

# THE NEXT DENMARK

**FREEDOM AND COMMUNITY  
- A NEW NARRATIVE**

**38 ideas for a future-proof Denmark**

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# THE DREAM OF THE NEXT DENMARK

What should the Danish dream be? How should the next Denmark look? How do we want life to be lived in the Denmark which lies just beyond the horizon, and which we are going to build together? What role should Denmark play in the world?

This is the political discourse I am starting with this manifesto of ideas, which fundamentally challenges Denmark today in a number of areas – and in due course will challenge the whole world as well.

We all know about the American Dream. It very much dominated the last century. Rooted in the Declaration of Independence of almost 250 years ago, which stated that everyone was created equal, there was a steadfast belief that everyone had the opportunity to attain a rich life full of opportunities regardless of social background, gender, belief, race or sexuality, as long as you just used the talent you had been given and were willing to work hard.

Looking at the USA today, it is obvious that for by far the majority of people, that dream of equal opportunities lies in ruins. It was great to believe in, but today the reality is that the American Dream is something only few people can realize. Not because the majority are not talented or do not want to work hard, but because the structure of society oppresses them in one way or another. "The idea is dead," declared Niels Brandt from The Minds of 99 group in the song of the same name. "America is dead," he continues, singing on with the artistic license that allows him to be so pointed.

That the American Dream has indisputably become a pipe dream for many does not just apply in the USA, but also everywhere else in the world where there has been massive American influence for almost a century. We are seeing the results in recent years: revolt, resignation and anger. "Noises we have heard before, from 1943," warns Brandt, referring to the Second World War and what happens when totalitarianism gains hold.

As I see it, here in Denmark we have been among the best at realizing the dream of equal opportunities for all. The welfare state has historically provided lots of great opportunities for people to unleash their talents and build better lives for themselves – regardless of the level of opportunity they were born with. We can be proud of that. It shows the potential we have here in Denmark, which has rightly given inspiration to the world.

The welfare state is the work of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. For me, it was the perfect answer to the challenges the country faced in the industrial era of the 20th century. Today it is under pressure because two decades into a century marked by globalization and sweeping change, the challenges and opportunities are quite different. There is no doubt that we must look after our welfare state and our community, but the Denmark of today calls for a new dream. It calls for a concrete, tangible vision for The Next Denmark: a friendly revolution.

Why? Because we need to know what direction to take. We need to know how to build the best possible life for as many people as possible in the 21st century – not just in Denmark but all over the world. We need to know how to build rich and meaningful lives – and how to make sure we have freedom, equality and happiness in the age of globalization. And we need to know how to break free of the slavery of the growth paradigm.

As far as I am concerned, the political center-left, which The Alternative must be said to most closely identify with, most definitely still has to deliver the answers. The same goes for the other parts of the political spectrum. Looking at today's world, the old ideologies seem to be devoid of answers. The solutions we used to subscribe to no longer have the same effect, and maybe they don't even have any meaning left at all. But one thing is certain: the world doesn't need dystopian analyses which are not followed by concrete answers, vigor and the courage to make improvements. That is why we set up The Alternative.

We are facing a new necessity which breaks away from the old "politics of necessity". The world we live in can no longer be described as modern or post-modern. With the arrival of the climate crisis, we have entered a whole new geological age, where because of the dominance of humanity in the overall eco-system, we have become a real force for change, challenge and for reshaping the Earth. Researchers call it the Anthropocene Epoch. An epoch where humanity quite simply changes the planet through its actions.

Fundamentally, it can be said that we are challenging what the ancient Greeks called the four elements: earth, fire, water and air – elements we all share. The four elements are the basis for all life on Earth. They are where we come from. And that which we do not own, we have the responsibility to pass on.

As humanity, we must therefore decide what is most pressing: the market's demands for eternal material growth or the need to change our behavior because our actions have taken the planet into a new geological age.

I know what I believe is most important. And it requires us to think, speak, do politics and organize our society in a completely different way to we do today and have done for decades.

So it is our – joint – task to give birth to a new idea which as just as strong as the American Dream, which is just as strong as the French Revolution's insistence on Liberté, Egalité and Fraternité, and just as strong as the universal solidarity of the welfare state. An idea so strong that it will be the Danish Dream which gives global inspiration in the coming century and which makes The Next Denmark a pioneering country that inspires the rest of the world.

Dear reader, I invite you to join in the political discourse about The Next Denmark.

I am not setting us an easy task. Political imagination is in dire straits these days. It takes a lot to imagine a different society to the one we have today. It takes a lot to break with the habits we have established. It takes a lot to ask the questions and formulate answers, which may then be ridiculed or dismissed.

Nevertheless that is what we have to do. We have to dream with our eyes open and reshape those dreams into concrete reality. That is how we can move from today's Denmark to The Next Denmark, which is more equal, more free, more diverse, more fair, more creative, more entrepreneurial and more sustainable.

This manifesto of ideas – which is my attempt to foster both the public debate and the debate within the party I am the political leader of, consists of 38 more or less fully thought-out ideas spread across 10 focus areas.

I have drawn what, for me, are natural conclusions from the political deliberations we have had in The Alternative since we were elected to the Danish Parliament three years ago. I am thus building on our party's program, our manifesto and our basic analysis of society. I am also building on our work with the "triple bottom line" for businesses and the numerous experiences we have had as a movement and a party up until now. And finally, I am building on what clever, courageous and visionary people have created or written before us – both together and as individuals.

Some may say that the ideas are unrealistic or perhaps even utopian. But I insist that they are no more unrealistic or utopian than the introduction of democracy, the abolition of slavery, the end of the colonial era or free schooling for all. I would rather say that it would be utopian to believe that we can carry on as we have done up until now. To believe that we can carry on impoverishing the world, running faster and faster around in our hamster wheels and neglecting our democracy without there being brutal consequences.



is the only constant. So we have to take on the responsibility for change being for the better, and formulate new answers. If we don't formulate them ourselves, then others will do it for us. Or else the society we hand on to our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will have been left to chance. That is not what I want. There is no balance without movement.

## WHAT WE ARE REVOLTING AGAINST

From time to time these days, or too often, it feels like we sometimes lose control of ourselves and each other. Of what is happening in our society and with ourselves. We can sense symptoms of our current model for society not making us feel sufficiently free, happy or emancipated. We feel distracted and end up wandering through life consumed with a need for enrichment – instead of enjoying the present or building strong communities. To a great extent we have become workhorses for a system we find no meaning in or feel that we cannot change. And at a pace we don't enjoy, at too high a price for our well-being and for the environment and nature.

That something is wrong with our society, and that there is cause for alarm is also apparent on other levels: through extreme inequality, terror, homelessness, stress and loneliness epidemics and a feeling of upheaval and fear which erodes our democracies.

These are signs of a crisis which all have something in common: they stem from a period in world history where eight people own the

same amount of material wealth as the poorest half of the Earth's population. Eight people compared to three and a half billion.

It is precisely this growth in individual assets and the intense concentration of capital in our society that creates an inequality which is systemic, and which only a progressive tax system can smooth out. The French economist Thomas Piketty has shown in the foremost sense how the growth in private wealth has created extreme global inequalities which are not just a question of social justice, but also represent a significant problem for democracy. Concentration of monetary wealth leads to concentration of power, which means that to an increasing degree economic interests control politics.

Economic inequality has also increased in Denmark. There are more poor people, and the distribution of wealth is more unequal than most people realize. People who own real estate have experienced a growth in their wealth which most other people are excluded from. That threatens the social cohesion which binds our society together. If the agenda is only set by the rich and those with the resources, and they also dictate politics, then we have a serious problem. The neoliberal model which has been dominant for decades has not just led to an economic meltdown as we saw in the financial crisis of 2008, but it has also meant there has been a comprehensive loss of meaning on a much deeper level. The marketization of our society, which lies in neoliberalism, has brought us into an existential vacuum. A vacuum of blindly accepted truths which we do not question. Instead, we internalize them and feel that we are the ones who are wrong instead of objecting to them. A vacuum where we have a sense that we can't go on like this, and where we don't have the language to describe – or the answers to – what comes next. Yet.

The combination of the dominating efforts to generate economic and material growth, along with the fast pace at which everything occurs, alienates us from ourselves and from each other. Many people lose their grounding – spiritually, socially and existentially. As the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa puts it, it is one of the tragedies of modern life that people feel trapped in an eternally rotating hamster wheel, where their hunger for life and the world are not satisfied, but where they just get more and more frustrated.

People are alienated to such an extent that we are steering towards disintegration, and are witnesses to a real erosion of our social and societal engagement. Our thoughts and actions are not anchored in our life as a whole, as Hartmut Rosa elaborates. We are alienated from each other, from the planet we live on, from our work and from ourselves. Rosa emphasizes the paradox that the richer a society is, the less time people have to do what they want. We damn well don't deserve that.

I find that the combination of systemic inequality, the desire for ever more material growth and thorough alienation are a dangerous cocktail. A cocktail which puts a lot of pressure on our free will and actions – and makes it immensely difficult to come up with alternatives. Because we have ended up in a situation where many people have to recognize to their bewilderment that we are not getting what we need if we are to find the core of ourselves and of each other. Meanwhile, climate change is knocking at the door and needs our undivided attention.

It is something of a dilemma.



As early as the 1970s, the authors of the debate book "Revolt from the center" saw some of the same worrying tendencies. In a way, this is an attempt to carry the baton on from there and start a new revolt.

A constructive revolt, which is built around a thoughtful yet radical revolt against the system and the box thinking which is undermining our community, our individual creative power and our environment, climate and nature. A revolt against a humanity which sees individuals as being to be utilized to the maximum. A revolt against a society which keeps ever larger groups on the outside and threatens our democratic foundations. A revolt against a state which is drowning in control and administration instead of guaranteeing welfare, closeness and social security. A revolt against a way of living which has such great consequences that it destroys the opportunities for the generations that follow to live lives as good as ours.

That is what my revolt is.



# THE FUTURE WE ARE MOVING TOWARD

The revolt which I see must of course take account of the future we are looking towards. Within a few decades, or maybe within just a few short years, Denmark and the world will be a different place than it is today in many ways.

It will be normal for us to talk to machines and robots. They will react to our wishes and even predict our needs, often before we are even aware of what those needs are. We will be transported in self-driving cars, diagnosed and cured before we know we are ill, and we will be able to travel from Rio de Janeiro to Shanghai in just a few hours. The boundary between the human body and machines will be erased, contact lenses will act as screens or we will have chips which can control our daily tasks implanted in our arms. Maybe we will even go to the moon for our vacations and live below the surface of the ocean. Work which was previously necessary will be made superfluous. Jobs will disappear and new ones will appear. Maybe the police will be able to predict and prevent crime before it happens, or maybe we will be able to 3-D print body parts and control electronics by blinking our eyes.

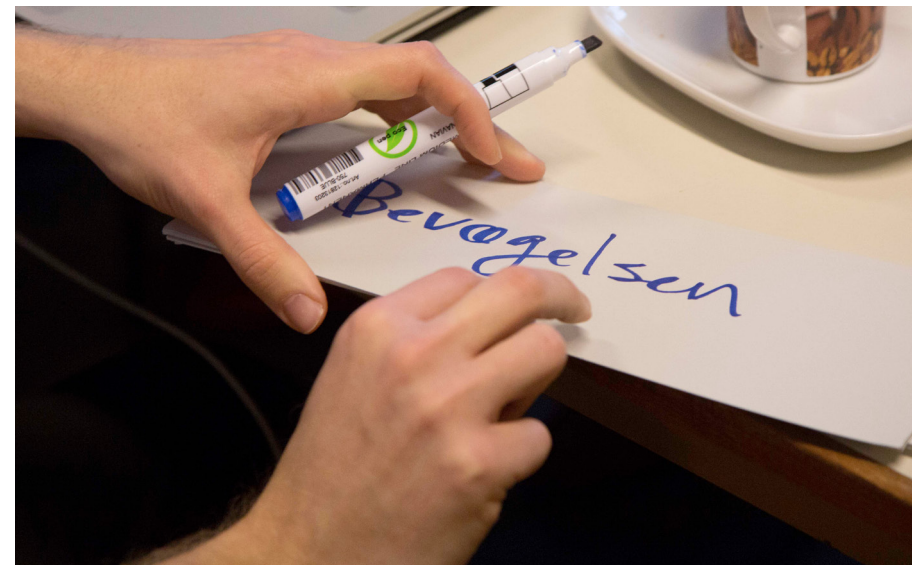
This can be good or bad – some of it is happening already – but what is certain is that the apparently impossible and unthinkable today will very likely become reality.

Just think about the technological developments we have lived through in the past 30 years. Computers everywhere – the Internet has set knowledge free and created communities without physical

borders. In just the past decade, smartphones have led to us almost dropping landline phones, letters, road maps, cameras, CDs, flashlights, bank checks, banknotes, contact ads, newspapers, written calendars and much more. And the smartphone is just one example of how technology has changed our daily lives in such an essential way.

This development can only continue – and exponentially. In the same way, the enormous crises which civilization is experiencing will reshape Denmark just as they will the rest of the world.

But I am convinced that we can solve these problems we are facing. I know about the potential for positive change which all great crises bring. I know that we can create a better society and a better world than the one we know today. I am sure that we can win the future. And win it so that it is not a dystopian puzzle where nature suffers, the climate goes crazy and hundreds of millions of people have to flee, where Orwellian mass surveillance tramples on our freedom while democracy dissolves, and where inequality limits the rights and opportunities for individuals to express themselves.





# WE'VE DONE IT BEFORE – AND WE CAN DO IT AGAIN

The discourse and task we are facing now will without a doubt be challenging, but fortunately we don't have to start from scratch.

The vision for The Next Denmark is namely far from unprecedented. It includes new ideas born from current needs, but it also draws just as much from history. From the power of thought which used to color our spiritual and cultural lives. From the successes which have brought us so much progress. And from the old, brilliant ideas which never had the chance to be tested in reality.

In Denmark we have a solid foundation and a strong tradition for pulling together when the going gets tough. We stand on the shoulders of a deeply inspiring national story, where forward-thinking pioneers released the potential of the community as well as the creative power of the individual. We must let ourselves be inspired by that.

If we are to look back in history, then 1813 is an ideal year to consider. It is the year when a war-torn Denmark went bankrupt. Nevertheless, society decided to make massive investments, especially in public education, in order to make individual citizens more skillful, wiser and to equip them to make decisions and act on them.

If as a nation we had reacted then as we have become accustomed to doing today, we would have used methods such as New Public Management, control, reporting, Excel sheets and tight financing. And the solutions would thus have been savings, cuts and reducing long-term investment. Fortunately, that didn't happen. Because then – as now – they are simple, one-dimensional answers which only focus on the bottom line here and now.

Instead, the political elite at the time took a number of brave political choices and decisions under pressure from new political movements, which consciously or unconsciously planted the seeds of what can very rightly be described as the first great wave of social innovation in Denmark. A wave which went on to ensure rights, participation and freer expression for all, and which laid the foundations for the modern welfare state.

Since then, Denmark has developed into one of the world's best and richest countries. That is not because of being rich in natural resources or because we were born with more talent than the rest of the world. No, I believe the reason is as simple and fundamental as people all over the country getting together in meaningful, committed communities to solve the pressing problems and challenges of the time together. Brave people taking up the fight even when it was thought to be impossible.

It is precisely those creative community forces which we must mobilize again to build The Next Denmark. My desire is thus not to turn our society on its head, but instead to build on the best we have from our strong foundations.

# PRINCIPLES FOR THE NEXT DENMARK – A NEW NARRATIVE ABOUT FREEDOM

Before I present the specific areas this manifesto focuses on, which are a range of different steps towards The Next Denmark, I want to describe the new freedom narrative which is the background for the sustainable society I see as our future.

It is a narrative about freedom which is about consideration of both what is best for the community and what is best for individuals to express their talents at the highest possible meaningful level. It is thus also a narrative which is based on – and continues to be built on – the classic freedoms which are unfortunately being challenged and undermined to a great extent today, both in Denmark and elsewhere.

It is a narrative which at the same time radically breaks with what the late sociologist Zygmunt Bauman formulated as the dominant freedom narrative of our time: the freedom to consume. And it is also a narrative which notes the obvious: how difficult it is to defend an understanding of freedom which depends on the absence of external compulsion and limitations when we live on a planet with limited resources.

So this freedom narrative for The Next Denmark confronts the belief that economic growth sets us free. It points out that freedom is more than the right to own things and generate wealth. Conversely, the narrative is in fact about breaking free from our economic chains.

About freedom also stemming from the right to a good life, the right to closeness and the right to nature.

Finally, the narrative starts out from what I see as key political agendas:

- A revolt against the neoliberal economic system in favor of a democratically grounded ecological economic system, where production respects nature's natural cycles and takes place within our planet's capacity.
- A thorough democratization of our economy and society which increases the feeling of meaning and ensures a fair distribution of resources.
- A revolt against our work and control culture in favor of a balance and trust culture which makes it possible for everyone to live a good life where wealth is not only measured with material goods.
- A diverse and tolerant Denmark which believes in the best in people and recognizes the individual's universal and inviolable rights and value, sees our differences as strengths, ensures equality before the law and genuine equal opportunities, and takes greater responsibility on a global level.



## **FREEDOM TO ENJOY DEMOCRATIC AND MEANINGFUL COMMUNITIES**

Today, our society's economy is not adequately set up to promote or foster democratic or equal communities. What is known as relation-based freedom – the right to enter into relationships with others – human and non-human – which we need to survive, is constricted.

So in future, we have to have the courage to re-think our society and ensure that individuals' freedom and creativity are not strangled by the greater community, while on the other hand ensuring that the application of individual freedom does not damage the community.

That balance is best released within the framework of a strong, healthy and dynamic democracy, where everyone has equal opportunities to use their freedom to take part in and influence the society which they themselves are a part of.

That democratic freedom cannot be practiced in a society where, in practical terms, the involvement of citizens is reduced to voting every few years. So a set task is ensuring that all citizens have the opportunity to live out and use their democratic authority through a strong civil society, political and social organizations and by taking part in various different forms of common ownership.

The democratic freedom struggle is thus not only about participating in democracy in a narrow sense. It is also about ensuring popular ownership of green transition and guaranteeing the rights and access of current and future generations to clean energy, water, air and land.

Today, economic freedom is often considered to be a prerequisite for democratic freedom. Of course, even though it is natural to ensure that the less able, the sick and the vulnerable are provided with the financial means to give them dignity, economic freedom is so much more than that. It is also the right to a good and meaningful existence, the right to be heard and the right to self-determination.

**FREEDOM TO ENJOY A RICH LIFE**

A rich life is so much more than financial riches. It is about making sure that we are all free to be who we are – or who we want to be. The right to a rich life is therefore also about being a complete individual in the true sense of the word. About living in harmony with body and soul – at work and at home. That we can feel that our life is rich in meaning. That we are part of systems and relationships which promote creativity, creative power and the freedom to be the best version of ourselves. And that we live in a society which has a framework which gives us the freedom to create a meaningful work/ life balance.

Freedom is not just material freedom, but also sensual freedom. Freedom is to have time to be with others. Freedom is something you can feel, smell, enjoy, swim in or eat. Freedom is the meaningfulness which we find in communities built around pure and free nature. Freedom is using our energy and creative power on what we feel is meaningful and makes us happy. So The Next Denmark has the freedom for togetherness and closeness as a focal point.

**FREEDOM TO ENJOY EQUAL RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

A final element in the struggle for freedom is ensuring that everyone has equal rights and opportunities. So we must do our utmost to look after those less fortunate or less advantaged. That means ensuring real gender equality in our society. And in order to do that, we have to embrace diversity.

At the moment, we are unfortunately all too ready to compromise on fundamental freedoms. Forbidding begging or certain items of headwear, as well as the increased use of surveillance and misuse of ordinary people’s data are just examples of a general trend towards the concept of freedom being abused to undermine and restrict people’s freedom.

The freedom narrative which sets the framework for The Next Denmark must therefore also be about re-establishing the rule of law so that it applies to all, regardless of social, ethnic or religious background.

If we offend against someone’s freedom, we are offending against everyone’s freedom. It is precisely the “universal” aspect of human rights applying to everyone that makes them so beautiful.

# THE PATH TO THE NEXT DENMARK

This manifesto of ideas, which is my bid about how to arrive at The Next Denmark, does not include any suggestions which I can immediately imagine being raised in Parliament tomorrow, or even in a year's time. The timespan is somewhat longer.

That is also why only some of the ideas here are directly related to The Alternative's most important and pressing agenda, namely the green agenda and the fight against climate change.

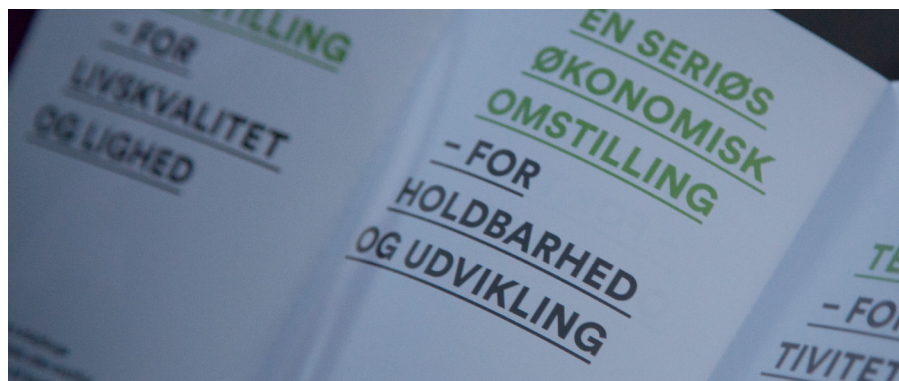
In The Alternative, we want Denmark to have stopped using fossil fuels by 2035, which is a such an enormous task that we have to start tomorrow. So we have already proposed concrete steps to achieving the objective of green transition.

Another reason for solutions to the climate crisis not being touched upon so much, is that the objective of this manifesto is to create a society which is by its very nature sustainable, and where the need for a national climate struggle will not be a necessary priority to the same extent.

That said, I want to emphasize that even though much of this text is very specific, nothing is carved in stone. Much of it can have apparently unmanageable consequences, some ideas have not been thought through to completion and other suggestions are different solutions to the same challenges. So it would not be meaningful to introduce them all at the same time. Only a few of the ideas are fully developed so far, because we have to do this together – with inspiration from all the clever and inspiring people having similar thoughts around the world.

It with this in mind that this text should be read. Vivienne Westwood, who as well as being a fashion designer is also one of my favorite provocateurs, once said that the only way to change the world is through unpopular ideas. I am well aware that many of the ideas in this text will be regarded as precisely that: unpopular dreaming. Some of the others will no doubt be condemned as Marxist, and a third group of them will be accused of coming directly from the "small government" school of thought. To that I say: neither a single individual nor a possessive state can protect what we have in common alone. We can only do it together. That is my starting point.

So to make it very clear: everything can be discussed – except the ambition for our community and our planet. As the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei said, freedom is the right to question anything. Yes – and for me it is also the right to imagine everything being different. That is what I have set out to do. With an ambition to renew, improve and change – not merely conserve.





## **1. Green forests are gold**

1. Give nature legal rights
2. Tax natural resources
3. At least 20% nature zones
4. A country without waste

## **2. Common forces of creativity**

5. Common ownership: cooperatives
6. An investment and development bank for cooperatives
7. Generation houses
8. Pension funds which invest in the future

## **3. A fair and sustainable economy**

9. Splitting banks up
10. A showdown against inequality from ownership
11. New inheritance rules
12. Turnover tax

## **4. Businesses that move things**

13. Reward businesses that introduce triple bottom lines
14. No taxes for startup businesses
15. Engage the community in new startup projects
16. Public procurement at sustainable businesses

## **5. A new view of work**

17. Meaningful valuation of work
18. From co-worker to co-creator

## **6. Time for a richer life**

19. A 30-hour working week
20. Basic income
21. A year of education every ten years

## **7. Citizen democracy**

22. Citizen parliaments
23. Compulsory democratic service
24. Real equal opportunities

## **8. The whole person**

25. Common responsibility for happiness and wellness
26. A good start in life
27. More free art and culture
28. Freer spiritual expression
29. Culture as a lever

## **9. The digital age of enlightenment**

30. Constitutionally-protected digital freedoms
31. Data used to our advantage
32. Strengthen the discourse borne by the media
33. Restrict the commercial society
34. Social media as public service

## **10. The best country for the world**

35. Freedom rights for all
36. Denmark as a humanitarian superpower
37. Welcoming people seeking refuge
38. Not just the best country in the world

# 1. GREEN FORESTS ARE GOLD



Shouldn't we as a society value birdsong in the forest, bees buzzing or the sound of ocean waves much higher than is the case today? A rich fauna, a free and wild natural environment and living, green forests are worth their weight in gold. My vision for The Next Denmark is thus for us to become much better at looking after the nature we have, because once we have lost it, it will be gone for ever. Our own freedom is dependent upon nature being free too.

Today, Denmark is one of the countries in the world with the least nature. More than half of our country is used for agriculture, we are one of the countries in the European Union with the lowest protection of nature, and ever more birds, mammals and other species are threatened. That shows only too well how much the

pressure on nature has been increasing in recent years, for example on coastlines, water environments, meadows, commons and forests. And most of all it shows that it is time for us humans to recognize that we do not own nature and that we ought to show much more respect and empathy for all the life forms we share the planet with. Even though plants and animals have value for us, we must not forget that they first and foremost have value in themselves. So in future, we have to get better at organizing our lives, the environment and society in balance with nature, the environment, the climate and fauna – instead of competing with them.

In The Next Denmark – the Denmark of our grandchildren – it must be decided once and for all that the needs of nature are more important than the desire for growth. I believe that that can only be ensured if we approach things more radically. For example, could we imagine us in Denmark trying something new but actually quite uncontroversial: having a nature policy based on the needs of nature, for the sake of nature? And could we, from the political perspective, make sure that there is more room for animals and all the plants and life that we share the planet with, and which we are isolating and supplanting today?

## 1. GIVE NATURE LEGAL RIGHTS

In by far the majority of countries, nature is regarded as someone's property, and that owners have the right to damage eco-systems and nature if they want to. It ought not to be like that in the future. In the same way as citizens have basic freedoms today, nature also ought to have rights, so that we create balance and cohesion.

Around the world, grassroots movements, organizations and politicians already work with various different models which can guarantee rights for nature. These include giving eco-systems and

species the status of legal persons, just as has been done with businesses. The objective is to underline that nature – because it has value in itself – has an independent right to live and indeed to live well. If nature is given rights, then those rights can then be protected.

In 2008, Ecuador was the first country to recognize the rights of nature in its constitution, while Bolivia with its "Mother Earth" law has equated the rights of nature with the rights of humans. In New Zealand, a river and its eco-system have been given the same legal status as a person and its health and well-being is guaranteed, whereas the River Ganges in India has been given human rights.

At a local level, several jurisdictions have increased the rights of nature, for example in Pennsylvania, where several cities – including Pittsburgh – have given nature its own rights, something which has helped to prevent fracking in the area.

In the Next Denmark, we should follow these examples and give nature its own legal rights. These rights should really be written into the constitution, but there are, as it appears, several different options. These include softer versions where the focus is on citizens. In Norway, the right of citizens to a healthy environment is written into the constitution, for example.

As a continuation of the recognition of the rights of nature, it would also be natural to pay nature for the resources it makes available, and which we take from it. Shouldn't we compensate the forest in one way or another for its lumber, repay nature for its loss of resources when we produce goods and products, and reinvest the money to create better conditions for nature?

Iceland's Pirate Party has already come up with the idea of paying interest for using natural resources, which could be very appropriate and something to take inspiration from.

## 2. TAX NATURAL RESOURCES

The whole world has an urgent need to reduce the pressure on nature and the planet's resources. Unfortunately, no one has yet succeeded in developing solutions which will tame our widespread over-consumption. An international resource tax could however be part of the answer, because it entails compensating nature for the costs which the use of resources and the production of goods and products lead to.

As well as limiting the use of resources, the introduction of a resource tax could hopefully contribute to promoting the recycling of materials and resources, because it would become more financially viable to reuse much of what today is incinerated or dumped. The most important thing of all, however, is to agree that we live on a planet with limited resources, so that it is only reasonable that we as a society, citizens and businesses demand that we pay a price to nature as compensation for its loss of resources.

## 3. AT LEAST 20 % NATURE ZONES

As I mentioned, more than half of the land in Denmark is used for agriculture. That has a lot of consequences for the diversity of nature, just as it has consequences for our drinking water and the impact on our climate. In addition, there is only a small part of Denmark which is a natural environment, and large parts of nature continue to be subject to production interests, which impoverishes biodiversity and changes natural values.

Let us turn that development upside down and give nature more space. Let us make sure that nature makes up at least 20% of the land area of Denmark, in particular 20% where nature and biodiversity have the top priority. That can only be achieved by setting up actual nature zones in the planning laws – where no production takes place, and where nature and biodiversity come first. That will ensure a much richer natural environment, and give people a greater experience of nature than we know today.

Denmark has an international obligation to slow the decline in biodiversity (achieving that objective is not going very well), so wouldn't it actually be more ambitious to increase the diversity of nature significantly, and make space for more free and wild nature? I think so.

The transition should occur primarily by buying up production forests and agricultural land, restoring state-run forests to untouched forest and ensuring larger cohesive areas where the conditions for more self-sustaining natural environments are restored, for example by populating them with large herbivorous animals such as wild horses and elk.

Compared to a number of other countries, nature takes up very little space in Denmark. In Slovenia, almost 40% of the land area is designated as Natura 2000 areas, while more than 35% of Germany is under some form of protection.

4. A COUNTRY WITHOUT WASTE

Humanity has an absolutely enormous consumption of resources. Many – too many – of these resources are only used once before they are thrown away or incinerated, despite the fact that we live on a planet with limited resources and which has to provide for ever more billions of people.

The throwaway culture is not just a problem when waste ends up in nature (just look at how our use of plastic creates problems when it ends up in nature and is absorbed into the food chain, or disrupts and destroys eco-systems); it is also a waste of resources, which could instead be recycled and be used in other ways.

Today, we are one of the countries that generates the most waste, but instead our vision ought to be to create a country without waste. A country where all waste is seen as a resource to be used again in new ways. A country with a circular economy, where we show greater respect for the things we produce and for the ecological footprint they leave behind.

## 2. COMMON FORCES OF CREATIVITY



In a historical perspective, the key to Denmark's progress can to a great extent be ascribed to our ability to unleash the creative forces of the community. That was how the cooperative movement started, and it was also how the folk high school movement started. And it is highly appropriate that the strength and success of the welfare society is found in communities – strong, inventive and meaningful communities which bring people together and set them free, and which are based on unity and empathy, which give everyone equal opportunities to live a good life and which ensure freedom to develop one's dreams and talents.

So something shows that in Denmark, we are particularly good at making use of the fire, the drive and the creative forces which can be mobilized through meaningful communities. That ability must come more into play in the future. The opportunities for setting up, owning and running user-owned, member-owned and worker-owned businesses must be strengthened.

It must be easier to turn ownership into co-ownership, co-worker into co-founder, worker into job creator, opponent into fellow citizen and employee into partner. If we do that I am sure that we can start the next great wave of social innovation that can transport Denmark up to the next level.

The question is whether we can spread and experiment with completely new structures, models and forms of ownership which challenge or improve the systems and models we have today. How can we combine the best from the public, the private and the voluntary sectors to create a fourth sector?

Personally, I believe that reforms are needed if we are to set the potential of the community free. But more efforts are needed if we are to change gear to a more mixed economy, and increase the number of citizens who take part in the economy in a new way.

### 5. COMMON OWNERSHIP: COOPERATIVES

For me, the cooperative movement is a unique way of combining the desire to tame the free market economy with a desire to ensure and promote the freedom and creative forces of the individual and of the community. So it should be generally be easier and more attractive to start a cooperative, a production collective or a land guild.



Ideally, the number of community-based production businesses should be doubled over a ten-year period. That requires a number of changes to our current laws and rules. The possibilities here are numerous, and maybe we should just introduce actual legislation for cooperatives. Maybe we could get inspiration from Italy, where they have a general cooperative law and another law for social cooperatives. This law should also be developed so that community-based businesses, which experiment with alternative forms of ownership with both capital and (natural) resources, are accommodated.

Another idea which could be used is to make it easier and less bureaucratic to establish new hybrid models and businesses where private, civil and public forces come together and share the ownership between them. One of the prerequisites of that is the establishment of new support schemes, and that better opportunities for financial, organizational and legal advice for new types of corporative initiatives are set up. Last but not least, it is important that access to startup capital and finance for employee-owned and consumer-owned businesses is made easier, which is why consideration should be given to making banks give such businesses special treatment.

## **6. AN INVESTMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BANK FOR COOPERATIVES**

Today, it looks like we will be lucky if the last remaining small mutual and savings banks still exist in a few decades. So the cooperative movement needs to be protected by a number of financial incentives which will combine to create an advantageous economic infrastructure for co-ownership. We should also ensure access to start-up capital and financing for the new cooperative

moment. So it is appropriate to set up a special public investment and development bank that is targeted at investments in cooperative, employee-owned and consumer-owned businesses.

Consideration should also be given to setting up a cooperative fund where a proportion of the profit from cooperatives and cooperative companies could be channeled into other new startups. Cooperative profits should be tax-free when they are reinvested into the business, and could usefully be passed on to such a fund.

## **7. GENERATION HOUSES**

We will not strengthen our communities and what we can achieve by being closer to each other if we do not also look at the way we live. There is a clear trend to the gap between the generations becoming greater and greater. There are weaker and weaker connections between age groups and societal groups. At the same time, more and more people in Denmark live alone, which for many is a source of involuntary loneliness. We can and should do something about this. We will have to take radical steps to think about bringing more closeness and care into our fundamental infrastructure. In that way, and at a time when care and closeness are lacking, the state and the public sector can help to support new communities and ensure greater cohesion in our society by greater interaction across generations.

To strengthen bonds across generations and ethnicities, we can integrate future institutions so that care homes, student housing, childcare and kindergartens are all under the same roof, a concept known as generation houses. With the clever and visionary architects we have here in Denmark, only our imagination limits what can be

achieved, just as we can get inspiration from abroad such as from England, Japan, Australia or Singapore where similar initiatives have been successful.

The model can also usefully be used to develop new private forms of housing where the nuclear family ideal is combined with the best from the cooperative movement. The generation houses can strengthen our communities across generational boundaries, strengthen the exchange of knowledge and experience between trades and professions, and give improved care and happiness for our children, senior citizens and for each other.

At the same time we should make it easier and less expensive to live in large units which are financially and socially obligating communities extending across boundaries of age and financial and social background. So we should not just increase the amount of non-profit housing in the whole country, but we should also create new forms of housing which support our community structures.

## 8. PENSIONS FUNDS WHICH INVEST IN THE FUTURE

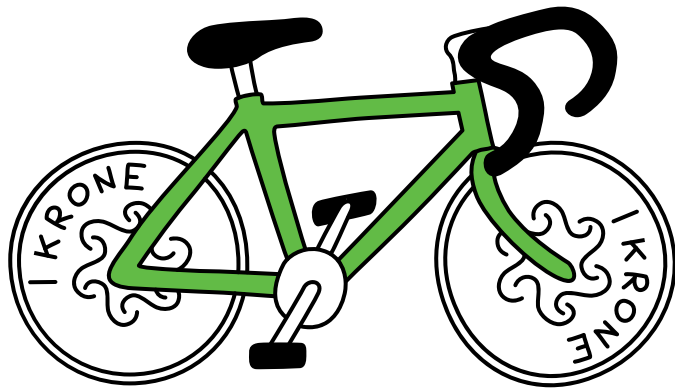
Our pension funds administer and invest billions and billions which basically belong to us all. So it is all the more important that this money – the community's money – be invested based on what is best for the community, and to a greater extent than today with respect to the financial, social and environmental bottom lines.

Even though the climate and the environment are moved higher up the agenda for many pension companies, many pension funds are still invested in ways which work against a serious sustainable transition. It is ethically indefensible, and should be changed.

In The Next Denmark, the law on pension investments should be changed. As a minimum it should be set out in law that consideration of social and environmental sustainability must be a requirement of equal weight alongside the requirements for the spread of risk and of financial return on investment. But additional requirements should also be considered which make it even more attractive for pension companies to make sustainable investments.



### 3. A FAIR AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY



According to Thomas Piketty, the growth in wealth and an intense concentration of capital on a global level have created such deep and systemic inequality, that it is difficult to imagine that a rebalancing of work incomes and redistribution via progressive taxation alone can compensate for this skewing.

Recent years have seen how rising inequality has also started to take hold in Denmark. While the richest people in the country have become richer since 2002, the poorer have become poorer. The numbers who live below the poverty line have grown enormously since the turn of the millennium, and according to The Danish Economic Council of the Labour Movement, the richest 10% of people in Denmark own just as much as the poorest 70% together.

A significant reason for the growth of inequality in Denmark is the combination of a number of economic welfare reforms, such as the introduction of a ceiling for social security payments and a particularly skewed distribution of wealth. But the fact that income from investment is higher than income from work means that inequality between rich and poor is rising and rising.

This more skewed distribution of wealth is a threat to the community. Because the large differences between rich and poor undermine the forces of cohesion in our society. Because concentration of wealth leads to concentration of power. And because inequality gives us very differing conditions and opportunities. Not to put too fine a point on it, in my eyes you cannot have real democracy if we do not also have economic democracy.

In the short term, it is of course an objective to do away with all the different payments to the poor, which have been proven to force thousands of Danish children and their families into poverty. But in the longer term, there is a need for more far-reaching suggestions. We must put the brakes on the excessive capital holdings and capital accumulation in society.

Maybe we should reform parts of the tax system, so that we can ensure a fair financing of our common welfare which is less directed at work and more directed to assets. Maybe we should dare to make changes to some of the things which for many people are almost untouchable, such as inheritance, property and assets, but which in fact are the factors which create the most inequality in our society. Or maybe we should just change the whole way we have set up the financial sector.

9. SPLITTING BANKS UP

In a frightening way, the financial crisis in the 2000s demonstrated why we should limit untamed economic growth and speculation. The financial crisis did not just bring the global economy to its knees, but it also showed that during a crisis, it is ordinary taxpayers as a rule, in other words the community, who end up having to pay the price for speculators’ mistakes and doubtful transactions.

In order to avoid future financial crises and prevent a new situation occurring where ordinary people have to finance the banks and support the financial sector, it is worth investigating if the solution is to split up the financial and banking sector into two separate sectors. One sector for ordinary retail banks and another consisting of all other financial institutions.

Besides splitting up the banks, we could look more seriously at the possibilities and advantages of re-organizing the monetary system in Denmark to one known as a full reserve banking system. With this, banks may only lend out money which they have already received in deposits or through loans from the central bank. This would partly minimize the risk of new financial crises, and partly create a more sustainable economic system with a stable money supply.

10. A SHOWDOWN AGAINST INEQUALITY THROUGH OWNERSHIP

In order to take care of our land and our communities, we need to have a fundamental discussion about how the framework and the legislative pre-requisites for purchasing and owning land and property in our society should look. That goes not least for the right to become extremely rich from owning, buying and speculating in

land and property. My objective as such is not to reduce rights, but to put rights other than economic freedom for the few in first place.

The objective of discussing our laws about ownership is to create a society which can support the development of a social and economic infrastructure which does not have increase in material wealth as a goal, but rather has respect and opportunities for people and the environment as its intention. Fundamentally, the desire is for individuals as well as businesses to own to a lesser extent the land they utilize, live or build on, instead borrowing that land from the community. There are of course many nuances and potential grey areas in this principle, but the essence in the approach is to take a brave and radical step to counteract both the privatization and the commercialization of our land, our soil and our natural resources.

In The Next Denmark we ought as a minimum to limit the opportunities for large capital funds to speculate in the purchase of land and property with the intention of making a profit. But we must also dare to discuss whether it is fair and appropriate for increases in the value of land and property to benefit the individual to the same extent as is the case today. Whether it is healthy for our democracy that the potential for becoming very rich through ownership is too great.

We ought to find ways for the increasing value generated between purchase and sale to be reinvested in society to a greater extent – for example in social, cultural and sustainable projects. Of course one should have the opportunity to own and withdraw the money that has been invested in the property. But in my eyes it should not be possible to become rich purely by owning property or buying land – and most important of all: people should not risk missing out on economic growth just because they do not own a home or property.

## 11. NEW INHERITANCE RULES

High value assets passed on through inheritance are a large factor in creating inequality in society, according to Thomas Piketty, because typically those people who already have the most are the ones who inherit the largest sums of money. It is neither logical nor democratically healthy that large sums of capital be passed on in the way they do today, because that maintains a skewed distribution of wealth. At the same time, neither is it fundamentally socially equitable that enormous fortunes are inherited as they are today because it causes inequalities between people right from birth. My starting point is, and has always been, that no one should be born into either an especially privileged or unprivileged situation. Quite the opposite: everyone should have equally good opportunities to create themselves a good life and become the best version of themselves.

As the economic moral philosopher Adam Smith emphasized, it is difficult to defend the right for people to be able to make use of their fortunes when they are no longer here. In future, people should of course also be able to inherit personal items, property with a sentimental value and small sums of money – but we should limit the possibilities of passing on large property portfolios and fortunes just because the recipient was born into a particular family.

I imagine a new and progressive inheritance tax as part of the solution to creating a more equitable society. A model where all those who inherit relatively little inherit a little more, while those who inherit relatively more inherit less. For example, a progressive inheritance tax could be shaped in a way that reduces the tax on amounts under €100,000 and raises it significantly for amounts over that. If inequality continues to rise, we should continue to adjust the rates.

When it comes to family businesses, advantageous inheritance rules can be established if employees are involved in the ownership, for example.

## 12. TURNOVER TAX

Many businesses – especially high-tech giants and other multinational companies – do not contribute to society, or only contribute in a very limited way, by paying tax. That some of the world's richest companies weasel their way out of paying tax, and thus undermine the structures of the societies which have contributed to making them successful, is not of course not sustainable

In this regard, a gradual transition of company taxation to a tax on turnover is a possibility. Over the last 18 years, the tax on company profits in Denmark has been reduced by 12 percentage points from 34% to 22% of a company's taxable profit. By moving tax from profit to turnover, it will be much more similar to the way ordinary people pay tax; as we know, people pay tax on their income and not on what they have left after their bills are paid.

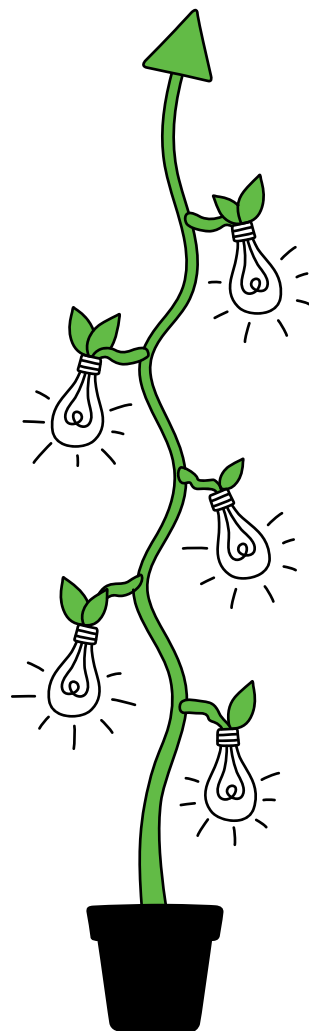
The scheme can be set up so that it is primarily multinational businesses that do not contribute today that end up paying significantly more, whereas Danish companies that already pay company tax today will not pay more.

In the spring of 2018, the EU Commission suggested a targeted turnover tax which can act as inspiration. Such a turnover tax as described above would of course have to be implemented internationally, as the problem is basically international, even though the consequences can only be felt in the individual countries where no tax is paid today.



## 4. BUSINESSES THAT MOVE THINGS

Everyone should be encouraged to help serious, sustainable transition along – citizens, the state and businesses. Danish businesses will be critical players in realizing the next Denmark. We cannot do it without them. Fortunately, we already have lots of companies who have acted and continue to act very responsibly when it comes to ensuring the future of the planet. They must keep it up – and I know that most of them want to.



The Next Denmark should be characterized by a business and startup culture which is even stronger and even more beneficial to society than today. New companies create new jobs, and according to "Start-up Barometer" in 2016, they have been responsible for 45% of the net job growth in Denmark. At the same time there is scarcely any doubt that small and medium-sized companies are absolutely essential for maintaining and developing the creativity, innovation and social invention which we need to live off in The Next Denmark.

The question is how we make it possible for businesses and new startups to advance and support sustainable transition. For example, can we make it easier and more attractive to invest in and start new businesses? And can we increase the incentive for businesses to introduce a triple bottom line?

### 13. REWARD BUSINESSES THAT INTRODUCE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINES

Businesses play a central role in creating a more sustainable society. So the companies which introduce and operate with a triple bottom line should be rewarded if they meet a number of requirements. For example, it could be businesses committing to having goals for society or the environment, and demonstrating the effect of that would lead to them being given significant tax advantages or being rewarded in another way.

### 14. NO TAXES FOR STARTUP BUSINESSES

The Next Denmark should support a development where it becomes just as normal to be someone who takes a job as to be someone who creates a job. Politicians should make it easier to invest in and start a new business, and should consider how we can best support such

a development. We should ensure that all startup companies, or at least those which are green or social-economic, do not have to pay tax in their first year of operation, for example. Or until they reach a certain size, so that they have greater potential to challenge and compete with established and large companies in the market.

## **15. ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY IN NEW STARTUP PROJECTS**

The engagement and creative force of the community should be used to strengthen Danish startup culture. However, that requires a change in some of the rules and laws which today form a significant barrier to new businesses being successful. For example, we should work to make it easier to expand ownership, and engage more people in the development – or financing – of new startup projects. Through various new steps, for example the expansion of employee share schemes, more up-to-date rules and less bureaucracy when it comes to crowd funding, we can strengthen the framework of Danish startup culture. Last but not least, more and better training in starting up your own business, across all levels of education, should support the ambition that more people should have the opportunity and courage to start and develop their own business in the future.

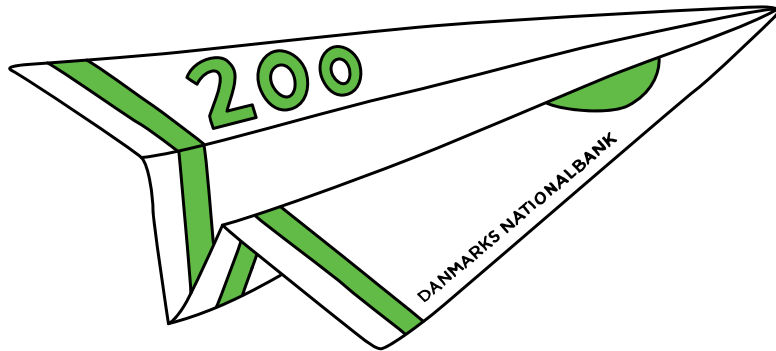
## **16. PUBLIC PROCUREMENT AT SUSTAINABLE BUSINESSES**

Public sector procurement in Denmark is around €40 billion annually, so the way the sector procures has enormous significance for businesses and for society as a whole. Public procurement should to a much greater extent help to support sustainable businesses and sustainable production than it does today. All public procurement in The Next Denmark should therefore be from sustainable businesses which not only operate with a financial bottom line but also with a

social and environmental bottom line, or which meet internationally recognized standards, for example the international B Corporation standard.



## 5. A NEW VIEW OF WORK



For many people, the way we have organized our work and live our lives is not a guarantee of meaning or of happiness. Quite the opposite. For many people, the job market has become a jumble of stress, chance, unfair hierarchies and repetitiveness. We are working for the economy, but in reality it ought to be working for us. At the same time it has almost become the norm that going to work should lead to self-realization and be deeply meaningful – but the reality is that far too many people have difficulty finding a deeper meaning in their work. Either because they are doing routine tasks, are too busy, or simply because they attach more importance to creating meaning in their lives during their free time.

There are a lot of indications that we ought to take a step back and ask questions about our work culture and our working lives. Should working eight hours a day, five days a week be a given? Should it

only be through work that we can find meaning? And can we shape our work in a different way, so that it gives more meaning for the individual and strengthens the community?

Re-evaluating our view of work continues on from the need to replace unlimited and unsustainable growth with more community and quality, just as it also goes well with the need to counteract stress and loneliness. And most important of all, it opens up for a revolt against the current logic of the competitive state, where people first and foremost are seen as useful beings instead of social creators.

### 17. MEANINGFUL VALUATION OF WORK

Creating a new view of work starts with a significant leveling out of the economic differences in incomes, and a revolt against the way we set value on work today. Real reform and democratization demands that we dare to question and review our way of rewarding work. For example, why do we not better reward those who do some of the most critical tasks in society– nurses and teachers?

The valuation of the work done in our society often sends the wrong signal about which tasks create value and meaning for society – despite the enormous work done by trade unions over a century. The current valuation of work seldom matches the real meaning and importance of that work. So it is appropriate to work with a model for pay leveling, which in time can supplement basic income. It ensures a model for a leveling system which doesn't just look after the interests of the groups that are represented by trade unions. That way we will not create pay equality which only benefits well-organized groups.



## 18. FROM CO-WORKER TO CO-CREATOR

It may seem banal, but it is nevertheless important to underline that we need to practice democracy before we can understand it. That also applies to democracy in the workplace and the opportunity for individuals to exercise influence on their work.

Changes to the job market will not only happen through outside forces. Companies must also be reformed and democratized from within. Employees should have greater influence on their working lives and workplaces, and opportunities for co-ownership and influence at work should be reinforced. It should also be made a legal requirement for employees to be offered the opportunity to get together to buy the business before it is taken over, sold abroad, closed down or goes public on the stock exchange.

We should work more generally across ownership forms and sectors to make sure there are incentives for companies actively working on promoting employee democracy and giving employees influence on large decisions in the company. Because stress and burnouts are not just due to the volume of work, but also the lack of influence on that work.

At the same time, employees and workplaces all over the country should benefit from their company's results to a much greater extent. We already have a lot of good experience with employee shares; unfortunately the schemes seldom benefit all employees in the company. In order to broaden ownership and inclusion, all employees, and not just middle and top management, should be rewarded with or offered shares.



## 6. TIME FOR A RICHER LIFE



Both in Denmark and the rest of the world, people are in living in a time of upheaval, where technological development is giving us completely new opportunities to organize our economies and job markets. On the one hand we have every opportunity to realize a working life where new technology and smarter ways of working can create a better work-life balance, can increase the feeling of meaning, can reduce the number of people hit by stress and in general can increase the quality of life. On the other hand, there is a risk for the same dynamics reinforcing a development where the job market becomes more uncertain, where the social safety net becomes weaker, and where we see a precarious situation occurring. And where inequality ends up rising even more, as a result of capital accumulation and undignified working conditions.

The challenge will be to ensure that the technological challenges are used to create a better, more sustainable and more meaningful society. The trends and tendencies we see demand new, innovative solutions to the challenges they bring. We already know that thousands of people in Denmark suffer from stress, that families with children have difficulty finding meaningful work-life balance, and that there is an overwhelming likelihood that many, many thousands of jobs will be automated in the coming decades (something which has caused leading entrepreneurs such as Bill Gates and Elon Musk to talk about the possibility of a robot tax, something which might also gain traction in The Next Denmark, so we tax the robots who take over jobs which were previously done by people).

If we do not take these trends seriously, they will only grow. The question is how we deal with them – how we ensure that technological advance is used to improve the framework for a good life, both privately and at work, while at the same time society is changing. In short: how do we build a daily life with a more flexible, solidary and family-friendly job market which ensures jobs for more people and time for people?

### 19. A 30-HOUR WORKING WEEK

Today, many people feel trapped in one of the many hamster wheels of the competitive state, and stress, attrition and low quality of life are increasing problems for thousands of people in Denmark. According to the Danish Stress Association, 430,000 people experience serious stress every day, while 900,000 have difficulty with work/life balance, according to the Family and Work Commission. The researchers Svend Brinkmann and Anders Petersen have explained in their work and descriptions of the "diagnosis and performance society" that it is essential that psychological conditions are not reduced to being an individual thing, but instead made



into a collective responsibility. So it is crucial that responsibility for handling the challenges which plague many people not be parked with the individual, but handled and solved by and within the community.

In The Next Denmark, we need to work together to make sure there is a framework for everybody being able to live a good, meaningful and healthy life. An important step on that path is to create a more flexible job market where we work less, and make sure we have a better and more sensible work life balance. In short, we need to reduce the number of hours we work and increase our quality of life. It is interesting that many people often point out the poor connection between the number of hours they work and the quality they produce – that we as a society both in the public and private sectors have built a layer of functions which do not really produce content, meaning or results, but instead are bureaucratic and unnecessary. That wasted energy could easily be released to be used on free time, time with the family and social purposes.

The introduction of a 30-hour working week can be justified in many ways, but overall it is an important vision for the future of society because it will generally increase freedom, improve quality of life, reduce stress and reduce the rate of disability in the population. A shorter working week will also be a solidary step for people outside the job market because it will open up opportunities for more people to join it and contribute to the community.

For some people, the idea of a 30-hour working week can seem rather distant, but in fact reducing working hours is actually a tradition in Denmark. In 1900, a working week here lasted 60 hours. Twenty years later it had fallen to 48. And since 1990, working hours have been constant at 37 hours. Interestingly, and seen historically, we have only become a richer and more wealthy society with the

reduction in working hours, which shows that you can reduce hours yet still maintain a high living standard.

## 20. BASIC INCOME

One of the foremost tasks of the welfare state is to define and reinforce the balance between stability, equal treatment, care and freedom. Over the past 15 to 20 years, we have however been witness to an increasing instrumentalization of both the public and voluntary sectors, which means that the administration of our welfare and laws are increasingly functioning as a control rather than a support mechanism. The caring welfare state has for some people – especially the vulnerable – become a means of control and discipline.

I see basic income as a central aspect of a future sustainable society. It can come to be the foundation of future job market policy, because the idea combines social considerations with a better distribution of work. The latter in particular can become very relevant within just a few years, because increasing automation will render some of the job functions we have today superfluous. Similarly, basic income will counteract the current inhuman and bureaucratic system for helping the unemployed back to work, and introduce completely new socio-economic thinking where we combine the desire for reduced working hours, for low economic inequality, for reduction in bureaucracy, for jobs for people and for a strong social safety net. That way, the idea of basic income fits very well with the whole idea of the cooperative movement, where the work available is distributed, at the same time solving the challenges of long working days and jobs lacking in significant meaning.

## 21. A YEAR OF EDUCATION EVERY TEN YEARS

We often hear that education is a natural resource in Denmark, and that knowledge and skills are what we will have to live off in the future. For the same reason, The Next Denmark should assure education for life – lifelong education. First and foremost, the increased centralization and control in schools and education institutions of recent years should be replaced by more decentralization and freedom for the individual institution. National tests should of course be completely done away with, but otherwise the overall framework such as the length of the school day and the use of grades should be set by the individual school or institution, and based on local needs and wishes to a much higher extent.

However, a strong education system should not just focus on children and young people. Humans are curious by nature, and in line with society developing – with greater and greater speed – we as individuals also have a natural need to develop ourselves. So the opportunities to become cleverer, to have one's curiosity satisfied and to make a life change should not just be available at the start of our lives, but be spread over a lifetime.

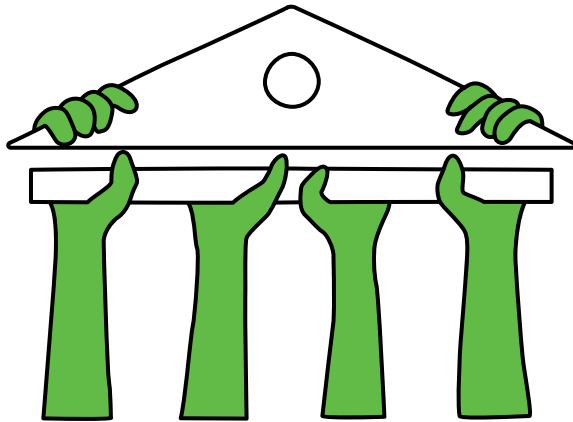
One way of doing this is by offering lifetime learning and a one-year training program every ten years over a person's whole lifetime. Of course it should be voluntary. The training program should be based on individual needs and motivations, and be aimed at developing people as whole, curious, creative and sensitive beings, just as it should also offer the opportunity to reinforce specific knowledge and skills. It will also open up our institutes of education and free them from the iron grip of the competitive state.

Alternatively, we could consider an extended model where people are also offered time for peace and quiet, contemplation and social engagement. A creative break where people have time and the opportunity to revisit the meaning of their lives and work out whether they have chosen the right path and direction in their own lives.

The value of these personal creative breaks is something we already know today when our teenagers choose to take a gap year or when they save up to go to a folk high school instead of going directly on to higher education. Or when an employee wants to take time out for further training after a number of years in the same job.



## 7. CITIZEN DEMOCRACY



Even though the level of corruption is low and the level of election turnout high, Denmark is facing some serious democratic challenges. It is of particular concern that people's trust in politicians is at a historically low level, that local democracy has been weakened since the municipal reform of 2007 and fewer and fewer people are interested in getting involved in the public debate through political parties. Very many people in Denmark today do not feel deeply involved in the public and political discourse. Quite the opposite: they feel that the distance to elected representatives has become greater, and that democratic participation has been reduced to a simple cross on a ballot paper once every four years.

At the same time we can see that several democratic institutions are under pressure. It is our task to defend them as well as grow them.

Because as a society, we should take it very seriously that so many people have lost the belief that it is worth getting involved. Democracy is far more than just a way of running the country and an election every four years. Democracy is a way of life which takes place in the discourse between people who want to collectively know more in order to take decisions which are best for the community. That is why democracy without active and engaged citizens is in reality also a weak democracy.

When we build The Next Denmark, it is essential that we take the democratic challenges in society seriously. Not just with words, but also with actions. We must motivate more people to take an active part in society and ensure that it is worth getting involved. Citizen proposals, which have already been introduced, can be part of the solution for some of these challenges. The same also applies to rolling back the municipal reform, experiments with direct democracy in free municipalities or the introduction of citizen budgets where people can decide together what a part of the municipal budget should be used on. But that is not enough. More is needed.

The question is how we create a more open, inviting, involving, trusting and curious democracy. How do we open our democracy up more, and bring people into the decision-making processes? And do we have the courage to rethink how our democratic structure and the potential for promoting democratic participation and representation?

22. CITIZEN PARLIAMENTS

In Denmark we are better at celebrating our democracy than growing it. It is very telling that the introduction of citizen proposals is maybe the most significant new democratic concept we have seen for a long time. Nevertheless, the trends and challenges we are facing are so great that the quality of our democracy is directly dependent upon having the courage to renew and change it for the better – and managing to involve many more people in democratic processes.

The idea of changing the democratic setup can seem somewhat controversial for some people. But in fact it is quite normal for what we know sometimes having to be renewed and developed if it is to retain its legitimacy. That also applies to our democracy. For example, we could choose to expand the representation of the people and supplement Parliament with a citizen parliament. The idea of a citizen parliament comes from the researchers into the elite Mulvad, Ellersgaard and Larsen who in their book ‘Tame the Elite’ suggest setting up a parliament consisting of ordinary people, which contributes to the development of new policies and is given a mandate to arrange hearings and expert meetings in connection with legislative proposals and manifestos from the government. In that way, bridges can be built between people and elected representatives, because it is a requirement that members of the citizen parliament are selected by lottery in order to ensure a broader and more socio-economic representative makeup of the Parliament.

23. COMPULSORY DEMOCRATIC SERVICE

The greatest democratic gain with the conscription model we have today is that it brings people together across different social, ethnic and geographic backgrounds and teaches them to collaborate on common tasks. Those are essential skills for The Next Denmark.

However the question is how the nature of the tasks should be renewed. I mean that. Why not expand conscription from military service to also have a direct democratic and humanitarian focus which benefits the community? I imagine that we could make it compulsory for all young people – both men and women – for a period of between three and six months, for example, to do compulsory, modernized community service which could well be in the military but which for most will be at an NGO, humanitarian organisation, a charity or a municipality or similar. It could be in a hostel for the homeless, helping schoolchildren with their homework, in a municipal park or in a sports club.

In that way, the scheme would give young people the opportunity to do meaningful work for the community as part of their ordinary education, just as it will give organisations and associations the opportunity to take on more tasks. The scheme could take inspiration from the experiences of setting up the scheme for conscientious objectors to military service. Of course it would be a requirement that the people taking part be a benefit and not a burden for the relevant organizations, and that they do not take work away from salaried staff.



## 24. GENUINE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

We used to say 'liberté, égalité, fraternité' – liberty, equality, fraternity. These days, we ought to call for a fight for 'liberty, equality and sorority', because there are still problems with gender equality in society. Sexism is also a problem in many places, and many surveys also show that it is still an advantage to be a man in the Danish job market of 2018: there are more men on company boards and there are more men in top level management in business.

In future, this lack of gender equality has to stop. In The Next Denmark, there will not just be gender equality on paper, but also gender equality in reality. Quotas are one of the ways this objective can be achieved. Another is parental leave for men, which will ensure that men have more time with their children and that women have better conditions in the job market. However, none of these steps will resolve the large differences in pay between men and women, something which makes up one of the largest equality challenges in society today. So in The Next Denmark we should take inspiration from Iceland, where there is a requirement that all companies with over 25 employees document that men and women in the same job get the same pay regardless of gender, sexuality or ethnicity. If that cannot be shown, then the company is liable to pay a fine. It should be the same in Denmark.

I believe that a society where decisions are taken by a more diverse group of decision-makers will be a better society, because it will simply take better decisions when various different perspectives are represented at all levels.



## 8. THE WHOLE PERSON



A year ago, I met the Argentinian sculptor Lala Pasquinelli. She talked about a project which she had completed over the past few years. It consisted of interviewing people from all over Argentina and asking them the same question: when do you most feel that you are yourself? Yes – when do you feel that you are most present and alive?

Even though those interviewed came from all parts of Argentinian society, the same three answers came up again and again. Namely that those interviewed felt most present when they were out in nature, being creative (playing music, singing, drawing, writing, dancing etc.) or helping someone.

If that is right, then why is it that we so seldom cultivate or value this side of human life – of being a living, social, multifaceted and a watchful person? When we as humans have such an enormous number of strings to play with: emotional, intellectual, creative, poetic and practical – then why is it that we most often only make

use of two of them: material consumption and (work) performance? And to such a degree that these two strings are so overstretched that it is only a question of time before they snap.

The next Denmark should be marked by a respect for and knowledge about us being full of so much more human potential and talent than we show today, if we are given more opportunities to use our heads, our hearts and our hands. That goes for children, young people, adults and senior citizens alike.

Unfortunately, we have built a society where the primary focus is on our heads, in other words on our academic and intellectual ability, or a society where we are exhausted by a long life of hard physical work. In both cases, the result is a society which very much cuts itself off from its own emotional capacity and its practical creative power. In my eyes, it is a society which is only running at half speed. It is emotionally unfulfilled and not least a society with poverty of creativity. It is not a society we deserve. Instead, we should build a more thoughtful, more aware and more creative Denmark.

### 25. COMMON RESPONSIBILITY FOR HAPPINESS AND WELLNESS

These days, far too many of us have pain in our souls – especially young people. Most certainly, that is because we have an excessive focus on individual intellectual performance, and a tendency to measure success by its usefulness to the job market. We have ended up in a hamster wheel Denmark.

That undermines our communities, intimacy and care for each other. Loneliness, stress, depression and anxiety are just some of the examples of the mental and emotional crisis we are in. We all need



care, intimacy and community – but we are still racing to be the first, the fastest, the best or the richest. It is as if we have forgotten that we are first and foremost social beings, not individualistic or economic beings. We should therefore learn – and this applies especially to young people – that the path to happiness is not just about being something for yourself – you also need to be something for other people. Being something for others should be regarded as being successful.

In order to leave this vicious circle, how we handle our mental and emotional imbalances and breakdowns must be equated with physical and psychological imbalances and breakdowns. Both when it comes to prevention and to treatment.

Help from psychologists, mindfulness, physical treatments, meditation and nature and culture on prescription should in other words be free of charge. But they are not enough, and they are to a great extent only treating the symptoms.

Efforts to improve mental and emotional health must not be undertaken in isolation, but be included as a concept for political development on all fronts. Mental and emotional health should not just be an isolated part of health policy, but should to a great extent be included across all areas of politics – from education to culture, and to housing and employment policy.

## 26. A GOOD START IN LIFE

Good childcare and kindergartens are assumed to be the best investment which society can undertake in a child's life from a health, socio-political and socio-economic point of view. A good start in life is essential for a child's health and path in life and an important tool for breaking down negative social legacies. For

example, research shows that children attending childcare with low teacher-child ratios and qualified staff generally end up better-educated, live healthier lives and become less frequently involved in criminality than other children.

In The Next Denmark, we must of course make sure that all childcare is of such a high professional, social and cultural quality that it is possible for all children to get a good start in life. Very specifically, that means that we must as a minimum ensure that staff are well-educated and have good working conditions, and that the teacher-child ratios meet recommendations. So that there is both time and space to stimulate the children and give them care, security and love.

But as a society, we must do more than that: our childcare and kindergartens must work with families and the local area they are part of to create the best possible pedagogical, social, cultural and emotional development space for our youngest citizens. A development space which is the foundation and thus the starting point for the personal life journey each of our children has started out on. Their whole personality should be acknowledged, brought out, challenged and reinforced in these early and crucial years. Physically, emotionally and intellectually.

## 27. MORE FREE ART AND CULTURE

Art and culture enrich our lives and make us smarter about ourselves and the society around us. So art and culture in The Next Denmark must be made available to far more people. The Alternative has already suggested offering culture vouchers to 18-year-olds, but the scheme is worth expanding so that far more people can become natural consumers of art and culture, and that there is increased demand for new forms of artistic expression.

A good start would be to make it free of charge for children, young people and families with children to visit many museums and cultural institutions around the country, and that children and young people of all ages get to see professional, live performing arts at least once a year throughout their schooling. A pre-requisite for this being possible is of course that the annual 2% reduction in the national culture and arts budget cease immediately.

Arts and culture should not be given a lower, but a higher priority in The Next Denmark. More specifically, artists who wish to exhibit their work free of charge should have much easier access to multi-year grants. We should also support new thought and initiatives in order to promote a lively influx of artists such as Artmoney, where art is used as a means of payment. That can be achieved by making sure there are advantages for shops, suppliers and businesses which accept alternative forms of currency. We should also ensure the best framework for artistic cooperatives, which should be accommodated in the new cooperative legislation and have the opportunity to make use of beneficial grant schemes and financing opportunities.

## 28. FREER SPIRITUAL EXPRESSION

For many of us, spiritual development or religious belief is essential to living a rich and meaningful life. However today, we only support one particular spirituality through state-collected church taxes, namely the Christian: the Lutheran Church of Denmark, where all members of that church pay taxes which are collected by the state.

Denmark is to a great extent a Christian country – in any event we have been one historically and Christianity has colored our culture and our society. But today we live in a different society, where large groups of people do not closely identify with Christianity. Either

because they regard themselves as atheists, or because they identify with and/or practice another religion or spiritual movement.

In the next Denmark, we therefore ought to support a more diverse form of religious and spiritual expression, which can for example be financed in the same way as with church taxes.

## 29. CULTURE AS A LEVER

Many of the social challenges we have today can be solved in committed cultural interest communities. That can be in sports clubs, in communal kitchens, in music, visual arts, literature schools and groups, in community houses, in the local skater park or in a public garden. My starting point has always been that culture must be at the center of the development of society. That is because, among other things, of the ability of culture to create and strengthen communities. So in future, we should strengthen the cultural offerings significantly based on the precepts of culture being welfare – and culture can be a social lever which can also promote integration and cohesion. Both in the town and in the country.

Culture in the broad sense – broader than today – should be cultivated as a political focus area in The Next Denmark. There can be house artist schemes in public, private or community-owned workplaces or institutions, where paid artists move in for a period and act as creative, gifted disruptors.

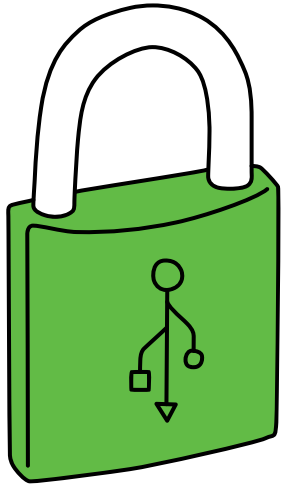
Very generally, it is important that we encourage people in Denmark to be active producers of culture to a much greater extent than today, not in a narrow or elite sense, but by giving space to a much broader production of culture. And again, that starts with children and young people. Art, music, theatre, modern circus, dance, design,

film and handicrafts should be given a higher priority starting from kindergarten and moving on into schools and further education. Again, the principle ought to be that in all types of teaching, the connection between head, heart and hand be understood. We must be challenged intellectually. We must be challenged emotionally. We must be challenged practically. We must be challenged creatively. So the creative and the practical must not just be on the school curriculum to a greater extent than they are today, but they must also be incorporated into every subject.

For example, this could be by allowing artists, musicians, dancers, actors, poets, authors, designers or cultural entrepreneurs to take over teaching all or part of the course for a shorter or longer period. One specific example of how radical and meaningful that can be done was when the Sisters Academy artist collective took over all the teaching at some educational institutes in the city of Odense.



## 9. THE DIGITAL AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT



Our relationship to and the use of data is a cornerstone of The Next Denmark. The old mantra of 'knowledge is power' has gained an almost explosive relevance in the new digital age. But as the world appears today, it is unfortunately not always the best thing for us.

In many ways, the Internet has set off positive, inclusive movements in our society and at a global level. The new digital universe has given – at least some of us – more opportunities, more knowledge and more experiences. But these digital opportunities have not overcome the economic and political forces which challenge

our democracy and create inequality. Quite the opposite: the new digital universes have become a motor for marketization and commercialization which have started a development, the consequences of which are difficult to determine.

The Internet as a whole has not become the great democratic digital community we could have dreamed of. Rather, the opportunities this digital innovation has fostered have too often been used for non-transparent marketing and misuse of people's data. Too seldom is it a social infrastructure that strengthens our communities.

But Facebook, Google and Snapchat are not just the problem – they are the symptom of the marketization of our communities. And it may be a cliché, but data is the new oil of world trade. Data, control of the flow of information, distribution of knowledge and information are among the greatest global power arenas of our time. Especially because the spreading of fake news and misinformation has become one of the greatest threats to global security of our time. And because the struggle for truth has to an almost absurd degree been overtaken by economic market forces, which, through advertising, control the algorithms which define our window on reality. Data control and news distribution can undermine democracies, decide elections and ensure that despots and authoritarian figures remain in power. If we do not take control of this development, there is a significant threat to the last democracies of this era. The Next Denmark therefore depends on a digital freedom project where we take up a fundamental revolt against the technology sector's and the state's way of using and misusing data.

The Alternative has previously proposed setting up an independent council for data ethics, an idea which quickly found political support. We have not yet seen this idea become reality, just as we are yet to see how the work of the council would look or how effective it will be, but such a council is also just the first step if we are to ensure a digital age of enlightenment which changes the world for the better.

### 30. CONSTITUTIONALLY-PROTECTED DIGITAL FREEDOMS

Securing new digital rights for citizens demands that we take those rights seriously – and that also includes when those rights are violated in cyberspace. There is a very fundamental need for us to create an ethical, legal framework for our digital present and future. Of course, national legislation and policies are not sufficient, but a significant ethical, legal framework can be an essential impetus for taking the fight on to the European and global arenas. That requires us to write digital freedoms for citizens into the constitution. That can include adding the following:

That citizens have full ownership of the data. That rules for public authorities' exchange, integration and further use of personal data for new, inconsistent purposes must always be approved by an Act of Parliament. That citizens have the right to express themselves freely and take decisions free from manipulation based on data analysis. And finally, that all surveillance must be approved by a court, with the approval being valid for a limited period only.

### 31. DATA USED TO OUR ADVANTAGE

We should not be so critical and limiting that we end up avoiding making use of the enormous positive opportunities which the digital age offers humanity. As a community, we must manage to make use of the digital opportunities to find new, innovative solutions to complex problems, to build a more lively discourse and maybe just make life a little bit easier.

A step in the right direction could be to set up an investment fund which finances free and independent research into digital data systems, and which supports private companies working on digitalization for the benefit of society and democracy.

That is because we shouldn't just end up regulating digital systems. Instead, we have to find the best way to make use of the opportunities provided by data for the benefit of the community. We have to turn the digital revolution into an advantage for us as a community.

That can be achieved with a massive effort to use new digital innovations to strengthen our communities, not least the services to be provided by the public sector and a more democratic distribution of research and knowledge. For example, we should ensure that universities and welfare institutions have the necessary access to technology, data and systems, so that they can use them to shape the social infrastructure of the future. At the same time, it is important that we make sure that people do not lose control of data and the infrastructure which most of our political and economic institutions will be based on in future. That is vital in order to ensure trust for authorities.

### 32. STRENGTHEN THE DISCOURSE BORNE BY THE MEDIA

A free and independent media is one of the pillars of democracy. Informed citizens are a basic ingredient of democracy and must therefore be treated as a public asset. Unfortunately, the conditions for a free press and trustworthy access to information are under serious pressure. Under such pressure in fact, that our democracy risks being undermined from within. We should therefore use the opportunities of the digital age to create a healthier and more democratic media landscape.

Compared to many other countries, the Danish media landscape has been protected from major breakups and extreme signs of crisis, but nevertheless we have witnessed a creeping commercialization of our media landscape, which means commercialization of the public discourse which takes place on television, online platforms, on radio and in newspapers. Advertisements and other commercial interests control the financing and distribution of news and knowledge to a much too great extent. Both the publishers and the distributors of news have advertising as one of their primary sources of income, and that can have an influence on what information reaches individual citizens, and how. The media picture should not be controlled by our consumer culture, but by our interest in society around us. We must consider trustworthy media as essential for the lifelong learning of every one of us. Allowing advertisements and consideration for advertisers to make up such a dominating factor is almost the same as financing our schoolbooks with advertising. It should be the interests of society which are in focus – not the interests of the market or of advertisers. So we must increase media subsidies significantly in order to ensure a much better and more financially independent basis for the media.

### 33. RESTRICT THE COMMERCIAL SOCIETY

Our consumer society is very much based on needs formed by the advertising industry. Public space, media and digital platforms are full of commercial marketing which helps to titillate our feeling of need – not just basic biological needs, but needs which are driven and formed by our need for recognition – the need to take part in the ever-faster race to perform. The spread of advertising testifies to an economic development which is taking place at the expense of our planet. As a privileged country, Denmark should lead the way and show that we can actually live a good life without living in a society plastered full of advertising. First and foremost it should not be commercially-borne platforms which set a framework for our consumption and information about the things we buy, consume or eat. Advertising helps maintain a consumer culture which is neither of benefit for our mental health nor for our environment or climate. I know that that seems a radical step, but as our consumer curve grows, there is a need to put limits on commercial freedom – in order to benefit our freedom to be at peace with ourselves, our freedom to consume according to our needs and not according to external pressures and expectations. So we should experiment with introducing bans on some forms of advertising in public space. Not a total ban on information about goods or services, but perhaps a ban on pictures of goods and of people using them. Such a ban is something I actually see as a freeing up of our public space and our public discourse rather than a limitation on our freedom.

### 34. SOCIAL MEDIA AS PUBLIC SERVICE

Social media have brought the world, and people who would otherwise not have met, closer together. And they have created new social communities, which although digital, can also be – and



often are – very meaningful. Most social media are free of charge because we the users – and information about us – are effectively the product which the tech giants capitalize on. Over time, several social media have also developed into echo chambers because of opaque algorithms, where users are presented for widely differing realities.

If social media are to seriously honor their potential and reinforce democracy, it is essential to regulate them here and now, although in the long term it may prove necessary to re-think, and actually de-commercialize them. The task of establishing non-commercial social media could thus be put out to tender, perhaps to public service suppliers. A public service alternative to the commercial social media we know today would be able to ensure more beneficial change for society. Where users' data is not something to be traded, where fake news can be combatted, where algorithms are publicly known and without any commercial interest, and where the platform is not financed by advertising. It is important to ensure that such a public service alternative has a critical mass of users, so it could for example be a task for the European public service media to run together. It is also essential that the alternative is independent, so that users' data does not fall into government hands. But with data not being used commercially, it would also mean less data being collected. At the same time we should cultivate social media alternatives which are decentralized, community-oriented and not commercially-run.



# 10. THE BEST COUNTRY FOR THE WORLD



In The Next Denmark, humanism and the defense of liberal freedoms go hand-in-hand. That alliance of values is central in many contexts – when it comes to the question of surveillance, law and order policy and foreign policy and when it comes to the way we treat ethnic minorities and refugees.

It is said that the strength of a democracy is shown by how it treats its minorities – both its own and its guests. Even though in a historical perspective, Denmark has stood up for most people's basic rights,

we have unfortunately in recent times seen developments where in particular refugees' and immigrants' rights are increasingly under pressure.

It is of great concern that we are increasingly seeing that the rights of some minorities are being suppressed and undermined. I actually believe that our treatment of refugees and our tone towards ethnic minorities in particular is a challenge to our democracy. It testifies to a short-sighted nationalism which tries to shield Denmark and ignores the responsibility which we as a privileged country should be taking on.

## 35. FREEDOM RIGHTS FOR ALL

We have fought hard for our freedom and our democracy. We must never take them for given. These days, I am seeing a massive and hitherto unseen pressure on liberal freedom rights – including here in Denmark.

So it is time to give massive support to basic freedom rights. Because it is a very short-sighted and dangerous slippery slope we are on our way down. I believe that freedom rights are some of the most important things we possess, and that it is our first obligation as democratic citizens to protect and preserve them.

Freedom rights must therefore be reinforced wherever they can be. First and foremost, we must rollback the numerous initiatives which have restricted basic freedoms in recent years. But from my point of view, it is obvious that that is not enough. We must consider other possibilities for reinforcing freedoms more permanently. For example, that could be by writing freedom rights more directly

and more broadly into the constitution or by introducing the use of qualified majority voting in parliament for proposals which restrict freedoms.

**36. DENMARK AS A HUMANITARIAN SUPERPOWER**

Our humanitarianism must not stop at the Danish border. Denmark naturally has a large responsibility internationally. Ideally, The Next Denmark will exist in a world where development aid is no longer necessary. But while we work for a more just world order and distribution of wealth, and for more democracy around the world, Denmark must take on much more responsibility for the most vulnerable of our planet.

Denmark must be a pioneer in both multilateral and bilateral development and humanitarian aid, just as we must also increase our climate aid significantly to help the world’s climate refugees. In that regard, it is appropriate to increase our development aid to at least 2% of GDP, just as development aid should be based on environmental, social and economic sustainability to a much greater extent.

**37. WELCOMING PEOPLE SEEKING REFUGE**

Worldwide, there are more than 65 million people seeking refuge. Around 90% of all refugees are located in what are known as neighboring regions. It is in no way a lasting solution that countries that are often poor and unstable themselves should be left alone with the massive task of ensuring protection for people seeking refuge. So we must work both at an EU level and also to ensure

better prospects for receiving asylum and rehousing elsewhere than in the so-called neighboring regions. We must do that in order to relieve the hard-pressed countries and their refugee camps in those regions, and we must also do this in order to free people from the hands of people smugglers and create more humane and secure ways of getting protection.

On the path to The Next Denmark, we must of course lead the European collaboration and deal with cases from spontaneous asylum seekers. But there is a need to ensure a fairer, more solidary and more global model. Today, refugees often end up being passed around from country to country. Instead of solving the problem together, refugee policy becomes a race to the bottom where each country tightens its conditions for asylum seekers in the hope that as few of them as possible will want to come to the country.

So in the next Denmark I foresee a Denmark which takes responsibility – and thus welcomes far more quota refugees to the country each year through the United Nations quota system. Of course, we have to do that to help people seeking refuge and who are in need, but in the long term we must also do it in order to help strengthen and expand the global quota scheme for distribution of refugees. In fact we should work towards the whole refugee area being passed over to the United Nations in recognition of individual nation states not being able to solve the problem individually.

**38. NOT JUST THE BEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD**

Just as today’s Denmark is not an island isolated from the rest of Europe and the world, neither is The Next Denmark an island.

The world is changing radically during these times we are living in. Time, space and distance change constantly and so the categories we previously used in order to understand the world are no longer sufficient. In future, the global community will, to a maybe even greater degree, face problems and challenges that have to be solved together in close international collaboration. For example, pollution knows no borders, and the old administrative and political practices are no longer meaningful when they stand alone.

Denmark's role in creating a better, more peaceful world must be assertive and progressive. Whether it is in the European Union, the United Nations or other international organizations, and whether it is about the global climate struggle, the fight against inequality, taking responsibility for the most vulnerable people in the world or grappling with tech giants, Denmark must encourage close collaboration with high ambitions for the community. We must be committed and work intensely in order to ensure a future that is worth living for all citizens of the world and for future generations. We must be the best country in and the best country for the world.



## THE FOUR ELEMENTS: WHAT WE SHARE

In this manifesto of ideas, I have given my personal suggestions for how we can create The Next Denmark. There will certainly be some suggestions which do not win support; there will certainly also be some which many people can see the point of. That's how it should be.

I am also well aware that it can seem contradictory to propose such big reforms and comprehensive regulation in order to create more freedom, when that would appear to have the opposite effect. But from my point of view, it is just those sort of radical initiatives which are needed if we are to ensure real freedom not just for the few, but for the many, for nature and for the coming generations.

What is indisputable is that I have proposed some building blocks. Ideas with high ambitions which can fundamentally change society. How these blocks will come together, well yes, that is the task we are facing now. It is the Danish Dream we now have to define. Together.

It doesn't matter if I am the only one who can see a different future for me. The established, the lasting, the stagnated – to paraphrase the civil rights group the Black Panthers – will first begin to tremble once many of us see the future in the same radically different way.

I know that I have put many suggestions and ideas into play here. Ideas which are not normally part of the political debate in the Danish parliament. But it is also my own objective to regain the right, the obligation and the courage to imagine things differently.



Whatever that might be. It may be written off as unworldly, but in fact it is fundamentally about ensuring something very down-to-earth.

As mentioned previously, it is about the four elements which the Greeks worked with over two thousand years ago: water, air, earth and fire. The four elements which together are the basis for all life on earth. Everything we have been given. And everything we pass on. Everything we share together. It is about setting those elements free and rediscovering our connection to them – and being conscious of our responsibility to them.

I believe that these elements are best administered together in communities. Not by governments, and not by individuals. But by communities.

The struggle for freedom – that protection of the four elements as something we have in common and look after together – it is not based on ideology, but may in fact be a new ideology which we can call elementalism. We shall see. It is less important to me what we call the journey we are starting out on. What is essential is that we succeed.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This text is my own, but it could not have come into being without the many conversations which I have had with people of all backgrounds since we founded The Alternative over four years ago. It could not have come into being without inspiration from members of The Alternative and representatives of other political parties at the Danish parliament. And it could not have come into being without input and ideas from companies, citizens, activists, people at the grassroots and artists from Denmark and abroad.

While I was writing it, I had the benefit of the input and warm and critical feedback from colleagues, party members and elected representatives in The Alternative, my fellow Members of Parliament and experts, authors, interest organizations and researchers. Thank you very much for that. And finally thank you very much to Mathias Høj Kristensen, Leila Stockmarr and Rune Langhoff, who have played a significant role in bringing this manifesto about The Next Denmark to life.

I'm looking forward to debating the ideas in this manifesto with all of you. Out around the country, on The Alternative's internal discussion site, at debating events and over dinner tables. And I am looking forward just as much to being surprised and inspired by the ideas you all may have about how we can create The Next Denmark.

Best regards  
Uffe Elbæk

