Danish Social Policy in the Shadow of Nazi Germany, 1933-1945

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Danes reading their morning newspaper on Tuesday, 31 January 1933, found two major stories on the front page: in Germany, Adolf Hitler had become Chancellor, and in Denmark, Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning had concluded a broad political crisis settlement.¹ As an irony of history, the latter was popularly dubbed the Chancellor Street Agreement (Kanslergadeforliget) after Stauning’s residence, where the crucial negotiations had taken place. Chancellor here and Chancellor there: in Germany, the economic crisis and politically volatile situation had led to a showdown with democracy, while in Denmark, there was political consensus within democracy.

It is not surprising that the events in Germany were carefully followed in the small neighbouring country of Denmark. For centuries, Danish–German relations had been closely intertwined and at times dramatic. In the mid 1800s the conflict over the Schleswig-Holstein duchies had led to a war that ended with a crushing defeat for Denmark in 1864 and the German conquest of Schleswig-Holstein.² This defeat was decisive for Danish–German relations, also in terms of social policy. Both countries were pioneers in the development of modern social policy laws, having enacted a series of national social reforms in the late 1800s. In the Danish social policy debate, Germany’s initiatives were followed very closely but also with a certain degree of ambivalence. While there was no doubt that the highly developed German social policy discussions of the time had

¹ Berlingske Tidende, 31 Jan. 1933.
² Rasmus Glenthøj, 1864: Sønner af de slagne (Copenhagen, 2014).
left an indelible mark on Danish debates, there was a genuine scepticism about importing German ideas precisely because they were German. This was perhaps most evident in the years-long discussion about retirement pensions in the 1880s. One of the debate’s central themes was Germany’s mandatory insurance model, which ended up being rejected in the Danish context. Even though anti-German attitudes were not the decisive reason for Danes rejecting mandatory old-age insurance, they were nonetheless explicitly voiced in the debates. For instance, the Liberal politician Niels Neergaard thought that only ‘the minds of German professors and bureaucrats’ could devise such a thing. In other areas, such as kindergartens and accident insurance, one can speak of the importation of German ideas to a much greater degree. Overall, however, it is crucial to understand this basic ambivalence: on the one hand, German social policy debates and reforms played a central role, while on the other, this took place in the wake of Denmark’s ignominious defeat in 1864.

Denmark, despite its proximity to Germany, did not create a variant of the Bismarckian social model, but instead developed a distinct Danish model based largely on tax-supported funding and voluntary membership. Whereas the Bismarckian model was based on mandatory insurance attached to formal employment, Danish social policy moved in the direction of universal schemes based on national citizenship. This ‘Danish Model’ was, of course, gradually developed in a constant transnational interplay with the social policy initiatives seen in other countries. However, it is noteworthy that the basic features of Danish social security were already established by the early twentieth century, and that Danish policymakers subscribed to the ‘imagined community’ of a Danish welfare model. The very long and distinctive Danish social policy


tradition, as will be shown, became a central element in the Danish strategy towards Germany during the years of Nazi occupation from 1940 to 1945. Here the primary reference for Danish social policy since the First World War had been the wider Nordic space, which saw very close co-operation in social policy development from 1919 onwards, gradually leading—through a process of convergence, imitation, and co-operation—to the construction of a Nordic social model.\(^7\)

Most scholarly research on Denmark's history during the Second World War has focused on the policy of collaboration, the legal settlements after liberation in 1945, and the activities and influence of the Danish resistance movement. For years historians used predominantly Danish sources in their research, and domestic Danish affairs were the primary area of scholarly interest. More recently, historians have shed additional light on interactions between Denmark and Germany, especially in the field of economic relations and trade, alongside more general political issues and the specific stories of individual Danish collaborators. Based on documents in Danish and German archives, the general picture today is that Denmark acted as Hitler's breadbasket from 1940 to 1945.\(^8\) The present essay will pursue this perspective further, addressing one of the least examined aspects of Danish–German history, namely, Danish social policy in the shadow of Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945. The approach is transnational, focusing primarily on the circulation and mutual exchange of ideas. Two areas are dealt with in particular: labour market policies and the ideological contest between the Danish social model and the two different German ones, namely, the traditional Bismarckian social insurance system.

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and the new Nazi model of the German Labour Front (Deutsche Arbeitsfront or DAF). Although German labour market reforms did have some influence on Danish labour market policies immediately after the Nazi rise to power in 1933, it will be seen that the Danish model generally showed a high level of resilience, even during the German occupation of Denmark from 1940 to 1945. There were two main reasons for this. First, there is a strong institutionalist argument that the Danish social security system was already highly developed, and that Danish policymakers were highly effective in defending the existing Danish model. Second, Germany generally intervened little in domestic Danish affairs during its ‘peaceful occupation’, which allowed the Germans to acquire Danish resources (especially agricultural products) without radically reforming Danish institutions, and also to present Denmark as a showcase of the ‘New Europe’ combining national sovereignty and German ‘protection’ (as a Musterprotektorat, or model protectorate). Conversely, Denmark had a self-interest in trading with Germany, as the Danish economy would have collapsed had it not traded with its enemy.9

The following discussion of German influence on Danish social policy development from 1933 to 1945 bridges a gap in existing research on Denmark during the Second World War and on the historical development of the Danish welfare state. These two separate strands of research have rarely interacted so far. The investigation also uses materials from various archives in Germany, including those of the DAF and Germany’s Foreign Office, as well as the Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda), the Nazi Party’s Office of Foreign Affairs (Außenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP), the Reich Chancellery (Reichskanzlei), and the Reich Ministry of Labour (Reichsarbeitsministerium or RAM). However, it should be emphasized that no German ‘social policy plan’ for development in Denmark has been found.10 The closest thing to such a plan was an annotated report on Danish social policy that was drafted by German experts and officials who visited Denmark in the late

10 This is in contrast to the areas of industry and agriculture, where numerous plans existed: BArch-MA, RW 19/727, Reich Group on Trade III, report on postwar planning, Denmark, Nov. 1940; Denmark report from the Reich Group on Industry, Aug. 1941; political status report on Denmark, Aug. 1942 to May 1943.
The lack of such material probably reflects the fact that Hitler himself failed to compose a comprehensive long-term strategy for occupied Europe. Nor have any traces been found of strong relations between Denmark’s Ministry of Social Affairs (Socialministeriet) and Germany’s RAM. The overall picture is that Nazi Germany’s influence on Danish social policy, both before and after the occupation, was quite limited, except for certain aspects related to the labour market, which will be examined later in more detail. The present investigation also led to the relevant archives in Denmark, namely, at its Ministry of Social Affairs and its Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Udenrigsministeriet), in order to trace Danish strategies and expectations vis-à-vis Nazi Germany. Especially for documents from the occupation years, this was not a straightforward task, because Danish politicians and policymakers were careful not to voice explicit statements that could be interpreted as hostile towards the occupying power. Based on the silence of the contemporary sources, one might come to the conclusion that Danish social policy was not affected by Nazi Germany. But the following will demonstrate that even though Denmark largely escaped the much stronger German imprint seen in other occupied countries, transnational links and flows continued to exist in the period from 1933 to 1945.

Danish–German Relations, 1933–1940

Germany’s political reconfiguration in 1933 did not dramatically alter German–Danish relations. Hitler’s coming to power reinforced existing Danish scepticism about German ideas, and a national unity revolving around a Nordic version of democracy linked to social rights emerged in Denmark. This did not mean that contacts between Denmark’s Ministry of Social Affairs and the RAM were non-existent. For example, the interwar border revision of 1920 had resulted in a complicated problem with German war invalids.}

11 e.g. BArch, NS/vi, 34103, travel report by Hans Lützhöft on the political and social situation in Denmark, 1 Oct. 1938.
13 A good example of this sceptical view was the book by prominent Danish Social Democrat Hartvig Frisch, *Pest over Europa*, published in 1933 as a warning against the threat to democracy posed by extremism. See also Jussi Kurunmaki and Johan Strang (eds.), *Rhetorics of Nordic Democracy* (Helsinki, 2010).
living in Southern Jutland.\textsuperscript{14} Years of wrangling about Germany’s reimbursement of expenditure on these war invalids and their descendants had created significant discontent among German veterans’ associations on Danish soil, which had yet to be resolved in 1933.\textsuperscript{15} After 1933 renewed hope could be discerned among these veterans’ associations, illustrated, for example, by direct appeals to Hitler to resolve the problem; there is hardly any doubt that the Nazi takeover in Germany had increased pressure on Danish decision-makers to resolve this issue. In 1935 they succeeded in concluding an agreement that improved services, but the problem was not entirely resolved until after 1945.\textsuperscript{16}

There is no doubt that the Germans followed Danish social policy developments very closely. The archives of the DAF contain surprisingly comprehensive and detailed material about Denmark.\textsuperscript{17} DAF interest increased with the occupation of Denmark in 1940, but even as early as the 1930s the Danish labour market, in particular, was monitored quite closely. For example, the major Danish social reform of 1933 was described in German periodicals in great detail.\textsuperscript{18} The archival material shows that the Germans focused on monitoring Danish developments while disseminating the German model (especially the DAF style of labour market regulation), rather than learning lessons from Denmark’s experiences. While hoping for eventual ‘Germanization’ in the long term, Germany’s occupation forces nonetheless came to recognize Denmark’s well-established social policy traditions. This dual approach became clear in a memorandum of autumn 1942 from Werner Best (the Reichsbevollmächtigter, or Reich Plenipotentiary, of Denmark) on the country’s social fabric:


\textsuperscript{15} See BArch, R/3901 for correspondence on this between the veterans’ associations, the Danish authorities, and the German authorities.


\textsuperscript{17} Based on a review of about 150 files about Denmark in the DAF archives at BArch in Berlin.

From a sociological point of view, Denmark is less a state and more a large municipality consisting of 3.8 million inhabitants, from which a kind of ‘village democracy’, the Danish ‘Folkestyre’, originated. Peasant mentality, spatial limitations, family connections, and personal acquaintances—supported by the favourable economic situation—have formed in Denmark a Volksgemeinschaft [a community of the folk, as an ethno-national ideal] that has solved all social problems informally. A Social Revolution in Denmark is not necessary.¹⁹

Best continued by arguing: ‘Inwardly, the Danes will come to terms with the New Order in Europe, just as the Icelanders once had to come to terms with Christianity: not swayed by violence and not won over by propaganda, but from the sober realization that this path is inevitable, and that it will benefit the Danes, too, in the long run.’²⁰

On the Danish side, an equally intense and detailed gathering of information on German social policy reforms did not exist. However, the difference may have reflected not only their interests and focus, but also administrative capacity. The international office of Denmark’s Ministry of Social Affairs consisted of just two or three people, headed by an official who was trained as a political economist; meanwhile, the RAM and DAF had much larger resources at their disposal.²¹ However, Denmark’s Foreign Office did have a social policy attaché stationed on German soil in the 1930s and 1940s.²²

Danish social policy interests become clearer if one examines the articles in Socialt Tidsskrift (Social Journal), the official journal of Denmark’s Ministry of Social Affairs. During the period 1933 to 1940, the vast majority of these articles concerned Denmark and the other Nordic countries. Of the remaining articles, only seven dealt

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²⁰ German: ‘Innerlich werden die Dänen sich in die neue Ordnung Europas hineinfinden, wie einst die Isländer in das Christentum: nicht durch Gewalt geschwungen und nicht durch Propaganda gewonnen sondern aus der nüchterne Erkenntnis, dass dieser Weg unvermeidbar ist und dass er auf weite Sicht auch den Danen Vorteile bringen wird.’ See ibid.

²¹ For Denmark see Henning Friis and Klaus Petersen, Socialforskningsinstituttets forhistorie og første år (Copenhagen, 1998), 9–11.

²² See Udenrigsministeriets arkiv, Repræsentation i udlandet, subnumber 02, Baghdad–Berlin, box 214.
with German developments. The themes covered include Germany’s dismissal regulations (1935), labour service (1936 and 1937), employment policy (1936), regulation of child and youth labour (1938), emigration policy (1939), health insurance (1941), and disability and retirement insurance (1941). A wider search of the period’s writings on social policy debates yields a few more Danish journal articles discussing German conditions. Nevertheless, the overall pattern remains the same, with international interest first and foremost on the Nordic countries, then on Germany, and then on the United States, United Kingdom, and so on. Danish interest in German social policy waned through the 1930s, and even more so after Germany’s occupation of Denmark in 1940. But what Danish interest did exist was particularly focused on developments in the German labour market, with several articles on wage and price controls, the regulation of working conditions, initiatives against unemployment, and so on.\(^2\)

The general conclusion is that Germany’s social policy developments were not entirely absent from Danish consciousness after 1933. Some attention was always paid to what was happening there. Germany’s monitoring of Denmark at the ministerial level seems to have been a good deal more intense than vice versa (as will be seen below). Social policy exchanges between the two countries (such as reports on policy reforms and specialist discussions) were rather limited, but this can hardly be attributed solely to the Nazi takeover in 1933. Instead, it was due to the fact that the two countries established their own divergent national traditions very early on. Nonetheless, it is worth taking a closer look at those areas where German ideas influenced Danish social policy.

In a few areas, social policy influences between Denmark and Germany seem to have been more intense. For example, the historian Lene Koch has described the very close co-operation between Danish and German eugenics researchers.\(^2\) The collaboration in this controversial field had its roots in the 1920s, and continued after the Nazi takeover in 1933. However, the policy area where Germany and German experiences were most influential was labour market policy.

\(^2\) Based on a review of Dansk Tidskriftsindex from 1933 to 1945.
\(^2\) Lene Koch, Racbygiene i Danmark 1920–1936 (Copenhagen, 2000).
One particular problem was the growth in youth unemployment that followed in the wake of the Great Depression. In Denmark as elsewhere, this generated increasing political concern. In February 1933 the Danish Minister for Social Affairs and leading Social Democrat Karl Kristian Steincke took the unusual step of appealing directly to the public, asking people to submit their ideas to his ministry. In his appeal, which had been underway even before Hitler’s seizure of power in late January of that same year, Germany’s Reich Labour Service (Reichsarbeitsdienst, established in 1931) is mentioned as the only concrete example, and the newspapers gave it a positive reception. The Social Democratic newspaper Social-Demokraten expressed the general Danish view:

In other countries, Germany, for example, measures have already been taken for this purpose, such as the establishment of a voluntary labour service and collective farm colonies. We do not know if it is possible to transplant these forms to Danish conditions with a view to a positive result, but we know that something must be done and done soon, in order to save Danish youth from impending destruction.

Over the weeks that followed the ministry received 145 proposals from all directions and with varying degrees of seriousness, covering a wide range of possibilities for employing Danish youth. Some of them pointed to the German example. However, when the Minister of Social Affairs summarized these proposals in mid March, his report reflected a clearly growing scepticism towards German developments. Particular criticism was directed at the coercive element and militaristic features that the Reich Labour Service had assumed with the launch of the Third Reich. The Danish newspapers noted: 'Fortunately, nor do supporters of the voluntary labour

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25 There were no precise calculations of Danish youth unemployment at the time, but it has been estimated to have been about 25–40 per cent. See Hans Sode-Madsen, Ungdom uden arbejde: Ungdomsforanstaltninger i Danmark 1933–1950 (Copenhagen, 1985), 36.
26 Danish: 'I andre lande, f. Eks. Tyskland har man allerede iværksat Foranstaltninger med dette Formaal saaledes ved Oprettelse af frivillig Arbejdstjeneste og kollektive Landbrugskolonier. Vi ved ikke om det er Former, der er mulige at omplante til danske Forhold med Udsigt til positivt Resultat, men vi ved, der maa gøres noget og gøres noget snart for at redde den danske Ungdom fra den truende Ødelæggelse.' See Social-Demokraten, 4 Feb. 1933. See also Politiken, 5 Feb. 1933; Dagens Nyheder, 4 Feb. 1933; Berlingske Tidende, 4 Feb. 1933; Politiken, 4 Feb. 1933.
27 Socialministeriets arkiv, box: selected materials on unemployment, 10 June 1933.
service recommend this in the militaristic form that the labour service has in Germany.'

Thus, the way was paved for the creation of a Danish version of the labour service, but without coercion and explicit militarism, which seemed not only undemocratic but even dangerous, especially in the light of the Nazi takeover of Germany.

As early as April 1933 Minister of Social Affairs Steincke presented a draft law on 'special forms of employment for the young unemployed in colonies, camps, work teams, or similar'. This law opened the way for municipalities and local associations to obtain government subsidies for employment initiatives targeted at youths aged 18 to 22. The measures offered would combine physical work, sport, and education. The proposal was not explicitly presented as an emulation of the Reich Labour Service, but in the parliamentary debate it was nevertheless clear where the ideas had come from. The Conservative parliamentary spokesman stated that no matter what one thought about developments in Germany, there was no doubt about the source of inspiration. However, this legislative initiative had only a very limited effect, also because it was largely geared towards supporting local initiatives. A number of municipalities and civil society organizations did begin small-scale employment projects, but this initiative never took off as a widespread phenomenon.

This led the Conservative politician Carsten Raft to propose going a step further in the German direction. In 1936 he introduced the idea of labour conscription for the two-thirds of the male cohort who had not been drafted into the armed forces. Similar ideas were found in certain parts of the military establishment, the world of organized sport, and even within the women's movement, also during the German occupation. Mandatory labour as a type of national conscription was never realized, but the voluntary principle was nevertheless abandoned in 1938, during a reform of unemployment.

28 Danish: 'Tilhængere af den frivillige Arbejdstjeneste anbefaler heldigvis heller ikke denne i den militaristiske Skikkelse, som Arbejdstjenesten har i Tyskland.' See Politiken, 14 Mar. 1933. See also Berlingske Tidende, 14 Mar. 1933.


30 The debate is discussed in Sode-Madsen, Ungdom uden arbejde, 36–9.

31 Ibid. 44–6.

32 Ibid. 59–61. See also Carsten Raft, Arbejdpligten (Copenhagen, 1938).
ment legislation. This opened the way for governmental initiatives that in the following years saw the establishment of numerous youth camps, typically located in rural areas, engaging youth in agriculture, forestry, and so on. Daily life in the camps was a combination of practical work, schooling, and sport.

The Danish initiatives targeting youth unemployment were monitored by the DAF in Berlin. From a German perspective, this was one of the very few areas where it could justifiably be said that Germany had acted as a kind of model for Danish social policy. This interpretation was made clear in a memorandum of December 1940, in which an anonymous official at the DAF wrote a personal commentary on the Danish initiatives: ‘It is said that this means that a “Danish version” of this kind of work school has been created! Nonsense, pure nonsense! As if it were necessary to teach a Dane how to work. It is nothing but a copy of the German labour camp—here wrapped up in a pretty package!’

However, German discussions of Danish social policy generally remained purely descriptive, simply reporting specific events without prescribing any explicit policy goals or strategy.34 This is especially apparent in the DAF archive documents, in which German officials (and occasionally Danish ‘consultants’ for the DAF) regularly reported on reforms and developments in Denmark, particularly concerning its labour market. The German sources do not express any clear position regarding Denmark’s social security system or its labour market, and statements such as the one cited above were simply for internal legitimation, rather than prescribing any future policy directions for Denmark.

The Danish work camp continued to exist during the Nazi occupation and even afterwards, into the late 1940s.35 In 1940 the target group was widened to include the unemployed of all ages. Alongside governmental infrastructure projects, the camps represented one of the cornerstones of Danish unemployment policy, also in wartime.

33 German: ‘Man spricht davon, dass man hiermit eine dänische Form für eine derartige Arbeitsschule gefunden hat! Unsinn und nochmals Unsinn! — als ob es wirklich notwendig wäre dem Dänen lehren zu müssen wie man arbeitet. Es ist nicht anders als eine Kopie für die deutschen Arbeitslager — die hierbei nur “in Watte” eingesackt werden soll!’ See BArch, NS/5/VI 34115, memo of 18 Dec. 1940.
34 Based on a systematic survey of the rich materials of the DAF archives at BArch in Berlin.
From Neighbour to Occupied Country

After the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 Denmark declared itself neutral for three main reasons. First, Germany was a major European power right on Denmark’s doorstep, one that should not be provoked. Second, the other Scandinavian countries had refused to sign a mutual defence agreement with Denmark after the Nazi takeover of Germany in 1933. And third, Danish Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning, during a visit to London in 1937, had been informed that the United Kingdom was not prepared to assist Denmark.  

In the early hours of 9 April 1940 Germany began Operation Weser Exercise (Unternehmen Weserübung), the German attack on Denmark and Norway. Moments later, the Danish government’s senior ministers, along with Denmark’s military chiefs of staff and a few others, met the Danish King Christian X. Germany demanded that the Danish government accept the German occupation. If it refused, Germany would take Denmark by force, because the Luftwaffe needed to pass through Denmark to reach Norway. If Denmark chose to accommodate the occupation, however, Germany would refrain from interfering in Danish domestic affairs. As stated in the ultimatum, Germany had no intention ‘now or in the future of interfering with the Kingdom of Denmark’s territorial integrity or political independence’. After a brief period of reflection, the government agreed to the German ultimatum. This meant that the Danish government could continue to govern and sovereignty would remain in Danish hands; it also showed that the Germans recognized the Social Democratic leadership and the Danish labour movement as key to securing political stability.

in occupied Denmark.\textsuperscript{39} The immediate political consequence was the establishment of a broad coalition government representing all major parties, and this national unity government remained in place until August 1943.\textsuperscript{40} Seen from today’s perspective, it is fairly clear that Germany had no plans for a ‘Nazi revolution’ in Denmark, but it must be remembered that in 1940 the situation must have appeared more acute and dangerous to Denmark’s political elite.

It was obviously a fiction that Germany would not interfere in Denmark’s domestic affairs, and everyday life would soon show the limits that had been placed on Danish sovereignty, with the Danish political system forced by circumstances to follow the German lead. For instance, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, the Communist Party of Denmark (Danmarks Kommunistiske Parti or DKP) was outlawed, and when the Anti-Comintern Pact was renewed in late 1941, Denmark was among its signatories.\textsuperscript{41}

Trade policy soon became an important issue in the German–Danish bilateral relationship. After the Nazi occupation became a reality, Danish imports and exports had to be reorganized, as Denmark could no longer trade with the United Kingdom. Under the new arrangements, Germany received a significant portion of Denmark’s exports, with payments being made through a clearing account at Denmark’s central bank.\textsuperscript{42}

Nevertheless, Denmark was a special case in Hitler’s Europe, as no other government had chosen to accommodate the German occupation. Hence, whereas German-occupied countries such as Norway and the Netherlands were each governed by a civilian Reich Commissioner (Reichskommissar), the connection between Denmark and Germany went through their foreign ministries.\textsuperscript{43}


\textsuperscript{40} Peter Munch, \textit{Dansk politik under krig og besættelse} (Odense, 1947).


In Denmark, Germany was represented by the peacetime German envoy Cécil von Renthe-Fink, who then became the country’s Reich Plenipotentiary for the first years of the Nazi occupation. However, after a crisis in Danish–German relations in the late summer of 1942, the post was taken over by the high-ranking SS officer Werner Best in November 1942.

One of the consequences of this unique occupation regime was that Danish Jews could continue to live in Denmark. It was only after the collapse of Denmark’s collaboration policy in August 1943, with the official dissolution of the Danish government, that actions against Denmark’s Jews began. Even then, the Danish situation was exceptional because, out of Denmark’s six thousand Jews, only some five hundred were captured by the Nazis. The rest were able to flee the country.\(^{43}\)

The country’s administration changed greatly after August 1943. The German military got the upper hand in the occupation of Denmark, resulting in policies relying more on force and brutality than negotiation.\(^{44}\) The role of Denmark’s coalition government was taken over to some extent by a group of senior civil servants, who (while staying in contact with politicians and eventually also the resistance movement) largely focused on navigating Danish society through the turmoil and dangers of the war’s final years.\(^{45}\)

As for social policy during the Nazi occupation of Denmark, German plans in this regard were very vague. The ‘peaceful occupation’ meant that Germany could interfere in Denmark’s internal affairs only to a limited extent, and Danish legislation between 1940 and 1945 shows no trace of direct German influence in social policy initiatives. Of course, Danish social policy developments were certainly affected by the occupation, and there were a number of restrictive general social policy measures, especially in terms of regulating the labour market. As will be seen in the following, Denmark was not only a pantry for Nazi Germany, but also a potential labour reserve.

\(^{43}\) On Werner Best and Denmark see Eckart Conze et al., Das Amt und die Vergangenheit: Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik (Munich, 2010), 243–51. On actions against the Danish Jews see Bo Lidegaard, Countrymen: The Untold Story of How Denmark’s Jews Escaped the Nazis (New York, 2014).


Germany and Danish Unemployment

One particular aspect that also served to consolidate relations between the two countries on matters of labour market policy, one that was specifically highlighted in Nazi propaganda for Danish consumption, concerned Danish nationals who chose to work in Germany. Shortly after Denmark had been occupied, Germany concluded an agreement with the Danish government to set up a German employment agency in Denmark, enabling the German government to recruit Danes for work in Germany. This is how approximately 100,000 Danes ended up working in Germany between 1940 and 1945.46

While this large group—representing around 5 per cent of the Danish workforce—only sporadically appeared in the Danish media and political debate of the time, they were highlighted by the German occupiers. In Nazi propaganda directed at Danes, they were often referred to as the ‘Germany workers’ (tysklandsarbejdere). They were mentioned in newspapers and described in pamphlets, and even formed their own associations. One example was the pro-Nazi Danish Labour Association (Det Danske Arbejdsfællesskab or DDA), which published countless depictions of the good working conditions Danes enjoyed in Germany, their experiences with the Nazi labour market model, and so on.47 Through this propaganda, an attempt was made to paint a positive picture of conditions in Germany and thus, indirectly, of German social policy as a role model for Denmark. For example, one Danish worker, writing in a Danish Nazi newspaper in 1942, described how during his period of work in Germany five marks per week had been deducted from his weekly wage of almost sixty-six marks. He had thought this was a large amount, but only until he became ill. Then he learnt that he would receive full sick pay without any deductions for his first

46 Therkel Stræde, ‘På “Førerens” yndlingsfabrik: Danske tysklandsarbejdere på Volkswagenwerk 1940–45’, in Henrik Dethlefsen and Henrik Lundbak (eds.), Fra mellemkrigstid til efterkrigstid (Copenhagen, 1998), 231–59. In formal terms, Danish workers in Germany had voluntarily signed up for their jobs. However, research has also shown that certain groups, such as long-term social assistance recipients, may have been heavily pressured by municipal authorities to do so. See Jeppe Wichmann Rasmussen, ‘Dimitteret til Tysklandsarbejde’ (MA thesis, University of Southern Denmark, 2014).

47 This was a prominent topic in the DDA’s magazines Tidens Krav and Sociale Breve.
two weeks on sick leave, and that his German health insurance was paying for his hospitalization, medication, and surgery.48

By highlighting these ‘Germany workers’ and thus Denmark’s unemployment, the German authorities were pressuring the Danish government in areas where it was weakest. At the beginning of the occupation Danish unemployment was about 16 per cent, reaching a peak of 36 per cent by early 1941. In 1940 nearly 60 per cent of the Danish workforce was unemployed for some period during the year.49 It was against this background that the German authorities spread an image of Germany helping Denmark to solve its unemployment problem, something that the Danish model itself was apparently unable to do.50 And to ensure that the message did not come only from Berlin, the same message was promoted in Fædrelandet (The Fatherland), the newspaper of the Danish Nazi Party (Danmarks Nationalsocialistiske Arbejderparti or DNSAP), and also in DDA publications, with a constant stream of articles criticizing Danish employment policy. The message was that Danish policy was ineffective, while in Germany they knew how to hold down unemployment: if the Danish authorities would only do what was being done in Germany, Denmark could immediately solve its unemployment problem.51

Danish Nazi criticism of Denmark’s ineffective employment policies represented an indirect threat to the democratically elected Danish government. And within the DNSAP, there were hopes for a Danish Nazi seizure of power. According to a plan dating from 3 May 1940, if the Party succeeded, the Ministry of Social Affairs would be transformed from a ‘negative’ support ministry into ‘a positively edifying social institution’ in order to create jobs for all, partly through retraining; moreover, a ‘work bank’ would be established to ‘administer a labour fund, created by combining the employers’ funds, trade unions’ funds, and unemployment insurance funds, along with corresponding negative funding sources’.52

48 ‘Sygeløn i Tyskland’, Fædrelandet, 27 Nov. 1942.
50 See BArch, NS/43 (Außenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP), report on Denmark to the Nazi Party’s Office of Foreign Affairs, undated [around the start of the occupation].
52 Danish: “‘negatív’ understøttelsesministeriet til at blive det, der blev defineret som ”en positiv opbyggende social Institution” . . . Desuden skulle der oprettes en ”Arbejdets Bank”, som ”forvalter en Arbejdsfond, som oprettes af de Mødler, der
In this Danish Nazi proposal, the inspiration from Nazi Germany was clear and unambiguous. But the DNSAP was a party with no real political or ideological influence. The German occupiers had acknowledged quite early that the Danish Nazis were too unpopular and perhaps also too incompetent to be used as a genuine political tool. In addition, decision-makers in Berlin were compelled to admit during the initial years that the occupation regime in Denmark was already working in a largely satisfactory way. 53

Nevertheless, Denmark’s unemployment problems and the mere threat of installing a Nazi regime had an effect on the decision-makers in the country’s coalition government. Soon after the occupation began, more heavy-handed controls of the unemployed were introduced, along with increases in their work obligations. A special employment committee was formed and employment projects implemented. 54 In June of 1940 the Ministry of Social Affairs was renamed the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (Arbejds- og Socialministeriet), signalling the coalition government’s stronger attention to employment issues, and four months later the government launched a large-scale job creation programme. Finally, the government also ordered the Labour Directorate (Arbejdsdirektoratet) to revise the unemployment statistics so that they would appear lower. 55

The government’s policies show that unemployment had both a domestic dimension and a foreign policy one. The aim was to reduce Denmark’s unemployment and thus its poverty levels and social expenditure, but there was also a fear that the occupying power would take matters into its own hands and force Danes to serve in labour brigades for German-controlled infrastructure projects or in German industry. 56 In general, there is no doubt that Danish decision-makers saw the implemented policy as still falling within

53 Henning Poulsen, Besættelsesmagnaer og de danske nazister (Copenhagen, 1970), 387.
55 A report from Danish Nazi Axel Berg to the DAF dating from 1943 shows that the Germans may have been aware of this situation; see BArch, NS/5/VI. On the job programme from October 1940 see F. Zeuthen, ‘Statens beskæftigelsesplaner’, Nationaløkonomisk Tidsskrift, 38/3 (1940), 225–42.
the scope of Denmark's existing social security system, and as a temporary defensive measure in the face of a very fragile situation. However, from the German point of view, these steps were seen by some as potentially game-changing. In a 1941 memo on the introduction of the controversial 'work card' (the Arbeitskarte, a kind of labour passport that workers had to deposit with their employer), Renthe-Fink wrote that 'one could almost say it is revolutionizing Danish social policy'.

In a similar vein, the DDA happily interpreted the latest developments in the Danish labour market as signalling a readiness for change among Danish workers. This typically involved pointing out that the Danish establishment could not secure the jobs needed to fight unemployment, while claiming that the coalition government was pursuing policies against the interests of the working class, that Danish Social Democracy was confusing universal welfare for socialism, and that the Danish social system was inefficient. Sometimes these claims were backed with references to criticisms voiced by the established Danish trade unions, and at other times with references to the status of workers in Nazi Germany. However, this was more a case of Danish Nazi optimism and propaganda than anything else. Beyond such examples of wishful thinking there is no evidence of Germans preparing a comprehensive social policy plan for Denmark, and Danish policymakers certainly saw the implemented changes as simply defending the Danish model rather than aligning with the German one.

The Debate on Nazi Social Policy in Denmark

Official German propaganda for the Danish audience, disseminated mainly through the magazine Signal, similarly lacked any evidence of comprehensive social policy planning. Social policy was not a central issue in Signal, except for a few articles. An examination
of the contents for the year 1940 reveals that there was a certain emphasis on Nazi conceptions of the family, women, and sport. In terms of social policy, one article did describe how living conditions for German working-class families had improved under the Nazis, compared with the situation before 1933.60 Another article explained how organizations such as the National Socialist People’s Welfare Association (Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt) had made it possible for working women to take a holiday and relax.61 Later in the war Signal made increasing reference to the occupied territories, probably to show how the German occupation had brought welfare improvements to the conquered regions.62

The Danish labour market encountered by the German occupiers was already well organized. Denmark featured national umbrella organizations for both employers (from 1894) and employees (from 1898), and after a major conflict in 1899, these mutually recognized each other as negotiating partners and signed a joint agreement on regulating conflicts; with high membership levels in both organizations, the country’s wage and labour disputes were systematically regulated and resolved. Whereas Nazi Germany’s unified organization, the DAF, had been based since 1933 on a corporatist model of society with a strong state in the driver’s seat, Denmark’s regulation of the labour market was based on a recognition of both conflicting and common interests, resolved through self-regulation and pragmatic co-operation with the state. As a result, neither Denmark’s historical traditions nor the character of the German occupation (with its promise not to interfere in internal affairs) were particularly conducive to a ‘DAF-ization’ of the country’s labour market. Yet this is the area where German efforts to influence Denmark’s social and labour market policies were strongest.

There are several explanations for this. First, it was tempting for the German occupiers (especially the DAF) to interpret the Danish labour market model as just a variant of Nazi Germany’s corporatism. There were a few common features, such as the formalization


60 ‘Kan det virkelig være muligt’, Signal, 1/5 (1940), 23–4.
of labour negotiations, that could serve as confirmation. In several cases German actors emphasized this commonality, pointing out that both the Social Democratic and the trade union leadership had shown a positive attitude towards the DAF’s way of doing things. Second, the DAF and Robert Ley’s Labour Science Institute (Arbeitswissenschaftliche Institut) had been pursuing an aggressive international strategy to disseminate the Nazi labour market model. On three occasions, Danish trade union representatives—one with Danish employers—participated in official research trips to Germany. However, this was the result of support for the Danish coalition government rather than of pro-German sentiments.

The main channel of Nazi social policy propaganda for the Danish audience was without doubt the Danish Nazis and their supporters, although the DNSAP (already founded in 1930) never came to play any significant political role. In the Party’s political programmes, the social policy area was clearly inspired by German developments. However, for social policy propaganda it was Nazi-inspired academic work that became more important. In July 1940 the DNSAP established dedicated ‘professional groups’ (faggrupper) to promote the Party’s trade union policy ideas, especially within Denmark’s working class and its trade union movement. However, these groups never had any great success because the Social Democratic trade union movement was much too strong and well established. In the social policy realm as well, Danish Nazi aspirations to play a more prominent political role faltered soon after the occupation began. Henceforth, Nazi propaganda took on a more indirect character.

The 1930s saw the publication of several books that in different ways legitimized the Nazi model of society, particularly focusing on Germany’s planned economy and the corporatist state. One

63 Christensen et al., Danmark besat, 266–7. See also the pamphlet on the Reich Labour Service by H. Müller-Brandenburg, Den tyske arbejdstjeneste (n.p., 1937).
64 Lauridsen, Dansk nazi, 133–221.
66 Henning Dalsgaard, Den tyske planøkonomi (Copenhagen, 1940); id., Det tyske økonomiske system (Copenhagen, 1941); id., Verden i kamp (Copenhagen, 1941), 9–24; Edwin Gunder-Hansen, ‘Klassestat eller Stænderstat’, Gads Danske Magasin, 31 (1937), 433–42; id., Den moderne stænderstat (Copenhagen, 1938); id., ‘Den organiske Bedriftsordning’, Gads Danske Magasin, 32 (1938), 338–44; id., Kooperativt uskæft: forslag til en nyordning af dansk samfundsliv paa stændersk grundlag (Copenhagen, 1940).
such book was even included in the Nyt Socialt Bibliotek (New Social Library), a respected book series published by the Social Policy Association (Socialpolitisk Forening), which also issued Danish translations of the Swedish social policy thinkers Gunnar and Alva Myrdal. This line of interest was also reflected in a certain fascination with Italian Fascism, as seen in some Danish political circles. For example, the new party called Danish Unity (Dansk Samling), which had attracted some Danish intellectuals, was certainly flirting with aspects of Fascist corporatism; similarly, in 1932 the leading Conservative politician Ole Bjørn Kraft published a book entitled Fascismen: Historie, lære, lov (Fascism: History, Theory, Law). This shows that corporatist ideas were taken seriously in Denmark’s social policy debates, especially before the German occupation.

Even during the early years of the Nazi occupation there was some Danish interest in such ideas. For example, in April 1941 the German newspaper Das Reich reported on Danish trade unions demanding a more systematic and proactive approach to the problem of unemployment. This report was partly based on truth. Unemployment was, in fact, a vital issue for Danish trade unions, and they lobbied for a more active labour market policy. For a small group of Social Democrats and trade unionists, Denmark’s new relationship with Germany offered an opportunity to pursue a more planned economy. Such arguments were most actively supported in the journal Globus (Globe), and more passively among Social Democratic members of the Danish–German Association (Dansk-Tysk Forening). For example, the Minister of Public Works Gunnar Larsen talked about Denmark needing to adapt its social and political situation to a new Europe under German leadership. Except for a small minority, however, Denmark’s trade union leadership stayed loyal to the coalition government, and despite a certain fascination with the idea of a more planned economy, Danish trade unions clearly did not want to give up their independent status for a DAF model of all-embracing control, and did not sympathize with the Nazi destruction of Social Democratic trade unions in Germany.

German social policy propaganda of a more outspoken type was released by the DDA, which was founded in 1942. It had

67 Gunder-Hansen, Den moderne stænderstat.
68 Das Reich, 20 Apr. 1941.
69 Steen Andersen, Danmark i det tyske støvrum: Dansk økonomisk tilpasning til Tysklands nyordning af Europa 1940–41 (Copenhagen, 2005), 214–35.
70 Politiken, 22 July 1940. See also Andersen, Danmark i det tyske støvrum.
the DAF as its role model, but never achieved the same kind of dominant position. The DDA boasted offices in most major Danish towns, as well as large headquarters in central Copenhagen, although it never revealed its actual membership numbers. The DDA was not just a Danish imitation of the German original. It also served largely as a German puppet.\textsuperscript{71} The DDA's close ties to Germany were also reflected in the fact that its members were regularly offered opportunities to study and train with the DAF in Germany.

The DDA's primary task was to promote the social policy initiatives of Nazi Germany, through the magazines *Tidens Krav* (*The Times' Demands*) and *Sociale Breve* (*Social Notes*), a lecture series (including some with the Foreningen Socialt Arbejder Oplysning, or Association for Workers' Social Education), study groups, and film screenings. The two periodicals were the primary source of German social policy propaganda in Denmark, offering numerous articles (often with photographs) praising Germany's regulation of the labour market, while highlighting the role of the DAF. Here,\textsuperscript{72} the ideological framework was a kind of 'German Socialism' ('Deutscher Sozialismus') in which the old class divisions were transcended and erased by the building of a new *Volksgemeinschaft* based on the valorization of work and the worker. The overall message was that through enlightened planning and management, Germany had transcended class conflicts and established a number of initiatives to ensure the German working class an unprecedented level of influence, social security, and social benefits in terms of education, paid holidays, working environment, employment law, improved housing, and so on. Other articles took a more comparative approach in addressing traditional social policy issues such as retirement, disability insurance, and family benefits, seeking to demonstrate the superiority of German social policy compared with that in other countries. On the other hand, some articles applied a very different approach, seeking to portray German social policy as harmless by showing how it coincided with Danish policy in various respects. This was the case in an article on the racial aspect of Germany's marriage laws, which were ostensibly comparable to Steincke's ideas from the

\textsuperscript{71} The DDA background is described in more detail in Siig, ‘De national-socialistiske Fagrupper’.

\textsuperscript{72} The following summary is based on a systematic review of the two magazines, offering just a few of many examples.
1930s, and in articles after Stauning’s death, which underlined his support for a new European order under German leadership.73

These magazine articles can hardly be read as a direct expression of the German occupiers’ social policy plans in regard to Denmark. With few exceptions, the articles maintained a uniformly positive presentation of Nazi social policy and its labour market aspects. Even when Germany was simply presented as a model, this in itself carried an implicit understanding that Denmark should also move in the same direction. As stated in early 1942: ‘But now we must open our eyes! A revolution is taking place, a few hours’ journey to the south. It is a revolution in the conditions of work. And it is our duty, as thinking and enlightened people, to know about it.’74

However, there are no explicit recommendations for reforming social policy in Denmark, apart from general statements that Nazi Germany will define the framework of the ‘socially just European order that will emerge when the war is over’.75 In a (probably fictive) letter to the editor from early 1943 the writer asked whether ‘German Socialism’ was the only way to establish orderly social conditions in Denmark. The pragmatic and disarming reply was:

No. While we believe there is much to learn from German Socialism, we also know that what you call ‘orderly social conditions’ can be created only by the people themselves, by their own will, passion, and faith. German Socialism holds enormous life-essential values for the German people. For the rest of us, it can only be an inspiration and encouragement, which we can hardly do without, certainly.76

In these magazines, a large proportion of the articles consisted of obvious German propaganda, and may well have been translated directly from the German. In some cases, however, they addressed

73 *Sociale Breve*, 1 Aug. 1942, 4; *Sociale Breve*, 1 Oct. 1943, 2.
75 Danish: ‘socialt retfærdigt ordnede Europa, som vil opstaa, naar Krigen er forbi’. See *Sociale Breve*, 1 July 1942, 1. This was a pervasive theme.
76 Danish: ‘Nej, samtidsig med, at vi mener, der er meget at lære af tysk Socialisme, saa ved vi ogsaa, at det, De kalder “ordnede sociale Forhold” kun kan skabes af det, paagældende Folk selv; ved dets egen Vilje, Begejstring og Tro. Tysk Socialisme rummer vældige Livsværdier for det tyske Folk. For os andre kan den kun blive en Inspiration og en Opmuntring, som vi ganske vist næppe vil kunne undvære.’ See *Sociale Breve*, 1, Feb 1942. A few months later, a similar sentiment was expressed: ‘Tysk Socialisme er ingen Eksportvare’ (‘German Socialism is not an export commodity’).
Danish conditions directly. This happened, for example, when the two magazines repeatedly criticized Denmark’s social legislation and its politicians for failing to safeguard the interests of the Danish working class. In other cases, a somewhat more sophisticated strategy was used, in which the magazines’ writers quoted critical voices from the Danish trade union movement to support their own opinions.

For the DDA’s magazines and other efforts, the ‘Germany workers’ sent from Denmark were a major focus. This topic was covered in a great many articles which underlined Germany’s exemplary treatment of these Danish workers, while also giving practical advice on employment contracts and other concrete details. Readers in Denmark learnt about German goodwill and the cultural offerings to be found in Germany (which included Danish cabaret evenings), while Danes already working in Germany received practical information and learnt about the activities of the Association for Germany Workers (Foreningen for Tysklandsarbejdere). The DDA’s importance as a communication link to the many ‘Germany workers’ was demonstrated by the fact that Germany’s Foreign Office purchased 3,000 copies of Tidens Krav in the summer of 1942 for distribution among Danes living in Germany. However, the DDA’s pro-German propaganda had little significant impact, and seemed incapable of challenging Social Democratic control of Denmark’s trade unions.

The intentions of the German side remain unclear today—and perhaps they themselves could not quite decide. On the one hand, it seems that the DDA was seen (especially by the DAF) as a stepping stone towards influencing Danish youth, but on the other, there was a strong scepticism among German observers about Nazism’s political potential in Denmark. It could be that the more optimistic interpretations were really about assuaging certain political audiences in Nazi Germany. There are several examples of German agencies clearly embellishing developments in Denmark. For example, a Danish women’s movement initiative to establish a voluntary social service for women—a project that clearly lacked any German inspiration—was characterized in a German report of May 1941 as an example of German ideas gaining a foothold in Denmark.

77 Siig, ‘De national-socialistiske faggrupper’, 89.
78 BArch, NS 19/3472.
Defending the Danish Social Model

Although no plans for overhauling Denmark’s social policy during the Nazi occupation have been found, Danish decision-makers were certainly at least aware of the possibilities. Danish experts closely followed German debates, as well as Robert Ley’s plans for the future Nazi welfare state.\footnote{Georg Drachmann, ‘Invalide og aldersforsikring i Tyskland I’, Socialt Tidsskrift, 17/6 (1944), 41–9; Georg Drachmann, ‘Invalide og aldersforsikring i Tyskland II: Dr. Ley’s forslag til en tysk alderdomsforsørgelse’, Socialt Tidsskrift, 17/9 (1944), 155–61.} Yet it should be noted that in the same social policy forums there was also discussion of Allied social policy schemes such as the Beveridge plan in the UK, as well as major developments in Sweden, with the Nordic countries’ well-established social policy co-operation in general as a clearly positive and democratic point of reference, even during the occupation.\footnote{Petersen, ‘Constructing Nordic Welfare’, 85.}

The threat of a ‘Norwegian situation’ was always lurking, although it could not be openly articulated lest it should become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead, Danish decision-makers pursued a two-pronged strategy for defending the country’s existing social model. First, they tried to hide social problems that might provoke German interference. For example, official statistics were manipulated to mask the actual level of unemployment. And the establishment in 1940 of the Employment Central Office (Beskæftigelsescentral), which assumed major responsibilities in unemployment policy, was also partially driven by the same motivation, according to one contemporary observer.\footnote{Klaus Petersen’s conversations with Henning Friis, International Adviser at Denmark’s Ministry of Social Affairs (1941–57), autumn 1996.} Second, they strove to reframe the history of the Danish model as one derived from the will of the Danish people and boasting a long history, with a propaganda offensive along these lines launched as early as 1941. For example, an extensive treatise on Danish social policy history (nearly 500 pages long), marking the fiftieth anniversary of Denmark’s introduction of retirement pensions in 1891, was also translated into German.\footnote{The Soziale Gesetzgebung Dänemarks (Copenhagen, 1944), originally published in Danish as ‘Danmarks Social Lovgivning’, Socialt Tidsskrift, 17, section F, 1–416.} This publication was well received in the German media, with the National-Zeitung (National Newspaper) going so far as to state...
that Denmark’s ‘good social legislation’ should be respected by the Germans too.\textsuperscript{84}

This Danish public relations offensive was further enhanced with the 1942 film Das Soziale Gesicht Dänemarks (\textit{The Social Face of Denmark}). The film presented the Danish social system in all its glory to a German audience. In February 1942 it was showcased during an event at the Nordic Liaison Office (Nordische Verbundungsstelle) in Berlin, where the Danish Minister of Social Affairs, Johannes Kjærbøl, gave a lengthy introductory speech that was subsequently reprinted in the \textit{Reichsarbeitsblatt} (the RAM’s official \textit{Reich Labour Journal}). Kjærbøl’s address, after a very long and detailed review of Danish social policy, ended with the following optimistic conclusion:

As to the further development of Danish social policy, I would just like to say this: we have not stopped working, and we do not believe that we have arrived at some kind of endpoint in human possibilities. This is why we are convinced that the Danish people’s strength, which has already achieved today’s social legislation, will also be up to creating the social legislation of the future.\textsuperscript{85}

\textbf{Conclusion}

This study is based on comprehensive research conducted in Danish and German archives, as well as on the examination of numerous publications, periodicals, and newspapers from the period 1933 to 1945. It has uncovered no evidence of any German master plan for transforming the Danish social security system. This lack was corroborated by Werner Best in 1944 when he stated that Germany, in avoiding further interventions in Denmark’s domestic affairs, never aimed to reorganize the country’s economic affairs and labour laws along German lines. He further stated that this unusual situation between independence and dependence had produced the best results for Germany, as occupied Denmark had successfully produced foodstuffs for Germany’s benefit.\textsuperscript{86} Denmark therefore seems to have

\textsuperscript{84} German: ‘gute soziale Gesetzgebung’. See \textit{National-Zeitung}, 17 Nov. 1941.


\textsuperscript{86} Cited in Kirchhoff, \textit{At forhandle med ondskaben}, 54.
generally escaped the direct transfer of Nazi German social policy. Except for a few marginalized groups of Danish Nazi sympathizers, there is no evidence of an explicit and intentional transfer of German social policy to the Danes, and the main objective for the German occupation forces was to secure agricultural exports, rather than to implement any fundamental changes to Denmark’s social security system. Moreover, in comparing the degree of co-operation in the field of social policy with that in other areas such as policing and education, the latter was clearly much more intense.87

However, the absence of a social policy paradigm shift in Denmark did not preclude other types of interaction between Danish and German state agencies. This study has demonstrated the existence of various transnational links between Denmark and Germany before and during the Nazi occupation, with both countries preoccupied (in very different ways) by the social developments and policy debates of neighbouring countries. On the German side, this interaction was based more on the initiatives of the DAF than those of the RAM.

What this essay offers is the first detailed study of social policy relations between Denmark and Germany during the Third Reich. Although 1940 to 1945 is generally considered the period of Denmark’s modern history receiving the most scrutiny by Danish historians, little attention has been paid specifically to the domain of social policy. In fact, historians of the welfare state have generally treated these five years as a parenthesis in Danish history: while the Nazi occupation did hold back certain reform initiatives and result in some retrenchment, it was back to business as usual as soon as the war was over. This study reaffirms the latter interpretation, while providing some additional nuances: neither the ‘peaceful occupation’ of Denmark nor Germany’s prewar developments (stretching back to the 1930s) would ultimately have a strong impact on Danish social policy, but this could only be ascertained long after the fact.

87 The relationship between Denmark’s universities and Nazi Germany is analysed in Niklas Olsen, Karl Christian Lammers, and Palle Rosling-Jensen (eds.), Nazismen, universiteterne og videnskaben i Danmark (Copenhagen, 2015); contacts between members of the Danish police and the Gestapo are described in Henrik Stevnsborg, ‘Politifuldmagtigen, der havde goodwill hos Gestapo: Vilhelm Leifer’, in John T. Lauridsen (ed.), Over stregen: Under besættelsen (Copenhagen, 2007), 307–25; Joachim Lund, “‘No Fertile Soil for Such Weeds in the Danish Garden’: The Danish State Police, the Gestapo, and the Fight against Communism, 1933–1940” (forthcoming); on the Danish German Association, whose task was to organize and promote Danish–German relations in the political, cultural, and economic spheres, see Andersen, Danmark i det tyske støtrum, 75–7; Nordlien, ‘Træk af den tyske propaganda- og kulturpolitik’.
For Danish policymakers the 1930s and 1940s were a period of risks and insecurity. During this time they strove to defend Denmark’s social policy model against any kind of ‘Germanization’—and were ultimately successful.

In fact, it might be argued that the German experience had a stronger impact (although only indirectly) on the Danish welfare model after 1945 than before, with the overall effect of having cemented the existing Danish welfare model as a core element of Danish society. This was especially clear immediately after the liberation of May 1945, with a strong and almost unanimous demand for equality (expressed both by the Danish resistance movement and by the main political parties) in recognizing the sacrifices of groups that bore the social and economic burdens of the Nazi occupation.

There was a general acceptance of the need for social reforms and increased benefit levels. A reading of party manifestos and parliamentary debates from 1945 clearly demonstrates this idea of ‘equality of sacrifice’ (which was further strengthened by British influence during the early postwar years).

Clearly the consensus of 1945 should not be overemphasized. Some groups were not included (such as the Danish communists), and others were explicitly marginalized (most prominently the Danes who had worked in Germany). Returning to business as usual meant that ideological differences concerning the role of the state and social rights also re-emerged on the political scene. Still, there is no doubt that the lessons of the period 1933 to 1945 left a huge mark on Danish society. First, the legitimacy of the state and its capacities had been strengthened. Second, social cohesion and social stability had been cemented as prerequisites for a well-functioning democracy. As Denmark entered the Cold War in the following decades, these lessons became key elements in Danish strategy, both domestically and internationally.