


Bending Michels' 'Iron Law of Oligarchy': can democracy ever be for 'home consumption' in political parties?

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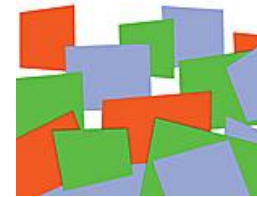
- Oligarchic Consensus: lack of membership influence on policy
- Michels' 'Iron Law of Oligarchy'
- Danish Socialist People's Party 
- SF a 'deviant case'

Political Parties

A Sociological Study of the
Oligarchical Tendencies
of Modern Democracy

Robert Michels

Introduction by Seymour Martin Lipset



- Tony Benn:
‘That is going to be
a very short book.
At the moment it is
zero’



- Oligarchic Consensus
 - Duverger's Mass party
 - Post-war catch-all/ electoral professional parties

- Problem: Lack of membership influence nothing new

- Michels and the iron law

- Duverger:

‘leaders tend naturally to retain power and increase it, because their members scarcely hinder this tendency and on the contrary even strengthen it by hero-worshipping the leaders: on all these points the analysis of Roberto Michels continues to hold true’ (Duverger 1964: 134)

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- The iron law of oligarchy
 1. Need for professional leadership in organisations above a certain size
 2. Leaders holding on to their positions
 3. Laws of tactics
 4. Membership gratitude

Membership gratitude

“The role of party members is to support decisions made by the leadership”									
	Red Green Alliance	SF	Social Democrats	Social Liberals	Centre Democrats	Christian Democrats	Liberals	Conservatives	Danish People's Party
Agree/agree strongly %	16.3	20.4	50.7	51.5	51.5	48.6	54.6	59.1	76.9
Neither agree/disagree %	10.3	10.6	14.8	14.7	18.8	22.1	17.6	16.6	11.5
Disagree/disagree strongly %	73.6	69	34.5	59	29.7	29.3	27.8	24.3	11.7

- Membership influence when:
 - Low government ambitions
 - Proportional electoral system
 - When the members want it
- SF:
 - ‘Ungrateful’ members
 - Danish list PR
 - Low government ambitions
 - Membership influence in SF

Conclusions

1. It is possible for members to have influence on party policy
2. Membership influence not a matter of mass party vs catch-all party:
 - Environment (proportionality)
 - Government ambitions of leaders
 - Attitudes of members

Conclusions

- SF only one case
- Need more research, but...
 - Data
- Membership influence does exist and worth taking seriously