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Populism and the Failures of Representation

Among the intellectual legacies of Stanley Hoffmann are reflections on Right wing politics. Today they seem more than ever relevant to understanding a world of triumphant populism.¹ Hoffmann's early publications include studies of groups with some strong family resemblances to contemporary populism: the Right conservatives in Vichy France and the Poujadists of the 1950s. Today, against all expectations, we face victories for populist candidates and parties in Europe and the United States that threaten to wipe out the centrist and social democratic politics of the postwar world. Brexit in England, the election of Donald Trump in the United States, the rise of AfD (Alternative for Germany), of Front National in France and Five Stars in Italy all have much in common. Their supporters are disproportionately drawn from the losers of globalization, workers whose jobs have vanished because of outsourcing, offshoring, and imports, and from communities whose economies have collapsed along with their traditional

¹ This paper is based on my presentation to the panel in memory of Stanley Hoffmann at the Conference of Europeanists, Philadelphia, April 2, 2016. I have also written on Hoffmann's work in "From le Mouvement Poujade to the Front National: Studies on Dark Side of French Politics," in *Ideas & Ideals: Essays on Politics in Honor of Stanley Hoffmann*, eds. Linda B. Miller and Michael Joseph Smith (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993) 313-329.

manufacturing base. Populists appeal to older people in the population and to those with less education. Anti-immigrant campaigns and proposals are another powerful draw for populists, even in regions with few immigrants and refugees in the population. Karl Polanyi's "double-movement" of backlash against global markets and against globalization's rapid, radical disruption of social life seems once again at work producing authoritarian anti-liberal politics.²

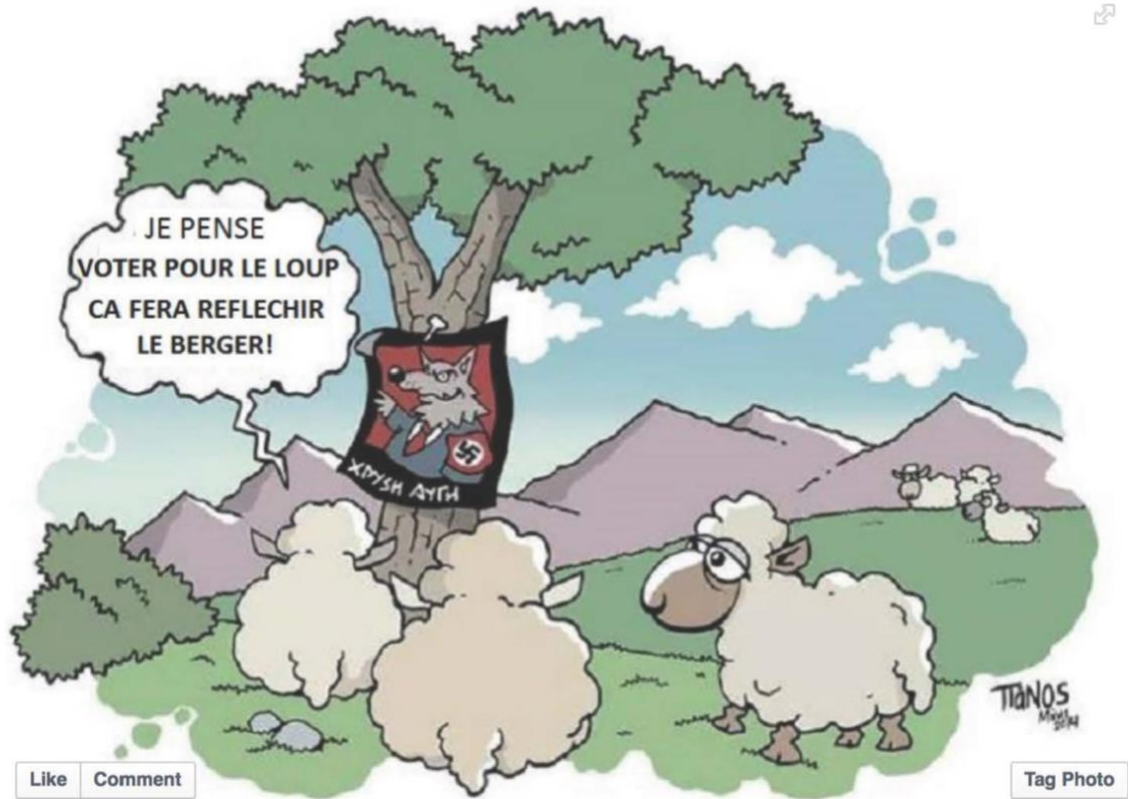
The economic and social circumstances that give rise to populism today and those of the 1940s and 1950s that Hoffmann studied are of course vastly different. But the critical similarity that links the French movements that Hoffmann studied to populism today is large-scale anger against an elite. As Bonikowski and Gidron suggest in their study of populist politics in the United States, populism can most usefully be defined as a form of political interaction "predicated on a moral vilification of elites and a concomitant veneration of the common people."³ Hoffmann's essential insight is that this anger is to be understood, not simply in terms of personal economic or psychological or cultural characteristics of the citizen, but as a collective reaction to failures of representation. Democracies become vulnerable to populist politics when parties

² Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston : Beacon Press, 1944).

³ Bart Bonikowski and Noam Gidron, "The Populist Style in American Politics: Presidential Campaign Discourse, 1952-1996," *Social Forces* 94 (2016): 4, accessed July 19, 2016, doi: 10.1093/sf/sov120. Justin Gest, *The New White Minority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

of government and of opposition, unions, and interest groups fail to transmit the interests and grievances of significant groups in the population into political deliberation and policy making. In Hoffmann's cases, the elites under attack were a mix of French Third and Fourth Republic politicians, capitalists, and Left wing intellectuals. Today what people mean by "the elite" is understood expansively to include the rich, politicians, well-educated professionals, and globally-connected big business leaders.

The essential dynamic in today's rage against the elite has been succinctly expressed in a single frame political cartoon that appeared first in Greece, then in France, and that now circulates widely on the Internet. Drawn by Panos Maragos, the cartoon shows three sheep looking at an electoral poster. The candidate is a wolf with a swastika armband. One sheep tells the others: "I think I'll vote for the wolf. That will really show the shepherd."



The point the cartoon makes is that populist politics is not a politics of interest representation. It's the politics you get when interest representation has failed. It's not that the sheep believes the wolf will act in the sheep's interest. It's that voting for the wolf gets back at the shepherd—even at the expense of the sheep's eventual fate as dinner for the wolf.

Given the recurrent themes of economic injustice and cultural despair across countries in which populist parties are rising, it is understandable that most analyses have focused on the economic and social characteristics of the individuals who are drawn to populist parties. But this one-eyed focus on individuals obscures other significant features of the rise of populist politics.

Critically, it fails to consider the role of institutional weaknesses and failures of representation in democracies in the growth of populism. Without understanding the ways in which the failure of institutions of representation to transmit and aggregate individual grievances and resentments into projects of collective action, we cannot understand why in some periods individual interests and emotions flow into "normal" politics and why at other times similar sentiments find expression in populism and anti-system politics. In thinking about this question, Stanley Hoffmann's writings about the "dark side" of French politics suggest a way of thinking about the dark side of our own politics today ---both in Europe and in the United States.

The relevant essays of Hoffmann's are an article on politics in Vichy France, "Aspects du régime de Vichy" and his study of the Poujade movement.⁴ The Vichy article and the book on the Poujade movement were written and published in 1956 and so Hoffmann must surely have had both of these experiences in mind at the same time. 1956 was a very dark time in France. France had suffered major defeats: 1940, Dien Bien Phu, and (in late 1956) Suez. It was far from obvious in the mid-fifties that the great economic growth spurt later to be known

⁴ Stanley Hoffmann, "Aspects du régime de Vichy," *Revue française de science politique* 6 (1956), 1, 44-69. This article was revised and published in English in « The Vichy Circle of French Conservatives, » in Stanley Hoffmann, *Decline or Renewal? France since the 1930's* (NY: Viking Press, 1974), 3-25. On Poujade, Stanley Hoffmann, *Le Mouvement Poujade* (Paris: Cahiers de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 81, Librairie Armand Colin, 1956).

as “les trentes glorieuses” was about to take off. The political instability of the Fourth Republic had already taken the toll of twenty-three governments since the end of the war. As Hoffmann’s autobiographical essays describe, he was traveling back and forth between Cambridge Massachusetts and France in the mid-fifties at the time he did this research.⁵ He did most of the writing of the Vichy and Poujadist studies in Widener Library at Harvard, but the political events and climate in France in the mid-fifties were clearly very much on his mind.

The two Right-wing political groups Hoffmann analyzed had emerged, peaked, and collapsed over the period 1941-1958. The Vichy groups were Right-wing supporters of Maréchal Phillipe Pétain’s National Revolution who came to power with him in 1941. They represented a distinct set of traditions and policies very different from the more radical, proto- Fascist, and Fascist activists of the Right who gathered in Paris and worked in collaboration with the Nazi occupiers. By 1943 these conservative groups, like Pétain’s National Revolution, had been broken up, with some fragments joining the Paris collaborationists and other moving into the Resistance. The Poujadists were a protest movement that started from a tax revolt of shopkeepers and artisans in the Lot and grew to win over 2 million votes and 52 deputies in the 1956 legislative elections.

⁵ Stanley Hoffmann, “To Be or Not to Be French,” in *Ideas & Ideals: Essays on Politics in Honor of Stanley Hoffmann*. Editors: Linda B. Miller and Michael Joseph Smith (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 19-46.

In his analysis, Hoffmann first emphasized that these groups were recruited from specific segments of society but from different strata. In the case of Vichy, supporters came from a very broad spectrum of non-wage-earning groups—landholders, business patrons, liberal professions, some upper-level managers, and bureaucrats. In the case of the Poujadists, the support came from the traditional middle classes: shopkeepers, artisans, small business. Secondly, Hoffmann observed that the political ideologies of Vichy and those of the Poujadists were quite different. Among the Vichy groups there was a common core of anti-Republican, anti-parliamentary, anti-liberal sentiments but beyond that-- an extremely diverse set of ideological programs ranging from the conservative corporatists to outright fascism. As for the Poujadists: their attack was on the elites that controlled the Republic, not on the Republic itself. Their electoral battle cry "Sortons les sortants!" [roughly "Kick the old guys out!"] could as well serve today for the Trump voters (assuming a better English translation).

Hoffmann's key insight was that the Poujadist electorate had no deep attachments, ideological or other, to Poujadism. Rather these were citizens enraged by their inability to make their voices heard in politics. They felt their own basic interests were completely neglected by those in power. The success of the Poujadists resulted from a failure of representation. The political parties had been captured by others, and by interests that totally excluded their own. The

channels through which interests and ideas flowed in the Fourth Republic did not work for them. Hoffmann concluded: "Poujadism does not really detach the French from the Republic; it does not have enough of an ideology for that. It draws in all those already alienated from a government that has coped badly with a series of different crises. The disappearance or expansion of Poujadism will depend less on the defects or characteristics of the social groups it seeks to organize or on the extent of their divisions or capacity to unite, than it will on the regime's ability to reform itself."⁶ A mere two years after the Poujadists' triumph in the 1956 legislative elections, when the Fourth Republic collapsed, and General de Gaulle returned to power with a new constitution and the Fifth Republic, only 2 of the 52 Poujadists who had been elected in 1956 were re-elected in the first legislative elections of the Fifth Republic,.

At the time Hoffmann was writing these pieces, the dominant social science explanations of the appeal and success of such movements drew on social psychological literatures about authoritarian personalities and the lower middle classes. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality* appeared in 1950, and the Frankfurt School's analysis of the psychological and social roots of Right wing populism and Fascism had impact far beyond academia. Two influential books that appeared at the end of the 1950s, Seymour

⁶ Hoffmann, *Le Mouvement Poujade*, 400. (My translation).

Martin Lipset's *Political Man* and William Kornhauser's *The Politics of Mass Society*, further developed these theories about individual characteristics and politics. Hoffmann was never one for single factor explanations, and he was perfectly willing to acknowledge the role that economic, sociological, and psychological factors played in Right wing populism. But what he saw as decisive in the origins and expansion of such groups as the Vichy Right and the Poujadists was a specific institutional failure. In both cases the fundamental flaw has to do with representation. The essential issues for Hoffmann in these two studies were how groups could or could not channel their interests into centers of political decision and how the blockages to representation led to political mobilization and radicalization. The two main channels he identifies are political parties and interest groups. The activism and mobilization of both the Vichy conservatives and of the Poujadists should be understood as responses to the fact that these channels did not work for these groups. Their anti-system anger was fueled by frustration over their inability to get their interests onto the political agenda.

In the case of Vichy, as Hoffmann described, conservatives had been deeply frustrated in the last twenty years of the Third Republic by the fact that access to state power required either organizing parties with a mass base—which conservatives in the main saw as dangerous and destabilizing to social order and refused -- or else organizing strong economic interest groups, as the unions had

done on the Left, and at that, too, for various reasons, conservatives had failed. On both these fronts the conservatives had been outdone by the Left and felt increasingly powerless and desperate. In the case of the Poujadists, in contrast to the Vichy conservatives, while there was a basic acceptance of the Republic and of parliamentarism, there was a similar sense of impotence and rage about getting the system to work for their interests, about getting the system to protect them.

Today in the United States, as we try to understand how Donald Trump could have been elected president, we are likely to attribute the eruption of populist voting to economic or social or cultural characteristics of the voters. And these economic and social factors are undoubtedly a large part of the story. The unbelievable successes of Donald Trump in the Republican primary elections and the presidential election and of Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primaries do clearly reflect the destructive impact of globalization on large segments of the population. Seventeen years ago the anti-globalization protests at Seattle against the WTO involved mostly marginal groups in the population, aside from some unions. Today in contrast, populist voters come from core groups across American society. The success of Trump (and of Sanders to some degree) was strongest in areas with large white male working class voters. They have good reason to be distressed. From the entry of China into the WTO in 2001 onward,

the impact of imports from low-wage countries hit the U.S. manufacturing workforce. Economists who have studied the localities hardest hit by imports have concluded that at least a fifth to a quarter of job losses between 2000 and 2007—so before the financial crisis-- was due to Chinese imports.⁷ If laid-off workers found jobs at all, it was usually at lower wages and benefits at a Walmart, for example. In a break with past patterns, unemployed workers did not move to other parts of the country to try to find jobs. Moving is expensive and chancy and laid-off workers might not be able to sell their now-underwater mortgaged houses. Many ended up out of the workforce on permanent disability rolls. Nationwide the income of white males without college degrees fell 20% between 1990 and 2013 and about 1/5 of these working-age men are out of the workforce.⁸

The last two decades are ones in which income inequality has been growing rapidly. Although per capita GDP was 78% higher in 2015 than in 1979, the average household income of a family in the 20th percentile of the income distribution rose only by 6.9% over the period. The gains overwhelmingly went to those at the top of the income distribution. The pain of inequality and job loss

⁷ Autor, David, David Dorn, and Gordon H. Hanson, *The China Syndrome: Local Labor Market Effects of Import Competition in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2012).

⁸ Brookings Institution research cited in William B. Bonvillian, "Donald Trump's Voters and the Decline of American Manufacturing," *Issues in Science and Technology*, Summer 2016, p. 27.

affects not only those who directly lose jobs. It extends to many middle class groups in the same communities. It's not only the Cleveland steelworker who lost his job who is up in arms; it's the Cleveland Ohio pharmacist and Cleveland dentist and Cleveland lawyer all of whose businesses and houses declined in value as the community went down. So these middle-class voters are furious, too. This is not the American Dream.⁹

How did we get to this point without noticing what was happening to large groups in our society? Why did we not stop to consider what their reaction might be? Perhaps because our understanding of how globalization works has been shaped by standard economic trade theory: Ricardian theories of comparative advantage, Heckscher-Olin, Stolper-Samuelson. The heirs of that tradition today, like Paul Krugman, now plead innocent. They claim they always said there would be losers under globalization, but that the gains of globalization for the community at large would outweigh the losses. And somehow the gains would be used to compensate the losers. Those thrown out of jobs in one industry would be absorbed into jobs in other more promising sectors of the economy. Or else be compensated by government and the political system. So what would become of the losers was not part of the economics model. It was up to politicians and not the fault of economists or of globalization that a broken,

⁹ A right-on-the mark conclusion I borrow from Bonvillian's article.

polarized political system did not do its job. Government did not provide the kinds of new job training, education, and income supports that would allow the losers to get new jobs and re-integrate into healthy communities. If wage stagnation has led to a great new surge of inequality, there, too, the economists point the finger of blame to a broken political system which failed to use fiscal policy to protect those at the bottom or even those on middle rungs of the ladder.

One problem with this line of reasoning, though, is that it fails to push the explanation one step further back to analyze why government failed to act. The broken politics of the past decades can be understood as itself a product of globalization. Research by MIT economist David Autor and colleagues shows that in the zones in which Chinese imports had the largest impact on killing manufacturing jobs, the response of voters in subsequent elections was to choose more and more radical candidates.¹⁰ In primary elections between 2002 and 2010 in these heavily hit districts Republican voters chose more and more radical Republicans and Democrats chose more and more radical Democrats; and thus the polarization of the political system proceeded and came to paralyze all action in Washington. Out of the Tea Party came the likes of Rand Paul, Ted

¹⁰ David Autor, David Dorn, Gordon Hanson, and Kaveh Majlesi, “Importing Political Polarization? The Electoral Consequences of Rising Trade Exposure,” (working paper number 22637, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2016).

Cruz, Mario Rubio and they prepared the terrain for the emergence of Donald Trump. Out of the impotence of polarized government grew the rage of the citizens against elites and politicians.

Alongside these economic explanations of the rise of the populist electorate that attribute most of the blame to globalization, there has also been a return to an older tradition of cultural and psychological explanations of populism that goes back to Horkheimer-Adorno's *Authoritarian Personality*, though this time around with more empathy for the population under study. Much of the work in this vein points to relatively stable cultural traits of segments of the population, like the Scotch-Irish Appalachian families depicted in the J.D. Vance autobiography, *Hillbilly Elegy* (2016), the Louisiana people in Arlie Russell Hochschild's *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (2016) or the Youngstown Ohio and English neighborhoods that Justin Gest studied.¹¹ These subcultures typically accord high value to individualism, self-sufficiency, and personal honor and denigrate "dependency" -- even when those espousing these values may themselves be regular recipients of government subsidies. Suspicion of foreigners, negative views of non-Caucasians, anti-intellectualism, and nationalism are other recurrent themes in these subcultures.

¹¹ J.D. Vance *Hillbilly Elegy* (New York: Harper Collins, 2016). Hochschild, Arlie Russell, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: The New Press, 2016). Justin Gest, *The New White Minority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press.)

Although these attitudes and values have been around for a long time, they appear to have been reactivated or leveraged into greater salience by the economic strains that globalization has imposed on these communities and by a set of political shifts in national politics that makes these communities feel even more marginalized and looked down on. Among these political shifts, perhaps the most painful is the rise in social status of the very groups to whom poor whites once felt superior and the conviction that these groups are rising because of favoritism from national government. Arlie Russell Hochschild describes that it feels to poor whites in Louisiana as if they are in a long line leading towards the American Dream and patiently waiting for economic betterment, while things seem to be getting worse not better, and while other people--- blacks, women, immigrants, gays, refugees-- cut ahead in line helped unfairly by special political dispensations. Even the government's environmental policies seem determined to advance animals ahead of humans—so “unbelievably, standing ahead of you in line is a brown pelican, fluttering its long, oil-drenched wings.”¹²

These economic and cultural explanations of populism are powerful and largely mutually complementary, but they also seem incomplete. The phenomenon we want to explain—the recent surge in populism—is a radical break, while the economic and cultural factors have been long in the making

¹² Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*, p.138.

without producing anything that even began to look like an advanced anticipation of the Brexit and Trump victories. It's on this point that Stanley Hoffmann's focus on the institutions of representation seems relevant. We need to look at the state of the institutional conduits through which the interests and values that recently have been expressed through populist voting *used to be* channeled. Such an exploration ought to be the agenda of a major research project; here I can only point to some obvious facts about the decay, obsolescence, and outright expropriation of the institutions through which the discontent of less-privileged groups in the United States used to be expressed and brought into centers of public decision making.

In the United States, these institutional conduits were mainly the unions and the Democratic Party. Thirty-five per cent of American workers were unionized in the 1950s; by 2015 only 11.1% of all workers, and only 6.7% of private sector workers belonged to unions.¹³ The reasons for the decline are complex. They mainly have to do with the legislative attack on union power both in Washington and in the states, and with the decline of those industries like steel in which the unions used to be strongest. But regardless of the causes of the loss of union power, the outcome remains. The anger over wages and working conditions and

¹³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Union Members 2015" <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf> (accessed December 10, 2016). See also Neil Gross, "The Decline of Unions and the Rise of Trump," *New York Times* August 12, 2016. <http://nyti.ms/2bc7a1U>

inequality that once was channeled by unions into collective action and strikes at the workplace now remains bottled up in desperate, angry individuals vulnerable to the appeals of demagoguery.

As for the Democratic Party--an institution which from the days of the New Deal on through the most prosperous years of the postwar world used to represent the interests of working class people---it now seems to many of these citizens to have been captured by the elites of Wall Street, the high tech industries, and the well-paid professional classes. Political scientists have explored the differential responsiveness of elected officials to the views of citizens of different income groups and discovered how little these representatives reflect the preferences of lower income citizens.¹⁴ Making matters worse, the Democratic Party, which in the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman used to represent workers, has over the past three decades shed its commitments to lower and middle income groups. It increasingly presents itself as the defender of the interests of rich and upper-middle class voters, highly educated professionals, and a diversity of ethnic and identity groups: Hispanics, African-Americans and gays. In a slashing attack on the transformation of the Democratic Party into a defender of privileged groups, Thomas Frank in *Listen*

¹⁴ On this failure of representation, see Larry M. Bartels, *Unequal Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), especially chapter 9, "Economic Inequality and Political Representation."

Liberal: or What Ever Happened to the Party of the People? has summed up this development: “Yes, social class is still all-important in politics, just like Madison, Benton, Bryan, and Truman thought it was. And yes, the Democrats are still a class party. In fact, they show admirable concern for the interests of the social class they represent. It’s just that the class they care about the most doesn’t happen to be the same one Truman, Roosevelt, and Bryan cared about.”¹⁵ The outcome in the 2016 elections was a massive shift of electors who once were stalwarts of the Democratic electorate to voting for Donald Trump.

The atrophy of union and party channels for expressing the concerns of working class citizens is hardly a phenomenon restricted to the United States. Those of us who study France have watched with alarm as the despair of lower and middle class citizens over the failures of both Right and Left governments has turned to rejection of the Left and Right parties of government.¹⁶ A survey carried out at the end of 2013 reported that 69 percent of the respondents believed that democracy is working badly in France—up from 49 percent who

¹⁵ Thomas Frank, *Listen Liberal: or What Ever Happened to the Party of the People* (NY: Metropolitan Books, 2016), 19-20. In a less polemical mode, Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2010), especially chapter 7, makes similar points.

¹⁶ I have analyzed the current French situation in “La Grande Désillusion,” in Jean François Sirinelli, ed., *La France qui vient* (CNRS Editions, 2014).

gave this negative assessment only four years earlier.¹⁷ An 11 December 2013 Ipsos/*Le Monde* survey found only 13 percent of the respondents expressing confidence that government could relaunch growth; indeed two-thirds of them thought growth would require limiting the role of the state as much as possible.

¹⁸ The public's faith in the possibility of bringing about change through collective action is collapsing. Perhaps this might be considered a desirable development if one believed that the French had previously held unrealistically high expectations of politics and had now come to recognize, as the former Socialist prime minister Lionel Jospin once put it (impolitically at the time): "l'Etat ne peut pas tout." On the contrary, however, the frustration of citizens over their inability to use the channels of established parties for changing the state seems to be resulting in a search for alternative channels. The Front National seems to be reaping the harvest of this frustration. Perhaps, as Stanley Hoffmann argued about the Poujadists, the support for the Front National does not mean some whole-hearted popular adherence to the FN's ideology—itsself a shifting and unstable

¹⁷ Thomas Wieder, "Les Français s'enfoncent dans la 'dépression collective,'" <http://www.lemonde.fr/journalelectronique/donnees/protégé/20130114/html/946498.html>. The "barometer de la confiance politique" was a study conducted for the Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po (CEVIPOF) and the Conseil économique, social, et environnemental. The survey was conducted 25 novembre-12 décembre 2013.

¹⁸ Philippe Escande, "Relance de la croissance: les Français ne comptent plus sur l'Etat," *Le Monde*.fr. 11.12.2013.

mix of old and new elements.¹⁹ As Hoffmann presciently suggested in the 1950s, the support for the populists might evaporate if the political system were reformed and institutions of representation functioned better to channel the interests of the angry citizens. In 1958, the Poujadists did disappear in the new Fifth Republic. What would it take in France to defeat populism in 2017? For an American political scientist still astonished and baffled by Trump's populist victory, the crystal ball of prediction looks very cloudy.

Suzanne Berger, December 11, 2016

¹⁹ Grégoire Kauffmann, *Le Nouveau FN* (Paris: La République des idées, Seuil, 2016).

