

Run-up to the European elections

Danish government lays ground for growth of racist party

By Steve James
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The racist and chauvinist Danish People's Party (DPP) is likely to make substantial gains in the forthcoming European elections in Denmark. The DPP, which emerged out of a 1995 split with the right wing Progress Party, has eclipsed its parent party in poisoning the political atmosphere with xenophobia. The most recent available opinion poll put the DPP as likely to win 17 seats in a general election compared to the 13 seats it presently holds in the Danish parliament—the Folketing—after general elections last year.

Discussions have also been held on the possibility of the DPP entering a future national government, as part of a right-wing coalition with the conservatives. The Social Democrat-led coalition, in power since 1993 under Nyrup Rasmussen, is losing support for having implemented sweeping austerity measures.

The DPP is led by Pia Kjaersgaard, a 50-year-old ex-office worker. It calls for drastically lowered tax, preferably to zero, reduction of welfare spending and the expulsion of immigrants. They call for rigorous policing of the border with Germany and are opposed to further European integration. In 1997 Kjaergard said, "DPP wants a tight policy on foreigners. We intend to work for a viable repatriation policy for refugees resident in Denmark."

The DPP's 1997 local government manifesto stated, "Foreigners, immigrants or refugees who have been jailed for crimes must be banished from the country after serving their sentences. Effective measures must be introduced to stop arranged marriages and only Danes should have the vote in elections."

The Danish newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* noted that a donation of 20,000 krone appeared in the DPP's

accounts from the large Danish shipping outfit AP Møller. The paper quoted the company's Head of Corporate Communications, Jette Clausen, as stating, "It is quite natural that we would support the parties that have the same attitude to business politics as we have."

The growth of the DPP is only the sharpest expression of the rightward turn in official Danish politics. The state, parties and media have led a vicious and sustained racist attack on the small numbers of mostly Somali and Tamil refugees, scapegoating them for the destruction of welfare and living standards.

On May 5, 1997 the popular daily paper *Ekstra Bladet*, which often echoes the DPP's views, compared immigration to the Nazi occupation of Denmark between 1940 and 1945. "There is an occupation without a war," it wrote. "It sneaks up on us without bloodshed, imperceptibly taking over the control of our lives, and the control of our freedom as a nation. Europeism and immigration constitute the existing threat against Denmark's freedom as a nation."

A social democratic government that has passed 18 individual pieces of legislation targeting immigrants has led this campaign. The radical magazine *Torch* has documented the systematic campaign to vilify immigrants. It noted the careful planting of distortions and fabrications to undermine attempts to stave off deportation.

Asylum-seekers are routinely jailed for an indefinite period. Of 16,000 foreigners jailed in the last six years, 90 percent were asylum-seekers. The government has reduced immigrants' and asylum-seekers' residency rights and introduced DNA testing, along with "genital examinations" of would-be immigrants.

The social democrats refused to expel from their ranks former MP Mogens Camre who stated on national TV, "Muslims and their overweight wives drive around in Mercedes while Danes drive Skodas. When I see immigrants driving round in fancy cars it makes me wonder how they have made their money." Camre's local party merely asked him to stick to less controversial topics.

In 1997 Rasmussen appointed as Interior Minister Thorkild Simonsen, who had previously gone on record to state his agreement with the Progress Party's attitude to immigration. As mayor of Aarhus, he recommended that Somalis should live in hut camps outside of town. As interior minister he cut 25 percent of social security benefits to asylum-seekers.

Last year, the police intelligence service arrested and questioned 2,400 Kurdish, Egyptian and Algerian men, allegedly on suspicion of terrorism. The case was used as a pretext for a massive information gathering operation on immigrant workers. Eventually, three men were charged with starting a small fire.

Many individual refugees have been brutally deported. In March and April last year, two women and a three-year-old child were deported to Somalia. One of the women wrote that they were badly received and such money as they had taken with them had been stolen. One was unable to find her family and had subsequently fled to Ethiopia. Despite protests, three more Somali women were deported shortly thereafter.

In April, a 32-year-old student and part-time worker with Amnesty International, resident in Denmark for eight years, was deported on the basis of a legal technicality. The man was separated from his four-year-old daughter, who remains in Denmark with her mother. The Danish immigration authorities claimed there had been no abuse of human rights, because the father and daughter could remain in contact.

Immigrants and asylum-seekers face permanent harassment. Last June Amnesty International publicised an unprovoked police attack on a Vietnamese worker in Copenhagen and noted that there had been several similar cases, in which the Danish authorities had taken no action against the officers involved. In January this year, a 29-year-old Turkish man died in the hands of Copenhagen police's notorious Station One.

All areas of daily life are affected. Last July, the United Nation's Race Relations committee announced it was investigating claims that a Tunisian man, resident in Denmark for nine years, was refused a bank loan on the grounds that he might leave the country to avoid repaying the loan.

In 1997 a horticultural society refused to let a gardening allotment to foreigners. In September of the same year, Shell was criticised for refusing to hire cars to people with a non-Danish accent.

So ferocious has the campaign been that in October the *Post* reported that the number of Somalis seeking asylum had dropped 55 percent in one year. An employers' organisation, the DAU, has warned of a shortfall of immigrant workers if the state policy of reducing immigration to zero continues. A visiting Somali, Muhammad Hussein Gelled, noted, "For the moment Somalian refugees are not treated well in Denmark—they are treated like the Jews in the years preceding World War Two."

The campaign to deport immigrants has been given support by the nominally "left" Socialist People's Party, who last year called for deportees to be given a token payment by way of compensation. The Progress Party supported this policy. In February this year, the Danish seafarers union, the SiD, threatened a blockade of Danish shipping companies employing non-Danish workers. A union official stated, "If a ship sails under the Danish flag, then it should be providing Danish jobs."

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