

Queen's Birthday and National Day of Denmark

Portrait of a Welfare Model

by Victor Andersen

If you mention Denmark to foreigners, most will be able to spontaneously name a few well-known, charming features such as the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen, a well-functioning royal house, and the statue of the Little Mermaid at the seaward entrance to the country's capital, Copenhagen.

Those who are more business-minded may reply if asked about Denmark: "It is a country with a stable economy and competitive industry". The infrastructure is impressive, too, with the new bridge and tunnel link across the Great Belt and the corresponding link between Denmark and Sweden that will open this summer.

Social observers of the more reflecting type may remember Denmark as the birthplace of new, interesting ideas such as the folk high school movement, the co-operative movement and the welfare state.

The Danish welfare state is built on recommendations from the country's great psalmist, priest and politician, N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872). He formulated the model in the following way: "In terms of riches we shall have come a long way when few people have too much and even fewer have too little." It is exactly this model that Denmark has realised through its tax legislation and social policy and which has won it world reputation.

All of these things signal idyll and efficiency. But is Denmark this land of happiness where everything is beautiful and nothing goes wrong? Reality is not like that, of course. But even the most sceptical Danes must admit that their fatherland has its beauties.

If you ask the Danish electorate what it most wants for its country, you will receive relatively identical answers. The Danes want to preserve Denmark's character of a welfare state and, if possible, to im-

prove it. But come with us on a visit to the Danish welfare state. There is much to see — including details that might surprise you.

There are 5.3 million Danes, 85% of them living in cities. Of the country's area 64% is cultivated with farmland or forests. Denmark is an island kingdom with the Jutland peninsula, connected to Germany, and 406 islands.

The Danes also love their country for its landscape values. Green lowlands with rolling fields mingling with blue fjords and coves. No place in the country has more than 52 km to the sea. The first line of the national hymn goes: "There is a lovely land".

The climate is temperate and changeable demanding a great deal of skill from those who earn their livelihood from farming — Denmark's thousand year-old source of income which has, since 1963, seen its export values dwarfed by a fully developed industrial sector.

With an expected lifetime for newly born girls at 78 years and for boys at 72, most Danes agree that public health could be better. Public campaigns urge Danes to stop smoking, eat less fatty food and exercise more.

Heart disease is the cause of death for 50% of women and 59% of men. Despite strongly increasing traffic the number of people killed on the roads has been halved over the past 25 years. This is ascribed to the large-scale construction of motorways and intensified control with speed and drunken driving.

The Danes are generally cheerful people with a developed sense of humour — often playing with the oddities of the language. But apparently, being married is not always that much fun. The divorce rate is conspicuous — out of three marriages, two end in divorce.

On the political front the Dane is individualistic and an inquiring spirit. The propen-

sity of older days to stay with one political party all life long is declining. After having won the battle for the daily bread, the Danes apparently feel they can afford to choose their political stance from other criteria — perhaps the burning topic of the day.

Denmark has been a member of the United Nations since the organisation was founded in 1945 and of the European Union since 1973. In the EU, Denmark refrains from taking part in the most far-reaching moves towards integration. The country has special opt-outs, for instance from the defence co-operation. A referendum on Denmark's future relationship to the euro is expected in 2000 or 2001. Denmark is currently outside the European Monetary Union.

Denmark is a kingdom, probably the world's oldest. The monarch is Queen Margrethe II,

who will celebrate her 60th birthday on April 16, 2000. She has won the hearts and the respect of the Danes with a new and open style, with her obvious television appeal and her artistic talent.

Denmark does not have nuclear power and is unlikely ever to get it. The environment policy is comprehensive and is starting to work. 64% of all waste is being recycled — glass waste is being reused 104%. This is not a statistical error, but a result of the fact that the glass mass is reused several times.

Few countries in the world have as many working women as Denmark — 9 women work for each 10 men. This requires a comprehensive, mainly public system of day care facilities for children during work hours.

The women's participation on the labour market has a strong economic motivation, but also contributes to a feeling of independence and self-esteem among women.

Danish women were emancipated in 1915, and equal pay was on the Danish agenda before it was ordered by the EU. Still more Danish men accept the importance of "soft" values and have access to paternity leave.

Of Danish households, 77% have a washing machine; 46% a dishwasher; 49% a microwave oven; 82% a video; 53% a PC; 49% a mobile phone; 23% a video camera, and 22% access to the Internet.

Since 1963, industry has been the country's main source of income (in terms of export). The sectors are distributed as follows: industry 79%; agricul-

ture and fisheries 15%; oil etc. 6%.

There are, however, other ways of measuring the relative importance of the various sectors. If we look at the use of labour, the picture changes dramatically. Then the bird behind the farmer's plough and the smoke from the factory chimney fade in favour of the service sector.

The following statistics show the beginnings of a post-industrial society where machines are in the process of taking over all the manual labour and where people spend their time serving each other and giving welfare and health care services in hospitals, nursing homes and children's day care institutions.

The Danish workforce is distributed as follows: Public and personal service 36%; trade, restaurant business and finan-

cial services 30%; industry 17%; transport 7%; energy supply and construction 6%; agriculture, fisheries and raw materials extraction 4%.

The strategy regarding elderly citizens is that they should remain in their own home as long as possible. But if they can only cope in protected housing or nursing home, they must be offered those possibilities.

The Danes are major consumers of culture ranging from public libraries and extensive daily newspaper reading to a large number of television channels.

Although it has never been close to being a superpower, over the centuries Denmark has been the starting point of a rather impressive parade of names in science, literature, music and the visual arts. Right now the profile is primarily held high by a group of young film directors.

With their demands to handheld camera and other unpretentious means they have created the Dogme concept, which has created more than a ripple in the international film world.

As a sports nation Denmark has often taken home the gold medal. This is mainly in sports such as sailing, swimming, curling and women's handball at the Olympics, at the European football championships and in Tour de France. A sports organisation for the disabled has 29,000 members and has won several world championships in wheelchair racing.

But the medal that we have generously awarded to the Danish welfare state in this article also has its flipside. It is not all successful and perfect. The strong social security network is expensive and has pushed Danish taxes to be among the highest in the world. With a burden of taxation of 50%, moonshining is an apparent temptation in the nation of the otherwise officially honest

Danes. Denmark has also had its share of drugs problems among young people and wars between biker gangs. Right now, however, peace appears to govern in biker circles.

A hot topic in the current debate is the issue of refugees and immigrants. How many should Denmark accept and how should they be integrated in society? The number of immigrants has doubled over the past 20 years to 287,000 roughly corresponding to 5% of the population.

The Danes are strongly interested in their own living conditions — both the immediate and the future prospects. Despite the widespread social service and a free medical system, points of criticism include reduced domestic help for the aged and sick, waiting lists for hospital treatment and poor care of the mentally ill.

In addition, the future perspective is somewhat threatening for the state-financed pension to all citizens over 67. Fluctuations in birth rates over the years will have the effect that in the next decade the population will consist of relatively many very young people and many elderly people, and relatively fewer in those age groups that provide for the others.

While at present there are four people in the working age for every person that needs to be sustained, there will only be three of those in ten years from now. Some believe that the traditionally increasing industrial production will solve the problem. Others are more pessimistic.

Now is Denmark the problem-free land of happiness? No, not unconditionally. On the other hand, Denmark's history has often showed that new problems inspire to new solutions. Maybe the Little Mermaid will witness new ways once again from the wet rock she is sitting on.



In the Service of Peace

by Victor Andersen

DENMARK'S coat of arms shows hearts and lions and two woodwooses armed with clubs. The watcher has a choice, since he is apparently dealing with a country that can behave both friendly and heartily, but also tough and belligerent.

What do you choose to believe? And what is the true interpretation in the year 2000?

We can help the reader by explaining that it would have been much clearer had a peace dove been allowed to peek in from the corner of the coat of arms. Modern Denmark has no reservations when it comes to serving peace. So far no international organisation has appealed in vain to Denmark to make staff available for peace-keeping missions. That has happened dozens of times to areas reaching from Cyprus over the Gaza Strip, Abkhazia and Tajikistan to Bosnia.

Measured by population size, Denmark is the country that has sent most soldiers to United Nations missions — more than 50,000 since 1948. In the spring of 2000, Denmark was taking part in peacekeeping missions in the Balkans with 245 soldiers per million inhabitants and with a group of police soldiers in the hottest spot of Kosovo — the city of Mitrovica.

Using the same scale, the next EU country has made 123 soldiers available.

As one of the oldest monarchies, Denmark has exercised its lion claws in certain periods. In the years between 850 and 1050, the Danish Vikings were far from welcome when they "visited" foreign shores. Today things are different. The main effort of Danish foreign policy is to contribute to conflict prevention and detente in the hot spots of the world.

To start with, Denmark practised its peaceful intentions in its own geographical area — the Nordic region. If you ask "Mr Jensen" he may spontaneously point to Nordic cooperation as the continuous hub in Denmark's foreign policy. Reality is, however, something else politically and economically. As a member of the European Union since 1973, Denmark increasingly looks towards Brussels.

Membership of NATO since its foundation in 1949 has also been an important foreign policy element. The third place is shared by Nordic cooperation and the UN.

Denmark has firmly entered the EU, but ever since accession the Danish population has distanced itself from the most Europe-enthusiastic thoughts of

accelerating integration. In a 1992 referendum on the Maastricht Treaty, a majority of 50.7 per cent of the Danes said no. But the majority shifted in 1993 when 56.8 per cent accepted the Treaty after the so-called Edinburgh decision.

The Edinburgh decision meant that Denmark had obtained permission from the EU to take a step back in union cooperation in certain areas. The opt-outs — there are four of them — provide exceptions for Denmark from participation in the third stage of European Monetary Union and the euro, from the common defence policy, union citizenship and majority decisions in internal and external legal matters. These reservations can only be abandoned following another referendum.

The reactions in the EU to Denmark's voluntary sidelining in parts of the cooperation have not been all negative. Many expressed recognition to the country's democratic rights and its use of the emergency brake to slow down a development it found too fast, too closed and too heavily controlled from Brussels.

France staged its own referendum after the Danish one, and in Germany a constitu-

tional court in Karlsruhe scrutinised the Maastricht Treaty process.

There is general agreement in the EU that the Danish action has added more openness in the union. Apart from that, the activities of the EU have been unaffected and progressed as planned. Denmark is left with its opt-outs to say no to the EMU and the euro, which were at that time only vague concepts. But reality has caught up now.

In 1993, there had not been military action against Milosevic. There has since, and NATO-member Denmark has taken part in direct action with fighter planes. If we asked Mr and Mrs Jensen again, maybe they wouldn't mind now exchanging the krone for a euro, and maybe they didn't care whether the marching orders were signed by NATO or the EU when Danish soldiers took to action in the service of peace.

Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen has announced a referendum on the EMU before the end of 2001.

Although Denmark is not the fastest ship in the EU convoy and although, measured by population, it is number four counting from the bottom, it is not without influence and has several good marks in its report book.

At the implementation of the Single Market, Denmark was in front with Britain introducing the new rules.

Secondly, Denmark has inspired several other EU countries to new parliamentary practice. A dedicated Europe committee in the Danish parliament, the Folketing, has the full control of EU matters. Danish ministers can consult the committee before going to meetings in the EU and be given the mandate to definitively and instantly give their consent or disapproval to decision.

Denmark has been the standard bearer at the opening of the Union for the countries in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. It has been important for Denmark to show that the EU is not only a club for the rich, and that the inclusion of new members could be motivated by other criteria than economic ability. As a NATO member, Denmark has played a similar role as a door opened for new countries.

Denmark has been described by one of its national bards as "the pixie nation that secretly keeps snug while the world is burning around its cradle". Like the woodwooses in the coat of arms, this line is slightly obsolete. Pixie nation? Yes! But snug in secrecy? No!

On the contrary, in the year 2000 Denmark has an marginally leading role internationally in efforts to provide better conditions for the millions of sick, poor, hungry and oppressed in the third world.

This is based on extremely well-founded strategies and a constant willingness of the Danish population to contribute. Denmark's annual reservation of per cent of the GDP for development support is a world record.

In addition another 0.5 per cent is dedicated to the promotion of peace and democracy, since Denmark helps former dictatorships design their democratic constitutions, trains police from developing countries handle conflicts without violence etc.

According to the United Nations, this effort is unparalleled in size and quality by any other western nation. The aid is given without ulterior motives for in-

stance of getting the money back home in the shape export incomes for Danish companies.

Denmark passes on half of its development aid to organisations such as the World Bank, the UNDP and UNICEF for further distribution. In this respect, the Danish contribution is so large — also measured in absolute amounts — that Denmark has a super power status.

Of the development aid that Denmark administers itself, 60 per cent goes to Africa, 30 per cent to Asia and 10 per cent to Central America — distributed

in 20 so-called programme co-operation countries.

For many years Denmark behaved carefully as a donor in order not to arouse suspicions that it wanted to colonise other countries. The Danes stepped in with specific projects such as water supply and health stations and then pulled out again as soon as the construction and installation were completed and local staff was instructed. But this method proved a disappointment since nothing came of many of the projects.

In the end of the 1990s Denmark changed its development aid policy. Now posted staff can

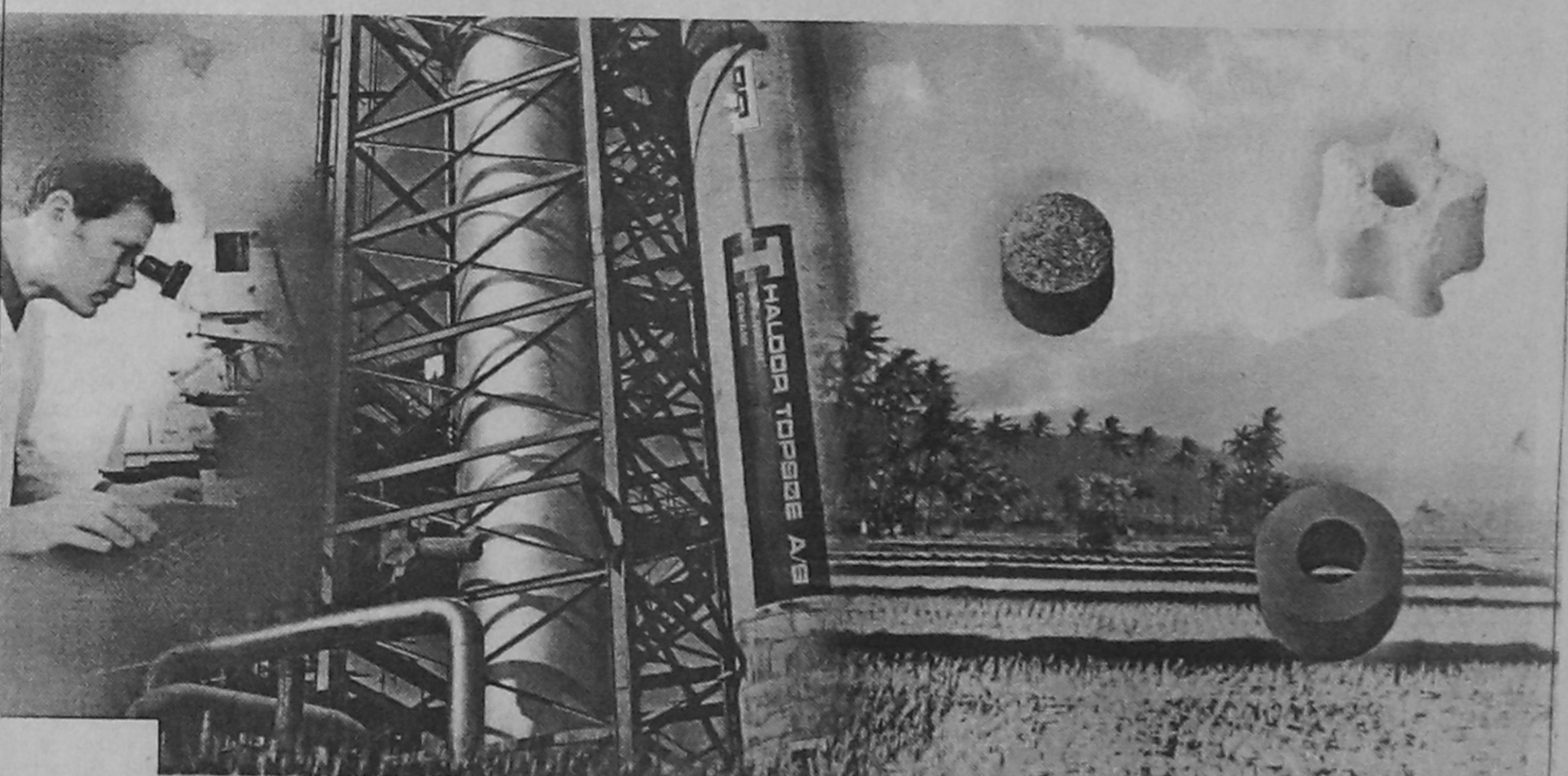
stay on for 15 years, and instead of donating the help as a kind of accidental drop from the air to scattered geographical destinations, Denmark has switched to the so-called sector programmes where a development plan for a whole sector, for instance farming, health or education, is prepared by Denmark, the receiving country and other donor countries.

A common denominator for all Danish development aid is that it must benefit the poorest part of the population. Another headline in all programmes is that they must benefit the women and the environment.

The Danish attitude should be seen in the context of its refugee policy. Persecuted people are received in the country to a great extent, but the Danes would naturally prefer — particularly for the sake of the refugees themselves — that they could remain in their home countries. If the refugee problem is to be solved, it is vital to work against civil war, violence, political persecution, poverty and disease.

That is exactly what Denmark is trying to do with its grand aid to development, democratisation and conflict prevention.

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