

**PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGES IN
WORKING LIFE AND THE IMPACT ON
POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS
INTERIM COUNTRY REPORT ON
QUALITATIVE FINDINGS (AUSTRIA)**

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this report we are presenting the results of the qualitative survey in Austria in the framework of the Siren project. The aim of this research is the analysis of the subjective perception of and coping with socio-economic change, in particular changes in the world of work. It is intended to clarify whether reactions to the upheavals in this area contribute to the growing support for right-wing populist politics. In-depth interviews were carried out with people who had been negatively affected as well as with those who had experienced an improvement with regard to income, status or job security. Furthermore, the 32 people in our sample display widely differing political orientations and party-political preferences. A focus of the survey was the economic areas in which job opportunities and working conditions have changed greatly over the last decade. Thus several interviews were carried out in the telecommunications and information technology sectors, in postal services and in the metalworking industry. Service-sector branches such as catering and health formed a further point of emphasis, as they have a high ratio of precarious employment and thus represent a changing tendency in the world of work.

Austria can be described as an ideal research field for the analysis of socio-economic change and receptiveness to right-wing populism. After all, the upheavals within Europe in the last decade and a half were probably only more deep-going in the central and eastern European transformation countries. In the mid 80s, nationalised industries and banks, a large public sector and large, foreign-owned enterprises dominated the labour market and provided long-term, sometimes guaranteed employment. Alongside this there was a highly flexible labour market with to some extent precarious employment conditions, which was of considerable size owing to the strength of tourism. Until the beginning of the 1980s almost full employment was achieved and maintained.

The penetration of neo-liberal convictions into politics in the 1980s coincided with a crisis in the nationalised industries' core companies. A policy of privatisation set in, which reached its high point in the mid 1990s. Austria's accession to the EU in 1995 marked a further milestone in the liberalisation of previously protected economic sectors and a sharpening of competition. The rise in the unemployment rate, from some 2% in the early 1980s to over 7% at the end of the 1990s, was accompanied by the abandonment of the political aim of full employment and a gradual limitation of social security. The promises of security had given way to a rhetoric and policy of increasing insecurity.

The phase of upheaval came in the period of the grand coalition between the social democratic party, SPÖ, and the conservative party, ÖVP, which in 1986 had replaced the coalition between the SPÖ and the FPÖ when Jörg Haider took over the FPÖ leadership. It also coincided with a fall in the importance of the social partnership – that is, the concerted action by the government and employers', workers' and farmers' associations in almost all areas of policy. As a party that was tied neither to the government nor the social partnership, the now right-wing populist FPÖ was able to

operate an energetic opposition policy and, from under 5% in the mid 1980s, increased its electorate massively at each election from 1986 onwards, when they already received 9% of the vote, until finally in autumn 1999 they achieved 27% and were brought into government by the ÖVP at the beginning of 2000.

In explaining the rise of right-wing populism in Austria, academic literature frequently points to socio-economic developments. Thus the thesis of enticement of the losers of modernisation has become very popular. But at the same time the causes were mostly or primarily sought in the political system, that is, in the grand coalition's system of *Proporz* [proportional allocation of jobs by political party] and the lack of transparency in the social partnership. Even if the thesis according to which changes in the world of work represent an important foundation for the success of right-wing populism is still upheld, its empirical basis has thus far been very weak.

In this report, on the basis of extensive qualitative material, we present the way in which the changes in the world of work are perceived and assessed by those affected. Further, we attempt to understand what the attractiveness of the ideologies and political messages of right-wing populism consists of both for the “losers” and the “gainers” from socio-economic change.

2. COMPOSITION OF THE INTERVIEWS AND METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

The starting point for the selection of the 32 interviewees was their current occupational situation or their being personally (positively and/or negatively) *affected by socio-economic change* in the chosen sector over the last ten to fifteen years. Consequently, *three categories* of affectedness were constructed:

Advancement: people working as self-employed or employed who have experienced an improvement of their occupational situation, of their income and their current or future chances on the labour market. What counts here is not high income or security *per se* but the professional advancement made possible by socio-economic change in the chosen sectors.

(Threat of) decline: people who are (still) in (long-term) employment, and with this employment being affected by worsening conditions (e.g. wages, working conditions, type of work, flexibility/mobility demands, etc.) and/or increasing insecurity, such as through restructuring of the company.

(Increasing) precariousness: people working freelance (e.g. on a contract for work basis or as freelance employees) and who are unable to earn a secure long-term income on this basis; people in short-term employment with a high level of insecurity.

The construction of these three categories was based on objective situations or positions in the world of work (e.g. employment conditions, wages or known changes in the conditions in a previously nationalised company) and not on the subjective assessments of the interviewees regarding decline, precariousness or advancement.

The *sectoral distribution* of the interviews was a quarter each from IT, telecoms & post office, metal-working and electro-industries, and services. The choice of these sectors is based on the extensive changes or expansionary or contracting tendencies and will be outlined in chapter three.

With relation to *region*, the sample is composed as follows: Eight interviews were carried out in an old industrial area in the province of Styria – here the region covers the metal-working and electro-industries. A further eight interviews were carried out in two rural regions of Lower Austria. The remaining half of the interviewees work and live in Vienna. Finally, in the choice of interviewees, consideration was given to achieving the best possible balance in relation to gender and age.

Because of the research focus, the aim of the overall sample was a 50:50 distribution of the interviews over the categories of “*low*” and “*high receptiveness for right-wing populism*”. The following dimensions, recorded with a corresponding “instrument” aimed at understandable categorisation, were used to define the “high receptiveness” category:

1. *Outgroup rejection* (e.g. xenophobia or rejection of minorities)
2. *Ingroup favouritism* (e.g. nationalism)

3. *Right-wing authoritarianism* (e.g. authoritarian attitudes)
4. *Anti-system feelings* (e.g. being disillusioned with politics plus rejection of democratic structures)

People who fell into the “outgroup rejection” category plus one other were classified in the receptiveness to right-wing populism category. The characteristic of “receptiveness” was the most difficult to establish in the selection of interviewees, as it could only be verified in the course of the interview analysis. This meant that in seeking interview partners, the research team concentrated on those for whom a high receptivity to right-wing populism could be presupposed (on the basis of the opinions of intermediaries). If this was not confirmed in the course of the interview or in the assessment, then the person fell into the group of low or non-receptiveness.

Following Heinz Steinert's (1999) concept, we defined right-wing populism as follows:

- Populism is identity politics in contrast to interest-group politics:

“Populism consists in the invocation of common interests of a category that in any case no longer have a common interest, but to whom a common identity is attached as the basis for policy and political representation.” (Steinert 1999:6)
- Populism is cultural-industry politics and is organised in the “people's party” type of organisation. Enemy images are particularly useful for populist presentation and agitation, as they attract attention, passions and common upsurge in feelings as well as creating a closing of ranks. They are also suited, however, to bringing together otherwise incompatible positions in the name of the common danger and rejection of a third party. For this to function, the *Volk* must be created as the reference point and for this it requires marking off from above and below as well as from the outside. The enemies of the people are then called “party bosses”, “social-security scroungers”, “pseudo asylum-seekers”, etc.. The exclusion of (not only) these people leads to the constitution of the image of a homogeneous people of honest and hard-working Austrians.
- Populistic politics constitutes a political subject of its own, namely a passive, resentment-laden and easily manipulated one without strong and clarified interests. In this way populist politics can make any rhetorical promises it likes, oriented on the desires and needs of the people but able to change its content at any time.

The following routes were followed for *search and selection strategies*:

- a. Trade union contacts (to representatives of various political fractions) in the post office and telecoms sectors and in the metal-working and electro-industries were utilised: shop stewards who were informed of the subject of the study functioned as intermediaries.
- b. Contacts in work foundations and training schemes found (former) course participants.
- c. Contacts in rural municipalities facilitated access to people in their neighbourhoods.

d. Provision of contact to people from the broader circle of acquaintances (previously unknown to the researchers); this was helpful for access to freelance interview partners.

Strategies b) and d) proved most successful with regard to the estimation of “receptiveness” from the point of view of the contacts and intermediaries. The study was presented to the interviewees as a survey of “changes in occupational life, personal experiences and the role of politics”.

The following table gives an overview of the distribution of the interviews according to the criteria of socio-economic position, sector, age, gender and receptiveness for right-wing populism:

Socio-economic change and political orientation	Advancement	(Threat of) decline	(Increasing) precariousness	
<i>Low receptiveness for RWP</i>	A2 (m/b/IT) A4 (m/d/IT) A17 (m/a/PT) A18 (f/c/IT) A19 (m/a/IT) A21 (m/a/IT) A23 (m/a/PT)	A8 (m/c/PT) A12 (m/b/M-EI) A13 (m/d/M-EI) A16 (m/c/M-EI)	A1 (f/b/S) A14 (m/c/M-EI) A24 (f/c/S) A28 (f/c/S)	15
<i>High receptiveness for RWP</i>	A20 (f/a/PT) A22 (f/b/PT) A26 (m/c/S)	A7 (m/d/PT) A9 (m/b/PT) A11 (m/b/M-EI) A15 (m/d/M-EI) A27 (m/d/S) A30 (m/c/S) A32 (m/c/PT)	A3 (f/c/IT) A5 (f/b/M-EI) A6 (f/c/M-EI) A10 (f/a/IT) A25 (m/c/S) A29 (f/d/S) A31 (f/c/S)	17
	10	11	11	32

A1(f/b/S) = interview no. (gender/age group/sector)

age group a: 20-30 (6 people). b: 31-40 (7). c: 41-50 (12). d: over 50 (7)

f = female; m = male; PT = post & telecoms; M-EL = metal-working/electro-industries; S = services

Methodological process of the qualitative research

As a methodological instrument we chose the qualitative “problem-centred guided interview”, which offers several advantages. It permits the most open access to the social reality of the interviewee, the openness of the questions leaves more room for the interviewees to take up issues for themselves and at the same time the guidelines serve as an *aide mémoire* for the interviewer and help to address issues or aspects that are left out by the interviewee. The internationally standardised guidelines include the following subject areas: employment history, subjective perceptions, affectedness by and interpretation of socio-economic change, and political attitudes and orientation. In carrying out the interviews, the approach to “understanding” in the sense of Bourdieu was a decisive methodological starting point.

In evaluation of the interviews, we oriented ourselves on the general standards or behaviour guidelines on the content-reductive assessment of qualitative interviews (Lamnek 1995, pp. 107f), which envisage four phases: transcription; individual analysis, the conclusion of which is a characterisation of the interview related to the particularities and the general points of the interview; a generalising analysis, covering the things the interviews have in common and their differences; and the control phase, in which the interpretations are discussed in the team. There are 32 individual interview reports as a written interim finding of this evaluation process.

3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE: PRIVATISATION AND LARGE-SCALE RESTRUCTURING

3.1. Main trends in former state owned firms and the consequences of liberalisation and privatisation

3.1.1. Telecoms sector: Dynamic development in a period of liberalisation

Until the early 1990s the telecoms sector in Austria was a state monopoly characterised by a high level of stability. The sector was privatised and liberalised in the 1990s, in the course of technological progress in the telecoms field and under international pressure for reform, which increased when Austria joined the EU. The Austrian Post and Telecommunications Administration (ÖPTV) was formally privatised under the 1996 Post Office Structure Act and the PTA AG (Post and Telecom Austria) was founded. From January 1 1998 the Austrian market was completely liberalised by the 1997 Telecommunications Act (TKG). This also corresponded to the “primary aim of the EU” to liberalise the whole telecoms sector from 1 January 1998, to break up all monopolies and introduce competition (Teleletter 1/1998, p. 9). In November 2000 Telekom Austria was floated on the stock exchange and the holding of the ÖIAG (state holding company) shrank from some 75% to about 50%. The current ownership structure is as follows: 42.7% of the shares are held by the ÖIAG; Telekom Italia sold its approximately 15% holding in early November 2002 to “institutional investors, including the United States” as well as to “professional investors inside and outside Austria” (Telekom press release, 6 Nov. 2002¹). The remaining 38% are small shareholders (including staff holdings).

The choice of interviewees from the telecoms sector was motivated by the following specifics: Staff at the previously state-owned group experienced major restructuring in the 1990s (including privatisation) and it can be assumed that workers at the former ÖPTV will have been deeply affected.² The telecoms sector is one of the few economic sectors in which there has been a significant expansion of employment in recent years – strongly driven by technological development. The situation of staff in other terrestrial network or cell-net providers is different inasmuch as it concerns very young companies without the “pre-history” of nationalisation.

¹ http://www.telekom.at/Content.Node2/de/media/pa_1106b.php.

² In an article from the Telekom archive for investor relations (on the subject of the stock-market floatation on 2 Nov. 2000) the following changes are outlined under the headings “cultural change”, “customer orientation” and “profitability”: restructuring of the marketing and sales organisation, abolition of hierarchies, “management by objectives”, payment by results, cost reductions above all by savings in the personnel area. The number of employees in the terrestrial network area is to be cut by 5,000 over the coming years. (http://www.telekom.at/Content.Node2/de/ir/arch_1102.php)

On employment developments, according to a study by Arthur D. Little (1999), it can be said that employment in the terrestrial sector has remained essentially constant; job losses in the former monopoly have been compensated by openings offered by the new providers. In all, the number employed in the telecoms sector (infrastructure providers, cell-net providers, terrestrial network, and services) rose by 6,000 to 42,000 between 1997 and 1999 (Little 1999, Leo 2000). The most dynamic development can be ascribed to the cell-net field, where 3,000 new jobs were created in 1999 and further employment growth is projected, for example through the introduction of new standards (such as the UMTS) (Little 1999).

3.1.2. Post Office: Organisational change and staff cuts

In the second half of the 1990s, the Austrian post office was subject to comprehensive restructuring. The restructuring involving the end of state jurisdiction and the beginning of liberalisation of the market for post and parcels services entailed far-reaching consequences for the employees. They were affected by personnel reductions, changes in job descriptions and by upheavals in the immediate working conditions. The Austrian post office is thus, alongside the former state monopoly for telecommunications, a good example of the accelerating socio-economic change since the 1980s. Austrian post-office staff were selected for the survey in particular because within a relatively short period they had been subject to the transition from guaranteed employment in the public services to the new conditions in a company that had been restructured and was increasingly at the mercy of market competition. It is true that those previously employed here still enjoy employment conditions as civil servants with guaranteed jobs for life, but the general framework has shifted enormously towards uncertainty and higher pressure for results. In particular since the restructuring, there have been continuing management attempts to cut staff levels, which clearly express this change.

In 1996, the Post and Telegraph Administration (PTV) was restructured as a newly created public limited company. In 1997, the post office and telecoms were divided thus creating the Austrian Post AG [plc]. At first the liberalisation of the market only covered packages weighing more than 350g. In this segment the Post AG had long been in competition with private courier services. In reaction to the competition and in preparation for further steps towards liberalisation, the company sought to cut staff levels and rationalise the work. In 1998 the company management negotiated a social plan with the trade union to regulate staff reductions. The employees were offered early retirement on 80% of previous income. This regulation, which was extremely expensive for the company, lasted only until 2001.

Most recently, a considerable number of the civil servants have been sent into early retirement, on the basis of the civil service law, on the grounds that they are no longer able to carry out their tasks. The personnel representatives' side criticised the fact that the staff had no opportunity to defend themselves against such "forced retirement". In an expert interview, one personnel representative estimated the number of this type of early retirements as being "well over 1,000".

The current rationalisation measures at the Austrian post office include the closure of post offices and the automation of letter sorting. Thus, 637 of a total 2,300 post offices were closed in the first six months of 2002, and in autumn of the same year a new central sorting office, from which high efficiency gains are expected, came into operation in Vienna. The difficulties with the personnel reductions, however, were that previously the number of workers was reduced although there were tight limits on the opportunities for efficiency gains. Thus the readiness of many staff to leave the company on the basis of the social plan agreed in 1997 led to bottlenecks in post office work. A further stage of liberalisation is envisaged for 2003, as a result of which competitive pressure will increase and further rationalisation measures are to be expected.

3.2. Information technology

The motivation for the choice of interviewees in the IT sector was the fact that on the one hand, in connection with the growing distribution of new information and communications technology, a large number of new jobs have actually been created, with it being possible to select interviewees in expanding sectors and job areas, who it could be assumed had been positively affected by socio-economic change: in all, around 155,000 people – 5% of the total in employment – were employed in the ICT sector³ in Austria in 1999; in the 1997-1999 period, there was 5.5% employment growth; in some areas, such as data processing and data bases, employment in this period grew by 50% (Leo 2000, p. 4). On the other hand, great expectations were also built up in relation to the employment potential: the IT sector was seen as a promising “job machine” and was the subject of much media-driven hype as the “booming new economy”. What is also interesting here is how this discourse influenced the expectations, for example of new entrants. Finally, new jobs and areas of activity have arisen as a result of ICT, as a result of which questions of professional identity, social recognition or affiliation are also thrown up.

Before we apply the term IT further, however, it should here be briefly outlined how we have defined it in the context of this project (and thus in relation to the choice of interviewees): the “provider sector”, for example web agencies, call centres or programming companies, can be defined as belonging to the IT sector in the narrow sense, as the work/service is only made possible at all by the existence of ICT, or ICT as such is its basic product. A consequence of this argumentation would be also to include companies in the telecommunications sector, which, however, because of the particular set-up of liberalisation and privatisation, we would like to scrutinise as a separate sector. In the choice of interviewees we also considered staff working in the “applications

³ This definition includes the hardware and communications equipment (NACE 30-33), news transmission (NACE 64) and data processing and databases (NACE 72). This aggregate level also includes sectors that are not primarily affected by developments in the telecoms and media sector. What these sectors have in common, however, is that they have well above average demand for employees with IT qualifications (Leo 2000, p. 3).

sector”, that is, in companies in all sectors in which new fields of activity and jobs have arisen: e.g. people like those working in an IT department advising users, as system administrators, website managers, online editors etc. As for us it was also a question of the experience in the job or field of activity in connection with ICT, this extension made sense, as we could thus include a broad spectrum of IT specialists in our sample.

In the most dynamic phase of expansion in the IT sector, employers and economics experts complained that it would not be possible to convert the new job opportunities into additional employment and thus economic growth to a sufficient extent, as there was insufficient training for these jobs. The recruitment of IT experts from India (catchword: green card) and the possibility of relocating work to countries where there were more favourable labour markets (e.g. central and eastern Europe, India) were some of the projects to circumvent this bottleneck (Flecker/Kirschenhofer 2002). Above and beyond this, in Austria there were also training projects for new entrants: the IT sector was also seen as a chance for those returning to the labour market or for older workers.

However, the economic crisis over the last one to two years soon compelled the painful insight that the *new economy*, too, is subject to old economic laws: the expectations with regard to employment development are now more subdued than they were a few years ago. Because of the general recession, the consolidation in the sector after the hype, and the improved supply on the labour market in the area of intermediate IT qualifications (through the collapse of start-ups and personnel reductions), the chances of untrained workers getting a foothold in the IT sector have worsened considerably. On the one hand, at the moment it is mainly highly qualified specialists who are being sought, and on the other, the competitive situation on the labour market in the field of intermediate and lower IT qualifications has intensified as a result of the above developments. A few years ago it was estimated that Austria faced a shortage of 80,000 IT workers; in 2002 IT specialists were registered as unemployed for the first time (Standard, Netbusiness, 31.10./1.11.2002).

3.3. *The regional embeddedness of the metal and electronics enterprises*

The choice of the metal sector arises from the central role of the steel industry, largely nationalised after the end of the second world war, for Austria’s industrial structure. The successive privatisation of this sector has been one of the most serious and decisive aspects of socio-economic change in Austria over the last 20 years. Using the example of one such leading company, the attempt was made to follow the effect of these changes on a region. The electro sector, on the other hand, in the form of the country the company studied (also not untypical for the region) represents an example of the relocation of production into the eastern European neighbouring states. It was thereby possible to cover a further specific aspect of socio-economic change, with special emphasis on women’s work. Thus, in this case, regional and sector-specific concerns overlap.

The interview partners from the metal and electro sectors all come from the same region, so a description of the development of these sectors at national level is not particularly meaningful. It is thus concentrated on the specific developments in the region itself. It concerns an “old” – in the sense of traditional – industrial region, with its beginnings going far back into the 19th century. The iron and steel industry dominated the region, although at the end of the second world war it was divided. The nationalisation of formerly German steel concerns in Austria also led to the biggest steel company in the region being nationalised. Alongside this, a range of small and medium-sized private companies formed the pillar of the iron and steel industry. In the steel industry’s “upswing” in the 1960s and 70s, the region as a whole also enjoyed a prosperous development in which new companies moved in too, such as the electro sector. However, this very one-sided industrial structure turned out to have a serious disadvantage in the steel crisis of the 80s and 90s. In the course of this crisis, the nationalised steel group was privatised. Because of its pivotal position and function as an industrial flag-ship, the economic and social rise and decline of the region and the sector is closely linked to developments in this company.

In its function as a leading regional company, the current enterprise – 30 years ago one of the biggest nationalised groups still at the heart of the region – has been subject to a process of privatisation and shrinkage resulting in a reduction in staff from some 2,300 to about 450. In the process, some sections of production were relocated to other sites in Austria and the finishing industry completely hived off. The company itself was incorporated as an independent limited company within an independent plc group, which is also in majority private ownership. Even if one counts the jobs in the enterprises that were hived off, approximately 1,000 industrial jobs were lost in the course of this process. This downfall of the industrial flagship company also had drastic effects on the region, which had to accept a fall in population and is also showing signs of the decay of public life (businesses, restaurants, public institutions).

Things changed inside the company, too, in the course of this process. On the one hand, the remaining employees had to accept reduced incomes and cuts in social benefits. On the other hand, the atmosphere in the company has become “harsher”. Stricter performance criteria are imposed; work and time pressure have increased. In the discussion, the shop steward brings out the difference in the following point:

“As regards the atmosphere, it’s you see it everywhere, it’s just nowadays it’s just a capital economy, pure capital economy. We’re happy that what we’ve got, we’re able to keep. Your own special ideas or social benefits you needn’t expect at all. So what we have, that we can defend that . . . the shareholders want to see money, and if you don’t have that you’re out of the picture.” (A2, Exp, p. 7)

However, this development is by and large not regarded as wholly negative by the workers, but rather as a necessity in the sense that the traditionally “more generous” working conditions in the state-owned industries are seen as a contributory factor in the poor economic development of the company. Despite the wage cuts, the company still has the highest industrial wages in the region, a circumstance that allows it still to appear attractive to many workers. It is, above all, the comparison with other companies

and their working conditions that has made the “decline” nevertheless more or less bearable for many workers. Escalating working hours and lower earnings in the predominantly smaller and medium-sized companies are the decisive factor in making even jobs in the company that “only” require semi-skilled qualifications still attractive to skilled workers. As for large companies, there are no alternatives.

After the years of restructuring and shrinkage, the company nevertheless achieved a certain stability, which is an important factor in job security, above all in view of the lack of alternatives in the region. Because of the economic boom, recent years have seen good order books. Recently, however, this stability has acquired serious cracks. Owing to the fall in contracts, management wanted to make part of the workforce redundant and re-employ them when the contract situation was more favourable. The works council defended itself against these plans, and achieved a short-time working solution. Since the beginning of the year 2002, part of the workforce have been on short-time working (with a small loss of income) i.e. two thirds of the wages are paid by the AMS (labour-market service). The action had a six-month time limit, and thus came to an end in July. Afterwards there was a six-month retention period in which no member of staff could be made redundant. The current situation is characterised by great uncertainty as to whether there will, nevertheless, be redundancies after the end of this respite.

The short-time-working measures are leading to rising uncertainty among the staff as to what will follow. If there are job losses, there are hardly any alternatives in the industry in the region, but in other sectors, which would also involve a big drop in wages, it is also extremely difficult to find work. Above all, those who are bound to the region by family ties or housing are in a trap, whereas unattached younger people still have the possibility offered by regional mobility.

The general mood in the region is bad. In recent years the economic slide has further accelerated. There have been a whole range of company closures in small and medium-sized companies in the metal and electro sector. Part of this can be attributed to the relocation of production facilities into neighbouring eastern Europe, above all Hungary. Three interviewees from one company were currently affected by this.

Developments on the regional labour market are correspondingly characterised by rising unemployment, particularly in the metal and electro sector. Within one year the unemployment rate has risen from 5.1% (2001) to 6.9% (2002).⁴ What makes this rise in unemployment particularly severe is the fact that in the same period the number of job vacancies fell by 40%. This means approximately 3,000 unemployed for only 159 vacancies, i.e., without inter-regional mobility the chance of finding a new job after being made redundant is somewhere between extremely limited and hopeless. In this situation it is not surprising that those (still) in employment are showing an extremely defensive attitude towards keeping their jobs.

“Yes, I have to be honest. You notice it in the mood, too . . . staff are happy that they can go to work here.” (Shop steward; A2, Exp, p. 8)

⁴ All figures from the *Kleine Zeitung*, 15 August 2002.

4. **VIEWS ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE: PERCEPTIONS/ INTERPRETATION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE AND OF WORKING AND EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS**

4.1. **Advancement**

This section summarises the perceptions and views on socio-economic change of the interview partners we classified as “gainers” from the changes. This does not mean that they have achieved wealth and fame; rather this group is distinguished by small successes and improvements in their socio-economic position, which in part can be immediately ascribed to the economic and social changes. Specifically it concerns the following occupational positions:

- Self-employed or employed people in IT jobs who found favourable earnings, re-entry or promotion chances owing to the expansion of the sector and the phases of labour shortages.
- Employees in the post and telecommunications who have been able to improve their status and incomes over recent years.

Gaining advancement or relative advantage from socio-economic change does not mean, however, that the subjective perception and assessment is necessarily positive. In the following we are interested in the interpretation patterns analysed, in particular the ambivalences of the views and the perceived costs of success. Above and beyond this, here – as with the subsequent categories of people facing the threat of decline and increasing precariousness – it concerns interpretations and views on security and insecurity and the orientation on the work-performance principle and feelings of justice.

4.1.1. **Perceptions of socio-economic change**

New management strategies and the good old days

For many employees the change in the world of work has been experienced at first hand through the change into a young, expanding company in a new sector. The employees we interviewed in a mobile-phone company have been attracted by an enterprise culture that is very different from that in the state telecommunications company. Against this background, they experience the lateral hierarchies, the omnipresent *Du* word [the informal form of address] and being incorporated in processes of change very positively. The informal atmosphere and working as a team are viewed positively and contribute to the view that as a whole the change is an improvement. The growth optimism of the telecommunications sector after the liberalisation of the market also affects the assessments. The high level of stress and pressure for performance with their negative health consequences are not ignored, but they hardly affect the general

satisfaction. As Ms T. experienced in her position as under-manager, the stress can sometimes lead to psychological and physical breakdowns:

“What you most wanted to do then, I don’t know, throw yourself crying into bed because everything all around you you just couldn’t do anymore, and [I was already getting] disturbed sleep, eating disorders.” (A20, p. 16)

But in the same breath this is accepted as necessity: *“but at the moment it’s OK, it’s bearable”*. And: *“If I can’t cope any more . . . then I just have to take a couple of days holiday and unwind. But that’s human. That’s quite legitimate.”* What is shocking in this example is that the two days off, which is directly attributable to pressure of work, seems to require justification. Further, it is noticeable that, because of the relaxed and more pleasant working atmosphere compared to previously – and possibly also because of the advancement, there is hardly any complaint about the high pressure of work. What is problematic for Ms. T. is that despite hard work she is in debt, can hardly afford her flat and thus despite her general advancement sees herself sliding out of the “middle class”.

Other interview partners who have also achieved advancement highlight the disadvantages of the current changes more clearly. The everyday working life in the Austrian post office is seen as being extremely stressful as a result of the speed and intensity of work demanded and the pressure resulting from it. In particular, the tempo of change leads to continuous overload. This is seen in the example of the 38-year-old Ms V. with civil service status, who has been at the post office since leaving commercial college and has recently risen in the hierarchy: *“Then you come home . . . I say, like a squeezed out rag, I often say.”* (A22, p. 6) In this perspective a nostalgic look back at the previous “good times” in which one could work more slowly and had more time for work and the customers is noticeable. But a second aspect of change is highlighted by Ms. V. and seen in a negative light: the “break-up”, i.e. restructuring of the company which accompanied liberalisation and the increasing pressure on employees to sell, to raise turnover. She sees the “scrapping for customers” in which the social norms of honesty and decency are violated as *“repulsive”* (A22, p. 14).

The nostalgia with which the former times are described does not lead to a demand for the restoration of better working conditions, however. Thus, for example, Mr W. a fitter from the former state-owned telecommunications company sees the previous situation quite critically:

“It was partly a cushy number, the civil service job and such. That’s changed a lot now.” (A23, p. 2)

The comfortable conditions are thus in retrospect seen as having been illegitimate, and thus the changes are accepted.

Freedom and the desire for the great success

Let us move from those who have achieved limited advancement to the winners of the technological-economic change. The expansion in demand for information and communications technology and related services has enabled above all young, male

employees to go into newly emerging occupational fields. Among those interviewed in the IT sector, some emphasise the advantages of self-employment, whereas others still prefer traditional employment. This difference in self-image and in occupational objectives also influences the perception of socio-economic change. The freelance workers explain that, for them, freedom, being one's own boss, being able to develop projects independently and determine the content and hours of work themselves is preferable to any (however lucrative) direct employment. They proceed on the assumption that direct employment allows a drift into mediocrity, as one no longer feels driven to outstanding performance. The enormous pressure of work, the over-long working hours of up to 80 hours a week, the unlimited availability required and the resulting extensive sacrifice of a private life are accepted as part of the deal. Mr B., who offers computer training and provides trainers, sees the coping with stressful periods of work quite positively:

“So of course that gives you a certain self-esteem, when you see that actually all hell has broken loose, actually everything's crashing round your ears, and nevertheless we still make ends meet, nevertheless it works.” (A2, p. 12)

Alongside the freedom, the attraction of the work itself (“the programmer's art”) and the comparatively high income, Mr S., who runs a one-man company for Internet applications, is motivated by the striving to create “*something really big*”. For others, the high demand for IT specialists at the end of the 1990s meant the opportunity to achieve stable, direct employment with social security. Their views will be reflected in the following when we present the subjective perspectives of the “gainers” with regard to security and insecurity.

4.1.2. Protection against insecurity: a safe haven or an agile boat?

For freelance workers in IT services, a high income functions as a guarantee of security with which they can save themselves from some misfortune, as Mr S. believes:

“My house burns down – my God, I'll buy a new one . . . I've got a slipped disc; OK, an operation will cost me 100,000 schilling. Can I afford that? Can I do it? And if I can't – fwhoo.” (A 19, p. 18)

Mr B., too, who is highly committed to his business as an agent for computer trainers, sees the basis for social security first and foremost as himself: the abilities, particularly social skills and organisational talent, can also be marketed in other sectors if the demand for computer training collapses. And if everything goes wrong because he falls ill, his parents will take care of him. The 30-year-old only has doubts when he thinks of the distant future, in which his ability to work might fall.

The opposite view is held by the directly employed IT specialists, for whom the security of long-term employment is a high priority. For them it is a problem that in looking for jobs they are mainly offered freelance, project-related part-time engagements. As direct and long-term employment are apparently considered to be an anachronism in some parts of the IT sector, they switch to other sectors in which new fields of work have also arisen as a result of ICT. Thus, for example, the English and German literature graduate

Mr U., who as an online editor was unemployed for a long time after the collapse of a start-up company, ultimately found the desired full-time post as a technical writer and website manager in the mechatronic sector.

The subject of getting older is of particular relevance in the IT branch, as top performance is required, which only younger people are in a condition to provide, and that cannot be maintained in the long term or not up to pensionable age. Thus, for example Mr D., a 54-year-old engineer in an IT concern believes himself positioned in an “elephants’ graveyard”, from which he can look forward to semi-retirement and thus unsackability.

“Until a year ago I still had personnel under me and everything, but, apparently, younger people do that now, and certainly with much more élan, you’ve got to admit that.” (A4, p. 3)

The ironic term “elephants’ graveyard” recognises the insight that one belongs on the scrap heap.

For outsiders or re-entrants to the labour market, age also represents a major hurdle which can be an obstacle even to getting into a profession. Thus for the 46-year-old woman Ms R. after a seven-month IT training scheme for re-entrants, there was no chance of employment in the dynamic web-agency scene because of her age, in contrast to younger colleagues on the scheme. Ms. R. managed to get in through a post as “application consultant” (advising computer applications users) in a company in the financial services sector. She considers her job to be secure in the long term and would like to stay in it until she retires.

To change the scene back to post and telecommunications, job security is a major issue for all the interviewees here. They would like to be able to stay in the company for the long term, and they are also relatively certain that this will be possible. They put their faith partly in the job security in the company, partly in personal qualifications and skills. Some consider precisely their training certificates to be a good investment – because of the increasing insecurity in periods of restructuring:

“But because I finished school and I also looked after myself a bit, I think I [can get] another post, a secure one . . . I mean, sure, no job is secure.” (A23, p. 10)

As opposed to trust in the success of the company, personal control is greater here.

Others have achieved professional advancement on the basis of a high level of readiness to work, “know-how”, social skills and the appropriate self-marketing abilities even without formal qualifications, and are banking precisely on this “me-shares” portfolio. Alongside trust in their own ability, which perhaps is optimistic because of the age of the interviewees (all except Ms. V., who has civil service status, are under 35), there is a good deal of trust in the employer: he will not sack anyone as long as they are reliable and committed. Also with the interviewees from companies which are no longer able to offer job security, this confidence is (surprisingly) pronounced. In contrast to the state enterprises, hopes attach themselves to the good economic situation, which is viewed with optimism. Perhaps, however, the desire for security is so great that objective

circumstances pointing in another direction are ignored and instead the construct of the well-meaning employer outshines possible risks.

Almost all of those interviewed joined the then nationalised post and telecommunications administration straight from school. This happened because of “family tradition” – parents (and grandparents) also worked in this sector – as well as the family advice – or pressure – to find a secure employer who could offer civil service status. Only one of our interviewees, however, namely Ms. V., had been *pragmatisiert*, i.e. given civil-service status with a job for life. What is interesting is how people deal with not having become civil servants. The breach of this promise of security is not perceived as a disappointment – the employer or the socio-economic changes are not complained about. Some feel their age and qualifications arm them to deal with the turbulence of socio-economic change. Only for Ms. T. in one passage of the text in which she explains how she failed to achieve civil service status “*that broke my neck, then*” (A20, p. 3), is it clear that this represented a significant blow to her expectations. Nevertheless the interviewees were unanimous that, because of privatisation and restructuring, civil-service status would in any case not be worth aiming at. The interviews thereby express a large extent of readiness to adapt and a largely positive assessment of their employment history. The restructuring and privatisation of the companies is not fundamentally called into question by any of the interviewees. In part this is accepted as necessity, in part no alternative is seen. The interviewees only criticised the speed, the way the process was implemented and the framework of the measures. That is, with regard to job security, the same is true as we have already noted concerning the working conditions: also those who do not bank everything on their individual marketable abilities and would prefer the safe haven of guaranteed employment by a company, do not express the wish for the redemption of previous promises. A demand for the *status quo ante* is not present because it no longer seems legitimate.

4.1.3. *Sense of justice: the work ethic and experiences of discrimination*

Competitive society and the work ethic

Often, first of all, a violation of the work ethic is considered to be an injustice. Such violations are socially-structurally located “above” (in politicians, trade unionists, managers, etc.) as well as “below” (e.g. in the long-term unemployed). Interviewees with this orientation display a strong identification with social achievement norms, as well as the personal readiness to submit themselves to them and accept the related privations. Others, who are not prepared to do this, are met with a more or less harsh and unsympathetic attitude, which is expressed for example in the fact that working people who (before or after a full day’s work) meet people begging for money in the underground with the response, “just get a job”, or “as long as you can afford cigarettes you can’t be so poor”.

Within the group discussed here the focus in relation to violation of the work ethic varies. For freelancers and employers everything that violates the principle of free competition and which disadvantages them represents an affront, for example through “cronyism” in the political system. Others see the pension system as being endangered and cannot accept how people who have not paid enough in because they lived from working on the side should get their pension paid. For others again, immigrants or refugees embody this injustice, which is dealt with in the next point. In general, many believe that our social system leads to laziness and is being exploited:

“Because I know people, or you know people, I don’t know them, who just live from social security and where you then just ask, OK, I’d like to live as well as that. And you know these examples specifically. Then you think, pf, yes, those are the black sheep who exploit this system.” (A19, p. 22)

Interviewees from various social positions hold this opinion. It is articulated, for example, by younger, middle-class self-employed people with a pronounced upwardly mobile and elitist attitude. As an example, one can quote Mr S., from whom the above quotation was taken. Mr S. sees himself as a high performing individualist, with good cards such as youth, qualifications that are in demand, ambition and capabilities, who feels at home in a social system based in performance and social Darwinism:

“I think a class society is not so bad at all, if it is not extreme. What would the world be like if everyone was equal. Not everyone wants to earn a lot of money . . . I think a classless society would be rather boring.” (A19, p. 26)

Older business people and employees favoured softer elitist models, including paternalistic systems of solidarity in which care for the weaker is planned in. Thus Mr D. for example, favours an image of society that is differentiated into top people, those in the middle, and “bearers of water”. He regards this hierarchy as functional and social, since the less hardworking are also integrated. He therefore sees recent internal developments in the company towards neo-liberalism critically.

“They think that they can create departments just with top people. That doesn’t work. Logically, they eat each other up. And there is an extreme competitive battle if they don’t have such a department. And it’s rather getting worse, where there’s something like that.” (A4, p. 6)

Tolerance and respect

We found a fundamentally different sense of injustice in three interviewees. This can be described under the term tolerance and respect. Everything in society that contributes to the exclusion of (groups of) people or a violation of human dignity is regarded as unjust. These people’s image of society is essentially determined by adherence to the value of solidarity. At the same time, liberalisation, privatisation and de-bureaucratisation or the rules of play of capitalism (including the work ethic) in combination with a strong welfare state are seen positively: the model for this is a social market economy with the objective of fairer distribution from the top to the bottom. In our sample this position was represented on the one hand by younger men from petty-bourgeois backgrounds, for whom (in their own judgement) class affiliation is not an issue and who display an

orientation on professional advancement and confidence that it is realisable. In their previous occupational life they have had no significant experience of disadvantage. On the other hand, this position was quite clearly expressed by an interview partner who reported extensively on her own injurious and humiliating professional experience (e.g., arbitrariness of the AMS (labour market service), in job seeking, harassment, etc). Her personal situation – her husband is a bank employee and they live in their own house – and her Catholic background may have facilitated the maintenance of this tolerant outlook or strengthened it.

The foreigners problem and discrimination as a working woman and mother

This group also includes the type of person who likewise strongly identifies with the work ethic, likewise sees injustices above and below, however (in contrast to the elites and the established people) has subjective feelings that their own work and sacrifices have not been adequately rewarded. The following section is dedicated to this type. Alongside the strong internalisation and observance of work performance norms, some of the interviewees also perceived immigrants and refugees as a problem complex in relation to injustice. Through the “ethnisation” of resource distribution, at least the foreign “scroungers” should be denied access to “our” welfare budgets. Ms T., for example, feels directly affected by the accommodation of foreigners where she lives, and links this to the fact that she had to wait years for a council flat:

“I had to fight for years until I finally got one [a flat]. Although I can pay for it, nobody asks how, but I can. And now they’re sitting in the flats and getting housing benefit, and just because I earn too much in the eyes of the Austrian government I don’t get any.” (A20, p. 20)

Finally the numerous presence of immigrants and refugees also represents a cultural threat:

“There you think you’re somewhere else, just from the smell, somewhere in Greece. Really, sometimes it’s terrible.” (A22, p. 24)

The “foreigners” represent a visible and tangible symbol of a society affected by massive economic and social changes. As a solution to the immigration policy mistakes, that we for too long have “let everything in” (A20, p. 21), and are now “overflowing”, a halt to immigration (“bolting the door”) is demanded. The substrate of this frustration is that it is not sufficiently recognised or it doesn’t pay off if one subordinates oneself to the rules of the performance-oriented society. The perception that the middle class in Austria is under threat goes with this. Ms V., although she could (objectively) be classified to the milieu of aspiring white-collar workers, perceives herself as being “lower”, and she is powerfully attracted by the populist invocation to the “ordinary people”. Her image of society is marked by the desire for a “decent” performance-oriented society in which everyone has to contribute something; orderly conditions as well as the safeguarding of values such as decency and reliability, which correlate strongly with her sense of responsibility and conscientious attitude to work, are important to her but are under threat – among other things from changes in the company, where restructuring decisions are being taken by “those up there”, who “all

talk so clever: they've forgotten what working down here is like" (A22, pp. 17-18). Those who have to carry the can for the consequences of the decisions are those at the bottom, where one becomes a "doormat": *"So, you're actually almost a doormat. Often it's not our fault at all."* (A22, p. 3)

It is noticeable in this connection that the threat from "foreigners" is made an issue particularly strongly by female interviewees, who as working women and (potential) mothers feel themselves discriminated against on the labour market. The team leader, Ms T., complains about the anti-family structures in the world of work, which are increasing through flexibility pressure; for herself she has the vision of being able to manage to combine career and family through tele-homeworking:

"When I see a poster by Mr Schüssel, more time for the family . . . should send him an e-mail with the question: how do you see that happening? It's not compatible, and that's where politics is lying, and there it's lying through its teeth." (A20, p. 17)

Ms V. on the other hand is frustrated and overloaded because as a mother she does not have the opportunity of getting part-time work with her employer, the post office (in a rural area). The impression arises that some women not only hold their strains and sufferings against a causative patriarchally structured society, but also articulate them through the safety valve of "foreigners".

4.2. *(Threat of) Decline*

A large number of those threatened by a decline in social position come from one region. On the one hand, the threat they face is related to the crisis and privatisation of the nationalised industries, which has led on the one hand to a reduction of wages and social benefits and on the other to reduced job security (at the time of the interview, short-time working because of collapse in orders) (A11, A12, A13, A15). At the same time, in the private metal and electro industry in the region, the threat from the relocation of production facilities to eastern Europe has risen, which affects one of the interviewees (A16). Two cases relate to decline scenarios or threats in a rural (non-industrialised) area (A27, A30), and a further three are characterised by the privatisation and restructuring of the post office (A7, A9) and Telekom (A8). To this extent the situation of male, semi-skilled and skilled workers in industry and services (8 out of 10) takes up much space, which expresses itself in the following analysis.

4.2.1. *Work ethic and performance orientation as the basis of personal identity and as a foil for the perception and assessment of socio-economic change.*

An important key to understanding how socio-economic change is perceived and assessed by workers lies in their identity constructions. Actually, all the workers interviewed are conscious of their social status as workers and draw important aspects from this both for their personal identity and their image of society. Work and

performance are here at the centre of their self-image and value and at the same time function as a measure for evaluating social processes.

Work and performance are thus the intersection where personal identity and social integration meet. This is important on the one hand, since a considerable part of self-esteem is formed through what one does at work. An intrinsic job motivation, an identification with the job is apparent not only with the skilled workers but also with semi-skilled workers. For Mr K., for example, work is the central, life-structuring value that gives his life support, stability and meaning. This is true even though as a skilled metalworker he has to carry out semi-skilled jobs. This is expressed in the sentence: *“Even if it sounds daft, I like working.”* (A11, p. 8) This is also apparent with Mr O., who as a skilled fitter has been working in the same job in the steelworks for 19 years doing heavy work under hard conditions (monotony, dust, dirt ...). With Mr O. this does not lead to an indifferent, purely instrumental attitude to his work, but leads him to wring sense even out of this form of work. He emphasises several times that he liked working and always attempted to do his work properly, by which he means with quality.

“... but it interested me nevertheless, and otherwise I wouldn't have stayed for 19 years. If you don't like it at all you don't stay. You chuck it in.” (A15, p. 12)

Mr Ö., who recently retired, emphasises his work ethic and discipline in the balance of his working life: *“... in the 46 years, six months off sick, and that was an accident.”* (A27, p. 16).

Whereas the perspective of remaining in the same job for more or less 30 years without too great a demand fostered an orientation on the realistic and the feasible with the workers at the steelworks, which was also integrated into the personal identity and thereby led to a general satisfaction with the job situation, in the cases of Mr H. (Telekom) Mr I. (post office) and Mr Ö. (road maintenance) feelings of frustration developed between their demands on the content of the work and the limited opportunities to put these into effect in the job. However, they have attempted to solve this dilemma in various ways. Whereas Mr H. is forced to persist in his unsatisfactory job because of the poor labour-market situation, and seeks to express and give shape to his occupational engagement in his function as health and safety representative, Mr I. seeks his compensatory salvation in the political field, which offers him opportunities for advancement that were denied to him in his job. Mr Ö. on the other hand, found this in the development of a second occupational pillar in the form of self-employment (petrol station) alongside his actual work in the road maintenance department.

At the same time, for these workers work is also of major importance for integration in society. In their subjective consciousness, as was repeatedly clear from the interviews, it is the only opportunity for them to achieve an acceptable living standard and thus to live life in dignity. Work and performance, however, thereby become the main basis for value judgements, which makes a diverging life-style difficult or hardly acceptable.

4.2.2. *Perceived consequences of socio-economic change*

Given this central significance of work, it also becomes understandable that socio-economic change is perceived and located above all in the company and factory. To many interview partners it appears to be a consequence of company policy, of which management is the protagonist. Here the anger is often not so much ignited by material losses, as long as these remain within more or less bearable limits. Rather, the lack of recognition and the devaluation of their position as workers resulting from the heightened economisation of inner-company relations is complained of. This is the case for the post-office workers, as Mr I. makes clear:

"... The worker himself, at least here at the post office, is more or less just the pits now. No one pays any attention to him at all or anything." (A9, p. 6)

But also for the steelworkers:

"... the upper, the middle levels [management], they've withdrawn a bit more and that's got much, much worse. So it's basically changed. You get the feeling that they really don't want anything to do with those down below any more." (A13, p. 15)

Such a reduction to the purely instrumental injures the identity of the worker and leads to offence and feelings of being held in contempt.

Whereas for the two postal workers this development is interpreted in an individualised way as weaknesses and personal mistakes by the management, for the two metal workers and also for Mr H. in the telecoms field, the increasing internationalisation and the companies' related greater profit orientation is seen as the general background, going beyond their own companies. Mr P., for example, sees the background and causes of the economic development of the company, which for him are only an example of a general economic trend, in the company's intensified profit orientation. In his eyes, this leads to getting involved in ever more risky business and has the general effect that the gap between rich and poor is increasingly widening.

"There I've got to say quite honestly . . . it's purely a matter of business. And for me that means only one thing, the rich are getting ever richer and the poor are getting poorer. As soon as I do such a joint venture, then there must be something in it for them . . . otherwise they wouldn't do it." (A16, p. 17)

4.2.3. *The injustices of a flexible world in which the long-term social exchange of the will to work and subordination to the burdens of (industrial) work in return for security and stability no longer works*

The feelings of injustice expressed in the interviews are very closely related to the non-recognition and disregard of the impositions and burdens at work to which the workers are subject, to their interest in the work and thereby their place in society as well as the increasing lack of adequate reward. Their own placing as (relatively) low down in society, even after 30 years of affluent society including the gentrification theory, is characterised by an unbroken realism and unmistakable feeling for the "fine

distinctions”. Their view and interpretation of social processes results from this perspective.

Although the question of (limited) choice or the pressure of work (to the sale of their own labour power) is not made an issue; work is accepted as the central social integration mechanism. As long as the general social exchange – subordination to the imposition of alienated labour (while simultaneously seeing its positive, meaningful side) in return for achieving a particular level of wealth and security as well as the company’s and society’s recognition of these burdens – to some extent functions, these existing injustices are not seen so sharply or are tolerated to a certain extent.

If this long-term exchange is broken up in the company, through stricter economisation of social relations and also at the societal level, if there is an increasing disregard for the impositions and burdens associated with the working conditions and job security is called into question, then feelings of offence and devaluation arise. The perception that no regard is paid to the “lower” people in society and that other groups who do not deserve it are accorded greater recognition, allows feelings of injustice and resentments to emerge. These can be directed both against “those up there” as well as against “those further down”. In such an atmosphere, latent and dormant resentments lead to manifestations of emotional outbursts.

The increasing injustices in the course of economisation in the company itself are most clearly perceived: for example in the form of harassment because of his health-and-safety activity (A8), in the form of lack of involvement in inner-company affairs because of management indifference and contempt for his skills and knowledge (A13).

For Mr G., this growing contradiction becomes apparent in the course of the privatisation of the post office, in the non-recognition of the postman’s burden of work. The job is described as being hard, the stress is expressed in emotional outbursts against those “behind the desk”, the superiors and the company management, none of whom have any idea what it means to work “out there”, “*what’s going on*”:

“... a postman, a parcels driver . . . the two are outside all day. I was out there at 6.50 and there wasn’t a single day when I go home before 7 in the evening. Left the post office at 7.30 . . . come back at five in the afternoon. Summer or winter, its the same . . . While those sitting inside, he can, he’s got no idea what’s going on. It’s true, isn’t it?” (A7, p. 20)

In Mr K.’s example, however, feelings of social injustice going beyond the company become clear. For him, perceived injustices related above all to his orientation to work and the work ethic consolidate themselves both upwards and downwards. They are directed on the one hand against politicians (up there) as the group who protect themselves from the strong wind of economisation, which is blowing him hard in the face, who get themselves out of the firing line and can fix things to suit themselves. Which for him (as for others, e.g. A16) shows itself primarily in the unjustified high incomes they award themselves. On the other hand, however, against the work-shy, with the injustice consisting in the fact that in his eyes they are paying too low a price for not having to submit to the values and rules of play of the society of work. This emotional-aggressive feeling of injustice is concentrated and heated as if through a magnifying

glass in the example of his friend, who uses every trick possible to manoeuvre himself through the controls of the labour-market society.

“Those are exactly the things, because you’re directly affected by it. He comes in, I come home from the shift. He comes home from [swimming in] the gravel pit, sweating. Great! Got so hot, sat down there, drank a beer, pretty women. You come home filthy, sweating from grafting. No . . . I don’t need to go to the retraining course, and not that, and I’d never do that, because it doesn’t suit me . . . then you just think, what am I going to work for? He doesn’t live badly. I say he hasn’t got any debts, and he’s got a flat and manages to buy his ten or twelve beers every day and as long as he can buy that with social security he’s getting too much. No wonder he doesn’t go to work any more.” (A11, p. 30)

This key point in the interview acquires great symbolic significance: One comes home filthy and sweating from the shift – the friend is indeed also sweating, but from going swimming in the gravel pit. All the injustice is expressed in this sequence. Those who do not submit to the main work performance criteria should not be able to lead a good life, even if Mr K. admits that his friend has to go without a lot (car, ...). But as long as things are good for his friend, and he is able to feel good at this low level, Mr K.’s subjection to the demands of the system is devalued. For him, this is the great injustice. One’s own constraints, which one is subject to both on the basis of objective conditions and one’s internalised work ethic, are drawn on as a measure for the judgement of others. A similar devaluation of work-shy people also plays an important role in the discussions with Mr O. and Mr Ö.

4.2.4. “You don’t know anything that’s really certain any more” – Security and calculability as the basis of living

The aspects of security and calculability of life have a major significance in the lifestyles of semi-skilled workers. They are aware of their position lower down the social order and at the same time see that work offers them few chances for advancement. If they have achieved a to some extent well paid (industrial) job, based on their attitude to what is feasible, they are interested in safeguarding it. Equally they are at the same time realistically aware of the ease with which they can be replaced in semi-skilled jobs and of their essentially weak position in the (regional) labour market. This affects older workers (over 45) to a higher extent than the younger, who can still trust to a certain extent in their labour power (in the full sense of the word).

Industrial work in general and that in the nationalised steelworks in particular is thus in two ways a synonym for security, stability and calculability in relation to workers’ life planning and way of life. The relatively high wage and relative security of the job permits advance planning and thereby an increase in quality of life. Because what is often forgotten is that semi-skilled workers can only finance larger purchases (house building, furnishing ...) through taking out credit, and not out of current income. For many, to a certain extent the shifting (forwards) of the future into the present thereby becomes possible. However, stable employment is needed for this.

This is expressed by Mr G., for whom the job security was an important motive in his choice of a job with the post office and for whom the early retirement and related loss of wages thwarted his long-term calculations (credit). This is also the main reason for his fierce resistance to early retirement. On the other hand, for the sake of a secure job as a stable precondition for having a family in his home region, Mr Ö. accepted a fall in occupational and social status from qualified metalworker to road worker and a considerable cut in wages.

The fixed working hours, calculable for weeks in advance, again make the coordination of social contacts possible. In this area, the effect of increasing uncertainty as a result of socio-economic change is apparent in the example of Mr O., in whose case the significance of fixed working hours to being able to lead a predictable life becomes clear. As a result of losing his job twice, first in the steelworks and then as a gas fitter, Mr O. has lost a central plank of the structure of his life. In his current job as a taxi driver, weekend work and irregular finishing times are the rule. What hurts him more than the material side is the loss of social contacts involved, and the fact that he can no longer practice his most important hobby as a referee.

“Yes, so the hobbies and friendships and that, that’s become minimal, you know, you can never plan anything. I can’t say at 4pm I want to go there, because it’s different from week to week, when you’re working. So friendships and things have naturally become very barren as a result. Of course, before it was easier, wasn’t it, because when you finish on Friday dinnertime or evening you know you’ve got time at the weekend. You can plan something . . .” (A15, p. 12)

Mr K., however, points to a very specific and immediate effect of the fundamental uncertainty that goes with short-time working: larger purchases and projects, such as a new kitchen or re-doing the bathroom are consciously put off. In the current uncertain job situation, such large investments represent too great a risk.

For Mr P., guaranteeing jobs is the most important socio-political aim – *“for me it’s most important that the region is revived and that jobs are created”* (A16, p. 23), which for him, also under pressure from the increasing insecurity of his own job and the related feelings of powerlessness, leads to an extremely defensive attitude which goes as far as setting off employee rights within the company against the creation of new jobs and the guarantee of existing jobs.

The in part very real worries about one’s own job and the related integration in society combine and consolidate with those at the social level. Thus Mr M. (A13) answers the question regarding the beneficiaries of change:

“The big ones profit; certainly the big ones profit, I tell you . . . it’s the same with the money, it’s all the, er, invest the pensions somewhere, I tell you quite honestly, and when you hear afterwards that it’s in some shares or other, and it’s all the same where it’s invested, I tell honestly, it’s crazy. So when you hear that, it makes you sick. It’s getting that you don’t know anything that’s really certain any more.” (A13, p. 27)

For the older ones in particular, the fear that the central social pillars providing life security are being undermined in the course of socio-economic change produces deep-going feelings of insecurity and powerlessness.

4.2.5. *The significance of the region as a (latent) reference framework for the threat of decline in the personal position*

At the same time, above all with the interview partners from the industrial region, it is noticeable that the decline of the region as a whole plays a role, but the actual extent of the threat to themselves is not directly addressed, or not seen with this degree of clarity. The impression arises that this repression fulfils a protective role, which allows them to maintain their lives without all-too-painful breaks. Their orientation on and anchoring in the region means that their mobility on the labour market is very limited, and a job loss resulting from the poor regional labour-market situation is for many an existential threat. This is true above all for workers over 45, who also see it this way when directly asked, but in general avoid speaking about it. They rather clutch at their present jobs as the last remaining straw, which also leads to defensive attitudes: *“Demands are something you can forget now”* (A16, p. 12).

However, one reacts particularly sensitively to symbolic manifestations that force this decline back into consciousness. This is illustrated in a particular way in the example of the casino. Previously, the casino, belonging to the works, was a group of prestige buildings in the middle of the town, with a fine restaurant and events hall. It is a symbol of the heyday of the nationalised industry in the region and in particular of the works in the town. This means that the decline of the plant and its effects on the town and the region are symbolically reflected in a particularly drastic form in the decline of the casino. For a long time it stood empty and then refugees were accommodated in it. Its current decrepit condition is not so much associated with economic developments as with the refugees, as Mr L. describes it:

“This all plays a role. It is, and perhaps for us in there, that this didn’t, is certain, that the casino had a lot to do with it, eh . . . In any case of course it made an impression, the casino was a smart building, and now its decrepit. Whether that was them [the refugees] I don’t know at all, that happened in the course of time. Of course, among the people themselves in [H.], that leaves an impression.”
(A12, p. 15)

The significance of the regional component also becomes clear from Mr P.’s example, who is the only one who addresses this sharply and mentions the disadvantaged position of the region and the whole province, which in his eyes is drifting into economic and social limbo, as being the most important political problem for him. In this connection he complains strongly about the weaknesses and inactivity of the provincial politicians, who in his view are not doing anything against this systematic disadvantaging.

“... so, what made me most angry is that actually Styria is [treated] like dirt. We have the weakest politicians of them all. And whether its the Semmering tunnel, they have just not managed anything, whether it’s to do with road building – if I think of Burgenland, there they used to be called barefooted, and now they’ve got

the finest autobahns, and here . . . whether it's up there or in the Enns valley, they don't do anything, they're weak.” (A16, p. 23)

Mr. P. has lived his whole life in the region and has an existential and emotional bond with it. He grew up during the region's heyday, which was characterised both by the building up of the nationalised steel industry and by an economic upswing in the private metalworking industry, and he has experienced the continual decline over the last 20 years. The gloomy outlook on the job market, the reduction in population figures and the social effects of this development, which are clearly visible where he lives – “*this is a dying town*” – hit Mr P. hard. His disadvantaging as a person, as worker or employee, for whom there only remains the role of a powerless plaything of economic decisions, and the increasing signs of a region in social decay, merge into a resigned feeling of being worth less, not being noticed and appreciated. The closely connected decline of the nationalised industry and of the region reflects the general devaluation of their social position as industrial workers, which inevitably entails effects on their personal and social identities.

4.3. *Increasing precariousness*

Of the 32 interview partners, eleven people – nine women and two men – are precariously employed. This corresponds with the well-known fact that the most precarious employment is predominantly female. The term increasing precariousness [French: *precarisation*; German: *Prekarisierung*] is here broadly defined: It includes people who are unemployed as much as the new self-employed. This means that this sub-group in the sample is very heterogeneous, both with regard to their employment status and the sector they belong to as well as with regard to their career history and their perspectives and chances. What they have in common is that in the framework of their current activity they either have no long-term guaranteed living income or that they are in employment with a high degree of insecurity or are currently unemployed. The objective situation of the interviewees can be described as follows:

“Laid off” in a crisis region: Several interview partners are unemployed at the moment and live in a region offering hardly any chance of new jobs. With one exception, these are semi-skilled industrial workers. The works they were employed in has been closed because the production has been relocated to Hungary. A long-serving skilled worker was made redundant from another company when the son of the previous owner took over the company.

Atypically employed in a low-wage sector: In the second group it is a case of two semi-skilled service workers in catering, who after long periods of unemployment are now atypically employed (from marginally to 20 hours a week). Both women are in their early 50s and after years of work in catering had to give up their full-time jobs as waitresses for health reasons – continuous synovitis and tenosynovitis – caused by carrying heavy trays. Their search for less strenuous full-time work was unsuccessful. The background: socio-economic change manifests itself in the restaurant and catering industry through an increase in enterprises and simultaneous fall in turnover. There are

shifts inside the sector, too: on the one hand a collapse of the classical broad-based catering companies (visible in the increase in bankruptcies), as well as an increase in “events catering” and special forms such as foreign speciality restaurants and luxury establishments (*cordon-bleu* gourmet restaurants). Like events catering, the last of these usually work with highly trained staff, and thus offer no employment opportunities to the two semi-skilled service workers.

New self-employed – “wellness” and information technology (IT): The third group finally includes the “new self-employed”. With extensive extra training (from shiatsu to life-style consultancy to gymnastics training) the two masseurs interviewed have in the meantime established themselves in niches, although still only precariously; a new entrant to the IT branch is working on contracts for work, another one as an assistant in her husband’s computer company.

4.3.1. Perception and assessment of socio-economic change against the background of earnings orientation and readiness to work

The significance of paid labour both as a central social integration mechanism and as the basis of social identification is widely substantiated. Likewise, individual ability and readiness to work are also substantiated as forming a pivotal factor in these identity structures (cf. 4.2.1). These identity structures become visible above all in the attitude to paid labour, which as a global interpretation pattern determines the whole life-style, and is thereby also central to the evaluation of social processes.

Confirmation of the significance of work for identity is also found in numerous studies of unemployment. For a major section of the unemployed, job loss leads to a threat to their own identity. One example of this is Mr Y. (A25), who was made redundant after 36 years’ employment as a skilled worker in a factory, and who today – seven years later – can still find no words for his dismissal. He describes “shock symptoms”, numbness, complete withdrawal from local social life. For months, he says, he did not know what was going on and what he should do. Mr Y. displayed a high level of identification, both with his job as a cabinet maker as well as with the factory. His professional pride was primarily based on the quality of his work, well-made pieces, but also on the fact that as a rule each piece was different, i.e. that he was solving different job orders and problems. At the same time, he had close relations both with the owner of the company and with his colleagues. They met privately in a restaurant, celebrated together, etc. In the process, instrumental relations to work were put aside. Mr Y. remained with the company despite the low income in relation to other companies. Against this background, the massive threat to his personal and social identity is understandable. The shock of the breach of trust and the breakdown of mutuality should also be taken into account, as the dismissal came about when the son of the former owner took over the company.

The thesis of the centrality of paid labour, however, is implicitly related – because neutrally formulated – exclusively to male employees. Whether and in what form this is also true of women, as the basis of identity and as an essential measure of worth, has

long been an object of theoretical discussion. What is certain is that paid labour has become ever more important for women over recent decades. At the same time, because of the continued gendered division of labour, women are still responsible for unpaid family labour. This means that they are confronted with contradictory demands from the labour market and family/children and orient themselves on two reference systems. They have to construct their life-styles as specific relations between the two areas of life – work and the family.⁵

For the overwhelming majority of the interview partners, “double life planning” applies, characterised by the attempt to maintain a balance between the two areas of life, paid labour and family/children. Ms J., 28 years old and wishing to have children, working freelance as a multi-media designer after retraining, is currently in a planning phase in which it is a question, as she says, “*of thinking about what and how [she wants] to go on.*” (A10, p. 4) Alongside her desire for greater job security, the possibility of being able to combine having a job and having children is also an essential criterion in the development of options. Technological-economic change gave her the opportunity of not having to work as a hairdresser any more, and being able to improve her standing by working in a new sector. She sees the disadvantage in the absence of opportunities for a fixed position, in the intense competition (“*I know a lot of unemployed website designers*”, A10, p. 3) and in low and uncertain income.

For the women over 40 who were interviewed, paid labour is currently more important – the children in the meantime are almost grown up – but their biographies impressively reflect the difficulty of leading the dual life-style. Thus, for example, Ms F. (A6) gave up her career plans in catering in favour of bringing up children. She returned to the labour market – not least because of fixed working hours – as a semi-skilled worker in the electro industry.

Ms Ä. (A28) gave up her music studies to look after two children as a single mother. And years later her decision to work as a self-employed masseur was an attempt to combine career and children. Ms A., likewise self-employed in the new “wellness” sector, defines her job as a hobby, as something she wants to do, which gives her a sense of meaning. Here what is essential is also the opportunity for many-sided personal development – that is, “career as self-realisation”.

“My great advantage is just that this is my hobby, and that I just, yes that’s mine, what I am offering and I have thought it out myself, that I do it like that, I have thought out myself, what I think is important. And each time I come and I’m happy to open up shop, I don’t have the feeling that I’m going to work, that is, not in that sense.” (A1, p. 3)

⁵ In this context, there is a differentiation between double life planning, which is characterised by the attempt to balance the two areas of life – paid labour and family/children (majority type), family-centred life planning (maintenance of the traditional woman’s role), career-centred life planning, in which the worker perspective is dominant, and individual life planning, whose reference point is “the self” (cf. Geissler/Oechsle 1994).

Despite increasing competition and insecurity, both make a positive assessment of developments in this service segment. Demand is growing, if slowly, and they can follow an activity that they like doing.

“A lot has changed there. And I have the feeling that it was not a bad idea that I did that, because in general developments towards alternative medicine are becoming ever more popular and more and more people are taking it up, and massages and shiatsu is part of it. . . . Which simply a few years ago . . . how shall I say, seemed very . . . esoteric or exotic, is just being more and more taken up.”
(A28, p. 4)

For Ms C. on the other hand, previously working as a computer operator and often unemployed, the focus at the moment is on bringing up children. She works in her husband’s PC company, and so she is relatively free to divide up her time and has a high level of flexibility for the needs of her children:

“Because I always have it a bit in the back of my head that I am working for him, because when there’s anything wrong with the children . . . I pack up and drop everything and go. Which would not be so easy in another office or something.”
(A3, p. 15)

As with the men, individual ability and readiness to work is a central factor of identity for the women interviewees too, expressed on the one hand in work orientation and which on the other hand can be related to the achievement of combining job and the family. Thus, for example, Ms E. (A5) describes with pride how she assembled “a complicated appliance” on her own, that she worked so well that there were never any complaints from external checks. For Ms C. (A3) on the other hand, it is primarily a question of her management and organisational achievements with regard to combining a job and having children, which has won her much respect from her milieu.

With regard to the instrumental and/versus the content relation to paid labour, the attempts of the former semi-skilled woman workers in the electro industry to find areas of identification with the content of work are also apparent.⁶ The example of being able to assemble an appliance independently has already been mentioned. At the same time, however, it is clear that paid labour serves primarily to earn money in order to “safeguard your own course of life” (A5, p. 19). The semi-skilled service workers in catering who were questioned, on the other hand, display a strong relation to the content of their work; here, waitresses’ feelings of “professionalism and vocation” come out (cf. also Lechner et al. 1991). Thus, for example, Ms Ü. (A29) says that she enjoys the work. Catering suits her perfectly, she works with people a lot, a sense of humour is

⁶ There are numerous strands of argumentation precisely on the job orientation of unskilled and semi-skilled women workers. Theses concerning semi-skilled women workers’ less pronounced identification with the content of work, on women’s family-related instrumentalism, on the strategy of planned obsolescence as the most important motive powers of female working behaviour and female job orientation marked the discussion in the early to mid 80s. These were later replaced by more differentiated discussions of the subjective handling of the burdensome working reality. Here it concerned the question of how women manage to acquire meaning beyond the instrumental aspect of earning money and to develop self-assurance and self-esteem on the basis of their work (cf., i.a., Becker-Schmidt 1983).

needed, and she has that, and needs to assert herself. Nevertheless, with Ms Ü. instrumental relations do exist, even if they are subsidiary.

Those formerly employed in industry associate socio-economic change with the disadvantageous developments taken by the companies. The causes are on the one hand seen in internationalisation, which for Mr N. (A14), for example, are expressed in the increased profit maximisation strategy of the big international concerns, which drives them to use the cheapest locations. In the process, social standards and wage levels are undermined. "Part of the guilt" for these developments, however, is also attached to management. Thus, for example, as Ms F. formulates it, management was organised inefficiently and bureaucratically and thus was not able to take important decisions quickly enough:

"But the management, the left hand didn't know what the right hand was doing. There was the boss, a deputy, another deputy and . . . what are they sitting there for . . . when everything's going down the drain and nobody cares." (A6, p. 9)

For the semi-skilled workers in catering, on the other hand, the reference point for the perception of socio-economic change is not the individual enterprise but the situation on the labour market. They are not currently able to find employment in catering that would provide them with a living. They personalise the causes for this, however, not in the management but in the foreign labour.

"Above all Czechs and Slovaks", according to Ms Ü. "are very much in demand both in service and in the kitchens because they work for lower wages than Austrian workers or are often not registered." (A29, p. 7)

Ms C., on the other hand, ultimately links the consequences of socio-economic change for her career developments closely with private changes. The devaluation of her qualifications as an operator, a consequence of developments in the IT area, which led to unemployment and a "difficult marriage" which led to divorce, was followed by a new beginning with her current partner, the birth of two children and the building up of a "family business" (computer trade). In this context she experiences the developments of recent years as having been positive.

Overall, even this small group of precariously employed people displays great diversity of life situations and experiences. The differences in subjective perceptions and patterns of coping with the experience are correspondingly large. It is noticeable that alongside the job situation and the regional job market, it is particularly the biographies, the family situation and the origin milieu that mark the pattern of perception and coping. Thus women workers and waitresses assess the situation in very similar ways, whereas the self-employed, who have to some extent found a footing, see their situation as no longer being precarious and look to the future relatively optimistically. Women who care for children worry more about their material existence, but on the other hand also regard the job situation from the viewpoint of combining paid work and family work, as a result of which some precarious situations can appear in a better light.

4.3.2. *Injustice – one's own work and efforts are not rewarded*

Injustice is a pivotal factor in the interview partners' assessment of socio-economic change. Perceived injustice is experienced very emotionally as an injury and offence, as a feeling of not being noticed and recognised, as a feeling of being looked down on and punished despite the high level of work orientation.

Although paid labour as a central social integration mechanism is not made an issue of, it becomes apparent in the interviews that as long as the subjection to the impositions of "alienated labour" (cf. Zoll 1984) has an exchange equivalent in social security and social recognition, a certain degree of injustice can be tolerated. The one-sided breaking of the exchange, in the extreme case in the form of dismissal, produces the above described feelings of injustice, which consequently may be directed against the people higher up – or also the gainers, such as, for example, the management – but also, however, against the weaker people, such as immigrants.

But another side also becomes apparent: The women interviewed experience a double injustice – as employee and as woman – which undoubtedly corresponds to the doubled societalisation (Becker-Schmidt 1988). This is most clear for women who as single mothers (after a broken marriage) have paid a high price for their independence and autonomy, and indeed in the form of enormous burdens, feelings of guilt, of having too little time for the children, material limitations and not least also to some extent in giving up career perspectives.

One example of this is Ms F. She points to the experience of society not taking women seriously "... *I mean, by and large, women are looked on as being disabled.*" (A6, p. 12) As an example she gives unequal pay, the prohibition of night work, and experiences as a single mother. On the other hand, she enumerates a lot of perceived injustices which took place in the course of the closure of the factory and the relocation of production. As a particular affront and offence, or a range of affronts, she experienced forced active cooperation in the loss of her own job, through the training of Hungarian women – the plant's new location is in Hungary. First of all the affront of actively having to support the relocation through passing on her own knowledge and skills in training Hungarian women workers. Then the affront of also having to correct the "sloppy" work of the Hungarians. While in her own plant, the quality criteria were always applied extremely strictly and the workers were reprimanded by management for any mistakes, the same strict standards apparently did not apply for the Hungarians. From Ms F.'s point of view, these were allowed to deliver sloppy work, which then had to be corrected by those who in the end were sorted out and left by the wayside.

As a second example, the core of Ms Ü.'s (A29) feeling of injustice is that she has "worked her whole life with great willingness to work, burnt herself out", and now has to live with the health consequences, and has not been able to find a job in catering from which she could make a living because companies are employing cheap foreign labour, sometimes illegally. This means that for her, as a woman, who for years had safeguarded her independence, also through financial autonomy, now again – through no fault of her own and despite her efforts – is dependent on her partner's income.

4.3.3. *An uncertain labour market – between hope and resignation*

Life security is another pivotal factor in the interview partners' life planning, yet only this security makes it possible to plan a life style. In contrast to the employee group described in the above chapter – semi-skilled workers in the nationalised steelworks (cf. 4.2.4) – job security or, better, the level of security for the currently precariously employed – with one exception – has always been more limited since the beginning of their careers. On the one hand, this can be ascribed to the sectors in which they have been employed – such as catering – on the other hand, to gender. The “normal work construct” that envisages continuous earning until retirement, has, as is well known, always been a model for male earning careers.

None of the precariously employed women has had a continuous earning career. The majority have broken off their careers because of the birth of children, at least for the length of parental leave and in some cases for longer. At the same time, in their employment histories there is short-term working, sometimes seasonal working, periods of unemployment etc. Almost all have a number of job changes behind them, both within the sector and between sectors. Their security therefore always primarily related to their chances on the labour market. They always found jobs that safeguarded their livelihoods again, even if many had to accept compromises. Precisely this security, however, seems to be falling away at the moment. For some this has a regional explanation. They live in crisis regions with high unemployment rates. Secondly, it is related to their age – those employed in catering are over 50 years old. Thirdly, it is related to their qualifications. They have indeed largely completed an apprenticeship, but in their further careers they were employed as unskilled or semi-skilled. The women's reactions fluctuate between hope, resignation and anger. They attempt to counter experiences of failure in seeking work or in seeking full-time jobs with calculated optimism: *“I've managed it so far, so it must be possible to do it again”*. The anger is directed against those who from their perspective have apparently been able to fix things to suit themselves, such as politicians, but also immigrants.

The current situation – unemployed or atypically employed – naturally entails material insecurity. Ms E. (A5) faces a threat to her survival: five years ago, when she started in an industrial company which at this time was considered secure, she took out credit to buy her parents' house from her sisters/brothers. For Ms Ü. (A29), the fear of material decline is closely linked with fear of social isolation – specifically with the fear of not being able to keep up with the living standards of friends and acquaintances, not to be able to afford holidays together, to go to restaurants together.

For Ms A. (A1) and Ms Ä. (A28), as self-employed people in the wellness field, a high degree of insecurity is part of their everyday working life, which they have learned to live with. To reduce the insecurity both have invested in further training and consequently in the possibility of a wider market, and simultaneously they have attempted to build up a customer base. Both attempts have succeeded. Here, their social background has turned out to be essential to the “constructive” coping with insecurity.

“Basically for me it’s like this, that although I’ve obviously always got my worries, strangely enough I have no worries about survival, that my self-employed existence will be shipwrecked. As there was never a shortage of money at home . . . I never stored the feeling of existential insecurity in my memory. That’s not part of me . . . I know a lot of people who have that very strongly, but I don’t have it at all. I also think that it’s only as a result of that that I dared to do what I’m doing at the moment.” (A28, p. 8)

Despite this constructive approach to insecurity, what bothers both of them very much is the absence of social guarantees in the case of not being able to work, above all in relation to their children.

“So there’s no security at all. That is, if the child is ill, it will be tragic; to be sick yourself mustn’t happen at all – there’s absolutely no safety net.” (A1, p. 3)

4.4. Summary

In all those interviewed, the subjective perceptions of and views on socio-economic change are characterised by a pronounced work ethic. Paid labour and good work can furthermore be seen as a major pillar of the identity of many of the interviewees. Added to this, for several women, there is independence and pride at being able to combine a career and having children, despite all the obstacles. In our sample there is thus very little of post-materialistic values or hedonistic outlook to be found. The clear differences in perceptions and views can be traced back to different biographies, social backgrounds and characteristics of the region.

Naturally, socio-economic change itself has become noticeable to the interviewees in widely varying ways. Thus the subjective perceptions even within the group of “gainers” are extremely heterogeneous, since the views are mostly ambivalent and the darker side is sometimes emphasised, sometimes glossed over. Among this for example is the high pressure of work, the long working hours and the demands on availability as a self-employed person and also as an employee. Among the interview partners from the post office and telecommunications it is noticeable on the one hand that personal advancement does not necessarily hinder the perception of the generally worsened working conditions and feelings of threat lower down the social scale. On the other hand, it is apparent that disadvantageous working conditions are less clearly perceived if one changes to a more pleasant working atmosphere and receives more recognition from superiors.

Most of those interviewed perceive their work situation as increasingly insecure. The exceptions are the self-employed who are very convinced of their abilities and employees who have a high level of trust in the company. The extent and frequency of the concessions made in order to achieve a degree of security that makes an orderly life and a reasonable if often modest living standard possible were striking. Many sacrificed their desired career, changed from catering to a factory work or did not take up better-paid work elsewhere. The consequences of loss of security are only understandable against this background. At the core, it is a question of disappointments arising from the dissolution of the social exchange in which relative affluence and security are

exchanged for hard work and subjection to constraints. Having worked all one's life, having "*done everything without moaning*", suddenly no longer counts at all if the plant is faced with closure or there is no job that pays a living wage to be found on the labour market.

Even if the material aspects of the changes, that is, income and working and employment conditions, are of immediate importance, the lack of recognition or the devaluation for example as a worker, acquires major significance in the assessment of the changes. The wider social distance between employees and middle management and the lost esteem for one's work causes deep offence. In some cases the employer's dissolution of relations of trust leads to a deep shock.

Both in the dismissals of the workers concerned as well as in individuals who achieved advancement, there is a hint that they no longer understand the social world. It no longer acts according to the rules that they themselves had always closely adhered to in the expectation of mutuality. A frequent reaction was the insisting on the adherence to old or even new rules, the old including the work ethic, and the new the opportunity to combine a career and having children.

A common feature of the changes in the world of work that was surveyed is the fact that earlier promises of security are no longer kept and that conditions of work are becoming harder. The responsibility for this is laid partly on incompetent managers, partly on incompetent politicians, partly on underhand competition on the labour market, and partly on globalisation and the profit motive of the big companies. Experiences with the relocation of companies and competition with foreigners on the labour market make it understandable why many of those interviewed describe a "*queasy feeling*" or even "*panic-stricken fear*" on the subject of the enlargement of the EU.

Changes in working conditions are often only expressed when the question is raised directly. Security and bearable working conditions are seldom brought up directly. There is obviously an absence of legitimate forms of expression for the increasing pains of work as there is for desirable working conditions, since nobody wishes to be seen to want a return to the rosy times of the previous "officialdom".

Sacrifices and pressures are naturally more easily swallowed by those who have made their hobby into a career, who are in a pleasant working atmosphere, feel recognised or hope for wealth and fame as the reward for their efforts. With all the others issues come to the fore that had long been out of fashion in public debate and in politics: the alienation of labour and the high degree of pains of work. This is where the core of some statements on injustices seems to lie: personal suffering is compared with the suffering of others, the apparently happy "scrounger" and the apparently well-looked-after refugee become a provocation. The level of comparison is thus the subjective affectedness, that is, the relative happiness or unhappiness. As long as the unemployed and refugees also seem to be poor and unhappy, one's personal suffering is bearable. If this is not the case, one asks oneself: "*Perhaps I've been a fool*" (A27, p. 15).

5. ***VIEWS ON POLITICS: THE RELATION BETWEEN SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE AND RIGHT-WING POPULISM***

5.1. ***General background***

The FPÖ scored its greatest success in the period of the grand coalition between the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the Christian conservative “People’s Party” (ÖVP), which was formed after 1986 when the SPÖ dissolved its coalition with the FPÖ because Jörg Haider had taken over the party leadership. Disillusionment with politics and depoliticisation are frequently referred to results of grand coalition consensus politics, a proxy democracy and shapeless politics of the centre. A specifically Austrian feature and a factor contributing to the consensus politics is the social partnership, in which agreement between the government, employers’ and workers’ organisations takes place. Since the mid-80s, this major-party system (including the social partnership) has been in a process of change and crisis: on the one hand, the traditional socio-cultural milieus (allegiance to political camps) were being eroded, on the other hand, in the 1980s the SPÖ abandoned its full-employment policy and moved, above all in the 1990s, towards economic liberalism. The FPÖ was all the more able to raise its profile as the opposition because it was not tied into the social partnership.

From 1986, under the authoritarian leadership of Haider, the FPÖ was successively transformed from a liberal to a right-wing populist party, which then operated for 13 years as an opposition party. The FPÖ electorate rose from 5% in 1983 to a spectacular 26.9% in 1999,⁷ making the FPÖ the second strongest party in the country. This election brought in the well-known “blue-black transformation” in Austria. The ÖVP formed a government with the FPÖ which lasted two-and-a-half years. In September 2002 it broke down after internal FPÖ power struggles and struggles over political direction.

The political positions of the FPÖ are based on a nationalistic concept of the *Volk* [the people], which is understood as an organic community. Ideologically, Austrian patriotism and anti-pluralism are paired with strongly xenophobic attitudes and a sexist image of society. In the FPÖ rhetoric, immigrants and refugees above all are lumped together as welfare-state scroungers and criminals and thus misused as scapegoats. The discourses related to this are widespread in the mass media and contribute to general social acceptance of resentments against foreigners and to discrimination against them. Since participation in government, the racist messages have lost their edge; however, more diplomatic terms such as “bogus asylum-seekers” and “economic refugees” have become part of the social and political discourses of all (three) major parties and characterise the immigration policy of the FPÖ/ÖVP government. In its social and

⁷ According to occupational group, the FPÖ electorate in 1999 was distributed as follows: 33% self-employed and freelance, 10% farmers, 20% public service workers, 22% white-collar workers and 47% industrial workers.

economic policy, the FPÖ party programme is essentially neo-liberal, placing its emphasis more on personal responsibility and the individual and less on the welfare state. At the same time the FPÖ presents itself as the better workers' party, which fights against the "privileged elites" and for the interests of the hard-working and competent Austrians, or "the ordinary people".

As a governing party, the FPÖ raised taxes and national insurance contributions, and together with the ÖVP, who were now no longer held back by the social democrats, followed a neo-liberal course. "Zero deficit" was the much invoked catchphrase of the austerity policy and the message that it was necessary "to tighten belts so that things would go well again in our affluent island of Austria" found an echo among large sections of the population. However, there was dissatisfaction over the additional financial burden, and the FPÖ's credibility as a party against political privileges suffered as a result of black sheep in its own ranks. Because of its participation in government, the FPÖ's internal contradiction between a neo-liberal position (represented by the FPÖ's government team) and the right-wing populist standing up for the "ordinary people" (still Jörg Haider's role) became particularly virulent and pointed in the break-up of the government in early September 2002: internal party differences in the course of a power struggle between Haider (and his followers) and the FPÖ government, which could be followed in the media by the whole population, led to the resignation of three FPÖ cabinet members and the head of the parliamentary party. The federal chancellor, Wolfgang Schüssel, then called new elections. The central conflict was the promised tax reductions, which Haider demanded and the government wanted to postpone. This power struggle showed that Haider and his "Knittelfeld rebels"⁸ were able to assert themselves; the new FPÖ line (rapid tax reform, putting off the purchase of the *Eurofighter*⁹, scepticism regarding eastern enlargement of the EU) once again bore Haider's signature. The political events of recent months have obviously put off a large section of the FPÖ voters and sympathisers, which is why the support for the FPÖ in the election on 24 November 2002 collapsed to just 10% (from 26.9% in 1999).

The political situation thereby changed drastically during the period of this survey (March to September 2002), which is also reflected in the interviews: in spring, the ÖVP-FPÖ government was still firmly in the saddle and many interviewees attested to its good work; the last interviews took place in the period when the FPÖ was disintegrating and in these talk was also more often of a "Punch and Judy show" and the FPÖ was heavily criticised as a party.

⁸ Knittelfeld, where an extraordinary party conference was called at which the FPÖ ministers were to be forced to follow the Haider line, is a catch phrase for the internal FPÖ struggle and the victory of the Haider supporters.

⁹ Air defense jet fighters.

5.2. *The impact of socio-economic change on political orientations*

In chapter four we presented the perceptions and views on changes in the world of work, sub-divided according to the socio-economic categories we had established. In the following, we would like to continue with the presentation of the political orientation of the interviewees and in the process concentrate in particular on the possible effects that the affectedness by socio-economic change has on the receptiveness for ideological and political messages. In part, the interviewees themselves provided explicit information on how their political views have changed as regards preference for parties, questions of the welfare state or with regard to security policy. In part, it remains to our interpretation to provide a connection between the perception and view of socio-economic change and statements on politics. In all cases, the aim of the interpretation was to understand the political orientation, in particular statements on policy towards foreigners and refugees, on representative democracy, preferences for parties and politicians, on trade unions and shop stewards etc. through consideration of social and family origins, employment history, current life circumstances and the changes experienced in the world of work. Here it was important only to take up the most plausible connections with experiences in the world of work and, conversely, to leave all other reasons for particular political orientation, such as the influence of the mass media and social environment or experience with politics itself, as open as possible. The following links between the conditions of paid labour and changes in them, and the political orientation of the interviewees, in particular receptiveness to right-wing populist positions, prove to be particularly plausible:

- Limited influence of socio-economic change on political orientation or strengthening of social-democratic, conservative or liberal positions.
- Injured sense of justice: a sense of one's personal suffering through work and too low a price being paid by others who are not subject to it.
- Fear of declassing: *"There isn't a middle class at all any more."*
- Sense of powerlessness in the face of economic upheaval – the attractiveness of "strong men".
- The rebellion against political monopoly of power and "cronyism" and the resentment against those who set things up to suit themselves.

As the comments on perceptions and views on socio-economic change have already shown, we often found quite similar patterns of interpretation in people we had classified in different categories. Also with regard to changes in paid labour and political orientation, particular patterns can be found both with the "gainers", those "threatened by decline" and the "precariously employed", or at least in two of these categories. In the following we will therefore present the most plausible connections and dispense with a subdivision into the three socio-economic categories.

5.2.1. *“People should be treated as human beings” – Negative experiences in the world of work strengthen social democratic or conservative political positions*

Socio-economic change can also lead to a strengthening of patterns of interpretation and political orientations that can be classified as belonging to the social democratic, conservative or liberal political camps. We would like to outline this form of connection between socio-economic change and political orientation in this chapter and illustrate it with examples.

A turning towards social-democratic principles or their strengthening consists in the view that precisely the growing insecurity and inequality demands a fairer distribution of social wealth and state measures to tame the power of the market. The causes of disadvantageous change in the world of work are located in the strategies of the big corporations and in globalisation in general. Thus, in Mr N.’s view, currently an unemployed worker from a crisis region, social standards and wage levels are being undermined by international concerns seeking out the cheapest location.

“The big companies want to make billions in profits. For them it’s only profit that counts now, not the ordinary man who’s doing the work.” (A14, p. 21)

Mr N., who considers himself socially to be a “small worker”, would like a society that made a modest but secure living standard possible for everyone:

“... that at least everyone has a job – I mean, just as well as it goes, that everything’s in order in the schools, education, and that everyone has got welfare cover. That the money isn’t distributed unequally, that would be an important point, that one person doesn’t have very much and the other nothing at all. Let’s say, as if you can call it the social middle class, you don’t have to have too much, but it should be enough to live on.” (A14, p. 28)

In recent years Mr N., who comes from a poor family background and has therefore had to struggle all his life to maintain a modest living standard, has noticed that the securities in working life in general and social security are being called into question. This, however, has not made him angry with refugees or “welfare-state scroungers”, as was the case with some others we interviewed in the region. Rather he views the world more strongly from the perspective of the worker, although he too was self-employed for a number of years. And contrary to his previous voting behaviour, which was influenced by his father-in-law, an ÖVP local councillor, he turned to those who in his view represented the interests of the workers, namely the SPÖ. The fact that his politicisation took this direction, although he *“in principle doesn’t think much of politics”* (A14, p. 23) and is also influenced by discussions in the pub, initially resulted from the fact that he has always rejected Haider’s destructive political style. A further explanation could lie in the fact that his precarious life situation does not seem to encroach on his identity. Even under existential insecurity, he sees the possibility of controlling his conditions of life as lying with himself:

“I have always watched out that things go forward. Actually I’ve never worried. I’ve always thought of something, and it’s the same now. And if things just get a bit tight, I’ll have to live with it.” (A14, p. 16)

Although Mr N. sees workers' dependence on the economic powers much more clearly than others, he does not allow feelings of powerlessness to arise.

For Mr M., too, socio-economic change is leading to a shifting of power relationships in favour of the big enterprises and to growing insecurity. He sees the primary aim of politics as being in safeguarding living standards and fair chances, which he relates in particular to employment, health and pensions. In contrast to Mr N., he is politically active (he is an SPÖ councillor in a small town). The increasing economic insecurity and in particular the threat to his job, may have strengthened or reactivated his social-democratic values, although he is immediately confronted with his colleagues' acceptance of right-wing populist positions and cannot escape individual aspects of these. The stereotype of the refugees accommodated in the region is among these: *"Sure, he comes, doesn't need to do anything, has a pile of money"* (A13, p. 29). For him, however, other injuries to his sense of justice weigh more heavily, for example the fact that the company management did not adequately reward a proposal for improvements. The investment of pension money in shares also triggers an essentially stronger negative reaction.

Mr U., who we categorise as a "gainer" from socio-economic change, because the growth of Internet applications has enabled him to get secure employment after he had completed a teacher-training course but did not want to work as a teacher. The painful experience of unemployment, which preceded his current employment, has rather *"solidified"* his social-democratic political orientation and *"filled it with emotions"*. He emphasises the state's responsibility and is strenuously against any form of privatisation:

"OK, for me the state is in any case preferable to a private initiative, because with the private initiative I have the feeling that they only serve one aim, namely to make money." (A21, p. 21)

The attractive power of right-wing populism is not understandable for him. In the FPÖ's policies he sees an economically motivated attempt to play different population groups off against one another. Mr. U. does not come from a social-democratic family, but is close to the SPÖ and sees them as the *"lesser evil"*.

Mr H. is the most explicit critic of neo-liberalism and the socio-economic change over the last ten years in our sample. His own experiences of unemployment, or that he has occasionally been categorised as being too old at 30, have rather further strengthened him in his political involvement and commitment for the weaker sections of society. Thus in the company he attempts to maintain the values of solidarity, human rights and the protection of life against the rampant "social Darwinism", in which he sees parallels with right-wing extremism. He is very interested in contemporary history and because of his firm and reflected counter-position to right-wing populism is in no way receptive to their message. He also criticises the SPÖ, in which he is *"a very distant"* member, because they are not engaged adequately with issues such as unemployment and poverty and the organisation is not free of racism and xenophobia.

In the conservative camp, too, there are examples of the fact that demoralisation and offences in working life do not have to cause increased receptiveness to right-wing populism. Thus, Ms R. suffered extremely negative experiences after re-entering employment following a long maternity break. After eight years in a company where she felt at home, she was sacked out of the blue. She became a victim of harassment in one job, which she obtained through a personnel agency, and when unemployed had to struggle hard to obtain financing from the AMS (labour market service) for further training. But, ultimately, information technology training enabled her to get a position in a renowned service-industry company in which she feels very much at home. For Ms R. respect for the dignity of every human being is very important, and she criticises the FPÖ for fomenting xenophobia. Her father owned a construction company for which her mother also worked. Politically she tends towards the ÖVP. What differentiates her from other interview partners is the material security through her husband, a bank clerk, as a result of which employment for her is at least economically not absolutely necessary.

The young, self-employed “gainers” from technological and economic development in our sample finally showed themselves to be very little impressed by the darker side, which working life holds for them too in the form of overflowing working hours. For Mr B., his left-wing ideology which he brought with him from his family home, and which also led him to be politically active for the Greens, is not easily compatible with some aspects of his professional practice as an agent for computer trainers, which puts him closer to an economically liberal attitude. Mr S., too, who in contrast to Mr B. displays an economic liberal world view bordering on social Darwinism, has no liking for right-wing populist ideology or politics. He sees himself as being strong enough to look after himself and is one of the social elite. His opinion of right-wing populism is that it appeals more to mediocre and dependent employees.

5.2.2. “And you think, what am I going to work for?” – Injured sense of justice and appeals to the “decent and hardworking people”

The interpretation of the interviews showed a clear connection between the conditions and changes in the world of work and the receptiveness to right-wing populism, which in the previous discussion has hardly been addressed: the burdens of work through high pressure of work and disadvantageous working environment, or more generally formulated, the pains of work. Inhuman working conditions do not *per se* lead to political reactions. Even if they are extremely burdensome, they are seldom addressed as an urgent problem. It appears that in present-day society there is a lack of legitimate forms of expression for the pains of work. If one raises the issue, people are even satisfied with their working situation, even if it is often a relatively resigned satisfaction, from which it appears that one has resigned to the inevitable. However, this coping pattern also includes the fact that the positive aspects of work are particularly highlighted. Occasionally, however, these come out so clearly in people’s perceptions

because they distinguish themselves with relief from previous experiences in working life.

The disadvantageous working conditions are not interpreted against the background of opposing interests in the company or in the economy in general, but in relation to the – subjectively perceived, comparably far too favourable – situation of others. In the following quotation, Mr K., a worker who has been working shift work in a metalworking factory for many years and who does a physically hard and little regarded job, compares himself with a friend who lives on social security. The injured sense of justice is understandable. But here it is not only a question of the application of abstract performance principles according to the motto: he who does not work, neither shall he eat. Because for Mr K. the most important thing is having a job. It is determining for his identity and protects against the danger of “giving up”. Here the defence against the pleasure principle comes through clearly. He has come to terms with by no means pleasant work (“*even if it sounds daft, I like working*”), the pain expresses itself only in aggression against domestic and foreign “welfare-state scroungers”.

The years-long to life-long subjection to the constraints of industrial work or the performance conditions of work in general (“*did everything without moaning*”) are, seen relatively, insufficiently rewarded. The distance to those above is seen as too great, to those below as too small. Aggression is directed against those who obviously escape the demands of work – and “*still live well*”. On top of this, in the category of those “under threat of decline”, among whom we categorised Mr K. and other interview partners with whom we found similar interpretations, comes the experience of job insecurity. No one knows how long the company will continue to exist and how long one will thus have a job in the region.

In the category of “increased precariousness”, half of the interview partners currently cannot cover or can only partly cover their living costs from their work, because of unemployment or marginal employment. Their job situation is immediately connected with the consequences of socio-economic change: relocation of companies into low-wage countries, immigration of cheaper labour, illegal employment, etc. These people, too, display a strong work ethic, discipline and subordination. The core of the connection between the perception of socio-economic change and their receptiveness to right-wing political ideas or ideologies consists in the fact that they see themselves as not being rewarded for their subordination and in some cases being punished. The feelings of disappointment and anger are directed against those who in their eyes have advantages without the subjection to the impositions and risks of an increasingly pitiless world of work. These are the politicians with high and secure incomes; it is the refugees who are looked after by the state, and it is the long-term unemployed, who don’t want to work at all, but also against foreigners who represent unfair competition on the labour market.

For people in precarious life situations, such as Ms E., for example, who lost her job because the electronics company she was working in was relocated to Hungary, the injury to the sense of justice through the perceived preferential treatment of refugees is even easier to understand than that of those whose jobs are in danger. In material terms,

Ms E. contrasts her attempts to keep her head above water (including bartering with food) with what in her view is the generous provisions made for others. From a symbolic point of view, as for other interview partners, for her it is quite clearly a question of the lack of recognition the public discussion accords to her problems. It thus hurts that no one seems to care about her problems, although the problems of refugees are given a great deal of attention.

If we compare the interviewees' above-described interpretation patterns with the right-wing populist policies then the attraction is understandable. After all, the "decent and hardworking Austrians" who have been disadvantaged and do not get their fair share has been one of the FPÖ's core issues for many years. In this connection public sentiment has continually been stirred up with stories about supposed "welfare-state scroungers" and foreigners exploiting Austria. But it would be too simple only to speak of problem transference and fomenting resentments. It should not be overlooked that an important concern of these people is being fulfilled, namely public recognition of actual, subjective problems.

It is surprising in our findings on this point, however, that the "ethnisation", that is the emphasis on membership of the *Volk* as an inclusion/exclusion criteria does not play so great a role as is often assumed. At least it is very exaggerated to connect receptiveness for messages such as "Austria First" directly with ethnocentrism and racism. Even if they did not feel recognised as Austrians with problems or in part displayed extreme xenophobia, the erection of an injured personal identity on an ethnic shadow identity (Dörre 1997) is not the central aspect in this group – with right-wing extremists this is presumably different. Our interviewees all drew a quite clear difference between foreigners who work hard and contribute something and those who do not do it, or are criminal (*"We've got rabble ourselves. . . . They should go and murder people in their own countries."* A3, S. 28). And they make no distinction between domestic "scroungers" and refugees in the care of the state, who seem to be doing well without working. For our interview partners the reference group of identity politics (Steinert 1999, Betz 2002) is thus not purely composed from an ethnic perspective. The reason why campaigning for *Inländer* [Austrians] and stirring up hatred against "foreigners" nevertheless finds an echo becomes understandable against the background of the lack of recognition and the limited financial room for manoeuvre. As can also be read in Zilian (2002), it is missing the problem if the politically correct elite demands generosity from those to whom one is not even generous enough to recognise their problems – to say nothing of remedying material hardship or easing the pains of work.

The receptiveness, however, is not an automatic consequence of the experiences described and their subjective perception. This is indicated by the counter examples also found in our sample. Thus, Ms R. had to struggle against discrimination and had to deal with deep injuries in her working life: however, for her this strengthened the desire for respect for human dignity, and indeed for everybody. On health grounds Ms X. ultimately was no longer able to do her job, and supplements her income from social security and begging on the underground. For her, however, the refugees do not represent an enemy image (*"They've got to go somewhere"*) and she also takes no

offence at state support, as one might have expected in the light of other interviews (*"I'm being supported by the state too"*). Such differences become understandable if one takes into account the social background, the social allegiances and the fundamental values or ideologies of the individuals concerned.

5.2.3. *"There's no middle class at all any more" - Fear of declassing*

A strong work ethic and aggression against those not subject to the impositions of the society of work to the same extent is often closely connected with the fear of social decline. We find examples of this in particular in people who have managed to achieve a relative or only precarious advancement. As described above in chapter 4.1, this is the case, for example, with Ms T., who works in telecommunications and who has changed from a company with a bureaucratic, authoritarian management style to a young company where she not only found a relaxed atmosphere and a collegial management style, but which also gave her promotion opportunities without formal qualifications. Against this background, the high pressure of work, which according to her description is also injurious to health, and the impossibility of combining career and family, are "bearable". The high stress level, however, becomes very significant for the receptiveness to right-wing populism: despite subjection to the pressure to perform, despite the painful sacrifice of free time, despite all the adaptation and over-exertions, Ms T. is in debt and can only just afford her flat. She sees her living standard as in no way being secure, but fears sliding down into the underclass. Here, the foreigners in the form of refugees appear on the scene: they have been accommodated in Ms T.'s block of flats by the state; one of them once deliberately scratched her car. The injury of Ms T.'s sense of justice, conditioned by the disproportionate relationship between performance and pressure of work on the one hand and reward in the form of secure living standards and status on the other, finds the opportunity for expression in the complaint about the relatively better treatment of refugees.

Ms C. has blows of fate and experience of discrimination behind her and at the moment, together with her husband, is struggling hard for the success of his small computer business. Her hostility to foreigners becomes more understandable as a result of the high work orientation and own sacrifice, which is only just enough to stay in the middle class. The fear of decline is evident:

"The way it looks, in the end there won't be a middle class at all any more. Either you have something or you have nothing. And the percentage of those who have nothing is probably now already big enough, and later it will be even bigger."
(A3, p. 35)

Ms C. lives in a district with a high ratio of socially disadvantaged immigrants and dislikes some immigrant families in the same block extremely. Above and beyond the actual points of friction, these could represent a symbol for her that with regard to the housing situation the distance between her and the lowest stratum of society is not so large. Ms C.'s worries regarding the high ratio of pupils from socially disadvantaged immigrant families in many schools in the district should also not be overlooked, which

is why she shifted her children to other schools and kindergartens. In her environment, therefore, foreigners represent not just a symbolic threat.

From these descriptions the close connection between a high work ethic, disadvantages suffered, great fears of decline in status and the confrontation with “foreigners” on the one hand and a marked receptiveness for the ideological and political messages of right-wing populist politicians becomes understandable. These examples show that we are indeed in part dealing with “problem transference” (Bourdieu 1999, Bohle et al. 1997) inasmuch as the activities of the employers, which are the root cause of the competition, are not made an issue of. Yet the individual reactions cannot only be dismissed as such. Many discussions showed that an injured sense of justice and fears of decline in social status in the experience of those concerned actually did have a connection with “foreigners” or “scroungers”, sometimes materially, sometimes symbolically, even if this connection is one that is constructed in a form suggested by the media and politics.

5.2.4. *“Here everyone’s worrying about their job” – Insecurity, powerlessness and the attractive power of the “strong men”*

In the interviews many interview partners expressed the problem of increased insecurity and the threat this represented to them (see chapter 4). The extent of control those concerned believe they have over their own futures is now important to the connection with political orientation. After all, right-wing populism addresses the population as a passive victim of overpowering opponents, often without going into clear interests (Dubiel 1994; Steinert 1999). In this respect, the interpretation of the interviews revealed that the receptiveness to right-wing populism is actually closely related to feelings of powerlessness in the face of developments in the company or on the labour market as well as in relation to economic powers in general. Interest-group representatives, that is, the works council and the trade union, are no longer perceived as being a protection because they appear to be incapable of action and have also “surrendered” to the employers or “swim along” with them. Attention and hope is directed at all those who in the general insecurity still appear as players, that is, as capable of action and having an effect.

From the example of Mr P., it can be shown how the existential threat caused by socio-economic change and the related feelings of powerlessness and lack of protection in the face of these changes may affect political orientation. Although as a worker or minor employee he was always aware of the fundamental dependence on the concern and management decisions, he now has the growing feeling of being a plaything at the mercy of a volatile situation in which for him a threat to his survival is emerging. Because of the partial relocation of the factory, management wanted to transfer him to Hungary, which he was able to resist on health grounds. Even if a job was found for him in the company, it is highly insecure. And it is clear to him that at the age of 45 he will not find another job in the region, should he lose this one. For him, this experience calls into question the trade union but also the parties, as these are not in the position to protect him from the loss of his job.

Alongside the acute threat to his own job, the creeping decline of the region, to which he is emotionally very strongly attached, injures Mr P.'s identity. He therefore sees the safeguarding and creation of jobs as the most important socio-economic aim:

“For me the most important thing is that the region is revitalised and that jobs are created.” (A16, p. 23)

Players who in his opinion have the actual power to swim against the tide of relocation of production to central and eastern Europe and to create jobs in Austria therefore appear to him fundamentally as shining figures, even if, as for example in the case of Frank Stronach,¹⁰ it includes the endangering or dismantling of trade union rights. Alongside businessmen, politicians who counter to the stereotype shared by Mr P. that they are only out for themselves, who appear as “strong men” who can do something, can also play this role. This is precisely what right-wing populism often offers, and the other parties strengthen this impression if the right-wing populists succeed in “driving them in front”, as Haider repeatedly emphasises.

Ms. E., currently unemployed in the same region, would like to see politicians “*who have the courage to say something*”. But her experience is that they give in in the face of the actual political and economic powers, such as for example the “sanctions” by the EU countries after the formation of the government in 2000.

“And what’s up with our politicians? They all duck, like our shop steward in the company. That’s how I see it.” (A5, p. 28)

5.2.5. “That perhaps the cronyism would stop sometime” – Rebellion against the dominance of a party and aggression against those who “set things up for themselves”

A further cause of the attractiveness of right-wing populism, which was recognisable in some interviews, has to do with the political system. It concerns the dominance of one political party in a municipality or region, the arrogance with which this power is exercised, and the interweaving of politics and business. The sympathies for the FPÖ or the crossover to this party should be understood as a rebellion and the desire that these quite undemocratic structures should be broken up. This connection was addressed in a range of interviews, but only in a few can the main motive for the support of right-wing populism be seen in it. In these interviews the political rebellion has indeed something to do with socio-economic change: inasmuch as the interweaving of politics and business means that those who do not belong to the right party are excluded from economic advantages – and occasionally also those who do belong to the right party but are not as influential as their competitors – the causes of the rebellion can be seen in the intensification of competition and in the narrower financial room for manoeuvre. Because then those without political protection go empty handed, whereas previously there may have been something left over for them.

¹⁰ Frank Stronach is a Canadian businessman who emigrated from Austria in his early years and now owns an international concern in the auto industry. In the last decade his company has built up, or taken over, several plants in Austria.

The connection is very clearly displayed in the examples from the medium-sized construction business, in which a businessman and a manager from different regions complain: *“The ÖVP sorts everything out among themselves in secret”*. Because of the increased competitive pressure, among other things due to the entry of major companies into their market segment, the interviewees attempted to change these circumstances through their involvement with the FPÖ.

But the dominance of one party and its effects can also make political powers that promise to break up ossified structures seem attractive to workers. For Ms E., an unemployed worker in an old industrial region, this is foremost the case in connection with the perception of municipal politics. She finds it no longer possible to vote SPÖ because, in her view, unsuitable people have acquired important positions through cronyism (for example a mayor and a head teacher who beat children) and because she has seen *“how lying they all are”* (A5, p. 25). Mr S. can be seen as a further example of this. In the crisis in the nationalised industries he lost his job as a result of a politically motivated decision – he was a communist shop steward. This led to frustration and withdrawal from his political involvement. For him too, as a communist, the FPÖ seems attractive, as a fighter against the SPÖ’s arrogance of power and the social partnership, precisely in this function, although he did not agree with the main points of the right-wing populist positions of the FPÖ (immigration question, eastern enlargement and attitude to the EU). It is true that somewhat authoritarian views and his work ethic make Mr. S. receptive to right-wing populist proposals to solving social abuses, but the resistance to the establishment and in particular to the SPÖ seems to be the main motive for his slight sympathies with the FPÖ. Apart from the FPÖ there are no real alternatives for an effective protest against the SPÖ.

A general mood against “the politicians” gives possible grounds for another reason. The feeling of increasingly being at the mercy of an existential threat as a result of the neo-liberal restructuring of society and current economic developments leads many workers and employees into opposition to those who in their view are not affected by these threats and above and beyond this are still in the position to safeguard their privileged positions. Politicians’ incomes are widely seen as being too high. Ms C., too, who only became interested in politics before the 1999 general election, when she voted FPÖ, and never followed it any further, has a very negative image of politicians. They only look after themselves:

“Whoopee, ha, now I’ve got the post. Now I only have to make sure that I can keep it and only need to hold my hands out everywhere.” (A3, p. 36)

Several interview partners stereotypically relate politics to “lies”.

The negative image of politicians among these people can thus not completely be traced back to the fact that they are propagated as projection areas for resentments which are easily fomented because of an injured sense of justice. Often the basis is also immediate personal experiences, for example in the village, with politicians “who arrange things to suit themselves” or with a party that arranges and divides up everything among themselves. We will come back to this in the next section, which concerns explanations for the rise of right-wing populism other than socio-economic change.

5.3. *Limitations of this explanation and alternative reasons for the attractiveness of right-wing populism*

The starting point and focus of our analyses was the way in which socio-economic change affects people, and in most cases this was a central complex that facilitated an understanding of the receptiveness to right-wing populism. However, the interpretation also yielded a range of other contexts, circumstances and influences that proved indispensable to the understanding of this receptiveness. Ultimately, for a few interviews we came to the conclusion that, despite the massive positive and/or negative impact of socio-economic change, this could only be accorded a peripheral role in the turn towards the FPÖ. In this chapter, on the basis of our interview results, we will examine these other factors and the limits of the explanation of right-wing populism through changes in the world of work.

In this we would also like to draw on the Siren literature analysis which preceded the qualitative interviews. With regard to Austria, the theses for the success of right-wing populism that are set out in the political and sociological literature can be summarised and distinguished according to their main focus as follows:

- a) Cultural and political traditions (for example, authoritarian attitudes) are accorded the most important role (Egger de Campo 2000; Goldmann/Krall/Ottomeyer 1992; Menschik-Bendele/Ottomeyer 1998; Pelinka 1993; Ulram 2001).
- b) The circumstances and recent changes in the political system are decisive (Betz 2001; Egger de Campo 2000; Pelinka 1993; Ulram 2001).
- c) Changes in the socio-economic sphere as well as in the political system are responsible (Neugebauer 1998). The following quotation from Helmut Dubiel is particularly pertinent:

“In such [suddenly changing] moments in social history, the collective experiences of injury, fear of losing one’s status and thwarted hopes for happiness of some groups of the population are dropped, as it were, from established discourse and become ‘floating potentials’, at odds with the traditional spectrum of political orientation.” (1994, p. 200)

- d) There is a connection between right-wing populism and socio-economic change, but the effects of this change are mediated by the policies of the major parties (Becker 2000; Falkenberg 1997; Ptak/Schui 1998).

On the basis of our interviews, we were able to trace a multi-factoral interweaving of changes experienced in working life, the perception of the political system and the individual embeddedness in cultural and political traditions: according to our results, the a. and b. thesis strands, however, are insufficient to understand the receptiveness; with c. and d. on the other hand, the factors of the other two lines of argumentation must be more strongly incorporated.

With most interviewees (regardless of their political orientation), in relation to the reception of politics, the self-perception in relation to politics and a disillusionment with politics, characteristics could be seen that reflect on the one hand the political climate and system in Austria and on the other must also be understood as the political context

for the growth of right-wing populism. The following relationship to politics was found in most interview partners:

- *Role of the media and the personalisation of politics:* Politics is received mostly through the mass media – primarily through television (ORF) but also through newspapers.

“For me it’s got to come directly from the box, when I watch for a bit, I look through a bit and think it through.” (A27, p. 22)

This form of reception gives a strongly personality-related and personalised approach to politics (see also Butterwegge et al. (ed.) 2002), which is communicated in many interviews. One orients oneself less on political positions or programmatic points than on how some issues are expressed and by whom. Thus politicians’ sympathy, charisma and appearance become the decisive marketing qualities. What is assessed is not the economic or social programme of the ÖVP, FPÖ or the Greens, but what is embodied in relation to it by people like Schüssel, Grasser and Van der Bellen. One interview partner regards SPÖ leader Gusenbauer as a capable man but one who unfortunately has no charisma:

“So, what he says might often be good, but because I dislike him as a person, I don’t like what he says.” (A18, p. 21)

As a whole, politicians are mistrusted and negative images of politics predominate, which is why “objectivity” and “competence” come high on the list of assessment criteria. It can be assumed that the increasing personalisation of politics is a highly relevant factor for the success of populists. Finally, what counts for the media are the viewer ratings and circulation figures, which is why politics is only a crowd puller if one can for example offer “TV duels” at election time and maximise the entertainment factor. The presence and success of Jörg Haider should be understood not least through the phenomenon of the utilisation of his provocations and charismatic appearances in the interests of the media.¹¹ All this contributes to frustration with politics, which some perceive as a “Punch and Judy show”.

- *Disillusionment/tiredness with politics - objects versus subjects of politics:* With some interview partners the impression arises that they see themselves only as the object and not the subject of politics. They have never had experience or success in political action and activity and conclude that one cannot do anything or change anything. As a result of this passivity, politics is seen as being “up there”; oneself is down below and powerless. In addition, with some women their own opinions about politics are dismissed (see quotation below, A20). Then again there is another variant of political disillusionment, which (inside or outside party-political commitment) goes in a very active, rebellious and resistant direction. In general, almost all have a negative image of politicians (personal enrichment, cronyism, fat political salaries, the interests of the electorate are not represented) and politics is seen as a lying, dirty

¹¹ “The various dissatisfaction and protest motifs often merge into an explosive hybrid relationship that is orchestrated by the widespread special forms of the tabloid press in Austria.” (Ulram 2001, p. 206)

business – or, as one interview partner crudely formulates it: *“Politics is a whore”* (A16, p. 26).

With the people in whom we noted a receptiveness for right-wing populism, the disillusionment with politics was on the one hand more marked, and on the other somewhat differently formed:

- *Nostalgia and a lack of seriousness on the part of those in power:* It is complained that previously politicians were “respected people” and that the level (the language of argumentation and politicians’ behaviour) is continuously falling:

“I mean, now, a Federal President was previously a person I respected, which I must say is actually no longer the case.” (A22, p. 21)

“The politicians had different attitudes than they do today. Then politicians did something for more, for people in general, more for Austria. Today it seems to me anyone only goes into politics because he’s after the money.” (A27, p. 23)

Because of the dominance of day-to-day political squabbling, parliament is seen by some as a “castle of lies” (A7) or a “Punch and Judy show” (A11).

“They should be setting an example; they should be representing the country, and they are making complete idiots and clowns of themselves. That’s sad, sad to watch. And then you ask yourself, should I be voting for something like that?” (A11, p. 26)

The desire for people with authority is more marked among this group. It was possible to establish cross-connections to authoritarianism, which very much relate to the disciplining of people who avoid work-performance norms or misuse the welfare state, or are manifested in relation to the question of foreigners. Charismatic personalities and *Führer* figures like Jörg Haider here assume an ambivalent role: on the one hand they are appreciated for their qualities as strong men who take tough action, on the other hand their frequently “embarrassing” or “inappropriate” statements mean that they do not necessarily satisfy the wish for serious people whom one can respect.

- *Cooperation and harmony instead of opposing interests and argument:* As a positive counter vision to the disillusioned tiredness with politics, the desire was formulated for parties to “argue” less and work together more. This position is not necessarily directed against the political system or pluralism, but against competitive democracy. It consists of the conception that the interests of all social groupings might be compatible if there was the corresponding desire from the parties:

“None of these parties says exactly what people really want. Every party always only talks about a bit of what people want, and I would put the whole thing in one; that would be easier. But OK, that’s only the naive thoughts of a nobody, someone who doesn’t belong to them.” (A20, p. 21)

One could suppose that there might be a desire for the familiar and trusted times of the grand coalition and its harmony. In general, however, most interview partners said they were satisfied with black-blue government’s fresh wind of the reforms and changes; the cuts in the welfare system and the budget consolidation course were seen (by people of all political outlooks) as necessary rescue measures for Austria to safeguard it as an island of affluence. According to this,

however, there seems to be a desire for the avoidance of conflicts and opposing interests, which fits with the authoritarian heritage of a society in which a culture of conflict as a democratic value has never been particularly promoted, valued or practised. Thus differences, conflicts and arguments are perceived as destructive “quarrelling” and not as an unavoidable phenomenon of divergent interests. With regard to democratic politics, this may also reflect the decades-long depoliticised culture of proxy politics to which people had become habituated.

In the “receptive to right-wing populism” category in the interviews, two further points were relevant which we associated with the terms “political traditions” and “resistance against established parties”.

- *Political traditions*

Regionally, in some federal provinces there are specific traditions which could influence proximity to the FPÖ. For some interviewees, for example from the western province of Vorarlberg, there is a positive attitude to the FPÖ independent of experiences in the world of work, since the FPÖ has been in the provincial government there for some time together with the ÖVP. For these people it is not Jörg Haider and his charismatic *Führer* style that is attractive, but a reforming economically liberal policy which represents the interests of the hard-working. Above and beyond this, however, east-west stereotypes with racist roots show through. To the question of why western Austrians are considered more capable and hardworking than eastern Austrians, came the following statement:

“That can’t just be because they [i.e. in Vorarlberg] are Alemannians and the others . . . down there, are actually already Slavs, that is, that’s what the German teacher explained to me once.” (A10, p. 33)

Ideologically, some people seem to have had a liking for the FPÖ for many years. They underwent their political socialisation in the context of the *Burschenschaften* [nationalist student fraternities] in their youth. They have been voting FPÖ since 1986, i.e. since Jörg Haider took over the party. The proximity to the FPÖ is based on ideological conviction (right-wing conservatism, German nationalism), and in the person of Jörg Haider these people found a representative figure through whom the FPÖ became their political home.

Authoritarian attitudes in some (overwhelmingly male) interviewees lead to an ambivalent attitude to the FPÖ. Although they cannot accept certain positions (e.g. hostility to foreigners or anti-EU-enlargement), and the FPÖ is not necessarily the party of their choice, there is sympathy for Jörg Haider’s “leg-biting”¹² qualities, as someone who exposes scandals or for cracking down on people who exploit the welfare state or do not submit to the norms of the system (promised by the FPÖ):

“Crack down much harder, but you can’t do that; if you say that you’re [called] a right-wing radical.” (A15, p. 22)

¹² *“What Haider the leg-biter, what he has always exposed. I mean, that does change politics.” (A16, p. 22)*

“With the kind of democracy we’ve got at the moment, you almost can’t do that at all. Run things properly. How can you . . . ? You must, yes with them somehow just use some kind of harder measures a bit.” (A27, p. 16)

Finally, the FPÖ is regarded as the only political power capable of a rebellion against the ossified political structure.

On the key words political traditions, it should be added that some people do indeed find the FPÖ policies attractive, but because of their allegiance to a particular political camp, which is in many cases created through the family, they do not vote for this party.

- *Resistance to the established major parties*

From some workers, previously belonging to the social democratic camp, the decision to vote FPÖ or join the FPÖ or even to become politically active for the party is ascribed to the SPÖ: They felt themselves let down and not satisfactorily represented by this party (or its trade unions and shop stewards). Experiences with the undemocratic structures in the SPÖ, the inability or unwillingness to promote changes in favour of workers, or ultimately the accusation against shop stewards and trade unions close to the SPÖ that they did not provide appropriate representation and support were primarily experienced in the working career. Support from the party or its organisations were seen as “acts of mercy” and people felt shut out of democratic decision-making (e.g. in works meetings). In resistance to this, they turned to the FPÖ, where they felt better represented.

A further variant was to be found in some self-employed men and managers, who after personal experience of discrimination in allocation of public contracts, became active in the FPÖ to fight distortion of competition and the interweaving of business and politics in rural regions dominated by the ÖVP.

The following anecdote by one of the interview partners can be given to illustrate the omnipresence and the monopoly of power of individual parties in some regions, or within the nationalised industries, which those affected found deeply undemocratic: If there were ever more than a few votes for other parties in the elections for personnel representatives in a nationalised company in a rural area, the ÖVP provincial governor, rang up and wanted an explanation for this deplorable state of affairs both from the managers and the “black” [ÖVP] personnel representatives:

“Good God! They all voted red. The provincial governor would certainly carpet him, because there’s something wrong.” (A27, p. 13)

5.4. *Typology of receptiveness for right-wing populism*

Our data and their presentation in the previous remarks show and confirm that political movements or parties like the FPÖ actually succeed in appealing to a wide range of people from the most diverse socio-economic situations with in part contradictory social interests. In order to be able to present the diversity of these constellations, we have drawn up a typology of forms of “receptiveness” for right-wing populism that were found. In the course of the process of type formation, in the interpretation of the

interview material the following differences turned out to be the most important: the various ideological elements or political appeals to which the people reacted, the social milieus both in relation to their background and their current life situation, and, finally, the gender and thereby the different life contexts and experiences of discrimination.

Type 1: Self-employed with right-wing conservative and German nationalist mentality: the breaking of the political monopoly of power of the ÖVP in rural areas

This type within our sample concerns a businessman and a manager in the construction sector in two rural areas dominated by the ÖVP. The political socialisation took place in the context of the *Burschenschaften* [nationalist student fraternities], which gave rise to a right-wing conservative and German nationalist ideological character. In 1986, when Jörg Haider took over the FPÖ, electoral behaviour switched from black to blue. Abuses in relation to the interweaving of ÖVP politics and business, in the course of which free competition was undermined and they felt discriminated against as businessman or manager, were decisive for becoming politically active for the FPÖ at a municipal level. This was seen as the chance to break the ÖVP monopoly of power and get in on things oneself. The FPÖ was seen as the only party that came out against corruption and abuse of power. Alongside the ideological proximity, the FPÖ was the party which they felt best represented their professional interests. Above and beyond this, there are various other elements as to why the FPÖ became their political home.

One interview partner, Mr Z., comes from a poor, small farming background and, through getting his *Matura* [A-levels] at technical college, managed to make the social advance to become technical manager and *Prokurist* [person with general power of attorney] for a construction company with 100 employees. He sees socio-economic change as a challenge and has so far been very successful in dealing with it. As a manager, Mr Z. feels he is obliged to act in a socially responsible way: moral responsibility and mutual obligation inform his professional behaviour, which is why he is critical of neo-liberalism “*because social peace is only achievable with reasonably full employment.*” (A26, p. 32) There is a paternalist-caring attitude with regard to the staff, and the needs of the “ordinary people” play a major role for him. On the basis of this value position, there is likewise a close relationship to the FPÖ, which sees itself as the lawyer of the “ordinary people”. Here it is interesting that the FPÖ’s contradictory programme which long successfully marketed doing the splits between being a capital-oriented economically liberal party and the better workers’ party, scores with him. As an employer it appeals to him that better conditions for free competition will be created. Because of his value position, he likes the FPÖ’s consideration for the “ordinary people”.

In Mr XZ., likewise a technical college graduate, who (in a different rural region) took over his authoritarian father’s construction company, a quite different picture than that of Mr Z. becomes apparent, which is complementary to the above outline of our businessman type. As a businessman he had to deal with the stagnation and shrinkage of the family business (from approximately 60 to 30 employees); he opened a restaurant in

order to have another leg to stand on. He believes that party connections and the overblown administration is the country's most important problem; he ascribes the miserable state of the building trade to politics, which failed to make reforms. He became politically active because he trusts the FPÖ to drain the "swamp of corruption" of the local ÖVP. Otherwise, too, the FPÖ's policy positions coincide with his interests: sharper laws on foreigners (with exceptions for business interests – he, too, largely employs commuting Czechs and Slovaks), anti-EU-enlargement to the east (also because of the Benes decrees), and harsher action against long-term unemployed (for example through forced labour), are also concerns of his. He would like the FPÖ to remain in the government.

Type 2: Worker identity and pragmatic change from the SPÖ to FPÖ

For interview partners who we classified under this type, the FPÖ, in a time of deep-going economic upheaval in the post office companies, became an attractive representative of workers' interests; they were disappointed by the SPÖ. Negative experiences in the course of restructuring were individualised: "incompetent" bosses and managers "up there" who lacked psychological skills and training, and "civil service pen-pushers" with A-levels, who had no idea of the world of the delivery workers, are to blame. The privatisation itself is not criticised. It was not the FPÖ's policies aimed at "stopping foreigners" or anti-welfare-state-scroungers that were the driving take-up points for them, but injuries and frustrations in the occupational field. These difficulties were recognised by the FPÖ and their own interests were better represented by this "workers' party". As a victim of harassment in his struggle against forced early retirement, Mr G., a former delivery worker in Vienna, felt himself better represented by the FPÖ personnel representative than by the SPÖ, whose support he saw as "an act of mercy" "*when you rang up, you felt like you were sounding like an idiot.*" (A7, p. 13) Today, for tactical reasons (related to his appeal against retirement), he is a party member of both the SPÖ and the FPÖ. The 33-year-old postman Mr I. became an FPÖ member six years ago, after he was informed at a works meeting of the SPÖ personnel representatives that making demands was not legitimate and democratic involvement was not desired. Mr I. says that before his involvement with the FPÖ he had a rather non-political relationship with the SPÖ – he comes from a Viennese working-class background; his grandfather was an SPÖ councillor. He sees the FPÖ as the party for the ordinary people and the workers; his joining of the party is described as a significant moment – his appearance communicated his social status as a worker, and as such he was taken up into the party:

"They first looked at me, because of what I looked like, dirty, greasy, black from top to bottom. Then I just filled it in and I was a member . . . and from then on everything just got better." (A9, p. 20)

He became politically active in the company as an FPÖ personnel representative; above and beyond this he is also an FPÖ district councillor. He imagines a future political career. Political action in the form of support for colleagues and fellow citizens gives

him a sense of purpose and allows the frustration over company changes to recede into the background.

Type 3: The community of decent and hard-working people and the devaluation of subordination – “perhaps I’ve been a fool”: workers against scroungers

The central elements that form this type consist in the social location in a working-class background, self awareness as a worker, a pronounced work ethic, an exclusivist ideology in relation to welfare-state “scroungers” (and all work-shy members of society) and authoritarian attitudes with regard to the solution of social problems.

Common to the (male) interviewees in this type is the self-positioning and self-awareness as a worker whose work is not sufficiently recognised. This is located in the fact that those who do not subject themselves to the constraints of the work-oriented society (for example, long-term unemployed or refugees), in their opinion nevertheless live quite well. As a result, their own subjection including sacrifices or functioning according to the work ethic, is devalued. In their meritocratic value system, the rule is that those who work hard should receive recognition, rights and money (also, for example, foreigners); those who do not do this (or want to do this), should be forced to subordinate themselves to this system by appropriate measures. On the key word “foreigners”, Mr Ö. says for example: *“There are also people here who aren’t worth anything”* (A27, p. 19) Thus people’s value is measured against their usefulness to society according to the work ethic. The Austrian welfare state and its safety net is regarded as “too social” for those not willing to work.

Authoritarian attitudes can also be found. A crack-down to discipline scruffy youths who lack “leadership” or the welfare-state scroungers like long-term unemployed is longed for; however, because of the present form of democracy or the problem that one is open to accusations of right-wing radicalism with such proposals, this is not realisable – see also the quotations in chapter 5.3 (political traditions).

Also, because of their high salaries, the politicians and managers are described as being out of touch; the distance upwards is seen as being too large and downwards as too small. There are sympathies for the FPÖ, although the FPÖ is not necessarily voted for or they see themselves as “floating voters”. According to region this means a switch between the respectively dominant major party (SPÖ or ÖVP) and the FPÖ – other political forces or parties represent no alternative.

The FPÖ is seen as attractive because it operates as a rebellious power against the “big-shots” and orients itself on the “ordinary people”. The message that working ought to pay off again appeals to people who see themselves as decent and hard-working, who do not understand why their suffering at work and suffering in the performance-oriented society is not sufficiently understood, recognised and rewarded. The FPÖ’s proposals to ensure more “social targeting”, i.e. to prevent the exploitation of the welfare system, and also the law-and-order attitude with regard to drugs and criminality, appeals to the authoritarian traits in the interviewees, who in particular see a lack of (self-) discipline in the youth and long-term unemployed.

Mr Ö., who because of his dual identity as worker and petrol-station manager does not quite fit in with this type, sums up about people who at work do as little as possible and when unemployed enjoy it to the full:

“Lots live like that. That was never my way, never. But perhaps I was an idiot.”
(A27, p. 15)

What comes through in this quotation is the fact that this system is not one that one could adopt for oneself, but on the other hand one is perhaps stupid for always “slogging away”. Alongside his job in street maintenance, Mr Ö. has built up a petrol station. He worked double shifts for twenty years: after the work on the street maintenance he returned to the petrol station and carried on working in the late afternoon. In the meantime he has retired and feels he has achieved something (through the petrol station, which his son will take over), as a result of which his view of the long-term unemployed has become somewhat milder. For him they are poor creatures who are going to the dogs and whose lack of paid labour (i.e. meaning of life) has led to an increasing loss of a sense of personal worth and led them into alcoholism.

Type 4: Women workers in precarious employment: struggle for survival – double disadvantage and preferential treatment of foreigners

The dominant feature with this type is hardnosed struggles for survival, experiences as combative and robust individualists, as well as discrimination on the one hand as a woman, on the other as a worker. The current labour situation is characterised by great insecurity and precariousness; the income does not provide a living. Women in this type are all middle aged (three are in their 40s, one interviewee is 52); they come partly from working-class backgrounds, partly from petty-bourgeois circumstances. The women’s employment biographies are marked by breaks in employment, turbulence and changes of sector; employment as semi-skilled workers in factories or as waitresses in catering predominates. Their life experiences have led them to the recognition that one can only rely on oneself, *“because no one else is going to help you”* (A5, p. 26). Their material independence from men is of central importance to their self-image as women. As a result of the precarious situation at the moment they are to a certain extent reliant on the support of their husbands or partners, which for the 52-year-old Ms Ü., who is working as a part-time waitress in a cafe, is a source of annoyance.

These women’s picture of society is an individualistic one. They complain about people’s selfishness, the impossibility of acting in solidarity, and about most people’s cowardice. They see themselves as self-aware and combative and (in contrast to most of the others) do not put up with everything. They are politically interested, although they have a disillusioned attitude to politics. Politicians only look after themselves, they fix things to suit themselves and are not interested in the “ordinary people”. Politicians also earn too much, as a result of which they have no idea what it is like to live on a low income. Ms E. thinks she could never vote SPÖ again, because of disappointment with local municipal politics, which for example included acceptance of the closure of her company, *“because I just see how lying they all are.”* (A5, p. 25) Another interviewee, Ms F., became an FPÖ member and is proud of it because she is used to the role of the

social deviant outsider (as a child of a violent alcoholic father and later as a single parent); she feels herself inhibited by the social climate in which one is punished for the free expression of one's opinion.

As with many other interviewees, there is a pronounced work ethic; one has however repeatedly experienced the fact that one's own work is not recognised – thus, too, Ms F., who after her redundancy felt exploited and thrown away, says: *“I worked properly and I feel I've been punished for it.”* (A6, p. 11) On the one hand one sees oneself discriminated against as a woman, *“I mean, by and large women are looked down on as being disabled”* (A6, p. 12), and on the other hand as a worker. Although one has always worked hard and conscientiously, one has been let down by politics and not sufficiently supported. In contrast, foreigners and refugees are supported to a greater extent, which is regarded as absolutely unjust. They get everything and they have it better than the poor people in Austria. The “privileges” of foreigners are set in relation to one's own precarious situation:

“I have to buy my potatoes and cook my potato soup at home. And they, I see they all buy ready-cooked packets, then of course I start thinking. Then I think, how can they afford that.” (A5, p. 29)

One's own situation and sacrifices are hardly recognised. The care for refugees, in contrast, seems too generous and is seen as a provocation. As is apparent, the “Austria First” slogan, which is rightly considered evidence of ethnocentrism in right-wing populism, is attractive to this group of women not primarily because it is latently racist but rather because of the lack of recognition of the in part existential threat they are facing, and the feeling of being let down by politics.

As a whole these interview partners think that Austria is too socially minded. The central injustice consists in the fact that some live well, without paying the price (subordination to the norms of work). In contrast to the men in Type 3, hardly any authoritarian attitudes manifested themselves in relation to changes and solutions for the “over socially minded” Austria.

There are various points of contact to the FPÖ. In their opinion the FPÖ fights for the “ordinary people” and would also make sure that the work of the “decent and hard-working Austrians” would again receive due recognition. The strict FPÖ policy towards foreigners would also serve their occupational interests, as foreigners are seen as forcing down wages as well as being competition. The FPÖ's activity against political privileges (key word: upper salary limits) and in the exposure of political scandals and abuses is seen in a positive light. Jörg Haider's self-promotion, who is a “big mouth”, doesn't mince his words and doesn't let people walk all over him also commands respect because they can identify with this rebellious attitude and it is seen as effective, in contrast to their personal lack of power to change economic and political conditions.

Type 5: Threat to middle class status and identity: insecurity through modernisation; nostalgia and threat to cultural identity

The women represented in this type continue the family tradition of belonging to a company. Like their parents (and grandparents) they also work at the post office or in *Telekom* (or its subsidiaries). There is a strong orientation to promotion and work, which expresses itself in the company through strong identification with the company, readiness to work and commitment. Promotion has been achieved inside the company and the women now find themselves in a supervisory position in lower management. This advancement inside the company is felt to be insecure, the women have the feeling that it is very difficult to maintain their position. On the one hand, the performance bar is increasingly being raised because of the changed circumstances in the companies (speed of change, pressure of flexibility, increasing competition, intensification of work). On the other hand, ability to combine family and career is seen as being hard to realise. The last point, above all, is felt to be extremely unjust and blamed both on the employers and on politics. Thus there has been a high price to pay for career advancement as a woman, and side-effects on health such as irregular heart-beat, depression, sleeplessness and eating disorders are reported. At the societal level, this struggle for a place in the middle and the compatibility of employment and motherhood correlates with the fear that the middle class is under threat:

“There will always be some who have more and some who have less; the gap is just much much too wide in Austria. The middle class practically doesn’t exist any more. And that, I think, is a big problem. There isn’t that three-class society anymore, but actually only two. Either you belong to the upper class or to the lower. The middle class in Austria has rather disappeared.” (A20, p. 18)

What is interesting here is that there is a clear receptiveness for right-wing populism, but the allegiance to the traditional political camp is so strong that they would not vote FPÖ. Ms T. describes her family background as “red”, she has a “red mentality” and a “social streak” and for these reasons would always vote for the Social Democrats. Ms V. is linked to a rural region with an ÖVP tradition and dominance, and thus continues to vote ÖVP. She cannot imagine voting FPÖ, because Jörg Haider seems too dangerous a person to her.

“Well, as for Haider . . . he seems somehow dangerous to me sometimes. Even if he sometimes makes quite good statements, about the ordinary people . . . when you think, ah, that could change something . . . but to vote for him only for that, it’s just then, to be honest, too dangerous, that somehow. . . as it’s often said, you get a little Hitler there.” (A22, p. 20)

However, they feel addressed and understood by the FPÖ, because it represents and expresses the interests and thoughts of the “ordinary people” (i.e. the middle class), which other politicians do not dare (e.g. clear anti-foreigner positions). Precisely the FPÖ positions on the “foreigners problem” are supported.

“There I’ll admit the [Freiheitlichen = FPÖ] are even right in some points. I’m certainly not a racist; quite the opposite. But there needs to be a certain direction, a certain control over it.”... “That we’re simply overflowing, and that we have no

structures on that score. Yes, we've just let everything in, haven't we?"
(A20, p. 19)

Only one interview partner, Ms C. is a committed FPÖ voter. She is the only one who does not dislike Jörg Haider as a person:

"He opens his mouth and speaks; he exposes the abuses and such." (A3, p. 34)

Foreigners are above all seen as a problem because of their presence in the social vicinity (in a small rural town, in one's own block, as neighbours and as one's children's school colleagues). In the school context, they fear a drop in educational quality; in the housing sphere it is seen as discrimination that one has to work hard to afford a flat, in contrast to refugees who are accommodated for years, paid for by the state and even receive help with furnishings and rent; in general foreigners are also seen as a cultural threat, devaluing the quality of one's own life circumstances and endangering the social vicinity. The threat to one's own (Austrian) identity is seen as endangered on a number of grounds. For Ms C. this threat is embodied in foreigners.

"Because otherwise, sooner or later, we, the non-foreigners, oh yes, we'll be the foreigners in our own country." (A3, p. 33)

Ms T. on the other hand criticises the membership of the EU as well as the tendencies to consumption and indebtedness in society, and likewise fears for the Austrian identity:

"So, I'm an Austrian body and soul and so[my] patriotism is perhaps a bit higher. And I think with the euro we've lost a part of our identity. If they now take our neutrality away, we've actually lost almost everything." (A20, p. 18)

There is a variant within this type that is best summed up in the term nostalgia, and interestingly is found exclusively in some men and women from rural, farming regions near the border to an Eastern European neighbour. They feel uneasy because of the current economic and political changes and to some extent feel their cultural identity is threatened. Foreigners represent an issue to which this threat can attach itself. Ms V., for example, who lives in a rural region, sees foreigners as being problematic firstly because, in a tight labour market, they take jobs away from Austrians. Thus in the course of an excursion to the new sorting centre in Inzersdorf, she was shocked that so many foreigners were working there. Second she believes that the social security budget cannot cope with so many foreigners or that there will not be enough for everyone. Thirdly, she sees foreigners as a cultural threat who are "clannishly" hanging around the small town she works in:

"Here, you think, you are somewhere, just from the smell, somewhere in Greece. Really, sometimes it's terrible." (A22, p. 24)

Further, her interpretation of current general societal developments is marked by a backward glance and comparisons with the past, *à la* "it was all better before", with the present being seen gloomily. This view also relates to politics. Previously, politicians were respected people, with qualities of uprightness and honesty. Now the political sphere is occupied by unscrupulous, power and money hungry politicians who are remote from the people. This orientation on the past is present in people who are approaching pensionable age (e.g. Mr Y. and Mr Ö.),

“The politicians were different then than they are today. Then there were politicians who above all did something for people, for Austria. Today it seems to me they go into politics because they’re after money.” (A 27, p. 23)

But this view can also be found among younger people, like Ms. V., in her late thirties:

“I think, like earlier, when Mock was visiting” ... “He was just someone I could relate to . . . mm.” (A22, p. 21)

What is complained about is that values according to which they have been socialised and have always lived by, such as uprightness in the world of work and in politics, no longer count. Mr Y., who was sacked by the young boss of the family company after 36 years in the firm, which caused a deep identity crisis for him, can be given as an example. His personal world view and value system based on the pillars of decency, justice and social responsibility were shattered. His loyalty and work were not recognised and rewarded. He feels discharged as unfit for service, which as the main experience of injustice shattered his lifestyle and led to social withdrawal from the village community. Mr Y. sees the biggest problem in the decline of traditional village culture, the dissolution of social contacts in the village and the resulting social isolation. True, he projects these developments onto the “young people”, but at the same time he describes his own development over recent years. Mr. Y. sees himself as a small worker at the bottom, and sees hardly any chances of political influence for the individual. The only means remaining to him is going to the polls. He describes himself as a floating voter, which for him means a change between the ÖVP and the FPÖ. After his dismissal some eight years ago, he voted for the FPÖ.

5.5. Summary

It is a defining feature of right-wing populism that it does not represent a cohesive ideology and that its political programme is changeable or contradictory, even if, as in the case of the FPÖ, there are clear overlaps with the main points of extreme right-wing ideology (see the Siren literature report). The causes of the attractiveness of the FPÖ that were ascertained in the interpretations of the qualitative material were also correspondingly diverse. This attractiveness sometimes has a lot, and sometimes nothing at all to do with right-wing ideology. It is sometimes very emotional, sometimes more rational and can be classified both as interest-group and as identity politics. The connection with the effects of socio-economic change is clear, even if the results show that disadvantageous developments in the world of work by no means automatically lead to receptiveness to right-wing populism. Finally, it has also become clear that the widespread supposition that modernisation losers develop dull resentments and thus become easy prey for right-wing populists is itself not much more than a prejudice.

Our findings confirm the theses proposed by Vester et al. (2001) for Germany, that the consequences of rapid socio-economic change may be handled politically by those affected both in a democratic way as well as through an excluding form of authoritarianism. Some examples of our survey show how people under the influence of great uncertainty and inequality are strengthened in their social-democratic or

conservative-humanist convictions. For others, the injury to their sense of justice, the fear of social decline or the feeling of powerlessness makes them receptive to excluding ideologies or for the provocative style of the right-wing populists against political elites.

A connection, which has thus far hardly been referred to in the literature, seems to us to be of particular significance for the Austrian situation, namely the physical, psychological and social costs of the subjection to the impositions and constraints of working life, that is, the pains of work, which are balanced by an increasingly uncertain reward in the form of income, security and social integration. The fact that others, who do not subject themselves to the pressure of work, apparently also live well provokes feelings of injustice. It does not need much problem transference, which is obviously suggested by discussions about “welfare-state scroungers”, “economic immigrants” and “bogus asylum seekers”, to convert these feelings of injustice into political capital. In our view the situation is intensified by the fact that there seem to be hardly any legitimate forms of expression for the pains of work, let alone perspectives for ameliorating them. The receptiveness to the FPÖ in part explains itself just through the fact that they have made the problems of and lack of reward for the “hardworking and decent people” into a public issue, and given social recognition to many people, which is what all of the others have failed to do.

Ideology was not always in play when people approved of the FPÖ. Many do so not because of but despite this party’s xenophobia and were more attracted by the political style. Primarily, they wanted to achieve a change in the political system or expected career opportunities through political activity with a rising party. On the other hand, the circle of those who are attracted by the ideological elements offered by right-wing populism goes beyond those who voted for it in its heyday – because the anchoring in the political camps of the SPÖ and the ÖVP is often still too strong for agreement with what the FPÖ says to lead them to voting for it.

By means of a typology of “receptiveness” we have illustrated the diversity of the aspects of right-wing populism that seem to make it attractive, and the multiple life situations and mentalities that make such attractiveness probable. Typical patterns, as the interpretation of our qualitative material shows, range from right-wing *Burschenschaft* [student fraternity] mentalities in connection with the economically motivated desire to break the municipal monopoly of power of the ÖVP, to a combination of the fear of declassing and the threat to cultural identity with nostalgic longings for lost communities. The connection between the experiences in the world of work and political reactions are highly varied, according to family background and political camp, and according to gender. Thus the struggle for survival which women in precarious employment are engaged in, and the double discrimination they experience, makes it understandable why they see comparatively apparently generous provision for refugees as a provocation. It would be wrong to assume that the “Austria First” slogan, which is rightly considered to be proof of the ethnocentrism of right-wing populism, appeals to many people primarily because they are latently racist. Our analysis shows that it is above all the absence of recognition of to some extent existential threats and the feeling of having been let down by politics that is the basis of its attractiveness.

6. SUMMARY

Austria can be described as an ideal research field for the analysis of socio-economic change and receptiveness to right-wing populism. Ultimately, the upheavals within Europe in the last decade and a half were probably only more deep-going in the central and eastern European transformation countries. In the mid 80s, nationalised industries and banks, a large public sector and large, foreign-owned enterprises dominated the labour market and provided long-term, sometimes guaranteed employment. The penetration of neo-liberal convictions in politics in the 1980s coincided with a crisis in the nationalised industries' core companies. A policy of privatisation set in, which reached its high point in the mid 1990s. Austria's accession to the EU in 1995 marked a further milestone in the liberalisation of previously protected economic sectors and a sharpening of competition. The sharp rise in the unemployment rate was accompanied by the abandonment of the political aim of full employment and a gradual limitation of social security. The promises of security had given way to a rhetoric and policy of increasing insecurity.

The phase of upheaval came in the period of the grand coalition between the social democratic party, SPÖ, and the conservative party, ÖVP, which in 1986 had replaced the coalition between the SPÖ and the FPÖ when Jörg Haider took over the FPÖ leadership. It also coincided with a fall in the importance of the social partnership – that is, the concerted action by the government and employers', workers' and farmers' associations in almost all areas of policy. As a party that was tied neither to the government nor the social partnership, the now right-wing populist FPÖ was able to operate an energetic opposition policy and, from under 5% in the mid 1980s, increased its electorate massively at each election from 1986 onwards, when they already received 9% of the vote, until finally in autumn 1999 they achieved 27% and were brought into government by the ÖVP at the beginning of 2000.

Socio-economic change: perceptions and views

In all those interviewed, the subjective perceptions of and views on socio-economic change are characterised by a pronounced work ethic. The clear differences in perceptions and views can be traced back to different biographies, social backgrounds and characteristics of the region.

Naturally, socio-economic change itself has become noticeable to the interviewees in widely varying ways. Thus the subjective perceptions even within the group of "gainers" are extremely heterogeneous, since the views are mostly ambivalent and the darker side is sometimes emphasised, sometimes glossed over. Among the precariously employed on the other hand, it is noticeable that even if the material aspects of the changes, that is, income and working and employment conditions, are of immediate importance, the lack of recognition or the devaluation for example as a worker, acquires major significance in the assessment of the changes. The wider social distance between

employees and middle management as well as the lost esteem for one's work causes deep offence.

A common feature of the changes in the world of work that was surveyed is the fact that earlier promises of security are no longer kept and that conditions of work are becoming harder. Sacrifices and pressures are naturally more easily swallowed by those who have made their hobby into a career, who are in a pleasant working atmosphere, feel recognised and upgraded or hope for wealth and fame as the reward for their efforts. With all the others issues come to the fore that had long been out of fashion in public and in politics: the alienation of labour and the high degree of hardship at work.

View on politics: the relation between socio-economic change and right-wing populism

In line with the defining feature of right-wing populism, that it does not represent a cohesive ideology and that its political programme is changeable or contradictory, the causes of the attractiveness of the FPÖ that were ascertained in the interpretations of the qualitative material were also correspondingly diverse. The connection with the effects of socio-economic change is clear, even if the results show that disadvantageous developments in the world of work by no means automatically lead to receptiveness to right-wing populism (cf. Vester et al. 2001).

We have illustrated the diversity of the aspects of right-wing populism that seem to make it attractive, and the multiple life situations and mentalities that make such attractiveness probable, in a typology of "receptiveness". Typical patterns, as the interpretation of our qualitative material shows, range from right-wing *Burschenschaft* [student fraternity] mentalities in relation with the economically motivated desire to break the municipal monopoly of power of the ÖVP, to a combination of the fear of declassing and the threat to cultural identity with nostalgic longings for lost communities. According to family background and political camp, which many cannot escape, and according to gender, the relationship between the experiences in the world of work and political reactions is highly varied. Thus the struggle for survival which women in precarious employment are engaged in, and the double discrimination they experience, makes it understandable why they see in comparison apparently generous provision for refugees as a provocation. It would be wrong to assume that the "Austria First" slogan, which is rightly considered to be proof of the ethnocentrism of right-wing populism, appeals to many people primarily because they are latently racist. Our analysis shows that it is above all the absence of recognition of to some extent existential threats and the feeling of having been let down by politics that is the basis of its attractiveness. The fact that the perceived threat is quite relative and may consist in the fears of decline in social status by those who are materially well off, makes it understandable why receptiveness to right-wing populism is not just found in precarious life situations.

A connection, which has thus far hardly been referred to in the literature, seems to us to be of particular significance for the Austrian situation, namely the physical, psychological and social costs of subjection to the impositions and constraints of

working life, that is, the pains of work faced with the continuously uncertain reward in the form of income, security and social integration. The fact that others, who do not subject themselves to the pressure of work, apparently also live well provokes aggression. It does not need much problem transference, which is obviously suggested by discussions about “welfare-state scroungers”, “economic immigrants” and “bogus asylum seekers”, to convert this aggression into political capital. In our view the situation is intensified by the fact that there seem to be hardly any legitimate forms of expression for the pains of work, let alone perspectives for ameliorating them. The receptiveness to the FPÖ in part explains itself just through the fact that they have made the problems of lack of reward for the “hardworking and decent people” into a public issue, and given social recognition to many people who all of the others have failed.

If one bears in mind the continuing increasing insecurity in working life and the growing social inequality in relation to the powerlessness of politics to solve people’s main problems, it becomes apparent from our findings that right-wing populism will find a better rather than a worse basis in Austria in the future. The collapse of the FPÖ in the autumn 2002 general election should not obscure this.

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