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Covid-19 pandemic in Denmark

Danish government reopens schools, immigrants left out

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No Borders News: describe the state of the pandemic in your country or city. How many people are infected? How many have died? What do experts expect in the coming weeks in terms of how fast the contagion will spread.

Peter Saxtrup: Writing from Denmark on April 15, the number of infected people is impossible to guess, since government testing has only recently sped up. Nevertheless, this means that around 4,000 tests are carried out daily for a total of just under 75,000 to date.

The lockdown measures have slowed the infection, so that each patient is believed to have infected just 0.6 other people. State authorities see this as an argument for loosening the lockdown.

NBN: Please describe measures your government is taking now to contain the virus and treat people infected with Covid-19. Is there a state of emergency, are schools closed, etc.?

PS: The government was unprepared for the scale of the threat, even after WHO issued severe warnings during January. No programs for securing protective gear or sanitizers were adopted. No plans for testing or containing a possible outbreak were initiated. Starting on March 12, the government invoked a new iteration of Denmark's epidemic laws, initiating a far-reaching transfer of power to executive although it still governs through parliamentary means. These measures will be assessed regularly by parliament and are set to expire after one year.

The initial success in curbing the spread of the virus stems from social distancing measures initiated by the government. Health authorities have thoroughly publicized advice on hygiene and personal health safety, although they are not recommending masks. Schools, daycare, malls, and the like have been closed. Public transportation is running by observing special measures with regards to safety. Gatherings of more than ten people both inside and outside are prohibited.

However, workplaces in the productive sector have been running through the lockdown despite being non-essential. Especially in the construction sector where we are experiencing growing dissatisfaction with lack of safety measures and the lack of hygiene. PPE is in very high demand in general, including at hospitals.

NBN: How has your health care system responded to the crisis? What are your health care system's greatest weaknesses? What are its greatest strengths?

PS: The healthcare system has entered into an emergency mode. Hospitals have created extra infection wards, volunteers are being mobilized, and non-acute operations have been delayed. Staff are running separate shifts so as to minimize spread of the virus inside the hospitals.

For many years, Denmark has had a well-developed public and free healthcare system. Unfortunately, it has been

subject to years of austerity and "just-in-time" production. The consequence of this is that the hospitals are not prepared for a sudden influx of patients as all their resources are meant to be continually in use. Also, as described above, the healthcare system was not prepared for the pandemic in due time and is still in need of basic necessities despite the slowing infection rate.

Fortunately, the Danish Serum Institute has developed a cheap and fast test and have made the method freely available. Yet Danish vaccine production capabilities have been hampered by the selling off of production facilities in 2016. To this day no additional funds have been directed to the health services. For this reason, all medical measures have been paid for by rearranging health budget priorities and hospitals are supposed to move towards normalizing their activities in the near future.

NBN: Describe the official political response to Covid-19 in your country from the far-right and conservative parties, to liberal and social democrat parties, and the parties of the left if applicable.

PS: All parties in parliament have adopted an official position of legislative peace, almost all measures so far have been accepted in unanimity. One exceptions was a measure increasing punishments for certain crimes during lockdown and a measure removing guaranteed days off for retail workers.

The far right has been attempting to cater to racist and nationalist sentiments, casting specific blame on Muslims and foreign workers. This in spite of the fact that the virus was brought to Denmark through wealthy tourists in Austria and northern Italy.

The Liberals and Conservatives have started a cautious campaign to restart production and end emergency measures, arguing that the remedy must not be worse than the disease, as they say.

The center left has backed the government, moving quickly to secure protection for specific groups in their electorates.

The Red-Green Alliance has backed government measures and the approach to national unity while calling for measures to include all people living in Denmark. This has meant calling for public shares in banks that are receiving funds from the government and calling for corporations that receive such funds not to pay dividends to stockholders. The Red-Green Alliance has also opposed measures increasing punishments and a bill to keep shops open during Easter.

All parties have so far agreed with the government's strategy which relies on natural herd immunity through controlled infection by slowing down societal functions. All parties are supporting the government's strategy of opening child care, schools, and workplaces.

NBN: How have trade unions responded to the crisis? Especially public sector, education, and health care unions?

PS: Trade unions have backed the government, but have called for raising unemployment subsidies during the crisis. They have condemned poor sanitary and safety measures in the building sector, while teachers and educators unions have called to protect their members' safety during the reopening of schools and daycare.

However, the trade unions have accepted a plan whereby workers must use their own vacation and saved overtime to cover the reduced work hours in the public and private sector.

NBN: How have social movements (student, feminist, ecological, immigrant, indigenous, etc.) responded to the crisis?

PS: Social movements have been pacified for the time being. We have seen the emergence of specific movements related to the crisis, such as the #Coronaknibe mutual aid campaign - where we are also active - which aims to gather and organize people not included in the government health packages. Immigrant movements have pointed to unsafe conditions in camps and inmates have also organized a call around the equally unsafe conditions in prisons. In general people without citizenship have been left out of the government's responses and granting citizenship has been postponed indefinitely due to the ceremony requiring a handshake.

Smaller examples of direct solidarity are beginning to emerge, but these are very local and immediate. Several ecological movements have brought attention to the reduced pollution due to the lockdown and have started arguing for an ecological transition post-corona. Women's movements are calling attention to the vulnerability for people in violent relationships. The student movements have called for information about the status of exams and the consequences for their members. And parents of young children have expressed concern about the reopening of daycare and youth classes.

NBN: Can you discuss the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and how you think it will impact national politics in the coming weeks and months?

PS: The crisis has moved the political discussion to the left, but has stopped short of becoming a class issue. The political life of the parties, including the Red-Green Alliance, has been brought to a halt and normal branch meetings have been scarce. Instead, political debates have taken place on the basis of presentations by members of parliament. The national leadership of the Red-Green Alliance have yet to make a political statement on the crisis.

Without a proper class-based response, the debate will continue down the path of securing the interest of the "Danes," clearly meaning those with citizenship. Meanwhile, more than 4 billion euro have been allocated for companies which means that tax money is being used to cover all losses incurred during the crisis. If we don't come to grips with these facts, the left will end up demobilized against the biggest transfer of wealth to corporations since the financial crisis.

Since all parties have accepted the strategy of the government, they will all be judged by its outcome. For this reason, the specific strategy to deal with the epidemic will most likely only benefit the ruling social democratic party.

Source [No Borders News](#).

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