



**HAL**  
open science

# Resentment? Revolt! Rupture of communication, rupture of experience, and the perfect breeding of welfare chauvinism in the epicentre of the German radical right

Paulus Wagner

## ► To cite this version:

Paulus Wagner. Resentment? Revolt! Rupture of communication, rupture of experience, and the perfect breeding of welfare chauvinism in the epicentre of the German radical right: Report on field research in the Sächsische Schweiz-Osterzgebirge. 2018. hal-02186721

**HAL Id: hal-02186721**

**<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-02186721>**

Preprint submitted on 17 Jul 2019

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

---

Princeton-Sciences Po Strategic Partnership

Summer 2018 Fellowship Program:

*“Europeanization vs. Globalization: The Euro Crisis and the Changing Politics of Economic Interdependence in Europe” (EUROGLOB)*

---

## Resentment? Revolt!

**Rupture of communication, rupture of experience,  
and the perfect breeding of welfare chauvinism in the epicentre  
of the German radical right**

Report on field research in the Sächsische Schweiz-Osterzgebirge

PAULUS WAGNER

Sciences Po, Paris, LIEPP & CEE

In my PhD thesis, I am interested in the *sociology of the electorates* of populist-radical-right (PRR) parties in continental Europe. As a part of the EUROGLOB project, I am conducting four weeks of qualitative field research in which I am interviewing “local-level experts” (party activists, in particular campaigners, unionists, etc.) about the German PRR-party AfD’s electorate in the two electoral circumscriptions where the party has yielded its highest results in the September 2017 national parliamentary elections in the country’s post-socialist East respectively the West. These are the district of Sächsische Schweiz-Osterzgebirge in Sachsen, East Germany, and the city of Gelsenkirchen in the Ruhrgebiet, West Germany. I have defined a specific social group – people who switch their vote between left-wing parties (major left SPD, radical left DIE LINKE) and the AfD – and two specific political issues of interest – “social justice” and “globalisation”. It is the way in which questions relating to these issues are narratively framed by the PRR’s voters that is interesting to me (rather than simple pro/contra positions).

In early May 2018, I have realised two weeks of field research in the district of *Sächsische Schweiz-Osterzgebirge* (SOE), a rural district south of the city of Dresden in the Bundesland of Sachsen, East Germany. The AfD has here yielded her highest result federally, in a jump from 7% to 35% over the period of four years, and won the district. SOE has a particularly strong local AfD-organisation which is a driving force in the transformation of the federal AfD from a “national conservative” and economically liberal to a “radical-right” party with a pro-social (welfare chauvinist) rhetoric. Frauke Petry, the AfD’s former party head and representative of the liberal wing, ran and won the election in this electoral circumscription – just before, in October, she left AfD and founded another political initiative. SOE’s AfD organisation was strongly involved in making Petry leave (I am citing the press speaker: “A

cleansing process.”) SOE having an extensive history of neo-nazism, the AfD has here amongst others absorbed 7% of the total vote share directly from the neo-nazist party NPD.

In 14 days I have been able to interview a total of around 40 persons. This includes nine local politicians of the AfD (3), the conservative CDU (2), the LINKE (3) and the SPD (1) (district- or municipal-level politicians, party members who have done campaigning in the last federal elections, one mayor and one member of the state parliament), two unionists, one local journalist who has done all the reporting on the local AfD, two representatives of the district administration working on economic affairs and one of the Federal Employment Agency’s local centre, five representatives of local associations (sports, tourism, a theatre, an NGO dealing with multiculturalism and racism), two representatives of a local higher education institution, shopkeepers, the attendees of a shabby bar and the entirety of the parents present at a hiking trip of the first form of a local high-school on Sunday, to which I was kindly invited by the teacher who organised it. Also, I have observed live as a participant a large AfD-demonstration and liberal/left counter-demonstration in Berlin as well as the public talk of the Saxonian Ministerpräsident (head of federal state) Michael Kretschmer in one of the towns in SOE most notorious for its neo-nazist movement and AfD vote, which the CDU-politician has held as a part of a very early campaigning tour for the 2019 state elections.

Hereafter, I am analysing the backgrounds to AfD’s landslide electoral victory in SOE – social experience, socio-political relations and policy feedback – before I am presenting my concrete results concerning vote switching, social justice, and globalisation.

## **1. Social experience**

SOE today has 255.000 inhabitants. This is 20% less than in 1989, the year of German reunification. The population is disproportionally over-aged and ethnically highly homogenous: before the mass-inflow of refugees in 2015, 1% of regional residents were foreigners; meanwhile this number has risen to 2%. The nowadays elderly generation (65+) has experienced adulthood in DDR (German Democratic Republic, GDR) times and is marked, in one way or the other, by the experience of its authoritarian and socially solidaristic system. The generation that now counts 50-65 years of age has, thirty years ago, been the agent of political change – these are the people who crowded the streets when the *Wende* happened. This experience is today re-politicised in favour of populism (see below). The majority of AfD-activists are male and belong to the latter-named age group.

Post-socialism in East Germany meant the sudden closure of large socialist industrial enterprises. SOE in the 1990s had unemployment levels of up to 20% – and this is the formal figure, not including those who made part of *Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen*, the provision of lowest-quality work by the German Federal government. The transformation of the DDR’s economy has generally been perceived as mismanaged by the Federal government’s agencies, not as radically mismanaged as e.g. in Russia, but as a sell-out of local assets to West-Germans. This perception is held by the quasi-entirety of the population, not only of SOE but also of the more cosmopolitan city of Dresden.

The experience of the post-socialist socio-economy by the population can be categorised into three ideal types. One group of people – in the early 1990s, young people right after their graduation or qualified mid-aged professionals – has left the region, many of them to Germany’s economically flourishing South West (Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg). Another group has been able to profit from the new circumstances, e.g. by successfully founding their own business or attaining a position in public service. They have been given a name:

“Wende-Gewinner” (winners). The opposite, the “Wende-Verlierer” (losers) are a large group that had to (due to low professional qualification) or decided to (due to family, real estate ownership, or attachment) stay while facing economic hardship. Many of these latter people on the long run accepted jobs of a lower qualification or remuneration than they potentially could have under better regional economic conditions.

Today, SOE’s economy is very small-structured, dominated by small enterprises in various domains of artisanship, construction, and notably, tourism. There are almost no industrial enterprises in the region. As a result, prices (housing, consumption goods) are very low, but wages are even lower – in a comparison of all German districts, SOE has one of the lowest wage levels.

Education levels in the region are equally very low. The small-structured private wealth that has, during a lifetime of work and not rarely in a bad job, been built here is what I want to call “wealth remote from education”: no high professional qualification was required for its earning; a materialist business-mindedness and a culturally speaking lower-middle class private-property logic stands behind it. From a number of respondents in the region I have heard that they disapprove of the zeitgeist which sees higher education as the only way to make a career. If their children attend a Gymnasium in the region’s capital Pirna, they already move away from their village. Later they will necessarily go to study – at least to Dresden, if not further away – and then work outside of the region.

SOE, located between the city of Dresden and the Czech border, it needs to be stressed, is an idyllic region in terms of its geography, nature, and architecture. It has a tradition of receiving tourists that reaches back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century: already Richard Wagner<sup>1</sup> preferred it for his holidays and creative stays due to the beauty of the mountains and woods at the Czech border and the silence that could be found along the river Elbe. And this, already, sets the general theme. SOE’s inhabitants, and their predecessors, have been very immobile and have never received many immigrants – not even from the directly neighbouring countries. The high school class I went hiking with consisted to 100% of white, German children – something I had never seen in any of the Western European countries I have resided in since including the 1990s. The vast amounts of tourists received today are *elderly conservative couples* from other German regions. This leads to a very high number; I want to claim to a critical mass of elderly conservative people with a similar live experience being present in this region, talking about that “you cannot go to Dresden anymore, you will be harassed by foreigners in the streets,” and how the small number of city dwellers who have newly bought houses in the village do not fit into local community.<sup>2</sup>

There is a certain amount of variance. The town of Tharand in the very West of the region SOE is home to the world’s second oldest university institute in forestry. A part of the local population here is (far) higher educated than the regional average, is more mobile, has a different culture and different values. Some of these people are engaged or work in local politics and administration and have contributed to facilitating communication about what is

---

<sup>1</sup> As we know, the antisemitic composer of ultraconservative, mythically nationalist operas (“musical dramas”, “Gesamtkunstwerke”) glorifying archaic notions of masculinity, of battle, etc., aiming to “replace religion by art”, which later served as propaganda material for the Nazi regime (but of course still are among the greatest pieces of romantic music ever written – a statement that a Wagner-fan would respond to, “Remove the “among” and the “romantic”).

<sup>2</sup> There is also a small but growing amount of climbing tourism in the region which i.a. brings young, socio-politically “alternative” people into SOE. I have not been able to test at this stage if this, at specific spots of social contact and exchange, may produce an inverse effect.

going on during the large immigration of refugees in 2015, as well as between new immigrant and local resident groups: they carry a different political culture than the local population (by which, predominantly, such initiatives were not taken). Even more, local residents in Tharand may be used to a slight degree of ethnic and cultural mixture, having seen visiting students of a different culture, language, and physiognomy already during DDR times. Here we find SOE's lowest AfD-election-result in 2017: 30%. The highest AfD-results – of around 40% – we find in the touristic, but economically and culturally very peripheral towns in the Eastern valley of the river Elbe (see below).

Based on participant observation and -experience, I want to make a geographical classification of *life-worlds* – one that follows *degrees of urbanity*. When you take the train from the 500.000 inhabitants-city Dresden, a cosmopolitan centre of the arts and at least a federal one of the sciences, the political capital of the state of Saxony, one of only three large cities in the German East, to SOE's district capital town Pirna, you cross a border of life worlds. The mode of living in Dresden is *urban*, it is indeed only by a small degree less *metropolitan* than e.g. in Berlin.<sup>3</sup> Pirna has 40.000 inhabitants, is beautiful, quiet, features a small town centre with some cultural offer indeed of trans-regional relevance (but not transcending in relevance the state borders of Saxony). It is connected to Dresden as well as to the villages around it through the daily commuting of a substantial number of people of all ages for all purposes. It hosts a high number of hiking tourists. When you are a resident of Pirna, you are likely to own or rent on the long-term a house or apartment. You are likely to live with your core family. When you walk through the town-centre, you meet a number of people whom you know – possibly, whom you have known for a long time. You greet the shop keepers. You walk past many people whom you don't greet, including people whose lifestyle is not yours, but if you see something that appears bizarre, not in order to you, you will stop and address the issue. You feel that this town is, not to an extremely rigid, but to a coherent degree, collectively *yours*. The mode of living can be described as *town-ish* and as *suburban*. When you take the bus from Pirna to one of the villages in SOE, you notice first of all that you should own a car. By no other means will you be able to make sure you arrive on time for your appointments. If you are a resident of one of these places, you live in a house, possibly with your extended family or not far from them. You have either inherited or built this house. You know the quasi-totality of the village's inhabitants as well as their children, their parents, and you know where in the graveyard there grandparents lie. The only local institutions of trans-local relevance are the touristic sights and gastronomy as well as the commuting of some to Pirna or Dresden for work. The commute to Dresden, however, is a bit far and complicated, so that this latter group is likely to move (at least) to the *suburban(ising)* towns of Pirna, Bannewitz or Freital. If you live in the village, all creation of meaning, of

---

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that a so-conceptualised “metropolitan” or “urban” life world – in comparison to a “suburban/town-ish” and a “rural” one as described afterwards – obviously features the largest internal variance. Indeed it is *defined* by this huge variance of social experience in high geographic proximity. Whether, inversely, by a reasonable measure, a “metropolitan life world” features at all *any* points of coherence in collective experience – experiences that are shared, to a certain level of recognition and identification, by a large part of a city's dwellers – is a pertinent question. One could argue that the continental European city, *notably through welfare-state (type-of) provisions*, has at least some of them: credibly, most of their residents make use of public transportation systems. This is not the case e.g. in Mumbai, where the middle classes systematically use cabs instead of the local trains. In this typology of social dis-attachment, North American cities would be found somewhere in the middle. I will stop here as it is rural, not urban sociology that interests me in this paper; also, much more has already been written about the latter (side question: why – and how does this relate to the rise of populism?).

purpose being shared and radically local, by every appropriate judgement, this place *is* organically *yours*.

Sitting at the shore of the Elbe in one of the villages that I visited for interviews in the river's Eastern valley (the Östliches Elbtal, close to the Czech border) is a memorable experience for me. I saw a picture that you would print on a postcard – sun, water, woods, houses built of Elbe sandstone. I heard complete silence, literally but for the mellow murmur of the river, and then a group of elderly German conservative lower middle class couples chatting (loud, they are German) while getting on a ferry boat operated by a local man who goes from one shore to the other in a 15-minute frequency, 8 hrs a day. I felt – semantic void. Nothing of this spoke to me. Get me right, I adore hiking – but the last times I did it were in Kyrgyzstan, in Colombia, and in Ireland – which are places that interest me – and in Fontainebleau and the French alps with friends from Paris – who are people that interest me. While the experience of Pirna somewhat relates to that I have made growing up in a Lower Austrian small town, there was absolutely *no reason* for me to be in that village – except that in fact, it has the single highest proportional populist vote in all of Germany.

I want to conclude two things from the preceding two paragraphs. Firstly, the here-described differences in life-worlds are not only relevant to superficial aspects of social experience. These worlds differ in core aspects of social *existence*: in the modes, in which *life meaning* is created.<sup>4</sup> What is the meaning of life? – *the* question to which post-modern societies – and this is what defines them – do not offer a common, uniting answer, by us does not need to be explored normatively, but descriptively, *sociologically*. The goals that people set or follow in their lives, the types of social embeddedness and the experiences of social transcendence (Th. Luckmann) that give meaning to their lives, is my argument, *at least in this case study* differ significantly along the line of degrees of urbanity – which automatically overlap with age, education, and taste.<sup>5</sup> (However, the urbanity dimension must be correlative rather than causal; possibly there is causation via a short effect chain.) Secondly, I want to formulate the hypothesis that the combination of, 1) this substantial difference in what superficially and possibly wrongly we might call “socio-cultural characteristics”, what better should be called “social experience” and most precisely, “worlds” or “worldliness”, and 2) the *rupture of communication* between them is a background factor to the success of populism among a specific part of its electorate. Hereby, I am not saying anything new on the surface: the significance of the urban-rural divide as well as of age and of education for populist voting (as well as for a “GAL-TAN-cleavage” or an “integration-demarcation cleavage”) have been shown time and again. I want to sharpen our understanding of *how in detail this works* – which, by the way, is the only way to understand *what can be done about it*. Our colleagues at Paris School of Economics, at Nuffield College, Oxford, and at the LSE International

---

<sup>4</sup> Meaning creation ... Sinnschöpfung. Possibly the use of the English word “purpose” would be better.

<sup>5</sup> In this very early report, I am not rooting my arguments in the literature. What I implicitly cite, using the chosen wordings, includes: Saskia Sassen’s classification of urban sociologies (“Global cities”); “social transcendence” in the phenomenological work of Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann; “meaning” from Viktor Frankl’s psychotherapeutic approach of *existential analysis*. “Social experience” is a widely used and not strictly codified term in sociology. Phenomenology, generally speaking, is the discipline that qualitatively analyses individual experience. George Herbert Mead, although – or probably rather, because – departing from American pragmatism offers an interesting approach in connecting the two. Also, on the more fundamental side, James Dewey’s *transactionalist* social ontology (every human act is a “transaction” that involves an individual as well as its social environment) seems of significance here. A direction into which the here-begun theorising could move is the following: to what degree is the meaning that matters to your life – in two extreme cases – *transnationally shared* or *localised*? Possibly this conceptualisation could help us move beyond the confusion about *in what way* education, geographical mobility, and urbanity currently matter for politics.

Inequalities Institute are doing great work in measuring social inequalities in numbers. If we want to understand how inequalities matter for politics, and possibly if we want to understand what they are and how they matter at all, we must look at: 1) how they are *experienced* by people and 2) the ways in which *different* people *communicate* with each other. The latter is what I do in the next section.

## 2. Socio-political relations and policy feedback

Sachsen, and this includes SOE, has been governed by the conservative CDU ever since the *Wende*. As a rule rather than an exception, this long-term stability of power has produced corruption scandals, internal power fights, and most pertinently, high political arrogance. The former MP for SOE, even when the AfD's party leader Frauke Petry announced she would run in this district in 2017, did not put more effort in campaigning than usually because he simply did not believe he could lose elections. The approach to politics that here is being punished – not in any way implicitly, but explicitly, people have actively and loudly demanded change for years – has generally been described to me as a “top-down” way of talking to people, as well as “not talking” to people. There is sparse evidence that generational change may overlap with “style” in the qualitative change in socio-political relations that is here underway; but there is also the CDU's district member of state parliament who is in his mid-20s and seems as far from the people (comfortably, plural and singular of this word are identic) and as involved with his own profit as it could get.

The German Federal government has *never* since 1989 been seen by the local population of SOE as simply “their government”, but consistently as a type of “foreign”, at points even as an invading institution. The widespread perception is: there is no connection between local needs and Berlin's politics. What I find is that this perception is founded at least on some solid ground.

Infrastructure and education are among the region's big problems. A general issue in current German politics, one of multi-partisan mobilisation, is: there are not enough kindergartens – because there is no money to run them. In Saxony, in addition, there is a lack of teachers – as a direct result of the low payment of teachers in the state. Young qualified people leave the state. While there is extensive commuting or migration of labour from Czech Republic to Bavaria or Austria, there is few to East Saxony – as the wages are not attractive “even” in comparison with Czech wages (given the named alternatives). SOE's wage level is among the lowest of all German districts, but more importantly: many people here have a reason to fear poverty once they retire due to the proportionality principle of the German pension system – which, as the AfD stresses, can send a Federal public servant into retirement with 3,000 euros monthly. In SOE, it can be 600.

Since 2000, the river Elbe which runs through SOE has produced three serious floodings which have left damage to houses, infrastructure and the tourism industry and made a strong impression on the population. State and federal funds for reconstruction were vastly insufficient. This is among the first answers one gets when asking: “What has politics done well, what could politics do better?” It tends to be co-articulated with another issue: a significant part of the region lacks the infrastructure for mobile internet connection – speak, you cannot use internet on your cell phone – as no public investment has been made over years. In 2018, excluding a whole region from the world's most favourite hobby (surfing on one's cell phone) seems a sure way to alienate its inhabitants, to literally force them to ask: are we a part of ... Germany? (This, evidently, is the nationalist articulation – which seems to win this articulation game. Another one would be: ... of modernisation?)

The AfD's district head, professional carpenter Egbert Ermer, tells me in a memorable moment of our extensive conversation:

"The people would never have reacted so strongly to the refugees if they had not before that heard for years from all levels of politics: there is no money, there is no money. And suddenly, there was money."

"... but for the others", as the radical-right articulation then goes. And as is stressed again and again, the district had to take up debt for the management of refugee accommodation and integration, the state and Federal funds that were provided in a top-down process did not suffice. One was "left alone" with the "problems" while Merkel was making "big words" (CDU-politician). Around 80% of people I talked to, among them educated residents of metropolitan Dresden, not at all only AfD voters, share these perceptions. This may have been the perfect preparation of the ground for welfare chauvinism – here, in an *internal periphery* of the global economic *centre*.<sup>6</sup>

The number one reason, however, for why the AfD seems to be successful in SOE, is: they talk to the people. They are strongly represented personally sur place, in all the local towns and increasingly many of the villages. They are accessible. They talk to everyone. In their events, you can say "everything you think" (note the double meaning: you can equally be as racist, explicitly as "politically incorrect" as you want); in a CDU-event the politician will wear a suit, stand on a podium, and it is exclusively him<sup>7</sup> who speaks. The point and the problem here is that as a matter of fact, the AfD is the *only* party who effectively *talks to these people*. When they propagate "The German government wants to replace its people" (read: through immigration, while usually, you would replace a bad government), almost no one believes this in the strict sense. However, it is the only slogan out there that *communicates with*, even if it *disarticulates*, the peripheral-rural experience of the people I talked to in the villages of the Eastern valley of the river Elbe, who all are huge football fans but had to close their football club because there are no more children in the village, why, because there is no more school in the village; who complain that their children do not want to continue their touristic enterprises that had been run for generations and not even to keep their houses in the village after the damages done by the flooding. Many of these people are not poor, they have built up a considerable bit of private wealth, often under hard conditions, over all of their life course, framed in a lower-middle class logic of private property with a fence around it and a low-educated aesthetic: car(s), large TV set, shopping with your car at a large supermarket including a lot of meat and Wurst, conservative clothing, holidays: hiking in Austria. It is not so much them individually, it is their local *world* as a whole which is in danger of going down the hill – and which many of them have decided to "defend", by means of whichever vote and supporting whichever articulation – explicitly including: "Hol' dir deine Heimat zurück" ... "Take your homeland back" and "Zukunft Deutschland" ... "Future: Germany". Our analytical question must be: which other future effectively seems to be on offer for this group?

---

<sup>6</sup> While "austerity politics" is the word that directly comes to my mind, summarizing this history of local-federal relations, the named AfD representative, interestingly, did not even know this word when I asked him back on it.

<sup>7</sup> No need, even, to gender this pronoun.

Saxonian political culture is traditionally marked by high interest for politics together with generalised distrust and specific distrust towards authorities – a “Kleingarten resistance”<sup>8</sup> type of characteristics that have become reinforced during DRR and that are now being re-politicised, and it is important to note: both in pre-political forms of articulation – amongst people who do not accept PRR-discourse – and by the AfD-milieu of propaganda outlets. What may have been resentment has, explicitly, become revolt. This revolt can have various enemies – f. ex. “Antifa” and “links-grüne Gutmenschen”<sup>9</sup> in an AfD framing. But what, once more, 80% of people I interviewed – this includes the entirety of AfD voters as well as CDU-voters, left-wing-voters and, *in particular*, CDU activists and party members – agree on is that Angela Merkel is a problem.

The small, crucial step from *democratic backlash* to *populist revolt* is what some perform privately in pre-political articulation and what the AfD blatantly propagates publicly. This is the assignment of sole responsibility to a principal opponent: in a process evolving since 2015, that in May 2018 seemed to still be steering towards its peak, Angela Merkel has become *the* problem.

What the young German PRR, the AfD, is successfully doing is not only to spur, but also to sit on top of, to *monopolise* this protest dynamic against the existing conditions.

### 3. Vote switching and issues

Syncretising the preceding pages-long building of *understanding*, I want to present in more concrete terms my results to the questions: who in SOE are the former left-wing voters who switch to the PRR? And what role do questions of social justice and of globalisation play, equally importantly, how are they narratively framed among the electorate?

A large part of the new AfD voters are switchers from the conservative CDU or newly motivated non-voters. However, from 2013 to 2017 the populist left party DIE LINKE has lost 10% of the total vote share – either to non-voting or the AfD. The neo-nazist party NPD’s vote of 7% has been absorbed by the AfD. Interestingly, the liberal FDP – a typical competitor of AfD – has *as well* won in this election.

A typical explanation for the landslide switching from CDU to AfD is that people are as conservative as they used to be, but the party has become more centrist. This in mind, it however seems to be the protest directed at concrete policies and political styles that matters. This includes a long period of slowly increasing dissatisfaction plus a sudden uproar about *the way how* the refugee inflow *was managed* in 2015. At the moment, Angela Merkel is more and more becoming the protest’s main target. Possibly, when as a party you move your position, it depends on whether you move *with the people* or *without the people*: not only in terms of “spatial” position plotted in a chart, but also in terms of communication, relationality, and leadership.

---

<sup>8</sup> Kleingartenvereine (allotment clubs) are a characteristic of Germanophone life. A typical activity of conservative low-income strata (not seldom, a *post-working class*) it includes owning a very small garden divided by high fences from another 50 small gardens around it, sitting in this small garden for extended periods of time, drinking beer and disliking all of the 50 neighbours as well as immigrants to your country. Indeed, hissing German flags in your garden is one of the most common local ways in SOE of “patriotic” protest. In post-nazist Germany it is not common to be patriotic about flags except in football. Many of us see this as a cultural advancement that Aufarbeitung (the active dealing with history) has helped make, a step of cultural progress that other Western countries have not made (!). Moving this social line of acceptance “backwards”, of course, is one of the aims of nationalist activism – and for the time being this project seems to be successful.

<sup>9</sup> ... „left-green humanitarians“.

The LINKE seems to in 2013 have collected a significant share of the *general protest vote*. These protest voters are distinct from the LINKE's core electorates: elderly people socialised in the DDR, young highly educated people with explicit left-wing attitudes, and the poorest. After 2015, the direction of the general protest vote shifted towards a monopolisation by the AfD. A LINKE campaigner tells me how among people who came to his campaign stand in SOE there was but one pertinent question: "All that you do about social policy is great, I really support that. But why are you for immigration? [...] I cannot vote for a party that supports immigration."

The NPD – AfD flow on a voter as well as on an activist level, interestingly (and maybe not even surprisingly) seems to shift the AfD's socio-economic rhetoric to the left.

Social difference and social justice, by all of my respondents in the region, is framed in a predominantly horizontal, not vertical way. The basic distinction, and this is the real experience they have lived through since decades, is the difference between German West and German East: the prior being advantaged over the latter. A much younger, and also horizontal, distinction is that between ethnic/cultural foreigners and locals/Germans. Not only is economic reality in Saxony a different one – and dis-attached – from that of Bavaria or Baden-Württemberg. In addition, Saxony is among West Germans generally laughed about: because it is peripheral, because of its specific mentality – both of these are then, usually, articulated around the issue of the Saxonian dialect ("Germany's least sexy dialect." – Note the pertinence of this innuendo suggesting reproductive ineligibility.) More recently, the strong Saxonian neo-nazi movement makes part of these stereotypes. Dichotomisation instead of communication leads to what it will always lead: in SOE, the phrase "If you speak Saxonian dialect, they anyway call you a Nazi" has become a vehicle of *legitimising*, of pushing the acceptance frontier of radical right attitudes and actions – along the line of collective opposition to the West, the metropolitan liberals, and the Merkel-government. Needless to say, these discursive vehicles also stabilise (neutralise) intra-group inequality: some of the richest entrepreneurs of SOE are now AfD-members.

Globalisation is not an explicit issue of political competition or societal interest (although the district-head of the AfD answers my question about it: "This is ... the biggest lie of the recent decades.") In this part of the world, globalisation has mainly been experienced as the post-socialist transformation of the economy, which has included sudden deindustrialisation. As said above, it was by a large societal majority perceived as mismanaged by the Federal government's agencies; effectively, as an unjust sell-out of assets to Western Germans. It resulted in high unemployment and in SOE's case, a population outflow of 20% (see above). It is just to argue that the articulation of this experience, and thus the political backlash to neo-liberal post-socialism – which is one distinct chapter of globalisation – is happening right now.