



## Advancing Liberty in times of populism

**Roxana Nicula, Chair, Foundation for the Advancement of Liberty (Spain)  
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Kalimera.

Dear friends in the Liberty movement,

May I take this kind opportunity to convey to you a short reflection on the worrisome revival of populism in our continent.

May I start by naming the culprit. Social-democracy is to blame for the resurrection of both far left populism and far right populism. But when I say “social-democracy” I do not mean a particular party or a particular government. What I mean is the system as a whole. I mean most of the mainstream political spectrum, because a transpartisan social-democratic line of thinking has in fact been common to all main parties and governments across Europe, since the 1950s.

Ralf Dahrendorf, a German-British social scientist called this phenomenon “the social-democratic consensus”. This consensus was —*and is*— economically doomed because it is just a fairy tale that hides an enormous debt and confiscatory taxes. It is not based on the free, spontaneous order of the economy. The Austrian School of Economics posits that such a system may more or less survive during the “boom” phase of the economic cycle, but it will fail miserably in its “bust” phase.

Over the past decade we have seen recession and the subsequent incapability, by the social-democratic system, to deliver on its promises of eternal, free-for-all happiness. All of a sudden, millions of young people discovered that the welfare they had experienced as kids, and which the governments had promised to maintain, was no longer sustainable. They discovered that welfare systems were utter Ponzi schemes; and the State was just a sorcerer’s apprentice playing with the fire of debt.

So now, when everybody fears that the next economic bubble to explode will be that of national debt and currencies, how is the social-democratic Big Brother State reacting? Well, it is tougher than ever on any structural criticism. It resorts to narrowing the space for long established individual freedoms. It aims at controlling everyone everywhere. It tries to turn the digital revolution against us and to curtail the advent of blockchain. It has destroyed banking privacy and it now threatens cash money. And it has paved the way for both populisms to resurface.

These are hard times for Libertarians. We had taken the basics of the modern world for granted. Because totalitarians would “never” come back, we could confidently push further. We Libertarians would work to accelerate Liberty, but it would increase anyway, driven by technology and by the simple trend of things. Inertia was on our side.

But now we face populism. In some countries left wing populism, or *communism in disguise*, is stronger than its opposite number. In some other countries, it is right wing populism, or *fascism in disguise*, that has the upper hand. We seem to be back to the 1920s or 30s. Before we resume the struggle for more freedom, we first need to turn around and secure the freedom we already have.

We need to fight both populisms, and the battleground is, above all, a cultural one:

- **When the left wing populists** act as warmongers for a clash between women and men, Libertarian women need to abhor any privilege given to us just because we are women. We need to show that we are not weaker, and that men are not the enemy: more often, some of the so-called feminists are. And yes, it is OK to shout “Me Too” if applicable, but most of us will shout “Me Neither”.
- **When the right wing populists**, heavily funded by the enemies of the modern world, try to send us back to *before* the Enlightenment, to before the basic freedoms, to *before* the separation of church and state, to *before* capitalism and individualism, we Libertarians need to stand for the latest three centuries of human development. We need to cherish the victories of classic liberalism as the roots of our own current Libertarianism, and reject any sort of state-induced neo-traditionalism.
- **When the left wing populists** pursue their agenda to push us down the *road to serfdom*, and to make us all Big Brother employees through the Universal Basic Income and other profoundly anti-capitalist strategies, we Libertarians must stand up for a free labour market, and for economic freedom generally.
- **When the right wing populists** pursue their agenda to *make nations great again* and thus make the Individual smaller again, we Libertarians must unmask this illiberal

endeavour and show it for what it is: utter statism and cronyism. And we must defend cosmopolitanism and the free movement of people, goods, services, capital, ideas, and data.

We shall never allow populists of either side to take our freedom of conscience, our free speech, our free press, our individual decisions on each and every moral issue, our hard earned civil liberties, our freedom to be different (be it by ethnicity, by gender or sexual orientation, or by beliefs), the independence of our Judiciary, the checks and balances that keep our politicians at bay, or, of course, our fundamental *human right* to trade, to do business, to hire and be hired, to economic freedom.

Threatened by the two-headed monster of populism, we must be wise and strategic. But we must also be emotional. Otherwise, the enemy, with cheap blindfolds like egalitarianism or patriotism, will win the people's hearts because playing on emotion is what they do, and they are good at that. Let's be better than them. We are today in the country of Pericles, a pioneer of Liberty, and twenty-five centuries ago he warned us that "Freedom is the sure possession of *those alone* who have the courage to defend it". We are think tanks, yes, but, more than ever before, we also need to act as direct defenders of freedom. We have an entire worldwide movement to rely on, the libertarian movement. So let's go out there and struggle to advance Liberty.

Thank-you