**SCMP Article**

**Like Trump, localists are a wake-up call**

Like many people, I have been fascinated and shocked by the rise of Donald Trump as a possible contender for the US presidency. Many of his ideas are unrealistic, and he breaks the rules when it comes to basic manners. In theory, he should not be a serious candidate. Yet he is ahead of all his Republican rivals.

I do not expect him to end up in the White House. But the fact that he can get this close to the Republican nomination is disturbing. If so many people are angry enough to support him, something has gone seriously wrong in America. And this mood is not confined to traditional Republican supporters. The success of Bernie Sanders – a socialist – in the Democrats’ race is a sign of broad frustration.

I think this is fairly easy to explain – but the explanation may be difficult for mainstream figures in politics, media, academia and business to accept. Essentially, a lot of our assumptions and beliefs about what is good for the economy might be wrong.

This is not just about the US. Something similar is happening in Europe. And Hong Kong is also experiencing a backlash against accepted wisdom about development and growth.

Let’s consider a few mainstream ideas. One is that globalisation is, on balance, beneficial. Few people dispute the advantages of free trade – nearly all of us are richer because of it. New digital technology opens up markets, boosting choice and reducing prices. Movement of people across borders spreads new skills and culture. Movement of capital improves efficiency.

Economists, businesspeople, academics and others will accept all this. And many industries, communities and people have enjoyed great gains from these trends in the last few decades. But somewhere in this process, there were bound to be some groups of people who lost more than they gained.

The theory that manufacturing jobs would be replaced by decent-paying employment in services was not always correct. The idea that immigration would enrich everyone’s lives did not always work out. The new financial tools that were supposed to help create wealth contributed to unaffordable housing and crushing student loans.

As the wealth gap has become more obvious over the years, politicians and others have become more concerned; or at least they tried to sound as if they cared. Now, people who feel left behind have lost patience.

In the United States, many of them feel that Donald Trump gives them a voice. In Europe, far-right populist parties are playing that role. The nastiness towards outsiders such as immigrants and Muslims is disturbing. I do not believe most of the supporters of these movements are in fact racists or extremists. But they are very angry – and they know this is a way to be noticed.

If I suggest there are parallels between Trump in the US and Hong Kong’s localist movement, people might laugh. But I do see similarities.

The working-class Americans who support Trump do not buy into the idea that the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal will be good for them. Nor do they agree that visas for foreign skilled workers will boost their living standards. They are not comfortable with the vibrant multicultural society that liberal elites like so much. They feel like second-class citizens in their own land.

In Hong Kong, many of our young people do not believe politicians’ claims that closer ties with the mainland will benefit the city. They do not accept the business sector’s assumption that Hong Kong should attract more and more mainland visitors. They fear that local culture, quality of life and core values are under threat from the mainland.

Some of our young radicals, like some Trump supporters, can get violent and nasty.

Just as I do not see Trump becoming president, I do not see localists sweeping up lots of seats in the Legislative Council. They are not that numerous. But they are not a small group, either. We need to see their anger as a wake-up call. And we need to ask hard questions about how far or fast integration with the mainland should proceed.