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Denmark

Socialist leaders arrested for 'terrorist' T-shirts

- News from around the world -

Publication date: Sunday 26 February 2006

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Danish authorities on February 20th arrested four members of the Danish Left Socialists Party (Venstresocialisterne, VS), among them several of the party's leaders, and presented arrest orders against three more members. They are charged with selling T-shirts supporting the FARC in Colombia and the PFLP in Palestine. All seven are accused of violation of Section 114a in the Danish criminal code prohibiting support for foreign terrorist organisations. This section has a maximum penalty range of 10 years prison.

VS was present in parliament with between four and six members during 1967-87, and has since been an integral part of the Danish Left-Green alliance (Enhedslisten), that is presently represented in the Danish parliament with six members.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/censur.jpg>]

Since its creation in 1967 VS has been working in support of national liberation movements in the 'third world', having supported the NLF during the Vietnam War, the ANC and SWAPO in their fight against the apartheid regime in South Africa, the PFLP in Palestine in its struggle against the Israeli occupation, the FMLN in El Salvador, URNG in Guatemala, the FSLN in Nicaragua, and many other national liberation movements in Latin America that have fought against military dictatorships.

Six months ago the party formed a company, Fighters & Lovers, whose purpose was to sell T-shirts on the internet in support of the national liberation movements PFLP in Palestine and FARC in Colombia. Both organisations are on the EU list of 'terrorist' organisations, but this list has no legal status in Denmark, and VS regards both organisations as national liberation movements, not as terror organisations.

Some people nonetheless regard these organisations as terrorist organisations, just as the liberation movement in Denmark during the Second World War was characterised by the occupying German forces and its Danish collaborators as terrorists.

The VS company Fighters & Lovers started selling T-shirts on January 10th 2006, and the authorities reacted five weeks later by arresting seven members of the party, closing the company WEB site - in violation of the Danish constitution prohibiting censorship - confiscating 3,000 euros, and computer equipment the authorities claim was used by the company.

The VS members were released the same day, but the authorities have upheld the charges of violation of §114a. "We regard the charges and the closing of our WEB site as a blatant violation of the Danish constitution and its guarantees for free speech, against censorship", states Michael Schoelardt, member of the national leadership of VS and director of Fighters & Lovers.

He continues: "The Danish prime minister has referred to the 'irrevocable status of free speech' in his defense of cartoons in the Danish newspaper 'Jyllandsposten'. Drawings that have provoked a considerable part of the world's population. But free speech apparently doesn't apply in Denmark, when it comes to support for the Palestinian liberation struggle or the struggle in Colombia for freedom and democracy, against the government death squads and repression. VS has supported national liberation struggles around the world for nearly 40 years, and will continue to do so, even though democracy in Denmark is under fierce attack from right wing parties these years", he concludes.

"The Danish authorities during the last 5-10 years have been in a process of limiting the spaces for democracy in Denmark. Especially for refugees and immigrants. The present Danish government has been especially active in promoting xenophobia, and campaigns against primarily Muslim immigrants.

"These measures have been criticised by other countries in Europe, the Human Rights Commission of the European Council, and several UN institutions. VS urges the international community and especially the international Human rights organisations to monitor the developments in Denmark closely. And especially the ongoing restrictions on Democracy."