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Populism and the Ambivalence of Egalitarianism. How Do the Underprivileged Reconcile a Right Wing Party Preference with Their Socio-Economic Attitudes?

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***Populism and the Ambivalence of Egalitarianism. How do the Underprivileged Reconcile a Right Wing Party Preference with their Socio-Economic Attitudes?**

Anton Derks

Abstract: This paper attempts to understand the phenomenon of so-called 'unnatural' voting (right-wing voting by lower-status groups). Most scholars explain this phenomenon with cultural motives, such as working-class authoritarianism, yet they assume that it contradicts their economic interests and motives. Although my findings corroborate the importance of working-class authoritarianism, I contend that a working-class vote for the right can also be explained by economic attitudes. Drawing on the theory of populism, I will examine the relationship between cultural attitudes (including authoritarianism and ethnocentrism) and economic rightist attitudes concerning social policy and the welfare state. Economic populism is characterised by egalitarianism as well as anti-welfarism. By addressing economic populism, right-wing parties are able to reconcile their discourse with the economic attitudes of lower status groups. The empirical relevance of this hypothesis is tested on the case of Flanders (Belgium).

1. Theoretical Problem

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The question to what degree class voting has declined over the past decades, and whether this trend can be generalized, spurs as much disagreement as it does discussion (Pakulski and Waters 1996; Esping-Andersen 1999; Clark and Lipset 2001a). Nieuwbeerta (2001) found that in most countries, including Belgium, the relationship between social class and voting behaviour has diminished. His research included 20 western industrialized countries and analysed the evolutions over the second half of the twentieth century. Whether this means that social class has become politically irrelevant, as defenders of the 'death of class' thesis would argue, is the subject of an often heated debate. Most observers agree, however, that the relationship between social stratification and politics has drastically changed over the past decades.

The traditional 'class politics' scheme starts from the 'natural' affinity of the labour class – or economically weak groups – with left-wing political parties. The fact that this relationship is no longer self-evident, is explained in a number of ways. We are reminded of the disintegration of the organized (socialist) labour movement in the post-industrialist society. Our knowledge intensive society is characterized by a decline in need for manual labour and a growth of the new middle class in the services and non-profit sectors. The new economic precarious groups, such as the lower educated and immigrants, do not form a class 'für sich' with a collective conscience, but are strongly internally divided.

From the eighties onward a number of western countries witnessed the rise of new-left, green parties and new radical right-wing or right populist parties. This development turns the traditional 'class politics' scheme upside down: the new-left parties disproportionately recruit voters in the highly educated new middle class, while right populist parties are successful among the lower educated labour class (Andersen 1992; Hainsworth 1992; Kitschelt 1995; Elchardus 1996; Clark and Lipset 2001b; Lubbers, Gijsberts and Scheepers 2002). The breakthrough of the VB (Vlaams Blok), in 1991, appears to be largely supported by the base of the former traditional socialist electorate (Billiet, Swyngedouw and Carton 1993).

The rise of new-left and new-right parties is often explained from the perspective of a new political culture that is predominantly defined by socio-cultural - and less by economic – divisions. Since the research of Shills (1953) and Lipset (1981; 1960) regarding 'working class authoritarianism' it has become a standard practice to approach left-right attitudes as two-dimensional. The research tradition of Middendorp concerning economical and cultural conservatism (Middendorp 1978; Middendorp 1991; De Witte and Scheepers 1999) in the Netherlands, the cleavage-analysis of Elchardus (1996) in Belgium and the analysis of Evans, Heath and Lalljee (1996) for the British electorate are examples of this two-dimensional approach. Except for the traditional economic left-right cleavage, centred on the problem of equality and welfare allocation, there also exists a cultural dimension that deals with conflicting values concerning the broader layout of society. Shills and Lipset argued, from the 1950s onward, that the labour class takes on left

points of view economically, yet culturally positions itself in an authoritarian way. Lipset (1981) explains these economic left-wing points of view from the economically precarious situation of the working class. People in an economically weak position have more to gain from left-wing economic policies whereby the government reallocates material wealth. Lipset relates cultural authoritarianism to a low cultivated world view that is the result of an authoritarian education and a weak social position (weak integration into civil society, low level of education, few intellectual stimuli in the work environment, few reading skills). From this incomplete world view labourers opt for simple yet drastic and direct solutions to political and societal problems.

Right-wing voting behaviour of the economically weak classes is usually explained from cultural rather than from economical motives. The ‘unnatural’ voting behaviour is seen as a result of working class authoritarianism (and the many interpretations and variations of this concept). The importance of cultural attitudes for the explanation of the success of new right populist parties has been described in an extensive literature with a solid empirical base. The question that arises, and that is the central point of this paper, is how these groups reconcile their right-wing vote to their economic attitudes.

In the literature we find diverging explanations for this paradox. Some authors claim an enduring tension between economic left attitudes of the lower social classes and the economic right or free market point of view of right-wing parties (Depickere and Swyngedouw 2002; Houtman 2003). Cultural attitudes would then be crucial in the decision for a right-wing vote. Left-wing economic attitudes pose a conflict with the economic right party policy, yet this would only mildly influence voting behaviour, e.g. because of the limited knowledge of the economic policies of right-wing parties or because economic issues are not prominently featured on the political agenda (Houtman 2003).

From the literature that deals with the concept of ‘populism’, I will explore an alternative explanation. This approach in no way contradicts the importance of the new cultural cleavage in its explanation for ‘unnatural’ voting behaviour. I challenge the idea that there exists a fundamental tension between the economic attitudes of the so-called ‘unnatural’ voters and the economic discourse of right-wing populist parties.

The argumentation is built on a number of steps. First, based on the literature on causes and characteristics of populism, I will discuss the relationship between populism, social class and attitudes towards redistribution and the welfare state. Populism, I will argue, appeals to a yearning for equality, but does not link this egalitarianism with a leftist redistribution policy. On the contrary, it is highly susceptible to a radical right-wing critique of the welfare state. Secondly, I will search empirical support for the hypothesis that there is a high resemblance between the socio-economic discourse of right-wing populist parties and the opinions of its

electoral supporters, including economically weak groups. The analyses are based on Flemish (Belgian) data.

2. Populism and Welfare State Attitudes

2.1 Populism, Left and Right

The expansion of the welfare state after the Second World War, which was made possible by an expanding economy and the related rise in standards of living, to a great extent pacified the economic (labour-capital) cleavage. Welfare state politics accept the free market; however it is also aimed at active reallocation of welfare, based on the actual accomplishment of legally guaranteed social and economical rights and supported by the ideology of equality. Ideologically the welfare state may not be exclusively identified with socialism. According to Deleek (2001, 36) the welfare state must be seen as influenced by the three traditional ideological currents, namely liberalism (personal freedom and free market economy), socialism (class conflict, government intervention) and Christian-democracy (subsidiarity and intermediary organisations between government and individual). The welfare state was at its height in the sixties of the past century, but ever since the economic recession of the seventies has been criticized.

The criticisms on the welfare state and economic intervention in general were supported to a great extent by the ideas of neoliberal thinkers such as Hayek and Friedman, who argued in favour of deregulation and privatisation to combat the economic recession. These critiques often had a philosophical and intellectual nature and as such were difficult to mobilize electorally. As members of the Flemish ultra-liberal think-tank Nova Civitas noted, liberalism needed to reconnect with the conservative segments of the population to create a platform for the critique of the welfare state. According to these thinkers it was this platform that created the basis for the Reagan and Thatcher revolutions of the eighties (Nova Civitas 2000, 2). In Belgium the neoliberal breakthrough never took place, so that the dissatisfaction with the welfare state took on a more extreme form. The analysis of Nova Civitas sees the lack of a successful neoliberal answer to the crisis of the welfare state as an important cause of the rise of the right-wing radical VB (Nova Civitas 2000, 2-3).

Typcasting the economic cleavage as an opposition between labour and capital is no longer suitable in the contemporary post-industrial society. The economic cleavage is now centred on the question how and to what extent the free market must be socially corrected (Giddens 1998). The discussion whether the welfare state must be retained or dismantled poses a significant conflict matter. Criticism of the welfare state has not only been voiced from the classic neoliberal camp, it can also clearly be found in the ideology of the populist-right. Much like fascism in the 1930s, contemporary right-wing populism does not clearly fit into the classic scheme of the economic left-right

cleavage (Sternhell 1983; Mudde 2000). Liberal capitalism and leftist politics are rejected simultaneously. In the case of contemporary right-wing populism, appeals to 'real' egalitarianism and 'fair' redistribution as well as radical criticism of the welfare state go hand in hand. In the argument concerning international free trade, populism takes sides with the right-wing current of antiglobalism that, much like the left current, criticizes neoliberalism.

2.2 Populism as a 'Thin' Ideology

Due to its chameleon-like appearance, some authors conclude populism does not have a fixed ideological core and must be reduced to a style or syndrome (Wiles 1969). Canovan criticizes this reduction. Populism may not be a 'full' ideology like socialism and liberalism, yet it is a 'thin centred' ideology with a limited core that is connected to a limited part of politics. The ideology is also not only negative (anti establishment), but possesses a positive core, which is directed at appreciating the 'common sense' of the 'average Joe' (Canovan 2002, 32). The antagonism proposed by populism between the people and the establishment is central in most descriptions of populism (Ionescu and Gellner 1969; Di Tella 1995; Mény and Surel 2002).

Populism as a 'thin' ideology does not contain any specific economical doctrine. However this does not mean that populism, and particularly right-wing or national-populism, has no implications on matters pertaining to the socio-economic cleavage. To understand this we must further explore the characteristics and background of populism.

Populism positions the 'common sense' of 'common people' against the corruption and abuse of the elite. Populists want to regulate societal life according to the 'will of the people' and reject intermediary institutions that hinder the direct influence of that will. Thus, populism takes on an ambiguous attitude against democracy. Pleas for direct democracy and sighs for an authoritarian leader who 'embodies' the will of the people go hand in hand (Papadopoulos 2001). Especially intermediary institutions with a representative function, such as parliament, are subject to populist criticism. A significant proportion of the political science debate deals with the question to what extent populism undermines the legitimacy of the parliamentary democracy.

According to Mény and Surel (2002) democracy is based on two components: on the one hand 'the power of the demos', and on the other hand 'constitutionalism' that sees general judicial principles and rules as necessary to protect democratic institutions. Due to a variety of factors the second component (constitutionalism) has gained importance in continental Europe since the Second World War. The negative experiences with fascism, the transformation of the market, European unification and processes of privatisation prompted new rules and institutions. Constitutionalism has evolved in such a way, that some argue it undermines the legitimacy of

democracy. This supposedly leads to feelings of political powerlessness that offer the ideal soil for the development of populism.

2.3 Alienation from the Welfare State

Populism is situated in a field of tension between the will of the people and constitutionalism and gives voice to a yearning for a direct and more transparent political system. Populists question the legitimacy of intermediary institutions and constitutional principles and present themselves as the only true democrats that directly embody the will of the people. 'Wij zeggen wat u denkt' (we say what you think), is the slogan of the Flemish right-wing populist party VB. In reference to this problem Margaret Canovan (2002) points out the fundamental paradox that democracy is confronted with: The more inclusive democracy becomes, that is the more mechanisms it creates for civilians to have an impact on policy, the less transparent and more difficult to understand it becomes, for the people who are empowered by it. 'Empowerment undermines transparency' (Canovan 2002, 28). The ideology of democracy, which like every other ideology is aimed at reducing complexity, further nourishes populism according to Canovan. Politicians do not explain how democracy is supposed to work (because of the complexity this entails). This supports the populist cry that democracy is being sold out.

The populist attitude towards social policy can be understood by the same ambivalence and the same paradox as the one that characterizes the populist attitude towards democracy. The division of democracy into two components (will of the people and constitutionalism) can be extended to social policy: the popular moral attitudes surrounding equality and social justice form the first component and the institutional constructs of the welfare state the second. Applying Canovan's vision ('empowerment undermines transparency') to social policy it holds that 'redistribution undermines transparency'. Before the development of the modern social policy that culminated in the project of the welfare state, reallocation came to be through more direct forms of reciprocity and social support, such as charity initiatives (fraternalism). The modern welfare state on the other hand provides a legal entitlement to a number of social and economical rights for all civilians. This is institutionalized in a system of compulsory social insurance for employees, the right for every insured person to replacement income in case of unemployment, sickness, disability and old age as well as the provision of a legal minimum wage for every citizen.

Because of these social accomplishments social policy became much more inclusive in that reallocation was regulated and guaranteed by the government for every citizen. Yet this also made the reallocation process more complex and less transparent. Universal social rights replaced particularistic forms of reciprocity.

Therefore the complexity and lack of transparency of institutional accomplishments of social policy may cause alienation. The result is that

popular conceptions of equality and reallocation are not evidently associated with a support for welfare state politics.

2.4 Populism and Susceptibility to Anti-Welfare State Sentiments

Populism centres on the antagonistic conception where common people are distinguished from the elite. This is expressed through the rejection of intermediary institutions since they obstruct the expression of the will of the people. The anti-attitudes (anti-elite and resistance against intermediary institutions) directly contribute to the distrust of the welfare state. The welfare state is then construed as an instrument in the hand of the policy of the corrupt elite. Populists are known for their negative view of taxes, to such an extent that some populist parties (mainly Scandinavian) were initially known as anti-tax parties before they focused on the topic of immigration (Andersen 1992). Taggart (2002, 76) notes that populists will picture the tax system as a conspiracy with the intent to transfer the wealth generated by productive citizens to the unproductive elite and the 'welfare scroungers'. 'Socialists think government money is their money, and not that of the citizens', is an example of a VB slogan to express this sentiment.

Against the anti-attitudes we find a positive belief in 'common sense' of the 'common people'. The way 'the people' (*volk*) is defined and against which outgroups it is contrasted, varies along the context. National-populists will define the people in ethnical or nationalistic terms (Papadopoulos 2001; Mény and Surel 2002). The outgroup is then no longer restricted to the elite, but also includes immigrants, and categories of people who unrightfully receive social benefits. Immigrants are central in the right-wing populist discourse. They not only pose a cultural but also an economic threat. Immigrants are pictured as profiteers of the social security system and at the same time as competitors on the labour market. '400.000 werklozen, waarom dan nog gastarbeiders?' (400.000 unemployed, so why do we need immigrants?). This was the main VB slogan for the 1984 Belgian elections. Before that the French *Front National* had used a similar slogan: 'Un million de chômeurs, c'est un million d'immigrés en trop', compared by many to the Nazi-slogan '500000 unemployed, 400000 Jews'. Flemish electoral survey research has shown that negative attitudes towards immigrants have often strongly shaped voters' preference for the VB (Coffé, Billiet and Cambré 2002).

How does national-populism express itself on the level of moral reason concerning social themes? Populism appeals to the egalitarianism of people that feel left out by society. However, this does not take on the form of a universal notion of egalitarianism, but rather of a particularistic and utilitarian in-group identification. The moral ideals that lie at the base of populist justification strategies are derived from an idealistic image of the past or of the 'heartland' (Taggart 2002). These ideals are contrasted with the shortcomings of contemporary society. This leads to a fundamentally ambiguous position at the level of moral reasoning. The traditional and mostly conservative ideals

remain present in the background, yet in most cases they appear to be impertinent or unattainable. In the latter case the script of the corrupted society is used to legitimize an individualistic survival ethic. 'Contemporary society is a jungle, where only the strongest survive'. In a more extreme variety this conception can take the form of a 'resigned instrumentalism', i.e. the resignation of moral ideals so that justification takes on a purely instrumental and individualistic character (Derks 2000). 'Solidarity is nonsense and whoever does not put his own interest first, is a naive loser'.

Alienation vis-à-vis the welfare state sensitizes populist movements and their supporters for right-wing critiques that were formulated from liberal thought of the seventies onward. It would be wrong however to regard populism and neoliberalism as equal concepts. Firstly, populism seldom entails a rejection of reallocation and social security per se, yet populists are distrustful of the contemporary functioning of the welfare state (see Andersen 1992). The populist distrust regarding the welfare state does not generally translate into liberal political-economic orientation, but often leads to support for protectionism and criticism of unrestrained capitalism. Populism, and right-wing or national-populism in particular, is historically and ideologically more related to nationalistic solidarism (e.g. National *Socialism* in Germany) and corporatism than to liberal thought. Just as Belgian nationalistic solidarism of the 1930s¹ had its roots in late-19th century critiques of modernity, so is contemporary populism driven by a discomfort with contemporary modernity.

2.5 The Social Base of Populism

The grassroots support of populist movements is often explained by the concept of 'losers of modernisation' (Papadopoulos 2001). However, it is not always clear which social categories should be included under this common denominator. In the framework of the post-industrial knowledge economy it is mostly the lower educated that are considered losers, both from a material as well as an existential point of view. Papadopoulos (2001) breaks with a materialistic class view. According to him populism is attractive to people with different social backgrounds, who share a feeling of being left out of something they appreciate. From there they develop a societal resentment towards people that are associated with the exercise of power. But, as Papadopoulos notes, populism thanks its success to an important degree to the fact that contemporary societies do not sufficiently succeed in convincing people of their efficient (re)allocating function. It can be expected that people in socio-economically fragile situations are especially prone to this criticism.

¹ Solidarism in the 1930s was advocated by Joris van Severen, leader of the Flemish *Verdinaso* movement (*Verbond van Dietsche Nationaalsolidaristen*). Solidarism offers an ideological ground for a corporatist social doctrine, based on the general idea of an organic and hierarchical society with a natural solidarity between all classes.

This social critique in its populist appearance will however not take the shape of a support for an inclusive and universal set of social services. Populist resentment does not offer a solid basis for community building and solidarity, because it enhances cynicism and distrust. The populist voter will opt for narrow utilitarian and individualistic solutions, even though he feels like a victim of the system (Papadopoulos 2001). In that way populism undermines the platform of solidarity and the development of a social or class conscience.

The literature on populism can provide an explanation of how people in economically precarious positions reconcile a vote for a right-wing political party with their socio-economic opinions. Populism appeals to egalitarianism, yet at the same time mobilizes these earnings towards a criticism of the institutional accomplishments of the welfare state. The welfare state is complex, non-transparent and large-scale, and as such lives in tension with the populist need for direct and simple solutions. Furthermore populism uses an antagonistic world view, whereby not only the elite is targeted, but the entire 'unproductive' class that includes asylum seekers and 'undeserving' receivers of social benefits. The inclusive character of the welfare state, based on universalistic principles, is a thorn in the side of populists.

Hereafter, the populism hypothesis will be empirically investigated, based on the situation in Flanders. The discourse of the Flemish right-wing populist party VB on equality, redistribution and the welfare state will be analysed and compared to the attitudes of its electoral base.

3. The Socio-Economic Discourse of Flemish Right-Wing Parties

In the Flemish electoral landscape there are two parties that are considered to be on the right side of the economic left-right cleavage: the liberal VLD (*Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten*, Flemish Liberals and Democrats) and the right-wing nationalistic VB (*Vlaams Blok*, Flemish Block)². In November 2004 the Vlaams Blok disbanded itself and was reborn under a new name, *Vlaams Belang* (Flemish Interest). The party was brought to this decision after three organisations linked to the party were convicted for racism in a court of law.

The VB was founded in 1978. It has always presented itself as a Flemish nationalistic party and positioned itself as such on the Flemish/Walloon community question. Aside from that, it clearly has an ideologically rightist profile. It is the only Flemish party that uses the label 'right' without scruples to define its own ideology. These right points of view are most clearly expressed in topics associated with the socio-cultural cleavage such as the

² Many observers also include the NV-A, which was founded in 2001, to the right side of the political spectrum. This little party is not as relevant for our analyses since it almost exclusively stresses the linguistic or community (Flemish-Walloon) question.

clear position regarding immigrant policy and the preference for a repressive hard line against crime.

In the declaration of principles that was voiced at the inaugural conference of the Vlaams Belang (November 2004) the party describes itself as right-wing nationalistic in a tone that clearly evinces discontent with modernity and a voluntaristic ideal in particular:

The party also is a right-wing nationalistic party, because it acknowledges the free man as he is and thus rejects ideologies that assume the manipulability of mankind. Traditions, values and norms, such as they have evolved, must be respected and integrated into the way we shape the future.³

The same declaration of principles defined the social programme of the party in terms of ‘solidarity’ in a powerful manner:

A humane society exists not of isolated individuals. Free man after all is grounded in the essential characteristics of his people and his culture. Solidarity is the exchange between man and the smaller and larger societies to which he belongs. The community of citizens, sufficiently connected to each other based on cultural identity or a shared history and civilisation, in addition to the family and surroundings, offers a strong foundation for solidarity with the weaker in general and with the disabled and ill in particular. In a healthy community the excesses of the performance-based society are restrained. With respect to the principle of subsidiarity, the government should play a well-deliberated role. Every generation is an integral part of the community.⁴

Socio-economically the VB opposes both socialism and unrestrained capitalism. The right-wing nationalistic conception of the natural and organic

³ [original text: De partij is tevens een rechts-nationalistische partij, omdat zij de vrije mens erkent zoals hij is en dus de ideologieën verwerpt die van de maakbaarheid van de mens uitgaan. Tradities, waarden en normen, zoals die zijn gegroeid, moeten gerespecteerd worden en mee deel uitmaken van de manier waarop de toekomst vorm wordt gegeven.

⁴ [original text: Een menswaardige gemeenschap bestaat niet uit geïsoleerde individuen. De vrije mens is immers verankerd in de wezenskenmerken van zijn volk en van zijn cultuur. Solidariteit is de wisselwerking tussen de mens en die kleinere en grotere gemeenschappen waartoe hij behoort. De volksgemeenschap van burgers, die voldoende verbondenheid hebben met elkaar, op grond van culturele identiteit of op grond van een gemeenschappelijke geschiedenis en beschaving, is ter aanvulling van het gezin en de omgeving, een sterke grondslag voor solidariteit met zwakkeren in het algemeen, de gehandicapten en de zieken in het bijzonder. In een gezonde gemeenschap worden de uitwassen van de prestatie maatschappij beteugeld. De overheid speelt hier, met respect voor het subsidiariteitsbeginsel, een weldoordachte rol. Elke generatie maakt volwaardig deel uit van de volksgemeenschap.]

unity of the people (volksverbondenheid) in fact is the basis of its social rhetoric. This positions them on a solidaristic platform. Until the rebirth of the Vlaams Blok as the Vlaams Belang the notion solidarism was part of the official 'Basic Principles' (Grondbeginselen) of the party. References to this loaded notion however had been barred from the official party discourse for a long time. The underlying idea, particularly the notion of class reconciliation and solidarity among all layers of one's 'own people' (eigen volk) based on a general idea of a 'natural community', is still an integral part of the official party rhetoric, such as can be deduced from the above fragment of the declaration of principles. Solidarity based on the idea of the natural, organic community implies selectivity based on ethnicity and differs fundamentally from the universalistic principles of the modern welfare state.

The VB rejects a government controlled economy, but does not openly associate itself with a liberal laissez-faire programme. The party does not miss an opportunity to deny the accusation it is an anti-social party that plays into the hands of capitalists. Moreover, it likes to profile itself as the only party that consistently defends the interests of the ordinary workers and eagerly refers to electoral studies that have shown the 'common man' character of its electorate. In a platform text in reference to the May 1st family day in Bruges in 2002 it is formulated as follows:

The Vlaams Blok – according to every survey the largest labourers party in Flanders – has the right and duty to watch over the social interests and the socio-economic welfare of our people, not only of workers, but of all the working population. This duty is more relevant for our party because all parties who formerly set out to look out for the little man, have long since forgotten to defend the interests of the 'ordinary Flemish man' and the working Fleming.⁵

In the official party discourse there is no clear point of view against the principle of social security or unions as such, but against the way they function nowadays. Regarding social securities the alleged abuses by Walloons and immigrants, but also of unwieldy institutions are denounced. Using populist rhetoric that emphasizes the nontransparency of the welfare state, they attempt to show the inefficiency of contemporary social policy. In the June 2004 election programme we read:

Although a well-constructed system of social security is indispensable, we cannot be blind to the many abuses of the system. Our current social security scheme is trapped in its own unwieldy institutions: the state, unions, large corporations,

⁵ [original text: [H]et Vlaams Blok - volgens alle enquêtes de grootste arbeiderspartij van Vlaanderen – [heeft] het recht en de plicht te waken over de sociale belangen en het sociaal-economisch welzijn van ons volk, niet alleen van de arbeiders, maar van alle werkenden. Deze plicht rust des te meer op onze partij doordat de partijen die hiervoor vroeger opkwamen, al lang verleerd hebben om de belangen van de 'kleine Vlaamse man' en van de werkende Vlaming te verdedigen.]

medical insurance companies .. Each and every one are centres of power that need not justify their actions and expenses. They have contributed to the enormous deficit we are now faced with, which forms a threat to the future of the system.⁶

In the VB-discourse unions have become an integral part of the corrupted political establishment, and they no longer serve the interests of the common man. In the flyer '10 prejudices regarding the Vlaams Blok' (10 vooroordelen over het Vlaams Blok), edited by VB Senator Jurgen Ceder, it is formulated as follows:

In earlier times the unions were a way, perhaps the only way, for labourers and civil servants to defend their interests against capital and the powers that be. Today their task is reduced to 'guiding' the discomfort of the little man, channelling it and manipulating it into a shape that is acceptable for the government and the establishment so that it does not cause too many problems.⁷

Thus the VB appeals to feelings of social unease and egalitarianism of the 'little man' by connecting it to right-wing critiques of the welfare state. The VB's nationalistic approach to the economy is clearly based on ethnocentric thought, which can be seen in their explicit pleas for labour and social provisions 'for our own people first'. From their nationalistic roots they further oppose economic globalisation and the power of multinational corporations. For instance they demand, much like left-wing anti-globalists, international agreements that counter the power of multinationals. A lack of international regulation, according to the analysis of the VB, leads to social catastrophes.

The quotes above show how the VB tries to appeal to the common people's egalitarianism and feelings of injustice using its right-wing populist discourse. The dichotomy they use is not that of classic left-wing rhetoric (us, labourers against them, capitalists), but clearly right-wing nationalistic and populist: we, the working Flemings, against them, the belgicistic establishment, profiteers, Walloons and immigrants.

⁶ [Hoewel een goed uitgebouwd systeem van sociale zekerheid onmisbaar is, mogen wij toch niet blind zijn voor de vele misbruiken. Onze huidige sociale zekerheid is vastgeroest en gevangen in haar eigen logge structuren: de staat, de vakbonden, de grote ondernemingen, de ziekenfondsen ... Stuk voor stuk machtsbolwerken die geen verantwoording moeten afleggen voor hun acties of uitgaven. Zij hebben de enorme schuldenberg waar we nu tegen aankijken mee opgebouwd en die vormt stilaan een bedreiging voor de toekomst van het systeem].

⁷ [Vroeger waren de vakbonden een manier, misschien de enige manier, voor de arbeiders en bedienden om hun belangen te verdedigen tegen het grootkapitaal en het gevestigde bestel. Vandaag bestaat hun taak er in het ongenoegen van de kleine man te 'begeleiden', te kanaliseren en te manipuleren in vormen die voor de regering en het bestel aanvaardbaar zijn en niet te veel moeilijkheden opleveren.]

The dominant economic discourse of the VB, however, remains different from 'free-market' liberalism. Phrases like economic nationalism, welfare chauvinism or economic populism are far more adequate to describe the economic line of thought of the VB (Mudde 2000). Therefore the discourse is hard to place in the classic scheme of the economic left-right cleavage.

We can expect a classic liberal free-market ideology far more in a classic liberal party instead of a right-wing populist party. Most European liberal parties pertain to economic liberalism, however they do not always explicitly want to be associated with the (economic) right. The Flemish liberal party VLD tries to rid itself of its economically 'rightist' image and continuously emphasizes that the left-right cleavage is a dated concept.

According to Belgian prime minister Guy Verhofstadt (VLD), the left-right cleavage is a thing of the (dark) past, referring in particular to the Cold War. Only a number of years ago he liked to associate himself to the Third Way project of Tony Blair and the 'Neue Mitte' (New Center) of Gerhard Schröder, both Social Democrats. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall economic liberalism is a fact, but it must be accompanied by political liberalism. Verhofstadt formulates it as follows:

No Weltmarkt without Weltgeist. No economic globalisation without a social and political project. No equality without freedom. And no freedom that would isolate the individual civilian from society.⁸

In conclusion we can state that neither of the two 'right-wing' parties in Flanders, at least in their official party discourse, propagates a pure laissez-faire ideology. The VB utilizes the usual populist mix of egalitarianism and radical critique of the welfare state, while the VLD has evolved to the centre by going along with the discourse of the Third Way and the activating welfare state. Both parties express anti-socialist sentiments and explicitly speak out against too much government interference in the economy. Like the other Flemish parties represented in parliament, they support the socially-corrected free market economy. Yet it would be misleading to attribute to them a centrist position on the economic left-right cleavage. The VLD is careful not to be associated with a radical neoliberal image, but as a party with a liberal tradition and liberal supporters, it will often emphasize economic right-wing accents. The economic discourse of the VB is more right-wing populist than right-wing liberal. It is predominantly this party that is supposed to be relevant in our analysis, since we want to explain so-called 'unnatural' voting behaviour (that is right-wing voting among weak economic groups) from the concept of economic populism.

⁸ [Geen Weltmarkt zonder Weltgeist. Geen economische globalisering zonder een sociaal en politiek project. Geen gelijkheid zonder vrijheid. En geen vrijheid die de individuele burger van de samenleving zou isoleren.]

4. Analysis of Flemish Constituencies

We will present our research into the constituencies of Flemish parties in three sections. First we describe the data and operationalisation of the measurement scales. Second, we perform a short descriptive analysis of the actual situation of class voting in Flanders. Finally, in the third section we will test the populism hypothesis as an explanation of so-called unnatural voting behaviour.

4.1 Data and Operationalisation

The survey data were collected by the TOR-research group of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium) in 2001, in the framework of research into the social basis of solidarity. A postal survey was sent to a sample of 7500 Flemings, based on a random selection of all inhabitants of the Flemish District (Vlaamse Gewest) between 18 and 75 years old using the 'National Registry' (Rijksregister). 3600 people responded. More technical information concerning the fieldwork, response rates, representativity, weighing and scale construction can be found in the technical report (Elchardus and Tresignie 2002). Three indicators that are relevant to socio-economic status were operationalised: *Family income*, *Education* (highest attained diploma) and *Professional status*.

For the analysis of attitudes regarding equality, reallocation and the welfare state, we have two relevant scales at our disposal. These allow us to distinguish between (right-wing egalitarian) economic populism (i.e. the combination between egalitarianism and a radical critique of the welfare state) and left-wing egalitarianism (i.e. the combination of egalitarianism and support for the welfare state) (Derks 2004). All attitudinal scales are standardized sum scales ranging from 0 (completely disagree with all items) to 100 (completely agree with all items).

- *Egalitarianism*: unease with existing social inequalities and a need to abolish these inequalities, measured as six Likert- items: 'in Flanders the rich are getting richer and the poor keep getting poorer'; 'the gap between rich and poor is still too big'; 'government should redistribute incomes to benefit the socially weak'; 'in Flanders big bosses profit at the expense of labourers'; 'the class differences should be smaller than they are now' and 'the gap between high and low incomes should remain as it is now' (negative). Reliability: Cronbach's alpha=0.82 .
- *Critique welfare state*: indicates to what extent one is susceptible for radical criticism of the welfare state, both in terms of moral and budgetary risks, measured in six items: 'the welfare state makes people lazy'; 'social security is the reason for economic recession'; 'people don't care for each other anymore as a result of the welfare state'; 'people can no longer take care of themselves due to welfare benefits', 'social benefits are largely granted to people who do not need them' and 'unemployment rises as a result of the social security system'. Reliability: Cronbach's alpha=0.81.

Due to the two-dimensional character of the left-right cleavage we not only include economic, but also socio-cultural attitudes in the analysis. Measurement scales that were used by Elchardus (1996) are included to operationalize the right side of the socio-cultural cleavage. Two of these concepts (authoritarianism and ethnocentrism) are widely used in the research tradition on working class authoritarianism and cultural conservatism. Furthermore it is important to note that each of these four concepts are also found in the theoretical literature concerning national-populism.

- *Authoritarian*: short authoritarianism scale (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson and Sandford 1969 (1950)), measured in four items among which 'obedience and respect for authority are the two most important virtues a child should learn' and 'we need strong leaders that prescribe what we should do'. Cronbach's alpha=0.68 .
- *Ethnocentrism*: negative attitude towards immigrants both as a cultural and economic threat, measured by five items including 'immigrants are generally not trustworthy' and 'immigrant workers come here to benefit from our social security'. Cronbach's alpha=0.79 .
- *Anti-political attitudes*: negative attitude toward the working of the current democratic political system, measured in six items including 'parliament is a meaningless discussion group, we would be better off abolishing it.' and 'without political parties things would be much better in our country'. Cronbach's alpha .91.
- *Utilitarian individualism*: measures susceptibility to discourse centred around the pursuit of material self-interest. It is measured by four items including 'humanity, our fellow man, solidarity.. what rubbish, everyone must first take care of oneself and one's own interests' and 'the pursuit of personal success is more important than having a good relationship with one's fellow citizens'. Cronbach's alpha=0.71 .

The variable concerning political party favour is measured by asking for the respondent's voting intention at the next elections. We restricted our analysis to the five biggest parties at the time (2001), namely the Green Party (Agalev, in the meantime renamed to Groen!), the Social Democrats (Socialistische Partij, in the meantime redubbed SP.A), the Christian Democrats (Christelijke Volkspartij, in the meantime renamed to Christen-Democratisch & Vlaams), the Liberals (Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten) and the right-wing nationalistic VB (Vlaams Blok, in the meantime redubbed Vlaams Belang). The first two parties are generally considered left of centre, the green party a new-left party and the socialist party the historic ancestors of the socialist labour movements. Although the Flemish Christian Democratic party is a house with many rooms, it is generally thought of as a centrist party. The last two parties are associated with the right side of the political spectrum. For the liberals (VLD), who renounce their right-wing label, this is mainly due to their liberal economic positions, culturally they are not associated with the political right. The VB labels itself as right-wing nationalist and is considered by the majority of the population to be extreme right.

4.2 'Unnatural 'Party Preference'

According to the traditional class politics scheme people in a vulnerable economic position are expected – given their economic interests – to vote for left-wing political parties. This paper addresses the question how right-wing voters from a low socio-economic background (the so-called unnatural voters) reconcile their vote with their socio-economic attitudes. Before we look into that question, we will first present a descriptive summary of the level of ‘unnatural’ voting behaviour in Flanders in 2001.

Table 1 gives an overview of the relationship between the three indicators of socio-economic status and party preference for the five major parties, divided into three categories (left-centre-right).

The two left-wing parties are preferred by more than 21% of all respondents. Almost 30% of respondents indicated a preference for one of the two right-wing parties while the political centre is supported by almost 20%. The remaining 29% of the electorate indicated a preference either to vote for another party (more than 8%); to abstain from voting (almost 14%) or did not answer this question (more than 7%). The latter categories are less relevant for the analyses and were omitted from Table 1.

These figures are dated given the recent turbulent developments in the Flemish electoral landscape. We are only interested to what degree we find traces of traditional class voting preferences and the so-called unnatural voting behaviour.

The groups with a low socio-economic profile (lower educated and low income groups) do not have a uniform affinity with left-wing political parties. The lower educated nonetheless are over-represented with the Social Democrats, but this is compensated for by an under-representation in votes for the new-left Green party. Low income groups are underrepresented in the entire political left-wing. Here the strong under-representation with the Green party is not compensated with an over-representation with the Social Democrats. However this does not mean the class politics scheme has completely lost its relevance in the Flemish political landscape. Professional category is still a relevant indicator of voting preference. It would be wrong to simply look at the dichotomy government vs. private sector, since it is especially the opposition between the self-employed and employees in government-subsidized organisations (GSO) that stands out. The latter category is characterized by a strong affinity with the political left-wing, over-represented especially in the Green party and to a lesser extent in the Social Democratic party.

Table 1: Party Preference and Social Class

		LEFT	Green party	Social-Democrats	Christian Democrats	RIGHT	Liberal	VB
Family income ⁹	low (n=936)	18.4	4.4	14.0	21.6	29.2	18.8	10.4
	median (791)	24.1	7.1	17.1	20.4	26.5	16.8	9.7
	high (1150)	22.8	8.5	14.3	18.7	33.0	24.3	8.7
	<i>total (2,877)</i>	21.7	6.8	14.9	20.1	30.0	20.5	9.5
Educational attainment	primary education (825)	20.8	3.0	17.8	24.4	26.2	14.5	11.6
	lower secondary (801)	19.5	4.7	14.7	16.9	30.8	19.0	11.9
	higher secondary (1153)	21.2	9.3	12.0	17.0	31.7	22.9	8.8
	higher education (748)	24.6	12.8	11.8	21.0	30.3	25.3	5.1
	<i>total (3,527)</i>	21.5	7.5	13.9	19.5	29.9	20.6	9.4
Professional status	self-employed (363)	9.9	3.3	6.6	23.4	43.8	39.1	4.7
	employee private sector (1,875)	21.1	6.4	14.7	17.1	31.4	19.4	12.0
	employee government sector (406)	21.4	5.4	16.0	17.2	28.3	17.5	10.8
	employee in a government subsidised organisation (409)	30.1	13.9	16.1	23.2	18.3	12.5	5.9
	<i>total (3,053)</i>	21.0	6.9	14.1	18.7	30.7	20.5	10.2
TOTAL	(n=3643)	21.4	7.6	13.8	19.6	29.9	20.5	9.4

⁹ Based on a question in which we ask for the available (net) monthly family income, based on eight income categories. For each number of family members we calculated a median category. The constructed variable is based on a recoding into three categories: low family income (i.e. lower than the median category), middle income category (equals the median category) and high family income (higher than the median category), in each case taking family size into account.

The right-wing populist VB stands out for its under-representation of the group of higher educated. Income level is not a relevant indicator for party preference, but professional sector is. As to be expected, employees in government-subsidized organisations are strongly under-represented, more surprising is the under-representation of the self-employed. Earlier electoral research had further shown that contrary to most other European countries, there is no affinity between the self-employed and the extreme right in Flanders (Depickere and Swyngedouw 2002).

The sociological composition of the Liberal party can still fairly adequately be understood from the classic class-politics scheme: the higher income groups, the higher educated and the self-employed are overrepresented. The so-called unnatural right-wing voting behaviour of economically precarious groups is found mostly among supporters of the VB. In absolute terms we find more unnatural voters for the liberal party, because this party has more support (at least in 2001).

Socio-economic attitudes of 'unnatural' voters

In this paragraph we present the actual test of the central hypothesis. From the literature of populism we expect that not only the cultural but also the economic attitudes of so-called unnatural voters are well attuned to the discourse of right-wing populist parties.

Table 2 offers an overview of the average scores on the scales regarding economic and cultural attitudes, subdivided in the five party constituencies. Within each electorate we also calculated the scores for the categories with low socio-economic status, namely the lower educated (maximum lower education) and employees¹⁰ with a low income (income lower than the median category taking into account family size). Our attention is primarily directed at the position of VB supporters with a low socio-economic status. With them especially we expect to find an attitude profile consistent with the concept of 'economic populism' and subsequently that these opinions are well-attuned to the VB ideology.

¹⁰ Self-employed with low incomes were not included in the low-income categories, because from a classic class perspective they cannot be unequivocally labelled as lower class.

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Table 2: Economic and Cultural Attitudes and Party Preference, with Specification for the Socially Weak Categories

		N	Egalitarianism	Critique welfare state	Authoritarianism	Ethnocentrism	Antipolitical attitudes	Utilitarian Individualism
Greens	employee with low income	38	74.1	40.6	32.0	29.8	42.6	26.4
	low educated	25	76.4	41.4	40.5	21.9	37.9	33.3
	entire constituency	276	70.1	37.9	33.3	28.3	34.2	19.6
Social Democrats	employee with low income	118	78.3	44.2	47.9	45.4	45.6	36.8
	low educated	147	78.7	45.7	53.0	48.3	45.2	40.6
	entire constituency	504	74.1	41.0	43.2	40.0	37.6	30.5
Christian Democrats	employee with low income	167	73.3	48.7	54.9	42.5	43.7	31.9
	low educated	201	72.9	50.6	61.9	47.5	47.2	40.8
	entire constituency	714	68.3	45.9	51.5	42.2	39.9	29.6
Liberals	employee with low income	124	68.3	48.4	52.1	45.2	41.3	41.5
	low educated	120	70.8	52.6	62.7	48.6	47.5	34.7
	entire constituency	749	59.4	50.2	49.1	45.0	39.4	31.6
VB	employee with low income	91	73.7	56.7	62.2	68.7	58.7	40.4
	low educated	96	81.4	55.4	61.1	68.9	63.7	41.7
	entire constituency	341	71.1	56.1	55.9	69.7	58.2	40.1
Total sample	employee with low income	797	74.4	48.5	52.2	48.3	50.0	35.4
	low educated	825	76.0	50.4	58.4	51.4	52.5	40.5
	entire sample	3,643	68.3	47.0	47.6	45.4	44.0	30.9

The data in Table 2 support the hypothesis of economic populism. The economic attitudes of VB's constituency are best described as 'right-wing egalitarian' or 'economically populist', i.e. the combination between egalitarianism and the relatively high support for radical criticism of the welfare state. This combination does not appear to have emerged from an 'unnatural' alliance between fragile social groups with economically left-wing opinions and more affluent ones with right-wing liberal attitudes. The socially weak segment of the VB electorate, in particular the less educated, is characterized by a stronger egalitarianism when compared with others, but their support for the radical criticism of the welfare state is very similar to that of the other groups of VB voters. Where cultural attitudes are concerned we find confirmation for the image that emerges from most research literature. VB supporters are characterized by authoritarian opinions, a negative attitude towards immigrants, anti-political sentiments and a relatively strong radical utilitarian individualism (or survival ethic). The cultural opinions of the socially weaker supporters of the VB do not significantly differ from those of the rest of their constituency. In other words, the overall image of VB supporters matches perfectly the literature on national populism.

Thus, so-called 'unnatural' support for the VB can be understood with the concept of populism and should therefore no longer be labelled as 'unnatural'. The schizophrenic image of the VB as a market-liberal party with an important left-wing constituency is indeed fundamentally wrong. Both VB discourse as well as the attitudes of its supporters do not fit well into the economic left-right cleavage. 'Economic populism' is a far more accurate concept to label this ideological orientation.

The opinions of the VLD's grassroots supporters are better attuned to the classic economic right-wing (market-liberal) profile: a relatively low support for egalitarianism combined with a relatively high consent with radical critique of the welfare state. The opinions of less-educated VLD supporters do diverge from those of the rest of the VLD constituency and are inclined towards economic populism. Apparently the VLD succeeds in finding support with two economic groups, namely market liberals and economic populists. Both groups share a critical or distrustful attitude towards the welfare state.

As expected, the profiles of the two left-wing parties (the Green party and the Social Democrats) are best described as economically leftist: support for egalitarianism combined with rejection of welfare state critique.

The above was a descriptive and not (causal) explanatory analysis. In what follows I present a multivariate analysis by means of logistic regression. This analysis clarifies the relative impact of economic opinions (egalitarianism and anti-welfare state attitudes) on voting for the populist right.

Looking at the results of Model 1 (Table 3), three conclusions can be drawn. First, the VB electorate's high scores on egalitarianism (demonstrated in Table 2) can be fully explained by their socio-demographic profile. Egalitarianism has no autonomous effect on a vote for the VB. Second, negative attitudes towards the welfare state have a significant net effect on support for the populist-right VB. Third, the higher educated and the self-employed are under-represented in the electorate of the VB.

Drawing on these three findings, the thesis on 'economic populism' can be further elaborated. The economic populist attitudes of the VB electoral base (a combination of egalitarianism and anti-welfarism) can be explained by a combination of sociological and ideological factors. The egalitarian attitudes result from social conditions, whereas the negative attitudes against the welfare state are the result of an ideological position that cannot be reduced to the social characteristics of the supporters. The VB does not

attract all sections of the underprivileged, but particularly those categories with a negative attitude towards the welfare state. In order to test this argument even further, the analysis is repeated separately for the underprivileged, more specifically the lower educated employees (Model 2 in Table 3). Model 2 corroborates our claim that among the underprivileged considered separately, ‘anti-welfarism’ is also a relevant factor to explain the support for the VB.

Table 3: Preference for the Populist Right (VB) Explained by Economic Attitudes and Social Status. Logistic Regressions, Odd Ratios (Exp. B)

	Model 1: Total sample (valid N = 2,473)		Model 2: Low educated employees (valid N = 557)	
Egalitarianism (z-score)	1.080		0.930	
Critique welfare state (z-score)	1.648	***	1.650	***
Family income (ref.= High)			NA	
Low	0.949		NA	
Median	0.889		NA	
Educational attainment (ref. = Higher education)			NA	
Primary education	2.649	***	NA	
Lower secondary	2.264	**	NA	
Higher secondary	1.782		NA	
Professional status (ref. = Employee in a government subsidised organisation)		***		
Self-employed	0.427	*	NA	
Employee private sector	1.597		1.172	
Employee government sector	1.350		0.753	
<i>Nagelkerke pseudo R²</i>	0.096	***	0.059	***

*** p < 0.001 / ** p < 0.01 / * p < 0.05

NA = not applicable

Finally, the question of the relative importance of economic or cultural opinions in explaining right-populist voting behaviour will be addressed. The four scales referring to cultural attitudes do not only correlate with one another, but they also correlate with the scale on anti-welfarism (see Table 4). This need not surprise us, for radical criticism of the welfare state, like the four indicators of cultural cleavage, are unmistakably integral parts of right-wing or national populism.

Table 4: Pearson Correlations Critique Welfare State and Cultural Attitudes

	Critique welfare state	Authoritarianism	Ethnocentrism	Anti-political attitudes	Utilitarian individualism
Critique welfare state	1				
Authoritarianism	0.37	1			
Ethnocentrism	0.41	0.35	1		
Antipol. attitudes	0.32	0.31	0.36	1	
Util. individualism	0.30	0.45	0.39	0.32	1

To avoid multicollinearity, separate models are constructed for each of the four cultural attitudes. The models are identical in shape to Model 1, Table 3, but criticism of the welfare state is omitted and replaced by one of the four cultural attitude scales. Table 5 summarizes the main findings. The odd ratios of the remaining variables of the model are not included in the table, because they do not differ significantly from the parameters of Model 1 presented in Table 3.

Table 5: Preference for the Populist Right (VB), Controlling for Social Status and Egalitarianism. Summary of Four Separate Models. Logistic Regressions, Odd Ratios.

	Exp (B)	Nagelkerke R ²	N
Model a: authoritarianism (z-score)	1.456 ***	0.072	2,533
Model b: ethnocentrism (z-score)	4.028 ***	0.249	2,518
Model c: antipolitical attitudes (z-score)	1.786 ***	0.105	2,508
Model d: utilitarian individualism (z-score)	1.490 ***	0.071	2,528

*** p < 0.001

Consistent with earlier findings, ethnocentrism (or a negative attitude towards ethnic minority groups) is the most decisive factor explaining support for the VB. An increase of one standard deviation in ethnocentrism increases the odds for a VB preference four times. The effects of the other three indicators of rightist-populist cultural values (authoritarianism, anti-political attitudes and utilitarian individualism) are of a similar magnitude compared to the effect of anti-welfarism (odd ratio of about 1.5).

Criticism of the welfare state is a less decisive factor in explaining support for the populist right than is ethnocentrism. Obviously, the VB is above all an anti-immigrant party, not an anti-welfare state party. Yet, our analysis shows that criticism of the welfare state is strongly linked with cultural attitudes such as authoritarianism and ethnocentrism. This proves that cultural attitudes have important consequences for questions of economic redistribution as well. People distrusting the current political system and ethnic minority groups are much more susceptible to anti-welfare state rhetorics. In populist discourse, the welfare state is portrayed as a hammock, not a safety net. The welfare state is an obscure instrument in the hands of the political elite, exploiting the productivity of the ordinary hard-working people. It sustains a parasitic class, composed of politicians, migrants, asylum seekers and other ‘unproductive’ groups. It is depicted as an unfair system that runs counter to egalitarian principles of equal treatment. The VB appeals to precisely this mixture of egalitarianism and anti-welfarism. Economic populism should not to be equated with neo-liberalism. After all,

they do not fight the notion of redistribution and economic intervention as such, but criticize the *criteria* and the *basis* for reallocation in the framework of the welfare state. Right-wing populists oppose the welfare state's inclusive and universalistic criteria of reallocation. Against that, they defend reallocation based on direct and transparent reciprocity and this only for the cultural in-group. The large scale and complexity of institutional accomplishments of the welfare state further enhance this populist distrust.

5. Discussion

How do socially weak groups reconcile a right-wing vote with their socio-economic opinions? The problem of this so-called unnatural voting behaviour has, with the rise of new radical right-wing parties with extensive support among socially precarious groups, become extremely relevant. The classic idea of tension existing between the market-liberal current of the new-right parties and the left-wing opinions of their socially weak supporters is based on a double misconception, at least for the Flemish case. The VB is not unequivocally market liberal, and the economic attitudes of their grassroots supporters, including socially fragile groups, are not left-wing. They can be more accurately labelled as economically populist or right-wing egalitarian.

In the contemporary post-industrial context, the labour-capital opposition lost its ideological appeal. The growing consensus around accepting the free market economy means the economic cleavage now centres on the question of to what extent, and in what way, social corrections must be carried out. The discussion concerning the preservation or dismantling of the welfare state forms a central point of conflict. The lower status groups will not self-evidently take a left-wing position on this matter, since they are very receptive to welfare state critique.

Speculatively speaking we can contend that the rise of national populism has paved the way for a shift to the right of egalitarianism. Right-wing populists attempt to appeal to egalitarian sentiments of aggrieved citizens and at the same time mobilize them against the institutional accomplishments of the welfare state. Thus populism succeeds in making the aggrieved citizen an ally of economic-right forces.

National populists and market liberals concur in their shared criticism of the welfare state, even though their economic visions differ both in form and in content. Usually national populists have a less coherent and unclear socio-economic view, and socio-economic topics as such do not make up the core of their ideology. Some national-populist tenets contradict market liberalism, for instance economic nationalism and protectionism as well as the resulting criticism of economic globalisation, and welfare chauvinism and the right-wing egalitarian yearning for redistribution.

We can expect that populism gains a competitive advantage when compared to Social Democratic ideology, as the Social Democrats fail to convince voters of the efficiency of the welfare state as a fair mechanism of reallocation and insufficiently defend the universalistic foundation of egalitarianism.

The attractiveness of right-wing populism to the former grassroots supporters of left-wing parties is not surprising. Both currents are based on an antagonistic egalitarianism. Populist discourse is especially appealing to the losers of modernisation who feel threatened by contemporary cultural and economic developments: globalisation, (im)migration and new social inequalities. The primary enemy is no longer the 'employer' or 'capital', but the colourful combination of politicians, government servants, intellectuals, immigrants, etc. Equality in the national-populist

sense is reduced to ones 'own' people. 'Eigen volk eerst' (our own people first) is without doubt the most famous slogan of the VB. Through this idea, equality is defined in particularistic terms and will be difficult to reconcile with the universalistic premises of welfare state ideology.

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