Ordoliberal White Democracy, Elitism, and the Demos: The Case of Wilhelm Röpke

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► **Abstract:** Focusing on selected “Western” conceptions of democracy, we expose and normatively evaluate their conflictual meanings. We unpack the white democracy of prominent ordoliberal Wilhelm Röpke, which comprises an elitist bias against the demos, and we discuss different assessments of his 1964 apologia of Apartheid South Africa. Our critical-historical study of Röpke’s marginalized meaning of democracy traces a neglected anti-democratic continuity in his work that is to be contextualized within wider elitist (neo)liberal discourses: from his critique of Nazism in the 1930s to the defense of Apartheid in the 1960s. We provide an alternative, marginalized meaning of democracy that draws on Marxist political science. Such a meaning of democracy helps explain why liberal democratic theory is ill-equipped to tackle anti-democratic tendencies re-emerging in liberal-democratic polities.

► **Keywords:** apartheid, democratization, elite and masses, Marxism, neoliberalism, racism, white democracy, Wilhelm Röpke

After a lecture tour to South Africa, German economist Wilhelm Röpke put together the pamphlet *South Africa: An Attempt at a Positive Appraisal* (1964b),¹ in which he came to the rescue of the white democracy of the Apartheid regime that was increasingly under attack in the international community in the early 1960s. Even though Apartheid South Africa is history, white democracies are far from it, as contemporary liberal-democratic polities remain ridden with racist tendencies. Joel Olson even argues that white privilege is a constitutive element, rather than an anti-democratic aberration, within the tradition of US-American liberalism (2004: XV). Focusing on the US-American context as well, Adam Tooze notes that the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2007/08 “has starkly exposed [that] centrist liberals struggle to give convincing answers for the long-term problems of modern capitalist democracy”, that is, “increasing inequality and disenfranchisement” (2019: 20).

White-democrat Röpke, regarded as one of the forebears of ordoliberal thought and architect of the social market economy (*Soziale Marktwirtschaft*), the alleged foundation of the West German postwar democracy, is an integral part of the overall neoliberal project. Given the ordoliberalization of Europe that rose to prominence in the wake of the Eurozone crisis (e.g., Biebricher 2018: 200–236; Bonefeld 2017: 115–170), a critical perspective on Röpke’s “answer to the problem how capitalism fit[s] with democracy” (Caldwell 2019: 16) is of significant relevance with regard to the relationship between economic thought and democratic theory. Manifold marginalizations concerning the meaning of democracy and its demos that constitute illiberal elements in Röpke’s thought and its relation to wider ordo- and neoliberal discourses, thus warrant a critical-historical discussion with regard to democratic theory and practice. Tracing the roots of Röpke’s white democracy across his writings, we carve out (ideo)logical connections between his critique of Nazism in the 1930s and his seemingly paradoxical appraisal of Apartheid in the 1960s: We argue that his elitist, anti-democratic distaste for “mass society” led him to praise Apartheid South Africa and to justify the marginalization of its black demos.²

In a first step, we contextualize Röpke’s white democracy within wider discourses produced by opponents of democratic claims before and after 1945, which introduced an elitist bias against the demos into democratic theory. Then, we locate his thought within the neoliberal tradition, identifying ordoliberalism as a major tenet of international neoliberalism and outlining fundamental characteristics of ordoliberal democratic theory. Before we revisit Röpke’s controversial apologia of Apartheid, we briefly summarize both the critical and the apologetic recent scholarly reception of said 1964 pamphlet. Our subsequent textual analysis of selected writings by Röpke emphasizes an elitist (and related cultural-racist) continuity that is often marginalized by scholars who posit a rupture between his early and his late work. Finally, we delineate an alternative marginalized meaning of democracy that draws on Marxist political science and bring it to bear on Röpke’s white democracy and, more generally, on illiberal tendencies in Western liberal democracy and political economy.

Neoliberal Interventions in Democratic Theory Before and After 1945: Marginalization of the Demos

Kyong-Min Son (2020: 106–145) has convincingly demonstrated that the oeuvre of Friedrich Hayek is crucial for understanding how the concept

of democracy was reshaped in theory and practice after World War II. Yet, another leading neoliberal has intervened even more fundamentally in democratic theory. It was Hayek's decidedly more conservative fellow, the economist Wilhelm Röpke (1950: 45), who, in the 1940s, called for the establishment of "vigorous, organically integrated democracies", a strikingly common theme and metaphor among liberal-conservative ideologues at the time. Shortly after World War II, the influential German historian Gerhard Ritter, for example, spoke of the need of molding the "unattached masses" into "an organic body" and highlighted the necessity for "the formation of a strong, lasting and efficient authority" (1949: 249). The reason for this, according to Ritter, was that "[a]n unstructured mass is a mere collective; the collective, however, is by its very nature the mortal enemy of genuine freedom."³ The masses, thus, had to be structured in qualitative terms in order not to become a collectivist lump.

An anti-collectivist stance is a recurrent theme in Röpke's oeuvre, too (Reineke 1946: 356), hence his understanding of collectivism as "contrast to liberalism" (Röpke 1948a: xix). In Röpke's writings, collectivism figures as the common denominator of all political systems he conceived as totalitarianisms, hence equating Nazism and Soviet Socialism. Röpke constantly painted the latter, with its project of economic socialization,⁴ as the bigger threat to Western civilization (1948b: 282, 323). Totalitarianism in general was a child of modern mass democracy that found its origins in the French Revolution, as Röpke (2019a: 16) proclaimed. He made clear that the aforementioned collectivist threat was not only a trademark of Stalinism but also innate to all socialist projects, explicitly including revolutionary-democratic as well as reformist ones (Röpke 1949). Thus, in Röpke's works, all collectivist roads, in the end, lead to totalitarianism – or "serfdom", as he (1952) put it in consonance with Hayek (2001).

Like Hayek, Wilhelm Röpke was born in 1899. His academic career as economist took off in the early 1920s (for his biography see Kolev 2019: xviii–xxiv). He lost his position as professor in Marburg in 1933 and left Germany. In 1937, after stays in Amsterdam, London, and Istanbul, he settled in Geneva, where he resided for the remainder of his life and worked at the Graduate Institute for International Studies. After Röpke's death in 1966, former West German chancellor Ludwig Erhard – political flagship of the social market economy – praised his works as a "decisive inspiration in his journey toward liberalism" (Kolev 2019: xxi).

The fear of the people and the distaste for the masses, abundantly clear in Röpke's anti-collectivism, seem to be what was left of classical liberalism, whose societal foundations had eroded in most metropolitan capitalist countries in the late nineteenth century (Kühnl 1986: 69). The – in parts naïve and flat – optimism of early liberalism that hoped for a

straight and non-contradictory evolutionary societal process gave way to pessimism (Kofler 1959: 125). The classical liberal motif, with its promise of a society in which the individual finds optimal opportunities for self-development (Losurdo 2011: 1; Opitz 1979), had been transformed in a long historical trajectory that ultimately resulted in the de-linkage of political liberalism and economic liberalism in the early twentieth century (Kühnl 1986: 63). This is not to say that this “new” liberalism was merely an economic doctrine bereft of any political theory (Son 2020: 106), but its political content tended toward illiberalism. Barely resembling classical liberalism, it had changed its appearance by recombining elements that were present in its ideological core from the start (Kofler 1959). The initial skeptical attitude of classical liberals toward further radical democratization in theory and practice, however, was intensified in a way that resulted in plain anti-democratic elitism (Kühnl 1986: 55). *Fin de siècle* elite sociologists defended a pyramidal social order, which they regarded as the most effective way of structuring a society ridden with social antagonisms, thus averting democratic claims. This elitism was most prominently represented by former liberals such as Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, whose ideas proved influential on the formation of fascism (Gregor 1969: 39–53). It is justified to ask, then, whether twentieth century neoliberalism, whose liberal ingredients are predominantly of an economic nature, should rather and more adequately be called post-liberalism (Opitz 1979: 7).

Röpke feared “the levelling down of the social pyramid, its atomisation and therewith the intrinsic clumping together of individuals” (1948a: 134). Accordingly, Röpke identified a “true liberal” as being “sufficiently inspired by the writings of . . . [inter alia] Gaetano Mosca” (1951: 687) and championed “aristocrats of public spirit” as the leading elite in a sound society (1961a: 131). At the same time, Röpke tried to lend liberalism democratic attire (Kofler 1959: 115). Thus, it is important to acknowledge a significant (neo- or post-)liberal innovation in democratic theory after World War II that departed from classical elite sociology. These interventions struck at the very core of democratic theory and practice by introducing an elitist bias against the demos (Son 2020). With this resignification, anti-democratic tendencies were presented as truly democratic, whereas democratic advances appeared as totalitarian threats. This was especially cunning since “the critique of the masses” had been “a long-standing theme in political theory” but had “remained outside democratic theory in that it justified rejecting or recurbing democracy”; now, “a reimagination of the democratic ideal itself” was offered (Son 2020: 43). In a seemingly paradoxical fashion, the confrontation with totalitarianism furthered “a peculiar mutation of the democratic ideal through which elements

undermining it from within have become its integral part.” (ibid.: 9; ibid.: inter alia 12, 15, 38) Although Son (ibid.: 49, 52–55, 120) traces this resignation in scientific and political discussions on democracy during the interwar-period, he emphasizes the developments in intellectual history after World War II, against the backdrop of the Cold War, in which the leading powers of the West marketed themselves as the “free world”, opposing a totalitarian collectivism ostensibly embodied in Soviet-style socialism. A closer look at Röpke’s works will show, however, that the fundamental themes of this innovation were already laid down in the early 1930s. What looked like a brave confrontation with fascist totalitarianism and is still regularly praised as such (Kolev 2019: xix; Kolev and Goldschmidt 2020: 219) will reveal itself as a sophisticated means to repel democratic claims and as paving the way for a distinct illiberal perspective.

Wilhelm Röpke Within the Neoliberal Camp: Ordoliberalism and Democratic Theory

One can often read that neoliberalism is dead. Even Pope Francis (2020) follows this reading in his *Fratelli tutti*, heralding the end of the “dogma of neoliberal faith.” Such interpretations are based on an inadequate conception of neoliberalism. The persistent myth that neoliberalism refers primarily to the doctrine that all economic activity should take place within a self-regulating market does not apply to neoliberalism at large, and certainly not to its German variety, that is, ordoliberalism. Drawing on the work of critical scholars (e.g., Biebricher 2018; Bonefeld 2017; Ptak 2004; Slobodian 2018), we understand neoliberalism as a rather discrete, interdisciplinary intellectual movement that emerged in German-speaking Europe in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵ In 1938, these intellectuals, though not unanimously, coined the term “neoliberalism” at the *Colloque Walter Lippmann* in Paris to describe the political project they were pursuing (Reinhoudt and Audier 2018: 25–27). Nine years later, many of the participants gathered again to found the *Mont Pèlerin Society* (MPS) (see e.g., Plehwe 2009a: 1–26), initiated by Hayek and Röpke (Kolev 2017: 41). In their view, capitalism required a strong state that constantly safeguards the markets with new institutions that prevent democratic majorities from disrupting market and price mechanisms (Röpke 1950: 161; see e.g., Cornelissen 2017). Neoliberalism is thus one form of regulation among many, rather than the absence of regulation, and therefore not to be confused with a laissez-faire approach (Röpke 1950: 52). Its aim is the encasement – not liberation – of markets, as Quinn Slobodian (2018) argues.

Such encasement manifests itself especially in the approach of the key founding father of the Freiburg School of ordoliberalism, Walter Eucken (e.g., 1990), which would prove influential on the theoretical foundation of the West German social market economy after World War II.

While the Freiburg School focused on an economic constitution at the national level to ensure a competitive market order, the Geneva School or proponents of “ordoglobalism”, such as Röpke and Hayek, took this concern to the world scale (Slobodian 2018: 8–12). So-called socio-logical ordoliberals (e.g., Röpke and Alexander Rüstow) further sought to integrate the economic constitution into an extra-economic overall order, the “anthropo-sociological frame” (Röpke 1948a: 31–32). The neo-liberals referred to in this article were all born on the eve of the twentieth century and thus experienced their most formative years in the period before and during World War I. Röpke describes this generation as one that “in its youth saw the sunset glow of that long and glorious sunny day of the western world, which lasted from the Congress of Vienna [in 1815] until August 1914.” (1959: 3) For them, Slobodian points out, “[w]orld economic integration was simultaneously an ideological goal and a childhood idyll.” (2018: 187)

Neoliberalism and ordoliberalism are, therefore, a reaction to the aftermath of World War I. From this perspective, capitalism was in a major crisis, as the liberal order was eroding – caused by an excessively intervening state, resulting from massive wartime corporatism and a general intertwining of large corporations and the state. According to Eucken, Imperial Germany (1871–1918) had been characterized by the strict separation of the economy/society and the state, which formed the bedrock for capitalism to prosper. In the course of the formation of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933), however, this strict separation was weakened, which led to the “emergence of the economic state” (Eucken 2017: 56). For Eucken, “the chief factor was that the . . . process of democratization lent the parties, and the masses and interest groups that they organized, much greater influence over the management of the state, and so upon economic policy” (ibid.: 59). Thus, this new type of state is a weak state that cannot protect itself against rent-seeking interest groups (Röpke 1948a: 93; 1950: 192) and is in danger of being torn apart by particular interests (Rüstow 2017: 147).

The Weimar Republic, with its parliamentary democracy and welfare state, must be understood within the context of democratic demands developed by the labor movement. These democratic demands further penetrated the economic sphere in the 1920s, and intense debates on economic planning and on the democratization of the economy erupted (Abendroth 1964). From an ordoliberal perspective, such demands of the

democratic majority had to be countered. Ordoliberals advocated a state that is free from such interferences, represents a unitary whole – through uniform will-formation (e.g., Eucken 2017: 60) and decision-making – and is a “strong state, a government with the courage to govern.” (Röpke 1950: 192) In particular, the idea of a unitary, homogeneous state will and the related resentment against anything that might jeopardize it – above all, demands for democratization – mean that the ordoliberal conception of the state is indeed at least open to authoritarian forms of government (Biebricher 2018: 72).

According to Röpke, a weak state arises from “unhealthy pluralism”, as interest groups aggressively seek to exploit the state for their own objectives (1961a: 144–145). For Röpke, the great danger of “unhealthy pluralism” is that “pressure groups covetously beset the state” (ibid.: 144). By contrast, Röpke describes a second, legitimate type of pluralism, namely “sound pluralism”, which is characterized by its ostensibly defensive stance. Interest groups (minorities) defend their rights against the state’s rampant claim to power and the demands of other particular groups (majorities), and thus help to prevent ochlocracy. In this way, “sound pluralism” contributes to a “salutary limitation” of state power (ibid.). Röpke illustrates what this could entail: If the minority of landlords defends itself against expropriation by the majority of tenants, this is a clear case of “sound pluralism”. In short, this certainly not carelessly chosen example indicates that interest groups seeking to protect their property from economic socialization operate well within the bounds of legitimate pluralism – even in the context of a strong state. Given, however, that only “unhealthy pluralism” entails what is widely understood as pluralist democracy⁶ (see Biebricher 2018: 229), it seems rather presumptuous to speak of pluralism at all in the context of Röpke’s “sound pluralism”. Instead, Röpke uses the term in the service of the property-owning classes, as his own example indicates.

Overall, these reflections point to one question: How should the “problem” of democracy be approached? In neoliberal thought, democracy is a means to another end – that is, the functioning of the totality of the political and economic order. An instrumental relation to democracy is evident because once democracy becomes useless for achieving this higher end, more authoritarian measures are supported. Neo- and ordoliberals struggled with the issue of political – and especially economic – democracy. Most of them were not opposed to democracy per se, but they were deeply skeptical of it (e.g., Köhler and Nientiedt 2021). Arguably, one of the most fundamental issues for this intellectual movement was how to achieve formal-democratic legitimacy but ensure that democratic demands did not interfere too much with market mechanisms (Slobodian

2018: 158).⁷ One of the dominant neoliberal solutions to this question was, and still is, that there should be constitutional constraints on the potency of democratic governments (e.g., Biebricher 2019). Röpke is unambiguous and unequivocal on this issue: “Democracy is compatible with freedom in the long run only on condition that all or at least most voters agree that certain supreme norms and principles of public life and economic order must remain outside the sphere of democratic decision.” (1961a: 69) However, what usually remains unclear at first is the question of concrete agency, that is, who makes the rules that the strong and assertive state is supposed to impose. This neglects the question of whose interests are hegemonic in the state apparatus, giving the state the appearance of a homogeneous block placed neutrally above society. On closer inspection, this does not correspond to actual political practice – certainly not in Apartheid South Africa.

Case Study: Röpke’s White Democracy as Continuation of Ordoliberal Elitism

In his 1964 pamphlet on Apartheid, Röpke openly advocates what critics have called the “white democracy” practiced by the strong and assertive South African state after 1948, with its suppression of the political rights of its non-white majority. These are, of course, not the terms in which Röpke states the case; instead, he conjures a formalist-democratic attire when he argues that the Apartheid government is backed by the majority of its electoral base (Röpke 1964b: 2). What he purposefully ignores is the political marginalization of the black part of the demos, systematized under the Separate Representation of Voters Act in 1951. With a quick reference to the “present limitations of the constitutional guarantees” (ibid.: 15), Röpke likewise casts aside the legal suppression, and concurrent policing, of truly oppositional political parties and extra-parliamentary organizations of black liberationists and the left (Wolpe 1988: 66–68). As Harold Wolpe notes, the Apartheid regime consolidated its white democracy in the period from 1948 to 1960 using legal measures to suppress the political organization of its black population, while the period after 1960 was characterized by an increasingly armed suppression of now illegalized black resistance (ibid.: 68–71).

The term “white democracy” has prominently been applied to Apartheid South Africa by Tony Honoré (1979: 114) and to racially segregated South Africa before the ascent of the National Party in 1948 by Hosea Jaffe (1988: 139). Domenico Losurdo points out that the term bears the “limitation . . . of not stressing the proud seigneurial self-consciousness

of the community of the free and the explosive violence such a community could unleash against the excluded.” (2011: 107) Still, the concept captures the theoretical (and historically very practical) problems a white parliament, elected on the basis of a racially exclusive franchise, and its place within South Africa’s specific political system posed for the analysis of the authoritarian nature of the Apartheid regime (Wolpe 1988: 46–47). We apply it to Röpke’s approval of Apartheid South Africa in a critical manner, to emphasize his recourse to formal-democratic terms in his otherwise non- and anti-democratic stance that comprises both a racist and an elitist marginalization of the demos.

Röpke’s pamphlet was widely received on the part of the contemporaneous political right. It served as “rhetorical ammunition” for the South African government, became a welcome source for defenders of Apartheid, and strengthened Röpke’s ties not only with the US-American New Right (Slobodian 2018: 153–154). Furthermore, Röpke’s apologia of Apartheid was celebrated by former high-rank SS officer Gustav Jonak. His article in the West German far-right magazine *Nation Europa* particularly welcomed that Röpke’s “academic authority” had rendered positions defending Apartheid acceptable and had encouraged the like-minded to raise their voices accordingly (Junker 1966: 59).

Röpke’s take on Apartheid has received much scholarly attention recently, most notably in Quinn Slobodian’s critical study of neoliberal globalism (2018). Slobodian argues that the postwar era of decolonization constitutes the formative period for “neoliberal globalist thinking” as “mass demands for social justice and redistributive equality” threatened to shape global governance (ibid.: 16). He points out that “a racialized worldview was at the heart of Röpke’s postwar philosophy of society and economy” and served as an extra-economic framework to deter democratic demands (ibid.: 171). In particular, Slobodian surveys a range of racisms across Röpke’s works, from “crude statements” of evolutionary or biological racism to a more or less subtle “translation of race into economics” (ibid.: 169; see ibid.: 169–173, 152–153, 157). For the latter, Röpke constructed a “homology between qualities of entrepreneurship, the civilizational category of the West, and the functioning of a free market” (ibid.: 170), with frequent recourse to European and North-American “Christian patrimony” (ibid.: 157) as the basis of his “cultural essentialism” (ibid.: 160). In other words, Röpke recycled widespread topoi of both biological and cultural racism for his specific attempt to encase the liberal economic order. Hence, Slobodian remarks, Röpke stands out for his particularly “illiberal” political stance, since for him “defending the world economy meant defending Western Christian – and Caucasian – principles against what fellow neoliberal William H. Hutt called ‘black

imperialism” (ibid.: 22). At the same time, Slobodian regards Röpke’s turn to a rather crude racism as “striking” given his “principled stance against anti-Semitism that led to his emigration from Nazi Germany” (ibid.: 153) in the 1930s. Our contribution complements and extends Slobodian’s study on two accounts. We show that although Röpke explicitly embraced “race” in its biologicistic variant only in the 1960s, his cultural racism was already fully developed in the 1930s. What is more, our analyses shed light on yet another related extra-economic framework encasing the economic order that further links “early” and “late” Röpke, namely his elitism, likewise fully spelled out in the early 1930s.

Seemingly replying to Slobodian’s critique, Stefan Kolev and Nils Goldschmidt address Röpke’s pamphlet in a more apologetic manner. These current ordoliberal academics and campaigners identify a tension between Röpke’s alleged “passionate struggle for a free and humane society” and his “intolerable and politically naïve” attitude toward the Apartheid regime (Kolev and Goldschmidt 2020: 232–233). They quote but reject Slobodian’s verdict, refusing to label Röpke as a “crude racist” (ibid.) without, however, offering an actual engagement with Slobodian’s work. Instead, they portray Röpke as a social philosopher and a “pioneer of cultural economics” (Goldschmidt and Dörr 2018: 210). Their main strategy to safeguard their forebear’s reputation against allegations of an inherent racial and anti-democratic bias is to posit a rift between his “early” or main work and his writings from the late 1950s onward. In this narrative, Röpke’s growing “concerns for Western culture” and his “increasing bitterness” are to be seen in the context of his alleged diminishing influence and his degradation to an object of public ridicule and criticism since the 1950s (Kolev and Goldschmidt 2020: 220–221). This thesis contradicts their own statement (ibid.: 221) as well as other findings on intensified ties with prominent US-American conservatives, some of which reach back until the early days of the MPS as his main organizational base (Slobodian 2018: 161).

The authors trivialize Röpke’s blatant racism and elitism with ample euphemisms, speaking of his “not very likeable”, “dark side” (Kolev and Goldschmidt 2020: 214). Methodologically, they affirmatively embrace Röpke’s conceptual categories and conceal his notion of an international order based on white supremacy. They focus on a supposedly well-intending developmental idea, drawing Röpke as a respectful and humble outside observer caught in a contradiction (ibid.: 233). On the one hand, he was convinced that economic success is based “on certain psycho-moral reserves” of occidental Christian culture (Röpke 1942: 68–69). On the other hand, he argued against imposing this “culture” on the non-occidental world. Kolev and Goldschmidt (2020: 229) apologetically claim that

this “dilemma” is reflected “symbolically” in Röpke’s attitude toward Apartheid, without problematizing his essentialisms. Selectively citing Röpke, the authors concur with him that “[a]ny development programme will prove to be more surely on right and sensible lines the less it does violence to natural conditions and to the circumstances already existing.” (Röpke 1959: 236; see Kolev and Goldschmidt 2020: 233) However, they do not mention that, for Röpke, these circumstances, which must not be violated in the context of South Africa, imply the preservation of Apartheid. Moreover, they omit his (1961b: 31–32) racist remarks on the “lack of spiritual-moral prerequisites” of the Asian and African people, which gives rise to the necessity of “Western experts . . . not as temporary advisors but as permanent and truly leading forces.”⁸ (1961b: 31–32)

Kolev and Goldschmidt (2020: 214) ambiguously refer to Röpke’s “cultural pessimism” as both a personal flaw and a means of purposeful provocation. Linking Röpke’s biography with his theoretical positions, they detect an increasingly negative attitude toward global socio-political developments that allegedly only emerged during the course of his later life. Thus, they ignore the elitist and (culturally) racist continuities in Röpke’s thought, which form the ideological basis on which his later defense of white democracy is built. In doing so, they fail to acknowledge that pessimism was a trait of neoliberal thought in general (Kofler 1959: 116) and thus was not confined to Röpke’s thinking.

With reference to a speech Röpke gave in 1933 after the Nazis’ seizure of power, as well as his going into exile shortly thereafter, Kolev and Goldschmidt paint him as a determined member of the resistance against fascism. Directly citing Röpke, they neglect that his concerns about the decline of “Western culture” – and his rejection of Nazi fascism respectively – are exposed from a position that closely corresponds to the elitism shared by his contemporaries further to the right, thus marginalizing the elitist nature of his oppositional stance. Ultimately, Kolev and Goldschmidt (2020: 224) claim that Röpke’s “conservative diagnosis” of a cultural crisis triggered by mass society is somewhat redeemed by the “liberal therapy” he proposes. While we agree with the first half of this proposition – adding the terms “elitist” as well as “racist” – we question, in what follows, the degree of liberalism extant in his prescribed therapy.

Conservative and (Racist-)Elitist Diagnosis

In the speech he delivered in early February 1933, titled “End of an Era?”, Röpke indeed lamented the Nazis’ seizure of power, calling on “forces of resistance” to avert a “social catastrophe” (1969: 81), thus providing the keywords needed for the narrative of Röpke as a determined anti-fascist.

A critical reading of this foundational text of ordoliberalism (Haselbach 1991: 73) has been put forward by Ralf Ptak (2004). His wider analysis of entanglements of prominent ordoliberals with the Nazi regime (*ibid.*: 61–90) has seemingly led Röpke’s advocate Goldschmidt (2005: 321) to concede, quoting Daniela Rütger (2002: 107), that there was a “blurred line between cooperation and opposition”. Hence, we can reasonably doubt the consistency and extent of ordoliberal opposition to, let alone resistance against Nazism; what is more, an elitist distaste for the masses constitutes a notable ideological parallel and a shared history of ideas. Ptak (2004: 38–39) notes that Röpke, Rüstow, and Eucken used the notion of the masses to argue that the uneducated and uncivilized majority of the people must be led by assertive elites, hereby drawing on José Ortega y Gasset’s *The Revolt of the Masses*. In 1929, Ortega warned his contemporaries against the formation of social masses and the so-called mass man (as opposed to individuals and individualized elites) in modernity (1957: 13–16), and his primary concern was the political domination on the part of the masses (*ibid.*: 17). Ortega mentioned fascism as one political architect and beneficiary of this process rather than presenting a critical analysis as such. What is more, he continued the tradition of elitism developed by conservative thinkers at the turn of the twentieth century such as Mosca and Pareto (Meyer 2001: 77), a tradition that was, however, likewise taken up by fascists. Hitler’s cynical disdain for the majority of his followers mobilized in mass demagoguery, visible in his comments on the obliviousness and limited grasp, in a word the stupidity, of the “great mass” of society (1979: 111–112), and stances in Mussolini’s thought (1923: 149) illustrate this.

As Ptak demonstrates (2004: 39–41), Röpke draws on the motif of the masses in “End of an Era?” to criticize the “brutalization” (1969: 82) of Germany at the hands of the Nazis. We further stress that the history of ideas highlighted above actually connects his rhetoric and political theory with that of his fascist contemporaries. In Röpke’s words (*ibid.*: 80), what has allowed this historical moment to turn into a “world crisis” is “mass stupidity” and the fact that “the masses [are] ruthlessly reaching for power”, rather than the Nazis’ mass demagoguery and their ruthless reach for power. In fact, Röpke explicitly refers to Ortega’s *The Revolt of the Masses* to develop his motif of the uncivilized, inhuman, and intolerant masses (*ibid.*: 92, 96–97). When Röpke notes that “the people get more and more stupid and barbarous”, and the masses, at the mercy of their “instincts”, “revolt against reason, freedom and humanity”, much to the imagined “shame” of “our Germanic forebears” (*ibid.*: 81–82), we can see a rather straight-forward connection between his elitism in 1933 and the evolutionist-essentialist Western – if not German(ic) – supremacy that

resounds in Röpke's much later reappraisal of Apartheid South Africa. In the latter, he characterizes South Africa's black population as "an utterly different race" that "stems from a completely different type and level of civilization" (Röpke 1964b: 8).

According to Röpke, the revolt of the masses in the 1930s threatens "the intellectual and moral foundations" of "the existing economic and social order" (1969: 80), namely liberalism, conterminous here with "Western civilization" – he even suggests "Civilism" and "Westernism" as synonyms (ibid.: 83). Three decades later, he identifies a similar threat in contemporaneous critiques of Apartheid, noting a current of "certain ideals of modern mass democracy that attempts to reduce everything to a normed level" (Röpke 1964b: 1). In other words, granting the black population political equality is cunningly represented as some kind of enforced conformity here. Röpke also conversely taps into the much older topos of the white man's burden, when he argues that the whites have to raise the non-whites to the necessary level of civilization before the latter merit political equality (ibid.: 11). He further accuses those taking a stand for the marginalized black majority of "extremely selective partisanship" in the name of a "power-greedy ideology" (ibid.: 1), a rhetorical reversal of actual power relations that is reminiscent of his class-blind reading of conflicts between tenants and landlords mentioned above, with the latter represented as a minority weighed down by the allegedly particularistic interests of the majority. Furthermore, we can note two implicit parallels between Ortega's *The Revolt of the Masses* and Röpke's Apartheid pamphlet. First, Röpke warns his contemporaries that the inclusion of the black population in the demos would amount to "handing over to them jointly undisputed control of the country" (ibid.: 13). In other words, Röpke, like Ortega, fears the political domination of the masses, in this case, the black masses. Second, Röpke (ibid.) also fears the overcrowding of formerly white urban territory by "Negro masses", just as Ortega (1957: 12) had lamented that urbanization meant that "the multitude, as such, [is] in possession of the places and the instruments created by civilization" (such as public transport and theaters).

The elitism connecting "early" and "late" Röpke can be carved out in his metaphorical terms, which reappear in his cultural-racist statements, namely his use of the clichéd metaphor of plant cultivation (as opposed to rank growth) in both "End of an Era?" and his Apartheid pamphlet. In the former, Röpke laments that "the mass is about to trample down the garden of European civilization, ruthlessly and uncomprehendingly" (1969: 97), just as in the original German version of his Apartheid apologia he argues that it was the white population that has metaphorically brought South Africa "to the highest bloom"⁹ (1964a: 103), while its black

population would, if granted the right to vote, “ruin” the country politically, spiritually and economically (1964b: 11). A similar logic can be discerned in “End of an Era?”, when Röpke admits that, for all his critique of “a mass revolt against reason, freedom, humanity” that “degrad[es] individuals into slaves of the state” (ibid.: 81), he does not reject Nazism for its project of forming the masses as such: “Mass man is not used to thinking for himself; he likes to let others do his thinking for him. That would not matter much if the ready-made ideas he consumes were those of the best in the land, but unfortunately they are simply the ideas of those who are most skillful in pandering to mass moods and emotions.” (1969: 97) The point Röpke makes here is not so much a critique of the mental “slavery” of the Nazis’ mass man, on the grounds of some liberal notion of individual subjectivity. Instead, he not only claims that this “state slavery” is “more Asiatic than German” (ibid.: 82), adding yet another essentialism, but laments that liberalism failed to sow the seeds of its core set of ideas in what remains, either way, a receptive, malleable mass. Just as the white masses of 1930s Germany are, in Röpke’s view, misled by the Nazis to trample his elite garden, so the black masses in 1960s South Africa would trample the flowers of white development if given the chance. Hence, Röpke’s topos of an orderly Western garden as used in his 1933 speech “End of an Era?” not only serves to illustrate his elitism, a feat easily accomplished given the European tradition of the landscape garden as a cultural practice to stage and legitimize (aristocratic) rule (see e.g., Mittelstädt 2013). It also prefigures his tapping into the discursive construction of the racialized other via the binary civilized vs. wild in his apologia of Apartheid three decades later, when, in “End of an Era?”, he constructs a dichotomy between the well-ordered occidental garden and a “rank jungle of thought and style run wild” (Röpke 1965a: 173).

When, in our close reading, we have juxtaposed Röpke’s 1933 speech and his 1964 pamphlet, we have done so to underline continuities of thought between an early “anti-fascist” and a “late” racist Röpke, thus countering the narrative of a rupture in Röpke’s work. However, the notion of the masses, signifying an uneducated, impulsive, and uncivilized majority of the population, occupies a central role in Röpke’s oeuvre as a whole. His 1944 social-philosophical monograph *Civitas Humana*, a prominent reference work for contemporary ordoliberals, may serve as an example. Here, Röpke (1948a: 135) again refers to Ortega’s *The Revolt of the Masses* when he voices his bourgeois, elitist contempt for the masses and characterizes the majority of the population as incapable of independent political thought and practice. In this instance, he speaks of the “massification” (Röpke 1979a: 243) of the population, which leads to “the creation of an intellectual proletariat, the most explosive dynamite

for any society whatsoever” (Röpke 1948a: 135). Closely related to such massification, Röpke laments “proletarianization” as a “pathological process . . . in its widest material as well as immaterial sense of uprooting [and] nomadisation” (ibid.: 137–138). In sum, Röpke argues, without the rational leadership and guidance of an elite, the masses bring about the collapse of society, susceptible as they are for socialist and collectivist ideas. This brings us to the second major strand of our analysis, namely Röpke’s ideas as to a possible therapy for the cultural crises unleashed by the masses reaching for power. In what follows, we summarize crucial elements of this therapy as first proposed in 1933 and further spelled out in his 1947 pamphlet *Kulturideal des Liberalismus* [Cultural Ideal of Liberalism], in *Civitas Humana* and his 1958 monograph on economic philosophy, *A Humane Economy*.

Liberal or Illiberal Therapy?

Going back to Röpke’s 1933 speech, we find a first exposition of his ostensibly liberal therapy for the problem of the “destructive . . . tyranny of the masses”: “When liberalism advocates democracy, it can therefore do so only on condition that democracy is hedged in by such limitations and safeguards as will prevent liberalism’s being devoured by democracy.” (Röpke 1969: 97) Hence, rather than safeguarding democracy against the threat of the Nazis’ authoritarian usurpation, Röpke is intent on defending liberalism from an engulfing democracy, curiously epitomized, in his analysis, by the Nazis’ reach for power. He revisits the tense relation between liberalism and democracy in his *Kulturideal des Liberalismus*, the point of reference for Goldschmidt and Kolev’s (2020: 224–226) notion of Röpke’s liberal response to a conservative diagnosis. To prevent the liberal motif (Röpke 1947: 14) from being “devoured” by the “dangerous maelstrom” (ibid.) of collectivism (ibid.: 25), Röpke proposes the following concrete checks for democracy: “limitation of parliamentary rule, . . . two-chamber system, the strict separation of powers, a richly structured society, monarchy or a strong presidential system” (ibid.: 20). Some of these suggestions are indeed truly liberal; however, the inclusion of more or less autocratic forms of government surely displays Röpke’s illiberalism. Furthermore, the societal structure seems particularly important to Röpke, with “social stratification” (ibid.: 18) mentioned in passing before the passage quoted here. This has to be read in relation to Röpke’s sense of a healthy societal structure, namely a pyramidal order, while mass society resembles a pyramid turned on its head (Kolev and Goldschmidt 2020: 222). Or, to quote from *Kulturideal* again, Röpke sees the

major containment of democracy in “a spirit that is not ready to sacrifice freedom for equality” (Röpke 1947: 20).

Finally, Röpke argues that “spiritual-political” liberalism by no means necessitates a free market economy – it may also prosper in an economy of “self-sufficient peasants” – but would be destroyed by economic collectivism (ibid.: 25). From our perspective, Röpke’s rhetorical division of economic and “spiritual-political” liberalism is dubious, in that it brushes over how he pits economic freedom (in a market economy) against economic equality (in economic collectivism) to then posit that only the former can coincide with political freedom. Ironically, Röpke further mentions that democracy is not only a formal matter of who holds power but must likewise be characterized in terms of its content (ibid.: 20). However, it is clear what the economic content of Röpke’s “democracy” entails, since the bulk of checks he proposes safeguards the *bourgeois* from the *citoyen*. In doing so, Röpke privileges economic liberalism over the political participation of the demos (or *citoyen*) as expressed by parliamentary rule. In other words, Röpke’s “democracy” actually becomes a formal matter, with the subordination of the *citoyen* to the *bourgeois* (Kofler 1959: 121); for Röpke, “the most sound and stable democracies” (1947: 20) seem to be blocked ones.

Such blocked democracies are in line with the ordoliberal conception of a strong state but Röpke also proposes remedies for what he regards as a weak state. In *Civitas Humana*, he spells out the role of social hierarchy, proposing a “vertical class structure of society” (1948a: 110). This stratified society “determines the status of the individual . . . at his birth” (ibid.: 111), which adds a feudalistic twist. At the top of this hierarchy, Röpke (ibid.: 110) envisions a leading “elite and legitimate minority”, a role he (ibid.: 117) assigns to “clerks”. Röpke’s gallery of clerks – for example, distinguished individual scholars as counterpart to the “massification . . . of science” (1979a: 229), appointed rather than elected high judges (1948a: 123) and journalists above “cheap concessions to mob taste” (ibid.: 125) – once again reveals his elitist contempt for the masses as well as his anti-democratic tenor. Not only does he attribute these elites “a justice higher than the decrees of the governing body” (ibid.: 117), but he also curtails universal suffrage, when he (ibid.: 96) considers giving multiple votes to the male heads of families and to those who have proven themselves in their professions.

While Röpke’s conception of clerks already suggests an elitist attitude, this is unequivocal in his later monograph *A Humane Economy*, when he (1961a: 130) calls for a “revolt of the elite” and a “true *nobilitas naturalis*”. This “natural nobility” possesses an authority that is “readily accepted by all men”, “deriving its title solely from supreme performance and peerless

moral example and invested with the moral dignity of such a life” (ibid.). Only those who bravely promote what is true and right – and thus stand “above the classes, interests, passions, wickedness, and foolishness of men” (ibid.: 131) – can ascend into this elite through an “exemplary and slowly maturing life of dedicated endeavor on behalf of all” (ibid.: 130). These “agents of the strong state” (Bonefeld 2017: 39) intervene, Röpke notes, when “governments . . . fail to take independent decisions based on objective assessment of all relevant facts and designed to serve the common interest” (1961a: 141). These “aristocrats of public spirit” (ibid.: 131) should include, for example, businessmen and bankers, who are expected to relinquish the systemic logic of action inherent to their profession and assess the overall economic development independently of their subjective short-term economic interests.

Alongside businessmen and bankers, Röpke (ibid.) also identifies union leaders as part of the *nobilitas naturalis* and expects them to understand that they share the responsibility for the national currency with the head of the country’s central bank. Elsewhere, Röpke warns against the “extremely harmful and dangerous monopolistic powers [of unions]” (1950: 230). Such incorporation of union leaders into the ruling elite testifies to Röpke’s anti-union stance. In short, Röpke delegitimizes the democratic demands of the working class voiced by the unions, against the backdrop of a desired depoliticized and “domesticated labour movement” that aims at “formatting workers as disciples of order” (Bonefeld 2017: 39). In sum, Röpke’s notion of an ostensibly class-neutral elite correlates with the ordoliberal conception of the state, somehow located above society and the economy, that is, above class conflict. At the same time, this semblance of neutrality dissolves when Röpke refers to his “natural nobility” as a “class of censors” safeguarding society from the masses (1961: 131). An alternative approach that conceptualizes the state as an integral part of an antagonistic society, and thus as a sphere of conflict and negotiation, is provided in what follows.

Marxist Interventions in Democratic Theory: Locating Illiberal Tendencies Within Liberalism

Röpke was ready to defend the liberal economic order against democratic demands by way of politically illiberal means if necessary. In the case of Apartheid South Africa, this led him to justify the marginalization of the black demos and the authoritarian nature of its white democracy. Such illiberalism was not restricted to his approval of authoritarian measures at the front lines of liberation struggles in the Global South. That he feared

a “black” democracy as much as the “red” threat of world communism (and indeed regarded the two as connected, see Röpke 1964b: 13–15) provides a link, here, with Röpke’s (1962a: 258) sympathy for McCarthyism as well as his response to the specter of communism in postwar West Germany. At the onset of the Cold War, he advocated measures that in the formative period of the Federal Republic of Germany led to the political persecution of actual and suspected communists, reminiscent of the Orwellian hunt for thought-criminals. This included the surveillance and oppression of peace activists, pacifists, neutralists, socialists of other persuasion than Marxism-Leninism, as well as trade unionists – sometimes at the hands of former Nazi officials again in charge of security apparatuses (Foschepoth 2017). According to Röpke, banning the Communist Party (KPD) in 1956 helped further a change in the West German labor movement, which he praised as the triumph of Adam Smith over Karl Marx, or “the capitulation of socialism to liberalism” (1962b: 36). Röpke referred to the adoption of the Godesberg manifesto of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1959, which abandoned demands for economic socialization and accepted the capitalist economy. This, Röpke rejoiced, stripped the party off its socialist tradition, barring its name (*ibid.*: 35). Although he was convinced that the majority of voters by then rejected socialist economic policies, he still asserted that the ban of the KPD allowed for the “freedom of maneuver” necessary for the “change in program” (*ibid.*), since the SPD leadership was otherwise at risk of losing segments of its party to the left. Röpke thus viewed the curtailing of West German political pluralism from above, by way of authoritarian measures, as a crucial pathway for the victory of liberalism, which clearly displays his illiberal affinities.

Leo Kofler (1959: 116) was ready to admit that the “mistakes of Stalinism” had helped liberalism to acquire its democratic attire, in spite of the aforementioned illiberal tendencies (*ibid.*: 125–126). Kofler spoke from experience. He was one of those Marxist scholars who had left East Germany during the Stalinist period in the late 1940s and 1950s without renouncing socialism – and without pausing the critique of liberalism and the call for further democratization. Another prominent example was Wolfgang Abendroth, a former anti-fascist resistance fighter and professor at Marburg since 1950, Röpke’s workplace until 1933. The East German refugee proved influential for the emerging discipline of political science in West Germany, although the influence of the Marburg School has subsided by now and its impulses for democratic theory have been marginalized (Peter 2019). Abendroth fiercely criticized the ban of the KPD and the shift to the right of the SPD (Abendroth 1967: 407–428). A card-carrying social democrat until 1961, he analyzed the ban of the KPD

as a potential “door-opener for the state to counter any socialist movement and any radical-democratic project, as well as, in the last instance, for the suppression of the freedom of opinion” (ibid.: 141). Banning the KPD, in Abendroth’s analysis, amounts to an upfront exclusion of the left that is difficult to reconcile with the constitutional order as defined in the West German *Grundgesetz* with its pluralist stance and its principled openness for political opposition and ideological dispute (ibid.: 147–148). It further constrained the programmatic positioning of other parties that wished to avoid illegalization, which helped consolidate the ideological hegemony of the ruling bloc (ibid.: 155).

In Abendroth’s understanding (1954: 38), democracy entails a tendency toward an “identity of the ruled and the rulers” in the political as well as the economic sphere – he specifically includes “industrial democracy” (1964). By contrast, in Röpke’s conception, the divide between the ruled and the rulers could not be wide enough; such a rift even secures the functioning of a sound democracy. While Abendroth defined democracy in the tradition of democratic theory established by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Röpke considered Rousseau as “the chief moving spirit of democratic doctrinarianism”, responsible for “democratic dogmatism” (1948a: 52). According to Abendroth, almost every form of political rule in the modern world needs a certain democratic legitimacy, as even the most elitist ordoliberalists knew. Despite the contradiction between a monopolist, essentially autocratic leadership structure in capitalist economies and a formally democratic type of state in most countries of the West, (neo- or post-)liberal ideologues successfully asserted an incompatibility of democracy on the one hand, and socialist structures in society and a socialized economy on the other (Abendroth 1954: 34). This success is striking and even grotesque (ibid.: 37) in Abendroth’s view, bearing in mind that influential sectors of the holders of economic power had flanked the Nazis’ ascent (Tooze 2006: 101). To Abendroth, this proves that “Germany owes the 1933 victory of the most inhumane form of the totalitarian state that ever existed to the inner contradictions within the liberal-capitalist economic order shot through with monopolies” (1954: 37–38). He thereby returns the accusation of totalitarianism Röpke leveled at all socialist projects as such. After the war, the attempt to portray the catastrophe of fascism as a consequence of “egalitarian democratism” resumed (ibid.: 34), giving Röpkean theses known from “End of an Era?” new prominence. Thus, concepts of a liberal democracy along those lines exclude not only socialism but majority rule in general, generating an “unclear terminological mysticism” (ibid.) with which political democracy can be subject to suspension again – this time in the name of “democracy”. While Abendroth (1967: 62–66) also critically analyzed why

socialist societies fell short of democracy in the political sphere, Röpke never attempted such an analysis. This again goes to show that it was not so much democracy in the political sphere or the liberal motif in society as a whole that was Röpke's primary concern, but rather how to push back economic democratization, let alone socialization.

Abendroth's (1954: 35, 38) own notion of democracy can be traced back to the writings of the young Karl Marx and the elderly Friedrich Engels. He (ibid.: 38) locates the main threat for democracy as coming from above: In modern societies, the ruling classes perpetually tend to avert the potential democratic emancipation of the masses and their democratic control of the state apparatuses, by resignifying constitutional norms. Furthermore, Abendroth highlights the need of democracy to unfold its core meaning, which means not to remain locked "inside an abstract form of government and to only function as political constitution"; rather, democracy should be extended into a "constitution of society as a whole" (ibid.: 36). This is not to belittle formal democracy. "[T]he struggle for democracy is [rather] the first step on the way to the remodeling of society" (ibid.). Socialist transformation is the necessary consequence of democratic thinking (ibid.), since it takes the liberal motif as a promise for each and every one (ibid.: 35), and searches for the societal conditions of its realization (see also Rooksby 2012). In a dialectic manner, Abendroth sees this transformation not only as the consequence but also as the condition for safeguarding democracy, since democracy can only overcome its inner contradictions and acquire actual content when expanded "from a merely political to a social democracy" (1954: 36). According to Abendroth (1967: 109–110), the Weimar Republic perished because its democracy had failed to expand accordingly. A social democracy can only be achieved once the "headquarters of economic life", hitherto beyond societal control, are subordinated to "the needs and the will of society" (Abendroth 1954: 36). This is why Abendroth (ibid.: 41) argues that "[s]ocialism is no more than an all-encompassing realization of this meaning of democracy, extended in a way that turns a system of political rules of the game into a substantial principle of the whole of society", with actual democratic content. This does not mean that only socialists are true democrats. However, the most reliable defenders of even a merely formal democracy, despite its limitations (Asara 2020), are those striving for democratic "content" (Abendroth 1954: 39, 41), such as working class mass parties and trade unions so heavily criticized in ordoliberal thought. They secure the "equal participation of each and every one in the collective organization of the responsibilities of all" (ibid.: 38), another important characteristic of democracy. Putting the social and economic order up for negotiation (Abendroth 1967: 114, 116) would overcome the limitations

of formal democracy and render the democratic state a “society in self-determined action” (ibid.: 118). Ordoliberalism’s anti-collectivism is in its core a fear of such negotiation. The latter, however, is no end in itself. The negotiation of the social and economic order serves the liberal motif that in a Rooseveltian sense includes the freedom from want and fear (Son 2020: 133–134) – a nightmare to Röpke (1951: 690; see also Slobodian 2018: 158).

Liberal Democratic Theory—Quo Vadis?

Departing from Son’s (2020) work on the reshaping of the concept of democracy in the aftermath of World War II, we have argued that the elitist resignification of anti-democratic projects as truly democratic dates back even further. Analyzing some of his most significant works, we have illustrated how influential ordoliberal Wilhelm Röpke efficaciously introduced an elitist bias against the demos into neoliberal democratic theory as early as the 1930s. He shared argumentative starting points (distaste for the masses, collectivism as ultimately totalitarian threat) with ideologues even further to the right, which culminated in Röpke’s apologia of Apartheid in the 1960s. His defense of white democracy now poses a nuisance to contemporaneous advocates of his wider thought. Tracing his deeply anti-democratic stance across his writings, we have illustrated its scope for democratic theory by thoroughly embedding his rhetoric and political theory into its broader context and expanding the focus from his racism to his virtual illiberalism. That Röpke (1979b: 151–152) himself doubted whether the word “liberal” truly captures his political stance gestures toward the question we posed with recourse to Reinhard Opitz (1979: 7), that is, whether twentieth century neoliberalism is more accurately termed post-liberalism. In sum, we have demonstrated how Röpke marginalized not only the overwhelming majority of the demos – be it the (South African) black demos or the demos of “civilized Western societies” – but also the meaning of democracy as such. In pursuit of an ordoliberal project of world scale, Röpke drew up a “democratic” attire bereft of any truly democratic content, not only in the economic but also the political sphere.

The perspective of Opitz, as Abendroth’s student, necessarily differs heavily from Röpke’s: “The question of freedom is, in its nature, the question of the system” (1979: 50). Thus, the liberal motif is kept alive and expanded in democratic struggles and socialist endeavors for even further democratization (ibid.: 63–64), whereas the Röpkean sound and healthy, that is, blocked democracy ultimately results in the decay of liberalism,

reducing it to a “mere synonym of illiberalism” (ibid.: 63, see also 7–10). In conclusion, in our plea for realization through *Aufhebung*¹⁰ – instead of elimination through ostensible continuation – of the liberal motif, we have outlined a truly marginalized understanding of democracy actually capable of accomplishing the identity between rulers and ruled. This marginalized Marxist meaning of democracy is well-equipped to counter elisions in liberal democratic theory and practice in the face of increasing socio-economic inequalities and disenfranchisement in the twenty-first century.

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■► NOTES

1. The polemic originally appeared in German in *Schweizer Monatshefte* but was disseminated as a stand-alone pamphlet by the South African government in English translation within the same year. Unless otherwise stated, our citations are taken from the English translation, generously provided by Quinn Slobodian. Another version of the text, almost identical in content with the original polemic, was published by Röpke (1965b) in a volume edited by Albert Hunold.
2. We use “black” and “white” as social categories in accordance with Balibar and Wallerstein (1991: 198–200).

3. All non-English sources are translated by the authors, except where stated otherwise.
4. We understand socialization as part of the project of democratization. With regard to the economic sphere, democratization encompasses (the struggle for) participation on the part of employees in decision-making processes in capitalist enterprises within the existing socio-economic order (ranging from the most basic forms of workers' participation to co-determination) as well as practices related to the socialization of the means of production, hence reaching beyond the capitalist order. The latter usually evokes ideas of democratic workers' and/or popular control, and comprises projects of nationalization (with the state as owner) and various other forms of collective or social ownership, such as commons and cooperatives (Topham 1965: 479–482).
5. Hence, our approach differs from two major interpretations of this concept. One refers to a periodization that covers the last 40 to 50 years, emphasizing in particular the 1980s, with Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan's policies of privatization, union busting, dismantling of social redistribution, and a general unleashing of "embedded liberalism" (e.g., Harvey 2005). The other understanding of neoliberalism describes a novel and intensified version of capitalism that is qualitatively different from its predecessors and is essentially characterized by cultural changes such as the emergence of the entrepreneurial self and the subjective management of human capital (e.g., Bröckling 2015).
6. In this context, a pluralist democracy exhibits the following exemplary characteristics: liberal fundamental rights such as the freedom of assembly and association, allowing one's values and worldviews to be represented in the competition of ideas by non-governmental groups, and preventing absolute concentration of power by distributing it among various institutions within and outside the state (see Abendroth 1954: 39–40).
7. See also Opitz (1979: 21–31) for a distinction between content and form of democracy.
8. For a comprehensive discussion of the neoliberal development discourse, see Plehwe (2009b).
9. In the English translation, the wording follows the sense, rather than the metaphorical terms, and reads "to the highest prosperity" (Röpke 1964b: 7).
10. The German word *Aufhebung* (Engl. sublation), in the Hegelian tradition, further encompasses the senses of preservation, supersession, and transcendence.

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