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det **radikale** venstre

FACTS ABOUT
det **radikale** venstre

The Danish
Social-Liberal
Party





In elections, Danish political parties use letters of the alphabet as abbreviations, e.g.:

A: *Socialdemokratiet*, the Danish Social Democratic Party

B: *Det Radikale Venstre*, the Danish Social-Liberal Party

C: *Det konservative Folkeparti*, the Danish Conservative Party

V: *Venstre*, the Danish Liberal Party

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- Marianne Jelved
- Naser Khader
- Martin Lidegaard
- Elsebeth Gerner Nielsen
- Niels Helveg Petersen
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- Anders Samuelsen
- Margrethe Vestager

The party maintains many-faceted contacts through its Liberal International membership, the parliamentary work in the Centre group of the Nordic Council, and its membership in ELDR (an association of liberal and reformist parties in EU member states). Additionally the party has observer status in the European Centre Party Network as well as many bilateral contacts; these play an especially important role in Central and Eastern Europe.

Introduction

Det Radikale Venstre was founded as an independent party in May 1905. A majority of its founders were former members of Venstre (the Danish Liberal Party), who had broken away mainly due to Venstre's lacking social consciousness. Originally many intellectuals, small agrarians, and craftsmen supported Det Radikale Venstre, but today its members represent all parts of Danish society.

The party's name 'Det Radikale Venstre' has never failed – internationally – to create confusion about the party's political platform. However, the party is neither extremist nor terrorist. The word 'radikal' comes from the Latin radice or radix, meaning 'root', and was originally defined as 'reformist', particularly in social, military, and constitutional matters. Therefore the direct translation would be 'the Liberal Reformist Party'. However, since the party throughout its existence has based its political platform on social-liberal ideas, 'the Social-Liberal Party' is a more accurate name.

Det Radikale Venstre is situated at the centre of the Danish political spectrum. From here the party has co-operated with both the 'left' and the 'right' sides of the Folketing (the Danish Parliament). This has made it possible to contribute considerably to the political development, whilst being a guarantor against excesses from both political wings.

The Party's History

PRE SECOND WORLD WAR

From around 1880 and especially after the appointment of the Liberal government in 1901, the year parliamentary sovereignty was introduced in Denmark, some members of the Danish Liberal Party, Venstre, believed that it had become disloyal to democratic liberalism and had drifted too far to the right. This minority group was known as the Social-Liberals.

The most inspiring person among the new Social-Liberals – and one of the most gifted political speakers and writers Denmark has ever had – was Viggo Hørup. He died in 1901 and thus was not directly involved in the founding of Det Radikale Venstre in 1905. However he must be considered the spiritual founder of the party. Even today the writings and speeches of Hørup are often cited in Danish political debates.

The new party was also inspired by the French Social-Radical Party (Parti Radical de Gauche), which had been studied by the young historian Dr. Peter Munch, who later served as an MP (1909–1945) and as Minister of Foreign Affairs (1929–1940). Munch was the principal drafter of the Social-Liberal 'Odense Programme', adopted in 1905. The programme had great impact on the development of Danish democratic and social institutions. In the history of Danish politics no other party programme has been implemented more fully.

The main points of the 'Odense Programme' were Danish neutrality policy, universal suffrage for persons over 21, secret ballots, provisions for referenda, progressive taxation, unemployment insurance, a reduction of working hours, and better care for the elderly, children, and the needy.

The first Social-Liberal Cabinet (1909–1910) was led by Carl Theodor Zahle and was supported by Socialdemokratiet (the Danish So-

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE WORLD AROUND US

Highly developed technology, i.e. the very foundation of the industrialised world, is a threat to human life.

Military technology has led to mass production of weapons of mass destruction which, if used, would mean the end of human civilisation. The Danish Social-Liberal Party has a long antimilitary tradition and fights the super powers' and other nations' use of military force. It is our hope that a stronger United Nations will secure permanent international co-operation, understanding, and disarmament.

Similarly, disrespectful treatment of the environment is ruining the world around us. For too many years economic interests have overruled environmental considerations. All parts of society, i.e. both the business sector (including heavy industry) and civil society, must contribute to the rebuilding of a healthy planet.

There is more inequality in the world today than ever before. The economy gap between the rich and the poor countries keeps increasing. Therefore the rich countries must demonstrate commitment to and solidarity with the poor countries, not only in word, but also in deed. It is important that receipt of aid and assistance – economic, commercial, educational – is managed by the developing countries themselves and not by the rich contributors. Only then will the gap begin to diminish in real terms.

DET RADIKALE VENSTRE AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The Danish Social-Liberal Party views itself as an international party. Throughout its existence it has taken an active part in the work of international organisations. Its main aim is that the United Nations be transformed into a genuine world authority with the power to insure peace and with decision-making and –implementing power in areas where global solutions are necessary.

Political standpoints of Det Radikale Venstre

THE INDIVIDUAL IN SOCIETY

Social-liberalism combines social consciousness with traditional liberal viewpoints.

The rights of minority groups must be insured, yet the main role of society must be to enable individuals to build their own values and create their own lives. Education possibilities must be made available as a spectrum of possibilities that lead to personal development, yet at the same time individuals' feeling of social responsibility must be strengthened. It is also important to remember that public sector efforts cannot replace nor can they create the inherent value of human contacts, self-respect, imagination, and inner harmony for the individual.

In order to further the achievement of these goals, it is important that decentralisation principles are strengthened.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND EMPLOYMENT

Although we have seen vast economic growth in the industrialised world, differences in humans' working and living conditions are tremendous. The gaps, especially between employees and employers, will increase even more with further technological development. This development will also lead to increased specialisation in the working environment, which will increasingly endanger both the physical and mental health of the individual employee.

He or she must therefore be given a direct possibility to influence his or her own future.

cial Democratic Party), as was the second Zahle Government (1913–1920). (Denmark remained neutral in the First World War.)

The second Zahle Government introduced a new Act of Constitution in 1915, which included voting rights for women and a democratically elected Upper Parliamentary Chamber.

Again from 1929 to the German Occupation in 1940, Det Radikale Venstre was part of a coalition government with the Social Democrats, in which Social Democrat Thorvald Stauning served as Prime Minister and Social-Liberal Munch as Foreign Minister. Far-reaching social reforms were implemented, enabling Danish society to remain intact in spite of the economic crisis and international unrest during the thirties.

POST SECOND WORLD WAR

After the end of the German Occupation in 1945, Det Radikale Venstre waited some years before again participating in a coalition government in 1957. During the first post-war decades, the party held only 1214 seats in the 175 MP Folketing, yet Social-Liberal influence continued to be felt in many policy areas. However the party voted against joining NATO, as it would have preferred Nordic defence co-operation. However later the party accepted NATO membership de facto, while at the same time working to further non-military foreign policy efforts, through the building of a strong United Nations and the creation of the Nordic Council.

In 1966–1968, the party found strong support for the new, non-dogmatic views of party leader Hilmar Baunsgaard. In the 1968 parliamentary election, the party more than doubled its seats (from 13 to 27), and Baunsgaard became Prime Minister of a coalition government that also included the Conservatives and the Liberals.

The main goals of the coalition were economic growth and preparation for the later application to join the EEC. Concerning other po-

licy issues, the three parties sought to maintain a low profile, as they had substantially diverging views.

The 1973 election shook the established parties. Denmark had joined the EEC following a referendum in 1972, yet discontent with the old parties was widespread. Thus three new parties won a substantial number of seats from the old.

The years that followed were marked by instability and changing minority governments. Under these conditions, Det Radikale Venstre lost many supporters; in 1977, the party held only 6 seats, before beginning to win some of its previous strength anew.

FROM THE EIGHTIES UNTIL NOW

After the 1982 dissolution of a Social Democratic led government, Det Radikale Venstre decided to support the new centre-right coalition government. It was clear to the party that this was the only way to strengthen Denmark's economy and reduce the number of unemployed.

However, the Social-Liberals often sided with the left wing in defence, energy, environmental, and criminal justice issues. The party favoured the idea of the Nordic countries as a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone and succeeded in prohibiting the construction of nuclear power plants in Denmark.

Denmark's economy improved substantially during this period, especially after 1988, when Det Radikale Venstre decided to join a minority coalition government and received five ministerial positions.

This government only lasted until 1990, and in the subsequent elections, the Social-Liberals lost 3 of their previous 10 seats in Parliament.

The question of leading ministers' integrity in relation to the Parliament and the immigration regulations – the so-called 'Tamil Affair' – led the Conservative Prime Minister Schlüter and his Conservative-Liberal Coalition Government to resign. Subsequently a new four-party coalition government headed by Social Democrat Poul Nyrup Rasmussen was formed. Det Radikale Venstre was represented by three ministers in the Government, which also included the Centre Democrats and the Christian Party.

At the election in September 1994 the Social-Liberals regained 1 seat, winning a total of 8 seats. The Government was reconstituted, resulting in Det Radikale Venstre also receiving the position of Minister of Culture.

The 1998 parliamentary election was extremely suspenseful. Many believe that the Liberal Party (Venstre) would be able to form a centre-right coalition government, but the results allowed the previous coalition to continue. The Social-Liberals lost one seat, yet continued in the Social Democrat-led government. The party kept its previous four ministerial positions, yet appointed new ministers to the Ministries of Education and Culture.

The most recent parliamentary election took place in November 2001. Even though Det Radikale Venstre won two extra seats, the election was disastrous for the government as a whole. It was forced to resign and a new rightist government composed of the Liberal Party (Venstre) and the Conservatives was formed – with the support of the extreme right Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti). For the first time in decades, Det Radikale Venstre is operating on the sidelines in the opposition because the new government only needs the votes of the Danish People's Party to achieve a majority for its policies. However, the new situation allows Det Radikale Venstre to make very clear statements about its own policy – something which was more difficult when the party operated as the 'junior partner' in the previous coalition government.