

Werner J. Patzelt

RESPONSE TO REVIEW

UNAWARE OF FACTS, STRONG IN OPINION: THE REVIEW BY THOMAS KLIKAUER AND NORMAN SIMMS OF WERNER J. PATZELT, „CDU, AfD UND DIE POLITISCHE TORHEIT”

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No less than seven printed pages have been devoted to a review in the *Polish Political Science Review* of my small book, *CDU, AfD und die politische Torheit* (“On CDU, AfD, and the political folly”). My book deals with that political short-sightedness on part of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) which has allowed the AfD (Alternative for Germany) to grow to significant influence, particularly in Eastern Germany. This book is a collection of 28 interviews and over 20 short newspaper articles and texts from my blog, *wjpatzelt.de*, that originally appeared between September 2014 and February 2019. Arranged in chronological order, these comments on ongoing German politics demonstrate that the rise of the AfD, doing so much harm to the CDU and to political stability in Germany, needed not to come as a surprise, at least not for careful political observers.

Overall, my book shows that the road towards success of the AfD has been opened, and even widened, by serious political mistakes committed by – not only, but in particular – the CDU. This sad story has concerned me not only as a political scientist, but also as a politically active citizen. Between January and September 2019, I was the CDU’s political advisor for its 2019 electoral campaign in Saxony. My message as a political advisor, expressed in this book for both analytical and political reasons, is obvious: “Understand the real reasons of the AfD’s attractiveness for so many voters, and then fight this party with more success than in the past!” This message is clearly sketched out in the preface of the book, and the concluding chapter speaks expressly on how to fight populism. Any reader should be able to understand what such a book is about.

This was, however, not the case for reviewers Thomas Klikauer and Norman Simms (*Polish Political Science Review* 7.2: 108–114). Klikauer is a lecturer of human resource management at Western Sydney University and has recently published two texts on the AfD. Simms is professor emeritus of English Humanities at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. Neither of them are political scientists nor have professional expertise in contemporary German politics. Nevertheless, they hold strong opinions on Germany’s party system – and on me. They write about my book as if it was advocating to vote for the AfD, or that my book would argue for building a coalition between this party and the CDU. In addition, they criticize me as if I would sympathize with right-wing populism or ignore those legacies from Nazi ideology that still weight heavily on German political culture. Not only the true intentions of my arguments, but even most facts are opposite to what the reviewers claim them to be. To describe this review in one single sentence: I have

rarely seen a book review so full of intellectual negligence, so much shaped by unsuspecting prejudice, and so void of reliable information about an author and his arguments.

This review's intellectual disaster starts with the authors' habit of arguing as though my book was a monograph on the AfD with the obligation to cover systematically whatever may belong to its subject matter. Yet the book consists only of chronologically ordered interviews, of short comments, and of brief analyses. Was it really beyond the reviewers' intellectual reach to understand that it is always the interviewer who gives the interviewee something to react to? Has it really escaped the reviewers' notice that short media comments always refer to specific situations in ongoing debates, but rarely unfold into a comprehensive argument? If so, their reading was not professional; if not so, their review is simply unfair. On balance, nearly all the reviewers' reproaches for "missing topics" are off the point.

Instead, there is a systematic argument in my book, expressed by the choice and arrangement of the texts included. Yet Klikauer and Simms, for whatever reason, have completely failed to recognize this argument; and unable to detect it, they did not understand it either. It is certainly no problem if a reviewer disagrees with an author on an argument. But simply ignoring what a book is about provides no base for honest discussions and falls short of any review's intellectual obligations. The core argument of my book that was missed by the reviewers is as follows.

As can be recognized from the chronology of German party politics, the AfD emerged after the CDU had stopped this party's decades-long, quite successful attempts at leaving no political space for a right-wing party present in all parts of Germany. Since their founding in 2013, namely as a reaction to Germany's eurozone policies, the AfD has continuously grown. Its growth has usually been fueled by decisions of CDU Chancellor Angela Merkel that were found to be implausible for a growing part of the members and voters of the CDU. Several polls showed that, in particular, Merkel's immigration policy of 2015–16 triggered both significant losses of trust in the CDU and considerable electoral successes of the AfD at all following elections. That immigration policy was based on extended media support and on the admirable goodwill of Germany's civil society to help those hundreds of thousands of refugees who came into the country within very few months. Yet this goodwill was meant to master an exceptional situation, not as a resource to be used by the government as a matter of course. The coalition government of CDU and SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany), however, created the impression that the immigration policy of September–December 2015 was meant to go on, being without any policy alternative due to international law and Germany's humanitarian obligations. Quite early in 2016 it turned out definitively that keeping the central promise made in the fall of 2015 – "Germany will continue welcoming refugees without any limit!" – was politically unsustainable for three reasons. There was dwindling popular support for an exclusively humanitarian approach to migration issues; there were the CDU's tremendous losses in east German elections in the spring of 2016; and there was the steep rise of the AfD at the expense of the CDU.

Although Germany's policy of unconditionally welcoming all refugees has been gradually abandoned since 2016, the voter migration from the CDU to the AfD could not be stopped. What is more, the CDU has been very reluctant to make serious attempts at regaining political trust from those who now prefer voting for the AfD. As a result, the CDU has maneuvered itself into a lose-lose-situation. This process started with the

CDU becoming too weak to form traditional majority coalitions with the liberals, while the internal development of the AfD has made coalitions with this new party politically impossible for at least two reasons. First, the AfD's overt hostility towards Germany's political system and political elites, and, second, their growing rightist radicalism and political unreliability. The consequence thereof is that entering coalitions with the SPD or the Green Party, or both, has come without any alternative for CDU leaders seeking cabinet positions, at least as long as the CDU strongly dislikes forming self-led minority cabinets. Yet policy-making in coalition cabinets with the SPD or with the Greens will further alienate non-centrist voters from the CDU, and it will therefore most probably work out to the benefit of the AfD, thus strengthening the CDU's most dangerous political rival. Letting things come so far, in spite of all the warnings repeatedly presented in public by many analysts, is "political folly", and hence the title of my book.

Instead of recognizing this overall pattern of recent German party dynamics, and instead of understanding why I have derived from it the actual advice that I have given to the CDU, and not the advice the reviewers erroneously attribute to me, Klikauer and Simms repeatedly ascribe political positions to me that are absolutely different from my real ones. For instance, they take it as my "key argument" that "because of the CDU's rejection of entertaining a CDU-AfD coalition ... the AfD was allowed to grow into a political force" (p. 108). As a statement about my position this is utterly wrong, and even assuming that I would claim such a possible chain of causation to exist is just nonsense, as can be seen by anyone who has read and grasped my argument above. Unfortunately, I cannot react to all the unwarranted reproaches in the review by Klikauer and Simms due to limited space, but I will focus on the most important ones.

First, the reviewers simply do not know who I am and what I stand for. In just their second paragraph, they claim that I would favor a coalition between the CDU and AfD. Yet what I am really favoring under present circumstances are either coalitions of the CDU with the liberals whenever possible or otherwise minority governments led by the CDU. I have given my reasons for that above. Drawing consequences from these reasons, I argue that in no electoral campaign the CDU should allow the AfD to produce a slogan like this one: "Each vote for the CDU means voting for a coalition of the CDU with the SPD and/or the Greens; therefore, you simply have to vote for the AfD if you disagree with center-left policies!" In anticipation of such a slogan, the CDU should always prevent the SPD and the Greens from defining the political situation in an electoral campaign somehow as follows: "Since the AfD will attract a significant share of voters anyway, no cabinet led by the CDU is possible unless it includes the SPD or the Greens; and in order to make sure that not 'too much of CDU-shaped policies' will be put to in place under such conditions, you better vote for the SPD, or for the Greens, right now!"

Exactly in order to open a way out of this trap for the CDU, I have repeatedly advised the CDU never to exclude a CDU-led minority cabinet that is prepared to cooperate with *all* good-willed parliamentary party groups, including the presently dwindling rational and pragmatic parts of the AfD. Not recognizing this as a means to magnify the already existing split within the AfD and to weaken this rival party decisively, Saxony's CDU did not follow this advice. Strategically short-sighted as they still are, I expect other state organizations of the CDU to reject my advice as well. Yet there will a high price to be paid for the CDU's engagement in coalitions with, in particular, the Greens during the coming

years, namely the ongoing existence of the AfD, and the risk of the CDU's further shrinking to a party attracting much less than 30 percent of the votes.

Second, and already in their first paragraph, Klikauer and Simms quite erroneously claim that my key thesis would be that the CDU has "moved too far to the centre of German politics". This absolutely is not my thesis. Like all German political scientists, I know that the key to the CDU's tremendous success as a catch-all party has been its anchoring in the center of Germany's political spectrum while at the same time reaching out to the right political fringe as far as is possible without giving up the CDU's liberal and democratic positions. This means that the CDU has to keep away from all right-wing radicals and extremists, but it needs to attract all other non-centrist voters. In not doing so, the CDU will continue to leave political territory to an exclusively right-wing radical party, which, for its part, would put at risk, and probably end, the CDU's so far dominant political position in Germany. My key thesis is no more than that: *the CDU has foolishly neglected to remain attractive for non-centrist and right wing voters*. The rise of the right-wing AfD, going hand in hand with significant voter migration from the CDU to the AfD, has proven this observation as correct beyond serious doubt. For most political scientists, therefore, it would quite obvious that I argue for re-integrating right-wing voters *because I want the AfD to be defeated by the CDU*—and, by no means, so as to play down the AfD, or to embellish the character of that party. Yet Klikauer and Simms do not bother with professional analyses, but instead prefer to make the fully nonsensical assertion that I would advocate an "opening of the CDU towards the AfD" (p. 111) which I would additionally consider as party with a something like a "normal center-right position" (p. 112). Had the reviewers really read what they are quoting, they would have found that their quote was no formula of mine, but a headline attached by a journalist to one of my interviews, and that I have explicitly stated that this headline is misleading when I wrote the introductory remarks to the reprint of that interview in my book.

Third, both reviewers argue as if the AfD had no history of *becoming* what it is right now, namely a party with a significant share of right-wing radicals among its party members and party officials, now under observation by German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, and so "toxic" that each politician or political analyst has one's own reputation damaged if one only *seems* to come too close to the AfD. Yet in reality there *is* a history of the AfD, and there *was* a significant change of this party's character. The first turning point in the AfD's right-wing radicalization was their vote to remove Bernd Lucke, the party founder and chairman, out of office in the summer of 2015. The second turning point was the departure of Lucke's successor as party chair, Frauke Petry, in the fall of 2017. In addition, any knowledgeable observer would be aware of the fact that the AfD's history is a *co-history* of the AfD *and* the CDU, in the course of which the CDU increasingly allowed the AfD to occupy earlier CDU policy positions and to attract former CDU voters. In many of my interviews and media articles, I have spotlighted several of those occasions on which CDU leaders cultivated wrong perceptions of the reasons for AfD's success. This has subsequently led them to take wrong decisions, namely such that benefited the AfD but were detrimental to the CDU.

The content of my book is, in fact, mostly documentation of my interviews and articles that have presented variations on *this* argument for nearly five years. It demonstrates exactly that *not* following my advice on how to handle the AfD has turned what previously only had been fears about the AfD's possible rise into a reality. Reading my book with

a minimum of care and attention would have made it clear to the reviewers that I always have urged the CDU *never to yield ground* to the AfD, and that I have repeatedly advised the AfD never to accept a right-wing radical take over of the party. In both cases, my advice has been ignored, and obviously to the detriment of each party. Had they followed my suggestions, the AfD would either have disappeared (due to a strategically sound handling of this new rival by the CDU), or would have positioned itself as something similar to the CDU's more conservative sister party, the Bavarian CSU (Christian Social Union). Then, and only then, the usual non-leftist majority among German voters could be transformed into non-leftist parliamentary majorities. Alas, things have turned out differently. In the AfD, former CDU-sympathizers have been outgunned by their right-wing radical intra-party opponents, and the CDU is no longer the champion in Germany's political space between its center and its right fringe. Klikauer and Simms, however, apparently know so little about the dynamics of German domestic politics that they are simply unable to understand a differentiated position like mine.

Fourth, the reviewers insinuate that I am either a sympathizer of the AfD or simply naïve. In particular, they came up with the reproach that I would not care for the past of the leading AfD politician Björn Höcke as an author close to the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), or that I would not take seriously the anti-Semitism in the publications by the AfD's Baden-Württemberg state legislator Wolfgang Gedeon. Yet Klikauer and Simms fail to mention that I referred to both politicians only briefly in some newspaper interviews in January and July 2016, where there was no occasion to give an account of the biographies, personalities, or publications of these two right-wing radicals. In both texts, I simply refer to intra-AfD debates in which Höcke and Gedeon played a role. I have, however, written two expert reports demonstrating Höcke's racism and Gedeon's anti-Judaism that have been publicly available on my blog since 2016: <http://wjpatzelt.de/2016/01/03/das-hoecke-gutachten-oder-wie-erkennt-man-rassismus-bzw-extremismus/> and <http://wjpatzelt.de/2016/07/05/gedeon-und-der-antisemitismus-gutachten/>. Of course, Klikauer and Simms do not know anything about these texts and simply prefer to believe whatever makes them feel morally superior. As a result, once again the contrary is true of what Klikauer and Simms claim to be the case. They are so blindfolded that they do not even shy back from asserting I would "promote the idea of whitewashing the AfD despite its many Neo-Nazi links" (p. 109). Both reviewers obviously mix their ignorance with their prejudices and end up in slander where objective reporting of the facts would certainly have been possible.

Another instance of slander can be found on p. 110, where Klikauer and Simms attribute a lack of "supporting Germany's constitution" to me, although they can only mention that I indeed have referred to the dilemmas and impasses created by Germany's illusory immigration policy of 2015–16. Yet quite contrary to insinuations by Klikauer and Simms, I am pro-asylum, pro-immigration, and pro-Muslim. I insist, however, on basing our immigration policy not on idealistic hopes, but on the practical experiences of countries with a history of immigration like the UK and France. If my critics were interested more in my real positions than in their self-satisfied projections onto me, they could have looked up the 19 page-long list of only those among my publications that are relevant for the book under review. There, they might have found my volume *Neue Deutsche in einem alten Land: Über Zuwanderung, Integration und Beheimatung* (Würzburg 2018) ("New

Germans in an old country: On immigration, integration, and starting to feel at home. Apparently, however, they did not want to spoil their smug emotions by too much reading.

Fifth, Klikauer and Simms repeatedly criticize as objectionable flaws in my book what simply are correct descriptions of reality. There *is*, indeed, a new cleavage in German society and, hence, in Germany's transforming party system, centered around the possible role of the nation-state in the era of globalization and migration, with the Greens and the AfD as those rivaling parties that give the clearest expression to that split (as can be read in their manifestoes and speeches). There *is* a left-green intellectual hegemony in Germany, with (as it has been repeatedly shown by empirical studies) more than two-thirds of German journalists sympathizing with the Greens, the SPD and the Left, and with most academics in the social sciences and humanities sharing this sympathy. There *really are* problems with integrating Muslims into secularized European societies (just as there were problems to get Catholicism to make peace with pluralist democracy in the 20th century). There *are* left wing extremists co-operating with the well-established party *Die Linke* (one only needs to look up the annual reports of the German Offices for the Protection of the Constitution). There *are* some 20 percent of Germans holding right-wing and racist views, more in former East Germany than in former West Germany, and they exist in spite of all attempts at making clear to each new generation of Germans the crimes of the Nazi and the horrors of the Shoah. There *has* been, and still *is*, unfair and even violent play against the AfD (and, of course, against migrants, Jewish citizens, and leftist persons, in these cases by people sympathizing with the AfD). There *has* been, and there still *is*, "Saxony bashing" in Germany. The shares of votes for non-left parties at most state and federal elections *do* usually add up to larger sums than the shares of votes for left parties. Moreover, ever since the forging of the present grand coalition there *have been* extended discussions in the German media on how long this coalitions will last. The new leadership team of the SPD has even won the intra-party contest against their rivals with the argument that they would quit the grand coalition on the very first occasion. If Klikauer and Simms, living quite remote from Germany, do not know of such things and, as a result, come to erroneous conclusions about how I react to these in my interviews and public texts, then the fault is theirs, not mine.

Sixth, Klikauer and Simms repeatedly blame me for formulations that either they have invented themselves or that belong to the interviewers or right-wing persons referenced in my book. On p. 112, they falsely say that I have attributed a "normal centre-right position" to the AfD, and they cite p. 203 of my book as evidence. However, there I simply note, corresponding with the facts, that it has become a widespread practice in Germany "to label as right-wing extremist or Nazi even quite normal center-right positions". In fact, Klikauer and Simms themselves set an example of such outrageous behavior in their review. On p. 110, they even claim that I would applaud the initiator of Dresden's Pegida for having "achieved something superb for Germany". Yet in reality, I say in the quoted interview (p. 43) that this person is self-affirmed because *he* feels he has initiated something unique on the German political scene. In fact, Pegida has been unique, in particular for its capacity to mobilize at least a thousand demonstrators nearly each week for no less than five years by now, which is beyond the mobilizing power of any German party or civil society association. Finally, to give only one more example, the reviewers make the reader believe that I would call the AfD "the only party that speaks truth about refugees" (p. 111). They even dare to quote me from my book where I clearly say no more than "the AfD has, compared

with the CDU and CSU, the most outspoken position on the refugee issue”. This, however, is undoubtedly the case, and it is so quite independent on whether one agrees or disagrees with the AfD. However, Klikauer and Simms simply want to justify their completely wrong conviction that I am “pushing a right-wing wave” (p. 112).

They might have come up with a less emotion-driven and off-the-facts review if they had not organized their text along a series of jumps from one “infuriating” line in my book to the next one, adding prejudiced context to each quotation, and never caring for the factual context – or even the concrete wording – of my interviews and articles. These reviewers were simply not interested to discuss what I said in my book. They preferred to write an ill-founded polemical text, avoided engagement in scholarly criticism, and showed not even the least interest in a rational debate. The only merit of this review is that it can serve, for students, as a very bad example of alleged scholarly work, as a caricature of an academic review. But, who may be proud of that?