

Denmark, Decency and Decay

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Once again Denmark appears in the international community and media for the wrong things, this time for a law package with three main, draconian anti-refugee laws. One legalises stealing – that’s what it is – valuables owned by refugees upon arrival if they exceed US\$ 1450; the second cuts down on the already meagre daily benefit and the third extends the family reunion period from 1 to 3 years.

188 MPs voted yes, 108 No and 37 abstained. The main argument is that Denmark wants to “signal” that asylum seekers should go elsewhere. Otherwise marketing-conscious politicians have overlooked that there are millions upon millions out there who are not asylum seekers and they get an extremely bad impression of Denmark. Like they did when Denmark put ads in Middle Eastern newspaper some time ago to deter potential refugees.

The three laws – of which the first clearly provokes memories of what the Nazis did to the Jews – are just a peak point in a long (mal)development of Denmark’s foreign policy. It can be characterised by incremental absence of ethics, solidarity, compassion, empathy and sound human judgement – all concepts outside the domain of ‘real’ politics – combined with increased interventionism, militarism and lofty contempt for international laws.

By passing these laws, the country’s parliamentarians – with a few exceptions – have soiled the image of the country abroad even more and for a very long time ahead, one must fear.

It is not unreasonable to assume that terrorists will pay attention to this development which is de facto targetting refugees which are almost 100% Muslims.

Many Danish citizens including myself now recognise that ‘Dane’ rhymes with ‘Shame’. This trend in Danish policitics doesn’t happen in our name.

Once upon a time

Denmark used to be known and appreciated around the world as a welfare state with equality – gender and otherwise – and solidarity with the disadvantaged. Known for citizens with a diversified free education – also at people’s colleges and elsewhere where culture and good manners were taught.

Quite a lot of it was based on Danish pastor, author, poet, philosopher, historian, teacher and politician, Grundtvig – others inspired by Kierkegaard. Out there educated people associated Denmark with composer such as Carl Nielsen, painters like Asger Jorn, entertainers like Victor Borge. It didn’t go for nuclear energy but became a major producer

of windmills.

Danes were proud of being democratic and peaceful – remember the poster with the policeman who stops the cars to let some ducks pass a road? Or, say, furniture design, Carlsberg, H.C. Andersen and the Little Mermaid. Piet Hein.

It was known for rescuing 7000 Jews to safety across the Oresound to Sweden in October 1943. And known for talking about problems, not killing people.

Perhaps a bit idyllic, too good to be true? Yes, but still! There was something one could be proud of.

Militarist and interventionist “active” foreign policy

And what's the image the rest of the world is getting these years?

A rogue state, a warrior country any time it's called upon by US/NATO – five wars or occupations: Serbia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya – and then Iraq again. And now special forces on their way to Syria.

When I was a member of the Danish government's Commission on Security and Disarmament all through the 1980s no one even thought about Denmark as a war-fighting country far away. Defence, not offence, was the issue. International law was important. The Commission even produced a report on the Nordic areas as a nuclear-free zone – not bad for a NATO country. At the time there were elements of independent thinking about Denmark's role in the world.

The first war participation – bombing Serbia two nights in 1999 – was decided by a government led by a social democratic prime minister, Nyrup Rasmussen and a foreign minister from a small historically anti-militarist, liberal party, Helweg Petersen.

They broke the traditional image of Denmark as adhering to peace and international law (the destruction of Yugoslavia had no UN mandate).

The doctrine of an *active* foreign policy was good in and of itself. Small countries have to be active and work together when the big ones play their games. But in Denmark's case it was destructive – active meant joining wars, not being active in terms of early warning, conflict-resolution, mediation or any of the sort.

This was only the beginning of the road to rogueness.

2001 – the ‘war on terror’

The war on terror was initiated after 9/11 – Afghanistan 10/7. Denmark went along without thinking. The idea came from Washington, so what was there to think about?

At the time about 400 people were killed in international terrorism per year; today the Global Terror Index informs us that 32.000 people are killed in terrorism. It must be the stupidest war in modern time and the majority of the victims are found in the Middle East, not in Europe and not in the US.

But we bomb – and create more terrorism. And more refugees. Politics having become anti-

intellectual and devoid of ethical considerations, few connect the dots. Fewer see Denmark's own co-responsibility for causing the problems and even fewer see the moral responsibility of taking care. No, steal their belongings.

Iraq

It was prime minister, *Anders Fogh Rasmussen* of the liberal Party, Venstre (meaning left but it's neo-liberal right) whose government made Denmark an occupying power in Iraq over four years (2003-2007). By any standards the most serious foreign policy blunder of Danish foreign policy since 1945.

Asked recently on Danish television how he felt about the tragic situation in today's Iraq he answered that – well, we stretched out our hand to the Iraqi people but unfortunately they didn't take it.

No remorse there, Mr. Always Right. But quite a statement when you are a non-convicted war criminal having joined a project that killed about 1 million Iraqis during war, occupation and 13 years of sanction. The Danish politicians and people are still, it seems, unable or unwilling to understand the dimensions of this blunder – which is one reason they also don't understand today what it means to be a refugee.

Muhammed caricatures

It was under his leadership – or lack if it – the Muhammed caricatures became a diplomatic disaster. He refused to meet with Muslim leaders in Denmark and also ignored a letter of concern from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the global voice of Muslims with 57 member states and 1,6 billion people.

Probably no one in the PM's and foreign minister's office had a clue what the OIC was.

But he *did* know who Khadaffi was when later, rewarded for his good deeds by the US and catapulted to S-G of NATO, he spearheaded the coalition member states' violation of the very limited UN mandate, their destruction of that country and the killing of Khadaffi.

A social democratic prime minister re-invents rogue Denmark

Former female prime minister, *Helle Thorning Schmidt* – at the time leader of the social democratic party – will be remembered for bringing Denmark into Iraq for a second time, a decision to bomb taken in less than 24 hours after Washington's call on September 24, 2014.

She will also be remembered for three other foreign policy-related blunders:

- 1) Supporting without any limitations the freedom of expression after Charlie Hebdo and saying that in Denmark we shall be able to speak and write and make the any drawing we want – while Danish police arrested youngsters who had used politically incorrect words on their Facebook pages.

- 2) She defined a socially marginalised young Muslim's killing of two individuals in Copenhagen in early 2015 as terrorism without the slightest evidence. These two tragic events brought the official Denmark to the verge of hysteria with a memorial event in a park in Copenhagen – led by the royal house, the government and military plus 40.000

Danes where a song written against the German occupation (!) was sung followed, pathetically, by Lennon's *Imagine*...

3) Thorning Schmidt committed herself and Denmark to follow the US/Denmark to also bomb in Syria – a plan only prevented by Putin's intervention and the chemical disarmament agreement with Syria.

The extreme populist People's Party has been shaping and promoting these trends for decades with a manifest xenophobic profile that spoke, at least originally to the petty bourgeoisie.

Whatever there once was of a the genuine social democratic party and a liberal party, of socialism and liberalism, has been buried long ago. The extreme right has become mainstream – thus time to change party names to fit reality. However the right social democratic party is wrong.

The third re-invention of rogueness

The present liberal party prime minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen's, first foreign policy action was to kill the already established commission for investigating how Denmark under the leadership of his party comrade, Fogh Rasmussen, got involved in the war on Iraq.

The possibility that Mr. Always Right should be proved just a little wrong was a risk not to be taken.

It characterises the decay of democratic politics that elites across the political spectrum have more in common with each other than each has with their voters and constituencies.

The decision to bomb Libya was a milestone in the Nordic countries in that it was the first time ever that all parties, left to right – with one exception – voted for the bombing of Libya. The exception was the far-right, xenophobic Swedish Democrats. The Nordic public opinion against war and for peace – and there are some – no longer has more than a handful of individuals that represent them.

In a TV interview in October 2015 prime minister Løkke Rasmussen advocated safe zones to be established in Syria for refugees. One must assume to keep them away from Europe. In his view these zones should be protected from the air by combat aircraft – deliberately omitting any mention of UN peacekeepers.

This is an indication as good as any that he has no knowledge about such matters and no advisers either. Such an arrangement would create more than one Srebrenica in a war environment such as Syria which is worse by any standards than Bosnia where there were at least some UN troops at the time.

The underlying racism embedded in the idea of gathering citizens of a country in camps because you think it is necessary to destroy their country and culture – a kind of warfare Bantustans – speak of the *Zeitgeist* of a Denmark inside a Western world that is in moral free fall. Decaying.

Mr. Løkke Rasmussen further maintained more than once that he could not imagine Danish boots on the ground. But that was October last year.

It took only to January 2016 when it was revealed that his government now intends to send special forces to Syria. And rest assured: before long Denmark will again be at war in a foreign country in full violation of international law and UN norms.

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