

“Take Back Control!”

Marx, Polanyi and Right-Wing Populist Revolt

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Abstract Right-wing populist revolt can be interpreted as an “ambivalox” movement of a Polanyian type, the following article argues. In order to classify populist revolt in this way, an ideal-typical distinction is made between market-critical and class movements. With the help of an empirical study that examines the world-views of employees with right-wing sympathies, the thesis is tested and refined.

Keywords Class · Counter-movements · Marx · Polanyi · Right-wing populism

„Take back control!“

Marx, Polanyi und die populistische Revolte von rechts

Zusammenfassung Der Beitrag interpretiert die rechtspopulistische Revolte der Gegenwart als Gegenbewegung zur marktgetriebenen Globalisierung. Idealtypisch wird zwischen Klassenbewegungen Marx’schen und klassenunspezifischen Bewegungen Polanyi’schen Typs unterschieden. Auf der Grundlage einer qualitativen empirischen Erhebung können sodann Motive von Lohnabhängigen genauer beleuchtet werden, die offen mit der rechtspopulistischen AfD und ihren Vorfelddorganisationen sympathisieren. Bei den Befragten finden sich zwei Denkschemata, von denen das eine die Umdeutung klassenspezifischer Verteilungskämpfe, ein anderes die Suche nach intakten Gemeinschaften beinhaltet. Weil beide Denkschemata miteinander korrespondieren, wird eine präzisere Fassung des Konzepts Polanyi’scher Gegenbewegungen vorgeschlagen. In ihren autoritären Ausprägungen handelt es sich, so der Befund, um ein „ambivaloxes“ Phänomen, das sich die Klassenvergessenheit moderner Gesellschaften und die Schwäche sozialer Klassenbewegungen zunutze

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macht. Gegenstrategien können sich am Klassenbegriff Polanyis orientieren, der Anerkennungskämpfe einschließt.

Schlüsselwörter Klasse · Gegenbewegungen · Marx · Polanyi · Rechtspopulismus

Karl Polanyi's "Great Transformation" (Polanyi 2001 [1944]) is an attempt to explain fascism in continental Europe in terms of the failure of laissez-faire economics. For Polanyi it was clear that this history would not be repeated. Nevertheless, many observers of current events consider Polanyi's analysis to be more topical than ever. "Take back control" is the battle cry of a right-wing revolt that is convulsing democratically constituted societies around the globe. This revolt is being fed by real social dislocations. A globalization driven by the ideology of free markets has generated dynamics of growing inequality, ecological destruction, increasing forced migration, escalating conflicts and new wars that are widely perceived as a loss of control. For this reason, globalization has once again become a contested project (Crouch 2018; Flassbeck and Steinhardt 2018). Authoritarian counter-movements promise unsettled sections of the population "to take back our country and our people" (Alexander Gauland in *Berliner Zeitung* 2017). This message is finding resonance—even in the wealthy Federal Republic of Germany. Concurrent with one of the longest periods of economic growth in post-war history, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has established itself at a national level as a right-wing populist party, a concept which for leading researchers already amounts to a trivialization (Heitmeyer 2018).

Opinions differ on the causes of the populist offensive (Becker et al. 2018a). Is it racism or misguided social protest? Are socio-economic or cultural reasons decisive? Are we witnessing an uprising of privileged middle classes or the rebellion of new labor movements? What is troubling in the controversies created by such questions is the exclusionary "or". Karl Polanyi can help to overcome such schematic oppositions because he suggests interpreting right-wing populist revolt as an "ambivalox" phenomenon.¹ The term "ambivalox" takes account of the fact that counter-movements of the Polanyian type may in one respect promise protection against the consequences of deregulated markets, while in other respects having exactly the opposite effect. This is not a contradiction, however, the overcoming of which could be dictated by a specific social development. What follows the free-market movement is historically open, i. e. the subject of social conflicts and po-

¹ "Ambivalox" is not a term Polanyi used himself but a neologism comprising the terms "ambivalent" and "paradoxical". A paradox exists when a phenomenon which produces a certain effect in one respect produces the exact opposite in another. In the more recent Critical Theory, paradox has been used as a counter-concept to the Marxist category of contradiction (see, e.g. Ludwig 2013, p. 299–336; Neckel et al. 2018). But a paradox is not exhausted by itself. Often there is something contradictory about the phenomenon at hand that offers the prospect of changing or even abolishing the paradoxical constellation. The inclusion of this dialectical dynamic makes "ambivalox" an attractive term. As a term it is not yet established in German-speaking countries, but it is the subject of introductory literature on sociological theories of modernization. Cf.: Degele and Dries 2005, p. 23–40. In a world flooded with Anglicisms, such a Germanic neologism is surely permissible. I owe the hint to Axel Salheiser.

litical disputes (see e.g. contributions in Brie and Thomasberger 2018). Hence to interpret populist revolt in these terms it is necessary to clarify in a theoretically precise and empirically sound manner what is to be understood by market-critical counter-movements of the Polanyian type.² In the following, this will be attempted by reference to the German situation. The article outlines the theoretical framework, the understanding of social populism, the empirical basis and the methodology of a study that draws upon Polanyi’s concept of movements (1). It presents research findings on the right-wing populist orientations of employees (2, 3) before critically examining the initial thesis in the light of the findings presented (4).

1 Market radicalism and authoritarian counter-movements

Although the forms of organization, the political personnel and the objectives of right-wing populist formations may differ greatly in detail (Müller 2016), their social profile has one thing in common. In the Federal Republic of Germany, as in many other countries, it involves alliances between the middle-class and working-class as well as parts of the elite. Although the AfD recruits its supporters from all classes and strata of the population, the unemployed and above all male workers are significantly overrepresented in its electorate (Vehrkamp and Wegschaider 2017). The social profile of the right-wing populist bloc has proven to be relatively stable in numerous state elections and, to a lesser extent, during the 2017 federal elections. Even where the AfD has a bourgeois appearance, it achieves above-average success among workers (Infratest dimap 2017, 2018). Trade union membership in no way hinders sympathy for the radical right and corresponding orientations are now also to be found among active trade unionists and works council members (Sauer et al. 2018; Dörre et al. 2018).

1.1 Marx and Polanyi

In order to explain this phenomenon, it makes sense to distinguish in ideal-typical manner two basic forms of social movements—class movements of a Marxian type and market movements of a Polanyian type. At first glance, such a typification may seem very schematic, but it is undoubtedly helpful as a heuristic device for classifying the specific form of contemporary right-wing populism. Let us begin with the first basic form of social movements, for which class is decisive. Marx, who interpreted the history of all hitherto existing societies as a history of class struggles (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 482), neither presented a coherent class theory, nor does his work contain an elaborated political economy of labor that would allow a systematic analysis of class struggles and movements. Nevertheless, following Marx, criteria can be identified with whose help class-specific (workers’) movements can

² These movements are market-critical in that they arise as a reaction to deregulated markets. This does not mean that their followers explicitly criticize the capitalist market. Instead, market-critical movements give political names to abstract market power (elites, establishment) and often tend to personalize its elusive influence.

be distinguished from inter-classist market-critical movements. Marx's class theory rests on four premises. As large-scale human and interest groups, classes are anchored in relationships of social ownership and production. They can be described as empirically comprehensible social situations, yet they exist only in process and in relation to other classes. The specific class division in capitalism results from the ability of the ruling bourgeoisie to largely monopolize ownership of the means of production and to appropriate the unpaid surplus labor of the dominated working classes that have to live solely from the sale of their labor power. In capitalism the relationship between the two main classes is structured by a causal mechanism that Marx calls exploitation, the appropriation of unpaid surplus labor. Although formally and contractually based on the exchange of equivalents, the exploitative relationship of capital to labor requires for its reproduction additional extra-economic means of domination. The state formally guarantees for all commodity owners "freedom, equality, property and Bentham" (Marx 1996, p. 186), yet since a relationship of domination is concealed behind the formal equality of proprietors, a structural conflict arises over the distribution and control of the surplus product. This conflict is carried out over long periods of time within the boundaries of the wage system, which it constantly shifts and only irreversibly exceeds in rare revolutionary situations.³

Aside from the complex relationships between socio-economic class situations and political space (Hall 1989), the dynamics of capitalist societies are driven—not exclusively but in important social fields—by this fundamental conflict which, beyond particular historical pressures, still has a structuring effect today. To have recognized this is, as Ralf Dahrendorf rightly states, the greatest strength of Marx's theory of class. It explains how "social structures, in contrast to most other structures, are capable of generating from themselves the elements of their overcoming, of their change ... 'Classes' are interest groups that have emerged from certain structural conditions, which then intervene in social conflicts and contribute to the change of social structures" (Dahrendorf 1957, p. VIII–IX). Movements of dominated working classes, one can say more precisely, arise out of exploitation, or more weakly, out of the struggle for the socially produced surplus. They are directed against a clearly identifiable opponent class, aim primarily at equality or parity and make use of various sources of wage labour power (Dörre 2018a, p. 622–623).

Movements of a Polanyian type have other characteristics. In current debates, Polanyi is regarded as the key witness in a critique of capitalism that addresses not the exploitation in the labor process but rather the socially destructive consequences of deregulated markets (Streeck 2013; Fraser 2011). This understanding is in turn reflected in the classification of social movements (Dale 2010, p. 221). If one follows Beverly Silver's classification (Silver 2005, p. 30–44), movements of a Polanyian type are directed against an expansive market power that appears diffuse and ab-

³ "The Poverty of Philosophy" contains one of the few passages in which Marx formulates in rudimentary form the frequently used expression about the class "in itself" and "for itself" (Marx 1976, p. 211). I propose to replace this formula, burdened by the history of philosophy, with the distinction between mobilized and demobilized classes. Classes are demobilized unless they possess active representatives of economic-social and political class interests. The mobilized class produces such representatives in the form of spontaneous movements, trade unions, labor parties, etc.

stract to market actors themselves. This power can seldom be clearly identified, and criticism of it can be politicized in different directions. It is possible for market-critical movements to take on reactive-nationalist or even fascist traits. In contrast to the implications of Marx’s class universalism, which assumed that the “exploitation of the world market” would give “a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country” (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 488), Polanyi always reckons with the opposite. Translated into operationalizable criteria, movements of a Polanyian type, so Michael Burawoy (2017) suggests, arise out of alienation and disrespect—but the target of their revolt remains diffuse. They claim the right to protection not only from *social insecurity*, but also from threats to *public security* (Castel 2005). Here the nation state is their main addressee. Their effectiveness rests mainly on their ability to polarize society and to exercise blocking power in political decision-making processes. Their resources include the willingness to use force against state institutions, but also against competitors and dissenters.

1.2 The right-wing populist bloc and the social question

At the same time, using the typology of movements outlined above leads to a serious analytical problem. It needs to be clarified whether right-wing populist formations such as the AfD and related organizations can be understood as market-critical agents at all. In fact, radically right-wing parties differ considerably in ideology, program and political practice (Kitschelt 1997; Werz 2003; Priester 2012). Many of them, like the Freedom Party in Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs or FPÖ), initially constituted themselves as radical variants of neoliberal politics. At least in terms of their role in the governing coalition, the FPÖ is taking action in this programmatic direction. Some observers therefore still tend to interpret right-wing populism as an authoritarian variant of neoliberalism (for a nuanced view see Ptak 2018, p. 72–73). However, important right-wing formations such as the French National Front (now Rassemblement National) or the Italian Lega have long since altered their programs. At the center of these parties’ programs and political practice one now finds critiques of globalization, Europe and migration, as well as a nationalist social populism that specifically addresses real or supposed losers of economic internationalization (Bieling 2017). The AfD has completed this development in fast motion. In its program, which is still partly radical in market terms,⁴ a national-social current has gained ground (particularly in the Eastern states of Germany) that is deliberately aiming to seize the former “crown jewel of the left” (Kubitschek 2018)—the social question—for the right.

But it would be wrong to measure the AfD against the scale of a party with a coherent programme. Rather, it makes more sense to speak of a right-wing populist or radical-nationalist “social bloc” (Gramsci 1991 ff., pp. 490, 1490) that integrates different political currents. In addition to the AfD, this bloc includes related extra-parliamentary movements such as Pegida and its extreme offshoots (Thügida, Legida, etc.). It ranges from national-conservative circles and the ‘identitarian’ youth

⁴ Helmut Kellershohn confirms the AfD program to strive for a national competitive state on a völkisch basis (Kellershohn and Kastrup 2016).

movement to openly neo-Nazi organizations. Its intellectual advocates include such leading public figures as SPD-member and Islam-critic Thilo Sarrazin (Sarrazin 2018) and reach well into the social and political center of society. For a long time now this bloc has had its own think tanks (e. g. the Institute for State Policy), media, publishers, newspapers and magazines. Even more significant is that its actors have proven to be enormously effective campaigners in social networks (Nagle 2018). Nevertheless, this heterogeneous bloc is far from matching the ideal of a “mosaic right” (Stein 2018, p. 7) which would unite with complementary strategies to form a multifaceted whole. Instead, its everyday business includes permanent disputes over boundaries, party expulsions, the formation of cliques and mutual denunciations. Any analysis must also take into account the different “levels” that each social bloc comprises: systems of ideas that at least imitate scientific theories, organized political action in movements and party forms, and the everyday consciousness of sympathizers, all of which need to be reconciled time and again.

The synthesizing efforts that turn right-wing populism into a market-critical movement are brought to the level of ideological struggles by, among others, representatives of a New Right who would like to be “lumped together” with the social question (Stein 2018, p. 7). These thought-leaders who strive to cross borders are always trying to reformulate the social as a national question. In an effort to provoke, they even seek to rescue Karl Marx from the Marxists and re-interpret him in right-wing fashion. A Marx liberated from class struggle and labor movement traditionalism is rediscovered as a critic of the “commercialization of all social life” and the “globalization of capital including the superfluity of nations” (Kaiser et al. 2018, p. 54). Superficial anti-capitalism combined with a right-wing sceptical image of man aims to make possible what can only be regarded as a violation of the Marxian corpus. Thus Marx’s concept of the industrial reserve army becomes, in New Right diction, a vehicle for criticism of migration. While Marx explained the emergence of a dispensable part of the population as “the superfluity of workers”, this topos has now “acquired a new meaning through the mass immigration of low-skilled ‘superfluous’ people” (ibid., p. 55). What Marx introduced as a category for the structural production of unemployment and poverty in capitalist societies is thus transformed into a charge of alleged migration-driven competition. All this is done in the name of a higher ideal that floats above the classes. Instead of following antiquated ideas of class struggle, one must “finally work towards what we should all be aiming for: *unity*” (Stein 2018, p. 11).⁵ It is a decisive advantage of the New Right that it “knows this higher feeling, this timeless ideal that stands above classes, parties and other mechanical conflicts” (ibid.) Provided that national unity takes precedence, a capitalism-critical rhetoric can easily be transformed into an ethnic one. National communities—a construct that can also be thought of as pan-European—are called upon to reconcile class differences. Consequently, the “distribution

⁵ “Where the common good is to stand in the foreground, one cannot continually think and fight in an outdated binary class system. Because ‘division requires hatred. But hatred and division are incompatible with brotherhood. And so, in members of one and the same people, the feeling of being part of a greater whole, of a higher, all-encompassing, historical unity, is extinguished’ (José Antonio Primo de Rivera)” (Stein 2018, p. 11).

of national wealth from top to bottom, or from bottom to top, or from young to old ... is no longer the primary social question”. Rather, the attack is directed at “old-party politicians” who “open our social security systems to millions of people who have never paid into them” and thus “wantonly destroy the foundations of our established community of solidarity” (Höcke 2017).

If one accepts such redefinitions, it seems plausible to declare the “preservation of a diversity of peoples” (Kaiser et al. 2018) as the central concern of a national revolution. One might object that the capitalism-critical New Right, and its thought leaders such as Alain de Benoist or Diego Fusaro (2018), are at best extreme, marginal positions within the right-wing populist bloc. But the influence of right-wing intellectuals on the AfD leadership groups and above all on their national-social wing can hardly be overlooked. It becomes visible not only in the aspiration to take up the legacy of the old labor movements but also in the concept of a productivity pension which promises German retirees a guaranteed income of at least 52% of their former gross wage (AfD 2018; for a critique see Dörre 2018b, p. 71–72).

There is something else important for the context here, though. Ironically, the appropriation of Marx illustrates that the right-wing populist bloc’s ability to mobilize is based on a Polanyian motif. Marx is praised as a critic of a value- and commodity-form that destroys national communities in the course of its globalization. Within the right-wing populist bloc, this critique appears “ambivalox” in the previously defined sense of the word. The national-liberal current of the populist right wants to radicalize a capitalism that the national-social currents want to constrain or even overcome. The national-conservative current moves between the poles. In the last instance, when right-wing populist formations enter government this contradictory paradox must become practical, though it is by no means inevitable that right-wing populist blocs will be destroyed by their own internal contradictions. With the destruction of national communities, all currents take up a traditional topos of national-conservative discontent with capitalism, which unites them despite all their differences. Social populism combined with anti-liberalism, anti-feminism, anti-ecological naturalism and an ethno-pluralistic “racism without the concept of race” (Taguieff 1991, pp. 221 ff.; Balibar 1993, p. 148) lays the groundwork for intellectual edifices that make authoritarian movements of a Polanyian type an ideology of aggression. If such mobilizations are successful, they can preserve in the guise of an “ambivalox” revolt what they pretend to overcome—the dominance of market conditions that promote the very motives on which populism feeds.

2 Everyday consciousness and exclusionary nationalism

Why do such ideologies meet with approval even among trade union and company employees? We have investigated this question by means of a qualitative survey that follows on in content and method from an earlier study on precarity and right-wing populism (Brinkmann et al. 2006; $n = 100$). The empirical basis of the current study on the “Social Image of the Precariat” is a series of topic-centered interviews ($n = 88$) which took place in 2017/18 in East and West German industrial and ser-

vice enterprises.⁶ The interviewees were unemployed persons and employees in the metal and electrical industries, in the mail-order trade, in the mining and energy industries, in the postal service and in social services. The survey included a deep sociological drilling in a region of Saxony ($n=18$), the aim of which was to interview employees who openly professed allegiance to Pegida, the AfD or other right-wing organizations. Thematically, the focus was on attitudes to right-wing populist and right-wing extremist formations, the image of trade unions, and the subjective view of work, business, society, and democracy.

In addition to semi-structured interviews with right-wing employees (coded as Pro), the survey included interviews with employees who have a clear anti-Pegida/AfD attitude (coded Ant). In addition, there were interviews with members of youth organizations (coded JAV) and political secretaries of the local trade union (coded as Sek). The topic-centered interviews (Kaufmann 1999, p. 24; Witzel 2000) were analyzed for content (Kelle and Kluge 2010, pp. 43–44) and examined for contradictions and inconsistencies with the help of a theory-based coding of key passages (Bohnsack 1993, pp. 132–138). Of 88 interviewees, borderline cases included, a total of 12 (nine men, three women) openly sympathized with Pegida, the AfD or other right-wing organizations (Reichsbürger, NPD, Nazi-Skins). If we had chosen xenophobia as the criterion for right-wing populism, the number of cases would have been considerably higher, since resentment against foreigners is also to be found among interviewees who are politically more to the left.

A large proportion of the interviews contain motifs from a *deep story* that many interviewees feel to be the “real truth” (Hochschild 2018, p. 27). No matter whether they were on the left or right, the employees interviewed felt they were stuck waiting in a queue at the foot of a mountain of justice. With globalization, German unification and mass unemployment, this deep-rooted history of problems has constantly been supplied with new raw materials, which demand ever new sacrifices from all those waiting in line. This applies in particular to employees in the new Länder who experienced the collapse of the GDR economy and a series of radical structural changes and who are waiting patiently for the promised adjustment to “Western levels”. European financial and so-called refugee crises have given their deep story a new turn. Inured over decades to the idea that there was no longer “enough to go round”, they now see money available in abundance for the cause of crisis management—initially to save ailing banks and crisis-ridden public finances on the southern periphery of Europe, then for more than a million refugees who reached German territory in 2015. Since then, from the point of view of many interviewees, queuing has become pointless. This is also because the overall economic situation has improved significantly. In the decade following the global financial crisis, numerous companies have made good profits, unemployment has officially fallen below the six percent mark and the number of people in employment has risen to record levels. This has meant an end to moderation, not least among younger em-

⁶ Sophie Bose, Jakob Köster, John Lütten and the author are working on “Social Image of the Precariat” project. The new survey was carried out as part of the BMBF joint project e-labour, which is coordinated by SOFI-Göttingen. For detailed information on the methodology of the study see Dörre et al. (2018, pp. 55–89).

ployees, especially in the Eastern Länder (Dörre et al. 2017). However, many who have waited so long have seen little of an economic boom. The general dissatisfaction with unfair distributional arrangements can be divided into three typical forms of thinking,⁷ and which—using the criteria mentioned above—can be interpreted as the transformation of a class problem.

1. *Dichotomy with an addition*: The first form of thinking reflects a status problem. In the self-perception of interviewees, being a worker means being stuck fast in a prospering society. One sees the decline in unemployment and yet one does not believe one's own life is fundamentally improving. Instead, younger employees in particular have an image of society that strictly distinguishes between above and below. To be a worker means to have achieved everything that can be achieved, with a steady job and a reasonably good income. Nothing more is possible. But being a worker is not a status to be proud of, because whoever can "study or gets a job in an office" (JAV 1). In their own perception, even though socially devalued and on low wages, they consider themselves "middle class" (Ant1). This means that there is not much that can be done to climb upwards, but a fall downwards is always possible. Although devalued and treated unfairly, one is not "at the bottom". One has something to lose and one knows others—temporary workers or Hartz IV recipients—who are much worse off.
2. *Nationalistic causal mechanism*: The dichotomous consciousness we encounter among many interviewees, regardless of political orientation, testifies to a class-specific conflict over distribution. Let us take the example of an East German workers' family from a rural area. Husband and wife work 40h full-time for a gross monthly wage of 1700 euros. After deduction of all fixed costs, the household with two children has 1000 euros net with which to pay its subsistence. Under these conditions, every major purchase, every repair to the car, becomes a problem. Holidays are unaffordable and even a visit to a restaurant at the weekend is often out of reach. In view of this regime of scarcity, those questioned regard themselves as "involuntary abnormal". A works council member with sympathies for the extreme right sums it up as follows: "Every German citizen has, I believe, an average salary of 3300 [...]. So I ask myself, what am I then? Am I not a German? Am I something? I mean, I get 1700 gross. What am I to do with that? I can't live on that." (Pro 3).

At first glance, it is a semantic shift that distinguishes radically right-wing employees from the other interviewees. The social mechanism that explains the unjust distribution is not exploitation but perceived discrimination against German citizens. Being German becomes a cipher that conveys the claim to parity, an appropriate wage and a good life. This claim becomes an exclusionary one if it demands social standards *solely* (or first and foremost) for German citizens. Interviewees who argue in this way by no means describe themselves as poor or precarious. They want to be "normal" and do a lot to demonstrate normality. Their self-positioning in the middle-class corresponds to this effort. Despite queuing at the mountain of justice, however,

⁷ By 'form of thinking', I understand typical socially pre-produced and co-produced schemes that have a cross-cutting relevance.

“normality” is difficult for them to achieve. To the extent that their hopes of success in the distribution struggles between capital and labor dwindle, right-wing workers tend to reinterpret these struggles as conflicts between inside and outside. Hard-working nationals should be protected from interlopers who are unable to integrate culturally and who would enrich themselves from the national wealth without being entitled to it. Trade union commitment to greater distributive justice and pleas for protection against refugees are subjectively understood as different axes of one and the same distributional conflict (above versus below, inside versus outside). In their justifications for a “politics with borders”, even active trade unionists tend towards a radicality surprising in its severity and latent violence. “Refugees”, a works council member explains openly, “must leave”: “Whoever comes here now, works, integrates, whoever fits in, falls into line, no problem. I don’t mind that. But those who only come here to hold out their hands and behave badly and think they can do whatever they want, get out!” (Pro 3).

3. *Redefinition of the security problem*: Refugees and migrants who do not adapt are considered by our interviewees with right-wing populist orientations to be part of a “dangerous class” from which “normal” citizens must dissociate themselves. Dissociation seems to work particularly well when the proportion of migrants in their city or region is low: “There aren’t that many [foreigners, KD] here or it’s less noticeable. There was a time when you noticed it more, especially my girlfriend noticed, because she likes to go shopping in the P.-Straße and there were these troops of teenagers who were obviously of a different origin and harassed my girlfriend and talked to her and were like ‘Marry me’ and ‘pretty woman’ and so on, which is already really annoying and pushy. It’s just not appropriate. I’m not saying every German is a saint or that they’re flawless. But it’s [...] because we also have such problem-people here in Germany that we shouldn’t be bringing any more of them into the country. We have to deal with our own problems first [...] before we take care of such others.” (Pro 2).

Workers who feel themselves devalued equate the “dangerous classes” with a “culture” in which disorderliness and harassment are characteristic. According to this story, the—fictitious—danger for “our women” can reappear at any time. In evoking the threat of culturally alien hordes of men unable to control their instincts, a traditional image of masculinity is implicitly revitalized. Faced with the danger of uncivilized fiends, German men present themselves as protectors of “their” women and thus legitimize their own property claims. The invocation of dangers posed by the migrant “dangerous classes” also achieves what Robert Castel indicated as an option with regard to two fundamental security systems: the welfare state and the rule of law (Castel 2005, p. 7). The vilifying of the lower classes shifts the discourse around social security: widespread concerns about social security, which may well be based on real experience, are turning into a demand for protection from the threat of uncivilized interlopers.

3 Longing for the intact community

The elements of the everyday consciousness of radically right-wing employees described above point to a social mechanism that enables class formation via the devaluation and exclusion of others. While one has long been waiting for economic betterment, “everything” is apparently being given to lazy and even dangerous refugees (Pol 2). Indeed, according to this perception, people who have made no contribution to the “national wealth” are probably pushing their way to the front of those entitled to claim. Not only in the East, but also in Lower Bavaria and the Ruhr Valley, employees perceive this as an additional devaluation of their own social position. Even in affluent regions such as the Ingolstadt Speckgürtel, where it is considered a particular flaw not to be rich, one encounters a similar attitude to life.

Such dispositions are by no means restricted to employees with comparatively low incomes. The feeling of social devaluation applies to the entire context of life: the structurally weak region; the city neighborhood one dares not visit; high urban rents; crumbling social infrastructure and barriers to mobility in the countryside. For this reason, the perception of social devaluation is also widespread among highly qualified employees who earn above-average wages. The East German engineer with high earnings personally knows “people in the same profession who get significantly less or sometimes more, depending on where they are” (Pro 2). As a trade unionist, he is also aware of the growing income and wealth inequality in the country. Thus it is subjectively no contradiction to be “satisfied” with one’s own earnings and yet to state: “Those who have something to say are those with power or money”, and they can simply “impose their [decisions] on others” (Pro 2). This experience of powerlessness connects well-off interviewees with low-income earners and the unemployed. And subjectively it weighs all the more heavily when the mode of devaluation not only concerns one’s social status but also one’s region. Anyone who repeatedly becomes an object of negative classification tends to be intolerant of those even lower in the social hierarchy. Self-evaluation via devaluation of others is not the only possible reaction to this state of affairs, of course, but it is nevertheless a subjectively understandable response (Rommelspacher 1995). If all this points to misguided social protest by blocked class movements, then the everyday consciousness of our interviewees can also reveal forms of thought that directly correspond to the criteria for Polanyian-type movements discussed above.

1. *Double Standards*: Radical right-wing interviewees see themselves as victims of double standards of evaluation. Those who, so the perception, constantly demand tolerance of minorities, homosexuals, migrants, refugees etc., find nothing wrong with disparagement of e. g. East Europeans or even their East German compatriots. Even when it comes to objects of collective devaluation, the interviewees have little understanding for what they consider to be excessive tolerance towards Muslims and other foreigners who are unwilling to adapt: “You can make a joke about Poland or people joke about Poles that they allegedly steal cars or that they’re thieves and there are Ossi-Wessi jokes, you get teased about that. But [...] say something negative or make a stupid joke about Muslims or that religion in particular, then it means, oh no, you better stifle that, that’s not appropriate and [...] also

the temperament in that religion is such that they take everything so seriously and you can't express yourself in a negative way and immediately [...] you get insulted as a Nazi and whatever. So that religion is intolerant, I think" (Pro 1).

2. *System versus Community*: Immigrants allegedly unwilling to integrate reinforce the complaint about the loss of intact communities. In the world-views of radically right-wing employees, this form of thinking is central. The binary scheme of these world-views knows only people and system, no society. "System" acts alternately as a collective name for the financial economy, the European Union, the euro, the elites or capital, but also for "withdrawn trade union bonuses" (Sek 1). This accumulation of negative powers is in turn taken to correspond to the human tendency to selfishly strive for money and power. It would be good, from the point of view of right-wing interviewees, if such selfishness were constrained. If this were possible, the will of the people could unfold optimally. In contrast to the system, the people are subjectively constructed as a culturally rooted community, a community like that which (as some of the interviewees know only from their parents) allegedly existed in the GDR. Of course, no one wants to see state bureaucratic socialism return. But at the top of individuals' wish lists is an ethnic community that is not characterized by egoism, striving for personal gain and "elbow mentality": "I don't know the GDR personally anymore. But when you hear your parents talking about it, there was more cohesion. It was more about the personal, the human, and not about how can I get more money or something so that I can afford this and that" (Pro 2).
3. *Democratization against loss of control*: Nation, understood as culturally homogeneous community, is in radically right-wing world-views the antipole of a destructive system that substitutes competition and elbow mentality for intact communities. Migrants and refugees, it is claimed, are an additional burden on the national community. Yet one doesn't need to devalue others in order to identify the growing migratory movements as the cause of further loss of control: "I am a self-confessed AfD voter [...] I say everyone who is halfway intelligent, who has an education and who has been to Africa, will know what potential [exists, KD] there, a legitimate potential, for migration. And against this background anyone who says: 'We'll manage it (*Wir schaffen das*), right to stay for all', is either completely unhinged or is lying to himself", so a highly qualified employee explains his sympathy for the AfD (Pro 9). For him, as for other interviewees with an affinity for the right, refugees are a synonym for loss of control, which must be reversed. Without having been asked, one finds oneself exposed to an immigration that appears uncontrollable. By opposing this "mass immigration" one hopes to protect one's own good life from additional loss of control.

Since they believe they are in the majority with their attitudes, right-wing interviewees position themselves as advocates of direct democracy: "Well, for me it would be a good democracy if we had a referendum, that's where you have to start. And the second for me would be a proper penal law. Referendums, where you can see where the mood of the people in the country is going, not some politician presuming 'I'm going to decide this and that for everyone'" (Pro1). Radically right-wing interviewees can well imagine a democracy based on the Swiss model. Admittedly,

referendums reduce democratic governance to the majority principle, but the people should rule directly and help the popular will to prevail. In this thinking, “the people” are identical with common sense. If the popular principle of reason can express itself in undistorted manner, the interviewees are certain the “correct” views will prevail. Tougher penalties for murderers and rapists or the immediate expulsion of migrant offenders would then be a matter of course. That, in any case, suggests a calculus in which *éthnos*—a relatively homogeneous people in cultural terms—is taken to be a democratic subject. Migrants may also belong to this “people” of those with German citizenship, as long as they unconditionally comply with the given norms of the national *Leitkultur*. Such an understanding of democracy, on the other hand, has no need of international and human rights. The principle “German first” counts. Only a culturally uniform people is strong and able to decide its fate autonomously. This—limited—understanding of democracy is simultaneously rebellious and conformist. It attacks national elites only to demand from them a strong leadership that must immediately and if possible permanently reverse the loss of control over the individual’s life.

4 A preliminary résumé

What are the implications for an analysis of right-wing populism of these findings on the explanatory power of different types of movement? They suggest—and here is a central conclusion—that Polanyi’s and Marx’s theoretical perspectives should be linked more closely. This becomes clear as soon as one takes a closer look at the causes and driving forces of right-wing populist movements in the light of the empirically garnered criteria. Three phenomena are key here: the *double structure of everyday consciousness* (1), the *Bonapartist constellation* of the present (2) and the *conflictual dimension* of democracy (3).

1. *Double structure of everyday consciousness*: First, it should be noted that the ideal-typical distinction between market-critical and class movements is not very clear with reference to the empirically demonstrable everyday consciousness of employees. Motives that lead to right-wing populist orientations can derive both from the perception of class-specific inequalities and from criticism of markets and alienation. In the first case, right-wing populist orientations reflect the consequences of a financial capitalist colonization (*Landnahme*), which has made the Federal Republic one of the most unequal societies in Europe and the OECD, not only in terms of income and wealth but also in terms of housing, health, education and social distinction (Fratzscher 2016, p. 9; Kaelble 2017, p. 176; Alvaredo et al. 2018, pp. 155–161). Via a nationalistic causal mechanism (“discrimination against Germans”), this experience leads to a form of processing that can be described as self-evaluation via the devaluation of others.

In the second case, unequal standards of valuation are associated with the destruction of community life, the real core of which is rooted in the economization of areas of life that actually obey other principles of rationality (Schimank and Volkmann 2017; Aulenbacher et al. 2014). This experience is transformed into criticism

of migration via an evocation of past communality and used to construct a cultural antagonism (“cultures incapable of integration”) which is to be dealt with by means of direct democracy on the basis of “the people”. In both forms of thinking, the identity of the opponent remains relatively diffuse. It is predominantly shifted into the political sphere and addressed to persons (“Merkel must go!”). Demands are primarily directed at the state and government. Those who vote AfD as a protest vote also stress that it is above all a matter of rousing the “big parties” to address the concerns of “normal” citizens and their families. This, the appeal for state protection from inequality, injustice and loss of community, allows us to speak of populist movements of a Polanyian type. Loss of control (Heitmeyer 2018) is an apt term for summarizing the socio-economic, cultural and political motives of the right-wing populist revolt.

2. *Bonapartist Constellation*: The fact that the increase in class-specific inequalities can become a driving force of right-wing populist revolt is due to a constellation that, following Marx, can be described as “Bonapartist” (Beck and Stütze 2018). When Marx concerns himself with real processes of class formation, he goes analytically far beyond the field of socio-economic class determination. In his famous essay “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” (Marx 1979) he analyzes the power relations and alliances between classes and class fractions that characterized French society at the time. Using the example of the French peasant smallholders, he explains why a class is unable to form itself into a mobilized movement due to its monadic mode of production, lack of means of communication and lack of organization. Structurally existing classes are thus incapable on their own of producing consciously acting class movements. On the contrary, demobilized classes lacking representative actors have little choice but to delegate their—always contradictory and therefore interpretable—interests to capable political actors. The majority class of French peasant smallholders voted in favor of Louis Bonaparte and his party of order, because it promised social benefits and the restoration of public security. Having come to power by democratic means, the party of order then used its position to eliminate democracy and restore a monarchist form of rule.

Under completely different conditions, the demobilization of—this time wage-dependent—classes can also be witnessed in the present. Although history does not repeat itself, it is nevertheless striking that a dramatic increase in class-specific inequalities is now accompanied by a weakness of trade unions and political organizations that operate on the axis of wage labor and capital, something that is probably unique since 1945. It appears that economic structural change and the precarization of labor have contributed decisively to the fact that particularly industrial workers in the old capitalist centers now regard themselves as a shrinking class (faction) in social decline (Therborn 2012; Milanovic 2016). This constellation can be described—in Germany and in Europe at large—as that of a demobilized class society. There is struggle between classes and class factions, but the initiative lies with the ruling classes. The everyday consciousness of employees is lacking in connecting concepts and forms of thinking with whose help they could understand inequalities and social conflicts in terms of collective mobilization and “democratic class strug-

gle” (Dahrendorf 1992; Korpi 1983) and so be in a position to change social power relations and influence events in the political sphere.

3. *Conflictual Democracy*: Class relations, as Didier Eribon (2016, p. 122) has pointed out, have an effect even when they are no longer to the fore in public discourse and everyday consciousness. In such constellations, social spaces open up in which classes emerge primarily as a result of negative classifications and attributions. To put it succinctly, if the everyday consciousness of dominated classes lacks orientations that could produce mobilized collectives, class relations operate in the mode of competition, as a result of a permanent separation into winners and losers, and by means of collective evaluations and devaluations. Devaluations accelerate the development of social situations that discriminate against all those who have to come to terms with such conditions. The state, which directly or indirectly distributes 40 to 60% of GDP in developed capitalist countries, plays a central role in this. By allocating or curtailing social property, and thus a means for individuals to secure their livelihoods, state activities exert a considerable influence on the class structure of society. Border demarcations associated with the expropriation of social property in turn promote class formation by stigmatizing large social groups. In order to counteract by democratic means the experience of collective devaluation, it is thus insufficient to conjure up social cohesion, as is currently happening in the public discourse of the political elites. Attempts to do so are anything but selective in their response to the lament over the loss of supposedly harmonious communities, and which forms a bridge—including an emotional one—between the everyday consciousness of employees and organized right-wing populism.

Instead of overemphasizing value-based cohesion, we must strive to counter the widespread sense of loss of control by rediscovering conflict, dispute and regulated class struggle as forms of democratic socialization. A Polanyi-oriented class concept can be helpful here, one that is closer to the anti-economistic Marx of the analysis of Bonapartism than the Austrian socialist himself suspects: according to Polanyi, class interests only provide “a limited explanation of long-term social developments” (Polanyi 2001, p. 159), since “sectional interests” must ultimately always be related to “a total situation” (ibid.). Moreover, class interests “most directly refer to standing and rank, to status and security” and are therefore “primarily not economic but social” (ibid., p. 160). An all-too-narrowly defined concept of interest must therefore lead to a “warped vision of social and political history” (ibid., p. 213), because it ignores the fact that purely economic facts are far less relevant for class behavior “than questions of social recognition” (ibid., p. 160).

In Karl Marx’s analysis of Bonapartism and especially in Antonio Gramsci we find similar ideas. A class concept that integrates the cognitive dimension could join up with analyses which address other causal mechanisms of social inequality (domination, social closure, etc.). Above all, however, it would make it possible to take a closer look at the class-specific plurality of social questions. The majority of right-wing employees we interviewed did not consider themselves poor or precarious. Their social problems are different. In the “probationary test of wages” (Boltanski and Chiapello 2003), which is central to capitalist societies, and the prob-

lem of recognition associated with it, they see themselves as members of groups whose performance is insufficiently rewarded by society. This problem is barely addressed (if at all) by a political system that equates social dislocations with poverty, unemployment or precarity. Disrespect, which is the real core of the thesis of a new cleavage (Merkel 2017), is also opposed by those academically qualified and therefore culturally superior classes (or class fractions) who—in the form of “distinction”—devalue the pragmatic conservatism, values, family forms and lifestyles of the shrinking industrial workforce (Williams 2017; Evans and Tilly 2017).

This specific class experience becomes material for the formation of the right-wing populist bloc. But it can only become a means of cultural bonding because there is a lack of a mobilizing, democratically inclusive class politics that could uncover the “ambivalox” character of that bloc. Because it is the favored political plan of the market-radical part of this bloc (e. g. an internal European market without regulative European institutions) that would produce exactly that which is already perceptible in the everyday life of employees as inequality, collective devaluation and loss of control, and which is to be compensated for by an atavistic community. Democratic class politics, on the other hand, decomposes any notion of homogeneous national communities. It calls for collective self-activity and unites groups directly or indirectly dependent on wages, since it can only be successful across ethnic, national and gender boundaries (Zwicky and Wermuth 2018; Friedrich and Redaktion analyse und kritik 2018; Riexinger 2018; Candeias and Brie 2017). In contrast to calls for a new left-wing populism (Mouffe 2018), such a democratic class politics has no need to locate antagonisms merely in the political arena and to justify them with the help of a friend-enemy scheme inspired by Carl Schmitt. Conflicts of interest and antagonisms are to be found in the (class) structures of real societies themselves. Comparative research that systematically examines differences and similarities not only between market-critical and class movements, but also between authoritarian and democratic movements of a Polanyian type (on this see Becker et al. 2018b) could, in addition to their intrinsic analytical value, also contribute to providing a scientific foundation for democratic-conflictual policies.

For the time being, a first résumé must suffice to identify empirically available criteria for the analysis of right-wing populist movements of a Polanyian type. Such movements can (a) emerge both from class-specific inequalities and from market- and competition-driven alienation; they (b) become right-wing movements because, in attributing the causes of social dislocations, they make use of a nationalistic exclusionary mechanism that replaces society with the national community. Faced with diffuse market power, these movements (c) attribute the causes of insecurity and injustice on the basis of personalization, resentment-fueled knowledge, and conspiracy-theoretical views. Right-wing populist movements of a Polanyian type claim (d) the protective function of the national state and become attractive for workers and low-paid employees because they afford self-esteem via devaluation of others. Corresponding orientations, however, (e) are not without contradictions, since the “ambivalox” right-wing populist bloc (f) aims to serve a capitalist expansionism which promotes the very loss of control that right-wing social populism laments. For this reason, the revolt from the right ultimately (g) remains an imaginary counter-

movement whose oppositional gesture can be disenchanting to the extent that the "ambivalox" becomes a public and popular topic of democratic counter-movements.

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