

An exchange on the Danish Euro referendum

30 September 2000

The World Socialist Web Site has received the following email from a reader in response to the article "Right-wing politics dominate Danish Euro referendum" (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/sep2000/dens20.shtml>). A reply by Steve James is included below.

Dear WSW

Let me tell you something about the Danish referendum.

The governing parties of Denmark tried to run their campaign with the following reasoning: If you vote No then you vote the same as the Danish Peoples Party and therefore you must be a racist.

But people could see through that argument (unfortunately not Steve James). They are not racist or nationalist. But they want to keep their influence over their own lives and the future society.

Democracy is the number one issue raised by the No-side in the Danish debate. Giving power to the undemocratic EU institutions is a setback for democracy in Denmark and a wrong course for Europe in general.

Conservative economic politics is the number two issue. Low inflation and a balancing the state budget are written as necessities in the treaty. Employment is only a nice thing to have.

Solidarity is the number three issue. Should the welfare system be paid for by taxes (solidarity) or by individual insurance? The European Union prefers the latter. And the pressure to harmonize will be strong in Euroland.

At no point have I heard chauvinist arguments put forward by the No side. But maybe the reference to the Socialist Peoples Party as former Stalinists is a hint that the story is not to be taken seriously.

When we vote No, can you please print a story telling the truth and giving the correct reasons behind the No?

Yours sincerely,

Viktor Rasmussen

Steve James replies on behalf of the World Socialist Web Site.

Dear Mr Rasmussen,

It was never my intention to portray the millions of workers opposed to the adoption of the euro as implicitly

supporting the Danish Peoples Party's (DPP) xenophobia. I understand that many of those voting No will vigorously oppose the DPP, and its open racism and Danish chauvinism. Your opinions of the "No" campaign clearly reflect the thinking of the many Danish workers and young people, who correctly see the European Union (EU) as undemocratic and committed to destroying social welfare in the interests of the banks and corporations through tax and employment policies. A No vote would also, in part, represent a rejection of the SPD government's right wing policies. The quotes I utilised in the article from Holger Nielson were to bring out the fact that the main thrust of the Socialist Peoples Party's (SPP) "No" campaign focused on social questions.

My point is, however, that programmatically the SPP's advocacy of a national perspective for the defence of democracy and living standards in Denmark brings them close to the DPP and cedes the political initiative to its demagogy. Your three points "democracy", "conservative economic policy", and "solidarity" reflect this. Taken together they sum up an outlook which insists that the present Danish state institutions, its social policies, the close relationship enjoyed by the trade unions with the government form a framework within which welfare and living standards can be defended. They do not.

In the latter stages of the campaign, both sides have claimed that pensions will be destroyed if their position is not successful in the referendum. The "No" camp points to corporate Europe's need to compete with the USA and notes that welfare provisions and the higher taxes on business this demands are a barrier to competition. Nyrup Rasmussen felt himself unable to use unspecified assurances from the EU leadership that Danish pensions would be safe if the euro was adopted.

The "Yes" camp counter these arguments by insisting that outside of the euro, Denmark will be vulnerable to currency speculation that will destabilise the economy so much that welfare would be undermined. This was the basis of the governing Social Democratic Party's (SPD) presentation of euro-membership to the Danish

population. Big business, the trade unions and the main political parties all argue that to expand Denmark's profitability the euro has to be adopted. The alarms over welfare are a hook with which to drag the population along with them.

Neither position offers a way forward. Rather everything hinges on the development of an independent political movement in the working class that is neither tied to the Danish state nor the institutions of corporate Europe. This is what I was trying to argue for. If the article's concentration on the politics animating the "No" campaign has inadvertently created confusion, even an assumption that I believe the "Yes" campaign has greater merit, then I can only apologise.

Nevertheless, one of the questions that must be worked through carefully in Denmark, and the other Scandinavian countries, is why opposition to government policy has for decades most clearly expressed itself in a nationalist opposition to the European Union.

The SPP acknowledges that it played a key role in forging the anti-EU movement for 20 years, only changing its position after 1993, when Holger Nielson was elevated into a new role as the Danish negotiator with the EU. Throughout this period, the SPP, along with the anti EU "June Movement", presented Danish democracy, Danish institutions, and Danish self-determination as something Danish workers should defend. The SPP present this nationalist position in left-sounding phrases, proclaiming Denmark as a haven of social democracy besieged and menaced by a unifying capitalist Europe.

At the same time, the SPP support Denmark's imperialist ambitions on the world arena. Although they opposed the NATO bombing of Serbia, the SPP supports Danish involvement in military adventures organized under the banner of the UN, calls for a professional army and the strengthening of the Organisation for security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as an alternative to a US-dominated NATO. Taken together, these nationalist policies bring the SPP close to the DPP and their defence of the "Danish family"—despite the differing presentation of their policies.

Most damning of the SPP is their attitude to the working class in the rest of Europe and the world, who do not figure at all in any of the party's statements. What attitude do they take to German, Polish, French or Swedish, workers? How should, for example, Danish and German workers forge a strategic unity against their respective ruling classes' efforts to demolish living standards?

During a period when anti-immigrant hysteria has

dominated Danish politics, including the anti-EU movement, the SPP has developed a line, which presents immigration as a product of the euro.

Rasmussen and the SPD government recently argued that concerns over immigration have been exaggerated. Having led the attack on immigrants, their position is clearly hypocritical. Their latest statements are largely motivated by concerns within the bourgeoisie that their past witchhunting of immigrants could discourage much-needed skilled foreign workers from moving to Denmark and Europe. But the SPP position is no better. Leading party member Kristian Thulesen Dahl said that the SPP based its own views on a report written by Robert Mundell, a Nobel Prize winning economist, "that a common currency requires a mobile workforce, so that workers can move to places where there is need for them and where there is good pay. Mundell sees this as one of the conditions which the euro requires to function."

One can only assume from this type of argument that retention of the Danish krone means less immigration and is therefore to be preferred. They are effectively defending immigration controls and national borders as part and parcel with their championing of little Denmark against big bad corporate Europe.

Finally, you object to the description of the SPP as "former Stalinists," and imply that this definition explains the allegedly biased presentation in my article of the party's opposition to the euro. I beg to differ. Although they split quite early from the Danish Communist Party and made "democracy" the principal issue of their split, the SPP have retained the nationalist political orientation that characterizes all the numerous splinters from Stalinism worldwide. Events have confirmed that the SPP's break with Moscow was bound up with a political accommodation to Danish capitalism rather than a move towards genuine socialist internationalism.

Sincerely,
Steve James



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