



The End of an Era

The Danish Left in a pro-European landscape

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Amidst Brexit and the rise of populist, EU-skepticist parties all over the continent, the results of the European Parliament elections mark a historical decrease in Danish Euro-criticism leaving climate politics the only common area of political attention where Denmark follows the tendency of the result of the elections on the continent. Turning towards a work-from-within stance, the left has abandoned its decade-long leave position and ended the era of the popular resistance.

Once again, Denmark marks a counter-tendency in European politics.

The Danish results in the European elections marks a victory to the pro-EU (mainstream) parties and sees the entire left to have successfully stressed a more positive stance towards working inside the European Union. On the other hand, the far right and its nationalist, anti-immigrant agenda has been reduced dramatically, and the leave position – the so-called Daxit – appears to be as good as dead.

Apart from the political reasons behind the result addressed below, it is worth noticing that the highest turnout ever at a European election in Denmark seems to have weakened the Euro-critical parties, whom usually benefits from the lower turnouts.

PARTY / MOVEMENT	GROUP	VOTES IN %	SEATS
Liberal Party	Alde	23.5	4*
Social Democrats	S&D	21.5	3
Socialist People's Party	EFA	13.2	2
Social-Liberal Party	Alde	10.1	2
Danish People's Party	ENF	10.7	1
The Red-Green Alliance	GUE/NGL	5.5	1
Conservative Party	EPP	6.2	1
The People's Movement Against the EU	GUE/NGL	3.7	0
The Alternative	Other	3.4	0
Liberal Alliance	Alde	2.2	0
Turnout: 66%			
*The fourth seat is a so-called Brexit seat.			

Climate change demands action now, the Liberal Party (Venstre) has boasted throughout their campaign. The climate can't handle more hot air, the Socialists People's Party (SF) has exclaimed again and again, while The Alternative (Alternativet) demands a climate emergency. Thus, last Saturday, 40.000 people filled the square in front of Danish parliament in the global climate march with political parties from the entire spectrum present handing out flags, placards and free t-shirts calling for action now.

Despite internal political differences, the consensus between the various candidates running for the European Parliament has been that climate change is a problem that needs to be prioritized by and from within the European Union. A position that has received widespread support.

Along these lines, the Danish left has now confirmed itself as an independent, social voice promoting a progressive green agenda working from within the European Union. However, the left will have to develop new strategic visions in order to maintain a clear, distinct political position in opposition to the ruling classes and their political parties.

Flashback: Two election campaigns

With national elections coming up on June 5th, the European campaign has suffered an existence in the shadow of national elections. "Let's not forget the European elections", almost every candidate has said during the national campaign before turning back to talking about the national elections.

Apart from climate politics, national issues have taken precedence over international problems of the European Union in the Danish European elections debate. A journalistic story of a literal "campaign train starting half a dozen forest fires" set the tone for what has so far been an absurd national election campaign, as it was high jacked early on by the newly founded proxy-fascist party Hard Line (Stram Kurs) and its maniacal leader Rasmus Paludan.

Promising to rid the country of all Muslims, talking of the immanent civil war and hinting at the possibilities of shipping the disabled off to camps, Tight Course have gone from laughing stock to being feared by sections of the population, as the party have cleared the two percent threshold in the latest opinion polls. Tight Course thus joins another racist, semi-fascist party, The New Right (Nye Borgerlige), in its bid to challenge the nationalist Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti) from the right, which has hitherto had a monopoly of harsh immigration policies.

From its left, the Danish Peoples Party has also been challenged by the Social Democrats (Socialdemokratiet), who have adopted its nationalist discourse but who are not tarnished by supporting the outgoing government, thereby shedding voters left as well as right.

As a result, support for the Danish People's Party is according to polls currently half of what it was at the last elections, and in the European Parliament it now sees its number of seats shrink from four to one.

The election result generally reflects a fear within the Danish population that stems from Brexit, where the leave-position has shown to be more than troublesome. This has clearly resulted in a much more pro-European votes from a hitherto Euro-critical Danish electorate.

Accordingly, more votes have gone to pro-European parties such as the smaller Social-Liberal Party (Radikale Venstre) as well as the leftist Socialist People's Party. The Social Democrats has regained their three seats but sees themselves undertaken by the Liberal Party of current Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen – the big winner of the elections with four seats and its best European result ever. Running independently for the first time, the Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten) has obtained a single seat as well. All these parties have successfully linked their work in the EU with promises of handling climate change.

Friends and allies

Amidst the larger political discussions of climate change and how to deal with them, a major theme in the Danish European election debate in the days prior to the election arose around the Conservative Party (Det Konservative Folkeparti), currently a part of the incumbent centre-right government.

A relatively small party in terms of national popular support (currently less than five percent of the electorate), polls released the week leading up to the elections indicated that the Conservative Party was set to lose its one seat in the European Parliament.

Although such a fate of a bourgeois party with its clear-cut upper class, capitalist affiliations appears to be good news for its political opponents, the scenario of the conservatives exiting the European Parliament and especially the public discussions that followed it revealed a new and more fundamental challenge of the Danish left.

Less than a week before the elections, Bente Sorgenfrey, the Vice President of FH – the newly founded main organization of the Danish unions – raised the alarm when the news about the possible fate of the Conservative Party hit the public polls. According to Sorgenfrey, this would leave Denmark without crucial influence within the EU system, as the Conservative Party pertains to the largest and most influential group in the European Parliament, the EPP.

Stressing that it is “decisive to have Danes within the largest groups” of the European Parliament, since it is there "big decisions are made", Sorgenfrey was supported by the main employer's association DA, when she expressed fear that Denmark would thus be left in a poorer position than today should the Conservative not gain re-election.

Noting the somewhat ironic paradox that a political party representing class interests that traditionally are anything but aligned with those of the labour union movement was now considered a guarantor for labour union tactical influence (the Conservative Party has continually promoted tax reductions for companies and the wealthy at the expense of public budgets and social welfare), two other points needs to be stressed here as well.

First, this has been the first European election where the question of the political affiliations in the European parliament has played a (influential) role in the political debate. While the conservatives seem to have been saved on the finish line (perhaps thanks to the unions, since the party gained more support in the polls from the day Sorgenfrey went public) due their affiliation with the EPP group, the focus on European affiliation has had negative consequences for others.

Thus, the Alternative, which is regarded as a progressive green party and a member of European Spring, had entered into an election coalition with the Social-Liberal Party. The latter, however, has nothing in common with Varoufrakis' European Spring project, and is seated in the European parliament with other liberals in the ALDE group. Thus, the scare has been that votes given to the Alternative for a greener Europe could strengthen neoliberal forces working in the opposite direction. This has left the Alternative with a depressing result of 3,2 percent of the votes and no seats whatsoever, while the social-liberals now hold two seats with the help of the green voters.

Secondly, this also shows a Danish nation that finds itself under the weight of the Lilliputian fear of being run over by the bigger countries in the EU, effectively accepting a fate that is ever more closely connected to the European Union. As unions joins forces with the employers in a call for “Danish influence” in the largest groups in the European Parliament, a shift from politics to tactics seems to dominate the field within which the left would have to form its future European political strategies and bonds of political affiliations.

With the demise of The People's Movement Against the EU, the left now seems to finally have parted with the leave-position, and now faces a twofold problem: How, on the one hand, to reject the (capitalist) EU-system but maintain (obtain?) influence within the EU system? And how, on the other, is this to be done alongside other left-leaning parties with similar political agendas trying to improve the European Union from within?

The death of a movement

When the Red-Green alliance decided to run for the European parliament, it was the hope that the position of EU-criticism could rise from one to two seats. For a while this seemed like an unsecure bet, leaving either the Red-Green alliance or the Peoples Movement Against the EU without representation.

The first polling at the start of the election campaign spelled a windfall for the alliance between the party and the movement, giving each a seat and thereby strengthening the GUE/NGL group. While the People's movement has campaigned on an easily understandable leave-position, spiced up with tales of the absurdity of EU bureaucracy and the unfairness of privileges held by MEPs, the Red-Green Alliance has balanced between its critique of the European Union and its hope that it can be a tool in the fight against climate change and social dumping.

This has been a difficult strategical position to uphold. Cutting the Gordian knot, the frontrunner of the Red-Green Alliance, Nikolaj Villumsen, in an interview with the daily paper Politiken toned down the EU-critical stance substantially during the European campaign.

As a strategical move, this was meant to attract EU-positive left leaning voters – a gamble that seems to have worked out although not without a cost.

The people's movement leaves the European parliament for the first time since 1979 and is probably shattered as a popular movement. Without funding from the European parliament and without a candidate around which to focus support, even the activists in the movement themselves believe that they will not survive the next five years.

All this spell the end of decades of anti-European Union work and with it a movement that has built up expertise in criticizing the union's flaws; it silences a voice of discontent, not only in Brussels, but in many Danish discussions as well.

As a side effect it is also a slap in the face for the smaller communist parties of the country for whom work in the movement has long been a focus point. Here the fear of dying out has moved one step closer.

In the consensual pro-European landscape that rises after Sunday's elections, the Red-Green Alliance with its newly chose strategy of working for a more social and progressive EU, is tasked with developing the content of a more socialist political vision for the party's work inside the union. It received 5,5% of the vote, which is substantially less than it is expecting to receive in the national elections.

Returning to the Euro-critical stance of yesteryears seems impossible, while finding alliances within the European framework is more necessary than ever.

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