

# Danish parties shift further right in election campaign

**Jordan Shilton****17 June 2015**

The brief three-week campaign ahead of Thursday's general election in Denmark has witnessed a further shift to the right by all of the political parties.

The election was called three months early by current Prime Minister and Social Democratic Party leader Helle Thorning-Schmidt. The Social Democrats have ruled in a minority coalition with the Social Liberals (Radikale) since 2011. The Socialist People's Party (SF) was also part of the government until it quit last February.

Polls have indicated an extremely close race, with both Thorning-Schmidt's "red block" of Social Democrats, Radikale, SF and the pseudo-left Red-Green Alliance (RGA) and the right-wing block of the Liberals (Venstre), Danish People's Party (DF), Conservatives and Liberal Alliance being predicted the winner. The Social Democrat-led block has closed a gap of 10 percentage points in the polls since March, and their ability to hold on to power could depend on whether the Alternative, a new party founded by disaffected Radikale members, achieves enough support to surpass the two percent hurdle for parliamentary representation.

Even by the standards of Danish politics, which have moved sharply to the right, the current campaign has been particularly reactionary. It takes place just four months after February's twin shootings in Copenhagen by Omar El-Hussein, a young Muslim from an immigrant background who adopted radical Islamist positions while in prison.

The attack was seized on by the political establishment to portray Denmark as a country in danger of being overrun by terrorist groups so as to justify the passage of anti-democratic reforms granting additional powers and funding to the intelligence agencies.

This fearmongering is also being used to legitimise right-wing denunciations of refugees and the immigrant population as a whole. In March, in anticipation of the coming election, the Social Democrats launched an

advertising campaign hailing its record on clamping down on immigrants. The main slogan on its posters was, "If you come to Denmark, you have to work."

Thorning-Schmidt has touted her record on asylum policy, commenting that for the first time in 12 years, Copenhagen had tightened refugee regulations. Last year, her government introduced a new residency permit for refugees which only allows them to stay in the country for a year, and a separate measure banning any asylum seeker on such a permit from bringing their families to join them.

The Social Democrats' scapegoating of immigrants is aimed, above all, at diverting attention away from the party's defence of the interests of Denmark's financial elite at the expense of the working class. Since coming to power in 2011, the Social Democrat-led coalition has implemented budget cuts harsher than its right-wing predecessor.

Austerity budgets were imposed to meet a commitment under European Union (EU) guidelines to cut the budget deficit by 1.5 percent each year until 2013. The length of time unemployment benefit can be claimed was slashed, healthcare and welfare budgets cut and state pensions capped. In 2013, 70,000 teachers were locked out to compel them to accept concessions and longer working hours.

The austerity drive has seen a sharp rise in income and wealth inequality. Last year, a study revealed that the top one percent of Danes controlled 33 percent of total wealth. This makes them 32 times wealthier than the average Dane. Conservative daily *Berlingske* noted shortly after that the crisis "has been a party for the very richest in Denmark."

In all of these policies, the government relied for support in parliament from the pseudo-left RGA, a coalition of ex-Stalinist and Maoist groups which includes the Pabloite Socialist Workers Party (SAP). The RGA backed the government's first two austerity budgets and

came out in support of its decision last August to send troops to the Middle East to supply the Iraqi army with weapons using Danish aircraft. The alliance's leadership justified their backing for the latest imperialist intervention in the region with the claim that there was a "temporary coincidence" of interests between the RGA and American imperialism.

Thorning-Schmidt's social assault on working people and the lack of any progressive alternative to her government have played into the hands of the far right. DF is anticipated to see a significant rise in its support on Thursday, with around 19 percent expected to back it as compared with 12 percent last time. It is not clear whether DF would enter government with Venstre should the right-wing block secure victory, or decide to support a minority administration from the outside.

The Social Democrats have moved so far right that DF is able to present itself to disillusioned voters as a defender of Denmark's welfare state and public services. As election researcher Kasper Møller Hansen asserted in comments to Germany's *Liibecker Nachrichten*, "DF has changed its character."

He went on to state that under new leader Christian Thulesen Dahl, its campaigns were much more focused on social questions. "In this, the party is actually to the left of the Social Democrats, demanding a larger public sector," Hansen claimed.

Venstre and DF blame budget cuts, unemployment and mounting social problems on immigration. They have accused Thorning-Schmidt of rhetoric on migrants, arguing that the numbers of immigrants have gone up under her government. Seeking to outdo DF, Venstre has proposed calling an emergency sitting of parliament over the summer to take action on refugees, if leader Lars Løkke Rasmussen becomes prime minister. Thorning-Schmidt has agreed to hold joint discussions with DF and the Liberals to draw up new refugee policies after the vote.

When last in power, Venstre led a minority government which relied on the extreme right DF for parliamentary support. It implemented a restrictive immigration system, led Denmark into the US-led war in Iraq, and implemented deep attacks on social programmes in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis.

The anti-immigrant chauvinism dominating Danish politics has been targeted at the country's Muslim population in particular. The Conservatives, which would be a junior coalition partner in a Venstre government, ran a campaign under the slogan, "Stop Nazi Islamism." Mai

Mercado, the party's immigration spokesperson, argued in *Berlingske* that Christianity was superior to Islam.

The promotion of Islamophobia was continued this past weekend at the annual Folkemødet (People's Meeting) on the island of Bornholm. Ostensibly an opportunity for politicians to interact with ordinary Danes and engage in transparent debate, organisers permitted right-wing and openly fascist parties to invite guests to conduct debates on Islam. The Danish Free Press Society invited the notorious anti-Muslim Dutch politician Geerd Wilders to deliver a speech on Islam, just weeks after he participated in an event in Texas where images of the Prophet Mohammed were drawn, provoking an attack by armed men.

The Danes Party (Danskerne Parti), an explicitly neo-fascist outfit, invited representatives of its Greek co-thinkers Golden Dawn to take part in a debate on nationalism.

On Thursday, Venstre, DF, Conservatives and Liberal Alliance announced a joint policy to restrict the access of immigrants from other EU countries to welfare benefits. The policy was entitled "Danish welfare in Europe" and was framed in terms of preventing the EU from becoming a "social union."

The four parties stated that they would back the efforts of British Prime Minister David Cameron to renegotiate EU regulations to allow national governments to deny social support to citizens from other EU states. "We are far from in agreement on everything in relation to the EU. But we agree that if Denmark gets a new government after the parliamentary elections on June 18, we will stand behind Britain's, and other like-minded countries' work to ensure that the EU does not become a social union," the agreement read, according to *Gyllands-Posten*.

The policy announcement was a further concession to the far right by Venstre, which has traditionally been a pro-EU party.



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