. Similarly, Laclau's example of «proleta nationalism,» Mao and the Chinese Revolution, is spurious. Mao himself never claimed that he was appealing to nationa as a component part of proletarian ideology; on the contra the nationalist aspect of the Chinese Revolution was postu as an expression of the bourgeois, anti-imperialist phase (the struggle, destined to fade away under socialism; it wa not regarded in Maoist ideology, and should not be regarde in theory, as «proletarian nationalism.» Of course, it is more than possible that Mao did allow nationalist elements assume excessive importance in the ideology of the Communi Party of China; and this may well be related to the subseq vicissitudes of Chinese socialism. But far from proving t case for «proletarian nationalism,» this would indicate th

stress on popular sentiment against the oligarchy of the «establishment,» the appeal to «the people» irrespective of class, the attack on party politics, the direct dialogue between leader and mass, etc. It remains to provide a theoretical explanation of these features, without falling into idealist pitfalls.

Toward a Definition of Populism as Movement

Our analysis surely has to begin by dealing with populism as movement. Laclau, despite some disclaimers, in fact analyzes populism almost exclusively as ideology, whereas it is usual to refer to populist movements, leaders, parties and régimes, as well as ideologies. It could be argued that this reflects the imprecise usage of the term, and to some extent this is true. But to discuss it only as ideology is to exclude an important part of the real phenomenon subsumed (admittedly inadequately) under the common usage of the term. Nicos Mouzelis correctly points out that the «gap between real contradictions and ideologies» in Laclau's analysis has serious consequences for his theory. In order to decide whether a given party or movement is populist, says Mouzelis, it is hardly enough to show that its ideology «articulates popular elements in an antagonistic manner»; it is also necessary to look at its internal organization, at the relationship between rank-and-file and leadership, at the articulations between its official ideology, at long-term politics and day-to-day practices, etc.

> To illustrate this, let us concentrate for a moment on the question of organization. Populist parties tend to have a fluid, protean organizational structure. Even populist movements with a strong grass-roots organizational base are characterized by directness in the relationship between leader and led which tends to weaken the structuring of intermediary administrative levels between the top and the rank-and-file. Any intermediaries, whether of the clientelistic or the more bureaucratic type, are distrusted. They are seen as preventing the direct, immediate rapport between the populist leader and 'his people'.... From this point of view, I believe it is possible to speak of common organizational features of popular movements without falling into class reductionism--i.e., without directly linking populist organizational elements to a determinate class basis. For this 'gelatinous' character can be found in populist movements of both the conservative and socialist type.[20]

Although, for reasons which will be discussed below, it would be preferable to substitute «progressive» for «socialist,»

Mouzelis has hit on a crucial aspect of the question. The structural features of populist movements are very distinct quite different from those of other political parties and movements; and their most characteristic structural feature is precisely this «gelatinous» quality. So typical is this of populist movements that one is tempted to see it as the crucial defining element; despite great political and ideological variation, all populist movements seem to share this very distinctive organizational tendency (the prominen of charismatic leadership, the strong, almost mystical bond between leader and mass, the organizational fluidity). Eve populist movements with strong bureaucratic structures (lik Peronism or most of the fascist parties) display a tendency for the leadership to bypass or «short-circuit» their own internal organization at critical moments, or indeed whene it suits them to do so.

As against this, it could be objected that these struc features or tendencies sometimes appear within parties or movements of a more conventional type, and are not therefo peculiar to populism. Thus one can point to the fact that individual politicians are often described as populists, although operating within parties which are definitely not of this type. Lloyd George in Britain was described as a Liberal populist, and more recently, Enoch Powell has been dubbed a Tory populist. The American President Lyndon Joh was described as a «Southern populist» within the Democrat Party, and in Canada, Conservative ex-premier John Diefenb has been labelled a Tory populist. Politicians to whom th epithet is applied are usually those who, within the conte of their respective parties, resort to the use of an «ant establishment» discourse; who like to address their appea to «the people» as a collective body; and who profess a preference for «direct» communication, bypassing or short-circuiting structured mechanisms and institutions. This could lead one to conclude that populism is less a type o movement than a feature or syndrome which may under certa conditions affect a great variety of otherwise quite disp movements. However, it is noticeable that the populist approach of the leaders just mentioned often causes them operate on the margin of or outside their own parties, wh tend to regard them with suspicion; frequently they becom «independents.»

The marginal or eccentric position of such leaders wi their own parties strongly suggests that their true signi transcends party structures; it seems in fact that they represent populist movements in embryo, or the potential populist movements inherent in certain conjunctures or ce class fractions, a potential which, if fully developed, w become completely independent of--and antagonistic to--t existing political parties with which these politicians associated. But, if this is the case, one cannot speak

populism as being a feature of these parties themselves; rather, it should be seen as an entirely distinct phenomenon, to such an extent that when any of its characteristics appear as features or tendencies within conventional parliamentary parties, they do so as alien and ultimately antagonistic elements. For this reason, leaders who incline towards populism are always regarded with distrust and ambivalence by party loyalists and machine politicians: think of the attitude of many British Conservatives towards Churchill, or of the French parliamentary Right towards De Gaulle. Populist features or tendencies may appear within parties which are essentially non-populist, but they cannot develop fully within the confines of a structured party of either the bureaucratic or the clientelistic type. Populism, then, has to be seen as a distinct type of movement in its own right; some of its features may appear within more conventional parties, but if allowed to develop fully they will give rise to an autonomous movement with its own characteristics.

It follows from this that some generalizations can be made about the structural characteristics of populist movements, despite their apparent diversity and heterogeneity. The «gelatinous» character already referred to, the prominence of charismatic leadership, the close relationship between leaders and led--these things are fundamental. Although there are variations in form and degree, different populist movements all exhibit these tendencies to a significant extent. Charismatic leadership and organizational fluidity are certainly characteristic of most of the Latin American movements described as populist, and also, in varying degrees, of Gaullism, Nasserism, many of the African liberation movements, and fascism. (It might be objected that the classic fascist movements had a very rigid structure; but in practice this structure was constantly being subverted by the arbitrary interventions of the fascist leaders.)[21] But undeniably, many populist movements also have more organized, concrete structural components; frequently they are organized precisely as «movements» with some sort of membership and hierarchy, and at times as political parties, although parties of an unusual type. The populist party, classic examples being the Partido Peronista in Argentina, the Bolivian MNR, and the PRI in Mexico, tends to be all-embracing: it attempts to draw in not merely dedicated militants and party workers, but vast barely-politicized masses of workers, the middle class, peasants or urban marginals.[22] Its clientele potentially includes the entire nation, or «the people,» excluding only the plutocrats or the «oligarchy,» those defined as the enemy. Even populist parties aimed primarily at a specific class, such as Vargas' PTB in Brazil, tend in practice to have a wider appeal. Sometimes this all-encompassing appeal is given institutional expression in a corporatist structure, as in the PRI with its sectors for labour, peasants, and the middle class (the «popular» sector); even in the absence of such

clearly-defined «sectors» (or fascist «corporations»), th typical populist party will set up its own union movement else attempt to take over existing trade unions. Classic Latin American examples, again, are Peronism, Varguism, t APRA in Peru, and the Bolivian MNR.[23]

However, it would be quite wrong on this basis to cor populist parties with social-democratic parties which hav union base, like the British Labour Party. The Labour Pa was essentially created by the union bureaucracies, which came together with intellectual socialist groups to form political vehicle of their own. With populism, the relat ship is reversed: the populist leadership creates, or ta over, a union movement to serve its own purposes. The ca of Peronism is very instructive: it is no accident that Argentine Labour Party, supporting Perón but formed indep by the unions, was destroyed by Perón through administra action and replaced with a personalist party controlling own unions. The ideology of populism is all-embracing, appealing to the idealized unity of the nation or the peo it cannot therefore tolerate class-based organizations wh are truly independent, and therefore divisive. This is closely related to the populist intolerance of rival par and movements: a populist party which achieves power, i does not establish a strict one-party régime, will tend t reduce opposition parties to a subordinate or marginal ro The case of Mexico is typical; similarly with Bolivia un the MNR, with Peronism, and with Varguism (although here exceptionally, there were two populist parties sponsored the same leader and serving different constituencies). I in the words of Hugo Neira:

> The populist system leads to the perpetual electoral victory of populism. No populist régime has been defeated at the polls. Only the army has been able to expel them from power. Consciously or unconsciously, populist movements in power take as their model the partido revolucionario institucio (PRI) of Mexico.[24]

In the logic of populism, other parties will inevita be seen either as rivals--competitors for the populist constituency--or as agents of the «enemy»--the oligarchy the reaction--and therefore illegitimate. Populism tend towards one of two political solutions: either authorit (with fascism as the extreme case), or consensual, direc democracy, based on mass participation under a paternali leadership (as with cardenismo in Mexico, Castroism in i early years, or the Algerian FLN).

Does this mean that populism is necessarily corporat If we are to regard fascism as populist (and in my view is a good case for regarding it as a peculiarly reaction

form of populism), then certainly some populisms are corporatist. There are also the many populist movements and régimes of the centre and left (including most of the Latin American examples just cited) which are corporatist to a greater or lesser degree. It appears in fact that populism has a marked tendency towards corporatism, and that this tendency becomes consolidated when a populist movement becomes institutionalized as régime; although there are some cases of populist movements in opposition (the obvious case being the APRA in Peru) which have a corporatist structure. However, this should not be taken as implying automatic affinity with the classic corporatist theories of the European Right (of such thinkers as De Mun, Maurras, Manoïlesco).[25] To the extent that corporatist theories postulated a «new order» and expressed discontent and the desire for social change, they represented early attempts to formulate populist ideologies; but where they advocated social peace and harmony embracing all classes (including the aristocracy or the existing governing class), they were not populist but simply conservative. The corporatism of populist régimes (even right-wing ones) is a corporatism rationalized in the name of progress and popular rights.

Populism and class

We can say, then, that populism is a movement of a specific type, with distinctive structural, organizational and ideological characteristics: and if it achieves power, it will also tend to produce a régime of a distinctive type. But these characteristic features must have some basis in social reality: they do not simply originate spontaneously or through the sheer force of the charisma of the populist leader. It is not possible, then, to ignore the question which Laclau seeks to evade: that of the class character of populist movements.

Any attempt to analyze the social base of populism has to begin by recognizing the enormous variety of movements embraced by the concept. If Nazism, Peronism and Castroism are all to be considered populist, we must at the very least distinguish certain sub-types or varieties. On the basis of their political tendencies, one could propose a threefold classification--reactionary, reformist and revolutionary--to which the three examples just cited would correspond. But any such classification, if it is not to be a mere taxonomy, has to be related to the social bases of the various movements; and since we have already seen that the social composition of populist movements is, by definition, multi-class, any classification can only be in terms of the relative weight of the different classes and class fractions within each movement. One could, then, distinguish different populisms by the specific class fractions which are dominant within them, either in terms of leadership or in terms of mass

composition. The problem here, however, is that there d not seem to be a one-to-one relationship between the pol character of a particular movement and its class composi different and even diametrically opposed movements often to have leadership groups of similar origins, and at lea partially similar mass followings.

The apparent lack of a clear class basis inevitably the question of Bonapartism. The concept of a classless déclassé leadership «suspended above» the major classes conflict, appearing to mediate between them, and yet ult protecting the interests of one or another class fractio this seems to describe accurately many of the populist movements which come to mind. In fact, it might be argu that populism is simply another name for Bonapartism. B this would be too restrictive, since it does seem that s populist movements have a definite social base; and not populisms attempt to mediate class conflicts, indeed, in cases they openly and aggressively attack certain classe It would be accurate to say that, as suggested by Octavi Ianni,[26] many types of populism are tendentially Bonapar Bonapartism will result when a given populist leadership acquires a marked degree of autonomy from the class coal which formed its original base of support. However, thi certainly does not mean that such a populist movement is completely independent of class; the classic analyses of Bonapartism make it quite clear that the «man on horseba always in the last analysis services the interests of on another class or class fraction.[27]

The problem of analyzing different types of populist movements in class terms is particularly acute in compar movements at the two extremes of the political spectrum. it is well known that Nazism--to take a classic case of reactionary movement--was generated and led mainly by se of the petty bourgeoisie (along with déclassé elements o varying origin). But the same could be said of cardenis in Mexico, of the nationalist régimes of Jacobo Arbenz i Guatemala,[28] of Castroism, and of the Portuguese MFA and civilian allies in 1974-75, to mention just a few. So w in class terms, is to distinguish these movements? In a Leninist analysis, the class character of a party or mov is defined not by the social origins of its leadership personnel but by the interests it serves; and this makes possible a perfectly clear distinction between reactiona progressive movements. But this is really to beg the qu it still remains necessary to explain why several populi movements, all generated and led by sections of the pett bourgeoisie, should serve such contrasting interests.

It seems to be a general rule that populisms of both radical Left and the radical Right are led by sections o petty bourgeoisie--white-collar professionals, students,

officers, intellectuals. More concretely, it is predominantly members of these social and professional groups, marginalized or threatened with marginalization in crisis, who become radicalized, either to the Right or the Left, and provide the cadres and shock troops for both types of movement. The marginalized or displaced petty bourgeoisie is a class fraction which often assumes a critical role at times of hegemonic crisis; it tends to generate radically anti-status-quo «revolutionary» ideologies, whose specific character will vary according to the class structure of the country concerned and the prevailing conjuncture. It is these contextual and conjunctural factors which must presumably provide an explanation of the specific, sometimes dramatically contrasting forms and political significance assumed by different radical populisms. Confirmation for this position, although with regard to movements which were essentially reformist in their politics, comes from a North American source: Peter R. Sinclair, a sociologist who adopts a working definition of populism very similar to the one proposed in this paper,[29] argues with reference to Canadian examples (the CCF in Saskatchewan and Social Credit in Alberta) that both were movements of the petty bourgeoisie, both arose out of the impact of the depression on small rural producers, and both exhibited marked populist characteristics; yet the CCF became identified with the Left, giving rise to a Canadian version of social democracy, whereas Social Credit from the beginning adopted right-wing positions. For Sinclair, this divergence is to be explained by differences in the historical development of each Province prior to the depression, and especially by the political context of the preceding decade. Social Credit, an «authoritarian» populism, only triumphed in Alberta because of the prior failure in that Province of an incipient «democratic» populism, similar to the CCF, the United Farmers of Alberta, which formed the Government from 1921 to 1935.[30] But the significant point for our argument is that both movements had similar social and structural characteristics; and although we are dealing here with reformist rather than radical movements, these examples lend support to our argument that there is a basic parallelism between populisms of both the Left and the Right.

In a comparative perspective, we can hypothesize that petty-bourgeois populist movements are most likely to take a reactionary direction in an imperialist country with a powerful chauvinist and anti-popular tradition; this is how fascist movements originate. Conversely, a radical populism of the Left is much more likely to develop and flourish in a dependent country with a weak bourgeoisie. It is not accidental, for instance, that Italy, as a weak imperialist country, produced a fascist movement in which the worker, syndicalist component was stronger than in Germany, and which was less extreme in its chauvinism; and that in Spain and Portugal, with even weaker bourgeoisies, fascism as a mass movement remained subordinate to the traditional military-

clerical oligarchy. In this context, Portugal is partic
interesting in that having produced in Salazarism a radi
populism of the Right (but one which was weak and entire
subordinated to traditional conservative interests), it
produced a reformist populism (the opposition movement o
Delgado in 1958)[31] and a radical populism of the Left (t
Armed Forces Movement, especially its left wing associat
Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, in 1974-75). This accurately
reflects the paradoxical position of Portugal, as simult
a European colonial power and a dependent country, with
bourgeoisie; but it also illustrates very well the impor
of conjunctural factors. Thus, many of the same social
and categories which played a key role in the reactionar
of 1926 (or its precursors, such as sidonismo)[32] were al
prominent in the progressive movement of the MFA fifty y
later: junior officers, students, marginalized intellec
and white-collar professionals. This tends to bear out
we have said about the similarity in class composition o
radical populisms of both Right and Left.

It is here that Laclau's notion of a «populism of th
dominated classes» may be useful--but not in the sense i
which he intended it. Whereas «moderate» or reformist p
(of both the Left and the Right) are generated and led b
sections of the bourgeoisie, what is distinctive about r
populisms (again, of both Left and Right) is that at lea
origin, they are largely independent of any sector of th
ruling class. Led by the petty bourgeoisie (indeed, oft
petty-bourgeois strata which are becoming déclassé), the
supported by a mass following which may include workers,
peasants, urban marginals and intellectuals, in other wo
by a coalition of different sectors of the dominated cla
Laclau's error consists in the suggestion that this «pop
of the dominated classes» can become a socialist populis
which would imply that, without ceasing to be populist,
movement had somehow lost its petty-bourgeois leadership
acquired a proletarian one. This, I submit, is impossib
the mass movement may indeed come under proletarian dire
but only through an open break with its existing leaders
in the course of which it will cease to be populist.

However, once this distinction is made, the concept
«populism of the dominated classes» can be very useful.
particular, this would explain why the development of a
populism, whether of the Left or the Right, is always op
by the bourgeoisie in its initial stages. Later, if the
hegemonic crisis becomes sufficiently severe, a radical
populism of the Right will be «adopted» by the bourgeois
used to smash any independent movement of the working cl
But a populist movement of this kind is not originally c
by the bourgeoisie; and the most frequent and most serio
misinterpretations of fascism stem precisely from a fail
to appreciate its origins as, in part, a populism of the

dominated classes, i.e., as an autonomous movement of popular protest.[33] Certainly, the «adoption» of such a movement by monopoly capital, at least as a tactical weapon to be held in reserve, occurs at an early stage; and it is clear that fascist movements are from the start ideologically predisposed to be «adopted,» despite their revolutionary rhetoric. But this does not alter the fact that they originate independently; and the peculiar and contradictory character of fascism derives from the fact that one of its constituent elements is a populism of the dominated classes which has been appropriated by the dominant classes. This is why it is so much more effective than straight reaction in countering revolutionary movements; it has a mass appeal which a simple reactionary movement could never hope to achieve.

Of course, the ideological and structural similarities between fascist and revolutionary populist movements should not be exaggerated. Despite the similar class composition of their leadership and middle-ranking cadres, their mass bases tend to be significantly different. Thus, while fascism did acquire a multi-class following, recent analyses indicate that it never succeeded in winning over the bulk of the organized working class; its proletarian support was limited to the unemployed, youth, and marginal or casual workers.[34] As against this, the mass appeal of revolutionary populisms normally includes solid proletarian support (e.g., Castroism, or the Portuguese movement of 1974-75).[35] Partly for this reason, radical populisms of the Left, revolutionary populisms, are generally opposed by the bourgeoisie throughout; they pose a genuine threat to bourgeois rule, and are normally immune to co-optation. This is undoubtedly because they are led by sectors of the petty bourgeoisie with strong links to the independent workers' and peasants' movement, and only tenuous links to capitalist interests. If such a movement succeeds, it will destroy the previously dominant class bloc and institute a revolutionary democracy; although if its power becomes stabilized it will tend to lose its revolutionary characteristics, since it is unable to transcend its petty-bourgeois origins.

If we now turn our attention to reformist populisms, we find quite a different pattern: while their mass base is similar to that of revolutionary populisms, the leadership is clearly bourgeois, composed, for example, of individuals of upper and middle class background, maverick politicians from established parties, and senior officers; and if some of the leaders are of petty bourgeois origin, they are far from being marginalized or «downwardly mobile.» Obvious examples would be Peronism in Argentina and Varguism in Brazil, and several other Latin American populist movements whose leaders actually attained power or came close to it; Ibáñez in Chile, Gaitán in Colombia, Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador.[36] Such movements may also tend more to the Right

(Ibáñez) or to the Left (Gaitán), but they are obviously somewhat different from the radical movements cited above.

An interesting study of reformist populisms, despite a tendency to eclecticism in its analysis, is that of Octavio Ianni. Ianni correctly points out that what he regards as populist movements, i.e., reformist populisms, emerge not from revolutionary class struggle but from conflicts within the dominant bloc itself:

> The populist State, unlike the socialist or fascist State, is not the result of an exceptional worsening of the contradictions and struggles between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It emerges from the contradictions generated within the dominant class (the agro-pastoral, commercial, financial and industrial bourgeoisies) in combination with the antagonisms between these fractions and the other social classes, during the crisis of the primary export economy.[37]

Ianni also correctly indicates that such populist regimes sometimes (although by no means always) become institutionalized as régimes, giving rise to a distinctive form of State. His analysis also has the virtue of situating populism within a specific historical conjuncture, not in the sense of an artificial chronological limitation, but with reference to a distinctive phase in the development of the relations of production. At least in the case of Latin America, he sees it as a product of the crisis of oligarchic power and the rise of industrial capitalism:

> In all cases, populist phenomena are directly linked to transformations in the relations of production, whether economic or social and political. In this sense, populism would be incomprehensible if it were not analyzed bearing in mind always the fact that it occurs in a period of pronounced transformations of the capitalist sub-systems of Latin America.[38]

Indeed, Ianni hints that this type of analysis is of wider application; referring to the earlier populist movements in Eastern Europe and Russia, and to contemporary movements in Africa and Asia, he says:

> All populist movements, parties and governments, together with their doctrinal controversies, have the character of ideological and practical reactions according to the country and the context of the movement, to the economic, social and political changes brought about by the formation of industrial capitalism and by urbanization of the capitalist type.[39]

Certainly, it is only in this sense that we can account for the prevalence of populism in dependent societies where industrial development is late and combined with the persistence of pre-capitalist relations in the rural sector; and it is significant also that populism in more developed countries has appeared mainly where industrial development was late, unusually rapid or particularly uneven (Germany, Italy, Spain). Even the case of Gaullism in France, which exhibited at least some elements of populism, could be explained by the belated and difficult completion of the transition of French capital to the monopoly stage.

Viewed in this light, the classic analyses of Latin American populism by such authors as Germani and Di Tella[40] do retain some value; as Mouzelis points out, there is indeed a correlation between populism and such phenomena as massive rural-urban migration, socio-cultural «lags» and the breakdown of traditional social relations.[41] It is not a question of the «immaturity» of Latin American societies or of their «aberration» in relation to European models, as implied in these earlier (functionalist) analyses; rather, the particular pattern of the development of the relations of production in these societies created the material conditions for the emergence of populism, conditions which were correctly identified by these studies despite their inadequate theoretical perspective. Many authors have argued for a connection between populism and «political mobilization»--the incorporation into the political arena of hitherto inert or excluded strata--and the concomitant process of initial organization of mass political parties.[42] Although this would scarcely apply to the highly developed European countries mentioned above (Germany, France), it is certainly relevant to Latin America, and could apply to Italy in the fascist period and to countries like Spain, Portugal, and Greece even in very recent times. In Portugal, for instance, no political party prior to the fascist era had really incorporated a large working-class and peasant following; it was only after the liberation of 1974 that organization of mass parties could take place. Similar considerations apply to Greece, where the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Party (PASOK) of Andreas Papandreou has been described as populist.[43]

In general terms, then, the origins of populism can be traced to specific conditions associated with the crisis of oligarchic or aristocratic power, the rise of industrialization or urbanization in dependent societies, or the transition to monopoly capitalism. These conditions accentuate the contradictions within the dominant bloc, and it is this conflict which leads one fraction of the bourgeoisie (usually the rising industrial or medium bourgeoisie) to adopt a populist solution. Such a populism, however, will necessarily be reformist, and will never go beyond the limits imposed by the existing hegemonic system. The crisis of authority may also give rise to the emergency of a radical populism under petty-bourgeois leader-

ship, but this type of movement cannot attain power unless reformist solutions have clearly failed. Indeed, radical populisms are unlikely to achieve power except during or shortly after a crisis of revolutionary proportions. We can thus postulate an important distinction between radical populisms (led by the displaced or marginalized petty bourgeoisie) and reformist populisms (led by individuals of bourgeois origin and/or connections). Within both these categories, it is possible to make a distinction between movements of the Right and movements of the Left; but this distinction is far more clearcut and significant with regard to radical populisms than it is for the reformist type. Radical populisms of the Right are in fact fascist movements radical populisms of the Left can be described, within limit as revolutionary. Despite similarities in the class origin of their leadership in their organizational structure, and some aspects of their ideology, their ultimate significance therefore completely different. It is to the problem of the revolutionary potential of radical populisms of the Left tha we must now turn.

The Concept of Revolutionary Populism

Revolutionary populisms, as described earlier, are movements which frequently proclaim themselves to be socialist (and which are often so regarded by social scientists and commentators). The clearest example is Cuba, since it is probably the case where revolutionary populism has been most successful, and has reached the limits of its potential development. Laclau proclaims that what he calls a «populis of the dominated classes» can be socialist, and quotes Cuba as a prime example. We have already noted how Cuba has exercised a powerful attraction for all those who hope for socialist revolution without a Leninist party, or in an «unconventional,» weakly institutionalized form. In the early years, the reaction of some was to regard the Cuban experience as a freak, as a lucky coincidence in which a singularly enlightened and energetic leadership was able to overcome the political weakness and disorganization of the Cuban labour movement, and to take U.S. imperialism by surprise.[44] Others, conveniently ignoring Leninist theory on the role of the party, tried to assert that what had happened in Cuba did, after all, conform to the Marxist-Leninist model of revolution. Thus Jacques Arnault, an intellectual spokesman for the French Communist Party, criticizing those who saw the Cuban Revolution as a pragmati movement, devoid of ideology, could write:

> Fidel Castro and the principal leaders of the Cuban Revolution did indeed have, from the beginning, a body of doctrine--it is in any case because they had this body of doctrine that they made plans for

> the future--and this body of doctrine was in essence the result of the coming together of Marti's ideas with Marxism-Leninism....
>
> Indeed it is hard to say which is the more remarkable illustration of Marxism: the fact that the Cuban revolutionaries decided empirically to install socialism in Cuba because, engaged in a life-and-death struggle, they discovered that it was the best system for their country; or that, convinced of the justice of the [socialist system], they implemented what was best for Cuba.[45]

But this attempt to beg the question (Arnault simply ignores the problem of the relationship of Fidel Castro and his associates to the Cuban working class) need not concern us so much as the attempt by a number of Marxist intellectuals to theorize the Cuban experience, not as an exception, but as a model for revolution in dependent countries. The best-known proponent of this position, although his focus was more on the military phase of the struggle and less on the mass politics of Castroism in power from 1959 onwards, was Régis Debray, the French intellectual who became a semi-official spokesman for Havana in the mid-sixties. Debray's «foco» theory of guerrilla struggle,[46] formulated as a radical critique of the legalism and collaborationist policies of most Latin American Communist parties, was the most explicit statement of the Cuban position on revolutionary strategy; it has been effectively criticized for its militarist, élitist and voluntarist positions,[47] and the signal failure of many guerrilla «foci» established in Latin American countries during the sixties was a practical demonstration of its suicidal consequences.

But Debray's book was far from being the only, and certainly not the most coherent, attempt to draw novel theoretical conclusions from the Cuban experience. Others correctly saw the really significant innovations of the Cuban process not in the tactics of guerrilla warfare but in the politics of the movement once in power--more specifically, in its dramatic transition to «socialism» and in its relationship with the masses. Sensing correctly that the role of the PSP (Communist Party) was completely subordinate to that of Castro and the 26 July Movement, some observers saw the Cuban case as the first example in history of socialist revolution without the direction of a party. The vanguard role of the guerrilla fighters, coupled with Castro's charismatic leadership, had substituted for the party in leading the Cuban people through the anti-imperialist phase of struggle and on to socialism by 1962 or 1963 (and had done so, according to some, with greater dynamism and flexibility than any party had ever been able to achieve).[48] Clearly, such an analysis raises fundamental questions both about the role of the party

and the nature of revolutionary leadership, and about the class basis of the Cuban Revolution, since there cannot b much question that the 26 July Movement was fundamentally petty-bourgeois. Certainly, many individual workers part ipated in it, and it has been shown that the revolution e general working class sympathy;[49] but the movement as suc no organic links to the working class, and its ideology a program were thoroughly petty-bourgeois. No amount of sp pleading about the proletarian origins of individual mili can alter this fact.

The most honest attempt to recognize this problem and deal with it on a theoretical level was made, interesting enough, by the African revolutionary leader Amilcar Cabra Writing in 1964, Cabral argued that the revolutionary pet bourgeoisie could--indeed, must--commit «class suicide.» Pointing out that in most African countries on the eve of independence the peasants were illiterate and divided, th proletariat was a mere embryo, and there was no economica viable bourgeoisie, he concluded that only the petty bour could take control of the State. Once in power, it would to choose which line of development to adopt. It is wort quoting Cabral's argument at length:

> What attitude can the petty bourgeoisie adopt? ... The petty bourgeoisie can either ally itself with imperialism and the reactionary strata in its own country to try and preserve itself as a petty bourgeoisie or ally itself with the workers and peasants, who must themselves take power or control to make the revolution. We must be very clear exactly what we are asking the petty bourgeoisie to do. Are we asking it to commit suicide? Because if there is a revolution, then the petty bourgeoisie will have to abandon power to the workers and the peasants and cease to exist qua petty bourgeoisie.[50]

Developing his argument further, Cabral specifically to the Cuban example:

> To return to the question of the nature of the petty bourgeoisie and the role it can play after the liberation, I should like to put a question to you. What would you have thought if Fidel Castro had come to terms with the Americans? Is this possible or not? It is possible or impossible that the Cuban petty bourgeoisie, which set the Cuban people marching towards revolution, might have come to terms with the Americans? I think this helps to clarify the character of the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie. If I may put it this way, I think one thing that can be said is this: the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie is honest; i.e.,

> in spite of all the hostile conditions, it remains identified with the fundamental interests of the popular masses. To do this it may have to commit suicide, but it will not lose; by sacrificing itself it can reincarnate itself, but in the condition of workers or peasants. In speaking of honesty I am not trying to establish moral criteria for judging the role of the petty bourgeoisie when it is in power; what I mean by honesty, in a political context, is total commitment and total identification with the toiling masses.[51]

This concept of «class suicide» does at least attempt to come to terms with the peculiarities of the type of radical development, led by sections of the petty bourgeoisie, which has taken place in several new African states with extremely weak bourgeoisies. The great weakness of the argument is its voluntarism; it gives the impression that the fate of the new nation, capitalist or socialist, depends entirely on the will of a petty-bourgeois élite. In another address, Cabral did at least attempt to relate his analysis to material conditions:

> To retain the power which national liberation puts in its hands, the petty bourgeoisie has only one path: to give free rein to its natural tendencies to become more bourgeois, to permit the development of a bureaucratic and intermediary bourgeoisie in the commercial cycle, in order to transform itself into a national pseudo-bourgeoisie, that is to say in order to negate the revolution and necessarily ally itself with imperialist capital. Now all this corresponds to the neo-colonial situation, that is, to the betrayal of the objectives of national liberation. In order not to betray these objectives, the petty bourgeoisie has only one choice: to strengthen its revolutionary consciousness, to reject the temptations of becoming more bourgeois and the natural concerns of its class mentality to identify itself with the working classes and not to oppose the normal development of the process of revolution. This means that in order to truly fulfil the role in the national liberation struggle, the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie must be capable of committing suicide as a class in order to be reborn as revolutionary workers, completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people to which they belong.[52]

Here there are two recognizable alternatives: the first corresponds closely to what has in fact happened in most neo-colonial situations, where the petty-bourgeois leadership of the nationalist movement has encouraged the development

of, and has itself merged with, a national bourgeoisie, f in commerce and then in actual production. The second wo appear to be what has happened in those states which have rejected the classic pattern of neo-colonialism and opted for State-controlled, «national» development: Angola, Mozambique, Guinea, Alberia, perhaps Tanzania. But Cabra solution remains voluntarist: in order to arrive at the solution, the petty bourgeoisie must «choose,» it must «r temptations of becoming more bourgeois.» It is difficult see why a class (as opposed to dedicated individuals from within its ranks) would do this; in fact, it contradicts historical experience. The reality is that a class canno in this sense, «commit suicide»; and much less can it act direct and implement the revolutionary project of another class (the proletariat), which is what Cabral implies by that the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie can establish so

It is clear that Cabral was partially aware of this contradiction; thus in the first passage quoted he says t the petty bourgeoisie must «ally itself with the workers peasants, who must themselves take power or control to ma the revolution» (my emphasis). But this is the whole poi the workers and peasants must themselves take power, thro their own organizations; it cannot be handed to them on a plate by the goodwill of the petty bourgeoisie, nor can t petty bourgeoisie transform itself en masse into workers peasants to substitute for the real workers who are not y ready. Attempts to do this, by well-intentioned leaders the Castro or Guevara type, will merely lead to a growing divorce between the masses and a leadership which was, wi its limits, genuinely progressive; and it will also facil the consolidation of a bureaucratic bourgeoisie.

Returning to the Cuban case, there is no doubt that i does illustrate more clearly than almost any other the tr character, and the ultimate limitations, of revolutionary populism. Castro and the other leaders of the 26 July Movement did indeed represent the Cuban people and their aspirations for national liberation and social justice in 1959-62, and in the absence of a revolutionary party Cast populist bond with the masses provided an effective leade for breaking the grip of U.S. imperialism on Cuba. But t dominant force in the 26 July Movement, as in all cases o revolutionary populism, was the radicalized petty bourgeo as such, it inherited the petty-bourgeois nationalism of Martí, of the student leaders of 1933, and of Antonio Gui and the moral fervour of Eddy Chibás and his «Ortodoxo» p An excellent analysis of the cultural background of Castr is provided by Nelson Valdés in an article entitled «Ideo Roots of the Cuban Revolutionary Movement.» Arguing prec that the 26 July Movement was populist in character, Vald shows how the ideology of Castro's guerrilla band was the logical outgrowth of the Cuban nationalist and populist t

tion, and he argues that despite Castro's verbal adherence to Marxism-Leninism from 1961 onwards, the structure and ideology of the movement remained populist and not socialist:

> The revolutionary groups formed to struggle against the Batista régime had been nurtured on the ideals of national emancipation as they were expressed by José Martí, on the revolutionary student activism of Julio Antonio Mella, on the anti-imperialism and the insurrectionary actions of Antonio Guiteras, and on the extremely moralistic and highly politicized populism of Eduardo Chibás....
>
> The ideological equipment that these revolutionists introduced into national politics is clear, but it was not new. Moreover, it was far from Marxist.... The ideological roots of the revolutionary movement truly were as Cuban as the palm trees. But this brings us to a most significant point: the ideology of the Cuban revolutionist, despite their revolutionary activity, was not a direct challenge to the prevailing cultural hegemony. The revolutionists did not put forward an alternative cultural paradigm claiming legitimacy to be a new ruler for a new social class.[53]

Valdés shows very clearly how Castro and his followers appealed constantly to typical populist values of «morality,» «purity» and «justice,» and how they interpellated «the people» in the abstract. Of course, a Marxist-Leninist party could with legitimacy also appeal to these ideals, and interpellate «the people» in the struggle against imperialism; but the dominant values in its discourse would still have to be those of class struggle, materialism, and revolution, and its structure would have to be firmly rooted in the organized working class.

Despite its dynamism and intense anti-imperialism, the Cuban leadership could not transcend its ideological heritage of élitist voluntarism and commandism, tendencies which would easily give rise to militarism once the populist bond with the masses was weakened. Lacking a party, a proletarian base and a socialist program, the movement inevitably became a dictatorship of the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie over the masses: a radical, nationalist form of Bonapartism which rationalized its rule through the adoption of official Soviet «Marxism-Leninism,» modified by a heavy dose of petty-bourgeois voluntarism and egalitarianism. The likelihood of left-wing populism degenerating in this way is clearly perceived by Nicos Mouzelis. Discussing the «gelatinous» structure of populist movements, he writes:

It is precisely because of the collapse of any organizational autonomy and the close identification of the entire movement with the period of the populis leader, that many socialists mistrust populism. This mistrust, which Laclau considers so misguided, does not stem simply from a sectarian insistence on keepin working-class parties as 'pure' class parties. It stems rather from a well-justified suspicion of movements where it is the leader, rather than strongl rooted administrative structures and practices, from whom emanates the main integrative and directing force--a situation which frequently leads to the type of adventurist tendencies which are so prevalent a feature of the so-called socialist populist movements of the third world.[54]

Although Mouzelis did not intend it as such, this is excellent description of what has happened in Cuba--perso leadership giving rise to adventurist tendencies in the n of socialism. Whatever the good intentions of Castro, «C Guevara and their comrades, they could not embark on the construction of socialism; socialism implies the structur and democratic rule of a revolutionary party of the worki class, intimately linked with the workers' mass organizat Revolutionary populist democracy, linked to the masses on by an intangible charismatic bond, has to be seen instead a classic instance of «unstable equilibrium.» In the Cub case, unless this equilibrium was resolved within a few y by the victory of a proletarian party, it was inevitable the charismatic bond would weaken and that the revolution petty bourgeoisie would begin to fuse with the technocrat and bureaucratic stratum represented by the pro-Soviet Pa Socialista Popular: the State bourgeoisie in embryo. Fr revolutionary petty bourgeois, with no clear stake in the productive system, they would become converted into a bureaucratic bourgeoisie of the Soviet type. This proces already advancing rapidly by the mid-sixties, despite the efforts of idealists like «Che» Guevara to combat it by voluntarist means; and after 1970 it became irrevocably consolidated with the «institutionalization» of the new régime. In the course of this process of consolidation, Cuban movement gradually lost its populist character, bec converted into a state-capitalist régime of increasingly militarist and bureaucratic tendencies. In the absence o proletarian hegemony, this is the typical ultimate result of the triumph of revolutionary populism, which as an established régime is inherently unstable. In the Cuban it should be recognized that the régime still retains som residual populist characteristics (notably Castro's perso charisma) which can become important at critical moments; this was abundantly clear during the recent refugee crisi (May 1980). It is this residual populism which accounts the obvious difference in tone between Cuba and the régim

Eastern Europe.

None of this is meant to deny the very real significance of the Cuban Revolution as a progressive movement in the Latin American context. In the light of the above analysis, it might be questioned whether this type of populism should be regarded as in any sense «revolutionary.» However, it is undeniable that in dependent countries a petty-bourgeois movement of the Cuban type can, and frequently does, lead a revolutionary assault on oligarchic rule and imperialism, and within the limits of a democratic and anti-imperialist struggle, it does indeed play a revolutionary role. But it does not, and by itself cannot, lead to socialism; and it cannot do so because, as we have argued earlier, it is the political expression of a specific class (or class fraction), to whose interests its left-populist ideology corresponds: the marginalized petty bourgeoisie. This class fraction is particularly prominent wherever the national bourgeoisie is unusually weak (e.g., several Caribbean and Central American nations, and most of the new African states); and it may also come to the fore in more developed nations in a state of hegemonic crisis, e.g., Portugal in 1974-75. Because of its marginalization under imperialist-dominated régimes, this social stratum frequently becomes revolutionary; but also, by virtue of its social position and cultural formation, it has a natural interest in technocratic State-sponsored «development» (i.e., State capitalism), and is therefore attracted to East-European style «socialism» and «Marxism-Leninism.» The fate of many national-liberation movements in recent years attests to this: those in Angola, Ethiopia, South Yeman, for example. The tendency of such régimes to gravitate into the Soviet camp is not, therefore, due to mere geo-political determinism (a simple reaction against the West), but is intimately related to their class character.

The startling complexities and contradictions of revolutionary populism were even more fully revealed recently by another revolutionary experience: that of Portugal in 1974-75. Unlike Cuba, the Portugese movement did not succeed in completely destroying the prevailing pro-Western régime of dependent capitalism, but only in democratizing it and reforming it. The Armed Forces Movement (MFA), composed of junior officers weary of the African wars and the more anachronistic aspects of the neo-fascist Caetano régime, from the start had radical-populist characteristics. During 1974 and the first three months of 1975, it successfully dismantled the corporate state and the repressive structures of Portuguese fascism, and outmanoeuvred its main political rival, General Spínola, whose project was essentially a reformist populism of the Right, as well as neo-colonialist and «Gaullist.» The failure of Spínola's scheme is scarcely surprising, since Portugal had just emerged from an outmoded and discredited right-wing populist régime, and popular sentiment demanded

radical change; and given the deeply-rooted strength of populist tendencies in the country's political structures (the weakness of organized parties, the prevalence of charismatic leadership, and a long history of vaguely-def anti-oligarchic and anti-foreign movements), conditions w in many ways ideal for a populism of the Left to take ove After Spínola's abortive coup of 11 March 1975, this is precisely what began to happen with impressive speed: th institutionalization of the MFA (with its Assembly and Revolutionary Council), the ascendency within it of the military Left, the adoption of a project for a vaguely-de direct democracy (the Documento-Guia para a Aliança Povo- which is a veritable classic of revolutionary-populist ideology,[55] the rapid passage of a series of structural r (nationalization, agrarian reform) and the approximation the then-dominant faction of the MFA (led by Prime Minist Vasco Gonçalves) with the pro-Soviet PCP. If this tenden had been able to consolidate itself, a pro-Soviet populis régime would certainly have resulted, laying the foundati for bureaucratic State capitalism; it is not by chance th Portugal was labelled «the Cuba of Europe» by some observ (and not merely by visceral anti-communists). That the tendency did not consolidate itself was partly due to the continuing strength of the Portuguese Right (powerfully supported by Western interests), as demonstrated in the showdown of the «hot summer» of 1975; but it also reflect the internal division within the Left-populist leadership itself, between the pro-Soviet faction led by Vasco Gonça and the more revolutionary wing represented by Otelo Sara de Carvalho. The latter, more closely linked to the mass movement and less inclined to compromise, wanted to push process to its logical conclusion of a revolutionary demo independent of any external domination. Taking seriously profoundly revolutionary implications of the populist «di democracy» proposed in the Documento-Guia, Otelo and the officers who signed the so-called «COPCON document» of Au 12th[56] explicitly rejected both social-democracy and Stat capitalism, and seem to have envisaged a true popular-dem régime. The insoluble contradiction remained, of wanting push through an authentic popular revolution without prol leadership; and Otelo, acutely conscious of this vacillat between the Scylla of revolutionary Bonapartism (as he sa one occasion, he might have been «the Fidel Castro of Eur and the Charybdis of total reliance on the workers' spont Ultimately, Otelo and the revolutionary left failed to ta decisive action of any kind, and thereby permitted by def the renewed ascendancy of the traditional pro-Western bourgeoisie. In this sense, the Portuguese experience re even more about the potential and the limitations of revolutionary populism than did Cuba; for this tension be the pro-Soviet, bureaucratic tendency and the more truly revolutionary popular-democratic wing of the movement was fully developed in the Cuban case. The tension was obviou

present, with Che Guevara coming closest to representing the second option; but, perhaps because of the lack of autonomous mass action in the Cuban Revolution,[59] this tendency ultimately became subordinated to the technocratic and bureaucratic trend which is dominant today.

It is important to stress that in the Portuguese case, a major factor in the development of revolutionary populism (and in its ultimate disintegration) was the independent, spontaneous mass movement of the workers and peasants themselves. To a very great extent the agrarian reform, the nationalizations, workers' control in the factories, and other major reforms were not instituted by the MFA, which merely ratified what the people had already done by direct action; or, in other cases, the government acted only under strong pressure from the popular movement. In this sense, the movement of 1974-75 was not populist, but an independent class-based movement of the workers and popular strata, who often refused to accept populist tutelage. What was populist, then, was the response of the junior officers to a revolutionary situation; faced with a popular mass movement going beyond the limits of reformism, the progressive military responded in the only way they could, by developing a radical-populist project.[60] If this was the case, one cannot speak of a populist movement, since all that existed was a would-be populist leadership without a following; one half of the equation was missing.[61] However, the populist appeals of the MFA--particularly of its radical wing, led by Otelo--did elicit a significant popular response, and to that extent a populist movement did emerge during 1975. Moreover, this latent populism re-emerged and blossomed forth dramatically in the summer of 1976, with Otelo's election campaign for the Presidency (in which, without resources and despite the opposition of all the major parties, and against a candidate, Eanes, enjoying the unanimous support of the bourgeoisie, he polled over 16% of the popular vote after a campaign lasting only three weeks).[62] This campaign mobilized mass support for a program which articulated genuine popular demands, an authentic revolutionary-democratic program for Portugal;[63] but in its rhetoric, its style, its amorphous organizational structure, and its reliance on Otelo's charisma, it was thoroughly populist. In the absence of effective proletarian leadership, it had to be; there was no other way of maintaining mass popular mobilization around a revolutionary program. Given the objective conditions prevailing in Portugal, then, the radical populism of Otelo and the COPCON officers did play a very progressive, indeed potentially revolutionary, role; but it could not (except in terms of its subjective self-image) be described as socialist.

The situation of unstable equilibrium in which a revolutionary populism emerges can be resolved in a number of different ways. One is, quite simply, counter-revolution: the victory, with or without external assistance, of the old

forces ousted by the revolutionary movement. Clear example of this would be Guatemala in 1954 and the Dominican Republ in 1965, after the U.S. intervention.[64] Another possibilit as already explained, is bureaucratization and State capita A third alternative is the militarization of the régime, leading to a military/Bonapartist dictatorship, inherently unstable and tending gradually to lose its progressive characteristics. A good example of this might be Libya unc Ghaddafi. But any of these three solutions, reactionary restoration, bureaucratic capitalism, or militarization, represents return to bourgeois rule in one form or another. The only way to avoid this, and to realize to the full the revolutionary potential inherent in populist movements of t type, is through the intervention of other forces of a proletarian character; and if this intervention is success socialism will indeed result, but the movement will no lon be in any sense populist. A consistent proletarian line, which does not rule out class alliances or political flexil but does imply a clear programmatic socialist position and reliance on the organized working-class movement, will inevitably involve an open rupture with populist tendencie This was the case with the Bolsheviks in 1917 (as against Social-Revolutionaries, for example, or later against the peasant leader Makhno), and with every successful socialis revolution.

However, once this crucial distinction is established, remains important to recognize that in dependent countries revolutionary populism is a very widespread and influentia political phenomenon, and has very real progressive signif within these limits (i.e., before degenerating into a bure cratic or militaristic régime); and it would be extremely divisive and sectarian for socialists in those countries t cut themselves off from all collaboration with it. Indeed so prevalent are the conditions which give rise to revolut populism in dependent countries, and so pronounced is its capacity for precipitating a critical rupture in bourgeois power, in fact, for creating a revolutionary situation, th it must surely be considered imperative for socialists to support such movements up to the limits of their progressi potential. It is not a question of a movement which in an way transcends class contradictions, but of one which maxi the breadth and strength of the class alliance (what Grams called the «national-popular historic bloc»)[65] available f revolutionary action. To appreciate the significance of t it is necessary to return to the distinction between refor (dominant class) and revolutionary (dominated class) popul The implications of this distinction are immediately appar from the contrast between two revolutionary situations in development at the time of writing (October 1982): in Nicaragua (where the Frente Sandinista is clearly a revolu populism) and in Iran (where Khomeini's «Islamic revolutio is merely a reformist populism of the dominant classes,

progressive only in the struggle against the Shah). The Sandinistas (unless crushed by overt or covert U.S. intervention) have at least the potential to destroy not merely Somoza but the entire basis of the existing ruling class in Nicaragua; Khomeini's régime, unless ousted by more progressive forces, will rapidly re-consolidate the power of the semi-feudal Iranian oligarchy. The distinction is crucial, and it cannot be understood without reference to the class character of different types of populism.

NOTES

[1]See for example, Gino Germani, Política y Sociedad en una época de transición (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidos, 1962); David Apter, The Politics of Modernization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); A.E. van Niekerk, Populi and Political Development in Latin America (Rotterdam: University of Rotterdam Press, 1974).

[2]The approach derived essentially from Marx's treatment of Bonapartism, in e.g., The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. Also very relevant, obviously, is Gramsci's treatment of «Caesarism»: Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith, eds., Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), pp. 210-26. The difficulty is that populism may embrace a broader range of phenomena than those encompassed by Marx's concept of Bonapartism.

[3]On the Portuguese MFA, see Kenneth Maxwell, «The Hidden Revolution in Portugal» and «Portugal under Pressure,» The New York Review of Books, 17 April and 29 May, 1975; Douglas Porch, The Portuguese Armed Forces and the Revolution (London Croom Helm, Stanford, California: The Hoover Institution Press, 1977); Avelino Rodrigues, Cesário Borga and Mário Cardoso, O Movimento dos Capitães e o 25 de Abril (Lisboa: Moraes Editores, 1974) and Portugal Depois de Abril (Lisboa: DIG, 1976).

[4]Ernesto Laclau, Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory (London: New Left Books, 1977), especially chapter 4.

[5]Ibid., pp. 172-73.

[6]Ibid., p. 174.

[7]Ibid,. pp. 196-97; emphasis in original.

[8]Ibid., pp. 104-8.

[9]Ibid., pp. 173-74. For a North American version of the notion of «socialist populism,» see Harry C. Boyte, «The Populist Challenge: Anatomy of an Emerging Movement,» Socialist Revolution, 32 (March-April 1977), pp. 39-81, plus Michael Rotkin's «Response» and Boyte's «Reply,» pp. 82-88 and 89-92.