

How demagogues work in politics



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Leadership stands when the leader gains the trust of his followers. Leaders motivate and inspire their subordinates with a shared vision. In order to be effective and earn the allegiance of his or her followers, it is important for a leader to be trustworthy. Unfortunately, in many cases, leaders break this important factor. It happened in "The Bathsheba Syndrome", when King David lost the trust of his constituent for having an affair with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his army officers. It happened with President Bill Clinton in the "Monica Lewinsky Scandal", and it continues to happen in the American political environment. The question is: Why is that? Why leaders promote something and do the opposite or promote a concept when they know it is not true? One mean used by political leaders to achieve their goal is demagoguery. Demagoguery is the rhetoric of the demagogue; and Thesaurus defines the demagogue as a leader who obtains power by means of impassioned appeals to the emotions and prejudices of the populace. Demagogues are having an impact in this American society. The first aspect will be to analyze the practice of demagoguery by politicians. Through Ayn Rand theory of objectivism, one will dwell whether the actions of the demagogue are based on self interest or simply demagoguery is explained the principle 'the end justifies the means' of Machiavelli. Later, one will present the consequences of the practice of demagoguery on our society

An important theory of democracy will be the general public's access to information. If this information is not accessible or distorted, it will be impossible for the public to differentiate between a truth and a lie. Therefore, the demagogue will be hard to be identified. Demagogues use propaganda as a mean to carry their message across an audience they believe is vulnerable.

Before getting to the practice let identify the characteristics of a demagogue. Demagogues use the qualities of charismatic leaders. They are great orators and use their charm to carry their misinformation across the audience. Charles Horton Cooley demonstrates that in his definition of demagogue. He says that a demagogue is “ A person of definite character and purpose who comprehends our way of thought is sure to exert power over us. He cannot altogether be resisted; because, if he understand us, he can make us understand him, though the word, the look, or other symbol , which both of us connect with the common sentiment or idea; and thus by communicating an impulse he can move the will” (Charles Horton Cooley). Demagogues use two tools to in their actions. They polarize their audience and use the rhetoric of hate. Polarization is in fact dividing everything into two groups. Demagogues divide the general public into two poles: the people who are on their site and those who do not agree with them. It is important strategy, because they know who do not stand by them and therefore they can use propaganda in order to earn the loyalty of these people. Today American society is divided into major political parties that experts believe decline competition during election periods. Kenneth Mehlman, a chairman of the Republican Party said that “ some Republicans gave up on winning the African-American vote, looking the other way or trying to benefit politically from racial polarization”.

The other method practiced by demagogues is the rhetoric of hate. Demagogues encourage the hate a group of people they do not like and they justify the use the hatefulness. They want the mass to condom their hate against a certain group. The perfect example will be Hitler and his

hatefulness against the racial minority. Hitler didn't like the Jew, and declared that " my enemy is Germany's enemy: always and only the Jew". He used the propaganda theory to tell the Germans that the Jews were responsible of the great depression, and they were the friends of the Bolshevik, thus the enemy of Germany. Another example is Osama Ben Laden, who accuses the United States to be the scapegoat of the misery of all Muslim in the world. He urges all Muslim to be against the United States. History reminds us that Osama bin Laden is just jealous of the prosperity and the power of the United States. He didn't like the fact that the United States back Israel in the Israel-Palestine conflict. He hates the influence of capitalism and hates anyone who is against Arabic countries for Jews. Harley Sorensen published Osama's Letter to America', in which Osama said " this is why we hate you". Osama Bin Laden is using misinformation to promote his hatefulnes in the Muslim world. The third example in this chapter is Theodore Gilmore Bilbo, an ex governor and ex senator of Mississippi. He was a defender of segregation and called himself " white supremacy". He was an active member of the Ku Klux Klan and declared that he does not hate African-Americans but he believes that they should be sent back to Africa, where they belong. Obviously, one can see a demagogic rhetoric in his statement.

For demagogue, propaganda is a very useful tool. Before accessing to power in 1929, Hitler knew that propaganda theory was a key to his success by saying " propaganda, propaganda, all that matter is propaganda". Hitler was a great orator and a smart politician. Ian Kershaw reveals that " his only asset was his demagogic power over the masses, his voice". He believed

that the repetition of propaganda is important in order to have an impact on the general public. He said that “ the receptivity of the mass is very limited; their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is enormous”. Hitler demonstrates that demagogue consider the audience as idiot. To insist on the concept of propaganda repetition, Hitler wrote a book, Mein Kampf, in which he says “ the orator who wishes to sway a crowd must exaggerate, and he must repeat the same thing again and again”. Hitler believed that demagogue should be lying big instead lying small, because the audience is vulnerable to big lie. This practice is still used by politicians in this American society. Former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, criticizing the Obama’s health care, declared on her facebook page that “ The America I know love is not one in which my parents or baby with Down Syndrome will have to stand in front of Obama’s ‘ death panel’ so his bureaucrats can decide, based on a subjective judgment of their ‘ level of productivity in society’, whether they are worthy of health care. Such a system is downright evil”. The ‘ panel panel’ syndrome, which created many angry people across, was in fact a pure misinformation. ‘ Death panel’ was voted the “ the biggest lie of year 2009”. Sarah Palin knew what she was doing. Her goal was to create many dissidents against the bill in order to ‘ kill’ it.

In addition, demagogues are always vague in their statement. They do not clearly explain their intention to the general public. This means that if the audience does not take time to analyze the demagogue’s rhetoric, the demagogue will not explain to them. This strategy makes them even more effective, since their goal is to sell what is not true. Karl Klaus says that “ the secret of the demagogue is to make himself as stupid as his audience so that

they believe they are as clever as he". Demagogues like to be vague because people in general will try to be kind and avoid asking for details. They like this practice because do not want to say anything that can be prejudicial to them or the people who support them.

Demagogues are also called the leader of the people, because they know how to persuade the audience. They are also known as the heroes of the general public. They called themselves nationalists in order to be gain the loyalty of the masses. Nationalism is defined by the devotion to the interests or the culture of one nation. Demagogues believe that their country is better than other countries. This is what makes them different from patriots. Hitler begins his race to power by promoting nationalism. He wanted to show the Germans that Germany was the powerful country on earth. Hitler believed that anybody from any other country would be a treat to Germany prosperity and stability. His first enemies were the Jews. Hitler was anti-Semitist in all means. Another example of nationalist demagogue will be Lou Dobb. Lou Dobb, a former head of CNN's financial news unit, promotes social anger against immigrants. He blames the immigrants for all problems facing the United States. He believes they are the scapegoat for the jobs loss, the low wages, terrorism and the health care crisis.

Ayn Rand defined selfishness as a virtue and believes that the most important in human nature must his or her own well-being. Does this definition really apply to demagogues? Demagogues are political leaders who use false rhetoric in order to reach a goal. They are before any means people who act to survive in the society. They are looking first for their own self-interest. However in most cases, demagogues do not really care about

the general public. Hitler did not have any respect for the German who cheer for him. In 1926, he said that “ the broad masses are blind and stupid and do not know what they doing.” Werner Maser, a German historian, proved that Hitler was using propaganda for his own self-interest by saying “ Hitler knew his people - the masses he so detested. More than that, he despised them and said so openly without circumspection”. Another example will be Joseph McCarthy, a former Senator of Wisconsin. He was known to be one of the famous demagogues in American history. He was not a good orator.

Therefore to get the support of his constituent, he accused his opponents of being communist or sympathizer of communism. He became famous by using demagogic rhetoric toward the politicians who disagree with him.

Senator McCarthy was guided by his own self-interest. Ayn Rand does not see selfishness as a mean to hate other or use other to achieve a goal. She thinks that human self-interest is based on psychological and biological needs. However, demagogues are trying to satisfy a desire, not a need.

Demagogues do not need to

Furthermore, Machiavelli said that “ the end justifies the means”; which means that one will do whatever is needed to get the result he or she wishes regardless of whether the action is morally right or not. Another interpretation, one can take an evil to achieve a greater good. But when that goal is achieved, the bad action can be neglected. Based on this principle, can demagogues say that their actions are justified? First of all, demagogues are leaders; which means that they have goals that they need to achieve. Alike other leaders, they will take to ‘ do the right things’. Demagogues use unethical tools like propaganda in order to convince their audience. When

Hitler told the masses that the Jews were the scapegoat of the Germans problems, he gained the support from the masses. Hitler was known to be the powerful and popular head of state in the world. Hitler's supporters represent ninety percent of the Germans. Hitler used demagogic rhetoric to rise to power in 1933. He reached his goal and the Germans were even proud of him. Even Winston Churchill called him, " the greatest German of the age. He has restored Germany's honor". Another example will be Joseph McCarty who uses propaganda against his opponents to win elections. His actions worked well that he stayed Wisconsin senator from 1947 until death in 1957. Both these leaders used immoral means to gain the support of their respective constituent. What matters is that they both reached their goals. They would probably not been successful if they didn't use demagogic rhetoric. For the demagogues, the end is actually good, therefore the means should not be considered inappropriate. Throughout demagogues, this principle can be analyzed differently. Demagogues use evil doing. They cheat the system and do not really care about the masses. The result is what matters for them. Sophocles would reinforce the idea of the " the end justifies the means" by saying that " the end excuses any evil". Should evil be excused? They decide what end is important enough to justify the means. In most cases, that end is not morally good since it is not helpful and noble to everybody else.

Demagogues have negative impact on our society, especially on the political environment.