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Denmark

# Use the election victory to put pressure on the government and build up the Red-Green Alliance

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**This statement was made by the SAP (Danish section of the Fourth International) leadership at its meeting on October 1st 2011.**

## **1. Background**

Seen in the greater view of things the election result marked a provisional conclusion to a period in the class struggle and in Danish politics, which had its starting point with the welfare demands of the 2006 demonstrations. That period has been marked by:

- a) an upturn in extra-parliamentarian political mobilisations compared to the 1987- 2006 period.
- b) a party-political left turn containing to coherent elements; on one the hand a shared growth for the workers' parties (from 33.1 percent in February 2006 to 49 percent in February 2011), on the other hand a movement of voters within the ranks of the workers' parties moving at first from the Social Democrats (S) to the Socialist Peoples Party (SF) and subsequently from S/SF to the Red-Green Alliance. [\[1\]](#)
- c) a gradually growing wish and expectation of a change pertaining to the change of government.

This development Michael Voss has described in more detail in his article "Five years of mobilisations has paved the way for a new government" [only in Danish].

At the same time the election result is also a result of the slump in mobilisations and the collective decline in voters' support to the workers' parties that we have seen since the beginning of this year.

## **2. S-SF lost at the election but won government power**

The declining support to S and SF has been mentioned quite often by the media during the election cam-paign. But the decline started as early as February this year.

The average of February's opinion polls gave S and SF 45.5 percent of the votes and along with the Red Green Alliance, 49 percent, only inches away from a "Red" majority with the votes from the North Atlantic. It was the third time within two years that the workers' parties got more than 48 percent of votes.

From February to the call of the election, S-SF lost 4.1 percent and on the Election Day they had lost 11.4 percent of which only 3.2 percent moved to the Red – Green Alliance. How can we explain this?

In January-February the discussion of an early retirement allowance peeked after the Prime Minister's New Years speech. S-SF's focus was on a social line of reasoning; almost class- reasoning and they created an image based

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on a biting anti-governmental controversy, and the Social Democratic leaders in the trade unions organised an rally on the lines of the same theme – as a pre-emptive move against more radical activities. In the following period both parties clearly moderated their class profile and reacted in a vague way to participation of the Social Liberals (financially right-wing liberal party with a humanitarian view of immigrants and refugees) in the withdrawal of the early retirement allowance. They dubbed the election a referendum about the early retirement allowance, but did not run their campaign accordingly. Even the most radical parts of the Social Democratic party, the 3F union leadership preferred to shield the Social Liberals and did not work for a political shift from the Social Liberals to the workers' parties.

In addition to this, they intentionally tried to keep the expectations to the improvements one could expect from a new government at a low level. During the election campaign, they did not provide an alternative to the right-wing 'economic responsibility-line'. Instead they presented other ways of strengthening the competitive edge of the employers.

Finally, they pushed the voters towards the Red-Green Alliance and the Social Liberals by hanging on to the strict line of the right-wing government's immigrant – and refugee politics.

This is four important parts of an explanation, but it is probably possible to think of others.

### **3. The political situation after the election**

This development during 2011 and the actual election have created a parliamentary situation for the Red-Green Alliance which certainly isn't exactly advantageous for the Red-Green Alliance.

A clear left-wing majority would have made it possible for the Red-Green Alliance to put a maximum of pressure on S and SF, because we could offer a majority. Considering the current Danish parliament the Social Liberals are not only vital (if the Danish Peoples Party - DF [populist right wing party] isn't an option), they also got an electoral victory that has made it incredibly difficult to topple them with a threat of a new election.

At the same time, the current parliamentary situation makes it easy for the S-SF to create a situation that makes it possible for them to blame the Red-Green Alliance if the government has to resign. The Red-Green Alliance will find that it is difficult to hold on to the unconditional class line while at the same time putting pressure on S-SF and making sure that a broader part of groups in society will see that it is S-SF's own doing if they fail.

Once again, this illuminates the fact that in order to put pressure on S-SF to refrain from cuts and instead introduce even just limited improvements, demands from outside the parliament – from the working class (S and SF's own voters) - are necessary.

Earlier experiences show us that it is difficult to mobilise people to extra-parliamentary activities during the first months to half a year after an election. It is commonly accepted that we have had our say and used our democratic right to vote so know the new majority/government must be given time to show what they can do.

Add to that, that S-SF probably managed to lower the level of expectations.

But that does not mean that it is impossible to build up demands from outside the parliament to the new government.

As early as the first week after the election some Social democratic local union leaders demanded that the Social Liberals were kept out of the government if that was what it would take to preserve the right to unemployment benefit (for certain amount of time). At a conference for shop-stewards in the public sector seven demands to a new government were put forward. The leader of the local 3F union, which is not known for its left-wing inclinations, declared immediately after the election that: Our demands to the coming government therefore must be that they despite the former settlement must take responsibility for these peoples destiny and disastrous situation, or otherwise the Danish welfare system is about to fall.

## **4. Red-Green Alliance's incredible election result**

The growth for from 2.2 percent to 6.7 percent and from 4 to 12 members of parliament was incredible and by far surpassed even the most optimistic forecasts. Several elements helped get this result.

The basis of that growth was the growing discontent among the social democratic and - in particular – the SF voters. The movement away from S-SF to the Red-Green Alliance occurred before the two parties actually (as a government) had showed what they represent and where their line of politics would bring about. The explanation is that SF as part of a leftwing two-party-alliance completely wiped out their own profile. Bit by bit, a considerable amount of people lost faith in SF's ability to pull S to the left,.

Even though the Red-Green Alliance many voters' view simply took the place of SF, it is nevertheless a left turn in a small part of the population. The parties hold a more or less fixed place on the left-right scale and to most people it seems to demonstrate a more leftwing position to vote Red-Green Alliance rather than SF and the actual campaign of the Red- Green Alliance has been more leftwing than that of SF four years ago.

The Red-Green Alliance's and SUF's (Socialist Youth Front) election campaign obviously had a great bearing on the result. We need only to look at the fact that the better part of the growth came during the three weeks (from 4.4% to 6.7%).

First of all, the Red-Green Alliance completed a very focused election campaign, in which our main priority was on a relatively small amount of themes and political demands. That, in itself has played its part, making a greater impression on the voters – independently of the content in those themes and demands.

Furthermore, those demands and themes had a class-profile, focused as they were on unemployment (allowances and jobs), low income public service employees, child poverty and a demand that the rich must pay more. The Red-Green Alliance was also the only party which took seriously the voters' interest in the climate and demanded green public jobs.

Secondly, the Red-Green Alliance this time was better than ever at popularising our politics. It was evident what we wanted politically and how we would intervene in the political struggle after the election (within the chosen framework).

Thirdly, we gave voice to a distinct criticism of the VKO-government – and the Social Liberals – also on those discussions that S and SF tried to bring to a close, such as foreigners and the administration of justice.

The fourth reason is that Johanne Schmidt Nielsen had a remarkable appeal. It made a big difference to the number

of votes and it is worth mentioning that the appeal she had did not only stem from her age and looks but combination of this with an impressive ability to give voice to our political views and to debate them without an upsetting aggressiveness.

The fifth reason can be that not choosing to campaign around clear anti-capitalist demands may have led more people to vote for us (but this has a price – more on that later). Today it is very unlikely that 7% of the population supports anti-capitalist measures. It is therefore likely that a clearer anti-capitalist profile would have reduced the electoral success. In addition to the lack of a clear anti-capitalist agenda comes also the ignorance, distancing and in some instances direct critic from several prominent candidates of the strategy and programme of the Red-Green Alliance

## 5. The Red-Green Alliance position after the election

The election has strengthened the Red-Green Alliance's position in parliament. Even if this does not lead to an actual influence on day-to-day politics we will by far become more visible and have greater weight in the political debate.

Furthermore, the Red-Green Alliance has a substantially greater amount of members than before the election. The campaign has made formerly passive and partly inactive members become active and the spirit is high among the members right now.

The Red-Green Alliance also receives far more economic resources at Christiansborg (parliament) and to the party as such.

These two things put together gives us a very good basis for work to be done in the succeeding years. But the Red-Green Alliance also has big and partly new problems. As mentioned above, the situation in parliament will be very difficult to handle and our tactics must be very wise if we are to avoid a situation in which we either renounce our principles by compromising our political foundation or to the greater majority appear to be a sectarian party that overturns the government because of 'futile' principles.

There will be a considerable pressure on us from the right. It is already there. Journalists, commentators and leading articles demand that the party becomes realistic, pragmatic, and responsible – meaning: just like the other parties. Part of this pressure will come from S and SF when everything else fails; partly as a public debate partly by planned political situations that will make it as difficult as possible for the Red-Green Alliance to explain why we do not renounce our principles to save the government.

A special version of the pressure will come from some of our own voters and perhaps members. That's the part of the voters and members who consider the Red-Green Alliance the 'old' SF or the 'real' SF.

Finally, the pressure may stem from an identity-crisis, if the election results make us see ourselves as a party that has 12 members of parliament so that we unofficially start working to secure that result.

## 6. In part our own fault

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Some of these problems would exist, no matter how we had achieved such a big success and no matter what had led to the current parliamentary situation. But these problems are also partially self-inflicted.

The extreme populism of the demands, the partially toning down of the disagreements with S-SF-R, the almost complete lack of calls for direct actions, the clear deselection of the party's own more explicit anti-capitalist parables, and the almost monopoly in representing the party in the national media, that Johanne was given, reflects that getting the maximum amount of votes, has been the overriding concern behind every initiative and every statement in the election campaign. As already mentioned this has contributed to the result, that we all celebrate. On the other hand the Red-Green Alliance with this approach has neglected to prepare people at large, our own voters and members for the current political situation.

Thus we face the real risk of a major chock for many voters and members, if we fail to get a significant influence on the policies of the coming government.

Time and time again during the election campaign, Johanne and other leading candidates emphasized, the shared basic values within the "red block" and that the disagreements were "well known" and that it would be possible to sit down at the negotiation table and work it out. Thus we failed to contribute to a preparation of that part of the population, that listens to us, to the fact that S-SF do not wish to harass or confront the capitalist/ the rich/ "the system" and therefore often will end up attacking working people, except by distancing ourselves from a proposal from S-SF that people should work 12 minutes more every day.

With the large amount of talk about how the Red-Green Alliance will use its influence in Parliament, and the almost complete lack of references to or calls for direct mass action, there is a risk that the people who voted for the Red-Green Alliance, Social Democracy and SF will be completely without understanding when we after the election will explain that pressure from the outside is necessary in order to make S and SF carry out sensible policies.

When S-SF-R in the coming year will introduce an economic policy against the crisis, that does not solve the problems, and which contains attacks on the working class and welfare benefits in addition to clear concessions to capital, the Red-Green Alliance will be forced to present anti capitalist interventions and reform proposals. This is not an idea, we have prepared our surroundings for during the election, and even among our own voters, many will be surprised and turn against us.

In addition to this, the electoral campaign of the Red-Green Alliance partly played along with the focussing on Johanne, for instance by sending her to all the important debates. Some of the voters we gained alone through the personality of Johanne will turn against us, when the Red-Green Alliance is forced to supplement the basic agitatorial demands and suggestions with more radical demands and a clearer emphasis on the fact, that we are not the critical support troops of S-SF, but a political alternative to reformism.

At the end of the day, the Red-Green Alliance has, with its one-eyed focussing on the common ground with S-SF, on parliamentary influence and on obtaining the maximum votes put itself in a situation, where there is a risk of suffering a massive drop in the polls, a considerable amount of members leaving, and pressure especially from new members, who will try to turn the Red-Green Alliance into the party, which was SF, 5 to 10 years ago.

## **7. Not necessary**

It will always be difficult for a socialist party to strike a balance between the agitatorial demands, which can receive

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support here and now, on the one hand, and on the other, the propaganda for more radical demands and the introduction of the party as a complete alternative to the other parties. It is incredibly easy to stray into sectarianism, where everything said is correct and with full perspective, but where we convince nobody, and do not gain the visibility, that is offered by a strengthened representation in parliament.

But the one-sidedness of the election campaign of the Red-Green Alliance could have been avoided with few changes without falling into the sectarian trap:

If:

- some of our anti-capitalist demand adopted at the last party conference had been included in the printed leaflets
- our representatives in public debates once in a while had presented these demands, when the crisis was debated, or when questions such as “job and company emigration”, “the banks sends the bill to the customers” or “the national ability to compete” was popping up – preferably with a comment about the fact, that we do not expect to get this adopted in parliament even if we should achieve 15 seats, but we believe that it is necessary.
- our representatives a little more often had mentioned, that it will take outside pressure to persuade S and SF to support some of the demands that we otherwise were promoting in the election campaign
- our representatives, when confronted with questions about the goals and strategy of the party, more often had said, that these are our goals, but we do not demand that S and SF implements all our goals under a new government; or that it is changes that preconditions, that we have been able to convince a large majority about them
- our representatives at least had not denied, that we need to nationalize banks and the major companies or if our representatives had not agreed with everybody else in the studio, that we need private enterprise.

## **8. Strengthen activism and the pressure on a new government**

the Red-Green Alliance thus has a starting point, which on the one hand is really good (MPÅ’s, members, economy, enthusiasm), but on the other side we are facing a political situation, which is complicated, and which we have not prepared ourselves for in the best possible way.

This means, that the coming period could go terribly wrong for the Red-Green Alliance. The task now is for everybody in the Red-Green Alliance to implement those activities, which most efficiently strengthen the working class, the class struggle and the Red-Green Alliance. In the immediate future that means:

A) We must exploit the enthusiasm over the election result to strengthen activism in, and the organization of the Red-Green Alliance. We need to hit the streets again for instance, as the Amager branch of the Red-Green Alliance did recently. This could also mean leaflets with the demands of the Red-Green Alliance to the negotiations about the state budget. We need to strengthen the trade union networks, other structures of intervention, the branches and SUF [the youth organisation that works in solidarity with the Red-Green Alliance].

B) We must strengthen all initiatives for demands and mobilizations from the outside, which can put pressure on S

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and SF. This is possible for members of the Red-Green Alliance and SUF through their trade unions, educational organisations, tenant's organisations and in many other places. This could also happen through debate meetings and common statements with local branches of S and SF. Such a pressure can arise both from direct demands to the government and parliament, through trade union struggles and from mobilizations against municipal cuts, which, directly or in-directly will put pressure on the government to give money to local government.

C) We must exploit the recently gained strength in parliament to put maximum pressure on S and SF, in order to gain the highest possible number of concrete results and to make as many as possible see and realise that it is S, SF and R, which carries the blame for not achieving more results and the rea-son why the new government will get into trouble.

D) We must exploit the newly gained parliamentary and activist based strength to project our entire political alternative both to the bourgeois opposition and the new government. It will be a major task to convince people, who have voted for the Red-Green Alliance, that our policies are right. The same goes for a big part of the many new members.

E) We have to strengthen the political discussions and every kind of educational activities inside the Red-Green Alliance and SUF through: speeches at public and branch meetings, introductory meet-ings, study circles, seminars and publications.

F) Education and discussions must include the entire programme of the Red-Green Alliance. Not in order to change it, but to educate members and candidates to parliament in it, so that they gain real ownership of it, and make it possible to defend it in wider audiences. This will also test whether the lack of defence of it and the criticisms of the programme by some of the candidates expresses real strategic disagreements, smaller tactical differences or it is the result of lack of edu-cation and discussions about how we transform society. This might lead to a wish to update it and revise it on certain points. Such a debate about programme will strengthen the Red-Green Alliance politically. The alternative is to gradually diminish the status of the programme.

## 9. Tactics and themes

On the election night, the Red-Green Alliance turned the searchlight on R. We must continue this focus. This means that we emphasize the role of this party as a Trojan horse for the bourgeois opposition and as an excuse for the government. By pointing to what policies would be possible with a majority of the workers parties in parliament, we indirectly also criticise the lack of will by S-SF to distance themselves from bourgeois and neo-liberal politics and we are already raising the perspective for a future election: A workers majority, that carries out workers policies.

The basis for doing so is, that we continue to make clear that we support the appointment of [the leader of S], Helle Thorning-Smith, as PM, but that we are not responsible for the program of the new government, in other words we will put continuous pressure on the government from the left.

The question about the early retirement bonus constitutes a special problem, which we dealt with in our newsletter for the previous week. Here the conditions for struggle changes all the time. First and foremost it should be glaringly clear, that we will not take part in or approve of any attacks on this bo-nus. Secondly we must exploit the possibilities to put pressure on S, SF, R and even DF [Danish Peoples Party] to the very end. Thirdly we must loud and clear call on S and SF rather to lose the vote in Parlia-ment, than put name to and legitimize this "reform" [or rather gradual abolition of] the early retire-ment bonus. Participation by S and SF will lead to disillusionment of everybody, who expects improve-ment by the new government. But this of course preconditions that S-SF have managed to keep R



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out-side of the government.

In continuation of this, we must challenge S-SF and R with the proposals and demands that carry the most support by the members of these parties, and where they will be hurt the most if they are re-jected. Amongst these are: unemployment benefits, creation of jobs through (green) public invest-ments, job training for apprentices, municipal welfare, health care, immigration policies and policies on law and order.

Finally we must use most possible occasions to explain that we have proposals for legislation and others measures that really can strengthen the working class and people receiving public support, because they interfere with the power of capital and attacks its profits. This work must all the time take place as a combination of initiatives in parliament and outside. It is important, that the discussions in the Red-Green Alliance in the coming months focus on how best to build such a pressure on the new gov-ernment around concrete demands.

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[1] The names of the parties referred to in this article are Socialistisk Folkepart, SF in Danish, or Socialist Peoples Party, SPP in English; Socialdemokraterne, S in Danish or Social Democrats, SD in English; and the Radikale Venstre, R in Danish or Social Liberal Party, SLP in English.