

Call for papers for a Special Issue of the EJIR: *Industrial Relations and the Rise of the Far Right in Europe*

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Far right (or extreme right) parties, defined by Mudde (2007) as ‘nativist’ and ‘authoritarian’, have increased their electoral support in Europe dramatically over the past two decades. Until the mid-1990s their vote share fluctuated on average around the 5% level; today the figure is around 25% (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2022; Rooduijn et al. 2024). In a number of European countries they now head the polls and participate in national government, sometimes as the leading party. Far-right parties now constitute the third largest group in the European Parliament, while other extreme right-wing parties – notably the *Fratelli d'Italia* (Fdi) – adhere to the fourth-largest group. In many countries these parties attract particularly high support among the manual working class, traditionally the stronghold of left-of-centre parties.

The rise of right wing ‘populist’ parties and movements has attracted much scholarly attention in recent years (Mudde 2021). However, the central focus of much of this literature has been on two main questions. First, what motivates a high proportion of the electorate to vote for these parties? Here, the main analytical debate has been between ‘economic’ explanations, which emphasise insecurity, inequality and relative deprivation; and ‘cultural’ explanations, which focus on xenophobia and Islamophobia. Second, what are the consequences for political systems which in many countries were previously dominated by the competition between centre-left and centre-right blocs? In what circumstances do established parties attempt to exclude the right-wing insurgents, collaborate with them, or seek to capture their agenda through a process of ‘position contagion’ (Enyedi et al. 2025)?

What has been much less studied, however, is the relationship between the extreme right and established industrial relations institutions. Here, two main themes have indeed been covered in some detail. The first is the relationship between the far right and social policy. While some of these parties (most notably the Fdi) have direct (neo-) fascist origins, most others (like the *Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD) have emerged from neoliberal, low tax and small-state parties, often as part of an opportunist attempt to appeal to a working-class constituency. Commonly they face internal divisions over their priorities, which they try to reduce through ambiguity, imprecision and ‘position blurring’ (Erben and Bieling 2020; Fenger 2018; Rovny 2013). These parties often seek to resolve such conflicts by promoting ethno-nationalism (jobs only for citizens) and welfare chauvinism (no benefits or housing for foreigners) (Ennser-Jedenastik 2018; Fenger 2018). In line with the assertion that they alone can directly represent the interests of working people, such parties commonly question the status of intermediary institutions, and in particular trade unions (Kim 2023; Rathgeb and Klitgaard 2022; Seghezzi 2026).

This points to another theme which has been extensively explored: the relationship between far-right parties and trade unions. In some countries they have attempted to establish separate right-wing unions; in others, to infiltrate existing unions and win official positions; in yet others they have launched violent attacks on unions. They have also presented candidates for election to workplace representative bodies, with varying degrees of success (Dörre et al. 2019; Kim et al. 2022). Trade unions in their turn have adopted

varied responses, to some extent reflecting the degree of the perceived challenge in each country (Bieling 2023; Devin 2022; Erben and Bieling 2020; Hoffmann and Meinardus 2023; Miessen et al. 2023; Stöss 2017).

The aim of the special issue is to explore the links between the far right and industrial relations, drawing as appropriate on recent literature and addressing in particular themes which as yet remain relatively under-studied. We welcome submissions which bring theoretical, empirical and methodological novelties to our current understanding of the impact of the rise of the far right on industrial relations actors and institutions, with a particular focus on, but not necessarily limited to, Europe. In line with the normal policy of the EJIR, papers taking a comparative approach will be preferred, which in some cases may involve cross-national collaboration between scholars. We suggest some of these themes, but will consider others.

- The far right in government and related institutions. Writing a decade ago, Afonso (2015) argued that such parties faced a 'trade-off between office and votes', and therefore had to choose 'whom to betray'. However, his focus was on the far right as junior partners in coalition governments, when it was impossible to satisfy both the electoral base and the (dominant) coalition partners. Since then, many such parties have become the main agents of government: are they subject to similar constraints? Is the greater challenge now to satisfy the incompatible demands of their different constituencies? There is some evidence that when forced to choose, they adopt pro-business rather than pro-labour policies (Barbakadze and Deakin 2026; Benito 2024). This issue demands more systematic analysis. Moreover, the main focus of existing literature has tended to be at national (or EU) level. However, the far right in many countries is in control of local or regional governments; Kim (2023) has published an exploratory study, but we need more extensive evidence and analysis.
- The effects and influence of the rise of the far right on 'actors' in the industrial relations system – trade unions, employers and their associations and the state – and their responses. This may include the impact on institutions such as collective bargaining, labour market regulation, social welfare and training. As noted above, there is already a substantial literature on involvement with trade unions and works councils. Far less is known about relationships with employers and their organisations. There have been high-profile cases of individual employers providing substantial financial support to the extreme right in a number of countries, but there is little systematic evidence on this; and the position of employers' associations – the extent to which they perceive the far right as a threat or an opportunity – has been little researched.
- How are industrial relations actors responding to the rise of the far right? To what extent are they adapting to the new political landscape, to what extent are they fighting back? As noted above, there is much literature on trade unions in this respect, but far less on other actors.

We invite detailed proposals for contributions (up to 1,000 words) by 30 April 2027. We will invite those selected to submit draft articles by 31 September 2027. The aim is to publish the Special Issue in 2028. Those considering possible submissions are invited to contact the Guest Editors (email addresses above) as soon as possible.

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