

The Politics of Part-time Employment and the Standard Employment Relationship in Austria: a contradiction?

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Abstract

Recently there has been a resurgence of talk of contradictions in welfare state research: Daly (2011) pointed to contradictory family and employment policies in European welfare states, and Rubery et al. (2018) argue that the normalisation of precarious work has also been non-linear and contradictory. These are presented as policy dilemmas that are outcomes of multiple competing values and interests in policy making, without an explicit theorisation of the meaning and origins of contradictions in the welfare state. This article aims to highlight the usefulness of a systematic engagement with the idea of 'contradictions' in relation to the historical interplay of the welfare state, the standard employment relationship and part-time employment. Social reproduction theory and a gendered employment systems approach will be introduced as a theoretical framework to analyse the interplay between structural pressures and institutional configurations of the welfare state, with a focus on underlying contradictions between demands of social reproduction and production. Using Austria as a case study, it will then describe the development of the Austrian politics of part-time employment, identifying key normative-institutional developments in the welfare state and its role in upholding a particular gendered employment system. It will argue that the incentivisation of part-time employment must be understood as a gendered attempt to mediate competing demands for production and social reproduction, whose initial stabilising function for the Standard Employment Relationship (SER) seems to have had increasingly reverse effects. The significant rise of both marginal and non-marginal permanent part-time employment appears destabilising for the traditional SER in the conservative Austrian welfare state who appears unable to provide long-term risk protection for all workers, revealing the crisis tendency of this fundamental contradiction.

Welfare states and working time

It is widely accepted that welfare states have played a key role in institutionalising a particular gendered model of work, family and nation. Labour law and social laws of the welfare state have been closely intertwined and actively shaped the "division of labour both inside and outside the labour market" (Fudge and Vosko, 2001, p. 349). A key institution that has functioned as such a normative-regulatory model is the so-called standard employment relationship. Bosch (1986:165) defines this standardised employment relationship as "stable, socially protected, dependent, full-time job ... the basic conditions of which (working time, pay, social transfers) are regulated to a minimum level by collective agreement or by labour and/or social security law". This notion of standard working time was established in reference to a male standard worker, thereby also institutionalising gendered divisions of labour time. Less than a century after its institutionalisation, the standard employment relationship has been challenged in recent decades due to the flexibilization of product markets, rising employment among women, changes in education and work patterns over the life course, rising education levels, higher unemployment, regulation and deregulation of the labour market (Bosch, 2004; Rubery, 2010). As a result of these structural changes, the share of so-called forms of non-standard employment has increased, including temporary, part-time and dependent self-employment.

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One of the most significant types of non-standard employment is part-time work, which is usually defined in relation to a standard working-time norm as employment under 35h per week. Though 'universally gendered', the forms, drivers and conditions of part-time work vary significantly across national employment regimes. Buddelmeyer et al.'s (2008) quantitative study has shown that female labour market participation explains more than half of the growth in part-time employment in Europe, but other factors such as the growth of the service economy, reforms of employment protection legislation as well as the provision of public childcare have also played a significant role. The characteristics of part-time work also deserve closer attention: Part-time work is more likely to be low paid, characterized by more frequent interruptions, fewer career progression opportunities and less likely union membership. Yet it is not always necessarily precarious depending on hours worked, job characteristics and household incomes (OECD, 2010; Rubery, 1998). These so-called part-time penalties are particularly strong for those classified as marginal part-time workers, characterized by very short hours and low incomes, usually legally defined by a monthly earnings threshold (Messenger and Wallot, 2015).

Different approaches have been used to study part-time employment and its relationship to so-called standard employment in the welfare state. The question of why people work part-time, and women overwhelmingly so, has long concerned researchers and policy makers alike. Survey data has consistently demonstrated that unpaid care work is the most common reason for women to work part-time across Western capitalist economies, whereas men tend to work part-time if they cannot find another job or are attending education or training (OECD, 2010). Explanations for these patterns have to a large extent varied depending on different accounts of gender and its relationship to the welfare state (Orloff 2010). Mainstream social policy analysis has tended to focus on individual preferences of women and how they differ from men, particularly with regards to the patterns of labour market participation and the distribution of care work (Esping-Andersen et al 2002; cited in Orloff 2010, p14). Hakim's (YEAR) 'preference theory' is based on the claim that women have different lifestyle preferences, with some being more work- and others more home-oriented and some forming part of an adaptive middle. Others have challenged this conceptualisation of gender identities and agency being natural, but rather that "welfare provision, alongside other political and social institutions, is involved in shaping gendered divisions of labour and the preferences, needs, and desires that sustain it" (Orloff, 2010, p. 5). Those with such a relational account to gender have theorized that the growth of part-time work represents an outcome of changing gender norms, broader structural economic pressures and constrained choices for women (Daly, 2011; O'Reilly and Fagan, 1998; Rubery, 1998). Welfare states have dealt differently with part-time work which has shaped its quality and outcomes for workers. This is because the quality of part-time work depends significantly on the access to labour and social rights, which often institutionalise create divisions between employment on a part-time (or low income) basis and other forms of employment. As Rubery (2010, p. 502) argues, these distinctions do not just shape different outcomes for part-time workers but "serve to embed social relationships - such as the male breadwinner model of household organisation - in both the organization of employment and the welfare system, thereby creating potential problems of adjustment to changing relations, including household arrangements". Analysing changes in welfare state provision and labour law in relation to part-time work is therefore highly instructive to understanding changing relations of work, the state and gender.

Structural pressures and the politics of part-time work

A relational approach to gender highlights that part-time work has become the most viable option for many women across Europe in the context of the slow erosion of the male breadwinner norm since the 1980s which was not accompanied by a wider renegotiation of the distribution of the work of social reproduction. It is important to note here that political initiatives related to part-time work have not just had explicitly gendered, or care-related aims: Incentivising part-time work for mothers, as well as students and the elderly through the reduction of structural barriers and subsidies for employers and employees has been a common part of so-called activation as well as work-sharing

strategies (Casey, 1983; OECD, 2010). Whilst women have been a key focus of such strategies, other marginal groups of labour market participants have too. This deserves closer attention and analytical specification. As Daly (2011, p. 12) notes, “the support for and promotion of part-time work (...) is a significant social policy development that does not receive the attention it should”. Recently, however, the part-time debate has been declared as re-opened (Nicolaisen et al., 2019), putting a thorough theoretical engagement with the structural drivers of part-time work, its institutional mediation and political negotiation on the agenda again. A key question is whether the promotion and support for part-time work are in contradiction with the historical institutions of the welfare state which were built around a model of full-time male employment and female caregiving.

To understand what might be contradictory and what is fully functional for welfare capitalism, we ought to analyse the structural drivers of part-time work growth and incentivisation more closely. As noted before, the growth in part-time employment and its gendered character is understood to be a result of changing gender norms which have led to an increase in women wanting to engage in employment. This normative change also led to growing demands for public provision of childcare to allow female labour market participation. This coincided with the decline of industrial production in the global north and the rise of the service economy which increased employers’ interests in a more flexible and cheaper workforce that can be adjusted to cyclical demands (Fudge and Owens, 2006). In the context of these structural economic and social shifts, financial pressures on welfare states increased, leading governments to prioritize raising employment rates (Häusermann and Palier, 2008) for which encouraging women’s and students part-time work appears to have been an important tool. Encouraging male workers and elderly people to engage in part-time work can be understood as a strategy of work-sharing rather than activation.

Different interpretations of these developments have been put forward. Some have framed this as part of welfare states response to so-called new social risks, which have emerged as a result of economic and social changes associated with the service economy (Bonoli, 2010; Taylor-Gooby, 2004). Incentivising part-time work could be seen as a strategy to increase female employment which could represent a stepping-stone to full-time employment as well as a supply for flexible employment that employers increasingly demand, whereas elderly peoples part-time work can be seen as a way to deal with the pressures of demographic ageing. Others have emphasised the gendered nature of these changes as well as the proactive nature of policy intervention by referring to an ongoing shift from a male breadwinner to an adult worker model, or new gendered family arrangements (Daly, 2011; Lewis, 2006; Lewis and Giullari, 2005). Rather than the welfare state just being a reactive actor that has addressed newly emerging risks, the emphasis here is put on the role of the welfare state in shaping social risks and social relations. A third approach from industrial relations research has analysed these changes as part of broader shifts in gendered employment systems, which aims to capture the relationship between the welfare state, labour market institutions and gendered social relations (Mutari and Figart, 2001; O’Reilly and Spee, 1998; Rubery et al., 1998). Rubery et al. (1998) and Mutari and Figart (2001) find variation in approaches to the distribution of socially reproductive work, arguing that there are different working-time regimes with various outcomes depending on policies. This approach seems most suitable to analyse the role of the welfare state in mediating the changing relationship between the SER and part-time work. A gendered employment systems approach highlights the complex and changing relationships between the state and the market and interrogates the politics of pro-active and re-active policies. Whilst closely related to male breadwinner theorising in social policy research, this angle takes a broader perspective on shifts in economic production and their relationship to welfare state policies. This holistic angle appears necessary to study the politics of part-time work but is not mutually exclusive with the detailed institutional analysis that has been practised by scholars of changes in male breadwinner norms in the welfare state. In fact, a theoretical approach to gendered employment systems is most insightful when combined with close analysis of institutional changes in the welfare state and labour markets.

This type of approach requires a sound theoretical framework for elaborating the interplays between the state, the market and gendered social relations. The theoretical framework most suitable for a systematic gendered employment approach is social reproduction theory. Building on previous Marxist and feminist theorising of capitalism and its contradictions (Offe, 1984), social reproduction theorists have emphasised the necessary but contradictory relationship between capitalist production and social reproduction which lies at the core of capitalist societies (Bhattacharya, 2017). Capitalist society is understood as more than just a specific model of production but a particular institutionalised social order, or a way of life (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018). For capitalist society to function productively, its components and structures need to be socially reproduced. In this process of reproduction, social relations of gender, class, race and other inequalities are reproduced. In contrast to the common misunderstanding of social reproduction being a question of care work in the household only, we must approach it as a question of the social reproduction of the capitalist society as a whole (Bhattacharya, 2017). The work of social reproduction happens mostly outside the direct circuit of capital, through institutional practices that have long served as fields of conflict over the contradictory demands of more resources for and control over the reproduction of workers and society, and the drive towards capital accumulation. Social reproduction takes place in households, as well as through welfare institutions such as social security provision, education and healthcare. The complex management of this fundamental contradiction has long caused trouble for capitalist societies. As Fraser (2016, p. 100) summarizes, “every form of capitalist society harbours a deep-seated social-reproductive ‘crisis tendency’ or contradiction: on the one hand, social reproduction is a condition of possibility for sustained capital accumulation; on the other, capitalism’s orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilize the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies.” In this sense, contradictions are understood not as simple policy dilemmas but as a systematic, destabilising tendencies that are rooted in the relationship between capitalist production and its pre-conditions (Offe, 1984). This is an important specification for welfare state research to distinguish superficial dilemmas and deep-seated contradictions.

Welfare state provision is a key site for social reproduction, making it a central institution of modern capitalist societies which is at odds with the capitalist logic of accumulation and has in-built crisis tendencies. As Offe (1984, p. 330) argues, the embarrassing secret of modern capitalism is that it can “neither live without the welfare state nor live *with* (sic) it”. Fraser (2016) claims that capitalist societies have undergone broad structural shifts from liberal capitalism of the 19th to state-managed capitalism of the 20th century and financialised capitalism of the 21st, each society having different institutions to manage the contradiction and tensions of production and social reproduction. She suggests that the role of the state in managing the contradiction has drastically weakened. This US-centric perspective is to be taken with caution, as the way contradictions play out and to what extent they become destabilising depends on the interplay between structural pressures, national institutions and actors (Offe 1984). Whilst social reproduction theory helps conceptualise and historicise the social relations and institutions that welfare capitalism builds upon, like most critical social theory it lacks specification of national institutions and varied developments across states. In combination with a gendered employment systems perspective, however, which directs focus onto the relationship between the different welfare states, labour markets and political actors, we can analyse the effects of different types of regulation and policy interventions and how they shape the relationship between economic production and social reproduction. Part-time employment represents a particularly interesting case as it exemplifies contradictory demands for time for both production and social reproduction. Whether part-time work is destabilising for the welfare state and particular gendered employment systems per se or under what conditions is therefore a key question to be answered by close case analysis. The next section of this paper will focus on this task.

Dilemmas and contradictions of the Austrian welfare state and part-time employment

Austria is one of the three countries in Europe with the highest part-time rates and the most significant growth over the past four decades, making it a particularly interesting

case study for the above-stated aims. Only the Netherlands has higher part-time rates, and closely after Austria follows Germany which has had seen a similar growth since the 1980s. This has been the single factor driving employment figures since the 1990s and has even caused a fall in the share of full-time employment in all three countries (Bosch, 2004). Austria's traditional conservative welfare state that was built particularly strongly around the SER therefore represents an interesting case to study the way the welfare state mediates the relationship between the SER and part-time work. Its working-time policies have been called a regime under transition (Mutari and Figart, 2001), yet the direction of the transition has not been clearly identified. The status of part-time employment and part-time workers is one of the issues that are up for scholarly debate. Hinterseer (2013) argues that in Austria part-time workers are not atypical anymore and should rather be considered normal, since a quarter of the population works part-time and because part-time workers are formally fully included in the social security system and integrated in labour law regulations. Temporary, subsidised part-time models introduced in labour and social law could be seen as an indication that norms of part-time employment as acceptable, and good employment are widespread not just amongst the working population but also policymakers. At the same time, however, pension administrators and politicians often refer to the part-time trap (*Teilzeitfalle*) which describes the long-term disadvantage of permanent part-time employment which appears to reinforce the non-standard status of part-time work. A few key questions emerge: Do the Austrian welfare state and its institutions have double standards regarding part-time work and are these contradictory? How are certain forms of part-time work encouraged and others discouraged? How do these relate to the capitalist contradiction between social reproduction and production?

To understand structural incentives and disincentives for certain forms of part-time work in the Austrian welfare state, a close analysis of labour and social law is required. Even though non-marginal part-time workers are formally fully integrated in social security, a detailed analysis shows a more complicated picture. Clasen and Clegg's (2007) conditionality framework highlights multiple levels of conditionality in welfare benefits, distinguishing between conditions of category, circumstance and conduct. This allows understanding the role of the welfare state in structuring part-time employment through incentives and disincentives for workers to engage in part-time work over the life course. Conditions of category refer to eligibility as a result of membership of a defined category such as unemployed. Conditions of circumstance describe eligibility and entitlement criteria such as work history or earnings-related conditions, which are particularly important for part-time workers. Finally, conditions of conduct are behavioural requirements which regulate ongoing benefit receipt such as active job searching or suitability criteria for certain jobs. Analysing the Austrian social security system according to these conditions allows to analyse whether part-time workers are really to be considered normal, or if more complex dynamics are at play.

With regards to the risk of unemployment, most part-time workers are compulsorily insured in contribution-based unemployment insurance alongside with all others in paid employment. Those who fall into the category of marginal part-time employment, defined by an earnings threshold of 446.81 EUR (2019) per month, however, are not able to contribute nor to receive unemployment insurance. The conditions of circumstance furthermore impose restrictions on part-time workers eligibility and entitlement. Firstly, an insurance record of 52 weeks in the past 24 months is required for the first unemployment benefit insurance application. Although not a direct working-hours condition, this can represent a problem for part-time workers who tend to have more frequent interruptions of employment for periods of unemployment and non-employment (Rubery 1998; OECD 2010). Secondly, the duration of the benefit also depends on the length of the insurance contribution record, which rewards those with longer and uninterrupted working lives. Thirdly, and most importantly for part-time workers, are the conditions regulating the generosity of the benefit. Here, workers receive 55% of the daily net income calculated on the last or second to last annual contribution base, with a needs-tested supplement which retains an earnings-related element. This supplement, which is important for part-time workers with a lower contributions record, must not be more than

80% of the net assessment basis. Once the insurance benefit has been exhausted, workers rely on unemployment assistance in which all non-marginal part-time workers are equally insured. This benefit is means-tested and retains an earnings-related element, with entitlement being 92% of the basic amount of unemployment benefit that is paid for an unlimited duration. Both insurance and assistance have conditions of conduct regulating the duration of receipt, which include a rule allowing marginal part-time employment without any deduction of the benefit amount. Overall, this means that non-marginal part-time workers are relatively well insured in unemployment benefits whereas marginal part-time workers do not have access and this precarious form of part-time work is furthermore temporarily encouraged by the benefit conditions.

The risks associated with old age are much more significant for those in part-time work, as their disadvantage often accumulates over the life course due to the various earnings-related conditions of pension insurance in Austria. Even though the Austrian public pension system is considered comparatively generous, those with lower incomes and interruptions during the life course are structurally disadvantaged (Mairhuber, 2003). Similarly to unemployment benefits, conditions of category function to exclude those in marginal part-time employment whereas all other employees in paid employment are compulsorily insured. For those with incomes from more than one marginal job that add up to a level above the marginality threshold, a voluntary opt-in is possible. The conditions of circumstance have a strong employment-record related element. People qualify for a pension when they have acquired 180 insurance months within the last 360 months of which at last 84 have been from employment. Period of childcare (up to 4 years per child), as well as times of benefit receipt or military service are credited as non-employment insurance periods. To receive a full pension at 80% of the average previous net income², 45 insurance years are required when retiring at the age of 65. For those who qualify for a pension and have a certain amount of credits but are below a set needs threshold, a needs-tested tax-funded income supplement (*Ausgleichszulage*) is paid on a household basis. This supplement establishes a minimum income floor for pension recipients but does technically not represent a minimum pension since previous pension insurance contributions are required. There is also an earnings-related element to this supplement, as those who have contributed at least 360 months through insured employment are granted a higher supplement and those who have contributed at least 30 or 40 years an even higher one. Since those with significant periods of part-time work over the life course are unlikely to acquire a sufficient level of pension benefit due to lower earnings, many are dependent on this income supplement which grants a minimum level of social security as is highlighted in the fact that most recipients are women. The contribution required for a higher supplement however once again serve to reproduce inequalities in levels of incomes. Overall, the Austrian pension system is weak at reducing risks of old-age poverty for pensioners who worked part-time during their life course due to the multiple conditions related to previous earnings and insurance periods. The norm of the full-time continuously employed standard worker remains strong in the social insurance system. Those who do not qualify for insurance or have insufficient credits have to rely on means-tested benefits, reinforcing the marginal status of female part-time workers.

The historical development of working-time policies in the Austrian welfare state is characterised complex trends. Ever since part-time rates started to rise in the 1980s, a few adjustments have been made to the social security system. Three main trends can be distinguished: firstly, the traditional SER-centrism in social security has been strengthened in several reforms. Particularly in the 1980s and 1990s several small changes in calculation rates reduced the generosity of unemployment and pension benefits and strengthened the earnings-relatedness of benefits, thereby increasing inequalities between those workers who were employed in full-time, well-paid and continuous employment and those who were further away from this norm. The pension reform in 2003 further strengthened the equivalence principle by extending the calculation base and required contributory years for a full pension. This further disadvantaged part-time workers access to a sufficient level of pension benefits. From the 1990s onwards, a second trend can be identified which had

² This has been gradually raised to achieve the best 40 insurance years by 2028.

the seemingly contrary objective of de-marginalising part-time workers positioning in labour and social law. After equal treatment legislation was introduced for part-time workers in labour law in the 1990s, small adjustments were made to the unemployment and pension system too. Pension benefit calculation rates were homogenised for low and high earners in 1997 and unemployment insurance contribution rates for low earners were reduced in 2008, improving access and entitlement conditions for part-time workers eligible for contributions. Furthermore, the calculation basis for unemployment assistance was changed from a household to an individual basis in 2018, allowing those with low earnings to have a higher independent benefit income. An additional bonus was introduced in pension insurance for the means-tested tax-funded income supplement was introduced in 2003 for those with pensions below 1000 Euros who had contributed for 30 years. This supplement saw an increase in 2019 to 1200 Euros for those who contributed for 40 years, further rewarding those with longer contribution periods.

The income supplement for pensioners highlights the ambivalent nature of working-time policies in the Austrian welfare state where social protection rights have been extended to some groups of workers who were previously disadvantaged, whilst creating new lines of segmentation amongst groups of part-time workers. In other words, the segmentation between marginal and non-marginal part-time workers which is marked by the insurance thresholds has remained unchanged, as new inequalities between other non-marginal part-time workers have been strengthened depending on their level of income and contribution record. Whilst this means that some part-time workers are relatively well-insured, others have been made worse off through pension insurance reforms. This particularly affects those who work part-time over longer periods of the life course, which tend to be women. A third trend can be identified which points to an increased acceptance of particular forms of part-time work amongst policy makers, thereby further complicating the relationship between working-time and social protection. Since the 1990s, five different temporary part-time models have been created in labour and social law, which aim to allow working-time reduction without part-time penalties. These include part-time parental leave, part-time educational leave, part-time retirement and reintegration part-time. In the 1990s, subsidies were introduced for part-time parental leave for non-marginal as well as marginal workers, alongside the introduction of a subsidised part-time retirement model. In 2004, the right to part-time parental leave followed, as well as a subsidised part-time educational leave and part-time elderly care leave in 2013 and 2014 respectively. These temporary part-time models include no reduction in previous insurance contributions to avoid long-term disadvantage, as long as the workers increase their working-time again after a certain period or enter their pension in the case of part-time retirement. They point to a new acceptance of temporally reduced working hours, often for reasons to care for others or oneself, which count as performing socially reproductive work.

Overall, these changes in working-time politics of the Austrian welfare state pose not just regulatory but also normative challenges: segmentation in social protection appears to have increased with the persistent marginalisation of marginal part-time workers and increasing inequalities between those part-time workers closer to the SER and those further away from it. Structural disincentives for permanent part-time work remain, whilst temporary part-time work has been encouraged through several subsidised part-time models. The so-called “part-time trap” therefore does not apply to all anymore, insofar people follow the incentives and disincentives of the welfare state. Part-time work appears to have lost its atypical status when it functions as temporary flexibility, whilst retaining its structural disadvantage for those who choose to work fewer hours than full-time for longer periods of their lives. Whilst part-time work is not necessarily atypical, it remains this status for some groups of part-time workers who remain dependent on either a male breadwinner or social assistance benefits of the state.

Making sense of Austrian part-time politics: Stabilisation or destabilisation of the Standard Employment Relationship?

A close analysis of part-time conditions in the Austrian welfare state shows that working-time norms have undergone incremental reforms the past few decades, re-affirming the

description of Austria as a working-time regime in transition (Mutari and Figart 2001). Whether these regulatory-normative changes represent a hollowing-out of the Standard Employment Relationship, or a contradiction which might act as destabilising for the Austrian welfare state that was strongly built around it, remains unclear so far. A tentative assessment can be made, however: Austrian governments have partially extended protections to non-marginal part-time workers and incentivised temporary part-time flexibility, they have also retained and partially strengthened the strong earnings-relatedness of insurance benefits. Whilst one might interpret this a highly contradictory development, this can be understood to be rather a stabilising mechanism for the male standard employment relationship: regulating part-time work and incentivising a certain level of part-time employment does not challenge the standard employment relationship and its male full-time working-norm *per se*. As long as it is performed by previously non-employed workers in households with a full-time breadwinner or alternatively functions only as a temporary reduction of working-time, it reinforces the primary status of the standard working time norm. In both scenarios full-time employment for the male breadwinner remains the primary norm and socially reproductive work continues to be performed mostly by women in permanent or temporary part-time work. This fits into what others have previously described as a 'flexibilised Standard Employment Relationship' (Bosch 2004), which aims to combine more demands for productive labour whilst retaining the reliance on socially reproductive labour in the household. Even though the temporary part-time models can be read as a recognition of the value of some socially reproductive work, their temporal character simultaneously reinforces the full-time norm of productive work. This also highlights the weaknesses of a partial flexibilization of the Standard Employment Relationship, as it does not address the unequal distribution of socially reproductive work and demands for more equal distribution within private households as well as public institutions.

Whilst stabilising in the short-term, such a partial flexibilization of the SER risks encountering serious destabilising problems for the welfare state in the long run. It has been argued that contradictory pressures for working-time reduction in the name of socially reproductive work and working-time increase for productive work will intensify over time (Fraser 2016; Offe 1984), which might also be the case in Austria. If part-time rates continue to grow both as a temporary and permanent working-time reduction, social protection gaps in insurance benefits are likely to increase as the principle of equivalence reinforces contribution inequalities. Changing gender relations in the form of less stable households and a breakdown of the traditional lifelong breadwinner-homemaker contract will require further welfare state protection against the poverty risks of unemployment and old-age. This might contribute to the mounting financial pressures on the post-industrial conservative welfare state: Social protection of part-time employees can become a problem if more are not eligible for social insurance benefits anymore or acquire only insufficient contributions, thereby intensifying the pressures on tax-based social assistance benefits. This unequal risk sharing could furthermore undermine public support for the welfare state in the long-term. One can also imagine an alternative scenario with decreasing rates of part-time work as a response to the risk posed by the previous scenario. If part-time work is increasingly perceived as a "trap" as larger groups of previously part-time employed suffer from a lack of sufficient protection in the long-term, part-time employees might aim to increase their productive working hours to full-time, thereby reducing the share of part-time workers. This creates another serious problem for the work of social reproduction and in particular care work, whose responsibility might be increasingly shifted onto private market providers by those who can afford to do so. The reliance on migrant care workers might be furthermore intensified. Overall, both scenarios are likely to produce a crisis of social reproduction without sufficient long-term social security for those working part-time, as well as sufficient public provision for care work.

Overall, the Austrian case illustrates common problem pressures for conservative welfare states that have been built around standard working-time norms but have tried to flexibilise it in the past decades. A social reproduction perspective highlights how the flexibilization of working-time policies in the welfare state has been driven by competing demands for time for both economic production and social reproduction. The way welfare state actors have dealt with this dilemma, namely by incentivising and supporting

temporary part-time work for certain tasks of social reproduction, has stabilised the standard employment relationship in the short term but risks destabilisation in the future due to the growing numbers of permanent part-time workers.

Reform paths: reflections from feminist scholarship

The traditional orientation of the Austrian welfare state towards the Standard Employment Relationship and Male Breadwinner Model seems to have led to increasing difficulties in managing the competing demands of production and social reproduction in the service economy. Part-time work is both seen as a symptom of the problem and solution for these difficulties, highlighting the contradictory pressures which have led to an increasing segmentation amongst part-time workers. A reorientation does not just require a thorough engagement with regulatory questions but also normative questions. A vast body of feminist scholarship has long called for a new norm of employment and a new gender contract in the welfare state (Fraser, 1994, p. 199; Fudge and Vosko, 2001; O'Reilly and Spee, 1998; Rubery et al., 1998; Vosko, 2011; Weeks, 2011). Most agree that the traditional division of labour and in particular the unequal burden of unpaid labour of social reproduction on women's shoulders needs to be addressed. A normative reorientation away from the Male Breadwinner model and towards more inclusive and equitable norms of work, workers and working lives is demanded in order to address the regulative and normative inadequacy of current policy models. Yet there is also significant disagreement amongst feminist scholars regarding the path that this reorientation should take.

A key point of disagreement is over the question whether the SER can be reformed to serve part-time workers and accommodate the work of social reproduction better or not. Jill Rubery and colleagues (Rubery, 2010; Rubery et al., 2018, 2005, 1998) have argued for a flexibilization of the SER to "allow for more diverse employment and working-time patterns without any loss of rights or marginalization" (Rubery et al., 1998, p. 99). From their perspective, the welfare state should help promote flexible employment that works both for firms and workers as well as work to reduce insecurity for workers. Yet they argue that too much de-standardisation, understood as moving too far away from having any standard norms of working-time and earnings to qualify for social provision is a risk. Instead, a certain standard of regular and predictable working hours should be incentivised and regulated with the involvement of the social partners and the state (Rubery et al., 2005). Extending and flexibilising the SER is set as the goal to maintain the shared responsibility of the employer and the state in providing income and quality employment protected by labour and social rights for the working-age population (Rubery et al., 2018). A new broader employment norm is suggested which expands SER protections to non-standard workers by providing income guarantees with sufficient minimum standards across both employment and non-employment periods as well as focusing on opportunities for career development and training, fair treatment and recognition of the needs for a "life beyond work". Employment is therefore to remain the basis for social protection, but the exact form should matter less. In the case of Austrian part-time workers, this could mean the introduction of minimum unemployment benefits and minimum pension insurance benefits sufficiently above poverty level with low contribution thresholds to reduce poverty risks and dependency on the male breadwinner. This could go hand in hand with crediting care-work as insurance contributions more highly and not just during periods of non-employment but also different forms of part-time employment. Furthermore, the existing right to part-time work for parents could be expanded to all workers and complemented by a new right to return to full-time work. The strength of this approach is the focus on providing well-regulated quality employment with more flexibility for workers and firms whilst maintaining the traditional institutional form of the SER, in particular by upholding employers' responsibilities. There are also weaknesses from this perspective however: The upholding of paid employment as the main source of social protection does little to address the distribution of care work and other unpaid socially reproductive work that is traditionally performed by women. In practice, SER expansion processes have furthermore often created new lines of segmentation amongst non-standard workers as insurance contribution requirements continue to reproduce labour market hierarchies between those

close to the full-time norm and those further away. Additionally, in practice expanded conditions have tended to exclude those on very low hours in an attempt to avoid subsidising low quality employment (Vosko, 2011). Mückenberger (1989) also highlights that simply expanding the SER does not challenge the function of incentivising the capitalist work ethic that is embedded in it, which might not go far enough for some critics. Overall, one can argue that whilst stabilising in the short-term for welfare capitalism this employment-centred model does not directly challenge distribution of unpaid care work and therefore not adequately address competing demands between social reproduction and production.

In order to reduce segmentation and polarisation between standard workers and non-standard workers as well as among non-standard workers, a more radical approach than simply an extension and flexibilization of the traditional SER appears required. This has been the basis of claims for a reorientation of the welfare state away from full-time employment-focused social protection towards alternative models of social provisioning and social reproduction (Fraser, 1994; Vosko, 2011; Weeks, 2011). Nancy Fraser (1994) has argued for orienting welfare states and work societies around a universal caregiver model, in contrast to the employment-focused current model. Such a model is based on values of gender equity and requires the development of policies that are oriented towards income equality, anti-poverty, anti-exploitation, anti-marginalisation, leisure-time equality, equality of respect and anti-androcentrism. All jobs and social provision would be designed with the assumption that all workers are caregivers, requiring a general shortening of working-hours to allow for the delivery of informal care as well as the development of democratically controlled public care institutions. This aims at challenging the boundaries between collective and private responsibilities, breadwinning and caregiving and ultimately between different gender roles. A related, yet different approach comes from Kathi Weeks (2011) who argues from an anti-work perspective for an unconditional basic income that would challenge the wage system and allow for a better redistribution of the work of social reproduction. Though different in focus, both agree with a radical working time reduction and accompanying universal income provision instead of upholding standard full-time norms through conditional benefits. The distinction between full-time and part-time work would then become obsolete.

Whilst challenging the institutional basis of welfare capitalism more generally, this represents a particularly radical demand for conservative welfare states. The insurance-focused institutional architecture of this welfare state which has long functioned to reproduce status hierarchies and the male SER norm on the basis of a mix of insurance and tax funding would require significant rebuilding. This applies not just for the radical model but even just for a more inclusive SER that is similar in form but different in content. It is important to note that the possibilities for more or less radical reform depend on power relations in place as well as the interests and ideas of actors. As Fudge (2017, p. 367) argues, "prognoses about the ubiquity and robustness of the SER depend upon a prior assessment of the resilience of the institutional ensemble in which it is embedded, which in turn depends upon the social mobilization of political constituencies that support an egalitarian capitalism". Building a welfare state towards more universal principles of social protection requires even more ambitious actors that are willing to challenge capitalist principles of production and reproduction at their core. Existing institutions must also allow for change, which has turned out difficult in the past as historical institutionalists have shown. Whether radical change in the Austrian welfare state is possible is therefore yet to be seen.

Conclusion

Overall, the Austrian case of part-time politics highlights the prevalence of contradictions in the modern welfare state. Its approach to part-time work highlights how demands for more time for social reproduction are in contradiction with demands to expand productive labour time. Attempts at stabilisation have been made over the past few decades which have partly mitigated this contradiction by encouraging temporary part-time models that allow working-time reductions for engaging in socially reproductive work. Part-time work

has grown significantly as a result. Whilst performing a stabilising function in the short-term, the institutional inertia for social security for those deviating from the full-time norm to engage in socially reproductive work, is in the long-term destabilising for the welfare state. This is likely to cause funding issues as well as reduce support for the welfare state due to declining coverage and entitlements to sufficient social insurance. Addressing problems caused by the rise in PTW requires not just an evaluation of social protection systems and in particular the principle of equivalence in social insurance, but also a broader discussion on gendered working-time norms of employment and labour and their relationship to key contradictions of welfare capitalism. As O'Reilly and Spee (1998:275) argue, "the future organization of work and welfare in contemporary society will emerge from the inherent conflict between the principles underlying the spheres of public production and private reproduction". Assessing possibilities for progressive reforms requires a careful consideration of possible SER reforms and alternatives, which must combine normative questions as well as an analysis of historical institution-building and power constellations.

The following questions appear crucial for further research:

- Which actors have suggested and supported policies that support, subsidise and incentivise part-time subsidies and for what reasons? What was the role of governments and the social partners?
- To what extents have considerations of the value of the work of social reproduction shaped policies to support and incentivise part-time work?
- How have different conceptions of part-time workers and their needs shaped their policy strategies?
- How have policy makers negotiated the reinforcement of full-time norms in pension insurance at times when part-time rates were rising? Was the latter a consideration at all?
- How does the Austrian case compare to other welfare states with rising part-time rates, such as Germany or the Netherlands?

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