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Denmark

A glimpse of the discussions within the Red-Green Alliance

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Michael Voss is a long time member of the SAP, Danish section of the 4th International. He was recently elected to the National Leadership of the Red Green Alliance (RGA).

After the vote of the 2013 budget by Enhedslisten/RGA parliamentarians inside the party an discussion start. You write that this decision was an important mistake. The RGA national conference in April adopted a resolution on the RGA and the government. Could you explain the differences in the RGA discussion and on what this resolution permitted to avoid these type of mistakes in the future?

The negotiations of the 2013 budget between the government and the RGA started in the autumn of 2012. At that time the majority of the working class quite clearly wanted important changes to the rules of unemployment benefit. Just before losing the last elections the openly right government made an agreement with the centre-liberal party about serious cutbacks in unemployment benefit. After the elections of 2011 the centre-liberal party made a governmental coalition with the two traditional reformist workers parties, and they made their governmental partners accept to carry through these cutbacks. They were implemented from January 2013.

During the autumn of 2012 the disastrous effects for tens of thousands of unemployed workers became clear for those involved and for the public as such. Protests evolved from workers, trade unions and from the rank and file of the reformist workers parties, the Social Democratic Party and the Socialist People's Party, even from parts of the centre-liberal party.

For the RGA it was a central issue in public campaigning, in mobilising and in the negotiations about the national budget.

In the end, the RGA accepted a budget with a very limited compensatory measures to relieve the situation for some of the unemployed workers hit by the cutbacks. In some way this undermined the attempts to further build a movement on this issue. That is one reason why the RGA should have refused to vote for the budget.

Secondly the overall impact of the budget had so few and so limited positive elements that it could not at all offset the negative effects of a number of neoliberal measures that the government had decided in 2012 with the support of the right parties. This overall situation was predicted in a resolution by the 2010 National Convention of the RGA stipulating among other things that the RGA could only vote for a budget with significant improvements, and that we could not vote for a budget that primarily summarized neoliberal measures adopted during the preceding year.

In the opinion of the Danish section a broad layer of the working class would have understood and accepted if the RGA had refused to vote for the 2013 budget, even if the result would be the downfall of the government, especially because the budget did not solve the unemployment benefit problem.

After the vote on the 2013 budget the government made a number of new neoliberal agreements with parties of the right, cutting down on social welfare measures and redistributing in favor of the rich and the ruling class. It was seen by everybody in Denmark as an important rightwing shift by the governmental parties.

This development gave reasons to second thoughts among a lot of RGA-members who had favored the 2013-budget vote, even in the leadership. More and more often you could hear MP's and members of the National Leadership say that it is now extremely unlikely that the RGA can vote for the 2014 budget.

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In this situation fifty members of the RGA made a proposal for the 2013 National Convention with the aim of repeating and clarifying the 2010 conditions for voting for a budget. The most important change was that it was made completely clear that the RGA can only vote for a budget which implies a break with the political course of the policies of government in its' first two years.

In the pre-convention debate a proposal for changes in the original resolution "of the 50" was made that would give the National Leadership (NL) and the MP group the freedom to accept a budget as they liked. Only a few delegates voted for that.

A group of leading members together with other members made another proposal for change. These people had all been supporting the vote for the 2013-budget. Their proposal was not very clear in its consequences. Would these additional paragraphs make it possible for the NL to accept a budget if they judge that such a vote would strengthen working class mobilization even if the budget would not meet the original conditions. Or was it an additional condition for a budget vote, making it even more difficult to vote for the budget?

A couple of the leading members behind the proposal stated both in writing and at the convention that it was an extra condition. At the convention the resolution of the "the 50", including the change of the leading group was carried by a solid majority.

This was in my opinion a positive outcome. But the differences still exist, and no NC decision will remove some real differences. No sooner had the NC ended before a debate erupted on what "a break" with the governmental course implies concretely, only illustrating that no NC resolution can work as an Answer Book on how to vote on all possible versions of a national budget.

This resolution criticised the the governmental policy, but said at the same time *Enhedslisten does not want to overthrow the government, but it gets harder and harder to save it from committing suicide.* The S-SF-R government has not parliamentary majority. If RGA dont vote the budget, the right wing could decide (for their own reasons) to also vote against. It will overthrow the government. So what then does not want to overthrow the government ?

This has been very much debated in the RGA and even inside the SAP. In my opinion nothing is gained for the working class or for the left wing by actively setting the target of overthrowing the government by parliamentary means or by accomplishing this target. This is also the official position of the RGA, and it is supported by the Danish section.

This is not based on a principle, but it is based on the evaluation of the class struggle and of the political parliamentary situation.

At the moment a huge disappointment and dissatisfaction with the government exists among a big section of those who voted for the parties of the government. They have almost continuously lost support in opinion polls since the elections. This has created the historically almost bizarre situation of no more than one percent difference in the support of the Social Democratic Party and the RGA (ca. 14 and ca. 13 percent) while the Socialist Peoples' Party is down to 3-4 percent.

But it is not a result of big mobilizations, and the right parties have gained as much voters from the governmental parties as has the RGA.

In this situation, actively overthrowing the government would not lead to a more left wing government but to return to government of the right parties. At the same time the RGA would risk cutting the links to the rank and file of the reformist parties and to those who still would vote for them. They are critical to their own parties but they do not want

to overthrow the government.

On the other hand the RGA should not and will not support neoliberal policies in order to save the government. By tying themselves to the right parties and to the neoliberal agenda the government itself is endangering its own future. They put their lives in the hands of the right parties who will cut their throat at the right moment, and the governmental parties act in a way that make it less and less likely that they can win the next election.

In that sense the government is in the process of a long drawn suicide. The RGA cannot and will not prevent that suicide by guaranteeing a vote for their policies or their budget.

Some formulations in the adopted resolution underline - as the RGA did it in the resolution adopted in 2010 - conditions must be realised to permit the RGA to vote the financial law.

What is the signification of the new formulations and are they more clear than the 2010 resolution, which was not sufficient to avoid the mistakes of last year ?

The words of the 2013 resolution are not qualitatively different from the 2010 resolution. For the members behind the proposal – among whom were a number of SAP members – one aim was to counter the argument that the 2010-resolution was passed in a different period for a situation that could not have been predicted and for that reason was not relevant anymore.

Secondly the 2013 resolution makes it unequivocally clear that a budget must break with the policies of this government, while the 2010 resolution – passed before the elections and the change of government in 2011 – called for a break with the policies of the right government of 2001-2011.

The resolution is one way to define RGA policies – but a resolution can never guarantee that the NL and the MPs group will not make a wrong decision. Unless you want to decide once and for all that you always support a budget of a “left” government – or if you want to decide once and for all that you can never vote for national budget in a capitalist society.

As we have explained in former articles, the SAP agrees with the vast majority of the RGA that voting for a national budget is not by itself wrong. It is a part of united front approach to make demands for the national budget, to try to mobilize working class pressure on the government for social, environmental, pro-working class measures in the national budget.

This will not be possible if an RGA vote for the budget is not an option. On the other is not possible if the RGA are not clear on the conditions for voting for a budget. That is why members of the SAP have been in the forefront of defining these conditions both in 2010 and 2013.

But the political discussions and the political struggle inside the RGA will of course continue among the membership, inside the MP-group and in the NL. According to RGA statutes the MP-group need a majority vote in the NL to vote for the budget.

The resolution said that "Large sections of the working class, including S-SF voters are good reasons been disappointed, but the disappointment is only limited translate into organized protests and movements". But also : "The final assessment of whether the Alliance should vote for a budget, will be influenced by current political and strategic evaluation, in which the following aspects must be included:

**Will participation in a budget contribute to popular movements to create mobilization and engagement?
Will participation in the budget increase public support for and confidence in a progressive socialist policies?"**

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Could you explain the discussion on this questions and said in why RGA comrades imagine that the vote of the budget could "contribute to popular movements to create mobilization and engagement" and "increase public support for and confidence in a progressive socialist policies" ?

This is some of the paragraphs that were added to the original resolution of "the 50" on a proposal by a group of leading members of the RGA. As I explained there was some confusion to the actual implications of these paragraphs.

The line of thought is that the working class needs partial victories to build its self confidence and not to lose faith in political action or even in just voting left. If a number of improvements and pro-working class measures are included in the national budget it could have this effect. Especially if the inclusion of these measures are seen as the result of some mobilizations or at least popular pressure on the governments.

This is not wrong – in my opinion. But in the case of the 2013 budget it seems clear to me that the RGA majority grossly overestimated the positive effects in this sense by the very few and small improvements in the budget. This was made even worse because they did not account for the disappointing effect because the unemployment benefit was not changed for real.

In addition to that, the majority underestimates the importance of showing a real political alternative to the two neoliberal strands of the respectively the right and the present government. By voting for a budget that only make minor changes to the overall neoliberal course the risk is very big that the RGA is seen as just a part – although critical part – of the governmental bloc.

This constitutes a real tactical dilemma. In the situation of the 2013 budget the RGA majority did not handle that dilemma very well – as is has happened in other situations.