

## Northern Flank by Poul Rasmussen

### To be or not to be for NATO

*Denmark's pro-NATO government is still in crisis after the May 10 elections.*

In evaluating the results of the May 10 parliamentary elections in Denmark, foreign observers might conclude that the Danish population has fully adopted the indecisive nature of Shakespeare's Hamlet. The elections did not resolve the question of the future role of Denmark in the Western Alliance, but instead, brought about the most complicated government crisis since World War II.

But rather than blaming the results on the Danish national character, the outcome should be evaluated by analyzing the questions the Danish population had to face in the election.

The central theme throughout the campaign was the question of Danish membership in NATO. Therefore, one of the main questions to be answered by the population was whether or not they would support the parties behind the infamous April 14 parliamentary referendum, calling for direct guarantees from visiting allied naval vessels that they are not carrying nuclear weapons. It was this referendum that caused conservative Prime Minister Poul Schlüter to call new elections.

The answer was not clear. Taken as a whole, the four parties behind the referendum (the Social Democrats, Socialist Popular Party, Common Course, and the Radical Liberals) suffered a significant defeat, losing 7 seats in the parliament. But even if this result sent the small Common Course Party out of the Parliament, took 3 seats from the Socialist Popular Party, and 1 from the Radical Liberals, this still leaves a one-seat majority in the parliament for the referendum (90 out

of 179 seats). Adding to the confusion, the architects of the referendum, the Social Democratic Party, actually gained a seat.

So, even if the parties behind the April 14 referendum suffered a collective defeat, the referendum was upheld.

Why did the 70% of the Danish population who strongly favor Danish membership in NATO not vote differently? A significant part of the answer lies in the way the conservative and liberal parties posed the NATO-question to the voters. At no point was the reality of the Soviet military build-up addressed. Instead, all parties bent over backward to present themselves as the most pro-disarmament. The INF agreement, and continued support for the appeasement policies of the Reagan administration, were presented as the main reason that Denmark should stay in NATO. As one conservative politician remarked, "Denmark should stay in NATO to get rid of all nuclear weapons."

In an INF fantasy world, it does not seem crazy to deliver a resounding defeat to the parties that supported the anti-nuclear referendum, while at the same time delivering a small victory to the architects of the same referendum.

The clearest winner in the May 10 elections was the right-wing, tax-evasion protest party, The Progress Party of Mogens Glistrup. It increased its representation in parliament by 7 seats, going from 9 to 16. On election eve after the poles had closed, Glistrup appeared on Danish television to issue

a raving racial attack on the "Muslim invasion" of foreign refugees into Denmark.

Observers and commentators around the world have already compared Glistrup to Jean-Marie Le Pen of France, but that is far too simple-minded. The Progress Party did not run its election campaign on racial issues (Le Pen did). Headed by its new leader, Pia Kjaersgaard, it went into the election with a better voting record in the Parliament than any other party. The Progress Party had voted against all 22 Danish "footnotes" qualifying its membership in NATO since 1982. It alone had voted against all of the environmental protection laws that have hit Danish farmers so hard. This was where the votes for the Progress Party came from. In some of the farm districts of Denmark, the Progress Party is now the second largest.

Although the conservative party of Poul Schlüter suffered a defeat, losing 3 seats, the 4 parties of the conservative-liberal coalition kept their total of 70 seats. With 3 additional liberal seats from the North Atlantic states of Greenland and the Faeroe Islands, and the backup of the 16 seats of the Progress Party, the Schlüter government is only 1 seat away from the 90 seat majority needed to survive. Had that been attained, the NATO question would also have been resolved.

But instead, Denmark now faces a very severe government crisis. In order to block the influence of the Progress Party, the Social Democratic Party, The Social Popular Party, and the Radical Liberal Party conspired to prevent Schlüter from forming a new government. As a result, the speaker of the Parliament, Svend Jacobsen of the Social Democrats, is now posing as a neutral leader of negotiations for the formation of a government. This can take a long time, and meanwhile, the NATO alliance stays in limbo.