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Driving a Populist Party: The Danish People's Party

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Driving a Populist Party: The Danish People's Party

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Abstract

The Danish People's Party has since its formation in 1995 as a splinter party of the Progress Party been very successful: Since 2001 they have acquired substantial political influence through their position as parliamentary support for the government and their electoral support reached over 23 per cent in 2005. The Danish People's Party is deliberately building a membership organization. However, why have they chosen to do that at a time when party financing is substantial and when TV and new information technologies provide new communication instruments potentially decreasing the value of party members? Why have they enrolled members that could restrain the manoeuvrability of the party leadership? Why have they followed the organizational strategy of the established parties by building a traditional party organization when they at the same time politically have presented themselves as against the established parties? This paper is empirically based on a survey of party members, an interview, written material from the Danish People's Party, and the national election survey of 1998. The analysis of the party membership of the Danish People's Party shows that the party has built a membership organization where they take the advantages but (try to) avoid the disadvantages of party members. Party members are important when it comes to electioneering and providing a recruitment pool for candidates at public elections. However, party members are not granted any political influence; the party leadership decides on the policies.

The Danish People's Party

When Pia Kjærsgaard entered *Christiansborg*, the building of the Danish parliament, and went up the stairs in the big hall on the night of the Euro referendum on September 28th 2000 she was the queen of the no-sayers. The 'no' from the Danes was attributed by the press to her and the Danish People's Party even though other parties had also advised a 'no' and even though no-sayers were found among the electorate of all the parties represented in parliament. The moods and festivities of this victorious night reoccurred on the two following national election nights: On November 20th 2001 the Danish People's Party became the third biggest party in parliament and on February 8th 2005 this position was sustained.

The Danish People's Party was formed in 1995 as a splinter party of the Progress Party. Pia Kjærsgaard became leader of the Progress party in 1984 when the party founder, Mogens Glistrup, was imprisoned. Due to conflict at the leadership level between a protest line, represented by Glistrup and his supporters, and Kjærsgaard's more pragmatic wing she, together with three of the Progress Party's parliamentarians and about 1/3 of the party members, chose to create a new party (Bille, 1998). Pia Kjærsgaard is not only the leader of the Danish People's Party but was especially during the first couple of years simply *the* party. The party had no advertisements without a picture of her, and she kept the rest of the party in a very short leash with the support of a few trusted fellow politicians and party bureaucrats.

At the party's first national election in 1998 the Danish People's Party got 7,6 pct. of the votes, which established it as the main party at the right wing of the political spectrum. When they in 2001 got 12 pct. of the votes it resulted in a rise from 13 to 22 mandates out of a total of 175 elected in main Denmark. The election results of the Liberal Party, the Conservative People's Party, and the Danish People's Party gave them jointly a majority of the seats in parliament. The Liberal party leader, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, created a Liberal/Conservative minority government with the parliamentary support of the Danish People's Party. The general election on February 8th stabilized this situation: The Danish People's Party increased its electoral support to over 13 per cent and 24 members of parliament. The government continued with the parliamentary support of the Danish People's Party.

The Puzzle of the Organizational Strategies of the Danish People's Party

The Danish People's Party has not only experienced a growth in number of voters but also in number of members since the formation in 1995. In 2000 the party had 6,100 members; as many members as the Socialist People's Party and the Christian People's Party. Only three parties – the Liberal Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Conservative People's Party – have more members than the Danish People's Party. The Danish People's Party has thus experienced a growth in the number of members in a time when other parties experience decline or stagnation. But one thing is whether the party gets members; another thing is whether they want members.

There are several indications that the Danish People's Party is deliberately building a membership organization. First of all, the party poses low barriers for entry into the party. To become a member of the Danish People's Party a citizen needs to be 14 years old, have Danish citizenship, and not be member of or affiliated with any other political party (statute).

Secondly, the Danish People's Party conducts an annual nationwide recruitment campaign based on street activities where potential members get to meet with the party. Besides this the party always includes enrolment forms when conducting political campaigns and advertising on current political issues. The party finds that these latter campaigns, which are not explicit recruitment campaigns, provide them with more members than the explicit recruitment campaigns, especially when promoting their immigration and social policies (ST, 2002).

Thirdly, the Danish People's Party has the goal of having a local organization with more than a few members in each of the 275 municipalities (PLN, 1997: 2; ST, 2002). The party leadership encourages enrolment of more members (PK, 1997: 8; PLN, 1997: 2; PLN, 2000: 2), and they find that 10.000 members is not an impossible goal even though this number is not around the corner (ST, 2002). Besides this the party has since 1999 kept a strict membership record at the party headquarters where only dues-paying members are kept.

It seems as if the Danish People's Party is deliberately building a membership organization – though with more centralized control than in the other Danish parties. Why have they chosen to do that at a time when party financing is substantial and when TV and new information technologies provide new communication instruments potentially decreasing the value of party members? Why have they enrolled members that could restrain the manoeuvrability of the party leadership? Why have they followed the organizational strategy of

the established parties by building a traditional party organization when they at the same time politically have presented themselves as against the established parties?

This paper is empirically based on a survey of party members, an interview, written material from the Danish People's Party, and the national election survey of 1998. The survey of party members was conducted among members of parties represented in the national Danish parliament, 'Folketinget', in May 2000.¹ Such a systematic study of the members of Danish political parties has never been conducted, and this enables answering a number of previously unanswered questions. The leader of the party bureaucracy was interviewed in January 2002, and party documents are such as statutes, accounts, member magazine, and annual statements from the organizational leader and the party leader from 1997-2001. The character of the empirical material implies a lack of time series data whereby it is extremely limited how much it is possible to analyse through time. The objective in this paper is thus to give a synchronic, rather than a diachronic picture of the Danish People's Party in a membership perspective.

Why Do the Danish People's Party Enrol Members?

The approach applied in this analysis is the rational choice inspired model of the economy of party membership. The basic assumption in this model of the economy of party membership is that actors make rational calculations of costs and benefits on the basis of their preferences within the limits set by given conditions and available information (Elklit, 1991: 67). Parties – in reality the decision makers of the party – thus estimate the costs and benefits of having party members as they see it in relation to the available information and their goals and interests. Party members may thus be assets as well as liabilities to the parties. The assessment of the economy in having party members determines the parties' demand for party members and is thus termed the demand side arguments. The demand side arguments about the decline in the numbers of members emphasize reasons why the party should or should not want members. They "highlight

¹ The survey is conducted in 2000-2001 by Lars Bille, Hans Jørgen Nielsen and Karina Pedersen, University of Copenhagen, Jørgen Elklit and Bernhard Hansen, University of Aarhus, and Roger Buch, University of Southern Denmark - Odense. The questionnaire was sent to 1.000 members of the Social Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, and the Conservative People's Party, and to 800 members in the Red-Green Alliance, the Socialist People's Party, the Social Liberal Party, the Center Democrats, the Christian People's Party, and the Danish People's Party. The response rates vary between 60 pct. and 80 pct. - in total 5.266 cases. When all the members are analyzed together it is done on the basis of a weighing based on the party's share of the total of members.

reasons why party élites are not, or are no longer, willing to invest either party resources or their own reputations in building and maintaining an inclusive party membership” (Scarrow, 1996: 6). Scholars have argued and shown via empirical analyses that these costs and benefits have shifted in Europe thereby making it less attractive for parties to have members (see, e.g., Katz, 1990: 158).

A study of the literature on party members reveals that a number of scholars have argued how party members are imputing costs as well as benefits to political parties, or worded differently how parties may benefit from having party members (Katz, 1990; Elklit, 1991; Scarrow, 1994; Scarrow, 1996: 41-46; Seyd & Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley et al., 1994). Of the potential benefits that members may provide their parties with, five are analysed here, namely the financial benefit, the labour benefit, the outreach benefit, the innovation benefit, and the recruitment benefit. Two potential costs of party members are included in the analysis, namely the financial cost and the programmatic cost which are related to the financial benefit and innovation benefit, respectively. It is analysed both to what extent the members provide these benefits and costs, that is, whether the party members may be said to be advantageous or disadvantageous to the parties; and how the parties view this provision, that is, to what extent the party values and encourages the provision of the benefits and discourages the provision of the costs. The purpose of this analysis is to shed light on why the Danish People’s Party has chosen to build a membership organization.

The General Participation of Party Members

Before the more specific contributions of the party members are analysed the general level of participation in the party will be analysed on the basis of the amount of time that party members indicate that they spend on their party in an average month. Members of the Danish People’s Party spend on average a little more than four hours on party activities in an average month, which is a little more than the average for all the party members. This indicates a higher level of activity in the Danish People’s Party. That the party wants active members is indicated, e.g., by the party leader: “It means a lot to the Danish People’s Party to have active members. I therefore encourage you to keep up the steam. The Danish People’s Party must be visible at most places

possible, and that is done by an active and goal-oriented contribution for a better and happier Denmark” (PK, 1997: 8).

The general participation of the party members may also be determined on the basis of number of meetings attended. Attending a meeting is one of the most traditional activities in the parties. Members were asked to indicate the number of meetings they had attended at the local level of their party within the last year. Members of the Danish People’s Party have on average attended around two and a half meetings, which is a little below average but this is primarily due to the fact that members of parties left of centre participate in more meetings than other members. The party estimates that around 1/3 of the members attend nomination meetings (ST, 2002).

The Financial Benefit and Cost

Members may contribute to their parties by providing financially means. The financial contributions of party members were especially important when the mass parties were established, because they contrary to the cadre parties relied on many small rather than a few large contributions.

Members were asked about their voluntary contributions in 1999, the year prior to the one in which the survey took place. Whereas members on average contributed with the equivalent of 7 euro, members of the Danish People’s Party on average contributed with only 5 euro. Financially members of the Danish People’s Party are of a lesser value than members of the other parties.

The accounts of the party show that the national party organization does not rely financially on neither the dues nor voluntary contributions from their members. The public financial support to the parties on the basis of the most recent election result accounted in 1999 for 89 pct. of the income of the Danish People’s Party. Local and regional organizations on the other hand rely more on the dues. Of the dues equivalent to 20 Euro only 1 1/3 Euro (less than 7 pct.) is paid to the national headquarters (PLN, 2000). The Danish People’s Party wants to sustain dues paying in order to identify members and since they find that the moderate dues do not restrain anybody from becoming a party member (ST, 2002).

Just as the members may provide the party with financial assets they may also impute financial costs on the party. When members contribute with such a low share of the party's income it comes as no surprise that the members are in total a financial cost to the party. The membership dues and contributions do not even cover the member magazine, and besides this the party spends money on meetings, courses, conferences, etc. (ST, 2002). So, it is not due to financial considerations that the national party wants members.

The Labour Benefit

Members may not only contribute with financial means but also with the benefit of labour. Parties may within their financial and judicial limits choose whether they in and between elections engage in activities that are labour- or capital-intensive. The labour-intensive activities are dependent on the voluntary participation from the members, e.g., when they put up posters in the light posts. The capital-intensive activities require less labour from the parties since they pay others to do the job, e.g., by buying airtime on a network or advertising space in a newspaper. The general tendency is that the West European parties increasingly engage in capital-intensive activities, especially during election campaigns (Bowler & Farrell, 1992: 227; Butler & Ranney, 1992: 280-283). The Danish parties have for a long period withheld from this due to limited financial resources but the introduction of public financing in 1987 and a drastic increase in 1995 has enabled the parties to an increasing extent to engage in capital-intensive activities (see, e.g., Andersen & Pedersen, 1999).

However, this does not imply that Danish parties do not need the participation and activity of their members. First of all, the financial resources of Danish parties are still limited, especially in an international comparison. Secondly, not all the labour-intensive activities may be substituted by capital-intensive activities. Thirdly, it may be perceived as being illegitimate for parties to hire people to take on assignments that have earlier on been performed by party members. Fourthly, there are legal limits to what parties may do. Political commercials are, for example, not allowed on national radio and TV. Parties therefore still to some degree depend on the participation and activity of their party members.

Since the defining characteristic of political parties is that they propose candidates for elections, election campaigns are crucial in the political parties. But not only activities at

elections are important in order for the parties to win votes. Even though the intensity level is highest during election campaigns it is also important for the parties to engage in activities between elections. Between elections the parties are taking on a number of activities for the purpose of sustaining the party organization and the support for the party.

In order to analyse the extent to which party members participate and contribute with voluntary labour to their party, an election and an inter-election participation scale are established on the basis of a number of activities. The election scale is based on six election activities, such as delivering leaflets, putting up posters in the light posts, and organizing fund-raising, whereas the inter-election scale is based on nine activities, such as collecting funds for the party, writing letters to the editor, and handing out party leaflets. Some of the activities are the same but take place at different times – as part of an election campaign or between elections. Members are scored on the basis of whether or not they have participated in the activities, at the national election in 1998 and within the last five years (i.e., from 1995 to 2000), respectively.

It is on one hand expected that members of the Danish People's Party would score lower than members of the other parties since not all the respondents were enrolled in the party at the time of the election in 1998, and only a small part of the respondents have been party members since 1995. On the other hand it could be expected that the participation in the Danish People's Party would be higher as it is a new party characterized by enthusiasm and engagement. Members of the Danish People's Party score lower than the other party members on both the election and inter-election scale. At the inter-election scale Danish party members on average scored 31 out of 100, which means that they have on average participated in a little less than three of the inter-election activities, whereas members of the Danish People's Party on average scored 21. At the election scale Danish party members on average scored 25 out of 100 and thus participated in 1½ activities on average, whereas members of the Danish People's Party scored an average of 19 and thus on average participated in only a little more than one activity.

Members of the Danish People's Party contribute with labour a little less than members of the other parties, but this may be a picture that has already become inaccurate. The party finds that the members in the EMU referendum in 2000 and elections in 2001 were very active and more active than in the election in 1998 (ST, 2002). And the party is satisfied with the labour contribution of the party members.

“When we reach the finish line on September 28th [the euro referendum in 2000, KP] the Danish People’s Party has been present at 46 markets and ‘cattle-shows’ around the country, and we will have participated in a lot more than 100 debates. It has been a quite fantastic effort by our people in the organization and politicians” (PK, 2000: 2).

The party finds that labour is one of the three most important contributions of their members (ST, 2002). Prior to the election in 2001 the organizational leader emphasized the need for party activity as to achieve a high number of elected representatives requires an enormous effort by everyone in the party. “We need to write lots of letters to the editor and press releases – make election pamphlets – arrange handouts of these in the streets, squares, and in mail boxes. We need to glue and put up election posters and we need to participate in local election meetings” (PLN, 2001).

The party motivates the members to provide the labour benefit mainly by attaching social aspects to the party activities. Members that feel as part of a group and attached to other members are according to the party more inclined to provide the labour as it becomes more fun to participate (ST, 2002). The organizational leader also emphasizes the great importance of social get-togethers for the spirit in the party and proceeds to give examples of party activities with social aspects that have been held in the Danish People’s Party (PLN, 2001).

The Outreach Benefit

Party members are in their everyday life in contact with many different citizens and may through this influence other citizens and make them more favourable towards the party. Members may be “ambassadors to the community” (Scarrow, 1996: 43) or “representative figureheads in their local communities” (Whiteley et al., 1994: 4). The advantage of having members present in neighbourhoods, local communities, and workplaces is that the contacts made are more informal and may therefore more easily have an impact than formal party campaigning. Members present in the local environment convey “the impression that a party is more than just an enterprise of the political elite” (Scarrow, 2000: 84). Party members can legitimise opinions or enhance the image of the party just by being present. Party membership in this way may provide “a base for proselytizing in the wider community; and it helps to publicize the existence of the ideology among potential believers” (Ware, 1996: 63). The party members’ outreach into their immediate

environments is relevant both in election campaigns and between elections but is of particular relevance between elections. Citizens are less aware of the political 'propaganda' performed by the members in the inter-election period, and the parties are not otherwise campaigning substantially thus increasing the difference the party members' outreach provision potentially makes.

That members contribute in this way has been shown in international research (Seyd & Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley et al., 1994; Scarrow, 1996). The Danish party members also to a large extent contribute with this benefit to their parties as between 53 pct. and 81 pct. of the party members have both discussed the party's policies with non-members within the last five years and in the election campaign in 1998 encouraged voters to vote for the party. In the Danish People's Party three in five party members have contributed to their party in this way. The party finds that even though street campaigns and other party activities are important the outreach of members at work, in the family or around friends are mobilizing more votes; but the party does not explicitly encourage members to provide this benefit (ST, 2002).

The Innovation Benefit and Programmatic Cost

Party members may also provide innovation benefits to parties by generating ideas and being innovative both in relation to the policies and the organization of the party. Party members' provision of political as well as organizational innovation into parties is advantageous for parties if they thereby can keep track of public concerns, upcoming ideas, new tendencies, etc.

It is not easy to measure the contribution of innovation by party members to their parties as this may be happening to different degrees and in many different political processes. It is tried estimated here on the basis of whether the party members participate in a party internal working group, committee or the like, and whether the party members have participated in the formulation of political proposals. It turns out that only one in twenty party members of the Danish People's Party has participated in these two activities, which is a lot less than in the other parties displaying between 12 pct. and 35 pct.

The benefit of providing innovation counters the so-called programmatic cost of having party members, where members are said to constrain party leaders in their voter appeal (Katz, 1990: 153). That members of the Danish People's Party participate a lot less than members of

other parties in party activities associated with the provision of the innovation benefit may be due to a specific strategy of the party. The question is thus whether the party refrains from providing members with opportunities for policy influence in order to avoid potential programmatic costs of having party members.

There are two ways in which party members provide programmatic costs. First, if engaged party members and the party leadership diverge in their political opinions. Some party members may have other goals than the party leadership, or they may have more extreme views regarding specific policies or policy areas. Influential party members may thus compel the party leadership to take stands that the ordinary members, the voters in general or the party's voters do not support. This is the essence of the disputed "Special Law of Curvilinear Disparity" where sub-leaders are more extreme than both the parties' top-leaders and non-leaders (May, 1973: 139). The party leadership is thus more in tune with the ordinary party members than the active party members are. Seyd & Whiteley have found support for May's law in British Labour (1992: 101) where members who think of themselves as left or centre-left are more active, but they did not find support for the curvilinear disparity thesis in the Conservative Party (Whiteley, Seyd & Richardson, 1994: 120). Heidar & Saglie question the applicability of the thesis or myth that active members are extremists, but more importantly they argue that even if party members are ideological extremists this does not necessarily scare away voters. It may be advantageous for parties that members clearly express the party's standpoints and policies, as it gives the voters a clearer picture. And members may even to a larger extent than the party leadership realise the importance of electoral victories and thereby moderate their opinions (1994: 153).

The second way in which party members may provide what is termed programmatic costs to the party is more procedural than substantial. Even when members are not extremists they may still constrain the party leadership and make the party organization inflexible. Members may constrain the party leadership if they must be heard, before the leadership takes certain decisions or terminates certain negotiations with other parties. The party leadership of parties in which members are influential is thus less flexible in their negotiations with other parties, because they need to get acceptance from members. Another related way in which party members are able to constrain leadership is if they are decisive in the election of party leaders.

The Danish People's Party argues that one of the three most important contributions of the party members is that they provide inspiration in regard to politics at the annual meetings as well as at local meetings where the policies of the party are debated (ST, 2002). It is argued that it is healthy for a democracy that voters participate with more than their vote on Election Day. But when that is said, it must – according to the party – also be said that the party's voters are above the members so that members cannot enrol and think that they thereby may change the policies of the party (ST, 2002). This implies that the members are not left with much influence on the development of party policies. The parliamentary group is mainly taking the initiative. The parliamentarians have for instance formulated the Working Programme, and even though the members will have the possibility of providing input in the process of the formulation of a new 'Party Manifesto' (ST, 2002), the Danish People's Party do not rely on their members for the provision of innovation.

This choice of party strategy is apparently not because the party finds that members are unrepresentative of their voters as they at least express the opposite (ST, 2002). But to what extent are members representative of the voters? The left-right continuum is often applied as an aggregate picture of the political opinions of voters. It includes a broad range of political issues, which is both its strength and weakness: On one hand it might be unclear what the specific content of a left or right placement is; on the other hand it provides an overall picture. When the voters, the passive members, the semi-active members, and the active members of the Danish People's Party place themselves on the left-right scale there is a small tendency to the voters being more moderate and placing themselves more to the middle than the members, which is a common picture among Danish parties. On the other hand, there seems to be little difference among the members on the basis of their party activity. This picture of the voters and members is repeated when looking at the opinions on specific policy issues such as the EU, defence spending, support for third world countries, and the environment. These findings do not support that the members of the Danish People's Party should be of any particular programmatic cost to the party.

The Recruitment Benefit

The electoral process and thereby also candidate nomination lies at the very heart of representative democracy. Candidate recruitment for international, national, regional, and local elections is inconceivable without political parties in representative democracies. Epstein argues that “[r]ecruitment is an important function of political parties” (1980 [1967]: 167), and Panebianco views “the selection of candidates to elective office” as one of three assignments traditionally attributed to, but not monopolized by, the political parties (1988: 268). As noted by Paul Webb,

“parties are hardly threatened in respect of the final major function they perform, *political recruitment*. National parliamentarians in West European democracies are still overwhelmingly likely to bear party labels; moreover, the parties in most countries maintain control over important – sometimes vast – reservoirs of patronage, from the British quangocracy to the Italian system of *lotizzazione*” (Webb, 2000: 207).

The assignment of nominating and (s)electing candidates for public elections is not universally attributed exclusively to political parties – membership organizations provide only one means for selecting candidates in a representative democracy. Candidates may for example be selected outside the party internal arena with the parties providing the campaign, or candidates could be self-recruited and establish their own campaign organizations.

A potential benefit of having party members is that they form a recruitment pool from which the party may recruit personnel for party external positions, such as parliamentary offices at the local, regional, and national level. Members of the Danish People’s Party are more inclined than members of the other parties (except the small Centre Democrats) to stand as candidates for their party. If encouraged by the party, 22 pct., 13 pct., and 15 pct., respectively, of the members would stand for election at the local, regional, and national levels. In addition to this 24 pct., 17 pct., and 16 pct. would consider it. The members of the Danish People’s Party do thereby in regard to party external office provide their party with the recruitment benefit.

One of the three most important contributions of the members in the Danish People’s Party is according to the party itself that they stand for election (ST, 2002). In 1998 when the party was still rather new it experienced a lack of candidates:

“In the national committee we are aware that it at times is difficult to recruit people to the organization and elected representatives. But you need to know that both the national committee and the national parliamentary group are ready to help you when there is a need for that” (PLN, 1998).

In the 2001 elections candidates were nominated where needed – on the basis of opinion polls, the party decided how many candidates should be nominated at the municipal and county elections. At these levels potential candidates are encouraged by the local and regional party organizations but there are also members that come forward themselves. The party provides education of nominated candidates – political education prior to elections and organizational education after elections (PLN, 1998; ST, 2002). Besides education and schooling the party may in the longer run rely more heavily on recruitment through their youth organization. The organizational leader stresses the importance of recruitment through the youth organization already in 1998. In the youth organization members acquire skills that they may later apply both in an organizational and a political career within the Danish People’s Party (PLN, 1998).

The party also finds it advantageous that its members are members of day care boards, school boards, etc. because it enhances the chances of promotion of the party’s policies on these fields (PK, 2000: 7). Pia Kjærsgaard emphasizes how the party must try with their political proposals to set the agenda both through elected public offices at varying levels of government but also through individual elected public offices, such as in parish councils and day care boards, and public offices to which the party elects officeholders, such as layman judges and juries. It turns out that members of the Danish People’s Party to a lesser degree than members of other parties are holding or have held a position on a day care board, school board or in a parish council. This may be explained by the fact that many of the members were not enrolled when elections for these boards and councils were held. But this also indicates that these members are not prior to their party membership politically engaged citizens involved in different spheres of the political system. The Danish People’s Party is mobilizing these voters, and due to their party membership it is expected that they to a larger extent will become engaged in the public offices that they may hold as individuals – once they have been encouraged by the party and have had a chance to stand for election.

Taking the Advantages but Not the Disadvantages of Party Members

The analysis of the party membership of the Danish People's Party has shown that party members are financial assets only for the local organizations – for the national organization they present a financial liability. On the other hand, party members contribute with both labour and recruitment benefits, and are valued because of this provision. The membership organization with the local branches is thus an important mean by which the party is able to win elections. Members are thereby providing the party with advantages – they are an asset in the party's pursuit for votes and mandates. This is why the Danish People's Party – even though a new party and potentially organizationally different – has established a fairly traditional membership organization.

But what about the constraints on the manoeuvrability of the party leadership that party members may exert? Party members are encouraged to participate in the party and provide the financial, labour, and recruitment benefits but they are not encouraged to provide the party with the innovation benefit. The party leadership and national parliamentary group decide on the policies. The formal structure, but even more so the informal workings of the party, displays strong centralistic tendencies. Members are to be in line with the party leadership and parliamentary group, otherwise they might as well leave the party. If members or local organizational chairs are in doubt about the party's standpoint on certain issues – if the programme is unclear or new issues arise – they call up party headquarters to get an authoritative interpretation. The Danish People's Party has thereby tried to avoid some of the disadvantages while at the same time seeking the advantages of having members.

In linkage terms the Danish People's Party is relying on direct linkage to the voters via mass media and opinion polls in policy matters whereas it relies on linkage mediated by a membership organization when it comes to mobilizing the voters. The fast establishment of a membership organization and local branches has thus been an important factor in the electoral success of the party, but the policies are developed independently of this.

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