

# The Impact of Immigration on Danish Politics: The Rise of Populism and the Fall of Social Democracy

Eric Pytel & Kristanna Roper

DePaul University

[cevric@aol.com](mailto:cevric@aol.com) & [kristannar@yahoo.com](mailto:kristannar@yahoo.com)

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## Abstract

Perhaps the most volatile current issue in Denmark is immigration and its impact upon Danish society and politics. The Danish population is incredibly homogenous. Only 7.3% of the population is composed of either immigrants or citizens of non-Nordic descent. While the rate of immigration has remained relatively steady throughout the past twenty years, it soared in 1995: over 40,000 immigrants settled in Denmark in 1995 alone, many of them coming from less economically developed countries like Sri Lanka, Somalia, and Ethiopia. The political ramifications of these developments, which are still unfolding, have been tremendous. This paper explores the rising force of anti-immigration sentiments in Danish political discussions since the early 1990s. Our specific focus concerns the effect of growing anti-immigrant sentiments amongst some elements of the citizenry upon political party behavior within the Danish assembly, the Folketing. Have the policy positions of the major parties in Danish politics been affected by this increasingly important ideological/policy dimension? What has been the impact upon the process of coalition formation and the traditional coalition partners? These are the questions studied in this paper, where particular attention will be directed at the major player in Danish politics, the Social Democratic party.

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## **Introduction**

“We shall work with each other and against each other: that is parliamentarism’s strange and necessary paradox” (Poul Schluter quoted in Miller 1996, v).

The Danish parliamentary system is host to over ten political parties in any given election during the past ten years. Denmark’s political model is characterized by extensive dominance from four core parties that utilize the remaining smaller parties to gain the necessary electoral support needed to control the Folketing. Thus, “the balance of power is...fundamentally important” (Aylott 1999, 97) and can be jeopardized by issues both intrinsic to the Danish model and by peripheral issues that receive an unnecessary amount of political attention. We argue that the latter primarily influences coalition formation within the current Danish system.

Our focus in this paper will be upon immigration, which has become a contentious dividing line between Denmark’s left and right political axes. The issue of immigration has impacted both party coalitions and voter perceptions as to what is vital in the Danish political agenda. The volatility of the issue, caused in part by the Danish People’s Party (DPP) on the far right, has resulted in the party gaining electoral support, as well as influencing the subsequent decline of the Social Democratic party on the left. In this paper, we will explore the political, social, and economic situations in Denmark that were conducive to generating and sustaining the influx of anti-immigration rhetoric that provided the DPP with a conduit to access Denmark’s political stage and become a viable political actor. The purpose of this study is to examine the issue of immigration within the Danish political system, specifically focusing on the impact it has had on the coalition formation process and the rise and fall of two of Denmark’s important political parties. Several components of this study will include: a basic understanding of Denmark’s political and social structures, institutions, and political actors; a comprehensive history and analysis of the rise of immigration as a salient political issue; and an extensive exploration of immigration implications on coalition formations and policy initiatives.

## **The Folketing**

It is important to understand the structure of the current Danish government in order to understand the coalitional nature of political parties and thus the effects of current issues on the coalitional nature. The current unicameral legislative assembly, the Folketing, is relatively new and

has existed only since 1953. There are 179 Folketing seats: 135 are proportionally elected within single constituencies, 40 are filled on the basis of the overall proportion of votes a party receives, and 2 are filled from proportionally-elected independent elections in Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Elections are mandated every four years, but the Prime Minister (with a minimum three-week notice) may call early elections. A 2% threshold is the established minimum percentage of the votes that a party must receive to acquire representation in the Folketing (Siaroff 2000, 226).

[1]

### **Political Parties**

Any discussion of Danish politics must address the proliferation of political parties, as the “Scandinavian party systems are multiparty systems characterized by an increase in the number of parties in elections” (Sundberg 1999, 223). Throughout Denmark’s history one party has maintained an apparent dominance by consistently controlling a significant portion of the vote. The Social Democrats have, up until just this past election on Nov. 20, 2001, received the highest percentage of the votes in every election, peaking in 1935 with 46.6% of the vote (Esping-Anderson 1985, 77).

For the sake of this paper, it is important to know that the current Social Democrats are decidedly split over the issue of immigration; one side favors, in collusion with the right-wing parties, tighter immigration laws, the other favors better integrative measures (O’Rourke 2002; Bering, 2001). The Liberal party has always been a veritable threat to Social Democratic rule, and this past November they overtook the long-held Social Democratic electoral dominance by receiving a plurality of the vote. While not virulently anti-immigrant, the Liberals campaigned on a determinedly anti-immigration platform (“Denmark set” 2002). Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the head of the Liberal party and current Prime Minister, declared, “Denmark must not be the social security office for the rest of the world,” seemingly qualifying the party’s position (“Denmark Shifts” 2001, A6).

The Danish People’s Party is the newest face in Danish politics, first making an appearance in the Folketing in 1998. Headed by Pia Kjaerssgaard, the party’s main and only focus is an outright anti-foreigner platform, and their actions in conjunction with their platform have been called “distasteful” and “vindictive” by the major political players in Denmark (Isherwood 2001). Other parties with Folketing representation are: Unity list, Socialist People’s Party, Radical Liberals, Christian People’s Party, and the Conservatives. [2]

### **Immigration: A Salient Issue**

Immigration as a salient social and political issue gained increased scrutiny during the 1970s partly as an offshoot of the rising Populist Party movements in Europe. The populist parties of Norway, Denmark, and later on Sweden were pivotal in generating the eventual perception that immigration was a growing regional issue.<sup>[3]</sup> In the wake of anxieties over the European Union membership referendum of 1972, Europe found itself in an intense political climate, marked by stratified cleavages which included concerns over EU integration affecting the national culture of many countries (Betz and Immerfall 1998). In Denmark, the right-wing populist party, the Progress Party, seized the opportunity to be an anti-establishment party that was strongly anti-EU integration (Betz and Immerfall 1998).<sup>[4]</sup> During the election of 1973, the Progress Party was able to take advantage of the turbulent political climate to garner 16% of the vote in its first election campaign (Betz and Immerfall 1998, 85).

The anti-establishment purpose of the populist parties eventually shifted towards other areas like immigration, becoming “the first two parties in their respective systems to address the immigration issue in strongly negative terms” (Betz and Immerfall 1998, 84). Immigration was portrayed as either having consequences economically on the welfare state or cultural ramifications that would generate societal conflicts (Betz and Immerfall 1998). In response, the progress parties advocated “a reduction of allowed immigrants, as well as encouraging further integration within society, deportation of those that commit crimes, and repatriation for those with native countries that have stabilized” (Betz and Immerfall 1998, 84). The negative view towards immigrants has historical roots that suggest that “native populations have often looked upon new arrivals with a mixture of apprehension, suspicion, and disdain” (Betz 1994, 70).

Whether or not immigration is necessarily a reasonable concern within Danish society and politics is questionable. To paint a picture of Denmark using only the colors of its inhabitants’ skin, one would find very little color. Denmark, like its Nordic neighbors, is virtually homogeneous. Only 7.4% of the Danish population are citizens of a non-Nordic descent (1.6%) or immigrants (5.8%) (Agerskov and Bisgaard, 2001). While a small figure at just approximately 400,000 people, this number signifies a relatively sharp increase in the loss of homogeneity in the past thirty years, as in 1970, immigrants or descendants were less than 1% of the entire population (“Denmark set” 2002). What may perhaps lend the most recent influx of immigrants distinction is that they are “quite visibly recognizable” with “a distinctive race, religion, and culture,” many immigrating to blonde-haired blue-eyed Denmark from Morocco, Somalia, sub-Saharan Africa, the former Yugoslavia, Turkey, the Arab world, and the Far East (Berdichevsky 2001, 138).

In the past ten years, especially, Denmark has undergone the most profound changes in its society. Though its borders were closed to open immigration in 1973, Denmark operated on a “de facto” immigration/refugee rule that permitted refugees to easily become Danish citizens and further permitted foreigners to bring their family and/or spouse to Denmark to become a citizen (“Denmark Shifts” 2001, A6). The current Danish immigrant faces this policy, as many of the

refugees-turned-citizens have fled from countries avoiding the severe persecution that comes along with civil wars and political instability. For instance, in 1995, the Danish immigration statistics peaked at a twenty-year high, permitting over 40,000 refugees and immigrants to join society, at a time when the war in the Balkans sent millions of persecuted people searching for a safe haven (Mousavizadeh 1995, 46). One strong reaction to these immigrants is the treatment of them as “others”, as Danish natives can identify “a man, woman, or child whose roots are Balkan, whose language is Slav, and whose faith...is Muslim” (Mousavizadeh 1995, 46).

Though claims from populist politicians have throughout the past ten years demanded sharper segregation, with many advocating refugee camps or deportation, many claims fell on relatively deaf ears. The trend to discriminate and force assimilation however has been increasing steadily. Spawning massive media attention and political debates, in 1999 a Muslim 14-year-old girl was denied an internship at a department store because she wore headscarves. Following the hype, 56% of Danes agreed that privately owned industries and businesses should have the right to forbid their employees from wearing headscarves despite the religious significance of the headscarves in the Muslim faith (“Europe: Testing” 1999).<sup>[5]</sup> Later that same year, riots broke out in Copenhagen after a Danish-born man of Turkish descent was given an order of expulsion by the courts as punishment for committing violent theft (“Europe: Danes” 1999).

In the aftermath of September 11, the reality that Denmark’s largest minority is Muslim has directly affected the Danish citizenry’s perception of Danish “others” even more extremely (Kokin 1996); currently, two-thirds of all Danish natives support tightening or halting immigration into Denmark (Juhl and Vennekilde 2001). Such a reality has no doubt been shaped by vocal populist-party leaders, who, grasping the market to prey on formerly non-existent “Danish nationalist” identity fears, have run ads reading, “By the time you retire, Denmark will be a majority-Muslim nation,” next to pictures of blonde-haired Danish children (Karacs 2001).

The social reality of immigrants unfortunately provides little ammunition against immigration backlash. A study conducted by the Catinet Institute and the University of Copenhagen found that immigrants and refugees in Denmark typically have poorer jobs, lower wages, and “considerably worse living conditions and housing than their Danish compatriots” and that despite the fact that their standard of living goes up as the immigrants live in Denmark longer, “foreigners never achieve the higher level of affluence of the Native Danes” (“Immigrants fill” 2001). Political scientist Fleming Mikkelsen observes, “Refugees and immigrants find themselves in a situation characterized by extreme marginalisation, both economic, social, political, and cultural” (“Immigrants fill” 2001). Their somewhat subordinate position is further illuminated in the fact that refugees and immigrants in the past ten years have generally lived in tight-knit, low-income communities in and around Copenhagen. In Ishøj, a suburb of Copenhagen, the immigrant and descendent population from less developed countries is five times greater than the national average (Agerskov and Bisgaard 2001). One proposed reason for the immigrants’ stratified

position in Danish society is that, typically, immigrants “are not welcome” in the job market (“Refugees head” 2002).

Not unlike other European Union countries, Denmark “has already experienced one episode of mass migration, which has still not ended” (Coleman 1992, 457), fueled by the need for skilled laborers. “Since the 1970s there was a steady decline in the proportion of European immigrant workers, while at the same time the number of workers from Asia and Africa increased considerably” (Betz 1994, 72). It was during this same period, too, that Turkish, Pakistani, and Yugoslavian “guest workers” were brought in to fill a void in the Danish system. Since closing its borders to “guest workers” in the mid-1970s, though, the outlook for employment for these immigrants has been bleak. The proportion of immigrants in the job market is very low; with immigrant unemployment levels three times that of native Danish citizens. Danish political commentator Jakob Neilson explains, “You hear stories about highly educated people from Iran, Afghanistan, from Turkey and Pakistan who leave Denmark because they are unable to perform as doctors or dentists or information technology experts” (O’Rourke 2002). Part of this problem rises from the “political arrogance” of the Danish system, in which the belief was that “one can simply transplant people from very different parts of the globe and expect them to become instant Danes” (Bering 2001). When this immediate assimilation did not occur, despite integration efforts, the result is disillusionment and a fear or animosity towards foreigners that leads to the very stratification that we see today (Bering 2001). This disillusionment is in part evident in that recently, the former Danish Minister of Social Affairs, Karen Jespersen, explained that Denmark “rejects the notion that the country needs to import manpower” to fill the new void left from workers reaching pension age, claiming, “the Danish government does not believe that this need can be fulfilled by accepting more immigrants” (Knowles 2000).

### **Immigration: Myths and Media Hype**

The egalitarian notion of a multicultural society makes good sustenance for political rhetoric, but in the Danish system the reality is far from such a noble ideal. Not only does Denmark’s homogeneity lend itself to cultural tensions, but also there seems to be a drive towards assimilation of immigrants based on the idea that “let the immigrants be any colour, but let them think and act like decent Danes” (“A centre right” 2001, 51). In some ways the anti-immigration rage was a Scandinavian-wide phenomenon, as evident in the “common manifesto that was adopted at Oslo in 1993, that declared, ‘A defense against this takeover of power (by immigrants) is both possible and valid’” (“The Nordic Anti-Immigrant League” 1999, 16).<sup>[6]</sup>

The media has impacted the perception that immigration is so pervasive and problematic that it has become a concern for every Danish citizen. There is a belief that the media has in many ways played more than just a minor role: “It is the media’s focus on immigration that determines

the success of the anti-immigration parties” (“The Nordic Anti-Immigrant League” 1999, 16).<sup>[7]</sup> The more the media focuses on the issue the greater the effects it has on the Danish citizenry: “As media focuses on immigration issues, there is a perception that it is reflecting public opinion, this in turn gets politicians going which in turn provides more ammunition for the media,” according to Lise Tøgeby, political science professor at Aarhus University (“The Nordic Anti-Immigrant League” 1999, 16).<sup>[8]</sup> Often the immigration issue has contained a degree of ambiguity, as citizens are unsure what role immigrants must play within Danish society.<sup>[9]</sup>

Politicians have not helped to lessen immigration fears. Instead, politicians have been a source of many of the more contentious and volatile statements and positions on the immigration debate. Among the most vociferous on the subject is Mogens Glistrup, the outspoken Progress Party founder who claims, “All Muslims should be rounded up into camps, and the women sold to South American countries” (“Europe: Danes,” 1999). Another of the vocal politicians is Pia Kjaersgaard, head of the right-wing Danish People’s Party, who told Swedish television, “I think people are frightened by the number of immigrants in Denmark. The people who vote for us want to send the immigrants back to where they came from” (“Anti-Immigration Party” 1997).<sup>[10]</sup> Less volatile statements that have anti-immigrant appeal were made by the current Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who said, “We are facing a lot of unsolved problems with immigrants in Denmark” (“Danish Opposition” 2002).

The media’s influence reverberated through the Danish electorate when “two days before the 2001 election, the country’s largest newspaper (Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten), published a three-page long article about social fraud among some Lebanese refugees allegedly receiving Danish social security and working in Lebanon” (Anderson 2001, 6).<sup>[11]</sup> The article is believed to have resulted in nearly a complete loss of voters for all of the immigration-friendly parties except the Radical Liberals (Anderson 2001). Just prior to the 2001 election a portion of Danish intellectuals and artists decided to fight back against the anti-immigration rhetoric by taking out “advertisements in newspapers and on the internet warning Danes against voting for a right-wing government claiming, ‘the party has a repulsive view of human nature,’ and ‘threatens values like justice and freedom of mind’” (Juhl and Vennekilde 2001).<sup>[12]</sup>

While the current immigration realities and the extent to which they are exaggerated in the media obviously affects the voter perceptions of immigration as an ensuing substantive political matter, “how members of receiving societies come to think and feel about immigration is necessarily tied to changes in their country’s political and economic policies specific to the new entering members of their respective societies” (Jackson, Brown, Brown, and Marks 2001, 456). In concordance with our argument, the Danish People’s Party and the current wave of immigration fears are less tied to actual problematic realities than to a snowball effect whereby immigration concerns (a peripheral issue in the larger scheme of Danish politics) are elevated by a political

party, essentially for its own political advancement, and then must be addressed on a national level in accordance with the level of hype the issue was able to garner.

### **Proposed Immigration Initiatives**

The proposed immigration initiatives would serve to stratify Danish society even further. The Government's policies "rest on three fundamental considerations": "international conventions must be honoured"; restrictions must be placed on the amount of immigrants coming in conjunction with requirements enforcing their "duty to support themselves"; and current Danish-residing immigrants "must be better integrated and get a job faster" ("A new policy" 2002). While the fundamental elements of the "foreigner policy" seem relatively innocuous, the specifications of the initiative bear the label "draconian" from some critics (Isherwood 2001). Some controversial specifics of the immigration package propose the following: no person under 24 years old may bring a spouse into Denmark; "current access to family reunification with parents over 60 years of age will be abolished"; family members of immigrants must put up 50,000 krone (\$6,000 U.S.) to insure against the immigrant receiving full welfare benefits; a command of the Danish language, both written and spoken, along with knowledge of the Danish society, principles of laws, and values are required, and must be tested; foreigners can "only obtain a permanent residence permit after seven years," increasing from the current required three-year waiting period; and immigrants convicted of serious crimes may be repatriated ("A new policy" 2002).

These policies directly reflect the powerful position of the Danish People's Party and its influence on the ruling coalition that they are part of, as many of the stipulations of the policy coincide directly with the Danish People's Party's platform (Isherwood 2001), and are milder assertions of the Danish People's Party's own ideal policies, which include "repatriating Somali refugees by dropping them in parachutes over the Horn of Africa" (Bjungan 1999, 174), and deporting "any person convicted of a criminal offense," along with "that person's entire family" (Came 2000, 32). Initiatives are to be brought to the Folketing within this year, and integrative measures are not expected to be developed until fall (O'Rourke 2002).

Ruud Koopsman proposes an opportunistic model to explain the rise of racist and extreme violence that seems to succinctly describe the rise of immigration fears and subsequent political ramifications in Denmark. In this model, "objective conditions such as the presence of foreigners and the influx of refugees will only come to be a social problem and an issue on the political agenda if they are defined and interpreted as such by political elites" (1996, 201). Thus, though "objective conditions" increase (as they so have done in Denmark), the issue will only become serious enough to be put on a political agenda if "political elites choose to problematize given state of affairs," often "for a variety of other reasons than objective pressures" (Koopsman 1996, 201). Obviously, in the case of Denmark, the concrete problems caused by immigration have not yet spiraled out of control, and there is little possibility that unaltered, they will actually do so. While

stable in reality, the situation has been seemingly blown out of proportion by politicians and the media and has even started to cause immigration-discrimination effects that that would in fact be linked to objective conditions (immigrant unemployment).

To alleviate the newly created problem of immigration to prevent far-right violence, “politicians must act swiftly and effectively on the concerns they have helped to stir, for instance by introducing restrictive legislation with regard to immigration and refugees” (Koopsman 1996, 201). In Denmark, the fervor has been manifested in the growing popularity and parliamentary strength of the Danish People’s Party and immigration policies that reflect the ideals of the party, rather than an increase in violence towards foreigners. However, as a result, the issue has saturated political discourse and invariably shaped not only the policies but also the formation of coalitional governments within the Folketing.

### **Understanding Coalitions**

Throughout the course of our study thus far, we have explored the structure of the Danish political system, the relevant political actors, and the situation of immigrants in the Danish society. We also have examined the inaccurate depiction of the current immigration situation by the Danish People’s Party used to generate immigrant fears through the use of various political tactics. Immigration was portrayed as a pressing political issue that stands to alter the shape of Danish politics. Next, we will explore coalitional theories and assess the degree to which the Danish People’s Party has succeeded in making immigration a policy that defines Denmark’s political structure.

#### *Theory*

Coalition theory seeks to examine the many factors that affect coalition formation. Some of the integral factors: “historical, ideological, policy, personality and leadership, political perceptions, and tactical choices - have hampered or inhibited party cooperation and hence coalition formation” (Miller 1996, 222). Coalition theory is a multi-faceted concept that broadly defines what tendencies lend towards coalition building. For the purpose of this study we will only discuss theories of policy-based coalition formation. In this study immigration is the policy issue explored. On a polar scale, coalition theory often entails political parties that are nearest one another in terms of ideological similarities, uniting in an alliance. Kenneth Miller however, defines a coalition as existing if three conditions are present: “a Government is to be formed, following a general election, parliamentary defeat of a previous government; there are several parties seeking to participate in such a Government or with an interest in determining which other parties participate; and some or all of the parties believe they can gain more of what they want by agreement and through coordinating their efforts than by acting alone” (Miller 1996, 36). Typically a coalition

entails the formation of an alliance between two parties: “Alliances have been both formal and informal, with a minority cabinet relying upon more or less steady assistance from one or several support parties (‘parliamentary coalitions’)” (Miller 1996, 220). What classifies a party as in agreement with another party requires an understanding of the idea that parties can be categorized into pairs of either “agreeing” or “disagreeing” based on a specific policy issue (Laver and Budge 1992, 15). Most coalitions fall into one of two categories: “the first group compromises theories that predict that parties closest to each other in policy terms will form coalitions”; and “[t]heories in the second group base themselves on pure policy considerations and emphasize strategic considerations deriving from the overall configuration of the policy space” (Budge and Laver 1993, 501).<sup>[13]</sup>

A crucial concept to further understand coalition theory is the idea of a policy space. The most common representation of policy space is the traditional “left-right socioeconomic” dimension (Laver and Budge 1992, 16). This places parties respective to their policy differences on a theoretical scale that has equality and justice on the left, and individualism on the right. Party positions are often formulated along the traditional polar scheme: “an actor strives to bring about a winning coalition in which he is included, and which he expects to adopt a policy that is as close as possible...to his own most preferred policy” (Budge and Laver 1993, 500). However, it is important to note, “party policy positions are liable to change over time” (Laver and Budge 1992, 16).<sup>[14]</sup> Policy positions of government can be analyzed by examining the policy positions of a government’s respective parties (Laver and Budge 1992).<sup>[15]</sup> Coalition theory also illustrates that the “link between party policy and government policy is central because it helps to make sense of the process of coalition bargaining” (Budge and Laver 1993, 499).

### *Traditional Coalition partners*

Coalition building has been a trademark of the Danish political system. “The era of coalition politics had begun for Denmark in 1909. With no party able by itself to capture a majority of parliamentary seats, every Government since then has had to rest upon some kind of alliance” (Miller 1996, 220). Prior to the 1970s, Denmark was basically a three party system: social democratic parties, conservative parties, and agrarian parties (Sundberg 1999), and “[a]fter 1973 even three-party coalitions proved difficult or impracticable to form; and a majority of cabinet and parliamentary coalitions since 1973 have been four-or five-party combinations” (Miller 1996, 220; Sundberg 1999, 222).

There are three types of government that may form subsequent to an election: majority coalition, minority coalition, and single party (majority or minority). A majority coalition is formed when the party in the cabinet and its support parties together have a legislative majority (Miller 1996). Such coalitions formed in 1945 (the National coalition), 1957-1960 (Social

Democrats, Radical Liberals, Justice Party), 1960-1964 (Social Democrats, Radical Liberals), 1968-1971 (Conservatives, Liberals, and Radical Liberals), and 1993-2001 (Social Democrats, Radical Liberals, Centre Democrats, Christian People's Party), 2001-current (Liberals, Conservatives, Danish People's Party) (Damgaard 1994). Minority coalitions occur when the party and the cabinet and its support parties together, lack a legislative majority (Miller 1996). Minority governments formed in 1950-1953 (Liberals and Conservatives), 1978-1979 (Social Democrats and Liberals), 1982-1988 (Conservatives, Liberals, Center Democrats, and Christian People's Party), 1988-1990 (Conservatives, Liberals, and Radical Liberals), 1990-1993 (Conservatives and Liberals) (Damgaard 1994).

Due to the nature of minority coalitions, "sometimes, without consistent support, a minority Government has had to search for shifting issue-to-issue, parliamentary-vote-to-parliamentary-vote majorities, or to hope for other parties' tolerance and forbearance, or their distaste for an immediate election" (Miller 1996, 220). Single party governments are non-coitional in nature and, in minority situations, have a single party cabinet that "lacks a parliamentary majority of its own and has no support parties" (Miller 1996, IV). Some coalitions are built via historical familiarity with another party: "Parties are likely to find it easier to form a coalition similar to a previous one, rather than seeking a new arrangement, if the earlier experience has been fairly happy" (Miller 1996, 225). Other coalitions are never made because of apprehension regarding an accommodation to the point of compromising a party's own identity: "A party might decide that staying out of a coalition served its interests better than joining one" (Miller 1996, 236).

### *Current Coalition Discussion*

The Danish system doesn't appear to offer the Danish People's Party any motivation to continue to push the anti-immigration issue any further after obtaining parliamentary representation and shaping coalitional formation. On the surface it would seem that the immediate gain of making immigration the basis of policy-based coalition formation had been achieved with the replacement of the Social Democratic coalition by the Anti-immigration friendly, Liberal/Conservative coalition. Despite the fact that the Danish People's Party was not officially integrated into the ruling Liberal/Conservative government, a payoff still existed: "It is possible, indeed, for a party to receive high policy payoffs, in the sense that the government adopts policies close to the party's ideal policies, while it none-the-less remains outside the government" (Budge and Laver 1993, 514). Consequently, the immigration issue is kept as a salient political issue, to the approval of the Danish People's Party. [\[16\]](#)

Politically, Denmark has a high degree of party cohesion. Ozbudun defines party cohesion as an "objective condition of unity of action among party members" (Skjaeveland 1999, 121). The basic premise of party cohesion is that Danish voters punish MPs that break away from voting

along party lines. Danish voters have some degree of electoral pull: “even though the electoral system is one of proportional representation, voters can vote for an individual candidate within a party” (Skjaeveland 1999, 124). Party cohesiveness is important in policy-based coalitions in that it prevents party members from straying too far from their respective party’s ideological platforms. Anti-immigration is linked strongly to the Danish People’s Party and despite the lack of a representation in the new Liberal/Conservative regime the party is able to remain viable partly due to party cohesion, which keeps members from breaking ranks, and partly due to the inherent coalitional nature that required the Liberal/Conservatives to seek the Danish People’s Party’s support.

On the other side of the spectrum, the Social Democratic party suffered huge losses during the November 20, 2001 election. The immigration issue was at the forefront of the debate, perhaps due to the “lack of other problems, the fact that immigration has never been taboo in the Danish media, and by the presence of a right-wing party” (Anderson 2001, 6). After years of changes by the Social Democrats to the immigration and refugee laws it was apparent that “19 law changes in six years” failed to appease the Danish electorate of their concerns over immigration (Ohlin 2001). It became increasingly apparent that the Social Democratic calls for a “more ‘humane’ refugee policy and better integration of immigrants in Danish society appeared to have fallen on deaf ears” (Ohlin 2001). The fall of the Social Democrats was so dramatic that between the spring and winter of 2001 opinion polls showed a “precipitous drop from 35.9% to less than 20%” (Fallesen 1999, 21). The benefactors of the sudden decline were the opposition Liberals who had their support reach a “historic 35%” (Fallesen 1999, 21).

In the wake of the electoral defeat the Social Democrats were forced to reassess their immigration policy as “the Danish People’s Party had adapted to the times by aiding in the passage of key social and welfare issues” (“Overtures to” 2002). The disastrous misfortunes for the Social Democrats left many of the party’s members calling for party leader Poul Nyrup Rasmussen to resign. “And it isn’t just Nyrup who’s the problem, we’ve had four people at the top for too many years,” said Frank Jensen, a possible replacement candidate for Nyrup (“Call for ex-Premier” 2002).

## Conclusion

Social Democracy, the vanguard of Danish politics for the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, fell off its bicycle. In its place, the Liberals/Conservatives have formed a potent coalition with the assistance of the rising Danish People’s Party, which captured “12% of the vote in the 2001 election to become the third largest Danish party” (Bernbom 2002, 25). Denmark’s political system lends itself to coalition formations due to the dominance of the social democrats, and the parliamentary requirement of 90 seats in order to have a majority coalition.<sup>[17]</sup> Denmark’s political scene has

experienced the following: “In 41 coalitions over a period of nearly 90 years, only 12 resulted in such winning cabinet coalitions. In 12 coalition situations the outcomes were winning parliamentary coalitions – that is, minority Governments supported by one or more non-Government parties with no share in cabinet portfolios, regardless of any other payoffs they may have received” (Miller 1996, 222).

The vibrancy of the Social Democratic party began to lose its luster by the time the 1970s rolled around. Not only were right wing anti-establishment populist movements popping up in Europe, but there was also a growing sentiment that the “ordinary man” must be “represented against his enemies which include politicians, bureaucrats and immigrants” (Widfeldt 2000, 488). Anti-immigration became the anthem for these new populist movements. The Danish People’s Party was able to create a general state of panic and anxiety amongst the Danish electorate that the perceived fear over immigration was greater than the reality. Strategic use of the media by the DPP was essential to increasing the perception that foreigners were both a social problem and a political dilemma that resonated within every proud Danish citizen. The homogenous population in Denmark made the sight of foreigners virtually unavoidable. Once believed to be a tolerant and peaceful country, Denmark is now a virtual inferno for immigrants and foreigners. The European phenomenon “suggests that xenophobia and hostility to immigrants and asylum seekers are a key part in the appeal of the populist right, but it isn’t the only issue; and indeed not even always the most important” (Widfelt 2000, 498).

The Danish political system’s support “varies according to the magnitude of the gap between what one wants the government to do and what it is actually doing on a few critical issues” (Borre 2000, 306). In Denmark a new era has begun, one that includes the “New Politics” issues regarding “foreign aid, criminal justice, environmental protection, and of course, immigration” (Borre 1995, 189).<sup>[18]</sup> We can only hope that the traditional values of a tolerant and just Danish society will ultimately prevail, creating more of the utopian society that many social democrats still dream about.

## APPENDIX

### Political Parties

#### Social Democrats (SD) 1871

- Pro social spending
- Pro immigration
- Pro joining the EU/EMU
- Represents mostly industrial labor, advocates economic planning, full employment, extensive social security benefits, and environmental planning.

- Received a little over a third of the vote in 1990 and 1994 national elections but was slightly less successful in subsequent European and local elections.
- Party secured 36% of the vote in the March 1998 legislative balloting.
- Poul Nyrup Rasmussen prime minister from Jan. 1993- Nov. 2001; He has also served as the head of the Social Democratic Party since 1992.

### **Liberal Party (V) 1876**

- Agrarian and rural population constituency
- Traditional liberal position on economic policies
- Calling for further liberalization of the national economy
- Advocates more personal freedom
- Pro joining the EU/EMU
- Anders Fogh Rasmussen is the current Prime Minister of Denmark. He has also been the head of the Liberal Party since 1998.

### **Radical Liberal Party (Social Liberal) (RV) 1905**

- Less conservative members of Social Liberal Party
- RV supports traditional economic policies and gradually more supportive of the EU in recent years.
- Support from intellectuals and small landholders.
- Joined/Endorsed SD-led governments
- RV is the “hinge” party-containing median MP in a left-right axis sense.
- Supported Schluter KF-led coalition in 1982.
- Awarded 5 cabinet posts in the Schluter 1988 government.
- Withdrew from formal participation in 1990.
- In Jan. 1993, it received three portfolios in the new center-left coalition.
- In June 1994 European Parliament balloting, RV was the only government to increase its vote share, from 3.5% in 1990 to 8.5% (gaining one EP seat)
- In Sept. national election it scored 4.6% (increasing its seat total from 7 to 8 and remained a part of the ruling coalition.
- RV lost one seat in the March 1998 election.

### **Conservative People’s Party (KF) 1916**

- Represents financial, industrial, business groups
- Supports adequate defense; protection of private property; sound fiscal policy
- Wants lower taxation
- (Under leadership of Poul Schluter the party recovered from a low of 5.5% of vote in 1975 to 14.5% of the vote in 1981 enabling a center-right coalition in 1982). Later the party surged to 23.4% (1984) followed by a decline to 16% (1990) and resignation of Schluter in Jan. 1993.
- In the March 1998 election, KF lost 11 of its 27 seats.

-Despite maintaining traditional center-right positions on social/economic issues (i.e. lower taxation), they continue to support the welfare state.

### **(Small party) ANTI-EU Justice Party (JP)**

-Founded in 1919 as the Single-Tax Party.

-Strongest during the 1940s and 1950s but since had only managed to win representation in 3 elections

### **Socialist People's Party (SF) 1958**

-Formed out of a split in the Communist Party of Denmark (DKp) over the party's support of Soviet intervention in Hungary during 1956.

-Supports far left positions but independent of Moscow line.

-Party opposed to NATO/ EU

-Support comes mainly from disenchanted social democrats and left wing intellectuals

-Unofficial left wing of SD {influences the SD platform and voting patterns of the larger party}.

-Traditionally anti-EU, but the party was split at the Aug. 1997 congress when parliamentary leader Steen Gade resigned his post in order to campaign for ratification of the EU's Amsterdam Treaty.

### **Left Socialist Party (VS) 1967**

-Formed out of split from the Socialist People's Party (SF)

-Achieved representation during 1968-1971

### **Christian People's Party (KrF) 1970**

-Opposes abortion and liberalization of pornography regulations.

-Support base is mainly religious groups and clergy.

### **Progress Party (FP) 1972 Right wing party**

-A protest party with strong anti-tax platform.

-For the abolition of diplomatic service and the military.

-Argued for gradual but complete dissolution of personal income tax in Denmark.

-Party founded by Mogens Glistrup who was convicted in Feb. 1978 of tax evasion in the longest trial in Danish legal history. He was later sentenced in 1983 to serve a 3-year prison term.

-Glistrup returned as the head of the party in the year 2000.

### **Centre Democrats (CD) 1973**

-Formed by dissident Social Democrat Erhard Jakobsen

-Anti-taxation increases

- Oppose leftist tendencies of government (Giddens: Left/Right distinction blurred)
- Involved in center-right coalition from 1982-88
- Joined SD government in 1993 before resigning over policy differences in Dec. 1996

### **Red Green Unity List (EL) 1989**

- Formed out of a coalition of 3 left wing/environmentalist groups: Left Socialist Party (VS) {resulted from 1967 split in SF party}; Communist Party of Denmark (DKp); the Trotskyist Socialist Worker's Party.
- The Maoist Communist Worker's Party of Denmark joined the coalition in 1991.
- Strongly oppose joining the EU and the Maastricht process.
- The Unity list in Sept. 1994 general election won 3.1% of the vote earning them 6 seats in parliament.
- Led by a 21-person collective leadership group, no single individual party leader.
- Unity lost 1 of 6 seats in March 1998 elections with vote share of 2.7%.
- Main goals: work for socialist democracy and towards solving environmental problems facing Denmark/Europe.
- Anti-EU, based on idea that the EU is out to exploit the countries of Eastern Europe.

### **Danish People's Party (DFp) Oct. 1995**

- Formed by dissident deputies from the right-wing Progress Party (FP)
- Located to the right of the Progress Party
- Openly anti-immigration
- Anti-taxation

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[1] To control the Folketing, a coalition must hold a majority of the seats, at least 90 out of 179.

[2] While the other parties are important, they are not immediately important in the scheme of immigration political discourse. Please see the appendix for complete party histories and platforms.

[3] "The two Progress parties (Norway & Denmark) emerged in 1972-1973, while New Democracy (Sweden) surfaced in 1991. All three share a common type of origin: establishment by people outside of the political mainstream during a time of declining public confidence in political institutions" (Betz & Immerfall 1998, 77).

[4] "79% of those who voted for the Danish Progress Party in 1973 expressed little satisfaction with politicians, as did 57% of those who chose the Norwegian party" (Betz and Immerfall 1998, 80).

[5] "In Denmark the main issue at the general election of March 1988 was the position of foreigners. No less than 48% thought that refugees and immigration were the most important electoral issues. Although only 4.5% of the Danish population –237,000 persons, mostly located in the large towns—are foreigners, they are highly visible and the Somalians in particular stand out in the blond crowd" (Arter 1999, 350).

[6] "The manifesto also states that politicians and journalists who 'actively or passively' support immigration 'are to be held personally responsible for this disaster'" ("The Nordic Anti-Immigrant League" 1999, 16).

[7] In the 1998 election, the Danish People's Party's success of did not necessarily "reflect a growing racism among Danes" ("The Nordic Anti-Immigrant League" 1999, 16).

- [8] “In the spring of 1997 the evening paper Ekstrabladet ran a campaign with critical articles on immigration and immigrants. This resulted in a dramatic increase in articles and television programs about immigrants in other media also for a number of months causing Danes and especially their politicians to believe this was a pressing problem” (“The Nordic Anti-Immigrant League” 1999, 16).
- [9] “Today’s supporters of the right of immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees to reside permanently in Denmark are often unsure whether this entails any commitment to Danish culture, language and knowledge of Danish history, society and government” (Berdichevsky 2001, 139).
- [10] “Ms. Kjaersgaard, who once said she crossed the street when she met a Muslim, exploited increased fears of immigrants, arguing: ‘Islam, with the fundamentalist tendencies we have seen, must be combated’” (Castle 2001, 18).
- [11] “The Danish People’s Party won large victories in areas where there are very few immigrants (which means that people had to rely more on impressions from the media than on personal experience” (Anderson 2001, 8).
- [12] “Decency seems to have taken a vacation during the past couple of weeks. When one substitutes the word ‘Jew’ with ‘Muslim’, the current campaign could be compared to Nazi propaganda during the second world war” (Osborn 2001).
- [13] “When only one policy dimension is relevant, according to this approach, the party controlling the median legislator is effectively a policy dictator” (Budge and Laver 1993, 501).
- [14] “The overwhelming majority of governments can therefore be characterized successfully by policy based models” (Budge and Laver 1993, 510).
- [15] “This allows there to be a link between party and coalition policy” (Laver and Budge 1992, 16). “The idea that the policies of governments are affected by the policies of the parties that compromise them is at the heart of the theory of representative democracy” (Budge and Laver 1993, 499).
- [16] “Helle Thorning-Schmidt of Denmark is a Social Democratic member of the European Parliament and a critic of the Danish government’s proposals. She blames the rightist Danish People’s Party for creating the hostility toward foreigners within which the government has been able to frame its policy” (O’Rourke 2002).
- [17] “Finally, we should note the importance in multiparty system like Denmark’s of the small pivotal center party or parties that often have the determining voice on the coalition to be formed” (Miller 1996, 240).
- [18] See Ole Borre’s “Old and New Politics in Denmark” for further discussion on the New Politics issues.