

DECEMBER 2014 VOL. 1 ISSUE 7

**COPENHAGEN
EDITION**

**Falling in
love with
Denmark
can leave
you broken
hearted**

**Cepos on
liberty and
breaking
free from
the welfare
state**

**Ebola, ISIS
and illegal
immigrants
– welcome
to America**



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The success at the far left

Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen negotiated the national budget while her friends got drunk

THE MURMUR

Being a European affords you with a certain refined edge our American friends can only dream of. While we have a deep cultural history, they will always be nouveau riche upstarts.

Then Black Friday came to Europe. "I got a Dyson but I don't even know if I want it. I just picked it up," hairdresser Louise Haggerty told The Guardian. "I got two coffee makers, two tablets, two TVs and a stereo," Any Blackett added. "I couldn't tell you the prices, but I know they're bargains."

Well so much for our cultural superiority. No more can we look to American excess and shake our heads condescendingly.

It's even more sad that this sort of excessive consumption is good for us. Economies need to constantly grow for some reason that isn't that obvious to people without degrees in economics. It seems be related to positive reinforcement. The better an economy does, the greater the investment in the economy because those doing the investing have confidence in making a return.

Recessions are bad then, not because the economy isn't growing, but because people think they are less likely to reap a reward on their investment. So people don't invest, markets collapse and the rug is pulled out from under the economy.

"Markets are ruled by fear," independent trader Alessio Rastani told the BBC in a 2011 interview. "For most traders we don't really care about fixing the economy, our job is to make money from it."

While unscrupulous bankers and traders are fair targets, we sadly need them. The market economy drives technology and progress that has lifted billions out of poverty. I like my iPhones and holidays abroad. I like that there is meritocracy and working hard and doing well is rewarded.

But I also don't like the massive swirling patch of plastic in the Pacific Ocean, the levelling of rainforest for soya plantations and the impeding climate disaster we are pretty sure we will leave our children to fix. I don't like the idea that we need an underclass working in a low wage economy to produce goods cheaply enough to sustain a constantly growing economy.

This issue isn't an attack on capitalism. Much of our wealth is dependent on the liberal freedoms that Martin Ågerup from Cepos espouses in this issue. But unionisation and workers rights, which Enhedslisten and Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen fight for, has also enabled workers a decent standard of living.

As Schmidt-Nielsen said in her interview, politics is just about conflicts of interest. The status quo is not an outcome decided by one party or another, it's simply the state of equilibrium between opposing sides. Our environment is suffering, but people need jobs. Do the two sides always have to be in conflict, can we accomplish both at the same time? We'll vote for anyone who's got the answer.

THE MURMUR

It is catastrophic that the West has not yet realised that it cannot continue to consume and produce at the same rate as we have done. It's obvious our planet cannot cope, but the machine just continues

JOHANNE
SCHMIDT-NIELSEN

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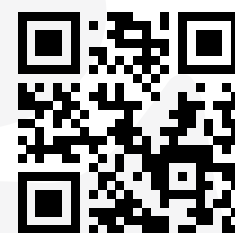


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MONTH IN REVIEW

MOST CONNECTED
Denmark is the world's 'most connected' nation. According to the Information and Communication Technology Development Index, Denmark has the highest rate of mobile phone and internet use. South Korea came in second, while Sweden came in third.



News Oresund

Government agrees 2015 budget
The government successfully negotiated the budget for 2015 together with left wing parties Socialistisk Folkeparti and Enhedslisten. Finance minister Bjarne Corydon (left) stressed its focus on strengthening communities and welfare, as well as pushing for development and growth. The major highlights include changes to social benefits, with 1.5 billion kroner going to support individuals who qualify for no form of unemployment benefits following reforms in recent years.
Up to 75 million kroner will go to public schools to help streamline special needs students into regular classes, while one billion kroner will go towards hiring an additional 600 day care workers in the nation's public institutions. Five billion kroner has been earmarked for health-care and improving cancer treatment. 600 million kroner has been set aside to increase staffing in maternity wards and to decrease patient overcrowding.

GAY COUPLE PUSHED OUT OF TOWN
A lesbian couple has been harassed into leaving the fjord town of Mariager after enduring a series of hate crimes due to their sexuality. The couple recently moved from Aalborg with their children and were looking to settle into quiet country life. Instead they were received by a series of abusive letters, garbage was dumped on their lawn and dog excrement thrown was at their windows.

DANES EATING DIRTY TOMATOES
Most tinned tomatoes eaten in Denmark were picked by poor illegal immigrants according to a recent report by the research center DanWatch. Their investigation found that Denmark's largest supermarket chains mostly stocked tinned tomatoes from southern Italy where up to half a million poor, and often illegal, immigrants work without contracts and in harsh conditions. The study looked closely at thirteen tinned tomato brands sold in supermarkets and revealed that ten contained tomatoes from the same southern Italian town, Puglia. Up to 65 percent of all employees in Italian agriculture are employed without contracts, DanWatch reports, and over 250,000 are illegal immigrants.



flickr / espode

Fraud shuts down shipping fuel firm
After discovering a major leak in funds from their Singapore subsidiary, one of Denmark's largest companies OW Bunker filed for bankruptcy. The ship fuel supplier lost a reported 746 million kroner from the fraud and, with no available credit facilities, the company was forced to close its doors. OW Bunker was valued at over five billion kroner earlier this year in what was Denmark's second biggest IPO in 2014.

Lesley Price

Freedom House



Chechen refugees not wanted by councils
Three Danish towns, Haderslev, Skive and Brønderslev, have written to the Immigration Service claiming that they cannot accommodate any more refugees from Chechnya due to integration difficulties and "bad experiences". While the Immigration Act allows municipalities to preferentially select immigrants from particular countries, the strategy has come under heavy criticism for being discriminatory and racist.

CLAUS MEYER SELLS OUT
Danish gourmet companies Meyer and Løgismose have been sold for a reported 700 million kroner to British capital equity firm, IK Investment Partners. Despite being owned by a foreign company, Claus Meyer of Meyer, and Jakob Grønlykke of Løgismose enterprise, will retain their influence by sitting as board members of the new company, which will consolidate the two.



EXPLODING VEGETABLES

Vegetables have been hard hit by the second warmest autumn on record. The mild weather has most affected red cabbage farmers whose crops have grown too quickly. Some farmers have reported that so many of their cabbages have exploded and rotted that they have lost up to 80 percent of their expected yield. There won't be a red cabbage shortage during the prime Christmas season, however, as this year's total yield is still expected to be higher than normal. Phew.



Alice Henneman

TESTING IMMIGRANTS VALUES

Young immigrants in Copenhagen will be asked to anonymously complete a questionnaire that quizzes them on their attitudes towards democracy. The initiative was headed by the Conservatives and will target immigrants between ages 18 and 29 with non-Western backgrounds. The goal is to improve the government's knowledge of the youth's perspectives on basic democratic values and how they align with Danish society.



FOREIGN AID CUT TO PAY FOR ASYLUM
The government's proposal to redirect 2.5 billion kroner from its foreign aid budget to house asylum seekers and refugees in Denmark has over 30 Danish NGOs fuming. According to the government, the increasing number of asylum seekers coming to Denmark will cost an additional 4.5 billion kroner. Around a fifth of the developmental aid funding will need to be diverted to shoulder the cost.
In protest, left-wing parties and 33 NGOs have signed an open letter urging the public to join them in their effort to have the proposal dropped. Development minister Mogens Jensen defended the bill, saying that the move is still by the book and entirely necessary.

Arrested for seeking shelter
A group of homeless people were arrested and fined for trespassing after taking shelter in a public school yard during a storm. Bakary Camara, a Spanish national, along with 11 others, sought temporary shelter from the weather under an open shed after they were forced out of a Nørrebro hostel due to overcrowding. Police shortly arrived to arrest and move the group to Amager police station, where they were searched, photographed, fingerprinted and fined for occupying an area that their defence lawyers claim is public and open to anyone.

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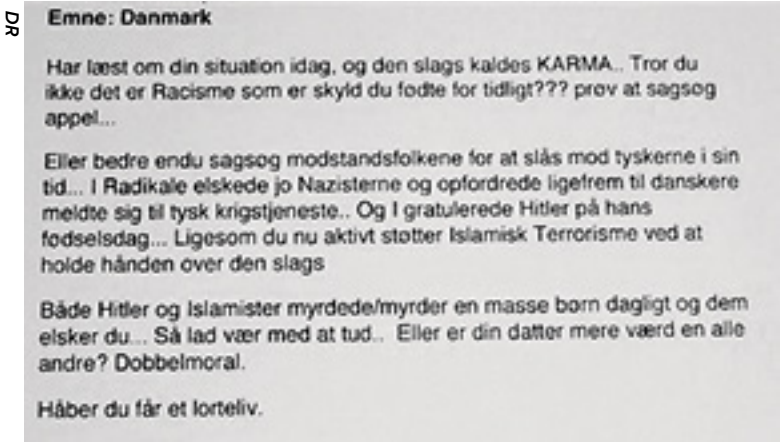
A documentary exposes the vile threats and abuse public women have to suffer

The culture of online sexism has been making headlines lately following the airing of DR's three-part documentary programme *Ti stille kvinde* (Keep quiet woman). In the programme, notable women who participate in the public debate reveal the shocking and hateful messages they have received through emails and social media.

In the first episode MP Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen shared a multitude of messages she has received. One message was the casually chauvenistic, "you don't know what you are talking about little darling", left by an aspiring member of the Konservative party.



MP Zenia Stampe and an abusive email she received. The final lines read: "Both Hitler and the Islamists murdered/murder lots of children every day and you love them ... So stop whining ... Or is your daughter worth more than all the others? Hypocritical. I hope you have a shit life"



Elias Thorsson

A more sinister message was left on her official Facebook page by a Kenni Jensen who wrote: "bite the pillow baby, I'm coming in dry".

Jensen agreed to be interviewed for the programme and when asked about the reasons for writing the thinly veiled rape metaphor, he simply replied "it was just for fun".

Most of the sexist trolls that agreed to participate in the programme expressed a similar view, claiming that their comments were

'just a joke', and that they had never imagined that they would be taken seriously.

MPs Zenia Stampe and Özlem Cekic also shared their similar experiences. One particularly grotesque message to Stampe claimed that the tragic death of her daughter was "karma" for her support of immigration.

In the aftermath of the programme the issues of sexism and the culture of online debating have

been widely discussed, with the hashtag #tistillekvinde becoming very prominent on Twitter.

Reaction to the programme has mostly been shock and surprise at the extent of abuse that women in the public sphere have to endure. More women have since come forward, however, reinforcing the reality of an online world where speaking in ugly tongues is not only expected, it's accepted. **M**

RESEARCH

STARK WARNINGS NEEDED ON PLASTICS

Something is messing up our baby-making organs and we need to do something about it, claim researchers at Rigshospitalet. The culprits are thought to be phthalates and bisphenol A (BPA) - ingredients that are used to make hard plastics more malleable. Neither compound is actually bound to the plastic, so they can be separated over time and released into the air.

In an editorial in Politiken newspaper, the researchers report that in a study of over 3,500 men, women and children, five out of six had detectable levels of phthalates in their urine. The

findings are worrisome as these chemicals are thought to be responsible for malformed genitals, higher rates of infertility, abnormal development in puberty, and a rise in testicular cancer.

The four most common types of phthalates are classified by the environment ministry as toxic to reproductive organs. Consequently, Denmark has a strict ban on the production and sale of food, toys, or materials designed for children up to the age of three, which contain a concentration of phthalates and BPA higher than .05 percent by weight. The EU has a ban that extends this to age 14.

The high level of exposure to

these toxic chemicals is the result of their ubiquity. Phthalates are highly prevalent in the production of building materials, toys, medical instruments and cosmetics. They are, essentially, everywhere. They aren't just in what we eat or touch, but also in our homes, supermarkets and bars.

A person on the metro wearing rubber boots containing phthalates is unknowingly releasing toxins into the air. This type of exposure increases over time and creates an exponential problem. Even during pregnancy, a woman's exposure can affect the developing fetus despite her efforts to live healthily.

Hanne Frederiksen and An-

ders Juul, the chemist and physician involved in the research, have stated that the only way to combat the problem is to phase out "the chemicals that are known or suspected to be endocrine [hormonal] disruptors".

Consumers also need to be more aware of what they are buying. All plastics are labelled to indicate the materials used, which are identified by arrows in a triangle. If there is a '3' inside the triangle, it contains phthalates. Additionally, more pressure should be put on the government to regulate the production of materials in Denmark and procedures for importing goods from elsewhere. **M**

Nereya Ofieno

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The bleak future of the Nordic model

Increasing inequality and rapidly changing demographics challenge the future success of the Nordic model says Norwegian think tank FAFO

WITH THEIR extensive healthcare systems, strong institutions and high levels of equality, the Nordic states have enjoyed almost unparalleled standards of living and economic stability in recent decades.

But a report by Norwegian think tank FAFO suggests that unless some hard decisions and radical changes are made in the coming years, the Nordic model might be heading for trouble.

The report, entitled 'The Nordic Model towards 2030. A New Chapter?', was released last month and lists the key challenges facing the Nordic states – Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Finland. The report indicates that bleak times may be in store for the region, with the real possibility that the model may have all but eroded by the year 2030.

TROUBLE AHEAD

Central to the Nordic challenge is an ageing population, declining labour market participation, decreased unionisation, increased immigration and growing inequality.

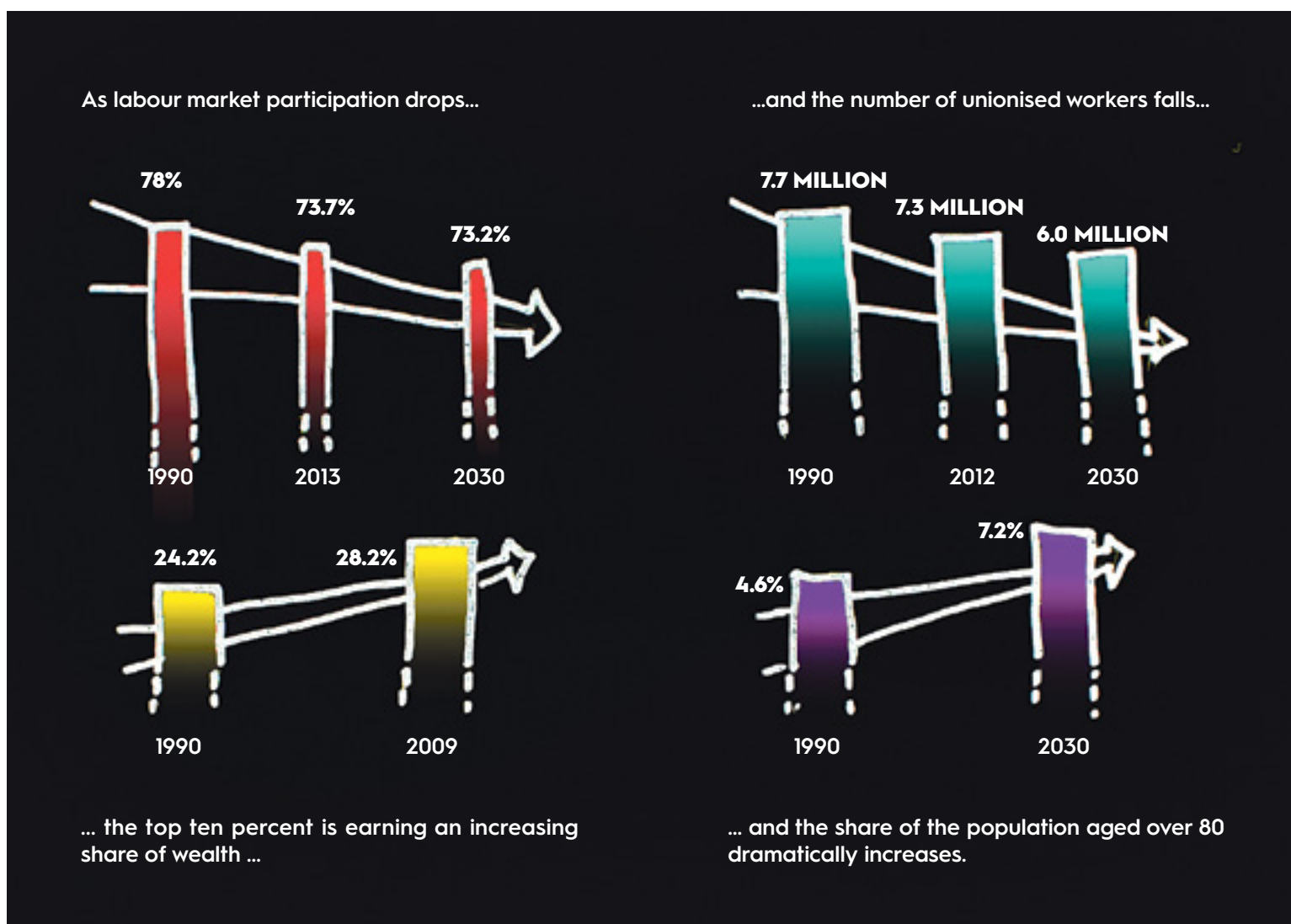
The average age has increased by a month each year since 1990, and it is estimated that the number of people aged over eighty will have doubled to 2.1 million by the year 2030.

As the birth rates continue their slow decline, the increasingly aged population can look forward to being supported by fewer and fewer working age people. The birth rate has tumbled from 123 births per 1000 people in 1990 to 100 in 2013, and this trend is set to continue.

The labour market participation is also expected to continue declining. In 1990, 78 percent of the region's population were of working age. In 2013 the number had fallen to 73.7 and is expected to reach 72.2 percent in 2030.

This combination of factors places an increasingly heavy burden on societies with generous public healthcare and pension schemes.

One saving grace is immigration, which has stabilised populations in the region despite the de-



The number of people aged over eighty will have doubled to 2.1 million by the year 2030

Elias Thorsson

clining birth rate. The number of immigrants in the Nordic states has risen from 750,000 in 1990, to over three million today, accounting for around 13 percent of the population.

RISE IN INEQUALITY

But while immigration has replenished the ageing workforce, it has increased the pressure on welfare programmes and suppressed wages.

Decreased unionisation will also likely impact the labour market. The 7.3 million union members in 2012 represent a drop of 420,000 members since 1990. Should the trend continue, unions can expect to lose a further 1.3 million members by 2030, reducing the influence of organisations that have helped maintain generous unemployment benefits and high standards of living.

While unionisation the level of unionisation is dropping, inequality is rising. Using the Gini coefficient – where 0 is perfect equality and 1 is perfect inequality – inequality across the Nordics rose from 0.22 in 1990 to 0.27 in 2011, and is expected to reach 0.3 in 2030. While the Nordics are renowned for their relative equality, the study found that inequality is rising faster than in comparable European countries, such as France and Germany.

These factors demonstrate the rapid changes taking place in the region. A smaller tax base will have difficulty supporting the ageing population and, as inequality increases and unionisation drops, pressure on reducing wages and welfare will likely develop.

The report's authors argue that while the Nordic model enjoys

widespread political support, complacency is its greatest threat. New ideas are required to ensure that people don't fall out of the system, to increase labour market participation, and to address the pressures of an open labour market. Politicians need to both increase efficiency and equality in order to succeed in adjusting the model to new conditions, but the authors also have a warning:

"It is possible to imagine 'vicious cycles', where politicians bicker, key institutions disintegrate, government measures do not provide the desired results, for example in integration and labour market policies, and the consequences are continued high unemployment, lower employment, growing inequality and increased pressure on the welfare system." **M**



Stemplet

An app to stamp out discrimination

Most people never share their experiences of discrimination, making it a difficult issue to address. But now Copenhageners have a tool at their fingertips to help them do just that, and in the process map exactly how widespread unfair treatment is in the city

BEING TURNED AWAY by a nightclub is an experience most will have the misfortune to suffer. But when a group of young men were turned away from five out of six clubs in one evening, it made newspaper headlines. The reason: they were the children of immigrants.

After Politiken newspaper published the article in 2010, several of the nightclubs were served with fines. The discrimination continued, however, and in a 2012 survey over 10 percent of the city's residents reported being discriminated against. The same survey – commissioned by Copenhagen City Council – found that only three percent of victims reported their experience to the police.

Stemplet – Danish for 'labelled' or 'stigmatised' – wants to address the underreported experiences of discrimination. Two members of the organisation, Firas Mahmoud and Eline Feldman, believes they can strike a blow against discrimination and change what it means to be a Copenhageners.

"It is important that people feel that Copenhagen is for them, regardless of who they are," Feldman says, adding that surveys

"I have it in my hand, with me. It is a tool. So I am also empowered"

ELINE FELDMAN

Nereya Otieno

have found that those who had been discriminated against were less likely to feel at home in Copenhagen, or even call themselves Copenhageners. As a result, discrimination can affect the very identity of a city and undermine the confidence residents have in local government.

"It's a trust issue. The whole campaign has been around trying to make people think and believe this matters – that their experiences matter. And we're listening."

A MATTER OF DATA

Politiken's exposé – and the punishment meted out to nightclubs – was made possible because one of the young men, Jakob Sheikh, was a journalist working for the newspaper. Without these resources, it can be hard to prove discrimination has taken place.

"It's easy for politicians to say it doesn't exist. There is always a question of proof," Mahmoud states. "Some politicians really want to work with us, but they need hard numbers to convince other parties as well."

But while not everyone has a media organisation that can share their experiences, many do

have smart phones. So Stemplet launched an app to enable residents to report their experiences of discrimination in the city, and let the local government know where action needs to be taken.

"I have it in my hand, with me. It is a tool. So I am always empowered," says Feldman.

The app is simple. You start by specifying where and when the discrimination happened. Then you state whether you are a victim or a witness. Lastly, you indicate which type of discrimination was experienced – assault or verbal abuse, for example – and the apparent motivation for the discrimination – ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender or age. The report is anonymous by default, but you are invited to add further information, such as your contact information and more details about the event, if you so choose.

MAPPING DISCRIMINATION

Once Stemplet receives the report, they have the option to contact the authorities, the owner of the location, or even – if a club or bar is involved – the local government department responsible for alcohol licencing.

Experiences of discrimination

are not limited to nightlife, however. In fact, the 2012 study found that people with a majority ethnic background were more likely to experience discrimination when clubbing, while people from a minority culture were more likely to experience discrimination on public transport.

Stemplet's strength is its ability to map and catalogue incidents of alleged discrimination. If a specific area receives a high volume of reports, authorities and city planners can take a closer look. Maybe the area needs better lighting to feel safer, for example.

Ultimately, the app is not meant to target individual offenders. Feldman argues it is more useful in changing how we think discrimination operates.

"It is not our goal to go out and become the police – we just want to figure out how to make the city better."

The app has been met with positive feedback since its launch in June and has been downloaded over 1000 times so far. An English version is now available, and the government is developing a nationwide version, which is set to come out sometime in the spring. **M**



Private photo

Michelle Lucas and Lasse Larving after their wedding in Copenhagen. Their time in the city was short-lived, however, after they gave up battling the immigration system.

I take thee Denmark, for better or for worse

Would you remain in your home country if your foreign-born partner had to reapply every 18 months to stay with you?
Lasse is one of the many Danes who ended up saying no

"I WAS JUST SO DISAPPOINTED," he says after a long pause. "I was disappointed in Denmark for pushing me out because of who I loved, and because I knew that I was leaving over 30 years of my life behind."

Lasse Larving describes the crushing decision to leave Denmark with his Canadian spouse Michelle Lucas after the immigration authorities ruled that she would never be eligible for permanent residence.

"I felt like I never had the opportunity to truly enjoy Denmark," says

Lucas. "I loved parts of it, but in the end I felt like I was being treated like a second-class citizen. You work so hard to be in a place that doesn't seem to even want you, and you start to think, 'what's the point?'"

Given Denmark's wealth, security and generosity, joining its community is rightfully an earned privilege. But strict immigration rules designed to protect this wealth has inflicted collateral damage – couples like Lucas and Larving, who are excluded through the state's attempt to fil-

ter out those deemed unfit for integration.

MOVING TO THE PROMISED LAND

It was a summer vacation fling that grew into marriage. Lucas and Larving met while on holiday in Thailand in 2009. So strong was their bond that Lucas soon moved to Denmark on a working holiday visa.

"I went to school, took Danish classes, and by the end of the year we had to decide what we needed to do – getting married or break-

ing up were basically our only two options," Lucas explains.

The couple were married shortly after in June 2011 in Copenhagen City Hall, the bride in a classic cream cocktail dress with a matching white bow and fascinator, and the groom in a sleek black suit and sneakers. The couple were excited about starting a life together in Copenhagen, and had every intention of enjoying the easy-going Danish lifestyle for many years to come.

For a Danish national to marry a non-EU citizen, they must both

Lesley Price

"There is a great deal of debate as to whether Danish immigration policies breach human rights, especially considering the right to family life. Some of the immigration policies go to the absolute brink of being brought to international courts"

SILVIA ADAMO, EXPERT IN UN AND IMMIGRATION LAW, THE UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

be at least 24 years of age, reside in a Danish apartment of a specific size, and deposit approximately 50,000 kroner in a locked account for five years as collateral. In addition, Danish language requirements must be fulfilled within six months of marriage. It was this strict technicality that eventually lost the couple their right to permanent residency in Denmark – he can stay, she can't.

"We got married on a weekday so we could submit the paperwork the next day," explained Lucas.

After that it was a waiting game, a time Lucas describes as "a miserable hell", which was far more difficult and emotionally taxing than she had anticipated.

"I was just in absolute limbo. I wasn't allowed to leave, I wasn't allowed to work – which was fair enough, but I wasn't even allowed to volunteer," she said.

Six months dragged on with Larving supporting them both, the looming answer constantly weighing heavily on their minds and putting a strain on their relationship.

"When you go through the process, you're torn apart, you don't sleep, you don't eat, you look like shit, and you feel like shit." Larving explained. "You can have a normal day, but as soon as you come home and try to fall asleep, you just think 'what if' and it kills you inside."

After six months, the application was finally approved – they could stay together. Little did they know this right could just as easily be lost.

A COSTLY TECHNICALITY

Lucas began working night shifts

as a pastry chef, sometimes working six days a week and rarely having time off on the weekends. Her new job made it difficult for her to complete Danish classes within the prescribed period of time. This is a strict stipulation required for spouses seeking permanent residence. While she had begun Danish classes on her holiday visa, the classes were not completed consecutively and, as a result, she was told she could never apply for permanent residency.

Without this right, Larving and Lucas would have to apply for a new visa approximately every 18 months under the scheme of 'family reunification' – a visa designed for spouses and accompanying family members. The couple would have to relive the same struggle every time they submitted a new application – an application with no guarantee of approval.

After a difficult deliberation, the couple decided to relocate to Lucas' hometown, Oakville, in the Canadian province of Ontario. They sold their apartment and began preparing for their departure, feeling the misery of countless good-byes and suppressing the anxiety of starting a whole new chapter.

"I felt disowned," said Larving. "Growing up in Denmark, you feel like you're a part of something, you've contributed to make this what it is – and now we've been forced out."

PRESERVING DENMARK

The 'family reunification' scheme has experienced a significant tightening over the past decades, which, according to Silvia Adamo,

an expert in UN and immigration law from The University of Copenhagen, is the result of a variety of societal pressures.

"In 2002, they passed some laws addressing integration 'problems'. But they basically just tightened rules for marriage and family reunification in order to decrease the number of immigrants coming to Denmark," she says.

"Denmark is quite a homogenous country, so the idea that there were people living here who were of another religion or didn't speak Danish very well clashed with this idea of community."

Adamo argues that there is also a clear effort to reduce the number of humanitarian migrants and asylum seekers, and this strategy has been spilling over into cases of family reunification.

"There is a great deal of debate as to whether Danish immigration policies breach human rights, especially considering the right to family life," she explained. "Some of the immigration policies go to the absolute brink of being brought to international courts."

Like Adamo, the couple believes the problem lies not only with the immigration policies, but also with the general attitude towards foreigners in Denmark. Larving feels that aside from Copenhagen, the vast majority of Danes are not open to cultural diversity.

"They have the attitude that everyone is coming to take advantage of the welfare system," Larving claims.

Lucas admits that while their immigration process was stressful,

"When you go through the process, you're torn apart, you don't sleep, you don't eat, you look like shit, and you feel like shit"

LASSE LARVING

they have heard far worse stories.

"It's a vicious circle. People show up and they're not welcome, they become angry and start disliking the Danish culture, and then of course Danes are going to become equally wary. I feel there is so much wrong with the immigration system. Not just that it prevents people from coming in, but also in the way that it treats people."

Professor Sune Lægaard, an expert in migration and integration at Roskilde University, says politically and socially there is a strong protectionism toward maintaining Denmark's identity. He argues, however, that people aren't against the idea of multiculturalism, but are simply concerned with the misuse of the welfare state.

"Many immigrants are a net cost for the welfare state and this is a very real economic problem," he said. "Some who come to Denmark, often for very good reasons, probably won't be extremely productive for at least a few years, as they may not have the necessary education or qualifications. It's not that we don't like immigrants, we just want to preserve the welfare state."

Larving found work in his field as a logistics professional, while Lucas is now in a dream job as assistant food editor at the Canadian magazine Chatelaine. They fell through the cracks in Denmark and found their place somewhere else. While Canada reaps the reward of their labour, Denmark is saved the burden of a couple whose complicated relationship was deemed too much of a threat to the country's famous social cohesion. **M**



IBIS has worked in Mozambique since 1975 to raise educational standards, improve democratic conditions and increase transparency in the country's resources sector.

Money doesn't trickle down, it floods offshore

To IBIS it's rather simple: paying taxes is not just a personal expense, it is the moral thing to do. Getting people to pay it is the tricky part

LUXEMBOURG MADE HEADLINES

last month when it was revealed that the small European state was ground-zero for tax avoidance. While the schemes were entirely legal, they were ethically dubious and sparked uproar across the continent.

Tax evasion is a hot topic, and was high on the agenda at the recent G20 Summit in Brisbane, Australia. NGOs are also increasingly focussing on taxes to resolve global issues. Among these NGOs is IBIS in Denmark, which campaigns for fairer taxation around the world.

"The reason why people like Obama and Cameron – who are hardly left wing revolutionaries – are talking about tax avoidance is because they can see that the public coffers are drying up, and that it is impacting people from Denmark to Zambia. Super rich corporations are running away from the bill of maintaining society, while the rest of us are left with the cost," explains Lars Koch head of politics and campaigning for IBIS.

If we really wanted to put an end to tax havens we could do it tomorrow

**LARS KOCH,
HEAD OF POLITICS AND CAMPAIGNING, IBIS**

Elias Thorsson

The organisation is located above a row of noisy bars just off the Town Hall Square. The flickering light show from the enormous glass-faced offices of the Confederation of Danish Industry, visible through Koch's window. Their resources stand in stark contrast to Koch's. As the interview starts, a young female intern interrupts us. She is the other half of IBIS' tax unit.

A TAXING INEQUALITY

IBIS recently launched the campaign *Ingen skattekrone i skattele* (No tax money in tax havens), which aims at put an end to both the illegal and legal ways companies use to avoid paying taxes.

According to IBIS, Denmark is losing out on between three to five billion kroner annually in tax fraud, which excludes the higher number lost to legal tax avoidance. The numbers for the developing world are much higher, however, with an estimated 900 billion in taxes being

illegally syphoned out of their economies.

"Since we were founded almost fifty years ago, we have worked towards supporting the developing world, especially in the areas of education, as well as assisting with issues of poverty in general," says Koch. "Over the last six years we have started focussing a lot on taxes because it's the most sustainable way of improving conditions in the poorer parts of the planet."

Koch argues that tax collection is directly related to worsening global inequality. According to IBIS, taxing the world's billionaires a mere 1.5 percent since the start of the 2008 Great Recession could have saved the lives of around 23 million people.

"The debate about inequality, which has been rapidly increasing, is in many ways connected to the tax debate," he says. "In recent years the number of dollar billionaires has quadrupled, and about one third of the world's growth is going to the top of our socie-

ties. And these are not the people who are paying taxes, because they have ways of hiding their money away in tax havens. We have also seen that increased inequality does not promote growth like the market fundamentalists want to claim, but in fact directly harms it."

AN INTERNATIONAL PROBLEM

Globalised finance doesn't make taxing companies any easier. Money slips in and out of markets so quickly that governments often have great difficulty pinning it down and taking their cut.

"Our tax minister has ramped up the fight against tax havens, but if you have countries within the EU like the UK, Ireland, Holland and Luxembourg that all have built in loopholes, then it is very limited what we can do on our own," he says. "If we are really going to address the issue then we will need a lot of international cooperation and effort."

As the discussion of tax avoid-

ance and tax havens increases, so have the efforts taken by governments to address the issue. Last year the G20 expressed explicit support for the OECD's seven-point plan to tackle tax avoidance, which includes combating predatory tax competition between countries, and tougher rules on moving 'intangible' assets, such as intellectual property rights, to tax havens. While nation states have started to take the matter seriously, Koch believes that the issue is also having a negative effect on competition in the private sector by rewarding companies that aggressively utilise loopholes and tax havens, while punishing those that don't.

"There was an article in Politiken the other day about the company Saxo Books, which had moved its headquarters to Luxembourg, where Amazon is based. In Lux-

embourg the tax on selling books is only three percent, compared to the 25 percent here. They can therefore offer prices far below what the companies based in Denmark can, which gives them an unfair advantage on the competition, and hurts companies that are based here."

THE RIGHT THING TO DO

Those in support of tax competition argue that consumers are eventually rewarded through lower prices. But Koch argues that cheaper consumer products don't make up for the damage caused by companies that refuse to participate in the societies whose markets they depend upon.

"I find it reprehensible that companies that use our roads, make money from selling their products here and employ our ed-

ucated workforce refuse to take part in paying for our society," he says. "An issue like tax avoidance has a lot to do with perspective, these companies and individuals see this from the point that this is legal, but does that mean it is moral?"

Koch wants companies to regard paying taxes as a social responsibility that they feel morally obligated to address, along the lines of civil liberties and the environment. And given the public support for fairer taxation, he believes that it is possible.

"There are some people out there that have extreme views, who feel that corporate taxes should just be abolished, and therefore don't see this as a problem. But the smart people can see that the major corporations are paying less than small and medi-

Increased inequality does not promote growth like the market fundamentalists want to claim

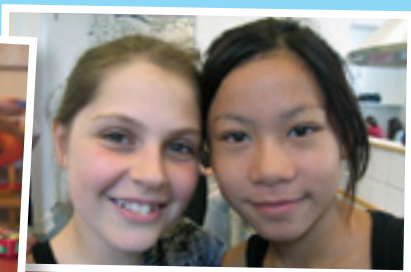
LARS KOCH

um sized ones, and that you and I are paying a higher percentage of our wages than the billionaires."

With the world's biggest and most powerful nations and organisations addressing the issue, it's tempting to think a solution is well on its way. But Koch argues that while the technicalities might be simple, large political and economic interests remain a major challenge.

"If we really wanted to put an end to tax havens we could do it tomorrow. If big markets like the EU and the US would say to the Cayman Islands 'if you don't deliver information about our citizens, and if you don't make sure that our citizens are paying taxes than we won't cooperate with you anymore'. Then the Cayman Islands would cease to exist as a tax haven." **M**

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The halls of Reagan and Thatcher: the fight for freedom from government

Cepos is leading the charge for economic liberty and personal freedom. For while Denmark's economic problems are many, there is one simple cure – lowering taxes and reducing the size of the welfare state

DENMARK'S FOREMOST free market think tank Cepos lies a stone's throw from the royal palace Amalienborg, on a street that translates as 'landed Count', Landgreven. Hidden in a maze of streets, I miss the entrance and end up by the Michelin-starred restaurant Clou, where a homeless man is sleeping outside under a pile of newspapers.

"We are a policy-oriented think tank, which means that we are always thinking of ways to improve society in a manner that is sustainable and that also increases personal liberty, responsibility and economic freedom – factors that are all strongly connected to wealth and prosperity," says Martin Ågerup, the director and founder of CEPOS who greets me when I finally find the door.

He leads me through the hallway of the office and into their main meeting room. On the way I spot a picture of Ronald Reagan depicted in the style of the iconic Shepard Fairey Obama poster. We sit down across from each other in a meeting room littered with pictures of politicians and other notable persons. As we start to talk, I notice that right behind Ågerup is a picture of him shaking hands with the late Margaret Thatcher.

IN THE STATE OF DENMARK

"Generally speaking Denmark has a very strong society and a strong economic model. To a large extent this is based on Denmark being a very liberal society with a lot of economic freedom," he says. "People tend to forget that and focus on one area where we are not so liberal – the large public sector, and the taxes that follow from it, as well as the very large redistribution through the tax and welfare system."

CEPOS' stance on society is firmly rooted in market fundamentalism and a belief that the

freer the market, the better off we all are. This inevitably places the organisation's view on society in line with the right wing of parliament, but Ågerup is adamant that they have no ties to any of the political parties.

"I want us to continue with the process that we are already undertaking. We need to lower some of the taxes, and we should lower the average tax burden by ten percent, over the next ten years," he says.

"We also need to make the public sector more productive. I'm not saying that public employees are lazy, but they are a part of a system that hinders their productivity and creativity. Many public employees say that they are being told too much what to do, and that there is too much bureaucracy."

Ågerup is charming and his delivery switches seamlessly between heavy brow firmness and light-hearted humour. He has a knack for communicating complicated issues in a simple manner, and draws upon relatable analogies when dissecting topics like reforming the welfare system.

"Let's say you went to the launch of a new smart phone. If it were equivalent to the public sector, the producer might say 'we have made this 1000 kroner better'. But what does that mean? Then they'll say, 'it costs 1000 kroner more, so it is 1000 kroner better'. This is how it works with the welfare system: the politicians say 'we have increased spending by 2 billion kroner and isn't that fantastic?' But what has really come out of it? We need to come away from this idea that we need to increase input to get better output."

ON IMMIGRATION AND LABOUR

In recent years a split has begun to emerge between the purely economically minded right-wing, and those more focussed on culture and values. In an ideal world of



Loophole? You mean tax deduction. Martin Ågerup in Cepos' offices.

free markets and personal liberties, people would be allowed to shop around for a country to settle in, while nation states competed over a workforce unbound by their country of origin.

However, as the West witnesses a revival of right wing populism, these arguments lose out to a conservative stance on immigration that seeks to keep foreigners out. The situation is no different in Denmark, and I am curious to know what Ågerup's views on the issue are.

"All parties look at the polls and what voters are thinking. Some issues shift votes and this is one of those issues. It is true that Dansk Folkeparti (DF) and Venstre have a very strong position on

immigration, but all parties have shifted their position since the nineties closer to what DF was then. Now all parties have moved their position, with certain exceptions, not just the right wing."

Ågerup admits that CEPOS do little work on immigration, but he believes that the main problems facing immigration today have to do with the welfare system, and economic controls over the market.

"We have an inclusion problem, in that we don't have enough entry level jobs. So the metaphor is that you have a ladder, and we need more steps on it. Currently the lowest steps are too high, so some people can't enter the labour market. That means that people with

Christopher Rosenfeldt

Elias Thorsson

low skills, who maybe don't speak the language that well, can't get employment. We need to have a lower de facto minimum wage. Right now it is around 100 kroner, but I'm not saying we should go down to 60 like in Germany, as we have a higher cost of living, but maybe 90 like in Sweden."

TAXES AND INEQUALITY

The recent debates about inequality and tax avoidance through loopholes inevitably come up, and Ågerup has a very critical stance on both issues.

"First of all we need to think how do you define what a loophole is? Denmark has agreements with other countries, and corporations look at these agreements and figure out where they are best served. What do you do when you look at your taxes? You look at what you can deduct. You don't say 'I'm not going to deduct that because I want to give the

government more money', we don't expect private individuals to do that, so should the CEO of a company go to the board and say that he chose not to deduct the taxes he could have done? That is not his job."

This view on the tax debate falls very much in line with the view free market fundamentalists have on taxes in general, and Ågerup is not shy to admit that he feels that, "corporate taxes are a very bad thing". He also believes that it is good for consumers that states compete with each other on taxes to attract corporations, as lower taxes mean lower prices on the goods and services they produce.

When I prod him on the issue of inequality, he once more draws on an everyday analogy.

"When we talk about equality we are talking about several different things. I don't think that anyone would disagree that we want to be treated equally, in front of the

law for example," he says.

"But then there is equality of outcome. If you compare this to a football match, you want the referee to treat both teams equally. Otherwise the other team would be very unhappy and you could say that the game was unfair. But you wouldn't say that it was an unequal result if one team was better and won the game 6 - 0, you would just say that the better team won."

Ågerup frames the issue in terms of fairness: it is unfair to take away people's money to give to their neighbour who earns less. The left wing's desire to redistribute wealth, he argues, is driven by a hysterical fear of ending up like the US.

"There has been a development in the US that we have neither seen here nor in most EU countries, in which the earnings of the top one or ten percent have really taken off compared to everyone else. It is a

We need to lower some of the taxes, and we should lower the average tax burden by ten percent, over the next ten years

MARTIN ÅGERUP,
DIRECTOR OF
CEPOS

very US specific issue, and people on the left are pretending that we have the same situation here, but we don't. Some people like to say 'let's just put a tax on the rich', but that hits a lot of people that have made their money in a very good way, entrepreneurs for example. The way I see it, if my neighbour starts earning more money than me then that is a great thing, as it increases the wealth in society."

As our talk winds down I make a joke about the picture of him and Thatcher, which leads into a talk about his university days in Bristol in the eighties and the rigidity of the English class system. He reminisces about the Eton boys, and how people were categorised by their accents into certain types. It would seem that not even Denmark's most dedicated right wingers can fully escape Scandinavia's culture of class awareness. **M**

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"Being able to express myself isn't a gift. I don't believe in talent"

INTERVIEW Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen was brought up to have an opinion about the society she lives in and, at age 23, became the political spokesperson of the far left party Enhedslisten. It's a position earned through hard work and dedication and driven by an ambition to support society's weakest and demand that businesses are held socially responsible

OUR EARLY twenties are for transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. We work service jobs to finance a lifestyle of sleeping too little and drinking too much. It's a time of study, self-discovery and freedom before children and work tie us down into a more mundane life. Well, not for everyone.

"It was hard – while my friends were out partying and getting drunk, I was spending late nights in parliament negotiating the budget," Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen told me as we stood in the elevator after the interview had finished.

It made me think. We are both 30 years old, but while I was starting a Masters degree in 2007, she had been elected to parliament for the Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten). When she was re-elected in 2011, I was six months into my first job as a journalist and still living at home. Fun fact: I still live with my dad.

Her prodigal political ability is both fascinating and suspicious. Age 23, she was the youngest ever candidate to represent a party in a national television debate. What sort of person feels prepared to take on that level of responsibility and not only succeed, but thrive?

"I spend a lot of time preparing. Even if the debate is only seven minutes long I can spend two

It's human to be afraid of what we don't know. But as a politician you have a choice: you either fan the flames or try and solve the conflicts that exist and reduce the angst

Peter Stanners

hours practicing. Being able to express myself isn't a gift. I don't believe in talent," she says, dismissively.

But I'm not buying it. Schmidt-Nielsen is the Enhedslisten's first political spokesperson, appointed after she was elected to parliament in 2007. In 2011, after four years in the role – Enhedslisten is run collectively and has no leader – the party tripled its electoral success and amassed 6.7 percent of the vote. While fellow left wing parties have since stumbled, Enhedslisten is now polling at almost ten percent.

It's an incredible feat for a party whose 2011 party platform called for Denmark to become a communist and classless society. Schmidt-Nielsen's communication skills are evident during the interview, where she remains on message as she deftly manoeuvres and sidesteps my attempts to get her to criticise her political opponents.

"I would rather answer a positive question," Schmidt-Nielsen says after being asked to identify Enhedslisten's primary ideological rivals. "Enhedslisten stands for increasing the influence that people have over their lives and for increasing sustainability. It is catastrophic that the West has not yet realised that it cannot continue to consume and produce at the same rate as we

have been doing. It's obvious our planet cannot cope, but the machine just continues."

Schmidt-Nielsen has no issue with being the party figurehead. When I return with a photographer a few weeks later she immediately takes charge, guiding us to a bright stairwell where she slips into an uninhibited casual pose.

As I hold the flash above my head for the photographer, I notice she has on the same outfit she always wears – black trousers and a white shirt.

"I've tried to never be accused of using my gender to my advantage, so for years I have worn this uniform. Sadly it's much easier for women to be labelled less serious than men – a short skirt or slightly revealing top is all it takes," she explained during our first meeting.

"There are politicians and female politicians. [The prime minister] is known as Gucci Helle, but no one would have called [former PM] Armani Anders, even though his suits are probably just as expensive. Women are still judged by their appearance and abilities as mothers."

Schmidt-Nielsen is disappointed by the debate about gender equality that, she argues, is too focussed on extremes. The lack of gender equality is a pervasive issue that affects all wom-

en, not just those trafficked into the prostitution industry, or who are kept out of male-dominated boardrooms.

She has long campaigned for more action in the field, and in 2009 Schmidt-Nielsen facetiously presented a pair of red socks to then equal rights minister Karen Jespersen. The Red Sock Movement (Rødestrømpebevægelsen) campaigned for gender equality in the 1970s and Jespersen was a notable member – the socks were awarded to Jespersen after she finally presented a law 13 months into her ministerial role.

YOUTH REBELLION

Schmidt-Nielsen has a history in direct action and, concerned by the role of supranational organisation in redistributing the world's resources, attended global summits during the rise of the anti-globalisation movement as a teenager. Her interest in tackling social issues developed on a far more local level, however.

"I grew up in a commune in the countryside together with my mother and 29 other families. I was brought up to take a political position on the communities and societies I belong to, and question the truths we are given – and to think that's OK," she says, adding that she moved into student politics to address the failings she witnessed around her.



Christopher Rosenfeldt

"I was in a class with lots of kids who did badly and didn't get the help they needed. Despite living in such a plentiful society, I couldn't understand why we didn't help these kids. That was my starting point for politics."

In Danish politics you have a choice; embrace globalised trade but minimise immigration, or be mistrustful of corporations and supranational governance and leave the borders open.

It's a crude generalisation, but it illustrates Enhedslisten's priorities relative to its political neighbours as well. In its party program, Enhedslisten argues the fight against capitalism requires opposing institutions including the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation.

Schmidt-Nielsen is quick to point out that her party isn't opposed to international cooperation, it's the only way to solve environmental and climate issues, which are central to Enhedslisten's mission.

"The European Union is built on a political foundation that listens more to the interests of large businesses than the interests of workers and the environment. In a globalised world where capital and labour travel across borders, we need international answers. But the EU prevents Denmark from forcing businesses to provide apprenticeships, or agree to collective bargaining agreements in exchange for taking public contracts, arguing that it is anti-competitive."

The Copenhagen Metro is an example of a public infrastructure project that has failed to live up to Enhedslisten's demands. In 2013, several years into the construction of the new City Ring, only two apprenticeships had been given, leading Enhedslisten to demand that the transport minister take action.

Collective bargaining agreements and social clauses make jobs more expensive, but Schmidt-Nielsen argues that they pay off in the long term.

I was brought up to take a political position on the communities and societies I belong to and question truths we are given

"The labour movement believes that we increase freedom by being organised. This has been attacked aggressively in recent years where the public sector is cast as an enormous burden around the neck of private companies. But private businesses wouldn't be doing so well if there wasn't a well-functioning day care system, excellent health care and a security net to catch the unemployed," she says.

"Scandinavia would have gone bankrupt decades ago if redistribution didn't work."

MONEY MATTERS

Is jealousy of the wealthy and accomplished the other side of the coin to campaigning on behalf of society's most vulnerable? The right wing thinks so, arguing that generous welfare keeps people dependant on the state because it lessens their incentive to work, while high taxes are essentially a punitive attack on those who've managed to succeed.

Schmidt-Nielsen doesn't share

this worldview. When I walked into her office I found her flipping through the copy of The Murrur I had sent her a week earlier. She was keen to know how it was funded and where the money came from. She sees money as a corrupting force, not only in the media, but especially in politics, where Enhedslisten wants tighter and more transparent financing regulations.

"Citizens have a right to know who is financing political parties. It makes a difference that Danske Bank has financed Vens-tre when the same party was negotiating bank bail out packages worth hundreds of millions kroner. And isn't it interesting that the four parties that Maersk finances, were the four parties that agreed on its North Sea oil deal?" she says without a trace of humour.

"We know that if lots of capital is accumulated in the hands of the few it means that influence condenses too, that's how our society works."

What about Liberal Alliance, I ask, are you concerned that a Libertarian anti-welfare party has managed to find a niche in parliament?

"Despite getting millions and millions of kroner in support from Saxo Bank, Liberal Alliance can still only attract around five percent of the vote," she says waving the question away.

"It's often claimed that the left wing is in crisis, but Enhedslisten is growing and has never had more seats in parliament. Across Europe we are seeing the same trend. The Social Democrats are the ones in crisis because they stopped challenging the market logic and instead jumped onboard. But we will continue to insist on social clauses and make demands on the businesses that we sink billions of kroner of tax payers' money into. We also need to try and organise labour even better across borders, to keep up with the flows of labour and capital."

OPEN ARMS

Schmidt-Nielsen's cynicism to-

ward the charity and philanthropy of business is matched only by her disillusion of the government's immigration policies. She recently returned from a trip to the Middle East where she visited refugee camps housing those displaced by the conflict in Syria.

"You are overpowered by powerlessness. It's the worst feeling you can have," she says of the experience, before launching into an attack of right-wing proposals to reduce the numbers of asylum seekers.

Right wing Dansk Folkeparti and Venstre both argue that asylum seekers are better served if they are returned to countries near their countries of origin, instead of being housed in Denmark. Some MPs think Kenya, home to the world's largest refugee camp, could be an ideal destination.

"The idea is ridiculous - you might as well suggest sending them to the moon or to Norway," she scoffs. "It's bad for the debate that we would even waste time

Scandinavia would have gone bankrupt decades ago if redistribution didn't work

talking about something as unse-rious, populist and unrealistic."

She is also highly critical of the government's decision to bar asylum seekers from claiming family reunification for the first year that they are in the country.

"Attacking something as fundamental as limiting the right for children to be with their parents is totally unbearable. You need to have really good arguments to tell a child they can't be with their parents."

Despite the increase in asylum seekers and associated costs, Schmidt-Nielsen does not think Denmark is about to collapse under its asylum obligations. Rather, she argues that the fear of immigration is merely a well-rehearsed populist narrative.

"It's human to be afraid of what we don't know. But as a politician you have a choice: you either fan the flames or try and solve the conflicts that exist and reduce the angst. Sadly, lots of parties choose the easy option of fanning the flames and pretend

that Denmark is being flooded with refugees. It's awful that there are votes in saying asylum seekers should be sent to Africa."

For a part of her trip she was joined by Martin Henriksen, immigration spokesperson for anti-immigration Dansk Folkeparti, who is a keen proponent of the send-them-to-Africa solution for asylum seekers. How is it possible to go on a trip with someone you disagree with so fundamentally? How can you even communicate?

Again, she dodges the chance to take a personal swipe.

"In Denmark we enjoy cursing out and offending other people for its own sake. It's childish. So what if I'm allowed. What's the point?" she says, before illustrating why she'll never be out of a job.

"You need to stay far away from anyone who thinks they hold the absolute truth. It's important to realise that in life there are conflicts of interest. There always has been, and there always will be." **M**

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Authentic integration and internationalisation

Institut Sankt Joseph is the first bilingual international school to open its doors in Denmark. The programme offers children the opportunity to learn in both Danish and English, in an environment that values diversity, understanding and integration

INSTITUT SANKT JOSEF'S bilingual international programme is the first of its kind in Denmark. Unlike other international school programmes, it allows students to prepare for an international education, while also integrating into Danish society.

Denmark's first fully international bilingual programme was launched in August by Institut Sankt Josef, a private Catholic school located in the Østerbro district of Copenhagen. The programme is designed to offer the academic quality and transferability of the Cambridge International Examinations, while simultaneously providing a framework for authentic integration and internationalisation in Denmark.

Institut Sankt Josef believes its bilingual approach to international education is unique, and distinct from both Danish schooling and other international programmes in the area. It is also an attractive alternative for both Danish and expat children, who are caught between the two systems due to both relocation and the absence of alternative opportunities for authentic integration.

Both programmes have their respective drawbacks – the Danish programme presents barriers for authentic internationalisation and for maintaining or cultivating academic English. English-language

international programmes, on the other hand, often prevent students and their families from becoming fully integrated into the Danish society in which they reside.

Institut Sankt Josef's new programme is designed to overcome barriers to successful internationalisation and integration. Although the programme targets everyone, the goal is to produce bilingual students who are equally prepared to attend either a Danish gymnasium or an International high school, and is therefore especially appealing to expat and Danish families with an international outlook.

The bilingual model incorporates two curricula, in which half of the lessons are taught in English (English, maths and science) and the other half in Danish (Danish, religion, art, and history). Students are taught by native English speakers – who are experienced in preparing students for the Cambridge International Examinations – and navigate the key stages of the Cambridge international examinations process, which ultimately culminates in the IGCSE examinations at age 15 or 16.

The school's programme also emphasises an intercultural pedagogical approach, where students are encouraged to become both academically bilingual and multicul-

Quick facts

680 students are enrolled at Institut Sankt Josef

Ages 5 to 16

The International Bilingual Department opened in August 2014

The school is located in Østerbro, across from the American Embassy

Students come from 59 different countries



tural. Institut Sankt Joseph wants its students to regard diversity as a positive catalyst for understanding. This intercultural emphasis goes hand in hand with a celebration of Danish traditions, and an emphasis on Denmark's unique history and culture.

Institut Sankt Joseph has a clear set of values that inform and ground the school's culture. The school believes that a Catholic education must be essentially understood as an educational and formational project. The overall objective is that every child becomes equipped to take on the task of what it is to become human – in

short, to become themselves.

Institut Sankt Joseph has come a long way since it was founded in 1858 as a French-inspired all-girls school. Today Institut Sankt Joseph is convinced that the international bilingual programme, now only a few months old, will continue the school's long tradition of Catholic-humanistic education, which prepares students to become positive members of society both locally and abroad. Institut Sankt Joseph believes that children should not be divided by linguistic and cultural differences, but united by the shared vision of the school. **M**

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FOREIGN

Fear and loathing at the Fish Fry

The second time I heard the story was at a Republican fish fry in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, when, over the foul-tasting local-fried catfish, my new friend Debbie warned me of the coming terror

A WEEK EARLIER, covering the mid-term elections in Kentucky, I first heard a version of the story from supporters of Republican Senator Mitch McConnell in Lexington. I had disregarded it as nonsense, but there Debbie was repeating it – and not for the last time. On my final stop covering the American midterm elections, at yet another fish fry in Balls Creek, North Carolina, it resurfaced.

ISIS, Debbie told me in Arkansas, was planning to cross the US-Mexican border with an armed posse to wreak havoc in the United States. A few of them had already been caught at the border.

My objections fell on rocky ground. Why would they go through Mexico? Wouldn't a bunch of Arab fundamentalists milling about at the border raise eyebrows in Mexico?

The story, as it turned out, was not from CNN, as Debbie tried to convince me. It seems to have originated with Republican Congressman Duncan Hunter, who claimed to have his information from unnamed sources with the Border Patrol – but even Fox News questioned his allegations, and both Mexican and American authorities flatly denied them.

"With the truth so dull and depressing, the only working alternative is wild bursts of madness and filigree," wrote Hunter S. Thompson in his classic account of Nixon's 1972 campaign. "When the going gets weird, the weird turn professional."

I'm not sure Debbie had even heard Congressman Hunter's original story, but the tactic seems to be to just throw it all out there and let people connect the dots themselves.

My favourite example of this from the midterm campaign came from Pat Roberts – a mediocre

Republican senator from Kansas – who managed to mash it all into a single sentence during a debate against his independent opponent:

"With Ebola, ISIS, whoever comes across the border, the 167,000 illegals who are convicted felons, that shows you we have to secure the border and we cannot support amnesty."

Boom. Ebola, ISIS, illegal immigrants. Felons. You figure it out. It's like the title of that movie, *The Sum of All Fears*. What's scarier than a Zombie? A Zombie wielding an AK-47 and spewing Anthrax.

The weird had indeed turned professional, and the Republicans thumped Obama's Democratic Party, which basically had no message during the elections.

While fear was in good supply, loathing was even more abundant. Everybody loathes the capital, hewing to that grand old tradition in American politics of running against Washington. It's 'broken', 'not working for ordinary folks', 'out of touch'. There is 'gridlock' and nobody can 'get things done'.

People always give me a kind of a compassionate look when I tell them I live in Washington. Well, contrary to the cheap applause lines in political stump speeches, Washington is pretty nice. And people seem to be making a ton of money. A big chunk of the nearly four billion dollars spent on the midterms landed in the pockets of advisors, media consultants and campaign professionals in and around Capitol Hill.

When everybody's making money, things tend to stay the same.

It was a 'throw the bums out' election. Well, meet the new bums, same as the old bums.

In spite of the ritualistic invocations of bipartisanship, reach-



Tom Woodward

ISIS, Debbie told me in Arkansas, was planning to cross the US-Mexican border with an armed posse

Kristian Madsen

ing across the aisle, and other stale metaphors of cooperation, things are almost sure to be as fiercely partisan as ever before, with attention soon turning to 2016: Hillary vs. a slew of Republicans.

When Obama lost the midterms in 2010, he tried to take a page from the old Bill Clinton playbook. He acknowledged that he got a 'shellacking', and tried to reach out to the opposition. In return, he got stonewalled by a Republican Party whose expressed primary goal was to make Obama a one term-president.

This time around, Obama has chosen a vastly different approach, pretending there was no election. Congress was dysfunctional before, Congress is dysfunctional now – same same. I'll just go right ahead with my agenda, working around Congress as best I can, and leave them to bicker thank you very much.

Congress won't reform immigration? Well, I'll just go ahead and do it anyway. So sue me. The Republican leaders won't combat

climate change? Well, I'll just cut a deal with Xi Jinping instead of Mitch McConnell. Suck on that.

It's an interesting strategy, not unlike the one George W. Bush employed after losing the 2006 midterms over the unpopular Iraq War, when he went right ahead and redoubled the effort with the so-called troop 'surge' in 2007.

While it might actually produce some results for Obama to put up on plaques in his forthcoming Presidential Library, it probably won't cure the fears at the fish fries, or the loathing so eloquently expressed by Hunter S. Thompson back in the 70s:

"How many more of these stinking, double-downer sideshows will we have to go through before we can get ourselves straight enough to put together some kind of national election that will give me and the at least 20 million people I tend to agree with a chance to vote FOR something, instead of always being faced with that old familiar choice between the lesser of two evils?" **M**

COLUMN

The shirt that sent the internet into orbit

People in positions of power need to realise that they will be judged on how they look and what they say. Matt Taylor isn't a sexist, just insensitive to the plight of women in academia and the sciences, and criticising his attire isn't a feminist plot to make men's lives hell

THIS MONTH the European Space Agency (ESA) landed a satellite on a comet for the first time in history. As the cameras rolled, project scientist Matt Taylor spoke passionately to millions of people around the world, but all I could see was the scantily clad women printed on his garish bowling shirt.

Poor Matt screwed up – or at least the ESA's PR department did. Because if they thought no one was going to find the shirt offensive, they are as disconnected from the planet as we'd expected stereotypical space geeks to be.

"I don't care if you landed a spacecraft on a comet, your shirt is sexist and ostracizing," wrote The Verge as Twitter erupted with a flood of similar messages.

But poor Matt. We later learned the shirt is a favourite of his, given to him by a female friend. His teary apology pulled at my own heart strings. It was supposed to be the pinnacle of his career, instead he had to endure abuse on Twitter for his poor sense of fashion.

Then came the backlash and thousands rallied in Matt's support. The shirt isn't sexist, they argued, his female friend gave it to him after all! And what's wrong with the female body anyways? It's obviously just a stupid garish shirt. Why is everyone focussing on the shirt rather than his accomplishments? When did people get so sensitive?

Some went further. @celeste_o argued that anyone who found the shirt sexist should be punched in the head. London mayor Boris

Johnson thinks there should be space in the world for eccentricity. Getting offended by the shirt is akin to being an Islamist maniac, he added.

But who was driving the attack on Matt? Feminists argued the Guardian, which was now at risk of 'becoming toxic'. The New York Post summed up a number of similar headlines with their own "we landed on a comet, and feminists are angry about a shirt".

So lets sum up. People are upset that feminists have found Matt's shirt offensive. The shirt may be stupid, eccentric and in bad taste, but it matters far less than his scientific accomplishments. We all need to chill the fuck out and get some perspective.

Sure. But how about this. Women have struggled to break into science and academia and continue to be underrepresented. Of the 567 Nobel Prizes awarded since 1901, only 47 have been given to women. You have to either believe that women are significantly less intelligent or ambitious than men, or that social structures have prevented women from achieving their potential.

The context that the shirt was worn matters greatly. Matt is in a position of power when he appears on TV representing the space agency. He wasn't some cool dude who was hanging out with his mates on a beach smoking cigars and drinking Piña Coladas. He was in mission control in one of the world's foremost space agencies wearing images of scantily dressed women. I find it very reasonable that women would find the shirt, worn in that context, offensive.



ESA project scientist Matt Taylor wearing 'the shirt'

ship driven by aggressive online feminists bent on ending masculinity. Boris Johnson added that "few have come to the defence of the scientist [because] no one wants to take on the rage of the web".

Huh? On 9Gag, a prominent online platform, a post in defence of Taylor has garnered over 2,500 comments. In it the author writes that if a man or a women is driven away from pursuing a career in science, technology or mathematics (STEM) because of a shirt like Matt's "you should never dream about a STEM job in the first place. You are not good enough".

In other words: just deal with it ladies. If you're offended by male behaviour that's your problem. Stop being hysterical. You don't have a right to be offended. But I have a right to tell you that you don't deserve opportunity because you are offended. Ugh. Sounds like an episode of *Mad Men*.

The fear seems to be that being respectful to each other is somehow an act of censorship and the first step on a slippery ladder toward a totalitarian and humourless politically-correct society. This is clearly idiotic.

What I don't understand is why no one said, "Hey Matt, you're in a position of power and how you're dressed sends a signal to the world that you perhaps don't respect women as much as you do. This is particularly problematic in science, so would you mind wearing something a bit more neutral for the cameras and people who don't realise you're a cool guy who doesn't hate women. Thanks." **M**

Let's just stop for a second and think about what the pro-Matt camp are arguing: 1) Matt has the right to express himself however he likes. 2) People who find the shirt sexist are ridiculous and deserve to be called rude names and threatened with violence.

Why is not ok to get offended, but it's ok to get angry at people who are offended at something you don't think is offensive?

The debate about Matt's shirt divided into two camps. One side argues that Matt's shirt was another act of ignorant and casual sexism and he should have known better.

The opposing side argues that finding it sexist is an act of censor-

Peter Stanners

YOU HAVE REACHED THE END OF THE CULTURE SECTION, TURN OVER FOR THE NEWS SECTION



CAPTURED

Photojournalist **ANDERS BIRGER** spent some time with Christian Iraqis who had sought refuge in the Kurdish city of Erbil after being driven from their homes by the Islamic State. Head to <http://murmur.dk> to read an interview with Birger.



"This photo was taken in one of the bigger camps in Ankawa, the Christian suburb of Erbil. The Church lay empty in the middle of this sea of tents. I was slowly circling it and moving in between the many refugees going about their daily business. Suddenly I saw them, the three older men who have sought refuge for the harsh midday sun under a group of trees. It felt like they were being presented to me by the Virgin Mary. I looked at them, they looked at me, and with a nod, I raised my camera."



"This is shot in a massive apartment complex that was under construction. The Church had rented the space for three months and had resettled hundreds of refugees there. I like this picture a lot because it almost feels like a mall where these two teen girls are just hanging out, talking about life, like hundreds of thousands of other teens around the world. The reality is that they have been robbed of everything, including their future, and now spend their days in this concrete silo with a highly uncertain future."



"This family shared a tiny two bedroom apartment with three other families. The humidity in the room was overwhelming, but these exhausted children slept right through it. It was like you could swim from one room to the next."