

Paper abstract

Transnational militant anti-fascism in Denmark during the 1930's

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During the early 1930's, militant leftwing environments were established in and around both the communist and the social democratic youth organisations of Denmark (DKU and DSU respectively). Largely imitating the militant political culture of the Weimar Republic and especially the fighting organisations of the German left, these environment imported a series of external characteristics – uniforms, symbols, militaristic organisational forms – as well as propaganda methods and confrontational practices from Germany and other European countries used them in a Danish political context.

Faced with the growth of Danish fascism and right radical street mobilisation around 1932-33, these militant groups formed the organisational basis of a development of a radical anti-fascism and confrontational collective actions. The establishment of a militant culture and strong anti-fascist tradition proved to be inspirational for a network of specialised anti-fascist groups during the mid-1930's, especially in the greater Copenhagen area. They were characterised by a high degree of initiative and willingness to use violent means against rightwing groups. While radical anti-fascism was mostly in opposition to the established left, it was closely linked to the general mobilisation against fascism in the 1930s.

Through empirical analysis of organisational groups, their use of propaganda and their confrontational practices, my paper examines how and why the Danish leftwing youth organisations during the 1930's were highly influenced by the anti-fascist street politics and propaganda methods of especially the German left. I analyse concrete examples of innovative transfer of anti-fascist and militant symbols, organisational forms, politics, and practices as well as the transnational influence of the concepts of 'fighting fascism' and 'fighting for the streets' itself.

My study shows how the experience of the political development in Europe and the liquidation of the workers movements after the fascist takeovers in Germany and Austria hold a key explanation. The militancy and violence of the anti-fascist groups – as a Danish imitation of a transnational trend – then were largely a consequence of the violent practices of fascism against the left internationally and a desire among the anti-fascists to encounter the emerging fascist street movement in Denmark. The 'German'

way of fighting the radical right became a righteous pre-emptive way of self-defence in the minds of the anti-fascists.

Theoretically and methodologically, my study thus departs from the explanatory models that see the militant tendencies and physical confrontations between left and right in the interwar period as an expression of a totalitarian mobilisation with predisposed violent tendencies. With a theoretical basis in contentious politics studies, the study rather focuses on transnational currents and dynamic processes as ways of understanding political violence and militant political cultures.