

Far right makes major gains in Danish elections

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Following a campaign dominated by anti-immigrant chauvinism, the far-right Danish People's Party (DF) has emerged as the biggest winner from last Thursday's Danish general election.

The DF almost doubled its share of the vote from 12 percent to over 21 percent, overtaking the Liberal Party (Venstre) and becoming the country's biggest party within the right-wing bloc. However, it will be Venstre leader Lars Løkke Rasmussen who will serve as prime minister, as the DF has turned down the opportunity to lead a coalition.

The vote brought an end to four years of Social Democratic-led government. Although the Social Democrats saw their share of the vote rise marginally from an historic low in 2011, its coalition partner, the Social Liberals, lost more than half its parliamentary seats. The Socialist People's Party (SF), which was in the government until last year, also suffered major losses. When the four MPs from Greenland and the Faroe Islands were included, the right-wing bloc obtained 90 seats while the Social Democrat-led red bloc got 85.

Helle Thorning-Schmidt has announced her resignation as Social Democratic leader.

The result ensures that Denmark's next government will be the most right-wing administration in recent years. Venstre suffered significant losses at the polls, dropping around a quarter of its seats. Rasmussen was involved in a series of financial scandals last year, which at one point almost cost him his job. He will now take over as prime minister in spite of the party achieving its worst election result since 1990.

The DF will be in a position to essentially dictate government policy in key areas, whether or not it decides to join a coalition. The Rasmussen-led government will implement an agenda of stepped-up attacks on immigrants and refugees, as well as a deepening of the social cuts carried out by the outgoing government led by Thorning-

Schmidt.

In an indication of just how far to the right the entire political establishment has shifted, Rasmussen made a point of praising the Social Democrats for their role in government, which has included enforcing austerity measures targeting workers and overseeing a sharp rise in social inequality. Accepting the opportunity of becoming prime minister, he commented during his victory speech on Thursday, "I will happily do so, because it is not a bad point to be taking over from."

Later, he added, "I am very glad that Helle Thorning-Schmidt has on behalf of the Social Democrats invited [sic] to cooperate in the coming term."

The composition of the incoming government remains uncertain. Rasmussen was given authorisation on Friday to explore the possibility of forming a majority administration, but this quickly proved impossible. The Conservatives, the smallest right-wing party, announced that due to its size and the parliamentary arithmetic, it would be beneficial for the party to remain outside of government. The Liberal Alliance, another smaller right-wing party, has indicated its readiness to join a coalition.

According to the daily *Berlingske*, the most likely outcomes are a Liberal minority government or a minority coalition with the DF. The Liberals alone control just 34 seats in the 175-seat parliament.

The DF has named four conditions that Venstre would have to agree to in order for it to form a coalition. These include adopting a eurosceptic attitude to the European Union (EU), clamping down even further on immigration and asylum, a 0.8 percent rise in public spending and a reintroduction of border controls.

In 2011, when Rasmussen was prime minister, border controls were introduced but were lifted again shortly afterwards when the Social Democrats came to power.

The four right-wing parties released a joint statement prior to Thursday's vote announcing their support for

British prime minister David Cameron's efforts to renegotiate EU treaties. However, while the DF supports border controls and immigration restrictions that would require treaty changes, Venstre has indicated that it would only support reforms that do not require treaty revisions.

Rasmussen is in favour of banning citizens of other EU states from claiming welfare benefits, declaring, "We want an EU where people can go wherever workers are needed, but we don't want an EU where people go wherever the social benefits are good."

On public spending, the DF's call for a marginal increase would struggle to keep pace with inflation. Moreover, it plans to slash social support for immigrants and refugees—some of the most vulnerable sections of the working class. Venstre advocates even deeper cuts, with a public spending freeze.

Beyond the make-up of the next government, the election demonstrated once again the bankruptcy and deep crisis of social democracy. The *Financial Times* noted in its commentary that the ousting of Thorning-Schmidt meant, for the first time since 1945, that social democracy held power in just one Scandinavian country, Sweden. Should the DF join the incoming government, three out of the four Nordic countries would have extreme right-wing parties in government: the Finns in Finland, Progress in Norway, and the DF in Denmark.

Denmark's Social Democrats secured support from just one in four voters. Even in last year's Swedish elections, Social Democrat leader Stefan Löfven became prime minister with less than a third of the popular vote. This represents a drastic decline from previous decades, when social democratic parties across the region could be certain of obtaining the support of well over 40 percent of the electorate.

Despite the superficial commentary in the bourgeois press, it is entirely false to interpret this decline as being due to voters shifting to the right. Social democracy has in reality abandoned all of its former reformist policies, transforming itself throughout Scandinavia, as it has done the world over, into a tool of the financial aristocracy.

In Sweden, it was a Social Democratic government from the mid-1990s that began the assault on public services and the welfare state. In Norway, a similar role was played by the Labour Party under the leadership of Jens Stoltenberg. Stoltenberg is the current NATO secretary general and one of the leading figures in NATO's aggressive anti-Russian policies in eastern Europe and the Baltic region. He modelled his domestic political career on Tony Blair, former British Labour

Party prime minister.

Developments in Denmark mirror this trend. After a decade of Venstre-led governments, Thorning-Schmidt came to power in 2011 following the party's poorest election result. In office, she junked all of the meagre election promises made so as to launch an assault on social welfare and public spending, clamp down on immigrants, privatise state companies, send Danish troops to participate in the US-led war against ISIS in Iraq, and attack democratic rights in the wake of February's twin shootings in Copenhagen.

The sharp shift to the right by the Social Democrats has prepared the way for the emergence of xenophobic and nationalist forces. The DF has exploited the alienation felt by a large majority of the population from the political elite by making demagogic references to defending social conditions and jobs for ordinary Danes, while whipping up Islamophobic sentiments and Danish nationalism to divide workers.

An indispensable role in opening the way for far-right parties like DF to emerge has been played by the pseudo-left, which supported the Social Democrats in government with claims that they would improve the lives of working people. While the Socialist People's Party sat in government for more than two years, agreeing to welfare cuts and other budget reductions to comply with deficit targets imposed by the EU, the Red-Green Alliance propped up the government in parliament and ensured that its austerity budgets were passed. The collection of ex-Stalinist, Maoist and environmentalist groups, which includes the Pabloite Socialist Workers Party, obtained a small increase in its vote last week—gaining two more parliamentary seats.



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