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# The Rise of the Welfare State in International Society

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## Abstract

In this article I seek to develop a case for viewing the welfare state as a primary institution in international society. This is with particular reference to Norden (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), where it in the course of the 1930s, and particularly in the post-WWII era, was elevated to a core principle of legitimacy, largely defining the idea of nationhood for these countries. Furthermore, I will attempt to show how the adoption of this principle of legitimacy conditioned the Nordic countries' interpretation of a number of other primary institutions in international society such as diplomacy, war and trade. A key contribution of this approach is that it not only aspires to examine the evolution of one institution in isolation, as has often been attempted in English School scholarship, but to actively explore how institutions relate and interact with each other.

Keywords: English School; international society; welfare state; Scandinavia; institutions

## ***Introduction***

The conceptualisation of international institutions is arguably the English School's greatest contribution to the study of international relations. Hedley Bull's pioneering book, *The Anarchical Society* (1977), revolved around the five institutions of the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, war and the great powers. And more recently Barry Buzan has offered the conceptual distinction between 'primary institutions' and 'secondary institutions' to distinguish those institutions dealt with by English School scholars from those found in liberal-institutionalist theory. The former refers to 'durable and recognised patterns of shared practices rooted in values held commonly by the members of interstate societies, and embodying a mix of norms, rules and principles', whereas the latter refers to consciously designed regimes or organisations for dealing with various problems in international affairs (Buzan 2004, 181, 166).

The agreement on the centrality of institutions<sup>1</sup> is, however, not mirrored by an agreement on what the institutions of international society are and by which criteria a possible candidate should be deemed qualified for inclusion or not (Buzan 2004, 167-76). Holsti (2004, 25-6), for example, in his book *Taming the Sovereigns: Institutional Change in International Politics*, argues that the relevant institutions should be territoriality, sovereignty, international law, diplomacy, international trade, colonialism and war, while explicitly discarding the balance of power and the great powers as viable candidates. I do not propose to settle this debate here. Suffice it to say that I have dealt with the problem in a different article (Schouenborg 2011a), where I proposed that rather than setting up any fixed parameters for inclusion, we could approach the problem from a functional perspective. In this scheme there are five analytical categories - 1) principles of legitimacy and membership; 2) regulating conflicts; 3) trade; 4) authoritative communication; and 5) international organisation.

The first category covers institutions defining rightful membership and rightful conduct in international society. Regulating conflicts aims to capture those institutions that have to do with settlement of disputes between international society's members. These institutions can be based on either violence or non-violence. War is obviously an example of the former kind. Trade refers to institutions formed around the basic function of economic exchange. Authoritative communication encompasses those institutions which revolve around maintaining channels of communication between the members of international society - usually this is what we refer to as practices of diplomacy. Finally, the international

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this is only a partial agreement, as some scholars working within the tradition have actively resisted a focus on institutions and instead opted to emphasise other aspects of international society. See in particular Peter Wilson (2009) 'The English School and the Dead-End of International Institutions'.

organisation category is meant to capture institutions for aggregating interests between international society's members. It does *not* refer to specific international organisations such as, for example, the UN or the WTO. Rather, it is there to indicate practices of interest aggregation. Multilateralism is an institution in this sense, which can find practical expression in a 'physical' international organisation such as the UN (Schouenborg 2011 a).

These are lenses through which one should be able to analyse institutional formation within historical as well as contemporary international societies. The idea is that the institutions of international society are not fixed, but rather whatever you will find at any given time when you look through these five lenses. It should thus be emphasised that the categories have no ontological status, only institutions do.

One of the novelties of this framework is the first category: principles of legitimacy and membership. There has generally been paucity in English School writings about what kind of regimes have historically been considered legitimate members of international society. This question has often roamed around in the background, but it has seldom been explicitly addressed. One exception to this is David Armstrong's (1993) book *Revolution and World Order: The Revolutionary State in International Society*, where he among other things looks at revolutionary France's and revolutionary Russia's challenge to the conventional standard of membership and eventual integration into international society. Another exception is Ian Clark's (2009) exploration of democracy in international society as a standard of both inclusion and exclusion.

In this article I will attempt to analyse a less grand but nevertheless significant principle of legitimacy, namely the welfare state, which can also be argued to be the core institution of the Scandinavian regional international society. As I will argue in a moment, the Scandinavian case is interesting because the welfare state ideology largely came to define nationhood for these countries. This not only appeared to result in more generous welfare regimes than those found in neighbouring Britain and on the continent, but also had a significant impact on local practices of diplomacy, international organisation and conflict regulation etc. This is the key claim and contribution of this article: that one primary institution – the welfare state – influenced institutional evolution in other functional areas.<sup>2</sup>

The article will be structured around the five analytical categories identified above - 1) principles of legitimacy and membership; 2) regulating conflicts; 3) trade; 4) authoritative communication; and 5) international organisation. Considerably more space will be dedicated

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<sup>2</sup> Following Lawler (1997), Ingebritsen (2006) and Bergman (2006 and 2007) I see a constitutive causal connection between the welfare state principle of legitimacy in the domestic political structures of the Scandinavian states and their propensity towards solidarist policies in the international sphere. When I therefore say below that their solidarist foreign policies are 'tied to', 'associated with' or 'entailed by' the welfare state ideology, it is this constitutive causal logic I am referring to. However, I must emphasise that I am not making general claims about any intrinsic international solidarity of socialist or social democratic states. As the case of Germany has shown us, *national* socialism can imply the very opposite. I am only making claims about the specific way international solidarity was/is conceptualised in the context of the Scandinavian welfare state. Moreover, as the analysis hopefully shows, this sense of international solidarity was first and foremost directed towards the other peoples of Scandinavia and only secondly towards the peoples and nations of the wider international society.

to the first analytical category, as it is here the case for the Nordic conception of the welfare state will be made. In the conclusion I will draw together the findings of the analysis and connect these back to the central issue of institutions and regime types in English School scholarship. For practical reasons the period under investigation here will be limited to the early 1920s to the end of the Cold War.

## ***Legitimacy and membership***

*Capitalism in the north, it seems to me, has been modified, and in a sense, controlled, the profit motive in many fields drastically curbed or abolished – subjugated might be a better word. To a considerable degree it is true that the domestic economy has been made to serve the greatest good of the greatest number (Childs 1936, xii).*

In this section I will discuss the emergence of the welfare state as a distinct principle of legitimacy in the Nordic polities during the 1930s. Firstly, in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and secondly, in the two ‘latecomers’ to the idea, Finland and Iceland. While there is a rich literature in comparative politics (see especially Baldwin 1990 and Esping-Andersen 1985 and 1990) debating the detailed differences between various types of welfare states and the reasons for their emergence, I will only engage with this indirectly. This is because the argument I wish to pursue here is not so much about the technical details of different welfare state models or regimes, but rather the elevation of the idea of *being* a welfare state to the status of a key discursive prop in the Nordic polities’ collective identity, something which to the best of my knowledge is not true of any other welfare states. The main marker of this discursive shift was the introduction of the concept of a ‘people’s home’ (*folkhem*) by the Swedish social democrats in the early 1930s, and while not all the Nordic polities adopted a similar all-embracing concept, they did gradually move the idea of being a welfare state to the centre of what defined them as nations, with the possible exception of Iceland. This is the story I will attempt to tell below. To that effect I will first deal with the emergence of a strong welfare state constituency in the Nordic polities during the 1930s, then look at how the idea became dominant in the core countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, its eventual adoption in the two latecomers, Finland and Iceland, and finally its persistence throughout the period explored here.

The main political actors responsible for the emergence of the welfare state in the Nordic countries were the social democratic parties, which came to enjoy a dominant position in the party systems of Denmark, Norway and Sweden during the 1930s. This is not to say that they had a blue-print for what the welfare state should look like and for how it should develop – most reforms were incremental and responded to immediate problems or crises – nor that they were alone in pushing for social reform; in Denmark in particular, liberals and social liberals had in many ways been the pioneers of social legislation. Rather, the argument

is that they were the *predominant* force behind the institutionalisation of the welfare state.<sup>3</sup> Esping-Andersen (1985, 159), following Titmuss (1974), speaks of two commitments in this respect:

First, society takes over responsibility to provide and guarantee adequate levels of welfare for all members of society; citizen entitlements, rather than family or market contract, constitute the nexus of welfare distribution. Second, socially stigmatizing and degrading forms of public relief are discarded in favor of an inviolable right to a certain level of welfare, to be determined by prevailing societal standards.

Some authors, particularly Baldwin (1990), have argued that these commitments were not intrinsic to the Nordic labour movements from their emergence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that the universal right to social insurance was not only an idea of their making, but reflected equally a compromise with the middle-classes to make sure that they would not be excluded from increasingly generous welfare measures. This is true to an extent. Before the 1920s and 1930s the social democratic parties had been marginalised and had generally pursued a strategy based on three elements: 'critiques of bourgeois reformism; development of mutual aid-schemes within the "ghetto party" tradition; and attempts to influence whatever reform legislation might happen to be introduced' (Esping-Andersen 1985, 149). The bourgeois state was looked upon with suspicion, and thus the social democratic parties were wary of channelling the provision of social goods through its 'arteries'. It was feared that this would only dilute the strength of the proletariat and prolong the survival of capitalism (Esping-Andersen 1985, 145-9). However, the ideological kernel of the two central commitments of the institutionalised welfare state was already present in the mutual aid-schemes of the 'ghetto party', and its broader acceptance in society was made possible when the social democratic parties realised that they had the power to take over the administrative organs of state during the 1920s and 1930s, albeit via compromises with the right. It is this development I will turn to now.

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<sup>3</sup> Lars Bo Kaspersen (2006) has recently proposed an alternative explanation, seeing the development of specifically the Danish welfare state as a response to various external pressures resulting from geopolitical circumstances. However, I do not find his argument convincing for a number of reasons. First of all, because it is based on the highly questionable realist assumption that all international politics is a struggle for state survival (see Wendt 1992 and 1999 for a refutation of this). Second, because the supposed strategy of using the welfare state to chart a middle course between communists and capitalists does not hold in a comparative perspective. According to this logic, you would expect that the altogether more exposed Finland would have been the front-runner when it came to promoting the welfare state, which it was not; or that equally exposed Austria would have adopted a welfare system similar to the one found in Scandinavia, which it did not do. It was no doubt convenient for Denmark and the other Nordic states to be able to portray themselves as somewhat aloof from the ideological conflicts of the 1930s and the Cold War, but there is not much to suggest that this fundamentally dictated their internal political struggles.

The first crisis agreement was *Kanslergadeforliget* (literally the agreement in Kanslergade) entered into by the Danish social democrats, headed by Thorvald Stauning, and the liberals (agrarians) and social liberals in 1933. The immediate cause of the agreement was the dire state of economy, and after protracted negotiations, lasting into the early hours of the following morning, a settlement was reached whereby the liberals and social liberals consented to extensive government proposals to combat unemployment via public works and social programmes in exchange for policies aimed at helping struggling farmers. While building on previous programmes, their radical nature signified a watershed in attitudes about society's responsibility for the individual (Nordstrom 2000, 271-2).

The agreement in Denmark served as a direct model for subsequent agreements in the rest of Scandinavia and also in Finland and Iceland. The Swedes were the first to follow suit with the so-called *Kohandel* (literally 'cows trade') in the spring of 1933. The Swedish social democrats had been briefed about the contents of the agreement by their Danish counterparts and prime minister Hansson referred to it directly in his May day speech as something that was also worth considering in Sweden. The agreement in Norway came a bit later, in 1935, which seemed to be due to the more conflictual relationship between left and right in this country, something I will return to shortly (Lindström 1985, 160). Finland and Iceland also reached broad agreements between left and right, in 1937 and 1934 respectively. However, these agreements were not concluded from a position of dominant social democratic strength, as was the case in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and hence seem to foreshadow the somewhat slower development of the welfare state in these two countries. In Iceland, the social democrats, or the labour party, was a junior partner in the agreement, and even though the social democrats in Finland had been quite successful at the polls, they were still regarded with some suspicion on the right due to the legacy of the civil war (Kirby 2006, 195-6; Hilson 2008, 36-7).

The question of the relative strength of the social democratic parties in connection with these crisis agreements is integral to the argument about the emergence of the welfare state as a key symbol of national identity. In 1935, the Danish social democrats ran on the slogan 'Stauning or Chaos' and polled over 46 percent of the vote (their greatest victory ever). The Norwegian social democrats had succeeded in gaining the support of 40 percent of the electorate in 1933 and their Swedish counterparts 42 percent in 1932. What were the factors behind this success? In the Danish case it is not possible to discount the effect of the 1933 crisis agreement itself, but considering that the Norwegian and Swedish electoral gains came before their respective agreements, another explanation appears necessary. There now seems to be a broad consensus amongst historians that the social democratic success was primarily tied to these parties' transformation from 'class parties' to 'people's parties' during this period. What is meant by this is that all three of them abandoned their goal of revolutionary socialism and started to embrace nationalist rhetoric which had formerly been monopolised by conservatives. Swedish social democratic leader Per Albin Hansson seems



to have been the first to do this in a famous speech to parliament in 1928, although there is evidence of him using this rhetoric all the way back to 1921 (Sejersted 2005, 165):

The foundation of the home is community and solidarity. The good home knows no privilege or neglect, no favourites and no stepchildren. There, no one looks down on another, no one strives to gain advantage at the expense of others, the strong do not repress and rob the weak. In the good home equality, thoughtfulness, co-operation and helpfulness prevail. Applied to the great people's and citizen's home this would mean the breakdown of all social and economic barriers that now divide citizens into privileged and deprived, into the rulers and the ruled, into rich and poor, the propertied and the destitute, the robbers and the robbed. Swedish society is not yet the good citizen's home...If [it] is to become [so] class differences must be banished, social care must be developed, there must be an economic levelling out, the workers must be accorded a share on economic administration, democracy must be introduced and applied to social and economic life (quoted in Hilson 2008, 106).

Via this rhetorical act the social democratic project became intrinsically intertwined with that of the nation, and the word 'people', with all its national symbolism, appropriated from the conservatives. This was perhaps even more explicit in the Danish party programme from 1934: *Denmark for the People*. In the first paragraph the social democrats charged the conservative party with being infested with Nazism and in the second paragraph it appealed explicitly to constituencies outside the working class, from farmers and tradesmen to state functionaries. The programme's conclusion is emblematic of the appropriation of nationalist rhetoric and the attempt to broaden the party's appeal. It read: 'Forward towards the daily chores. For home and children, for people and country. Denmark for the people!' (my translation, Socialdemokratiet 1934a). Tied to this shift was Hansson's and Stauning's increasing portrayal as 'fathers of the people' (*landsfædre*), implying the organic unity of the social democratic party and the nation. This was particularly evident in the Danish propaganda movie, equally titled *Denmark for the People* (Socialdemokratiet 1934b). However, the same sort of imagery was clearly present in Sweden as well (Sejersted 2005, 165-6).

For reasons that are not entirely clear, there was not the same direct appropriation of nationalist rhetoric in Norway. This may have been due to the fact that the Norwegian national identity differed from Denmark and Sweden, putting an emphasis on the 'founding fathers at Eidsvold' (a reference to the 1814 constitution) rather than the idea of a people existing since time immemorial (Sejersted 2005, 167). Also, the social democrats had been far more radical in Norway, only discarding their goal of wholesale revolution from around 1933 on (Nordstrom 2000, 275). However, with the crisis agreement of 1935 the situation started to largely mirror that in the rest of Scandinavia. The social democrats had clearly committed themselves to

democracy and parliamentary reformism and had successfully broadened their appeal to include farmers, fishermen and small traders (Hilson 2008, 42).

Above I described Finland and Iceland as 'latecomers' to the idea of the welfare state, and there are a number of reasons for doing so. First and foremost, the idea was not integrated into their national discourses to the same extent that it was in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Contrary to the discourse coming out of Scandinavia, where welfare was both conceptualised as a social right and as a positive investment in the growth of society and the private economy (Andersson 2006), Finland and Iceland tended to talk about welfare as a luxury which was dependent on economic prosperity. As Jonsson (2001, 250) has put it:

Social policy has played only a subordinate role in public policy and debate, a feature that Iceland seems to share with Finland...welfare services have been perceived as a product of the economic well-being of the nation and consequently subject to changes in the fortunes of the economy.

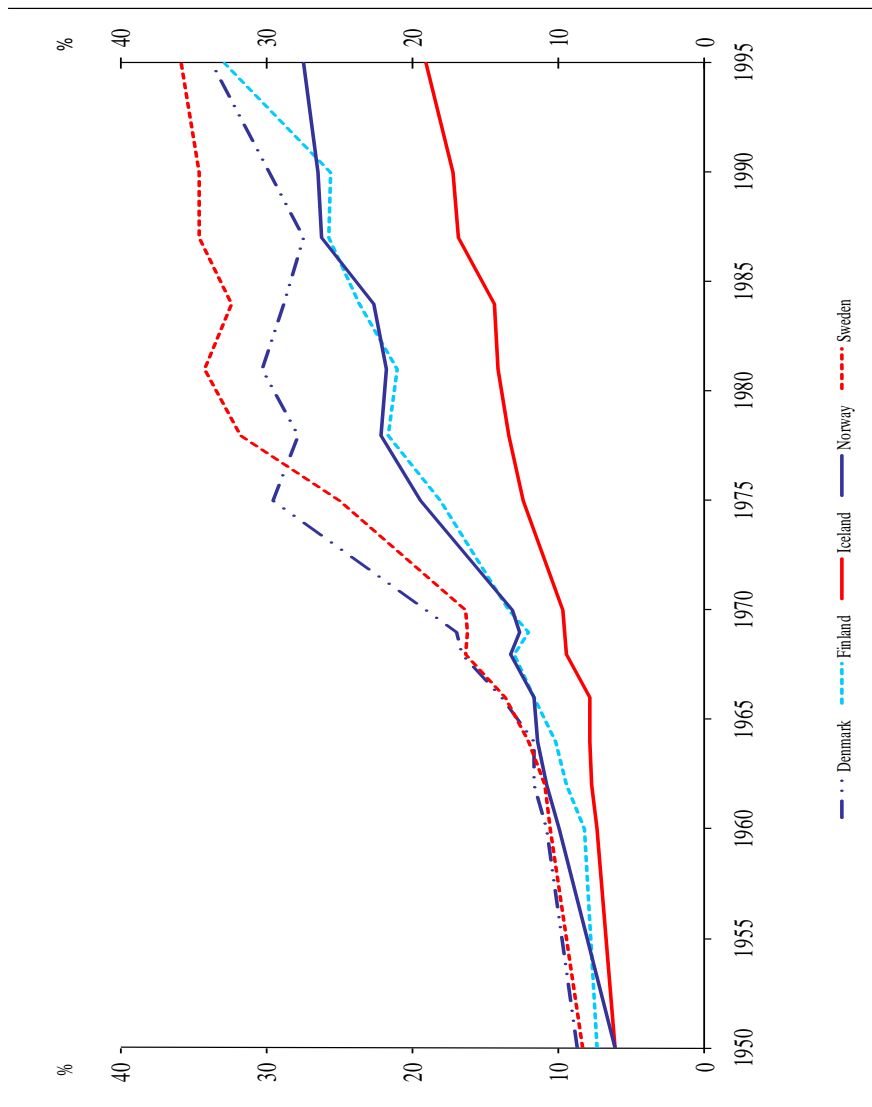
Or as Kettunen (2001, 231) puts it with respect to Finland: 'the mode of thought and action was reinforced in which social policies have been assessed from the point of view of the limits of economic resources'.

The second plank of this argument, and I will have more to say about this in the section on international organisation in connection with the Nordic Council, is that in so far as the welfare state was adopted as a national identity marker by these two countries, it was part of the broader sense of belonging to the Nordic region. In Finland this was particularly with reference to the view of Sweden as a kind of beacon of modernisation and social development (Kettunen 2001, 233-4), whereas in Iceland, politicians, and especially the social democrats, were looking towards Denmark as a model (Ólafsson 1993, 62 and 1999, 77). Furthermore, the influential book *The Northern Countries in World Economy* (1937, 7), published jointly by all five Nordic countries, explicitly promoted the idea of one region with common and advanced political, economic and social traits:

Without any sudden social revolution the Northern Countries have attained to their present form of political democracy, which leaves it to every individual to exercise his influence in social affairs...With this political democracy is combined a relatively highly developed social equality. There are, as in other countries, different social strata with different income-levels. But it may justly be said that the passage from one stratum to another encounters fewer obstacles than in many other countries. The selection of the fittest is in many ways promoted by existing institutions and is in remarkably small degree hampered by class privileges or exclusive class traditions.

The second reason why it makes sense to speak of the two countries as latecomers is that they consistently lagged behind in social expenditure as a percentage of GDP during what is

usually referred to as the 'golden age' of the welfare state: early 1950s to mid 1970s (see figure 1 below). And in the case of Iceland, this difference persisted throughout the period explored here. However, basing one's judgment on these figures alone, it could equally be argued that Norway was a latecomer seeing that it was closer to Finland in terms of expenditure after the great expansion of the welfare state from the mid-1960s on than to Denmark and Sweden. What is noteworthy, though, is the steady increase in the percentage of GDP dedicated to welfare spending in all five countries as time passed by.



**Figure 1 – Social expenditure in the Nordic countries as a percentage of GDP  
(adapted from Jonsson 2001)<sup>4</sup>**

Now, briefly turning to reasons why the welfare state was not embraced to the same extent in Finland's and Iceland's discourses of national identity and why they lacked behind in social expenditure, two explanations are usually on offer. The first has to do with the absence of a strong social democratic party. This is not so much an argument about the relative support for social democratic ideals in the respective populations, but rather the failure to translate this support into political power via the party system. In Finland, this explanation sees the mistrust of the social democrats due to the civil war by parties on right-hand side of the political spectrum as a key factor (Kettunen 2001, 225-6). In Iceland, on the other hand, the problem was more one of the left's own making in the sense that it remained disunited due to internal squabbling. This split the vote between several leftist parties and lost them the direct support of the otherwise strong unions (Jonsson 2001, 267). The second explanation is based on cultural differences. This is with particular reference to Iceland, where some have argued that the mentality of the people was closer to that found in the United States, with a stronger emphasis on individualism and self-help (Ólafsson 1999, 79). However, other evidence from the mid-1980s suggests that Icelanders were less content with the quality of their public services (health, child and elderly care, education) and were more inclined to choose equality over freedom compared with the rest of Norden (Ólafsson 1993, 79-81). Whether this actually disproves or confirms the cultural difference thesis is hard to tell. It could be argued this was just a case of them wanting better services, while their culture of individualism inhibited them from paying the bill.

While there was thus a marked unevenness across Norden when it came to embracing the welfare state as a core principle of legitimacy, I will nevertheless hold that it had become firmly entrenched by the 1980s. This claim seems paradoxical at first, since it was during this very decade that a strong discourse emerged about the 'crisis of the welfare state'. Neoliberalism was on the rise internationally and the Nordic countries had been exposed to quite severe economic shocks as a consequence of the oil crisis in the early 1970s and the general decline in export markets. In the views of many, the welfare state had come to stand for bloated bureaucracies and economically unsustainable social policies. However, the interesting thing is that welfare spending continued to increase, albeit with some

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<sup>4</sup> Sources: *Social tryghed i de nordiske lande 1998* (Social security in the Nordic countries 1998). Nordisk Socialstatistisk Komité (NOSOSKO) 13:2000 (and earlier publications in the same series).

*Note:* Social expenditure as defined by NOSOSKO, i.e. primarily public transfers and services, but also employers' contributions to social security, pay during illness and compulsory private pension funds.

slumps along the way, as a percentage of GDP in all five Nordic countries throughout the 1970s and 1980s (see figure 1). Furthermore, there was no real challenge to the two core principles of the institutionalised welfare state: 1) society takes over the responsibility for the social well-being of all its members; and 2) the removal of social stigmatising in connection with the provision of welfare (see Titmuss above). The Nordic countries continued to regard themselves as vanguard welfare societies (Hilson 2008, 109-11). The most significant change, if one is to be identified, was that the discourse, particularly prevalent in Sweden, about welfare spending being a positive investment in economic growth, seemed to die out (Andersson 2006; Sejersted 2005, 445). In this way Scandinavia can be said to have converged with Finland and Iceland to the extent that welfare was still seen as a citizen's right, but as a right that was intrinsically costly for society to uphold.

To conclude, the idea of the institutionalised welfare state was adopted as a distinct principle of legitimacy in all five Nordic countries during the period explored here. First in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and later in Finland and Iceland. In metropolitan Scandinavia this was predominantly via social democratic electoral hegemony based on the transformation from class to people's parties during the 1920s and 1930s. In the two latecomers, it was mainly tied to the process of identifying with metropolitan Scandinavia and the ideational construction of a wider Nordic region.

This is not to underestimate the influence of the social democratic parties in these two countries or indeed the desire of most parties across the political spectrum to promote some increases in welfare spending. But rather to make the counterfactual argument that if they had not identified with metropolitan Scandinavia, and imported their models to an extent, it is likely that their welfare regimes might have looked more like those on the continent.

This argument about a unique Nordic interpretation of the welfare state should equally not be taken to mean that all, or even most, of the ideas it was based on originated in Norden. Throughout the period explored here, ideas were actively imported from the continent, Britain and North America, particularly ideas pertaining to reform socialism and social engineering (Musiał 2002). The argument is mainly about the differences in practices and norms/rules which they gave rise to in this specific context, i.e. the rise of the institutionalised welfare state as a defining feature of Nordic nationhood. In the rest of the Western world, 'embedded liberalism' (Ruggie 1982) in the form of different types of welfare regimes was generally accepted in the interwar and post-war periods. Yet, the political forces sustaining them never took on the shape of a broad national movement encompassing most sectors of society and creating a consensus across the political spectrum. As Esping-Andersen (1999, 78-9) points out, only in Norden was there a principled belief in rights to welfare based on citizenship rather than various forms of market-determined need, as was the case in its closest 'welfare competitors', Britain and the Netherlands. Baldwin (1990, 29) echoes this when he states that:

Solidaristic policies have become accepted, legitimate and uncontroversial only to the extent that they are regarded as a right rather than as charity or altruism [...] This has been the basis of the claim made for the superiority of Scandinavian welfare – measures woven in as the warp of society's fabric, not considerations exceptionally begrudged the poor and the marginal [...] Social citizenship entitles all to benefits that in different value systems must be otherwise justified or are granted only on demeaning terms, marking the recipient as less than a full member of the community.

In the following sections I will attempt to trace how this new principle of legitimacy, and especially its emphasis on equality and solidarism, interacted with institutions in the four remaining analytical categories.

### ***Regulating conflicts***

The emergence of the welfare state in Norden seems to be neatly correlated with the conclusive abandonment of war as a legitimate way of settling international conflicts for these states. It is true that they had been at the forefront of efforts to promote peaceful conflict resolution internationally since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (see in particular Holbraad 1991 and Jones 1939), but it was only during this period that violence was effectively abandoned as a policy option between themselves and where they started to dedicate significant resources through the League of Nations, and latterly the UN, in pursuit of this wider international agenda. Part of this was the successful resolution of a number of Nordic non-wars (conflicts that could have turned hot but did not), most notably the Finnish-Swedish conflict over the Åland Islands in the early 1920s and the dispute over East Greenland between Denmark and Norway, settled in 1933 (Archer and Joenniemi 2003). These paved the way for the outward projection of international solidarist values inherent in the welfare state ideology. This came in two forms. The first was the principled social democratic stance against war as an attack on the transnational solidarity of workers, and peoples more generally. The second form was the active support of international conflict resolution, of which Nordic peacekeeping missions were some of the most prominent examples.

I should preface this discussion by stressing that it was only *inter-Nordic* war that seems to have been conclusively ruled out by the early 1930s. That is to say that war was no longer an institution of this particular regional international society, but it was no doubt still an institution of the broader global international society in which Norden was embedded. The rising European tensions throughout the 1930s made all the Nordic polities realise that war was a distinct possibility and that it was increasingly prudent to take defensive measures. And towards the end of the decade they were all increasing their spending on armaments. Indeed all of them, save for Sweden, became involved in WWII. Denmark and Norway were occupied

by Germany in 1940, Iceland by Britain and then the United States, and Finland entered the war in 1941.

The experience of war and occupation had a profound impact on political attitudes in Norden with regards to national security. So much so that Denmark, Iceland and Norway decided to join a military alliance in 1949 (NATO) when tensions were again on the rise in Europe during the opening stages of the Cold War. Sweden maintained her traditional neutrality, but one backed by a large army, and Finland was equally prepared, although having signed a treaty of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union in 1948. One could therefore feel compelled to ask the question of whether the polities had given up their attempts to influence their international environment in a more peaceful direction and accepted that non-violent conflict resolution was only an option between themselves internally?

I will argue that this was not the case. First, both before and after WWII, Denmark, Norway and Sweden had explored the idea of establishing a defence union which would serve to guard their neutrality during a great power war, and indeed it was only when these negotiations failed that Denmark and Norway decided to join NATO. However, this decision was taken with great hesitation, and only after the Norwegian government had come to the conclusion that the combined forces of the Scandinavian countries would not be sufficient to independently deter an attack by the Soviet Union (Holbraad 1991, 101-2; Riste 2005, 200-1). Moreover, once in NATO, Denmark and Norway went out of their way to stress the non-offensive character of the alliance. This included decisions not to allow the stationing of foreign troops on their territory in peacetime, including the stationing of nuclear weapons, and in the case of Denmark, military spending which consistently ranked below the target agreed to by the allies. The latter is what has made historian Poul Villaume (1995) speak of Denmark as the 'reluctant ally'. More broadly, alliance membership came to be embedded within the concept of a 'Nordic Balance', meaning a balance where Finland on the one hand, and Denmark and Norway on the other, could stave off demands from the two superpowers and maintain Norden as a low-tension area. According to this logic, if the Soviet Union leaned on Finland, it would push Denmark and Norway further towards NATO and the other way around – something neither of the superpowers were interested in (Wæver 1992, 78-9; Killham 1993). There was thus a continued commitment to neutrality, and nothing to indicate a newfound interest in war as an institution of conflict regulation in the broader international society.

Furthermore, antimilitaristic sentiment was still strongly represented in the respective social democratic parties, and general international disarmament remained a core objective of Nordic social democratic governments in the post-WWII period (Blidberg 1984, 36-8; Olesen 2003, 31-56). Moreover, in 1951, the social democratic parties of Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden placed themselves firmly behind the idea of collective defence and the illegitimacy of offensive warfare when they issued a joint peace programme. Prime minister of

Denmark, Hans Hedtoft, echoed the premises of the programme in a speech to parliament later that year:

...any aggressive action, regardless of the type of weapon it is pursued with, and regardless of whether it is pursued openly or via support for civil war in a third country or via any other means, is a crime against the peace and security of the entire world. All governments must commit themselves not to attack any other state or support any policy of aggression. In a hostile conflict it should be the UN who decides who the attacker is (my translation, quoted in Midtgaard 2005, 45).

This point is bolstered if one looks at the policies the Nordic countries pursued, particularly but not exclusively, via the UN. In general, these were about building up multilateral frameworks and legal regimes, which sought to make the use of war redundant as an institution for settling conflicts in international society. One element of this, somewhat paradoxically, was the practice of UN peacekeeping missions. Introduced under the leadership of the Swedish secretary-general, Dag Hammerskjöld, in 1956, the idea was to place a military force between two opposing sides so they would be able to negotiate a settlement via peaceful means. The three principles guiding these missions were consent of the parties, impartiality and non-use of force. Thus, although an armed force was involved, the core idea was non-violent conflict resolution. During the course of the Cold War, the Nordic countries became some of the most ardent supporters of this practice. They closely cooperated on the planning and deployment of the missions and contributed about 25 percent of the 125.000 troops that had been sent out on such missions by 1987.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, there seems to have been a striking consensus behind this policy across the political spectrum in individual countries (Midtgaard 2009, 48-9).

Jakobsen (2006, 17-27) has offered a number of interrelated explanations for why this came about and why the extraordinary Nordic support for peacekeeping remained unusually consistent throughout the Cold War period. The five factors he suggests are: 1) the suitability of the Nordic states; 2) common interests; 3) national interests; 4) an unusually high overlap between national interests and values and UN goals and ideals; and finally 5) that the Nordic involvement in UN peacekeeping became a success story. Here I will focus in particular on factors 2 through 4.

The second factor refers to common small state interests. In a world where the Nordic polities only enjoyed insignificant material power, it appeared rational to work against the principle that might should make right in international relations.

The third factor refers to specific national interests, both domestically and internationally. The leaders of Denmark and Norway were keen to demonstrate to an audience at home and abroad that their membership of NATO did not fundamentally

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<sup>5</sup> Iceland's direct contribution was of course rather limited, since it did not have a standing army.



compromise their commitment to the principle of collective security. Similarly, in Sweden, it helped silence the critics who held that its stance of armed neutrality undermined the ruling ideology of international solidarity. And in Finland, it served the purpose of convincing the West that the country was able to pursue a foreign policy independent of the Soviet Union. I consider all these points valid and well substantiated. There was a rational interest (calculation) in promoting non-violent conflict resolution via the solidarist support of international peacekeeping. Moreover, this was achieved at a relatively low cost, both in terms of economic resources and soldiers lost. As Jakobsen (2006, 27) puts it: 'The development of the Nordic Model [of peacekeeping] can, in short, be explained by the fact that it generated power, pride and prestige on the cheap'.

However, Jakobsen also notes the unusually high overlap between national interests and values and UN goals and ideals (factor 4), and I believe this is crucial. Jakobsen (2006, 24, footnote 75) is quick to point out that there is often made too much of the distinction between interests and ideals in the academic literature. Nevertheless, he does seem to suggest that regardless of the near perfect fit of interests (factors 2 and 3) with the lofty ideals of the UN, the Nordic support of peacekeeping would probably have been short-lived had it not proved so successful. In other words, what sustained it were the tangible gains in power and prestige it conferred on these small polities. This may be true, but I will risk the proposition that regardless of this supposed overlap, there would inevitably have been some form of commitment to international solidarism and the UN. Again, the ideals of non-violent conflict resolution and a rule-based international order encompassing political, social and economic equality appeared to be shared across the political spectrum in the Nordic polities. There were obviously rational (calculated) elements in the decision to support UN peacekeeping, but these were elements conceived within the framework of an international solidarism informed by the welfare state ideology.

To conclude, I will therefore hold it is possible to observe certain local institutional practices in the area of conflict regulation, which appear to be tied to the specific regime type prevalent in Norden. The heightened sense of transnational solidarity led to an extraordinary commitment to peaceful conflict resolution. This also seemed to be the case in the area of international economic exchanges, which I will turn to next.

## ***Trade***

Another dimension that appears to be premised on the prevailing welfare state ideology is the unusually generous Nordic official development assistance (ODA) programmes, which became the norm in the post-WWII era. Indeed, towards the end of the period explored here, they contributed between 100 and 190 percent more than the OECD average, and Norway was in the lead with 1.1 percent of GNP (Pratt 1989a, 196).<sup>6</sup> In this section I will try to show

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<sup>6</sup> Excluding Finland and Iceland.

how this generosity was linked to the ideological commitment to the welfare principle and a sense of solidarity transcending the boundaries of the state. However, I will also describe how the more liberal trade practices, which the Nordic countries had adhered to since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, persisted and how they can only be said to have been marginally challenged via the short-lived Nordic support of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) demanded by countries in the so-called global 'South'.

In his book on the history of Norway's foreign relations, Olav Riste (2005) entitles one of his chapters 'An Ethical Foreign Policy?'. He does this to suggest that policies pursued in the post-WWII era, such as support for decolonisation, development assistance and UN peacekeeping, were informed by a long-standing Norwegian 'missionary impulse'. Others have argued that it was a combination of religious beliefs and social democratic ideals that caused the strong commitment to helping others in need in Scandinavia in general (Pratt 1989, 198). Here I shall not try to settle this debate. Rather, the purpose will be to demonstrate how the practical conception of international trade and aid policies was influenced by the ideology underpinning the institutionalised welfare state.

Drawing on the Swedish case, Hook (1995, 103) has shown how the Nordic 'model' of development assistance differed markedly from that pursued by other Western donor nations. Its core objective was the promotion of socio-economic equalisation, it was usually in the form of untied grants, based on long-term commitments and directed towards countries that were nonaligned and seemed to aspire to develop a social democratic form of government. This was mirrored in some early Swedish policy statements. For example this one, outlining the rationale of the Swedish parliament's first major ODA appropriation:

to carry out such structural changes as will create conditions for development characterised by economic and social equalization....Aid must not imply foreign economic and political interference...nor must questions of race and religion play any role. [Sweden must display a] positive attitude toward the cultural background and specific needs of recipient countries (quoted in Hook 1995, 99).

In contrast to this approach, many Western governments directed their aid towards countries where they had commercial or geopolitical interests, it was often in the form of concessional loans, was tied to conditions and focused on the short to medium-term (Hook 1995, 103). There were thus a number of qualitative differences distinguishing these policies in addition to the quantitative one of simply being more generous.

So far this argument has mainly been based on evidence from Sweden. Nevertheless, the same aid practices were evident in all of Norden, giving credence to the idea of a Nordic model. Indeed, Nordic officials regularly met and coordinated their programmes, especially via the Nordic Council (Wendt 1981, ch.42; Laatikainen 1996; Engh and Pharo 2009). However, it should be stressed that Finland and particularly Iceland again seemed to be outliers in this respect. They generally adhered to the qualitative aspects of the

Nordic model, but during most of the period explored here their contribution in quantitative terms was significantly lower (Laatikainen 1996, 115), a possible indicator of their less developed welfare commitments.

Turning to the Nordic countries' general trade policies, the picture becomes a bit more murky. What I mean by this is that the solidarism displayed in their development policies was not as immediately evident in their regulation of commercial flows. Throughout the period various tariff regimes imposed barriers on imports from developing countries. Some of these policies were expressions of participation in GATT and EFTA, and in Denmark's case the EC from the early 1970s. However, even in a country like Norway, which could be said to have gone farthest in opening its economy to developing countries, various textile and agricultural products were subjected to tariffs and forms of technical trade hindrances (Angell 1990, 144-54). It thus seems as if solidarism with the Third World in commercial relations was only accepted to the extent that it did not harm crucial national economic interests.

One thing contradicting this interpretation, though, was the strong Nordic support during the 1970s of the NIEO demanded by the developing countries in the so-called 'like-minded group'. Norway was particularly active here, taking the initiative to form the group together with the Netherlands, and the efforts were also broadly supported by the other Nordic countries, even when liberal parties were in government. Yet, the initiative failed to win the support of most major Western states, and there was no appetite for unilateral concessions from the Nordic group (Pratt 1989b, 204-7).

Although it is hard to establish with any level of certainty, it also appears as if the general inclination towards open international markets in these countries played a role in how they approached preferential trade agreements. It has to be remembered that none of them abandoned the market principle in their domestic economies during the 1930s. What they abandoned was the idea that the market should control welfare distribution. In addition, they were plainly aware of the risks posed to small, export-dependent economies by various forms of protectionism internationally. Finally, in their opinion, what had allowed them to prosper and indeed achieve a very high GDP level over the preceding century was precisely profits accrued from international trade. Following this logic, it perhaps becomes easier to understand later Nordic explanations for the widespread failure of their aid policies. In this discourse, blame was assigned to the developing countries for not managing to build up their national strength and succeed in international markets. The role of the donor and the structure of the international economic system were dismissed as secondary (Laatikainen 1996, 121).

There thus seems to be enough evidence to suggest that the prevailing welfare state ideology influenced how these countries behaved in regard to international trade and development assistance. Meanwhile, the Scandinavian core of Denmark, Sweden and Norway again appears to have been in the lead, possibly another indicator of the hegemonic role of the social democratic party in these polities.

## ***Authoritative communication***

In this section I will look at practices of diplomacy in Norden, and especially how they came to be increasingly coordinated and democratised during the period explored here. And, as was the case in the other functional areas, this cooperation often resulted in the outward projection of welfare state norms.

Nordic cooperation in diplomacy was nothing new in 1919. In the preceding century, they had, for example, issued almost identical declarations of neutrality, and in 1912 Denmark, Norway and Sweden in fact issued a *joint* declaration and committed themselves not to unilaterally change this without prior mutual consultation. They had thus been speaking with one voice on certain issues for some time. However, with the establishment of the League of Nations, their agreement on most issues, and their resulting efforts to champion them in unison, increasingly made other countries refer to them as the 'Scandinavian bloc' and their representatives as 'Scandinavian representatives' (Jones 1939, 3; Götz 2005, 271). What united them was first and foremost what you could call their attempt to 'contract back into international politics'. In other words, rather than merely securing international recognition of their permanent neutralisation, they sought to change the international environment by arguing for an international legal regime based on general disarmament and compulsory arbitration of all disputes.

They also enjoyed similar views in another area, namely when it came to the idea of 'open diplomacy'. Originally an issue promoted by the Bolshevik government of Russia, it was subsequently embraced by American president Woodrow Wilson who made it the first of his so-called 'fourteen points' at the end of WWI. It basically entailed that secret diplomacy should be a thing of the past and that international treaties should be negotiated and arrived at openly, thus allowing for public scrutiny. What is more, this commitment was in many countries quickly translated into the more wide-ranging demand that just as the people's representatives should have a say over government policy in general, they should also have a say over the formulation of foreign policy and the conduct of diplomacy in particular. In the Danish context this sentiment was very clearly expressed by the social democrats in 1919 when they stated that their goal was a 'reorganisation of the diplomatic service, so that foreign policy is unequivocally made the subject of the people's representatives' control and authority' (my translation, quoted in Lidegaard 2003, 173). In the following years, parliamentary committees overseeing foreign policy were established in Denmark, Sweden and Norway (Brusewitz 1933).

Taking this argument a bit further, Götz (2005, 266) has talked about two dimensions of the concept 'parliamentary diplomacy'. The first dimension is the one outlined above, where countries start to form blocs or 'parties' in international organisations. The second dimension relates to the democratisation of diplomacy, and involves the sending of parliamentarians as representatives to these organisations. This second dimension was also embraced by the

Nordic polities, including Finland, who consistently had a high representation of parliamentarians in their delegations to the League (Götz 2005, 272-5).

Over the course of the interwar period, and particularly after WWII, these practices became more and more institutionalised in Norden. A system of rotation emerged whereby the countries would in turn occupy seats on various boards and councils of the League and later the UN, OECD, IMF, World Bank etc. (Götz 2005, 271; Petersen 2004, 111). As one scholar has put it:

The underlying principles of Nordic cooperation in the United Nations included a strong multilateralist ethic, a small state commitment to and appreciation for the concept of collective security, and the externalization of the norms of Social Democratic governance (Laatikainen 2003, 414).

This commonality of values, including the commitment to the welfare state, led to an unusually high voting cohesion amongst the Nordic group, growing upwards of 90 percent in the first few years of the UN's existence (Laatikainen 2003, 416). Another indicator of the institutionalised nature of this diplomatic cooperation was when Denmark in 1965 unilaterally decided to support a more restrictive UN policy towards the South African government. Following this incident, Denmark was scolded by the other Nordic countries for having broken the norm of prior consultation, and there was talk of making this a specific obligation under the Helsinki treaty on Nordic cooperation (Andrén 1967, 11).

Finally, there is one remaining issue I would like draw into the discussion. Just as parliaments became more involved with the diplomacy being channelled through the respective foreign ministries, so did other ministries progressively free themselves of the foreign ministry's monopoly on external communication. As Nordic cooperation grew stronger after the emergence of hegemonic social democratic parties in the mid-1930s, officials increasingly started to make direct contacts with their counterparts in other Nordic countries, even to the extent that it was granted as a specific right under the Nordic Council in the early 1950s (Andrén 1967, 13).

It should thus be possible to conclude that diplomatic practices across Norden became increasingly coordinated during the period explored here. While this first seemed to be due to a common interest in surviving as small polities in a hostile world, from the 1930s on they gradually came to encompass elements of the shared welfare state ideology and acted as an international conduit for these values.

## ***International organisation***

The final area I will look at is the institutional architecture the Nordic countries established to aggregate interests between them, namely the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of

Ministers, and it will again be argued that these can to a large extent be seen as attempts to channel common welfare interests.

As was the case with Nordic cooperation in diplomacy, cooperation in social policy had been going on for some time prior to the establishment of the Nordic Council. Since 1926 Nordic ministers of social affairs had been meeting every second year to share their experiences and discuss current problems. Partly this was also to coordinate their policies towards the International Labour Office (ILO), which had been set up in the aftermath of WWI (Wendt 1981, 215). Moreover, already in 1919, some ideas had been expressed about the desirability of Nordic mutual social rights. The kernel of these was that citizens staying abroad in another Nordic country would still be entitled to social benefits. Some schemes of this sort were agreed to during the interwar period, most notably the Nordic Poverty Treaty (Petersen 2006, 83).

However, they were only to find their full expression with the founding of the Nordic Council in 1952 and the big Social Safety Convention of 1955 in which the principle of full Nordic social rights was explicitly recognised. Before that, mutual agreements had only covered some areas of social policy, and often they had also involved some form of monetary compensation for the additional expenditure between the countries. Now, on the other hand, a citizen's right to welfare was recognised regardless of where in the Nordic region that citizen chose to reside (Solem 1977, 106-9).

This is not to argue that the Nordic Council was only about social policy and the promotion of the welfare state, but it was certainly one of its key concerns. As it was stated in the preamble to the 1962 treaty on Nordic cooperation (the Helsinki Treaty):

[...] to promote and strengthen the close ties existing between the Nordic peoples in matters of culture, and legal and *social philosophy*, and to extend the scale of cooperation between the Nordic countries; Desiring to attain uniformity of regulation throughout the Nordic countries in as many respects as possible (my emphasis, Nordic Council 1962).

Another indication of this can be gleaned from the foreword to a survey titled *Freedom and Welfare* of the Nordic countries' social policies published in 1953 and co-signed by the ministers of social affairs of all five nations. It fell squarely in the tradition of marking the Nordic countries out from the rest of the world, which had been established with *Sweden: The Middle Way* (introductory quote in the section on legitimacy and membership) and *The Northern Countries in World Economy*:

The Northern countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, constitute five independent states. They form no political or economic union of any sort. Still, they are often looked upon as a collective entity. [...] especially in the social field differences are less essential than in several other domains. In their approach to a

number of vital problems of community living the five countries show a basic similarity at the same time that this approach presents certain aspects peculiarly characteristic of these peoples (quoted in Petersen 2006, 67).

While I have thus far in this section spoken about welfare commitments in Norden as a unified whole, it is also important to recognise the differences between the countries. This is because one element of Nordic cooperation was precisely the standardisation of diverging practices of welfare provision. As noted by Petersen (2006, 89-9), there was a certain level of competition going on between the countries. Being at the forefront of the implementation of new welfare initiatives was considered a matter of national prestige, and the realisation that one was lacking behind the other Nordic countries could in and of itself serve as legitimate reason for new national initiatives. This competitive element and the standardisation processes involved can be exemplified with a statement by Icelandic minister of social affairs (and prime minister) at a Nordic social political meeting in Stockholm in 1947:

We have received many impulses from Sweden and have been glad to learn from this country which at the moment is Nr.1 among the Nordic countries (quoted in Petersen 2006, 90).

There is thus evidence to suggest that some novel practices in the area of international organisation had been established in Norden during the period explored in this article. Not so much in actual organisational form, or what one could term the 'design' of secondary institutions, but rather in the kind of interests these were meant to aggregate. Moreover, they became increasingly standardised following the 1955 Social Safety Convention.

However, what is particularly interesting is that the solidarity, which was also evident in the Nordic polities' conflict resolution policies in the UN and their unusually high commitment to development assistance, found an even greater expression *within* the region. The sense of community and loyalty that the idea of Nordic social rights signified was unique in a comparative perspective.

## **Conclusion**

In this article I have attempted to present a case for Nordic differentiation within international society. This case has mainly been about the emergence of a national ideology of welfare statism, which was gradually embraced by the Scandinavian core of Denmark, Sweden and Norway during the 1930s, and latterly diffused to Finland and Iceland, partly as an element in the ideational construction of a wider Nordic region. I consider this national ideology a unique principle of legitimacy within the analytical category of legitimacy and membership.

Furthermore, I have also argued that this principle or national ideology impacted on institutional evolution in the remaining four analytical categories. In the area of conflict regulation, the illegitimacy of war was further stressed by the united social democratic parties of Scandinavia and the strong Nordic support of UN peacekeeping operations in the post-WWII era. In a similar fashion, the generous development assistance programmes and, admittedly, short-lived support of the developing countries' agenda for a New International Economic Order can equally be interpreted as being tied to a basic solidarist inclination. This shared ideology also seemed to promote the constitution of the Nordic countries as a separate bloc in various international organisations in particular and in international politics in general, in effect producing one common authoritative channel of communication. Finally, it appeared to lead to a unique aggregation of interests in the form of Nordic social rights with the establishment of the Nordic Council in 1952 and the Social Safety Convention in 1955.

The broader relevance of these findings for IR theory in general and English School theory in particular is that the institutions of international society are not fixed but rather evolving and changing bundles of social practices. I believe this point is recognised by most English School scholars, but it is still worth emphasising. The reason is that, in my view at least, it cautions us to look at differentiation and alteration within international society, and this also at the micro/state/regional level (see also Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2009; Schouenborg 2011b). There is a marked tendency in English School scholarship towards looking at the 'big picture', say, how the balance of power emerged as an institution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or how human rights came to be universally accepted as a core normative principle following WWII. However, these accounts tend to gloss over how different types of regimes – be they welfare states, democracies or fascist dictatorships – negotiated and participated in their creation. To provide this micro-account not only expands our understanding of the sources of these institutional changes, but also brings English School theory closer to a subject area it has hitherto not had enough of an impact on, namely foreign policy analysis. An important aspect of this is the conceptualisation of specific types of regimes/states as 'norm entrepreneurs', to use Ingebritsen's (2006) term, changing or modifying the institutional make-up of international society.



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