

»Everyone on Board!«¹

The Nordic Model and the Red-Red-Green Coalition – A Transferable Model of Success?

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**NORWEGIAN LABOR PARTY (DET NORSKE ARBEIDERPARTI, DNA;
OR MORE COMMONLY: ARBEIDERPARTIET, AP)**

Official website:	http://arbeiderparti.no
Party leader:	Jens Stoltenberg
History at a glance:	Founded in Arendal in 1887. Represented in the Storting (Norwegian parliament) since 1907. From March 1935 to April 1945 the AP governed together with the Farmers' Party (Bondepartiet) under Johan Nygaardsvold and laid the initial foundations of a welfare state – abruptly suspended by the German occupation from April 1941 to May 1945 and the conduct of the resistance from exile in London. Between 1945 and 2010 the AP has governed for around 45 years with brief interruptions.
SI and PES membership:	SI: since 1932; PES: since 1999
Party membership:	2009: 50,269 1999: 61,327
Electoral resonance parliamentary elections:	2009: 35.4 % of the votes, 64 seats 2005: 32.7 % of the votes, 61 seats 2001: 24.3 % of the votes, 43 seats 1997: 35.0 % of the votes, 65 seats
Government participation:	2005: in government; head of government: Jens Stoltenberg 2000–2001: in government; head of government: Jens Stoltenberg, in coalition with SV and SP

1. »Alle skal med« – literally »Everyone is to come with us« or »everyone on board« – has been the main slogan of the Norwegian Labor Party since 2005.

From Electoral Disaster in 2001 to the Resurrection of Social Democracy in 2005

What's going on in Norway? While in many European countries social democracy is struggling, in both 2005 and 2009 the left-wing coalition government and successful reform policies of the Norwegian social democrats were endorsed in the elections.

Is it because of the oil which makes it possible to fund social democratic favors? From the Norwegian standpoint, the answer is a resounding »no.« This is because only a maximum of four percent of the petroleum fund² (one of two sovereign wealth funds comprising the Norwegian government's pension fund) may flow into the state budget; the rest goes into an international fund. The center-right parties resorted to the »oil argument« again in calling for cuts in taxes and contributions – and lost the past two elections against the social democratic »state and tax party« with its left-wing/red coalition partners.

In 2001, the Norwegian Labor Party (DnA), under the »Norwegian Tony Blair« Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, suffered its worst election defeat for 77 years with a meager 24.4 percent of the votes.³ Afterwards, the AP's poll ratings sank even further, to as low as 15 percent,⁴ accompanied by a fierce internal debate between supporters of party leader and former prime minister Thorbjørn Jagland, and those of Jens Stoltenberg, ousted as prime minister but elected leader of the parliamentary group.

However, from 2004, the AP was able to remold the party program and its organization, both by returning to traditional values and social democratic policies and by further developing the »Nordic welfare state« in close cooperation with the trade unions.

For the first time ever, the AP opposition group worked out a joint program with the Sosialistisk Venstreparti (Socialist Left Party or sv)⁵

2. Withdrawal from the »Statens Pensionsfond Utland« (»State Pension Fund – Global,« the other sovereign wealth fund) is limited to the average tax revenues (the four percent cited).
3. At the Storting election in 1924 the AP received only 18.4 percent, but thereafter always comfortably topped 30 percent (with the exception of 2001).
4. According to DnA interviewees.
5. The sv was founded in 1961 as the Sosialistisk Folkeparti (SF/Socialist People's Party Volkspartei) by former social democrats opposed to the EU and NATO and in 1975, reinforced by former communists and other left-wing groups, was renamed the Socialist Left Party.

and the Senterparti (Center Party or SP)⁶ (»155 points on which we are in agreement«). The AP led a coalition election campaign with them and won enough votes – 32.7 percent – to oust the center-right coalition with a Red-Red-Green majority in the Storting in September 2005. This Red-Red-Green coalition was endorsed by the electorate once again in the elections in September 2009.

For outside observers, but also for the Norwegian Labor Party itself, the question arises of whether and how the Nordic model à la Norway can continue – but also whether and how it could be transferred to other countries and other social democratic parties in Europe.⁷ The present study is intended to contribute to answering this question and thus to the dissemination of Norway's »lessons learned.«

Historical Background

Since 1945 up to the present day the AP has governed for around 45 years, furnishing six prime ministers: Einar Gerhardsen, Trygve Bratteli, Odvar Nordli, Gro Harlem Brundtland, Thorbjørn Jagland, and now Jens Stoltenberg.

With relatively short interruptions by center-right governments, social democratic governments worked out the foundations of the Nordic welfare state – in close cooperation with the trade unions and in discussion with SAMAK, the Nordic cooperation committee bringing together social democrats and trade unions.

Under the social democratic governments of Bratteli (1971/72 and 1973–1976), as well as Nordli the first basic reforms of the »Nordic model« were introduced. The *Nordic welfare state* was to be tax-financed and guarantee a basic provision permitting a decent living standard »for all« registered inhabitants, independent of family or social assistance. This was to be achieved, among other things, by the following means:

6. The SP is a traditional conservative-green party with its electoral constituency in rural areas.
7. Further testament to the transferability of Nordic experiences is provided by the invitation by the World Economic Forum to make the »Lessons Learned« from the Nordic model the main theme of the meeting in Davos in summer 2011. (»Ber verden se mot Skandinavia« / »Let the world look towards Scandinavia«), *Aftenposten*, June 20, 2010; see also: »Danmark bliver darling på Davos-møde« / »Denmark becomes the darling of Davos summit«, *Business.dk*, June 16, 2010.

- ▶ tax-financed »free« public health care;
- ▶ replacement of the »Bismarckian« school system and of schools for disabled and special needs children by a uniform, integrated education for all children up to the 10th grade;
- ▶ gradual introduction of all-day care – for example, with places in day-care centers for children whose parents are in full-time employment – up to early adolescence;
- ▶ support for academic education for all young people of majority age, entirely independent of their parents, through educational credits or grants;
- ▶ state minimum old-age pension dependent solely on residence (»Volkspension« or »national pension«), besides the income-related statutory old-age pension;
- ▶ funding of social benefits via consumption taxes in the form of (relatively high) VAT and high »sin taxes,« as they are known in the vernacular (for example, on cars, alcohol, tobacco, sugar, and so on).

On these foundations of the Nordic welfare state, established by the end of the 1970s, the Labor Party, under Gro Harlem Brundtland as Prime Minister of the AP minority governments between 1986 and 1996, drove the reform process further, the standards of which were still largely determined by the Labor Party even after her resignation in 1996.

Gro's resignation as Norwegian prime minister left a major political vacuum which was difficult to fill. Nevertheless, under Gro Harlem Brundtland the Nordic welfare state developed into the foundation of modern Norwegian society.

The successor to Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, who stepped down on October 25, 1996 was Thorbjörn Jagland, who had already replaced her as party leader at the AP party conference in 1992.⁸ After the elections in September 1997, in which the AP received 35 percent of the votes, Jagland resigned as head of the government, having publicly made his continuation as prime minister conditional on at least matching the previous election result (under Brundtland) of 36.9 percent.

This was why the leader of the Kristelig Folkeparti (KrF/Christliche Volkspartei), Kjell Magne Bondevik, formed his first coalition government (a minority government) on October 17, 1997 with the KrF, the Center Party (SP) and Venstre (V/Liberal Party). On March 17, 2000

8. Gro Harlem Brundtland's standing as party leader was very high; she stepped down in 1992 purely for personal and family reasons.

he submitted his resignation after his government received no support from the AP and the conservative party Høyre (H, literally »Right«) and thus was unable to attain a majority in the debate on the construction of a gas-fired power station. Leader of the AP parliamentary group Jens Stoltenberg then took up the reins as prime minister of an AP minority government, which was forced to govern with fluctuating parliamentary majorities.

In September 2001, the AP then suffered – similar to the SPD eight years later – the worst electoral defeat in its history, at around 24 percent of the votes. On the surface, this seemed to confirm the vacuum left by Gro Harlem Brundtland's resignation. But in that case, what can explain the revival of Brundtland's political legacy only four years later?

Analysis of the Current State of the Norwegian Labor Party 2010

Indeed, Gro Harlem Brundtland had left behind her not just a political vacuum, but also a political legacy with which the majority of Norwegians identify. That explains both the temporary disappointment with her younger and less experienced successors and the solid foundations on which the Labor Party was able to rebuild after 2001.

In order to understand the current state of the Norwegian Labor Party (2010) we shall examine the following:

- ▶ the Brundtland foundations: the substantial performance record of the legendary AP leader and head of government Gro Harlem Brundtland (certainly comparable to that of Willy Brandt);
- ▶ the election defeat in the crisis year 2001;
- ▶ the policy and practical weaknesses during the brief Stoltenberg government of 2000/2001; the AP's policy shift enabling the formation of the Red-Red-Green coalition while still in opposition;
- ▶ the party's performance record in implementing the government program based on the so-called »Soria Moria declaration« of the Red-Red-Green coalition since 2005;
- ▶ internal party changes, as well as the character and societal acceptance of the AP in 2005/2009.

The Brundtland Foundations: Enormous Success and Enormous Burden

Under Brundtland's leadership the economic and political foundations were laid for Norwegian society's sustainability, modernity, and capacity to integrate, of which Norwegian social democracy can be particularly proud. This includes the exemplary development of women's roles in Norwegian society.

Because the most important economic foundation – and effect! – of the Nordic welfare state in Norway is, notwithstanding a widespread misunderstanding, not the »oil money,« but the results of the reforms which were implemented largely under Brundtland:

- ▶ The most striking advances were pushed through by Gro Harlem Brundtland as prime minister of several minority governments in 1986–1989 and 1990–1996. Herself the mother of four children, she wanted to eliminate all obstacles to full employment by means of equality between men and women in working life and thereby fully reconcile family and working life.
- ▶ Her governments pursued these reforms under the overall banner of »work line« in continuous consultation with the trade unions.
- ▶ Measures for increasing employment included extension of the state-financed continuation of the payment of the full wage on the birth of a child from 18 to 46 weeks (80 percent in the case of 52 weeks), all-day care in kindergartens and schools, and quota regulations for top management positions in parties, public companies, and administrations.
- ▶ Brundtland's »work line« also encompassed more tax reforms, work incentives for both marriage partners, and lower corporate taxes coupled with abolition of write-offs not related to investments.
- ▶ Elimination of obstacles to employment flexibilization (e.g. income-dependent maximum pensions on the basis of the 20 »best« out of 40 years of employment so that occasional unemployment, training, or part-time working does not entail a reduced pension).

In 1992, the Brundtland government, with the agreement of the trade unions, introduced a law whereby all company and collective bargaining measures had to be tested with regard to whether they promoted or hindered employment, and in the latter case they had to be changed.⁹

9. Cf. Wolfgang Biermann (2004): »Umbau des ›Nordischen Wohlfahrtsstaates,« (Rebuilding of the »Nordic welfare state«) background paper for the event organized by the Norwegian-German Willy-Brandt-Stiftung, »Aus der tiefen Krise

The consequences of these policies were discernible after about 10 years and continue to exert their effects today: as a result of the Brundtland reform policies there have been increases in, for example:

- ▶ the employment rate of women, from 40 percent in 1970 to 75.3 percent in 1997;
- ▶ the employment rate of older workers aged 60–64, from 37 percent in 1970 to 45 percent in 2002;
- ▶ the pass rate of the school leaving certificate thanks to the introduction of comprehensive schools to 70 percent in 2007, while in the case of Muslim girls in Oslo it was as high as 80 percent in 2009;
- ▶ the birth rate, to around 1.9 children per woman. Among Norwegian women in responsible management positions three or more children are more common than the population average.¹⁰

When Gro Harlem Brundtland resigned in October 1996 for personal reasons she left behind her a historic legacy of which the AP – also in international comparison – could be proud, although for her successors she represents an almost impossible act to follow.

This success is part of a possible explanation for both the crisis which the Norwegian Labor Party subsequently went through – but also for its re-emergence.

Crisis Year 2001 – Policy Uncertainty and Practical Weaknesses as Causes of the Loss of Public Trust?

The electoral catastrophe of 2001, in particular with regard to the trade unions and many core voters, had both current, policy, and »cultural« causes.

While the success of social democratic policies even under the conservative predecessor and successor regimes under Kjell Manger Bondevik (1997–2000 and 2001–2005) were not called into question, the

in den Höhenflug – Wie reformiert man in Skandinavien?,« (From deep crisis to euphoria – what is the approach to reform in Scandinavia?) (January 28, 2004). Available at: www.willy-brandt-stiftung.de/htmldocs/umbau.pdf.

10. Cf.: »Rike kvinner føder mest«, in *Dagsavisen*, May 27, 2003 (»En ny undersøkelse (...) slår i hjel myten om at kvinner velger mellom karriere og barn. I stedet er det slik at kvinner med høy lønn oftere får barn nummer tre enn lavtlønte medsøstre.« (»New research [...] shattered the myth that women choose between a career and children. Instead, women on high wages more often go for a third child than their more poorly paid sisters.«)

triumphant election victory of New Labour under Tony Blair infiltrated traces of the Third Way even into Norway. The formulas presented in the Schröder/Blair paper and adopted by the predominantly social democrat government heads at European summit meetings were also celebrated by the media in Norway.

Even though the leadership of the Norwegian Labor Party did not formally embrace the Third Way and had no intention of rejecting the Nordic welfare state, Jens Stoltenberg, elected leader of the parliamentary group in spring 2000 and from March 2000 head of government, was described by the Oslo media as the »Norwegian Tony Blair.«

This portrayal by the media aroused among the trade unions and parts of the Labor Party fears of a possible renunciation of social democratic values. The emphasis on personal responsibility rather than state benefits, the »allocative function of markets,« and discussion of the liberalization of global financial and economic movements necessarily implied keeping the trade unions at something of a distance, as well as center-right sympathies.

During Stoltenberg's short period in office the government covertly considered – although it was leaked to the media – cutting unpaid sick leave within the framework of sickness benefit. This led to massive conflicts with the trade union federation Landsorganisasjonen i Norge (LO) and its then leader Yngve Hågensen.

A proposal formulated by energy minister Akselsen on the part privatization of Statoil provoked strong resistance within the AP and the protests of Finn Lied, who as industry minister in the 1970s developed the Statoil concept in order to safeguard national oil resources from international oil groups.

This and other debates led to uncertainty within the party and among voters and escalated during Stoltenberg's brief term of office as prime minister to a violent altercation within the AP between the »traditionalists« (who looked to party chair Thorbjørn Jagland) and the »modernizers« (with whom Jens Stoltenberg was identified). This contributed to the dramatic exodus of AP voters at the Storting elections in September 2001.

An analysis of the changes in voter approval makes the drama of the Labor Party's standing among the electorate particularly clear.¹¹

11. On this cf. Bernt Aardal, Henry Valen, Rune Karlsen, Øyvind Kleven and Tor Morten Normann: »Valgundersøkelsen 2001,« *Dokumentasjonsrapport, Rapporter*, 2003/14, Statistisk sentralbyrå 2003: 19 ff.

For the AP, the 2001 elections were characterized mainly by the mass desertion of younger voters: only 11 percent of voters below the age of 29 voted AP, in comparison to 18 percent in 1996. On the other hand, the Socialist Left Party (sv) polled 26 percent and the conservative Høyre (H) – »the Right Party« – as much as 28 percent of younger voters.¹²

In its analysis of the vote shift in 2001 the Central Statistical Office (SSB) declares: »The proportion of those who either voted for another party or simply stayed at home grew to 44 percent. Discounting the abstainers 37 percent switched their vote to a different party« (Valgundersøkelsen 2001, Rapport 2003/14, Statistisk sentralbyrå 2003: 19).

Only 56 percent of those who had voted AP in 1997 did so again in 2001. Thirteen percent of AP voters switched to the Right Party, 10 percent to the sv, and 12 percent stayed at home. In contrast, 73 percent of sv voters and 69 percent of Høyre voters remained faithful to their party.

AP losses were particularly significant among, traditionally, their most important core voters, members of LO trade unions: only 32.8 percent of trade union members voted AP, in comparison to 53.8 percent in 1997. Evidently, previous AP supporters among the trade unions felt »betrayed and sold out.«

AP Policy Shift – From the Third Way »Back« to the Nordic Model and the Red-Red-Green Coalition

After the election defeat there were further discussions within the party. For example, a section of the Labor Party in Sør-Trøndelag in northern Norway wrote an internal paper in which it appealed to the party's will towards unity and renewal and criticized the lack of communication and the arrogance within the AP leadership, as well as plans to privatize public services reported in the press. Under the slogan »Mitt Arbeiderparti« (My Labor Party)¹³ the paper – later adopted by Fylke-Arbeiderparti Sør-Trøndelag¹⁴ – demanded the renewal and development of the AP towards an »inclusive party« which would, with a policy of tax-financed

12. On this, cf. Figure 5.2, *Valgundersøkelsen 2001, Rapport 2003/14*, Statistisk sentralbyrå 2003: 21.

13. From 2005, »MittArbeiderparti« became a regular feature of the AP internet campaign to improve the inclusion and mobilization of AP members (<http://www.mittarbeiderparti.no/>).

14. Fylke-Arbeiderparti Sør-Trøndelag (»South Trøndelag«) is one of the AP's 19 regional organizations in Norway.

»collective solutions« contribute to the development of society and »a dependable social and welfare policy.«¹⁵

After the election of Jens Stoltenberg as AP leader in spring 2002 the party's policy shift accelerated in close cooperation with AP secretary general Martin Kolberg. The change was comprehensive – a Norwegian »exception« in the true sense of the word, apart from anything else because it was able to build on the Brundtland foundations and rely on the strong support of the trade unions.

While other social democratic parties in Europe struggle despairingly with the disappearance of their voter base and inability to dominate the public debate, abjure their left-wing policy stances and, faced with the problems of financing social security systems, follow the path of cuts, a smaller state and more self-responsibility, after Jens Stoltenberg had taken over the party leadership in 2002, the Norwegian Labor Party offered exactly the opposite line towards the further development of the social democratic »Nordic model.«

In a nutshell this meant:

- ▶ close agreement and cooperation with the trade unions;
- ▶ rejection of the privatization of public services and instead their development, but with less bureaucracy and more efficiency;
- ▶ clear identification of the tasks of the state in the strengthening and strategic orientation of state-owned companies;
- ▶ no cuts in high consumption and »sin« taxes, but rather utilization of their revenues to expand and improve public services.

The Labor Party pursued this policy shift in close cooperation with the LO trade unions and adopted ideas emanating from the LO leadership.

One important lesson was that the minority governments of Gro Harlem Brundtland were successful because she as prime minister showed undisputed leadership quality, held the party together and, both personally and politically, radiated a charisma whose influence and ability to secure people's commitment extended far beyond party boundaries.

15. Gjenreis Arbeiderpartiet, Arbeiderpartiene på Fosen (Region 1). The author of the Fosen paper, the chair of AP-Fosen and now mayor of Rissa, Per Skjærvik, told us in a research interview that the tax-financed »collective solutions« in terms of the Nordic welfare state had wide grassroots support even in 2001. That was why in many »fylke« (the 19 regions) there was cooperation with the SV, the SP and the KR. Many were worried, however, that the AP leadership would be tempted by the media to opt for Third Way-style privatization.

The legacy and the vacuum which she left behind were too great for minority governments with fluctuating majorities in parliament to be able to continue and develop. Due to these ups and downs during a very short term of office the AP had lost its authority by the end of the 1990s. The severe punishment dealt out by the voters in September 2001 was therefore a logical consequence of these circumstances.

Shift to the Formation of the Red-Red-Green Coalition

»Minority governments« under the Labor Party for the implementation of social democratic policies had become unrealistic under the circumstances, and the dream of an absolute majority for the social democrats, as in the 1950s, was finally over. The AP therefore had to achieve a stable majority »which stands behind us« via coalitions. But without regular communication and contact with one another there was no prospect of working out stable majorities with former, to some extent hostile opponents, such as the SV.

Stoltenberg tabled this new course for debate in his speech before the central committee (Landsstyret) of the AP on March 18, 2004, had it blessed by the party and Secretary General Martin Kolberg, and reported in the press: »Jens Stoltenberg first explained in plain terms that the AP would prefer to have cooperative parties in a coalition government. Previously, this was only one of several forms of cooperation aimed at establishing a majority.«

He even made an offer to the Christian Democratic Party (KrF): »He thought that the KrF would feel more at home in such a framework than in the kind of cooperation [with the conservatives] in which they now find themselves.« This aspect of offers made to parts of the center-right is likely to be reinforced in future in order to secure majorities for the policy of tax-financed »collective solutions.«¹⁶

16. NTB (Norwegian News Service) announcement, March 18, 2004, NTBtekst. Stoltenberg's opening up to the KrF had strategic aims: socio-political common ground between the AP and KrF (in terms of foreign policy also in development policy and at that time in disapproval of the Iraq war) also had the attraction of sowing discord in the center-right camp and of securing a narrow majority for the policies of the Red-Red-Green coalition. Longer term, cooperation with the KrF could be necessary with the advent of a new debate on Norway's possible EU membership since a change of opinion on the part of the – regional farmers' party – SP in favor of the EU appears out of the question.

Stoltenberg also engaged in some self-criticism concerning the quarreling between the AP and the SV: »The AP leader explained that both his own party and the SV had learned from the quarreling which had raged between them a few weeks previously and had led to worse opinion poll results for both parties. ›We should avoid such discussions and instead rather debate with the [conservative] government parties,‹ he said« (NTB report, March 18, 2004, NTBtekst).

At the same time, this course adopted by Jens Stoltenberg met with considerable support from the trade unions. The new LO leader elected in spring 2001, Gerd Liv Valla, was herself a strong supporter of Red-Red-Green cooperation.¹⁷

This transformation via convergence on »Red-Red-Green« was not easy: the Socialist Left Party (SV) came into being out of hostility to the AP's positive line towards NATO, from the coming together of frustrated social democrats and communists. Later on, the SV profited from the conflict over EU membership. The environmental-agrarian Center Party (SP) had already entered into pacts with the center-right parties from time to time. The social democrats had to avoid allowing their opponents to get ahead of them.

During its time in opposition the AP now wanted to prepare joint election campaigns in the Red-Red-Green alliance for a joint government.

The convergence between the AP, the SV, and later the SP took place first among MPs in the Storting. This new »cooperation« also made things easier with regard to seating arrangements in parliament. In the Storting, MPs do not sit according to parliamentary groups, but according to constituencies. By chance, SV leader Kirstin Halvorsen and AP parliamentary group leader Jens Stoltenberg sat on the same bench, since they represented neighboring constituencies, and both realized very quickly that they »understood one another.« The same applied to the relationship with SP leader Åslaug Haga.

In informal issue-related dialogue groups of AP and SV MPs, first of all only the less controversial social-policy and women's issues, as well as environmental topics, were to be discussed. After »informal discussions« developed into cross-party »talks« the AP also invited the SP to participate as a third party.

17. Liv Valla was deputy leader (1997–2001) and leader (2001–2007) of LO.

Only after careful preparation were the controversial issues – NATO, Afghanistan, the EU – addressed, leading to a common position on maintaining foreign policy »continuity« (presence in Afghanistan and NATO membership and in the European Economic Area) and the precedence to be given to the principle »unity before freedom« with regard to the self-presentation of the future coalition partners.

When the press got wind of the »secret talks« the working groups had already made progress and come to the realization that they could »do business together.« In July 2005 – two months before the Storting elections – the three party leaders presented their »155 points on which we are agreed« at a press conference.

Soria Moria Program 2005

At the parliamentary elections in September 2005, the social democrats won 32.7 percent of the votes and formed the first Red-Red-Green coalition government. In seclusion in a remote castle with the fairy-tale name »Soria Moria« the coalition reached agreement in October 2005, on the basis of the abovementioned 155 points, the so-called »Soria Moria« government program, incorporating a series of reforms intended to consolidate the Nordic model.

Analysis of the 2005 election, similar to that of 2001, shows a major swing among the voters, but this time in the opposite direction, back to the Labor Party.

The votes for the AP as leader of the Red-Red-Green coalition rose from 24.3 to 32.7 percent. Approval of the AP among first-time voters rose from 11 percent in 2001 to 28 percent in 2005. (See Figure 2.2 [2005], Rapportør 2007/31, Statistisk sentralbyrå 2007: 11.) Support among the 860,000 or so members of the LO trade union federation rose from 32.8 percent in 2001 to 51.6 percent in 2005. The AP attracted significantly more support among women (37 percent) than among men (31 percent).

While in 2001 the Labor Party exhibited the weakest voter loyalty, in 2005 its voter loyalty was the strongest, at 78 percent. In contrast, Høyre and the SV, having enjoyed the highest voter loyalty in 2001, this time did extremely poorly in that respect (Rapportør 2007/31, Statistisk sentralbyrå 2007: 10 f).

The renewal of the AP towards fundamental social democratic positions, the revival of the alliance with the trade unions, and the leadership of a joint election campaign as a potential Red-Red-Green coalition paid

off. As leader of this election coalition for »collective solutions« the AP regained their status as agenda setters in the public debate.

AP insiders explained the election victory in the following terms:

- ▶ The coalition's joint election campaign based on the »155 points« went down well with the voters and reduced uncertainty about the prospects of political change as a result of a new majority in parliament, »even if I vote AP.«
- ▶ The AP's policy shift and the »traditional« line of close coordination with the trade unions through reintroduction of weekly informal meetings with the LO leadership boosted the AP among its 800,000 or so members.
- ▶ Closer cooperation with civil society groups also bore fruit.
- ▶ By means of the consistent strengthening and improvement of public services, privatization in this area was opposed.

The AP was able to consolidate its position as dominant political force in Norway up to the September 2009 elections, despite the fact that opinion polls and the media had for months, and up until a few days before the elections, predicted losses for the Labor Party and a majority for the center-right bloc. Despite these predictions, the AP's vote increased to 35.4 percent and it was able to continue in power with the Red-Red-Green coalition and a three-vote majority in parliament (86:83), even though the Left Party, with 6.1 percent (-2.7 percent) and the Center Party with 6.2 percent (-0.2 percent) lost votes.

An Active Party Based on Strong Communication

In tandem with the clarity of its policies the AP adopted modern forms of internal party communication. Both telephone and internet conferences were among the new methods for including regional organizations in communication with the party leadership.¹⁸ The members of the 25-strong consultant team of the Sentralstyre (party headquarters) travelled every month in the two years leading up to the 2009 elections for a week at a time for discussions, evaluation and training with the Norwegian provincial parties.

18. Per Skjærvik identified these new forms of communication and dialogue with the party leadership introduced after 2001 as a key contribution to the remotivation of the whole AP after the election catastrophe.

AP efforts to include members and supporters were very successful, in particular with regard to young people via modern internet communication. The AP's homepage received numerous awards in 2008 and 2009 for being an »excellent website« from »Webkvalitet«, meeting the criteria of »W3C validation,« as »victor in the digital election campaign,« and »Beste nettsted, samfunnsinformasjon 2009« (»Best social information site«), and so on.¹⁹

The opening up of the AP website to creative, highly professional and youth-oriented communication with young people probably contributed to the strong increase in the number of first-time votes for the AP.²⁰

In addition, the AP consistently combined joint canvassing with leading figures and candidates from the coalition with its own modern internet and mobile telephone campaigns. The AP made a point of organizing and mobilizing party members via mobile telephone and internet »on the ground« (for example, the AP made 160,000 home visits in Oslo alone, handing out red roses and successfully attracting new members, as well as school visits and joint local activities by the coalition).

Reasons for Electoral Victory in 2009

Soria Moria I was popular and, according to all opinion polls, received wide public support, far beyond what party preferences might indicate: Soria Moria I contains a series of social-policy commitments on modernizing public services, which the coalition subsequently implemented.

19. See: <http://www.webkvalitet.no/kvalitetsmerket>; »vinneren av den digitale valgkampen«; www.valgpanelet.no; www.farmandprisen.no; www.Gulltaggen.no.

20. At the beginning of 2009 the campaign entitled »What's important for you« commenced on the website www.hvaerviktigfordeg.no. Visitors were supposed to register six words that were important to them for a »placard,« which was to be disseminated via e-mail, Twitter, Facebook or the Norwegian website »Origo.« Interaction with the AP's internet activities was very strong on the part of both interested young voters and AP members. Even before the internet election campaign the internal party campaign www.mittArbeiderparti.no commenced, which included such issue-related AP portals as the »climate change portal,« the »training portal,« the »international portal,« and the »integration portal.« Even after the 2009 election campaign the AP remains very active with its internet communication programs: www.arbeiderpartiet.no, www.mittArbeiderparti.no, www.youtube.com/arbeiderpartiet (video) and www.flickr.com/arbeiderpartiet (images).

To this end, for example, with regard to education, the coalition committed itself to expanding »comprehensive schools for all«, so that »everyone can achieve recognition and support and newcomers can be properly integrated.«

Furthermore, they pushed ahead consistently with the modernization of predominantly state-owned companies (Telenor, Statoil, and so on): although strategic direction is determined by the relevant minister via the state majority at the general meeting, the state does not interfere in commercial matters, as long as the private shareholders exert a positive influence on modernization. The principle »modernization instead of privatization« was also applied to state-regional hospitals and communal nursing services.

Soria Moria also contained statutory 40-percent gender quotas for the supervisory and administrative boards of large public and private companies, to be implemented if need be under threat of winding up the company.

The election victory in 2009 was able to build on a whole series of individual successes on the part of the government coalition, including:

- ▶ Full kindergarten coverage for all children from two years of age onwards (promised in 2005 and fully implemented from January 2009).²¹
- ▶ Improvement of the integration of children from immigrant families. One result of this is that in 2009 79 percent of female Muslim school leavers graduated from high school. Many schools with a majority of immigrant children have managed – since the introduction of systematic responsibility on the part of teachers for supporting disadvantaged children – to perform even better than schools in middle class areas with few immigrants.
- ▶ The management of the financial crisis by finance minister Halvorsen (sv). Large sums of money were invested by local authorities in order to preserve jobs, especially in the construction industry. The survival of banks was ensured, for example, by exchanging »toxic« real estate bonds for a kind of government bond.
- ▶ Simplification and people-friendly efficiency of public services. To take an example, income tax regulations were simplified: since 2005 tax payers have received from the Tax Office on the basis of current and extrapolated data an outline of their income tax declaration. The

21. In order to fulfill its promises of full day-care coverage the coalition also supported the building and expansion of private daycare centers.

person concerned can either accept it or reject it simply by sending a text message to the Tax Office.

- ▶ Gender quotas in the management bodies of large companies. Particularly demonstrative with regard to the government's record was the implementation of women's quotas in management bodies under threat of winding up the company.

The Special Role of Gender Equality Policy

The 40-percent quota was originally introduced by the conservatives from January 1, 2004 as a legal »recommendation« on voluntary implementation, but its impact was merely marginal. Consequently, from January 1, 2008 the quota was made obligatory for all large companies, under threat of the withdrawal of company registration.²²

This brought about not only strict fulfillment of the quota but also a considerable improvement in corporate decision-making.²³ As a result of this and other measures taken by the coalition on implementing gender equality in the economy and in society Norway was ranked first in the international »Gender Report« 2008 by the World Economic Forum.²⁴

Norway has also repeatedly been ranked in first place in the UN's Human Development Index (Germany comes in at number 20),²⁵ which specifically takes into account not only economic developments, but also qualitative societal developments. Such international »honors« contribute to people's pride in the government responsible, even on election day.

The positive international perception of the Red-Red-Green government's performance record on gender and social policy has also

22. On this see also the FES publication, *Das norwegische Experiment. Eine Frauenquote für Aufsichtsräte* [The Norwegian experiment. A women's quota for supervisory boards] (June 2010). Available at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipa/07309.pdf>.

23. »Women increase board effectiveness,« press release, Norwegian School of Management, March 22, 2010. Available at: <http://www.alphagalileo.org/ViewItem.aspx?ItemId=71042&CultureCode=en>; see also: Kilden: »A story of success,« Information Centre for Gender Research. Available at: <http://eng.kilden.forskningsradet.no/c52778/nyhet/vis.html?tid=57242>.

24. Cf. Global Gender Gap Report 2007 of the World Economic Forum. Available at: <http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Gender%20Gap/index.htm> (accessed on August 3, 2010).

25. See: http://www.nationmaster.com/red/graph/eco_hum_dev_ind-economy (accessed on August 7, 2010).

undoubtedly contributed to Norwegian pride in its exemplary successes in gender policy.

These internationally acknowledged Norwegian successes with regard to gender equality also explain the disproportionately high increase in female voters for the two coalition parties, the AP and the SV. The »female voter rate« for the AP was 37 percent as against 31 percent among men in 2005, and 38.7 percent as against 32.1 percent in 2009, and for the SV it was 14 percent as against seven percent in 2005 (SV data are not yet available for 2009).

The striking and exclusive »women's preference« for the Norwegian social democrats and the SV were decisive in the coalition's election victory. The opinion poll results – not broken down by gender – constantly predicted defeats for the AP-SV-SP coalition.²⁶

Even if the disproportionate support among women for the AP on election day can be accounted for in terms of the pollsters' five percent margin of error, the question remains how the AP can obtain a broader voter base for its policies over the long term, which can also garner more support among male voters and correspond to the broad support for the AP program.

Joint Public Presentation and Unity of the Coalition – Modern and Citizen-friendly Mobilization

The AP, the SV, and the SP appeared side-by-side in the 2005 and 2009 election campaigns as an »electoral coalition.« Contentious issues in the government were not hushed up, but publically discussed objectively and without controversy, even at joint election rallies.

While the social democrats in this way showed their ability to correct themselves even in government, the SV and the SP presented themselves – by prior arrangement with the AP – as performing an important corrective function in the government (for example, with regard to environmental issues by delaying oil production in the Lofoten conservation area). At the same time, it was essential to emphasize the common ground in the coalition and any debate on alternative coalitions was taboo.

26. »AP faller kraftig på ny måling,« in *VG*, August 14, 2009.

The Labor Party's Policy Line: Societal Integration – »Everyone on Board«

In the election campaign, the AP deliberately put itself forward as committed to its policy platform based on the primordial social democratic aim of integrating the whole of society. The AP's main slogan since 2005, »Alle skal med« (»Everyone on Board«), also pervaded party policy in 2009. Two weeks before the election the mass daily »Dagbladet« published a two-page presentation on the AP's comprehensive social-policy vision portraying it as a party of »integration« and »inclusion,« as well as an interview with the party leader.

According to him, the social democrats have already realized two great historic projects and are now tackling a third:

The first historic project of the AP was that of helping the working class to achieve participation in power, influence, and prosperity; in Norway, this is bound up with the name Einard Gerhardsen (first prime minister after World War II).

The second project is the equality and inclusion of women in Norway, linked to the name of Gro Harlem Brundtland. This includes abortion on demand (under certain conditions), as well as the abovementioned reforms (for example, full kindergarten coverage, no loss of pay for the first year after giving birth, high level of participation with equal rights for women in working and societal life).

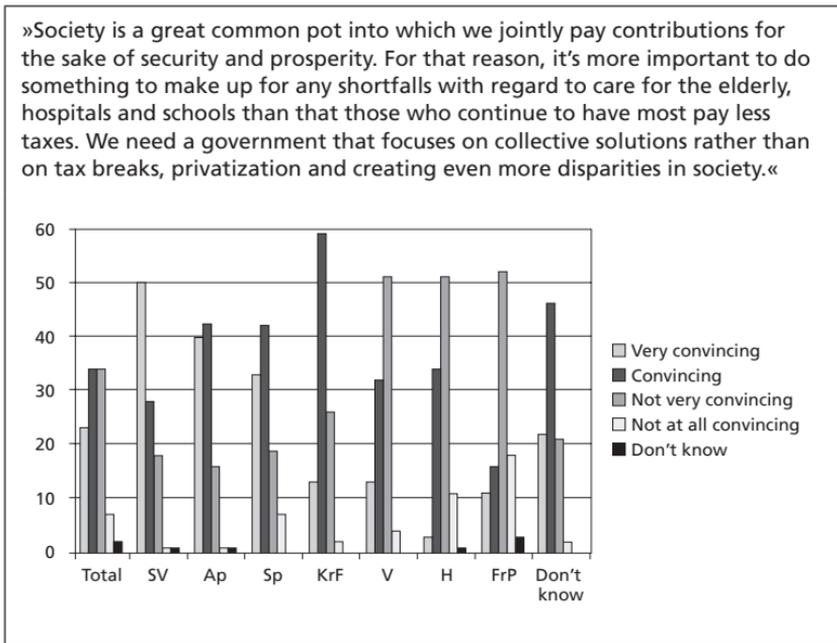
The third, future historic project of Norwegian social democracy is the integration and inclusion of »marginalized groups.« The task will be to support ethnic minorities and other population groups in this respect and to encourage them to participate to the fullest possible extent in working and societal life.

In this way, the Labor Party stands out as the sole Norwegian national party which demonstrably has asserted the integration and equality of all groups in society and will continue to do so in future. This clear and comprehensible policy orientation has made it possible to mobilize the party and the voters to an extraordinary degree. Consequently, the AP as a national party has made it an issue for society as a whole to bring about the integration of society as a whole.

Decisive for the Election Victory: Collective Solutions of the Nordic Welfare State – Building Bridges to Middle Class Voters

In the course of strategy development for the election campaign the AP tested several statements regarding its public approval. One argument which explained in simple fashion the need for taxes to pay for the collective tasks of the Nordic welfare state was as follows, which met with broad support even among supporters of the Christian Democrat KrF, the liberal Venstre (V) and even parts of Høyre: taxes for better public services instead of tax cuts and privatization.

Figure 1:
Assent to More Taxes for Better Public Services



Source: »Taxes for collective solutions« – internal materials of the Labor Party.

This argument struck most voters as the most convincing. The answers to the argument showed particularly strong differences between progressive voter groups and voter groups of the opposition center-right parties

and also among the latter groups themselves. On top of everything, the argument was relatively attractive to KRF and Liberal voters, as well as undecideds.

In the Norwegian elections of September 2009 the »left-wing government« taking the line of improving tax-financed public services won against the »privatization line.« The majority of the population accepted higher VAT and »sin taxes« (high duties on alcohol, cigarettes, private cars and so on) rather than the line of the conservative party (with a vote share of only 15 percent) advocating the privatization of public services or the populist bid for the »oil funds« by the Progress Party (22 percent).

Credibility by Means of Personal Example

Over the past 10 years the AP has tried to maintain a basic principle: the leadership itself must be seen to keep to and implement political decisions. As an example, one MP mentioned gender-related decisions: when the AP adopted quotas it adhered to them scrupulously. In order to emphasize equality in the government not only were ministerial and other leading posts allocated on a parity basis, but it was also ensured that concrete examples of behavior illustrating equality were paraded before the media:

For example, a state secretary publicly refused to have appointments before nine o'clock, the reason being that he takes his children to kindergarten every morning (his wife picks them up). This was also repeated by the Norwegian media.²⁷ The prime minister invited an Italian TV crew to his house for an interview and was found ironing his shirts. On being asked why his wife didn't do it he replied that he always irons his own shirts. What was treated in the Italian media as an example of Nordic eccentricity was taken in Norway as cause for pride in the progress that had been made.

Future Prospects – What Must Change

Despite a good deal of common ground in the left-wing government alliance the smaller coalition partners lose votes due to the dominance of the social democrats. Over the longer term, the challenge facing the

27. Conversation between Elke Ferner, chair of the Working Party of Social Democratic Women, with MP Marit Nybakk.

AP – without damaging the coalition with the SP and the SV – in the interest of future majorities is to gain part of the vote share of the opposition parties and, on the other hand, to weaken the still relatively positive response encountered by the – to some extent xenophobic – »Progress Party« in parts of the working class and the trade unions.

Support for the policies of the AP is much greater than the election results show. It emerges from one voter study commissioned by the AP in autumn 2008 that:

- ▶ only 33 percent of the Norwegian public believe that things are going in the wrong direction;
- ▶ 46 percent of the population want society to develop in a social democratic direction, not a conservative one;
- ▶ two-thirds of the population – 66 percent – say that they are »more community oriented than towards the individual.« Under the previous Bondevik government 2001–2005 the majority said that social development was going in the wrong direction.

The study comes to the conclusion that the political messages of the left-wing coalition are accepted far more widely than those of the right (which have already been tested): the political message of »collective solutions« (»felleskapsløsninger«) is very popular. The Labor Party, according to opinion polls, (once again) enjoys the highest level of public trust with regard to health care/hospitals, care of the elderly, and taxes and contributions. It also enjoys high trust with regard to the management of immigration/integration, education and training, as well as working and economic life.

Although the opinion poll results generally indicated some doubts with regard to the Red-Red-Green coalition's prospects of victory, both the approval of the AP's policies, both in theory and practice, and the actual election results vindicated the AP-led government. On June 23, 2009 the tabloid »Verdens Gang« published opinion poll results according to which the ministers of the Stoltenberg government received considerably higher competence ratings than the ministers of the previous conservative Bondevik government.²⁸

But there is an Achilles heel. The AP benefits from the policies of the coalition, but it also benefits from the smaller coalition parties: if the AP

28. »Stoltenberg-regjeringen får bedre karakterer enn Bondevik-regjeringen« (»Stoltenberg government receives better marks than the Bondevik government«), in *VG*, June 23, 2009.

wins, the two smaller partners lose votes to the AP, especially the SV. As a result, the parties in question to some extent need to make their mark, which could threaten consensus in the coalition.

The openness towards inclusion of the KrF, mentioned by Jens Stoltenberg as early as 2004 and already put into practice with regard to individual items of legislation and decentrally in some regions indicates the AP's interest – but also that of the coalition – in developing cooperation which goes beyond the coalition by means of »collective solutions.« With Soria Moria I and II the coalition has formulated a comprehensive and detailed program.²⁹ As the opinion polls show, there is broad agreement, extending far beyond the coalition, on this program, above all because of its employment policy and management of the financial crisis. However, there are also a number of challenges which have already contributed to somewhat disheartening opinion poll results and encouraging the aggression of the Right (H) and the Progress Party (FrP).

Health service waiting lists: health service capacities are still unsatisfactory despite considerable management improvements and personnel increases through the recruitment of foreign doctors and nursing staff.

The coalition has enormously expanded care for the elderly but it remains inadequate, especially in Oslo and in larger towns. The coalition has therefore agreed on the creation of 12,000 new care jobs by 2015.³⁰

The expansion of the road and rail networks is proceeding too slowly: expansion of the transport system is very costly in Norway for geographical reasons and has been neglected for years. Here too Soria Moria II plans comprehensive expansion in the National Transport Plan 2010–2019.

Unresolved environmental and climate change issues: although the electricity supply is sustainable (almost 100 percent water-powered) there have been internal government conflicts about oil exploration in the marine nature conservation area around the Lofoten islands and new routes for high-tension power lines.

Environmental policy weaknesses also revealed themselves after the 2009 election, which had partly been disguised. For example, the delay of Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) for the Mongstad gas-fired

29. »Politisk plattform for flertallsregjeringen, utgått av Arbeiderpartiet, Sosialistisk Venstreparti og Senterpartiet, 2009–2013.«

30. »Political platform as basis for the Government's work 2009–2013 (Soria Moria II)«: N49.

power station (the CCS for the power station was once endorsed by Jens Stoltenberg as the Norwegian »moon landing«).

Such problems will continue to occupy the new government, provide constant targets for the right, and remain an Achilles heel for opinion polls which in summer 2010 once again predict a center-right majority, although the basic Red-Red-Green political orientation continues to enjoy broad support.

This means that, while the AP has regained wide approval of its policies, an actual majority cannot be guaranteed forever by the small coalition partners alone. The AP has developed and implemented policies with the Red-Red-Green coalition, but over the long term cannot exclude some sort of expanded or even different coalition, if it wishes to make use of the creative power of social democracy and the broad public acceptance of its policies.

Conclusions

The example of the Red-Red-Green coalition under the leadership of the Norwegian Labor Party disproves a number of theses about the decline of social democracy:

- ▶ The »narrowing electoral base« or the loss of »discursive hegemony« are not the inevitable result of modern industrialized society, but dependent on policies which can attract broad support in society.
- ▶ »Reforms« do not have to be socially unjust and alienate social democrats from their social base, but they do need to focus more on maintaining core social democratic voters and winning back stay-at-home voters is more important in the Norwegian context than attempts to win over voters from the center.
- ▶ The exclusive relationship to the trade unions must not be allowed to collapse over the long term; rather, close relations with them are a condition of pushing through reforms capable of winning broad assent.
- ▶ The split in the social democratic electorate is not a natural consequence of globalization or value change – these things simply have to be overcome.
- ▶ The dramatic decline in the fortunes of Norwegian social democracy about 10 years ago – and the corresponding voter shifts – taken separately might have confirmed all of these theories. However, the

AP's determined about-turn to embrace social democratic values and alliance partners, coupled with a clear will to take action which encompasses the whole of society, within the framework of the Nordic welfare state, refutes the theories in question.

If social democracy is capable of achieving clarity with regard to policy and political and organizational leadership of a left-wing coalition it can also inspire the majority of people to embrace comprehensive societal change instead of merely standing by while society sinks into individual resignation.

Norwegian – and Scandinavian – society has a key advantage in this respect:

It has already implemented fundamental reforms since the 1970s which make up the »Nordic model« which, in comparison to the rest of Europe, has given rise to much more equality, security, flexibility, integration, and equal educational opportunities for all, as well as the ability to deal with social and economic problems.

The other European countries to some extent have a lot of catching up to do. But if that is the case, who apart from the social democrats is capable of conducting this process of social renewal?

Authors' note:

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