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## Diverse 'losers' with a common anxiety

YU BIN

The spectre of a growing mass of "losers" real or self-proclaimed haunts our increasingly globalised world, writes Yu Bin.

Anti-globalisation protesters are a strange mix. They include protectionist unionists, democracy promoters, Third Worldists, human-rights activists, surprisingly well-organised anarchists, America First patriots, book haters from elite colleges (who accuse their professors of teaching rubbish), old-fashioned socialists and environmental fundamentalists (who see technology and bureaucracy as causing all ecological disharmony).

But their diverse faces are marked by a common anxiety. Worried at being left behind by the growing power of multinational corporations and by the unpredictability of financial markets, anti-globalisation protesters point an accusing finger at the "global establishment". They see globalisation transforming the world's landscape, leaving a small number of islets inhabited by powerful chief executives and technology wizards surrounded by a growing sea of poverty and digital illiteracy.

Inhabitants of this sea are the "losers", the spectre haunting our increasingly globalised world. Perceptions of unfairness, of relative deprivation, of being left behind, provide powerful rallying cries for economic nationalism, utopian egalitarianism, and transparent and democratic decision-making.

But calls for "people's power" are both noble and nerve-racking. Noble insofar as they form part of Western democratic traditions. Noble insofar as they spring from the ideals that motivated United States president Abraham Lincoln to declare in his 1863 Gettysburg Address, consecrating a Civil War battlefield, that "government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the Earth". Nerve-racking insofar as they led to the rise of fascism, militarism and communism and made the 20th century perhaps the bloodiest in our history.

Modernisation based on industrialisation has produced powerful and destructive counter-trends fascism and communism. Globalisation based on capital maximisation, digital revolution and knowledge monopolisation is bound to create its own counter-trends possibly among the "losers".

Never before have human beings been so effective in manipulating their environment, for better or for worse. Because of this, no government democratic or not, rich or not can ignore the delicate balance between economic growth and social justice, between efficiency and equality, between quantity and quality. Globalisation is not an end in itself but the means to a better and more equitable world. Perhaps we must have limits on both globalisation and people's power.

*Yu Bin is an associate professor of political science at Wittenberg University in*