

# CONTEMPORARY DRUG PROBLEMS

The inflammable alcohol issue:  
alcohol policy argumentation  
in the programs of political  
parties in Finland, Norway and  
Sweden from the 1960s  
to the 1990s

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*In Finland, Norway and Sweden the alcohol policy positions of political parties have been related to party ideologies in complex ways. Until the 1950s, Nordic parties had brought up temperance argumentation. The consensus was enhanced by the radicalism of the 1960s. Improved alcohol availability was argued for across the political map; the dividing factor was generation. Regional, cultural and religious differences, but not political ideology, were important. Because the liberal arguments in the political arena were aimed at civilizing drinking patterns, they belonged to the tradition of political rather than market liberalism. It was only at the outset of the "backlash" period, around 1974, that the alcohol issue was "politicized" according to party ideologies. The parties shifted from the traditional temperance argument toward a more goal-oriented attention to the consequences of drinking, rather than*

*drinking itself. Nowadays the difference in attitudes toward market liberalism has had an increasing impact on the Nordic parties' alcohol policies.*

KEY WORDS: *Alcohol policy, Nordic countries, political parties, argumentation, liberalization, market liberalism.*

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Alcohol policy has been an exceptionally political issue in the Nordic countries ever since the temperance ideology came to Northern Europe from England and North America in the mid-19th century. In Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland, where societal responses to the "alcohol question" have traditionally involved state interference with the alcoholic beverage market, alcohol policy has been prominently a legal matter. Political action in the national parliaments has played a key role in determining, sometimes in very great detail, how alcohol has been available and in what way its use is regulated.

One could expect, therefore, that the alcohol policy positions of political parties would follow closely their overall ideological lines at least in three respects. First, the very relationship between the market and the state has been one of the most important divisions in political ideology. A second, related issue has been the borderline between citizens' rights and equality before the law on the one hand and, on the other hand, the state's responsibility to maintain law and order and to safeguard individuals and families against risks, especially those privately taken such as drinking problems. Third, attitudes toward moral issues such as alcohol and sexuality, often related to religion, have been important, too, in the ideological images of political parties. However, political parties have acted in the alcohol arena in ways that are not unambiguously

related to their general party ideologies. The history of the temperance movement, the role of nationalism, and the political role of the socialist labor movement, among other things, have influenced the ways in which alcohol issues have been handled in the political process—sometimes in quite unpredictable ways.

This article analyzes the actions and views of the political parties as regards the social issue of alcohol, in order to shed historical and comparative light on policy-making in the alcohol policy arena in Norway, Sweden and Finland. Our analysis aims particularly at gaining a deeper understanding of the current wave of alcohol policy liberalism. It has been argued that “politics is dead,” at least from the party ideological point of view. Our view, however, is that the relationship between overall party ideology and alcohol policy attitudes in the political process has become, if not stronger, at least simpler and more straightforward than it was before the onset of the current wave of liberalization in the 1980s.

The main research material used in this article is composed of the programs\* of Nordic parties. Programs can be analyzed basically in two ways (Aarnio, 1998). On one hand, they are the basic documents that direct the politics of the political party. On another hand, they can be read as an independent action, in which case they form their own literary *genre*. According to this second point of view, which is applied in this article, party programs represent the political cultures of a given time and place. (ibid., 20–21; Aarnio 1997)

As their own genre the programs are historical in the ideological way, traditional with their formulations, structure and substance. Additionally, they are always outcomes of a party's self-reflection, including various compromise solutions in the preparatory stage and finally at the party conventions. The programs are also collections of the most essential ideological values of the parties, because the party conventions have accepted their final formulations.

Here the party programs form the main research material, along with available special social policy and alcohol policy programs and election programs, but also political handouts, party conventions minutes, and articles of the political and independent newspapers. As said before, the party programs are always outcomes of compromises, and even though they are formed under the demands of everyday politics, they are not as current as the other programs. The other kind of research material shows the multifarious opinions of the party members, and above all, it shows the complexity of alcohol issues. The other kind of research material is not used as systematically as the party programs, chiefly because of the unsystematic filing in the different archives where we found the material.

### **The Nordic party system**

The Nordic welfare societies are based on strong political institutions: universal suffrage, parliamentary democracy, and a wide spectrum of political parties. Two gradients dominate the political map: the old antagonism between town and country, and the division between the political left and the political right. (Pettersson, 1994, 39–41) The city-countryside dimension is found especially in Norway. Cultural separation in the countryside is intertwined with religion revivalist movements, and for this reason the temperance movement is strong in the western and northern parts of Norway. (Helander, 1988, 115–116; Lundestad, 1977, 451–501; Valen, 1981) Similar antagonism has been present also in Finland and Sweden, but it is no longer so strong as before.

The left–right dimension, derived from the basic socio-economic conflicts since the late 19th century, is the principal dividing line in the party systems in all the Nordic countries. The traditional Nordic five-party system is based on two main groups: the socialists (the Communists and Social Democrats) and the non-socialists (Agrarians, Liberals and

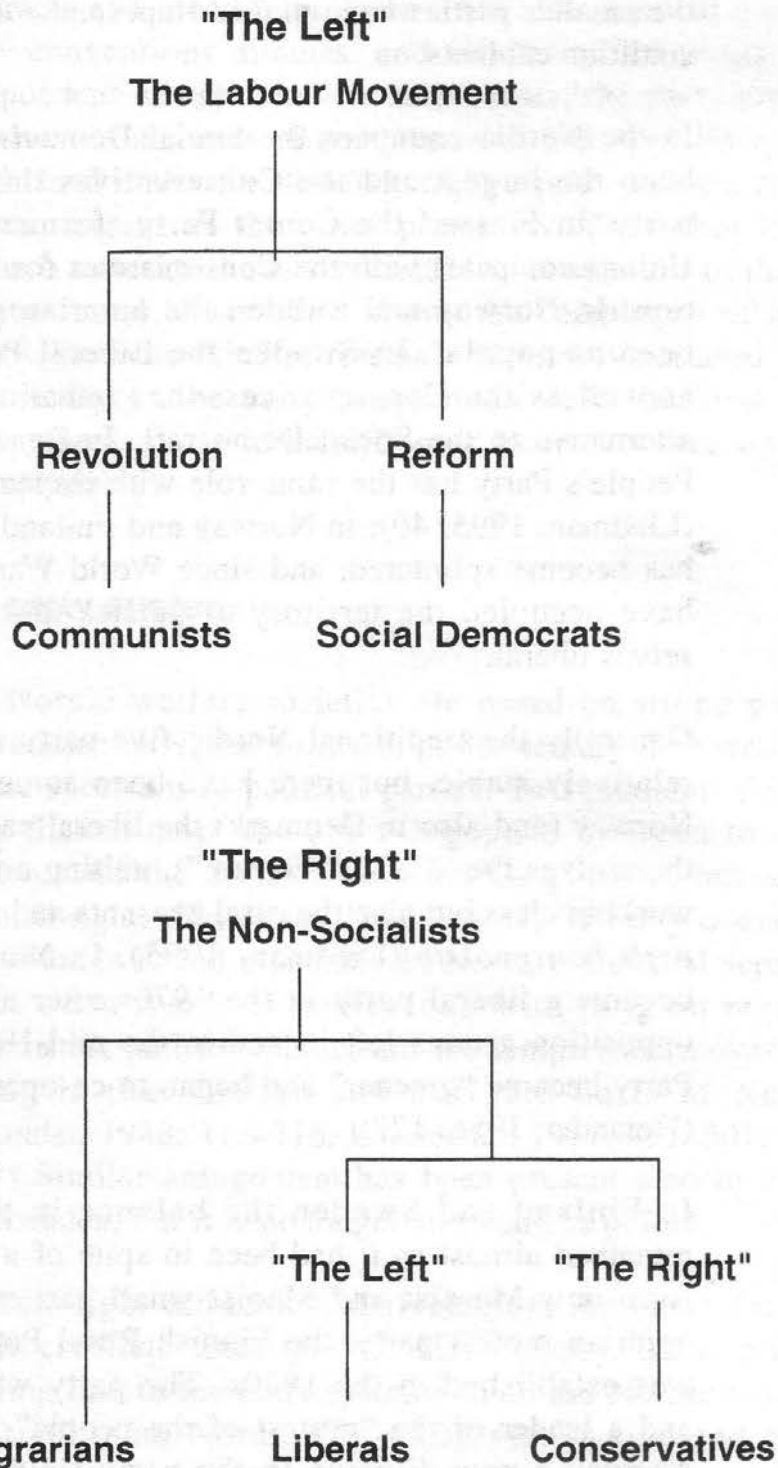
Conservatives) (see Figure 1). The left–right dimension has dominated the political orientation of governments, but also the smaller parties have played important roles in multiparty coalition cabinets.

In the Nordic countries the Social Democratic parties have been the largest and the Conservatives the second largest party. In Finland the Center Party (formerly the Agrarian Union) competes with the Conservatives for the second position. In Norway and Sweden the agrarian parties have not been as popular. In Sweden the Liberal People's Party—as well as the Conservatives—has remained an important alternative to the Social Democrats. In Denmark the Liberal People's Party has the same role with respect to the peasants (Liedman, 1995, 40); in Norway and Finland party liberalism has become splintered, and since World War II other parties have occupied the territory of parties that declared themselves liberal.

Generally the traditional Nordic five-party system has been relatively stable, but there have been some newcomers. In Norway (and also in Denmark) the liberal parties have called themselves the “Left” (“Venstre”), uniting not only the urban working class but also the rural peasants and part of the urban *petit bourgeoisie* (Liedman, 1995). In Norway the “Left” became a liberal party in the 1970s after a few right-wing opposition groups left it, and in the mid-1980s this Liberal Party became “greener” and began to co-operate with the left (Helander, 1988, 122).

In Finland and Sweden the balance in the party fields remained almost as it had been in spite of a few attempts to form new Marxist and Maoist small parties. In Finland an agrarian protest party, the Finnish Rural Populations' Party, was established in the 1970s. The party was very populist and a leader of the “protest of the people” in the 1980s. In Norway a new division in the party field emerged in the 1960s, after 30 years of stability. A new radical left was born

FIGURE 1  
**The traditional Nordic five-party system**



SOURCE: Petersson 1994, 41.

with a few small parties, like the new right-wing Progress Party, which was established at the beginning of the 1970s. (Helander, 1988, 119–120) In the 1970s the old left–right dimension was still in force, and in alcohol politics there was a tight demarcation, especially for the questions of beer socialization and liberalization, between the Social Democrats and the Conservatives (Aasland, 1986a).

In the late 1970s the environmental movement began to get organized as the green parties. Also the right-wing protest parties have gained increasing support, especially in Norway and Sweden, but not in Finland. The green parties are mainly regarded as belonging to the left (Gallagher, Laver & Mair, 1995, 151–209; Huber & Inglehart, 1995; Ware, 1996) and the new-liberal and new-conservative parties—like the Young Finnish Party in Finland, the Progress Party in Norway, and New Democracy in Sweden—to the extreme right (see Figure 2). In Norway the current main challenger of the Social Democrats is the right-wing Progress Party.

### Party ideology and the alcohol issue

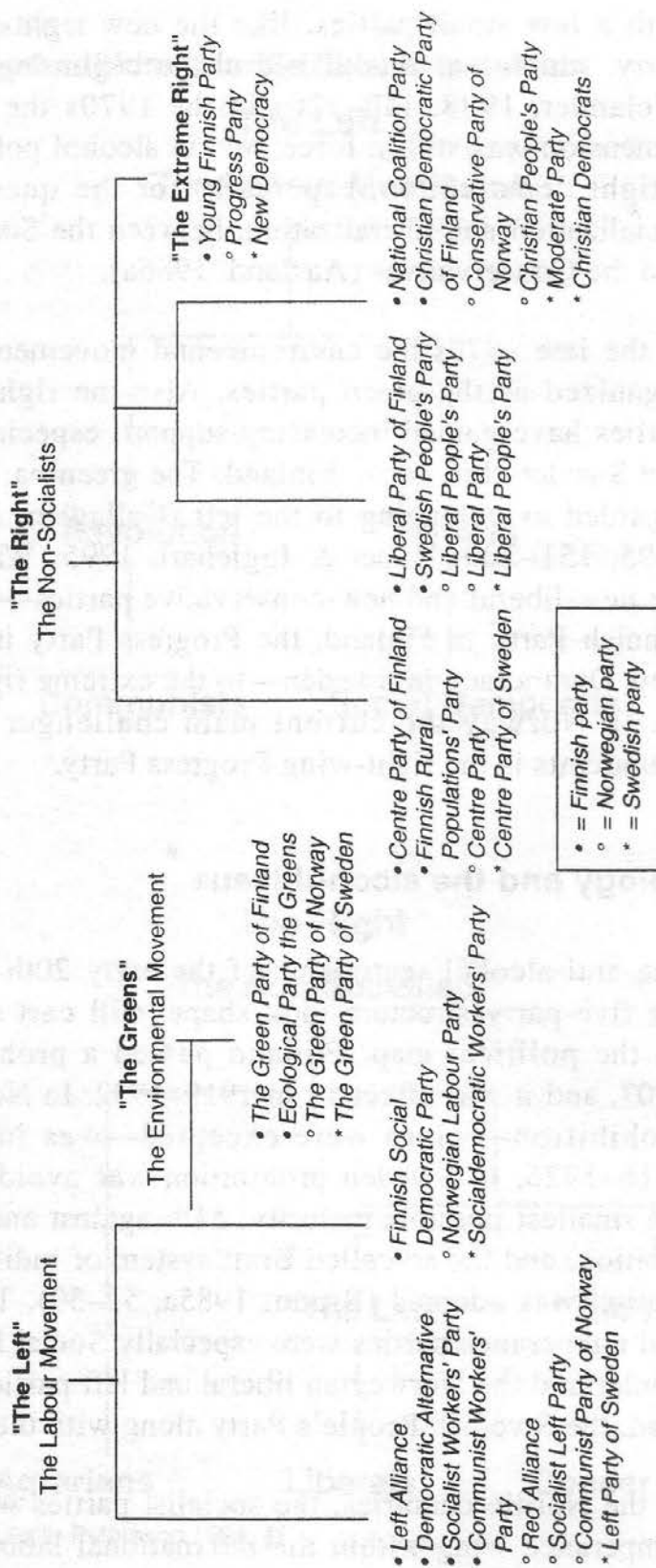
Socialism for  
temperance,  
control-friendly  
liberalism,  
and the  
conservative  
dilemma

The anti-alcohol sentiments of the early 20th century, when the five-party structure took shape, still cast a long shadow on the political map. Finland passed a prohibition law in 1907, and it was effective in 1919–1932. In Norway a partial prohibition—wines were excepted—was in force during 1916–1926. In Sweden prohibition was avoided in 1922 by the smallest possible majority: 51% against and 49% for prohibition, and the so-called Bratt system of individualized regulation was adopted (Bruun, 1985a, 52–59). The prohibition and temperance parties were especially Social Democrats, the Center and the Norwegian liberal and left parties, and, in Finland, the Swedish People's Party along with the Christians.

In the Nordic countries, the socialist parties were among the temperance wing within the international labor movement at



**FIGURE 2**  
**The new party system in Finland, Norway, and Sweden (including parties whose programs were used in the research material)**



the turn of the century. The German and the British labor movements rebuffed the alcohol issue as a bourgeois attempt to direct attention away from the real social misery that also was the cause of working-class alcoholism (Roberts, 1984; Dingle, 1980). The Nordic Socialists considered that alcohol itself is a "social evil" and that nobody should have the right to make a profit from it.

The background of the workers' temperance movement is not based only on socialist ideology. For example, in Finland, where the majority of new industrial workers had come to industrial areas from the countryside, they had adopted the ideology of the temperance movement. The Socialists gave several arguments why all workers ought to refrain from drinking alcohol. For one thing, it was considered important for the livelihood of the workers' families. Sobriety gives also the possibility for workers to climb up the social ladder, and in general to continue the class struggle for a better future for the working class. (See, e.g., Sulkunen, 1986.)

It is paradoxical but not unique that in the alcohol question the liberal parties have often supported a restrictive policy. Ideologically the reason is the main idea of liberalism itself: an individual has to be free from all kind of enslavement, including the slavery of alcoholism. In this question the state guarantees "freedom" by its alcohol monopoly control system, but ideologically the liberals do not support any kind of intervention of state or government in individuals' lives. In England and Wales it was Gladstone's Liberal Party that pursued the "prohibitionist" policy from the 1860s onwards (Harrison, 1971, 205–207; Dingle, 1980; Lambert, 1983). The background to the paradox lies in the historical process of party formation in Western European societies. In European politics liberal parties were part of the development of parliamentary nationalism (Laski, 1958). Their enemy was the aristocracy—in the Nordic countries, the privileged high civil servants (Liedman, 1995). While strongholds of religious tolerance, the liberal parties united members of the free (i.e. non-state)

churches and followers of revivalist movements constituting and surrounding them, usually with strong anti-alcohol attitudes. The English Liberal Party was in fact closely related to the Protestants, whose world view ["Weltanschauung"] has been analyzed by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

The same Protestantism that brought the temperance message to the Nordic countries was also associated with the rise of political liberalism. In Sweden the Liberal People's Party was originally based on rural support uniting Free Church and Good-Templar followers (Liedman, 1995), and even in the later urbanization process, when *Liberal* was added to its name, it retained a strong temperance platform (Nycander, 1996). In Finland the Liberal Party originated among the radical nationalist intelligentsia and the rising new middle class (teachers, the clergy, journalists and public administrators), and it had connections with the temperance movement.

The Finnish Liberals have had a weaker commitment to temperance than their Swedish and Norwegian counterparts, probably because the rising nationalist intellectuals were less influenced by the Free Church movement, and they also were not antagonistic toward the senior civil service. They were integrated into the state apparatus without political conflict and, on the other hand, became alienated from the working class and the peasants in the civil war of 1918 (Stenius & Turunen, 1995; Alapuro, 1997). Finally the Liberal Party was removed from the Finnish party register in 1999. For comparison, in Sweden the Liberal People's Party has been in its prime. In fact, it has been submitted that liberalism in the mid-1990s meant conservatism, because of its hard criticism of the Swedish welfare state system (see Öberg, 1995, 74–80).

The city–countryside dimension and its association with religious attitudes explain why the Center Parties have often represented strong restrictive positions in alcohol policy.

Christian parties traditionally have been against alcohol consumption and have supported teetotalism. They are relatively small in the Nordic countries, but they have created a dilemma for the main conservative parties, which, although less committed to Protestant populism than the Liberals, have had to balance their market-liberal views against this temperance background.

Furthermore, the Nordic Conservatives have been typical representatives of the nationalist new middle classes—teachers, the clergy and the intellectuals—as pointed out by Ernest Gellner (1983). They have vested much less interest in the free market than in the establishment and stability of the institutions of the nation state, the church, and public education. The construction of the nation states was based on the support of “the people” (Slagstad, 1998, 120), and therefore also the nationalism of the Conservative Parties assumed a relatively populist character. For these reasons the National Coalition Party in Finland, the Conservative Party of Norway, and the Moderate Party in Sweden, and their forerunners, have had important temperance wings, and as parties they have always had ambivalent attitudes toward alcohol.

In Finland the Conservatives wanted to encourage teetotalism (see the programs of the National Coalition Party, 1957–1966), and they supported ideological temperance education and restriction of alcohol consumption (Helander, 1969, 91; *Raittius- ja alkoholi-asiain tietokirja*, 1971, 372; Borg, 1965, 177–186, 240–263). Later, in 1970–1993, the National Coalition Party—like the other parties of Finland—did not take a stance on the temperance question in their party programs. In Norway the Conservatives trusted in a strict control policy (e.g., taxes) and the idea that “all restrictions have to serve temperance education” (the program of the Conservative Party of Norway in 1969). The Swedish Moderate Party trusted only in the force of education (*Förslag till socialpolitiskt program*, 1962; *Kommentar till att principprogram*, 1963).

The Nordic Conservatives have based their alcohol political opinions, on the one hand, on the bourgeois idea of the educated, individual consumer who masters the moderation of alcohol consumption. But, on the other hand, the facts of substance-abuse problems left no room for misinterpretations. These two themes are common in the programs of the Swedish and Norwegian Conservative Parties. In the 1980s, in a special social political program, the Finnish National Coalition Party recognized the social problems and also the health problems (*Sosiaalipoliittinen ohjelma*, 1984, 33–35), and implicitly in the argumentation still included the idea of dividing individuals into “moderate drinkers” and “difficult cases.” This kind of criticism toward the alcohol policy of Social Democrats has been typical of the Conservatives in all these three countries—especially when they have been in opposition. In Sweden the Conservatives have tried to throw out the whole “machine of the welfare state” in their politics (programs of the Moderate Coalition Party, 1983–1993).

In Finland, the Swedish People’s Party has had the same kind of problem with the alcohol question as the Conservatives, although in a milder form. Swedish-speaking Finns were divided on prohibition, and this explains why the liberal Swedish People’s Party had no temperance arguments in its party program in 1906. Neither had the party given any guiding principles in the prohibition vote in 1932. Even in 1937 the party did not take a position in their party programs. (Kallenaatio, 1979, 44–56.) Their problems have been rooted in the ambivalence of their constituencies. In the cities they have received support from the Swedish-speaking liberal, well-educated elite (see Stenius & Turunen, 1995, 49–54), but on the western coast, Ostrobothnia, their conservative supporters have had more positive attitudes toward temperance.

Contradictions  
over repeal  
and the "Bratt  
system"

In Norway, Finland, and Sweden, attitudes toward the alcohol question have been contradictory within the political parties, especially concerning repeal and the "Bratt system." In Finland, the repeal of prohibition created strong cleavages within all the parties, so the issue of alcohol policy was dropped from party programs in the 1930s and 1940s (Kallenautio, 1979; Helander, 1969, 89–90). Instead, abstract ideological formulations such as "promotion of temperance" became common. In practice they meant public financial support for temperance organizations. In parliamentary votes, free individual choice was tolerated. Also the milder temperance argumentation disappeared or changed to more practical argumentation relating to the social and health problems—meaning, naturally, the demands of a more strict alcohol policy.

In Sweden the new control system developed as a result of a complex political compromise (Johansson, 1992). The alcohol political situation changed dramatically after the prohibition vote in 1922, in which the Socialists and the Center parties supported prohibition. After the failure of the prohibition vote, they were satisfied with the alternative developed by the physician Ivan Bratt, from Stockholm. Only the political right took a critical stance toward Bratt's ideas, mainly because a central element in them was the elimination of private profit from alcohol production and trade. The expectation that the state alcohol monopoly would alleviate the state's financial situation was a serious consideration also among the non-socialist parties in Sweden (Bruun, 1985b, 73), as it was in Norway and Finland when the prohibitions were repealed (Kallenautio, 1979; Hauge, 1998).

The so-called Bratt system meant that alcohol was sold only to those who had a special ration book (*motbok*). The ration book allowed the purchase of different monthly quantities of alcoholic beverages, depending on sex, age, family circumstances, habits of living, financial position, payment of taxes, poverty, and complaints of drunkenness, and also the place of

residence—whether in the country or in a town. The ration book was personal and was valid in only one shop in the control area. (Frånberg, 1989, 263–264) The ration was not equal; it was smaller for women than for men and for the lower social classes as compared with the bourgeoisie (Bruun, 1985b, 289–317).

Although Bratt worked closely with the temperance movement before the prohibition vote, their ways parted eventually. Bratt's main ideas were (1) to eliminate the private profit motive and (2) to solve effectively the cluster of problems caused by alcohol while accepting the fact that many people do drink—most of them without serious damage if their consumption remains within moderate limits. (Bruun, 1985a, 52–67; Frånberg, 1989, 261–262.) The temperance movement never accepted the Bratt system's "harm reductionism" and argued that the ration system encourages consumption rather than leading to the final goal, which should be total elimination of alcohol use. The system was repealed in 1955, partly because of this conflict of principles (Nycander, 1996; Lenke, 1985, 318).

Like the repeal of the prohibitions in Finland and Norway, the Bratt system and its repeal in Sweden caused considerable political contradictions within parties over alcohol issues. However, the "alcohol question" has retained high visibility on the political agenda in Sweden, and the left has given a higher priority to control measures than in Finland and Norway. For example, the Swedish Social Democrats have listed four alcohol policy standpoints, which have remained almost identical from the 1960s until the present: To struggle against substance abuse; to make legislation positive to temperance; to increase research on alcohol problems and temperance education; and to take care of persons suffering from substance abuse problems. (Party programs of Social Democratic Workers' Party, 1960–1989, chapter "Prevent the misuse of intoxicants" ["Nykterhetsvård"]; 1990–1993, chapter "Drugs" ["Droger"])

### The repoliticization of alcohol policy

**The liberal consensus of the 1960s** In the 1960s a new orientation toward life evolved in the Western world. The work-centered lifestyle had gradually eroded, and new liberal attitudes toward pleasures had become widespread. The standard of living had risen, giving people more leisure time and more money. This general liberalization, the result of a better quality of life, was reflected in the media and in both high and popular culture, especially among youth.

One of the areas where the battle for change was fought was Nordic alcohol policy. Despite the changes in attitudes, in political life the mounting liberal argument since the mid-1960s has been more strongly regional than ideological in nature. There were, for example, regional differences in alcohol sales arrangements between the cities and the areas of scattered settlement. It was also more a question of the generation gap than of a division between the parties. Inside the parties this meant almost a war between the old temperance front and the young liberal radicals. (Helander, 1969, 93–95; Lindblad, 1996, 27, 31; Mäkelä, 1976, 43)

For example, in Finland the student organizations of four political parties provoked a debate on the liberation of medium-strength beer (maximum alcohol percentage by weight is 4.7). In 1966 the Liberal Party of Finland passed in their party convention a resolution proposed by their youth organization, including, for example, the statement that the old alcohol law “was one of the most awkward reminders of the censorship of citizens’ rights.” The same idea is evident in the conventions of three other parties that also discussed proposals from their student organizations: The Social Democrats in 1966, the National Coalition Party in 1967, and the extreme left Finnish People’s Democratic Union in the same year. (Helander, 1969, 93–95)



Student organizations of the Finnish Social Democratic Party and the National Coalition Party gave declarations that were almost identical. Both refer to heavy drinking patterns that are harmful and argue in favor of allowing medium-strength beer to be sold in grocery stores. Taxation should be eased, and the rising total consumption should be accepted on the grounds that more civilized drinking patterns would lead to less harm. There is no reference in either declaration to the benefits of free markets separate from the issue of alcohol-related problems, and no reference at all to the positive value of drinking or to the rights of consumers to choose their own pleasures. Both remain rigorously within the discourse of self-control and harm reduction, not extending the argument either in the direction of market freedom versus state control or in the romantic direction of liberating the true self from social constraints. (Minutes of the XXVII Finnish Social Democratic Party's party convention, 1966, 67–68, 187, 192–194; Minutes of the National Coalition Party of Finland's party convention, 1967, 8–9) Research reveals that the declarations might have come from the same source, perhaps the National Union of Finnish Students, as these identical formulations suggest.

Although strong pressure toward deregulation was exerted by business interests, especially by brewers and the tourism industry (Mäkelä, 1976), in the political discourse within all parties, the liberal argument was formulated in terms of citizens' rights rather than the free market, in contrast to the later demands of the neo-liberal parties. The right to self-control and equal treatment of citizens—the rural population and “deviant” individuals included—was more important than profits and competition. Also the arguments for liberation were based on its alleged positive influences: liberalization would change drinking habits in favor of milder alcohol drinks and stop illicit distillation, or “moonshining,” and also bootlegging.

The Finnish 1968 reform was directly influenced by the introduction of medium-strength beer in Sweden in 1965. The medium-strength beer, so-called "mellanöl" (maximum percentage by weight 4.3), was sold in the same shops as the milder beers. Reports on the Swedish experience, concluding that no spectacular effects could be observed after one year (Tuominen & Bruun, 1966; Ekholm & Tuominen, 1966), were noticed with pleasure. The major argument was that now "Finland appears to be the only country in the world where beer is considered as alcohol and consequently its sale is under public control. The debate on the matter is not based on facts but on emotional attitudes about alcohol that have been imposed on us by public education for decades." The editorial of the largest Finnish newspaper, the liberal *Helsingin Sanomat* (28.2.1967), associates the resistance to medium-strength beer with rural religious conservatism. (see Piispa, 1997)

In Sweden the medium-strength beer law was proposed in 1958 by the Social Democratic minister of finance Gunnar Sträng, but it failed to pass because the Social Democratic parliamentary group was split. The successful reform was initiated by a parliamentary motion (number 376, 1965) signed by representatives of all four major parties: the Social Democratic Workers' Party, the Moderate Party, the Center Party, and the Liberal People's Party. The motion argued that:

[T]he temperance situation would be greatly improved if we could shift consumption from stronger to milder beverages . . . . Hopes to create milder drinking habits must likely be attached most to the growing interest in wine as an alternative to spirits. Even beer can, however, be used as a replacement. . . . [T]he creation of the so-called medium-strength beer would therefore be the most suitable solution. (ibid.)

The public discussion that followed covers hundreds of pages in the press, but the argumentation is strictly limited to alcohol issues. The free market or consumers' convenience is not even mentioned. A group of students who launched a petition for medium-strength beer argued in the Social Democratic

afternoon paper, *Aftonbladet*, that “We believe a good medium-strength beer would considerably reduce spirits drinking among students” (18.2.1965). High school students joined the chorus in the same newspaper: “The current very mild ale [pilsner] is hardly attractive from the taste point of view. A medium-strength beer would effectively promote temperance. The good taste would lead to a shift from spirits to beer” (25.3.1965). Even the Students’ National Temperance Union supported the policy to promote milder beverages in the largest Swedish newspaper, the liberal *Dagens Nyheter* (16.2.1965).

**The free  
markets  
versus  
socialist  
brewing for  
health**

The radical consensus of the 1960s can be partly explained by the sudden cultural change that encompassed all faiths and persuasions, but it is understandable also against the Nordic historical background. Political liberalism, especially in the Nordic countries, has long been divorced from market liberalism. In the Nordic countries, where free markets would have been impracticable in view of their late industrialization, political liberalism has followed John Stuart Mill’s doctrine in which political liberty has no direct connection with the principle of free trade (Liedman, 1995, 40–41). This argument has also been questioned (see Laski, 1958).

Even in the Anglo-Saxon world the connection between the two was made only in the mid-20th century, notably by Ludvig von Mises and later by his student Friedrich [von] Hayek (1944, 1960), who argued that interference with the market necessarily implies interference with citizenship rights. In all Western European countries this connection has been incorporated into the doctrines of the conservative parties, but it has become important only in the postwar period. The context, of course, has been the labor movements’ continuing faith in the democratic and egalitarian effects of the welfare state.

The most important political division, between left and right, has had fairly little impact on alcohol policy positions of

the parties. All the parties have had strong temperance connections since their early beginnings. On the other hand, the radicalism of the 1960s was regional and was bound to generation rather than “political” in the party-ideological sense. However, a change took place in the 1970s, when alcohol policies again turned more restrictive. Consumption had increased considerably, and a “backlash” to the liberal reforms followed (Sulkunen, 2000). The theory on which the backlash was based emphasized again the role of the overall alcohol consumption rate in the population, and the measures recommended by experts purported to restrict the availability of alcohol to the general public rather than operating through individual disciplinary measures (Tigerstedt, 1999).

In this context the alcohol policy debate was repoliticized according to the left–right division, and for the first time the free market versus state control appeared as a relevant, albeit not decisive, argument in the debate. In 1974 the Pripps brewery was bought by the Swedish state. During that time the political climate was heated, and the parties, especially the Social Democrats, wanted to show their force in the political-ideological arena. The Social Democrats considered that state ownership is a democratic way to control economic power. As the principle of eliminating private profit from alcohol was accepted also in the non-socialist camp, the nationalization of the Pripps brewery did not meet strong resistance. On the other hand, the initiative came from the company itself, facing the excessive uncertainty in the beer market caused by, among other things, the expectation that the state alcohol committee report (SOU, 1974) would propose serious restrictive measures. In fact medium-strength beer was withdrawn from grocery store distribution in 1977, and a milder beer, so-called “people’s beer” (*folköl*), was put on the market.

The political left has had only a few alcohol policy arguments in their party programs. However, the Left Party of Sweden published a special social policy program (*Socialpolitiskt*

program, 1981) at the beginning of the 1980s. The party states that alcohol abuse and drug abuse were caused by the problems of the capitalist system: social injustice, unemployment, financial uncertainty, etc. The traditional argumentation of working-class ideology can also be found in this document: the working class has to fight against intoxication, which undermines its capacity to engage in social struggle, and should support restrictive alcohol policy to minimize consumption.

In Finland the Social Democratic Party adopted an alcohol policy position paper in 1974, which was largely repeated in the party program of 1978. The party took a strict stance on the consequences of the 1968 liberalization of alcohol policy, and one of the solutions was "to establish a state brewery." The private breweries must be dominated by the State Alcohol Monopoly of Finland (Alko), and as subcontractors they should prepare the same constant brands. (*Sosialidemokratian suunta*, 1974, 4) The total-consumption model dominates the argumentation of the program, but it associates the problem with social inequality and overall living conditions; in Sweden this is often called the symptom theory. The program explicitly aims at eliminating the profit motive by the state's taking over all alcohol production and trade. As late as 1978 the Commission of the Social Democratic Party required that all beer imports should be state run. In contrast, the National Coalition Party started to justify its alcohol policy statements with the social advantages of and rights to free enterprise, emphasizing that drinking problems and related problems are the individual's own responsibility. Representatives of the Conservative right went so far as to consider the government's proposal for an advertising ban (1975) as part of a wider socialist attack against private enterprise in general (Mäkelä, 1976, 55).

At the beginning of the 1960s, the other old temperance party, the Finnish Center Party, did not change the line of their alcohol argumentation. In their party programs the alcohol issue

is discussed in terms of the traditional temperance argumentation (the programs of the Center Party, 1962–1974). The older party program arguments promoted teetotalism—e.g., in the 1932 party program “people have to be liberated from the curse of alcohol” (*Raittius- ja alkoholiastaiin tietokirja*, 1971, 370–372). In the mid-1960s a quarter of the party members were also members of the party’s temperance organizations, and the situation of the Social Democrats was very similar (Helander, 1969, 96–97). From the political view, alcohol was a difficult question for the Center Party because of regional politics and also private interests within the party. From the regional point of view, the rigorous control of alcohol availability in rural areas was a problem, and entrepreneurs of the rural regions placed pressure on the party to support tourism and commerce. When the alarming consumption increase in the 1970s required restrictive action, the solution of the Center Party was to advocate withdrawing alcohol from the consumer price index. This measure was directed against the interests of the labor union movement, and the Center Party did not want to give even indirect support by their alcohol policy to wage claims. The Center Party has tried to shake off its agrarian heritage—e.g., in the mid-1960s the Agrarian Union changed its name to the more urban Center Party.

In Norway there were several debates after prohibition on the role of the State Alcohol Monopoly of Norway (Vinmonopole), and in the mid-1970s one important question was a separate beer monopoly, which would have been established at the municipal level (Nordlund, 1989, 159–161). Norway had not gone through the struggle and consequences of the medium-strength beer liberalization as in Sweden and Finland, but even so, the Norwegian left-wing and Christian parties adopted the “backlash” argument and demanded a stricter beer policy. The influence of the suggestions of Swedish and Finnish Social Democrats was clear, and, for example, the Socialist Left Party proposed a Swedish-style state monopoly of production of beer (the party program of the Socialist Left Party, 1975).

Additionally, the Norwegian Labor Party took a strict stance on alcohol policy questions in the late 1970s. But their argumentation related to health and social problems and their prevention rather than to the merits of public ownership of breweries (Aasland, 1986a, 1986b), and there were no comments about a state monopoly of beer in their programs (the programs of the Norwegian Labor Party, 1974–1985). The Christian Democrats and the Socialist Left Party supported the idea of a separate beer monopoly, especially at the time of the general elections (election programs of the Christian Democrats, 1977–1985; election programs of the Socialist Left Party, 1977–1985). The Conservatives were uncompromisingly against the beer monopoly (election programs of the Conservative Party of Norway, 1977–1985).

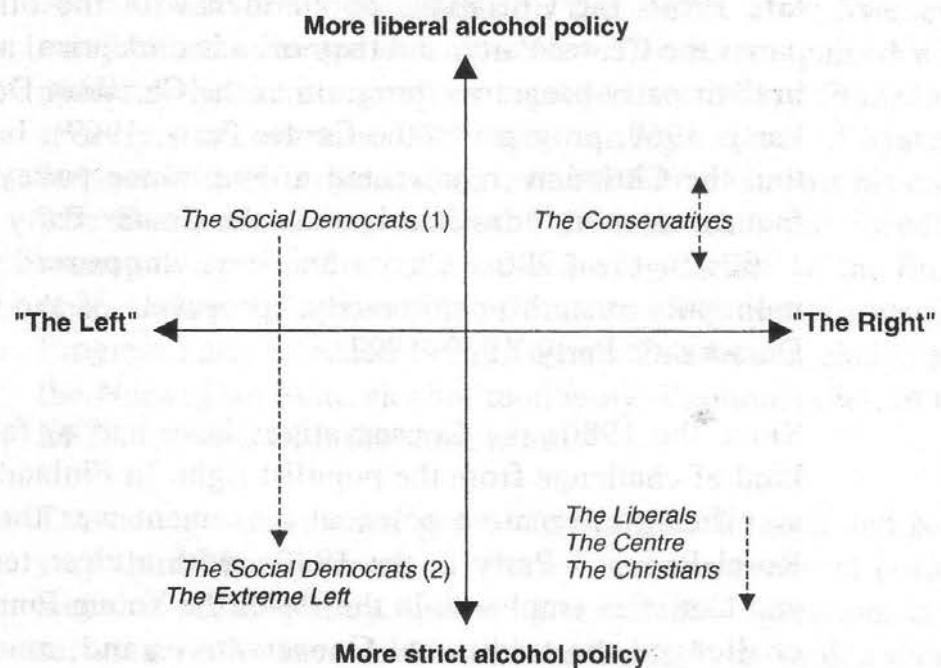
These so-called beer war years were, in the first place, part of everyday politics, the government parties measuring their strength against the opposition parties. After those heated years, in the mid-1980s, the Conservatives no longer commented on the subject, whereas the Christian Democrats did (program of the Christian Democrats, 1985–1989). The argumentation about a beer monopoly had changed from a state-level question to a municipal question (election programs of the Conservative Party of Norway, 1989–1993).

In Figure 3 we have tried to illustrate the general attitudes of the Nordic parties to the liberalization of alcohol policy in the late 1960s and to the “backlash” in the 1970s.

#### The Conservative ambivalence

After the liberalization consensus of the 1960s and the early 1970s, the Conservative dilemma had to be reconsidered, and new pressures from the right and from the Greens had to be taken into account. But the old pressures remained in place, too. Of particular importance has been the challenge from the Christians. In Sweden the goal of the Christian Democrats' alcohol politics has primarily been teetotalism (the party programs of the Christian Democrats, 1964–1999), and they have had serious differences of opinion with the Moderate

FIGURE 3  
**Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish parties' left-right dimension and the attitudes (1) at the time of liberalization of alcohol policy in the late 1960s, and (2) at the time of the "backlash" in the 1970s**



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Party. As late as the mid-1990s the Swedish Christians published a "special report" in which they listed four abstinence principles relating to when (pregnancy and childhood) and where (in traffic and in the workplace) one has to refuse alcohol. (See *Fyra vita zoner*, 1996, 4–9) The Christians wanted to pay attention to these general principles, which could be seen as a traditional approach in terms of an educational battle against alcohol abuse at a time of economic liberalization and Sweden's EU membership. In addition, there were intensifying demands for new liberalization by the extreme-right-wing New Democracy's populists.

In Norway the Christian Democratic Party has supported strict control policy by legislation and by raising prices



and taxes. It wanted to prohibit strong beer and to introduce stronger control of "moonshining" (programs of the Christian Democratic Party, 1965–1979). These strong temperance attitudes have led to problems with the larger Conservative Party when the parties have been in the same government. In the late 1960s the Christians cooperated with the other small party, the Center Party, and they even had identical arguments in their party programs (program of the Christian Democratic Party, 1969; program of the Center Party, 1969). In Finland, too, the Christians represented a temperance policy line—in fact much more consistently than the Center Party from the 1960s to the 1990s. Christians have supported the state monopoly system unanimously. (programs of the Christian Democratic Party, 1969–1997)

Since the 1980s the Conservatives have had to face a new kind of challenge from the populist right. In Finland the most significant alternative political movement was the populist Rural People's Party in the 1970s, with a clear temperance and Christian emphasis. In the 1990s the Young Finnish Party challenged the traditional Conservatives and, among other things, supported market liberalism in alcohol policy. The party was neither very populist nor popular, and it did not stay on the political map for long. In contrast, in Norway the populist right party, the Progressive Party, has been one of the biggest parties in the country. In its party programs it is clearly opposed to restrictive alcohol policy, especially to the state alcohol monopoly and high alcohol taxes (programs of the Progressive Party, 1977–1997).

The Swedish populist right party, New Democracy, has been working on the same lines as the Progress Party in Norway (Piaszczyk, no date). Although its popularity was short-lived, its alcohol policy arguments did have a strong appeal—for example, "We want to make it easier, nicer and cheaper for people to live their lives!" (program of New Democracy, 1999). In its programs the party claims that any kind of restriction increases the abuse of alcohol, and only drunken

driving is totally condemned. It wants to close the State Alcohol Monopoly of Sweden (Systembolaget) and demands “. . . medium-strength beer and wine in the grocery stores” (program of New Democracy, 1999).

At the peak of its popularity in the 1990s, after Sweden's entry into the European Union, New Democracy gained wide publicity because one of its local leaders, Harry Franzén, a grocery store operator, challenged the legal status of Systembolaget in the European Court. In 1997 Franzén lost his case. The European Court made the decision that the Swedish monopoly system does not break the regulations of the European Union. In a parallel fashion, in 1999 the Norwegian Progress Party's leader, Fridtjof Frank Gundersen, challenged the Norwegian State alcohol monopoly, Vinmonopolet, in the EFTA's Court, with the same result.

The new environmental parties in Finland, Sweden and Norway think that their main priority is environmental policy, and that social policy, including the alcohol question, is of secondary relevance. In Finland the Green Party took a stance on the alcohol question in their first programs in the late 1980s only by arguing for adding alcohol to the consumer price index (see the programs of the Green League, 1988, 1990). Another, much smaller Finnish environmental party, Ecological Party Greens, resorted to argumentation based on health problems and wanted to raise taxes on all stimulants such as alcohol and tobacco, and also on unhealthful nutrients. According to the party, the price of alcohol should be doubled or tripled. (program of the Ecological Party Greens, 1989) By comparison, in Sweden the Greens have been clearly against the demands for alcohol liberalization since Sweden's EU membership (program of the Green Party of Sweden, 1999). In Norway the Green Party supports the state-run monopoly system and strict alcohol policy, but, on the other hand, they want to take care of the rights of individuals (program of the Green Party of Norway, 1997).

Facing these challenges, the Conservatives have opted for market liberalism in their alcohol policy positions. In Sweden, the difference between Socialists, who were in favor of more restrictive availability policy, and the Conservatives was already aggravated in the 1970s. Although the socialization of the brewing industry did not meet determined non-socialist resistance, the conservative argument has tended to become clearly more consumer-friendly than oriented to public health and social problems. For example, the conservative MPs argued against the withdrawal of medium-strength beer not by defending the free market, but by saying that the spirits monopoly has not been able to prevent people from abusing alcohol. Furthermore, they argued, for many people beer is a beverage taken with meals and on social occasions, and they have the right to choose. (Lindbergh, 1971, 3, 107–112)

The same argument has been repeated even more emphatically since then. It has also been used in the discourse of the Norwegian Conservatives. In the beginning of the 1980s the right-wing government stopped restrictive reforms proposed by the Socialists and since then has been quite consistently in favor of a more relaxed availability policy. For example, in 1997 the legislation permitting the opening of 50 new liquor stores and other measures to please consumers was defended by a Conservative, Annelise Høgh, representing the opposition. She stressed that the extremely restrictive availability had not worked and that the Norwegian people demanded a change. Responsibility should be placed on the individual; the state's role is to wake consumers' own interest in protecting their health. In her view, regulating availability does not require a state monopoly. Private ownership of the shops would have the same effect. But controlling total consumption today is very difficult, and instead the emphasis should be placed on abstinence and lowering the alcohol content in beverages.

In Finland, to put it briefly, the legislation of 1995 adjusting the alcohol-control system to EU requirements was passed in

the parliament in a more liberal form than proposed by the government, mainly because of Conservative Party members' amendments (Alavaikko, 1998).

One forum where the ambivalent opinions of the Conservatives have come to light has been the political press. In Finland from the 1950s to the late 1960s, the main topic of all alcohol policy discussions in the editorials was temperance education. The conservative newspapers were almost as active in working for temperance education as the newspapers of the left (Piispa, 1997, 67). But in the 1960s the argumentation of Conservatives moved in a more liberal direction; for example, on the question of whether to liberate medium-strength beer, the conservative and independent newspapers supported liberation, while the left and center newspapers had ambivalent attitudes (Piispa, 1997, 82–83).

### **Conclusions**

Reading the party program material revealed five basic types of alcohol policy argumentation: (1) the temperance position; (2) social problems; (3) health problems; (4) liberalism that approves of alcohol use and favors relaxed availability regulations; and (5) demands for stricter alcohol policy, but not as total as the temperance arguments.

The party programs are a good source for study of the parties' positions as regards alcohol policy in Norway and Sweden. Finnish parties have only rarely clearly expressed their views on alcohol policy in their program documents. This in itself is an important indicator of the place alcohol issues have had on the political agenda in the three countries. In Finland alcohol issues have been related to political identities and ideology even more loosely than in Norway and Sweden. Consequently Finnish party programs are described by the absence of alcohol policy argumentation. This applies to a certain extent also to the other countries. In addition, the absence of the alcohol

issue forms a sixth, implicit argumentation type: (6) the absence of alcohol policy argumentation.

The absence of alcohol policy argumentation can be accounted for first by the fact that inside the parties the alcohol issue has been extremely inflammable. For this reason the issue has not been treated in the programs at all, or its treatment has been left only as an ideological curiosity or as a relic from the party's previous program. It is also evident that the party conventions have not reached a compromise concerning the formulations of alcohol policy argumentation—especially if the majority has not been from the temperance-friendly wing. Second, different parties have framed their political declarations in their programs in different ways. In some frames the alcohol issue is not the most essential, so there are no comments on it. And finally, the position of the party at a given time in the government-opposition axis affects its formulations concerning the alcohol issue. This influence of everyday politics is seen especially in Sweden and Norway, where the party programs have more importance in terms of lively public debate.

In Finland, Norway and Sweden the alcohol policy positions of political parties have been related to party ideologies in a complex and not always obvious way. The parties that have represented the liberal tradition in political thought in many cases have their origins in the Protestant religious groups that also formed the core elements of the temperance movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their liberalism was more strongly of a political nature than of an economic nature. They stressed equality before the law, and the equal rights of citizens in terms of public services and sometimes also in terms of welfare transfers. The Socialist labor movement has also been very temperance-oriented. The alcohol question has been a dilemma for the Conservative parties, on the one hand pressed by Christian parties, the rural Center and the morally Conservative nationalist intellectuals. On the other hand, they represent the free-market ideology against

state-centered socialism, and they also stress individuals' own responsibility to protect themselves against risks. Many contingent factors, such as regional policy and alliance with business interests, have further complicated the picture.

For these reasons political ideologies have been quite unrelated to alcohol policy stands ever since prohibition. The conservative dilemma was bearable because the national industrialization policies required extensive state ownership of industry and public production of infrastructure utilities. The alcohol control system, centered around comprehensive state alcohol monopolies, was therefore not an intolerable exception. The consensus was further enhanced by the radicalism of the 1960s. Improved alcohol availability was required throughout the political map; the dividing factor was generation and, to some extent, regional and cultural (religious) differences, not political ideology. The Liberal arguments in the political arena were then aimed at civilizing drinking patterns, and thus belonged to the tradition of political rather than market liberalism (Sulkunen, 2000). They have been strongly consequential as regards both drinking habits and total consumption. These questions have created cleavages between regions, generations and individuals within rather than between parties.

It was only at the outset of the "backlash" period around 1974 that the alcohol issue was "politicized" according to party ideologies. Figure 4 summarizes the approximate current positions of the parties on the left-right dimension and their alcohol policy stands. The left-right dimension basically describes the parties' commitment to the free market in general. The alcohol policy position describes their willingness to exercise public control of drinking and the alcoholic beverage market.

The difference in attitudes toward market liberalism has had an increasing impact on the parties' alcohol policy, and Figure 4 shows that it is currently dominant. Social Democrats

FIGURE 4

**Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish parties' left-right dimension and the attitudes toward the liberalization of alcohol markets, current situation**



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and some of the other Socialist groups favor state regulation, even state ownership in the alcohol market, while the Conservatives argue for free entrepreneurial activity, free consumer choice, and individual responsibility for harmful consequences. The state-owned alcohol monopolies appear increasingly problematic from the point of view of consistent attempts to privatize state-owned companies in transportation, energy and communications. The challenge from the new Populist right in Sweden and Norway has further shifted the Conservatives toward a liberal alcohol position.

The alcohol policy argumentation has changed also in the parties not committed to the free market, notably in the Social Democratic parties, the Christians and the Center parties, and the Swedish People's Party in Finland. Earlier their strong

commitment to anti-alcohol policy had been essentially based on moral grounds. Since the backlash of the 1970s they have shifted from the traditional temperance argument toward a more goal-oriented attention to the consequences of drinking, particularly on health, social costs, and suffering caused to others, rather than to drinking itself. However, as the available policy instruments are few, the practical consequences of accentuated political contradictions may amount to little more than a greater or lesser willingness to maintain the control structures still in place.

**Note** \* Most of the Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish party programs are in the form of electronic data. For this reason it was not possible to give the original pages of all references.

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## Appendix *The research material: Party programs and political handouts*

### **Finland**

Finnish research material is from the electronic data archives of the Political Institute of the University of Jyväskylä, which we would like to thank.

*National Coalition Party* (Kansallinen Kokoomus); programs 1945, 1957, 1970, 1981 and 1993. Handout: Social policy program (1984).

*Christian Democratic Party of Finland* (Kristillinen liitto); programs 1969, 1979, 1982, 1995 and 1997.

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*Young Finnish Party* (Nuorsuomalainen puolue); program 1994.

*Swedish People's Party* (Svenska Folkpartiet), programs 1964, 1974, 1988 and 1997.

Handouts: *Narkotika. Alkohol. Kamp mot missbruket en av 80-talets viktigaste frågor* (1984) and *Alcohol policy program* (1985).

*Left Party of Sweden* (Vänsterpartiet); programs 1961, 1967, 1972, 1987, 1993 and 1996. Handouts: *Social policy program* (1981) and *Aktiv eller passiv? Drug policy program* (1997).

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*Finnish Social Democratic Party*; minutes of the XXVII party convention 1966 (publ. 1967).

*Finnish People's Democratic Union*; minutes of the VIII party convention 1967.

Motioner i andra kammaren nr 376, lika lydande med motioner nr 304 I första kammaren av herr Wennerström m.fl. om s.k. mellanöl [Legislative proposals on medium-strength beer]. The motion was signed by Alf Wennerfors, Emil Elmwall, Ingrid Gärde Widemar and Rune Johansson, representing the four major parties (*Moderate Party, Social Democratic Workers' Party, Liberal People's Party and Center Party of Sweden*), 1965.