Support for the Danish Social Democratic Party 1924–39 — Growth and Response*

PALLE SVENSSON
University of Aarhus

1. Introduction

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The period studied was characterized by stability of several fundamental structures in the Danish political system. After North Slesvig was reunited with Denmark in 1920, the Danish political community reached a lasting shape in the Danish national state. By the Constitution of 1915 all special requirements for voting were abolished, and universal suffrage was introduced. The new electoral laws of 1915 and 1920 introduced proportional representation and divided the country into a new system of constituencies. For the *Folketing* (Lower House), the voting age was reduced to 25. All these environmental structures relevant for the support of the Social Democratic party remained unchanged during a period that appropriately can be considered to have lasted until 1939, since the political system was changed fundamentally by the German occupation and the national coalition government in 1940.[1]

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sive annual report (*Beretning*). Because these reports and the records from the party congresses (*Protokol*) are the main sources for this paper, I chose 1924 as a starting point.[2]

The years 1924 and 1939 both represent important milestones in the development of the Social Democratic party in Denmark. In 1924, the steady growth at the elections to the *Folketing* had made the party the largest in the country, and, as a result, the first socialist government was formed. However, this steady growth stopped in 1939. That year the decline at the election to the *Folketing* and the defeat at the referendum for a new Constitution[3] signaled the beginning of a new period in which the Social Democrats had to share the same conditions as the other parties, with shifting ups and downs at the elections to the *Folketing*. The time of triumphal progress had ceased. It is the period between these milestones that will be analyzed.

Up to 1939 it was commonly believed within the party that it was steadily expanding towards gaining an absolute majority in the electorate and in the *Folketing*. But it was not in itself sufficient that the party could continuously win and keep parliamentary seats. It can be hypothesized that, when the Social Democratic party considered itself to be a steadily expanding party, an interruption of the progress or events of the party or its environment threatening this progress might cause changes in its behavior.

The analysis of such changes in party behavior will in this paper be confined to the ways in which the Social Democratic party used the party membership in responding to disturbances.

2. Approach

It is my intention in this paper to perceive a political party – the Danish Social Democratic party – as a parapolitical system and to apply Eastonian systems analysis[4] as an analytical framework for the study of the support for this party.
To Easton,

> the question that gives coherence and purpose to a rigorous analysis of political life as a system of behaviour is as follows. How do any and all political systems manage to persist in a world of both stability and change? Ultimately the search for an answer will reveal what I have called the life processes of political systems – those fundamental functions without which no system could endure – together with the typical modes of response through which systems manage to sustain them.[5]

He defines the political system as 'those interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated for a society'.[6] What distinguishes a political system from all other systems of behavior are the two *essential variables* of political life:[7] the

allocations of values for a society and the relative frequency of compliance with them, i.e. the acceptance of these allocations as 'authoritative' by most of the members, at least most of the time. As long as the system does keep its essential variables operating within their critical range, some kind of a system can be said to persist.[8] But when these variables are disturbed to the extent that they are in danger of being pushed beyond their critical range, the system is threatened by stress.[9]

According to Easton, 'political systems may be identified at different levels of inclusiveness, from the parapolitical system of a voluntary organization to a municipality, province or state, national unit, and various kinds of international systems',[10] and he makes it clear that *he* chooses to deal only with societal political systems: 'we have seen that political life may be described as a set or system of interactions defined by the fact that they are more or less related to the authoritative allocation of values for a society. Although similar allocations occur within organizations, I shall find it useful to include within our range of theoretical concern only societal political systems rather than parapolitical systems. *However, much of our conceptual structure might apply equally well, with the necessary modifications, to parapolitical systems of organizations'.*[11]

As Easton emphasizes, the application of systems analysis to political systems other than the political system as such, e.g. democratic political systems,[12] requires modifications according to the definition of the political systems; 'if we were directing our attention to an analysis of varying classes of systems, such as democracies, we would redefine the essential variables to include whatever characteristic patterns of political relationships we associated with this kind of system'.[13]

A corresponding argument could be put forward with regard to parapolitical systems. When the defining functions or variables are stated and the essential variables redefined, it should be possible to work with questions and problems equivalent to those of David Easton: how does this parapolitical system manage to persist in a world of both stability and change? Which disturbances stress it? How does the parapolitical system respond to stress? And so forth.

When a political party is perceived as a political system and the analytical framework of Eastonian systems analysis is applied, the central problem for analysis becomes the persistence of this parapolitical system in its interaction with its environment. Just as the Eastonian systems analysis attaches small importance to the study of the internal structure and process of the political system,[14] so these phenomena will not be the focus of analysis when the systems approach is modified for the study of a political party.[15] But, whereas Easton links up the persistence view with stress,[16] it will in this study also comprise *disturbances* that might threaten the continued progress of the party.

As mentioned above, the Social Democratic party considered itself to be a party in steady growth. For this reason it may be hypothesized that, even if the persistence of the party was not exposed to stress, disturbances threatening the steady growth might provoke a response.

The first thing that one must do when modifying the systems analysis for the study of a political party is to determine what is characteristic for political parties in contrast to all other parapolitical systems.

In this paper the definition of a political party proposed by Erik Rasmussen, relating to the definition of the political system by David Easton, will be used: 'a party is an organization which strives to gain and keep positions of power which allow it to influence the authoritative allocations of values for a society'.[17] This definition is not claimed to be exhaustive; it is rather an indication of the minimal requirements put forward to label an organization a political party.

David Easton states the difference between political and parapolitical systems by emphasizing that parapolitical systems are concerned only with problems of authoritative allocations within the group or organization; the range of problems is narrower and the powers available are more limited than those arising in the political system of the society.[18]

When *a political party* is perceived as a parapolitical system, the essential variables or fundamental functions must be redefined. They can be identified as follows: it is *essential*

(1) that decisions are made that allocate values for an organization (the political party),
(2) that these decisions are authoritative, i.e. are accepted as binding by 'the members'[19] of the party, at least most of them, most of the time, and
(3) that this organization strives to gain and keep positions of power that allow it to influence the authoritative allocations of values *for the society* – usually in accordance with the general aims of the party, which might be set out in the program of the party.

Disturbances from the parapolitical system itself or its environment might affect the parapolitical system so that these essential variables are pushed beyond their critical range – e.g. a political party's possibilities to gain positions of power.

It is necessary for a political party's persistence in relation to its environment that the support of the citizens does not fall below a certain minimum level. This holds true both with regard to the ability of the party to make decisions and with regard to its ability to have these decisions accepted as binding but also, and perhaps especially, with regard to the goal that the party has set for winning and keeping positions of power.

In this connection Easton's distinction between *overt* and *covert* support[20] is of special interest. Whereas the covert support for a political party may be important because it expresses the possibilities of the party to increase its support, it is the *overt* support that involves the most immediate consequences with regard to the continued progress of the party. Thus it is not of much help that many citizens hold a sympathetic attitude towards the party if these attitudes are not expressed in a way that contributes to the party's winning and keeping positions of power. Therefore, the attention of this paper is concentrated on the overt support for

political parties. In effect, several parties' mutual competition for the citizens' *overt* support does show that a party's persistence is threatened when the party is unable to transform its covert support into overt support.

An individual can express his support for a party in many different ways, but two kinds of overt support are especially of vital importance to the party: (1) The *voting support,* i.e. the votes cast for the party at public elections, is of direct importance for the party to win and keep positions of power. (2) The *membership support*[21] is of indirect importance, but, for a political mass party, support in the form of membership may be anticipated to be decisive for the resources available to the party in its endeavors to win and keep positions of power.[22]

Voting and membership support represent different degrees of identification with the party and acceptance of its outputs.[23] Whereas voting support only indicates acceptance of the party's policies and candidates by intermittent secret votes, the membership support is more binding and can therefore be viewed as a higher degree of support for the party.

Since voters and members who cannot accept the outputs of the parties *qua* voters and members are free to withdraw their overt support from the party, it seems defensible to operationalize the two degrees of overt support for the party according to the formal criteria: voting and membership.

The members of the political system can support a political party in different ways, which, however, in a representative democratic system must manifest themselves in the greatest possible voting support if they are to contribute to the persistence of the party.

Since the Danish Social Democratic party will use legal means only, the winning of power can be implemented exclusively by participation in general, public elections. In this paper the participation in elections to the *Folketing* is examined. After the introduction of the parliamentary system, the parties' position in the *Folketing* alone decided the formation of government.

For a political mass party the resources provided by the membership support are vital, and it could be hypothesized that a mass party would react against disturbances threatening its steady growth in voting support by a regulation of the membership support. Two kinds of regulation are possible. The party could increase the resources provided by the members either by enrolling additional members or by using resources from the present members more efficiently.

The first kind of regulation would be an *extension* of the membership support, quite in accordance with Duverger's characterization of the activities in the local party organizations of a mass party:[24] 'the branch is extensive and tries to enroll members, to multiply their number, and to increase its total strength. It does not despise quality, but quantity is the most important of considerations'.

The second kind of regulation would be an *intensification* of membership support, which could possibly take different forms, e.g. increased participation, greater discipline, or greater economic contributions.

An analysis of political parties' reactions to disturbances is of course a vast subject; in this paper it is my intention to look only at the response of the Danish

Social Democratic party in connection with *membership support* during the 1920s and 1930s. But before carrying out this analysis, I shall describe in some detail the development of support for the Danish Social Democratic party in this period.

3. The Development of Voting and Membership Support

When making a quantitative analysis of the development of voting support for the Danish Social Democratic party 1924–39, it is necessary to operationalize the term 'voting support'.

The commonest measures of voting support for a political party at elections to the *Folketing* are the *number of votes* for the party and *voting turnout for the party in percent of all votes cast*. The voting support for the Social Democratic party is shown in Table I.[25]

Table I. Voting Support for the Social Democratic Party 1924–39 in Number of Votes and Per Cent of the Votes Cast

Year	Number of votes	Percent of the votes cast
1924	469,949	36.6
1926	497,106	37.2
1929	593,191	41.8
1932	660,839	42.7
1935	759,102	46.1
1939	729,619	42.9

The time sequence of this table shows how the progress in voting support for the party was unbroken until the election to the *Folketing* in 1939 and how this election stopped the development of the party towards an absolute majority of the votes cast.

Another operationalization that may seem more appropriate in connection with overt support for a political party from its environment would be *voting strength*, which is the votes of the party in relation to the whole electorate. Fig. 1 shows the party's voting strength.[26]

When the number of Social Democratic votes is compared in this way with the whole electorate, the defeat at the election of 1939 seems to be greater than when the number of votes or percentage of the votes cast is used. When the figures are presented as in Table I, the result of the 1939 election seems to be only a small loss and a check to the party progress, since the Social Democratic party at this time had almost 70,000 more votes and a slightly higher voting turnout than in 1932. When looking at the *voting strength* in Fig. 1, however, the Social Democratic party seems to end up at the level of the 1929 election or, perhaps, at a level between the elections of 1929 and 1932. After the party's failure in the election of
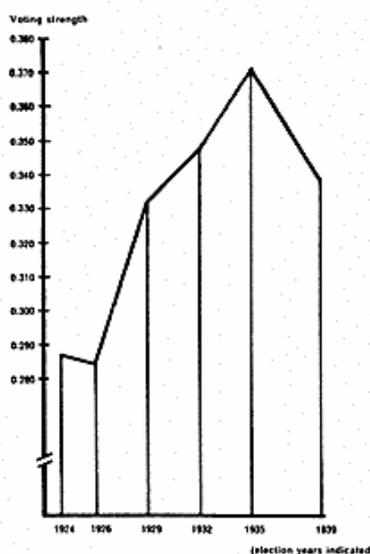
Figure 1. Voting Support for the Social Democratic Party 1924–39 in Voting Strength

1945 it remained at the same level throughout most of the post-war period; only the election in 1960 gave the party a voting strength that reached 0.360.[27]

The election to the *Folketing* in 1926 also looks somewhat different when stated in terms of voting strength. After its first period in power, 1924–26, the party made progress in absolute figures as well as in the percent of votes cast, but nevertheless it lost two seats. Even though this loss might be explained by the effect of the election law – the Agrarian Liberals were overrepresented, and the Social Democrats, among others, were underrepresented when compared with a completely proportional representation – it can be seen from Fig. 1 that the Social Democratic party's voting strength decreased because an increase in the number of votes of 27,000 could not make up for the increase of the electorate during the period 1924–26. Thus there is good reason to maintain that the *Folketing* election of 1926 means a check to the until then uninterrupted progress of the Social Democratic party.

Although it can be hypothesized that the voting support of a political party to a limited extent expresses the voters' acceptance of and support for the policies of the party, this acceptance and support are more concrete as far as membership support is concerned. Membership of a party requires a regular, personal reflection and confirmation by payment of subscription fees several times a year. Therefore membership support can be considered as a kind of support that involves a higher degree of identification with the party.

The commonest way of presenting membership support for political parties is either the *number of members* or the number of members as a percentage of the number of votes for the party (the *membership ratio*). These numbers were also used by the Social Democratic party as a measure of the development and strength of the party organization. The membership support for the Social Democratic party is shown in Table II.

Table II. The Membership Support for the Social Democratic Party 1924–39, in Number of Members and Membership Ratio[28]

Year	Number of members	Membership ratio (%)
1924	143,203	30.5
1925	146,258	31.1
1926	144,346	29.0
1927	148,138	29.8
1928	148,786	29.9
1929	162,859	27.5
1930	171,073	28.8
1931	173,890	29.3
1932	179,579	27.2
1933	190,070	28.8
1934	191,995	29.1
1935	195,142	25.7
1936	191,424	25.2
1937	199,283	26.3
1938	198,836	26.2
1939	206,995	28.4

Throughout the period examined the number of members increased. Especially from 1929 on the number of members increased, the heaviest increase taking place during the years 1929–33. The decrease in 1936 was probably due to the rise in the subscription fee, but generally the number of members increased only slightly after 1933.

The membership ratio indicates that every third or fourth Social Democratic voter was a party member in this period; however, a falling tendency can be traced. The progress in the number of Social Democratic votes (up to and including 1935) involves a falling membership ratio in the election years (apart from 1939), and the increase in the number of members between the elections could not make up for this. The Social Democratic party could not organize the new voters to the same extent as previously; this might indicate that these new voters belonged to categories of the population who would vote for the party but would not support the party more strongly by becoming members.

When membership support is viewed as one of the means by which the citizens in their political role can give overt support to a political party, these methods of presentation are, however, not the most appropriate. The absolute number of members may in itself be interesting, but it becomes important only when it is related to all citizens in their political role: the electorate. In Fig. 2 the Social Democratic *membership strength* is shown as the number of members in proportion to the whole electorate.[29]

In this figure it is seen that after the decrease in 1926 the Social Democratic membership strength increased up to the middle of the 1930s, and then it became stable; however, for the whole period there is an increase of from 0.087 to 0.096, i.e. almost every tenth of all electors gave the Social Democratic party this kind of overt support.
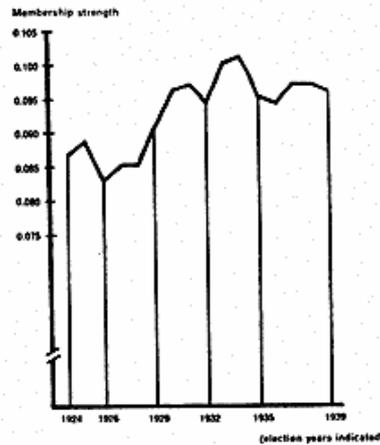
Figure 2. Membership Support for the Social Democratic Party 1924–39 in Membership Strength

It is only to be expected that the membership strength decreases in the election years, because in these years the number of members is related to the increased electorate, whereas between the elections the number of members is related to the electorate registered at the previous election. The only exception to this is 1929, with the greatest increase in the absolute number of members of the period examined – approximately 14,000 additional members. This increase in membership support was so considerable that it even made up for the increase in the electorate that year.

If only the election years are considered, it can be seen that the membership strength decreased from 1924 to 1926 and then increased from one election year to another, but only insignificantly so from 1932 to 1939.

Membership support for the Social Democratic party during the period examined reached its height in 1933 and 1934, and the party could not reach this level of strength after the election of 1935.

4. Regulation of Membership Support as a Response to Disturbances

The events that might threaten the progress of the Social Democratic party can be categorized as follows: (1) events in the party itself (the parapolitical system); (2) events in the surrounding political system; (3) events in the intrasocietal environment of the political system; and (4) events in the extrasocietal environment of the political system.

For a systems analytical approach these categories are logically exhaustive; however, only a few events within each category will be treated in connection with the description of the periods during which the Social Democratic progress may be said to have been threatened. It is not my intention in this paper to give a complete description of the party's responses to these disturbances. The descrip-

tion will be concentrated on the Social Democratic party's character as a political mass party, and therefore only the party's attempts at regulating its membership support will be examined.

Concerning *the party itself*, its solidarity and the unity of the party congresses were emphasized repeatedly. Even if it is characteristic for any party to convey such a unity as long as possible, there has not, after the break-away of the youth section in 1919 and during the authoritative leadership of Stauning, been any such serious breaches of the party solidarity that could threaten the progress of the party.[30]

During the period studied there were, however, two incidents during which the Social Democratic progress was threatened by disturbances from the *party's environment*.

At the 1926 election to the *Folketing* there was a decrease in voting strength and number of seats obtained, even if the absolute figures increased. Before the election there was, within the party, great optimism and confidence in an enormous victory. In the light of this, the election result was a disappointment, and the question was raised within the party of whether the Social Democratic progress had been stopped.[31]

Already the previous year the municipal elections had been disappointing for the Social Democrats, and the disturbances that the party found significant in this interruption of its progress can be traced back to the years before 1926 – partly to the Danish *political* system, where the Social Democratic minority government was unable to pass its bills and where in 1925 there were troubles on the labor market and discord among the trade unions, and partly to the intrasocietal environment, where the *economic* system was afflicted with an exchange crisis, deflation, and great unemployment.[32]

With its great victory at the *Folketing* election of 1929, the Social Democratic party resumed its previous line of progress and thereby ended the first period of disturbances that might threaten the progress of the party.

During the early thirties the Social Democratic party and its constant progress were, however, again exposed to disturbances from the environment.

Even though it was in power, the Social Democratic party progressed at the 1932 election to the *Folketing*, and, even if this progress could not be compared with that of 1929, neither absolutely nor relatively, the 1932 election cannot be interpreted as a break in the party progress. There were, however, other events in the party's environment that might involve disturbances.

Thus, the Communists' increase at the polls and gain of two seats in the 1932 election changed the Danish *political* system in a way that might influence the expansion of the Social Democratic party. Since this competing working-class party had had an unimportant and declining voting support at the elections throughout the twenties and had several times been on the point of dissolution for internal reasons, the Social Democratic party could previously almost ignore the Communist party as a possible source of stress or disturbances.[33] However, the Communist progress in the 1932 election changed this situation, a change that must

also be viewed in the light of the Danish political systems' intra- and extra-societal environment.

> It is of special interest for the working class to see that the Communists are now also represented in the Danish Parliament. For our foreign fellow-men this is no news, and the terrible crisis and long-lasting unemployment period in connection with a consistently mendacious and dirty campaign among the unemployed have now opened the gates of Parliament to these splitting men of the working class.[34]

The economic crisis of those years was evidenced by, among other things, the highest unemployment figures ever seen in Denmark.[35] In a situation of Social Democratic government participation and its ensuing share of responsibility for the economic policy, such circumstances might be disturbing for the Social Democratic party and its continued progress. Added to this were the events of the extra-societal environment. Especially the developments in Germany 1932–33 in connection with the appearance of and seizure of power by Nazism and the dissolution of the German Social Democratic party in June 1933 could, by the Danish Social Democratic party, be considered as a disturbance, even as a threat, to the persistence of the party.[36]

The Danish Social Democratic party saw the split in the German working class between Social Democrats and Communists as a contributory cause of the progress and seizure of power of Nazism.[37] Even if Danish conditions were in many ways different from the German, the Communist progress in 1932 in connection with the bad economic situation might be the start of suppression of the Danish labor movement, just as the labor movement in other parts of Europe had been suppressed.[38]

The Social Democratic success at the 1935 election to the *Folketing* and the fact that the coalition government of Social Democrats and Radical Liberals got the majority in the *Landsting* (the Upper House) the next year showed that the Social Democratic party was able to continue its line of progress, but it is questionable whether the second period of disturbances to the party progress can be said to be terminated by this. The Communists also had an increase. 'They are still an unimportant sect, however, at the same time the seeds of disunion, which out of consideration for the unity and further advance of the labour movement must be oppressed by all available means'.[39]

And the election of 1939 showed that the Social Democratic party could no longer continue its line of progress; the party suffered considerable losses both in absolute votes and in the number of seats and voting strength, whereas both the Communists and Nazis made progress.

In an investigation of the Social Democratic response to disturbances that might stop or threaten the party progress, it is, however, more interesting to know when the disturbances *set in* than to know when they stopped. I shall therefore investigate the Social Democratic party's behavior in connection with its attempts at

regulating membership support in the years after 1926 and 1932. Only these *internal* outputs will be treated and not the party's attempts at changing the environment by external outputs.[40]

Even though it is impossible to demonstrate any unambiguous interrelation between the economic trends and membership support to political parties,[41] it seems to be clear that in the Danish Social Democratic party it became more difficult to keep the old members and win new ones in times of economic difficulties and great unemployment.[42] But by improving the *agitation,* the Social Democrats thought they could meet such disturbances and thus maintain and increase membership support.

The organizing work was performed in the usual manner in the years around 1924, but the following years witnessed several new initiatives. Already in April 1926 the central board of the party discussed the agitation and organizing work, and it was decided to request all the party's branches and constituency organizations to agitate forcibly for the party. Even though such requests were common in the party, it is notable that this request was followed up during the summer by several agitation conferences for the local leaders of the party all over the country. 'The aim of these meetings was to discuss the agitation and organizing work among the local leaders, partly in order that the participants could exchange experiences and partly in order to create a still more solid cooperation between the headquarters of the party and the local leaders. The representatives of the central board especially advocated the *creation of agitator corps* in all branches and the introduction of a real *house-to-house canvassing* both in the cities and in the country during the autumn of 1926'.[43] For the first time in the party's history a country-wide canvassing was planned to enroll new members.

After the election of December 1926 and after the year 1926 had shown a decrease in the party's membership support – the planned canvassing came to nothing because of the electoral campaign – the central board appointed a committee on March 13, 1927, whose task it was 'to discuss organizing and agitation work and make a description of the practices that had proved useful till now and of possible new methods that could be regarded as recommendable. This description should give the boards of the more than 1000 branches of the party a complete survey of the duties of a branch both during election campaigns and between the elections and of the means by which these duties can be performed'.

The report of the committee[44] was presented and discussed at the Social Democratic Party Congress in 1927. The Congress's unanimous adoption of the resolution on the party's organization and agitation can be seen as the party's response to the mentioned disturbances with a view to regulating membership support. This resolution approved the submitted report as the basis of the organizing work and underlined that a powerful agitation was necessary to strengthen the party organizations further and to attract the strength necessary for the forthcoming election. The central part of the resolution reads as follows: the Congress decides 'to request the local branches to establish the best and greatest possible *agitator corps*

in all branches, both for distribution of pamphlets and for house-to-house canvassing; to order all branches *before the end of the year* to endeavour to carry through a house-to-house canvassing in order to create *a more reasonable proportion between the number of members and number of voters* and by that strengthen the party with a view to the forthcoming important campaigns . . .'[45]

With a view to the necessity of agitation, the report concluded that much remained to be done to create a really strong political organization for the party, and it made this concrete by setting as a goal the enrollment of 50,000 more members during the years 1927–31. Thus, it is clear that the party's response to the disturbances in its environment consisted of an attempt to *extend* membership support. The report, however, also mentioned the importance of more substantial club activities, where meetings and lectures could be the natural basis for information and training. This might be a goal in itself, but at the same time it served to make party membership more attractive. The profound engagement of the members in the inner life of the party was not stressed in 1927, when the focus was on the extension of membership support.

Concerning the agitator corps, the report said that the party committees in the branches would try to make as many members as possible help them, and thus there was no intention generally to create permanent organs with their own independent structure, division of labor, etc. The agitator corps had to be directed outward and were to enroll as many new members as possible.

Throughout the years 1927–28 the local groups were reorganized, and the number of members remained stable. Not until 1929 did a real increase in the number of members take place. Even though the goal of 50,000 new members and a total of 200,000 had not been reached at the Congress in 1931, the endeavors of the party to extend the membership support succeeded to the extent that during the period 1927–31 the number of members increased by 26,700 which was the greatest step forward since 1915–19.

As stated in Section 3, the number of members and the membership strength increased heavily until 1934. But at the same time the number of voters and the voting strength increased even more heavily, as is shown by a tendency towards a falling membership ratio. This meant that the input of resources provided by the party members to be used for activities such as information, agitation, and campaigning was directed towards a voter corps that was growing faster than the membership corps. If the party leadership should want to use a regulation of the party membership as a response to the disturbances in the environment of the party after 1932, the situation invited to some new methods.

Already in 1932–33 the party reacted to the Communist progress at the election of 1932. In the annual report it was said that the Communist progress should not be surprising 'in a period when the conditions of hundred-thousands of people are poorer than any time after the war . . . Possibilities will still be favourable for Communist agitation as long as conditions are not bettered, but everything must be done to *counteract this agitation* and *obstruct the disruption* which it involves for the Danish labour movement'.[46]

It was said about the means that 'it is primarily a question of *activating the members*. The goal must be to make them really participate, take an active interest in the movement they are affiliated. Today the possession of a party card is not enough. Now, the goal is not passive support, but *active* participation by all members'.[47]

The developments in Germany also produced the need for something new in the Social Democratic party: a more active attitude on the part of the members and greater efficiency in the organizing work.

The agitator corps that the Party Congress of 1927 had recommended the establishment of had been given the task partly to distribute pamphlets during campaigns, arrange election office, etc. and partly, by a persistent and systematic agitation, to recruit members to the local organizations and subscribers to the Social Democratic press.

However, these agitator corps consisted only of the most energetic, and perhaps especially the young, members who – when they were appealed to – were willing to devote some evenings or Sundays to the sake of the party. Even if experience showed that a lot could be done by these agitator corps, their activity was, as mentioned, first and foremost designed to extend membership support. In the early 1930s the Social Democratic party began, however, to a wider extent to deal with the 'inner life' of the party, because the former perception of the very limited duties of the organizations was on the wane.

On the average there were in each branch six or seven events every year – members' meetings, general assemblies, celebrations, etc. – but only a very few of the members were really active. Most just paid their subscription and, as a rare exception, participated in the events. 'The proper core of the party: members of the committees, agitators, participators in the general assemblies is a small fraction. Both in the Capital and in the country there are complaints of the lacking activity among the members and the need for agitators. The crucial question is thus still to increase the number of members but at the same time to increase the active participation of these members'.[48]

The above-mentioned disturbances in the party's environment were also part of the background why the party congress of 1935 took up the whole Social Democratic labor movement's agitation and propaganda methods for a thorough and critical examination, with a view to a reorganization.

In the opinion of the appointed congress committee it was now quite wrong to believe that the Danish Communists could be ignored or smothered: 'It is in the long run dangerous for us to remain passive to their exploitation of and refinedly planned speculation among *the non-organized, the people dissatisfied with their work, the unemployed, the young people, and the students*'.[49]

The Communists and the youth organization of the Conservatives are mentioned by the committee as the two 'main enemies' in the cities, whose activities and aggressive policy had been increasing during the years up to 1936. In 1935 the Nazis were still in their first stage and might seem harmless, but, taught by the fact that the German Social Democratic party had probably begun taking Nazism

seriously too late, the congress committee also took this party in consideration as a possible source of disturbances.[50]

Thus, in the early 1930s there were disturbances from two sides to the Social Democratic party and its continued progress, and the result of the discussions was that 'the congress committee recommends that the party and the trade unions co-operate in order to create an institution which shall have as its main task *to organize the campaign against Nazism and Communism in Denmark*. The work has also been performed previously, but not so systematically and not to the extent to which our opponents now force us to perform it'.[51]

This was to be done by, among other things, a reorganization of the party's agitator corps with a view to increasing the number of really active collaborators in the branches. The committee proposed that the anti-Communist and anti-Nazi work should be done in the organizations of the party and of the trade unions by a renewal of the methods of agitation and by an enlargement of the substance of this agitation.

The party congress decided to go through with this plan,[52] and on September 2, 1935, a joint meeting of the executive committees of the Danish Council of Trade Unions, The Workers Joint Organization in Copenhagen, and the Social Democratic Union decided to establish the H.I.P.A. (Hovedorganisationernes Informations- og Propagandaafdeling, The Information and Propaganda Service of the Main Organizations) whose duties, according to the proposal of the congress committee, were '(1) to collect, edit and distribute anti-Nazi and anti-Communist material, (2) to be consultative as to the propaganda of the organizations, (3) to train agitators, arrange courses and briefing conferences, (4) to cooperate with trade unions, branches, youth sections, and especially with the trade union clubs and the party's agitator corps, (5) to carry through a reorganization of the party's agitator corps'.[53]

Point 5 resulted in the proposal to establish *active groups:*

> The aim of these active groups is to find an outlet for that need of a *con-tinuous* activity which is felt by thousands of the party members, and to find such an outlet for this need that will serve the progress of the party and become a pleasure for the individual member. We expect that these working methods – which really are not new, but only represent a more efficient utilization of old and well-tried forms – will be taken up in every branch and that this may lead to a good result for the Social Democratic labour movement.[54]

Whereas the existing agitator corps had been used only at the annual canvassing campaign, during election campaigns, etc., the active groups were to be permanently working organs, consisting only of members who really were able and willing to perform an especially active and organized task and who were available in every respect and at any time: 'There are made heavy demands on the members of the active group; therefore it must *not* be a mass organization; it has to consist

of an *elite* that is ready unreservedly and at any time to go through fire and water for the Social Democratic Party. Thereby *admission becomes a recognition* and *membership a point of honour* for the party's great staff of active fellow combatants'.[55]

The active group of each branch was to have its own management and administration but should in other respects be a subsidiary and serving organ in relation to the party. Its members were under an obligation to appear at the regular group meetings, and they could specialize according to an internal division of labor. At all great agitation campaigns all members of the group should be available, and they were to constitute the permanent staff of agitators of the Social Democratic party.

Without examining more closely the working methods of the active groups, it can already be seen from this description that the party's response to the disturbances during the years after 1932 was of a different nature than in the 1920s. Whereas in the twenties its endeavors were aimed at what is here called *extending* the membership support, the party tried in the thirties to combine this with an *intensification* of the membership support, since by the establishment of special organs the party tried to engage and activate some of the members to a greater extent than ever before. Whereas in the twenties the party tried to secure its continued progress by procuring *more resources* (by extending membership support), it sought in the thirties to secure the progress by opposing the disturbances in its environment by means of *a more effective exploitation* of the resources available (by intensification of membership support).

Whereas the establishment of the active groups was an expression of a more intensive use of the *personal* resources, the decision of the party congress in 1935 to increase the subscription fee can be seen as an attempt at creating a greater use of the *economic* resources that the membership support represented for the party.

The extension is, as mentioned, in accordance with Duverger's characteristic of the activities in the local party organizations of a mass party. The intensification of membership support in connection with the establishment of active groups, on the other hand, is at several points equivalent to the Communist party's organizing of members in cells. Unlike the cell, the active group was organized within the party organizations and not at the places of work, but, like the cells, there was a limited admission by selection to the active group, whose duties were of a permanent character and at a very high activity level.[56] Just like Duverger stresses, 'the choice of the cell as the basis of organization entails a profound change in the very concept of a political party. Instead of a body intended for the winning of votes, for grouping the representatives, and for maintaining contact between them and their electors, the political party becomes an instrument of agitation, of propaganda, of discipline, and, if necessary, of clandestine action . . .',[57] so were the active groups organized in order to be instruments of agitation, propaganda, and discipline, but, however, hardly to be an underground movement!

Because the establishment of H.I.P.A. and the active groups can be seen as the party's response to the threat against the party progress that certain parties,

especially the Communists but also the Nazis, represented, it is interesting to note that this response can be characterized as a structural differentiation involving 'selective tendencies' in a mass party.

Even though Duverger may be right that no other party succeeded in copying the cell structure, since only the Communist party uses the cell as a basic element,[58] the Danish Social Democratic response of intensifying membership support by means of active groups may to a certain extent be said to express a 'contagion' of the more efficient organization forms that the opponents of the Social Democratic party used in the 1930s.

What effect this reorganization had on the membership support and voting support of the Social Democratic party is another question, which may be hard to answer. At any rate, it was *not sufficiently effective*. The active groups, which especially made progress in the cities, where the party's membership support already was big, did not succeed in increasing the membership support of the party. On the contrary, the membership support was generally stagnant towards the end of the 1930s, and progress was made only in districts with small membership support, so that the existing differences were equalized. In 1939 there were only 117 active groups and 212 permanent agitator corps – thus the reorganization had been effective only in approximately one fourth of the branches.[59]

At the election to the *Folketing* in 1939, when the Social Democratic progress came to a standstill, both the Communists and the Nazis made progress among the voters, and both parties obtained representation in the *Folketing,* with three seats.

But, as has been mentioned,[60] it cannot be told how the situation would have been *without* these active groups.

5. Conclusion

The overt support for the Social Democratic party during the period examined was an expression of support for a party that demanded decisive changes in the established allocation of values for the Danish society but which accomplished this by making reformatory and pragmatic demands and by giving support to the Danish political community and to the basic values and norms of the regime.

Since 1924 the Social Democratic party had been the largest political party in Denmark. Within the party it was generally believed and expected that it would win the absolute majority and hence the political power, because it thought of itself as quite an exceptional party that was the only representative of the victorious labor movement and which would therefore continuously be progressing at the elections to the *Folketing*. However, the progress was stopped – temporarily in 1926 and permanently in 1939.

During the period examined the leaders of the party strongly underlined the importance of the political organization and the greatest possible membership support in connection with the supply of personal and economic resources for the party.

In this paper I have made no attempt to demonstrate a *direct,* causal correlation between voting support and membership support. It has, however, been decisive for the central problems of this investigation that within the party the leaders *presupposed* such a direct correlation and considered membership support to be a possible regulator when the party's progress was threatened. In the years after 1926 the party thus attempted to extend and, after 1932, also to intensify the membership support as a response to disturbances in its environment.

As can be seen, this presentation of the overt support for the Social Democratic party has in several respects had a limited aim. At this point I shall make a few concluding remarks about the used systems analytical approach and its consequences. As a whole, it can be said to have been appropriate. On the one hand, it has probably involved a certain isolation of this discussion of the Social Democratic party as compared with the general party research, whose results have been applied only to a limited extent. On the other hand, it must be said to be important in that, by concentrating on the party's relations to its environment, the analytical framework and the persistence view – in a modified form, however – have proved useful by focusing attention on the continued progress of the Social Democratic party, the expansion of voting support, and the party's use of membership support as a regulating device in connection with disturbances in its environment.

NOTES

1. For a general introduction to the Danish political system, see Kenneth E. Miller. *Government and Politics in Denmark.* Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 1968.
2. In addition internal publications, periodicals such as *Socialisten* and *Socialdemokratiske Noter* and the official history of the party *En bygning vi rejser* (O. Bertolt, E. Christiansen, & P. Hansen, 3. vols. Copenhagen, Forlaget Fremad, 1954–55) have been extensively used. All this material is available in Arbejderbevægelsens Bibliotek og Arkiv (The Library and Archives of the Labour Movement, Copenhagen). For a more detailed examination of these documents, see my thesis, pp. 6–19.
3. A majority, comprising at least 45 % of the electorate, was required to pass a proposal for revision of the Constitution; in 1939 a majority of only 44.6 % was obtained! So the Constitution of 1915 remained in effect until 1953, cf. Miller, *op. cit.,* pp. 39–41 and 52–56.
4. David Easton. *The Political System.* New York, Knopf, 1953; 'An Approach to the Analysis of Political Systems', *World Politics* IX (3), 1957: 383–400; *A Framework for Political Analysis.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1965; and *A Systems Analysis of Political Life.* New York, John Wiley, 1965.
5. *Systems Analysis,* p. 17.
6. *Ibid.,* p. 21.
7. *Ibid.,* pp. 22–24; 'life processes', 'fundamental function' and 'essential variables' are here perceived as identical terms.
8. *Ibid.,* p. 25.
9. *Ibid.,* p. 24.
10. *Ibid.,* p. 181.
11. *Framework,* p. 74, cf. pp. 50–56. (My italics.)
12. *Ibid.,* p. 96; *Systems Analysis,* pp. 480–81.
13. *Framework,* p. 96.
14. *Systems Analysis,* p. 28 and p. 476.
15. Cf. Annick Percheron. *Revue française de science politique,* XX (1), 1970: 91; and George Laveau. *Ibid.,* XVIII (3), 1968: 445–66.

16. *Systems Analysis*, pp. 22–25.
17. Erik Rasmussen. *Komparativ Politik*, 2 vols. Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 1968, pp. 181–82.
18. *Framework*, pp. 52–56.
19. 'Members' of the party here means individuals in their party political role – below this role will be divided into a membership role and a voter role.
20. *Systems Analysis*, pp. 159–161; cf. Erik Rasmussen, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
21. 'A party member' is defined here in the same way as in M. Duverger. *Political Parties*, 3. ed. London, Methuen 1964, p. 64: 'one who signs an undertaking to the party and thereafter regularly pays his subscription', cf. *ibid.*, p. 71.
22. Duverger, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–64, 73, and 366; Leon D. Epstein. *Political Parties in Western Democracies*, New York, Praeger, 1967, pp. 242–50; and Gunnar Sjöblom. *Party Strategies in a Multiparty System*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, Political Studies No. 7, 1963, pp. 52 and 63.
23. Cf. Duverger, *op. cit.*, pp. 90–91 and 101–03.
24. Duverger, *ibid.*, p. 23.
25. *Statistiske Meddelelser*, 4th row, vol. 71, 1924, No. 1 (abbreviated 4,71,1924,1); 4,77, 1927,1; 4,83,1929,2; 4,92,1933,1; 4,99,1935,1; and 4,109,1939,1.
26. Voting Support for the Danish Social Democratic Party 1924–39 in Voting Strength

Year	Voting Strength
1924	0.287
1926	0.285
1929	0.332
1932	0.347
1935	0.371
1939	0.338

27. Ole Borre and Jan Stehouwer. *Fire Folketingsvalg, 1960–68*. Aarhus, 1968, pp. 14, 45, and 238.
28. The membership figures are obtained from the annual reports. The number of members is stated as per December 31; however, the figures for 1924 and 1925 are stated as per January 1 the following year. The number of members is stated for Denmark proper (i.e. without the Faroes), and the figures for the years 1925–30 (inclusive) have been corrected by deduction of the number of members on the Faroes, which were these years included in the Social Democratic member statistics.
29. Membership Support for the Social Democratic Party 1924–39 in Membership Strength

1924	0.087	1928	0.085	1932	0.094	1936	0.094
1925	0.089	1929	0.091	1933	0.100	1937	0.097
1926	0.083	1930	0.096	1934	0.101	1938	0.097
1927	0.085	1931	0.097	1935	0.095	1939	0.096

30. See *Beretning*, 1927, pp. 3–4; 1935, p. 15; and 1939, p. 56, as well as the comments in *Socialisten* 24 (7), 1927: 194–95 and 28 (7), 1931: 177–78 for Hans Palbo's reflections on the questions that had *previously* split the party.
31. Fred. Vedsø. 'Er vor Fremmarch stoppet?' (Has our Progress Been Stopped?), *Socialisten* 24 (1), 1927: 6–11.
32. *En bygning vi rejser*, II, pp. 92–104, 126, 139; III, p. 7; *Beretning*, 1926, pp. 4–6, 18. Cf. Erling Olsen. *Danmarks økonomiske historie siden 1750*. Studier fra København Universitet Økonomisk Institut, No. 3. Copenhagen, Gad, 1966, pp. 195–97.
33. *Beretning*, 1926, p. 17 and *Beretning*, 1929, pp. 25–26, cf. *En bygning vi rejser*, II, pp. 187–90 and 322–23.
34. The editorial of *Social-Demokraten* (the first Social Democratic newspaper), November 18, 1932. Cf. *En bygning vi rejser*, II, p. 326: 'for the Social Democratic Party they (i.e. the two first Communist representatives in the Folketing) came to act as a warning shot and a reminder that a more efficient combating of the Communists was necessary'.

35. The annual average of unemployed as a percentage of the insured labour force: in 1932, 31.7 % and in 1933, 28.8 %, *Statistisk Årbog*, 1934, p. 118; cf. Erling Olsen, *op. cit.*, p. 197.
36. *En bygning vi rejser*, II, pp. 269–72, 283, 307, and 322–23. A good impression of how the breakdown of the German Social Democratic party appeared to the Danish Social Democrats can be obtained also through *Socialisten*, vols. 28, 29, and 30, 1931–32–33, e.g. the articles by Ib Kolbjørn.
37. See the statement of the executive committee of March 1933, *Beretning*, 1933, pp. 285–87; cf. Hartvig Frisch, *Socialisten* 30 (5), 1933: 157–58.
38. Cf. Hans Hedtoft in *Socialisten* 32 (1), 1935: 3–10 and Lise Togeby. *Revisionismens betydning for det danske socialdemokratis idéudvikling fra 1890'erne til 1930'erne*. Copenhagen, 1965 (mimeographed), p. 195.
39. *Beretning*, 1935, p. 29.
40. The law against wearing uniforms of 1933 and the laws concerning unrest of 1935 may be seen as *external* outputs turned against the militant organizations which in the 1930s were among the disturbing factors to the Social Democratic progress.
41. Duverger, *op. cit.*, pp. 81 f.; cf. as far as Denmark is concerned Vagn Dybdahl. *Partier og Erhverv*. Universitetsforlaget i Aarhus, 1969, pp. 212–16.
42. *Beretning*, 1926, pp. 41–42; 1927, pp. 15–16; 1932, p. 158; and 1933, pp. 277–78. Many unemployed could not afford to pay the subscription but wanted to continue as a member of the party. Some local organizations granted these unemployed members exemption from paying the subscription, and then they were no longer included in the number of members. A general settlement through a reduction or suspension of the minimum subscription could not be agreed on at the party congress, see *Protokol for den 20.*
43. *Beretning*, 1926, pp. 38–40. (Original italics.)
44. *Organisation og Agitation*, 1927.
45. *Protokol for den 20. socialdemokratiske Partikongres*, 1927, pp. 72–74. (Original italics.)
46. *Beretning*, 1932, p. 145. (Original italics.)
47. *Ibid.*, p. 154. (Original italics.)
48. *Arbejderbevægelsens Agitation og Propaganda*, report from the congress committee on 'The Agitation Activities in the Near Future', the Social Democratic Party Congress, 1935, (marked 'Confidentially'), p. 9.
49. *Ibid.* p. 4. (Original italics.)
50. *Ibid.* pp. 6–7.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 8. (Original italics.)
52. *Protokol for den 22. socialdemokratiske Partikongres*, 1935, pp. 64 and 76; *Beretning*, 1935, p. 55; and *Vejledning*, 1936, p. 3.
53. *Arbejderbevægelsens Agitation og Propaganda*, pp. 8–9; *Beretning*, 1935, pp. 55–56; and *Protokol for den 23. socialdemokratiske Partikongres*, 1939, pp. 37–39.
54. *Vejledning*, p. 3.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 10. (Original italics.)
56. Thus, the regulations of the party strictly specify the possibilities for becoming a member; *Vejledning*, p. 11.
57. Duverger, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–36.
58. Duverger, *op. cit.*, p. 31, cf. p. 58; and Epstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 131–32. Duverger mentions, pp. 31–32, the opposition of the trade unions as a determining factor in why the socialist parties did not assume this more efficient organization form. Also in Denmark the trade union leaders feared that cells or the like would become dangerous competitors in the workplaces. Thus they were not very enthusiastic over the trade union clubs that were set up in 1932–33 in order to obstruct the Communist infiltration work in the trade unions. See *En bygning vi rejser*, II, p. 327.
59. *Beretning*, 1939, p. 73.
60. *En bygning vi rejser*, II, p. 332.