

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Special Issue of the *Forum for Social Economics*—FSE,  
a Journal of the Association for Social Economics—ASE

Working Title:

### **The Rise of the Illiberal Right in Central and Eastern Europe. A Countermovement to Neoliberal Capitalism?**

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The *Forum for Social Economics* (FSE) is pleased to invite submissions to a special issue, welcoming contributions from a variety of disciplines and encouraging application of different theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method).

The special issue of *FSE* will address problems related to the rise of illiberal movements in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The illiberal turn is marked by a rejection of the main tenets of political, cultural and (to some extent) economic liberalism (Zielonka 2018, Galston 2018). This poses a serious challenge to the liberal status quo that emerged after 1989. Illiberal tendencies in CEE have also become a serious dilemma for the European Union (Makarychev 2019), which regards itself as founded on democracy, the rule of law, tolerance, and multiculturalism. However, in Poland and Hungary governments formed by Law and Justice and Fidesz, respectively, not only dismantle the fundamentals of constitutional democracy but also openly employ a scapegoating rhetoric directed at immigrants and other minorities. Even though Poland and Hungary are considered paradigmatic cases of “democratic backslide,” similar tendencies can be easily identified in the entire region (Cianetti, Dawson, and Hanley 2018). Several scholarly accounts of these phenomena have been developed, but we remain skeptical about explanations that seek the roots of this crisis in the communist legacy or the antidemocratic tendencies inherited from the history of CEE. As Mudde points out, although rightist movements have been long present in CEE, it would be an exaggeration to call this region a haven for extremists (Mudde 2017). In other words, CEE states are in no way predestined to turn into illiberal democracies. Nor can the rise of populism be fully explained by the failed attempts to imitate the West (Krastev and Holmes 2018) or by the unfinished process of building a nation-state (Minkenberg 2017). Such accounts are partial at best since they ignore or downplay the intersection between democratic politics and neoliberal economic reforms.

How can we make sense of the populist turn in CEE? In our view, the rise of the illiberal right can be properly understood only against the background of the neoliberal market transition. Our thesis dovetails with observations made by Karl Polanyi, who argues in *The Great Transformation* that “in order to comprehend German fascism, we must revert to Ricardian

England” (Polanyi 2001, 32). As he makes clear, the reaction to market shocks can take both progressive and regressive political forms, with the latter proving hostile to individual freedom and the institutions that safeguard it. In Polanyi’s time, German fascism was regarded as a paradigmatic case of an illiberal countermovement, whereas contemporary examples of similar tendencies are described using various labels such as populism, elective authoritarianism, or illiberal democracy. What we witness today is a variant of Polanyian countermovement, one which has not yet developed its final form. Polanyi’s dictum that it is impossible to grasp German fascism without taking into account Ricardian England appears even more illuminating when interpreted in the context of the division between the center and the periphery of global capitalism. Although the project of a worldwide capitalism based on self-regulating markets was born in England and the United States, its most damaging social consequences have become apparent in peripheral and semi-peripheral countries. Hence, a close study devoted to the politics of Europe’s Eastern periphery may reveal important clues that could help to understand the nature and roots of the populist movements which emerged around the world after the Great Recession (Judis 2016).

We argue that the current upsurge of the illiberal right is a reaction to the socially destabilizing consequences of the neoliberal capitalism adopted by all countries of CEE (Bohle and Greskovits 2012). This may seem counterintuitive since it is widely believed that in most CEE countries the market transition was an outstanding economic success marked by a rapid increase in GDP per capita, attractive employment opportunities, growing consumption, and rising living standards. However, a closer examination reveals serious shortcomings of the emerging market economies, including growing economic inequalities, dependence on foreign capital, underfinanced public services, and labor market insecurity. As suggested by Apple and Orenstein (2018), current problems faced by many CEE countries are rooted in their attempt to join the international economy by adopting the principles of the Washington consensus. The picture is becoming even bleaker when we consider the evidence provided by anthropology and critical sociology. As Chris Hann has observed, “the dislocation of the 1990s was an irruption of Karl Polanyi’s «market society» in a dramatic form that made the “disembedding” accomplished by nineteenth century liberalism seem mild and gradualist in comparison” (Hahn 2019, 297). For many inhabitants of CEE, the rise of market society was marked by the disruption of established identities and social practices (Dunn 2004). Moreover, those who could not adapt to the new market realities have been demonized in mainstream discourse for their alleged adherence to a “Soviet mentality” (Buchowski 2006). Mass migrations, new forms of poverty, and the growing divide between the “winners” and “losers” of the economic transition have provided fertile ground for a new coalition between the dispossessed and cynical political elites.

The rise of the anti-liberal right in CEE poses both intellectual and ethical challenges for social sciences. We invite contributions engaging with the above account of the rise of illiberal right, both developing or challenging this approach. Specific research questions include but are not limited to the following problems:

- How can we conceptualize the recent anti-liberal reaction? Is it populism, elective authoritarianism, neo-fascism, illiberal democracy, Putinism or something else?
- What are the reasons behind the rise of the illiberal right? Can the current ascendancy of right-wing movements be traced to some policy errors made during the 1990s or early 2000s? What is the role of economic and cultural factors in explaining the recent surge of populism?
- Who supports the populists and why? What kind of rhetoric does the radical right employ to gain mass popularity? Is mass support for the illiberal right a lasting or transitory phenomenon?

- To what extent do the policies proposed or implemented by the illiberal right pose an actual threat to the established political order? Does the rise of the illiberal right mark the end of the neoliberal era or should it be rather considered as the most recent incarnation of neoliberalism? Can the success of the radical right in Poland and Hungary be regarded as a critical juncture, changing the trajectory of historical development in those countries?
- Is the rise of the illiberal right in Central and Eastern Europe a reflection of general political trends or a phenomenon specific to this particular region? Is it justified to classify Bolsonaro, Trump, Orban, Kaczyński, and others as various manifestations of populism? What is the relation between right-wing politics in CEE countries and the global crisis of neoliberal capitalism?
- What is the future of the illiberal right in CEE? What conclusions can be drawn from its response to COVID-19? Could the pandemic be used to strengthen the anti-democratic tendencies or does it mark the beginning of the end for the illiberal right?

The special issue is tentatively scheduled to be published in 2022 as volume number 51, both online and in print.

### Notes for Authors

Anyone wishing to submit an abstract or having any questions can email Slawomir Czech at [slawomir.czech@ue.katowice.pl](mailto:slawomir.czech@ue.katowice.pl). We shall gladly consider any suggestions and answer questions regarding possible topics. To submit a paper proposal, please email the title and a 300-word abstract to the editor by 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020.

All papers are subject to double-blind peer review. Articles should be submitted online through the journal website at Taylor and Francis/Routledge. For author guidelines and details about the submission process, see:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?journalCode=rfse20&page=instructions>

### Important Dates

Deadline for submission of the paper title and abstract (by e-mail): 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020

Deadline for the first full draft (Word file): 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2020

### Timeline

- Publication of the CfP: June 2020
- Submission of abstracts: end of August 2020
- Notification of acceptance: end of September 2020
- Submission of complete article: end of December 2020

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