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The new political scenario: Populism versus The Establishment

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Panem et circenses. The people want bread and circuses. They want to be entertained, they want an adrenalin rush, they want to see someone just like them fighting for their ideals, someone who understands them, someone who represents them. They want a Champion of the "us" to fight for their rights against a perceived "them". Welcome to political populism.

Where is the Establishment?

It comes as no surprise at all that the French Presidential election places a Monetarist neo-liberal Champion of wizzy Euroland - Emmanuel Macron - against the candidate Marine Le Pen. Some say a monetarist against a fascist. Some say, Where is the Left? I say, Where is the Establishment?

For the same reason at the end of January, Donald Trump was elected in the United States of America - an outsider against the Establishment, represented by Hillary Clinton. The bottom line is not necessarily the ideology or the political debate - the bottom line is a fresh face, a new boy/girl on the block, as we saw in Greece, already, twice, with the election and confirmation of Alexis Tsipras' SYRIZA and the rejection of the traditional tandem, PASOK and New Democracy.

The same trend we saw in Spain, which was fragmented between not the traditional two political parties, PP (Partido Popular, Conservatives) and PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, Socialist) but among four parties, which created political deadlock for a year, a deadlock eventually broken by Mariano Rajoy's PP. These four parties were the two aforementioned, Unidos Podemos (United we can) and Ciudadanos (Citizens).

As in the USA, as in Greece, as in France, the Establishment had become distinctly unsexy in Spain, although in this case, a mainstream party won.

How did this come about?

If we examine the history of the last century, we observe that since the progressive movements won the social battles for workers' rights, the right to form Unions, won the battle for women's rights, human rights, universal education and universal healthcare, and so on and with the implementation of the welfare state in western Europe and the implementation of the socialist model in the Eastern Bloc and the respective satellite countries and areas of influence, the space for championing political causes decreased.

Without children crawling down mines, with the end to rationing of food and with food on the table, the majority housed, fed, educated to a degree and cared for, with life expectancy growing, the urge to take to the streets delivering pamphlets, the urge to host political rallies, the urge to challenge the System became more and more distant from the hearts and minds of the people, who then, *en masse*, delegated political decision-making to their representatives, without following what they were doing too closely.

Jobs for the boys, irresponsible governance

The result? Jobs for the boys and girls, wives, children, cousins on the payroll without lifting a finger, plastic garden gnomes bought and sold for thousands of dollars of public Money, drivers, advisors, gate-keepers, plumbers, electricians, nannies and masseurs all paid for, by public funds. Echelon upon echelon of political quangoes and Commissions and Committees and Groups and Watchdogs and Missions - just take a look at the European Union organisms, for a start, and see how many additional advisors, drivers, cooks and so on are provided for the staff).

And so the space between politicians/policymakers and people, the space between political right (originally the Establishment, protection of capital and power of the landed gentry/industrialists/corporate elitists) and the political left (originally the challengers, representing the working classes and farm workers, often backed by a divided Intelligentsia) narrowed considerably.

And it narrowed to the point where it has become very difficult to see any real difference in policy between progressives and conservatives, once the ideology of the political campaign has died down, very often to be forgotten the day after the election. Take Tony Blair as an example, nicknamed Tory Blair because his political space was not the Left, it was to hover somewhere around the middle, picking and choosing the most popular policies from both sides.

In the USA, policymaking is not for the people

The most vibrant and transparent example of where political responsibility has broken down is in the United States of America, where it is crystal clear that policymaking is not for the people, it is for the corporate elitists, the Sinister Six Sisters, the BARFFS Lobbies (Banking, Arms, eneRgy, Finance, Food, pharmaceuticalS) which pull the strings in Washington, feather their own nests and use NATO as the sledgehammer to implement policy, under whose umbrella they gather together.

Hence Trump, the outsider who challenged the Establishment, even if it took him less than two months to start bombing people, being rude, losing the plot on the geopolitical stage, because Washington manages to get it wrong time after time after time...but he was elected and Establishment Hillary wasn't.

The bottom line, tips for a challenger

So the bottom line is not whether you are far left or far right. When it comes to a choice, and if they have to choose between extremes, they prefer an extreme Leftist over a Fascist. The bottom line is to challenge the Establishment, to appeal to the people and appear as one of them, tell them you understand their needs. If the economy is in a mess, and they have not yet experienced Austerity, the buzz-word of the European Union, then tell them they will have to tighten their belts and appeal to a perverse form of Patriotism (that they will be patriotically hungry and miserable). If they have already experienced Austerity, and seen how it destroys a society in three years, then preach an anti-austerity message from a soap-box somewhere sexy, grabbing the nearest child when the cameras appear, and saying "This is his future I am fighting for!" and you'll get elected, in a political system which favors proportional representation.

And the message for the Left?

The political Left is traditionally too responsible for such electioneering quips and tends to stick to its principles. That is why Melanchon was not elected, that is why the Left is invisible in the United States of America. But SYRIZA was elected in Greece and in Portugal, an informal Left-leaning political grouping (not a coalition) in agreement between the Socialist Party, the Left Block, the Communist Party, the Greens and the People, Animals and Nature Party has seen living standards rise, the economy produce results and a general feeling of well-being, as it takes an anti-austerity approach.

Populism, the anti-Establishment Champion, is a new phenomenon which may or may not be a flash-in-the-pan, fly-by-night, here today, gone tomorrow ephemeral shooting star in the political skies. Time will tell. Behind the Champion of the people can be a monetarist or a Champion of the neo-liberal Project like Macron. Or someone who represents a United Left, like Tsipras.

The message for the Left is, Unite! The message for the Establishment is, you ain't sexy any more.