

The Viking Root to Justice

DURING MY recent participation in the United Nations General Assembly as a member of the Danish delegation, I was repeatedly questioned about the ideological basis of the Danish Justice Party (DJP).

The English name is a direct translation, but the party is often called the Single-tax Party. We prefer the use of DJP because the party participates actively in all political aspects of the country on the basis of equal rights for all individuals.

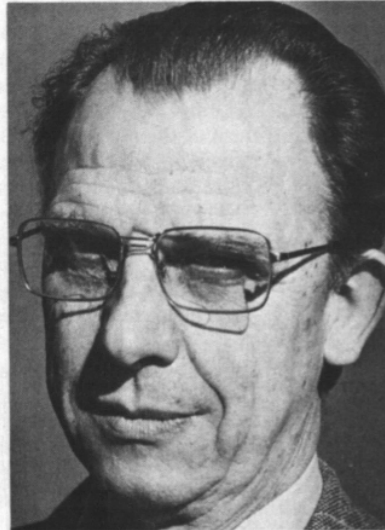
Many people in and out of Denmark ask for the reason why a political party – which is based in large part on the theories of the 19th century American economic philosopher Henry George – has taken root in Denmark. It has shown a remarkable capacity for survival, and no such party exists anywhere else in the world.

The answer has something to do with the old Danish cultural behaviour, based as it was on the custom rights exhibited in small local societies of the country – some say that it may be traced back to the Viking-time – which kept Denmark largely free of the influence of the Roman Law. This behaviour was most clearly expressed in Bishop Gunner's preface to *Jydske Lov* (Law for Jutland, 1241) where he says:

"... the law shall not be made or written for anybody's special favour, but in the interest of all those who live in the country."

In the last part of the 18th and the first part of the 19th centuries the opinion of the people was greatly influenced by Count C. D. F. Reventlow (1748-1827), who was influenced by the Physiocrats and Adam Smith's liberalism. He was Prime Minister for not less than 30 years. He inspired and promoted the farmers' Liberation Act in 1788, which laid Denmark's liberal foundation.

During the 19th century the poet, writer and clergyman N. F. S. Grundtvig was spokesman for a continua-



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tion of the land reforms initiated in 1788. In 1849 he wrote about people's ethical right to the land, and as member of the constituent assembly he claimed freedom for the individual. Thus, Grundtvig became forerunner for Henry George's ideas in Denmark. He influenced many people through his writings and the "Folkehøjskoler" (folk high schools) which he inspired. These provided a fertile ground for the ideas of Henry George when they first appeared.

HENRY GEORGE'S theories were brought to Denmark at the beginning of this century. They attracted considerable attention among intellectual people preoccupied with the thoughts of the Danish philosophers Severin Christensen, C. N. Starcke, Axel Dam, and C. Lambek, and among smallholders whose leaders had contact with the folk high schools.

As early as 1902 the smallholders association adopted the "Køge Resolution" which required farmers to pay rent to the Government for the land they occupied instead of paying income tax and duty. All these very small farmers were so sure of the value and importance of Henry George's ideas that they demanded freedom to help themselves; they did not want protection.

In the following years four different associations sprang up, based on the philosophy of Henry George, and Severin Christensen published his main work *The Constitutional State* (Retsstaten) – a state based on George's economic ideas, the concept of freedom for the individual that should not only be limited by the equal right to freedom for other individuals, and on the limitation of state intervention.

The Justice Association (Retsdemokratisk Forbund) and the Henry George Association attempted to stay out of party politics, preferring to "infiltrate" their ideas into the programme of existing parties. After some discussion between the associations it became clear that this strategy would not prove effective. In 1919 three of the associations fused to found "Danmarks Retsforbund" (The Danish Justice Party). The Henry George Association still exists as a cross-party organisation. This development partly explains the capacity for survival.

THE DANISH Justice Party has always been small, though quite a few Danes basically believe in the correctness of the ideas. In 1926 DJP won its first two seats in the Folketing (Parliament), and until 1947 never went beyond four. In

THE PRICE OF MODERATION

BRITAIN'S 2.5m unemployed workers are being told by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that they can price themselves back into work if they moderate their wage demands, writes Ian Barron.

The threat of unemployment is undoubtedly one of the checks on the rate of increase in wages. Despite the level of benefits paid out to the jobless, people prefer to work for their incomes.

But what about land monopolists? There are few pressures on them to moderate the price of their assets.

As the *Estates Gazette* (March 14, 1981: p. 981) observes in its editorial: "Few vendors willingly offer their holdings when prices are sliding." So the restricted flow of top-grade land onto the market has helped to keep selling prices at over £2,000 an acre.

Land that ought to be reallocated is retained by existing owners, who prefer to under-use their acres rather than agree to accept realistic prices which – given prevailing economic conditions – are lower than their expectations.

But Mrs. Thatcher is silent on the issue of land monopolists moderating their demands!

1950 it jumped from six to 12 seats. One of the reasons was that the DJP demanded swifter dismantling of postwar restrictions than the other political parties were willing to endorse.

The political success of DJP increased the general interest in land taxation. In 1954 - after six years' work - the land taxation commission, set up by the Government and including members of all political parties and larger organisations, submitted its report. The majority declared that they would support a gradual change from income tax to land tax. This result had an interesting effect on the fortunes of the DJP, which got nine seats at the election in 1957. It entered into government responsibility by forming a coalition with the Social Democrats and the Radical Liberals, the so-called "Triangle Cabinet".

It was commonly believed that this Cabinet of land tax supporters would initiate effective legislation in this field. The result was that land speculation practically stopped. Instead, capital was invested in increased productive capacity.

As a result of DJP's participation in this Cabinet during three-and-a-half years, several of its basic ideas were implemented, such as trade liberalisation by tariff reductions, and legislation to tax unearned increment on land values.

Everybody agrees that the Triangle Cabinet was a good government, but at the following election the Social Democrats received nearly all the credit. There had been strong opposition within the DJP against participation in a government with socialists. Anyway, the result was that the party lost all its seats and went into the political wilderness that lasted for 13 years. Shortly after the DJP was excluded altogether from Parliament the law on land taxation was rescinded.

The experience of government and defeat forced some hard lessons on the party which ever since have affected its conduct. As time passed, people became less orthodox in their beliefs. Leaders of the party realised the need for a clear profile and for coherent policies on all current issues. A new, updated and more pragmatic Statement of Principles was adopted in 1966 when the fortunes of the DJP were at their lowest point. This gave a somewhat new image to the party and contributed in the long run to its return to Parliament, but a number of odd, unpleasant issues came up and contributed to this. For example, the EEC became important from 1970 and helped the DJP, which was the only non-socialist party against it.

The many political failures during the '60s and early '70s planted a time-bomb in the Danish political system. It exploded with the election in 1973 which brought five new parties into parliament including the DJP with five seats. For no clear reason the party was eliminated again at the election in 1975, but its very absence from Parliament in the 1975-1977 period gave it a clean image and brought it back with six seats. Now, after the election in 1979, the party has five seats.

TODAY, we pay income tax, and interest and compensation to the former land owner for use of the land, even though he has not done any work for the money. This effectively means that we pay tax twice. The DJP proposes that state revenue should be raised primarily from a tax on annual land values.

The DJP advocates the development of a broad collaboration between nations in mutual trust and respect, gradually as the people are ready for it, such as is the case between the Nordic countries and to some degree in EFTA. For these reasons the party is against the Common Market, which is being forced on the people, and because it takes away our sovereignty piece by piece. Furthermore, the DJP is of the opinion that the Common Market acts monopolistically, and protects members against world trading competition. The economy should be free

of restrictions, and state subsidies and controls should be abolished.

The party opposes socialisation, state intervention, and incomes policy, but a modern, rich society should have a good security system for everybody. Therefore, all those falling into distress shall have the help they need.

The country should be governed by a "magistrate" consisting of the political parties in proportion to their size. Members of the government should leave their chairs as members of the Parliament in order to keep the tripartition of the power - legislative, judicial, and executive - as required by the Constitution. This will imply Parliamentary co-operation on a case-by-case basis in varying groupings and reduce elections to four-year terms. The DJP favours more frequent referenda.

The party supports international co-operation but prefers solutions on a world basis; it is against regional blocs. Foreign policy shall promote free trade, and the party supports an active development policy on the basis of free trade.

The party is not against NATO; though our military force cannot help much in a war it is seen as a will of existence for the country. Defence, however, shall be based on volunteers and not on forced conscription.

These clear and liberal statements partly explain the capacity for survival, but the DJP has always had and will always have one drawback: it cannot and will not speak in favour of any special group in Danish society.

One dimension the U.S. architects forget . . .

AMERICAN architects believe that the price of land will force families to accept smaller homes.

"The high cost of land will make it tough to afford much space," reported Lawrence Rout in *The Wall Street Journal* (May 13, 1981).

Some of the ideas being discussed:

- Tent-like structures of cables and fabric that can be moved, added to and replaced;

- Greater building densities, with fewer detached homes and more high-rise buildings;

- Smaller, multi-purpose rooms, with greater emphasis on space-saving devices like beds that fold into walls.

Ian Barron writes: the ingenuity of architects can offer us some exciting prospects, such as transforming rooms into three-dimensional areas operating

on different, but overlapping, levels.

But the thesis that families will have to resign themselves to smaller living areas is built on the erroneous belief that population growth - coupled with limited space - must inevitably force us into high-density living.

In fact, there is sufficient vacant space within the existing urban areas throughout the US to accommodate every single family in the country with a decent-sized home.

The problem, of course, is to release that land at a realistic price for the builders to use. That's politics; but the easiest solution is to redesign houses with a few lines on a drawing board.

Cramping ordinary families has always been easier than cramping the lifestyle of land monopolists. . .