

# INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK EMMENEGGER

**Can you tell us a bit about your background?**

I am Swiss, from a small village on the countryside in central Switzerland. I spent my first twenty years there before going to university. I graduated in Bern in Political Science (minor in Economics) in 2008. The thesis was on "Regulatory Social Policy: The Politics of Job Security Regulations" (i.e., dismissal protection). I then moved to Denmark, working as an assistant professor from 2008 to 2010, then associate professor 2010 to 2012, before returning to Switzerland (St. Gallen) in 2012. Now I am professor of comparative political economy and public policy. What else? I am a poster child for successful social mobility. Good public schools and decent salaries for people with regular jobs give their children the opportunity to become professors. Switzerland is quite good (but far from perfect) in this regard. That said, with my family background I am still rather exceptional among the faculty members of my university. There is a lot of focus on the number of women among faculty members – for good reason! But sometimes, it seems to me that there are even fewer faculty members with a working class background. By the way, the same thing could be said about members of parliament.

**How can Socio-Economic Review be made even stronger? What are the areas that you think should get more coverage?**

I am sometimes a bit concerned about a possible lack of progress in the social sciences. Papers are being published, but they are not part of a discussion. Earlier contributions are forgotten, new contributions stand in isolation. I always like to read conversations between authors that include multiple publications. Arguments, counterarguments, new ideas, rebuttals, etc. Much can be learned by following such an exchange. At SER, we are trying to stimulate discussions with our discussion forums, where important contributions are revisited or new publications are critically examined. Sometimes such contributions to debates are not considered to have the same

value as "stand-alone articles", but in terms of progress, they are sometimes more informative.

**What themes do you imagine will gain prominence in the coming years, and thus receive more attention in SER?**

Where do I start? Quite generally, I think that the issues SER covers are going to become more important. Given recent experiences, the combination of economic, political and sociological perspectives will become even more essential. Socio-Economics is too important to leave to just one discipline.

Substantially, we will have to talk a lot more about taxation. Much is going on in the field of corporate taxation that has major implications for topics such as state capacity or inequality. Much research on finance has been already done, not least in the pages of SER, but this topic will stay with us. New and changing employment relations will become even more important. Some of the ideas that are being circulated in some forums about the future of work are, quite frankly, rather scary. Here I am not just thinking of new forms of precarious work, but also recent innovations involving new (digital) modes of supervision and control. The world of work is changing and I do not know who is going to make sure that employees do not see their working conditions deteriorate. Historically, unions have played a key role here, but union influence is declining and not all unions have adapted to the 21st century. But it is not just unions that struggle to define their role and maintain their influence, there is virtually no postindustrial democracy, whose party system is not in turmoil. This is not just about populist parties. Also the traditional parties are in disarray. Such developments raise major questions about how our democracies are going to work in the future.

**International banking and the workplace are two central subjects in your research. How do you bridge the gap between them?**

The most important link is inequality. Both labor market regulation and financial secrecy have important implications for inequality. New forms of employment make it difficult for some societal groups to get good jobs. These outsiders, as we call them, risk being trapped in such precarious situations for a long time. Hence our concerns about a dualization of societies. Financial secrecy and tax competition allow some very specific societal groups to not pay their share. Personally, I believe that if you are rich enough, paying taxes is voluntary. There are simply too many ways to circumvent taxation if you have the necessary resources! This is an unacceptable situation for many reasons. Ultimately, I am concerned about equality. Everybody should pay their fair share and everybody should be able to live a decent life. Of course, this also concerns political representation - another one of my main research interests. Who is excluded from the political process? Who withdraws from the political process? Who decides?

**Between a heavy teaching load, PhD students, publications, reviews for top journals, serving as President of the Swiss Political Science Society for 3 years, and participation on various Swiss government commissions in the field of workplace relations, to mention but a few of your professional activities – which part of your work do you enjoy most?**

Like most scholars, I enjoy doing research. For me, there is nothing more rewarding than figuring something out – the feeling you get when you have learned something. But I also enjoy observing how others progress. I enjoy seeing papers improve and students learn. And I know that we must give something back to society. Hence my commission and media work. Maybe I have to change my answer to "don't know". It is all part of my job. These things cannot be easily separated. What I would like to have is time. Another six hours a day would be great. Maybe also another day a week.

**Your recent book, [The Power to Dismiss: Trade Unions and the Regulation of Job Security in Western Europe](#) is presently the subject of a very contentious discussion in France because of the new labor laws soon to be implemented. What is your opinion on the matter?**

First of all, I am not surprised. There is a powerful discourse identifying job security regulations as a major economic problem. The empirical evidence is considerably less clear, however. As I argue in the book, the reason is not so much economics – job security regulations are first and foremost about power. Who controls the workplace? Of course, rules are never perfect and can be improved. Nobody benefits from legal uncertainty (other than lawyers), but such reforms are often also opportunities to change the prevailing balance of power, and it is these power effects that trigger the protests. If reforms are inclusive, in the sense of incorporating and strengthening the role of the social partners, they are often considerably less controversial. This is also true for France, as research has shown.

We will see what will happen in France. Normally, the union movement is an excellent position to prevent such reforms. Job security regulations are simply too popular! However, the window of opportunity in France might currently be bigger than is normally the case. Macron controls a large majority in parliament that supports his agenda and the political left is split. A united left could probably prevent the reform, but there seems to be a lot of politics going on that complicates such cooperation.

And of course, as I argue in the book, unions have to be strategic. To be part of a dialogue with the government, unions have to demonstrate that they are willing to listen and to compromise. Hence, the question must be asked what is most important to unions. Job security regulations are often at the top of this list. Unions are more willing to compromise on other issues, for instance temporary employment. Yet context matters. If this reform is the price to be paid in order to keep other precious regulations (assuming the government's assertions are credible), some unions might be willing to compromise.