

**German Trade Unions and Right Extremism:
The Political Attitudes of the Membership
Selected Results from a Research Project¹**

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Paper prepared for presentation at the 15th Conference of Europeanists
Chicago, March 30 – April 2, 2006

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1 The project was conducted over a period of 22 months in 2003-2004 by the author together with Richard Stöss, Bodo Zeuner, Joachim Kreis and Günter Pollach. We are grateful to the Hans-Boeckler-Foundation and the Otto-Brenner-Foundation for their generous financial support. Our findings are based on a survey with four disproportional stratified random samples of 1,000 union members and 1,000 non-members in both eastern and western Germany. A total of 4,008 persons were surveyed. In addition, we conducted ten group discussions in the early part of 2004 with 58 officials from DGB unions. The full research report is available (in German) at http://www.polwiss.fu-berlin.de/projekte/gewrex/gewrex_anfang.htm.

Introduction

Right extremism and right populism is not only an issue in Germany, it is a phenomenon throughout Europe². Economic and monetary Europeanization, deregulation and cut-backs in welfare state protection, mass unemployment, workplace restructuring and the opening of previously protective borders – especially in regard to Central and Eastern Europe – are heavily impacting the lives of the working population. Unions are challenged in both the national and the European context to develop an understanding of the roots and forms of right extremism as a possible reaction to such phenomena and to devise strategies for combating its spread.

Trade unions in Germany are unquestionably at the political forefront in condemning all manifestations of right extremism. But they are still “terra incognita” as far as research on right extreme attitudes within their own ranks is concerned. For many years, trade union membership and the existence of a “trade union consciousness” were considered to have an immunizing effect on such attitudes. However, more recent research on the causes and development of right extreme beliefs within the German population at large has argued that union members do not differ in their attitudes from non-union members (mirror image hypothesis) and as such are just as susceptible to right extremism as non-members. Nevertheless, neither the immunity hypothesis nor the mirror-image hypothesis has ever been convincingly tested on an empirically broad basis among union members.

This paper will present the research design and methodology, the hypotheses, and selected results from a recently completed two year research project based on a representative survey of members and non-members, supplemented by ten group interviews with union officials. Our original hypothesis was that the mirror image argument was invalid because union members have a definable “trade union belief system”, i.e. they hold particular beliefs and values which correspond to the organizational structures and goals of the unions. And yet, in light of growing uncertainty, new risks and encompassing transformation processes in the world of work, this consciousness would necessarily reflect contradictory beliefs and show potential cleavages. Some elements would have an immunizing effect and some

might actually enhance susceptibility to right extreme positions. Thus it seemed likely that some union members or groups of members would be relatively immune to right extremism, while others would prove to be more vulnerable.

1. The General Political Context of our Research

“The German Trade Union Federation and its member unions will not tolerate anti-Semitism, racism or xenophobia. Indeed, everywhere and unrelentingly we will use every means at our disposal to combat such behavior.”

These were the words of the chairman of the German Trade Union Federation (DGB) in his opening speech to the delegates of the union’s national congress in June, 1998. The importance which he attached to this statement reflects the degree to which union leaders perceived a growing need for a more vigorous defense of democratic values. Research on the electoral basis of the right extreme party “Die Republikaner” before 1998 (cf. Roth 1989; Stöss 1990) along with studies on attitudes of young trade unionists (Held/Horn/Marvakis 1994) had given notice to the unions that membership was not tantamount to being a reliable protective shield against right extreme attitudes. While the DGB was relieved to see that only 3.3% of the electorate actually voted for one of the right wing parties in elections later that year, a more detailed statistical breakdown indicated that there was indeed a cause for alarm: Twenty-seven percent of all 18 to 24 year old union members in eastern Germany had voted for a right extreme party; and in western Germany the figure was 10%.

Such results confirmed the need for the blue ribbon Commission on Right Extremism which the DGB Congress resolved to create. Over the next two years, the DGB Commission analyzed the situation from a union perspective and formulated policy goals. In its report published in 2000, the Commission concluded that opinions and attitudes of union members mirrored those of the non-union population. Since unions do not exist in a vacuum, it was not surprising that xenophobic and racist attitudes were just as virulent within the membership as throughout the general population.

“For what reason should union members in particular be immune to the presentation of foreigners in the press as ‘the problem’? And why should union members have faith in government pronounce-

² See for example the homepage of the EU research project SIREN (Socio-Economic Change, individual Reactions and the Appeal of the Extreme Right), <http://www.siren.at/en/> as well as the Eurobarometer "Globalization" (EU 2003).

ments which claim that Germany is not a land of immigration, when such a denial is an obvious contradiction to their everyday experiences?" (DGB Kommission 2000: 24)

The Commission went on to present various explanations for the presence of right extreme attitudes among unionists, raising the possibility that union acceptance of the competitiveness argument (*Standort Deutschland*) played into the hands of right extremists by providing arguments for the marginalization of foreigners. The Commission also referred to the study by Held, Horn and Marvakis which posited a link between right wing orientations and the processes of socio-economic modernization, i.e. drastically increased job competition and weakened solidarity in the workplace. Unions, the authors of the study had concluded, were regarded as being partly responsible for such developments because they had acceded to the logic of plant competitiveness and lent support to the hierarchy of a work ethic which turned against migrant laborers, asylum-seekers and repatriated Germans (Held/Horn/Marvakis 1994).

In sum, the DGB commission's report provided an excellent overview of the state of the art of social science research on right extremism in Germany. Moreover, it presented a wide range of proposals for dealing with this phenomenon at the workplace, in union training seminars, in public schools, in the media and in politics. But in regard to the susceptibility or the immunity of union members toward right extremism, the report had little in the way of empirical social science research to draw on and as such, offered little in the way of new insights.

2. Hypotheses and Arguments

At the outset of our project we developed a research design to empirically test to what extent right extremism is present in the membership, what its constituting factors are, and how right extreme attitudes relate to other attitudes and beliefs which we expected to find among unionists. Our aim was to fill the gap in empirical research by investigating the connection between organizational goals and structures of the German unions, a trade union "belief system" and right extreme attitudes. We questioned the widely-held contention that the attitudes and beliefs of trade union members mirror those of society as a whole, not only because it contradicted the organizational self-understanding of the unions; but also for the reason that it rested

on insufficient empirical evidence. Indeed, this latter fact also contributed to our skepticism regarding claims that union members were even more prone to right extreme attitudes than persons who were not members (see for example the results of the poll by the radio station Westdeutscher Rundfunk. Dammann 1999). Instead, we postulated that trade union members hold basic political beliefs and value orientations which differ in part considerably from those in the general public. Union members, we argued, show much stronger support for social justice (*Gerechtigkeit*), they are especially reform oriented, and they are particularly concerned about social welfare and material well-being. If this difference in mentality is existent, then the “mirror-image” hypothesis would be refuted or another explanation for it in regard to right extremism would have to be found. On the other hand, if union membership was no longer a sure antidote for right extremism, then we wanted to find out what had happened to this presumed immunity. Has it completely disappeared or does it exist today in certain parts of the union or among certain groups of unionists? Which unionists might prove to be more resistant to right extremism, and which groups might turn out to be more susceptible?

In addition to the immunization and the mirror image hypotheses, we also looked at several other arguments, including the “modernization loser” hypothesis. The argument is that persons most negatively affected by socio-economic modernization are prone to right extreme attitudes and beliefs. The modernization loser hypothesis assumes that the classical clientele of the unions is especially hard hit by modernization and as such, is particularly susceptible to right extremism. If this hypothesis could be empirically verified, it would also prove the mirror image hypothesis to be false.

On this basis we then formulated four key research questions:

- Which attitudes, beliefs and value orientations contribute to the development and spread of right extremism and which ones have a prohibitive function?
- To what extent are union members and non-members alike or different in regard to their socio-political orientation? Do union members think the same way as non-members or do they have a particular trade union consciousness, or, to use the term common to empirical research, “belief system”, and if so, what are its characteristics and under what social-structural conditions does it exist?

- To what extent does such a union belief system protect or immunize against right extremism, to what extent does it promote its spread? And how is immunity or susceptibility tied to socio-economic processes?
- Does such a union belief system construct a special right extreme belief pattern? And if so, what characteristics differentiate it from right extreme belief patterns of non-union members?

3. Project Design and Methodology

Because of the indications that in the past, union members were less susceptible to right extremist overtures, and because we attributed this to what we postulated to be a particular trade union consciousness or “belief system” (see Converse 1964), our intention of finding and analyzing the existence of right extreme beliefs and attitudes among union members implied that there are probability relationships which are to be found only in this cohort. As such, we first constructed a survey inquiry based on a random sample of matching groups of union members and non-members. This was followed by the qualitative part of the research in which we used the quantitative results to conduct a series of group interviews with trade union officials. Our dependent variable is right extreme beliefs among union members and our independent variables are correlated with both the dependent variable and with right extremism among non-union members, although this latter aspect is not the focus of our research.

The survey which we conducted in March and April 2003 consisted of 4,008 telephone interviews, each of ca. 30 minutes in length. Our questionnaire contained three topical complexes: The dependent variables of right extreme attitudes (see below) and the four independent variables of socio-political orientation (SPO), socio-economic status (SES), personality structure and fundamental political value orientations.

The completed sample included 2,006 union members, equally divided between western and eastern Germany, and 2,002 non-union persons also divided equally between western and eastern Germany. We regarded this sample size as a minimum requirement for evaluating the results in subgroups (age, profession, gender, East-West, etc.). Over 90% of the union members came from a DGB union.

Whereas the survey provided us with important and differentiated empirical answers to our research questions, it could not enable us to understand how union officials, the group in which we could measure both the existence of a trade union belief system and traces of right extreme attitudes, actually formed their views and pieced together the analytical elements of our research design. In the qualitative interviews we hoped to find an argumentative consistency for attitudinal combinations – such as authoritarian values and support of social justice – which seemed contradictory or which did not lend itself to interpretation using quantitative methods. The quantitative findings gave us a “directional thrust and set focal points” (Birsl/Ottens/Sturhan 1999: 97) for qualitative research using the subject perspective.

Methodology

The project used the following definition of right extreme attitudes developed by a working party of social scientists recognized as the leading specialists in Germany in this field:

Right extremism is an attitude pattern which is constructed upon opinions of human inequality. These are expressed in the political sphere by an affinity to dictatorial forms of government, chauvinistic attitudes and the belittling of the harmfulness or the even the justification of National Socialism. In the social sphere right extremism is characterized by anti-Semitism, xenophobia and social Darwinism. (Expertenkonferenz Berlin 2001)

This definition was operationalized by formulating five statements for each of the following six dimensions. To illustrate the kind of statements used, one example is presented for each dimension:

- ➔ *Advocating a rightist authoritarian dictatorship*
"What Germany needs now is a single strong political party which represents the collective will of the people."
- ➔ *Chauvinism*
"The interests of our country need to be uncompromisingly and energetically represented in dealings with other countries."
- ➔ *Xenophobia*
"The large number of foreigners in the Federal Republic shows that we have been infiltrated to a dangerous degree."
- ➔ *Anti-Semitism*
"We have to defend ourselves against the way the Jews continually use the guilty conscience of the Germans."

- ➔ *Social Darwinism*
"There is worthy and worthless existence."
- ➔ *Belittlement or justification of National Socialism*
"We should finally put an end to the Nazi past."

Interviewees were asked to respond to the 30 statements of these six dimensions on a scale of one to seven, with seven indicating complete agreement. Within each dimension, the scale of answers ranged from five (5x1) at the low end to 35 (5x7) at the high end. Agreement with a statement was indicated by the values of five to seven. For all five questions of a dimension, the mean value was 20, and values of 21 to 35 were regarded as indicating concurrence. Table 1 (at the end of the paper) presents the results for each of the questions of these dimensions in percentage of agreement. This gives a first indication of the overall extent of concurrence and the differences between members and non-members and respondents in Eastern and Western Germany.

For the qualitative part of our research we conducted ten group discussion interviews with trade union members. The 58 participants included nine women, seven migrants, 22 residents of Eastern Germany and five retirees. Six of the eight DGB unions were represented in the groups. With the exception of the retirees, all of the participants were either salaried officials or held elected non-paid positions in the union or on a works council. Two researchers were present at each session to give topical impulses and document the proceedings. The seven topical impulses, drawn from the findings of the quantitative survey, helped structure the discussions and presented the participants with a clear statement of the purpose of our research. The participants were asked to respond to the impulses by discussing their own views and those of their colleagues. Following each two hour session, we paraphrased the statements from the tapes and coded them according to a detailed list of topics relating to the following categories: right extremism, affinity to or rejection of right extremism, role and situation of the unions, union membership and non-members, economic changes and globalization, and politics.

4. Project Findings

The following summary of our conclusions is far from being comprehensive, inasmuch as the final report of the project is 600 pages long. For this paper we will focus on those findings which are particularly important for the future of the German unions and their approaches to dealing with right extreme attitudes in their membership.

a) The Mirror Image Hypothesis

In regard to the union membership as a whole, our survey revealed only an insignificant difference in the percentage of right extreme attitudes between members (19.1%) and non-members (20%). On this level, the so-called mirror image hypothesis advanced by the DGB Commission on Right Extremism is confirmed: union members are no more (and no less) prone to right extreme attitudes than their non-member counterparts.

However, a closer look at our findings reveals significant differences between and within relevant socio-economic groups.

b) East - West Comparison

Among respondents in western Germany, i.e. the pre-1990 Federal Republic, we found only a negligible statistical difference between members (18.4%) and non-members (17.8%). The fact that the percentage of right extreme attitudes for all of Germany is somewhat higher is due to the fact that among all respondents in eastern Germany, i.e., the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), some 27% were in the right extreme category. In comparison between members and non-members in the East we found that the former (22.5%) are relatively less susceptible, while right extreme responses came from over 28% of the latter group.

c) Socio-Economic Status

As can be seen in Figure 1, labor force participants are generally far less susceptible to right extremism than persons outside the labor force. Secondly, unskilled workers, skilled workers and mid-level managers are more likely to harbor right extreme

attitudes if they are union members than if they are not. Of particular interest for our assessment of the results is the fact that non-skilled workers who are union members are twice as likely as non-members to have right extreme attitudes (34% vs. 18%). The same holds also for organized mid-level managers (14% vs. 7%). And skilled workers, who make up 25% of the union membership, are slightly more likely than their non-union counterparts to express right extreme positions (20% vs. 18%).

d) The Social Class Model

For the purpose of generalizing these findings in regard to union members we used the respondents who were counted as part of the labor force to construct a three class model based on their income and their level of general education³. The placement of a person in a particular class depended on the combination of these two variables:

income	low	medium	high
education			
low level	lower class	lower class	<u>middle class</u>
medium level	lower class	<u>middle class</u>	upper class
high level	<u>middle class</u>	upper class	upper class

We can categorize our respondents as follows:

Lower Class: Non-skilled workers, unemployed, retirees (both below and above the legal retirement age of 65). A group with comparatively low union density, while at the same time comprising 44% of our respondents.

Middle Class: Skilled workers, line and middle-level management, including public service. High level of union density. 32% of our respondents.

Upper Class: Mid-level and upper level management and salaried white-collar employees. Average union density (somewhat over 20%). 24% of our respondents.

³ Income is monthly personal net income of less than € 800, € 800 up to € 1499, and € 1500 and above. Education is equated with a low, medium or high level of general education.

Figure 2 shows how the various job classifications and status groups are distributed across the class structure. Interestingly, the lower class represents 44% of all respondents, but only about one-third of union members. Thirty-two percent of the respondents were from the middle class compared to nearly one half of the union members (45%). In the upper class the figures are 24% and 22%. From this it can be seen that the union membership is strongly dominated by the middle class. Expressed in terms of labor force status groups, we find mostly skilled workers and mid-level managers among union members in the middle class.

	Officials	Active members	Passive Members	All Members	Non-Members
Lower Class	20	30	35	33	46
Middle Class	43	46	46	45	30
Upper Class	37	24	19	22	24

What does class status in conjunction with union membership tell us about the prevalence of right extreme attitudes? Our conclusions are represented by Figure 3, which shows that **among** union members, those in the lower class have a significantly higher propensity toward right extremism than those in the middle and upper classes. However, when we draw the comparison **between** union members and non-members within each of the three classes, we find that

- The lower class is obviously much more susceptible to right extremism, non-members even more than members. At the same time, lower class unionists are less right extreme oriented than non-members in this class.
- Upper class unionists are slightly less right extremist in their attitudes than non-members in this class. In the upper class we find a considerably lower incidence of right extreme attitudes along with a lower level among unionist as compared to non-unionist.
- Of particular interest are the percentages of right extreme attitudes found in the middle class: Union membership in the middle class is comprised mainly of skilled workers and mid-level managers. This is the core of union membership, accounting for nearly 50%. Union members reflect the overall incidence of right

extreme attitudes among all members while non-members in this class are significantly – almost 50% - less prone to agreeing to right extreme statements. While they mirror the general population overall in their right extreme attitudes, unionists in this class are significantly more right extreme oriented than non-members with the same socio-economic status.

e) The explanatory limits of socio-economic categories

Up to this point the findings we have presented have been based on socio-economic categories. And indeed, the literature on right extreme attitudes generally argues that the increasing precariousness of social status and employment fosters the growth of such attitudes (cf. Dörre 2004). On the contrary, however, the results of our research show that while socio-economic factors certainly are relevant, standing alone, they provide only a partial and sometimes even an inconsistent and contradictory explanation for the endorsement of such views. As we have shown above, the social distribution of right extreme attitudes does not fit to a model in which socio-economic factors such as job loss, precarious employment or the status of a "modernization loser" are the primary or even sole causal factors determining right extreme attitudes.

As such, this is where we turn to an additional set of independent variables which can be subsumed under the heading of socio-political orientations. These include personality traits such as authoritarianism or self-confidence, values and general social and political viewpoints. In our evaluation of the survey data, two distinct and very broadly defined patterns of orientation emerged: one marked by democratic convictions and one dominated by authoritarian convictions. Again, while "democratic" and "authoritarian" include particular and distinct political views, they are used here in a much broader sense to refer to general socio-political orientations. We were able to show empirically that the stronger the former (democratic orientation), the less likely a person will harbor right extreme attitudes. Likewise, persons with authoritarian convictions have a clearly positive attitude toward right extremism, especially when such convictions are reinforced by a "gut reaction"

triggering disaffection and distain for the political process and the socio-economic and political system as a whole⁴.

f) *Status and Attitude*

Our interpretation of the empirical data together with the insights gained from the qualitative segment of our project in the group discussions shows that the role of social status in determining the prevalence of right extreme attitudes has been generally over-emphasized. In contrast, we argue that the readiness (*Anfälligkeit*) of a person to embrace such attitudes is less dependent on problems growing out of social status than on the way in which such problems are dealt with individually. In a very broad and general sense we found both democratic and authoritarian orientations in the answers given by the respondents, indicating two basic kinds of approaches to dealing with the complexities and uncertainties of a changing environment: On the one hand, there were the self-confident individuals with a clear orientation toward democratic values, displaying a readiness for active political or social involvement (in unions); at the other end of the spectrum were those persons exhibiting a tendency to turn over responsibility for their situation to authoritarian elements which promise decisiveness, power, security and order.

g) *Democratic and Authoritarian Convictions of Members and Non-Members*

Referring again to our class model, union members from all three classes have a stronger participatory orientation than non-members (Figure 4). From this we could assume that union members are more resistant to right extremism than non-members. However, a differentiation along class lines and a comparison with levels of disaffection and distain for the political system ("gut rejection" attitudes) shed a different light on this phenomenon.

Lower class: Here we find a comparatively low level of participatory orientations, an especially problematical social status and strong disaffection with the political system ("gut rejection" attitudes). However, union

⁴ In our project report we labelled this "gut reaction" *systemkritisch*, which led to misunderstandings and even consternation.

members are somewhat more democratically oriented and are less concerned about the precariousness of their social status than their non-union counterparts.

Upper class: Attitudes in this category reflect relatively strong "gut rejection" orientations. However, members are less prone to embrace right extreme attitudes than non-members due to their much stronger participatory values.

Middle class: The social status of members in this category is less endangered than that of non-members. And members have a stronger democratic and participatory orientation than non-members. However, their "gut rejection" disposition is extremely strong. Union members are to a much greater extent than non-members highly dissatisfied with the political and socio-economic situation, they show a tendency to be indiscriminately critical, assuming a position of "fundamental opposition".

Again, it must be emphasized that support for right extreme positions can not be measured solely on the basis of socio-economic status, nor do socio-political orientations alone provide a sufficient explanation of this phenomenon. Our findings have clearly shown, for example, that the problems associated with socio-economic change (modernization losers) are a contributing factor, but certainly not capable of explaining right extremism in full. Together, however, socio-economic status and socio-political orientations form a powerful set of indicators from which we can draw insights regarding the context, the content and the distribution of right extreme attitudes among union members.

Figure 6 helps to illustrate this point and to explain how these two types of criteria, socio-economic status and socio-political orientations, fit together and interact. The path model which we developed from our analysis of the quantitative survey data can be used to determine the dependency relationships among a selection of independent variables. Three conclusions can be drawn from this data:

- First of all, education (BILDUNG) is by far the most important explanatory factor and has the greatest overall influence on the existence of right extreme attitudes (REXL). There is also a strong path coefficient between education and class

status (SCHICHTD), indicating that education is an important determinant of class.

- Secondly, the socio-economic status factors of class status (SCHICHTD), modernity of the workplace (MODARB) and precarious employment (PREKAR) have only a moderate influence on the formation of attitudes of disaffection (*systemkritisch*) (SYKROR). This is equally true for education as well. Authoritarian personality traits, economic and social dissatisfaction, traditional socialist political views, and a hierarchical, non-participatory understanding of unionism are stronger influences on SYKROR. Nevertheless, SYKROR may be diminished or increased depending on the strength or weakness of the socio-economic factors, i.e. a lower class position, a non-modern workplace and precarious employment would certainly increase SYKROR.
- However, and this is the third insight, none of the three socio-economic factors SCHICHTD, MODARB, and PREKAR has a direct effect on the persistence and development of PARTOR, the participatory variable based on democratic attitudes, a leftist political consciousness and an understanding of unionism as grass roots activism and mobilization. PARTOR is wholly a function of socio-political orientations and education. Its strength or weakness is not affected by changes in class status, in the modernity of the workplace or in the extent to which a person's employment status is precarious.

PARTOR and SYKROR, the two bundles of socio-political orientations, confirm that right extreme attitudes are determined primarily by how a person deals with his/her socio-economic status and not by that status in itself. Precarious employment and poor (antiquated) working conditions, are not, as some industrial socialists tend to claim, factors which can independently explain the readiness of a person to embrace right extreme attitudes.

h) Disaffection among Middle-Class Union Members

The middle class includes 43% of all trade union officials⁵ and persons in this classification can not be generally categorized among the "modernization losers".

⁵ The term "officials" refers to all paid and non-paid unionists representing the union.

And yet, one-half of all union members with right extreme attitudes are from the middle class. Stated differently, this group of right extremists comprises 10% of the whole membership. In the upper and lower classes of our model we find the other one-half of the group of union members with right extreme attitudes. But since the deviance between members and non-members in these classes regarding such attitudes is relatively small, we will focus on the middle class in search of reasons for union members being much more vulnerable to right extremism than their compatriots from the same socio-economic group.

It is among middle class members, the backbone of union officials and membership and a group in which the majority are skilled workers and mid-level salaried employees, that we found "gut rejection" positions, a fundamental disaffection from the political system, to be especially virulent. Apparently, they stem from changes and uncertainties which these union members – in particular those in western Germany – perceive as already or potentially endangering their social status and achievements. The success story of the Federal Republic up through the 1980's was marked by the input and recognition achieved by union officials, active union members and works council members as the backbone of a successful integration of the working class and an income and labor policy of increasing affluence. Skilled workers as the backbone of union membership contributed strongly to the affluence of the Federal Republic, and they profited from the prosperity of the German Model. This status now seems to be eroding in the face of globalization, labor market deregulation, wage dumping and losses of union power and workplace representation. This group reacts especially sensitive to the loss of union power and the dismantling of their own success story. Among these union members we found the greatest concentration of respondents with strong anxieties about losing their hard-won social status as employees and political status as union members.

Still, the question remains as to why a notable percentage of this group harbors right extreme sentiments in the face of such problems. A closer look at the insights we gained from the group discussions provides additional insights on this phenomenon.

5. Examples from the group discussions.

We conducted the group discussions after completion of the quantitative survey, which turned up combinations of attitudes we found to be difficult to interpret when interrelated or when they seemed to be contradictory, such as support for both authoritarian values and social justice. In the group discussions we felt that such statistically evaluated contradictions could appear to be consistent in the views of individual persons.

To evaluate the statements from the interviews we used an extensive coding system to construct a "union belief system" consisting of ten core elements (Table 3)⁶. While the survey showed that such a belief system was not widespread in the membership, we could find evidence that union officials and active members did generally embrace a common understanding of "unionism". And this was confirmed by the group discussions.

**Table 3:
Overview of the Core Elements of a Union Belief System**

KE I	Unions represent employee interests in opposition to the otherwise overly powerful interests of the employers.
KE II	Unions need to be able to secure adequate wages, working hours, and working conditions. Therefore they must prevent wage cuts and a worsening of working conditions.
KE III	Unions must be unconditional representatives of the idea of equal rights and the equality of all persons.
KE IV	Unions must adhere unconditionally to the goal of social justice.
KE V	Unions must represent the interests of employees in the political arena, but they must remain independent of political party influence.
KE VI	Union officials are generally the decision-makers (<u>Stellvertreterpolitik</u>) Active participation of the membership is the exception, although the ability to mobilize the membership is essential.
KE VII	Unions have to maintain their capacity for action and conflict, while at the same time maintaining their credibility as negotiating partners.
KE VIII	Unionism is based on solidarity.
KE IX	Unions must develop a stronger international perspective in their organizational basis and their policies.
KE X	Unions are actors and agents for worker participation as an essential element of a democratic society.

⁶ The final project report contains an in-depth discussion of the consistency of this "belief system" as well as its real deviances.

Of particular interest in the context of this paper is the extent to which this "belief system" contains elements which potentially protect against or are susceptible to right extreme attitudes. In particular, the principles of equality (III), solidarity (VIII), internationalism (IX) as well as codetermination and participation (X) clearly can be designated as "immunizers". In regard to the leftist political orientations expressed in core element (V) we found that there are limits to its immunizing effect. For one, two different positions showed up in the group discussions. When the participants were asked to comment on our overall finding that union members are just as prone to right extreme attitudes as non-members, some reacted with surprise and disbelief; others saw nothing unusual in this result.

The latter group regarded unions as having the purely economic function of reducing competition among workers in the labor market. Joining a union for this reason would not be dependent on a person's political persuasion or on the political program of the union. In contrast, those who understood union membership to reflect a workers' movement mentality and a common political value orientation ("in essence, leftist"), were shocked by our finding that union membership per se did not immunize against right extreme attitudes.

This brings us to the second limitation in regard to the principle of political orientation and involvement as an immunizer which has to do with the "leftist" political consciousness of a union belief system. "Leftism" is a broad category which also includes what we designated as a "traditional socialist" attitude pattern: support for nationalizing large corporations, for the continuing importance of class conflict between the Haves and Have-nots, and for the statement that there can be no real democracy in capitalism. Our survey revealed that such an attitude pattern not only immunized against right extreme attitudes, it also correlated positively with them.

In the group discussions we found that especially the younger unionists referred to common historical traits between leftist and rightist movements. In reference to classic totalitarianism one of the participants said that both the left and the right had the phenomena of a "strong man" and a "strong state" in common. And nationalization of key enterprises, several argued, seemed to fit well to rightist demands that the government ensure jobs for Germans. In evaluating these statements it seemed important to us to point out that all of the references to commonalities between leftist and rightist positions did so not in totality but by

randomly selecting individual elements for comparison.

From an historical perspective, right extremist, fascist and national "socialist" movements were able to use elements of Marxist social critique for their own purposes. And the experience of a Soviet-style dictatorship in East Germany has heightened the impression of similarity for many, especially since the theoretical tradition of a democratic-humanitarian socialism is unable to present a convincing political perspective, especially since 1989. Instead, the extreme right uses elements of leftist political demands such as the protection and maintenance of the welfare state to join the protests against the reduction of social benefits by the Agenda 2010 and against the Hartz reforms in the labor market.

Even more concerning are further elements of the "belief system" which lend themselves as support for right extreme attitudes. This may take place either directly or indirectly and dialectically. The direct connection would be in the case of union policies to maintain labor standards being couched in terms of the need to ward off wage dumping by foreigners. This kind of "*Standort*" policy could easily provide an inroad for spreading racist and nationalistic parables.

The indirect possibility, which seems to be more likely to us, results from unfulfilled expectations which members have toward their union, i.e. protection from job loss and the loss of social status, decent wages and the organization of solidarity. The increasing economic and political challenges which unions have been facing over the last decades has weakened them and reduced their capacity to fulfill their proclaimed role. The response of a considerable number of members is disappointment, which can express itself in a variety of ways, including resigning from membership, in a lowering of expectations (concession bargaining), in demands that "the union" protest adverse policies more vehemently, or even in a willingness to entertain the simple solutions of the extreme right (a stronger state, a strong leader). As such, it is not the elements of the "belief system" themselves which open the door for right extreme attitudes; rather it is their negation and the feeling of individual and collective powerlessness in the context of developments which erode the achievements of the German Model. The union "belief system" is open to right extreme attitudes because its programmatic assurances of protection and collective solidarity seem hollow in the face of employer demands and politically instrumented changes to the system and in many respects, remain unfulfilled.

In the last part of this section we will present the two key areas in which the participants of the group discussions saw right extreme attitudes making inroads among union members: wage dumping and black market competition on the one hand and the increasing fear of a loss of social status and a reduction in social justice on the other.

Wage dumping and black market competition

"Foreigners" and the prevalence of xenophobia are an omnipresent issue in the world of work in Germany, and the often contradictory discussion inputs from the participants reflected this quite clearly. Although the German unions have taken a clear stand against scapegoating foreigners, the increasing competition for jobs as firms rationalize or relocate production outside of Germany together with the opening of the German labor market has heightened aggression against foreigners and such statements as "the foreigners are stealing our jobs" have become commonplace in certain sectors of the economy such as the construction and service sectors.

"I know that this is a delicate topic in the construction union (IG BAU), for example, in Cottbus [on the Polish border]; it is virtually impossible to hold a reasonable discussion on this topic because the membership is so adamant about their position: The foreigners are stealing our jobs!"

Others in the discussion pointed out that this is certainly not the official position of the union, and that the presence of foreign workers in Germany is not the cause of the economic problems. Most of the participants from private enterprises pointed out that the workforce where they were employed was multinational. At work, they could vouch for the fact that there was no inherent sign of xenophobia. All nationalities – Germans and foreigners who live in Germany with extended work permits – cooperated well together.

I have worked in the mine since 1971, together with Turks, Italians, French, Spaniards, Swiss – you name it, from every country around us. And I never felt that any of them was taking anything away from us, any particular job or employment in general. Everyone, independent of their nationality, who lives in Germany, could apply for the job and get it.

On the other hand, some of the discussants pointed out that when job cuts were announced, or a particular department was scheduled to be outsourced, "foreigners"

became an issue which divided the workforce. As reported by our participants, some of whom became quite emotional while discussing the problem, the restlessness and uncertainty was even greater when jobs were relocated to a foreign country or outsourced to subcontractors. And there was a general current of feeling unjustly treated and at a disadvantage when it was necessary to compete with foreigners working, but not living in Germany. Here is an example of such a statement, in this case coming from a worker who immigrated from Poland.

We Germans, we live here and pay our rent and our taxes. And when my brother comes here from Poland, where he lives with his family, he works here for two months, lives with me, makes money and lowers the market price with his 5 or 6 Euros an hour. Then he goes back home with his earnings, stays for a month and then comes back again. And that's why I don't want him working here.

Another discussant had this to say: *A construction site in Dortmund, the Holzmann Co. has hired 300 Rumanians for 3 Euros an hour. The union knows that, and the mayor knows that. Their ruining the market, and who's to blame? It's the politicians at the top.*

The dilemma for these unionists is evident: How can the high level of wage standards and working conditions, which the union has achieved, be protected? Combating non-regulated work and wage dumping is their obvious answer, but this puts the union in a potentially anti-foreigner position since this kind of work is usually done by foreign workers. For the German construction workers union (IG BAU) the issue is the protection of standards from any undercutting, regardless of the nationality or ethnic background of the perpetrator. The union has rejected the notion of priority treatment for Germans in favor of protecting persons in the labor force living in Germany. On face, this is an argument which is not readily shared by all and union activities to report wage dumping in cooperation with public authorities have been roundly criticized by anti-racist and foreigner support groups. But it seems to have the full support of union officials and many members. Nevertheless, some unionists were fully aware that union arguments for organizing solidarity to protect nationally achieved labor standards were being undermined by globalization and labor migration, opening the way for the spread of xenophobic and right extreme attitudes.

The loss of security, solidarity and social status

In their struggle for better wages and working conditions and in their demands for worker participation, unions awaken expectations. In times of crisis or restructuring, those expectations may even grow, although unions are often less able to meet them. Disappointment and a feeling of helplessness may spread:

Unemployment, the growing power of companies just from one day to the next to say "Pack your belongings; we're closing down this plant". Why is that possible? Where does that leave me? My existence is threatened! This is the kind of feeling that many have. Even those with secure jobs feel that they could be the next in line."

Competition is growing – fewer jobs, more competition.

In the group discussions there was a broad consensus that conditions were generally worse today than in former times and that they were worsening. While the conclusions drawn from that attitude covered a wide range of positions, our findings seem to indicate that some of the disappointed members look for the fulfillment of their expectations in right extreme arguments and solutions. "Die Politik" in general, i.e., the political establishment – and in particular the social democracy (SPD) –, is blamed for the worsening situation of working people and for not upholding the principles of social justice (*"We have a 'red' government which is ignorant regarding basic social policy."*). Repeatedly, we heard the argument that the demise of the SPD as the political arm of the labor movement and the upholder of social rights as well as the failure of the unions and their supporters to mount an effective opposition to this development had led to political chaos, resulting in a growing *"wish for a strong hand to bring an end to the chaos."* Dissatisfaction with the results and outputs of the political process is transformed into dissatisfaction with the processes themselves. Politics is not only socially unjust, it is also chaos under the label of democracy. Arguments such as these which result from disappointment link social justice to "order", which can only be restored via authoritarian means. When democratic participation is dysfunctional because it is incomplete, and when political alternatives are unavailable in the party system⁷, then only a "strong hand" would be capable of restoring order and ensuring social justice.

⁷

The project survey and group interviews were completed before the new political party "Election Alternative for Work and Social Justice" (WASG) was founded. In the Federal elections of 2005,

Such utterances reveal that social justice, one of the principles of a union belief system, can provide an opening for right extreme attitudes cloaked in the guise of an authoritarian state, when both the government and the unions fail to meet the expectations of union members in respect to the protection of jobs, the provision of socio-political correctives to the dynamics of capitalism and the guarantee of a measure of social security. Among union members we found such attitudes expressed in terms of the spreading of existential fears and the disappearance of any hope for collective interest representation and organized solidarity.

People have recognized who really runs things in this country, it's the employers who are in charge, not the politicians. The employers can do what they want. Whether they operate in this country or move their plants to somewhere else, that's not their worry. And that's why people long for the strong man who will tell the employers what they're supposed to do.

People are not well off, and everyone blames someone else, while hoping that someone will come along and solve their problems.

What is especially notable about these kinds of attitudes is that they are not only found among so-called modernization losers or the downwardly mobile, a finding which the SIREN project also confirmed (Flecker/Hentges 2004: 147f.). Even our discussants from Volkswagen, the epitome of a social partnership employer, expressed a deep-felt uncertainty over the future of their jobs. Our survey results showed a relative susceptibility on the part of the organized middle class for right extremism, a finding which was confirmed by the group discussions: The core of union membership, the better paid skilled workers from large industrial plants, is by no means any longer particularly resistant to right extreme interpretations of the current situation.

6. Summary and a Review of our Conclusions

Findings from our quantitative survey confirmed that right extreme attitudes are as widespread among union members as among non-members. On this overall level of comparison between members and non-members, the "mirror image" hypothesis was

the WASG achieved notable support in areas in which the right extreme parties had been expected to increase their percentage of votes.

confirmed, thus negating our original assumption that union members in general may be characterized as having a specific identity associated with their membership.

A closer look at the survey findings in conjunction with our group discussions modifies this finding and provides a more differentiated and complex picture of the prevalence of right extreme attitudes among union members in Germany. Both similarities and notable differences in attitudes between members and non-members can be found, depending on factors of socio-economic status and socio-political orientation.

An important finding from our research is that factors of socio-economic status alone can not explain the incidence and distribution of right extreme attitudes. There is a clear indication that democratic convictions (strong political consciousness and self-assuredness, democratic orientation, libertarian positions) on the one hand and authoritarian convictions (restrictive understanding of democracy, affinity to orderly structures) on the other hand have a strong influence on whether right extreme attitudes are discernable or not.

As we have referred to above, union membership is strongly concentrated in the middle class, and in comparison to non-members in the middle class, the unionists are considerably more prone to right extreme attitudes. As Figures 3 and 4 show, middle class union members have stronger participatory orientations than non-members. And yet, at the same time, within this group, disaffection and distain for the are not only stronger in absolute terms, they are also relatively stronger in comparison to non-members. These unionists are apparently extremely dissatisfied with the economic and political situation in Germany. A considerable number of them are frustrated by the unions and by the fact that the unions have not been able to stem the tide of deregulation, outsourcing, downsizing and pay cuts. And they feel betrayed by the political establishment, in particular by the SPD, which they no longer consider to be a representative of their interests. At the workplace, restructuring toward more decentralization and the introduction of individual and group performance measurements and communication lines is bypassing the status they had achieved and become accustomed to under the wing of the union and the union-dominated works councils. Instead of being the leaders and the main benefactors of the German Model (Markovits 1982) as part of a broadly anchored community of solidarity, they regard themselves as having been shunted aside and deprived of

their previous hard-earned status. For some of them, i.e. the 19% with right extreme attitudes, protection against further losses in status and position can only come from sources espousing nationalistic and ethnocentric policies.

In absolute terms, the lower class – both unionists and non-members – has a distinctly greater propensity toward right extreme attitudes. The strength of right wing positions in the lower class is unsettling, to be sure, but it is hardly a new insight. More alarming is the growth of right extreme attitudes in the middle class among the core groups of union members. This is the quintessence of our research findings and our arguments on behalf of an intensive and open discussion within the unions regarding this problem. For without directly confronting right extremism not only as a general political issue, but also as one of the possible reactions to the many political and socio-economic challenges facing the unions and the workforce today, it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible for the unions to deal with this phenomenon effectively.

Table 1: Agreement with Right Extreme Statements and Cumulated Indices of the Survey. Members and Non-Members in Percent

	Members			Non-Members			All Resp.
	All	West	East	All	West	East	
DIKTA (Index)	18	17	26	20	16	33	19
DIKTA_1	11	9	16	11	9	18	11
DIKTA_2	22	20	28	22	19	34	22
DIKTA_3	35	34	40	34	32	40	34
DIKTA_4	36	35	41	37	34	50	37
DIKTA_5	30	30	26	30	29	34	30
CHAU (Index)	31	31	30	32	31	36	32
CHAU_1	17	18	14	17	18	16	17
CHAU_2	40	40	39	41	40	45	41
CHAU_3	45	45	46	44	42	51	44
CHAU_4	43	43	46	45	43	52	45
CHAU_5	19	19	19	19	18	24	19
AUS (Index)	23	20	36	26	23	40	26
AUS_1	40	39	43	39	37	47	39
AUS_2	15	13	21	14	11	24	14
AUS_3	26	24	35	28	25	38	27
AUS_4	39	38	46	43	42	48	42
AUS_5	18	16	30	20	17	33	20
SEM (Index)	23	24	19	22	22	24	23
SEM_1	20	21	16	17	16	20	18
SEM_2	40	42	33	40	41	40	40
SEM_3	25	25	25	23	23	23	23
SEM_4	16	16	15	16	16	18	16
SEM_5	26	26	24	25	24	29	25
DARW (Index)	12	11	16	13	12	20	13
DARW_1	18	18	16	15	14	18	15
DARW_2	14	14	17	15	13	23	15
DARW_3	27	27	26	25	23	32	25
DARW_4	9	9	11	10	10	12	10
DARW_5	38	38	41	39	39	43	39
NS (Index)	28	29	24	29	29	28	29
NS_1	16	17	14	17	16	18	16
NS_2	18	17	18	17	16	19	17
NS_3	14	15	11	15	15	12	14
NS_4	66	67	61	68	69	65	68
NS_5	56	57	50	60	60	57	59

Figure 1:
Right Extreme Attitudes among Union Members and Non-Members by Labor Force Status Groups 2003 (%)

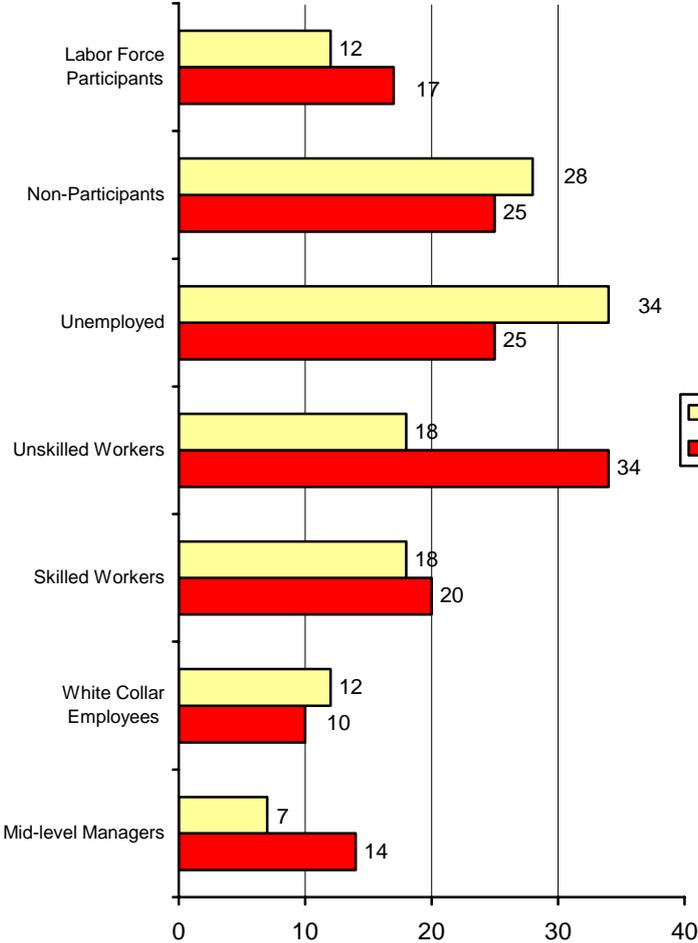
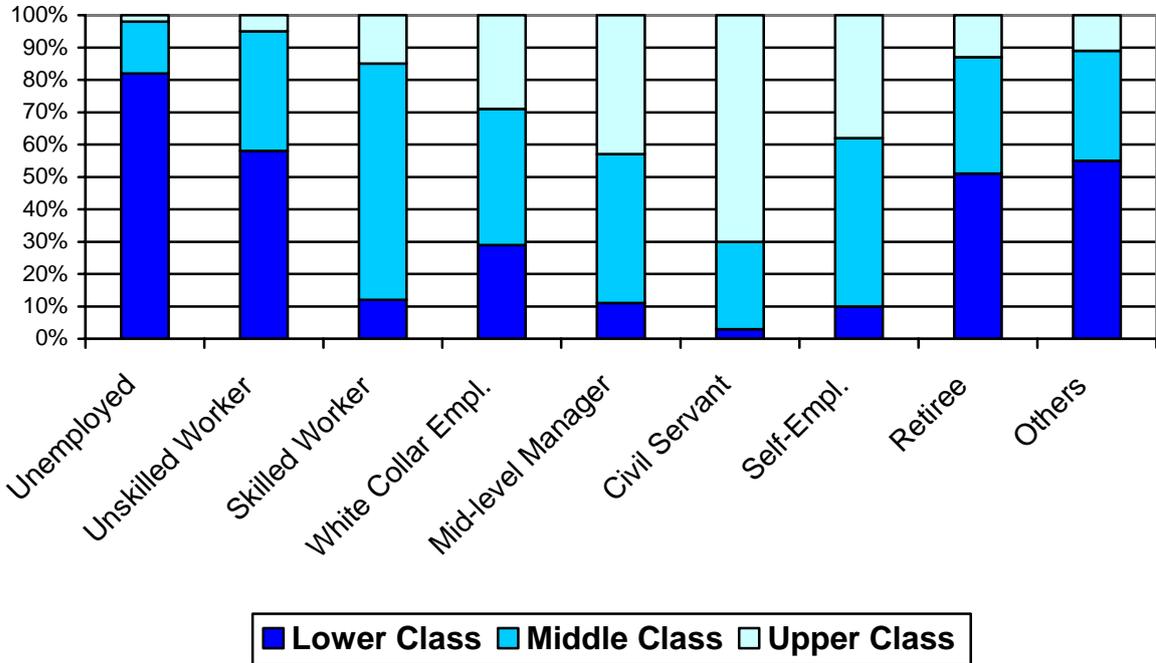
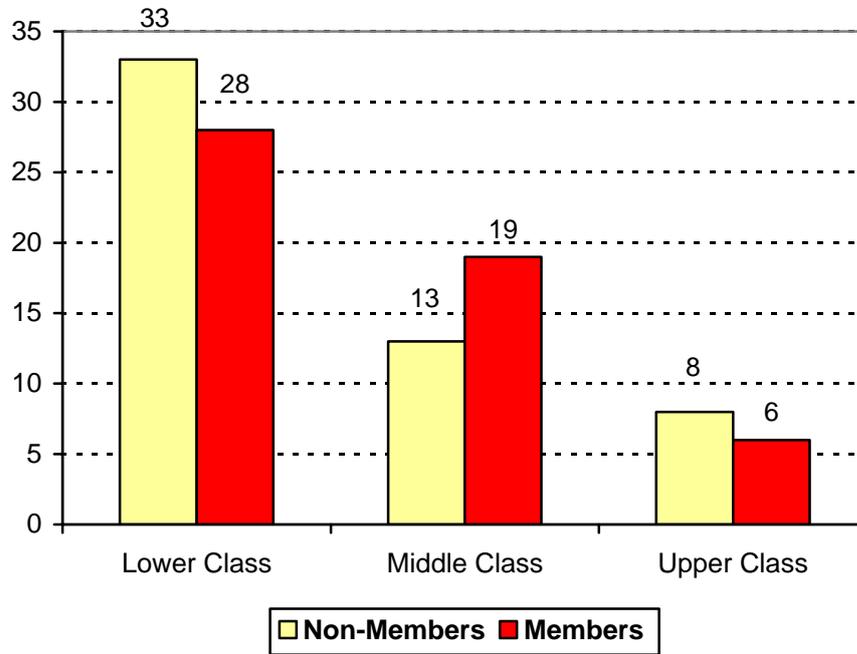


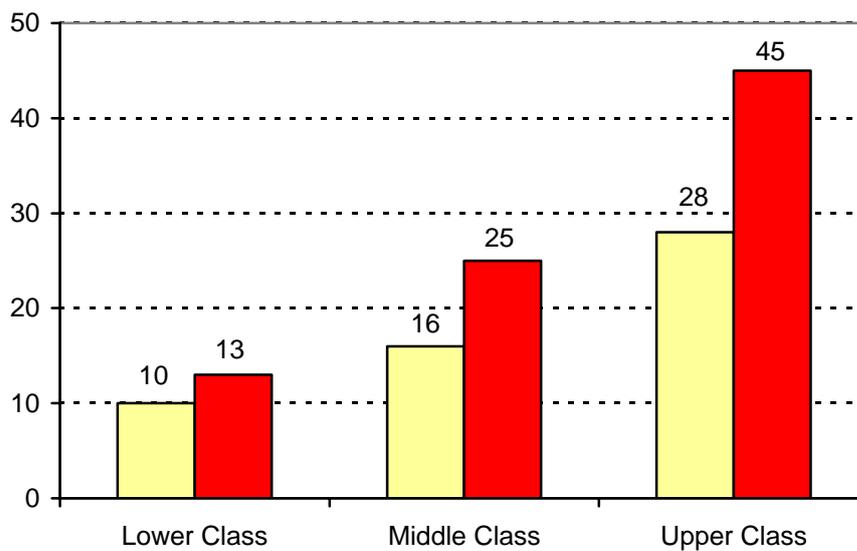
Figure 2:
Class Status of Union Members by Labor Force Status Groups
2003 (%)



**Figure 3:
Right Extreme Attitudes of Union Members and Non-Members
By Class Status 2003 (%)**



**Figure 4:
Participatory Orientations of Union Members and
Non-Members by Class Status 2003 (%)**



**Figure 5:
Disaffection Orientations of Union Members and
Non-Members by Class Status 2003 (%)**

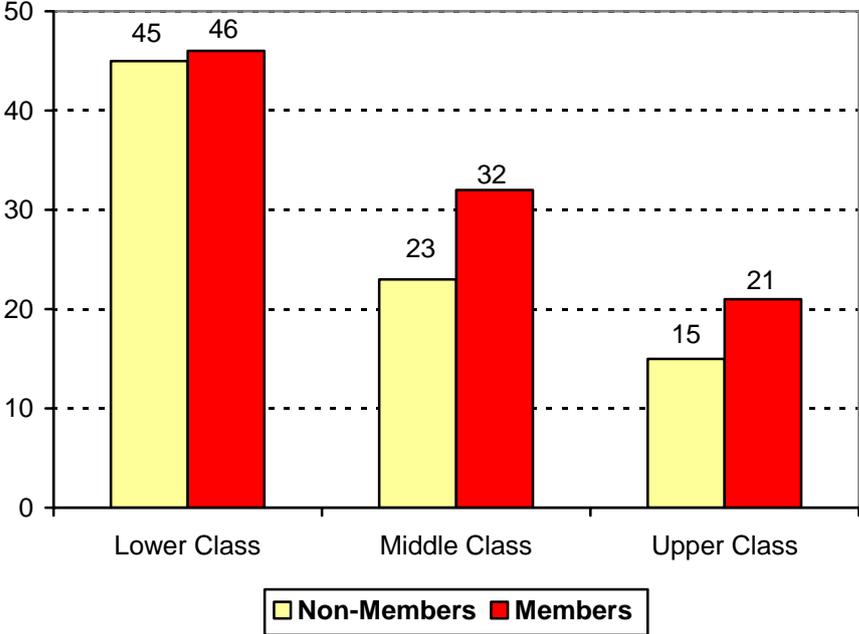
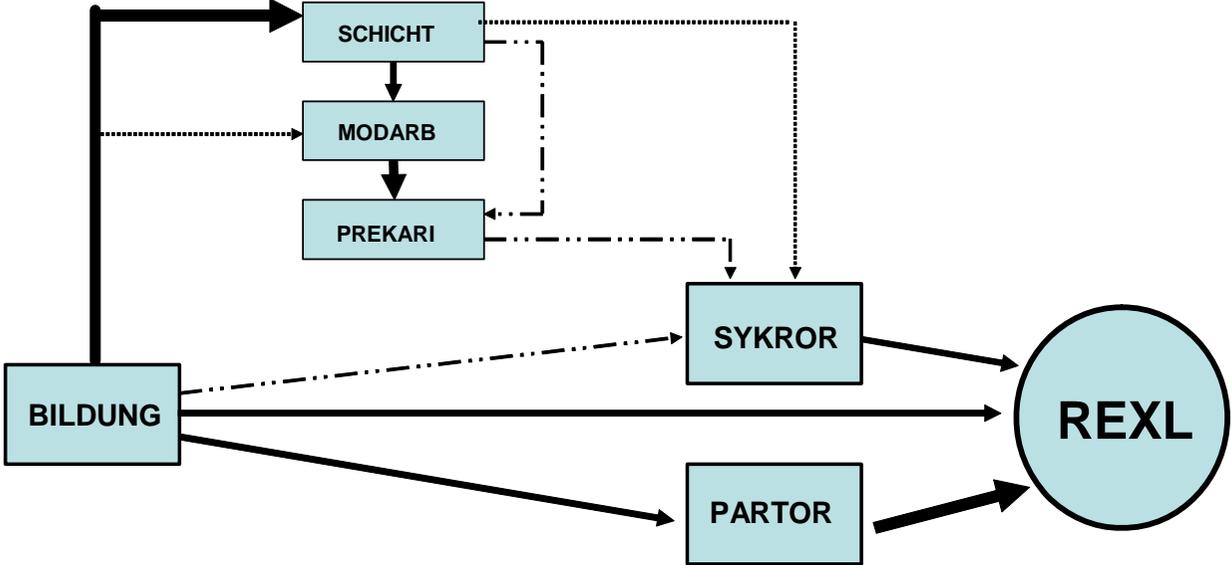


Figure 6: Path Model
Sources of Right Extreme Attitudes among Union Members



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