

Northern Flank by Poul Rasmussen

Danish elections on May 10th

NATO could find itself with an oversize "New Zealand problem" in the Baltic arena.

On May 10, the Danes will go to the polls in what could become the most important parliamentary election in Denmark in this century. At stake is Denmark's membership in NATO, and unfortunately, maybe even the future of the NATO alliance itself.

The troubles began on April 14, when the Danish parliament (Folketing) voted up a Social Democratic referendum calling for a tightening of Denmark's anti-nuclear policies. Since 1957, it has been official Danish policy not to receive nuclear arms in peacetime, and the Social Democratic referendum on April 14 called for continuing this policy.

But the referendum also included a new set of rules for naval ships visiting Danish harbors and territorial waters. From now on, the captains of visiting naval units would be presented with a letter, stating that Denmark allows no nuclear weapons on its territory.

This new set of rules is almost identical to rules implemented by the New Zealand government in 1985, which led to a severe crisis in U.S.-New Zealand relations and dissolving of the Anzus pact. U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz has already called the Danish referendum a direct threat to the United States' "neither confirm nor deny policy" concerning nuclear-armed naval units, and a threat to NATO's nuclear deterrence policy. Shultz warned that the implementation of the referendum could seriously hurt "unity and collaboration inside NATO" and have "extremely severe consequences for the defense collaboration between Denmark and the

United States." The British government warned that it would reconsider the deployment of the 15,000 British troops in the so-called "U.K. Mobile Forces" assigned to the defense of Denmark.

With these reactions from the major NATO allies in mind, conservative Prime Minister Poul Schlüter dissolved his government on April 19 and called for new elections on May 10.

Should the Social Democratic Party and the left wing of the parliament win the elections, NATO will find itself with an oversize "New Zealand problem" on its vital northern flank. Such a result would put the squeeze on Norway's Social Democratic government to take the same restrictive measures against foreign naval ships. This could become the long awaited excuse of George Shultz and the State Department to begin U.S. "disengagement" from Europe.

Moreover, just before the Danish elections, there will be elections in the West German state of Schleswig-Holstein on May 8. In the wake of the Christian Democrats' "Barschel Affair," the Social Democrats, led by Björn Engholm, expect to win an easy majority. Should this be followed by a Social Democratic victory in Denmark, NATO will suddenly have all of its northern flank (Norway, Denmark, Schleswig-Holstein) and outside the alliance, Sweden and Finland, ruled by anti-nuclear, appeasement-loving Social Democrats.

On the other hand, should the conservative-liberal coalition government of Poul Schlüter win a clear majority in the election, this would mean

the definite end to the "Danish problem" inside NATO. Since 1982, Denmark has presented 22 so-called footnotes to NATO decisions on nuclear arms policy. All of these footnotes have been fabricated by the Social Democratic Party and the left wing of the parliament, against the wishes of the government. A Schlüter victory would open up much needed discussion on the new strategic situation in the Baltic arena.

But who is pushing for this show-down? Inside the country, it was the new young chairman of the Social Democratic Party, Svend Auken, who blocked a milder referendum from the government, and forced the parliament to vote on the Social Democratic referendum first. This created the situation in which the government had to step down. But why?

Since 1982, the Danish Social Democracy has dramatically changed its security and defense profile. From 1949 to 1982 the Danish Social Democracy was unquestionably pro-NATO. Then in 1982-83, when the party lost the government, according to eyewitness reports, the following happened. At a birthday party for the then-party chairman Anker Jørgensen in January 1983, Egon Bahr from the West German Social Democracy briefed a handful of leading Danish Social Democrats in a back room on the Socialist International's new anti-nuclear policies. From then on, the defense policies of the Danish and West German Social Democrats were tightly coordinated.

This being the case, these people are playing Russian roulette with the NATO alliance. But according to the latest polls, upwards of 70% of the Danish citizenry is strongly pro-NATO. Maybe it will be the Social Democrats and Svend Auken who lose this round.