

Danish Party Time

Something is brewing in the state of Denmark. Lars Rindsig takes a further look at what is happening on the political scene in a cold country.

Lars Rindsig

Four Danish youths in their twenties are gathered in an office space on the outskirts of Copenhagen. Joining them is a fifth via a Skype connection. Having completed the formal agenda of the business meeting of the Executive Committee of the Youth Wing of the Justice Party, they are now deeply engrossed in a discussion on individualism versus collectivism and how the two concepts relate to the policy of the Justice Party.

Denmark's venerable Justice Party, which was a pioneer in placing radical land reform and even more radical individualism on Denmark's political scene, has since it lost its last parliamentary seat in 1982 led a somewhat languishing existence, with an inverse correlation between party funds

(declining) and mean age of the membership body (inclining). But ever since the party celebrated its 90th birthday in 2009, it has experienced growth and dynamism on a scale that has only been dreamt of for years. A new litter of young party activists joined the ranks and are now working alongside their much older colleagues in handing out leaflets, collecting signatures among the voting population in a bid to get the party back on the ballot, and in developing and running the party machine.

A group of the young party faithful began in 2009 to lay the groundwork for new organisation with the aim of gathering young idealists within the party – not in an attempt to splinter or oppose the party but in order to make it easier for young Justice Party activists to network, throw fresh ideas into the air and even bond on a purely social level.

Attempts to revive the Youth Wing, once mighty but which disintegrated in the 1990s, had been made before but wasn't successful until a sufficiently coherent group had come along. Lasse Solgaard Andersen, a 25-year-old student of Intellectual History at Aarhus University, is Deputy Leader of the Youth Wing. He says on the preparatory work that went before the formal founding of the organisation: "At first, it was just great to meet and discuss ideas with a few young people who were thinking about and addressing some of the same issues. Later, when the initial four of us gathered for the first and founding committee assembly, I think all of us were pleased about bringing our discussion to another level."

A core group of activists was quickly gathered - some with political experience (one committee member is a spokesperson for the Danish Movement Against the EU and one is veteran of several years within the mother party) while others were simply roused by encountering ideas they had not come across before and wanted to do something about it.

Generous individual donations from older Justice Party members along with a bloc grant from a party trust fund gave the youngsters a foundation to work from and the financial means to bring their vision to life.

The Youth Wing aims to act as a driving force, animating the mother party to not only spring back to life but also develop its policies. "We keep pretty close relations with our mother party and we're not trying to challenge the old generation of party members in any disrespectful way. But we are challenging an old generation of ideas to which young people in our experience find it hard to relate. For better and worse, a lot of the policies of The Danish Justice Party are rooted in the early parts of the twentieth century. The long history of the party is generally a blessing and it gives us an edge to a lot of other youth organisations, but we can't expect that new and potential members know or even care about what we

used to think and how many time we've been in parliament. That's why I see it as our most important task to figure out what it means to be a single taxer today in this brave new political climate. And another thing that I count as essential is finding new ways to communicate our policies so that young people, who do not necessarily have a deep knowledge of - or interest in - politics, also can understand what it is that we're all about."

The young input is very well received by more seasoned party workers. Poul Gerhard Kristiansen, Political Chair of the Justice Party, says: "I'm really very pleased that the Youth Wing is now active again. It brings a true sense of life into the party and we would not want to be without the Youth Wing."

As for future visions of the young organisation, Solgaard Andersen's greatest hope is that of raising the general awareness among young people that there is such a thing as economic rent. "In my generation there is a lot of discontent towards politicians and I can't say that it isn't justified. The present crisis is just as much political as it is an economic issue. Unfortunately, though, too many of my friends search in vain for anything that barely resembles

a feasible solution to the big issues we're faced with. And as a result of this, they become disillusioned and/or embrace different sorts of anti-capitalism. My mission as Deputy Leader is to introduce as many young people as possible to the ideas of Henry George and, to the extent of my abilities, elucidate the causes of the boom and bust cycle as well as to participate in the campaign for taxing unearned income instead of wages – not only a just but also an efficient remedy for fixing our broken economy."

The Committee members and other participants of the open meetings continue to meet and discuss both weighty philosophical issues along with day-to-day politics. And the Justice Party is indeed much richer for the work its daughter organisation does.