

On the Margins of Social Policy?
Union Federations and Welfare-to-work Reforms in
Denmark, Germany and the US

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Stream 9.3 European Welfare States and Labor Markets in Situations of Crises

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1. Introduction¹

The relevance of trade unions² in welfare state development is widely discussed within the social and historical sciences. Influential trade unions (e.g. in Denmark and Germany) fought for the extension of social rights (Korpi 1978, 1983). Also in the US trade unions as advocates of the poor fought for social rights (Huber/Stephens 2001). Research on welfare state expansion has always highlighted the relevance of unions as social political actors. From a theoretical perspective Walter Korpi and his power resources model is the most prominent research approach (Korpi 1978, 1983). Besides, empirical research highlighted this aspect, too. But since the financial crisis of the 1970s welfare states as well as trade unions are under severe pressure. Growing and steady unemployment and globalization on the one hand, and declining union membership on the other hand, are some of the major challenges. Welfare state retrenchment shapes the picture of welfare states after the golden age. Due to rising unemployment and numbers of social assistance recipients new strategies had been discussed in the states. A new weighting of rights and duties was the consequence. Welfare-to-work reforms are the symbol for this development. This trend also faced trade unions in their role as political actors. Welfare-to-work reforms resulted in an expansion of measures of active labor market policy (Peck 2001; Quaid 2002; Shragge 1997; Lødemel/Trickey 2000). Unions have always favored these programs. Besides, reforms brought a reduction of benefits (e.g. tougher time limits or shorter benefit duration). The historical development shows that unions fought for high social rights and benefits. Consequently, welfare-to-work reforms make it rather difficult for unions to position themselves. Besides, developments indicate another problem of modern labor organization. In times of welfare state retrenchment, it has become difficult for trade unions to influence social policy. They are less included in the process of policymaking. This change is visible in many countries (even in Northern Europe) (Jørgensen 2009). It seems that welfare state crisis and trade union crisis go hand in hand. The aim of the paper is to analyze the changing role of union federations in times of welfare state retrenchment. More specifically, the main questions can be summarized as follows: Which influence have trade union federations as power resource of the working class on the welfare-to-work reform process? Several additional questions are concerned with this main question: From a more actor-oriented perspective, it is asked: what contributes to more or less union influence in welfare state reforms? What differentiates union

¹ The paper is based on my PhD project on the same topic. It tries to summarize major findings and the main argumentation of the dissertation.

² The main focus is on union federations. If I use unions I will always mean union federations.

influence in welfare reforms during the golden era and the era of welfare state retrenchment?
Why are unions less influential in welfare state retrenchment?

From a welfare state research perspective, Denmark, Germany and the US represent the welfare regime types (Esping-Andersen 1990). The basis for this distinction is the differentiation between decommodification and stratification as the two major criteria. The US welfare model represents the liberal regime type, which is mainly characterized by the dominance of means-tested benefits, in contrast, universal benefits, and social insurance programs are rare (ibid: 26-27). The German welfare state represents the corporatist conservative regime, which is characterized by the dominance of social security. Benefits are based on the contributions based on earnings. Inequality are transformed from earnings to benefits (e.g. in case of unemployment) (ibid.: 27). Denmark represents the social democratic regime type. Universal benefits are predominant here (ibid.: 27-28). However, liberal elements and market orientation has always been important part of the Danish economy. Several researchers have pointed at the significance of the Danish and the Swedish welfare state as representatives of the Nordic model, too (Kautto et al. 1999). These differences are also predominant in the welfare-to-work reforms. These reforms are of special interest for unions as well. Unions fought for high social standards and the expansion of social rights and benefits. Welfare-to-work reforms change the understanding of welfare states and change the benefit system. The interest of unions arises out of these historical traditions.

The main aim of the paper is to analyze the role trade unions (especially trade union federations) played in welfare-to-work reforms and the reasons for the declining influence in Denmark, Germany and the US. The main argument of the paper can be summarized as follows: The diminishing role of trade unions in times of crises is a neither a single-country-phenomenon nor one-time-only-phenomenon. Welfare-to-work reforms are of special interest here because trade unions have long been important policymakers but have ignored the labor market insider-outsider problem and have thus not seen welfare-to-work workers as valuable trade union members (Ebbinghaus 2002). In order to show that this development is not only a syndrome of conservative governments and economic crisis the following criteria will have to be included in the analysis: strength of the labor movements and the mobilization of their members, structure and leadership of the organizations, political aims and representation in the policymaking process. In order to make the different stages

The paper is organized as follows: section 2, will provide a short outline of the relevant theoretical arguments and a short outline of the historical argument. In section 3, I will discuss the used criteria in a more detailed way. Afterwards, I will analyze the role union federations played in the welfare-to-work reform process (policy change). In section 5, a short analysis of the implications for the current crisis is given.

2. General Frame of the Study

A study of the influence of union federations in welfare state retrenchment is closely connected to several theoretical discussions. On the one hand, welfare state research is touched. On the other hand, union research is affected as well. In the next paragraph, I will recap the theoretical discussions mentioned. Afterwards, in a next step I will briefly recap the historical developments of union federation influence in Denmark, Germany and the US from a historical perspective.

Welfare state research on the establishment and development of welfare states intensively discussed the role of unions (Nørgaard 1997; Orloff/Skocpol 1984; Meerhaeghe 2006). It is not questioned that unions were important social policy actors. Since the crisis of the 1980s, several researches have called the significance of unions in question. Demographic change, economic globalization, rising and persistent unemployment, decreasing membership of unions and unclear political goals of unions were only some of the important challenges (Esser 1982; Sarfati 2003). It seems that the crisis of the welfare state goes hand in hand with the crisis of the union movements. Until the end of the 1990s, Denmark seemed to be an exceptional case. Union membership was comparatively high and stable.

The crisis of the welfare state, the new challenges and the new policy of the welfare state are closely linked. Welfare-to-work reforms are only one possible reaction to the new challenges. Since the reforms started, a huge variety of literature has been published on the reforms in general and the implications of these reforms (Peck 2001; Lødemel/Trickey 2000; Drøpping/Hvinden/Vik 2002; Hvinden 1999; Barbier 2004; Lamping/Schridde 2003; Merkel 2005; Mezger/West 2003; Opielka 2003). The role of the social partners was only recognized in national case studies. The German example is widely discussed because of the decisive role of the unions in the Hartz reforms or the Bündnis für Arbeit (Trampusch 2004; Hassel/Trampusch 2006). The influence of the Danish social partners is discussed especially after the turn of the

century (Jørgensen 2009). The American example is seldom recognized mostly because of the comparatively weak influence of unions in welfare state history (Fletcher 1997; Fletcher/Hurd 2001). The paper will compare the role of the unions in the reform process and thus contributes to fill the gap of comparative studies in this field. The best way to do such an analysis is to remember traditional approaches in social policy discourse. The power resources model provides inspiring ideas on how social partners affect welfare state development (Olsen/O'Connor 1998).

In contrast to institutionalist approaches (e.g. Tsebelis 2002) proponents of the *power resources model* emphasize the significance of actor constellations and political variables of state activity and policy outcomes. Organized Interests (e.g. parties or interest groups) have a key position in this approach. The content of policy is determined by the economic and political distribution of power. The contrasting interests of "Arbeit" and „Kapital“ are the basis for the mobilization of power resources. In times of welfare state expansion, trade unions played a major role in the political process. They fought for the expansion of social rights and benefits. Sweden und Denmark are prominent examples of high union influence in welfare state development and expansion. In the 1980s, Walter Korpi used these and other examples to analyze union influence systematically (e. g. Korpi 1978; Korpi 1983). In the meantime, the power resources model is a widely discussed theoretical approach. Six variables have been established as criteria for analysis: organizing power, fighting power; power in and outside the parliament; government participation of political partners, and de-commodification (Ostheim/Schmidt 2007: 40). However, there are several methodological problems: It seems to be difficult to operationalize these criteria. A number of researchers have dealt with these problems (Lehmbruch 1982: 8-13). Korpi argues that the more power resources on side ("Kapital" or "Arbeit") in comparison to their opponents has the more decisive can this side shape the political process. He shows that the stronger left parties and unions are, the more expanded social rights and decommodification are in a country (Korpi 1983: 26). Unified union structures, high union organization, high share of social democratic seats in parliament and close cooperation between unions and social democrats are conducive for union friendly social policy (ibid.: 39-41; Olsen/O'Connor 1998: 7). Korpi sees consequences for the institutional settings on the long term as well. Alber showed that there is a positive correlation between the foundation of the labor parties and the introduction of the first social security programs as well as between the electoral victory of the labor parties and the innovative dynamic of the welfare state programs (Alber 1982: 126-132). However, the power resources model is a contested approach. Several scholars grappled with the

explanatory power of the approach but did not manage to question the approach seriously (Pierson 1996: 147; Ostheim/Schmidt 2007: 47).

Even though the power resources model deals with the question of the basis for workers mobilization, it serves as a basis for the analysis. It provides several ideas for the study of union influence. The approach serves as a basis for the criteria used here (see below). Besides, literature on corporatism provides helpful ideas. Philippe C. Schmitter (Schmitter 1974; Schmitter 1977, Schmitter 1989) assumed that there was a inconsistent contradiction between pluralism and liberalism. However, researchers agree that the discussion about corporatism did not implicate that pluralism was obsolete. Pluralism has to be more understood as an overall category whereas corporatism has to be understood as an example (Alemann 2000). Besides, Gerhard Lehmbruch influenced the corporatist research as well (Lehmbruch 1982; Lehmbruch 1984; Lehmbruch 1991). Both authors take the view that organized interests are incorporated in the decision making process. In this way, organized interests and the state stand in a specific exchange and negotiation. Siaroff uses 22 criteria that are conducive for corporatist policymaking (see figure 1; Siaroff 1999: 177-179). Besides the power resources model, corporatist research is part of the analytical frame in this paper. A detailed description of the ideal-typical corporatist model would go beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is not surprising that Denmark and Sweden show a high degree of corporatism and the US and Canada show low corporatism.

Figure 1: Criteria for an Ideal-typical Corporatist Model (Siaroff 1999)

- (1) a high degree of unionisation
- (2) relatively few unions grouped into highly institutionalized peak confederations which have the key role in wage bargaining,
- (3) a business community dominated by large export-oriented firms, with a relatively powerful and centralised employer’s federation.
- (4) highly centralised wage bargaining
- (5) works councils in the main industrial firms *and* co-determination in key industries;
- (6) a centralised, powerful, and active state involved at least moderately in the economy;
- (7) a central – and joint – role for labour and business in such policies as training, education, and social programmes,
- (8) the institutionalised input of business and labour in the government policy process,
- (9) a strong economic and social consensus shared by business, labour, and the state;
- (10) recognition by business and labour of being joint ‘social partners’
- (11) a long-term outlook held by both business and labour;
- (12) low levels of strike activity;
- (13) voluntary and/or bargained incomes policies rather than state-imposed ones;
- (14) independence of internal decision-making of the key actors;
- (15) a certain blurring of the public sector/private sector distinction;

- (16) a small open economy;
- (17) which has benefitted from the free trade provided by the post-World War Two hegemony of the United States – indeed corporatist nations are often militarily neutral and/or spend little on defence;
- (18) a consensual or even consociational political tradition, rather than a ‘majoritarian’ one;
- (19) a long-term political role or even dominance of a united social democratic party,
- (20) a high level of expenditures on social programmes;
- (21) generally successful economic performance,
- (22) often because their success thus ‘exports’ unemployment elsewhere, to international economic stabilisers like the (non-corporatist!) United States and the United Kingdom

Source: Siaroff 1999: 177-179

Newer Approaches built on corporatist approaches but they focus more on the development of capitalist systems from an economic perspective (Hall/Soskice 2001). The major aim is to show similarities and differences in the varieties of capitalist systems. One major criticism focuses on the institutionalistic orientation of this approach (Streeck/Thelen 2005). In this paper, I will focus on the constellations of unions as political actors. That is why institutionalistic approaches will play a minor role in the analysis. The same applies to the approaches on the varieties in the systems of industrial relations (Crouch 1979; Crouch 1993; Salamon 2000).

The focus of the paper is the role of union federations in the policymaking process in times of welfare state retrenchment. In a comparative perspective, a study of the union federations is the best way to get promising results. The influence of the three main union federations in Germany (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, Denmark (Landsorganisationen i Danmark) and the US (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organization) in the welfare-to-work reform process are taken into consideration here. It is important to explain, why federations are central for the analysis. Union federations are the political representatives of the single unions and their members. The federations transform and advocate these interests in the policy making process. Besides, federations (instead of single unions) are chosen here because of comparability. Union federations are seen as political actors here. However, it is not obvious that unions have a special interest in welfare-to-work reforms. On the one hand, unions are more concerned about their traditional membership clientele (i.e. the employed). They recognized the potential of welfare-to-work workers as new members. However, the results of the paper will show that they did this in an insufficient way. Besides, the interest of unions derives out of welfare state history. Unions have fought for high social standards, rights and benefits in unemployment insurance and other programs (e.g. social assistance schemes and active labor market policy). From this perspective, union interest in welfare-to-work reforms is clear, because unions want to preserve their achievements.

If one wants to analyze the influence of union federations in welfare state retrenchment it is necessary to have a look on the historical trajectories. In a comparative perspective, one can highlight important differences in union incorporation in the political system in general and in welfare state reforms. Whether these historical trajectories will play an important role in welfare state retrenchment is one of the aims of the paper. The analysis of the Danish historical development point to an early and steady integration of the Danish confederation LO. Unions implemented the unemployment and sickness clubs in the 19th century. These clubs are important forerunners of the Danish welfare state (Nørgaard 1997). By the end of the 19th century, the first welfare state programs were implemented in Denmark. The setup and expansion of these programs (pension insurance 1891, accident insurance 1898 and sickness insurance 1892) were largely determined by tripartite commissions that prepared the central reforms (Kuhnle 1982: 129). This preparation was conducive to the adoption of the laws in the Folketing. Besides, the unemployment clubs were an important forerunner of the unemployment insurance that was passed in 1907. The main structures of the unemployment clubs were maintained in the insurance: It was installed as a voluntary and union administered insurance. The connection between unemployment insurance and union membership (Ghent system) was conducive to the strong and politically influential Danish unions (Scruggs 2002: 284). The role of Danish confederations of trade unions LO was expanded until the expansion of the welfare state has come to an end by the end of the 1980s. However, the LO was an important political actor.

The influence of the German confederation of unions (DGB) on welfare state development differs from the Danish trajectory: The beginning of the German welfare state at the end of the 19th century was determined by a prohibition of socialist and social democratic organizations. Chancellor Bismarck prohibited the organizations also because of their power. In this way, German unions and social democrats only had indirect influence on the establishment of the German welfare state. However, many researchers assume that without unions Bismarck would never have implemented social insurance programs. Still, Bismarck feared unions and social democratic protest and established the first welfare state programs (sickness insurance 1883, accident insurance 1884, disability insurance 1889) (Alber 1986: 5-6; Alber 1989: 45-51; Meerhaeghe 2006, Ritter 1983: 28-41; Ritter 1991: 60-86). In the Weimar Republic German unions directly influenced social legislation for the first time. After the end of the Second World War unions became more influential and secured their place in the political arena. However, in comparison to the Danish case the German confederation of unions gained influence

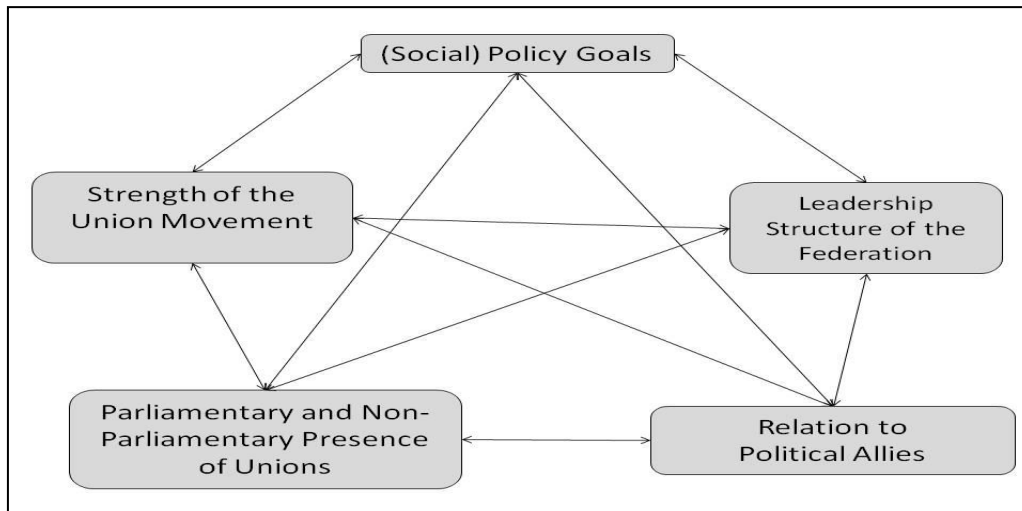
comparatively late. Furthermore, reforms were only seldom developed in tripartite commissions (Wolf 2000: 670-671; Esser/Schroeder 1999).

The American trajectory is characterized by a comparatively late and minor influence of the federation of unions in the social policy process. On the hand, the American welfare state is characterized as a welfare state laggard. On the other hand, researchers invoke on the lacking feudalistic and socialist traditions in the US (Hartz 1983; Lipset 1963: 124; Lipset 1990: 166; Lipset/Marks 2000: 266-268). The first welfare state programs were implemented during the New Deal in 1935 (unemployment insurance, accident insurance, pension insurance and social assistance for children Aid to Dependent Children) (Piven/Cloward 1977: 175-180; Skocpol 1992: 561-563; Somers/Block 2005: 267; Weaver 2000: 18-20). Besides, channels of influence differ from the other two countries. The American federation used political lobbying as strategy of influence from the beginning. Unions (especially) support election campaigns and are thus less directly integrated in the policymaking process.

3. Explanation of the Used Criteria

Following the power resources model (Korpi 1978, 1983) I will use the following criteria to analyze union influence in welfare-to-work reforms: (1) strength of the union movement; (2) leadership structure of the union federations; (3) social policy goals of the federations; (4) relation to the political allies and (5) parliamentary and non-parliamentary presence of unions in the reform process.

Figure 2: Illustration of the criteria that are used to explain the influence of union federations in the welfare-to-work reform process



Own Compilation

The *strength of the union movement* criteria provides information on the overall strength of the union movement and the mobilization capacities of the union federations. On the one hand, union density and the membership in the federations are considered. On the other hand, the organization of the federation is important as well. Conflicts within the movement or mergers are good examples. The existing literature and data of the OECD will serve as a common ground for the analysis (OECD Employment Database). Even though a small union can also be a central part of the policymaking process, I want to argue that union federations that are strong will have better chances to function as the representative of labor. I will take the membership in the federations and the net union density in Denmark, Germany and Denmark in times of the welfare-to-work reforms as a basis for the analysis. On the one hand, this will show the overall development in the three countries. On the other hand, other problems will arise. Taking the net union density is somehow problematic for the analysis of the union influence in

However, the influence of the union federation depends on the leadership of the federation as well. An increase in union membership will not automatically result in more influence in the political arena. If the leader of the union federation is not interested in social policy discussions he will not direct the policy focus of the organization more in this direction. However, leadership may change and contribute to a shift to social policy (e. g. in the US). A change in leadership may contribute to a new understanding of the movement and may result in an increasing incorporation in the political process. Long enduring fights about the direction or the leadership of the movement are not conducive to an increasing influence in the political system.

Every union movement that wants to influence welfare state reforms has to have clearly defined and formulated *social policy goals*. Welfare-to-work reforms are of special interest for the labor movement. These reforms affect mostly unemployment insurance and social assistance schemes. Unions should have an interest in these reforms because they helped to build and develop these fields of social policy in the past. The labor movement (esp. in European countries) had always been in favor of a developed and expanded welfare state. The American labor movement somehow hindered the establishment of the first social programs but afterwards defended the welfare state as well. In the comparative analysis, I will show whether union federations approved or refused the welfare-to-work paradigm and how they tried to transform their attitudes into the policymaking process. Therefore, several primary sources (e. g. speeches of union leaders, union programs and platforms, reports of union congresses and union magazines) had been analyzed and contextualized into the existing scientific debate.

Union federations will need allies in the political process and a good *relation to these political allies*. In northern and continental European countries social democrats are the political allies of the unions. The lack of an important and strong socialist or social-democratic party conceived to the fact that Democrats had become the political partners of the labor movement. Close relations contribute to an effective corporation between the partners. Several tripartite commissions in Denmark and the campaign financing efforts union made show the ties. The relation between the union movement and the social partners can be rather loose or rather narrow. Besides, the relation is not stable but changing. The analysis in the three countries shows a variety of ties and changing character of the relation during the welfare-to-work reform process. How this affects the influence of union movement is a part of the analysis. I focused the analysis on primary sources of the unions and parties as well as on the literature on this topic.

Besides the mentioned criteria, the influence in the parliamentary and non-parliamentary presence of unions has to be considered. On the one hand, I will analyze the real influence of the unions in the political arena (i. e. in commissions or the parliament as such). On the other hand, these means are not always parliamentary reforms. That is why both directions are considered here. The analysis will also include the question how far union federations managed to bring in their policy goals in the policymaking process. If union positions are ignored, I consider it to be as less influence. Besides, there is a trend to a posteriori criticism of unions. This means that unions heavily criticized the passed welfare-to-work reforms. They expressed their disagreement in preparing demonstrations (e. g. in Germany) or smaller campaigns against the reforms (e. g.

in the US). A broad empirical material is the basis for the analysis. I consider recent literature on the national reform context and primary sources (like plenary protocols, commission reports, union and union federation reports and general union statements on the welfare-to-work reforms).

The presented criteria serve as a basis for the comparative study of the influence unions played in the welfare-to-work reform process. However, this framework allows national case studies as well as comparative research. Besides, it allows including other retrenchment reforms (like pensions or health insurance). One could also consider more countries in a broader comparison. However, all possible expansions of the study are beyond the scope of the paper.

4. Union Federation Influence in Welfare-to-Work Reforms

4.1 Welfare-to-work Reforms in A Comparative Perspective

Figure 2: Chronological Outline of the Welfare-to-Work Reform Process

	Denmark	USA	Germany
Policy Change	1994-2010	1989-1996	2002-2005
Reforms	Reform Period I (1994-2001) n= 4 reforms Reform Period II (2001-2010) n= 4 reforms	Welfare Reform (1989) Welfare Reform (1996)	Job-AQTIV-Law (2001) Hartz Laws (2002-2004)

Source: Own Compilation

Figure 2 illustrates the chronological outline of the welfare-to-work reforms in Denmark, Germany and the US. It shows that the reform periods differ from each other. The quantity and quality of welfare-to-work reforms differ as well. It is obvious that Denmark has the longest and Germany the shortest welfare-to-work path. Denmark starts from a universal welfare model and ends with an adjusted welfare state. If you take the duration (of unemployment benefit) as an indicator, Denmark started with unlimited unemployment benefits (until 1993). The welfare-to-work reforms show a reduction to two years (since June 2010). Besides, governments have strengthened the work elements during the reform periods. Even after the passing of the last

Danish welfare-to-work reform in 2010 it seems as if the Danish way is on a continuous (not yet ended) welfare-to-work path (Jørgensen 2009).

In the US the welfare-to-work path is long as well (e.g. Weaver 2000). However, it started comparatively early. Both in Germany and in Denmark government had only passed two welfare-to-work reforms (US in 1989 and 1996 and in Germany in 2001 and 2004). In comparison to Denmark, the US started from a less generous welfare model and implemented strict welfare-to-work programs (esp. social assistance). Social assistance has a limit of two years and a lifetime limit of five years. After this period, the states are financially responsible for their TANF recipients. That is why American states implemented had implemented rather strict criteria for their benefits. They try to bring them to work as soon as possible. The quality and the payment of the jobs are of secondary importance.

The German case shows a middle position (e.g. Hassel/Trampusch 2006). The two major reform packages (2001 and 2004) show a clear tendency to strengthen work as a condition for unemployment benefit. With the Hartz reforms a new benefit (unemployment benefit II) was established. The government further emphasized work requirements and sanctions in case of non-taking of an offered job). Besides, government fostered education and training programs gave unemployed people the chance to become self-employed.

Welfare-to-work reforms indicate convergent but also divergent developments. All countries introduced stricter work requirements and cut assistance schemes. However, government expanded other measures that support the unemployed or poor (e.g. expansion of public transport or childcare).

4.2 The Role of Union Federations in the Welfare-to-work Reform Process

Union strength

The strength of the union movement in the three countries is an important indicator for the overall availability of the power resources of the working class. As shown in figure 3, union growth is declining in all three countries. The most salient decline (net union density and federation membership) is thus obvious in the Danish development. However, Denmark started from a comparatively high level. Besides, various timing has to be kept in mind. At the beginning of policy change, (net) union density in Denmark was around 78 %, whereas in Germany it was around 28 % and in the US 16 %. The distinct backlash is less astonishing against this background (OECD Labor Force Statistics).

Figure 3: Development of Union Strength in Denmark, Germany and the US

	Denmark	USA	Germany
Policy Change	1994-2010	1989-1996	2002-2005
Federation Membership Decline (in percent)	19 (latest data: 2007)	5	12
Drop in net union density (in percent)	11 (latest data: 2007)	12	8

Own Compilation based on the OECD data, several national statistics and the Golden/Wallerstein/Lange Database

This results points at an interesting development. The modern crisis of the welfare state and the union movement affects also countries that are known as strong corporatist countries. Another result becomes obvious from figure 3. Germany's union federation (DGB) has to cope with a bold decline in its membership whereas the membership decline in the US is more in the net union density. However, all union movements in the three countries have to cope with the decline of membership in the period of policy change.

Leadership structure

Leadership of the union federations contributes to the influence in the policymaking process in different kinds (Müller/Wilke 2002). The comparative analysis of Denmark, Germany and the US shows that each case needs different explications. In the German context, high fragmentation of the union federation results in a difficult situation for the union federation. Dieter Schulte and Michael Sommer tried to lead the federation but criticism turned the corner. Especially the stronger metal union and the union of the chemistry workers have criticized the work of the federation. The abeyance concerning the welfare-to-work paradigm and reforms was the most important problem of the federation and most of the criticism correlates with this indetermination. The problems of the American federation leadership differ from the German example in several aspects (Fletcher 1997). Lane Kirkland who had been the leader of the union federation until 1995 had been mainly interested in foreign policy. Domestic policy seemed to him as a useless undertaking because of the Republican dominance during this time. John Sweeney took the chair in 1995 and suggested a promising reawakening of the movement (Sweeney 1996). He wanted to transform the American unions back to an influential political

actor. He stated that the movement has to represent the rights of all American people. This also meant that the working poor who suffered most from the welfare-to-work reforms. The analysis of the leadership of Sweeney showed that it is far too easy to brand American unions as irrelevant political actors. However, the timing of the new leadership and the welfare-to-work reform was a disadvantage. In Denmark, the position of the LO and its leaders had not been questioned (Due/Madesen 2007). The unions appeared as a homogenous group which had to be represented by the leader of the LO. Union members and politicians accepted that the president of the federation represents the political goals of the members and the affiliated unions. The in debt analysis showed that this is valid for all three LO presidents (Finn Thorgrimson, Hans Jensen, Harald Børsting). However, during the last decade, the position of the LO has been increasingly questioned. Especially since the beginning of the new century, the FTF (*Funktionærernes og Tjenestemændenes*) doubled its membership (Jørgensen 2009).

The analysis of the leadership structure point at mixed results. In Denmark, the leadership is only seldom a contested issue. In the US, leadership does make a difference for the conditions of policymaking (see also social policy goals). The high fragmentation of the German labor movement contributes to the difficult situation of the leadership.

Social policy goals

Social policy goals are a central indicator of union influence in the social policy making process. Clearly formulated policy goals contribute to better position in the political system because it is easier to transform them to the political arena. The analysis of the important documents showed that all federations had dealt with the welfare-to-work paradigm. Unions see welfare-to-work programs as an appropriate measure to fight the most urgent welfare state problems.

Until 2003 the Danish federation LO had have no own policy goals (Jørgensen 2003: 167). The federation had followed the goals of the Social Democrats. Besides, the federation had thought that formulating political aims had been the task of the party. The close alliance between unions and social democrats obviated the need for formulated aims. However, in 2003, the situation changed: Several welfare-to-work reforms had been implemented and the LO had lost political power in the policy making process. The federation had formulated the first mission statement since its formation in the end of the 19th century (LO 2003). The major intention was to uncouple from the close relation to the social democrats and build new coalitions with other parties. The LO advocate the universal and extended welfare state. Besides, union leaders favor active labor market policy and to a large extend the welfare-to-work programs as appropriate

measures (Lind 2007: 58). However, they did not support major cuts of unemployment benefit duration. In general, the LO argues in support of carrots instead of sticks. The analysis of the German case shows a divergent picture: The leaders of the DGB hovered between acceptance and disagreement to the welfare-to-work paradigm and the reforms (Weßels 2007; Streeck 2003; Hassel 2007). During the social democratic election campaign (1998) unions had favored the welfare-to-work ideas of Gerhard Schröder. Conversely, Schröder had promised that unions would have an active and important role in the policy making process. Soon after Schröder's victory, Schröder and Blair published their Schröder-Blair paper. Unions harshly criticized the ideas as unsocial even though they had favored them during the election campaign. Soon after this, unions changed their opinion again. The *Bündnis für Arbeit*, which was a tripartite commission to discuss the future social and labor market policy, was a chance to shape policymaking. The acceptance of the welfare-to-work paradigm had lasted until the Hartz commission had published their report. The commission, which was a tripartite commission as well, developed reform proposals. After the publication unions again switched to harsh criticism because, Schröder changed some of the commission proposals. My analysis showed that the DGB has to be blamed for its weak position in the policy process because of his abeyance between agreement and disagreement. In the US, union federation had formulated new social policy goals when Sweeney took leadership (Dark 1999; Lichtenstein 2002). In general, a more intensive quarrel with social policy themes was obvious. Unions claimed an expansion of unemployment benefits. In their opinion, very few unemployed were eligible. Besides, they demanded a more extensive health care system and higher minimum wages. Unions heavily criticized the neoliberal aims demanded by the Republicans (Contract with America). In addition, union leaders criticized the harshness of welfare-to-work reforms. They argued in support of less rigid time limits and sanctions. In comparison to the other countries, the American development is considerable because it was the first time (since the Great Society) that a union leader took a stand for social rights for all American citizens.

The profound analysis showed that all union federations have dealt with the welfare-to-work paradigm as parts of their political agenda. However, it is obvious that (esp. in Germany) unions had some problems in deciding whether to agree or disagree. A mere description of the content is far from being satisfactory. It is also important to see how union federations tried to introduce them into the political arena (see below).

Relation to the political allies

The relation to the political allies affects the influence of union federations enormously. A close corporation between social democratic or democratic parties can contribute to an increasing political influence of the union federation. Concerning the Danish case the analysis showed a change in the relation to the political allies (Jørgensen 2009; Ebbinghaus 2000: 175). Until 2003, the ties between the social democrats and the unions had been very close. There was a common political agenda. The newly formulated political aims are still comparatively close to the social democratic ones. However, unions are more open to other political partners. This development also shows a deep dissatisfaction of the LO with the political direction of the social democratic policymaking. Since 2003, the relationship between the allies has changed: It has become more loose; nevertheless, both organizations are working together in the political arena. In comparison to the Danish case the German example is more complex (Streeck 2003; Siegel 2003; Schroeder 2005). On the one hand, social democrats shifted their positions towards the right. On the other hand, unions reacted too inflexible to this and shifted more to the left. The relationship between social democrats and the union federation was fickle. It was good when Schröder promised that unions will be a central actor, it was sinister when he has left unions out. However, the policy implemented by Schröder was contrary to some of the political aims of the unions and the arrangements between the allies. The promising developments in the American union movement did not bring about a changed relation of the political allies. The ties between unions and Democrats have always been comparatively loose (Slaughter 1999). Besides, in the US there is no strong left or social democratic party. The ties between the allies will be closer, if the president is a Democrat and if the Democratic Party has the majority in the Congress (unified government). In comparison to the other two countries, the mechanisms differ: Instead of tripartite commissions, the ties are rather a support in election campaigns and in the way of lobbying certain laws. However, in his early years, Clinton gave such a commission an honest try (Dunlop Commission).

The ties between the unions and the political partners vary in character and extend. In Denmark and Germany, strong ties dismantled during the reform period. In the US there is nearly no change in the relation between the political partners.

Parliamentary and non-parliamentary presence of union federations

The fifth criterion builds a synthesis between the other four criteria. Besides, it is the most important indicator for union influence. The presence of unions in the political arena indicates whether unions managed to transform political goals to the political arena. Besides, the analysis

shows which aims were pushed to the welfare-to-work reforms. The analysis shows that the work in tripartite commissions is still the most important part of union influence. This is especially valid for Germany and Denmark. In the US, traditional forms of lobbying and campaign financing remain the way of union work in the political sphere.

The analysis of parliamentary and non-parliamentary presence of the Danish unions was divided into two periods (until 2001 and from 2001 on). The results can be summarized as follows (Larsen/Goul Andersen 2008; Mailand 2005; Etherington/Jones 2004; Jørgensen 2009): In the first reform period, unions had lost power in political corporatism. They prepared the first labor market reform but from then on, they had been excluded from the policy making process. Commissions with the involvement of unions (e.g. the Zeuthen Commission) were obsolete. Civil servants have been the main actors in the policy making process. However, the loss of influence in the political corporatism went hand in hand with an increasing influence in administrative corporatism. Unions favored the labor market reforms because of the changes in the labor market boards and the resulting increase in administrative functions of unions. In the second period, unions have lost influence in the administrative corporatism as well. They are not the only provider of welfare-to-work programs anymore. Besides, reforms show a less influential role in the regional labor market boards. The increased influence in administrative corporatism changed to the opposite. Besides, the loss of political influence culminated in the latest reform of 2010. It was a try to combat the challenges of the economic crisis. However, it was the first time in the history of modern corporatist Denmark that unions had not been asked prior to the passing of the reform. All in all the reforms show a significant loss of influence for unions and on the long run, this development might be a threat to the Ghent system. The LO seemed to be astonished and frozen and had not been able to prevent this development.

The analysis of parliamentary and non-parliamentary presence of German unions showed the following results (Fickinger 2005; Arlt/Nehls 1999; Siefken 2007): Chancellor Schröder had promised that unions would have an active and central role in the policy making process. However, the reform trajectory showed that he fell short of one's pledge. Unions were part of the Bündnis für Arbeit, however, the tripartite commission ended without any result. The actors were not able to find any compromise on future social policy and on how to solve the problem of unemployment. Besides, the Hartz commission compiled several reform proposals. On the one hand, Schröder had promised to implement this compromise one-and-one. On the other hand, Schröder changed and tightened most of the proposals. This contributed to the split between the unions and social democrats. Unions were dissatisfied with the situation and changed their strategy. They started to criticize the reforms as unsocial. This a posteriori

criticism marks the end to the welfare-to-work ambiguity. In addition, it has to be mentioned again that it had been difficult for Schröder to estimate the political goals of the unions during the reform process.

The analysis of the parliamentary and non-parliamentary presence of American unions indicates a rather pessimistic picture, again (Piven 1997; Piven 2004; Rosier 1996). The AFL-CIO had not been able to transform the positive impetus of the new leadership to the policymaking process. Unions had not been able to influence the welfare-to-work policymaking process. Instead, scholars figured out that unions had been rather invisible. Unions played a more vital role in the election campaigns and during other social policy reforms (e.g. health care or minimum wage). It seems that the federation relocated its political power and energy for the welfare-to-work reforms from the national to the regional level. The AFL-CIO was very active and partly successful to demonstrate against the reforms (even though it was a posteriori criticism). Besides, these projects were a good example for the initiatives *organizing the unorganized*, which also aimed at welfare-to-work workers.

The involvement of union federations in the parliament and out of the parliamentary during the welfare-to-work reforms varied significantly. Danish unions have lost power in the fields of political and regional corporatism. Besides, German unions have lost influence in the welfare-to-work reform process. The American example indicates that there was appositive impetus (starting from the new leadership) but in the policymaking process they had not been able to play a vital role. The results of the in-depth analysis show that unions relocated their activity to the regional level. Besides, they recently shifted their involvement to a posterior criticism.

5. Conclusion

Unions are still important political actors. However, their ponderosity has changed during the last 20 years. It was the aim to show these changes using the example of welfare-to-work reforms, which are of special interest for unions. Unions fought for high social standards in the past and they tried to do the same during welfare state retrenchment. However, the analysis showed that this is a rather difficult task. It is not enough to be a rather strong and unified movement. The influence of unions depends more on a specific (national) combination of the criteria used in this article. The results indicate a common trend in the three countries: Unions have become weaker during the last decades. Besides, they remain concentrated on the

employed population and ignore the interests of the welfare-to-work population. None of the unions use this silent reserve (as a chance to strengthen the membership basis).

The following years will show whether unions will manage to improve their situations. It must be in the interest of the organizations to influence the policy making process. To accomplish this objective, unions will have to reorganize. The five criteria used here can be taken as a basis. Unions will have to formulate new goals, widen their membership basis, strengthen their ties to political allies, have an accepted leadership and will play a more vital role in the policy making process. Only if unions focus on all five basic principles they will not sink into obscurity. However, based on the last developments (e.g. in Denmark 2010) we have no reason for optimism. The crisis of 2009/2010 and the following welfare-to-work reform in Denmark showed that the process of excluding the union federation from the policymaking process will (presumably) continue. The former (corporatist) model country Denmark is on the best way to equal to continental European characteristics. On the long run, this is might be a threat to the Ghent system as well. However, the crisis of the unions could be understood as a chance to a revival of corporatism in all three countries. Therefore, unions will have to risk a new start. The economic crisis is probably a good time to start this new beginning. People will listen to union proposals and ideas. However, this optimistic picture requires a continuing debate on the future of national economies and the welfare states. Up to the present day unions react too statically to this new situation.

6. Literature

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