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Denmark

Euro-political realignment?

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With victory for the social democrats and a setback for the "Eurosceptics" an established tradition in Denmark seems to have been broken. For the left wing it places the question of an anti-capitalist answer to European integration high on the agenda.

Since the first elections for the European Parliament in 1979 the Danish results seem to have been characterized by two constants. First of all - and in common with almost all other EU countries - the relatively low participation compared with national elections (varying between 46.2% and 52.9% versus normally around 70-80%). And secondly, the relatively low score for the dominant Labour party and the correspondingly high score for the "official" Eurosceptics, Folkebevaegelsen and Junibevaegelsen.

It is this second constant which has now been challenged after 25 years, with a record (32.7%) support for the Social Democrats and an all time low (14.3%) "Eurosceptic" score. At the same time it is this second constant which has traditionally singled out the special situation in Denmark, namely the existence of an established, well organized and mainly left wing opposition to Danish membership of the EU.

In the EU elections many social democrats usually vote for the "Movements", i.e. the "Popular Movement Against the EU" (Folkebevaegelsen mod EU) and the "June Movement" or Junibevaegelsen. Effectively four of the 16 Danish seats in the European Parliament have been reserved for these "Movements" in every election since 1979. In addition until the 1990's the opponents of the EU were represented by the one mandate belonging to the Socialist People's Party (Socialistisk Folkeparti or SF).

Apart from the facts that 1) many voters saw the EU elections of 2004 as an excellent occasion to protest against the Liberal-Conservative government and 2) the Labour list was headed by the popular ex-prime minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, there seem to be more deep-seated tendencies behind the present situation.

Realignment?

Already during the 1990's the "Eurosceptics" were challenged by certain political realignments. On the one hand, there was a split over strategy within the Eurosceptics themselves. On the other hand there was the question of the left-right divide, accentuated by the rise of the nationalist and xenophobic Dansk Folkeparti (Danish Peoples' Party or DF) as well as by the increasingly "pro-European" tendency within the Socialist People's Party.

In the aftermath of the 1992 June 2nd referendum, where a majority of Danish voters said "no" to the Maastricht treaty, a split within the established "Popular Movement" came out into the open. For the new "June Movement"" the referendum was a demonstration of the possibility that Denmark could continue as a member state and still profit from the perceived benefits, but at the same time halt the development of a centralized union. Folkebevaegelsen rejected this, calling instead for the dissolution of the EU by way of the individual member states opting for independence and full national sovereignty.

Within the Danish political frame the "Popular Movement" and the "June Movement" have continued to cooperate on most issues after the split, but gradually they have developed differently. Under the leadership of former Communist Party (CP) member and MEP veteran Jens-Peter Bonde, the "June Movement"" has been trying to position itself as a more liberal-minded political group and even allied itself with the far right United Kingdom Independence Party

(UKIP) in the European Parliamentary group of EDD (Group for a Europe of Democracies and Diversities). In contrast the "Popular Movement"" has for several years been a member of the more left wing GUE/NGL group together with the Socialist People's Party.

Left and right opposition

For many years the Danish opposition towards the EU was mainly represented by the left wing and some smaller social liberal parties. United under the banner of national independence, anti-privatization and pro-democracy, most dominant "no"-parties were supporters of Folkebevaegelsen during the 1980'es. Within this heavily CP-inspired political frame there was not much room to debate or develop a more systematic alternative, the debate having been limited to strictly EU-related questions. In 1991 SF left Folkebevaegelsen and increasingly developed a "pro-European" stand, hoping to join a Labour-led government. After the 1992 referendum SF was instrumental in negotiating a new deal with the EU, the so-called "national compromise" where Denmark was formally allowed to have certain reservations towards the EU (for example not to join the Euro and to stand outside the Common Defence Policy). Gradually, SF has become more and more consolidated as a pro-EU reformist party (while they have still not gotten into any government). In effect, they have become left social democrats arguing for a European alternative to the USA, more green and peaceful, but with a strong military arm - prepared for "peacekeeping" and "humanitarian" interventions.

At the same time and as an opposite mirror image of the SF, the nationalist and xenophobic Dansk Folkeparti (DF) has positioned itself more and more squarely as staunch opponents of the EU, effectively switching places with SF as the main parliamentary "no"-party besides Folkebevaegelsen and Junibevaegelsen in the European Parliament and besides the Socialist Red-Green Alliance (RGA) in the Danish parliament.

In the elections of 2004, this meant that the RGA both ran its own independent campaign on a socialist and internationalist platform and campaigned openly for its eight prominent members standing as candidates for the "Movements". The setback for these organizations (and the record personal vote for MP SÃ¸ren SÃ¸ndergÃ¥rd) means that the question of the RGA standing fully on its own and with an independent socialist line will now be brought forward again.