

# Denmark - The Red Green Alliance, 2011-2017

Wednesday 28 February 2018, by [VOSS Michael](#) (Date first published: 17 December 2017).

**The National Leadership of SAP supports the general line of the following document. Due to the limits on the discussion posts, it contains no analysis of the current class struggle situation in Denmark (which is not in favour of the working class...).**

In January 2011, I wrote a chapter to the book "New Parties of the Left - Experiences from Europe" (Socialist Resistance, Britain, and IIRE) about the Red-Green Alliance. [[1](#)]

In this article, I will try explain the most important class struggles and political developments since then, what happened to the RGA, how RGA acted, and how SAP (Danish section of the Fourth International) related to it.

From 2001 to 2011 there was a government coalition of the two traditional parties of the Right, supported by the nationalist, xenophobic Danish Peoples Party. Especially during the last half of the period social protest evolved, and several mass demonstrations took place against the government.

At the same time the workers' parties - aggregatet - Social Democracy, Socialist Peoples Party and the Red Green Alliance - increased their support in opinion polls, getting close to a majority. There were big expectations for an SD-led government, and trade unions campaigned actively for this on class policy basis.

At the time of the election in September 2011, support for the SD and the SPP had decreased, though, and the growth of the RGA could not outweigh that. A government coalition of SD, SPP and the social liberal party was established on a platform, dictated by the social liberals. It was a platform that explicitly promised to continue the neo-liberal policies of the previous Right government.

The RGA supported the leader of SD, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, as "head of negotiations for a new government", and the party stated that it would not support a vote of no confidence at the first meeting of the newly elected parliament. In that sense, the RGA was seen as "parliamentary basis" of the coalition government.

The SD-led government adapted fully to the neoliberal discourse. It made continuation of the economic policy of the Right government a principle, and it did almost no rolling back of previous austerity policy. Only on a few occasions, organized protests and mobilisations against the government happened, primarily against a combined reform of primary school and an attack on teachers' working conditions and against the sale of the national energy company to Goldman Sachs.

The 2011 elections was a real strengthening of the RGA (from 4 to 12 MP's), but the new situation as "parliamentary basis" for the SD-led government was also a difficult tactical situation that would create risks of serious mistakes for any socialist party. For the RGA, these risks were seriously increased, because the party was not united behind a revolutionary socialist analyses of the

reformist parties. It was not united behind a class struggle based united front approach.

In fact, parts of the RGA held serious illusions that the SD would roll back the worst neoliberal reforms of the previous government, and that they would go for real progressive reforms. These illusions dominated the MP-group and the group of RGA party employees in Parliament.

At the bottom of this was also real strategic disagreements inside the party. Some people – like SAP – support a revolutionary class struggle strategy, promoting independent working class organisation and preparing for a revolutionary break with the capitalist system and its state apparatus. On the other hand, other leading members promote a strategy of defending “the Danish welfare state” as such and a parliamentary democracy – only in need of extending democracy to the economic sphere and the workplaces. Behind this is of course different analyzes of the bourgeois state which implicates these strategic differences.

These disagreements came out into the open when the RGA debated a new Political Programme. The final result was somewhat of a compromise, leaving out some questions of long term strategy. At the National Congress 2014, the left wing of the party won a couple of votes on important amendments. [2]

Basically, we can state that the RGA stuck to its principles and did not “cross classlines” during the S-led government period, like voting for austerity policies or other cutbacks. Most closely to that was the one week long support for Danish war planes to Libya, but the support was withdrawn, when the NL-majority and the MP-group realized that their preconditions were not met by the government. There were also a couple of wrong voting decisions, primarily cases where it was technically difficult to judge if something qualified for being a “cut-back”.

Seriously wrong decisions were taken when the RGA voted for National Budgets that – in the view of SAP and of big minority of the party – did not qualify for such a break with previous policies that were defined in Congress decisions on principles of voting on National Budgets.

In November 2014, SAP made a balance sheet on the parliamentary work of the RGA at a National Convention. Let me quote:

*“The decisive problem of the parliamentary work of the RGA during the Helle Thorning-Schmidt (HTS) government is caused by the framing of parliamentary work, including own political proposals, statements and voting explanations, which led to using phrases like:*

- “Our friends in SD and SPP”
- “Our friends in the government”
- “We are looking forward to negotiate with the government about...”
- “We expect to reach an agreement with the government about...”

This rhetoric and basic approach to the government has been unchanged from the election campaign (2011) until today [Nov. 14]. This is caused partly by far too big illusions in an SD-led government, partly by a mistaken publicity- and media tactic. It is hard to see where this was decided. On the other hand, at no time a clear majority against it manifested itself inside the party.

In accordance with this rhetoric, the MP group has almost only promoted political demands and proposals, which they could claim that they “expected” the government to agree on, fully or partly, and they did almost never raise anticapitalist demands which break with everything that “our

friends" in government represent.

This general approach became more problematic when the governmental platform was published with its promises to continue the economic policies of the VK-government [the Right government], and the promises to "over-implement" EU-rules and decisions and to carry through the reform of unemployment benefits that the Right government were about to put for a vote just before the election. At this stage, the RGA should have stated clearly that this general line would mean disaster for ordinary people, and that this would make it hard for the RGA to get sensible proposals through parliament under such a government.

This turned into catastrophe when the RGA did not change approach to the government after the tax reform, the refusal to annul the reform of unemployment benefit and the sale of DONG (state owned energy company) to Goldman Sachs. In all these situations, the RGA had the chance to go into opposition. It was done briefly after the tax reform, but this did not last."

From day one after the 2011 elections, the governmental coalition parties lost support in opinion polls. This reflected a deep disappointment among especially SD and SPP voters. At the extreme end of opinion polls, one of them came out like this: SD 14 %; RGA 13 %; SPP 4 %.

Support for the SPP nearly collapsed, resulting in deep conflicts inside of the party, and in January 2014 the party withdrew from government.

Of more deep consequences were what happened in Social Democracy during these four years of neoliberal governmental policies. Dissatisfaction manifested itself only in voters leaving, some for RGA, some for the no-voting-group, and some for Danish Peoples Party. Party members, including many trade unionists, left the party or became passive.

It is not the first time in history that Social Democracy has made a left turn in opposition and then a right turn in government, disappointing their constituency. But this time, the party did not act in the way that we would expect from a reformist workers party. No organized opposition inside the party developed, not to mention splits. Neither any organized fight-back from the trade union leaders, affiliated with the SD.

When confronted with massive discontent, loss of support in opinion polls and members leaving, the party leadership did nothing to adjust the course in order to win back working class support. Not a small left turn, not a little more leftist rhetoric, not even a few attacks on the parties of the Right or the multinational for a show.

The parties behind the SD-led government lost their majority in the 2015 elections. The traditional Liberal Party were another big loser. Nevertheless, this party managed to form a government, made possible by support from the new ultraliberal party, the Conservatives and the Danish Peoples Party. [3]

RGA votes increased from 6,7% to 7,8% and 14 instead of 12 MP's. Not only did the party consolidate the good result from 2011 but it was also able to obtain increased support. Still, SAP raised the question if this advance of the RGA was satisfactory, taking into consideration the massive disappointment among SD and SPP voters. A post-election statement of the SAP National Leadership said:

*"The RGA appeared too much like the other parties - a party that does politics in the same way as the others with serious, concrete and "fully financed" political proposals within the consensus on what can be made into reality. This approach has helped the RGA to address groups within the working class, but during the election campaign, the lack of more far-reaching demands such as a 30*

*hours work week, implies that the party did not fully appeal to those that wish for something different and something more. This also indicates that the RGA was not able to use the election to present own visions and politics."*

Parallel to the increase in votes in the period since 2010-2011, membership has grown from around 4.500 in 2010 to 10.000 in 2015, though now (May 2017), down to 9.000. The increasing number of votes and MP's has resulted in an even greater increase in staff. Danish Parliament allocate huge economic resources to MP-staff. At the elections for local and regional councils in 2013, the number of RGA councilors grew dramatically.

This development has given the RGA a lot of resources and a lot of possibilities. Most of these resources are tied by law to parliamentary work and publicity for MP's and their proposals, but other parts have been successfully used to build the party and support member activities.

This development has created serious imbalances in the party. Basically the party is built on democratic attitudes and strict formal democratic rules. But realities tend to pull in the opposite direction. When it comes to development of politics and decisions on political priorities, it is almost impossible for a National Leadership of 25 persons, most of them with full time job outside the party, to keep track with a group of 14 full time MP's and 30 MP-employees (the national office has 18 employees)..

Such a big full time group tend to develop a group mentality and a we-know-better attitude. Placed in the Parliament and with parliamentary work as their main task, they are easily drawn towards accommodation to parliamentarism and to other political parties.

The MP-group of the last periods did not avoid these tendencies, and it is obvious that the main forces drawing the RGA toward accommodation with the HTS-government and to downplaying the anticapitalist elements of the party were MP's, MP-staff and full timers in the local council of Copenhagen - though never a totally homogenous group.

These imbalances tends to undermine democracy in the party, and it gives this group a disproportionate power over politics and priorities in the party. The MP-group most often has the support of the majority of the National Leadership, and the MP-group never met a general opposition and protest from the majority of party members. In general the MP group is popular among the membership.

Nevertheless it is also important to note that the basic democratic impulse of the party often makes itself felt, when National Congresses make decisions against the majority of National Leadership and of the MP-group.

A National Congress in September 2015 almost unanimously approved a statement, called "The Left of the Future". Based on a balance sheet of the HTS-government, it outlines a new perspective. In the statement, the RGA defines its task as building a new Left in opposition to both Social Democracy and the Right. The focus will be on building our own political and organisational alternative and taking on responsibility for building social movements:

*"The story about the Helle Thorning-Schmidt government, the election campaign of Social Democracy plus the post-election statements of the new leader of Social Democracy (HTS resigned just after the elections, and Mette Frederiksen took over - MV) have made it clear that the RGA has no project in common with Social Democracy. On the contrary the economic policy and the migrant/refugee policy of Social Democracy are much closer to the Right than to us."*

The text then states the need to rebuilt the Left and says: "In this task we cannot rely on Social

Democracy as a co-player. The Left must strengthen itself and develop by itself in opposition to both the Right and to Social Democracy. Our main task cannot be attempts to make small correction to the defeated and mistaken political perspective of Social Democracy. We are the Left in our own right with our own perspective and our own course.”

The text took notice of the fact that the RGA now is the biggest party to the left of Social Democracy and concluded that it is the duty of the RGA to lead the work of rebuilding the Left. [4]

For the first time in party history, the RGA defined a political-organisational perspective that was aimed at directing all parts of party activities. Most part of it was in line with the perspectives that SAP had argued for in many years.

To a great extent, SAP has focused on making the RGA implement the perspectives of “The Left of the Future”. For several reasons this is a slow and difficult process: 1) Real opposition to some of it exists inside the RGA, also in the leadership 2) It is a huge and complicated political task, which might actualize some of the strategic disagreements in the party; 3) It involves a change of mindset not only at the top, but also among the membership. Among other things, a showdown with the widespread reluctance against organized and open intervention work.

**Michael Voss**

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**P.S.**

\* <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5295>

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## **Footnotes**

[1] ESSF (article 23199), [The Red-Green Alliance in Denmark](#).

The Red-Green Alliance is a name of the party which is only used in foreign languages. In Denmark, the party is known as “Enhedslisten”.

[2] ESSF (article 32324), ->art32324].

[3] ESSF (article 43295), [Denmark: A defeat for austerity policies but no left wing victory](#).

[4] ESSF (article 36086), [Danish RGA changes perspective - “building our own political and organisational alternative”](#).