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Critical policy studies and the politics of authoritarian neoliberalism

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EDITORIAL

Critical policy studies and the politics of authoritarian neoliberalism **Dieter Plehwe & Jennifer Dodge**

More bad than good news arrives from around the world regarding the position of academics, journalists and critical intellectuals in countries like Turkey, India, Brazil, or Hungary. The number of academics and journalists on trial in Turkey – due to their support for Kurdish citizens’ human rights in the country – is large and growing. Modi’s government in India has banned academics at public universities from criticizing the government. More than 20 universities in Bolsonaro’s Brazil have been raided by military police, and Victor Orban’s government in Hungary has driven Central European University out of the country and barred gender studies. Germany’s new right party AFD, in turn, encourages spying on high school teachers. The party has created platforms inviting students and parents to report on teachers who criticize the far-right party. Since the late 1960s, the right-leaning ‘Accuracy in the Media,’ which identifies as a citizens’ media watchdog, has encouraged reporting on alleged liberal bias in U.S. media and ‘Accuracy in Academia’ was founded in 1985 to spy on university professors in Reagan’s America. The global wave of new right wing and right wing populist government continues a particular and particularly repressive conservative-neoliberal tradition. Committed to economic freedom, national and conservative revival, these groups and others like them leave the left intimidated, excluded or silenced.

It is well-known that the rise of neoliberalism coincided with a fortification of the security apparatus. Limited government, in fact, translates into strong, if selective, law and order statehood. The increasing turn to authoritarian forms of government provides further clarification of these dynamics. Citizens who do not fall in line are now confronted with limited legal and political rights in addition to reduced social rights. Academics, journalists and teachers are privileged targets because of their role in generating and sustaining a public sphere at a distance to both government and corporations.

Following up on our post-truth editorial – in which we called for articles dealing with the issue of power in the contemporary obfuscations of science in lobbying, for example, related to the status of evidence in climate policy, we now extend the invitation to critical policy scholars to submit articles to CPS dealing more generally and more specifically with the shift of the new right and authoritarian forms of neoliberalism. The fundamental division of power in democratic society is in danger if academic research and public discourse are no longer permitted to function in an independent and critical manner. We invite articles that address the relationship between the rise of the alt right, new right and authoritarianism, on one hand, and public policy on the other. We also invite a debate on how to best support and assist those who are suffering from repression. Let us be alert and pay attention to those in our networks who need help and encouragement. CPS would like to be a journal that does not only publish the work of critical scholars but also tells their story if need be.

There are glimmers of hope. Hungary saw the biggest demonstrations in opposition to the plans to introduce hyper flexible labor laws demanded by foreign multinationals among others. New circles of critical policy studies have recently formed in Brazil. It is a good time for academics to join or form organizations like the Union of Concerned Scientists in the United States or the Bund Demokratischer Wissenschaftler/innen in Germany apart from joining trade unions. It may, in fact, be a good time to form a transnational union of concerned scientists. The shared experiences of citizen oppression and academic repression across the globe require us to better organize than we did in the past. Economic insecurity in combination with intimidation and political insecurity undermines the free exchange of ideas and criticism. CPS has already featured a discussion of neoliberalism and universities (see Fischer and Mandell 2018 in the Forum of CPS 1/2018) and is committed to continue the debate. The critique of authoritarian developments in academia in the four countries mentioned above, and in many others, needs outlets. We invite scholars to submit full articles and forum articles (shorter commentaries) to bring the community up to date on both neoliberalism and authoritarian developments in academia and in society at large. You may submit articles at our submission site (<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rcps>). And please contact any of the CPS editors if you have additional information and ideas in this regard. Calls for panels or papers related to authoritarianism and neoliberalism or solidarity motions, for example, can be distributed using our twitter channel: @critical_policy.

Reference

Frank Fischer & Alan Mandell. (2018). The neo-liberal transformation of the university, *Critical Policy Studies*, 12:1, 103. DOI: 10.1080/19460171.2018.1441942

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