

Sussex Migration Working Papers

A Matter of Decency?

The Progress Party in Norwegian Immigration Politics

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Summary

This paper is about the Progress Party and the part this political party plays in Norwegian immigration politics. The Progress Party has marked itself as a party in opposition to the dominant immigration- and integration policies in Norway, and has to a significant degree drawn popular support for its anti-immigration views. Adjectives such as anti-immigration, rightwing, populist, new right are often used to describe the party, and can certainly provide the first few indications of what kind of political party this is. But if we look at the party political landscape of Norway and the position of the Progress Party within this, the question is not only what the Progress Party is, but what they are made into by their political opponents. This paper is about the Progress Party and what they say, but also about their opponents, what they say about the party and how they construct their enemy

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Preface

This paper is a revised version of a paper given at a research seminar of the Sussex Centre for Migration Research on 28 February 2001. I would like to thank the seminar participants for their useful comments and questions. This work was carried out during a period at Sussex as a Marie Curie Fellow at Sussex, as part of the 'Migration and Asylum Research Training Initiative'. The initiative is funded by a grant of the European Commission, contract number HPMT-CT-2000-00043. I would like to thank the Sussex Centre for Migration Research for providing this opportunity to spend time at Sussex, and in particular I want to thank Professor Ralph Grillo for the many stimulating conversations we had during my stay at Sussex.

Introduction

In the summer and fall of 2000, more than 30 per cent of the respondents in several opinion polls said they would vote for the Progress Party. According to these polls, the Progress Party was the largest political party in Norway for a period. While Norwegian politics in general receive little or no attention in international mass media, the British media at least has paid attention to the strong position of the anti-immigration right wing in Norway. So why is the Progress Party the only thing of interest which is happening in Norwegian politics? It is worth pointing out that in Norway too, hardly any political party receives as much attention in the mass media as does the Progress Party. First, there is a certain degree of scandalous potential in a party like the Progress Party, as disturbing to the Guardian readership as it is to the political, intellectual and cultural establishment in Norway. Thus the Progress Party makes interesting news stories. But I wonder if it is also something about the almost perverse combination of Norway and the idea of a xenophobic right-wing party such as this. With almost no unemployment and still plenty of oil in the North Sea – why do people vote for the Progress Party? This is not a question I will be able to answer in this paper, suffice it to say that the rationale of voting for the Progress Party should not be reduced to anti-immigration sentiments only¹. On the other hand, if one wants to understand Norwegian immigration politics, it is impossible to overlook the part played by the Progress Party. Whatever their influence on actual immigration policies is, in the public political debate the Progress Party is undoubtedly seen as the most clearly defined 'immigration party'.

In the first section of this paper I will provide some basic facts about the immigration history and the political system in Norway in order to make it easier for the reader unfamiliar with

¹ Some researchers have found support in survey data for some kind of relative deprivation thesis to explain the development of hostile attitudes to immigration (Hernes and Knudsen 1990, 1994). But this conclusion has also been criticised for confusing relative loss vis-à-vis immigrants with income - and status differences between Norwegians (Jensen 1994). Also anti-immigrationism and support for the Progress Party can be seen in a more political, and less economic, context as a kind of political protest against the 'establishment' (Skånvik 1992, Aardal and Valen 1995). Finally it is important to keep in mind that negative attitudes to immigrants are not only a Progress Party phenomenon. Such attitudes can also be found among other parties' voters although these have not let their negative attitudes to immigrants rule their vote-casting to the extent that Progress Party voters have (Aardal and Valen 1995).

Norwegian politics to follow the argument. I then move on to present some examples of how the Progress Party argues and has argued historically on matters of immigration. Finally I will situate their particular kind of discourse in the context of the election campaign of 1999 to try and give some examples of how their mode of speaking functions in relation to the media and to their political opponents.

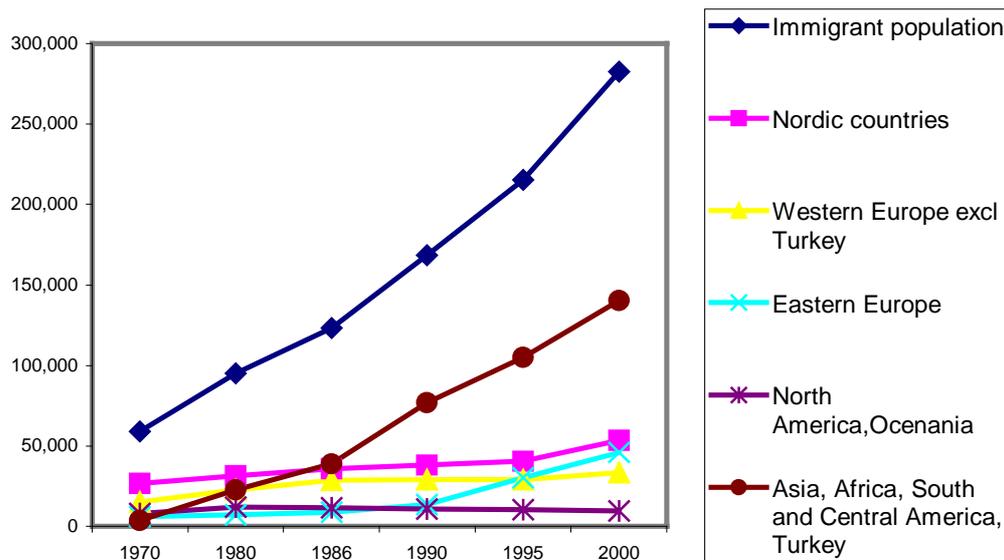
Immigration to Norway and Norwegian politics

Up until the early 1970s, immigration was hardly ever spoken about in Norwegian politics. The numbers of immigrants were relatively small. Most immigrants came from the other Nordic countries and were thus considered to be similar to Norwegians in terms of culture, life style and language. Immigration was not an issue, or at least it was nothing the authorities worried about.

1967 is often seen as the year when this began to change (Carling 1999). This is when the number of foreign employees gradually began to increase, a growth which was almost exclusively constituted by non-Nordic workers with Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco and Yugoslavia as important new sender countries. Within the first years of the seventies immigration started to emerge as a *political problem*. The first government white paper on immigration was published in 1973. This white paper proposed the introduction of a temporary immigration stop starting on the first of January 1975. The temporary immigration stop, intended to last a year, was approved by a reluctant parliament, but soon became a permanent arrangement. It was formulated as a full stop in the immigration of non-Nordic workers with some notable exceptions such as essential expertise – particularly relevant in the new petroleum industry – family reunifications and a small number of refugees.

As has been the case for most countries that introduced immigration stops in the seventies, the policy did not end immigration. Instead migrants continued to arrive, but increasingly through new channels such as family reunification and later as refugees and asylum-seekers. There has been a continual increase in the immigrant population since the 1970s – particularly of people with backgrounds from so-called non-western countries. The immigrant population today (as of 1 January 2000) constitutes 6.3 per cent of the population. So-called non-western immigrants constitute about half of these people.

Figure 1: Immigrant population in absolute numbers 1970-2000, total and by national origin



From 1985 to 1987 the number of asylum-seekers increased steeply. While only a few hundred asylum-seekers arrived in the early eighties, as many as 8,600 people applied for asylum in Norway in 1987. The newspapers were full of articles about new arrivals, and concerns arose about what to do with these 'streams' and 'flows' of refugees entering the country. The lack of an institutional apparatus to receive and house these people and process their asylum applications did indeed cause problems. Processing times were long, many asylum-seekers were housed in mountain resort hotels, sometimes generating discontent in the local communities and feeding arguments about all the benefits asylum-seekers received for free that were allegedly out of reach for most Norwegians. On the other hand, anti-racist movements also gained ground and with it, accusations of 'public racism' [*statlig rasisme*] in the authorities' dealings with the asylum-seekers (see Brox 1991).

In the midst of these events, the Progress Party began to speak about immigration and position itself in opposition to the dominant immigration policies. This is also when they began to advance on the opinion polls. Immigration was politicised in the early seventies in the sense that this was when the authorities started to develop policies for immigration control and for the integration of immigrants into Norwegian society. As mentioned, the first government white paper on immigration was published in 1973. However, if by politicised we mean that immigration became an issue that mattered for voters, 1985-1987 was the period when this happened (Bjørklund 1999). The

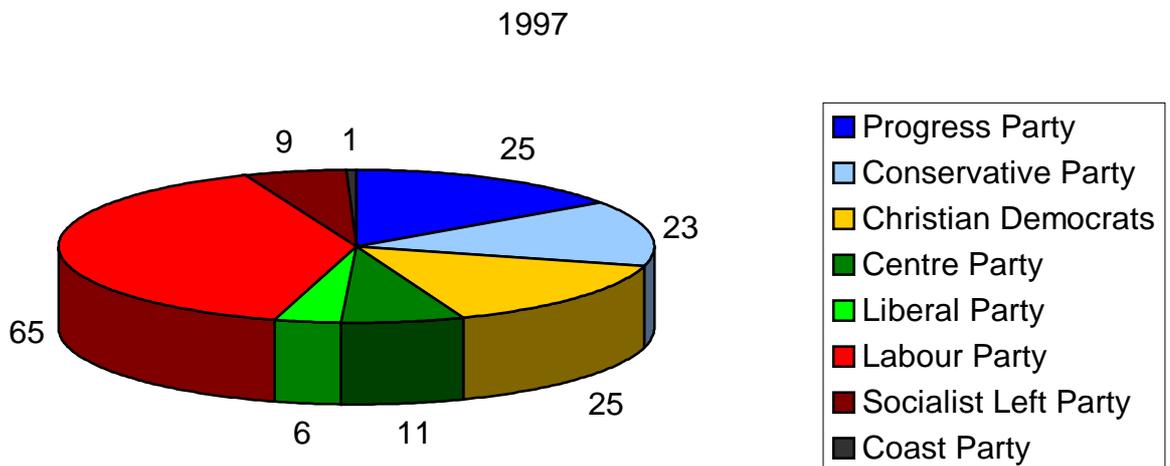
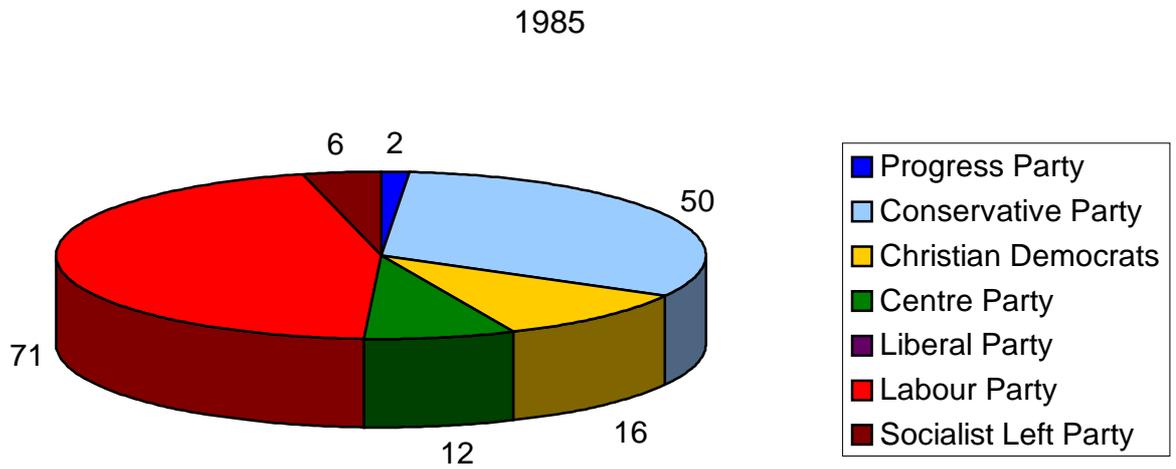
Progress Party were the ones who brought the issue onto the political agenda in the sense that the party publicly tried to make a conflict issue out of it, also in the context of election campaigns.

Some remarks on the political system in Norway may be helpful at this stage. Norway has a proportional election system and a multi-party system. There have traditionally been two dominant parties in the post-war era – the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. In 1985 these were clearly the two largest parties, with respectively 50 and 71 MPs out of a total 157. At this point in time, the Progress Party was tiny with only two MPs and limited political influence in the *Storting*.

The local election campaign in 1987 became a kind of break-through for the politicisation of immigration². All parties other than the Progress Party shunned the issue, and spoke about it as something with no place in an election campaign. Immigration was described as something one should not use to attract votes, but instead see as an issue ruled by consensus in some kind of shared humanitarian spirit and common

² Local and provincial elections take place every four years in between the four-yearly national elections. As they take place on the same day all over the country the election campaigns are also run on a national level with televised debates featuring MPs and covering issues with a national orientation. Thus the campaigns preceding local elections often have a more national than local orientation, and immigration politics have been at the centre of several local election campaigns.

Figure 2. Political parties in the Norwegian parliament, number of MPs. 1985 and 1997



understanding of the need to control and regulate the influx of immigrants. The Progress Party was the only party that was openly critical to the reception of asylum-seekers and what they saw as the privileged treatment given to asylum seekers compared to Norwegians. Despite condemnation from other politicians and the mass media over their immigration policies, the Progress Party did their best election ever so far receiving 12 per cent of the votes.

The party political constellations have changed rather dramatically between 1985 and now. The dominance of the Conservative Party on the right has been replaced by a situation with several medium-sized non-socialist parties. In the *Storting* that was elected in 1997, the Progress Party was, with its 25 representatives, larger than the Conservative Party³. The centre is stronger – especially the Christian Democrats which also has outnumbered the Conservative Party. The political centre (the Christian Democrats, the Centre Party and the Liberal Party) actually formed a minority coalition government in 1997, which lasted for more than two years before the Labour Party re-entered the government offices in March 2000.

But the growth of the Progress Party has not been a steady one. After their peak in the late eighties, they lost most of these voters again in the early nineties, before they again began to climb on the opinion polls in 1994-1995. Also this climb on the opinion polls concurred with an offensive on immigration politics and, to many commentators' disgust, their successful 1995 election followed the media's exposition of personal connections between Progress Party MPs and openly racist and nationalist organisations.

In late summer 2000 opinion polls showed the Progress Party to be the largest party in Norway attracting more than 30 per cent of the voters. Since then they have gone through major upheavals. The party leadership – especially chairman Carl I. Hagen – has wanted to make the party more acceptable as a government partner for the Conservative Party and possibly the Christian Democrats. They have tried to control the local party unit's nominations for the upcoming parliamentary elections so that the more rabid or extreme candidates – this will to a large extent mean the people who have been most outspoken and least diplomatic on the issue of immigration – would not be nominated. This has caused major uproar in some provinces, with

several MPs leaving the party and attempting to form a new party in order to run for parliament in September 2001. The party's deputy leader – Hagen's 'crown prince' and the party's only elected mayor – has had to resign from all positions following rape allegations from a 16 year old party member, and what is widely seen as a very unfortunate handling of the case by Hagen and his other female deputy. In short, after a very successful period, the party has got itself into a mess and the outcome of the situation is uncertain. Today the Progress Party is down to 11 per cent in the opinion polls (*Dagbladet* 06.04.01), and the scenario of complete disintegration of the party is not beyond the bounds of possibility. Nevertheless, it is still among the larger political parties in Norway and – as illustrated by figure 3 – they have been in trouble before and still managed to come back strongly.

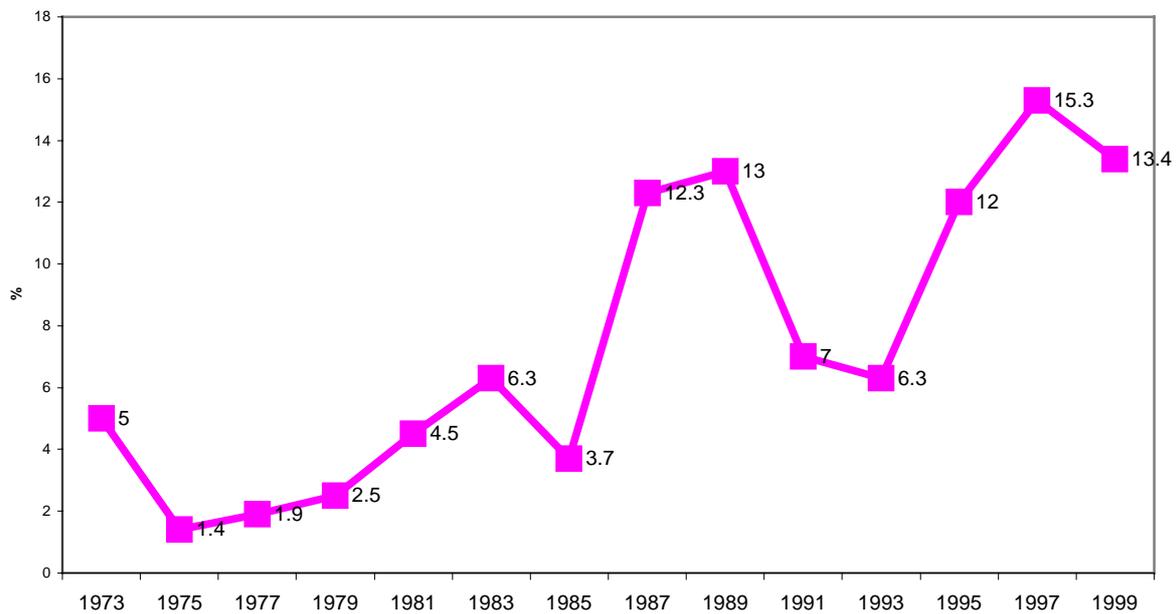
Conflict and unity – a view on the Progress Party

In my thesis work, of which this paper is only a small part, I try to approach the field of immigration political discourse from two directions. On the one hand it can be seen as a field of conflict and antagonism where political actors disagree and confront each other drawing on different kinds of discourses, which they try to establish as hegemonic. On the other hand, immigration is also a field of governance that can be characterised by its high degree of consensus, a set of understandings, principles and philosophies that are shared across the party political dividing lines. In many ways the actors in this field can be seen to share the fundamental conceptions of what kinds of problems immigration represents and how they should be dealt with. What I try to do is to analyse the problematisations of immigration as they have emerged and developed both in the field of party political conflict and, more generally, in the field of governing immigration.

By focusing on the Progress Party, this paper belongs to the part of the thesis where I see immigration politics as a battleground. When immigration is depicted as one on the most conflict-laden issues in Norwegian politics, the Progress Party is at the centre of such images. In another sense however, the Progress Party also plays a unifying part in immigration politics by being the negative outside against which all the other parties contrast themselves. When the other parties claim to represent a *decent immigration politics*, their decency acquires its meaning in

³ Although the same *Storting* is still sitting, the Progress Party is no longer the second largest party as a number of MPs have left the party following the internal struggles in the party in the winter of 2000-2001.

Figure 3. Election results for the Progress Party 1973-1999, national and provincial elections. Per cent of votes.



opposition to that which is not decent – the Progress Party and their immigration politics.

Much, perhaps most, of the debate on immigration politics, as it takes place in the mass media, revolves around the Progress Party. They have been active in bringing the issue onto the public agenda, successfully presenting themselves as the only party challenging the other parties' tacit consensus on immigration and thus 'representing' popular scepticism. They have what election researchers describe as *issue ownership* to immigration politics (Bjørklund 1999, Aardal et al. 1999). This means that some parties seem to 'own' certain controversial issues in the sense that voters have clear opinions as to which party is the best in dealing with these (Aardal et al. 1999: 23). Not only are the Progress Party's adherents much more likely to mention immigration among the most important issues for casting their vote, also people who do not vote for them often mention their immigration policies as the most – or least – preferable⁴.

⁴ In the general election of 1997, when immigration politics was low on the agenda during the election campaign, 20 per cent of the Progress Party's electorate mentioned immigration among the most important issues, while as much as 28 per cent of all voters was of the opinion that the Progress Party had the best policy regarding reception of immigrants (Aardal et al 1999: 25).

But is the Progress Party really important in the shaping of Norwegian immigration politics? They are rarely in a majority when immigration related bills and issues are debated or voted on in parliament. Their points of view concerning immigration have hardly met one favourable response from political commentators or fellow politicians. More important than their ability to achieve support for their proposals in the *Storting* is perhaps that the Progress Party, with the success they have enjoyed under the headline of restrictive immigration politics, has itself become an object of concern among the other parties. Their periodically considerable success has often been conceived as more than mere competition, but as a political and moral problem in itself. Firstly, their success indicates the presence of xenophobia and prejudices in the population. Secondly, they are seen to increase the presence of such sentiments by the ways in which they argue about immigration and immigrants. In this sense the Progress Party, and the kinds of sentiments it is seen to embody, has itself become a part of the problem of immigration politics. It is this double position of the Progress Party – marginalized from, but still at the heart of immigration politics – that I aim to explore.

The Progress Party before immigration politics

The Progress Party was founded in 1973 as a right-wing protest party under the unchallenged leadership of Anders Lange, who also gave the party its original name: 'Anders Lange's Party for strong reductions in taxes, duties and public interventions'. The too powerful state was the new party's enemy. It positioned itself as opposing all other parties, who were concertedly seen to be responsible for the ongoing growth in bureaucracy, public intervention and taxation levels. Thus, the Progress Party has from day one challenged the predominant conception of Norwegian politics as consisting of two opposed blocks, the socialist and the non-socialist, led respectively by the Labour Party and the Conservative Party.

Changing phases of electoral triumphs and destructive internal struggles have also characterised the party throughout its existence. With a very brief platform, under the heading 'We are tired of being exploited by state capitalism', they quite unexpectedly succeeded in having four representatives elected to the *Storting* in 1973. Anders Lange's authoritarian style soon conflicted with those who wanted a more conventional party organisation with party programmes, membership and congresses. His death in 1975 did little to ease the tensions, but it did bring his opponent and deputy, Carl I. Hagen, a seat in the Parliament⁵. Hagen became the chairman of the Progress Party in 1978 and managed to consolidate the many groups that over the years had broken with the original Anders Lange's Party. Most commentators, inside and outside the party, seem to agree that his political and oratory talents and capacities are at the core of the party's survival and success.

Was Anders Lange's Party concerned with immigration? It was not mentioned in their brief political platform from 1973. In the more extensive account of the party's principles that was formulated in 1975⁶, they were at pains to explain that they were not a neo-nazi or neo-fascist party, but there was no mention of immigration or migrants. However, the abolition

of development aid figured among the party's most important demands. It is wrong to spend money on strangers when 'our own' sick and elderly suffer from lack of resources, the argument went – not unlike their later immigration policies. Erik Gjems-Onstad, who later became a central person in extreme nationalist anti-immigration organisations⁷, strongly advocated a permanent immigration stop in the *Storting* already in 1974, with the aim that 'we as far as possible avoid minorities and minority problems, and that both those who come here, and we Norwegians aim at making them merge into the Norwegian society' (*Stortingstidende* 1974-75: 1957)⁸. There was clearly a strong nationalist ethos in Gjems-Onstad's rhetoric, but his critique of the government's proposed immigration policies was also formulated in anti-bureaucratic terms. Immigration and integration were seen to generate new tasks and new clients in an already overgrown welfare state. In this sense, strict immigration and assimilation policies were advocated to reduce the scope of state intervention.

If we look at party programmes, the Progress Party was clearly the party that paid least attention to immigration in the 1970s and early 1980s. When its first party programme came into place in 1977, immigration was mentioned with two sentences only, at the end of the chapter on unemployment:

In the light of the imminent unemployment, the present immigration stop must be observed, and eventual future immigration carefully considered. The use of migrant workers must be limited to categories where Norwegian labour is not available (Progress Party, election programme 1977).

Compared to other parties, this formulation of immigration politics paid scant attention to the welfare of the immigrant population. It accentuates the distinction between Norwegians and immigrants as one of competition over scarce resources – work, but no concerns were voiced over the kind of culturally based minority problems Gjems-Onstad had worried about in his 1974 speech and which were later to figure so prominently in Progress Party rhetoric.

I think one can say that immigration was not made into a political problem – it was not

⁵ As his substitute (*varamann*). Norway does not practise by-elections.

⁶ This text, 'ALP – Hva står det for? Hva vil vi?' [ALP – What does it stand for? What do we want?], was written by Erik Gjems-Onstad and Arve Lønnum (then parliamentary leader and chairman). This and all the other party programmes I quoted in this paper, have been published on a searchable Christian Democrats-ROM by the Institute for Social Research in collaboration with Norwegian Social Science Data Service: *Vi vil...! Norske partiprogrammer 1884-1997*.

⁷ Gjems-Onstad was expelled in 1976 after having been passed over as parliamentary leader and subsequently having vented his anger in the newspaper *Aftenposten* recommending supporters to vote for the Conservative Party (Iversen 1998).

⁸ All translations from Norwegian are the author's.

problematised – by the Progress Party until the mid-1980s⁹. Surveys also indicate that their voters did not stand out from other parties' adherents in their views on immigration until this point in time (Bjørklund 1999:141-2). When a policy on immigration gradually was developed and immigration launched as a key issue – parallel to the growing number of asylum-seekers arriving in the latter half of the 1980s – a kind of problematisation emerged which focused on the costs immigrants and immigration represent for the welfare state – immigration as an unjust burden on the taxpayers. In the 1990s another kind of problematisation emerged as increasingly important in the party's argumentative repertoire. This version of immigration as a political problem pivots on the dangers of cultural heterogeneity – the risks immigration and a multicultural society represent in terms of its potential for ethnic conflicts and the eradication of Norwegian culture and identity. Thus a movement from economic to cultural problematisations can be observed over time, although it must be pointed out that to some extent the two have co-existed in variable proportions throughout the period. I will try to illustrate this change through a more detailed textual analysis drawing in particular on party programmes and speeches in parliamentary debates on immigration, and also some material from the mass media in the context of one of the many election campaigns that has been dominated by immigration politics.

Problematisation 1: Expensive immigration

The Progress Party describes itself as a liberalist party. In every programme since 1985 they have introduced their chapter on immigration politics by stating that the Progress Party is 'in principle' in favour of immigration in the shape of free movement of labour. The problem is that these labourers are potential clients who will be able to claim something back. A model with six-months work contracts with no right to bring family members, allegedly based on a Swiss model, has sometimes been suggested as an alternative (Progress Party election programmes 1985, 1989). In this argument, the universal and inclusive welfare state is the obstacle that prevents more liberal policies towards the migration of labour.

The party's mode of arguing in the context of the welfare state has undergone marked changes since it first arose as an anti-tax party. Anders Lange's Party wanted to cut taxes so that the state would be forced to reduce its scope of

operation. When the Progress Party later has formulated more elaborate immigration policies, the point of attack has not so much been the overgrown welfare state as the *unjust* welfare state – the welfare state that gives priority to immigrants at the expense of Norwegian taxpayers. The problem is not only that immigrants receive the same benefits as long-term (Norwegian) residents. Special measures and special benefits [*særordninger, særfordeler*] for immigrants play a particular part in the Progress Party's argumentation. Immigrants are seen as recipients of welfare benefits that Norwegians are excluded from:

There exist at present a number of special arrangements that immigrants benefit from, and which are paid by the taxpayers of the country ... [lists some of these benefits] ... These special arrangements should in our opinion be removed. They cost the taxpayers money, means that alternatively could have been used to help weak groups like disabled, hard up elderly and sick people. These special arrangements have the main responsibility for that some have negative and unfortunate attitudes towards immigrants (Carl I. Hagen, Progress Party, *Stortingstidende* 1988-89: 444).

Politically widely supported measures to achieve 'real equality' between immigrants and Norwegians – what one could see as the welfare state's attempts at bringing disadvantaged groups to the same standing as the majority population – were rejected as differential treatment. Critics of the Progress Party stand were fought off by turning the discrimination argument against them: 'the Progress Party is the only party that does not discriminate on the basis of religion, race or ethnicity'. Welfare measures directed towards immigrants were seen as discrimination – discrimination against Norwegians. As far as racism is concerned, the roots of this were located within the more liberal policies of the other parties:

It is my sincere opinion that the most disparaging attitudes towards the immigrants who are settled in Norway today, come from the politicians who claim that immigrants by definition are deprived and thus need special care (Carl I. Hagen, Progress Party, *Stortingstidende* 1988-89: 444).

Although these kinds of neo-liberal and allegedly culture-blind arguments figure most prominently in the programmes and parliamentary speeches of the Progress Party in the 1980s, there are also aspects of the party's anti-immigration propaganda in this period that point towards the more culturally loaded rhetoric of the 1990s. The

⁹ This has also been supported by other commentators (Bjørklund 1999, Iversen 1998).

election campaign in 1987 was dominated by Hagen using a forged letter from a Muslim immigrant to warn against the increasing presence of Muslims in Norway and the threat they may constitute against Norwegian culture and Christianity. However, there is a clear difference between the 1980s and the 1990s in the sense that it was primarily in the latter period that this kind of cultural anxiety entered the more serious contexts of party programmes and parliamentary debates.

Problematisation 2: Dangerous immigration

The Progress Party's programme formulations in the 1980s did not mention cultural difference as a political problem at all, nor as something politicians should attempt to regulate or facilitate for in any way. In the 1990s however, cultural difference has emerged as a key issue of concern, and the Progress Party has begun to concern itself seriously about *integration*.

In 1993 the Progress Party was the first political party to use the – now widely applied – notion of 'integration politics' in their election programme¹⁰. In this problematisation, immigration represents more than a strain on the taxpayers' purses; it is threatening a state of harmony and equality. Rhetorically fuelled by a language of ethnicity and ethnic difference, prevention of conflicts between Norwegians and immigrants, and within and between immigrant communities, were incorporated into the rationale of Progress Party policies.

The Progress Party did not use the word 'ethnic' in any of their programmes until 1993. Then it appeared in two different contexts, namely in the chapters on military defence and on immigration. In the former the party voiced concern about the potential for ethnic and religious conflicts in Europe. In the latter they wanted to prevent 'antagonisms and conflicts between population groups [*befolkningsgrupper*] with basis in different ethnic, cultural and religious background' (Progress Party, election programme 1993) in Norway. The party has also argued for a screening of refugee groups so as not to receive refugees from different ethnic groups who are likely to bring their conflicts with them to Norway. I am here referring to their resolution on not to receive Serbian refugees from Croatia because 'a mixture of ethnic groups [*folkegrupper*] from all the warring parties may bring the conflict

between these ethnic groups to Norwegian land [*norsk jord*]' (VG 07.08.95.).

Integration politics in the Progress Party's version is formulated as preventive work that takes the shape of one-sided adaptation to Norwegian norms and values and no 'differential treatment based on race, religion, culture or ethnicity' (Progress Party, election programme 1997), coupled with a very limited future intake of migrants. Prevention of ethnically based conflicts constitutes the underlying rationale for this policy.

There is reason to fear that a continued immigration of asylum seekers, only approximating the extent one has had in latter years, will lead into serious antagonisms between ethnic groups [*folkegrupper*] in Norway. It is not immoral to argue that one must react against this immigration in order to prevent conflicts. It is neither immoral to argue that one should prevent too rapid change of the unified character our population possesses. It is incorrect to call this racism when it is not based on ideas about some races being more valuable than others (Progress Party, election programme 1997)¹¹.

An immigration-led loss of equality is, in such accounts, linked to a potential for conflict. Such arguments can employ the concept of equality in an ambiguous way, vacillating between using equality to mean social equality and equality as the absence of cultural diversity. The potential for playing with ambivalences when speaking about equality is further enhanced by the Norwegian language that does not make the distinction between equality and similarity, but translates both with the word *likhet*. This makes it linguistically difficult to distinguish between the politically significant and positively loaded aim of equality and the idea that everybody should somehow be similar:

What we see as a kind of key question that the *Storting* here discusses, is what kind of future society we shall have in the long term. Shall we have what we have had previously – a relatively homogenous society built on a

¹⁰ The Socialist Left Party used it in 1995, while in 1997 it was incorporated in the programmes of the Progress Party, the Conservative Party, the Christian Democrats and the Liberal Party.

¹¹ I have quoted this from the Progress Party's election programme. However, this quote is almost identical, word for word, to a statement from Kåre Willoch (Conservative Party) in *Aftenposten* 11 June 1988, then quoted by Carl I. Hagen in the *Storting* 8 June 1995 under the refugee debate. This instance demonstrates how the Progress Party uses intertextuality in their attempts at positioning themselves among the mainstream – decent – parties. By making the words of Willoch into their own, they demonstrate that what they stand for is no less moral and respectable than the position of a former prime minister.

large degree of equality, where one precisely tried to eradicate great differences between various groups of the population because this can create conflicts? In this sense one has in the Norwegian society – and I have no problems in giving credit to the Labour Party here – eradicated the old class distinctions [...] One wanted equality because this would be more peaceful, a better society than a society characterised by conflict (Carl I. Hagen, Progress Party, *Stortingstidende* (1996-97): 4029).

He thus makes a link between equality and peace and harmony. Furthermore, in doing this, he appeals to central values in the egalitarian Norwegian political tradition. The way he frames the attractions of equality is worth noting. It is the absence of conflict in an egalitarian society that is stressed. Alternatively one could have argued for equality in terms of justice or the rights of deprived or underprivileged groups. However, the negation of equality in Hagen's account is conflict, rather than inequality and injustice towards those who miss out.

Then he continues, slipping from the problem of social inequalities to cultural and ethnic diversity, while holding onto the dichotomy of conflict and peace:

Therefore I am surprised – that the Labour Party in a way nurtures perhaps new conflicts in the future by, instead of fighting for equality and maximal harmony, in reality supporting having different population groups based on different ethnic origins. When I say this, it is because, as is evident in the integration white paper, they have a strategy, which implies that the Norwegian society and immigrants shall adapt to each other on a mutual basis. We think it would be much more natural to state clearly, as we do in our first proposal, that those who have come to our country should adapt to our social conditions, our legislation, rules, customs etc, and that most of all, in Norway it is Norwegian that is the language (Carl I. Hagen, Progress Party, *Stortingstidende* (1996-97): 4029-30).

A fundamental difference between Norwegian culture and the cultures that immigrants are seen to represent is also invoked. Thus it is not only difference as such, but the specific kind of difference that immigrants embody, which threatens peace and harmony. This is the case for example when Hagen blames the dominant immigration regime for violence in society because many immigrants have brought with them a 'weapon culture and gang mentality' [*slagvåpenkultur* og *gjengmentalitet*]

(*Aftenposten* 31.08.95.). Hagen's more rabid colleagues – the ones he at present seems to want to marginalize or expel from the party, but at other times has supported – have put it even more bluntly:

I have studied integration policies all over Europe, and it does not work anywhere. Where Christians and Muslims, Jews and Arabs and other different cultures live together, life is characterised by murder, drugs and other types of crime (Øystein Hedstrøm in *Dagsavisen* 27.06.99).

I have got nothing against immigrants, but you cannot deny that they bring some negative aspects to Norway. It can be drugs, crime and oppression of women. I do not want us to ruin our nation with this. That is what we are about to do (Vidar Kleppe in *Dagsavisen* 27.07.99).

There seems to be a difference between Hagen's mode of argumentation and Hedstrøm and Kleppe's. While Hagen maintains the possibility of assimilation/integration of immigrants on the condition that they adapt to Norwegian culture and values more or less unconditionally, Hedstrøm and Kleppe seem to argue that this is impossible. For them violence, crime and oppression of women are apparently inherent traits of immigrants' culturally determined behaviour. This has been noted by several commentators in Norwegian public life, where the Progress Party's immigration strategy often has been portrayed as a double one: While Hagen is seen to maintain the respectable façade of the party, Hedstrøm and Kleppe have appealed more straightforwardly to racist and xenophobic sentiments in the Norwegian population.

In many ways the Progress Party certainly argues differently on immigration than the other main parties in Norway do. They are more explicit and restrictive when it comes to the number of refugees that should be accepted, they reject the celebration of the 'multicultural Norway' that other parties to some degree have embraced, they are much more likely to make connections between immigration, crime and conflict than other parties are, and they operate with another definition of integration which in fact closely resembles most textbook definitions of assimilation. Still, it is worth pointing out that when it comes to the overall imperatives of Norwegian immigration politics – a 'controlled and restricted immigration' and the 'integration' of immigrants into Norwegian society – these are not challenged as such by the Progress Party, but rather given meanings that diverge from how most parties speak about them.

However, to understand what makes the Progress Party stand out from the remaining parties in immigration political discourse, we need not only to look at their policies, but must also understand the position they occupy in relation to other parties. The distinction between the Progress Party and the remaining political parties has often been constructed in terms of moral and decency – *anstendighet* in Norwegian. As mentioned, when any other small party grows bigger, this changes the balance of power among the parties; when the Progress Party expands however, it is seen to symbolise that something morally disturbing is going on in politics and in the population. The source of this concern about the decency of politics, which the Progress Party provokes, can to a large extent be located in their immigration policies. Some election campaign episodes may be illuminating in this respect, and I will illustrate this through some examples from the election campaign in 1999¹².

The 1999 election campaign

The 1999 election campaign started with the Progress Party in what had come to be seen as their characteristic posture. MPs Øystein Hedstrøm and Vidar Kleppe appeared in open meetings on immigration politics – often referred to as ‘immigration shows’ – received massive attention in the press and were quoted with the kind of statements I referred above. The mass media were critical, but devoted much space to the pair, frequently referring to them in a vocabulary drawn from showbiz – show, circus, tour and so forth. In this sense they were ridiculed and not taken seriously as politicians and MPs, but at the same time their behaviour were seen as highly troubling in a moral sense. The kind of statements Kleppe and Hedstrøm were quoted on would later in the election campaign repeatedly be brought up by their opponents to illustrate the allegedly dominant attitude in the Progress Party – a kind of intertextuality which served to build up the image of the Progress Party as a party with an indecent take on immigration.

Carl I. Hagen's relationship to Kleppe and Hedstrøm soon became more important than the MPs themselves. He did not distance himself from the way they spoke about immigrants and immigration. Kleppe and Hedstrøm were in the press increasingly referred to as *verstinger* – in English, literally ‘worstings’, a notion that previously has often been used about school kids with problems such as petty crime, truancy and violence. Were *verstingene* representative for the Progress Party's policy? Several politicians and a

bishop challenged Hagen to reject the Kleppe and Hedstrøm's performances and clarify what the party line really was. Few commentators expressed any degree of surprise over Hagen's refusal to apologise for his colleagues' conduct. They were seen as part of a game, a strategy consisting in ‘speaking with two tongues’. On the one hand, Hagen was to maintain the party's image as a responsible and serious political party. On the other, Kleppe and Hedstrøm – the pitbulls as another journalist called them – were to appeal to prejudices and ignorance in the population, in short, to play on xenophobia.

This is an accusation that the Progress Party constantly has been exposed to since they first started to speak about immigration in the mid-eighties:

More knowledge and openness around what immigration implicates, for better and worse, will contribute to a more successful immigration politics. Unfortunately, many central representatives of the Progress Party contribute to the opposite. They misinform and build up under prejudices and ignorance. This amplifies the problems with immigration (Jens Stoltenberg, Labour Party, *Dagbladet* 09.08.99.).

They are not so much seen as being racist themselves, as to exploit the racist and xenophobic sentiments that exist in the population. This makes their practice appear in a morally dubious light – they woo the bad guys; they benefit from what should not have been there, and may even serve to strengthen prejudices and resistance to immigration within the population. This is put in opposition to the, on this matter, broad consensus among other parties, which is based on an allegedly decent immigration politics where a generous – but rarely specified – number of refugees are received, and where it is possible for immigrants to be integrated into Norwegian society in a less assimilatory way than that which the Progress Party advocates. However, while politicians frequently claim to lead a decent immigration politics, they often have trouble defining exactly what this implies in terms of concrete policies. Following an almost Saussurean logic, the meaning of decency only becomes clear when in opposition to the claimed indecency of the Progress Party. Decency is what the Progress Party is not.

It is not only the Progress Party's opponents who appeal to the value of decency. In the election campaign, Carl I. Hagen repeatedly claimed that the party's immigration politics was a ‘decent one’. Hedstrøm and Fridtjof Frank Gundersen, another ‘worsting’ MP who has now left the party,

¹² See Hagelund 1999 for an extended analysis of immigration politics in the election campaign of 1999.

wrote a number of newspaper columns where they tried to create legitimacy for their own policies and practices by rejecting the extremist-label that had been attached to them and call upon values such as truth and honesty. The other parties pretend to be more decent, they claimed, but in reality they are not so different. The difference is that the Progress Party is honest. Thus they tried to undermine the other parties' attempts at making the Progress Party into something fundamentally different than them:

All larger parties in Norway know very well that only a small percentage of the refugees in the world can get residence in Norway. The difference between the other parties and the Progress Party is that the Progress Party has been honest enough to make a limit, namely 1000 per year, while the other parties try to make the impression that they are willing to grant residence to any refugee who comes into Norway (Fridtjof Frank Gundersen, *Dagsavisen* 12.08.99.).

The Progress Party's defence against accusations of racism also draws on a rhetoric of equality. Typically the argument will be that other parties which support special welfare measures etc for immigrants in reality advocates a differential treatment based on ethnicity or nationality. The Progress Party on the contrary wants to treat everybody equally, independently of 'race, religion and ethnic origin'. Still, Hagen had problems defending his principled stance on equal treatment when one local politician, Oddbjørn Jonstad, was expelled from the Progress Party after suggesting the internment of all refugees in camps awaiting the time when they could return safely, whereas MP Jan Simonsen was unimpeded in saying that asylum-seekers 'of a certain age, from countries that make it possible that they can commit crimes' (*VG* 02.09.99.) should be accompanied by Norwegians when moving outside of reception centre areas. One may ask if this was an attempt on Hagen's side to make his own distinctions against the indecent. By holding up Jonstad as the indecent one and then expelling him, Hagen seems to have attempted to place the Progress Party in a position opposite indecency, thus joining the other parties in their definition of immigration politics as a moral sphere.

The case I am trying to make by recounting these episodes, is to show how much of the immigration debate in Norway has revolved around the questions of the Progress Party's touchability and how to distinguish the decent from the indecent. This has been the case since the mid-eighties. But the election campaign in 1999 can also be said to stand out as one in which all parties, except the Progress Party, almost competed in

demonstrating how 'immigrant-friendly' they were. So when speaking about immigration the parties tried to emphasise the aspects of immigration politics where their points of view were furthest from the Progress Party.

The Labour Party, for example, was more active in attacking the Progress Party than they had been seen to be in previous years, but they also avoided the issue of immigration control completely. Instead, they spoke of integration – of employment and the importance of learning Norwegian, and they attacked the centre-coalition government for their cuts in public spending on efforts for unemployed immigrants, and their support to women who stay at home with children thus, according to the Labour Party, counteracting moves to make immigrant women send their children to kinder-garden so that they can learn Norwegian.

The government parties on their side signalled their liberal mindedness by advocating moves to make it easier for labour migrants to enter the country – something the Progress Party completely opposed:

If you did not find that nursing assistant, that expert in Norway, or you did not find them in EEA, but you could find them in Russia, you could find them in the Baltics. It is the case that in such a situation, we cannot take them in today. But I want to put this issue before the *Storting*, because I think it is a fair question. When we take someone in who can help us to solve something because they can do a job, then we also create opportunities and we show respect for them... (Odd Einar Dørum, Liberal Party, *TV2* 24.08.99).

The Labour Party was also reluctant about these changes, maintaining the longstanding policy of making immigration control a matter of receiving refugees and asylum-seekers. In their leader's words: 'Those who primarily shall come to Norway from abroad are those who are persecuted' (Thorbjørn Jagland, Labour Party, *NRK1* 31.08.99). In this kind of formulation, decency was conceived as a matter of helping those who needed it most, as opposed to letting the needs of Norway determine immigration policies.

The government partners used the Labour Party's hesitance regarding labour immigration to portray the party as the Progress Party's allies. On the other hand, the Government also had to fend off accusations of being allied to the Progress Party. They had got their budget through Parliament with the support of the Progress Party. Would they do it again? And would they let the Progress Party influence their immigration and integration policies? Was it at all justifiable to collaborate with

a party containing elements such as Kleppe and Hedstrøm? Didn't they thus contribute to make the Progress Party into a decent party like any other? Hagen made it clear that his support would not come without the Government making concessions, and demanded reductions in the numbers of so-called 'asylum immigrants'. The centre-parties refused. 'This is about putting decency before political positions', said one centrally placed MP (Gunnar Kvasheim, Liberal Party, *Dagsavisen* 06.07.99). The Prime Minister followed up:

As a country with a Christian and humanist cultural heritage, we must take responsibility for these people, without coupling it onto internal political games about the national budget (Kjell Magne Bondevik, Christian Democrats, *Dagsavisen* 06.07.99.).

We see that much energy has been spent in the election debates on demonstrating distance from the Progress Party on matters of immigration politics, while they are woo-able in other fields of policy when their support is needed in parliament. There is an image of immigration as belonging to another and more moral sphere than other political issues. To the extent the indecency of the Progress Party is restricted to their immigration policies they are on the one hand kept outside the political circles of respectability, while their numeric strength in the *Storting* can be made use of in the ever-important search for compromise and coalitions that characterise a parliamentary system under minority governments.

Conclusion

Progress Party discourse has a lot in common with right wing, anti-immigration discourse all over Europe. Parallels can certainly be drawn with Enoch Powell in Britain, the *Front Nationale* in France and Haider's Freedom Party in Austria. This material could also successfully undergo a linguistically orientated critical discourse analysis where the party's repeated denials of racism and rhetoric of being a responsible and decent party, could be dissected to demonstrate how their discourse is imbued with an ideological message that systematically serves to legitimise the privileged position of white Norwegians as opposed to immigrants, or what the Progress Party in their latest programme draft terms 'people with background outside the Western culture complex' (*kulturkrets*). I do not at all consider such analyses irrelevant, but am a bit concerned about the tendency to end up with some kind of good guy/bad guy scheme where one either ends up classifying almost every political statement as somehow racist, or draws a sharp dividing line in the political landscape

between the nice and the not so nice – or the decent and the indecent.

What I have tried to do here is to look less for subliminal expressions of racism, and more on the kind of *problematizations* the Progress Party – and in a larger project, also all the other political parties – has made of immigration. How has immigration emerged as a political problem, and what do these problematisations look like? What we have seen here, in the case of the Progress Party, is a movement from problematising immigration in terms of economy, expenses and welfare state issues, to problematising immigration in terms of culture and ethnic conflicts. This kind of movement from economy and welfare to culture can not only be observed in the discourse of the Progress Party, but also among other political parties and in the governing of immigration in general. As Norwegians increasingly describe themselves as living in a multicultural society, the dilemmas of multiculturalism occupies a larger part of the political agenda.

Without disregarding the very significant differences between Progress Party policies and what other Norwegian parties stand for, most parties are concerned about the same issues as the Progress Party is – they are concerned about controlling the influx of asylum-seekers and of managing cultural diversity in ways that does not threaten what is conceived to be Norwegian. In this sense, the otherness of the Progress Party in Norwegian immigration politics is perhaps most of all constituted by the position they occupy in political discourse as the anti-thesis to the decency of the other parties.

What I in general have found striking about my material – a material that does stretch wider than the Progress Party part of it that I have discussed here – is the emphasis that is put on *decency*. This kind of language – we are a decent party, we do lead a decent immigration politics, immigrants or asylum-seekers do get a decent treatment – is widespread among all the parties, including the Progress Party. Disagreements and conflicts in this field of politics revolves, to a large extent, on the meaning of decency, and what one can say and not say to remain within the limits of decency. This is not to claim that Norway or Norwegian politicians necessarily are extraordinarily good or decent. In terms of reception of refugees and asylum seekers for example, the country does not really stand out from other European countries.

I think it is important somehow to account for this dimension of morality in Norwegian immigration politics. It seems to me that discourses on immigration politics can be read as discourses on

political and national identity. Discourses where the nature of our political system and national community are being produced, reproduced and negotiated, and where the making of immigration- and integration policies also can be seen as attempts at defining own identity and indeed confronting the parts of it that are represented by the Progress Party.

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