RADICAL
LEFT PARTIES
IN EUROPE

Luke March

ROUTLEDGE

6 Left-wing populism

Populist socialists and social populists

That populism can be left wing has been rediscovered relatively recently. Until the late twentieth century, populism was mainly studied as a theoretical concept, and applied little to political parties (Taggart 2000). Party populism was seen either as a predominately Latin American phenomenon, or one connected almost exclusively with the radical right (Betz and Immerfall 1998). Only with the emergence of Latin American leaders like Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales heading a wave of left-leaning regimes in the early 2000s did 'left-populism' gain wide currency. However, that populism is not *a priori* linked to any particular ideological position was always acknowledged by some – indeed, as Michael Kazin (1995) argues, prior to the 1940s, American populism was usually associated with socialist sentiments. But left-populism in Europe has only now started to gain attention (e.g. March and Mudde 2005; March 2007).

Accordingly, in this chapter I flesh out the nature of European radical left-populism, after first defining the contested concept of 'populism' itself. In general, left-populists are 'populist' in that a dichotomy between the 'moral people' and a 'corrupt elite' is central to their ideology. They have far less concern with doctrinal purity or class-consciousness than the traditional left. They may adopt organizational features common to other populist parties across the political spectrum, such as the emphasis on a charismatic leader who has unmediated communication with his people and distaste for formal organization. Nevertheless, they remain 'left' in their emphasis on egalitarianism and the espousal of collective economic and social rights.

Two main forms can be identified: *populist socialist parties* have a democratic socialist ideological core similar to those parties identified in Chapter 5, and should be seen as a subtype of them rather than a distinct *genus* – their socialist identity is still central. However, this core is overlaid with a far stronger anti-establishment appeal, greater ideological eclecticism and emphasis on particularistic identity than other democratic socialists (including espousing regionalism or even nationalism). The three West European populist socialist parties examined here are the most important cases but espouse differing degrees of populism. The German Left Party (until 2005 the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) but for convenience henceforward usually referred to as the LP) has been consistently the least populist since, although it articulates strong East German regionalist

and anti-establishment sentiments, it is markedly internationalist and (relatively) pro-European. The Dutch Socialist Party (SP) still maintains anti-elite positions and a clear sense of national distinctiveness and Euroscepticism but has latterly moderated its populism to the degree that it may currently be regarded as simply a democratic socialist party. The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) is consistently the most populist, with an anti-elite nationalist position and its rise and fall being inextricably tied to the fortunes of its former leader Tommy Sheridan. These parties have contrasting fortunes: the LP and SP's anti-establishment rhetoric has helped them mount serious challenges to previously dominant social democratic parties, whilst the SSP's dramatic rise was followed by an even more emphatic demise in 2006–7, from which no recovery looks possible.

Second, *social populist parties* have the closest resemblance to classical populist movements with a dominant personalist leadership, relatively weak organization and essentially incoherent ideology, fusing left-wing and right-wing themes behind an anti-establishment appeal. Most of these parties are not acknowledged as left wing by the radical left. Further, most are not consistently anti-capitalist or even radical, and many are 'flash parties' without long-term prospects, so this chapter will not focus on them in equal detail. However, such parties are vital in explaining why (with the exception of communists) the genuine radical left is much weaker in Eastern than Western Europe, since they often occupy the place where it might flourish. Social populists espouse quasi-left and pseudo-radical slogans, and Eastern Europe's political environment, with relatively unstructured party systems, where 'left' and 'right' are less clearly defined and where socioeconomic distress is greater and political trust lower than in the West, means that they are likely to remain an obstacle to the development of genuine RLPs there. Accordingly, I provide a brief overview of the main types.

What populism is and is not

'Populism' is one of the most controversial political terms, partly because it is widely used as an insult implying irresponsibility, demagoguery and opportunism. For example, the left's redistributionism might be dismissed as 'cheap' or 'dangerous' populism, as in Latin America where a simplistic division into the 'good' (non-populist) and 'bad' (populist) left has been made (Castañeda 2006). Nevertheless, I follow an increasing number of analysts in using populism as a neutral term with greater heuristic validity than its synonyms. For example, while populists are inherently opposed to the political elite, the term 'anti-political establishment parties' (e.g. Abedi 2004) includes those that are not necessarily populist (such as communists, fascists and even Greens).

Yet even if populism is used non-pejoratively, it is difficult to isolate. There is no 'Populist International'; populism is a 'chameleonic' concept that, like other 'thin-centred' ideologies (especially nationalism), easily combines with 'fuller' ideologies such as conservatism or socialism (Taggart 2000; Fieschi 2004). Moreover, although populism may be defined as an ideology, it has a deliberate lack of intellectual consistency – it is a syndrome not a doctrine (Wiles 1969).

Nevertheless, we can certainly identify the minimal necessary features of populism. Mudde (2004: 543; cf. Albertazzi and McDonnell 2007), defines it as:

> an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.

Populism implies a distinct political style (involving 'everyday' language, an appeal to 'gut feelings' and simplistic slogans and solutions – what Mudde refers to as bar-room politics). It implies an identifiable form of organization – centralized but fluid structures enabling a dominant, charismatic leader to be 'close to the people' (Taggart 2000; Weyland 2001). Charismatic authority, anti-institutional mobilization and simplistic language are not unique to populists, but the 'corrupt elite' versus 'moral people' dichotomy is. So, populist parties are those that define themselves against all other 'mainstream' or 'establishment' political parties, and see themselves as the only principled defenders of the 'ordinary person', relying heavily on emotional discourse and protest sentiment.

A left-populist Zeitgeist?

As a 'thin-centred' ideology, populism is inherently neither of left nor right; indeed, its moral and emotional emphasis and focus on 'the people' as a whole is inherently anti-programmatic. Nevertheless, whilst populism's anti-intellectualism, cross-class appeal and ideological amorphousness have usually made it suspect to the left, leftists have also been able to find affinity with intentions which *prima facie* look like 'a wish list for a socialist and radical-democratic agenda' – anti-elitism, empowerment, inclusiveness, morality and welfarism (Arditi 2003: 18). Indeed, some have argued that socialism is intrinsically populist. After all, among the most famous left-populists were the mid-nineteenth-century Russian *Narodniki*. Their rejection of constitutional limits on the state and assertion of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry were a key influence on Leninism (Clarke 2002). Moreover, in the early twentieth century, the proletariat's minority status in most democracies led socialist parties to broaden class struggle to the 'people' (Przeworski and Sprague 1986). On similar grounds Ernesto Laclau (1977:196) has called socialism 'the highest form of "populism"'. Because a Marxist sees proletarian interests as universal, it is simple to elide distinctions between proletariat and people and to struggle for this people in the 'national-liberation struggle'. Nikita Khrushchev's 1961 formulation of the 'all-people's state' arguably indicated that Soviet proletarianism had become populism.

However, this is overstated. True populists lionize the 'common sense' of the people, and aim to change its political status but not its values. For the Marxist, concern with education and class consciousness remained paramount. For the Leninist, the elite party of dedicated revolutionaries was inherently anti-populist. The CPSU actively formed popular interests, rather than simply reflecting them, hence often anti-populist Soviet campaigns for labour discipline and socialist morality.

Nevertheless, the affinity between socialism and populism in contemporary Europe is growing, partly because European politics is *itself* becoming more populist. Indeed, there is a 'populist Zeitgeist' – major European political entrepreneurs regularly employ populist rhetoric, especially in terms of presenting themselves as 'ordinary' representatives of the 'common people', and depicting opponents as elitist or out-of-touch (Mudde 2004). Accordingly all contemporary parties may use populist appeals to some extent (Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2009). This Zeitgeist has long-term causes and so is likely to be long lasting; in particular the 'modernization crisis' engendered by globalization and the decline of the post-war social democratic consensus; the modern mass media, which has 'demystified' politicians and put their actions under ever greater popular scrutiny; the emergence of 'catch-all' parties which appeal beyond defined class constituencies; finally, EU integration, which as an elite-led project which impinges on national sovereignty, has become a 'sitting duck' for populist mobilization (Canovan 1999: 6; Mudde 2004, 2007).

Whilst during the 1980s and 1990s right-wing populists were naturally more adept than communists and social democrats in exploiting ethnic and national grievances and adapting to neo-liberalism's anti-state and individualist emphasis, the contemporary socio-economic environment arguably favours a European left-populist Zeitgeist. Not only is neo-liberalism increasingly contested, but the decline of doctrinaire communism's hegemony over left-wing radicalism and the rightwards shift of social democracy to become a perceived element of the 'establishment' increases the propensity for populist mobilization both within and against the traditional left. Particularly after 2008, European economic travails indicate that socio-economic concerns (jobs, welfare, and benefits) are potentially as salient as the identity concerns (national sovereignty, immigration) more regularly expressed by the populist right.

Unsurprisingly then, the 'populist temptation' has become increasingly attractive to the left. Although I focus in this chapter on those parties with the most marked populist elements, it is already clear that RLPs of divergent ideological dispositions have increasingly adopted populist appeals, focussing on anti-establishment themes in order to articulate the concerns of a 'people' broader than the traditional blue-collar proletariat. For example, some communist parties such as the Greek KKE, Russian KPRF and Portuguese PCP have articulated a form of Stalin's 'socialism in one country' that appeals to 'national liberation' against capitalist elites and their foreign imperialist masters while de-emphasizing Marxism-Leninism and internationalism (without replacing them entirely). Newer ex-Trotskyist parties like the French NPA and the Socialist Party of Ireland (a sister-party of the SSP with an MEP from Dublin and which, together with the People Before Profit Alliance, gained 2.2 per cent of the vote and 5 seats in the 2011 Irish elections) have a highly personalized style and are prone to iconoclasm and gesture politics, even if they still retain a strong working-class discourse.[1] Even some resolutely non-populist parties such as the Finnish Left Alliance have a 'populist left' wing (see Chapter 5).

What are the implications of the left-populist Zeitgeist? In itself, populism is neutral, not the 'pathology' sometimes claimed (e.g. Akkerman 2003). Indeed,

Margaret Canovan persuasively argues that populism is a perceptive critique of the democratic limitations of liberal democracies, especially the elitist gap between the people's representatives and the people itself. The gap between liberal democracy's performance and promise provides a perpetual stimulus to populist mobilization 'that follows democracy like a shadow' (Canovan 1999: 10). This is why populism has become so integral to contemporary democratic discourse. To the degree that populism raises elite awareness of popular concerns and provides for the representation of the excluded it is not *necessarily* a negative phenomenon, however uncomfortable it is for political elites. For this reason, René Cuperus (2003: 108) has advocated the left becoming 'more "populist", in a leftist way' by addressing the concerns of those left behind by economic and cultural modernization and by disengaging with technocratic 'third way' strategies that downplay political conflict – thus populism might be 'civilized' by removing it from monopolization by the radical right. Left-populism is certainly *relatively* 'civilized' because it emphasizes egalitarianism and inclusivity rather than the openly exclusivist anti-immigrant or anti-foreigner concerns of right-populism (i.e. its concern is the *demos* not the *ethnos*).

However, populism can be democracy's shadow in a darker way as the archetype of the 'tyranny of the majority' warned against by John Stuart Mill (Arditi 2003). Populism's maximalist interpretation of plebiscitary democracy means that it is intolerant of constitutional limits that frustrate the unmediated will of the people, and as such is potentially illiberal, even extremist. Moreover, populism is potentially profoundly politically destabilizing, because its democratic aspirations raise expectations which both the liberal democratic political elite and the populist actors (often tamed in office because they lack organizational robustness, consistent programmatic orientation, or indeed any model of a 'people's democracy') – are usually unable to fulfil. Political actors whose *raison d'être* is criticism of the 'establishment' but who are consistently unable to represent their 'people' once in office are an invitation to further political disenchantment.

So the challenge for the contemporary European left is to become populist in style but not substance. This challenge is still easiest in Western Europe, where political systems are more stable, more structured, more parliamentary, and organized social democracy remains dominant on the left, thereby limiting the scope of true populist movements. The populism of the populist socialists outlined below has not replaced traditional socialist commitments, and there is no recent Western European example of successful social populist movement equivalent to the Latin American left-populists, with their dominant leadership and broad social mobilization. The Greek PASOK, which fitted such a definition in the 1970s and 1980s, jettisoned populism in favour of 'third way' social democracy after 1996 (Lyrintzis 2005). The only currently (partly) analogous party is the Irish/Northern Irish Sinn Féin, which joined the radical left's EU parliamentary United European Left/Nordic Green Left group in 2004 for pragmatic reasons (having no other obvious home). SF's platform is distinctive (given its history as the political wing of the terrorist IRA), with its nationalism, authoritarianism and populism reminiscent of the radical right, but seeing itself as leftist, egalitarian and pro-immigrants' rights (O'Malley 2008).

However, the 'dark side' of populism is far more of a challenge in contexts where the external constraints provided by strong institutions, legal systems and competitor political parties are weaker. Here, populism's association with charismatic leadership and organizational de-institutionalization has a tendency towards messianic leadership promoting authoritarian leadership and passive masses. This trait is of particular danger in Latin America's elitist 'delegative democracies'. For example, in Chávez's Venezuela, institutions have to be reshaped and the masses mobilized constantly in order to maintain the 'revolutionary' momentum of *Chavismo*, thus engendering a cycle of populist mobilization and demobilization and eliciting fears of authoritarianism even among some Chávez supporters. As we shall see, Eastern Europe's less stable party systems and poorer socioeconomic situation provide fertile ground for a less benign populism.

The Left Party – from populism to pragmatism . . . and back?

After German unification in 1990, the LP occupied the unique position of being the only communist 'successor party' (to the former East German Socialist Unity Party) outside an ex-communist state (the GDR). Although the party has become an important force in Western Germany, in important respects it is comparable to other successor parties, in particular the Czech KSČM, with which it shares a legacy of 'bureaucratic authoritarian' communism. As noted in Chapter 4, this legacy implied a highly repressive and inert ruling party that would neither try to reform nor co-opt the anti-communist uprising, but quickly collapsed in the face of mass pressure after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Like the KSČM, the LP inherited a large nostalgic mass base from its ruling predecessor. In 1990s Eastern Germany this membership was a bonus, being larger than the Eastern branches of the principal Western German parties (the Social Democratic Party, SPD and Christian Democratic Union, CDU) combined. Moreover, like other successor parties, the LP benefited from a strong socialist value culture – the so-called *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the GDR). However, the legacy proved a mixed blessing. Although by the end of the 1990s the LP successfully drew *voters* from all Eastern social strata and age groups, its traditionalist *membership*, combined with a new orientation towards *Basisdemokratie*, complicated its leadership's intentions to adopt more modernist, pragmatic positions (Padgett 1998). Today, also like the KSČM, its membership is ageing, averaging 63 years old (Striethorst 2011). Had Germany not reunited, it is possible that the LP's trajectory in the East would have mirrored the Czech party more closely, that is a stable niche position with minimal ideological transformation and still less political influence.

But of course, Germany did reunite, posing both opportunities and dilemmas for the LP. The rapid absorption of East by West, the East's continued poor socio-economic performance and the dominance of former West German elites in the new Germany allowed the LP to become a 'regional party built on socialist principles' (Hough 2001: 22), guarding distinct East German traditions, values and symbols (including even the communist-era pedestrian light signals, the *Ampelmännchen*).

The LP emerged a major Eastern German actor in the mid-1990s, polling 20 per cent of the vote (as opposed to less than 2 per cent in the West) and even surpassing the SPD in the regions (*Länder*) of Saxony, Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt. But whilst the East's political-cultural legacy weakened the SPD and Greens (in particular) there, by the same token, the LP was consistently unable to expand its organizational and electoral base in the West. Here, the SPD and Greens had deeper roots and with anti-communist traditions still salient the LP was regarded as an obsolete, 'Eastern' Stalinist relic, even among more radically inclined left-wing voters (Olsen 2007).[2]

Only in 2005, after the PDS allied with the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG) did the LP manage to overcome this persistent barrier. The WASG was a coalition of SPD defectors, trade unionists, global justice activists and members of minor extreme left groups. They coalesced in protest against the 'Agenda 2010' neo-liberal economic and welfare reforms proposed in March 2003 by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, leader of the SPD–Green government, in particular the so-called Hartz IV reforms which aimed (*inter alia*) to cut unemployment benefits and claimant rights.[3]

The LP's ideological position is broadly distinct but vague in detail – a combination of commitments to grass-roots pluralism (in 2011 there were 25 official groups (15 unofficial) with much programmatic and organizational autonomy) and the dictates of German federalism. At national level, it has undergone several shifts of strategic direction, from anti-establishment anti-capitalism and Eastern German regional populism in the mid-1990s to increasing pragmatic moderation by the millennium, with a more populist but office-seeking anti-capitalist position discernible since 2005. Overall, the party espouses a recognizably democratic socialist platform: broad aspirations to social justice coexist with opposition to neo-liberalism, commitments to a maximum 35-hour working week without pay loss, redistributive taxation, full employment and a mandatory ten-Euro per-hour minimum wage. In addition, the LP is strongly pacifist, opposing German troop deployment abroad (e.g. in Afghanistan) and supporting NATO dissolution.

Four broad intra-party tendencies are identifiable (Hough *et al.* 2007; Hough and Koß 2009), now supplemented by the WASG's 'protest activist' and 'far left' wings. The 'modern socialists' dominant in the leadership seek to increase the democratic accountability and social justice of Germany's political system by positioning the LP as a radical, pragmatic socialist alternative to the SPD; the 'pragmatic reformers' engage mainly with local level problem solving, and practical, rather than ideological issues; the vocal 'restorative ideologues' associated with Sahra Wagenknecht's Communist Platform insist on communist verities and the heritage of state socialism, whilst the anti-establishment and anti-authoritarian 'radical-alternative wing' opposes the GDR heritage, collaborates with the social movements, supports a libertarian social position (e.g. on drugs liberalization) and generally opposes LP participation in government. Ex-WASG 'protest activists' include former SPD and trade union activists for whom social justice is more important than ideology; the 'far left' includes minor communist/Trotskyist groups conversely aiming to struggle for 'socialism'.[4]

All told, merger with the WASG has bolstered anti-establishment protest sentiments, and has increased the number of members for whom social justice and employment are more important than left-libertarian and green issues (Olsen 2007). Such members regard the SPD as anathema and LP collaboration with the SDP in Land governments (e.g. in Berlin) as neo-liberalism in action. Unsurprisingly, ideological and strategic wrangling has characterized party development: although Marxism-Leninism and democratic centralism disappeared in 1989–1990, only in 2003 did the modern socialists prevail and the party programme distance itself from Marxism, revolution, and soften its criticism of market economics (Patton 2006). Any agreement on programmatic issues has been tortuous to attain (Hough 2010). Although consensus between the PDS and WASG (e.g. on rejecting German military intervention abroad even under UN auspices and on opposing neo-liberal reforms where possible) facilitated a smooth merger, a draft programme finally appeared only in early 2010, and has still not been finalized (LP 2010c).

To reduce this complex amalgam to populism alone would be evidently simplistic, not least because the ideological and internationalist elements of the LP's activity have remained consistently important. A focus on the international rather than the national is not typical of populists, but the LP has been one of the key drivers of initiatives like the New European Left Forum and PEL (see Chapter 8), and sees itself as pro-European, whilst not supporting an EU politics 'by the elite for the elite' (Bisky 2008). Moreover, although the party drew heavily on the protest sentiments of Easterners who had lost out during unification (epitomized by its 1994 slogan of 'Election Day is Protest Day'), it was not simply a protest party: by 1998 its increased support among younger and white-collar voters gave it pretensions to be an East German regional *Volkspartei* (People's Party) with an electoral profile similar to the Greens (Betz 1999). Moreover, 'red–red' regional coalitions with the SPD in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (1998–2006), Berlin (2001–) and Brandenburg (2009–) have meant that the party has moderated its comprehensive anti-establishment stance.

Nevertheless, populism remains an important element of the LP's appeal. The party's traditional self-perception was an 'everyday party' (*Alltagspartei*), representing the 'ordinary' East German citizen and even the East German 'people' against the alleged remote, colonizing elites in Bonn, as a 'kind of "Lega East"' (Decker and Hartleb 2007: 448), although this was downplayed after 2005 as the party became an all-German force. Indeed, a key populist trait is a mythologized popular 'homeland' (Taggart 2000). The PDS itself represented a 'piece of "Heimat" that many eastern Germans do not wish to lose' (Hough 2001: 132). Furthermore, the party's anti-capitalism is presented very much as the 'good' people's battle against 'bad' big business with a strong accent on 'wealth redistribution . . . based on the interests of the people and carried out by the people in self-determination' (LP 2005). Merger with the WASG reinforced the LP's concern to remodel German democracy with (ill-defined) participatory elements, including economic and gender democratization and referenda, and its 2010 draft programme contained classic populist demands such as 'the implementation of economic, social

and political reforms, which focus on the needs and interests of the people and not on the claims of the upper crust to private enrichment' (LP 2010c).

Moreover, the party's leadership style has been strongly populist and reliant on a few key telegenic leaders such as Gregor Gysi – indeed before 2005 the PDS was occasionally known as the 'Gysi Party' (Gapper 2003). Gysi and (since 2005) Oskar Lafontaine have been particularly effective and charismatic media stars, presenting themselves as modernizing but simultaneously astute and unorthodox champions of the 'victimized' underdog who can talk in 'common-sense' and simple terms. Lafontaine in particular was archetypally populist with his attacks on the 'Hartz IV' parties, and in the course of the 2005 election campaign he controversially used the word *fremdarbeiter* (foreign worker), a word with Nazi-era overtones, indicating that he might be appealing to extreme right voters.[5] Overall, the LP's populism appears largely a stylistic and tactical device, a core but not *the* core component of ideology, reflecting leadership style and the party's marginalized position in the political system, whilst also helping to consolidate disparate party tendencies.

The LP's national electoral performance can be broadly categorized as re-emergence from 1990–8, stagnation until 2004 and exponential growth until 2010, whereafter stagnation again threatened. From 1990–1998, its increasingly strong Eastern base allowed it to scrape into the Bundestag (national parliament). Since it failed to surpass the Bundestag's 5 per cent threshold, it relied on electoral rules granting parties with three representatives from single-member districts Bundestag seats in accordance with their vote share. Although it did clear the threshold for the first time in 1998 (with 5.1 per cent), this success ushered in a period of drift, culminating in 2002 when the party polled only 4.0 per cent nationally and secured just two single-member Bundestag seats, too few to form a party group. Its 2002 failure was a combination of several factors: the redrawing of constituency boundaries; a sharp decline in its East German heartland (from 21.6 per cent in 1998 to 16.9 per cent in 2002) prompted by continued internal ideological and strategic disagreements under the lacklustre leadership of Gabi Zimmer and the resignation of Gysi as Berlin economics minister in summer 2002 after a sleaze scandal; finally, an opportunistic shift to the left by SPD chancellor Schröder, who exploited anti-American rhetoric and proved himself an adroit crisis manager during flooding in Eastern Germany in August 2002, further bled the LP's electorate (Smith 2004).

However, the 2002 election proved a wake-up call, strengthening the modern socialists and pragmatists in their attempts to build a flexible and reliable national party. Yet the union between the PDS and WASG and the LP's astounding 2005 Bundestag result (8.7 per cent of the vote and 54 (of 622) seats) might not even have happened without the SPD's mistakes, namely the expulsion of WASG activists and Schröder's decision to hold pre-term Bundestag elections, which jolted Lafontaine to leave the SPD and Gysi to return to politics (Olsen 2007). By allying with Lafontaine, a former SPD leader and finance minister (1998–9) in Schröder's first government, the LP snared the most high-profile social democratic defector to the European radical left in recent history.

Again, in September 2009, the LP capitalized on SPD weakness. From 2005–9, the SPD participated in 'grand coalition' government alongside Angela Merkel's CDU. However, the negative legacy of Agenda 2010, SPD leader Frank-Walter Steinmeier's plodding leadership and that party's strategic divisions led it to a post-war low of 23 per cent in 2009. In stark contrast, the LP managed 11.9 per cent and 76 seats. In 2005, approximately one third of the LP's new voters came from SPD defectors, but in 2009, in an election heavily defined by the economic crisis, the share was 75 per cent. In both elections, Greens and even former CDU members also turned to the LP in numbers, as it gained support especially among blue-collar workers and the unemployed (Hildebrandt 2009a; LP 2010a).

Germany's territorial system provides an added layer of complexity to the LP's performance, since federal and Land party systems have been much less congruent since German unification, prompting problems of coordination and control for all parties (Jeffery 2004). The party's very strength in the East forced it to confront the opportunity of sharing executive power at Landesverbank level relatively early and such coalitions forced flexibility and pragmatism. Most notably in Berlin, the LP has acted as an essentially pragmatic actor, focussing on promoting social projects (for example free day-care for children and funding for comprehensive schools) during a period of cutbacks in the capital's public services. By 2006, the Berlin LP campaigned as a normal, reliable coalition partner of the SPD (McKay 2007). However, in other regions, such as Saxony and Brandenburg, the Land LP (in part due to internal disagreements) has preferred populist, anti-neoliberal protest (even against other LP Land governments) to pragmatism (Hough *et al.* 2007).

However, the movement towards regional office-seeking has increased (Hough 2010). In 2007–8, the LP broke into the Western Land parliaments in Bremen, Lower Saxony, Hesse and Hamburg, in 2011, it was represented in 13 of Germany's 16 Länder. Though still weaker electorally and organizationally in the West, it now has a convincing claim to be a national party. Office-seeking motives are ever more apparent: as Bodo Ramelow, its Thuringia regional leader declared: 'we want to govern' (Becker 2009). However, although the taboo against including the 'Stalinist' LP in Western regional coalitions has softened, it remains as yet unbroken. Indeed, internal SPD disagreements over strategy towards the LP helped force out Kurt Beck as SPD leader in November 2008. Although as part of a move to the left in mid-2009, the SPD leadership permitted Land SPD leaderships to decide on cooperation with the LP for themselves, the SPD has still avoided 'red–red' coalitions with the LP, as in Thuringia and Saarland in 2009. In North-Rhine Westphalia in 2010, the SPD and Greens preferred a minority coalition relying on LP support to including it in formal coalition. In Saxony-Anhalt in 2011, the SPD returned to government with the CDU rather than courting the LP.

At national level, a 'red–red–green' coalition remains unviable. The SPD viewed Lafontaine as a traitor and, despite some policy convergence – e.g. the SPD's renewed commitment to 'democratic socialism', the minimum wage and social market economy, and the LP's respect towards the social democratic tradition in its draft programme (LP 2010c) – there remains a foreign policy gulf between

the LP's pacifist Euroscepticism and the SDP's Atlanticist Eurofederalism.[6] Anti-communism remains a weapon for both SPD and Greens, while the national-level LP retains a largely anti-system confrontational stance towards these parties and sets the bar to government participation so high (e.g. by demanding a fundamental renunciation of neo-liberalism) that, particularly in the age of austerity, a common left governing project is impossible (Hildebrandt 2011).

Indeed, after Lafontaine retired as party chair for health reasons in late 2009, the party risked looking increasingly unfit to govern. It stagnated in opinion polls and failed to even enter Land parliaments in Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate in 2011. Lafontaine had been a significant factor in both detoxifying the LP brand in the West and unifying its disparate fractions. But internal divisions swiftly resurfaced and, according to LP chair Lothar Bisky, the party suffered from 'a little east-west conflict, a little bossiness and a little ideological swine flu' (LP 2010b). The replacement of Lafontaine and Bisky with a new joint leadership headed by relative unknowns Klaus Ernst and Gesine Lötzsch has so far only exacerbated these issues. Ernst ('Porsche Klaus') was criticised for an allegedly luxurious lifestyle, while Lötzsch caused negative headlines with a commentary to a left-wing newspaper invoking the party to find 'paths to communism' (Berg and Pancur 2011).

Yet the LP's problems run deeper than weak leadership. In 2005–9, it had the luxury of outsider status opposing a 'neo-liberal' SDP–CDU 'grand coalition' and voters flocked to it more because of discontent with the mainstream alternatives than its problem-solving competence (Hough and Koß 2009). There were still ample opportunities for the party to play a protest role with Merkel's post-2009 coalition with the (neo)-liberal party FDP plumbing depths of unpopularity and the SDP still tarnished by Agenda 2010. Yet the crux of the LP's divisions remains its inability to define a clear identity bridging its Eastern traditions as a 'pragmatic, broad-based governing party' and the Western heritage as a 'radical political sect' (Berg and Pancur 2011). Moreover, particularly since the merger with WASG, it has been too focussed on 'old politics' social justice issues and has given scant attention to questions of participation and ecology (Hildebrandt 2011). Consequently, this allowed the Greens (exploiting anti-nuclear sentiment and with clear 'alternative' positions) to outflank the SPD to attain 28 per cent in opinion polls and gain their first-ever regional governor in Baden-Württemberg in 2011. Which of the Germany's three lefts will eventually best benefit from opposition cannot yet be decided, but it is increasingly clear that the LP's failure to reconcile pragmatism and populism risks lastingly excluding it from real national influence.

The Dutch Socialist Party – towards post-populism?

Gaining national parliamentary presence only in 1994, and reaching its electoral highpoint in 2006, the SP appears to have come from nowhere. In fact, the party has an unusual prehistory, being the only now relevant European RLP to emerge predominately from a Maoist groupuscule, the Communist Party of the

Netherlands (Marxist-Leninist), itself a descendant of the Communist Party of the Netherlands, KPN. By renaming itself the Socialist Party in 1972, the party aimed both to distance itself from China and the student/intellectual emphasis of post-68 activism (SP 2007a). Although the SP 'de-Maoized' after 1975, its Maoist 'mass line' perpetuated its adaptable and a-theoretical working-class populism (Voerman 2008). The party 'went to the people' to promote the concept of *Arbeiders-macht* ('workers' power'), creating dense local networks of tenants', medical and community organizations, and affiliated trade unions.

Although the SP attempted to enter national parliament's lower house (Tweede Kamer) in 1977, for the first 22 years of its existence it polled less than 1 per cent nationally. However, its strong local presence gave it a national backbone long before it achieved a national breakthrough. Notably, it gained a number of municipal councillors (e.g. future leader Jan Marijnissen's home town of Oss became an SP stronghold) and representation in provincial legislatures (e.g. Noord-Brabant). Younger, more pragmatic elites headed by new leader, Marijnissen, used democratic centralism to centralize the SP after 1988 (Keith 2010b). Although the party emphasizes participatory democracy and direct unmediated contact with the electorate as 'a social movement with its roots in the people', its leadership retains tight control (SP 2007c; Keith 2010).

Significant in the SP's slow rise was its programmatic pragmatism – 'a very practical SOCIALISM took the place of theoretical socialism' (SP 2007a) – culminating in the abandonment of Marxism-Leninism in 1991 and a 'de-socialization' in the 1990s (Voerman 2008). In 1989–1991, other radicals (the KPN, the Pacifist Socialist Party, the ecologist Political Party of Radicals, and the Evangelical People's Party) reconstituted themselves as GroenLinks (GreenLeft) on an eco-socialist platform. This helped the SP distinguish itself as a more radical labour-orientated party, and it benefited from defectors unhappy with Green-Left's relatively moderate left-libertarianism. For example, the former GreenLeft national Vice-Chair Erik Meijer joined the SP in 1996 and became its first MEP in 1999.

The SP's populist profile was continued in the 1990s as it pitched itself as an anti-establishment outsider: its 1994 slogan was 'Vote Against!' However, its success in appealing to disaffected Labour Party (PvdA) voters has led it since 2001 to position itself for possible national coalition with Labour and GreenLeft. Its 2002 electoral slogan of 'Vote For!' was notable in this regard, whilst in 2004 SP proposed a 'social alliance' (which Labour rejected) (SP 2007d). Success in municipal government also bred de-radicalization. As with the German LP, the SP proved increasingly pragmatic at local level. It joined governing coalitions in several large cities, such as Eindhoven (2002–) Groningen (2006–) and Nijmegen (2002–). Its preferred coalition partners were Labour or GreenLeft (e.g. in Nijmegen) but the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and even market liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) were also acceptable (e.g. in Groningen from 2002–6).

The SP's populism has traditionally consisted of several main elements. First is resistance to the 'political careerists' and remote, corrupt 'social technocrats'

of the 'political caste' who foist plans on an unwilling population like 'neoliberal Ayatollahs' (Marijnissen 2006). Instead, the SP proposed maximum incomes, the halving of politicians' salaries, ending of political donations and increased use of referenda to 'give the people more control' (SP 2003b). Furthermore, the SP's MPs hand their wages to the party and live on an average worker's wage. Second is an evocation of a past 'homeland' where workers had security and respect under the Keynesian welfare consensus, whose foundations have 'started to rot' under neo-liberalism (SP 2003a).

Third is a strong emphasis on Dutch identity politics. The SP has generally been one of the 'harder' Eurosceptic left parties, attacking the EU as an 'unwanted, undemocratic European superstate' under the 'domination of big corporations and big countries', which promotes 'false internationalism . . . corruption and greed' (SP 1999a). Under slogans like 'Netherlands needs less Brussels', the SP has proposed a decentralized, 'slimmed down' Europe, involving cuts to the EU budget (and Dutch contributions), an end to EU deregulation and privatization, to transfer of powers to Brussels, and a return to national scrutiny of EU laws (e.g. SP 2006). Most controversially, the SP envisaged restrictions on the free labour market, including preventing an influx of cheap East European labour, instead focussing on a redistribution of funds to poorer European countries to 'make immigration unnecessary'. Similarly, the SP has had a relatively semi-detached role in pan-European left networks (see Chapter 8). Although a member of the NELF and EU parliamentary group the GUE/NGL, and supporting a stronger European Parliament, it opposes greater co-ordination of EU elections or the funding of EU-wide political parties, and regards the PEL as unnecessary (SP 2007e). As a consequence, the SP has faced allegations that it is a xenophobic 'social nationalist' party pandering above all to parochial concerns, arguing that the 'Netherlands is no island and socialists are internationalists [but a] fairer, more just and more peaceful world [must be] everywhere shaped locally' (SP 2007f).

The SP has de-radicalized to the extent that Voerman (2008) regards it as social democratized and barely populist. Its leadership was also increasingly keen to perpetuate this impression (WikiLeaks 2011). Certainly, much of its populism was associated with Marijnissen, who demitted as party leader and head of the SP's parliamentary faction in June 2008 for health reasons. Marijnissen was an archetypal populist leader, with an earthy appeal that transcended his party, adept at modern media techniques, who emphasized his empathy with the plight of the ordinary citizen and who shared some of his critique of the 'monstrous' Dutch establishment with the populist maverick Pim Fortuyn, who came to rapid national prominence in 2002 (McGiffen 2006b; Marijnissen 2006). Nevertheless, although less pivotal than before, populism and reinforcing popular control remains important to the party's 'preparedness to serve the people' and 'character rooted in the people' (SP 2010c). The party's 2010 election programme offered detailed policy proposals demonstrating a governing aptitude (such as defence of the state pension and reform of NATO), but still attacked the political and economic elite, whose lust for profit had 'led to genuine hunger for many' (SP 2010a) and to call for popular control through referenda.

In general, the SP uses unorthodox and humorous campaign techniques (including showing opponents crushed with bright flying tomatoes, the SP symbol). It outlines familiar left proposals, including an increased welfare spending, redistributionist income and tax policies, employment protection regulations and expansion of the minimum wage (SP 2003b). Despite still desiring to supplant 'casino capitalism', by the late 1990s the party generally attacked neo-liberalism and made little direct mention of socialism, beyond aspirations to 'human dignity, equality of worth, and solidarity' (SP 1999b).[7] As part of its aspirations to become more *koalitionsfähig*, in 2006 the SP moderated long-standing proposals like immediate abolition of NATO and the monarchy and a 72 per cent tax band for the rich (Zonnevylle 2006). Even compared with the German LP and SSP's democratic socialism, the SP's anti-capitalism is eclectic, a-theoretical and increasingly moderate. However, the emphasis on Christian ethical humanism, extra-parliamentary mobilization and unmediated popular control means that claims of social-democratization are exaggerated (Weissbach 2009).

Since the 1990s, the Netherlands has proved a fertile environment for anti-establishment sentiment. From 1994–2002 Labour's participation in the so-called 'purple coalition' with the social liberal D66 and market liberal VVD contributed to the perception that it was moving inexorably rightwards.[8] After the millennium, economic growth slowed, and concerns over the introduction of the Euro, immigration and multiculturalism prefaced the rise of Fortuyn, who provided a 'focal point for an unexpectedly widespread sense of disconnection between the nation's political elite and the concerns of ordinary voters, as well as bringing into more critical focus the relatively unquestioned choices which underpin the so-called "polder model"' (Harmssen 2002: 2) – this model being a consensus-based corporatism involving close consultation between trade unions, the government and the private sector. A strong sense that EU integration (in particular budgetary contributions and increased immigration) is no longer in the Dutch 'national interest' has increased Euroscepticism since the 1990s (Harmsen 2004).

The SP's gradual march through the institutions was greatly aided by the Dutch electoral system, a PR system with one national level district and no constituency level seats, which helps a large number of new parties enter the electoral system. In 1994, the SP gained two lower house seats (of 150) with a mere 1.3 per cent of the national vote. It advanced incrementally in every subsequent election until January 2003 (see Table 5.1) when it stabilized at 9 seats and increased its vote marginally to 6.3 per cent.

In the context, such stabilization was disappointing. On 15 May 2002 the Labour vote collapsed (from 29 per cent in 1998 to 15.1 per cent) amidst a comprehensive defeat for the 'purple coalition'. But the anti-immigrant populism of the newly founded List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), which gained 17 per cent, albeit partly as a sympathy vote after Fortuyn's assassination on 6 May, was clearly a greater draw than the SP's populist socialism. However, the LPF collapsed to 5.7 per cent in the pre-term elections of January 2003. Intra-party discord had contributed to the collapse of the Liberal–Christian Democrat–LPF Balkenende I cabinet (named after the new Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende), which held office

from 22 July until 16 October 2002. Yet the SP's small 2003 gain showed it failing to benefit. Although the SP had been polling well, Labour's new leader Wouter Bos moved moderately leftwards and appealed to disaffected supporters to help Labour win in January 2003 (Harmsen 2004). It did not, but with 27.3 its recovery was remarkable. However, despite apparent stagnation, by 2003 the SP had super-seded GreenLeft as the main left alternative to Labour. It maintained momentum, gained its first MEP in 1999 and second in 2004, first Senator (of 75) in the Senate (Eerste Kamer) in 1999 and fourth in 2004.

Set against this piecemeal rise, the party's staggering November 2006 national success (with 16.6 per cent of the vote and 25 seats, making it the Netherlands' third party) demands explanation, particularly since the economy, improving by 2006, was barely an issue during the campaign (van Holsteyn 2007). One change was the SP's enhanced profile. The Liberal–Christian Democrat Balkenende II cabinet (May 2003–June 2006) unleashed an austerity package dubbed by opponents the 'right-wing winter', including cuts to free dental care and disability benefits, and limits on early retirement (van der Zwan 2006). The SP took a key role in the 'turn the tide' extra-parliamentary movement alongside Labour, GreenLeft, the FNV trade union and social movements, which precipitated 300,000 strong demonstrations against the government in 2004. The SP carved out a unique position, both intensifying its 'respectable' image to appeal to disaffected Labour voters and emphasizing its Eurosceptic credentials. Being the only parliamentary party to support the 62 per cent 'No' vote against the proposed EU constitution in the June 2005 referendum vastly boosted the SP's reputation, whilst the May 2006 municipal elections, in which Labour also did well, indicated a 'turn to the left'. The SP doubled its munici-pal legislature seats from 157 to 333 (of 8861) by doubling its candidates.

Still, the SP polled just 5.7 per cent in these May elections. Its eleven-point leap that November was aided by Marijnissen's strong debating performances and declining confidence in Labour leader Bos, seen as a 'flip-flopper' over his pen-sion reform proposals and in particular his evasiveness over the desirability of a left–left coalition, whilst the SP argued that a socialist vote alone would bring such a coalition to fruition (*Dutch News Digest* 2006). This tactic was a success: 24 per cent of Labour's 2003 voters voted SP, which also drew heavily from GreenLeft and non-voters, with some 15 per cent of its vote coming from the LPF (McGiffen 2006a; van Holsteyn 2007).

The 2006 post-election arithmetic meant that at least three parties would be needed for a governing majority and so confirmed the SP's new-found relevance; however, a left–left coalition evaporated because the largest party was the cen-tre-right Christian Democratic Appeal, with which the SP found little common ground. Moreover, the SP claimed that Labour, in part because of suspicion of the SP's communist roots, expelled it from negotiations, a point partially corroborated by WikiLeaks revelations (de Jong 2011; WikiLeaks 2011). Eventually, in Feb-ruary 2007 the Balkenende IV cabinet included Labour alongside the CDA and Christian Union.

Although Labour's cooperation with the right was tailor-made for the SP to ratchet up its anti-establishment opposition, the party proved unable to capitalize

on this in the June 2011 early elections after the collapse of this 'unholy alliance'. SP membership had risen every year since 1992, doubling between 2001 and 2007 (to 50,740) with particular gains among women, the young and students – giving an increasingly post-materialist profile, although it retained strongholds in indus-trial centres like Eindhoven (SP 2010b). However, party membership dropped by 502 in 2008; above all the failure to achieve coalition in 2006 showed the SP fail-ing to synthesize its older populist and newer 'respectable' positions, disillusion-ing older activists and demobilizing newer ones (Keith 2010).

More damagingly, the SP improved its June 2009 EU election vote only mar-ginally (to 7.1 per cent, retaining its two MEPs), despite the economic crisis. Its dismal performance in the March 2010 local elections (polling 4.1 per cent and losing 100,000 votes) provoked the resignation of SP parliamentary leader Agnes Kant. Kant had an abrasive image and had been unable to project herself as an effective electoral asset to replace Marijnissen (*NRC Handelsblad* 2010).

In June 2010, the SP polled just 9.9 per cent of the vote and lost 10 seats. The major winner was Geert Wilders' right-populist Freedom Party (PVV), which came third with 15.5 per cent and 24 seats, eventually supporting a centre-right minority government formed by the VVD and CDA. On this occasion the SP was not even included in negotiations. Its support for a centre-left coalition alongside CDA, Labour and GreenLeft was rejected by the latter two, but the SP at least suc-ceeded in getting this initiative taken seriously. The SP lost votes to Labour and GreenLeft, but perhaps most significantly to the PVV, which had supplemented its Islamophobia with the poaching of several popular SP policies, such as improve-ments in elderly care, more police officers on the beat, and opposition to the rais-ing of the pension age (van Heijningen 2011).

Nevertheless, the SP saw this as a 'defeat with a silver lining' (ibid). The new SP leader Emile Roemer established himself in a short time as a jovial and down-to-earth figure with high visibility and a firm grasp of the issues. The party's eventual result was twice as good as catastrophic forecasts just one month earlier. The new government's intention to undertake austerity measures and the divisive rhetoric of its ally the PVV certainly allows the SP some scope for recovery. One initiative in this direction was a common alternative to the cuts the SP agreed with Labour, GreenLeft and the liberal D66 in September 2010, which put the accent on cuts in defence spending, the maintenance of current tax levels on profits, and reductions in corporate subsidies. Meanwhile, the SP intends to work ever closer and more pragmatically with Labour in order to anchor it to left-leaning policies (de Jong 2011). Opinion polls in 2011 showed the SP recovering slowly.[9] However, the great task ahead remains to show that its 2006 result was no mere anomaly and that it can fully develop from protest to pragmatism.

The Scottish Socialist Party: populist breakthrough, then breakdown ...

The SSP has its roots in quasi-Trotskyist micro-groups, principally Scottish Militant Labour (SML), which first coalesced in 1996 as the Scottish Socialist

Alliance (SSA) and became a formal party in 1998, afterwards gaining one seat (its then leader Tommy Sheridan) in the newly constituted Scottish Parliament in May 1999. A minor step, but one which marked the first parliamentary seat for a RLP in Britain since 1950, and which proved the platform for the SSP's breakthrough in May 2003, when it gained 6.9 per cent of the vote and six seats.

The SSP had a direct English and Welsh analogue in the Socialist Alliance (SA) formed in 1999 by the Socialist Party (descended like SML from the Labour Party's Militant Tendency), Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and others on the basis of existing local-level coalitions in reaction to UK Labour's 'rightwards' drift.[10] In 2004–5 the SA was absorbed into 'Respect—The Unity Coalition' led by former Labour MP George Galloway. However, success for the English–Welsh radical left proved elusive: several council seat victories for the SA (e.g. in Coventry), council seats (e.g. in East London and Birmingham) and Galloway's Westminster parliamentary seat for Respect in 2005 promised much, but Respect split in 2007 and Galloway lost his seat in May 2010. The British radical left's unenviable record of extreme sectarianism and electoral irrelevance constantly reappeared: disputes between the Socialist Party and SWP (over the latter's alleged control-freakery) had already led the Socialists to leave the SA in 2001.[11] Respect's platform was controversial: although its pluralistic, populist anti-establishment emphasis mirrored the SSP's, its anti-Iraq war and heavily pro-Muslim focus, when combined with dependence on the SWP, meant it was widely regarded as a narrow and sectarian coalition. Ultimately, disputes between the SWP leadership and Galloway precipitated the split (Galloway et. al 2008).

The *relative* success of the Scottish socialists therefore demands explanation. Such factors include a long-tradition of Scottish working-class radicalism to which the SSP has made direct reference. Particularly important in this tradition are 'Red Clydeside' (working-class revolt in Glasgow from 1910 till the 1930s) and John Maclean, the Bolshevik consul who attempted to set up an independent Scottish socialist republic in the early 1920s. More recently, Scotland was at the forefront of opposition to Thatcherism, in particular the widely unpopular 'poll tax' was first piloted in Scotland in 1989 (one year before its introduction in the wider UK). The ensuing poll tax rebellion (in which Labour had limited involvement) helped activists from Trotskyist and Stalinist traditions to bridge their differences and work in relative harmony (Cornock 2003). A reservoir of 'good-will' therefore sustained left unity in the 1990s (Fox 2007). Set against a widening rich–poor income differential, the increasing moderation of Labour under Neil Kinnock opened a 'political window' for the radical left (Cornock 2003). Scottish Militant Labour's decision to leave the Labour Party in 1992 marked the end of its long 'entryist' tradition, but looked propitious given the high reputation of its activists in Glasgow. In particular, Tommy Sheridan became a 'working-class hero' after his six-month incarceration for opposing warrant sales in Glasgow in 1992, winning a council seat from jail.[12] SML won six city councillors and two regional councillors against Labour candidates in the 1990s (Fox 2007).

Nevertheless, the initial success of the SSP is traceable to shorter-term causes. Indeed, throughout the 1990s Scottish RLPs were barely more successful than

the English/Welsh. The SSA in 1996 was explicitly modelled on the 'broad left' models of parties such as the Spanish United Left: a pluralist, non-sectarian grass-roots coalition that aimed to replace Labour as the 'natural home of the working class' (Cornock 2003:132). The SSA was also a reaction against Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (SLP), which formed in 1996 to claim leadership over the UK radical left, but evolved into a monolithic organization opposing Scottish autonomy and intra-party platforms. However, despite strong support in Glasgow, the SSA made little wider headway, with potential allies such as the Communist Party of Britain and Socialist Workers not joining because of the SSA's approval of Scottish autonomy.

Above all, the SSP's initial breakthrough in 1999 was a combination of a beneficial electoral system and Tommy Sheridan's leadership. The Westminster majoritarian electoral system (encouraging two-party dominance of Labour and Conservatives) has been crucial in the failure of the radical left ever to emerge as an electoral force independent of Labour. However, that the British radical left's own strategies (in particular, introversion, sectarianism and general unwillingness to observe European experience) contribute to their weakness is shown by their widespread failure to gain seats in PR elections (e.g. the Greater London Assembly and European elections) as other small parties such as the Greens have done.

Nevertheless, in 1999 the Scottish parliamentary election system worked to the SSP's advantage. The Scottish Parliament (Holyrood) is elected by the Additional Member system (AMS), with 73 seats allocated in constituencies by the traditional UK first-past-the-post system, and 56 allocated proportionally within regional multi-member constituencies, a system which is broadly proportional but excludes parties attaining less than 4–6 per cent of the regional vote (Massetti 2009). Whereas in 1999 Scargill's SLP actually got more votes (55,000) than the SSP (45,000) in Scotland (without even campaigning), Sheridan's Glasgow support base got him a parliamentary seat via the Glasgow regional list. This was a 'credibility breakthrough' for the SSP (Cornock 2003: 140), allowing it to become the epicentre of the Scottish radical left. It surpassed the SLP vote in the June 1999 European parliamentary elections, and in May 2001 the Socialist Worker's Party joined.

Rather similar to the Dutch SP and Portuguese Bloco, the SSP has seen itself as a 'street-level' 'campaigning' party, focussing on fighting for immediate issues (for instance, free school meals) rather than theoretical purity. Indeed, reflecting its coalitional and grass-roots origins, the party is internally a very diverse amalgamation of platforms and networks. Principal platforms have included the International Socialist Movement (the former Scottish Militant Labour), Socialist Workers and International Socialists (representing the Committee for Workers International, CWI) combined with networks such as women, young socialists, gays and lesbians, animal rights and racial minorities.

The party sees itself neither as an exclusively Marxist nor revolutionary party (though like other 'broad left' parties it contains such elements). Indeed, former leader Sheridan (2007a) referred to 'Magpie Marxism' as his general orientation. Current co-leader Colin Fox argues that the party appeals to authentically Scottish

radical traditions espoused by Robert Burns, Keir Hardie and the author Lewis Grassic Gibbon (Fox 2007). SSP Member of the Scottish Parliament Carolyn Leckie talked of reaching 'people who wouldn't know who Trotsky was from Lulu [a 1960s Scottish pop star]' (Preston and Peart 2003).

Uniting the diverse party has been a populism more strident and ultimately more central to the SSP than to the LP or SP: the SSP sees itself as 'a working class party that stands up for ordinary people against big business and the rich', a maverick outsider that champions those neglected by the establishment (SSP 2007, 2011). Its 2003 campaign slogan of 'dare to be different' epitomized this. Despite its absence of revolutionism, the party retains a strongly anti-systemic emphasis, proposing to 'smash the state' and disparaging the Scottish parliament as a 'spineless cesspit' occupied by 'boring clone' parties (SSP 2003b). Nevertheless, the SSP aimed to act as a left-wing 'conscience' pressuring other parties' left wings to support its measures, successfully spearheading the 2001 reform of debt recovery legislation and increasing parliamentary support for free school meals and the reform of local government taxation. Although, in this way, the SSP espoused 'reforms' improving the daily lives of ordinary people, the party still saw itself as a 'visionary' force, challenging the idea that capitalism is invincible (Cornock 2003: 212). With a marginal position in the Scottish parliament, and only a handful of council seats, the SSP never faced incentives to moderate its stance of principled rage.

There are several other key elements to the SSP's populism. First, the SSP attacks mainstream parties (especially Labour) as corrupt and identikit 'big business parties'. Like the SP, the SSP proposed maximum incomes and its MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament) handed their wages to the party and lived on an 'average skilled worker's wage'. The party envisages community and workplace participatory democracy, including greater use of referenda, the extension of the franchise to the homeless and prisoners and the abolition of the monarchy, with an emphasis on local social and environmental initiative (SSP 2007, 2011). Second, the party's 'homeland' is as an idealized inclusive and socialist Labour Party whose former ideals the SSP now claims to protect. An often-used campaign picture morphed Margaret Thatcher into Tony Blair, while Sheridan regarded Labour's Gordon Brown and Tony Blair as 'cheeks of the same arse' (Sheridan 2007b).

Third and most controversial is the SSP's separatism: the party promises an 'Independent socialist Scottish republic', with radical spending pledges which Westminster would be forced to fund (SSP 2003a). Although the SSP was much criticized for its 'nationalism', it argued, in an echo of Lenin's theory of imperialism, that an independent Scotland would smash the British imperial state and advance the cause of democratic socialism internationally (Sheridan and McCombes 2000). The SSP says little about the EU (since Holyrood has no foreign policy prerogatives). However, seeing itself as pro-European but not pro-EU, it supports a 'social' EU and has proposed referenda to determine both the EU's constitutional powers and Scotland's EU membership (SSP 2004, 2007, 2011). Nevertheless, the party intended to join the GUE/NGL European parliamentary group had it won seats in the 2004 EU elections.

Fourth, the SSP's first leader Tommy Sheridan was populism personified: 'The man of the people. The man of principle' (SSP 1999). A forceful and dynamic orator, with an irreverent, earthy style, Sheridan's popularity far exceeded that of his party and he was often voted one of Scotland's 'Greatest Living Scots'. He was jailed on several occasions (e.g. when blockading the Faslane nuclear base alongside CND), ostensibly showing solidarity with ordinary people. The SSP's populism and republicanism were combined graphically after the 2003 elections when its new MSPs protested the pledge of allegiance to the Crown. Before taking the oath, Rosie Kane wrote 'My oath is to the people' on her hand in lipstick, while Colin Fox sang Robbie Burns' egalitarian 'A Man's A Man for A' That'.

The party's electoral highpoint was May 2003, when it benefited much from external factors: disillusion with the Scottish Labour–Liberal Democrat coalition and a weak campaign by the chief opposition, the left-nationalist Scottish National Party (SNP), allowed anti-establishment votes to drift to smaller parties (including the Greens, whose vote share approximated the SSP's). Sentiment against the recently-initiated Iraq War (the 'Baghdad bounce') may also have benefited the SSP, who marked out a distinct position by demanding immediate troop withdrawal and courting Scotland's Muslim minority. Neither of these external factors was present in 2007 when the election turned into a Labour-SNP conflict, squeezing smaller parties (including the Greens, who lost all but two seats) and the Iraq war was a background issue.[13]

In any case, it was always likely to prove difficult for the SSP to maintain momentum into the 2007 elections. In some senses it was too successful in 2003: with its key leaders entering parliament, it proved hard to maintain an extra-parliamentary community presence (Fox 2007). The SSP's disappointing result (5.2 per cent and no seats) in the June 2004 European elections presaged problems ahead.

Nevertheless, the SSP's second and final parliamentary term 2003–7 proved little more than a self-inflicted fiasco, dominated by Sheridan's sudden resignation in November 2004 in order to fight allegations of sexual misdemeanours published in the *News of the World* tabloid, and the defamation case that followed in August 2006. Sheridan was replaced by Colin Fox, an experienced party activist lacking equivalent public profile, and the party's support immediately suffered, polling just 1.9 per cent in the May 2005 UK general election (down from 3.1 per cent in May 2001).

The detailed intricacies of the protracted crisis cannot concern us here.[14] Nevertheless, in retrospect, the central dynamic was that the SSP executive refused to back Sheridan. Preferring him either to ignore or admit allegations that several of them clearly believed, SSP leaders opposed contesting them legally: 'the issue was never about who was telling the truth and who was telling lies . . . it was a question of whether it was tactically permissible to go into court and lie, and [Sheridan] thought that was bonny' (Fox 2007). Sheridan protested his innocence and saw it as a matter of class duty to fight a scandalous tabloid owned by 'billionaire . . . anti-union tax dodger' Rupert Murdoch (Solidarity 2008). The SSP forced his resignation.

The ignominious result of a complete absence of consistent party line was that SSP members were summoned on opposing sides in a highly public court case (six defending Sheridan's testimony, eleven disagreeing). Although this resulted in an initial £200,000 damages victory for Sheridan in 2006 (adeptly burnishing his 'wee man' image by conducting his own defence), it proved to be a Pyrrhic one, as he was sentenced to a three-year jail term in January 2011 for perjury. The inevitable outcome of the bitter court proceedings was a party split, with Sheridan immediately leaving to form the (un-ironically named) 'Solidarity: Scotland's Socialist Movement'. In the May 2007 Holyrood elections Solidarity tried to capitalize on Sheridan's initial court victory – a picture of him marching with wife and daughter adorned its election manifesto (Solidarity 2007). The rump SSP adopted a left-libertarian image trying both to re-connect with the themes of the wider movement ('people not profit') and to re-emphasize the seriousness of its parliamentary achievements (SSP 2007).

Yet both parties were appealing to the same electorate with very similar programmes, and the result of such appalling publicity, if not perhaps the full scale of it, was predictable. All six former SSP MSPs (including the two now representing Solidarity) lost their seats. Solidarity's relative 'success' (1.7 per cent of the vote compared with just 0.6 per cent for the SSP), despite only gaining 20–30 per cent of the SSP's 3000 members, probably resulted from Sheridan's greater public profile than his former party's. It is probable too that Sheridan was right when he claimed that, whatever the rights and wrongs of the court case, many former SSP voters regarded them as 'doing one of their own in' and 'sid[ing] with the enemy' (Sheridan 2007a).

Given the perjury trial outcome, Fox's view that the SSP's debacle was traceable almost entirely due to Sheridan's single 'catastrophic poor decision' (and party disagreements about how to handle it) has been vindicated (Fox 2007). Certainly the party split did not occur on traditional sectarian lines (the Socialist Workers and CWI, who often criticized Sheridan for his nationalism, joined Solidarity). Yet there were also policy related tensions that exacerbated the split (for example, the feminist wing headed by Rosie Kane and Carolyn Leckie were among the most critical of Sheridan in the aftermath of his resignation, while he in turn accused them of being a 'gender-obsessed discussion group').

However, longer term reasons for the SSP's failure can also be sought in its inability to find the balance between charismatic and collective leadership (Rogers 2006). The inability to routinize charisma is one of the major weaknesses of populist parties. While its leaders vehemently denied that the SSP was a one-man band, the party combined a dominant, publicly recognizable charismatic leader with a relatively decentralized internal structure, with voting for all main office bearers, regional organizers and conference delegates. After Sheridan was joined by five relatively unknown new MSPs in 2003, key differences in leadership style and public status increased internal frictions. For example Sheridan (2007a) regarded his comrades' parliamentary stunts (including wearing denim) as indicating a lack of seriousness: 'were we adult, were we mature, or was it a gang of kids?'

In the immediate aftermath of the 2007 debacle, both SSP and Solidarity were optimistic that they might still exploit the newly victorious Nationalists' inability

to fulfil their left-leaning agenda (e.g. Sheridan 2007a). But the SNP not only maintained popularity but was re-elected by a landslide in May 2011. Relations between former SSP and Solidarity leaderships remained venomous and there proved little prospect of two competing RLPs gaining the 4 per cent for parliamentary representation. Certainly, the 2010 Westminster elections showed no recovery for either party, with each polling 0.1 per cent.[15]

However, the collapse of the SSP and Sheridan's incarceration created an obvious vacuum in 2011 for Respect, which had lost its UK seat in 2010. Galloway (who had previously honoured an agreement with his friend Sheridan that Respect would not organize in Scotland) joined Solidarity to head the 'Coalition Against Cuts' with an archetypally populist programme offering 'to shake up the political establishment with a powerful voice for all those suffering from the rotten policies of the ConDem government' [the Conservative–Liberal Democrat government in Westminster] (Coalition 2011). Given that Galloway had been a Glasgow MP (for Labour) from 1987 to 2005 and needed just 6 per cent of the vote on the Glasgow regional list to gain a Scottish Parliamentary seat, this was a shrewd move. However, in the event, he got just 3.3 per cent, and both the SSP and Solidarity fell to new lows (Table 6.1). The performance of the latter in particular indicates that the 'Sheridan affair' has lastingly discredited the Scottish radical left, perhaps for a generation. After such promising beginnings in 1999 and albeit for personal and not ideological reasons, the systemic sectarianism of the British 'far left' has reasserted itself with a vengeance.

The East European 'parade of populisms'

In Western Europe, the appeal of populism remains wide but shallow: although populist rhetoric is pervasive across the party system, successful populist parties still remain the exception rather than the rule. In several countries further east, however, the appeal of populism is more deeply rooted in electoral preferences, even though individual populist parties still struggle to develop long-term viability.

The propitious environment for populism in Eastern Europe has several explanations. In many respects the political landscape exhibits significant parallels with the drivers for Latin America's 'Left Turn' (Castañeda 2006): relative to Western Europe these are lower trust societies, with greater social stratification, less stable and structured party systems and in general less institutionalized and more personalized political landscapes (Tismaneanu 1996). In Eastern Europe, the lack of historically entrenched parties mirrors the absence in much of Latin America of 'mass-bureaucratic' parties with stable institutionalized links to social movements, classes and organizations such as trade unions (Levitsky 2001). In Latin America, this absence allowed 'mass populist parties' to flourish, with charismatic leaders at the head of loosely institutionalized social movements. In Eastern Europe also, the elite-driven nature of democratic 'transition', combined with the prevalence of ex-communists, patronage and corruption, and the absence of strong democratic intermediary institutions, has led to

Table 6.1 Relevant populist socialist parties in pan–European parliamentary elections, 1990–2011

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Germany (LP)	2.4				4.4				5.1				4.0			8.7				11.9		
Netherlands (SP)					1.3				3.5				5.9	6.3			16.6				9.9	
UK (Scotland) (SSP)										2.0				6.9				0.6				0.4
UK (Scotland) Solidarity[a]																		1.7				0.1
UK (Scotland) Respect[a]																					0.4	
UK – Respect[a]																0.3					0.1	

Source: www.parties-and-elections.de (data correct at 20 May 2011).

Notes
a Not a 'relevant' party according to my definition, but mentioned in the text and included here for clarity. Solidarity and Respect ran together as part of 'Coalition against Cuts' in 2011.

an anti-elite discourse of 'revolution betrayed', and a propitious environment for a 'populist backlash' involving a reassertion of dormant authoritarian politi-cal-cultural motifs (Rupnik 2007).

Of course, there are significant exceptions: more prosperous countries with rela-tively structured party systems and greater political stability (e.g. the Czech Repub-lic and Slovenia) have been less prone to populist appeals, except at the margins. But in many, populist parties have been a permanent and mainstream presence. This is particularly so in former 'patrimonial communist' countries, where the persistence of closed patronage networks, weak party systems and presidential forms of govern-ance has provided an ideal environment for populist mobilization. Countries where ethno-cultural cleavages are strong (e.g. Latvia, Slovakia) have also provided incen-tives for nationalist populism 'defending' majority or minority peoples.

Classifying the unclassifiable: forms of social populism in Eastern Europe

Such similarities in political environment between Eastern Europe and Latin America notwithstanding, no analogous 'Left Turn' has occurred in Eastern Europe. The 'loss of geopolitical stigma' after the Cold War that helped re-legiti-mize the Latin American left is not present (Castañeda 2006). As we have already noted, the attraction of 'returning to Europe' and discarding the controversial communist legacy propelled successor parties to adopt a pro-European social-democratic and avowedly non-radical idiom. Compared with Latin America, disillusion with neo-liberalism and the Washington Consensus was insignificant in the critical formative years of post-communism, except in more peripheral and economically troubled states.

Indeed, clear forms of 'left-wing' populism are harder to identify in Eastern Europe than Latin America. The prevalence of 'nation-building' issues (rediscovery of history, language and identity, border disputes, and problems of minority inclu-sion) has meant that many prominent East European populists have taken a more obviously (extreme) right-wing slant (for instance the Serbian Radical Party and Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia). Moreover, a significant complication in identifying left-populists is the proliferation of archetypally populist parties whose ideology shifts according to circumstance. Such parties include Franjo Tuđman's Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), which governed from 1990–1999, and Vladimír Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), dominating government from 1992 till 1998. According to Sharon Fisher (2006: 61):

> The positioning of the HDZ and HZDS complicated the development of sta-ble party systems. Both claimed to be Christian-oriented, centrist parties, but . . . it was difficult to place them on the traditional left-right scale as they swayed from conservative to leftist, depending on what was more convenient at the time and used populist rhetoric to attract voters of all persuasions.

Other unclassifiable populists include Ukraine's Yulia Tymoshenko bloc, which often flirted with leftist rhetoric (including reversing past privatizations) and considered joining the Socialist International before joining the conservative

European People's Party as observer in 2007. Nevertheless, several social populists (i.e. those which that are at least quasi-leftist) can be identified.

Left social populists

Relative to the populist socialists outlined above, *left social populists* are more obviously creations of one dominant leader, far less programmatically oriented, and far more single-issue: their principal *raison d'être* is to accuse the mainstream left of 'selling out', and they adopt an emotional, simplified defence of some of the cherished ideals of 'pure' socialism. These are the only even quasi-*radical left* social populists, albeit with many qualifications. One of the most relevant was the Association of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS), a splinter of the social democratic Party of the Democratic Left. ZRS, led by the demagogic Ján L'upták, articulated a non-ideological anti-intellectual and anti-establishment image as the defender of blue-collar workers, focusing on fundamental opposition to the privatization process, dubbed the 'foundation of a speculative economy' destroying Slovakia's entire economic base and leading the world to 'barbarism' (Fisher 2006: 87). The ZRS' trajectory was typically inconsistent: having polled respectably in October 1994, it entered a coalition with the populist HZDS and nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS), whom it proceeded to attack as profiting from privatization (an allegation that its partners returned). ZRS displayed a complete disinterest in consistent programmatic politics: while rejecting EU membership, the party's written programme allegedly fully supported it – a position L'upták dismissed as a typing error (Kopecký and Mudde 2002)! The party's lack of effectiveness in government led to permanent marginalization after 1998.

Also archetypal is Ukraine's Progressive Socialist Party (PSPU), which split from the Socialist Party of Ukraine in 1995 as the SPU attempted to social democratize. Leader Nataliya Vitrenko got the nickname 'Zhrinovsky in a skirt' because of her firebrand populist rhetoric and ability to quarrel with everybody (Wilson 2000). Vitrenko saw herself as Ukraine's only 'true Marxist' and outlined a strongly nostalgic anti-Western platform, accusing the IMF of colonizing Ukraine and promising to expel all foreign advisers. Although the party performed strongly in 1998–9 (with 11 per cent in the 1999 presidential elections), this was largely because it was tacitly backed by the presidential administration in order to split the Communist/SPU vote. With this aim achieved, the authorities lost interest and the party dropped permanently below the 4 per cent parliamentary threshold in 2002, despite a residual regional strength in Russophile regions like Crimea. Other left social populists include the Latvian Unity Party (LVP), formed by the Communist Party's orthodox wing, and headed by Soviet-era collective farm chair Alberis Kauls and the Moldovan Electoral Bloc 'Fatherland', which competed with the Moldovan Communists for nostalgic socialist voters before joining their party list in 2009 (ADEPT 2011).

National-social populist parties

National-social populist parties combine leftist welfare rhetoric with more marked 'rightist' nationalist, ethnocentric or even xenophobic policies. The classic

example was Andrzej Lepper's Polish Self-Defence movement (Samoobrona), whose highpoint was 11.4 per cent in the 2005 Polish legislative elections. Samoobrona's radical anti-globalization, anti-neo-liberal rhetoric and cooperation with trade unions was combined with xenophobic nationalism (Krok-Paszkowska 2003). Despite a general ideological eclecticism/nihilism that makes it almost unclassifiable, the party's 'constant thread' was its social populism as 'a voice of social protest against liberalism' (Pankowski 2010: 142).

Most other national-socialist parties were successor parties emerging from 'patrimonial communism' who flirted with nationalist populism as a transitional stage towards a clearer left-wing profile. They were partially 'transformed' (from communism to social democracy), and partially or completely 'transmuted' (from internationalism to nationalism) (Bozóki and Ishiyama 2002: 6–7). Thus parties like the Social Democratic Party of Romania (PDSR, later PSD), Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), Socialist Party of Albania (PS), and the Socialist People's Party of Montenegro (SNP) – an offshoot of the successor Democratic Party of Socialists that retained ties to the Serbian Socialist Party – renounced Leninism but spent the 1990s supporting an economically populist defence of the communist-era welfare state and insider networks, and promoting culturally nationalist policies.

The archetypal, and most radical, national-social populist party was undoubtedly Slobodan Milošević's Serbian Socialist Party (SPS). The SPS was ostensibly democratic socialist – its 1992 programme even argued that 'the essence of democratic socialism is a commitment to . . . political, economic and cultural democracy' (quoted in Malesevic 2002: 195). At the same time, the SPS' nationalist policies, from its coalition with the Serbian Radical Party in the 1990s, to its tacit support for 'ethnic cleansing' policies throughout former Yugoslavia, received world-wide opprobrium. As a governing party, the SPS' populism focussed both on communist-era bureaucracies who 'behaved arrogantly and scornfully towards the people' and on external enemies – the SPS saw the Serbs as the victimized people who resisted the world (Malesevic 2002: 194, 210).

However, as noted previously, once these countries began to reform their politics and became exposed to the EU, their successor parties became social democratic. The remaining national-social populist parties are entirely marginal. For instance, the Romanian Socialist Labour Party was headed by Ceaușescu's former Prime Minister Ilie Verdeț. Portraying itself as the only legitimate successor to the national-communist ruling party, it was a close ally of the extreme right Greater Romania Party (Mungiu-Pippidi 2002). Yet, lacking attractive leaders and suffering internal splits, it fell permanently below the 3 per cent electoral threshold after 1996. The PSM merged with the (now social democratic) PSD in 2003, leaving those wishing to retain a communistic heritage to form the Socialist Alliance Party (PAS). PAS retains national-socialist leanings (even voting to rename itself the Romanian Communist Party in 2010), but has not regained national parliamentary representation.[16]

More influential (and also symptomatic) was the Russian Motherland (Rodina) bloc. In 2003, Motherland ran on a left-nationalist platform that combined 'protest populism and identity populism' (in the party's own terms 'social patriotism')

epitomized by proposals to expropriate wealth from Russia's plutocrats (oligarchs) and to restore popular control over the authorities (Laruelle 2006). Motherland's ideological position oscillated depending on leadership intrigue and opportunity, exploiting a popular backlash against benefits monetization (January 2005) and making a chauvinistic appeal to anti-immigrant sentiment, before its growing popularity angered the authorities and its (already highly fractious) leadership was replaced in March 2006. Motherland eventually evolved (after union with smaller left-wing blocs) into the more evidently left-wing (though still populist) Just Russia party, campaigning in 2007 on a 'socialist' platform of social justice directed against bureaucratic corruption as 'the party of working people' (March 2009a). Just Russia veered between radical quasi-communist rhetoric and a social-democratic image, finally settling on observer status in the SI in January 2008. The only consistent thing about the party was its loyalty towards the authorities, who had sponsored it in part to split the communist vote.

Centrist social populists

Finally, we can identify an increasing number of what Peter Učeň (2007) calls 'centrist' social populists: these parties are largely pragmatic, technocratic and non-ideological – their populism is based on attacking the alleged corruption and incompetence of all existing elites. They by no means articulate a radical critique of capitalism, but exploit certain left-wing slogans, often with great success (see Table 6.2) and many have been in government. Such parties include the Lithuanian Labour Party (DP), which in 2004 formed a disastrous coalition government with the Social Democrats and social-liberal New Union until withdrawing in 2006 mired in corruption scandals. The DP's membership of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe in the European parliament is misleading: the Lithuanian Social Democrats had vetoed its application to join the Party of European Socialists.

More successful was the Slovak Direction-Social Democracy (Smer-SD), an offshoot of the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL') formed in 1999 that initially adopted a defiantly 'non-ideological' position but gradually moved towards an anti-establishment social democracy having merged with the centrist-populist Civic Understanding Party (SOP) and three smaller social democratic parties (including the SDL) (Učeň 2007). In June 2006, Smer-SD entered a controversial governing coalition with the populist HZDS and radical right Slovak National Party (SNS). This coalition got Smer-SD suspended by the PES from October 2006 until February 2008 for 'compromising with extreme nationalism and xenophobia' (PES 2006). Its leader Róbert Fico initially responded in true populist style by arguing that it was punished 'for its policy to the benefit of people', although the PES' ban was rescinded after Smer-SD and the SNS pledged to adhere to European human and minority rights.[17]

This brief survey reveals that East European social populists often demonstrate the common populist life-cycle: rapid but short-lived success based on articulating protest themes, followed by an inability to translate anti-elite opposition into

effective governance. Additionally, this social populism is often only ambiguously left wing and ideologically inconsistent. Eastern Europe's relatively unstructured political landscape means that the Hungarian Jobbik party, which declares itself 'not imprisoned by an ideology [and having] the ability to cherry-pick from policies of either the Right or the Left', is typical of populists in the region (Jobbik 2010).

Such an environment provides potentially insurmountable obstacles to the development of a genuinely non-communist East European radical left. Certainly, quasi-left social populist parties can *directly* appeal to left-wing voters; for instance, the ZRS, PSPU and Just Russia have attracted former communists, while the Yulia Tymoshenko bloc and Samoobrona attracted former socialists. But more problematic is that social populist parties (as with Fianna Fáil limiting the success of Irish Labour in the 1920s-1940s) can prevent a genuine socialist left growing in the first place (Dunphy 2005). Certainly, the Lithuanian DP 'was able to rocket from nothing to . . . electoral success on the back of a few radical-sounding slogans about defending poor, hard-working Lithuanians' (Green 2004). Alongside dominant social democratic parties who occasionally adopt radical rhetoric, this results in 'redwashing' (disingenuously spinning policies as left wing), with potentially similar effects to the 'greenwashing' by which Western European mainstream parties have often co-opted the environmental agenda from the Greens. Moreover, the exploitation of left-wing slogans alongside ethnocentric and xenophobic rhetoric by parties who demonstrate little governing efficacy risks discrediting left-wing sentiments *in toto*.

Conclusion

Is left-populism the future of socialism? On one hand, there is nothing new about it: populism's emphasis on anti-elitism, democracy, and the representation of the excluded has made it a constant shadow of the left through various permutations and in various contexts. What is new is that contemporary developments allow the balance between populism and socialism to be recast. Until the collapse of communism, Marxism's insistence on class-consciousness, organization, and doctrine meant at best a populist sheen to traditional RLP approaches and strategies. Now, the decline of Marxism has opened the way to new approaches in which populism (as an intrinsic component of contemporary politics) plays a large part. Accordingly, populism has become an increasingly important element of RLP success across Europe: in particular the populist socialist parties identified here have benefited from overlaying democratic socialist ideology with an inclusive cross-class anti-establishment emphasis as the *vox populi*. These parties trade heavily on the alleged 'betrayal' of social democrats, and address contemporary anti-globalization and anti-European insecurities just as does the populist right, although their critique is still addressed far more on socio-economic insecurities than ethnic or national ones.

However, we have also identified potential problems to these parties' growth, not least in translating an anti-elite identity into governing opportunities. Since this

Table 6.2 Relevant social populist parties in pan–European parliamentary elections, 1990–2011

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Albania (PS)	56.2		25.7				20.4	52.7				41.5*				8.9*				40.8*		
Bulgaria (BSP)	47.2	33.1			43.5		22.0					17.1*				31.0*				17.7*		
Greece (PASOK)	38.6			46.9			41.5*				43.8*				40.6*			38.1*		43.9*		
Estonia (EÜRP)[a]						5.9				6.1				2.2				1.0				–
Ireland (Sinn Féin)			1.6					2.6					6.5					6.9				9.9
Latvia (LVP)				0.1		7.2			0.5													
Lithuania (DP)															28.4				9.0		–	
Moldova (BePR)[b]					22.0				1.8			0.5				5.0				–		
Montenegro (SNP)									36.1			40.6	37.9*				13.9*			16.5*		
Poland (Self-Defence)				2.8				0.1				10.5				11.4		1.5				
Romania (PDSR/PSD)			27.7				21.5				36.6				36.8*				33.1*			
(PSM)			3.0				2.2				0.8											
Russia (Motherland)														9.0				7.7[c]				
Serbia (SPS)	46.1		28.8	36.7				34.3			13.8			7.6				5.6				
Slovakia (SMER–SDS)													13.5				29.1			34.8		
(ZRS)					7.4				1.3				0.6				0.3					
(SOP)									8.0													
Ukraine (PSPU)									4.1				3.2				2.9	1.3		0.2		
UK–Northern Ireland (Sinn Féin)							15.5		17.7					23.5			26.2				26.9	

Source: www.parties–and–elections.de (data correct at 20 May 2011).

* as social democratic party
a EÜRP merged with Estonian Left Party to become Estonian United Left Party in 2008. In 2011 ran on lists of People's Union of Estonia
b in 1994 as the Socialist Party and Unity Movement, 1998 as Socialist Unity, in 2001 as Electoral Bloc Unity. From 2009 ran on lists of Party of Communists
c as Just Russia.

anti-elite identity is more central to their appeal, these problems may be greater than those experienced by other RLPs. Certainly, to date populist socialists have used populism more as a discursive device than *the* core component of ideology, reflecting particular leaders' style and parties' marginalized position in the political system, whilst also (particularly in the German LP) helping to consolidate disparate party tendencies. In this respect, populism mirrors Euroscepticism as a 'touchstone of dissent' (Taggart 1998), mainly limited to parties on the periphery of their party system and often moderated as they face governing prospects – a process evident in the LP and particularly the SP. However, the LP, SP and SSP have all faced problems in adopting a post-populist identity, in particular the dependence on dominant, charismatic individuals. Additionally, in many countries the populist right retains greater ability to exploit electorally relevant protest sentiments (e.g. against immigration). So in Western Europe, populism will likely remain both a shadow and *in the shadow* of contemporary socialism, at least in the medium term.

In Eastern Europe, populism is more visible and viable, and the near-term prospects for left-leaning social populism accordingly greater. Although East European populism has tended to be a nationalistic cross-class phenomenon with leftist accents rather than something truly radical left, relative socio-economic inequality and anti-elite distrust provide fertile ground issues for social populists to exploit. By the same token, their ideological incoherence and poor governing record remains their Achilles heel, at least in terms of becoming stable features on the electoral landscape. This instability perhaps offers hope for more institutionalized radical left parties to regain a foothold in the region.

The 'wild card' in such calculations remains the after-effects of the international economic crisis. Certainly, it is highly likely that high unemployment and general socio-economic insecurity might lead to greater anti-establishment sentiment and new forms of radical populist mobilization claiming to articulate the dashed hopes of the 'ordinary' people (such has already been seen with Jobbik and the True Finns in 2010–1). It is still possible too that governmental instability may institute in some Western European countries the lasting crises and electoral volatility that have till recently been more characteristic of the East. However such prognoses play out, as a factor that at the very least must be reckoned with by both the left and its opponents, left-populism is here to stay.