

Elites beware, a populist tidal wave looms

By Jennifer Oriel, *The Australian*, 23 January 2018

Populism is the great evil of the modern age. The word is so dangerous it has become a virtual synonym generator. For populism see: xenophobia, nationalism, right-wing and strongmen. If you believe much of the media, the personification of evil is US President Donald Trump. A year ago, the establishment feared the Trump effect would go global. Free-world citizens had begun to fight back against open borders, hatred of the West, selective racism against white people, Christophobia and big government. However, European voters returned centrists to office in a series of key elections. Pro-Trump parties in Australia performed poorly in state elections. Political elites are celebrating the restoration of order. Yet the conditions historically associated with populist uprisings remain.

The American Left filled the swamp to commemorate the one-year anniversary of Trump's inauguration. Left politicians shut down the US government in a bid to prevent immigration reforms. Rather than holding obstructionist Democrats to account, the Left media played a fast hand of blame-shifting to declare Trump culpable. The ABC conceded the US government was shut down during Obama's presidency too, but went the extra mile to damn Trump by highlighting his party's control of both houses.

Despite Trump's numerous policy wins, anti-Trumpers are determined to damn him. A column for *The Washington Post* by Jennifer Rubin illustrates the popular media narrative: "President Trump's ability to ride a global wave of right-wing populism — xenophobic, authoritarian, protectionist and (white) nationalistic — into office was a fluke ... the entire 'America First' strategy has proven largely unworkable." Ironically, Rubin's evidence for the supposed failure of Trump's America-first policy includes a Gallup poll on other countries' approval of US leadership.

The conflation of populism, nationalism, white skin and xenophobia has become increasingly common in left-wing literature since Trump took office. The UN frequently fuels a narrative of bigotry against pro-Western politicians by denigrating them as populists, nationalists and xenophobes. The angry rhetoric will reach fever pitch this year as the UN pressures Western states to compromise sovereignty for the global compact on migration.

The Trump administration withdrew from the UN migration compact negotiations last month, citing defence of US sovereignty as a major concern. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said: "We simply cannot in good faith support a process that could undermine the sovereign right of the US to enforce our immigration law and secure our borders."

As I have written, the UN and other supranational organisations are pressuring Western nations to open borders to anyone who claims refugee status, despite copious evidence that many have lied to gain entry and access benefits. In the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (which sets the frame of reference for the coming global migration compact), the UN vilifies dissenters as xenophobic. It is lazy and dishonest. A recent UN report shows about half of the world's refugees are produced by three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. Yet the UN will not tackle political Islam as a cause of asylum-seeking behaviour. Instead, it shifts the refugee burden on to states that do not create it while relieving Islamist regimes of their primary responsibility to take care of their own citizens. The Trump administration is smart enough to see the writing on the wall and has acted pre-emptively to protect its sovereignty against the UN and refugee-producing Islamist states.

The gulf between political elites and the people on border policy continues to produce popular support for politicians prepared to defend national sovereignty against supranationalists.

There is a historical relationship between poorly designed migration and the rise of populist movements. In an incisive analysis for *The New Criterion*, former British MP Douglas Carswell compared the common characteristics of three historical populist movements. He deduced that populist movements marked the end of exceptionalist eras in the Roman, Venetian and Dutch republics.

The republics shared three central features. Each was an independent entity, meaning that they recognised and defended borders against foreign entities. Second, each established internal constraints by various constitutional arrangements to militate against the concentration of power. Finally, each embraced interdependence, defined as prosperity through trade.

In Carswell's account, the promise of prosperity was spoiled by the concentration of wealth and power. Rome's use of mass slave labour from subjugated territories led to the development of big agrarian enterprises and decline of smaller freehold farm businesses. Power became concentrated as big farming enterprises gave cash to the Senate in exchange for future tax revenue. Populist revolt in Venice was preceded by the development of an elite class that - acquired great wealth from resource-rich colonies and established rule by heredity. In the Dutch case also, a rapid rise in wealth from foreign regions preceded the decline of the republic. Carswell concludes: "A sudden inflow of wealth from overseas upset the internal equilibrium in each of these three republics."

While it is difficult to establish causation in the analysis of mass movements and revolution, it appears that when the loyalty of political elites shifts from their friends and countrymen to outsiders, the body politic breaks down.

The combination of cultural and economic xenophilia accompanies the rise of populist revolts. Western governments are soothing the well-founded anger of citizens by economic measures, secure border policy, straight talk on the threat of jihad and clarifying non-negotiable Western values. Thus far, the measures have limited the threat posed to majoritarian democracy by populist parties of both the Left and Right. However, the coming economic downturn could change all that.

Voters are losing patience with debt-creating immigration policy, big government, perks and pay rises for politicians, inflated staffer salaries, useless green schemes, the bloated public service, publicly funded activist networks in the media and academia, and supranational meddling in our nation's internal affairs. The burden of debt created by all the useless layers of government and governance are becoming unmanageable. Beyond the beltway, people are struggling with high taxation, soaring living costs and the burden of unprecedented debt. The writing is on the wall.