

# Denmark Workers' Communist Party of Denmark – APK The Working Class and Labour Aristocracy in Denmark Today- By Dorte Grena

Reformists and revisionists agree with the bourgeoisie and well-paid bourgeois scientists that the working class is heading for extinction, and that it has outplayed its historical role in a complex modern society.

Social democrats have persistently claimed that classes, class society and class struggle would disappear with the so-called 'state of general welfare' as seen in the Nordic countries. Capitalism could be made human and almost social just following the line of class collaboration and reformism.

According to the widespread theory of the 'middle class society,' the working class will gradually become smaller and be educated and transformed into a growing middle class that will be the most important social force. According to this theory, the population of a given society is often described as one large middle class, except for some marginalised groups of rich and poor at each end of the scale.

Another version is the idea that the working class has been incorporated into one large group of wage earners and has common class interests with employed leaders and high ranking functionaries.

At the present juncture of acute class contradictions, some reformists have rediscovered the working class – but as a class with new characteristics, that has shrunk to a minority of the working population, in Denmark 47 percent. They have reduced the working class to comprise only people employed as skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled workers, while everyone thrown out of the labour market as unemployed – or as a consequence of neoliberal 'reforms' - now supposedly belongs to another class – the underclass – comprising 20 percent of the population.

In fact the working class still is the largest and most important class force. But the working class of today is – due to objective developments – much more complexly composed and with a wider range of living conditions. We must study these changes in order to develop our politics and tactics as the communist party of the working class.

The working class and 'neoliberal' imperialism

The division of labour in 'neoliberal' imperialism and its 'globalisation' has meant a higher level of education of both skilled and semi-skilled workers in the high-tech part of production that is left in Denmark.

The technological development of the means of production with its increased digitalization and industrial robots has made many jobs outdated and redundant and created a number of new labour functions, especially consisting in supervision of production, which demand other capacities than before.

At this time we see a massive demand from the bourgeoisie for changes in the educational system through a series of reforms, streamlined to fit the needs of the corporations.

The working class itself and its various groups and strata are thus differently composed from some years ago. We also notice increasing differences between the living and working conditions and wages of these different groups and strata. The divide-and-rule policy of the capitalists has meant paper fortunes for some in the shape of pension systems, home ownership and tax benefits, while others have lost their income, pension and home with the reforms of the unemployment system and others.

The semi-skilled and unskilled workers have been and remain the most class conscious group. It is probably the group that has changed most dramatically during the neoliberal European Union governments of Fogh Rasmussen, Thorning Schmidt and the present one of Lars Løkke Rasmussen. Several hundred thousand unskilled jobs have been moved to countries with greater super-profits, notably in Asia and Eastern Europe, or they have been solicited in the 'open market' of the EU to foreign subcontractors, bringing their own cheap labour.

More than a quarter of all semi-skilled and unskilled jobs have disappeared since 2000. In industry alone these account for more than half of the semi-skilled and unskilled jobs. The massive unemployment caused has especially been felt among women workers.

The semi-skilled and unskilled workers are under heavy pressure by the social dumping of cheap labour by the European Union and the tax-financed social dumping of the public sector in the shape of different workfare systems, where you work for the small social benefits you may receive.

More than one third of all industrial jobs of both skilled and unskilled workers have disappeared since 2000; this has been accelerated by the capitalist crises. Denmark has witnessed the biggest fall in industrial production of any European Union country within the country itself, with the exception of Ireland.

According to the employers and the bourgeoisie this has happened because Danish labour contracts, safety regulations and 'high social benefits' are harmful to their cost capabilities and competitiveness.

But the truth is that labour productivity has risen sharply, and at even higher rates since the crises of 2008. In recent years industrial companies have seen the highest increase. The level of productivity (the value produced per hour) is estimated by EuroStat at 425 Danish kroner an hour (approximately \$71 US) for industrial employees – one of the highest figures in the European Union.

Concerning the share of wages of the workers – that is the part of the value created that is spent on wages (the value of the special commodity labour) new figures show that it is now less than its historical average. In the year 2000 it was at the lowest point since 1966. This also means that the surplus value – the part of the value created by the workers that is appropriated by the capitalists, their unpaid labour – has increased, both relatively and in absolute figures.

This testifies to the fact that the competitive ability of Danish industry is very good. We see a high level of exploitation of the workers, high quality, big earnings and profits. Today only a quarter of the working class is employed in industry and construction. Another quarter is employed in the public sector – taking care of the sick and elderly, as day care workers, etc. A third quarter is employed in trade and transport – as drivers, shop assistants, cleaners and so on, while the last quarter works in a number of smaller branches.

One out of every five persons employed is termed a 'non-typical employee'. That means working in temporary and limited jobs, as substitutes, modern day labourers employed by the hour. They have fewer rights and often no pension. One out of four are working part time. The share of part time workers in retail trade is around 75 percent. More and more people cannot survive on one income alone and have to combine different jobs to make a living.

The working class is increasingly composed of people of different nationalities, languages, trade union organisations and traditions. The 'open' internal market of the European Union has induced the employers to engage in social dumping of cheaper labour force from the poorer EU countries. These are workers who are forced to seek employment away from their homeland and families. Today 9 percent of those employed in Danish firms are foreign nationals, mostly workers. In addition there are people on contract with foreign employers who are working in Denmark, and there also is a group illegally traded to the country, who have no rights at all.

While the number of workers from neighbouring countries like Sweden and Germany is decreasing, the largest new groups of workers, around half, come from Eastern Europe, especially from the Baltic Countries, Poland, Ukraine and Romania. Large public construction projects, as for instance metro, railways and bridges, have only a few Danish workers.

Foreign workers make up half of those working as cleaners and a quarter of the cleaning industry. They make up one out of four in hotel and service and one out of five in agriculture, slaughterhouses and restaurants. Trade and transport has the largest number of foreign employees, while industry employs half of this number. Health service is the fastest growing business in terms of foreign workers.

A growing number work as part of a multinational labour force employed in Danish global companies such as Maersk, Arla or Carlsberg that are spread over many countries, or in a foreign corporate group placed in Denmark. This underlines the necessity of the workers' international struggle and solidarity.

The conglomerate ISS World with more than half a million employees in 51 countries is the fourth largest employer in the world, only surpassed by Wal-Mart, Group Four Securicor (G4S) and Tesco, ahead of companies such as McDonald's and Siemens.

A process of mass ejection from the labour market has been going on throughout the economic crises, with the reduction of social security and a whole series of reactionary neoliberal reforms – prominently among these un-employment security and benefits. This affects among others people who are dependent on social security schemes, many who are ill or in poor health. A number of people are kicked or left out of these, with no income at all, and officially have to be supported by a partner.

This process also makes the stratum outside or underneath the working class – traditionally called the lumpen proletariat (the proletarians in rags) – grows. They constitute a group of people surviving from one day to the next, outside or on the fringe of the labour market – including homeless people, the mentally ill, addicts, prostitutes and people without legal papers.

The working class constitutes the majority of the Danish population. Today it is more complex than ever before – both economically, in terms of education, socially and culturally. But there is one common feature of all working class people: They are part of the class that create social values; they are part of the class with an objective interest in revolutionary change and in building socialism.

Bourgeois ideology and the social roots of opportunism

The working class is the main force of the class struggle.

This is the objective side. The subjective side is how the working class and its party acts, struggles and develops; If it pursues the line of class struggle or a line of class collaboration; If it moves towards the revolution or away from it.

It is the struggle for the minds and the hearts of the working class and to provide the necessary theory to win the struggle for socialism.

Every day we are exposed to a flood of bourgeois propaganda, designed to make us think of anything other than to change the world. When we as a communist party speak about opportunism within the working class, we are talking about political currents pretending to have working-class, left or even revolutionary policies, but in fact are not – like reformism, revisionism or Trotskyism. They may sound quite convincing, but their phrases and illusions about improving capitalism dissolve into hot air when they are put to the test of practice.

These opportunist currents are not the result of ignorance or naivety. Their purpose is to split the working class and prevent the unification of the revolutionary forces. They do not disappear and leave the stage, even though they are proven wrong all the time. On the contrary, the building of the communist party, the unification of the revolutionary forces and organising on a mass scale on the basis of the line of class struggle can only make progress by defeating the opportunist voices of defeat.

Opportunism has objective roots and stems from objective interests, bearing the characteristics of social strata outside the working class. The most important social bases of opportunism are twofold – a special social stratum at the top of the working class, the so-called labour aristocracy, and the intelligentsia, primarily petty bourgeois intellectuals.

In Denmark the labour aristocracy ranges from the heads of the reformist trade union and party bureaucracy and the managements of trade union related companies to ordinary trade union and party functionaries, technocrats and privileged shop stewards, including also some privileged workers.

More than one hundred years of social democratic reformism has made the labour aristocracy an institution, among others of the cooperative companies that originated from the labour movement, and gradually were transformed into the streamlined companies of today operating entirely on market premises.

The main Danish labour organisation – the social democratic trade union federation LO – has its own system of education for class collaboration, partly financed by contributions from the employers' unions.

During the last few decades we have seen a number of new so-called trade unions. They offer membership at a much lower price than the ordinary trade unions. They are the so-called 'yellow', splittist organisations such as the Christian Trade Union with 700 functionaries. These

organisations do not sign any labour contracts with the employers and they have abandoned the right to strike. Their members work as scabs at times of conflict between the real trade unions and the employers and their organisations. The yellow organisations count for four percent of the workers and employees, while the conventional reformist trade unions organise around 67 percent. This makes them among the highest ranking in the EU, although the level of organisation has actually decreased for a number of years.

The lives of the labour aristocrats are quite different from the lives of the trade union members who pay their salaries. Their lucrative wages, pensions and jobs differ sharply from the much lower paid labour of the trade union members, marked by attrition, job uncertainty and insecurity, terms of employment and work hours. They are not subjected to a constant pressure to raise productivity, or two percent yearly cutbacks as in the Danish public sector, or rationalisations, nor do they see their workplace outsourced, privatised or moved abroad.

You are not automatically transformed into a labour aristocrat by becoming a shop steward or having another position of trust from your co-workers. But the danger is obvious in the back-patting reformist trade union hierarchy. The process of corruption is an objective mechanism, characterised by material cash advantages or certain privileges enjoyed by the corrupted. Subjectively a trade union leader may at one moment be a labour aristocrat of the classic type and the next a person of class struggle – but unfortunately also the other way around, which is the tendency when a strong communist party does not exist. The higher the rank in the labour aristocracy, the more one is bourgeoisified.

In the long run even the most honest trade union leader is only able to resist the corruption of the labour aristocracy by the support of the communist party and the consistent line of class struggle. In the original revolutionary communist party in Denmark – DKP (1917-56) and its Marxist-Leninist successor DKP/ML (1978-97) – it was the rule that trade union and parliamentary leaders should be considered as party functionaries, paid by the party. They would deliver their bribe salary to the party and keep a sum equalling an ordinary worker's pay.

Back in 1892 Friedrich Engels spoke about an 'aristocracy inside the working class' in England, signifying a privileged minority of the workers, as contrasted to the great majority. This privileged minority originated as a result of the profits of Britain's colonial monopoly. Lenin broadened and clarified this analysis in the light of the emergence of imperialism, stressing that the imperialist bourgeoisie in a number of countries is able to bribe a part of the best-off workers on the basis of imperialist super-profits.

Due to the special economic position of the labour aristocracy and its social position and influence, it emerges that the class interests of this social strata is connected to the preservation and survival of capitalist society.

The labour aristocracy is better able to defend the politics of class collaboration and thereby the interests of the bourgeoisie than the bourgeoisie itself. This makes this social stratum the most important class basis of the reformist and revisionist parties, the actual material and social basis of their ideology, theory and politics, along with petty bourgeois intellectuals.

It has always been an important principle for the Marxist-Leninists not to make appeals to this special stratum to uphold the demands of the working class or to nurture any illusions that they will fight for them to the end. Every struggle must be fought in spite of them – at times in direct confrontation, as many strikes and labour struggles and protest movements have experienced over and over again.

The labour aristocracy does not constitute a separate class, also not in imperialist countries like Denmark, where it is somewhat larger than in the countries exploited by imperialism. As a social stratum it relates to different social classes.

The strata of the labour aristocrats in Denmark them-selves may also be subdivided

The main figures are the bourgeois politicians of the so-called workers' parties, the parliamentary reformist and revisionist organisations and the heads of the trade union leaderships and their consorts. This upper segment belongs to the monopoly bourgeoisie and includes the managers of the big pension and investment funds of the labour unions. The Danish ATP (workers' special pension) is the biggest pension fund in Europe with a value of one billion dollars, and is an important economic force in Danish society.

What once was created to protect the workers from social misery is now a business on purely capitalist terms. Recently the LO trade union leadership sold the insurance company of the trade unions, Alka, dating back to 1903, to corporate vultures for more than 1.35 billion dollars.

The top leadership of the two largest trade union federations (one for workers in private companies and one for public employees) have for a long time prepared to amalgamate into one huge enterprise, expected to take place by 2019.

The top layer of the trade union leadership and labour aristocracy is a part of both the economic and political elite of today. Together with various bourgeois and social-democratic governments and employers' organisations, they are responsible for the implementation of the greater part of the neoliberal labour policy and social policy of the European Union and the subsequent reforms, which are endorsed in the main labour contracts by negotiations among the three parties – the state, the employers' organisations and the trade union federations.

The middle layer of labour aristocrats consist of the paid trade union leaders and functionaries at lower levels, the employees and functionaries of the administration of the unemployment funds, consultants and paid staffs of the so-called workers' parties. Their salaries and working conditions are also much better than those of the people they are supposed to represent.

The lowest but still privileged layer of labour aristocrats are paid shop stewards, groups of highly paid workers in certain key functions and workers who have been accorded leading functions in the implementation of the concrete work projects.

The characterisation of the labour aristocracy by Lenin in Imperialism as the 'fire extinguishers of the struggle of the working class' has been distorted by certain elements into a claim that the entire working class in the imperialist countries is bribed and bourgeoisified. Such radical sounding 'theories' are sheer left opportunist nonsense. Their purpose is to pull the teeth out of the working class struggle and leave the workers by themselves to the reformists and revisionists.

The other main social basis of opportunism is the intellectuals, the intelligentsia. This is a social strata, not a class, outside of the working class and the petty bourgeoisie, but with ties to the different social classes in a given society and social system.

With the development of the productive forces and the increased demand for a better educated labour force, and with improved possibilities of education, this group has increased significantly.

Like the labour aristocracy, the intelligentsia as a social stratum may be subdivided into three main categories, according to their class affiliations.

A large part of the lowest layer of intellectuals is more and more proletarianised. This means that their life and working conditions increasingly resemble those of the working class in general, no matter whether they are privately or publicly employed. This also means that they are very harassed and have uncertain work conditions, low wages and attrition.

This is true of large professions like school and kindergarten teachers, nurses and others. During recent years public employees have waged strong struggles for their demands or have been locked out by their employers in the state apparatus, local regions and communities. This was the case with the lockout of the teachers and the closing of public schools in 2013, when a social democratic led government sent the teachers home and closed the schools. As this did not break the fighting spirit of the teachers, they passed legislation making the employers' demands the law. The public employers are the same as the (elected) politicians on different levels.

The lower ranks of the intellectuals – such as students in general – are close allies of the working class, and in times of acute class struggle many of them are won to the side of the workers.

The upper part of academic top officials, the highest echelons of the judicial and executive power, the CEOs of public enterprises – as for instance managers of hospitals and universities – are socially entwined with the bourgeoisie, with whom they share conditions. This upper quite swollen layer serves the interests of the ruling class unconditionally.

Between these two groups are several categories of people who have not made it to the top of society, but who may one day be the right hand of the boss; the next have a time limited project employment, and the third be unemployed with a big debt. They struggle for career and position, a situation they share with parts of the petty bourgeoisie.

Due to their objective conditions of life and work the intelligentsia has no independent class position, but has some specific features making it susceptible to opportunism, and at times to waver between the main classes of capitalist society, the bourgeoisie and the working class.

This is true of its individualism and the fact that knowledge in capitalism is a private value, an asset in the opportunist competition for jobs and career, or else used as private property. This also means a certain susceptibility to illusions and an inclination towards the easy way.

Thus petty bourgeois intellectuals along with labour aristocrats may spread opportunist and reformist ideas and theories in the workers' movement, and indeed also in the communist party. On the other hand, revolutionary intellectuals who join the working class and its cause are of great importance to the struggle of the proletariat and its party. The communist movement is and has been joined by many great revolutionary intellectuals and outstanding cultural figures who have used their creative powers to advance the working class struggle for socialism.

The communist party lives and fights in the midst of bourgeois society, at all times surrounded and attacked by furious anticommunist or anti-revolutionary propaganda and by the hostile activities of its enemies. It is a part of the existing society and is in touch with and affected by the social classes and strata of this society.

Therefore the question of the class composition of the party is so important, making it imperative to secure a decisive majority of workers in the ranks of the party.

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