
UNIT 8 POPULIST MOVEMENTS AND REGIMES

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8.1 INTRODUCTION

Populism remains a central theme in the scholarly study and understanding of the processes of social change, economic development and political participation in Latin America. In fact, one may even argue that the entire spectrum of Latin American politics, developmental strategies and societal change since the 1930s can be usefully studied in reference to one single theme, viz. populism. It should also be borne in mind that no other theme in contemporary Latin America has generated as much controversy about its origin, character and contribution as populism.

There are several perspectives and approaches to studying populism. Generally, the historians and political scientists use the term populism to describe the regimes and movements that arose in the 1940s. The period of the so-called 'classical' populism lasted until the 1960s when armed forces overthrew populist democratic governments in several countries. There is another view, which is also shared among political scientists. Many regimes—both civilian and military—that arose in the 1970s and 1980s are also described as populist. The social character of these regimes, their economic policies, and their mobilisation of the popular forces were in many respects identical to those of the populist regimes of the 1940s. Yet another view is what we call developmental view of populism. Analysts, taking a long-range view of the conditions and consequences of economic under-development and dependence, have described populism as a specific response to the conditions of the 'delayed' and 'dependent' capitalist development in Latin America from the 1930s to the 1960s. There is another perspective as well. Some economists associate populism with the demand-driven, deficit-financed economic growth policies. For them, any such economic policy is populist and therefore the regimes that follow them are described as populist.

8.2 POPULIST MOVEMENTS AND REGIMES

At the outset, it may be stated that populist movements and regimes constituted events of historical importance at altering the political, economic and social *status quo* in Latin America. Populism pertains, more or less, to the period from the 1930s to 1960s when new urban social classes importantly the middle and the working classes rose seeking greater political participation and a development strategy based on industrialisation and redistribution. Populist movements and regimes, however, were very diverse in their social composition; the route they took to gain

political power was very different; and their behaviour, when in power, was dissimilar that there remains to this day a debate as to the character, purposes, and accomplishments of populist movements and regimes. Besides, those populist movements that could not accede to power evolved in altogether different fashions from those that ascended to power. Although populist movements and regimes were witnessed in several Latin American countries, in this unit, we will be focusing on these regimes in Argentina under Juan Domingo Peron (1946-55), Brazil under Getulio Vargas (1951-54), and Mexico during the presidency of Lazaro Cardenas (1934-40).

8.2.1 Peron of Argentina and Vargas of Brazil

Few leaders of 20th Century have dominated their countries' politics to the extent of Juan Domingo Peron of Argentina and Getulio Vargas of Brazil. In a nutshell, they both changed the politics of their countries from being conservative and elitist, dominated by the landowners and exporters of primary products—generally described as oligarchy—to the one that became 'mass-based' under the leadership of the urban middle class elements. They sought to mobilise the 'masses'—as against the 'classes'—under a 'nationalist' banner so as to oust from power the so-called 'anti-national' export-oriented oligarchy. They both considered politics essential to gain access to power. Their preferred route to power—and the preferred route of most populists—was electoral (only some populist movements have taken recourse to the revolutionary path). They sought popular participation, and under their regimes, the size of the electorate expanded sizeably, though not enough so as to become universal. More important, they changed the economic development strategy from the primary product export to inward-looking Import Substitution Industrialisation (ISI).

- a) Peron governed Argentina between 1946 and 1955 and again briefly from October 1973 until his death in July 1974. Peron's rise to power is the story of the political rise and organisation of the urban middle and working classes, and their entry into the Argentine politics. Peron had been a member of the military junta that had come to power in the wake of 1943 coup that had deposed the conservative regime representing the interests of large landowners and exporters of grain and other pastoral products of Argentina. As minister of labour, he foresaw the political importance of organised labour and went on to win the presidency in 1946 with the support of the unionised working class and other urban social forces importantly the so-called 'urban poor', the salaried section of the urban middle class, the nascent class of national industrialists, and importantly the 'progressive' sections of the military. It was a loose alliance of heterogeneous forces that was kept together for ten years by the policies, rhetoric and the personal charisma of Peron.

Certainly, there was more to Peronism than Peron. The following characteristics of his regime are noteworthy: (i) Important for an understanding of Peronism is the nature of Peron's leadership. A highly charismatic leader, Peron combined elements of authoritarianism to give rise to what came to be called Peronism. Though the working class, the urban poor and other supporters, had been organised under the banner of Justicialist party (more commonly described as the *Peronista* party), remained essentially personal followers of the charismatic leader. Peron in power was like a patron who dispensed goods and services in a personalist manner in return for the fealty of his clientelistic supporters. The personalist authoritarian leadership of Peron would brook no opposition. His style of functioning greatly weakened the existing political institutions and structures of government.

- ii) Populism in Argentina was an urban phenomenon. The social change was evident more in the way different social classes aligned with Peron and benefitted from his economic development policies. The fast expanding urban working and middle classes were also the principal beneficiaries of the economic distributive policies including higher wages and salaries and social welfare schemes. Politically more important, however, was Peron's support base among the urban poor—the so-called 'shirtless' (*descamisados*)—who were mostly recent migrants suffering alienation and who lived in urban slums.
- iii) In the end, the main thrust and the chief beneficiary of the economic development strategy remained the small domestic industrialist class, thanks to the economic incentives and protectionist policies of the state. A significant goal of Peronist regime was the creation of a modern industrial welfare state. Peron used the state machinery to weaken the economic and political hold of the conservative classes. His government encouraged domestic manufacturing activity and towards that end, the regime also formulated policies of transferring resources from the agricultural export sector to the industrial sector. Foreign investors, mainly British, had been a key ally of the conservative forces. Peron also moved against many foreign investors expropriating their properties.

Peron's regime is generally considered the prototype of Latin American populism. Yet it combined many diverse forces and conflicting elements; and it is said that his policies so often reflected the specific circumstances of Argentina in the 1940s.

- b) Getulio Vargas had been the president of Brazil for thirteen years (1930-1943) before he began to build a populist coalition that brought him once again to the presidency in 1950. Until 1930, Brazilian politics had followed a pattern—which was affected after the end of monarchy in 1889—reflecting the interests of powerful regions and influential politicians at the national level. Vargas—a representative of the regional interests of the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul and influential urban politicians at the national level—had emerged as the dominant figure after he had successfully led an insurrection following his defeat in the fraudulent presidential elections in 1930. For the next thirteen years, he dominated the national politics by playing according to the rules and norms of Brazilian politics—constant alignment and realignment of various regional and economic interests and powerful urban politicians but all the time strengthening the hold of a centralised federal state with the support of the armed forces. He manipulated a constituent assembly in 1934 to continue in the presidency, and drew on the support of the military to secure another term in 1938. In 1938, he established, what came to be known as, *estado novo* (new state)—a centralised state apparatus that was designed to incorporate and subordinate the major economic classes and interests to state control. Unlike Peron, Vargas never challenged the power of the landowners and coffee planters. Yet, he, more than Peron, led Brazil into the industrial era by promoting the interests of the industrial entrepreneurs, secured the cooperation of urban workers by extending state patronage and expanded the hold of *estado novo* over the economy and society. Vargas was remarkably successful in combining two political traditions: the 19th Century political tradition of paternalistic central rule which had evolved during the rule of emperor Dom Pedro II between 1841 and 1889; and secondly, by reinforcing the dependence of private economic groups over the state largesse. He revived the central authority of a paternalistic state, which had weakened by the rising regionalism during the period of 1889-1930, by transforming the presidency and national bureaucracy into powerful

instruments of industrial economic development. He encouraged the organisation and expansion of both the urban working class and the industrialists but always on his terms and reinforced their dependence on state. A military coup in 1945 brought an end to *estado novo*. Long before that, however, Vargas himself had lost interest in the political project. Whatever might have been the other reasons, the politician in Vargas had realised early the importance of the growing working class movement in Brazil. He had understood the pattern of social change and the fact that Brazilian politics though would remain, as it had always been, elite-based and manipulative but henceforth, any claim to political power would be settled through mass support and working class mobilisation.

When Vargas re-entered the electoral arena in 1950, he had turned populist in order to garner and mobilise the working class and other urban elements to become, once again, the president. The populist coalition, he built, consisted of, besides the labour, his traditional supporters comprising of old style politicians, bureaucrats and urban salaried middle class, industrialists and landowners, and sections of the armed forces.

To recapitulate, the regimes created by Peron and Vargas had several things in common: (i) The resources and rules they used to gain power were also used to retain power. They kept the working class and other urban supporters mobilised but, at the same time, retained their hold over these classes. They used their popularity to intimidate their political adversaries. (ii) A singular consequence of populist rule was the broadening of the electorate. In this restricted sense, one may even claim that populism had a democratising effect. (iii) Both had large multi-class, urban constituencies to support their political programmes. (iv) Populists also drew on their personal popularity to augment their power base. At least in the case of Argentina, Peron's charisma—and that of his wife, Evita—was an important factor in his emergence as a populist authoritarian ruler. (v) Both had also succeeded in establishing patron-client relationship under modernising conditions. Critics have pointed out the *status quoist* aspects of the regimes. Populism not only foreclosed the chances of revolutionary transformation but also emerged as an effective mode of social control at a crucial time when societies were changing from being under oligarchic domination to becoming mass societies. (vi) The experience of the two countries also differed as far as the political parties were concerned. Peron used his hold over the General Confederation of Labour (CGT)—an umbrella organisation of the leading labour unions whose formation Peron himself had encouraged—and his other supporters to organise the *Peronista* party. In contrast, Vargas encouraged the formation of modern political parties on the eve of the 1945 elections. Vargas created the Brazilian Labour Party to organise, mobilise and thereby also control his urban working class supporters. (vii) In the 1946 elections, Peron had defeated the coalition of Conservatives and the Radicals. In power, he attacked the landowners, bankers and merchants, and the agro-exporter elite and the foreign investors and greatly indulged in nationalist, anti-imperialist rhetoric. On the other hand, Vargas had employed the traditional methods of patronage, co-optation and coercion to remain in power.

By early 1950s, both regimes were beset by serious budgetary deficits and balance of payments crisis, which necessitated the imposition of unpopular austerity measures. This greatly strained the populist coalitions in both the countries. Amidst rising political conflicts and social tension, the military staged a coup in 1955 and sent Peron into exile. By the early 1950s, Brazilian economy had also entered a period of crisis which antagonised Vargas' popular supporters particularly government employees and labour. Junior military officers also had become highly

critical of the politics of patronage and the corruption within the government. Foreign investors were apprehensive as Vargas' rhetoric became stridently nationalist. Faced with wide-spread opposition and feeling besieged, Vargas shot himself on 24 August 1954.

The impact of populism has lasted much longer than the regimes of Peron and Vargas. To some extent, it broadened the political process. Many more sections of the society were enfranchised. Urban working and middle classes became crucial actors in national politics. However, populism had a demobilising effect on these classes as they were incorporated in state policies and structures and thus lost their political autonomy of action. Thus populism entrenched corporatism and authoritarianism in the national political processes of the two countries. On the positive side, analysts admit that the main contribution of populism lay more in what it destroyed viz., breaking down the economic and political hold of the conservative oligarchy. Populism was an urban phenomenon. It was a heterogeneous coalition of the urban 'have-nots', which had sought to break the monopoly of the oligarchy. It also initiated a larger and broader role of the state in the economic development of the country and distribution of the resources—aspects which nevertheless remain somewhat controversial, even to this day. Populist regimes expanded the role of the state in the economic development strategy. Besides, the development strategy fostered the growth of domestic business and industry. Under populist rule, two specific factors viz., the central role of the state in the economic development strategy and its role as provider of social service and distribution saw the expansion of public sector. Since state had become a huge public employer, in the process, populist regimes also added an important new player to the political game in the form of thousands of public employees who would use their power and position in state machinery to promote and protect their interests.

8.2.2 Lazaro Cardenas and the Agrarian Populism in Mexico

The complex phenomenon of populism and its diverse manifestations are borne out further by the populist experiment in Mexico. Populism had its genesis in the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20. 'Land and Liberty' was the slogan of the peasant-based movements led by Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa. However, the popular movements lost during the phase of active warfare. The middle class leadership heading the moderate Constitutionalist movement had emerged victorious. In fact, it was the unionised labour consisting of miners and other urban workers who had played a decisive role in the defeat of the more radical peasant-based movements of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa. Be that as it may, the agrarian dimension of the Revolution could not be negated or ignored. A progressive document of its times, the Mexican Constitution of 1917 provided for land reform and recognised various labour rights. With large landholdings including foreign-owned having been destroyed and the hold of Church over land and the religion having been swept away during the Revolution, Mexico had the potential of turning towards radical social change. Millions of impoverished and dissatisfied peasants demanding right to land including the restoration of the pre-Columbian system of 'communal farms' were still under arms and mobilised in the 1930s. Land had been distributed intermittently and on small scale since the promulgation of the Constitution but it was left to Lazaro Cardenas (1934-40) to consummate the agrarian dimension of the Revolution. He launched one of the most extensive land distribution programmes in Latin America distributing some 44 million acres of land to the landless *campesinos*; it included mostly creation of 'communal farms' (*ejidos*). Every government in Mexico, until the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-94), had to willy-nilly swear by the Revolutionary commitment to land distribution. In sum, populism in Mexico had a strong agrarian dimension,

and it remained so well into the early 1990s. President Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-76) attempted to disinter the legacy of Lázaro Cárdenas in what has been described as a case of delayed populism. Very much like Cárdenas, he exhorted the labour to organise, settled strikes in favour of labour, rant against the over-powering presence of multinational corporations, openly criticised the excessive influence of the US over the Mexican economy, protested against the growing concentration of land and *caciquismo* (bossism) in rural Mexico and launched another major programme of land distribution and agricultural modernisation besides raising the number of public sector enterprises and raising levels of subsidies for the urban population.

A second important dimension of populism in Mexico is its success in instituting the corporatist control mechanism under the Institutional Revolutionary Party. To channelise and control the peasantry, labour and other sections of the society that were still highly mobilised and were being organised by various radical parties and leaders, Cárdenas had reorganised the ruling National Revolutionary Party (PNR) in 1938 on corporatist lines. He renamed the party as the Mexican Revolutionary Party (PRM) and reorganised it into four sectors—the Peasant Sector, the Labour Sector, the Military Sector, and the ‘catch-all’ Popular Sector. Prominent labour unions such as those of petroleum workers, railroad workers and others were brought under a national-level umbrella Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM). Many others remained outside the CTM. All such unions and workers federations were then incorporated into the Labour Sector of the PRM. Through federal legislations and political manoeuvring, issues such as the legal recognition of unions, their membership and leadership and finances all came to be controlled and decided by the ruling party. The labour ‘bosses’—part of the ruling establishment or the ‘Revolutionary Coalition’, as it came to be described—mobilised and demobilised the rank and file to sub-serve the governmental needs and policies. A similar situation obtained in the Peasant Sector where nearly all the peasant leagues and formations were brought under state control with the help of the peasant leaders who were often chosen and sent by the national political leadership. Unions of urban salaried classes such as the teachers’ unions and government employees, women’s groups, youth organisations and organisations representing the indigenous communities were brought under the ‘catch-all’ Popular Sector. To bring the political role of the military out in the open and to give it political representation, Cárdenas had also created the Military Sector, which, however, was abolished in 1940.

The institution of corporatist mechanisms of political representation and control endowed Mexico its proverbial political stability; and PRI remained the ruling party until its defeat in the presidential election in 2000. Apart from the ruling party, which had been re-christened as the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in 1946, corporatist mechanisms of representation and control were also instituted for the domestic business when separate chambers were set up for the business and the industry. Thus with both capital and labour arraigned behind and under the leadership of the state, succeeding governments pursued the ISI strategy of development without any hindrance. With state pursuing the industrialisation strategy, a controlled labour and peasantry were made to comply with even the most unpopular economic policies. A mix of cooptation and coercion made these classes barter their political autonomy for specific privileges. To be noted here once again is the fact that corporatism, even in the successful case of Mexico, was partial and limited only to the significant sections of the labour, peasantry and the middle classes.

8.3 POPULISM AND THE CRISIS OF ‘DELAYED’ AND

'DEPENDENT' DEVELOPMENT

The developmental perspective emphasises upon the specific levels of economic development and the international context of capitalism impinging on particular Latin American countries, and the region as a whole, since the 1930s to explain the economic development strategies of populist regimes and their propensities for authoritarian corporatism. Historically, Latin American economic development process has been characterised by its 'lateness'; and secondly by its 'dependence' on the industrialised economies for export of its primary products and import of capital, technology and finished goods. The critical point for an understanding of populism is that it arose in a specific period as a mode of organising developmental process in Latin American countries that were at some specific levels of 'delayed' and 'dependent' capitalist development.

Under the developmental perspective, it has been argued that the 'first crisis' of 'delayed and dependent' capitalist development in Latin America occurred in the 1930s and that populism was a general regional response to the crisis. For almost half a century, beginning around 1870s, Latin American economies had experienced a long period of boom based on the exports of primary products. It was the stimuli emanating from the industrialised capitalist states of Western Europe and the United States that had led to export boom. While experiencing boom, Latin American economies had also become even more deeply integrated with and dependent on the international capitalist economy for markets, capital, technology and goods.

Such an 'outward-oriented' economic development model had numerous effects on the Latin American economies, politics and societies: (i) There was more emphasis on the development of export sector at the expense of the domestic needs. National economies had become increasingly dependent over international market, over which they had little or no control. Major decisions relating to the production of primary resources and their pricing were all determined by the 'demand' in the industrialised economies. Foreign investors also decided matters relating to the introduction of new technologies or otherwise in the export sector of the economy. (ii) The expansion and modernisation of export oriented sectors contrasted with the backwardness of the sectors producing for domestic needs. It created extreme imbalance; so much so the economies developed 'structural dualism'. (iii) The 'deepening' of the dependence on more advanced industrialised economies had also produced some very complex societal patterns. More notable was the expansion of urban middle class. It was a class mainly of liberal professionals and public and private white-collar employees who lived off wages, salaries and fees but did not control any hard source of wealth. A sizeable group depended on public employment. It was a case of 'premature bureaucratisation', that is formal governmental apparatus had expanded much faster than the underlying socio-economic structures. It would be this dependent urban middle class that would become a critical political actor from the 1930s and the human base that spawned populism. (iv) 'Delayed and dependent' development significantly also affected the position of formal governmental structures or 'the state'. By the late 1920s, most Latin American state structures were weak and characterised by low level of autonomy vis-à-vis the domestic oligarchy and its foreign collaborator viz., the foreign investors. The expanding, consumption-oriented new middle class would further press the structures of the state with their demands so as to make it weaker and more dependent. It is therefore to be noted that from the 1930s onwards, a critical political issue in Latin America would be the power, effectiveness and autonomy of the various structures of the state.

The world-wide economic depression of the 1930s brought an end to the outward oriented economic model. In other words, with the particular phase of 'delayed and dependent' development having come to an end, the 'crisis' of the development model expressed itself throughout the region in the economic and political weakening of the oligarchic rule. There were tremendous internal economic, social and political dislocations; in other words, there was a hegemonic crisis in all the Latin American countries. Large sectors of the middle class were unaffected from the oligarchic system, and began agitating for political and economic changes. In the ensuing region-wide rethinking, there was a significant rise in the nationalist sentiments which found expression in the general desire for autonomous national development. Thus nationalism and developmentalism became, and were to remain, dominant ideological themes throughout the region from the 1930s. Populism was the political expression of the sentiments of nationalism and developmentalism.

Though populism, as a concept remains broad and somewhat amorphous, there was sufficient similarity in terms of group composition in all the populist movements and enough thematic consistency behind their programmes to justify considering them as *of a piece*. The unaffected middle class—given its size and consumption culture—could not independently carry out the basic structural transformations. It had to seek allies in other social strata importantly the urban working class, military and in some countries even the peasantry. Populism became the guise within which change-oriented segments of the middle class sought to construct multi-class coalitions, powerful enough to gain control of the state and underwrite programmes of structural change. Populism in Latin America was and remained largely the ideological product of the highly bureaucratised and largely dependent middle classes whose previously secure position had been threatened by the multiple effects of the 'exhaustion' of the export-oriented growth model.

Populist movements varied widely from the highly personalised style of Peron and Vargas who had constructed the movements when in power in Mexico where populist elements dating back to the Revolution were coalesced into the ruling party by the Cardenas. Elsewhere, for instance, the more organised movements such as the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) in Peru and National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) in Bolivia constructed organisations and ideologies as a means to assault the entrenched oligarchies, promote national economic ownership, continental solidarity, and projected the indigenous past and integrate the indigenous communities. Whatever may be the variations of these movements and regimes, populism, in a powerful way, set the political debate in the period from the 1930s; and in one manner or another, all political forces from the left to the right had been forced to structure their behaviour in response to the populist challenge well into the 1980s.

Notwithstanding its rhetoric and self-designation, populism had, however, never been revolutionary. It never advocated a radical break from the past and a total overhaul of the existing economic and social structures. In both theory and practice, it was a reformist attempt at limited structural change aimed at adapting to the new exigencies while maintaining basic continuity with the past patterns of elite political domination and skewed income distribution. The political principles of populism proceeded from diagnosing the economic and social ills of Latin America; and, in important respects, populist diagnoses had anticipated the many theoretical formulations of Raul Prebisch and the UN Economic Commission of Latin America (ECLA) and, later on, of the 'dependency school'. For the populists, the central problems of Latin America were economic underdevelopment and deformed economic structures. A central dilemma was the lack of internal 'integration' owing to the economic dualism. In Peru and Bolivia, populists also stressed upon

the geographical and ethnic-cultural divisions that were reinforced by economic dualism.

For the populists, the problem was not a simple one of one class exploiting another class. What had made Latin America under-developed was the exploitation of the 'nation' by the 'anti-nation'. The 'nation' was made up of all the groups other than the oligarchy (at the minimum, it comprised of the middle class, workers, and the peasantry) who shared some common interests. The task, therefore, was not to form a class-based party but a broad multi-class movement of 'national' forces to unseat the 'anti-national' oligarchy and install a leadership that would represent the entire 'nation'. The chief declared goals of the populists were to assert national economic independence and anti-imperialism; to break local semi-feudal structures so as to liberate human and material resources for economic development, and to promote social justice for all sectors of the nation. The central agency charged with achieving these goals was the state. The central themes for the populists were state, nation, development and social justice. The task of the multi-class coalition was to seize the state and use it to promote development and distribution. Populism in that sense was 'statist'.

Populism condemned capitalism and imperialism; but it did not stand for socialism. In fact, the entire orientation of populist ideologies and programmes was anti-socialist. Invariably, populists ousted socialists and others from the leadership position in labour unions and peasant associations etc. Populists like Peron talked of 'neither capitalism, nor socialism' and advocated a third path of development, which he called *justicialismo*. What the populists had intended was to reform and regulate the internal and external structures so as to achieve gradually a controlled but autonomous economic development under the aegis of the state. In a sense, populists advocated some kind of a 'state capitalism' or a 'reformed' capitalism. Later on the writings of Raul Prebisch and ECLA further underwrote the imperatives of import substitution industrialisation and lent an ideological credibility to populist development strategies. Populism had stood for 'integral' development so as to achieve the maximum socio-political harmony. They rejected the Marxist notion of class struggle as well as the ideas of 'economies of scale'. They rather had an organic view of the society and assumed a community of interests among all groups and sections of the nation. They advocated the need for a society that would foster interdependence and cooperation among its various sections and regions.

The influence of populism was deep and wide. Countries where populists did not come to power also responded in their own ways to the populist ideas and programmes. In the 1940s, most countries either wrote new constitutions or amended old ones to reflect many populist ideas, which included labour rights, social welfare measures, land reform and national ownership of resources, etc. These ideas were so widespread that one could argue that there had developed, particularly among the middle classes of Latin America, a general consensus around the image of reforms proffered by the populists. The main challenge was how to put these reformist ideas into practice. In fact, Latin American politics since the 1930s and well into the 1980s can be interpreted in part as a struggle to realise the reformist image of populism. Cuban revolution of 1959 was in its initial stages, also very much in the reformist mould of populism. However its 'radicalisation' into Marxian socialism by 1962 dramatically put forth the radical potential of populism. In Argentina, many *Peronista* labour groups moved left-ward after Peron's ouster. APRA, facing constant persecution by the armed forces, had also at one time embraced more radical ideas. Be that as it may, the Cuban revolution had added further to the belief, even among the conservative elements, that something resembling populist reforms had to be implemented if the region had to

avoid more radical solutions. Looking back at the theoretical and practical dimensions of populist regimes and movements, it is evident that populism was based on an *implicit* corporatist image of socio-political organisation. Somewhere, it was more clearly delineated as in the case of Mexico; elsewhere, as in the case of Argentina, it could not. It is to be noted that populist corporatism was however '*inclusionary*', compared to the '*exclusionary*' corporatism which, the military regimes, that came to power in the 1960s, would enforce.

Populist doctrine—if one may describe it so—was also founded on the notion that because of economic underdevelopment and structural deformity, class formation in Latin America has been deformed and demented. Masses of workers and peasants themselves were underdeveloped and thus, ill prepared to define either their own interests or those of the nation. Populists saw mass of workers and peasantry as 'human capital' to be freed from semi-feudal fetters; and organised more rationally as a productive force with the help and guidance of the state. In several writings, it was suggested that workers and peasants have to be 'capacitated' (educated) under the leadership of the middle class-oriented elites to play a role in the future. In other words, populism had its own elitist moorings and it could not completely shed the elitist and paternalistic biases of Latin American politics.

Populist policies had led to the increased levels of consumption. The tension between development and consumption in an environment of relative scarcity manifested itself directly in the balance of payments crisis and deficit financing which together fuelled inflation throughout the region from the 1940s onwards. Political mobilisation, concomitant with the rise of nationalism and consumption levels, had other consequences too. By the 1940s, the principles of nationalist-oriented welfare statism had become deeply implanted in the region. Governments fearing loss of legitimacy and popular support often resorted to deficit financing and borrowings to maintain high levels of consumption often with disastrous economic consequences. Inability to sustain high levels of consumption often created tensions within the populist coalitions with supporting classes and groups turning against the regime and the regime in turn resorting to coercion to keep the various supporting classes under state control. No wonder, Latin American regimes, populist and non-populist alike, showed high levels of social tension and political conflicts amidst worsening economic situation throughout the 1950s and the 1960s. These factors brought populist experiments to an untimely and often violent end with armed forces staging coups against civilian regimes. The general increase in popular consumption had tended to outstrip both the rate of growth and the control capacity of public institutions contributing thereby to a general tendency in the direction of praetorian politics. Under populism, the formal apparatuses of the state, though had grown markedly, this was accompanied not by an increase in the power and efficiency of the states but rather by the reverse. National economies were still primary product export dependent in the 1950s; and this largely made the states weak in reality though they had expanded and become formally more powerful. Populist elites also could not keep for long the competing groups and clashing interests at bay. State apparatuses were appropriated by vested interests to sub-serve their particular ends. Such *de facto* parceling out of the state was particularly evident in the politics of social security policy. Thus, instead of an assertion of the autonomous power of the state to regulate its internal and external environment, the period saw not only an increase in the size of the state but also a decrease in autonomy, power, and efficiency of the governmental apparatus. Despite these developments, the pressures generated in the 1930s and 1940s were, to a large extent, contained during the 1950s and 1960s despite rising confrontational politics. This was because established elites continued to incorporate new power contenders into the

political coalitions as long as they did not seek to unseat the established power groups. So, while the number of groups and actors in the political arena increased, it did not mean that the basic rules of the political game had also changed. The ability to include and co-opt new groups and interests was related directly to the availability of resources. So long as resources could be found, new and old groups in the populist coalitions could be satisfied. But there were structural limitations to the availability of resources, which with industrialisation had only accentuated further. By the mid-1960s, a new structural crisis had developed as ISI had reached the stage of 'exhaustion'. Contrary to all earlier expectations, external penetration of local economies had only increased under ISI, with the industrial sector also coming under the control of foreign capital, operating now as multinational corporations. With nationalism and developmentalism having gained wide legitimacy and societies characterised by high levels of political mobilisation, the economic crisis of import substitution strategy only incensed the confrontational politics and the potential of radicalisation. A weak state with many of its parts appropriated by vested interests could not offer a peaceful, negotiated solution to the growing praetorianisation of politics. The failure of populism thus contributed directly to the emergence of repressive military regimes in the 1960s, which shunned both the redistributive and participatory goals of populism. This was the 'second crisis' of the 'delayed and dependent' capitalist development process in Latin America. In confronting this 'second crisis', a large part of Latin America moved away from the 'inclusionary' populist-corporatism to the 'exclusionary' authoritarian-corporatism of the military.

8.4 SUMMARY

Summing up the discussion, one may identify the following important characteristics of populist movements and regimes. Populist coalitions were urban, multi-class, electoral, expansive, 'popular', and led by charismatic figures. Their urban character comes out more strongly in the context of Argentina. The agrarian dimension was very prominent in populist experiment in Mexico. The APRA, led by Victor Raul Haya de la Torre, was also an urban-based and student-organised movement that had emerged in Peru in the 1920s. Haya de la Torre had also linked the goal of social transformation with the retrieval of Indian culture; and the movement had drawn support from both the urban and the rural wage earners.

The term multi-class is often used since populist movements recruited support from all and very diverse levels of society. The movements identified themselves very broadly as movements of the masses, often negating any specific class or ethnic identity. The 'masses' included, besides the urban middle and working classes and some times the peasantry, social elements such as the rural migrants, students and youth, intellectuals and foot soldiers. The political formation of such an amorphous population has also been described as the 'massification' of politics.

Populism in Latin America was usually electoral and encouraged citizen participation in politics. By 1960s, most of the countries that had experienced populist regimes had electorates of between 40 and 50 per cent of the population. In other words, most of the adult urban population had been enfranchised.

Populist movements were expansive since they continuously strove to expand by embracing new groups and causes. It was in the nature of populist movements to politicise and mobilise new groups and sectors of the society in a continuous bid to win and maintain popular allegiance and support for their programmes. It is not beside the point that such continuous expansion often

made it difficult for populist leadership to keep control over the amorphous coalition; besides there were economic limits to fulfilling promises made to diverse social groups and sectors.

One of the enduring legacies of populism was the cultural awareness and national awakening among the masses. Populism moved away from the Europeanised taste of the oligarchic elites and focused on the culture of the 'people' whose importance and role in national life was anyway increasing. Pride in the Indian past and the goal of integrating the nation with the indigenous, i.e. *indigenismo*; pride in the mixed blood, i.e. the *mestizo* whom the Mexican philosopher Jose Vasconcelos described as the 'cosmic race'; intertwining of the Indian, African and European lineages in Brazil as producing a unique 'civilisation in tropics'—all led to a cultural awakening in the region. Certainly, populism alone was not responsible for the rising interest in the 'popular' and the 'national' culture; but populist quest for the 'people' sanctified indigenous and national cultures.

Populist leadership was often charismatic. At least in the case of Argentina, the personal appeal of Peron and of his wife Evita was important in galvanising the masses and spearheading the populist movement. This is true to an extent in Mexico too under Lazaro Cardenas. However, the personalist authoritarian leadership was to some extent responsible for the early demise of populist coalitions.

Scholars have highlighted various aspects of populist experiments. The noted Argentine sociologist Torcuato di Tella has underlined the aspect of class autonomy under populism. Urban working class and, some times, the peasantry were the basis of populist political parties but populist movements were not the result of organisational autonomy of these under-classes. The Brazilian political scientist Francisco Weffort has underscored the inability of the populist leaders to radically transform their societies. In the end, populism served the cause of capitalism and betrayed the cause of social justice and democratic equality that Latin American masses had stood for. In a somewhat similar fashion, Steve Stein has presented populism as a mode of social control of potentially the most radical of the social classes namely the organised working class and the peasantry at a time when society was undergoing major structural transformation. Fernando Henrique Cardoso has examined populist regimes of the 1940s from the perspective of 'dependency'. There are some subtle variations in the dependency analyses of populism and populist regimes; however, most analysts concur that populism represented an alliance between specific sectors of the ruling classes and the popular masses that arose in a specific phase of 'delayed' and 'dependent' capitalist development of Latin America.

8.5 EXERCISES

1. Identify the significant features of Latin American populist movements.
2. Explain the regime of Juan Domingo Peron in terms of its populist characteristics.
3. In what ways could one say that Getulio Vargas of Brazil was a populist leader?
4. It is said that the movement led by Lazaro Cardenas is basically an agrarian populist movement. Do you agree?
5. What impact did the populist movements and regimes make on the Latin American political

and economic developmental processes?