H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

SÖ ¸ren Hein Rasmussen. *SÖ¦re Alliancer: Politiske BevÖ¦gelser i Efterkrigstidens Danmark.* Odense: Odense University Press, 1997. 367 pp. 348 Dkr (cloth), ISBN 978-87-7838-252-8.

Reviewed by Morten Ranum (Institute of History and Western Civilisation, Odense University)
Published on H-Skand (October, 1998)

MOVEMENTS IN PROGRESS AND DISPAIR

Introduction

The somewhat mysterious title of this book can be translated into "Odd Alliances" with the more informative subtitleˆÔPolitical Movements in Postwar Danmark." The political movements in this book differs from the traditionel structure of political organizations in Denmark. The new kind of movements are odd, because they are organized around specific themes rather than ideologies, and their participants do not divide according to the ordinary political lines. The movements organize people across traditional political divisions. Therefor they have become symbols of restructuring the political field in Denmark, though this is not specifically a Danish development. Some of the experiences made through the concrete movements are influenced by the specific Scandinavian context.

The author ends his introduction of the book by: "And let's then begin the story." This expresses a peculiar concept of history, which is typical for comtemporary Scandinavian historiography. This concept claims that history begins with the concrete source material, which is quite odd, since every historical analysis–at least–begins by defining the frame of research. It is interesting, then, that the book begins with an introduction titled "The beginning," which ends by declaring: "And let's then begin the story" when the story has already begun. This neglectance of taking into account the assumptions of the analysis is crusial for the book as a whole. It may seem exaggerated to address this general critique on such narrow grounds. After all the introduction is very short (5 pages), whereby the author indicates that he does not reserve much space for showing his assumptions. I do not think that the author does this intentionally, but it has som consequences for his writing of history. The presentation of the subject lacks aˆÔleitmotif," which leaves the reader with some very interesting but fragmented anecdotes. It makes you wonder with what purpose the specific movements have been choosen. Was the author a member of some of them? During reading the book I wondered about the ideological stand of the author. Is there mainly a political or scientific interest or motive for his research? These types of questions create confusing considerations, which disturbs the concentration while reading.

Content of the book

As mentioned the book begins with a short introduction. This first chapter are followed by four chapters dealing with four different public movements. The presentation of these movements follows a chronological development, though they are partly parallel in time. The last chapter intend to draw some general conclusions about these movements and the research on grassroot organizations. The four specific movements are the peace movements in respectively the 1960s and 1980s, which are described as two different movements. The movement against nuclear power and the resistance against the European Community.

Peace movements in the 1960s - and 1980s

I will treat the two different peace movements as one, because they are tied together by their subject. The peace movement of the 1960s is often regarded as the foundation for the later danish movements and a turning point in the organization of public political influence, whereas the later peace movement refer to experiences from the other movements.

All the movements have been accused of being communist influenced organizations, which have been more true for some than others. The early peace movement was never free of this accusation, but there were efforts to prevent it (p. 21). From the mid-1950s there was a public debate about radiation and fall-out due to nuclear tests (p. 39), which provided the background for progress in grassroots movements (p. 45). The founding of Vietnambevægelsen (The Vietnam Movement) in 1965 showed a division in the peace movement (pp. 57, 61), which con-

nects with the development of the later peace movement in the 1980s.

The peace movement in the 1980s was at first caracterized by a decrease partly because the question of peace was overshadowed by the resistance against The European Community (p. 169). There were attempts of continuing the peace movement from the 1960s, but first in the late 1970s the Neutron Bomb motivated serious public protests (p. 174). The peace movements was still troubled by fear of communism (p. 177). The protests were mostly directed towards parliament (p. 181). This is a generel theme across the different movements that they concentrate on specific demands to the politicians using non-parliamentary methods. The major difference between the 1960s and 1980s were how the movements were organized. In the late 1960s a division occurred in the movement, which developed further in the 1980s. The later peace movement tried to combine the experiences from the 1960s with the experiences from the movement against nuclear energy in the 1970sˆÔOrganisationen for Oplysning om AtomkraftÔ (OOA - The Organization for Information of Nuclear Power). This attempt of forming a broad movement resulted in conflicts between the highly structured, party dominated and the activist, informal (pp. 186-87). The result was a more differentiated movement not only in the organizational sense. In the mid 1980s the question of peace became integrated in the formal institutions (p. 237).

The presentation of the later peace movement seem less fragmented, even though it is still difficult to see the ˆÔleitmotif." This made me consider the reason for that difference. My own relationship to the peace movement in the 1980s is, that it represents my first years of political engagement, whereas my impressions of the peace movement in the 1960s is more distant.

Maybe the author of the book was part of the peace movement in the 1980s?

If you have a personal relationship to the source, it makes a lot more sense. Then it does not really matter, when the story is presented in a fragmentary way, because you unconsciously fill in the blank spots. The same is the case, when you read something, which you have a good background of understanding. Then anecdotes give new meanings but with no background you are lost.

During the early 1990s there were published a number of political biographies, which have some similarities with the present book. They were also written in a fragmentary manner, but had a public known person as the ˆÔleitmotif." This make me suggest that theˆÔleitmotifÔ in Søren H. Rasmussens book can be movements in contemporary political culture–or even specific types of movements. Still it only serves as a vague structuring of the text.

Against Nuclear Energy in the 1970s

The discussion of nuclear energy resulted in disagreements inside the peace movement from the 1960s, because some distinguished between weapons and the civilian use of nuclear power (p. 124). The people from the centralistic orientated left wing was in favour of nuclear power. This goes specifically for the communist party but also social democrates and parts of Socialistisk Folkeparti (SF -The Socialist Peoples Party). Nuclear power not only divided the peace movement but also the left wing (p. 139). This had an interesting effect on the movement against nuclear power. The political parties had very little influence in the movement– and were not part of the movement either (pp. 136-37). The movement was very focused on expertise and facts (p. 127). This was made into a strategy for the movement, because they wanted to prevent the accusation of being a communist organization. The movement wanted to succeed in preventing nuclear power in Denmark, and they believed that to require a broad public support. The movement had a better relationship to the press than the other movements (p. 133) but still they could not totally avoid the critique of being a left wing organization. Developing alternatives also became part of their strategy. Already in 1976 a sister organization was founded,ˆÔOrganisationen for Vedvarende EnergiÔ (OVE - The Organization for Renewable Energy) in to balance the opposition against nuclear energy and the development of alternative forms of energy (p. 142). After 1977 the movement developed a more activist orientated strategy (pp. 145, 148). In the beginning of the 1980s the movement more or less had outplayed its role, because they had won the question of nuclear energy, when Danish non-nuclear energy decision was made official in 1985.

Resistance Movement against The European Community

The opposition against The European Community have had a different character than the other movements. It still exists actively though in differents forms with changed challenges. It hardly never experienced a real victory. Except for the election in 1992 but the present book stops in 1990. The movement have kept a form of organization similar to the early peace movement. The reason can be that the movement was founded before the experiences of the 1970s. It is difficult to explain why these experiences were not adapted later on.

This chapter is the most fragmented of the book.

There are a lot of information, numbers, people, activities, etc. The implicit conclusions are repetitions from the previous chapter. I have no clear diagnosis of the state of this chapter. In the other chapters there are interesting anecdotes, which balance the presentation, but in this chapter they are drowned in the huge amount of information with no obvious direction.

Conclusion

I have criticised the lack of ÔleitmotifÔ but expressed my appreciation of the many very interesting anecdotes and other kinds of information. This tendency in the book makes it most recommendable to people, who have some knowledge about, and perhaps even a personal background in, the movements presented in the book– or about the development of danish political culture in the twentieth century.

In spite of its shortcoming, there are some interesting aspects in the book. Søren H. Rasmussens presentation shows how effectively danish political culture are influenced by the fear of communism, also in relation to public movements as OOA, which have had no connection at all with communism and communists. Another exciting aspect deals with the type of political demand in these movements. They are all directed towards the parliamentary system. They never challenge the boundaries for parlamentarism. In this respect the movements are very soft and vague in their approaches. This can be a reason for their public appeal? I am not saying that the danish population necessarily have been reformist, but maybe these movements have chosen to believe so in forming their political strategies. Almost like a self fullfillment of prophecy. This kind of strategy has been tightly connected to the third–and last thing I will put forward: the role of counter expertise or advice. This goes like a string through all the movements and are not specific for the later movements. This is interesting since it is often regarded as a phenomenon the movements of the 1970es.

Copyright (c) 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: Morten Ranum. Review of Rasmussen, SÖ ¸ren Hein, *SÖ¦re Alliancer: Politiske BevÖ¦gelser i Efterkrigstidens Danmark*. H-Skand, H-Net Reviews. October, 1998.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2451

Copyright © 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.