

Towards a left government? Left socialist parties in Norway¹

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1. Introduction

At first sight, the party systems of Norway and Denmark are very similar to one another. In both countries, the social-democratic party had assumed a hegemonic role in the post-war period. In both countries, this hegemony was shattered in the 1980s by attempts to push through neo-liberal concepts. In the first half of the 1990s, Danish social democracy as well as its Norwegian sister party (DNA, Den Norske Arbeiderparti) again came into governmental responsibility.

Although both parties officially didn't agree to the rhetoric of Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder, similarities to *New Labour* were unmistakable in their polity. Until the end of the 1990s the doctrine of the European "stability pact" was in effect in both countries – rigorous fiscal policy, low interest and inflation rates, stable course of exchange – and was followed by a successive dismantling of

¹ Research for the study this text was founded on was concluded in January 2004, for the complete version of the study see homepage of the "Projektgruppe Politikanalyse".

social citizenship. Up to ca. 1998, both governments seemed to be comparatively successful in integrating the trade unions into a new social consensus. Most explicitly, this held for Norway, where the tripartite “Solidarity Alternative” united trade union association, employers’ union and government and constituted one of the few examples of an effective incomes policy. But despite the excellent macro-economic balance sheet that the governments of the two countries could present in the second half of the 1990s, the dissatisfaction with their policies grew. Around the turn of the century, large strike movements occurred in the private sector, both in Denmark (1999) and Norway (2000). In the first years of the 21. century, voters ran away from the SP in Denmark and the DNA in Norway in droves. One of the reasons was that during the boom of the 1990s a redistribution had occurred, of which the entrepreneurs and stockholders had only been able to dream even during the, from their point of view, “golden” 1980s. Ironically, bourgeois minority governments took over in both countries, while left socialist parties were more or less unable to gain from the failure of the “stability pact”. At the same time, right populist movements became more and more influential, first in the public discourse, and later in governmental practice as well.

However, for a precise picture of the situation in Norway, it isn’t enough to refer to parallels with Denmark or other Scandinavian countries. Some differences immediately come to mind: Norway is one of the largest states in Europe, with a distance of over 3000 km from Oslo to the Russian border. The centres of the country lie far apart from one another, next to the greater Oslo area, which together with Bærum has about 900000 inhabitants, Bergen (220000), Trondheim (150000) and Stavanger (110000), there is no city with more than 100000 inhabitants. The country overall has a population of 4.5 million, despite its size thus less than Denmark and Sweden (www.leksikon.org). The trend towards larger urban centres – and the increasing depopulating of the North – has reinforced the dissimilarity of the political and economic development within the country since the end of the Second World War. The political centre Oslo – the former administrative centre of the Danish and Swedish domination – lies in the utmost south of the country. The significance of sub-centres, local traditions and conflicts is comparatively strong; the expression of that is not only the existence of a primeval indigenous population in the North, but also the late development of the nation state itself. The existence of two languages (the old colonial administrative language *Bokmål* and the “New Norwegian” *Nynorsk*) remind us of this circumstance.

As a consequence of the historic development of the Norwegian nation state, private ownership in Norway has long been fragmented and restricted.² Up until the 1940s, Norwegian industry developed in particular around the natural

² On the following, compare Kjeldstadli 1993, and Kjeldstadli/Keul 1973, especially 95-127. On the development of the Norwegian welfare state see Seip (1994).

resources of the country (water power, timber industry), and its capital belonged to a large extent to Swedish and English investors. At the same time the difference of interests between the export and the domestic industries was more marked than in other European countries. In this context, the state became the key economic factor, regulating both the allocation of resources and the development up of a modern infrastructure. After 1935, the state became more and more identical with the DNA, only interrupted in 1941-45 by the brutal German occupation. After 1945, state regulation of investments became even more prevalent: the development of chemical industry, of the “workshop” industry (metal industrial sector), but also of agriculture and fishery, which up until the beginning of the 1970s especially in the North still had a decisive role, were de facto organised and regulated by the state. The extension of an universalistic welfare state simultaneously integrated in particular the trade unions of private industry into the historical compromise. Up until the 1970s people’s pension, unemployment insurance and other social services were granted on the basis of legal claims and tax financing. The expansion of the public sector until 1980, somewhat later than in Denmark and Sweden, achieved an increase of the female employment quota to far over the West European average. The oil findings since the end of the 1960s turned Norway not only into the third-largest oil exporter of the world, but also into the society on the top of the UNDP-ranking of social, health and educational standards (UNDP 2002). The opening up of the oil resources as well has mainly been a task of the state: the Norwegian state, as the largest capitalist, alone was in the position of offering the necessary resources for the tapping of oil resources. But in contrast to other countries, *Statoil*, up to very few years ago a state enterprise, was at the same time one of the main profiteers from the oil exploitation. The *oil funds* until today is one of the most important income sources of the state budget. Norwegian capitalism was and is state-regulated in an even larger measure than in other European countries. Obviously, the Norwegian national state is the most important factor in a now twenty-year-long history of de- and regulation. The central position of the state in Norwegian politics was, in my opinion, determining the reaction of Norwegian policy to globalization as well: the above mentioned new “social consensus” included a kind of neo-liberalism governed by social-democracy. Thus, even before Tony Blair’s “New Deal” was on the agenda in Great Britain, Norwegian DNA executed a workfare policy. But since the departure of the Stoltenberg-government in 1997, the decline of the social-democratic hegemony led to a up to then unknown instability. This instability among other things expresses itself in the fact that now, on occasion of the debates over the budget, every year the question of power is being posed.³ While the first budgets by the bourgeois government acting since 2001 were passed by

³ In contrast to the other Scandinavian countries and parliamentary systems, the Norwegian system doesn’t allow new elections before the end of the legislative period. Thus, during the legislative period, a new government may be formed only by way of a new combination of the existing distribution of seats.

way of an agreement with the right populist People's Party, in 2003 a compromise was reached between the conservatives (Høyre) and the DNA. The now ruling bourgeois parties – *Høyre*, *Venstre*, and *Kristelig Folkeparti* – together neither have a parliamentary majority nor the majority of voices in opinion surveys.⁴

Compared to its Danish sister party, the *Socialist Left Party* (SV) has a strong stance in opinion surveys, and is on the way to becoming one of the main parties in Norwegian politics. On the other hand, the *Red Electoral Alliance* (RV) is more marginal than the Danish Red-Green Alliance. At the last parliamentary elections it has for the second time in a row not been able to obtain any seat in the central parliament (the “Storting”) and received about 1.5% of votes.

In the following, I shall, in Section 2, describe in relative detail the politics of the SV. In Sections 3, I'll deal, somewhat more briefly, with the politics of the RV and in chapter 4 with the significance of the different (new) social movements in Norway.

2. The Socialist Left Party (*Sosialistisk Venstreparti*)

2.1 About the history of the SV

In the beginning of the 1960s, an oppositional faction within the DNA around the weekly *Ny Tid* resigned from the party and founded the *Sosialistisk Folkeparti* (SF). Since Norway had entered the NATO in 1949, Norwegian social democracy practised a strongly pro-American foreign and defence policy. The newly formed party was committed to a politics of the “third path” (in the progressive meaning of the term back then), pleaded for Norwegian neutrality in the block confrontation, refused the arms race, and in domestic policy stood for a further development of the welfare state and the state economy in the direction of a “democratic socialism” (see: www.sv.no/hvem⁵). At the end of the 1960s, the SF increasingly fell apart due to internal conflicts. In the course of the new youth movement, the youth organisation SUF (*Sosialistisk Ungdoms Front*, SUF) split off from the SF in 1969.⁶ In the same year, the SF lost its seats in the Norwegian parliament.

⁴ An opinion survey conducted on behalf of the daily papers *Klassekampen*, *Nationen* and *Dagen* in November 2003 yielded the following result (in brackets the result of the last Stortings election): the potential coalition parties of a centre-left coalition obtained: DNA: 25.7% (24.3), SV: 19.7 (12.5), SP (Senterparti): 5.6 (5.6), overall 91 of 150 seats. The governmental parties obtained: *Høyre* 14.8 (21.2), *Kristelig Folkeparti* 6.7 (12.4), *Venstre* 2 (3.9), all in all 45.5 or 38 seats. The PrP right populists 22.3 (14.6). The RV would obtain 1.2% (1.2) and would not be represented (*Nationen* 11/13/2004). This trend in opinion polls has remained stable over the whole year 2003, with a high for the SV at the time of the war on Iraq.

⁵ SV as well as RV run well-done internet pages supplying very much current information. On the homepage of the SV, some information in English can be found.

⁶ The SUF today is the youth association close to the SV – within the party, it is on the left wing, outside of the party a “revolutionary, Marxist youth association”, see www.su.no.

The reconstitution of a socialist left party in Norway came as a result of the of the fight against the membership of the country in the European Community. In the year 1972, there developed a broad popular movement against joining. In the year after the vote, the SF, representatives of the Norwegian Communist Party and the left opposition within the EC-friendly DNA formed the “Socialist Electoral Alliance”. At the parliamentary elections of the year 1973, this party reached 10% of the votes. In 1975, the electoral alliance was renamed into “Socialist Left Party” – a move which most representatives of the NCP did not want to accept and therefore left the association. In the years that followed, the new party stabilized at between 5% to 7% of votes in central and regional elections. In the phase of the “Solidarity Alternative” between 1993 and 1997, the party lost continually in political influence.

2.2 The SV today

In the year 2001, the annual conference of the SV voted for a governmental cooperation with the DNA and the left-liberal *Senterparti*. At the same time the party passed a new working program. In 2003, a perspective program for communal policy was passed. The party leadership since then consists of three women and one man. The results of the local elections of September 2003 did not confirm the optimism of the opinion surveys and the party conferences. Certainly, the SV with a country-wide average of 13% of votes reached the best result of its history, but the hope to gain more votes than the DNA was only realized in very few cases, mostly in medium-sized towns: in Rana (Nordland) the SV with an increase in votes of 20%, reached 40% of the vote, in Namsos 35.6%, and in Tromsø 22.3% (www.resultat.valg.no). Although the party got 20,3% of the votes in Oslo, it failed to replace the block of bourgeois parties by an alliance of the three left parties. Overall the party will provide the head mayor or mayoress in 10 communities, while the right populists, next to the SV the second big winner of the elections, were able to impose themselves in about 20 communes. Despite a slowly growing number of members, the SV is still a relatively small party: in the beginning of 2003, it had 8000, at the end of the year ca. 10000 members.⁷ The SV has 750 representatives in communal and regional parliaments and 23 representatives in the *Storting*. If one adds to that the apparatus necessary to take care of such a large number of members of parliament, then it is clear that the point of emphasis of the SV today lies on parliamentary work and public relations.

2.3 Political direction and programmatic statements

⁷ For comparison: the DNA has about 70.000, its youth association (AUF, youth front of the workers' movement) 7.000 members.

Occasionally, left wing social democrats are demanding the fusion of SV and DNA in order to recreate the “great hegemonic force” of the workers’ movement (compare Steen 2003, review in *Ny Tid*⁸ 2003/2). The discussion about this question, certainly, is until today hypothetical, because the overwhelming majority of SV officials refuses such a development. However, Norwegian left socialism owes much to a tradition of pragmatism and radical reformism:

- In contrast to Sweden and Denmark, the NCP already fell apart in the 1960s;
- The left parties developed from a militant tradition within the social-democratic movement;
- The new social movements of the beginning of the 1970s more than in other countries had the character of “popular movements”, and the SV is a party which developed on the basis constellation.

The working program of the SV is correspondingly pragmatic. In the preamble it says: “The SV is a socialist party with the vision of a society without class distinctions and injustice. We want to reach a fundamental change of existing society” (SV 2003, 3, my translation). This is almost all that is said about fundamental social alternatives. The remaining twelve paragraphs and 90 pages of the working program contain mainly concrete policy proposals and alternatives of the SF. The points of emphasis of these twelve chapters can be sketched as follows:

1. The SV wants to contribute to a restructuring of the public sector. Therefore, the party demands a program of public employment, an extension of the installations of the social sector, the educational sector and collective local transport. The SV commits to a better financing of the local budgets, extremely weakened by the redistribution of the 1990s, and speaks out against further privatisations.
2. Overall, the SV pleads for a Keynesian economic policy. The oil funds should be used for these purposes. Tax policy should redistribute incomes in favour of wages and social benefits. There should be close cooperation with ATTAC, among other things a Tobin tax is demanded.

⁸ In contrast to Denmark, in Norway, there is both a daily and a weekly paper with close relations to the left socialist parties. In the Communist tradition of the RV, the production of written agitation and propaganda material was always considered an important task. The daily newspaper *Klassekampen* (Class War), which reports very intensively about the politics of RV and SV, just as RV itself, has been born in this tradition. In the meantime, it disposes of an excellent Internet edition. Close to the SV is the weekly paper *Ny Tid* (New Times), which has developed out of the social-democratic tradition. *Ny Tid* just as *Klassekampen* has an internet edition, which contains valuable information especially about the politics of the SV.

3. A special focus of the party is policy for children and adolescents. The SV demands a lowering of the parental contributions to child care institutions as well as an extension of day schools and a renovation of existing school buildings.
4. The SV is against a further extension of energy extraction from non-renewable natural resources (water and gas power installations). This point in the program is an essential problem in the cooperation with the Norwegian industrial trade unions (especially the right social democratic “Fellesforbundet” of metal and workshop industry), which in part reproach the SV “an anti-industrial policy”.

These central policy topics are also the subject of the “alternative state budget” published by the SV in summer 2003. Here, investments are proposed in child care, schools, old people’s care, local public transport and psychiatry, in addition a tax reform should allow a redistribution of incomes. On the whole the “alternative” of the SV, however, seems very modest. Given a record number of unemployed of 110000 (or 5.5% of the workforce, including those with minor jobs, the number jumps to almost 8.5%), an employment program designed to create 20000 jobs, does not look very convincing. Indeed, the “alternative budget” of the SV follows largely the givens by the Bondevik government, as far as the general financial framework of state expenditures is concerned. Obediently anticipating the tenor of a possible social-liberal coalition, the party already today plays the “responsible force” (SV 2003/2).

2.4 Foreign and European policy

Next to the domestic policy agenda of the party, foreign policy traditionally plays a central role in the politics of the SV. In its working program, the party backs an exit from NATO and a new security policy conception as well as a cut in military spending (SV 2003/1, Paragraph 8). In accordance with this goal the SV pronounced itself clearly against a Norwegian participation in the war on Iraq. When the DNA, under the impression of the greatest mass movement in the Norwegian post-war history, adopted a similar position in spring 2003, this announced a break with its expressly pro-US course since 1945 (*Ny Tid* 2003, 3). Surprisingly, this has set off a debate in the SV, which represents a fundamental transformation, and if the tendency continued, would represent a turn away from the anti-militaristic orientation of the party. In summer of 2003, the defence political committee of the party has worked out a statement that requires the party to think over its position to NATO. The “modernizers” in the SV see NATO as “alternative to the US”, as “world-wide power of civilization” that should be “strengthened unconditionally” (Klassekampen, 6/10/2003). The party chairwoman Halvorsen recently visited the “Joint Warfare Committee” of NATO at Stavanger. Her summary: “It is a positive experience to discuss our

defence policy with such competent persons” (Verdens Gang, 1/6/2004). The revision of the military policy is up to now mainly proposed by a layer of party officials, while within the membership, the anti-NATO course still has a majority.

A quite similar development also shows in EU politics, the second important grounding pillar of the SV: The criticism that the EU is a “neo-liberal project” has been replaced by a criticism of the “deficit in democracy” of the EU institutions. Since the Norwegians in 1994 for the second time voted against a membership in the EU, the EFTA treaties have been reformulated such that they impose the EU directives to up to 90% also in Norway. The politics of the “Solidarity Alternative” corresponded more or less to the requirements of the stability pact – even without Norway being an EU member. The criticism of the “democracy deficit” opens a door for a pro-EU attitude which nevertheless within the SV is still more or less “taboo”: the argument lies close that if Norway remains out of the EU, but takes over most of its demands, it would lead to more “say” and avoid “isolation”, if one joined the EU. The argument is promoted, similar to the discussion on NATO, by the euro-chauvinistic sentiment triggered by the Iraq war (Klassekampen, 7/28/2003). The official policy of the party, however, as before considerable deviates from the new discourse. In Section 9 of the working program, the termination or at least redefinition of the EFTA agreements is demanded. The EU question continues to be one of the central “problems”, standing the way of a cooperation between DNA, SV and the also Euro-sceptical Centre Party. For the time being, the two front figures of SP and SV have only declared that after the elections of the year 2005 at first no new EU referendum will take place and that the status will be upheld in the EFTA question (Dagavisen, 12/21/2003).

The change in the political orientation of the SV is certainly also driven ahead by the considerable growth in the electoral base of the party. While among the party members a clear majority holds on to the old programmatic concepts, the EU question is considerably more debated among the voters. According to an opinion poll of summer 2003 the SV has the most voters “uncertain” about the EU question of all parties. Especially in the area around the capital, there exists a majority for joining the EU also among the SV voters (Klassekampen, 6/23/2003, 1b).

2.5 Summary

At first sight, the SV seems to be swimming on a wave of success: All electoral results for the last years point in the same direction: a first-time participation in a left-centre government in the year 2005 seems to be possible. The obstacles on the road to a left-centre government are at least two-fold: the relationship to social democracy is far from stable, and so is the relationship to the new social movements. Recently, the DNA has opted for a cooperation towards the “right” and secured the budget of the bourgeois government. This was justified by the

argument that both the “roughest cuts” in the state budget envisaged in the original catalogue of demands and a far-reaching deterioration of the protection against unlawful dismissal were taken back. The coalition with a weak moderate right wing will certainly continue to be an attractive option at least for an important faction within the DNA. Social democracy will, after the “modernizers” have prevailed within the party, only be ready for a coalition, if the SV gains approximately the number of seats promised by the opinion surveys last year: This, however, is uncertain. Moreover, the relationship of the SV to the new social movements is instable as well. Its popularity rose in 2003 in the context of the protests against the Iraq war. The changing foreign policy of the SV, being at the same time a prerequisite for taking part in a left-centre government, could shatter much of its credibility.

3. The Red Electoral Alliance (*Rød Valgalliance*)

3.1 History and contemporary political influence of the RV

When in 1973 the different left-socialist directions in Norway merged into the “Socialist Electoral Alliance”, the Maoist AKP (ml)⁹ was not invited. In the year before, on occasion of the battle around EU membership, the media turned the AKP(ml) and its youth organisation into a bogeyman, which threatened to undercut the otherwise quite homely bourgeois resistance movement (Kjeldstadli 1997, 40 f.). The RV was meant to be an alternative to the “Socialist Electoral Alliance” – a cover for the AKP, to which candidacy had been denied under that name. During the 70s, the RV remained a pure campaign organisation which the AKP activated only for elections. In the 80s, the presence of a few deputies in communal and regional parliaments urged a more independent existence of the RV. But it was only after the massacre on Tian An Men square and the decline of the socialist countries, that a new self-critical tendency was fostered within both organisations, which promoted independent initiatives of the RV and opened for new forms of cooperation with social movements. In 1993 the RV for the first time entered the *Storting* with one deputy. At the local and regional elections of the year 1997, the RV received about 2% of votes, its up to now best result (RV 2003).

Although the electoral alliance in the meantime calls itself a “party” and - for the last time at the Party Conference of 2001 - had given itself its own Program of Principles, certain elements of cooperation between party and campaign organisation have remained in force until today – and for this reason continue to be the subject of inter-organisational conflicts. Still today the “Electoral Alliance” in certain areas of political development disposes over no independent

⁹ The AKP(ml) today is just called AKP (Arbeidernes Kommunistparti, Communist Party of the Workers): www.akp.no. The website of this party is excellently assorted: among other things it contains theoretic-analytical statements in English, Spanish, German and Dutch.

position. Thus the youth organisation (“Red Youth”) continues its close relationship to the AKP and educational work is underdeveloped and in part, in quite traditional form, assumed by the AKP. On the homepage of the RV, one finds a link to the AKP as “the party supporting the Red Electoral Alliance” (www.rv.no). Certain forms of party propaganda and programmatic standpoints are reminding of the Marxist-Leninist tradition as well (see 3.2.).

Nevertheless, 30 years after the founding, the conference of the party in spring 2003 also offered a renewed picture: half of the participants were not born yet, when the RV was founded in 1973. After its defeat in the 2001-elections, the RV elected a new board and a new chairman. The electoral statistics published on the homepage of the RV provides a rough survey of the party’s social composition: it has about 1500 members (SV 10 000). The election results of the RV are above average with men (1.6%), under-30-year-olds (2%), people with higher education (2%) and pupils (5%). At the local elections in late summer 2003, the RV has lost about ¼ of its votes – in general its electorate is very volatile, and the party has lost in particular to the other socialist parties (www.rv.no/valgkamp). Today, RV is represented with 19 deputies in regional parliaments and about 70 in local parliaments (for comparison: the SV counts about 750).

One of the main organisational problems of the RV is its weak representation in rural areas: the association has local divisions in less than half of the communities. When RV was represented in the central parliament, part of the funds could be used for building up an extensive organisation. These means are no longer available, and thus the problem is increasing, and illustrated by the bad result at the local elections (Klassekampen, 1/6/2004). On the other hand, the local elections have confirmed some of the traditional strongholds of the RV: in Oslo, the party received around 3% of the votes and re-entered the parliament of the capital with two representatives, in Bergen, the RV reached 5.6%, and in the industrial city of Odda close to Bergen more than 16%. Different from the Red-Green Alliance in Denmark, the RV maintained some influence in a few cities with a local radical heritage (www.resultat.valg.no).¹⁰

The RV tries to cooperate on the basis of an equal partnership with local action committees and the new social movements. Although it was the only political force in Norway which has protested against all the wars led by NATO since the attack on Yugoslavia, especially the SV has been able to gain from the anti-war sentiment of summer 2003, whereas the RV stagnated in opinion polls also at this time.

3.2 Program

¹⁰ In many communes the RV has established a constructive cooperation with the SV, although the SV as a rule nods off local budgets that move within the guidelines set by the government. In some very few communes in 2003 again common lists of SF and RV were presented, which were quite successful throughout.

At the Party Conference of March 2, 2003, the RV passed a new working program. In a very brief preface, the goal of the RV is described as support for the “development of the international movements” against neo-liberalism, and “for a strengthening of people’s power and a socialist-democratic revolution” (RV 2003, 2).

Within *foreign policy*, the RV stands for the exit from NATO and the renunciation of the EFTA treaties. It demands among others: withdrawal from NATO, elimination of NATO bases in Norway, non-participation in all international military operations, renunciation to the dogma of “first strike” and to the training of “flexible reaction forces”. Nevertheless, the RV is not a pacifist party: “The security of Norwegian resources is not guaranteed by the present defence policy.” (ibid., 27, my emphasis) The RV still considers the EU unambiguously as a “neo-liberal project” (ibid., chapter 7).

In its *domestic policy*, the RV more than the SV aims at the traditional industrial workers’ class: higher wages and social income, struggle against rising labour norms and cooperation with the LO trade unions are important points on the agenda (ibid., chapter 4 and 13). On the *local level*, one of the most important criteria for the RV is resisting a limitation of the purview of local authorities due to an extension of tasks and the redistribution of taxes. A further important demand is the extension of the room for action of communal self-administration, the keep-up of regional parliaments and the redistribution of state funds for the benefit of the localities. At the same time, an end is demanded to the transformation of communal establishments into self-managing units and the privatisation of schools, child care institutions and public transport.

When the RV was able to develop a less instrumental and continuous cooperation with the new social movements and the trade unions, it could win a broad public for its clear positions concerning the international institutions. This again would be a prerequisite to overcome the problems of its fluctuating base and lack of representation in many localities and regions.

But there are, aside from the development of the social movements themselves, with which I want to deal in the last chapter of this text, some hurdles currently reduce the prospects of the RV to gain more acceptance and influence. Just to name one example, in contrast to the SV, the RV has *a more traditional ecological profile*. Thus it says in chapter 10 of the working program: “The RV is in favour of putting our stakes also in the future on an industrial development of Norway linked to our consumption of primary energy. Water power was and must also in the future be the foundation for this industry. Industry has to work actively with energy-saving measures. The RV stands for not worsening the competitiveness of Norwegian industry. Thus the Norwegian economic steering authorities must pay attention...to turn down the pressure on industry to pay energy taxes...” (ibid., 15, my translation). These, certainly somewhat surprising, statements follow from the fundamental picture of a Norwegian society, which still seems to be on the road from nationalisation to socialisation. While the program as well discusses the partial privatisation of Statoil under the

Jagland government, the opening of Norwegian industry towards global capital, the privatisation of the public sector etc., this does not seem to have influenced the basic ideas about “nationalisation” – as rational administration of an essential “progressive development of productive forces”.¹¹

All in all, independently from the more or less developed critical positions vis-à-vis the traditions of state socialism, one problem seems to be a common one in Scandinavian left socialist parties: the changes of the 1990s, the new role of social democracy, and the rise of the right populists are conceived above all in the context of a “defence of the social state”. Given the trauma, that the right-wing governments of the 1980s have caused, left socialists are searching for new forms of regulation via the state, which in principle offers starting points also for a “critical” cooperation. Viewed from the outside, a strange constellation occurs: the fact, that “nationalisation” has brought with it few emancipative experiences seems not to have influenced the analysis. Consequently, the problem that the extreme right in Norway today is a very important parliamentary force, is almost absent in the programmes both of the SV and the RV.¹² The thesis that this development is linked precisely to the double (both in- and exclusive) character of the (national) welfare state, is still no man’s land.

4. The social movements in Norway and their relationship to the left parties

Norway has witnessed one mass demonstration after the other in the last five years. As is described in the following in somewhat more detail, if not exhaustively, we have to do with movements with very different agendas that for a short time turn on a lively discussion and strong mobilisation but disappear equally quickly.

4.1 Movement against the war on Iraq

The mobilisation for the protests against the war on Iraq in 2003 surpassed all expectations of the organisers. Not fewer than 150 000 people came to the

¹¹ Although the party cooperates with the new social movements, its program shows other traditional elements as well. For example, the RV sees the “women’s problem” still as an independent chapter: “Full women’s liberation”, in the view of the RV, “can only be reached in a socialist society” (chapter 21). The topics of prostitution, contraception and abortion and of sexuality in general are – at least in the working program – part of the “women’s question” – a conception rightfully criticised during the last twenty years by the new women’s movement.

¹² The RV criticises the *refugee policy* of the bourgeois government: among other things, it demands an extension of the protection of refugees from deportation, the opening of Norwegian borders and the rejection of the Schengen treaty (ibid., chapters 17 and 18). It holds the refugee policy of the DNA to be hardly more credible than that of the PrP, but there is no deep analysis of the emergence and the significance of the right populism within the program.

demonstrations country-wide, in view of the population size of Norway, this can only be compared to the protests in England, Italy or Spain. In Oslo alone, the police – which in this respect is not inclined to exaggerate – counted around 60 000 demonstrators. Moreover, Norway was one of the very few countries, in which the peace movement had an impact on the government: the protests contributed to the decision, despite of a in general pro-American course, not to participate in the invasion. After the official end of the war, units were sent, however, for a “humanitarian deployment”. For the time being, it is debated how long these troops are to stay. It seems that the DNA could refuse an extension of the mandate beyond summer 2004 and that the current government will end the mandate for the sake of domestic policy peace.

For the noteworthy strength of the Norwegian anti-war movement there are (at least) two explanations: the first has to do with the specific positioning of Norway within the NATO. Norwegian foreign policy historically understood itself above all as politics of intermediation between the two blocks on the basis of a national defence policy consensus. Based on this tradition, Norwegian diplomacy lately for example took on the position of mediator in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Furthermore, a decisive part of the national consensus so far has been that military interventions must be carried out on an UN mandate. At the same time all large Norwegian parties, among others as a result of the experiences with the German occupation during WW II, represented a policy friendly to the US. It is obvious that the two elements of this consensus – pro-US, pro-UN – have been at the very least strongly attacked, if not finally destroyed. As a result, the “foreign policy” wagers in the partyscape have polarised: from the US friends and security fanatics in the right-wing populist camp – over a very volatile political middle to a social democracy and a SV, which banks more on the West European variant, especially however on the UN. The break with the security policy consensus has contributed a lot to the size of the movement of February 2003, since it reinforced the feeling that also in Norwegian domestic politics something is at stake. Moreover, the Norwegian “foreign policy” movements already since the 1970s were broader, more middle-class, more apt at coalitions than the social movements in the neighbouring countries. The initiative “No to War”, already dissolved again in May 2003, describes this quite explicitly: “We agreed to first keep the parties out of the mobilisation process and to concentrate on the cooperation of humanitarian organisations, individuals etc.” (www.nejtilkrig.no, my translation). Given the brief mobilisation phase, this position, assumed as far as I can see with the full agreement of the left parties, implied that only a very short time remained to stabilise the movement and discuss longer-range conceptions: maybe from the beginning of February until end of March 2004. The influence of the left-wing parties – for this reason – is very difficult to evaluate. It might be suspected that the experience of the anti-war movement has marked the left parties more than the other way around.

4.2 (Anti)globalization movement

In the Scandinavian countries, national divisions of ATTAC have existed for almost three years now. If their foundation everywhere at first was linked with the hope to achieve a broad organisation of the “movement of movements”, this picture has differentiated after the protests in particular on occasion of the encroachments on demonstrators during the EU summit at Gothenburg in 2001. The discussion in Norway in 2001 and 2002 was determined to a considerable extent by the “question of violence”. This atmosphere also characterized the actions which took place in Oslo on occasion of a World Bank meeting in January 2002. ATTAC already in advance distanced itself from “violent protests” and advised against visiting the street fairs by “Reclaim the Street” and other autonomous left-radical groups.¹³ Within the left, a conflict around this advice occurred, moreover since aside from the refusal of solidarity, it also contained a very disputable account of the Gothenburg events. But despite this debate, the protests can be considered as quite successful: about 10 000 people took part at the central demonstration, and there were no fights with the police at all. A “counter-summit” dealt with the question of debt relief and the policies of the World Bank in general.

ATTAC today has about 5000 members (beginning of 2003: 3900) and still seems to be a growing organisation. Within ATTAC, individual members of the SV and the RV are represented, partly as important officials. As in other countries as well, the Trotskyite “International Socialists” (the sister organisation of the SWP) has, compared to its overall social anchoring, an over-proportional role in ATTAC.

The annual “globalization conferences” organised by a left network that included a wide range of organisations draw many visitors – in 2003 as well, more than 1000 people took part. The network organising these conferences has meanwhile decided to constitute to a “Norwegian social forum”, among other things to achieve a more representative cooperation among the various groups of the globalization movement by way of more formal structures (Klassekampen, 3/28/2003).

4.3 Social Unionism

The dissatisfaction with the redistribution that occurred during the 1990s, with lack of means for the communes, the partial privatisation and curtailment of funds for hospitals, schools etc. was a release for the surge of the “Progress Party”. However, it has also brought, in connection with the change in the trade-union-scape, a few interesting new developments, among others the constitution

¹³ The autonomous left in Norway is primarily Oslo-based, concentrated around the cultural centre “Blitz” and a few Antifa groups located there.

of a wide range of initiatives against the dismantling of the welfare state. In particular the trade union of the teachers, the united hospital personal and the communal employees, who in the 1990s with many strikes and other actions had battled against the undermining of the material basis of the welfare state, have founded the *Aktsjon for Velferdsstaten* (= “Action for the Welfare State”). In a first step six trade unions, including both blue- and white collar TUs and the “new” associations of academicians, joined the *Aktsjon* in 1999. After 1999, the *Aktsjon* was extended, and a few additional TUs joined it: the trade unions of the oil workers, the workers in hotels and gastronomy, the electricians, the IT-workers and others. Overall, these TUs represent about one million workers, and it is certainly not wrong to assume that especially the influence of the SV within them is comparatively high.¹⁴ Meanwhile, SV as well as RV have joined the *Aktsjon* as collective members.

The *Aktsjon* seizes on some of the essential consequences of the policies of the “Solidarity Alternative”. In an article by its speaker A. Wahl, which elucidates the history and the essential points of emphasis of the *Aktsjon*, it says: “Recent research has revealed that 70 000 children are living below the poverty line in Norway. At the same time 20 new millionaires are produced every day. While the average wage increase was 15% from 1995 to 1998, the corporate fat cats increased their income by about 35% ... - in the long run this threaten the existence of the universal welfare state.” (Wahl 2003 (2), 6) In other words: the *Aktsjon* struggles for the maintenance of the “universalistic” principles in Norway. In the face of what was described in the preceding paragraphs it stands to reason that this is also one of the revolving points of SV and RV, in particular because it is part of a development further weakening the hegemony of social democracy within the trade unions. The reaction to it could lead to an increase in (both material and political) support for the different left parties by some of the TUs.

Wahl also mentions one weakness of the “Action”: “The alliance was... established at the national level. This is at the same time the strength and the weakness of the alliance. The (sic) strength because it reflects a strong and wide-reaching dissatisfaction with the current economic and political development in Norway (and internationally) and legitimates local and coordinated resistance. The (sic) weakness because it has not arisen from real movement of the grassroots (Wahl 2003 (1), p. 5).”

The coordination of the social movements over time and space in Norway thus is thus as problematic as everywhere else in Europe: despite the substantial links that obviously existed between the founding of the “Action for the Welfare State” in the year 1999 and the strike of the year 2000, the story about it told by Wahl does not refer to this relationship. Social movements also in Norway have reached a considerable dynamic, but apparently they have no history.

¹⁴ The SV can count a few high officials of the trade unions mentioned among its members, but also has a certain influence in the trade unions outside of the *Aktsjon*: thus the SV member Per Østvold was for a long time chairman of the transport workers’ union.

Furthermore, the links between the vast anti-war movement, the anti-globalization movement and the *Aktsjon* are very weak, although the protagonists of all of these movements often are identical. How to combine forces, build up a certain continuity, remains an open question. In which way left socialist parties should have an influence on-and-within the new social movements must be discussed on this background.

5. References

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