

Danish Social Democrats seek coalition with right-wing parties

Jordan Shilton
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Denmark's Social Democrats are seeking a coalition government with right-wing and even far-right parties after emerging from last month's general election as the largest party.

After campaigning prior to the vote for a "broad government" of the centre, interim Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has been in talks with the right-wing Liberals and far-right Danish People's Party for over a month.

Frederiksen's goal is to establish a government behind the backs of the population, ready to enforce Denmark's continued participation in the US-NATO war with Russia, a major increase in military spending, and "reforms" to health and social services that will entail sweeping austerity measures.

The Social Democrats decided against continuing its previous minority government, even though the "red bloc" of parties that backed it secured a parliamentary majority of 90 seats against 89 for the "blue bloc" in the election. The "red bloc" consists of the Social Democrats, Social Liberals, Socialist People's Party (SF), the pseudo-left Red-Green Alliance/Unity List (RGA), and The Alternative. The right-wing parties, including the Liberals and conservatives, and far-right Danish People's party (DF), New Right, and Denmark Democrats, are part of the "blue bloc."

The formation of a coalition between the Social Democrats and Liberals in the coming weeks appears likely. On Monday, Liberal leader Jacob Ellemann-Jensen told broadcaster TV2 that he was satisfied with the "good rhythm" of the talks with the Social Democrats, and Frederiksen added a day later that her party has "spent a lot of time" with the Liberals.

All of the parties, including the SF and RGA, have participated in talks and helped give legitimacy to a process which will result in a sharp shift to the right. They did so even though Frederiksen held initial talks with the New Right and Danish Democrats, who are considered to

stand even further to the right than the DF, whose support for previous Liberal-led governments has seen Denmark establish one of Europe's most stringent immigration systems.

After a meeting with Frederiksen in late November, the RGA announced its departure from the talks. Media reports interpreted the move as an effort by Frederiksen to send a clear signal to the Liberals, the traditional leading party in the "blue bloc," that she is prepared to sacrifice cooperation with "extreme" left-wing parties to finalize a coalition deal with the political right. The SF soon followed the RGA, announcing earlier this week that it is withdrawing from the government talks.

Frederiksen is now pursuing a coalition or some formal agreement to guarantee parliamentary support with the Liberals, Social Liberals, and the Moderates of former Liberal prime minister Lars Loekke Rasmussen. This coalition would have the support of 96 of the 179 deputies. Alternatives are possible, with DF's five MPs or 14 deputies from the libertarian Liberal Alliance, another "blue bloc" party, potentially playing a role.

"We can build a broad government in Denmark," Frederiksen stated on November 23. "A precondition for that is our ability to agree on the political content... There is a real desire from several parties to cooperate more closely and in a new way."

Underscoring that this "broad government" involves a strengthening of the political right, Frederiksen's Social Democrats refrained from installing their preferred candidate as speaker of parliament with the votes of the "red bloc" parties when parliament reconvened last month. Despite the "red bloc" majority, the Social Democrats supported the election of Liberal candidate Søren Gade. A similar approach was taken to elections for the parliamentary presidium, which determines the bills and other motions placed on the agenda.

The Social Democrats pushing for an alliance with right-

wing and even far-right parties is the logical outcome of its own shift sharply to the right. During three years at the head of a minority Social Democrat government, Frederiksen pursued a hardline immigration policy, including the retention of the discriminatory measures adopted by previous right-wing governments under the direct influence of DF. These measures include the notorious “ghetto law,” rebranded “parallel societies” by the Social Democrats, which enables authorities to declare districts of towns to be “ghettoes” if they have a high percentage of migrant residents. When an area is declared a “ghetto,” punishments for crimes can be doubled and residents are obliged to obey “integration” measures.

Frederiksen’s government also oversaw a major bailout of big business in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, including billions of kroner in subsidies and tax breaks. Her government’s pandemic response was so business friendly that the *Economist* gave Denmark the top spot in its rankings for best-performing economies in the OECD during the pandemic. Criteria for the ranking decisions included share market performance, capital investment, GDP growth, and government debt levels.

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The Social Democrats’ policies while in power, which were backed by the supposedly “left” SF and RGA as supposedly the best way to keep the right out of power, helped politically strengthen the far-right. Although DF lost ground in the elections, the overall representation of far-right parties in parliament grew.

The Denmark Democrats, set up by former Interior Minister Inger Støjberg, who served a prison sentence for violating the law by illegally separating asylum-seeker couples on the pretext of combatting “child marriages,” won 14 seats. The New Right, with ties to Giorgia Meloni’s fascist Brothers of Italy, secured six seats. If the mandates of DF, the Denmark Democrats, and New Right are counted together, the far-right has a larger parliamentary group than the Liberals and is second only to the Social Democrats. The “left” parties, meanwhile, saw their support stagnate, with the RGA losing four deputies and SF gaining one.

The Social Democrats’ overtures to the right-wing parties are in recognition that the deeply unpopular policies the next Danish government must carry out will be worked out behind the scenes and then supported by a strong parliamentary majority. These policies include the implementation of the initial stages of a plan to almost double military spending to 2 percent of GDP over the

next decade, and further expand Danish support for the US-NATO war on Russia. The new government will also seek to enforce stringent controls on public spending to pay for the war, military rearmament, and the large sums made available to support big business during the pandemic.

These austerity measures will have a devastating impact on the country’s health care system, which is already breaking at the seams. Last year, health care workers took two months of strike action to demand wage increases of 5,000 kroner (€600). The strikes were halted when parliament intervened to impose a real-terms pay cut, including a 5 percent increase over three years. In the year since the strike, 6 percent of nurses have quit the profession.

By contrast, for a country of just 5.8 million people, Denmark has provided significant financial and logistical support to the war. According to figures from the Danish government, total financial support since the Russian invasion amounts to €510 million for military operations and €147 million for civilian purposes, including humanitarian aid. Denmark supplied harpoon anti-ship missiles to Ukraine with US approval, a significant escalation of the conflict that enabled Kiev to strike Russian vessels in the Black Sea. The Danish army is sending 130 officers to Britain to participate in the UK’s training of 10,000 Ukrainian servicemen and will host an unspecified number of Ukrainian troops for training on Danish soil.

The Social Democrats, Liberals, and most parliamentary parties joined forces to successfully campaign for the scrapping of Denmark’s “opt-out” from the European Union’s common defence policy in June. The move means that Danish forces can be integrated into EU military operations and that military forces from other EU states, above all Germany and France, can operate in strategically significant areas in the Arctic due to the Danish military presence in Greenland and the Faroe Islands.



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