

At the Threshold of Social Respectability: On the political construction of new underclasses

Sous-classe ou précarité ? La signification de la propriété sociale

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Colloque international:

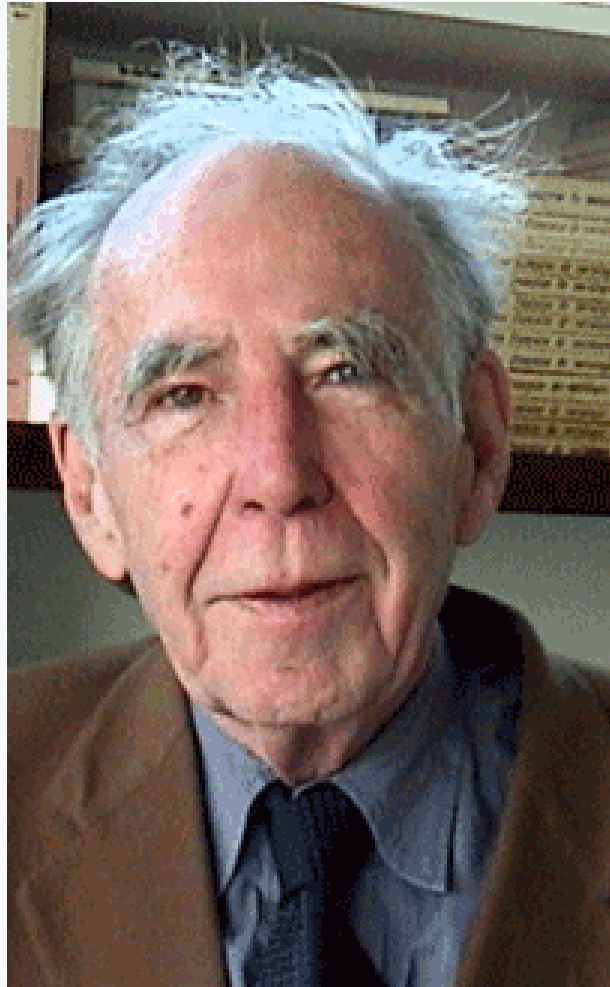
Robert Castel. Actualité et réception internationale



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Robert Castel

I. The Main Thesis

Ruling classes (fractions) which demand a “lean state,” low taxes, and the lowest possible labour and reproduction costs, are responsible (not alone but via an essentially complex set of causes) for the formation and recomposition of underclasses. Underclasses are characterized by structurally deficient social property, measured by common standards of normality. This means that they are suspected by the social majority of no longer being able to achieve individual reproduction through their own efforts and by means of their own achievements. They find themselves marked with the status of welfare and falling below the threshold of social respectability.

II. Zones of (In)Security 2003-2006

This contribution concerns the current debate on social disintegration.

- It starts out from the thesis that the precarization of gainful work endangers social cohesion.
- By way of a typology derived from empirical research it can be seen that the spread of insecure employment increasingly disciplines even protected regular employees.
- Furthermore, processes of precarization are an important cause of right-wing populist orientations.
- As a consequence, this contribution calls for a strategy of de-precarization as the cornerstone of an inclusive political coordinate system.

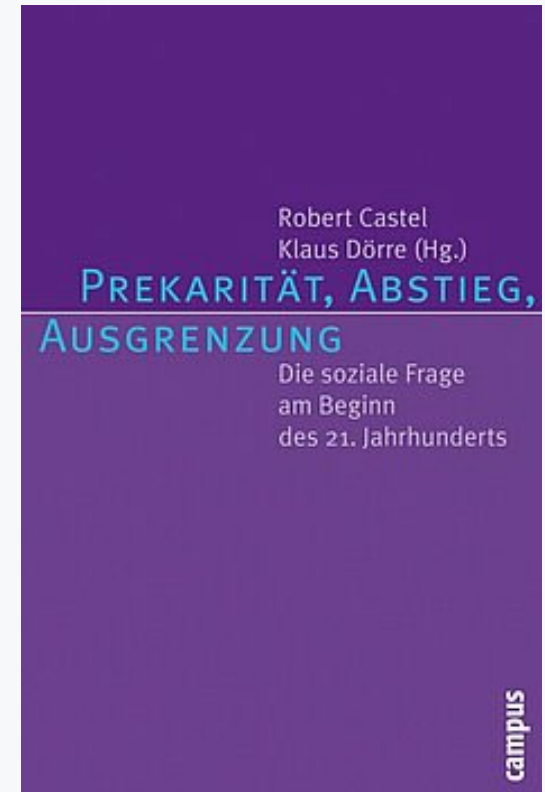


Table 1: (dis-)integration potentials of gainful work – a typology

zone of integration
1. secured integration (“those feeling safe”)
2. atypical integration (“those who are unconventional” or “self-managers”)
3. insecure integration (“those feeling insecure”)
4. endangered integration (“those being threatened by decline”)
zone of precariousness
5. precarious employment as an opportunity / temporary integration (“those who are hopeful”)
6. precarious employment as a lasting arrangement (“those being realistic”)
7. defused precariousness (“those being satisfied”)
zone of decoupling
8. exclusion which can be overcome: (“those willing to change”)
9. controlled exclusion / staged integration (“those being decoupled”)

III. The Construction of the Underclass

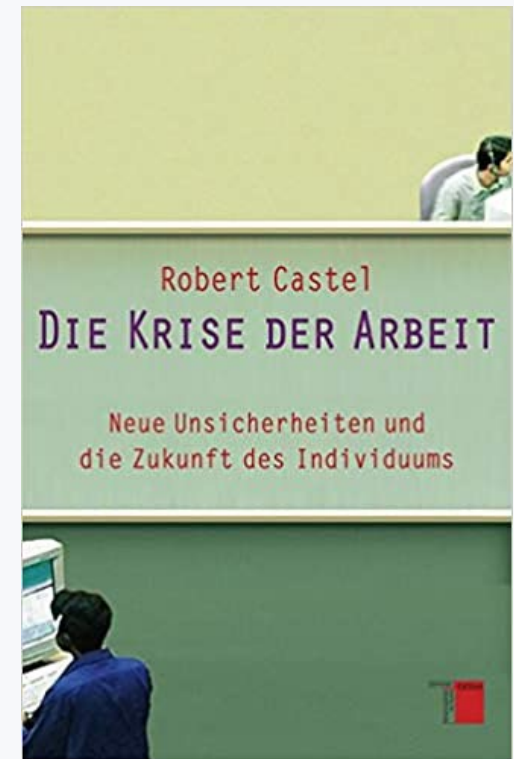


Table 2: Employment Orientations of Basic Social Security Recipients – Types and Subtypes

CORE CRITERIA	WORKERS AT-ANY-COST	AS-IF WORKERS	NON-WORKERS
Form of employment	Centrality of employment norm Paid work (remains) as centre of activity Handed down or lived normality of paid work First experiences of precarity Future expectations characterised by hope and confidence No “coming to terms” with unemployment	Relativisation of employment norm Experience of regular paid work Manifest experience of precarity Sense of the future ranges between hope and pessimism Ambivalent relationship to paid work (means of integration and source of insecurity)	Rejection of employment norm Distanced from labour market Vague idea of regular paid work No experience of paid work and loss of employment- related skills Lack of expectations for the future
Activity concept	Activism, sense of feasibility	Reintegration strategies: secondary labour market and alternative roles	Reintegration strategies: social networks and alternative roles
Method of dealing with situation	Untiring pursuit of paid work	Reinterpretation	Ignoring the employment norm
Socio-demographic characteristics	Medium and higher educational qualifications Labour market integration Age: 30 to 40	Medium and higher (but outdated) educational and vocational qualifications Unemployment and training measures Age: 40 to 60	No or low educational and vocational qualifications Long-term unemployment Age: 40 to 60
Sub-type I	The promising	The socially committed	The aimless
Experience of paid work	Good jobs and first experience of precarity	Succession of training measures and voluntary work	No experience of paid work
Anticipated chances	Precarity as an opportunity for and prospect of succeeding in own project	Little hope of integration into labour market	Vague sense of the future
Sub-type II	The no-alternatives	The pseudo-employed	The resigned
Experience of paid work	Varied experiences of precarious labour market integration	Succession of training measures and precarity	Experience of paid work long ago

IV. The Precarious Full-Employment Society 2012-2019

Robert Castel, 2011: "The hypothesis put forward here is that we are witnessing a shift from the classical employment relationship to forms of gainful employment below the level of employment, which could ultimately lead to a society of full employment, not to be confused with a wage-labour society in full employment. This development would mark the end of the wage-labour society, which, however, would not be an end of wage labour, because these activities would remain wage-dependent for the most part. But they would lose basic rights that were associated with the employment relationship and gave it status."





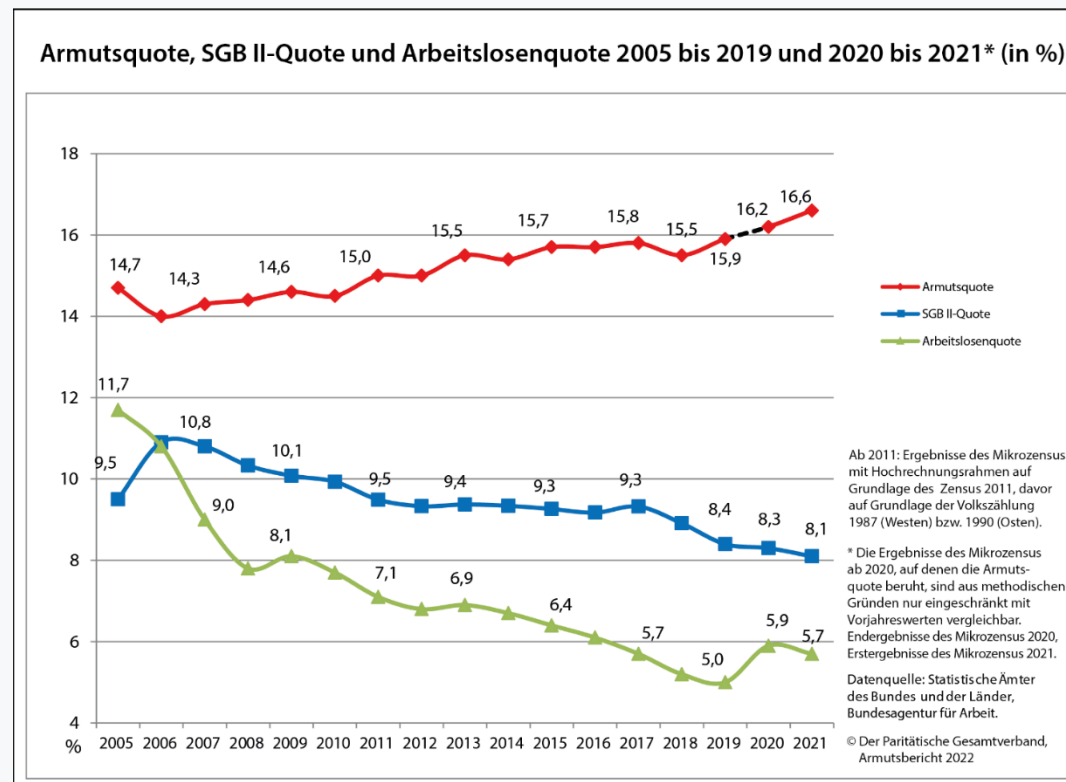
Robert Castel, 2004: The concept of class is blurring, but it would be "a grave mistake to underestimate the importance of collective determination, which would be at the core of the classical conception of social class-provided that one wants to keep in mind the social reality, which is still largely structured by relations of domination."

Table 3: Division by class

	BIBB/BAuA		H2Well	
	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number
Ruling class	1.3%	337	-	-
Old middle class	5.5%	1,460	5.8%	64
Zone of exclusion old middle class	1.9%	490	0.9%	11
New middle class	15.7%	4,182	11.2%	124
Zone of exclusion new middle class	4.7%	1,243	1.9%	21
New working class	9.6%	2,531	7.3%	81
Zone of exclusion new working class	2.6%	682	1.5%	17
Conventional working class	18.2%	4,823	21.7%	241
Zone of exclusion conventional working class	15.9%	4,216	6.6%	73
New underclass	3.3%	*	-	-
non-employed	21.4%	*	43.0%	477
Total	100%	19,964	100%	1,109

V. The Recomposition of the Underclass 2019-2023

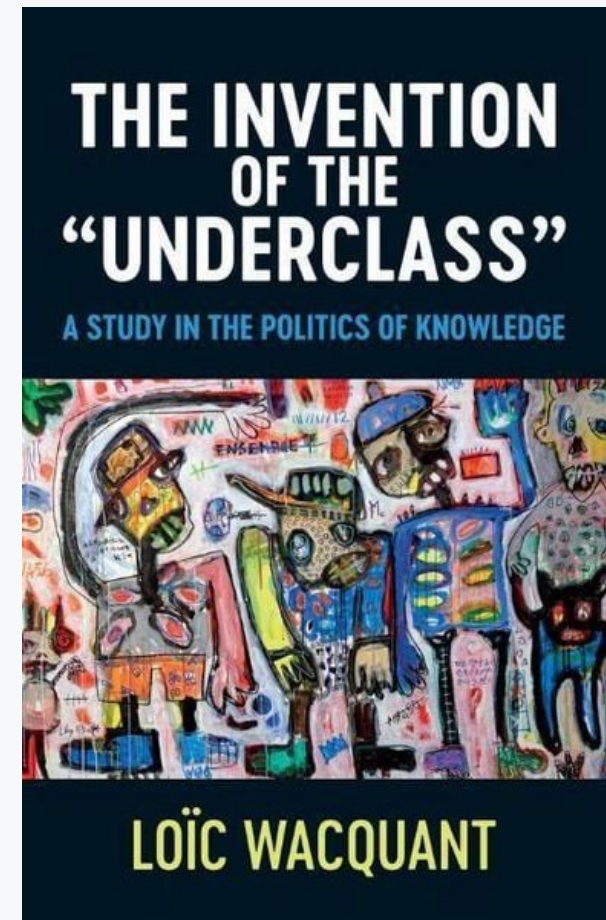
Figure 1: Percentage of population living in poverty (red), on Hartz IV/Bürgergeld (blue) and unemployed (green) 2005 to 2019 and 2020 to 2021



IV. The Precarious Full-Employment Society 2012-2019

“(…), the idiom of ‘underclass’ is derogatory, an identity that nobody invokes except to pin it onto a denigrated other.” (121)

“By this definition, the precariat comprises those social categories, shorn of economic or cultural capital, that are stuck in, or circulating between, insecure low-pay employment, chronic underemployment, and durable unemployment pursuant to the generalized degradation of labor, not to mention the gamut of job-readiness programs, subsidized jobs, training schemes, and other liminal statuses between employment and inactivity.” (162)



The image shows the front cover of the book 'Understanding Class' by Erik Olin Wright. The cover features a dark, atmospheric photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn, with a prominent bridge or structure in the center. The title 'UNDERSTANDING CLASS' is printed in large, white, sans-serif capital letters in the upper half. Below the title, the author's name 'Erik Olin Wright' is printed in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

UNDERSTANDING CLASS

Erik Olin Wright

Wright 2015: "It remains to be noted, then, that the precariat is either a part of the working class, if class is analyzed in terms of the basic rules of the game of developed capitalism in the twenty-first century; or it is itself a collection of several different class positions, if class is narrowly defined in terms of homogeneous interests determined by moves in the game. The precariat, as a rapidly growing segment of the working class and the bearer of the sharpest discontent toward capitalism, can play a particularly important role in struggles over the rules of capitalism and over capitalism itself, but it is not a class in its own right." (173)

My position: The precariat is not a class, but there are class-specific forms of precarity. Underclass and precariat are not identical. The New Underclass is a class that emerges due to a mechanism of negative socialization. Nevertheless, it is a real social phenomenon whose very existence contributes significantly to the demobilization of contemporary class societies. An important question is whether a rebellious collective consciousness can emerge in this class after all. An answer can only be found by means of empirical research and, above all, practically-politically.

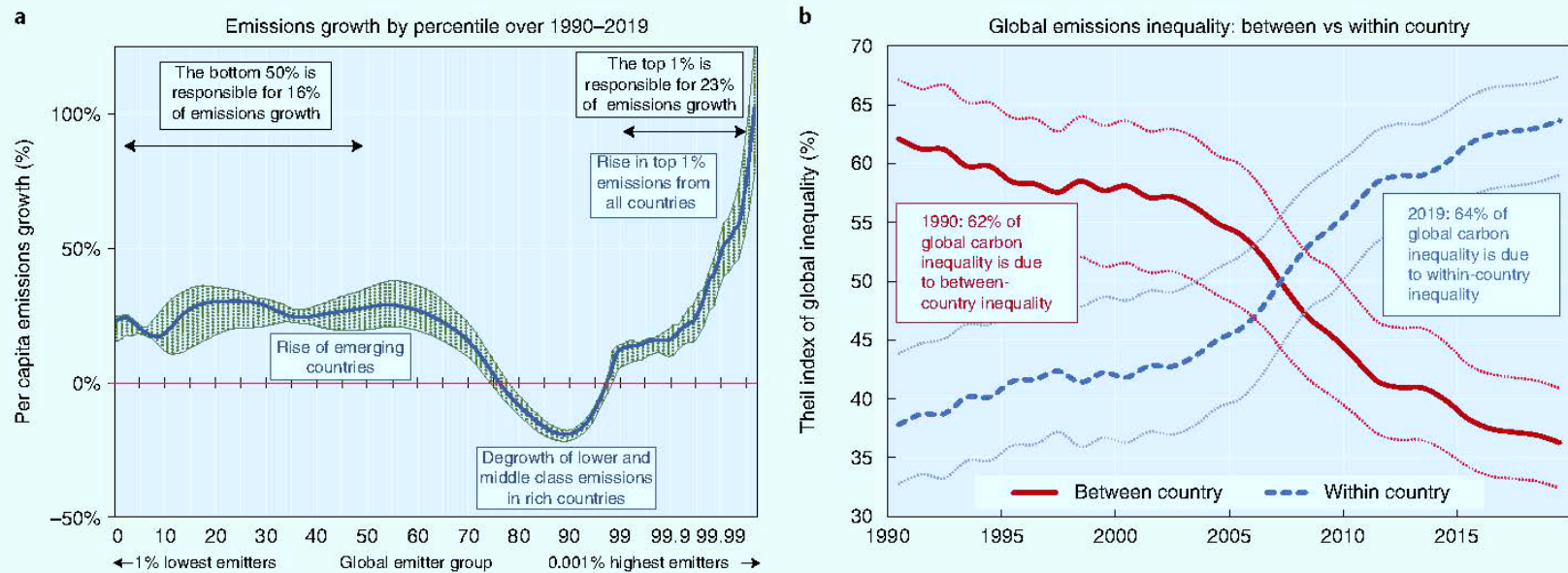


Fig. 3 | Global emissions inequality over 1990–2019. Personal carbon footprints include emissions from domestic consumption, public and private investments, as well as imports and exports of carbon embedded in goods and services traded with the rest of the world. Modelled estimates are based on the systematic combination of tax data, household surveys and input-output tables. Benchmark scenario. Emissions are split equally within households.

a, Growth in emissions by global emitter group over 1990–2019. Dotted area represents upper and lower bounds from our range of extreme scenarios.

b, Global emissions inequality between vs within countries. Dotted lines represent scenarios with $\alpha = 0.4$ and $\alpha = 0.8$. Source and series: Author, see Methods and Supplementary Information sections 5–7.

Source: Lucas Chancel: *Global carbon inequality over 1990–2019*, in: *Nature Sustainability* (2022), Fig. 3



Source: <https://www.jenaer-bier.de/biersorten/>