

# The Social Democratic Left, favourite in the general elections in Denmark

Corinne Deloy

Analysis

*The electoral campaign started on 7th May in Denmark when Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen -Liberal Party V - announced that the next general elections would take place on 5th June, Constitution Day (Grundlovsdag), which is a bank holiday. When the election date was announced the main leader of the opposition, the Social Democratic Party (SD), Mette Frederiksen was taken into hospital, and so she was unable to take part in the TV electoral debate, which brought the leaders of each political party together. She was replaced by Nicolai Wammen (SD), and returned to office three days later on 10th May. Health issues, retirement pensions and global warming are the main themes in this electoral campaign.*

Denmark has been governed by the right-wing since the general elections on 18th June 2015. Lars Lokke Rasmussen first led a government that comprised people from his party only. On 28th November 2016 he formed a coalition with Anders Samuelsen's Liberal Alliance (LA) and Soren Pape Poulsen's People's Conservative Party (KF). The government has enjoyed the support of the People's Party (DF) during the entire legislature.

The Liberals have had to compromise a great deal over the last four years. The Liberal Alliance and the People's Conservative Party fought to achieve tax reductions, whilst the Danish People's Party demanded a tougher migratory policy.

"It will take a miracle for the right to win," declared Thomas Larsen, a political analyst. According to Jorgen Goul Andersen, professor of political sociology at the University of Aalborg, the outgoing government coalition is paying the price of the austerity policy undertaken since 2010. "Whilst needs are exploding, notably due to the rapid ageing of the population, public spending increased by 1.8% per capita per year between 1992 and 2010 and has only risen by 0.1% since then, which has caused a great deal of dissatisfaction," he indicated.

According to the poll by Voxmeter, published on 22nd May last, the Social Democratic Party is due to make easy gains in the general elections on 5th June, with 26.1% of the vote, in front of the Liberal Party, which is due to win 18.6% of the vote and the Danish People's Party with

10.6%. The Red/Green Alliance is due to come fourth with 9.5% of the vote, followed by the Social Liberal Party (RV) with 7.8% of the vote the People's Socialist (SF) 7.10%, and the People's Conservative Party, 3.5%. The Red Bloc, which rallies the left-wing, is due to win 54.5% of the vote and the blue bloc, which rallies the right-wing, is due to have 44.7%.

## Liberals and Social Democrats drawing closer and closer together

The Liberal Party is campaigning on a 0.6% increase in public spending, i.e. an increase of 69 billion crowns by 2025. It wants to allocate this money to the youngest and oldest segments of the population. The ruling party's programme is therefore opposite to the one it adopted in the previous elections on 18th June 2015 when it defended a freezing of public spending. We should note that the Liberal Alliance and the People's Conservative Party do not support an increase in public spending. The outgoing government pledged not to make an increase over 0.3%.

The Social Democrats are proposing an increase of 0.7% in public spending and the People's Party, 0.8%. Mette Frederiksen wants to defend the Danish social model, a difficult task in these times of low growth and an ageing population.

We also note proximity between the right and left as far as immigration is concerned. In 2015 the social

democrats witnessed a rise in the number of its voters defecting and giving their votes to the People's Party. Consequently the opposition has chosen to modify its positions on migration, to adopt a firmer and more restrictive line. Mette Frederiksen is defending an extremely strict policy regarding asylum seekers.

The social democrats are calling for a cap to be placed on non-Western immigration and to oblige all migrants to work at least 37 hours a week if they want to be eligible for social aid. Last February they discussed a change in paradigm, arguing that the aim of the asylum policy should be to repatriate rather than integrate. "In my mind it is clear that the price of deregulated globalisation, of mass immigration and the freedom of movement of the labour force has been paid by the lower classes," declared Mette Frederiksen, adding "for years, mass immigration issues have been underestimated."

"The climate policy has taken second place to immigration for years. The People's Party's agenda has prevailed over all of the traditional parties," indicated Anders Widfeldt, lecturer at the University of Aberdeen and a specialist of the Nordic political arena. Denmark has the most restrictive legislation regarding immigration. Last autumn however 37% of the members of the Social Democratic Party deemed that the country's migratory policy was too lax, after three years of implementing the toughest of policies ever in Denmark.

The Liberal Party is promoting the changes that it has made to its immigration laws, which it estimates at a total of 114, including the approval of a text that allows the confiscation of money and goods of value from asylum seekers to finance their stay, a law that the Social Democratic Party supported, or which it did not oppose at least.

Last year Mette Frederiksen put forward a reform project that would be designed to halt the arrival of non-Western foreigners in Denmark, which plans for the dispatch of the latter to camps in Africa under the supervision of the High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR), a proposal, which put forward by the People's

Party populists. The social democrats' traditional allies (the People's Socialist Party, the Liberal Social Party and the Red/Green Alliance) have however declared that they are not so enthusiastic about supporting the candidacy of Mette Frederiksen for the post of Prime Minister, if she does not cut her ties with the People's Party and does not relax the present migratory policy.

"For the first time, the social democrats are succeeding in convincing the undecided," maintained Thomas Larsen. The Danish left is indeed due to win in the ballot on 5th June, but the issue is this: what will the social democrats do with their victory?

Their problem will be the formation of a government, even though the Danish political system does not oblige them to win an absolute majority in the Folketing, the only house in parliament, but to ensure that no majority forms against the government that it puts together. The Social Democratic Party has indicated that it wants to govern alone. One thing is certain however: the defeat of the Liberal Party would mean the end of the career of the outgoing Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen.

### **The populists overtaken on their right**

The People's Party was the grand victor in the previous general elections on 18th June 2015. It imposed itself as the country's second most important political party. The party then managed to force its agenda on the Liberal party in office (as it did during the electoral campaign). The populists refused to enter government, preferring to support Lars Lokke Rasmussen without becoming directly involved. They have now been overtaken on their right by two parties.

The first, Stram Kurs (Hard Line) was founded by the lawyer Rasmus Paludan in July 2018. This party focuses on immigration alone, and notably that from Muslim countries. Campaigning on the grand replacement theory, Paludan wants nothing less than to ban Islam from Denmark and to expel all non-Western immigrants who have gained asylum. Even further to the right of the People's Party, Pernille Vermund created the New Right in 2016. This party is asking for an even stricter

immigration policy than the one defended by Kristian Thulesen-Dahl's party. Liberal from an economic point of view, it also supports Denmark's withdrawal from the EU and from several international organisations.

### The Danish Political System

The Folketing, the single house of Parliament, comprises 179 members who are elected for 4 years by Danish residents living in Denmark only and by proportional representation according to the Sainte-Laguë method. People can vote for a list put forward by a party or an independent candidate. The parties represented in parliament are allowed to put lists forward for the election, those who are not represented have to collate a number of signatures corresponding to 1/175th of the votes declared valid during the last general election. Finally, independent candidates have to be recommended by at least 150 voters in the constituency in which they want to stand.

The provinces of Greenland and the Faeroe Isles each have two representatives. The other 175 seats are distributed across three regions: Copenhagen, Jutland and the islands. These three regions are then divided into three urban and seven rural constituencies. The number of seats allocated to each of the constituencies is proportional to the number of inhabitants and is reviewed every five years. The calculation undertaken (addition of the population, the number of voters at the last election and the surface area of the constituency in square km multiplied by 20, the result of this is then divided by 175) favours the least populous regions.

The distribution of seats is undertaken in two stages, firstly by party and then by candidate. 135 of the 175 seats in the Folketing are constituency seats, the 40 remaining are called compensatory seats. They are distributed according to the number of votes won by the parties nationally. This distribution method helps guarantee fairer national representation of the "small parties." In order to accede to the distribution of compensatory seats a party must have won a minimum of seats in a constituency, or a number of votes that is either higher or equal to the number of votes necessary to win a seat in at least two of the three regions in the

country, or at least 2% of the votes cast nationally.

9 political parties are represented in the present Folketing:

- the Liberal Party (V), a and agrarian party of the outgoing Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen, founded in 1870 has 34 seats;
- the People's Party (DF), a far-right populist party founded in 1995 and led by Kristian Thulesen Dahl, has 37 MPs;
- the Liberal Alliance (LA), founded in 2007 by dissidents of the Social Liberal Party and the People's Conservative Party and member of the outgoing government. Led by Anders Samuelsen, it has 13 seats.
- the People's Conservative Party (KF), founded in 1915, member of the outgoing government coalition, led by Soren Pape Poulsen, has 6 seats.

These four parties form the Blue Bloc which bring together the parties on the right.

- the Social Democratic Party (SD), founded in 1871, led since April 2005 by Mette Frederiksen has 47 seats;
- the People's Socialist Party (SF), the opposition party founded in 1959 by a former chair of the Communist Party, who was excluded after having criticised the Soviet Union's intervention in Hungary in 1956. Rallying socialists and ecologies, it is led by Pia Olsen Dyhr, it has 7 MPs.

- the Social Liberal Party (RV), a centre-left party created in 1905 after a scission of the Liberal Party. Led by Morten Ostergaard, it has 8 seats;
- the Unity List-Red/Green Alliance (E), founded in 1989 and a result of the alliance of the Communist Party (DKP), the Socialist Workers' Party (SA) and the Socialist Left (VS). Led by an executive committee of 25 people, its spokesperson, also the leader of the party's parliamentary group, is Pernille Skipper. The party has 14 seats.

These four parties make up the Red Bloc rallying the left-wing.

The Alternative has 9 MPs.

**Reminder of the 2015 general election results in Denmark**

Turnout: 85.9%

Parties	Number of votes won	% of votes won	Number of seats
<b>Social Democrats (SD)</b>	924 940	26,32	47
<b>People's Party (DF)</b>	741 746	21,10	37
<b>Liberal Party (V)</b>	685 188	19,49	34
<b>Unity List-Red/Green Alliance (E)</b>	274 463	7,81	14
<b>Liberal Alliance (LA)</b>	265 129	7,54	13
<b>The Alternative (A)</b>	168 788	4,80	9
<b>Social Liberal Party (RV)</b>	161 009	4,58	8
<b>People's Socialist Party (SF)</b>	147 578	4,20	7
<b>People's Conservative Party (C)</b>	118 003	3,36	6

Source : <https://www.ft.dk/aktuelt/nyheder/2015/06/valgidaq.aspx>

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