The Leverhulme Trust

OUTLINE APPLICATION FORM - Research Project Grant

Applicant: Dr [redacted]  ID/Ref: [redacted]

Project Title: Exploring Left-Wing Populism in an Age of Anti-Politics

Submission Date: 28/11/2014
Total Requested: 141,484

General Details
Title: Dr
Gender: Male
First Name(s): [redacted]
Date of Birth: [redacted]
Surname: [redacted]

Contact Details
Department: Politics and International Studies
Institution: University of Leeds
Address: Leeds, LS2 9JT
Leeds
United Kingdom (England)
LS2 9JT
Telephone Number: [redacted]
Email: [redacted]

How is your post currently funded?
directly by the University of Leeds

Date appointed to current post? 19/09/2010

Proposal
Long Title: Exploring Left-Wing Populism in an Age of Anti-Politics
Short Title: Left-Wing Populism and Anti-Politics
Main/sub field of study: Politics, Sociology

Start Date: 01/09/2015
Duration: 24
Total time to be spent on the project by Principal Applicant (Hours per week): 12.4

Abstract
Left-wing populism is a significant trend in European politics, yet it is largely overlooked in academic studies of populism. Against this backdrop, the project has two aims. First, we seek to carry-out an in-depth empirical investigation of left-wing populism in contemporary Britain in two domains: (1) left political parties (the Greens and Left Unity) and (2) left-wing public debate (reflected in left magazines and social media and reinforced by left-wing media personalities e.g. Owen Jones). Second, we aim to critically interrogate the politics of left-wing populism by mapping the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that shape and sustain it.

Why the Leverhulme Trust
This project fits closely with Leverhulme's general mandate. It is highly ambitious insofar as it builds on previous work by the PI and Co-I, but will take them into a new, fascinating and, as of yet, under-researched field of inquiry, i.e., the theory and practice of left-wing populism. It will do so by expanding the type of skills and knowledge within...
the research team – the requested research assistant will be an expert in party and electoral politics – and by requiring the PI (a political theorist) and Co-I (a social movement scholar) to engage with a body of scholarship that cuts across several disciplines including sociology, cultural studies, political theory, gender studies and political science. Indeed, one of the theoretical aims of the project is to bring very different disciplinary understandings of populism into conversation with each other and to assess them in light of empirical research. Moreover, the project will analyse a variant of populism that has, thus far, only received sustained academic attention in the context of Latin America. Apart from the excellent work of March (2007, 2012) and Stavrakakis (2013), ‘left populism’ has not been studied in a systematic or comprehensive way in Europe, in general, or Britain, in particular. We are confident that this project, focusing on one national case study of left populism, will generate the innovative theoretical and methodological foundations necessary for future comparative and cross-national research.

Other Research Commitments

The PI and Co-I are completing a project entitled ‘Gendering Protest’ (funded by the BA/Leverhulme Small Grants scheme), which ends on 31/12/14. The PI is currently named as a Co-I (0.1 FTE) on an AHRC research bid on moral and political disaffection (outcome pending), but has no other research commitments.
Summary

Context/Rationale:

It has been widely argued that we are witnessing an unprecedented upsurge of populist forms of political rhetoric and mobilisation across Europe (Brett, 2013; Stavrakakis, 2013). Populism in Europe has grown in the context of the ongoing economic crisis since 2007, a growing mistrust of representative democracy (Painter 2014, Moffitt and Tormey 2014) and a widespread "anti-politics" sensibility among European electorates (Hay, 2007; Flinders, 2012). Often perceived as a threat to political, economic and social stability, populism tends to be treated as a pathological phenomenon, largely due to its associations with xenophobic far-right politics (Economist, 2014; Fieschi, 2013). For example, Counterpoint, a London based research consultancy, identifies populism as the ‘top global risk’ for 2014 (Counterpoint, 2014).

While not wanting to dismiss concerns about right wing populism, we want to draw attention to the recent emergence of distinctively left-wing populist politics in Britain and across Europe. For instance, Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain are now serious political contenders for electoral power. Closer to home, ‘left-wing populism’ is becoming increasingly prominent in British political commentary and debate: Commentator Owen Jones recently called for a ‘left-wing populism to counter UKIP’ (Jones, 2014); the new political party Left Unity has sought to establish links with and present itself as the UK equivalent of Podemos and Syriza (Left Unity, 2014), the Green Party’s recent membership surge has been attributed to an embrace of left-wing populism (Economist, 2014); and recent pronouncements from figures as diverse as Ed Miliband and Russell Brand have been cited as evidence of a burgeoning left-wing populism in Britain (Freedland, 2013; Scullion, 2013).

Despite this, academics have yet to pay much attention to left-wing populism as a distinct phenomenon from its right-wing counterpart, and to the extent that they have, their focus has been on Latin America (Collins 2014; Mudd and Kaltwasser 2013; Cameron 2009). The exception to this trend is the excellent, but still preliminary work of Luke March (2007), Giorgos Katsambekis and Yannis Stavrakakis (2013) and Jeremy Gilbert (2014) who have all identified the need to disaggregate the discrete features of left populism.

Our proposed study seeks to contribute to this effort to understand left populism as a sui generis form of politics, by mapping its constituent elements and interrogating dynamics of inclusion/exclusion in relation to race and gender. To this end, we propose to study two political parties in Britain that have been characterised as instances of left-wing populism. The first is Left Unity, a new party founded in 2013 by Ken Loach and other left activists who want to offer a left alternative to mainstream British politics by ‘doing politics differently’. The second is the Green Party, whose membership is now flourishing (with a 28% increase this year) and which has been described by sceptics as ‘a UKIP of the left’ (Economist, 2014) and by its supporters as not populist enough (Pele, 2014). Furthermore, we shall explore left-wing populism within left public debate, inspired in part by the British cultural studies tradition’s emphasis on media and culture as key sites of power and contestation (Hall 1981). This will include social media such as twitter and facebook, left of centre printed and online magazines such as New Statesman and Open Democracy, and the discourses and actions of several left-wing media personalities including comedian and activist Russell Brand, writer Laurie Penny and Guardian writer Owen Jones, all of whom have self-consciously set themselves the task of ‘popularising’ left-wing ideas.

Aims:

The project will pursue four general lines of inquiry and, within each, ask the following questions:

Mapping Left Wing-Populism: What does British left-wing populism look and sound like? In other words, who are the key actors; what are they saying and doing; how are they saying and doing it? And in what ways do identity markers such as gender, race, class and sexuality constitute left-wing populism?

Comparing Left-Wing Populisms: What are the similarities and/or differences in these diverse enactments of left-wing populism and how do they differ from those of the ‘non-populist’ left in Britain?
Critically Assessing Left-wing Populism: What forms of inclusion/exclusion shape left-wing populism? What are the progressive/transformative possibilities of this variant of populism?

Conceptualising Left-Wing Populism: Definitions of populism are manifold seeing it as a ‘political logic’ (Laclau 2005), a ‘political style’ (Moffitt and Torney 2014), a type of ‘mobilisation’ (Jansen 2011) and as a ‘thin ideology’ (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012). Whilst instructive, none of these definitions specify the differences between right and left variants of populism. What would a more multivalent conceptualization of populism look like? What additional conceptual resources do we need to capture the gendered and racialized politics of populism?

Methodology

We will adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to our study drawing on feminist methodology, cultural and political theory, and political science to inform our choice of methods:

- Participant observation at party conferences, political and cultural events such as public debates, mass demonstrations and cultural occasions such as the Edinburgh festival of politics.
- Collection, coding and discourse analysis of a broad range of written texts including books, party manifestos, and online and offline media.
- Semi-structured interviews with individual party activists and leaders and media personalities.
- Surveys of party activists, aimed at ascertaining their self-understandings of the left in the UK and of the particular party to which they belong.

Outputs:

At least 5 articles in peer-reviewed academic journals. This will include one article on conceptualisations of populism; one on gender/race and left-populism (both co-authored by PI and Co-I); and three others on mapping and comparing the institutional forms of left-wing populism (co-authored with PI as lead).

A monograph on left-wing populism co-authored by PI, Co-I and RA.

A dataset on perceptions of left-wing populism among party activists, compiled by the RA.

At least four comment pieces for websites such as Open Democracy and The Conversation.

A twitter feed to disseminate findings.

Presentations at three academic conferences.

A three day workshop on left-wing populism in Leeds University, summer 2017 (funding to be sought from University of Leeds).

References

Brett, William (2013). ‘What’s an Elite to Do? The Threat of Populism from Left, Right and Centre’. The Political Quarterly 84 (3): 410-413.


Publication 1

'Radicalism Restored? Communism and the end of left melancholia' Contemporary Political Theory, 2014, advance online publication.

Publication 2


Publication 3


Publication 4


Publications by other authors in the selected subject area

Leverhulme Research Project Grant Outline Application Form


Populism is also being studied in earnest by policy think tanks. See, for example, Anthony Painter. (2013) Democratic stress, the populist signal and extremist threat: A call for mainstream statecraft and contact democracy, A Policy Report published by Policy Network, London.

Publications by other authors in the selected subject area 2


Referees

Referee 1
- Professor Yannis Stavrakakis
- Department: Institution: School of Political Sciences: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
- Position: Professor of Political Sciences
- Email:

Referee 2
- Dr Luke March
- Department: Institution: School of Politics and International Relations: University of Edinburgh
- Position: Senior Lecturer in Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics
- Email:

Previous and Current Applications

Previous / current application to The Leverhulme Trust
- Title: Tales of Resistance
- Date: 25/10/2012
- Ref Num:
- Status: Rejected

Previous / current application to other funding bodies
- Title: [Redacted]
- Date: 19/03/2013
- Funding Body: British Academy/Leverhulme Small Grant Scheme
- Status: Awarded
- Reason For Rejection (If Known):

Salary Budget

Staff Type: Research assistant
Percentage Of Time Spent On The Project: 100%

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### Staff Type: Replacement teaching

**Percentage Of Time Spent By This Applicant On The Project:** 33

**Percentage Of Replacement Teaching Requested Over The Total Grant Period:** 17

**Applicant:** (Lead Applicant) Dr. [Redacted]

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**Applicant:** (Co Applicant) Dr. [Redacted]

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### Associated Costs

**Accommodation**

- £[Redacted] Y1 & Y2 - Fieldwork (including interviews - London & TBC (UK) - total of 6 trips per annum of 2 nights (RA))
- £[Redacted] Y1 & Y2 - Political/Cultural Events (such as public lectures, panel discussions, demonstrations) x12 TBC (UK) - total of 6 trips per annum of 1 nights (PI/Col/RA)
- £[Redacted] Y1 - Team Meeting @ Leeds - total of 2 trips for 2 nights (Col)
- £[Redacted] Y1 - Left Unity Conference TBC (UK) - 1 trip for 2 nights (PI/Col/RA)
| (PI/Col/RA) | £60 Y1 - Green Party Conference Fee | £20 Y2 - Left Unity Conference Fee (RA) |
| (PI/Col/RA) | £600 Y2 - Mansept Workshops in Political Theory - Fee (PI/Col/RA) | £300 Y2 - PSA Annual Conference Fee (RA) |
| (PI/Col/RA) | £20 Y2 - FAWSA Conference Fee (PI/Col/RA) | £300 Y2 - FWSA Conference Fee (PI/Col/RA) |
| Other Research Expenses | £50 Y1 & Y2 - Political Events x12 TBC (UK) - total of 5 ticket charges per annum at £10 each (PI/Col/RA) | £100 Y1 - Digital Recorder x1 for interviews |
| Other Research Expenses | £500 Y1 - Books for research and annotation | £50 Y1 - SD Card 32GB x2 @ £20 each for data storage |
| Other Research Expenses | £100 Y1 - Guardian Subscription (1 copy) for Research @ £9.99 per week | £65 Y1 & Y2 - New Statesmen Subscription (2 copies - one Exeter, one Leeds) |
| Other Research Expenses | £30 Y1 & Y2 - Red Pepper Subscription (2 copies - one Exeter, one Leeds) | £29 Y1 & Y2 - Prospect Subscription (2 copies - one Exeter, one Leeds) |
| Computing | £800 Y1 - Laptop for RA to allow him/her to work remotely whilst on fieldwork and at interviews. | £0 |
| Transcription | £2,400 Y1 & Y2 - Transcription of interviews - 80 x 1 hour interviews at £30 per interview, using STEP Transcription, who PI and co-I have used for current BA/Leverhulme small grant-funded project. | £0 |
| Total | | £0 |
## Budget Summary

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Grand Total

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### Institutional Approver

I confirm on behalf of the Principal Applicant's institution that:

- we agree with the budget as laid out in this application;
- we have fully read and approve of this application and
- we understand that agreement to the Trust's terms and conditions will be requested following the offer of a grant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Helen Wells</th>
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<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Faculty Research Manager (Education, Social Sciences &amp; Law)</td>
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<tr>
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<td><a href="mailto:H.D.Wells@leeds.ac.uk">H.D.Wells@leeds.ac.uk</a></td>
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