

Something's Rotten in Denmark

by Naser Khader

IN SPRING 2007, I FORMED A NEW CENTRIST-RIGHT POLITICAL PARTY IN Denmark called the New Alliance. It was the first time in 15 years that a new party had been formed in my country. The New Alliance is for all Danish people, and if it hadn't been for the crisis Denmark is facing, our party might not have come into existence. Now, however, according to the latest polls, the New Alliance stands to have the final say as to whether Denmark's Prime Minister will remain in office or not.

My reasons for leaving the Social Liberal Party were many. I had long been frustrated by the naiveté among my fellow party members, especially during the cartoon crisis. A lot of them condemned the *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper for printing the cartoons, but had a hard time condemning the overreaction to the cartoons in the Middle East. My former party represents typical European intellectual cultural relativism and naiveté at its worst. Their general view goes something like this: all views are equal. In the 1980s and '90s, I shared that view, but I don't anymore.

Today I have become averse to cultural relativism. I find it old-fashioned and immature. I call those who hold such views “*halal* hippies,” and no longer believe that all values are equal. Some values are better than others, and democratic values will always stand above the rest. To me, democracy comes before religion, because democracy includes people of all kinds, while religion and culture have a tendency to exclude people who hold a different view or lifestyle.

In Denmark they call me a “democratic fundamentalist,” which I'm actually very proud of. (I even got “Democracy” tattooed in Arabic on my arm!) I am especially proud of it when it comes to fundamental democratic rights such as personal free-

dom and the right to make decisions about your own life, body, and future. My old party minimized the problems with the Muslim Brotherhood in Denmark and in the world. Their view was that if we speak out too loudly about the problems with the Brotherhood, we will instead find ourselves supporting the right wing's point of view. These naïve people did not and will not differentiate between Islam as a religion and the politics of Islamism. They have accepted the Brotherhood's point that there is only one Islam—the Muslim Brotherhood's Islam.

Something that happened in Denmark while I was in the United States last spring was the last straw in my process of leaving the party. At that time, we had a tough debate in Denmark about the Muslim headscarf, especially whether or not it is okay to sexualize little girls and force them to wear a headscarf and other Islamic clothes which limit their freedom of movement. To make the point that all values are equal, one of my then-fellow colleagues of the old party, a former minister of culture in Denmark, put on a headscarf in solidarity with Muslim women who wear the headscarf and *hijab*. It was an expensive designer scarf with the words “speak up” printed on it. She went so far as to be interviewed with one of Copenhagen's tourist attractions, a woman fish seller who also wears a scarf as a part of her work.

When I learned about this I was furious. For me this issue was not about selling fish. Why show solidarity with those who feel that women should cover up, who believe that women are not equal to men? I'm not in favor of banning the headscarf. My mother wears a headscarf—she chose on her own to start wearing it about 10 years ago. Like her, many women choose it freely, and that doesn't bother me. However, there are also many women who are not allowed to decide for themselves. Even little girls, not more than six years old, are forced to wear the headscarf. In making such a statement, my former colleague gave the Brotherhood and other conservatives a legitimacy they do not deserve. Afterwards, they could say to their young daughters, “You see? A former Minister of Culture agrees with us!”

I left the party after that, shaking my head in disbelief that we in Denmark had not learned anything from the cartoon crisis just a year before.

That cartoon crisis was an eye-opener for many Danish people. During that time I said that one of its most positive results was to make it impossible for the Danish people to see Muslims as one group. The crisis demonstrated that there are different kinds of Muslims. Our founding of the Democratic Muslims organization, in Denmark and other countries, was a cornerstone in that process. Forming that movement was an essential step for Muslims who do not agree with the Muslim Brotherhood. I do not believe that religion should be mixed with politics, and I do not believe that political parties should be organized on the basis of ethnic or religious background. And, since so many mainstream Muslims think our religion has

been hijacked by the Brotherhood, it was a necessary step for us to create the Democratic Muslims organization.

In Denmark—as in other European countries—there is a tendency in public opinion towards those who exaggerate elements of Islam, giving them authority over the whole religion. Consequently, people like me who don't flaunt their religion are not thought of as real Muslims. It is important that democratic Muslims organize all over the world, because the Brotherhood is good at organizing all over the world, including in Denmark.

I do, however, think that the Muslim Brotherhood may be relatively stronger in Western Europe than in Muslim countries. In a recent meeting with the Moroccan ambassador to Denmark, I asked her why so many Moroccans were involved in terror actions in the West—bombings in Madrid, Spain; in the killing of Theo van Gogh in Holland; and through such instigators as Said Monsour, a Moroccan who was sentenced in Denmark for influencing young people to commit terrorist acts. (In fact, three times in the last three years, Denmark has sentenced young people who were influenced by Said Mansour and others like him.) She responded: “We haven't any more left from the Brotherhood in Morocco. We captured some of them and put them in the prison. The rest fled to the West.”

UNTIL A FEW YEARS AGO VERY LIBERAL IMMIGRATION RULES IN WESTERN Europe created a back door for the Brotherhood to organize themselves in Europe. Meanwhile, Western Europe has been hopelessly oblivious to the Brotherhood. It is only recently that we in Denmark suggested a bill allowing convicted terrorists with foreign background to be expelled from our country.

Given all of these issues, what characterizes the Brotherhood in Denmark and the Scandinavian countries? They are troublemakers, but some more so than others. It is interesting to note that during the cartoon affair in Denmark only 10 imams out of 120 in the entire country were active during the crisis. These activists included people like Ahmed Abu Laban, who is very well-connected with the Brotherhood in Egypt; Mohammad Fouad Barazi, highly-connected with the Brotherhood in Syria; and Abu Bashir, who is well-connected with the Brotherhood in Lebanon. Raed Hlayhel, who has now returned to Lebanon, has been promoted by the Brotherhood there because of his role in the cartoon crisis. What very few know is that the imams who went to the Middle East to show the cartoons also went there to collect money for their schools and mosques from donors in the Middle East. The Muslim Brotherhood's aim in Denmark, as it is everywhere else, is to monopolize Islam, to gain the monopoly on teaching materials and books, to build the most schools and mosques, and, all in all, to become as strong and influential as possible.

Sadly, the Brotherhood in the West is being helped by some “useful idiots.” We

have a few of those in Denmark. A useful idiot in this case is someone who, with the best but totally misunderstood intentions, gives legitimacy to the Brotherhood by consulting with them, inviting them to important meetings and events, and treating them as if they represent all the Muslims in Denmark, which they do not. Yet until the cartoon crisis, the Danish government utilized the Brotherhood's imams as advisors on integration. But it's not only the Danish government that serves as useful idiots.

Recently, I was sad to learn that the United States Ambassador to Denmark, James P. Cain, joined the corps of useful idiots in Denmark. He invited several Danish members of the Muslim Brotherhood to his Ambassador's residence. One of the invitees, Safia Aoude, is a well-known Holocaust-denier who is known to be connected with the Brotherhood. She was excluded from the Conservative People's Party in Denmark for those very reasons. Cain also invited Mohamed al-Barazi, one of the most active imams during the cartoon crisis who falsely claimed on the Arabic television network Al Jazeera that the Danish threatened to burn the Quran, which led to even more riots in the Middle East. Al-Barazi thus had his cake and ate it, too: he gained legitimacy by having been invited to the residence of the U.S. Ambassador, while simultaneously inciting further violence in the Middle East.

The U.S. Ambassador did not invite the Democratic Muslims, as if we do not celebrate the Ramadan because we are democratic. Afterwards, when criticism of the event appeared, the U.S. Embassy told the press, "We are in dialogue." Correct me if I'm wrong, but I have never heard George Bush inviting Holocaust deniers, or even Ku Klux Klan members, to dinner in the White House for dialogue.

Do I think that we shouldn't have any dialogue with these people? No. We can listen to what they have to say. But I cannot understand how people in the media, governments, even ambassadors, can have such a short memory. How can they forget? I remember watching every inch of the Danish flag being burned in the Middle East. I remember every image of terrorists burning down the Danish embassy in Damascus. I remember the Danish imams traveling to the Middle East, telling lies about the cartoons and about how the Danish mistreat Muslims in Denmark. And I remember that more than 100 people died as a consequence of the crisis.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE BIGGEST CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS ISN'T between Islam and the West; it is between democratic-oriented Muslims and the Muslim Brotherhood. It is a battle about conquering Muslim souls, and it is fought with harsh means by the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood's main enemy is not the Jews or the Christians, but Muslims who want democracy, modernity, and reformation. That is where the real battle is, and the Brotherhood will win if the rest of the society keeps suffering amnesia attacks. The greatest challenge

for democratic Muslims in Denmark—and all over the world—is to cure the amnesia by constantly taking a stand in the debate, by constantly letting their voices be heard. If they don't, the only thing we will hear in the future is the voice of the Muslim Brotherhood. And the useful idiots will be applauding.