# Authoritarian Capitalism, Authoritarian Movements, Authoritarian Communication

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## 1. Studying Political Communication in Turbulent Times

We live in times of rapid political and social change that are highly complex and unpredictable. The 2008 crisis of the capitalist economy constituted a societal watershed. Rebellions, uprisings, occupations, revolutions, and counter-revolutions have become more frequent in the years since the crisis. Austerity measures, as well as short-sighted, uncoordinated responses to the the plight of refugees and to wars, have resulted in crises of national and transnational state power. In respect to ideologies and worldviews, socialism, nationalism and right-wing radicalism have been strengthened. New technologies and popular culture have been embedded into these changes.

Paolo Gerbaudo's (2017) book *The Mask and the Flag: Populism, Citizenism and Global Protest*, whose approach is reflected in his Crosscurrents piece in the issue of *Media, Culture & Society* at hand, is a response to these societal, political and academic challenges. Paolo suggests that the term populism should not simply be seen as signifying characteristics of right-wing radical movements, but should rather be understood in terms of people-power, grassroots empowerment, self-government, participatory democracy, and the common interest that aims at benefiting all those opposed to a particularism that benefits the few, the rich and the powerful at the expense of the many. He argues that left-wing populism is a long-standing tradition, a tradition that has resurfaced in new forms in recent progressive social movements.

Certainly, as Paolo Gerbaudo concludes in his contribution to this Crosscurrents section, the "future will tell if this populist potential of social media will only favour rightwing populists as Donald Trump and Nigel Farage that are currently taking the lead in defining this trend, or whether a more progressive and hopeful form of populism, such as the one championed by the likes of Podemos and Bernie Sanders will prevail". But history is not pure chance, but chance with necessity that can be influenced to a degree so that certain options for future developments become more likely and others less so. It is in this context that in my recent work I have become interested in a specific set of negative-dialectical questions that address another way of how critical research can inform left-wing movements. I ask: Why is it that right-wing authoritarian populism in recent times has become much more popular than left-wing movements? How do right-wing authoritarian movements communicate? Why is it that right-wing political communication strategies seem to garner and result in mass support? Engaging with these questions has convinced me that authoritarianism and authoritarian capitalism, rather than populism, are key critical theory categories for understanding, explaining

and intervening into the political conjuncture that we are currently experiencing.

## 2. Right-Wing Authoritarianism

The far-right is successful in using social media for political communication. The far-right's use of the Internet has been much less studied than progressive movements' communication. W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg's book The *Logic of Connective Action* (2013) mentions Occupy 70 times. It does not mention the Golden Dawn, Jobbik, the National Front, UKIP, Svoboda, Nigel Farage, the FPÖ, the Sweden Democrats, the Finns Party, Marine Le Pen, Geert Wilders, etc. a single time. The *Encyclopedia of Social Movement Media* (Downing 2011) presents 600 pages of analyses of "alternative media, citizens' media, community media, counterinformation media, grassroots media, independent media, nano-media, participatory media, social movement media, and underground media" (xxv). The focus is on all sorts of progressive, left-wing media, from the likes of the Adbusters Media Foundation to Zapatista media. The editor John Downing admits that "much less examination of media of extreme right movements occurs in this volume than there might be" (xxvi), but he does not explain why this might be the case, why it is problematic, and how it could be changed.

My argument is that we should not just study what we like, but also what we really dislike. Critical research is not a Facebook or Twitter 'like' button, but must try to impart insights that can inform changes in the world. This does not simply require construction and positivism, but also the analysis of negative dialectics that hinder, and at the same time require, determinate negations, positive negations of the negative.

Contrary to the other contributions to this Crosscurrents section, I do not find the concept of populism theoretically meaningful. Its uses are too confused, meaning that the term requires constant explanation when employed in academic research. In the broadest sense, populism is the movement of making something popular, such as in popular culture. Etymologically the term "popular" stems from the Latin word *popularis* that designates that something is prevalent in the public (Williams 1983, 236). In a more political understanding, populism means the movement of making something appealing to the people. The problem of this second meaning is that by the people one can refer to (a) all humans, (b) all citizens, (c) the nation and those belonging to it. There is a variety of meanings of the term "the people" as the *populace* that ranges from universalism on one end to nationalist particularism on the other end. Populism as political movement goes back to revolutionary movements in 19th century Russia (Labica 1987, 1026). But the term has also become associated with nationalist and right-wing extremist forces and ideology that try to appeal to prejudices, conceive of the people as an "undifferentiated unity" so that classes and their antagonisms are "denied and downplayed" (Labica 1987, 1028). Populism is therefore often associated with *"demagogy*, which has moved from 'leading the people' to 'crude and simplifying agitation'" and with "rightist and fascist movements which exploit 'popular prejudices'" (Williams 1983, 238). In addition, populism is also used

as a term for a particular style of politics that uses tabloidisation, scandalisation, entertainment, ridicule, simplification, one-dimensionality, and banalisation. Using a term such as "left-wing populism" is confusing because it can have many meanings: It can mean a political strategy that aims at ownership and control of society by all (self-management), a left strategy that uses popular culture, one that denies the existence of classes in a class society, one that uses tabloid politics, or one that resorts to traditionalist, nationalist or xenophobic rhetoric and prejudices.

Whereas for Gramsci (2000) the "national-popular" as populism has to do with popular culture, organic intellectuals, the cultural dimension of class struggle, the popular university, and the formation of a collective socialist will, Hitler (1926) in *Mein Kampf* understands populism as the popularisation of the anti-Semitic Nazi movement: "Later on the National Socialist Movement presented the Jewish problem in a new light. Taking the question beyond the restricted circles of the upper classes and small bourgeoisie we succeeded in transforming it into the driving motive of a great popular movement". That both Gramsci and Hitler embraced the notions of the popular and of populism shows that these are not well-suited terms for a socialist strategy. Populism is not a clearly delineated, but rather a politically confusing term.

Instead, the notion of authoritarianism is a more suitable concept for explaining the Trump phenomenon, as I have discovered in the research for my forthcoming book *Digital Demagogue: Authoritarian Capitalism in the Age of Trump and Twitter* (Fuchs 2018 for a preliminary prolegomena see Fuchs 2017a & Fuchs 2017c). The critical theory of authoritarianism advanced by the Frankfurt School and related authors on fascism, Nazism, and the authoritarian personality has been very helpful in this regard and particularly works by Franz Leopold Neumann, Erich Fromm, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Löwenthal, and Willhelm Reich. Seen as a totality, the body of works of these authors has the advantage that by combining political economy, ideology critique, and critical psychology it enables an integrative analysis of society. Furthermore, it combines the social sciences and humanities, social analysis and philosophy, empirical social research and sociological theory. These authors start from Karl Marx's notions of alienation and Georg Lukács' (1923/1972) concept of reification. They see exploitation, domination and ideological manipulation as types of instrumental reason, as forms of asymmetric power that instrumentalise labour power (exploitation), citizens (domination) and consciousness (ideology).

A first important insight of the Frankfurt School authors is that political economy and ideology critique are not enough to fully understand right-wing authoritarianism. The combination of both can explain why right-wing authoritarianism emerges in particular contexts, but not why individuals and groups follow it. Wilhelm Reich (1972, 5) argued that the Left and Left analysis in the period form 1918 until 1933 only focused on "*objective* socio-economic processes at a time of crisis" and failed "to take into account the character structure" and the "social effect of mysticism". In order to produce proper understandings, critical theory and critical empirical research need to combine political economy and ideology critique with critical psychology. The

success of far-right authoritarian populism is not just a matter of political-economic crisis and nationalist ideology. A significant dimension is that it appeals to people's everyday affects, emotions, desires, instincts, and drives.

Franz L. Neumann is one of the rather forgotten thinkers of the Frankfurt School. His works managed to combine political economy, ideology critique, and critical psychology in the critical analysis of authoritarianism (see Neumann 2017/1957, Neumann 2009/1944; Fuchs 2018; Fuchs 2017c) Neumann (2017/1957) argues that destructive collective anxiety that generates large-scale support for far-right movements, groups, parties, institutions, and systems can emerge when six conditions coincide: a) the alienation of labour; b) destructive competition; c) social alienation; d) political alienation in respect to the political system; e) the institutionalisation of anxiety; and f) destructive psychological alienation and persecutory anxiety.

These categories can be applied to an analysis of the links between current forms of neoliberal capitalism and the rise of right-wing authoritarianism. Neoliberal capitalism has resulted in the intensification of labour's alienation, the destructiveness of competition, the great fear of social decline, political apathy, and a lack of trust in the political institutions of democracy and politicians. Neoliberalism is a politics of social anxiety (precarious labour and precarious life) that can backfire and turn into fascist politics of political anxiety. In this political void, nationalist and xenophobic far-right movements and their authoritarian leaders have not only stoked fears by constructing scapegoats, but have also promised alternatives in the form of nationalism, strong leaders, and authoritarian rule. They advance persecutory anxiety by creating and supporting the unleashing of aggressions in collective forms, and direct these at scapegoats. Contemporary societies can come to tipping points where quantity turns into new qualities that may take on the form of authoritarian capitalism and the undermining of democracy. Neoliberal capitalism has experienced its own negative dialectic of the enlightenment and has increasingly been sublated into authoritarian capitalism (Fuchs 2018, 2017a).

However, authoritarianism is multi-layered. It can operate at the levels of a) an individual's psychology and behaviour; b) groups/movements/parties; c) institutions; or d) society. We must distinguish between right-wing authoritarian personalities, groups, institutions, and society. These levels are nested, meaning that an upper level always contains and requires all necessary preceding levels. Each level is a necessity, but not a sufficient condition for the next level. There is not deterministic or automatic development from one level to the next, only the possibility of emergence under specific conditions.

 In my analysis of the Frankfurt School's critical theory of authoritarianism, I have identified four elements of authoritarianism that Frankfurt School scholars seem to agree on: a) authoritarian leadership; b) nationalism; c) the friend-enemy scheme; and d) patriarchy and militarism. Nationalism is the construction of fictive ethnicity that tries to unite people around the ideological belief in a commonality organised through elements such as blood, traditions,

language, origin, and/or culture. Nationalism has a necessary outside, from which it distinguishes itself. The friend-enemy scheme constructs scapegoats, typically minorities, that are presented as society's ills and as the causes of social problems. The inclusive form of the friend-enemy scheme argues for the inferiority of the enemy group in order to exploit it, and the exclusive form constructs the enemy as inferior for the purpose of deportation, imprisonment, or extermination. In authoritarianism, "[h]atred, resentment, dread, created by great upheavals, are concentrated on certain persons who are denounced as devilish conspirators". In such situations, the "fear of social degradation […] creates for itself 'a target for the discharge of the resentments arsing from damaged self-esteem'" (Neumann 2017/1957, 624).

Right-wing authoritarianism is a type of political fetishism that idolises the nation as a mythical collective that is directed against perceived outsiders who must be contained, purged, or eliminated, in order to achieve greatness. Its ideological role is that it distracts attention from, and dissimulates, the complex structural causes of capitalism's social problems that have to do with class structures and social domination. Nationalism tries to construct an ideological unity of capital and labour in the form of the national collective that is said to share a national interest that is under threat by foreigners and foreignness. The world is presented as a struggle between nations, a view that fetishises and naturalises the nation and disregards the realities of class conflicts and power inequalities. There is a difference between right-wing authoritarianism, right-wing extremism, and fascism. Whereas right-wing authoritarianism violates democracy, opposition is still possible and to a certain extent tolerated, whereas right-wing extremism propagates and practices direct violence against opponents, and fascism institutionalises it in the form of a system of terror. Authoritarian capitalism is a form of capitalist political economy, in which the principles of right-wing authoritarianism – authoritarian leadership, nationalism, the friend/enemy scheme, militarism, patriarchy, – are, to a specific degree, practiced by the state in order to organise capitalism and assert capitalist interests. In authoritarian capitalism, nationalism, political fetishism and scapegoating are politically practiced as ideology put into legal form in order to distract attention from class contradictions.

Authoritarianism involves the belief in, and the practice of, hierarchic social structures dominated by the leadership principle. Leadership is applied as a principle of totality that has no respect for individuality in the organisation of the political system, the capitalist economy, the army, the family, and the cultural organisation. Erich Fromm pioneered the study of the authoritarian personality. He describes the right-wing authoritarian leader and his followers as sadomasochistic personalities characterised by the simultaneous "striving for submission and domination" (Fromm 1942/2001, 122). A sadomasochistic individual "admires authority and tends to submit to it, but at the same time […] wants to be an authority himself and have others submit to him" (141). Under the accumulated experience of particular conditions, the psychological striving for freedom and solidarity is suspended by negative dialectics of superiority/inferiority, love/hate, construction/destruction, submission/aggression. One psychological dimension of authoritarianism is

that it is a form of collective narcissism The vision of the strong leader produces the psychological "enlargement of the subject: by making the leader his ideal he loves himself, as it were, but gets rid of the stains of frustration and discontent which mar his picture of his own empirical self" (Adorno 1951, 140). "The narcissistic *gain* provided by fascist propaganda is obvious" (Adorno 1951, 145). An authoritarian leader presents himself as superman and ordinary, as a "great little man" (Adorno 1951, 142). The image of the superman allows projection and submission – the sado-masochistic desire to be a superman and to be dominated by a superman.

Militarist patriarchy combines the gender division of social life with the fetishisation of the male soldier as the ideal human being. Competition, egoism, violence, and, in the final instance, physical destruction, war, and imperialism, are seen as natural features of the human being and as appropriate solutions for social conflict. According to Klaus Theweleith (1987, 272),"Under patriarchy, the productive force of women has been effectively excluded from participating in male public and social productions". In patriarchy, leaders are typically male. The friend/enemy-scheme in the final instance leads to wars. Patriarchy entails militarism; the glorification of the male soldier, surveillance, the police; imperialism, and warfare. The figures of the soldier and the policeman are also bound up with nationalist ideology. The soldier and the policeman are in nationalist ideology seen as the defenders of the nation against foreigners and enemies. Authoritarians "destroy others to create themselves; they destroy things in the alien object-world and metamorphose into killing-machines and their components: a 'baptism of fire.' *Wreaking revenge* is their way of becoming one with themselves" (Theweleit 1989, 382). Militarist ideology and practice aims at annihilating the perceived enemies.

Speaking of right-wing authoritarianism implies that there is also left-wing authoritarianism. Stalinism was the best example of left-wing authoritarianism. It employed a socialist rhetoric and language, but used the leadership principle, nationalism, militarism, patriarchy, and a repressive state apparatus for the organisation and defence of a state-capitalist regime (James 1986). Only Stalinism's rhetoric was socialist. The Stalinist bureaucracy acted as a collective capitalist controlling the economy and exploiting waged and unwaged labour. In addition, the Stalinist economy was ideologically legitimated by a protestant ethic of toil, the idealisation of manual labour and abstinence (Marcuse 1958). Thus, the opposite of Stalinism is not "left populism", but democratic socialism.

Frankfurt School-authors' analysis of right-wing authoritarianism remains crucial today for understanding phenomena such as Donald Trump and their use of digital media.

### 3. Trump, Social Media and Right-Wing Authoritarianism

There is an academic dispute about the causes of support for right-wing authoritarianism. The culturalist hypothesis assumes that such support is the result of a cultural and generational gap between the older and younger

generations and the rise of post-material values (Inglehart and Norris 2016). The socio-economic hypothesis ascertains that the support of right-wing authoritarianism has to do with socio-economic inequalities, class structures, de-classification, and fears of social degradation (Bornschier and Kriesi 2012; Lubbers, Gijsberts and Scheepers 2002; Oesch 2008, Rooduijn 2016; Werts, Scheepers and Lubbers).

Taken together, there is ample evidence of certain tendencies, namely that voters of far-right parties live in rural areas, are older, are active or unemployed blue-collar workers, and live in areas that have become de-industrialised. Also unemployed, routine service workers and small business owners show a certain tendency to vote for far-right parties. Fears and realities of social degradation and declassification generated by neoliberalism, post-industrialisation, transnational capitalism, and computerised automation play an important role. The generational gap that was amply observed in the Brexit referendum is not a different, but related phenomenon: The rise of the knowledge-based society has brought about higher levels of occupation for the younger generation, which comes along with different social experiences, realities, and moral values than in the parent generation. The younger generation faces new forms of self-determination combined with precarity that together with its educational status makes them overall more likely to support left-wing over right-wing forces. Especially blue-collar workers experiencing the key factors that Neumann (2017/1957) described (see the previous section), including economic, social and political alienation, are prone to right-wing demagoguery.

The question of who supports right-wing authoritarianism is not new. Classical critical theories have often made the mistake to characterise right-wing authoritarianism and fascism as petty bourgeoisie movements. In contrast, more recent empirical research has shown that for example the Nazis had significant support of blue-collar workers both in respect to its membership and voters (Falter 1991, 2016; Fischer 1996). Nationalist ideology enables far-right parties to act as popular parties that promise something for every group in the name of the nation.

Authoritarian populism appeals to the emotions partly via public communications, including entertainment formats and social media. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that Donald Trump's two favourite media are reality TV and Twitter. Authoritarian politicians are convinced that one cannot "get at the masses with arguments, proofs, and knowledge, but only with feelings and beliefs" (Reich 1972, 83). Today, this circumstance is most often referred to as post-truth politics.

It is not an accident that Trump's preferred media are reality-TV and Twitter. Trump's capital accumulation is not simply real estate and casinos, but Trump the brand. Trump is a narcissistic self-branding machine that generates rent and profits for products that hold the Trump label. Trump is "the personification of the merger of humans and corporations – a one-man megabrand, whose wife and children are spin-off brands" (Klein 2017, 10). *The Apprentice* embodies the ingredients of social-Darwinist survival of the

fittest, competition, militarism, patriarchy, and hyper-individualism. Twitter is based on a culture of high speed, superficiality and brevity. It supports simplistic, brief 140-character, propaganda messages transmitted at high speed that allow Trump to live out narcissism and feelings of leadership. In turn, the platform allows his supporters to admire their leader and express their hatred for the scapegoats. Trumpism is a political model that combines Trump's self-branding with the logic of *The Apprentice* and Twitter (Fuchs 2018, 2017a).

Among the reasons of the success of the authoritarian Right is that the simplicity and aggressiveness of its ideology appeals to those who feel politically left alone, disenfranchised, disappointed, and anxious. Media-savvy right-wing leaders "instrumentalize such disenchantment in text, image and talk, via many discursive and material practices" (Wodak 2015, 182). Social media is, just like the beer tent, the pub, and the public assembly, a space in which right-wing authoritarianism is communicated. Right-wing authoritarianisation is based on the Haiderisation and the Berluconisation of politics (Wodak 2013) – two forms of far-right authoritarian politics using entertainment and media publicity that were pioneered by Jörg Haider in Austria and Silvio Berlusconi in Italy.

Right-wing authoritarian communication is a semiotic strategy that publicly communicates right-wing authoritarianism's four elements. Based on critical theory, we can study how right wing authoritarianism is communicated in public, such as on social media. For the book *Authoritarian Capitalism in the Age of Donald Trump and Twitter*, I have used Frankfurt School theory as foundation for the analysis of Trumpism and Trump's communication strategy. For the empirical analysis, I collected all postings from Trump's Twitter-account @RealDonaldTrump for the time period between the start of the Republication National Convention (July 18, 2016) and Trump's inauguration (January 21, 2017). I used TAGS (Twitter Archiving Google Sheet), which is a plug-in to Google Docs. The data collection resulted in a total of 1,815 tweets that were the foundation for a Critical Discourse Analysis that used the Frankfurt School's critical theory of authoritarianism as its foundation. CDA combines text-immanent critique, socio-diagnostic critique, and prospective critique (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 31-35). It critically theorises and analyses *texts* in their *contexts* and aims at advancing *prospect*s for progressive changes of society. Critical social media discourse analysis can in contrast use "small data" analysis that provides a deep critical analysis of meanings.
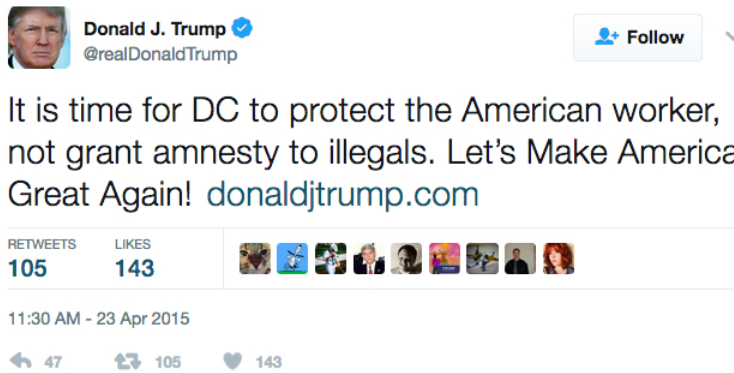
Consider the following two examples:

**Figure 1: Tweet by Donald Trump, example 1**



**Figure 2: Tweet by Donald Trump, example 2**

In a nationalist manner, Trump communicates the need to "make America great again". National greatness is said to have come under threat by illegal immigrants, Africans, transfer of taxes to foreigners, and development aid. Americanness and the American interest are identified with the American working class, while un-Americanness is identified with immigrants and the developing world.

There are two semiotic chains, one of negative associations (amnesty, illegals, waste, Africa) and one of positive associations (protect, invest, concern, workers, America, greatness) that are combined with each other. The implication suggested is that immigrants and the developing world threaten the American worker and therefore the American interest. Political action by, and support of, Trump would therefore be needed in order to "make America great again". What is missing in the picture is U.S. capitalism that in reality not only exploits U.S. workers, but also migrant workers and workers in developing countries.

### 4. Conclusion: Towards Chaplin 2.0, Brecht 2.0, Verfremdung 2.0, Critical Data Visualisation, Slow Media, and Critical Public Sociology

One of the problems of the Left is that it has lost its appeal to blue-collar workers who fear or experience social degradation, and who are, despite automation, computerisation and de-industrialisation, large enough in numbers to tip election results towards the right and the far-right. This is especially the case when voter turnouts are low, the Left is disorganised,

factionalised and weak, and when social democracy imitates neoliberalism and entrepreneurialism in an attempt to appeal to the new "middle class".

Corporate media monopolies and the logic of the acceleration, spectacularisation, and tabloidisation of the media are part of the reason why we see a rise in right-wing authoritarianism. The Left therefore needs to struggle for media reforms that advance slow media, non-commercial media, public interest media, a public-service Internet, the digital and communicative commons, and platform co-operatives (Fuchs 2018, 2017b).

Part of the problem of the Left is that it has more problems in appealing to the psyche, emotions, affects, and desires of those who feel politically anxious and disenfranchised than the Right does. It would be wrong to imitate the communication strategies and elements of right-wing authoritarianism. But the Left can also not leave political psychology entirely to the Right. Those who feel politically anxious and disenfranchised need to express their desires for love and hate. The key question is then how the Left can manage to turn a disenfranchised group's love for the authoritarian leader and nationalism into a love for participatory democracy and socialism, and its hatred of immigrants and foreigners into the hatred of capitalism and inequality. Part of the problem is that prejudices can often not be countered by rational arguments and citing statistical data, because they operate at the psychological level of hopes and fears that are the psychological material of post-truth politics. The solution then is not that the Left gives up the use of well thought-out arguments and debates. On the contrary, the point is to understand the complexity of the world and come up with proper responses that are supported by visual and argumentative strategies that bring the problem to the point.

Critical visualisations of data, studies, and statistics can form one important element of how to popularise progressive thought so that it challenges right-wing authoritarianism's prejudices, nationalism, scapegoating, and leadership ideology. An interesting way of responding to right-wing authoritarianism's irrationality is by political humour, satire, and parody. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002, 60) wrote about the "ambiguity of laughter": "If laughter up to now has been a sign of violence, an outbreak of blind, obdurate nature, it nevertheless contains the opposite element, in that through laughter blind nature becomes aware of itself as such and thus abjures its destructive violence". Humour is part of oppression itself, but may also be turned into challenging oppression. Left critique can be simultaneously enlightening, humorous, and serious. There is much to learn in this respect from Charlie Chaplin and Bertolt Brecht. The Left 2.0 requires Charlie Chaplin 2.0 and Brecht 2.0 for the age of social media and big data. The right-wing authoritarian spectacle staged via social media and reality TV needs to be challenged by the Brechtian epic and dialectical theatre 2.0, and the Boalian theatre of the oppressed 2.0.

Chaplin described the communicative approach of his movie *The Great Dictator* (1940): "Pessimists say I may fail – that dictators aren't funny any more, that the evil is too serious. That is wrong. If there is one thing I know it is that power can always be made ridiculous. The bigger that fellow gets the harder my laughter will hit him" (Van Gelder 1940).

Brecht speaks of *Verfremdung* as opposed to *Entfremdung* (estrangement, alienation) as principle of the dialectical theatre. "Verfremdung estranges an incident or character simply by taking from the incident or character what is self-evident, familiar, obvious in order to produce wonder and curiosity. […] The V-effect consists in turning the object of which it is to be made aware, to which one's attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected" (Brecht 2015, 143, 192). *Verfremdung* is a negation of the negation that creates feelings, emotions and affects of curiosity, surprise, and wonder. *Verfremdung* is the alienation of alienation and the estrangement of estrangement. By *Verfremdung 2.0* we mean equivalents of the Brechtian dialectical principle in the digital age.

Consider the following two examples. Figure 3 is a humorous comment on Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey, figure 4 suggests that Trump may just like Richard Nixon face impeachment. Meme and social media culture is in such cases turned into a left-wing strategy. For characterising such strategies, we do not need the term left populism, but can rather speak of left cultural politics or critical cultural politics. The term left populism in contrast risks association with a politics that is nationalist or xenophobic, does everything necessary and does not shy away from any tactic in order to appeal to as many people as possible.
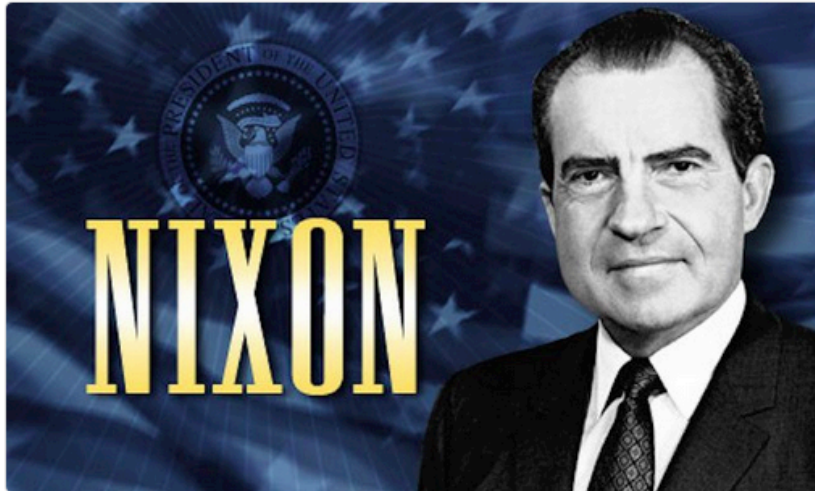


**Figure 3: Tweet by @RealDonalDrumpf**

**Figure 4: Tweet by @RealDonalDrumpf**

However, it is also the task of the intellectual in the difficult times we live in to be a critical, public intellectual who practices a critical, public social science. Franz L. Neumann, who as a Jewish socialist intellectual had to flee from Nazi-Germany to Britain and the USA, and who perfectly understood right-wing authoritarianism like only few others did, has brought this task of a critical public sociology to the point in his essay *Anxiety and Politics* (Neumann 2017/1957, 629):

> "Hence there remains for us as citizens of the university and of the state the dual offensive on anxiety and for liberty: that of education and that of politics. Politics, again, should be a dual thing for us: the penetration of the subject matter of our academic discipline with the problems of politics […] and the taking of positions on political questions. If we are serious about the humanization of politics; if we wish to prevent a demagogue from using anxiety and apathy, then we – as teachers and students – must not be silent. […] We must speak and write".

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