

## Is The Trump Phenomenon Spreading to Europe?

A headline this week read, "Europe's Trump Moment: Countries See Rise of Populist Leaders Amid Anger Over Economy, Migrant Crisis." In a nutshell, what the article posits is that what America experienced with the election of President Trump is not just an "American" phenomenon. Of course, one could argue that Trump's election was simply an extension of the uprising that produced the Brexit vote and now that sentiment is simply spreading to other European countries. But the question in my mind is this: What is really behind this populist uprising, and does it represent real change?

The article I am referencing said that in a number of European countries "the political establishment is being challenged by a slew of populist—and mostly far right—politicians who are riding the same anti-establishment anger that earlier this year saw the United Kingdom vote to leave the European Union and the United States elect Donald Trump as president."

I don't know that Mr. Trump's election was the product of the "far right," whatever that means, but I think it might have been the product of what, on the surface, one might call the rejection of the ruling class by the average person.

However, a look at our recent political history makes me wonder if this is just another swing of the pendulum, another teeter of the totter that will bring us back to where we were. Bill Clinton's election in 1992 led to the Republican Revolution of 1994 spurred by Newt Gingrich's Contract with America. But enough of George Bush's policies led to Democrats taking back control of Congress in the 2006 election cycle and the revolution against Bush's policies culminated in the election of Obama in 2008. It was the promise of "change" that we could supposedly believe in. Obama's election led to Republicans taking back the U.S. House in 2010 and, four years later, the Senate. Now, as at the end of the Bush regime, Americans have had enough of Obama and his ilk and have elected Trump.

We seem to be like a people tossed to and fro by every wind of political doctrine. If we don't figure out why this phenomenon exists, then I predict that in another four to six years we will see another swing with Congress changing hands and another Obama-Clinton type, or perhaps worse, a Bernie Sanders, going into the Oval Office when we find ourselves disillusioned with Mr. Trump and the change we were looking for from him didn't come.

Going back and forth between Republicans and Democrats may not seem like a big deal; it's the way of politics as we've come to know it. But if we look at our national trajectory over this twenty-plus year period, we see that, on the social side of the cultural ledger, we've gone from not knowing how to define the word "is" to not knowing how to define marriage, and, on the fiscal side of the ledger, we are \$20 trillion in debt with no end in sight.

When viewed over time, it seems to me like we're taking two steps toward oblivion, halting for a moment to take a step back, and then taking another two steps forward. And it seems the steps forward are longer and faster than any the steps back.

That is why over Thanksgiving I read the book *Christian Political Action in an Age of Revolution*. It's only 135 pages, and I commend it to you. I believe it describes what is at

the bottom of the Trump phenomenon and the current populist uprising in Europe. The interesting thing to me is that it was written in 1860 and is an insightful analysis about what caused the political pendulum to swing from Robespierre's guillotine to Napoleon's sword.

Next week, I'll let you in on his diagnosis of the situation in his day and why, if we (particularly Christians) don't learn from history, we may well be on the way to repeating its mistakes.