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## Immigration and the Legitimacy of the Scandinavian Welfare State: Some Preliminary Danish Findings

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### Immigration and the legitimacy of the welfare state

It is frequently claimed that immigration may put the legitimacy of the welfare states under pressure (Soroka, Banting & Johnston 2003). The typical argument is that cultural homogeneity is a precondition of the solidarity that is the essence of the welfare state (Miller 1995: 90-99; Brochmann 2003). As the Scandinavian welfare states are based on residence/citizenship rather than contributions as the main criterion of social rights, they could appear particularly vulnerable (Forsander 2004).

However, in addition to the argument about cultural homogeneity, one may also identify a number of other possible mechanisms that could link immigration to declining legitimacy (Swank & Betz 2003; Forsander 2004). In this paper, I discuss five factors that might connect immigration with declining support for the welfare state:

- Multiculturalism: The solidarity of the welfare state depends on a shared national identity and culture.
- Indirect effect: Demobilisation of the labour movement and mobilisation of anti-immigration parties.
- Costs of immigration and competition over welfare: welfare state chauvinism.
- Differences in work ethic between immigrants and the native population.
- Institutional change and the emergence of an ethnic “underclass”.

The assumption of an association (at the aggregate level) between influx of immigrants and the development of social expenditures has been confirmed in

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some of the few empirical studies that have been published until now (Alesina, Glaeser & Sacerdote 2001; Soroka, Banting & Johnston 2003; Alesina & Glaeser 2004). However, these findings are open to interpretations, and most of the literature on the subject remains rather speculative. In particular, there is a shortage of survey data which could illuminate the connecting links at the micro level.

The purpose of this paper is to elaborate theoretically on the possible connecting links between immigration and support for the welfare state, and to illuminate such hypotheses by means of scattered Danish survey data. The approach is exploratory as few adequate operationalisations currently exist. Also, I shall avoid any lengthy discussion of the polysemous concept “legitimacy of the welfare state” (Goul Andersen 2005) but simply concentrate on some straightforward aspects as far as the dependent variable is concerned.

The selection of Denmark as a test case is not completely arbitrary. More than most other countries, Denmark has experienced a thorough political mobilisation on the issue of immigration, which should strengthen both the direct and indirect effects of immigration on the support for the welfare state. In the following section, I briefly describe the impact of this mobilisation on the Danish context. The subsequent sections discuss the possible connection mechanisms one by one, and test some of them on the basis of Danish survey data. Finally, the concluding section also discusses how far the findings can be generalised and sketches some outlines for future research.

### **Denmark: A “worst case”?**

In several respects, Denmark could be considered a “worst case” when analysing the impact of immigration on welfare state support. That is, if there is an effect, one could expect it to be particularly strong in Denmark. There are several reasons for this: First, as already mentioned, in the Scandinavian welfare model, social rights are based mainly on citizenship/residence rather than on contribution. To a (somewhat) larger degree, and more visibly than in other welfare states, this leaves the responsibility for social security with the taxpayers. Secondly, immigrants have not been very successful on the Danish labour market – and somewhat less so than in most other European welfare states, not to mention traditional immigration countries (Coleman & Wadensjö 1999; Zimmermann & Hinte 2004: 116-19; Forsander 2004). Third, Denmark was traditionally one of the most ethnically homogeneous societies in the world, and occasionally, Danes have even been described as a tribe (Gundelach 2001) – a theme which will be discussed below.

Finally, and far most importantly, Denmark has experienced an unusually strong political mobilisation on the issue of immigration and ethnic conflict since the 1980s. When the Progress Party, launched in 1972 as a populist, anarcho-liberalist tax protest party, was heading towards extinction in the mid-

1980s, the sudden explosion in the number of asylum-seekers in 1984 and onwards provided the party with a new rallying issue in the protest against immigration (Goul Andersen & Bjørklund 1990; Bjørklund & Goul Andersen 2002). This reversed the decline in support: The party won 4.8 per cent in the 1987 election and 9.0 per cent in the election of 1988 (table 1). After years of internal strife from which the party miraculously survived, the party's former leader Pia Kjærsgaard in 1995 launched her Danish People's Party, which soon became the successor of the Progress Party. Free from ideological heritage, the Danish People's Party could specialise on immigration and replace former tax protests with a strong nationalism and an almost classic Social Democratic defence for the welfare state with priority to health care, elderly care and public pensions. The two anti-immigration parties gained 9.8 per cent in the 1998 election and 12.6 per cent in 2001. In the 2005 election, the Danish People's Party obtained 13.3 per cent of the votes.

**Table 1. Electoral support for the Progress Party and the Danish People's Party, 1973-2005. Percentages.**

	"Tax protest party"						"Anti-immigration party"						
	1973	1975	1977	1979	1981	1984	1987	1988	1990	1994	1998	2001	2005
Danish People's Party											7.4	12.0	13.3
Progress Party	15.9	13.6	14.6	11.0	8.9	3.6	4.8	9.0	6.4	6.4	2.4	0.6	-
New right, total	15.9	13.6	14.6	11.0	8.9	3.6	4.8	9.0	6.4	6.4	9.8	12.6	13.3

Source: Statistics Denmark, *Statistical Yearbook*, various issues.

However, the political impact of anti-immigration parties in Denmark goes further. The Danish People's Party recruited many working class Social Democrats. This party, in turn, became increasingly divided over this issue. Not surprisingly, voter problems and internal strife contributed to even more media attention to immigration. As from 1998, also the Liberal party saw the potentials in mobilising on this issue. Thus, even though increasing immigration is the underlying cause, the self-reinforcing *dynamics of party competition* contributes much to explaining why this issue is considered so much more important among Danish voters than among, say, Swedish voters. When 10 per cent of the Swedish voters mentioned immigration or refugees as an important cause of their party choice in 2002, this was a record-high figure. But in the Danish 2001 election, 51 per cent of the voters mentioned immigration as an important problem the politicians should handle (Goul Andersen 2003a; Holmberg & Oscarsson 2004: 123).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The questions are not perfectly commensurable as the Swedish question refers to motives for voting whereas the Danish question asks about a more important problem. However, this

Whereas saliency of immigration was strongly fluctuating in the 1980s (Tonsgaard 1989), it became a permanent issue on Danish voters' agenda from 1994 onwards (see table 2). In 2001, it was the most important single issue (although if all welfare issues are collapsed into one category, welfare ranks higher). After radical restrictions to immigration were adopted in 2002 by the Liberal-Conservative government and the Danish People's Party, the saliency of immigration declined, but it has remained a core issue in Danish politics.

**Table 2. Percentages mentioning immigration among most important problems.**

1971-1984 (election surveys)	0
Feb.1986	4
Sep.1986	26
Aug.1987	11
Sep.1987 (election)	8
May 1988 (election)	3
May 1989	4
June 1989	5
Dec 1990 (election)	7
Oct. 1994 (election)	17
March 1998 (election)	35
Feb.2000 ('mid-term survey')	38
Feb.2001	32
Nov.2001 (pre-election survey)	44
Nov.2001 (election)	51
Nov. 2003 ('mid-term survey')	21
Jan. 2005 (pre-election survey)	24

Question: Now I would like to ask which problems you think are the most important that the politicians should handle? (Slightly different wording in 1986-88).

Sources: Togeby (1997:67), Tonsgaard (1989), Election surveys, and surveys conducted by Goul Andersen in cooperation with Ugebrevet Mandag Morgen. Election surveys refer to the month of the election even though many of the interviews were recorded 1-3 months later.

But how should this high saliency be interpreted? Often, the mobilisation of negative attitudes against foreigners is seen as an effect of economic crisis and the accumulation of social problems. In such situations, immigrants may serve as an outlet for frustrations. However, this does not appear to be the case in Denmark. On the contrary, the high saliency of immigration may be pictured partly as an effect of the solution of other problems. From the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s, unemployment was the big issue, alongside the economy (in particular the balance of payment). After 7 years of economic prosperity, these issues had declined into insignificance (table 3). Even environmental problems had been dealt with. What remained of "unresolved" problems were, first and foremost, welfare and immigration.

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explains only part of the deviance. The lion's share is likely to reflect differences in saliency of the issue to Danish and Swedish voters.

**Table 3. The political agenda of Danish voters, 1971-2005. Percentages of all answers.**

	1971	1975	1981	1984	1987	1990	1994	1998	2001	2005
1.Unemploym.	3	40	44	} 63	16	29	24	7	3	16
2.Econ. probl.	24	32	28		31	19	15	7	4	3
3.Taxes	12	6	6	4	2	9	2	5	6	5
Econ.issues, total	39	78	78	67	49	57	41	19	13	24
4.Environment	8	1	2	3	15	10	8	9	4	4
5.Welfare	26	4	8	13	15	20	38	47	51	53
6.Immigration	-	-	-	-	4	4	8	14	20	13
7.Foreign/defence	17	1	2	9	3	3	3	5	4	3
8.Other	10	16	10	8	14	6	2	6	8	3
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Q. "Now I would like to ask which problems you consider most important today for politicians to take care of?"

Table 3 shows distribution of all answers. Average number of answers was 2.4-2.5 in 1998-2001, a little below 2.0 answers in the 1970s and in 2005.

Source: Election surveys. 2005: Pre-election survey conducted by Jørgen Goul Andersen in cooperation with Ugebrevet Mandag Morgen.

Regardless of the background for this mobilisation, it remains a fact that the issue is strongly politicized, in a way that should provide for a thinking in terms of "us" and "them", and consequently in terms of a division or even polarisation that may undermine solidarity. But apart from the mobilizing effect of party competition, what are the arguments for a more general tendency towards an erosion of solidarity because of immigration?

### **The culture argument – the "simple version"**

As indicated above, the most widespread argument is the culture argument which relates welfare state solidarity to the existence of a homogeneous population with a shared national identity and culture. It could be argued that in Europe, the building of the welfare state was almost a part of the nation-building process (Freeman 1986; Wolfe & Klausen 1997).

As demonstrated by Alesina & Glaeser (2004: 140-48), there really is a strong correlation between racial and linguistic fractionalization and social welfare spending. Their explanation is related to the classic debates over American vs. European exceptionalism. Among the several causes of the absence of Socialism in the US, racial and ethnic divisions have always been listed among the most important – and whereas the United States have traditionally been described as the exception (Lipset 1996), Alesina & Glaeser rather turns the argument around: It is the cultural homogeneity of European welfare states that was exceptional. With increasing immigration, these nations may become more similar to the US, and consequently, one can also expect trends towards convergence of their welfare states.

In this section, I discuss this “simple” version of the hypothesis. It should be underlined, however, that Alesina & Glaeser do *not* suggest a deterministic and unconditional hypothesis about the impact of ethnic heterogeneity. In the first place, they emphasize that the impact depends on whether ethnic divisions coincide with economic divisions so that one ethnic group benefits disproportionately from welfare. (Alesina & Glaeser 2004: 134-36; 175-81). Secondly, they underline that ethnic divisions gain importance, first and foremost, when they are exploited by right-wing politicians for anti-welfare purposes: “In fact, the extreme right in Europe is already using the race card to oppose welfare policies. We predict that as racial heterogeneity in Europe increases, even the more ‘respectable’ right will move in that direction” (Alesina & Glaeser 2004: 219). Finally, Alesina & Glaeser (2004: 219) point out that differences in political institutions are also very important and act to preserve considerable differences in the welfare states across the Atlantic.

I suggest, however, that also the *institutions of the welfare state* will have a major impact. It makes a fundamental difference what comes first: Ethnic heterogeneity or institutionalised welfare. I suggest that the institutional welfare state may serve to maintain solidarity with the poor, even if they are foreigners, and that right-wing parties will find it difficult to get support if they maintain an anti-welfare stance.

From the literature on welfare state attitudes, the argument about cultural homogeneity could build some plausibility already on the observation that people tend to be most supportive of transfers and services which are given to people resembling themselves. Although it is not a rule without exception (for instance, universal child benefits are not too popular in Denmark), universal benefits have typically been more popular than selective ones. Also, people are usually more suspicious of abuse among social assistance claimants than among those who receive unemployment benefits, and there are usually more people who want to cut back on social assistance than on unemployment benefits – although in Denmark since the early 1980s, few people have wanted to cut back on any of these (Goul Andersen 2005).

I also know from studies of “deservingness” that immigrants are nearly always considered less deserving than the indigenous population (van Oorschot 2005). And we know from numerous studies that nearly any sort of social and economic inequality between Danes and foreigners is strong and increasing.

Still, the simple version of the cultural homogeneity argument is not as plausible as it might seem. In the first place, *timing* matters. Once built, institutions are resistant to change. Institutions have a strong impact on perceptions, norms, and values. Thus it would seem likely that reactions to immigration may be different in different welfare states.

Next, the culture argument often implies that solidarity is *mechanical*, to use Durkheim's classic label. However, Durkheim's argument was exactly that with modernity follows a transition from mechanical to organic solidarity, from a solidarity based on conformity to a solidarity based on difference and mutual interdependence. Indeed, one could argue that if solidarity was mechanical we should have observed a decline in support for the welfare state already in the 1960s, long before the wave of immigration. In Europe, the last 40 years have witnessed a long process of diversification and break with tradition. Consider the 1960s and 1970s with its sudden outbreak of the youth rebellion, the student rebellion, new social movements etc. Consider the sudden and dramatic break with established sexual, religious or political values and norms in the late 1960s; women's liberation in the 1970s, the public acceptance of homosexual marriage in the 1980s and 1990s, etc. These cultural changes of course generated tension. But in Europe, they were absorbed. The outcome was a new stage of reflexive modernity with a large tolerance for diversity and to a large extent an outright rejection of tradition, including religion. To paraphrase Giddens (1991), any tradition unwilling to discuss its own assumptions was no longer a tradition but rather became isolated as fundamentalism.

In Europe, there was no enduring counter-reaction to this transition to reflexive modernity. In the United States, there was more of a moralist and fundamentalist counter-reaction. George Bush was re-elected in November 2004, in part because of his position on moral issues. In Europe at the same time, a newly appointed member of the European Commission was rejected by the European Parliament because of his traditionalist view on religion and the family.

It may be argued that the tension between traditionalism and reflexivity is also in part what the tension between immigrant cultures and national culture is about. Partly as a politically framed stereotype, partly as a "real" phenomenon: Tradition vs. modernity – traditional gender roles versus women's liberation; freedom of young people vs. paternal authority; fundamentalist religion vs. atheism or extremely individualised, "private" religion; sexual freedom vs. restrictive sexual norms, rigid norms vs. reflexivity, etc. This is why some progressives are cross-pressured between anti-traditionalism on the one hand and tolerance for cultural diversity on the other: which value should prevail when it comes to cultural traditionalism among ethnic minorities? But this is also a reminder that the current cultural clash between ethnic cultures bears quite some resemblance to the cultural clash between generations some 30-40 years ago.

But what does empirical evidence tell us? Beginning with the macro level, Taylor-Gooby (2005) has challenged the findings of Alesina & Glaeser (2004) by replicating their key analyses with political variables. It turns out that the explanatory power of racial/ethnic diversity drops into insignificance when controlling for political factors (percentage of left parties in cabinet). This



finding indicates that *politics is an intervening variable* between ethnic/racial diversity and welfare spending – it does not happen mechanically. However, this is to some extent argued by Alesina & Glaeser themselves.

**Table 4. Attitudes towards welfare spending, 1979-2005.  
Percentages and balance of opinion (percentage points).**

	2001: The state spends			Balance of opinion: too little minus too much						
	too little	appropriate	Too much	1985	1990	1994	1998	2001	2003	2005
Health care	70	27	3	+61	+61	+73	+77	+67	+49	+55
Old age pension	47	52	1	+64	+57	+51	+42	+46	+38	+41
Education	48	50	2	+44	+45	+42	+39	+46	+46	+65
Unempl.benefits (level)	12	75	13	+17	+2	0	-7	-1		
Soc assistance (level)	11	65	24	+30	-11	-11	-19	-13		
Aid to developing countries	10	48	42	.	-26	-35	-40	-32	-12	+5
Immigrants/ refugees	12	43	45	.	-30	-35	-41	-33	-13	-1

Wording: “Now, I’ll ask about your view on public expenditures for various purposes. I should like to know whether you think, government spends 1) too much, 2) appropriate, or 3) too little money on these tasks.” Source: Election surveys (1985-2001); 2003 and 2005: Mid-term survey/pre-election survey, conducted in cooperation with *Mandag Morgen*.

Turning to micro-level evidence from Denmark, table 4 reveals that economic support for refugees and immigrants has indeed been among the least popular public spending areas. However, it also turns out that this negative sentiment is not unconditional. After the 2002 reform which tightened the conditions for getting permissions to stay in the country, as well as the social assistance payments for immigrants for their first seven years in the country, public attitudes became considerably more “soft”. As late as in 2001, 45 per cent wanted to cut spending for immigrants and refugees; only 12 per cent found current spending insufficient. By 2005, only 25 per cent wanted to cut back, and 24 per cent wanted to increase spending. *In other words, people’s attitudes seem to be much more determined by policy than by the target group.* There was a widespread belief that immigration had gone too far, but there does not seem to be a widespread unwillingness to pay.

**Table 5. Attitudes towards the scope of government, 2000.  
Percentages and average index values on a scale 1-4.**

To what extent should it be the responsibility of government to ...	Definitely	Probably	Probably not	Definitely not	DK	Index 2000 (1-4)
Provide health care for the sick	83	14	2	1	0	1.19
Provide a decent standard of living for the old	71	26	3	0	0	1.33
Provide child care for everybody who need it	53	35	8	4	0	1.62
Provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed	33	48	16	2	1	1.88
Provide decent housing for those who can't afford it	39	45	12	3	1	1.78
Integrate immigrants	38	40	13	7	2	1.90
Provide good leisure facilities for children and young people	32	46	18	3	1	1.93
Provide leave arrangements for families with small children	30	46	15	8	1	2.00
Provide leisure facilities for pensioners	28	46	19	6	1	2.03
Provide a job for everyone who wants one	19	44	25	10	2	2.26
Reduce income differences between the rich and the poor	19	27	27	25	2	2.60

Source: Welfare Values Survey conducted by the author (2000) (ISSP format questions); Nationwide representative survey. N=1235.

This is also confirmed by another question where people were asked which tasks should be government responsibility (table 5). Not surprisingly, providing health care for the sick and decent standards of living for the old received top priority. And remarkably, even public childcare belongs to this category. But immediately following these items are three areas with a rather low ranking on the public expenditure question: Unemployment, housing and integration of immigrants. The latter is particularly noteworthy: Immigration is considered an important task for the state by a huge majority. Redistribution and full employment rank much lower at the list. Running the risk of over-interpretation, one may suggest that this structure of attitudes reflects an underlying concern for *citizenship*.

**Table 6. Association between considering immigration a salient problem and attitudes to immigration, 1998-2005. Percentages.**

Year	Immigration salient problem	“Immigration constitutes a serious threat to our national character”			Balance of opinion: Disagree minus agree
		Agree	Do not know	Disagree	
1998	yes	53	14	33	-20
	no	34	15	51	17
	effect 1998				37
2001	yes	46	13	41	-5
	no	34	18	48	14
	effect 2001				19
2003	yes	37	11	52	15
	no	45	3	52	7
	effect 2003				8
2005	yes	42	4	54	12
	no	40	9	51	11
	effect 2005				-1

Source: 1998-2001. Election survey. 2003: Mid-term survey. 2005: Pre-election survey.

However, the most important indication of solidarity is found when we analyse the association between saliency and attitudes (table 6). When the Progress Party and the Danish People’s Party mobilised to put the issue of immigration on the political agenda in the first half of the 1990s, there was a very strong association between seeing this issue as important and having negative attitudes towards immigrants. Even in 1998, this association was quite strong. But since then, it has changed almost year by year. By 2003, there was no longer an overweight of negative feelings among those who regarded immigration important. And by 2005, there was no longer any association between importance and attitudes. In other words, *there has been a mobilization of people sympathetic to immigrants who think that this issue is important*. No doubt, because they feel solidarity with immigrants, and/or because they see the dangers of new divisions and threats to cohesion in society. Whereas the mobilisation of negative feelings by the Danish People’s Party has been highly visible, this mobilisation of concern and solidarity may rather be characterised as a sort of silent revolution. In short, there is little reason that cultural diversity *as such* should undermine solidarity.

Finally, from the culture hypothesis, one could imagine that in the most generous welfare states, people would be more reluctant to grant equal rights to immigrants, or that requirements to immigrants about cultural conformity would be higher: The more people pay, the more they should expect recipients to be like themselves. But this is not the case. From table 7, it seems that if there is any association, it rather pulls in the opposite direction. But no systematic pattern can be inferred. Scandinavians are among those who are

most inclined to think that immigrants should be treated equally; and they are about or below average for Western Europeans when it comes to requirements of assimilation.

**Table 7. Attitudes towards equal treatment and assimilation requirements. 2002.**

	Should immigrants be treated equally 1= fully agree 5=fully disagree	Better for a country if almost everyone share customs & traditions 1= fully disagree 5=fully agree	Important (0-10) that immigrants are committed to way of life in society
Sweden	1.97	2.07	7.77
Norway	2.10	2.21	6.64
Denmark	2.14	2.17	6.84
Finland	2.18	2.41	8.16
Average Scandinavia	2.10	2.22	7.35
Netherlands	2.01	2.13	7.88
Germany	2.57	2.11	7.86
UK	2.44	2.15	7.37
Italy	2.22	2.38	7.25
mean all countries	2.36	2.39	7.54

Source: European Social Survey (2002).

### **Divisions within the working class or the reappearance of the “Irish worker” problem?**

As pointed out by Alesina & Glaeser (2004), immigration may also have indirect effects on the welfare state and on welfare state legitimacy, mediated through a weakening of the labour movement. At least historically, Walter Korpi’s “power resources theory” which attributes the welfare state to the strength of the political labour movement, may account for some of the most important variations in the welfare state. As Taylor-Gooby (2005) has shown on the basis of Alesina & Glaeser’s data, the explanatory power of ethnic diversity is mediated primarily through the strength of socialist parties. As Alesina & Glaeser suggest, ethnic diversity was a main obstacle to socialism in the US, and by the same token, it may lead to a weakening of socialism in Europe. Indeed, ethnic divisions within the working class are a classic theme in the political theory of the labour movement, dating back to Marx.

However, a classic source of weakening of the working class is ethnic divisions within that class. Marx was well aware of its importance, not only in the US, but also in Britain where the conflict between Irish and English workers was an impediment to their organization:

Every industrial and commercial center in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish

proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member of the ruling nation and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the "poor whites" to the Negroes in the former slave states of the U.S.A. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of the English rulers in Ireland. This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. *This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this.* (translated from MEW, Bd. 32, pp. 668-669).

In contemporary Europe, immigration seems to lead to widespread mobilisation of new anti-immigration right-wing movements with strong working class appeals. Applying the same explanatory model as Marx, Alesina & Glaeser suggests that

racial conflicts can be used strategically by political entrepreneurs interested (...) in preventing redistribution. By convincing even the not so rich whites that redistribution favours minorities, they have been able to build large coalitions against welfare policies (...) In fact, the extreme right in Europe is already using the race card to oppose welfare policies. We predict that as racial heterogeneity in Europe increases, even the more "respectable" right will move in this direction (Alesina & Glaeser 2004: 218-19).

Denmark appears to be an ideal-typical case of this development. As mentioned, right-wing parties began to mobilize on this issue already in the mid-1980s, and from the second half of the 1990s, also the Liberal Party began campaigning on this issue, most conspicuously in the 2001 election campaign with pictures of angry immigrants outside a courtroom protesting against their friends and relatives being sentenced for rape, accompanied by the slogan (borrowed from Blair): "Time for change" (Goul Andersen & Borre 2003).

Looking at political attitudes of social classes, it is very obvious that there was a potential for mobilisation in the 1990s when the Social Democrats formed government with centre parties, in particular the Radical Liberals, who were strongly in favour of liberal, humanistic immigration policies.

**Table 8. Attitudes to welfare, equality and immigration, 1979/1990 - 2001. Balances of opinion: Left attitude minus right attitude. Percentage points.**

	Maintain social reforms at least as now			Increase economic equality			Immigration a threat		
	1979	1994	2001	1979	1994	2001	1990	1994	2001
Manual workers	+35	+53	+34	+42	+28	+27	-21	-17	-16
White collar	+33	+44	+25	+17	+4	0	+23	+29	+34
Difference	1	11	9	25	24	27	44	46	50

Source: Election surveys (N about 2000).

Indeed, it has worked: Although class voting of the working class had declined already in the 1970s and 1980s, socialist parties still managed to mobilise 71 per cent of the workers in the 1990 election (table 9). But in 2001, socialist parties only gained support from 42 per cent of the manual workers – half as much as in 1966. Parties to the right, on the other hand, attracted only 14 per cent of the working class vote in 1996, but 52 per cent in 2001. Actually, the Liberal-Conservative government and its supporting party the Danish People's Party received slightly more support from manual workers than from white collars. Preliminary results from the 2005 election indicate that this pattern was maintained or even aggravated. It can also be demonstrated that the ideological group that was lost by the socialists is the group which combines a positive attitude to equality (agreeing that “in politics, one should strive for the same economic conditions for everybody, regardless of education and occupation”) with a negative attitude to foreigners (agreeing that “immigration constitutes a serious threat to our national character”). Among those who combine these attitudes (which are uncorrelated!), support for Socialist parties declined from 58 per cent in 1990 to 28 per cent in 2005 (and 27 per cent in June, 2005). Combined support for the Liberals, the Conservatives and the Danish People's Party, by contrast, increased from 29 to 58 per cent (and 64 per cent in June, 2005).

Beneficiaries of the working class vote were both the Liberal Party and the Danish People's Party. Beyond comparison, the Danish People's Party has become Denmark's most clean-cut working-class party. It attracted voters disproportionately from the working class already from 1979, but from 1988, it accelerated, and from 1994 onwards, the Danish People's Party has had a more clear working class profile than the Social Democrats (table 10).

**Table 9. Proportion voting socialist and on parties to the right, by occupation. Denmark 1966-2001. <sup>2)</sup> Percentages.**

	Socialist parties			Liberals, Conservatives, New Right	
	1966	1990	2001	1966	2001
Manual workers	81	71	42	14	52
White collars	42	48	39	42	49
Self-employed	14	13	11	73	83
All voters	50	50	38	40	53

Source: Election Surveys. N > 10000 in 1966, > 3000 in 1990, > 4000 in 2001.

**Table 10. Proportion of workers among the supporters of various party groups. Deviations from sample means. Percentage points.**

	1966	1973	1977	1979	1981	1984	1987	1988	1990	1994	1998	2001
Progress Party/DPP		-4	-1	+2	+6	+9	+4	+14	+15	+16	+13	+21
Other bourg. part.	-26	-15	-20	-17	-15	-12	-12	-15	-16	-11	-10	-8
Social demcr. part.	+27	+26	+20	+15	+18	+20	+19	+16	+16	+13	+9	+8
Left Wing	+26	+17	+6	+3	+4	0	+2	+4	+1	-3	-3	-9
Normal	40	37	35	36	36	32	32	36	31	34	38	35

Source: Bjørklund & Andersen (2002). Election surveys, Danish Election Programme. Except for 1979 (N about 2000), 1988 and 1990 (N >3000), N is >4000).

Note. Entries are deviations between the proportion of manual workers among the supporters of various party groups and in the entire sample ("normal"). Only voters belonging to the labour force (but 1966 including housewives classified according to their husband's position).

So far, the data more than confirms Alesina & Glaeser's predictions. However, there is one problem with their theory: The assumption that the new right mobilise anti-welfare sentiments or manipulate people who are positive towards the welfare state to support another political programme. As can be seen from table 11, adherents of the Danish People's Party are more supportive of the "classic" welfare arrangements more than any other party: Pensions, health care, elderly care and early retirement allowance (enabling people to retire voluntarily at the age of 60). True, adherents of the party also have more "fiscal illusions" than adherents of other parties, so when it comes to tax relief, they are more resembling centre-right voters.

**Table 11. Attitudes to welfare expenditures in Denmark 2005, by party choice. Percentage Difference Index: Proportions wanting to spend more minus proportions wanting to spend less. Percentage Points.**

Party	Public pensions	Health care	Home help	Early retirement allowance	Index (average)	Immigrants and refugees	(N)
Left wing	36	64	60	0	40	63	37
Social Dem.	52	56	79	18	51	10	117
Centre Parties	19	46	55	-34	22	37	51
Liberals + Cons.	38	46	71	-12	36	-13	193
Danish People's Party	67	66	79	36	62	-58	47

Source: Pre-election survey conducted by the author in cooperation with Ugebrevet Mandag Morgen, January 2005.

Also, if we look at aggregates (table 12), it is obvious that the increasing support for the right was not accompanied by declining support for welfare. On the contrary, in order to obtain this impressive support from working-class voters, the parties to the right had to pay a price: Namely to declare themselves to be explicitly supportive of the welfare state. In the 2005 election campaign, the government deliberately sought to eliminate any impression of difference in social programmes between the government and the Social Democrats, furthermore, declaring that no welfare reforms containing retrenchment would be carried through except in agreement with the Social Democrats; furthermore, they would not be implemented until after the next election.



**Table 12. Welfare State Attitudes, 1994-2005. Percentages and PDI's (percentage difference indexes) in favour of the welfare state.**

		Agree mostly with A	Agree mostly with B	Indifferent/ Don't know	Total	PDI (in favour of welfare state)
A: Social reforms have gone too far B: Social reforms maintained	1994	28	63	9	100	35
	1998	30	63	7	100	33
	2000	25	69	6	100	44
	2001	34	58	8	100	24
	2005	20	74	7	100	54
A: Prefer tax relief B: Prefer improved welfare services	1994	47	44	9	100	-3
	1998	41	54	5	100	13
	2000	40	55	5	100	15
	2001	45	51	4	100	6
	2005	35	61	4	100	26

\*) Wordings:

1. "First a question about government spending on social programs.

A says: 'Social reforms have gone too far. More than now, people should manage without social security and contributions from society'.

B says: 'The social reforms that have been carried through in this country, should be maintained at least at the present level'.

- Do you agree mostly with A or with B?"

2. "If it becomes possible in the long run to lower taxation, what would you prefer: ...

A: Tax relief or B: Improved public services?"

Source: 1994, 1998, 2001: Election surveys (N=2000); 2000: Welfare survey (N=1235); 2003: Mid-term survey; 2005: Pre-election survey (N=560). The 2003 and 2005 surveys were conducted by the author in cooperation with Ugebrevet Mandag Morgen and AC Nielsen AIM A/S.

Now, these data do not rule out the possibility that the parties to the right will pursue a long-term goal of rolling back the welfare state. Indeed, the Liberal Party (and not least the leading ideologue at that time, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, now prime minister) advocated a "minimal state" in the early 1990s. Stated differently: Even though the government does not pursue "programmatic retrenchment", it may still pursue "systemic retrenchment" (Pierson 1994). But any such "hidden goals" are clearly subordinated to the strategy of maintaining support from the working-class segment that keeps the government in power. And as far as the Danish People's Party is concerned, this party is much more preoccupied with overtaking the position as the "true Social Democrats" from an increasingly confused Social Democratic party that has lost its working-class roots and its sense of direction. Indeed this party is increasingly in a position to beat the Social Democrats not only on the issue of immigration but also on the issue of welfare as leading Social Democrats have become attracted by more or less neoliberal ideas of welfare reforms.

If we look at workplace relations between Danes and immigrants, we do not have much hard evidence. But in general, there appear to be few, if any, tensions. Newer data (collected by Jens Peter Frølund Thomsen, not yet published) also seems to confirm the old contact hypothesis that contacts, and in particular workplace contacts, tend to reduce negative sentiments towards immigrants.

Of course, a long-term weakening of the Social Democratic party is likely to have long-term implications for the Danish Welfare State, but at least in the short- and medium term, the right wing has not won any mandate to change the welfare state; it has won a mandate to pursue more harsh immigration policies (in particular limiting access to the country), but it has only won this mandate by issuing quite strong welfare guarantees.

### **The costs of immigration**

Due to the low labour market participation among non-western immigrants in Denmark, immigration is quite costly – more than in most other welfare states. This also means that there could potentially be a competition for welfare which could manifest itself as “welfare chauvinism” among those who are dependent on welfare.

However, in the Danish case, there is virtually nothing to confirm such assumptions. In the first place, there is no association whatsoever between labour market position or “welfare dependence” and attitudes towards immigrants, or between “welfare dependence” and support for right-wing populism (Goul Andersen 2002).

Secondly, Danes (and Scandinavians) are among the least likely to fear competition on the labour market, or competition over welfare, according to the 2002 European Social Survey (table 13). They are not inclined to fear a downward pressure on wages, they are among those least inclined to think that immigration harms the economic prospects of the poor, and they typically do not think that unemployed immigrants should be sent home.

**Table 13. Competition on the labour market/competition over welfare. ESS survey, 2002. Average values on a scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).**

	Average wages brought down by immigr.	Immigration harm econ. prospects of the poor	Unemployed immigrants should be sent home
Sweden	3.41	3.25	3.69
Norway	3.56	3.11	3.03
Denmark	3.47	3.15	3.43
Finland	2.93	2.69	3.03
Average Scandinavia	3.34	3.05	3.29
Netherlands	3.36	2.96	2.87
Germany	2.95	2.60	2.72
UK	2.93	2.70	2.64
Italy	3.08	2.92	2.61
mean all countries	2.94	2.68	2.82

Source: European Social Survey (ESS), 2002.

However, there is a strong interest among political elites (and public policy elites) in increasing labour market participation among immigrants, and there is also widespread public acceptance of using pressure in order to bring immigrants to work. This is perhaps where we should look for sources of change. For instance, a “Welfare Commission” consisting of economists was appointed by the Danish government in 2003 in order to explore the challenges of ageing and to come up with proposals for reform. Some members of the Commission were also members of a “Social Commission” in the days of mass unemployment 1991-93. In accordance with later OECD (1994) recommendations, this commission proposed that minimum wages should be lowered in order to provide an opportunity for low-skilled workers to get a chance to get back to work. This proposal received absolutely no support in the general public, and as the long period of prosperity from 1994 reduced unemployment at least as much among the unskilled as among the skilled, without lowering minimum wages, this proposal was absolutely dead for many years. But by 2005, the Welfare Commission has revived the proposal, now framed as a measure to give low-skilled immigrants a chance of entering the labour market. With this framing, and with a weak labour movement, the proposal might have a future.

This remains purely speculative so far, but one cannot rule out the possibility that some old neoliberal proposals which have had no popular support so far, could become much more legitimate if they were framed as efforts that should get immigrants back to work. Indeed, as part of an “integration programme” adopted in the spring 2005, measures were included to remove social assistance for housewives in households where both man and wife received social

assistance and had no labour market record. This measure was directed against immigrants who were allegedly quite satisfied with a position as a housewife and had no intention of participating actively on the labour market unless they were forced to do so. Remarkably, the Social Democrats were in fact exerting pressure to make the proposal tougher. What is remarkable about this is not the increasing emphasis on the duty to work (which has a long tradition in Denmark but has been strengthened more and more since the mid-1990s). The remarkable aspect is that a *general social policy measure* was included in a package about integration of foreigners. It is difficult to tell whether the proposal would receive popular support if it was framed differently (probably it would), but at least the framing increased the possibility to carry the proposal through without resistance.

### **Work orientations**

This brings us to the last mediating path to be discussed in this paper. The Danish welfare state provides excellent protection against poverty and excellent protection for low-income people. Average compensation is not very high, but social minima are very high. For instance, the compensation rate of unemployment benefits is – in principle – 90 per cent. As the ceiling is very low, average compensation is much lower – comparable with other Northern European countries. But for low-income groups, with the least attractive job opportunities, compensation is high. Besides, duration is long: four years – and there are no seniority requirements: The four years applies to anybody who is eligible (although supplementary requirements about education have been introduced for younger people).

The dark side is of course that economic incentives to work are small, and this has been the concern of many economic analyses (e.g. Ministry of Finance 2002, 2004). However, it is equally well documented that this does not constitute any big problem as non-financial employment commitment is unusually strong in Scandinavia – and in Denmark it is the strongest in any country (Svallfors et al. 2001; Goul Andersen et al. 2003). Apart from a strong “protestant” work ethic, there are also many other non-economic incentives to work, including fulfilment of social needs, and indeed self-realisation. It is also well-documented that these incentives are particularly strong in Denmark, due to a rather “progressive” workplace culture (Goul Andersen et al. 2003; Goul Andersen 2003b). In short, the tacit cultural precondition of the Danish welfare state is a strong employment commitment and a strong instinct to provide for oneself.

The question is of course whether this employment commitment is equally strong among immigrants. If not, it could undermine the cultural precondition of the welfare state and force the welfare state to rely more on economic incentives. By and large, we have only anecdotal evidence on “welfare dependency” including “clientilistic” or “demanding” forms of behaviour. The

only data available so far are from a country-wide survey of long-term unemployed conducted in 1999, but it included only 62 respondents with a mother tongue that did not belong to the languages spoken in the EU area and Norway. Based on this sample, the results did not indicate any difference in work orientations, but admittedly, better data are required to test this.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 14. Work orientations, by mother tongue.**

	Danish/ language spoken in EU	Others
Want a job	81 %	85 %
Looked actively for a job	71 %	73 %
Willing to move for a job	25 %	37 %
Willing to take job in another industry	20 %	36 %

## Conclusions

Immigration certainly constitutes a challenge to European Welfare States in many respects. Labour market marginalisation among immigrants is widespread, and there is obviously a risk that an underclass of immigrants could emerge. It is also plausible that the European welfare states are built on the basis of cultural homogeneity and a shared national identity, and that racial/ethnic diversity is one of the key factors that explain the differences between the welfare state in Europe and the US.

However, it does *not* follow, that multiculturalism will undermine the European welfare states. There is the crucial question of temporal order. Inserting multiculturalism into an institutionalised welfare state has different consequences than institutionalising welfare in a multicultural society. Testing the “simple” culture hypothesis on Denmark – presumably a “worst case” in terms of political mobilisation of anti-immigration sentiments granting a majority to the right (for the first time since 1920) – did not provide any confirmation of the hypothesis. Attitudes towards supporting immigrants were rather negative, but they were also very policy-sensitive. After the tightening of access to the country, attitudes have softened considerably as far as the economic aspects are concerned. Securing integration of immigrants is considered among the most important tasks of government. And the increasing saliency of immigration among voters reflects more and more solidarity

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<sup>4</sup> Even among 24 married respondents receiving social assistance (=no short-term incentives to work), 62 per cent have looked actively for a job within the last month – at least as much as among *all* Danes.

concerns. By 2005, those who are concerned about immigration even hold slightly more positive attitudes than those who are not concerned.

Moving to the question of the impact of immigration on the labour movement, it is true that in the Danish case, this issue has contributed to something resembling a collapse of working-class support for Socialist parties. Working-class support has been captured by the parties to the right who have deliberately competed with the Social Democrats over this segment of voters. And the Social Democratic Party has been confused about strategies (apparently to a large degree because it has lacked an adequate understanding of the situation – unlike the Liberal Party and the Danish People’s Party). However, even though these parties (or their predecessors) used to be very critical of the welfare state, they have not managed to mobilise anti-welfare attitudes, nor have they sought to do so. They have recognised that there was a price to be paid for remaining in office, and to the disappointment of Liberal ideologues, the Liberal party has indirectly contributed to mobilise pro-welfare sentiments. The party has largely abstained from programmatic retrenchment but has exploited some opportunities to make systemic retrenchment that may perhaps have long-term effects. Still, it has basically accepted that there was a price to be paid for maintaining working-class support.

For the Danish People’s Party, the situation is somewhat different. Its long-term strategy is not to remain a protest party, and hardly even a right-wing party. Another possibility is much more appealing, namely to become a *guardian* of social democratic welfare ideals and perhaps even the successor of the “old” Social Democratic Party. This strategy is flexible, and it is of course dictated by the Danish context. But it is no accident that the party has been so successful and has been able to maintain a quite stable support. This could indicate that a similar strategy is open to sister parties in other countries (if they act in a self-interested manner). At any rate, the assumption that these parties will use anti-immigration sentiments as a vehicle for anti-welfare policies is presumably wrong, not only in the Danish case, but more generally. Finally, it is worth noticing that the mobilisation of the right in Denmark has been accompanied by mobilisation of pro-welfare sentiments – *and* that Danes are not by any comparative standards inclined to regard immigrants as competitors for job or for welfare. Basically, it is not a mobilisation of hatred but rather a mobilisation of worries (and indeed prejudices) – one could say in Ulrich Bech’s terms that immigration is the new risk of the right wing in “risk society” just like the environment and other issues are the risks of the left.

This concern about risks also includes a concern about the economic costs of immigration. Given the prosperous Danish economy, however, this is currently more a matter of elite concern than a matter of mass concern. At the same time, immigration provides opportunities for a new framing of old social policy goals among policy elites – inside and outside government. This is perhaps where we should look for potentials for institutional change. Another issue (which is

more narrowly related to the Danish or Scandinavian welfare state) is the question whether immigrants share the strong employment commitment that is a tacit foundation of the Danish welfare state, or whether there are potentials for a “dependency culture” among immigrants. No doubt, this would rather be an effect of poverty than a cause of poverty (as American neo-liberals or neo-conservatives would have it). But alongside other tendencies towards accumulation of multidimensional deprivation among immigrants, this is of course an instance where there are quite some potential for change.

However, I will suggest that as long as the welfare state maintains its universal character – “from all of us to all of us” – there are no real dangers that cultural diversity will constitute a serious threat to welfare state legitimacy in the advanced European welfare states. If welfare is a matter of payment from “us” to “*those people*” (as the first American president Bush phrased it), this will inevitably raise a number of critical questions about the deservingness of “those people” – are they like “us”, do “we” have any obligation towards “them”, could “they” do more by themselves, etc.? Undoubtedly, such questions will tend to be more critical, the more culturally deviant this group of welfare recipients are. But in an institutional welfare state where there is no real distinction between “them” and “us”, this is supposedly much less important. This also means that where we should be really observant is about the institutions of the welfare state. There have been strong forces advocating a more residual or targeted welfare state, sometimes even based on the argument that it would enable society to do much more for those “really in need”. Since Titmuss, the most widely shared belief among welfare researchers is that this is by no means the case – that “welfare for the poor” inevitably ends up as “poor welfare”. This may be aggravated by cultural diversity but as long as the welfare state avoids this slide (which it might indeed enter for many other reasons than immigration), it seems more likely that the welfare state will make it possible to mobilise solidarity with immigrants, than the presence of immigrants will undermine the welfare state.

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