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## Boekbespreking van: Parliamentary change in the Nordic countries

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litieke filosofen als Claude Lefort en Frank Ankersmit. Laatstgenoemden delen voor een groot deel Schmitts *diagnose* van de huidige democratie. Het parlement is alleen *de jure* de plek waar onafhankelijke volksvertegenwoordigers door middel van een openbare discussie beslissingen nemen. *De facto* vormen volksvertegenwoordigers machtsblokken waarmee ze enkel hun eigen positie willen consolideren of verbeteren, terwijl ze het volk via massamedia aan zich proberen te binden. Voor zowel Ankersmit, Lefort als Schmitt is de verhouding van het volk tot zijn representatie het belangrijkste probleem van de moderne staat. In hun *therapie* voor de problemen van de democratie verschillen ze evenwel van mening.

Zoals bekend zag Schmitt, die in de jaren dertig de democratie definieerde als de identiteit van regeerders en geregeerden, de oplossing voor de crisis van de parlementaire democratie in de representatie van het 'homogene' want 'Artgleiche' volk door de Führer. Daarentegen ziet Ankersmit een oplossing in de aanvaarding van het verschil tussen de representant en de gerepresenteerde, waardoor de Schmittiaanse ernst van het politieke plaats zou kunnen maken voor de ironie. En voor Lefort wordt de macht niet, zoals bij Schmitt, toegeëigend of belichaamd door de soeverein. De macht is voor hem een lege plek die alleen symbolisch kan worden bezet. In de lijn van Schmitts these van de onontkoombaarheid van de politiek ziet Lefort democratie als een nooit eindigend proces van zelfbepaling. De daarmee gepaard gaande onzekerheid is volgens Lefort in een democratie zo geïnstitutionaliseerd dat de lege plek van de macht slechts door middel van een symbolische strijd kan worden bezet.

Hoe oordeelt De Wit over Lefort en Ankersmit? De democratie-theorie van Lefort gebruikt De Wit enkel als een folie om het werk van Schmitt kritisch te kunnen bekijken. Hij schijnt met de politieke filosofie van Lefort in te stemmen, omdat deze niet bekritiseerd wordt. Wanneer hij het heeft over Leforts opvattingen over democratie, dan spreekt hij over een *alternatief* voor die van Schmitt.

Wat betreft het vraagstuk van de relatie tussen de volksvertegenwoordigers en het gerepresenteerde volk, maakt Ankersmit een onderscheid tussen de mimetische en de esthetische representatietheorie. Volgens de *mimetische* representatietheorie moeten de representanten een zo adequaat mogelijke afspiegeling van de gerepresenteerden zijn. Hierbij is het ideaal de identiteit tussen beide, hetgeen neerkomt op de overbodigheid van enige vorm van representatie en het einde van de politiek. Ankersmit is een aanhanger van de *esthetische representatietheorie*: voor een goed functionerende democratie moet er een verschil zijn tussen de volksvertegenwoordiging en het vertegenwoordigde volk.

De Wit kritiseert Ankersmit, omdat hij Schmitt alleen opvoert als vertegenwoordiger van de mimetische representatietheorie. Volgens De Wit maakt Ankersmit zich schuldig aan een *reductio ad Hitlerum*. Ankersmits kritiek op Schmitt geldt immers alleen voor diens nationaal-socialistische periode. Voor de Schmitt uit de jaren twintig gaat de kritiek van Ankersmit echter niet op, omdat eerstgenoemde in *'Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage des heutigen Parlamentarismus'* de crisis van de mimetische representatie kritisch onder de loep neemt.

R. Gabriëls

Erik Damgaard (red.), **Parliamentary Change in the Nordic Countries**. Scandinavian University Press, Oslo 1992.

This book can best be described as a thorough report on governmental and parliamentary changes that occurred in Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland during the 1970s and 1980s. It is an edited volume with four main chapters written by country experts. Each chapter offers insight in the way one Nordic parliamentary system developed over a period of two decades and includes a description of its main rules and procedures.

However, the detailed rules for parliamentary work are not the main concern of the five authors. They focus on 'the extent to which various procedures for proposals, questions, interpellations etc. are in fact utilized, especially by non-governmental parties and individual MPs.' (p.16) For each of the four countries data on the amount of various parliamentary activities are presented. Although the indicators of parliamentary activity are not the same for each country and, for that reason, cannot be directly compared, the data show an increasing level of activity in all four Nordic countries. The authors seek to investigate whether this development reflects increased conflict in Nordic politics. Therefore, they present additional data indicating aspects of inter-party conflict and competition. Again, the indicators are not the same for each country. For example, in the case of the Danish 'Folketing' the percentage of passed bills and resolutions not adopted unanimously is taken as an indicator of inter-party conflict, whereas for the Norwegian 'Storting' the number of dissenting remarks in committee recommendations and the dissent frequency are used. In the final chapter Damgaard draws the conclusion that the higher level of parliamentary activity is at least partially associated with increased conflict in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, whereas that association does not exist in Finland. Given the difference of the indicators and the fact that comparable data are not reported for Finland, Damgaard rightly notes that his conclusion can only be tentative. The authors present a third kind of data on Nordic parliaments, namely data on the party composition of parliament. By reporting on changes in the party composition of parliament, each country expert provides Damgaard with data for his concluding chapter, in which the degree of parliamentary party system fractionalization is calculated. The resulting figure shows that the degree of fractionalization changed considerably over time in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, although the three countries did not change in the same direction. Again, Finland is the deviant case with a more or less stable level of fractionalization.

Although the title of the book suggests otherwise, the authors are not only concerned with changes at the level of parliament. They are also interested in the extent to which parliamentary activity and conflict is associated with the type and party composition of governments. Therefore, the governmental level is included in their analysis. Data are presented on changes in party composition of Nordic governments and the occurrence of various types of governments, *i.e.*, majority or minority government and coalition or single party government. Again the data reveal the

picture of Denmark, Norway and Sweden on one side, with governmental stability decreasing in recent decades, and Finland on the other, experiencing an increase in governmental stability.

According to the editor, 'the purpose of this book is to analyse important trends in the parliamentary development of the Nordic countries during the past few decades.' (p.13) By presenting the abovementioned data, the authors do indeed reach this goal. Furthermore, they can take credit to themselves for doing so in a thorough and convincing manner. They are less successful, however, with regard to the three additional aims mentioned by Damgaard in the introductory chapter.

Firstly, the book seeks to 'describe similarities and differences'. (p.13) In four chapters on four countries the reader obviously comes across a lot of similarities and differences. They are, however, not described in a systematic way. For that purpose a book with cross-national chapters on changes in government formation, parliamentary activity and the party system may be more suitable. One wonders why the authors did not choose this option and wrote four country chapters instead, thus limiting the room for comparison. More important is that, even within the given structure of country-specific chapters, the result, *i.e.*, the description of differences and similarities, could have been better. Obviously, each country chapter deals with one country only. The countries are, however, not treated in the same way. One only has to look at the titles of the paragraphs to see that the structure of the four chapters differs. As mentioned earlier, the operationalizations of key variables, such as parliamentary activity and inter-party conflict, are not the same either. This may be due to the availability of the data; it nevertheless limits the possibilities to identify important similarities and differences. The fact that the lay-out of the tables varies even when the country experts present the same kind of data is, in this respect, an irritating and significant detail. A third feature of the book that does not facilitate the description of similarities and differences, is the apparent arbitrariness with which theoretical concepts are used. For example, the concept of a consensual political system is used both in the chapter on Norway (p.95) and in the chapter on Finland (p.164-167). When using the concept, the authors refer to different literature and in neither chapter the concept is properly defined. The fact that the chapter on the Finnish 'Diet' is the only chapter with a definition of the term 'opposition' is another example of the eclectic use of theory, impeding a systematic description of similarities and differences. More similarity in the way the chapters have been structured, as well as in labels, headings and definitions used, would have been a relatively simple but effective improvement. Furthermore, it would have served the purpose of description if each country chapter would have included a few more, well chosen references to the other Nordic countries.

In addition to a description of similarities and differences the book attempts 'to explain shared experiences and national variations'. (p.13) With regard to this objective the problem of the eclectic use of theory is even more manifest. Although the authors share some theoretical notions, the book is not the report of a comparative analysis guided by theory. In the first chapter Damgaard introduces the thesis of the 'decline of parliaments', and even starts to criticize and reformulate it. Unfortunately, he immediately adds that this thesis 'is not the main object of the analysis'. (p.17) What pre-

cisely the main object of the analysis is, however, remains unclear. Presumably, the authors were guided more by their own research interests or the availability of the data than by a common theoretical interest. Only the final chapter is reserved for a comparative analysis of parliamentary and governmental change in the Nordic countries. In this chapter Damgaard discusses various explanatory factors, such as party system change and institutional structures, but his analysis remains fairly general. It merely reaffirms what has emerged as the overall picture from the preceding chapters, namely the Finnish deviation from the Nordic pattern. The reader is left with the question whether Finland would still be the deviant case when the analysis would have been more comparative and less theoretically eclectic. The discussion on institutional structures as an explanatory factor in particular could have been more illuminating. In the concluding chapter institutional structures are linked with party strategic considerations. Nevertheless, what has been the exact contribution of both factors to the observed developments remains unclear. Underlying this is the fact that the book focuses on process-generated data. In the country chapters the main rules and procedures of the Nordic parliamentary systems are described, but there is no comparative analysis of institutional data. This is one of the reasons why the authors are not as successful as they could have been in explaining the changes at the levels of parliament and government.

The third and last objective of the book is 'to discuss briefly the possible consequences of the observed developments for parliamentary democracy in the Nordic countries.' (p.16) As far as the length of the discussion is concerned the authors are true to their word. Alas, this does not apply with regard to the content of their discussion. Again, and obviously due to the abovementioned weaknesses, the conclusions take the form of general statements, such as:

Weaker governments, more active and influential parliaments and more party competition suggest the possibility that standard accounts of Nordic corporatism are no longer adequate. A certain 'reparliamentarization' or 'revitalization of parliaments' seems to have taken place in the Nordic countries with a possible exception of Finland. (p.204)

I would have welcomed a more evaluative approach. It would have been interesting to be provided with, for example, suggestions for parliamentary reform based on a comparative analysis of parliamentary change in the Nordic countries.

Apart from the weaknesses discussed above, the four country chapters in this book each sketch an informative picture of the parliamentary developments in the respective countries. They are well written, providing students of parliaments with a fair amount of data. Therefore, the book remedies a deficiency, not by being a truly comparative study but by presenting four valuable country monographs.

H.W. Nijzink