

Political Representation in Times of Bailout: Evidence from Greece and Portugal

Edited by André Freire, Marco Lisi, Ioannis Andreadis, and José Manuel Leite Viegas

Routledge, New York, NY, 2016. 152 pages, \$160.

Reviewed by Christopher C. Faille

Whatever exactly the word “democracy” means, at a minimum it surely implies a system in which some predictable congruence exists between the policy-making elites on the one hand and mass opinion on the other. If a nation-state is to earn the sobriquet “democracy,” then there should be some mechanism by which the elites can be brought back into line should they lose touch with their base on a particular range of issues.

We express this idea of democracy whenever we say that an officeholder “represents” his constituency.

This volume, a contribution to Routledge’s South European Society and Politics series, looks at how the bailouts of this decade have affected the democratic nature (so understood) of the governments of Portugal and Greece.

The European sovereign debt crises arose in large part as a reaction to the global

financial crisis of 2008-09, which in turn was triggered by the U.S. housing and banking crises of 2007-08. The very short story is this: The air of crisis induced some European countries to try to shield their economies by stimulative spending and public capital investments. This made already heavy public debts even heavier and, it turns out, unbearable. Greece first asked for a bailout from the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission, and the European Central Bank (the “Troika”) in 2010. Portugal did likewise the following year.

As events have transpired in the “time of bailouts,” political parties in both countries—at least those with a share in governing or any realistic hope of governing—have had to answer to other sorts of constituencies, including the Troika, the bond markets, and the parties represented in the European Parliament. Has this drawn them away from their home base? Has it made the major parties and their leadership, in the straightforward sense just defined, less democratic? The authors of the seven essays in this book look at a number of aspects of that question.

Austerity and Polarization

The useful and accepted buzzword for the demands that the Troika have made of the bailed-out nations is “austerity.” If you get in financial trouble and your benign uncle bails you out, he may well demand a promise from you that you will cut back on extravagances. To the extent that he inquiries closely into your life and your household balance sheet from the day after he cuts you the check, you may well come to resent him and develop some irritation at the thought that your life is no longer fully your own. One key question in this study is: Do the masses in Greece and Portugal, whose connection with Uncle Troika is indirect, have markedly different attitudes toward austerity than do the elites, who rub shoulders with Uncle on a regular basis?

Austerity is often seen as inherently a right-wing position in European terms, whereas the continued largesse of social democracy is seen as a left-wing position. So the question of congruence as to austere-

ity merges with the broader question of congruence as to left-right positioning. Is the left-right split among voters similar to that among their elected representatives? And, where it differs, *how* does it differ?

As to Greece, chapter two of the book gives a fairly straightforward answer to these questions. With regard to austerity in particular, there is a marked difference between voters and the political elite, but it is not the difference one might have intuitively suspected. One might have suspected that the political elite, jet-setting around the continent with other nations’ political elites, would internalize the pro-austerity position of the Troika at the expense of setting themselves apart from their followers. But, then, one would have been wrong.

The political leaders of many political parties in Greece, across the left-right spectrum, are likely to be *less* accepting of austerity than are their rank-and-file voters.

The authors of this key chapter are Glasgow-based scholars Geogios Karyotis, Wolfgang Rüdiger, and David Judge. Aside from the incongruence on austerity, their study offers another noteworthy finding: Austerity does not necessarily track left-right positions, and, with respect to general left-right positioning, the attitudes of voters and elites are fairly congruent in Greece, the politics of crisis notwithstanding. Surveyed voters, on the one hand, and members of parliament, on the other, were asked to place themselves on a zero-to-10 scale, with zero representing the furthest possible leftward position and 10 the furthest possible rightward one. Generally speaking, there was a broad congruence of self-positioning, with parliamentarians “only marginally more extremely positioned ideologically than their voters.”

A Lesson for the US

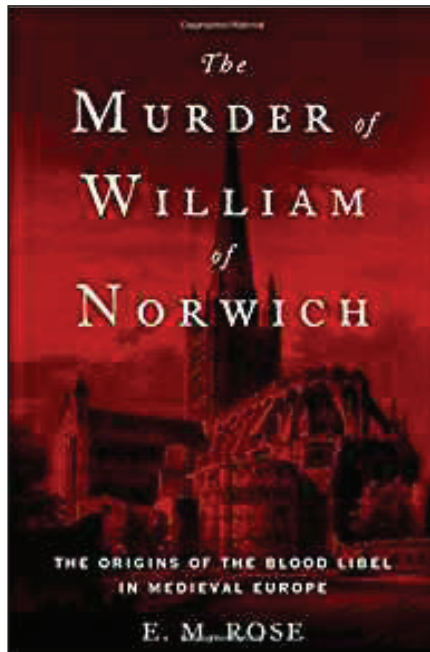
I leave the other chapters (and indeed the particulars of that one) for interested readers to discover on their own. That chapter is fairly typical of my personal takeaway from the book: That, as a matter of political science, ideological posturing is an occupational hazard of the political class,

so democratic governments may well suffer from greater extremism the higher on the ladder one rises.

In the United States at present, this tendency may help us make some sense of the recent seemingly chaotic politics of health insurance legislation. The legislative package of 2010 collectively called Obamacare—which was Mitt Romney’s idea before it was Barack Obama’s—represents the middle of the road in the United States, somewhere between a laissez faire model and a British-style National Health Service. Through seven years, the elites of the Republican Party got away with risk-free posturing away from the center because they knew that President Obama would veto what they passed so they feared no backlash from passing it. Only in 2017 did this catch up with them.

At the time this review went to press, it seemed that only Sens. Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski, and John McCain gauged and responded to the non-polarized position of their constituents and helped keep the policies congruent with the grass-roots sentiments. Though, as the arithmetic played itself out after midnight on the Senate floor, and everyone had to look to the direction of one man’s thumb, it was a very close call. ☉

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The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe

By E. M. Rose

Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2015.
394 pages, \$29.95 (cloth), \$16.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Jon M. Sands

From what religious darkness, from what communal hate, from what intolerant social circumstances could the blood libel spawn? E. M. Rose argues that the blood libel, an anti-Semitic accusation that Jews killed Christian children in order to use their blood for rituals and in mockery and hatred of Christ, arose in medieval England in 1140. It started with an unsolved death of a teenaged tanner’s apprentice named William, followed by the efforts of a fervent monk in a nearby priory to turn the apprentice into a religious martyr and saint; a knight returned from the crusades who, debt ridden, murdered a Jewish banker; a clever bishop defending the knight by casting blame on the Jewish community; and Christian leaders stoking the slanders to exploit passions and prejudices. The turmoil of the 12th century, the anxiety and upheavals that followed failed crusades, and a general crisis of medieval Christian society, led to the blood libel becoming widely believed and spurring acts of murderous revenge against Jews and Jewish communities.

William the tanner’s apprentice was found hanged in a wood outside of Norwich,

then the second largest city in England and a bustling commercial center. His distraught parents pointed to the small Jewish community as being responsible, and Rose sees this as the beginning of the blood libel. Of course, the blood libel likely was circulating before, but it became notorious through the efforts of Thomas of Monmouth, a monk from Wales, who seized upon the unsolved death to write a vivid and horrifying account of how local Jews had abducted, tortured, and ritually murdered the youth. The monk promoted the charge for 20 years and wrote a tract about it. This tract, argues Rose, made William of Norwich into Saint Norwich. More important, it became the foundational text for the ritual murder accusation.

This local accusation gained prominence in a murder trial that occurred in 1150, when a local knight, Simon de Novers, was accused of arranging to have his Jewish banker, to whom he owed debts, killed. The knight had gone on the Second Crusade, seeking spiritual and monetary rewards. Crusading was expensive, requiring arms and retinues, and knights and royalty often borrowed heavily from Jewish bankers. The Second Crusade was a failure, and those knights who returned did so not with booty but with crushing debts. Simon de Novers sought to erase his debt by murdering the Jewish banker. Rose wonders if he bragged about it too loudly, but somehow his role became known. The outraged Jewish community appealed to the king for justice, and the knight was placed on trial.

At the trial, the local bishop, William Turbe, defended the knight. The bishop was homegrown, raised from childhood in the monastery attached to the Norwich cathedral. He was aware of the blood libel, and he used it to his advantage. Turbe argued that it was the Jewish community that should be on trial for the murder of the young boy. He used biblical texts and legends such as that of the perpetual wandering Jew, and he played upon the religious and social prejudices of the community as to purported bizarre Jewish rituals. The community, supposes Rose, sympathized with the knight, who struck a blow for the young victim, William, when he killed the banker. The king dismissed the charges. Perhaps the king had other reasons, such as loyalty to the lords or a desire to appease the Church, or he merely took notice of the community’s mood. The result, though, was more than a guilty knight going free; an upsurge occurred

in the veneration of William. Miracles were reported. In due time and with the publicity provided by the local church, the young victim achieved sainthood. More important, the broad outlines of the blood libel became established, creating a justification to attack the Jewish community as a whole.

Rose then tracks the upsurge in blood libel accusations. The accusations had an imaginatively grotesque appeal. They also had pragmatic consequences. Accusations of child ritual murders occurred in 1168, 1171, 1180, and beyond, with some frequency. A child victim was found, and the Jewish community was blamed. The accusations detailed by Rose were the ones of notoriety, recorded because of the size of the affected Jewish community or the king or duke making the charges. They were not confined to England but leaped over to France and the Low Countries. And they did not occur by happenstance; Rose skillfully connects the accusations with various debt crises experienced by the upper royalty. The accusations could and did result in trials, with scores of innocent Jews being burned at the stake or butchered in reprisals. More often, an accusation would lead to debts being forgiven by a frightened Jewish community, or loans extended. In some cases, Jews were expelled from communities or even countries, leading to a windfall of confiscation of property.

Rose presents a compelling case. Her accounts of the crimes and trials occurring almost a millennium ago are vivid. She places the actions within the context of the age, explaining the social and religious background and the hierarchy of society, making the connections based on what must have been dusty research in ancient libraries and archives. Rose also makes use of the iconography of the times, showing how Jews were portrayed and known. She describes the economics of the medieval state and society. Of course, she explains the position of the Jews in medieval Europe.

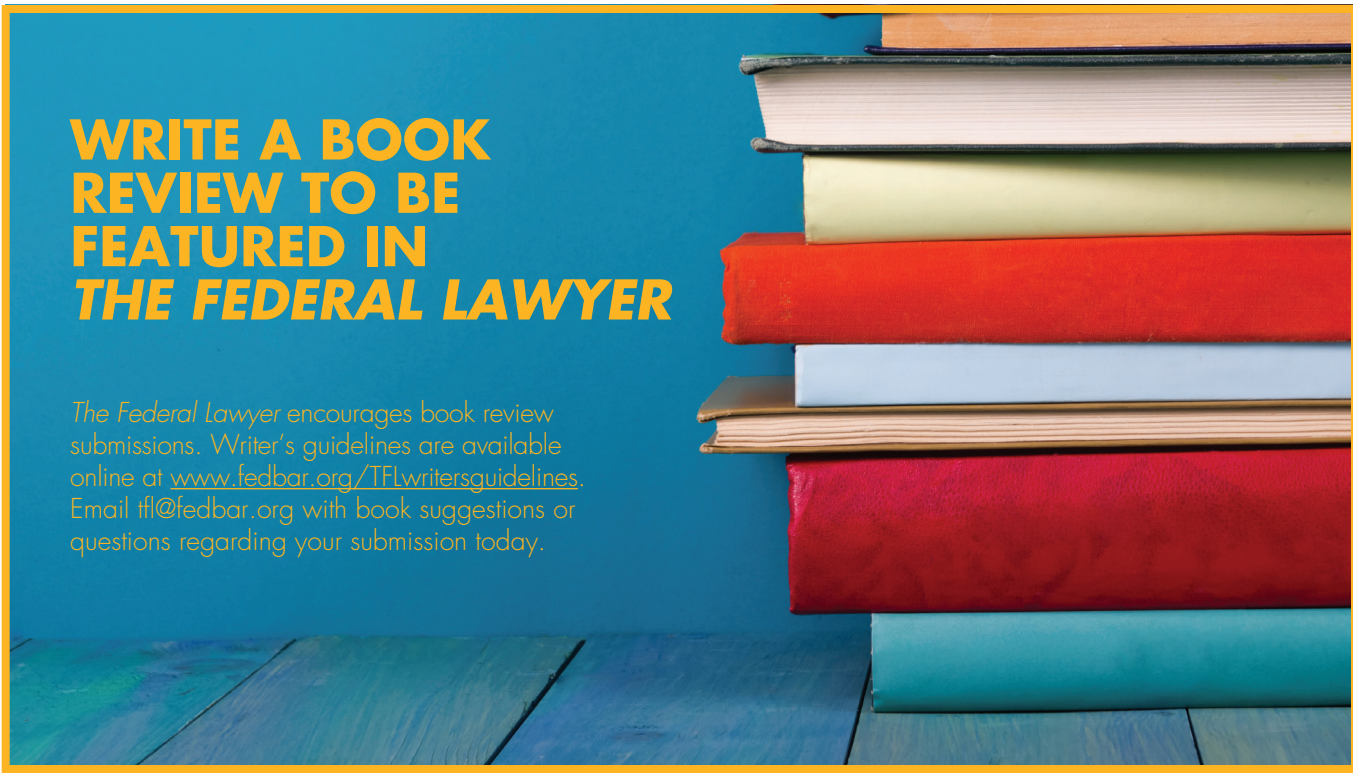
And yet, for all the research, the connections she makes still rest on circumstantial evidence, such as dates and chronologies, sometimes with suppositions. We will never really know whether, as she posits, the blood libel was picked up by a traveling lord attending a relic's ceremony and put to his own dark use, or whether it was just spreading from market to market, an insidious alternative fact to be put to hateful uses.

The blood libel continued for centuries and continues still. Accusations appear in accounts from medieval, Reformation, and modern Europe, and in England, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Greece, and Russia. They have appeared in some communities in the United States, and, since the 19th century, in Islamic countries

as well. We also know, Rose writes, that "[n]o charge has withstood historical scrutiny." Churches have denounced such allegations. Christian emperors and kings, Turkish sultans, and naturally Jews themselves, have likewise denounced such accusations. "Yet some notion of the blood libel accusation has endured to the present." The slur, the libel, is a poison that courses in the sewers of anti-Semitic thought.

The Murder of William of Norwich is a compelling and lucid work of historical detection. Rose sums up: "The story that began with a monk, a knight, a bishop, and a banker metamorphosed into what one might call a master narrative that became the basis of expulsions and murders, tortures and mass conversions. It provided the outline of a story that could be reimagined and repurposed in every generation. Financially advantageous, politically useful, ethnically and socially bonding, the ritual murder accusation united community, reinforced borders, and reassured medieval Christian believers about God's salvific plan. It was—and is—a powerful story that retains its capacity to fascinate, provoke, disgust, and repel." ☉

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