3 The Danish Social Democratic Party
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HISTORY

Since the mid-nineteenth century Danish society has been homogeneous in the sense that no ethnic, religious, linguistic or regional differences of any significance existed. The formation of political parties was consequently based on economic, social and ideological cleavages. Two political groupings dominated the period prior to the enactment of the first democratic constitution in 1849 as well as in the subsequent three decades: the conservatives and the liberals. In 1870 the various liberal factions and elements merged into The Liberal Party (Venstre). It was an agrarian party representing the interests of the farmers and organizing the rural population and it was the leading party in the struggle for equal and universal suffrage and parliamentary democracy. The party became the largest bourgeois party. The opponents of the Liberal Party in the constitutional struggle gradually organized in the right (Højre, renamed the Conservative People’s Party in 1916). In the beginning the party was dominated by landowners, but as a consequence of increasing industrialization and urbanization this group lost influence and increasingly the party stressed general conservatives values appealing to business interests, middle-class values and national defence.

In 1871 The Danish Social Democratic Party (SD) was founded as a section of the First International and in the same year the tobacco workers organized the first trade union. The initiative to establish the SD was taken by Louis Pio, Harald Brix and Paul Geleff. In general, the founding fathers had some acquaintance with European socialist agitation and in particular of the German socialist movement and propaganda. None of them, however, had any knowledge of Marxist theory as such. Their driving motives were pure social and moral indignation and a desire to ameliorate the living conditions for working people, all mixed with a dash of a romantic approach to the project.

From 1872 to 1875 the leaders were imprisoned and in 1877 Pio and Geleff fled the country. The party was on the edge of dissolution when the second generation of founding fathers took over. They were all skilled workers with a practical approach to the professional and political organizing of the workers. P. Knudsen was chairman of the party (1882–1910), followed by T. Stauning (1910–42).
In the first seven years the Danish section of the International had encompassed both the political party and the trade unions. As part of the reorganizing of the party a formal separation between the two occurred in 1878, when an independent party responsible for the political organization and mobilization of the workers was established, leaving the trade unions to take care of their professional organization. In addition, and along with the political and professional organization, the workers gradually founded a number of co-operative firms, educational, social, and leisure organizations as well as a party press. Thus the Danish labour movement was composed of the party, the trade union, the co-operative movement, the press and a large number of affiliated organizations all of which were organizationally connected to one another, first and foremost by a reciprocal representation in the executive organs.

As indicated above the ideological roots of SD were not strictly Marxist. Reformism, not revolution, was and has always been the ideology of the party. Theoretical discussions of the ideological foundation of the party were almost absent in the nineteenth century. Thus, the first manifesto of the party adopted in 1876, the Gimle Manifesto, was a pure and simple translation of the German Social Democratic party's Gotha Programme. In the first two decades of the twentieth century the ideological debate intensified somewhat. One of the results was the adoption of the 1913 manifesto which was in effect until 1961. The 1913 programme employed a Marxist perception of society, used a Marxist-inspired vocabulary and analysis, and demanded among other things the seizure of the means of production by the state, but the gap between programme and day-to-day politics was considerable.

As a consequence of the increased support by the workers of various revolutionary and syndicalist groupings between 1910 and 1920, as well as the Russian and German revolutions, the left-wing opposition inside the SD gained in strength. In 1919 a section of the party's youth organization broke with the mother party and founded in 1920 together with other extreme left wing organizations the Danish Communist Party (*Danmarks kommunistiske Party*, DKP). The SD was no longer the sole political representative of the Danish working class.

The predominant position of the party was not affected by the split. The SD continued to increase its membership and electoral support and in 1924 became the largest party in parliament. The first SD minority government was formed and lasted from 1924 to 1926. In 1929 the party returned to office, this time in a coalition with the minor centre party, the Social–Liberal Party. The coalition held governmental power until it was forced by the German occupational power to step down. At the general election in 1935 the SD reached an all-time high in electoral support of 46.1 per cent. Since 1884 the party had increased its share of the vote at every single election, a fact that sustained the prevailing conviction at the party leadership that it