



From People's Movements to Electoral
Machines?
Interest Aggregation and the Social De-
mocratic Parties of Scandinavia

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INTRODUCTION¹

The story of the Scandinavian social democratic parties is one of impressive success. In terms of vote, office-holding and membership levels, they compare very favourably with equivalents elsewhere. Parties exist simultaneously in different arenas: in the institutions of the state, in parliament, in the electoral marketplace and with organised social and economic groups. In this chapter, we examine the ways in which these three parties have responded to their changing political environments. In particular, we look at how they have addressed their declining strength in the parliamentary and electoral arenas by changing their internal organisation and their relationships with one type of interest group, that representing organised labour.

Functional analysis of political parties has ascribed to them numerous different roles, but, perhaps above all, the party has often been seen as providing linkage between society and state (Katz, 1990, p. 143; Lawson, 1980, p. 1). The basic assumption was that society's political and economic preferences are diverse and often non-transitive, and that a party could overcome this social-choice problem by aggregating some of these interests (Almond, Powell and Mundt, 1996, p. 104-5). The party provided a forum in which groups would bargain and compromise and produce a policy platform that could be presented to a mass electorate. In the language of modern political analysis, the socio-economic groups were the principals, and the party the agent. The parties that were born out of the working classes of Western Europe around 1900 – those in Scandinavia as much as any – conformed most readily to this model. To use Korpi's (1981, p. 321) phrase, they allowed the interests of labour to be carried beyond the industrial arena and into the political arena; the linkage they offered was thus "participatory" (Lawson, 1980, p. 13-14). They were mass parties, created by organisations external to existing political institutions. Because, in Scandinavia, bureaucratic state apparatus had long been established, the party linked society and state via the promise of collective benefits through implementation of public policy, rather than through the disbursement of selective, clientelistic benefits (cf. Kitschelt, 2000, pp. 858-59).

Of course, agents have their own interests, distinct from those their principals charge them with pursuing, and principals require mechanisms through which they can control the agents' behaviour and thus reduce "agency loss" (Koelble, 1996, p. 253). The constraints placed on mass parties by their parent groups were, in theory at least, quite clear. The aggregation of these groups' interests occurred *within* the party; that is, groups and their members were actively involved in the party's internal life, from policy-making to electing officials, campaigning and fulfilling social functions. But when Kirchheimer (1990 [1966]), in the 1960s, described the advent of catch-all parties, it seemed that even

¹ This working paper is a revised version of a paper submitted to a workshop on From Aggregation to Diffusion? Parties in Individualistic Society, Copenhagen, April 2000. Thanks go to the co-ordinators of the workshop, Kay Lawson and Thomas Poguntke, and the other contributors to it, especially Karina Pedersen, for their helpful comments on earlier drafts. Thanks too to Anders Widfeldt for his thoughts. Responsibility for translation from all non-English-language sources is mine.

mass parties had outgrown their original *raison d'être* and were instead acting primarily in their *own* interests – or rather in the interests of individuals within the party, its elites in particular. Scandinavian social democracy may be seen as one of the pioneers of this catch-all model. Indeed, Esping-Andersen (1985, p. 8) argues that, early in its life, it “distinguished itself by the decision to subordinate class purity to the logic of majority politics. The organisation moved from ‘working-class party’ to ‘people’s party’; its platform addressed the ‘national interest’ rather than the ‘proletarian cause’.”

These models necessarily concealed a complex pattern of parties’ response to changing environments. It is now axiomatic to assume that, in fact, different sections or levels of the party organisation – including leaders, activists, rank-and-file members, as well as distinct but associated “collateral organisations” – will have different orders of preferences regarding the party’s pursuit of policy implementation, office-holding or vote-maximisation (Müller and Strøm, 1999, pp. 5-9). The translation of these conflicting preferences into an output, that is, party behaviour, will be affected by various intervening variables. Some (the rules of competition, the pattern of social and economic interests within a society, the structure of party competition) will be external to the party. History plays its own role; path dependency constrains the practical political options open to a party. Just as important, however, are those related to the internal structure of power within the party: the resources, formal and informal, material and procedural, that different sections of the party can muster in their attempts to control the organisation’s “zones of uncertainty” (Panebianco, 1988, p. 33), and to shape its behaviour in ways that conform to their preferences. It is one of these internal variables – namely, the relationship between the parties and the trade-union movements upon which they were founded – that this chapter focuses on. Have these social democratic parties outgrown their earlier status as agents aggregating the interests of organised labour in the political arena? Are they now better understood as electoral machines, akin to an “electoral-professional party” (Panebianco, 1988, p. 263) or a “voter party” (Gilljam and Möller, 1996), courting external groups, to be sure, but essentially in order to enhance the pursuit of the parties’ own objectives? As will be seen in the following sections, there is a strong *prima facie* case that they have developed in this way.

The cases investigated here are well suited to comparative analysis. Danish Social Democracy (SD), the Norwegian Labour Party (DNA) and the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP) differ in important and interesting ways, but they share more than enough in their similar histories, political roles, cultural contexts and contemporary challenges to offer hope that the causes of the differences that interest us can be reliably, albeit tentatively, extracted. In the next section, the necessary backdrop to these parties’ contemporary situations is drawn. The section that follows outlines the parties’ organisational structures and explores the changes in the parties’ relationships with the trade unions in recent years. Finally, conclusions are drawn.

LIVING UP TO THE PAST: THE SUCCESS OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Although class became the main dimension of political conflict throughout Scandinavia, social democratic parties were accepted into the mainstream of national politics fairly early in their lives, which meant that “the Scandinavian working-class organisations did not develop the alienation and siege-mentality that was a frequent consequence of official repression elsewhere in Europe” (Castles, 1978, p. 15). These fairly smooth paths to mass politics are reflected in electoral strength. SD has averaged 35.6 per cent in national parliamentary elections since 1945, and DNA 40.3 per cent, each nearly double the average of the second-biggest national party. SAP's average is 44.5 per cent, more than two and a half times that of the next-biggest Swedish party. SAP achieved a plurality of the vote in 1914, SD managed it in 1924 and DNA followed in 1927. None lost it throughout the rest of the 20th century.

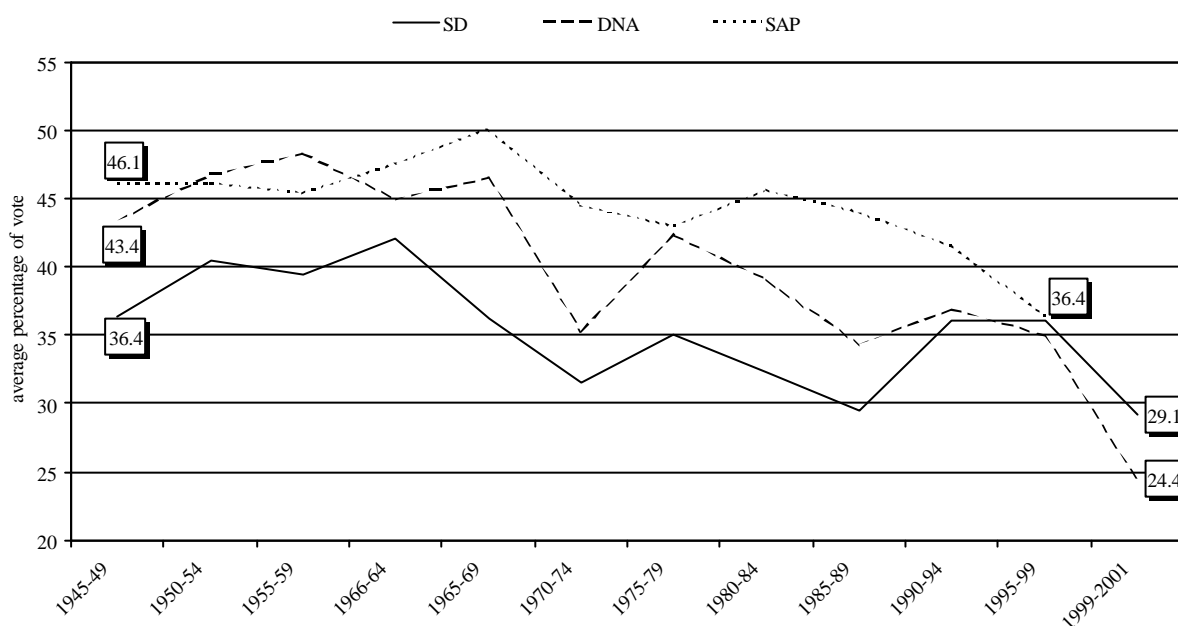
Certainly, the social democrats' domination of politics in Scandinavia, and even their domination of the left, has not gone unchallenged. External events – the Russian revolution, the cold war and European integration – have each prompted offshoots from at least one of our trio of parties. But the three have deep-seated political advantages. No single bourgeois party ever managed to aggregate the interests of the old privileged classes, urban capitalists, liberals and farmers. More than anything, though, the balance of power between labour and capital has underpinned Scandinavian social democracy's strength. Not surprisingly, given these parties' origins in organised labour, ties between the two wings of each labour movement, the party and the unions, were very close, and they were to the advantage of the former in at least two ways. First, the unions provided the organisation, mobilising capacity and financial support that a mass party required in the early 20th century. Second, the Scandinavian workforces were and remain highly unionised. Because they enjoyed institutional links to the trade-union confederations, each called LO, which controlled most of the labour supply, the social democrats had a powerful lever in the implementation of national economic strategies. In Sweden above all, LO's domination of the labour market reduced the chances of workers' militancy upsetting government economic policies.

The decline of social democracy

Not all in the social democratic garden is as rosy as it once was, however, and the three parties have had to respond to their changing environments. The social democrats' problems have been most visible in the parliamentary and electoral arenas. As figure 1 illustrates, the social democratic vote in Scandinavia has declined in recent decades, though not uniformly. DNA has suffered most: its average poll in the 1990s was fully 11.5 per cent lower than it was in the 1950s, and its score in 2001 was its worst since 1924. The decline of SAP has been not much less marked, with its average in the 1990s

8.6 per cent lower than during its own heyday, in the 1960s. SD has done better in maintaining its position, albeit from a weaker base; its zenith in the 1950s, and its nadir in the 1980s, look to have been aberrations. Nevertheless, the election of November 2001, in which the Danish Liberals took the most votes, was the first time since the 1920s that any of the three social democratic parties had relinquished the status of biggest national party.

Figure 1. Social democratic vote in Scandinavia



Yet Scandinavian social democrats have only rarely governed with parliamentary majorities of their own. Rather, the basis of their power has been their pivotal status (cf. Lewin, 1998). The social democrats' strategic position is at its strongest when the left bloc's combined vote brings it more than half the seats in parliament, as this maximises the social democrats' bargaining power vis-à-vis the parties on both left and right; in such circumstances, no majority that excludes social democracy is practical. In other words, the social democrats hold the median legislator. In Denmark, the left bloc won a parliamentary majority for the first and only time in 1966. Such majorities had long been the norm in Norway and Sweden. However, the early 1970s were the high electoral water-mark for social democracy in the region. In Norway, DNA had lost its own parliamentary majority in 1961, and, when the left lost its collective majority in 1973, Labour surrendered its pivotal position. In 1973 the Swedish left lost its parliamentary majority. While that majority, and thus the Social Democrats' pivotal position, has been periodically recovered since, the arrival of the Greens, whose bloc status remains undefined, has made it still harder for SAP to control the balance of power. (See figures 2-4.)

Inevitably, all this has weakened the social democratic grip on power (see figure 5). This, in sum, is the challenge to which these parties have had to respond.

Figure 2. Balance of forces in the Danish parliament

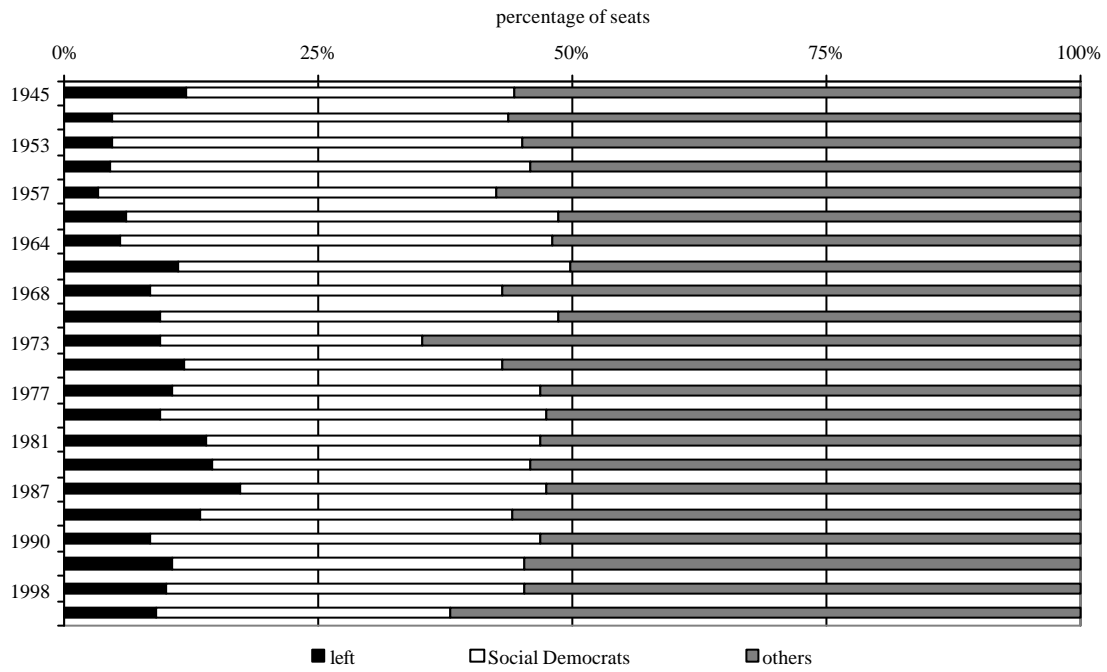


Figure 3. Balance of forces in the Norwegian parliament

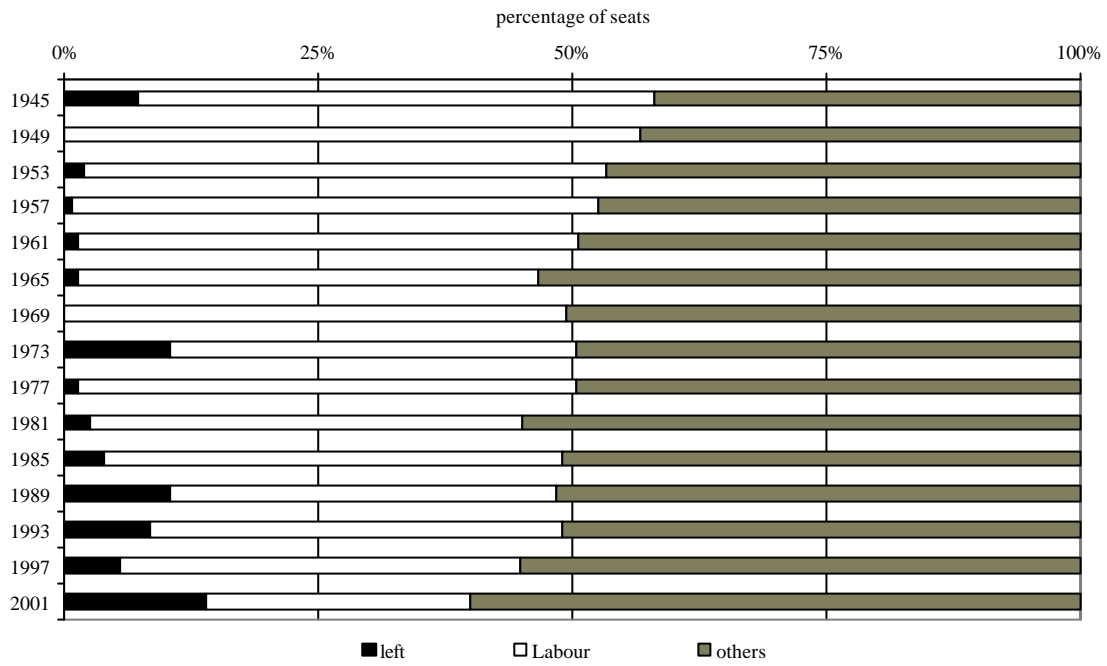
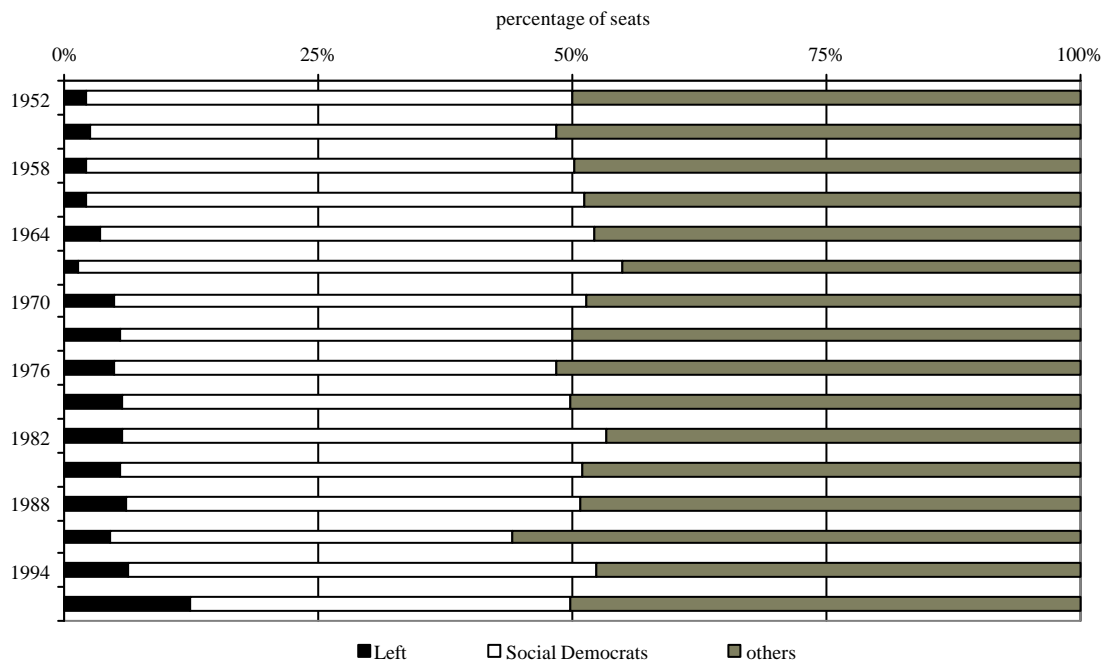


Figure 4. Balance of forces in the Swedish parliament



From agents to innovators?

This social democratic decline is part of a general West European phenomenon (Gallagher, Laver and Mair, 1995, p. 229), although, partly because of our parties' stronger starting position, the trend is more pronounced in Scandinavia. The causes are manifold, and have been widely debated. A better educated, better informed, more socially diverse, more discerning electorate, whose members have outgrown traditional class- and party-identification, is one common explanation. Certainly, class voting, which provided social democrats with a body of reliable supporters, has declined in Scandinavia as elsewhere (Borre and Andersen, 1997; Listhaug, 1997; Oskarsson, 1994). Electoral decline is not necessarily inexorable, as centre-left parties throughout Western Europe have demonstrated. But how is recovery to be engineered? A leading scholar of Scandinavian social democracy, Gøsta Esping-Andersen, has attributed its success to its innovative capacity to forge, at key junctures, "cross-class alliances" between its core constituency, the industrial working class, and other groups – most notably, in the turmoil of the 1930s, parties representing the peasantry (Esping-Andersen, 1985, p. 85). In the mid-1980s his prescription for a reinvigorated social democracy was a new alliance, this time with white-collar workers. Given the demographic trends (the decline of the left's core constituency, the growth of the service sector), such a strategy clearly makes sense for the parties. As Koelble (1992, p. 371) argues, "The key to social democratic electoral success is adaptability."

But, in accordance with the model of the catch-all party, this changes rather fundamentally the conception of the party's relationship with the socio-economic groups whose interests it aggregated in the political arena. No longer is the party the political agent of those groups. Instead it is afforded the licence, even the obligation, to put itself at the centre of the equation; its survival and electoral prosperity become the prime objectives. It must actively seek out new wells of support. At the least, it implies a much more entrepreneurial type of interest aggregation by the party, one that might be better understood as interest collection (cf. Lawson and Poguntke, this volume). Very probably, this will take the form of policy concessions or other courting devices, designed to win electoral support from external groups without having them impinge on the party leadership's decision-making autonomy. These "nods and winks" are far less costly to effect and, importantly, they can be aimed at a much wider range of (perhaps conflicting) interests than would allowing such groups a genuine stake in the party's internal life and the generation of its policy platforms. Diverse interests are much more easily collected than aggregated.

The need for active adaptation has surely been the essence of the much-discussed process of social democratic "modernisation" in Western Europe, which in some countries – Britain is probably the most striking example – has shown its potential to transform political fortunes by attracting middle-class voters. They tend to approve of a commitment to price stability. An easing of the tax burden, both through scaling back the system's level of redistribution and through using the private sector to obtain better value in public spending, would also appeal to the middle class. Greater choice between

providers of public services may appeal to better-off, consumer-orientated socio-economic groups, as might an embrace of European integration. The parties' relations with trade unions, among whose members middle-class workers may be under-represented, will be played down; organised labour will be treated like any other interest group. The logic cited here behind such programmatic reforms is, of course, grossly simplified. But, with an eye to contemporary trends across the European left, it is probably not grossly wrong. In Scandinavia, the middle-class targets of such policy revision are likely at present to incline towards the centrist bourgeois parties – whose electoral territory, if conquered by the left, would raise social democratic hopes of recapturing the median legislators in the three parliaments, positions that are so crucial in multi-party systems.

A quick overview of the last two decades does offer evidence that the Scandinavian social democratic parties have taken steps in a “modernising” direction. Personal taxes remain comparatively very high, but few rises have been implemented in recent years, except during the Swedish state's financial crisis in the early 1990s. Some public-sector reform has been undertaken. It is hard now to envisage the leaderships of the three parties taking a Eurosceptical position in the way that SD did against the Single European Act in 1986. Since then, the three parties have all campaigned for Yes votes in EU-related referendums, often in the face of misgivings in the parties' grass-roots. Above all, each has had to make painful adjustments to its macroeconomic orientation since the early 1980s, and none now contains serious opposition to anti-inflationary, non-accommodating monetary policies. Nevertheless, such programmatic changes do not, in themselves, necessarily confirm a new-found ability to formulate vote-maximising, median-seeking, interest-collecting political strategies. It is at least plausible to suggest that, finding themselves in office, Scandinavian social democrats had little option but to adapt their policies in the face of environmental circumstances – the end of the cold war, globalisation, domestic economic crisis, and so on.²

Instead of comparative analysis of policy innovation or liberalisation, then, we will look at the ties to the trade unions – the groups whose agents the social democratic parties were traditionally supposed to be. This involvement is our dependent variable, our measure of the extent to which interest aggregation has been supplanted in our three parties by interest collection. The parties' formal rules governing such involvement have changed considerably in recent years; and yet, as we shall see, it may be that formal institutional relationships are only part of the story. Scandinavian social democracy has a variety of organisations affiliated to it, such as educational foundations, cultural groups, co-operatives (especially strong in Denmark) and housing associations. It also has some influential ancillary organisations, including often independent-minded youth wings (particularly in Norway and Sweden). But SD, DNA and SAP emerged very much as the political agents of organised labour, and the trade unions are still by far the most important interest attached to each of them. Have party–union

² Pennings (1999), for example, argues that social democracy has reformed furthest in an economically liberal direction in countries that have the biggest welfare states, and that this is a rational and necessary strategy to *preserve* the economic foundations of welfare states.

links loosened in a way that would reflect social democracy's programmatic evolution from mass party to catch-all party to electoral-professional party?

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ORGANISATION: CHANGING LINKS WITH TRADE UNIONS

The formal representation of an interest in a party's decision-making structures that can be observed in the British Labour Party, in which trade unions may deploy "block votes" at conference, are rarely found elsewhere, and are absent in Scandinavia. Nevertheless, strong ties between the two wings of the labour movements remain. This section is divided into three sub-sections. First, we sketch the basic structure of the three social democratic parties' organisation, particularly regarding the party's methods of electing the leadership, formulating policy and selecting candidates for public office. Second, we examine the evidence that, as the models of party development predict, relations with the trade unions have been loosened considerably. Third, we examine those links – formal and informal – that remain.

*Social democratic organisation*³

Strom argues that the more decision-making within a party is decentralised, the greater will be its prioritisation of pursuing policy implementation rather than holding office. Structures designed to offer the grass-roots a sizeable say in deciding a party's policy will be likely to constrain its elites' scope for adopting electorally optimal policies (and thus maximising their chances of election to office). Such a party could well conform quite closely to our model of the interest-aggregating mass party; it implies that groups are attracted to the party by the prospect of using their involvement in its internal life to shape its policy positions in accordance with their preferences (Strom, 1990, p. 576-79). So how does the structure of power appear in our three parties, particularly regarding the three "faces" of the party – the party in public office (in government and in parliament), the party in central office and the party "on the ground" (its members and local organisations)? (Katz and Mair, 1993).

In our cases, the party leadership must be defined with some specificity. In each, the chair of the party itself is elected by congress,⁴ but that person need not necessarily also hold the chair of the parliamentary group. In this chapter, however, the party leadership is defined collectively, as the *executive committee*. In SD (in which it is called *forretningsudvalg*), the executive committee comprises at least 11 party officers elected by congress, including the chair, vice-chair and secretary. All its

³ Data in the next two sections are taken largely from Bille (1992, 1994), Svåsand (1992, 1994) and Pierre and Widfeldt (1992, 1994).

⁴ In SD, since 1996, if a candidate for chair is not supported by three-quarters of the delegates at congress, the contest is referred to a ballot of party members.

members sit on the other important management committee, the *national executive (hovedbestyrelse)*, the majority of whose 50-odd members are elected by or chair regional party organisations. In DNA, the executive committee (*Sentralstyre*) is mainly elected by congress, and its members join two delegates from each of the 19 regional party organisations on the national executive (*Landstyre*). In SAP, the seven voting and seven non-voting members of the executive committee (*Verkställande utskott*) are all elected by congress, as are the 50-60 members of the national executive (*Partistyrelse*). Women's and youth sections are represented on DNA and SAP's national executives (though without voting rights in SAP), and also on DNA's executive committee.

In Scandinavian parties, parliamentary groups have historically enjoyed relatively wide autonomy from the rest of the party. Yet open division between the party's leadership and its MPs has been rare, and discipline among parliamentary groups has usually been strong in support of the party line. This has been especially the case in SD. The exigencies of coalition politics, which has required a certain licence for its negotiators to strike deals with other parties, plus the effect since the 1960s of public subventions for parliamentary groups, have boosted the leadership capacity of SD's parliamentarians. By the 1970s, the Danish party's strategy was generated chiefly by a small elite, known as "the Circle", usually comprising the prime minister, the finance and the economics ministers, plus the leader, deputy leader and main spokesman of the parliamentary group (Elvander, 1980, p. 211). SAP's MPs appear to have become more independent in recent years, a trend that can be traced back to its first experience of opposition for four decades, in 1976-82, and thereafter, when minority governments became the rule (Sannerstedt and Sjölin, 1992, p. 147). But co-ordination between the two branches of the party in office has been mostly firm. In DNA, although the party chair has sometimes been distinct from the parliamentary group leader,⁵ and although the European question prompted parliamentary defections in 1972 and in 1993, collective discipline has also generally held.

As for the leadership's relationship with the party on the ground, congress is the main representative forum for the grass-roots. Indeed, congress is formally the sovereign body in each party, and has the power to set the broad thrust of party policy. Until recently, none met every year, but reforms since the mid-1990s have instituted annual congresses in SD (although elections for party posts take place only every four years) and provided for ad hoc congresses in SAP in addition to its regular one, which convenes around twelve months before the (usually) quadrennial parliamentary election. The Norwegian Labour Party congress meets biennially. Membership of the three parties is uniformly via a local unit, and congresses comprise mainly delegates elected by local branches and constituency organisations, plus some representatives of ancillary bodies. In SD and DNA, motions to congress can be submitted by any local or regional party organisation, and in SAP (in principle) by any member.

⁵ Gro Harlem Brundtland revived this division of executive power in the party in 1992-96 and it was reinstated in February 2000, when Thorbjørn Jagland relinquished the chair of the parliamentary group (which allowed his replacement, Jens Stoltenberg, to engineer his own elevation to the prime ministership the following month), but retained the chair of the party itself.

The three party leaderships have little formal say in the selection of candidates for public office. Constituency- and regional-level organisations, comprising delegates elected by the local branches, are responsible for organising and implementing the nomination process. Since 1969, ballots have been required when candidates have competed for places on lists in SD. The party at the national level has some power to review candidates selected by lower levels in SD, but in DNA and SAP it has no role.

The rules paint a picture of markedly decentralised parties, and there is no doubt that, in Norway especially, the regional levels of the party can exert a strong influence: witness the public rebellion by a third of Labour's mayors, just before the local elections in September 1999, against Thorbjørn Jagland, an episode that perhaps fatally undermined his position as the party's candidate for prime minister. In reality, however, the leaderships are rather more powerful than they appear. National membership lists, introduced in the 1980s, allow the leaderships to circumvent sub-national levels and communicate directly with individual members. Furthermore, the growth of media attention has changed the role of congress, making it less a mechanism for democratic steering of the party by its membership and more a means of conveying the party's message to the wider electorate. This has obvious implications for congress's policy-making role. In fact, in Widfeldt's (1999, pp. 90-94) additive index of membership influence in Swedish political parties, which takes account of several variables,⁶ SAP is given 5 (the Greens and the Christian Democrats score 9, denoting higher levels of membership influence). The Social Democrats' institution of a National Council (*Förtroenderåd*) in 1997 takes that score up to 7.⁷ When Widfeldt's index is applied to SD and DNA, these two parties score 7 and 3 respectively.

So far, the trade unions have been conspicuous by their absence from our brief look at social democratic organisation. Does this mean that the leadership now has an even more powerful position that the foregoing discussion would imply?

The loosening of party–union ties

Conforming to the model of the mass party, with socio-economic principals keeping firm control over their political agents, relationships within the labour movements have long been close and fairly exclusive. Indeed, until 1878, 1887 and 1889, when SD, DNA and SAP respectively were founded, trade-union movements and social democratic associations were considered practically synonymous. Early

⁶ These are (a) the possibility of sub-national party levels calling a vote of the entire membership, (b) the frequency of the national congress, (c) the right of sub-national party levels to call an extra national congress, (d) the right of individual members to submit motions to a national congress, (e) the right of any party member to participate in a congress debate, (f) the existence and powers of a representative organ between congresses, and (g) the number of other central decision-making organs that are directly elected by congress or sub-national levels.

⁷ The National Council is the party's highest decision-making organ between congresses. It comprises 120 delegates from local branches. While representatives from the national executive and parliamentary group usually participate in discussion, they have no voting rights.

in their existence, around the turn of the century, the Norwegian trade unions sided with the Liberals, but the unionisation of the rapidly expanding industrial workforce pushed LO towards Labour. The Communists gained a foothold among some Danish trade unions after the country's liberation from German occupation in 1945, before their influence was eased out by LO; Swedish Communists made some progress around the same time; and, in Denmark and Norway, the radical left also exploited disquiet caused by the issue of European integration in the early 1970s. But, in general, neither wing of the labour movement has had much cause to be suspicious of the other's faithfulness, at least as far as institutional rivals are concerned.

Formal, elite-level institutional connections were present for many years. LO was long guaranteed members of the Danish Social Democratic executive organs, while DNA's statutes stipulated that LO should be represented in its congress, its other major decision-making organs and even its cabinets (Svåsand, Strøm and Rasch, 1997, pp. 97 -103). By 1920 the two organisations were "like Siamese twins, intertwined and with partly common membership at all levels" (Maurseth, 1987, p. 47, cited in Allern and Heidar, 2000, p. 4). LO remained neutral during Labour splits in the 1920s, and in 1925 LO's congress decided to abandon mutual representation on executives. But two years later this institutional relationship was replaced at the elite level by a Co-operation Committee (Elvander, 1980, pp. 75-76). In Sweden, LO was established in 1898. Two of the five members of LO's executive were nominated by SAP (Gidlund, 1992, p. 106). The party's first leader, Hjalmar Branting, writing 17 years after it was launched, declared that, in Sweden, "the trade-union movement has been the basis for all political work in the Social Democratic Party" (Branting, 1906, p. 466). Tomasson (1973, p. xiv) argues that the party's success in the years prior to 1914 "was largely a result of the success of the solidly Social Democratic trade union movement in organising and politicising the workers".

But the closeness of party-union ties, in Norway and Sweden at least, was really epitomised by the system of collective party membership. This was implemented at the local level. A union branch could affiliate to the local branch of the social democratic party, and in so doing the former would automatically bring all its members into the latter, unless they actively opted out. Unions that affiliated in this way almost always belonged to LO. Thus, in Norway and Sweden, the basic party units were not only based on geographical areas, but also included trade-union branches, plus clubs and other workplace associations based on union membership. These units all affiliated to the party branch. The system of collective membership long provided around three-quarters of the total membership of SAP, a figure that in 1983 reached 1.23m – equivalent to around 15 per cent of the entire Swedish population (Widfeldt, 1999, p. 112). Of DNA's nearly 160,000 members in 1971, half were through the unions' corporate membership (although that proportion declined thereafter to around 20,000 by 1996). If even a small proportion of collectively affiliated party members attended party meetings, their potential influence on internal party life – from candidate selection to policy orientation and campaign management – is obvious. "On the basic level [in Sweden]," Elvander argued,

“there is such intimate co-operation and so high a degree of personal overlap that it is often hard to distinguish the union element from the political in everyday co-operation” (1980, p. 175).

These intimate connections must have had an impact on party policy, and sometimes this was quite visible. Over 40 years ago, for instance, two Swedish LO economists, Gösta Rehn and Rudolf Meidner, were primarily responsible for the strategy that guided Social Democratic governments' economic policies until the 1970s. LO, and Meidner in particular, were also the instigators of the plan for the wage-earner funds, which injected a radical element into Sweden's hitherto consensual politics. Indeed, “one can say that the party in Norway collects colleagues (like the party secretary and cabinet ministers) from LO, but not ideas, whereas it is the opposite in Sweden” (Elvander, 1980, p. 174).

Yet this relationship between party and unions has, incontrovertibly, changed, and the demise of collective membership reflected the way in which parties and unions have gradually grown apart. The Swedish Social Democratic congress's decision in 1987 to make all membership individual and actively chosen by 1991 was a major turning point in the history of the Scandinavian labour movements. In 1992 DNA agreed to drop the formal guarantee of LO representation in its cabinets, and collective membership was phased out by 1997. Even in Denmark, where automatic overlap between trade-union membership and political commitment had been abolished when the party was formed in 1878,⁸ comparable developments occurred. Danish LO unions' affiliation to the party had not involved collective membership, but legislation in the years up to 1990 forced SD to underline the voluntary nature of its relations with LO, and provided for trade-union members to opt out of paying political contributions. In 1996, the Social Democratic congress decided to end representation of collateral organisations on the party's administrative organs. Thus, “One of the crucial features of the mass party type was...removed from the Social Democratic party” (Bille 2000:7).

This decoupling of the two wings of the Scandinavian labour movements is surely related to the process of programmatic “modernisation”, which, as we have seen, can be observed to varying degrees in all three parties. Moreover, while there was still opposition to the reforms, there was little serious resistance from the unions. Many union leaderships had grown increasingly unwilling, for the sake of their own credibility with their members, to be too closely identified with unpopular social democratic governments.⁹

Developments in the parties' economic situations further reinforce the idea of greater distance between the two wings of the labour movements. Financial support given by a group to a party will

⁸ A rule adopted in 1961, and tightened in 1988, requires members of a local SD association to join an appropriate trade union, however (Bille, 2000, p. 6).

⁹ Twelve years after the decision to end collective membership, the former chair of Sweden's LO, Stig Malm, when asked to identify his greatest achievement during his time in charge, replied: “To abandon collective membership of the Social Democratic Party. It would have been a millstone around our necks in today's society. Why should it have remained when the whole of the iron curtain and the Berlin wall had fallen?” (NSD, 28 Oct. 1999). Norway's LO was making similar calculations.

almost certainly enhance that interest's influence within the party, and the threat of withholding that support may constrain the party leadership's scope for flirting with other groups. The level of support given to a party is thus a pretty good indicator of the extent to which the donor group can be said to be genuinely involved in the party's internal life. One rather diffuse type of financial support that a group can offer is in the form of membership fees. Complicated as the exchange relationship between party and members is (Müller and Strøm 1999:16), the latter, paying their dues, are unlikely to accept indefinitely the absence of any real input into the party's decision-making. The same applies to a much more focused source of party finance, that flowing from organised interest groups. As far as our three cases are concerned, the groups with the biggest financial influence over them are, of course, the trade-union movements. Cash has clearly procured considerable influence for the unions throughout the parties' existence.

Party finance will also affect the campaigning and administrative methods employed by the party; it can only do what it can afford. But the flow of influence will also be in the other direction: that is, the methods used by the party may have a significant impact on how much finance the party requires. For example, a hard-up party will not only be open to (presumably conditional) financial contributions from external organisations, it may also be more reliant on labour-intensive administration and, in particular, campaigning. The latter will involve "traditional" methods, such as door-to-door and workplace canvassing, because they do not rely chiefly on cash, but rather on the voluntary donation by members and activists of their time and effort. On the other hand, a well-resourced party will not only be less dependent on external financial contributions, it will also have more scope to use professionalised bureaucratic structures and more capital-intensive campaigning, meaning a concentration of resources on, for example, media-based strategies of mass communication (Strom, 1990, p. 581). It may also have the scope to employ a more professionalised party bureaucracy. The preferences of such professionals, whose motivation will chiefly be normal financial remuneration rather than ideological commitment, may be less likely to clash with the leadership's vote-maximising priorities.

The social democrats' dependence on both individual membership fees and on support from the unions has waned. Table 1 is far from a full depiction of the parties' sources of income over the last 40 years, but it does illustrate trends. By 1905 membership subscriptions had become the main source of Swedish Social Democratic funds, and by 1945 the party obtained 86 per cent of its income in this way, with most members paying automatically as members of LO-affiliated trade unions. By 1996, as table 1 shows, that proportion had fallen to 3 per cent. Similarly, 27 per cent of SAP's income in 1950 came from LO; by 1996 it was 4 per cent (Wörlund and Hansson, nd).¹⁰ The major factor in this decline, in all three countries, has been the advent of state subsidies for political parties. In Norway, for example, these were extended beyond parliamentary groups to central organisations in 1970,

¹⁰ Elvander's (1980, ch. VI) research into the years 1975-76 suggested that contributions from trade-unions amounted to over 15 per cent of SD's total budget for its central administration, over 17 per cent of SAP's and nearly 18 per cent of DNA's.

and they immediately constituted nearly 60 per cent of the central Labour Party's total income. For DNA and SAP, public subsidies were more than adequate to cushion the loss of membership fees from collective members. Nor, it would appear, has the loss of such members done much to impair the parties' campaigning capacities, thanks to the adoption of more capital-intensive strategies. Half a million voters were telephoned directly by SAP workers during the 1998 election campaign (the initial aim had been for double that); 100,000 letters (just a third of the figure initially planned) were sent to target voters. Five thousand volunteers staffed the party's telephones, 250 at the party's headquarters. At a campaign seminar for foreign social democrats, SAP managers stated explicitly that the party's aim was to replace labour-intensive campaigning with these modern techniques. Similar trends were identified in the Danish Social Democrats' campaign six months previously (Andersen and Pedersen, 1999).

In sum, it appears that the public purse has given the parties much greater scope to prioritise their own interests over those they were hitherto perceived as aggregating.

Table 1. Parties' funding (percentage of total income)

	SD			DNA			SAP		
	members' fees and donations	corporate donations	public subventions	members' fees and donations	corporate donations	public subventions	members' fees and donations	corporate donations	public subventions
1960	42*	57*	0*			0	25*	12*	0*
1961	66					0			
1970							10*	10*	47*
1971	27*	67*	7*						
1972	56								
1975						63			
1980	58	26	23				17	6	54
1981	33*								
1985						58*			
1990	23*	42*	40*		19		7	4	39
1991	33				25				
1992					14				
1993					22*				
1994					8				
1995					14	67			
1996					4		3		28
1997		28	62		17*	63*			
1998	11*	49*	40*					4*	

Notes: Additional sources of income mean that totals in these categories do not always sum to 100. Public subventions include payments to the parliamentary party and to the central party combined. In Sweden and Norway, corporate donations refer exclusively to support from LO; in Denmark, it is mostly so. * Signifies figure coinciding with an election year, during which corporate donations to campaign funds can be expected to raise total contributions higher than in non-election years.

Sources: Allern and Heidar, 1999; Bille and Christiansen, 2000; Wörlund and Hansson, nd.

Enduring links

So far, the evidence certainly seems to support the hypothesis that the Scandinavian social democratic parties have reorganised their institutional relationships with their most important collateral organisations, the blue-collar trade-unions, in order to allow the parties to collect among a wider range of groups, and thus to expand their electoral appeal. But there is another side to the story.

The financial relationship between party and unions has by no means disappeared, even if the latter's largesse has become less systematic and more conditional. For instance, in Sweden, some of the bigger LO unions still contribute to their members' party-membership fees. For all the public subsidies that are available, LO can also provide crucial support to the party before an election. In Sweden, around SKr20m – perhaps a fifth of SAP's national income – is donated by LO to the party every year towards an election fund, something the opposition frequently complains about (eg, Hökmark, Pettersson and Persson, 1998). LO itself still campaigns actively during election campaigns. Up to 4,000 LO functionaries are detailed to assist the party's election campaign, while many of the 230,000 trade-union officials, whose duties employers are legally obliged to allow paid time for, also campaign for the Social Democratic cause (Johnson, 1998). Indeed, in 1998 the Social Democratic platform was presented jointly with LO – a symbolic gesture of reconciliation after several years of strain during the government's austerity programme. Even in Denmark, cash from organised labour greatly benefits SD. A good example was before the 1998 election, when the unions paid for a late advertising campaign that appeared to damage the bourgeois coalition just when it seemed set to win. Trade unions contributed DKr30m overall to the Social Democrats in that election year (Andersen and Pedersen, 1999, p. 303).

As for formal organisation, some deep institutional connections remain at all levels of the parties and the unions. In Denmark, an informal "Contact Committee" maintains dialogue between leaderships. In Norway, a similar task is performed through the Co-operation Committee, which nowadays meets at least weekly and often includes Labour cabinet ministers. A Central Union Committee, a party organ that reports to SAP's national executive, is chaired by an LO representative. In September 1999 a new deputy party secretary was given special responsibility for relations with LO. Ties also remain at grass-roots level. Collective trade-union affiliation was not actually abolished, but rather reformed. In Sweden and Norway, union branches and clubs can still affiliate to the local party branch, the difference being that their representation in the party's decision-making now depends on the number of individual union members who have actively opted into the party. It is clear, then, that although the in-

fluence of the unions is not as great as it was, their members still have a big say in local party affairs in Norway and Sweden, not least in selecting electoral lists (Aylott, 2001).

Arguably, it is these local links that underpin the less formal, habitual, almost cultural ties between social democratic parties and trade unions in Scandinavia – and these informal ties may still have an important influence on party behaviour. For instance, the sway that LO holds in SAP could undoubtedly be seen in autumn 1996, when the government proposed decentralisation of labour-market rules and time limits on receipt of unemployment benefit. LO responded by threatening to withhold its annual contribution to the party.¹¹ Allern and Heidar (2000, p. 14) have established that nearly a fifth of Labour MPs after 1997 had a background in LO, at either national or local levels – and that figure excludes those with backgrounds in LO's constituent unions.¹² After strained relations between DNA and LO in the 1980s, the success of a corporatist deal in 1992, the "Solidarity Alternative", owed much to the close ties between the party chair, Jagland, and LO's chair. The latter continued the tradition of LO's leader chairing the party congress's election committee. The LO chair in both Norway and Sweden has no automatic right to sit on the party's executive committee, but the party congress almost always elects him or her onto it anyway. Representatives from Denmark's LO still attend the Social Democrats' executive meetings, even though the party's statutes no longer entitle them to. The chair of Sweden's LO will meet the party leader as often as once a week; their respective executive committees may meet every month. Although overlapping representation at elite levels has long been fairly insignificant in the Danish and Swedish parties, in DNA, LO's secretariat has gradually increased its presence on Labour's executive committee. By 1997-2001 it supplied four of the committee's 20 members, all with full voting rights (Allern and Heidar, 2000, p. 13).

Yet it is at the local level where, ultimately, the informal ties between parties and unions may be most enduring. A useful vantage point from which to observe them is the House of the People (Folkets Hus), which most large towns in Norway and Sweden have.¹³ The local branches of the party and of LO still often have their headquarters in the building; frequent personal contact between leading figures in each is thus fairly inevitable. Indeed, at the local level, both DNA and SAP seem keen to promote these ties. In Norway, the 1992 Labour congress implemented "an organisational attempt to breathe life into the party's relationship with

¹¹ "The members' money will not go towards financing right-wing policies," the LO executive announced (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 7 Sept. 1996). Later that month the government significantly watered down its proposal. It is still possible for a book that accuses SAP of being almost entirely in thrall to LO's political and economic demands (Johnson, 1998) to be taken very seriously by the Swedish media.

¹² Johnson (1998, p. 90) reckons that 36 per cent of SAP's MPs in 1994-98 had an LO background.

¹³ In Denmark, by contrast, only a few such centres remain. Folkets Hus in Copenhagen and in Aarhus have been turned into nightclubs.

the trade-union movement locally, as local union-party councils had functioned badly. Union-party co-operation committees were established instead, on the national-level model" (Allern and Heidar, 2000, p. 6). The workplace organisations in Norway and Sweden are still more basic institutions in which party and unions cannot help rubbing shoulders. Indeed, at this level, party and union roles may be filled by the same person. This sort of congenital collaboration seems to be especially strong in Sweden. Joint local committees on, say, unemployment will frequently be set up. Joint study circles, often as part of centrally initiated education campaigns, have been common since the 1960s (examples were those on EU membership in 1992-94 and the single European currency in 1998-2000). Why this basic-level personal contact and overlap should be so strong in Sweden is not obvious, but there may be something about the history of the country's industrial relations that has played a part. The state has played a smaller role in wage formation than it has elsewhere in Scandinavia.

A Danish precedent was set in 1933 when, in agreement with the Liberals, a Social Democratic government broke a strike by compulsorily extending existing collective agreements. This occurred a further six times in the 1930s, and compulsory mediation was eventually made law. Similar legislation was prepared by a bourgeois government in Norway, and although – partly in return for a pledge of co-operation from LO – an incoming Labour government watered it down in 1934 (Elvander, 1980, pp. 69-70), it has frequently been used, especially in the 1980s. By contrast, the Swedish state's tolerance of free collective-bargaining was probably partly thanks to the prevalence of industrial unions, which were easier for LO to co-ordinate in a common strategy. State intervention in wage formation remained a possibility into the 1930s, but it was pre-empted by LO's famous agreement with the Employers' Confederation at Saltsjöbaden in 1938. The state's participation became even less likely after the centralisation of wage bargaining in the 1950s. Conflict might have become sharper in Sweden if the Social Democrats, in office, had played a bigger role in wage formation – and thus exposed the potential conflict between unions, whose *raison d'être* is to promote the interests of their members, and government, which must try to promote a wider interest, which in turn is likely to involve wage restraint. Avoidance of this conflict, equally desirable for the unions and for the party-in-office (Martin, 1984, p. 340), may have helped to cement especially close relations between SAP and LO in Sweden. Only in the 1970s did avoiding conflict become harder, as wage discipline in the labour market eroded and Social Democratic governments, as the employer in a fast-growing public sector, found itself in direct dispute with some unions. The public-sector strike of 1971, in which a Social Democratic government used emergency powers to hasten a settlement, was a major shock for the Swedish model. So too was the collapse of a government attempt to promote a freeze of wages and prices in 1990 – the culmination of a "war of the roses" between the two wings of the labour

movement. Nevertheless, if there is anything in the argument made in the preceding four paragraphs, change in deep-rooted patterns may yet survive such shocks.

CONCLUSION: AGGREGATION OR COLLECTION OF INTERESTS?

In this chapter, we have seen some of the ways in which the Scandinavian social democratic parties' political environment has been changing. In the electoral arena, their vote has been falling. This and other party-system developments have made the parliamentary arena less comfortable, with the median legislator a more elusive prize. In response, the parties' role as aggregator of socio-economic interests, as linkage between state and civil society, has undergone significant change. The parties seem to have outgrown an earlier ideal type, in which they were formed to represent the interests of the working class in the political sphere, first through securing mass democracy, then by engineering redistribution of wealth. The indicators that we have examined suggest that voters have become much more important to the parties than are members and collateral organisations,¹⁴ and that it is primarily "the electorate at large" (Katz 1990, p. 145) that Scandinavian social democracy now responds to. Power lies chiefly in the parties' executive committees, in which collateral organisations, including trade unions, have no automatic place. The party leaderships do seem able to act more autonomously than in the past. Congress, although far from toothless, rarely appears to conflict openly with the preferences of the leadership. Campaigning is becoming ever more capital-intensive, making a mobilising membership less indispensable to the party elites. When it comes to finance, money that flows from members and donor groups is nothing like as significant for the parties as it once was. This must give the leaderships greater scope to collect interests rather than aggregate them.

With the focus of this chapter on social democratic parties' relations with the trade unions, we have seen that each of our three cases has changed the formal basis of this connection in the 1990s. The Norwegian and Swedish parties ended collective membership. Conversely, the Danish Social Democrats have since 1996 adopted a similar elite-level structure to those of DNA and SAP, in which collective interest representation on executive bodies has little formal role. "The explicitly stated purpose behind the fundamental changes [in 1996] was to 'modernize' the SD organization and to increase the influence of party members and thus create an incentive for more intensive involvement by the rank and file" (Bille, 1999, pp. 46-47). It may be, however, that in practice this stately has had a rather different effect. The

¹⁴ A report by the Centre for Business and Policy Studies (Pettersson, 2000) suggested that, if current membership trends are continued, by 2013 Swedish parties will have no members left.

chances are that moves away from collective, delegatory democracy and towards a more direct relationship between leadership and grass-roots will actually increase the leadership's scope for policy innovation, and thus the collection of a wider range of interests (cf. Mair, 1994, 17; Seyd, 1999, p. 401). The promotion of a more direct, individualist form of internal democracy, might well allow the leadership to act more autonomously of the group interests that the party has hitherto involved.

Yet there remain signs that, in fact, our parties have still not completely discarded their old role as the political arm of a certain section of society – although this is where the experiences of our three cases begin to diverge. Regarding formal links with the trade unions, each party is now on a roughly equal footing on the national level, with DNA and SAP having abolished collective membership for those belonging to affiliated trade unions. Where there is a marked difference is at the local level. The formal and informal ties between party and organised labour have deeper roots in Norway and especially Sweden than in Denmark. The frequency of personal contact between the representatives of each wing in the Norwegian and Swedish labour movements has effectively entwined the interests of social democrats and unions, and – in some respects – continue to do so. The precise nature of these enduring links is ripe for further research.

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