The committee established for the purpose of drawing up a democracy canon

On 31 May 2007, the Danish Government set up a committee whose task was to draw up a democracy canon. The democracy canon contains what the committee believes to be key events, philosophical trends and political texts that have played an important role in the development of Danish democracy.

The committee has pointed to 35 canon items as key landmarks in the long evolutionary history of democracy.

The democracy canon is envisaged as a source of inspiration for debate about and understanding of the preconditions for modern democracy in Denmark.
The Danish Democracy Canon
The Danish Democracy Canon

The committee established for the purpose of drawing up a democracy canon

Published by: The committee established for the purpose of drawing up a democracy canon and the Danish Ministry of Education, 2008
The Danish Parliament – Folketinget. The sessions of the Folketing are public, and it is thus possible for anyone who is interested to follow the debates in the Chamber from the seats in the Public Galleries.
In Denmark, we have considered freedom a matter of course for generations. Democracy is self-evident. And respect for life, freedom and property is taken for granted.

However, these years we experience that various quarters call these values into question, both in Denmark and in other countries. We must face the fact that support for democracy and respect for the fundamental freedoms are not a given thing. Every new generation has to win, develop and defend freedom.

The Danish Government therefore wishes to strengthen knowledge of the principles of freedom and democracy on which Danish society is based.

This was the background to the establishment of the committee that has drawn up this democracy canon. The aim of a canon is to highlight Danish and international historical events, philosophical trends and political texts that have had a special impact on the development of the fundamental freedoms and democracy in Denmark.

I wish to thank the members of the committee for having presented their ideas of what we ought to know about events, philosophers and texts if we want to understand what has shaped the development of Danish democracy.

A canon is not an answer key. It is qualified input for debate. I hope that the democracy canon will be used actively and dynamically in teaching, in associations, in liberal adult education, and everywhere in society to strengthen awareness, consciousness and discussion of the fundamental principles of democracy.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen
Prime Minister
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On 31 May 2007, the Danish Government set up a committee to draw up a democracy canon for the purpose of strengthening knowledge of the principles of freedom and democracy on which Danish society is based. A chairman and eight committee members were appointed.

The task
According to the terms of reference of the committee, the members are “to identify the key events, philosophical trends and political texts that have contributed to the debate about and impacted on the development of the fundamental freedoms and democracy in Denmark. This collection should include both foreign and Danish as well as historical and more present-day contributions”. Furthermore, the terms of reference state that the canon must consist of “the events, philosophers and texts that have had a special impact on the view of the individual’s fundamental freedoms, the cohesion of society, and the development of Danish democracy”.

Consequently, the pivotal point according to the terms of reference is Danish democracy, and the task of the committee has therefore been in particular to select and present reasons for an appropriate number of canon items that can provide the basis for a sensible and well-informed debate about today’s Danish democracy as well as its historical and philosophical preconditions.

The committee was, furthermore, assigned the task to present proposals for ways in which the democracy canon can be introduced and disseminated through text, film, internet, etc. for use in the teaching at primary and lower secondary school, general and vocational upper secondary school, etc. The entire text of the terms of reference is printed at the end of the canon.

The double meaning of the word democracy
The word democracy derives from the Ancient Greek word demokratia. Demos means “people”, and kratos means “rule” or “power”. Accordingly, the word democracy means “rule of the people” or “power of the people”. In other words, in a democracy, power lies ideally with the people as such and not with an individual, as is the case in an absolute monarchy or with a limited group of people, as in an aristocracy or an oligarchy (rule of the few).

It is inherent in the wording of the terms of reference that the word democracy in this context has two main meanings: first of all, as the designation of a political ideology the concept of which today is connected with ideas such as freedom, equality and tolerance – three ideals that are specified in detail in the human rights; and second, as the designation of a system of government where the Government belongs to the entire people on the basis of the idea of the sovereign will of the people and the active participation of legally competent citizens in the political process.

Democratic ideals and a democratic government system are inseparably linked. This is established in unambiguous terms in the Preamble of the European Convention on Human Rights of 1950, to which all the Member States of the Council of Europe have acceded. The Preamble refers to the members as “Reaffirming their profound belief in those Fundamental Freedoms which are the foundation of justice and peace in the world and are best maintained on the one hand by an effective political democracy and on the other by a common understanding and observance of the Human Rights upon which they depend”.

Democracy as ideology
Democracy in the sense of ideology is not particularly Danish, but the result of Western civilisation’s lengthy modernisation process. In principle, the concept can be traced all the way back to the democracy of the Athenian city-state; but it was only in the course of the European Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century that it developed into a coherent ideology with consequences in terms of practical politics.
Looking at events, the following milestones are important in this process:

- *The Glorious Revolution* in England (1688-1689)
- The American War of Independence (1776-1783)
- The French Revolution (1789-1799)
- The European democratic revolutions (1830 and 1848)

Each of these events sparked texts presenting policy statements that are seen, even today, as important landmarks in the politico-ideological history of Western civilisation. They are:

- The English *Bill of Rights* (1689)
- The American Declaration of Independence (1776)
- The French National Constituent Assembly’s declarations regarding the abolition of
feudalism and regarding the rights of man (August 1789)

Democratic constitutions, including the Danish Constitution (1849)

At the overall philosophical level, the democratic ideas were formulated successively and based on different approaches by political philosophers such as:

- Baruch Spinoza
- John Locke
- Charles de Montesquieu
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau
- Alexis de Tocqueville
- John Stuart Mill

It is worth noticing that the word democracy had in general a predominantly negative ring, almost like “mob rule” right up until the beginning of the 19th century. Today’s unconditionally positive meaning as a word signalling ideals such as freedom, equality and tolerance did not seriously gain ground until the major middle-class revolutions in the first half of the 19th century.

Democracy as a system of government

The above landmarks of the development of Western civilisation towards democracy as the sustaining ideology constitutes the broad background to the second main point of the terms of reference, i.e. the identification of some important milestones in the special Danish version of democracy as a political system and as a system of government and community. In order to meet this demand, it is necessary to try to delineate to some extent what in particular characterises the Danish version of democratic rule compared with other forms of democracy.

According to political theory, there are three ideal forms of democratic rule: 1) participatory democracy, where ideally all citizens participate directly in all decision-making processes and exercise co-decision rights on an ongoing basis; 2) representative democracy, where the co-decision of citizens is indirect and primarily exercised through elected representatives who risk not getting re-elected if they act in opposition to the electoral basis; and 3) constitutional democracy, where the role of the Government is confined to acting as the overall protector of the citizens’ rights in relation to each other and to the state (the night-watchman state).

Like other Western democracies, Danish democracy is a representative democracy in which common decisions are taken by the elected representatives in the Folketing (Danish Parliament), who at least every four years are to provide accounts of their activities to the electorate. Basically, Danish democracy is not very different from other Western democracies, even though there may naturally be considerable mutual variations in the specific designs of the countries’ democratic institutions. However, due to historical developments, Danish democracy has developed a number of special characteristics over time, which combined provide the outline of the Danish democracy model. These characteristics include a strong and well-functioning Government, which is usually perceived by the citizens as incorruptible and as the protector of the citizens. Furthermore, Danish democracy has developed into a consensus democracy, in the sense that major political decisions are often reached as a result of broad agreement, and where the yardstick of good political craftsmanship is the ability to achieve broad agreement regarding important decisions. Lastly, modern Danish democracy is closely linked to the Danish welfare model, which is inherently inclusive, in the sense that a comprehensive safety net has been set up for the most vulnerable in society. This is financed through some of the highest tax rates in the world, which is accepted because the citizens in general have confidence in the Government’s ability and will to ensure social justice and an equitable distribution of goods.

This overall understanding of the organisation
Democracy in the form of voting in connection with an election of representatives for “rule of the people”.

and mode of operation of Danish democracy has been a guiding principle for the committee's identification of the “Danish” canon items.

The canon work
In the period from 27 June 2007 to 30 January 2008, the committee met 10 times. In the course of the process, the committee's legal expert, Professor Henning Koch, communicated that he wished to withdraw from the work. Instead, the committee secured the legal assistance of Professor Claus Haagen Jensen, Aalborg University. Claus Haagen Jensen has neither participated in the meetings of the committee nor in the selection of the canon items, but assisted the committee with legal review of relevant sections as well as provided supplementary factual information in places where this was considered relevant.

In the course of its work, the committee decided to apply a time limit with respect to the selection of canon items with the year 2000 chosen as the cut-off year. The reason is that the committee is of the opinion that it is difficult to assess the historical effect of events, texts, etc. that are very close to the present time.

All the members of the committee have contributed to the final product. The reasons for and descriptions of the canon items were, in the first instance, written by individual committee members and subsequently reviewed in plenum at the committee meetings. Consequently, the canon is a joint project. In the descriptions of the selected canon items, there may be references to the other canon items. Where this is the case, the canon point to which reference is made is underlined in the text.

Following the selected canon items, a section sets out the committee's proposals for presentation and dissemination of the canon.

To place the democracy canon in perspective, the committee decided by way of inspiration to include a section in which Ole Thyssen in a philosophical form discusses the current conditions for democracy from four different angles: the multicultural society, locally-based democracy, global democracy and the significance of the mass media to democracy. The committee is grateful to Ole Thyssen for having assumed this task.

The canon as a source of inspiration
The following canon items reflect what the committee believes are some of the important landmarks in the long development history of democracy. They indicate, furthermore, what the committee has found it important to pay attention to in the endeavour to understand the preconditions for modern Danish democracy. The members of the committee have not been in full agreement on all details. However, the final list with accompanying texts is the result of committed and sometimes heated debates at the committee meetings. In good democratic fashion, the committee members eventually chose to accommodate each other after having given thorough consideration to the views and arguments presented. The result of this, by no means painless democratic process, is the canon below.

The canon list must neither be perceived as a curriculum nor as a recipe for what to study to become a good democrat. It is primarily envisaged as a source of inspiration for the hopefully many who wish to understand the preconditions for our modern democracy on a considered basis. Food for thought, for debate, for contradiction – and especially for enrichment.

Knud J.V. Jesperсен
Composition of the committee

Chairman *Knud J. V. Jespersen*, Professor, Doctor of Philosophy, University of Southern Denmark

*Esma Birdi*, Integration Consultant, Danish Women’s Society

*Lise Egholm*, Principal, Rådmandsgades School

*David Gress*, PhD, columnist for the newspaper Jyllands-Posten

*Ove Korsgaard*, Professor, Doctor of Pedagogy, Danish School of Education – University of Aarhus

*Peter Kurrild-Klígaard*, Professor, PhD, University of Copenhagen

*Kathrine Lilleør*, Master of Theology, PhD and vicar

*Ole Thyssen*, Professor, Doctor of Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School
Identification

Democracy as the “rule of the people” emerged first in some Greek city-states in the 6th century BC, the most well-known democracy being that of Athens. The fundamental principle was that all citizens – adult free men – had an equal right and duty to rule the city directly by turning up in person at the Assembly to take part in all decisions there. Also in Rome, citizens in the days of the republic (510-46 BC) had a certain influence on the government of the city and later the empire even if Rome more closely resembled an oligarchy – a rule of the few – with wealthy families or a junta in power.

Until the end of the 6th century BC, many Greek city-states were ruled by tyrants. By way of reaction, democratic movements emerged in Athens and other cities, demanding rule of the people. In Athens, the tyrants were expelled in 510 BC. After a civil war, and under the leadership of Cleisthenes (circa 570- circa 500 BC) a rule of the people was introduced in 507 BC, and it remained in force for almost 200 years, only interrupted by two short revolutions in 411 and 404 BC. To guard against tyrants, a procedure was introduced known as ostracism. It consisted in a referendum by which a politician could be exiled for 10 years.

Democracy in antiquity rested on three principles. The first was that the people ruled directly. The citizens met in the Assembly-place in the open. Everybody had the right to speak, and voting was conducted by show of hands. Many decrees of the Assembly were inscribed on stone and began with the words: “The people have decided that…” they dealt with matters of war and peace, worship of the gods, grain supplies, and honours to be bestowed on deserving citizens. In order to enable everybody to participate the Athenian citizens were paid for attending political meetings and the poor turned up in large numbers.

The second principle was that officials and judges were appointed by sortition instead of being elected. True democracy was not a matter of the best suited, but of the randomly selected, because all citizens were equal, and because appointments for one year based on the drawing of lots prevented the formation of a bureaucracy of wealthy citizens who could divest the people of power. In addition to the Assembly, there was a Council of 500 citizens appointed by sortition for one year. The Council prepared all matters that had to be debated and put to the vote in the Assembly, and it supervised, on an ongoing basis, the many hundred other officials chosen by lot. Every day, from the midst of the Council a chairman was chosen by lot who acted as president of the state, but only for one day and night. Judicial authority was exercised by juries, each of them manned by many hundred jurors appointed by lot. Generals were not eligible. War required professional leaders.

The third principle was that democratic participation is not only a right, but a patriotic obligation. “We condemn any man who does not participate in politics”, said Pericles (circa 495–429 BC).
 BC). He was an aristocrat by birth and for many years the leading statesman in Athens, both as elected general and as a speaker in the Assembly. The historian Thucydides (circa 460-circa 400 BC) explains how Pericles in a funeral oration delivered the grandest speech in defence of the Athenian democracy.

Democracy was not without its critics. The great philosophers of antiquity, Plato and Aristotle, believed that democracy would degenerate into mob rule. They compared the people to a huge, sluggish monster that might become unexpectedly dangerous because it thinks along petty lines and is apt to be carried away by feelings. To a modern eye, another deficiency is that only male citizens had political rights, which were denied women, slaves and resident aliens, *metics*. Athens controlled an area the size of Funen. At the time of Pericles, the city held between a quarter and half a million inhabitants, many of them slaves and *metics*, who had to pay taxes and perform military service, but did not have citizenship rights. The number of adult male citizens enjoying full citizenship rights amounted to approx. 50,000.

It was only in Athens and in a number of other city-states that democracy functioned completely successfully. Other Greek city-states were oligarchies like Rome. The Athenians’ victorious opposition to the Persian Empire in the wars 490-449 BC was at the time ascribed to freedom of expression in Athens, a form of political freedom in the public sphere which in the private sphere was matched by a form of individual freedom which Thucydides defined as “every citizen’s right to live as he pleases”.

“*Our constitution (…) favours the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy. (…) We cultivate refinement without extravagance and knowledge without effeminacy. (…) In short, I say that as a city we are the school of Hellas, while I doubt if the world can produce a man who, where he has only himself to depend upon, is equal to so many emergencies, and graced by so happy a versatility, as the Athenian.*”

*From Pericles’ funeral oration over the dead in the first year of the Peloponnesian war (431-404 BC), written down by Thucydides.*
Identification

With all their individual differences, all people are equal before God and must be equal before the law. This idea of equality is to be found in the epistle to the Galatians, which was probably written by Paul the Apostle (circa 10-circa 67 AD) in spring 54 AD. About the same time, the Stoic philosopher Seneca (4 BC-65 AD) referred to a similar idea of equality as a universal order where all human beings are equal.

The epistle to the Galatians was probably written by St Paul in spring of 54 AD to a group of congregations that he had previously established in Galatia, an ancient region in Asia Minor. The congregations had apparently allowed themselves to be persuaded by Judeo-Christian preachers who regarded Christianity as Judaism for gentiles. Therefore, they had tried to persuade the Galatians to accept circumcision and comply with the Jewish dietary rules, in other words accept the Jewish rules as they are set out in the Mosaic Law, which normally constituted the visible distinction between Jews and non-Jews. The Judeo-Christian line of thinking was that it was necessary first to become a Jew – and subsequently become a Christian. However, in his epistle, St Paul strongly refutes the attempt to supplement Christianity with acts based on religious law; acts that would make human beings worthy in the eyes of God (i.e. that the individual can obtain salvation by acting in accordance with the laws set out in the Old Testament). It is not statutory provisions that must regulate the individual’s relationship with God. Only love of fellow human beings counts, and it cannot be delimited and translated into rules and regulations. As St Paul puts it, “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.”

In his epistle to the Galatians, St Paul preaches Christianity which has no laws and rules, but places Christ at the centre, and in Christ crucified God has manifested himself as he who is powerless in the world. According to St Paul, God has overthrown the hierarchies of power and the faithful are therefore not slaves, but free sons and daughters. To St Paul, Jews are therefore no longer closer to God than non-Jews; men are not more important than women; and free people are not grander than slaves before God. For in the belief in Jesus Christ, all men are equal before God.

When Jesus made the distinction between the Kingdom of God and that of Caesar, he held a coin in his hand. It was not only because money clearly belongs to this world but the coin also bore the image of a god of this world: The emperor of the Roman occupying power.

An occupied country distinguishes inevitably between worldly law and universal justice. The law imposed from outside by force is not
perceived in a favourable light, so it is possible to protest against the occupation by pointing at a universal moral order for all human beings. Strangely enough, at the same time one of the brightest members of the Roman elite, the Stoic philosopher Seneca (4 BC-65 AD) arrived at the same conclusion. Also an occupying power must consider the relationship between its own law and the laws of the occupied countries. Seneca took the idea to its radical conclusion. He pointed at a universal order where all people are equal, irrespective of whether they locally were both different and unequal, for example as slaves and free people. Even though Seneca did not contribute to a theory about democracy, equality before the law is an important brick in the house of democracy.

St Paul

The Apostle Paul was originally a Jew and a Pharisee even though he was born and raised in Tarsus in the south-eastern part of Asia Minor. He participated in the persecutions of the first Christians, but after having experienced a revelation circa 40 AD, he himself began to preach the new faith. He preached also to non-Jews, which led to the establishment of a number of congregations in Asia Minor and Greece. He perceived himself as an apostle; that is, one who is sent out by Christ. In his epistles, we find the full theological consideration of the Gospel and its consequences that constitutes the background to Christianity without the ethnic limitations of Judaism. A total of 13 epistles in the New Testament are ascribed to St Paul, but some of them derive from later disciples of his. Among the epistles that are generally recognised as authentic Pauline epistles, there are, in addition to the epistle to the Galatians, the epistle to the Romans and the two epistles to the Corinthians.

Seneca

Seneca was a Roman lawyer, Stoic philosopher and landowner, who lived in the precarious environment of the emperor’s court. He became a teacher and later adviser to the Roman emperor Nero (37-68 AD). However, Seneca found it difficult to reconcile philosophy and politics and eventually withdrew to the peace and quiet of private life in order to avoid the strife and problems of political life. A few years later he was accused of participating in a conspiracy against Nero and was forced to commit suicide.

Stoic philosophy underlines that because of the unpredictability of the world at large, it is wise to find stability in the world within – in oneself and in the close relationship with family and friends. Seneca was a humanist and regarded also slaves as fellow human beings. In terms of religion, he believed that there is only one god.

Reason

In a democratic context, the idea of equality, which is to be found among others in St Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, is a crucial confrontation with religious laws that are required to be visibly manifest in the lives of the believers, and are thus seen as important for the individual’s place in society. St Paul underlines that belief in Christ is a spiritual matter that cannot be visibly seen in specific acts, but must become manifest only in the acts of love. The Apostle Paul here lays the foundation for the separation of religious belief and law that is a crucial precondition for the separation of religion and politics. In continuation of this, there is the Pauline emphasis on equality between human beings. That all people are equal before God is an expression of the idea of equality which is reiterated in later Western democracies. In these, it becomes a democratic hallmark that all citizens are equal and, consequently, must be equal before the law.
Identification

Until modern times, the history of many European countries was characterised by constant fights between first the Crown and the nobility, and subsequently with the church and the middle classes as powerful groups in society. When the Estates had the opportunity, they put pressure on kings to recognise, in writing, existing rights or freedoms or to grant new power of co-decision. Two of the most important of these documents are the English Magna Carta (1215) and the Bill of Rights (1689).

The Magna Carta (which is Latin for “Great Charter”) is a blanket term for a number of documents on which John Lackland, King of England (ruled 1199-1216) reached agreement with the English barons, and which were subsequently realised in a number of coronation charters and specific rules.

Since 1066, the English kings had been among the most powerful in Europe, and King John also wanted to control the church. This and the fact that he lost several wars and raised and introduced new taxes led to a number of revolts against a king who was perceived as tyrannical. The nobility wanted a king who was strong enough to guarantee peace and property, but who was at the same time not too powerful: He must be subject to and bound by the law. In summer 1215 they staged a rebellion and on 15 June, under the pressure of the situation, the king signed the Magna Carta with far-reaching concessions.

In the document the king promised among other things that the church would be independent of the Government; that the citizens would have legal protection in connection with lawsuits and only their equals could pass judgment on them; that the Crown’s officials could not function as judges in lawsuits; that property could not be seized at random; and that only the courts could enforce the punishment of convicted persons. The Magna Carta is also the origin of one of the most central concepts in a modern liberal-democratic society based on the rule of law, namely “habeas corpus”, which means that imprisoned citizens enjoy certain legal rights. It means, in practice, protection against unlimited imprisonment without conviction, as a person in prison has the right to appear before a judge, and the authorities must justify the imprisonment on the basis of the law.

The Magna Carta contains nothing about democracy in the modern sense of the word, but the document contributed to laying the foundations for the English Parliament, which is a direct offshoot of the so-called Grand Council, which was established. It consisted of 25 barons who were to advise the king, but who in particular

King John putting his signature to the Magna Carta in 1215.
circumstances could break the oath of allegiance they had sworn to the king. The Council could convene at any time and veto the king’s decisions, among other things by seizing his property if necessary.

In 1689, the English Parliament declared that King James II (ruled 1685-1689) had violated the Magna Carta, thus forfeiting his right to the throne. The so-called Glorious Revolution took place because it was feared that the king intended to introduce absolutism: He had endeavoured to fill Parliament with his own supporters and had arbitrarily granted exemptions to legislation passed by Parliament. The next step – prior to offering the crown to somebody else – was to summarise what demands a future monarch would have to respect. The result was the English Bill of Rights. On 13 February 1689, it was presented to William of Orange (1650–1702) and Mary Stuart (1662–1694). In addition to being married, they were the nephew and daughter respectively of the dethroned king, and they had been instrumental in the revolution against him in 1688. Out of gratitude, Parliament offered them the crown jointly and the Bill of Rights subsequently became law.

In the Bill of Rights, Parliament lists a number of fundamental freedoms which the executive power must not violate. For example, the king must not set up his own court of law or act as a judge himself; he must not levy new taxes without the consent of Parliament; citizens must not be subjected to “cruel and unusual” punishments; and all fines and forfeitures before any conviction and judgement must be illegal and void. From a democratic point of view, the most important thing was that the executive power must not interfere in elections to Parliament, that laws passed by Parliament must not be suspended, and that Parliament must be convened at regular intervals. This put an end to almost an entire century of constant tensions between Parliament and the royal power and established a relatively stable balance of power between the parties.

Reason

The Magna Carta is generally regarded as the first important example of the state granting the citizens a number of rights and political co-decision. There had been other charters, both in England and other places, but the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights have both of them been of great importance to English history. They are still part of what is perceived as the British constitution – and consequently part of the legal tradition in a number of other countries (e.g. including Ireland, New Zealand and the USA). They have also been perceived as models for guarantees of rights in other places – for example in Europe, the USA and the UN.

“No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any other way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land.”

MAGNA CARTA, SECTION 39.

“[We declare], That the pretended power of suspending the laws or the execution of laws by regal authority without consent of Parliament is illegal. (…) That levying money for or to the use of the Crown by pretence of prerogative, without grant of Parliament (…) is illegal. (…) That election of members of Parliament ought to be free. That the freedom of speech and debates or proceedings in Parliament ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament.”

BILL OF RIGHTS.
Identification

“A land must be based on law”. These are the introductory words of the *Jutland Code*, which is the most important of the Danish provincial codes. It was officially granted by King Valdemar II, the Victorious (ruled 1202-1241) in 1241 as one of his last acts, and it was adopted by his council consisting of the kingdom’s nine bishops. One of these was the 90-year-old Gunnar of Viborg (1152-1251), who is believed by many to have written the famous introductory words of the Code. With the Code, the concept of the legal order as a contract between ruler and people was introduced into Danish social development. This concept was further strengthened by the charter which the nobility forced King Erik V, Klipping (ruled 1259-1286) to sign at the national assembly in Nyborg in 1282. Both documents are forerunners of subsequent Danish national law, including the *Constitution*, and they are therefore important sources of the prehistory of democracy in Denmark.

The conflicts between emperor and pope began as fights over the right to appoint bishops, but ended in deciding the relations between secular and spiritual power in the manner that subsequently became the point of departure for the modern democratic social order: The fundamental separation of religion and politics, church and state. The *Jutland Code* is, furthermore, highly characterised by the contemporary legal provisions of Catholic canon law regarding personal responsibility and freedom.

According to the *Jutland Code*, legislation must be based on justice in order to be legitimate. Justice is defined neither by the king nor the nobility. The concept of justice is universal and eternal. It rests on the order of nature. The Romans said that justice is the constant will to give everybody his due – materially as well as morally. Christianity enlarged this concept by embedding justice in the natural order created by God, which it is in the power of human reason to understand, and which it is man’s duty to realise in society.

*The charter of 1282*, signed in Nyborg, was the result of specific power struggles between the king and the nobility, and is therefore very firmly embedded in its own time. It is the development and a practical example of the ideas that were presented in the preamble of the *Jutland Code*. With the charter, the king guaranteed a number of rights which – although they at the time were reserved for wealthy people – were to become fundamental in the further evolution towards democracy. For example, the king promised – as did the English king in the *Magna Carta* (1215) – not to convict anybody without any legal basis and not to rule in an arbitrary manner.

Both the *Jutland Code* and the *charter of 1282* hold the idea of a legal order that was the result of a pact between the ruler and the people and rests on objective and sovereign justice. The pact was necessary for social life and inviolable; he who broke it “obviously acts against God”, as the preamble states.

The Code and the charter were both adopted by assemblies including king, bishops and the nobility. In a sense, these assemblies were the forerunners of representative democracy. The laws would not have been valid unless those present found that they had the right to represent the entire people – meaning all free men in the kingdom and their households. It is in events like the assemblies in Vordingborg in 1241 and in Nyborg in 1282 that we see how the idea of the representative exercise of the power of the people was born in Denmark, at the same time as it was emerging in Italian and German cities.
“A land must be built on law, and if all men would be content with what is theirs and let others enjoy the same right, there would be no need of a law. But no law is as good to follow as the truth. But where one is in doubt of what the truth is, there the law shall show the truth. If the land had no law, then he would have the most who could seize the most. Thus the law shall be made after the wants of all, that the righteous and the peaceful and innocent shall enjoy their peace, and the unjust and malicious can fear for that which is written in the law, and thus will not dare fulfil the malice they have in mind. (…) The law must be honest and just, reasonable and according to the ways of the people. It must meet their needs and speak plainly so that all men may know and understand what the law is. The law is not to be made in any man’s favour, but for the needs of all who live in the land. (…) The law which the King gives and the country adopts he can also not change or repeal without the will of the people, unless he obviously acts against God.”

FROM THE PREAMBLE OF THE JUTLAND CODE, 1241.
Identification

The religious reformations, the general name for the events that took place in the 15th and 16th centuries which ended the monopoly on opinion of the Catholic Church, led to a division of Western Christianity and the formation of Protestant religious communities like the Danish church. The reformations were not only a confrontation with the dominant Catholic Church, but also a social and cultural revolt against the dominance and spiritual monopoly of the unitary church. Together with the fundamental idea of humanism that man is at the centre, the religious reformations came to have decisive influence on the long modernisation process that shaped modern European culture.

When the German monk Martin Luther (1483-1546) on 31 October 1517 nailed his 95 theses against the Catholic Church’s practice of selling indulgences to the Wittenberg church door, he initiated – perhaps unwittingly – a cultural revolution that once and for all ended the Catholic Church’s monopoly in Europe and left deep impressions in Western civilisation. Luther maintained that no human body stands between God and the individual, which means that all have equal access to interpreting the Bible. Saying so, he challenged the papal church’s monopoly on opinion and faith and opened up for individual religious views and interpretations of the Bible. Luther was in no way a liberal or a democrat in the modern sense of the word, and the Protestant reformation did not lead to freedom of religion in the short term. Nevertheless, he paved the way for the humanist basic view of respect for the individual’s right to a development in freedom and accountability, which later became a hallmark of Western democracy.

Denmark officially joined the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in connection with the coup staged by Christian III in 1536, which put a sudden end to the influence of the Catholic Church. The responsibility for church matters was instead taken over by secular authorities headed by the king. Similarly, the Crown seized the Catholic Church’s huge estates. The previously so powerful clergy changed into an estate of servants of the state. It had two far-reaching consequences. First, the Government was provided with the entire administrative capacity of the church, and thus a power potential which laid the foundations for today’s public sector. Second, the state assumed responsibility for the tasks that had
rested on the church up till then, such as the education of young people and poor relief. Both matters were ultimately administered by the clergy. Consequently, we may here be looking at some of the most significant historical conditions for our modern welfare system, the actual precondition of which is a strong and stable Government with the capacity to ensure a fair distribution of goods and to ensure that help for those in need is provided as close to the citizen as possible.

Reason

The religious reformations with their background in the biblical criticism of humanism represent one of the great changes in modern European history, namely the initial transition from a state characterised by cultural and religious authority to a state where ideas of cultural and religious diversity and the opportunity of the individual to change his own situation became dominant. These values remain the pillars of today’s Western and Danish democratic thinking.

What happened during the Reformation with its liberating and sometimes revolutionary thinking would be an obvious point of departure for considering and discussing the historical preconditions for modern democratic values, such as the freedom of the individual, the right to make individual choices while being accountable to the community, and freedom to choose a faith in God or choose not to believe in God.

“Now I would advise you, if you have any wish to pray, to fast, or to make foundations in churches (…) to take care not to do so with the object of gaining any advantage (…). What you give, give freely and without price, that others may prosper and have increase from you and from your goodness. Thus you will be a truly good man and a Christian.”

MARTIN LUTHER’S WORK VON DER FREIHEIT, 1520.

Reformer Hans Tausen (1494-1561) protecting Bishop Rønnow from angry citizens in Copenhagen.
Identification

The Thirty Years War (1618-1648) had involved almost all European countries, it had cost the lives of countless people and laid cities and huge rural areas bare. The war ended officially with the Treaty of Westphalia, which was signed on 24 October 1648 with great ceremony in the two Westphalian cities of Münster and Osnabrück. The peace treaty was the result of an international peace conference that lasted several years. It was attended by representatives of all the warring powers, and it came to constitute the basis of an altogether new European world order.

The Treaty of Westphalia constituted the official end to one of the most destructive and drawn-out wars in the history of Europe. The Thirty Years War was on the surface a bitter clash between Catholics and Protestants, but in reality it was dominated by anarchistic warlords who regarded war as a source of personal gain and an end in itself. The length and cruelty of the war was a frightening reflection of the fact that the monopoly on the use of armed force had eluded the heads of state. The peace treaty underlined very clearly the state sovereign principle and the obligation of the heads of state to strive for peaceful solutions to conflict instead of settlements based on war. It was a significant expression of the fact that secular rulers had eventually succeeded in placing state reason and secular law and order above anarchistic use of violence and religious fanaticism. War became subsequently, to a much greater extent than earlier, an instrument in the service of state politics and a tool that was controlled by responsible political decision-makers.

In itself, the peace conference was a significant reflection of a new era. Up until then, it had been common for the pope and emperor as the grandest worldly representatives of divine justice to act as mediators in international conflicts. The peace treaty in Westphalia was, by contrast, a product of equal negotiations between diplomatic representatives of all the warring parties. The Westphalian method came to constitute a model for all subsequent major peace conferences in the history of Europe.

With the peace treaty in 1648, an important new principle was introduced in European political reality, i.e. the principle of tolerance in regard to both religion and systems of government. The treaty established that states that subscribed to different religious faiths should be able to live peacefully together, in the same way as different forms of government (monarchies, republics or mixed forms) should not be an obstacle to future peaceful coexistence. The powerful emphasis of the treaty on the importance of respect for diversity and differences at the practical level was later given a philosophical form by Baruch Spinoza and John Locke. Especially Locke’s demand for tolerance became an important part of the thinking that subsequently shaped the democratic ideas.

“The Westphalia concept – giving legal status to a growing exercise of authority on a national level – has provided the main outline of structure and process in international society up to and including the present period. Sovereign states remain the dominant actors in international society and the contents of international law in its most formal sense is the result of voluntary action by states.”

Reason

Irrespective of the fact that the Westphalian peace conference took place at a time when democracy was not yet a household word in a European context, it is nevertheless an important stepping stone on Europe’s path towards democracy – for three reasons: First, the peace agreement was a decisive break with the former ideal of unity of church and faith in the Christian world. Instead, it introduced a community of sovereign territorial states whose mutual relations were regulated by secular international law. Second, the treaty established very clearly the precedence of secular politics over religious politics. Third, it made it clear that peaceful coexistence and the ability to find solutions to problems without resorting to war was a political goal in itself. These provisions were all important preconditions for the development of subsequent periods in the direction of democracy.

Ratification of the peace treaty at the city hall in Münster on 24 October 1648.
Identification

The first step towards a modern theory about democracy is to be found in the writings of the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). His parents were Jews who had fled from the Portuguese Inquisition, and he lived in Amsterdam, the then most liberal city in Europe. In addition to his great work, *Ethics*, Spinoza wrote several books about political subjects in which he argued that fundamental freedoms granted to the enlightened middle classes would not weaken but, on the contrary, strengthen the state.

Spinoza’s path to democracy passed through mechanical physics, which at his time was developed by Galileo (1564-1642) and later by Newton (1642-1727). They described the solar system as a physical system of forces in equilibrium, and Spinoza wanted to test that model in the social sphere. He wanted to describe society objectively: not as it ought to be, but as it was. He claimed that “right is determined by power” – an apparently brutal thesis, which did, however, only say that the decisive thing in a society is not what people find true, but what has social power to work. A political leadership’s most important task is to ensure that the various forces in society do not counteract and eliminate each other, but work harmoniously together. Even if Spinoza accepts that all parties have irrational passions, he endeavours to find an equilibrium principle that can place the passions in a rational and peaceful relationship with each other.

As no force is truer than other forces, Spinoza found a good argument for tolerance through physics. There is a need for all forces, and minorities are often particularly powerful because they have to fight in order to gain recognition. To fight minorities is a waste on three counts: waste of force to fight them, waste of their force, and finally the production of martyrs, i.e. negative force. Therefore it is destructive to adopt one truth only and stigmatise all other truths as heresy. Not the truth, but the majority must decide what is right and wrong. The majority is the most important force in society, but it should not waste any strength on fighting minorities. As long as minorities contribute to the wealth of society and comply with the law, minorities are positive forces. A legal order must not mix up politics and religion.

Through a dispassionate analysis of society as a system of forces, Spinoza arrived at two important principles for modern democracy: tolerance and freedom of expression. There is not just one truth, but many, and everybody must have the right to express themselves within the limits of the law.
The concept of law and order needs to be reinterpreted on an ongoing basis concurrently with changes in the balance of power in society—the relationship between the majority and the minority. Free elections are necessary to clarify if changes have taken place. Laws are not God’s eternal dictates, but man-made rules for the development of a society in which the forces do not destroy each other.

Spinoza also arrived at another conclusion. Irrespective of whether a society is a monarchy or a democracy, it is always an aristocracy—an elitist system. For a king cannot rule alone, and a people cannot rule en bloc. There is a need for a Government to give the people a sense of unity, and a Government will inevitably require a political elite; in other words, an aristocracy.

“For men’s natural abilities are too dull to see through everything at once; but by consulting, listening and debating, they grow more acute, and while they are trying all means, they at last discover those which they want, which all approve, but no one would have thought of in the first instance.”

**Baruch Spinoza: Political Treatise, 1677.**

“In a free state every man may think what he likes, and say what he thinks. (...) For, although men’s free judgments are very diverse, each one thinking that he alone knows everything, and although complete unanimity of feeling and speech is out of the question, it is impossible to preserve peace, unless individuals abdicate their right of acting entirely on their own judgment. Therefore, the individual justly cedes the right of free action, though not of free reason and judgment.”

**Baruch Spinoza: Theological-Political Treatise, 1670.**
Identification

John Locke (1632-1704) was one of the first philosophers and political thinkers of the English Enlightenment. He became significant as a political thinker due to his association with leading circles in the budding liberal Whig Party, and his most important contribution was the book *Two Treatises of Government*, which he wrote circa 1679-1683, but which was not published until after “The Glorious Revolution” (1688-1689). On the surface of it, the Revolution was a mere coup, but the result was a new constitutional form and the *Bill of Rights*, which became of great importance to British history and the development of democracy; and it was Locke’s book that provided the ideological defence.

Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* served two purposes: to argue against absolute monarchs and to formulate a defence for the view that human beings have certain rights independent of the specific historical context. These rights impose substantial limitations on what the Government can do and require a division of the powers of the various parts of the Government.

Locke’s fundamental view was that all people are, in principle, born with an inalienable right to “life, freedom and property” – in other words, a right not to be killed, not to be exposed to arbitrary force by others, and not to be deprived of lawful possessions. It is the task of the state to protect these rights, and human beings can only be expected to give their consent to a state that does exactly that. A state that, by contrast, violates these rights – even if it is for a good purpose – becomes illegitimate; and once that happens, the citizens have a right to rebel. Therefore, Locke’s preferred political system combined individual freedoms with a division of the political power between an executive power (e.g. a monarch and a government, which he or she has appointed), a parliament (preferably consisting of several chambers) and the courts of law. It was Locke’s particular wish that the lower house in the British Parliament should be elected and be independent of the Government’s control, whilst the legislators themselves should be subject to their own rules – and, as a matter of fact, not convene all the year round, as full-time politicians posed a risk.

Locke has also affected democratic thinking through *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 1689, 1690 and 1692. Before Locke, religious pluralism had been perceived as a problem that was best solved by one religious denomination suppressing the others. Locke, by contrast, saw the suppression as such as a source of conflict. The argument links up naturally with Locke’s view of the fundamental human freedoms and the ideal of political division of power. This refers specifically to Locke’s view that state and church must be
Reason

Locke is often, and rightly so, perceived as one of modern political philosophy's first democrats and advocates of freedom for human beings: He was thus the first to combine a focus on individual freedoms with political division of power. After “The Glorious Revolution” and the *Bill of Rights*, Great Britain became a model of the closest thing to a liberal democracy. Consequently, Locke came to exert considerable influence on later political thinking, among others the French philosophers Montesquieu (1689-1755) and Voltaire (1694-1778) and the American “Founding Fathers” such as Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), James Madison (1751-1836) and Thomas Paine (1737-1809).

“*The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of nature for his rule. The liberty of man, in society, is to be under no other legislative power, but that established, by consent, in the commonwealth; nor under the dominion of any will, or restraint of any law, but what that legislative shall enact, (...) freedom of men under government is, to have a standing rule to live by, common to every one of that society, (...); a liberty to follow my own will in all things, where the rule prescribes not; and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man (...).”*

Identification

With the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century, a new epoch of intellectual history was introduced in Europe, according to which science and reason combined with observations and experiments were adduced as the basis for secular cognition of the world. It became a serious challenge to the old cultural basis, namely Christianity. During the Age of Enlightenment, the dominance of religious philosophy was challenged with regard to cognition or rather: God was sought in empirically ascertainable regularities.

In terms of intellectual history, John Locke (1632-1704), François de Voltaire (1694-1778) and Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754) constitute the portals to the Enlightenment in England, France and Denmark, respectively. As enlightenment writers, they saw it as their principal objective to disseminate the idea of reason, freedom and tolerance. Holberg’s *Niels Klim* from 1741 is thus a philosophical argument for tolerance. The book contains a number of descriptions of different forms of government that Klim encounters during his journey. Each society has its own absurd rules that are assigned divine validity and are enforced with barbarous zeal. By experiencing the grotesque arbitrariness of the laws and especially the ruthless persecution that dissidents are exposed to, Klim’s eyes are opened to his own prejudices and he changes his philosophy of life. However, there is one ideal in this universe, namely the principality of Potu, where legislation is a realisation of natural law that is based on the idea that man according to his nature must possess certain innate rights.

The focal point of the French Enlightenment was a huge universal dictionary, which was published in 17 volumes between 1751 and 1772. The objective was to bring together and present, in an easily comprehensive form, the knowledge and opinions of the time, and to use the dictionary as an armoury in the fight against the church in particular. The philosophers of the Enlightenment did not turn against Christianity as such, but against the Christian belief in revelation. They sincerely believed that enlightenment would have an ennobling effect on man and set humanity free from old prejudices and superstition. In the Age of Enlightenment, the fight for freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and tolerance raised the key questions: Could a political and educational system be established that was not embedded in religion? And where would politics and education find legitimacy if not in Christianity?

By way of answer, the philosophers of the Enlightenment referred to nature, natural law, and to the establishment of a social contract. However, there was no agreement on which parties should conclude the contract. In his book *Leviathan* from 1651, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) argued for a social contract under which the people would
surrender all power to one institution, for example an absolute monarch, whereas John Locke in his book *Two Treatises of Government* from 1689 advocated a social contract, under which sovereignty would remain with the people. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who was an extremely influential political and educational philosopher in the 18th century, developed Locke's understanding of natural law in his books *The Social Contract* and *Émile* from 1762. Today, the two books are classics in terms of social philosophy and the history of educational theory. They deal with the establishment of a democratic social contract and the education of a free individual, respectively.

“In Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. Sapere Aude! ‘Have courage to use your own understanding!’ – that is the motto of enlightenment.”

*Immanuel Kant* (1724-1804), *A Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* 1784.

In the Age of Enlightenment, it was very popular to meet at cafés to discuss topical issues. In the picture: Voltaire (hand held high) in the company of other writers and philosophers.

**Reason**

The Age of Enlightenment was not only the conquest of spiritual power by reason, it was also the middle classes’ fight to achieve a new political system. The society of Estates was to be replaced by a society in which all – men – were to enjoy equal rights. Universal human rights were conceived at the same time as the basic structure of a modern democracy was formulated. Society was not a God-given structure, but the result of sensible people – citizens, who had entered into a contract.
Montesquieu is a realist and a pragmatist. He does not present a theory about the ideal society. Various government systems each have their justification and explanation, and Montesquieu wants to understand their differences and development. Therefore he regards democracy as a system of government like others. He does not preach democracy as The Right Government Form, saying that all other forms are wrong. He will not force through a utopia, but his wish is that “the spirit of moderation should be that of the legislator’s”.

Fundamentally, there are three systems of government, each with its own principle: the republic, based on virtue; monarchy, based on honour; and despotism, based on fear. Democracy is a special variety of the republican government system, as it is the people in general that rule in a democracy. The classic problem arises, however, in that “the people” as such cannot rule itself, but must resort to representatives. Montesquieu is confident that even if the people does not have the same knowledge as the elected representatives, it is able to form a sensible opinion. The people needs “merely to decide on the basis of things of which it cannot be ignorant and on facts that are obvious to the senses”. But if virtue disappears, greed will take over, and the people will no longer be free under the laws but will be free against the laws.

The aim of a state is to ensure the freedom of the citizens, which according to Montesquieu is the same as the citizens’ legal protection. Everybody must be able to estimate their opportunities. It requires that the three functions of the state – to legislate, to administer and to judge – are kept separate and that they are assigned to three different state bodies. The legislative power must be in the hands of a parliament, the executive power must be placed with the king and the judicial power with independent courts of law, which Montesquieu wants to be elected by the people.

None of the three powers must control the legislature or the executive. The parliament must have two chambers, one of which is to represent the aristocracy and the other “the people” (which in practice is the upper middle classes). The two chambers must be in agreement in order for a law to be adopted, and the law must subsequently be given the royal assent in order to become valid. The executive cannot levy taxes until parliament has approved them. At the same time, both the
Reason

In his main work, *The Spirit of Laws*, which Montesquieu took 20 years to complete, he compares government systems of his own time with those of the past. He studies the ways in which they function together with ethics, education and economy, and how they are influenced by the climate. Montesquieu’s most important contribution to the development of democracy is his idea of the tripartite division of power, which became a cornerstone in the 18th and 19th centuries’ democratic breakthrough in the USA and Europe.

courts of law and the king must accept that everything they do must be based on the law and that nothing of what they do must violate the law. Power must set limits to power, and the three powers must be forced to cooperate because none of them can prevail on its own.

Montesquieu finds his point of departure in things as they are, and he wants to find a sensible balance between the existing social groups. He is not a radical champion of equality, but notes that the aristocracy will protest against being treated on equal terms with others. Such a protest can be rejected. Montesquieu does not reject it, but accepts that the aristocracy is like that, which society must take into consideration by establishing two parliamentary chambers, with the right of veto vis-à-vis the other chamber.

Montesquieu is not a modern democrat. His opinion that the tripartite division of power will benefit peace and security is based on the assumption that the legislative power is in the hands of a small minority. Nevertheless, he believes that the population will benefit from such a division. By contrast, the population’s freedom was threatened by the then French system of government according to which an absolute king was in control of legislation and the courts, thus diminishing legal protection and increasing insecurity. “The welfare of the people”, says Montesquieu in no uncertain terms, “is the law above all laws”. He wants to ensure personal freedom and avoid a concentration of power that will lead to oppression.

A love of the republic in a democracy is a love of the democracy; as the latter is that of equality. A love of the democracy is likewise that of frugality. Since every individual ought here to enjoy the same happiness and the same advantages, they should consequently taste the same pleasures and form the same hopes, which cannot be expected but from a general frugality. (…)

The principle of democracy is corrupted not only when the spirit of equality is extinct, but likewise when they fall into a spirit of extreme equality, and when each citizen would fain be upon a level with those whom he has chosen to command him. Then the people, incapable of bearing the very power they have delegated, want to manage everything themselves, to debate for the senate, to execute for the magistrate, and to decide for the judges. (…)

The political liberty of the subject is a tranquillity of mind arising from the opinion each person has of his safety. In order to have this liberty, it is requisite the government be so constituted as one man need not be afraid of another. (…)

There would be an end of everything, were the same man or the same body, whether of the nobles or of the people, to exercise those three powers, that of enacting laws, that of executing the public resolutions, and of trying the causes of individuals.”

Identification

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) belongs to the philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment, in which he with his emphasis on nature and feelings represents a contrast to the rationalist Voltaire (1694-1778). He wrote about education in *Émile* (1762) and about politics in *The Social Contract* (1762), in which he with his focus on the people and the general will contributed to creating the ideological foundation for the French Revolution.

The 17th century was the time of the absolute monarch. In order to reduce the power of the old nobility, the king allied himself with the local business community. This alliance was called mercantilism and implied active support for trade and industry. The state established trading companies and factories, in Denmark for example at Raadvad, so that the country could export and accumulate gold – a sign of wealth at the time.

Even if selected parts of the business community prospered in the incubator of the state, there were drawbacks, especially control exercised by the state. While France took the lead in terms of the alliance between royal power and the power of money, England was in the vanguard of the development of an independent business community. Since the *Magna Carta* (1215), the English Crown had been subject to severe limitations and could not exercise the same control of the economy as was the case in France.

In the 18th century, an initial distinction was made between state and society, which gave rise to some linguistic problems. Even if the state is part of society, “society” was referred to as the “private spheres”, which were in the process of liberalising themselves from the control of the state, both the private business community and private life. The political idea that society is the work of the state was challenged by the liberal idea that the task of the state is to protect people’s life and property, which was the result of their private enterprise. Private “society” had ambitions of managing on its own. From having been all-powerful, the state was reduced to a service-providing body. But service for whom?

Under absolute monarchs, the unity of the state found symbolic expression in the king’s body. A new symbol was now needed to give expression to the unity of society. Rousseau identified the problem and found a concise formulation: *The people are the core of society.*

Even if Rousseau is known for glorifying nature, he also says that it is an unambiguous advantage to give up natural liberty, enter into a social contract and become a member of a society. Man dies as a natural person, but is resurrected as a
social person, with greater liberty than before. When all rule on equal terms, all are equally free and nobody loses his liberty to others. Beyond each individual, a “public person” is created, a people as an expression of the general will.

As a member of a people, each individual obtains liberty on equal terms with the other nationals. A problem arises here in that human beings are also private citizens and may have private interests that run counter to the common interest. If they themselves are unable to realise that their individual will is contrary to the general will, they must be “forced to be free”. This is an expression that lays itself open to abuse – and which has been abused every time a group has claimed to be the true representative of the unity of the people and has felt justified in silencing dissidents.

Rousseau has difficulty in explaining how the general will is to be translated into practical policy. He does not say how the general will is to be identified, nor does he set up democratic ground rules. He sees political parties as a reflection of division, not unity. As the general will is infallible, it is not up for discussion. Therefore, it remains a problem how the policy of the state can be decided upon by all citizens in a direct democracy where political opinions meet and private wills run counter to the general will. Rousseau ends up admitting that democracy is more a matter for gods than for human beings.

“Let us draw up the whole account in terms easily commensurable. What man loses by the social contract is his natural liberty and an unlimited right to everything he tries to get and succeeds in getting; what he gains is civil liberty and the proprietorship of all he possesses.”


“Reason

Rousseau is a radical democrat. A state must not be too large. It must be possible for all to come together and present their points of view – not as private citizens, but as general nationals. The state must present the framework for a thriving cultural community in which a general will is a reflection of the unity of the people. With his idea about the people, Rousseau contributes to a new way of explaining what makes a society legitimate. The general will is manifest in the laws that the people impose on itself, which means that each citizen is both the creator and the recipient of the law. The people rules itself. It is indivisible and it is infallible, for if it is in error, it is only the people that can make good the harm. There is nothing above and nothing beside the general will. The general will is always as it should be, but it must not be confused with the government that is to realise the general will.

“If then we discard from the social compact what is not of the essence, we shall find that it reduces itself to the following terms: Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.” (…)
Identification

The Constitution of the United States was a new departure and a decisive source of inspiration for European constitutions in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was drawn up when the 13 British colonies in North America broke away as a result of the American Revolution and the War of Independence (1775-1783). Subsequently, the United States of America came into being with a common Constitution (1787) and a Bill of Rights from 1789.

In the course of the 18th century, the North American colonists became increasingly dissatisfied with being subject to British rule. They found that the British King George III (ruled 1760-1820) behaved like a tyrant, who arbitrarily introduced new and higher taxes, and who on several counts violated the rights that Englishmen were guaranteed through the Magna Carta (1215) and the Bill of Rights (1689).

In 1775, a process of secession began. A “Continental Congress” was convened in Philadelphia, and on 4 July 1776 the North American colonies declared themselves independent. The declaration which the congress adopted was drafted by a small committee, the secretary of which was the young political philosopher Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826). The declaration stating that it is self-evident truths that all men are created with “certain unalienable rights”, and that these are primarily “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”, became almost a poetic symbol that was adopted by large parts of the world.

The declaration was the beginning of a long war of independence. However, one thing was to become independent – another thing was how to structure the political system. In 1787, a constitutional assembly adopted a draft constitution, which was subsequently circulated for ratification among the constituent states. In this connection, a comprehensive political debate took place in the USA. The most prominent members arguing in favour of the draft constitution included John Jay, Alexander Hamilton (circa 1755-1804) and James Madison (1751-1836), who later became president – all of them writers contributing to the series of pamphlets known as The Federalist Papers.

Madison saw the Constitution as a practical attempt at solving a fundamental problem: On the one hand, the federal state must be strong enough to ensure peace between the constituent states and in relation to external enemies; on the other hand, it must not be possible to abuse it in a
tyrannical fashion to violate the liberty of the citizens: A democratic majority that could do as it pleased (tyranny of the majority) would be no less evil than the tyranny of a king.

Therefore, Madison wanted to separate political power as much as possible: between a legislative power (a congress with two chambers, elected in different manner, but required to agree in order to pass legislation), an executive power (a president with wide powers and with the possibility of vetoing legislation) and a judicial power (with the possibility of declaring legislation unconstitutional). At the same time, federal government was only to have the powers that had been expressly delegated to it. In 1789, Madison drafted a series of amendments (the Bill of Rights that came into force in 1791) listing all the obligations of the state towards the citizens. The Bill of Rights was among other things to ensure freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly (no. 1), the right to bear arms (no. 2), various procedural guarantees and the protection of private property (nos. 4, 5, 6 and 7), protection against “cruel and unusual punishment” (no. 8), etc.

“...But the great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department, consists in giving to those who administer each department the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others. (...) It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.”

James Madison in The Federalist Papers, No. 51.

From the Preamble of the Constitution of the United States (1787).
Prior to the Nationality Regulation, it had been discussed whether a person’s native country is the place where he performs the duties of his office or the place where he was born. With the Regulation it was established that persons born inside the monarchy, with few exceptions, had the exclusive right to hold official office. However, the law served not only an exclusive, but also an inclusive purpose. It was meant to strengthen the cohesion of the so-called United Monarchy, which also included Norway, Holstein and the North Atlantic islands. Tyge Rothe (1731-1795), one of the key figures of the Danish Age of Enlightenment, referred to nationality as a precious gift, but warned against the risk that exaggerated patriotism might lead to strife among the three large linguistic groups in the state. Rather than divide, nationality should contribute to uniting the people of Holstein, Norway and Denmark in a community of citizens.

The new status as a citizen is clearly linked to the emergence of a new identity as a fellow citizen. Even if the Regulation did not use this concept, the word fellow citizen was frequently used in odes and speeches on festive occasions, following in the wake of the introduction of nationality; for example, Tyge Rothe addressed his audience with the word “fellow citizen” in a speech to the Selskab for Borgerdyd (Society for Civic Virtue) in 1785. One of the then leading national law experts, Professor Andreas Schytte (1726-1777), underlined in his political-theoretical principal work, Staternes indvortes Regiering (the states’ internal governance), from the 1770s that a fellow citizen could not be bound by the dependence ties of the society of the Estates. Fellow citizenship therefore required that these ties were replaced by fellow citizen relations, i.e. free relations. The word fellow citizenship as used by Rothe and Schytte points towards key concepts in democracy such as the general public and civil society.

The emancipation of peasants was also an important element of the long-term strategy of absolute monarchy. According to a regulation of 8 June 1787, the aim was “to abolish any sovereignty on the part of the landowners in relation to his copyhold tenants and make the entire relationship subject to general laws and rules”. A regulation followed in 1788 on the abolition of adscription. At the same time, a new conscription system was introduced, which made military service a personal duty for young men of the peasant class. The key concept of the
regulation was personal freedom, as the king promised to "enforce the rights of our dear and true subjects of the peasant class, especially personal freedom". With words resembling that of a constitution, the absolute monarch even declared personal freedom to be “irrevocable”.

"The people among whom a man lives as a citizen, they are his fatherland. I shall give the meaning of the word: Fatherland means the people and not the land on which they live. Fatherland means the people with whom we as citizens are united, and not those among whom we first saw the light of day.”

TYGE RÖTHE: TANKER OM KIERLIGHED TIL FÆDRELANDET (THOUGHTS ON LOVE OF THE FATHERLAND) 1759.

Reason

Democracy was not introduced in Denmark at the end of the 18th century, but political, educational and agricultural reforms were introduced, inspired by the same ideas that constituted the foundation of the American Declaration of Independence of 1776 and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen of 1789. These are ideas such as nationality, fellow citizenship, freedom of the press, the general public, civil society and personal freedom – all key ideas in a modern democracy.
Identical
Since the introduction of absolutism (1660), censorship had been practised in Denmark-Norway, but the ideas of the Age of Enlightenment introduced a degree of relaxation. The result was a period (1770-1799), in which the social debate had much freer conditions than ever before. And freer conditions than the next decades would see, until freedom of expression and political freedom were guaranteed by the 1849 Constitution.

In Danish history, the first attempt at introducing freedom of expression was made by the physician of King Christian VII, Johan Friedrich Struensee (1737-1772), who was the country’s real ruler due to the king’s mental disease. As a child of the Age of Enlightenment, he initiated a number of freedom-related reforms: In 1770, censorship was abolished and complete freedom of the press was introduced in practice; the following year saw reduced state aid for industry, the liberalisation of trade, a more humane administration of justice, and a ban on the use of torture. Similarly, steps were taken to open up for the appointment to positions based on ability, and certain improvements were introduced for copyhold tenants. Struensee – who had by then become the queen’s lover – soon experienced the use to which writers put freedom of the press, and in both 1771 and 1773 certain restrictions were again imposed on the press.

In practice, however, the restrictions were not applied systematically, and throughout the 1780s there was a flourishing publication of pamphlets and journals discussing public matters. Under the impression of among others the French Revolution and its Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, the 1773 provisions were again repealed in 1790. It meant comprehensive freedom of the press, with the citizens enjoying freedom subject only to the consequences of the law. Freedom of the press did not give rise to an actual, organised opposition, but groups of intellectuals met in “clubs” to discuss magazines, for example Knud Lyhne Rahbek’s (1760-1830) Minerva and The Spectator. Among those who contributed to these were the vicar, Michael Gottlieb Birckner (1756-1798), who wrote the first philosophical defences of freedom of expression; the lawyer, Peter Collett (1767-1823); and more radical, almost revolutionary writers such as the authors and poets, Conrad Malthe Bruun (1775-1826) and Peter Andreas Heiberg (1758-1841). The last-mentioned were influenced by among others Rousseau (1712-1778) and Kant (1724-1804) and expressed sympathy with the French Revolution and with its more radical aspects.

Printing office from the end of the 18th century.
Reason

Growing freedom of expression in the last third of the 18th century contributed to the first debates in Denmark-Norway about the design of society – among other things about fundamental freedoms, about the power of the state, and about when citizens are allowed to rebel. In that way, the period saw the first flourishing of the free social debate that is indispensable to a democracy, and which – even if the period was brief and without democracy – gave rise to a feeling of confidence and political interest among the middle classes, which paved the way for subsequent reforms, especially in Norway.

The totalitarian turn of the French Revolution from 1793 made the regent of the country, Crown Prince Frederik (later Frederik VI (ruled 1808-1839)), fear the potential consequences of comprehensive freedom of the press – which also in Denmark had led to harsh attacks on absolutism, the nobility, the clergy and religion. Therefore, the government set up a commission in 1797 to consider the extent of freedom of the press as “a certain class of writers constantly strives to produce distrust in the government, deride public measures instead of, with restraint, indicating ways in which one matter or another might be improved”.

Birckner defended the principle of freedom of the press, but underlined at the same time that it must not be abused for the purpose of “attacks on absolutism” or “open calls for sedition and disobedience”. Collett went one step further in a review of Birckner’s book On the Freedom of the Press and its Laws, in which he argued that civil servants have a right and a duty to criticise the government, and that it is in certain circumstances legitimate to urge rebellion, namely when it comes from the majority or the entire people. This resulted in strong reactions on the part of the government: In September 1797, Collett was summarily dismissed from his office of court and city judge. Heiberg and Bruun rushed to his defence. They went one step further, arguing that a state that limits freedom of expression makes it justifiable for citizens to rebel.

In August 1799, Crown Prince Frederik found that the use of freedom of the press had gone too far. “I am in complete agreement with the chancellery’s decision to deal with these gentlemen”, he wrote about the writers who criticised the government. On 27 September the same year, the Print Freedom Regulation was issued, which effectively turned the clock back by silencing the critics of society and the government. It was no longer possible to write anonymously, practically every piece of writing had to be submitted to the chief constable before publication, and violations were, with retroactive effect, subject to lifelong censorship.

The consequence came swiftly. In 1799, both Heiberg and Bruun were retroactively sentenced to lifelong exile, and both ended up in Paris in 1800. Collett had to abandon his activities as a writer and the same year accepted a position as attorney in the Danish West Indies.

“Section 2: If any person, in writing, blames, mocks or endeavours to spread hatred and dissatisfaction against the Constitution of these Realms, or against the King’s Government either in general or through individual acts, he shall be punishable by banishment; and if he after having been deported again takes up residence in the King’s Realms and Lands, without having obtained permission, he shall work in irons for the rest of his days.”

Print Freedom Regulation of 27 September 1799.
Identification

The French Revolution refers to a number of highly dramatic and extremely symbolic events in the period 1789-1799. The revolution was initiated on 17 June 1789, when the representatives of the middle classes (“the third estate”) declared themselves the National Assembly. It continued on 14 July 1789 with the storming of the Bastille; it led to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen of 26 August 1789; it brought about a new constitution in 1791; it culminated in the death sentence on and decapitation of the French king in January 1793; it developed into an actual regime of terror in 1793-1794, which led to a new republican constitution in 1795; and it was finally brought to an end when Napoleon (1769-1821) seized power in 1799.

The revolutionary aspect of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen in 1789 is linked to two allegations: first, that the individual has rights which the community cannot deprive it of, be they of a family, religious or political nature; and second, that sovereignty, which in classical theory is the term for the highest principle of power, takes its origin in the people and the nation. This idea is formulated most succinctly in Article 3 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen: “The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body or individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.” The sovereignty of the absolute monarch rested on the notion that he personified God’s order on earth. The sovereignty of the nation, by contrast, derives from human society. For the nation refers back to the people and their history. Power cannot be given, but is created.

The transition from absolutism to democracy caused fundamental changes to the symbolic order of society. The establishment of democracy in France saw a shift from the king to the people as the legitimate basis of power, together with a shift from the throne to the rostrum as the centre of society’s symbolic system. Where the king’s throne represented divine power, the rostrum of
the people became the symbol of the order of democracy. The people is not visible in the same way as the king whose power is made visible by means of the throne. It means that democracy is dependent on a rostrum, from where the people and nation is perceived as the source of sovereignty. If a speaker refuses to leave the rostrum, arguing that he is the incarnation of the people, democracy collapses.

The National Constituent Assembly in Paris, November 1789. The speaker and the rostrum are at the centre, the king no longer.

“Article 1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.
Article 2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.
Article 3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.”

*Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, 26 August 1789*

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**Reason**

Even if the French Revolution as such ended in failure, it is one of the greatest landmarks in world history. Like the American Revolution, it constitutes a milestone in the development of modern democracy that is based on two different fundamental principles, namely human rights and the sovereignty of the people, which means that the individual rights perspective is combined with a democratic community perspective.
Identification

The Danish poet, clergyman and politician Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) has been of decisive importance to the development of Danish intellectual and social life, especially with respect to school, church and association activities. Grundtvig was also politically active and was among other things a member of the national assembly which in 1849 presented the Constitution of the Kingdom of Denmark.

It is a generally held view that Grundtvig has had enormous influence on the development of Danish democracy over the last 150 years. At the same time, however, it is well known that it was only late in life that he became a keen champion of the free constitution that was introduced in 1849. For a very long time Grundtvig had reservations about the introduction of democracy due the experience of the French Revolution. The French Revolution had shown the potentially fatal consequences of the destruction of the relationship that exists between the individual’s wish for freedom and the state as the guardian of the common good. In spite of the experience of the French Revolution and the risk that freedom may undermine the necessary idea of the common good, Grundtvig argued in favour of not less but more freedom! As members of society, we assume responsibility for the shared life. And that is best ensured if the individual has freedom in society to assume responsibility.

Grundtvig’s demand for freedom exceeded both the Constitution of 1849 and today’s ideas of the relationship between democracy and the welfare state. He was thus opposed to compulsion within the church, school and army: Religion, schooling and military service ought to be a matter of free choice, care for the poor ought to be a local and personal matter, trade ought to have economic freedom, national minorities ought to have cultural freedom, and slavery in the Danish West Indies ought to be abolished. Grundtvig would not maintain the old system, but develop the new one at the same time as popular enlightenment was to provide the consciousness-related preconditions for it. In 1848, Grundtvig stated: “The time of the Estates is over, the time of the people has come.” Even though he had reservations regarding the Constitution that was introduced in 1849, he was as a member of the Landsting (upper chamber) very critical of the proposal to limit the right to vote in “the revised constitution” of 1866. He said to the majority of the Landsting on 12 July 1866 that it seemed to have “its actual roots in privilege, in the purse and in arithmetic; three areas that will hardly ever be popular in Denmark”.

Especially in his songs and poems, Grundtvig inculcated his view of popular character and freedom in the Danish language with formulations that have almost become proverbial. He said for example, “We have made great progress when few
Reason

Grundtvig was a staunch champion of freedom in Denmark. His philosophy of society is based on the liberal view that only in freedom will the individual voluntarily accept the necessary restrictions. Force destroys the will of the people and without freedom to make decisions, personal ethics cannot develop. The view that freedom has both personal and social preconditions becomes the point of departure for Grundtvig’s philosophy of enlightenment: On the one hand, popular enlightenment and popular education requires a certain scope of freedom; on the other hand, enlightenment and education is only popular if it strengthens the wish to administer freedom.

The reason why I at this moment have requested the attention of the assembly is merely that as I belong to those who did what little they could in this country to abolish slavery in the Danish West Indies, I cannot refrain from opposing what has been stated repeatedly in connection with this question that it should be recognised that it is really possible to have full ownership of our fellow human beings, which I therefore in my own name and I should think in the name of all friends of humanity must protest against.”

**Grundtvig in the National Constitutional Assembly on 14 December 1848.**

Under the absolute monarchs, society was subject to comprehensive supervision, which the painter J.Th. Lundbye has illustrated in a drawing of Grundtvig speaking from the rostrum at Borchs Kollegium 1843. Lundbye has placed five upright men in the background of the picture, who are probably representatives of the church, university and police. Grundtvig knew that there were police spies present when he delivered his speeches.

have too much and fewer too little” from 1820, and “Freedom is the watchword in the Nordic countries, freedom for Loki (Norse god of destruction) and freedom for Thor (Norse god struggling against evil)” from 1832.
Identification

The advisory assemblies of the Estates of the Realm were active during the last decades of absolutism from 1835 to 1848. They were the first fora for comprehensive political debate in Denmark and, therefore, contributed to forming public opinion, which was one of the preconditions for the introduction of democracy in 1848-1849.

Based on the Prussian model, the Danish advisory assemblies of the Estates of the Realm were established by laws of 28 May 1831 and 15 May 1834. They convened the first time in 1835 and subsequently met every second year up to 1848. The immediate background to the decision to set up these assemblies was the widespread unrest throughout Europe in connection with the July Revolution in France in 1830, which also gave rise to political problems in the duchies.

The establishment of the advisory assemblies of the Estates of the Realm signified at the same time the fulfilment of the promise made by Frederik VI (ruled 1808-1839) at the Congress of Vienna 1815 to introduce a constitution for Holstein, which was part of the German Confederation. In order to avoid reopening the sensitive issue of the relationship between Schleswig and Holstein, the king decided that not only should a Holstein assembly be set up in Itzehoe, but also one for Schleswig with its venue in the town of Schleswig, one in Viborg for Northern Jutland, and lastly one in Roskilde for the islands.

The assemblies included representatives of landowners, peasants and urban property owners. People with property of a certain size enjoyed the right to vote and the electoral age was 25. This limited electorate constituted close to three per cent of the population. Eligibility was limited by an age requirement of a minimum of 30. The assemblies of the Estates of the Realm could not make binding decisions, but exclusively advise the monarch. Debates were not public, but were subsequently printed in *Stændertidende* (gazette of the assemblies).

In spite of many limitations, the assemblies became of real importance to the development towards democracy because they debated the great political issues of the day, such as freedom of the press and social inequality and, with increasing
force, demanded a free constitution. Communicated through Stændertidende and the awakening political press, the demands of the assemblies gradually grew into a popular wish to abolish absolutism and introduce a free constitution.

“On the provincial advisory assemblies’ right to petition. (...) Were therefore as a result of events our Estates to be given increased significance and a greater sphere of activity, the right in which the people already rejoices, the freedom to which it will have gained title (...) will change into the right and the freedom which first will lead to the situation that the people by (virtue of) its elected representatives becomes master of its own house.”

LEADING ARTICLE IN C.N. DAVID’S MAGAZINE FÆDRELANDET (THE FATHERLAND), NO. 7, 1834.

Reason

One of the preconditions of democracy is the presence of a middle-class general public where opinions and political views can be introduced and discussed. The advisory assemblies of the Estates of the Realm were the first official expression of an articulate middle-class public in Denmark and, consequently, of awakening political life in a broader popular sense. These assemblies became a preparatory school for later parliamentary life after the introduction of democracy.

At the Congress in Vienna in 1815, after Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo, the victors endeavoured to create peace based on a European balance of power.
Tocqueville used the USA as a model for democracy of the future. In the USA, he found liberty and equality with respect to conditions of life – something that did not yet exist in Europe. No powerful state imposed restrictions on liberty, and aristocrats had to cultivate their own land themselves. This image was most pronounced in the Northern States, where constitutions ensured that power moved from the bottom to the top. The fact that democracy was possible on such a grand scale was an important lesson to Europe, which after the regime of terror in France 1793-1794 had lost faith in democracy.

In Europe, it was not only absolutism that had been abolished, but also the communities in which people found their place – the village, the estate, the church and the class. When people are free and equal, they are severed from tradition. The result is a loss of cohesion. Tocqueville did believe that equality, Christian ethics and democracy could ensure social harmony, but he envisaged with horror “a numerous crowd of people, equal and uniform”. Expert craftsmen are replaced by unskilled and anonymous factory workers. Instead of people aware of their place within a stable framework, they are set free on an impersonal market. The result is asocial individualism, with everybody thinking only of their “petty and vulgar pleasures”. Above them looms a powerful paternalistic state “assuming sole responsibility for their welfare and watching over their lives”. It interferes in all spheres and is “structured, provident and mild”, resulting in civilised slavery.

A colourful and magical world based on lack of freedom and inequality must give way to a world in which freedom and equality also imply loss of solidarity. Tocqueville did not believe that an “invisible hand” spontaneously will achieve social harmony, or that a new type of solidarity will emerge when people must collaborate in order to reach their selfish goals. Being an aristocrat, he was deeply suspicious of the unenlightened people

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859).
and was keenly aware of the dark sides of democracy, populism and demagoguery.

A democratic society demands that everybody should have the opportunities to become rich, in terms of property, power and knowledge. Tocqueville was a liberal in the tradition of the philosopher John Locke (1632-1704). Therefore, he found that only work gives the right to wealth. He was revolted by the mere idea that the poor should be entitled to social assistance.

“I have an intellectual preference for the democratic institutions, but I am an aristocrat by instinct, which means that I despise and fear the masses.

I have a passionate love for liberty, law and respect for legality, but not for democracy.

That is what I find in my heart.

I hate the masses for their demagoguery, unsystematic mode of action, their violent and poorly enlightened interference in matters, the lower classes’ envious passions, their irreligious tendencies.

That is what I find in my heart.

I am neither of the revolutionary nor the conservative party. Yet, if I must choose I shall prefer the latter to the former. For I disagree with the latter about the means, but not the ends; whereas I disagree with the former about both the means and the ends.

Liberty is my foremost passion. There is the truth.”

Undated note reproduced in Antoine Rédier’s biography on Tocqueville: Comme disait Monsieur de Tocqueville…, 1925.

**Reason**

In 1789, attempts were made to introduce democracy with the French Revolution. However, it was not clear how the people were to rule, and in the first instance the result was a disaster. In 1848, there were new revolutions all over Europe leading to democratic constitutions. In the period between these dates, heated debates took place for or against democracy. In Denmark, the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was of the opinion that democracy was an “outward disturbance”, that diverted attention from the important issue i.e. the individual’s internal relationship with himself. In Britain, the philosopher and economist Karl Marx (1818-1883) believed that democracy and fundamental freedoms were the tools of the state directed against the proletariat. In France, Tocqueville was of the opinion that democracy was indeed the government system of the future, but that it would entail a loss of culture. His acceptance of democracy, but also his dislike of it, is more than just a reflection of the transition from absolutism to democracy. The ambivalence exists also today.
Identification

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) was a child prodigy, who at the age of three could read Greek and by the age of thirteen had finished his school education. The talent endured, and he became an influential philosopher, politician and economist. His political thoughts are set out in *Considerations on Representative Government*, which was published in 1860. As a liberal thinker, he was an advocate of democracy, (almost) universal suffrage, self-determination of colonies, basic school education, and gender equality. Stuart Mill also developed a moral philosophy that became known as utilitarianism, in which what is morally correct is determined by that which promotes the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people.

The French Revolution had cleared the decks, leaving the old societal system of absolutism and the Estates in ruins. What was to replace this system? The first attempt to create a sensible society based on liberty, equality and fraternity quickly led to terror. Those who believe reason is on their side easily succumb to behaving brutally towards those who do not accept what other people regard as reasonable. Also dictatorship, in the guise of Napoleon, met its Waterloo in 1815, and the attempt to turn back the clock and re-establish absolutism aroused fury. People who have tasted freedom will not accept servitude.

A modern democracy cannot imply that everyone must congregate in one place in order to make decisions. The population is too large and its political experience too small. When the population cannot govern directly, it must do so indirectly through representatives. It must select the “best among equals” and allow them to take decisions on its behalf. In this way, everyone’s interests are voiced, and as an added bonus it will provide a democratic learning process for all citizens.

Representative democracy is the best compromise between unenlightened rule of the masses and the greedy rule of the aristocracy. As a consequence of his utilitarianism (“greatest happiness of the greatest number”), Stuart Mill believed that (almost) all groups of society should have the franchise.

Mill was both afraid that voters would vote according to narrow class interest and that politicians would say and do anything to win power. Governing a country requires knowledge and experience; something which not everyone possesses. Mill believed in objectivity and reason, and he wished to balance popular rule with elite rule, in which those who were best qualified were given particular influence, not least because they were, in his opinion, the least partisan. Such individuals would vote less according to personal interest and more according to what served the
common good. In the same way that countries differ in terms of their level of civilisation, people differed in terms of their insight, experience and character. Stuart Mill considered whether the best qualified should have “two or more votes” and advocated setting up an expert council to undertake the work of drafting legislation. Alongside “the People’s Chamber”, a “Chamber of Statesmen” should also be created, composed of people who had held important political positions. This chamber could be a bulwark against the unenlightened and “rectify their mistakes”.

At the same time, people who received parish relief or who did not pay tax should be disqualified of the franchise, on the grounds that they would be tempted to be lavish and squander public funds. Furthermore, women should be enfranchised, and in this regard Stuart Mill was a pioneer, greatly influencing Georg Brandes (1842-1927) and cultural radicalism in Denmark.

Democracy raised technical, legal and moral issues at a time when representative democracy was still an idea for the future. Stuart Mill takes an important step on the road to a modern democracy. Even though his prejudices are evident, he sought to deliver a non-prejudiced analysis of how a representative democracy could be designed.

“From these accumulated considerations, it is evident that the only government which can fully satisfy all the exigencies of the social state is one in which the whole people participate; that any participation, even in the smallest public function, is useful; that the participation should everywhere be as great as the general degree of improvement of the community will allow: and that nothing less can be ultimately desirable than the admission of all to a share in the sovereign power of the state. But since all cannot, in a community exceeding a single small town, participate personally in any but some very minor portions of the public business, it follows that the ideal type of a perfect government must be representative.”

“Democracy is not the ideally best form of government unless this weak side of it can be strengthened; unless it can be so organised that no class, not even the most numerous, shall be able to reduce all but itself to political insignificance, and direct the course of legislation and administration by its exclusive class interest.”

*JOHN STUART MILL: CONSIDERATIONS ON REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT, 1860.*
Denmark acquired its first democratic constitution, the *Constitutional Act of the Kingdom of Denmark*, on 5 June 1849. It has since been amended several times, most recently in 1953. The Danish Constitution differs from all other laws by virtue of its superseding status. As such, these laws are not permitted to contravene the provisions of the Constitution. The Constitution comprises stipulations on the supreme bodies – the Folketing (Danish Parliament), the Government and the Courts – and their interaction as well as provisions on a number of fundamental freedoms and human rights.

Denmark’s first democratic constitution, the *June Constitution of 5 June 1849*, was adopted after the fall of absolutism in 1848 and was the result of the work carried out in the National Constitutional Assembly, which convened on 23 October 1848. This assembly comprised 38 members appointed by the King (i.e. by the Government) and 114 members elected by all men of sound repute over 30 years of age and head of an independent household. Regardless of the fact that the assembly was characterised by a strong element of conservatism, the Constitutional Bill that was drafted turned out to be one of the most liberal in Europe.

The actual process of drafting the Constitutional Bill was undertaken primarily by D.G. Monrad (1811-1887), who took his inspiration from the most liberal constitutions of the time, namely the Norwegian Constitution of 1814 and the Belgian Constitution of 1831. The entire Constitutional Bill package was subsequently edited into a Danish entirety by Orla Lehmann (1810-1870). The finished product therefore had clear national liberal fingerprints.

The new Constitution defined the system of government as a constitutional monarchy and enshrined the principle of the tripartition of power into the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. The legislature was organised in a two chamber system, which took the form of a democratically elected Folketing (lower chamber) and a more conservatively composed Landsting (upper chamber). However, the Constitution was only partially democratic, in that only men over a certain age had the franchise. Women and servants were excluded from democratic participation. By means of a constitutional amendment in 1866, the Constitution was tightened in a conservative direction in the wake of the defeat to Prussia in 1864, whereby the Landsting to a greater degree than earlier came to serve as a conservative brake on legislation. As a result, the stage was set for the subsequent constitutional struggle between the Liberal Party (Venstre) and the Conservative Party (Højre). It ended with the Liberal Party’s victory at the Change of System in 1901, and the 1866 arrangement was once again repealed by means of a constitutional amendment in 1915, which also saw the enfranchisement of women and servants. The most recent constitutional amendment was made in 1953, which saw the complete abolition of the Landsting and the establishment of parliamentarianism as the prevailing constitutional practice for the first time. Admittedly, the Constitution was adopted in its present form on 5 June 1953, although the legislative text by and large dates back to 1849 when the National Constitutional Assembly passed the law as a manifestation of the country’s transition from absolutism to democracy.
parliamentarianism had been practised since the Change of System in 1901, but had remained disputed right up until 1920. The constitutional amendment in 1953 also amended the provision governing the royal line of succession, enabling also women to succeed to the throne, although men take precedence over women. The amendment also extended fundamental freedoms, and a provision was inserted that made it possible for Denmark to join international organisations such as the EC (now the EU).

The fundamental freedoms contained in the Danish Constitution have since 1849 predominantly belonged to the category “civil and political rights”. First of all, these rights relate to provisions that fundamentally protect citizens against interference by the Government. Such provisions include protection against deprivation of liberty, protection of the right of property and protection against invasion of privacy. Secondly, the Constitution contains a number of fundamental freedoms that are essential in order for democracy to function. This concerns protection of the freedom of expression, the freedom of association and the freedom of assembly and demonstration. Furthermore, the fundamental freedoms contained in the Constitution are generally characterised by a predominant emphasis on the formal protection of the rights, for example by forbidding censorship or by requiring that government interference may only be permitted on the basis of a court order. The substantive protection of liberties is more limited. In this regard, the Constitution differs, inter alia, from the European Convention on Human Rights, whose provisions reflect the fact that they materialised far later than the majority of the provisions contained in the Constitution.

In the 1990s, a debate arose – especially in the light of the changed situation resulting from Denmark’s membership of the EU and the increased attention given to human rights – about whether the Constitution should be further revised. However, the debate did not lead to anything concrete, among other things because a constitutional amendment is difficult to implement. Any reform must be adopted without being amended by two consecutive Folketing assemblies either side of a general election. Thereafter, a referendum must be held on the constitutional proposal, in which a majority of the votes cast is required to be in favour of the proposal and this majority must constitute at least 40 per cent of all those eligible to vote.

“§ 1. This Constitutional Act shall apply to all parts of the Kingdom of Denmark.
§ 2. The form of government shall be that of a constitutional monarchy. Royal authority shall be inherited by men and women in accordance with the provisions of the Act of Succession to the Throne of March 27, 1953.
§ 3. Legislative authority shall be vested in the King and the Folketing conjointly. Executive authority shall be vested in the King. Judicial authority shall be vested in the courts of justice.
§ 4. The Evangelical Lutheran Church shall be the Established Church of Denmark, and as such shall be supported by the State.”

1953 – THE CONSTITUTIONAL ACT OF DENMARK, PART 1
Identification

The national liberal movement in Copenhagen was the driving force behind the introduction of democracy in Denmark. Culturally, the national liberals – also known as the intellectuals’ party – belonged to the educated middle class, who primarily comprised civil servants, lawyers, doctors, clergymen, newspaper editors and university academics.

Classical liberalism is built in principle on a non-national philosophy. However, during the struggle for a national democracy, an ideological bond was forged between liberal and national currents of the time that were critical of the existing economic and political system. In the transformation process that turned the liberals into national liberals, the status of Schleswig and Holstein in the united monarchy played an important role. National liberalism arose as a political trend in 1842 when Orla Lehmann (1810-1870) formulated the Eider Policy, whose objective was to separate the German Duchies of Holstein and Lauenborg from the Danish monarchy and incorporate the Duchy of Schleswig into the Kingdom of Denmark. In other words, the national liberals wished not only to replace absolutism with democracy as the new system of government, but also to replace the multinational united monarchy with the Eider State as the new national form of government.

The dismantling of absolutism in the Danish monarchy was hastened by the second democratic wave that swept through Europe in spring 1848. Despite great scepticism in certain sections of the population, the national liberals succeeded in gaining support for their national and democratic programme at a number of large-scale meetings in Copenhagen in March 1848. At the decisive meeting in the Casino Theatre on 20 March, Orla Lehmann gained enthusiastic support for the national liberals’ demand for a change of government in an Eider-Danish direction. The following day, 21 March, the national liberals organised a demonstration in which 15,000 men, led by the members of the City Council of Copenhagen, approached the King with a demand for a new democratic system of government and a new national system of government. The demand was backed up by the famous revolutionary threat: “We beg your Majesty not to drive the nation to take desperate measures”.

When the King stepped down as absolute monarch, a shift occurred in the symbolic order of power: from royal sovereignty to popular sovereignty. This shift led to a radicalisation of the controversial question that was already being debated: Who are the people when the people are no longer the King’s people? There was considerable difference of opinion on this matter in the United Monarchy.

The disagreement led to the outbreak of civil war in 1848, which with occasional interruption lasted until 1851. Although the civil war caused considerable suffering, no solutions were found to the fundamental question of who “the people” were in the new democracy. “The solution” first
materialised with the country’s defeat to Prussia and Austria in 1864 and the loss of the duchies, Holstein, Lauenborg and Schleswig. After this defeat, Denmark was close to achieving what was considered at that time to be the ideal of a democratic nation state, namely identity between the language’s, the nation’s and the state’s borders. However, the ideal was disrupted by the fact that around 200,000 Danish-minded citizens in Schleswig fell under German rule after 1864; a situation that was not rectified until the referendum held in Schleswig in 1920.

Reason

The introduction and development of democracy in Denmark is closely associated with certain social movements and philosophical currents. Democracy’s introduction was in this respect promoted by the fact that the political, economic and cultural interests of the liberal middle class came into increasing conflict with the existing system that was characterised by the aristocracy’s interests. The liberals demanded a constitution that gave citizens influence on political life and an economic policy that promoted freedom of competition. The fact that the national liberals lost considerable political and cultural influence in the wake of the defeat in 1864 had a significant impact on the further evolution of democracy in Denmark.

“Most Gracious King!
The advisers that your Majesty has inherited from your predecessor do not enjoy the confidence of the people, no more in Denmark proper than in Schleswig and Holstein. The lamentable fruits of your government system which day by day become ever more prominent have served to undermine any belief that your advisers should now possess the necessary insight and strength to rescue the country.
The hour of judgement approaches with giant strides. The state will be dissolved unless your Majesty without delay surrounds your throne with men capable of undertaking the grandeur of the task and who would be able to inject an energetic determination into the government and come to the nation’s assistance – men who could save Denmark’s honour and lay the foundations of the country’s freedom.
We beg your Majesty not to drive the nation to take desperate measures.”

ADDRESS BY THE MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF COPENHAGEN, 20 MARCH 1848.
Identification

The political and democratic struggle from 1864 to 1901 was dominated by one overall constitutional issue: Should the King appoint the government, or should the government emerge from the Folketing majority? In the struggle between the two principles, the peasantry in Denmark came to play a role that is unique in a European context. This was partly due to the fact that the peasantry organised themselves politically into the Liberal Party (Venstre) and established information and education facilities in the form of folk high schools and agricultural schools.

With the introduction of democracy in 1849, the relationship between state and people became a fundamental question: Should the state, for example, be in charge of all education so as to ensure national integration? Or should the state specifically not be responsible for all provision of education because this could undermine the very foundation of democracy, i.e. the individual’s autonomy and right of self-determination? Already before 1864, the Grundtvigians had begun to establish free (private independent) schools and folk high schools, but it was not until after “the great disaster” in 1864 that the creation of these types of schools gathered proper momentum. Between 1864 and 1872, around 50 folk high schools were established, the vast majority of which were based on a Grundtvigian philosophy. In contrast to the national liberals, the Grundtvigian perception of freedom and democracy was primarily connected not to the state and its institutions, but to self-management in the civil society. In the Grundtvigian self-knowledge, freedom could not be guaranteed by the state, but by the people. Free schools, free churches, free associations and societies, and free general education activities were seen as manifestations of a voluntary community, serving in this way as an ideal for a larger national-democratic community.

Self-management on a cooperative basis also came to characterise the many dairies and slaughterhouses that were established in connection with the transformation of Danish agriculture from vegetable to livestock production. Rather than limited liability companies, the new dairies from 1882 and the new slaughterhouses from 1887 were predominantly established as cooperative societies. A key argument advanced in favour of the cooperative movement was that it contributed to “democratisation in depth”, because cooperative society members voted “according to heads of people and not heads of cattle”, i.e. each vote carried equal weight. The Grundtvigian emphasis on the civil society rather than the state and the market was, however, not only ideologically determined. It was also based on recognition of the fact that the landowners had the strength to prevent the Liberal Parties from gaining access to government office. After decades of constitutional struggle came the Change of...
Reason

After the defeat to Prussia in 1864, the national liberals did not come to decide the content of the constitutional revision that became necessary after the break-up of the united monarchy. Even though the national liberals justifiably regarded the June Constitution as their work, they were left without influence when some of the peasantry’s representatives joined forces with the landowners to legislatively implement the revised constitution in 1866. After the fall of the national liberals, the landed gentry took over power, whilst the Grundtvigians – who can be regarded as the peasantry’s cultural vanguard – took the lead in the rapidly expanding civil society. After 1864, Grundtvigianism was the only form of popular movement with broad appeal, the labour movement having not yet seen the light of day.

System in 1901, the forming of the first Liberal Party government, recognition of the principle of parliamentarianism, and the amendment of the Constitution in 1915.

1. “As my thoughts at the moment are mostly preoccupied with the preservation of the country in its amputated condition, it goes without saying that I fear the party of the intellectuals more than I do the influence of the peasant sympathisers. With respect to the latter, the most dangerous element is Grundtvigianism. Even though they claim that they will give God the praise, they are in reality, however, the Court nobles of popular sovereignty.”

COUNT CHRISTIAN FRIJS, WHO LED THE NEGOTIATIONS ON THE REVISED CONSTITUTION.

2. “In limited liability companies, votes are always cast, as far as I know, according to shares. When a single shareholder has a very large number of shares, he also has a large number of votes. (…) We have a different method of voting in our cooperative undertakings. The person that only delivers one pig a year has the same voting rights as the person who delivers 300. We vote according to people, not according to capital or according to what we deliver. This, what you might call, democratic foundation, upon which our cooperative slaughterhouses are built, would be lost. If we entered a large limited liability company, we would have no hope of taking the most shares; whereas the capitalists, who would be able to take the largest number, would be the centre of gravity; those who would have control over everything.”

FOLK HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE PRINCIPAL PETER BOJSEN, ORIGINATOR OF THE FIRST COOPERATIVE SLAUGHTERHOUSE IN HORSENS 1887.
Identification

It aroused great attention when in 1871 Lieutenant Louis Pio (1841-1894) under the pseudonym, A Worker, published the first edition of *Socialist Papers*. In the papers, Pio observed that a fourth class in society had now developed – those without capital, the proletariat – whose interests were the exact opposite of those of the liberal middle class. Through publishing *Socialist Papers*, Louis Pio, who was a declared anti-nationalist and internationalist, laid the foundation of the Danish Social Democratic Party, whose objective was to organise the rapidly growing working class on a socialist basis.

The first genuine trade union was created on 1 September 1871. Many others followed soon after. Several strikes in the winter of 1872 culminated in the Battle of Fælleden on 5 May, which saw violent clashes between the strikers and the police. In 1896, the employers organised themselves into the Confederation of Danish Employers, and in 1898 a total of 39 nationwide trade unions joined to form the Danish Federation of Trade Unions. After a long period of strikes and lock-outs, a settlement was reached between the two main organisations on 5 September 1899 and a basic agreement was signed, which still today serves as a kind of constitution for the labour market.

The basic agreement of 1899 laid the ground for the strategy pursued by the labour movement.

Hussars and police officers dealt severely with workers who in May 1872 defied a ban on assembly and turned up at the common, Nørre Fælled, in Copenhagen. Even though the strikers and demonstrating workers lost the Battle of Fælleden on 5 May 1872, the incident helped pave the way for the labour movement’s march to power.
and the Social Democratic Party throughout the 20th century: a peaceful reform strategy on a democratic foundation. In contrast to the communists, the social democrats after the turn of the century maintained their adherence to the liberal democracy model, which is based on a division between state, market and civil society. Political democracy was regarded as an important step towards social and economic democracy, which was the goal. But in contrast to the liberalists, the socialists believed that it was not the state that needed to be minimised but rather the market that needed taming.

The outbreak of the First World War dealt a serious blow to people's faith in the strength of internationalism. The war showed that national brotherhood came before international solidarity. The coupling of democracy and social elements lay at the core of the national identity that the Social Democratic Party developed during the inter-war years. This process culminated with the party manifesto, *Denmark for the People*, published in 1934. By translating the class concept into popular terms, the Social Democratic Party established itself as the large party of the people. In contrast to the racist interpretation of the term “people” adopted by national socialism, the Social Democratic Party developed a popular concept that was based on a social and democratic interpretation. In order to strengthen the feeling of democratic co-citizenship, citizens should be ensured a number of economic and social rights. The demand to abolish the means-tested forms of support and replace them with social rights culminated in 1956 with the Pensions Act, which guaranteed all citizens of the country a basic amount. In this way, “democratic freedom has been given a social dimension”, argued the later Social Democratic Party Prime Minister, Jens Otto Krag (1914-1978).

### Reason

In 1848, Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) published *The Communist Manifesto*, which had the rallying call “Proletarians of all countries, unite!” The vision of uniting workers across national borders raised the question: How should a socialist relate to the question of patriotism and democracy? Was there a fundamental contradiction between national and international solidarity? Could the principles of liberal democracy be maintained amidst efforts to realise a socialist society? Different answers to these questions later led to a division between a communist movement and a social democratic movement.

“With the law – against tyranny! The Social Democratic Party’s Executive Committee will continue to advocate a policy based on law. We categorically reject attempts to deprive the people of its right of co-determination. We fight the dictatorship movement that bears the name of communism, and we fight the various forms of fascism that have also now appeared in this country. One of the preconditions for supporting fascism and thereby related movements, here and elsewhere, is the agitation and movement emanating from Russia that conflict with the nature of the Danish people and conflict with the interests of working people. The Social Democratic Party will join in the relentless struggle against any movement that threatens society and seeks to disrupt the peaceful development of society and society’s functions.”

*PARTY MANIFESTO OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY, DENMARK FOR THE PEOPLE, 1934.*
Identification

In the last third of the 19th century, an enlightenment movement arose, which later became known as cultural radicalism. Values such as freedom, reason and enlightenment lay at the basis of the new age of enlightenment, which was properly introduced in Denmark when Georg Brandes (1842-1927) held a series of lectures in 1871 with the innocent title *Main Currents in 19th Century Literature*. These lectures, however, ignited a fire, off which sparks still leap. Even though the new age of enlightenment was not a copy of the classical Age of Enlightenment of the 18th century, it built on the same emphasis of science and “freedom of thought” (including the right to criticise religious tradition), the same aversion to the supernatural and the metaphysical, the same preoccupation with social problems and the same optimism about human nature and history.

Georg Brandes has often been called the Voltaire of the North. He broke with Christian metaphysics and instead identified mankind’s own natural resources as the origin of freedom and individuality. Brandes was a key figure in the modern breakthrough that within literature encompassed authors such as J.P. Jakobsen (1847-1885) and Henrik Pontoppidan (1857-1943), and within journalism and politics comprised figures such as Edvard Brandes (1847-1931) and Viggo Hørup (1841-1902). In 1883, on the occasion of the centennial anniversary of the birth of Grundtvig, Edvard Brandes wrote a critical memorial article. Brandes believed that Grundtvig’s religious and Nordic views were far removed from “the principle of political democracy”, whereas his views on freedom and free speech enabled “a connection between his supporters and all those who love freedom of thought and the full truth”. The article’s publication has later been acclaimed as the event that led cultural radicalism to distinguish itself from Grundtvigionism in Danish culture and politics. The protests namely grew so violent that the Liberal Party’s leader, Chresten Berg (1829-1891), was forced to break off cooperation with Viggo Hørup and Edvard Brandes on the newspaper, *Morgenbladet*. With the creation of the daily newspaper, *Politiken*, in 1884, Hørup and the Brandes brothers acquired a new mouthpiece under the motto: “The paper of greater enlightenment.” While Georg Brandes emphasised that progress emanates from “single individuals, not from the masses of the people”, Viggo Hørup highlighted the class struggle as the way to achieving a more democratic society. Through his eminent writings, Hørup came to influence the political debate for a whole generation. He could be scathing in his criticism of the national liberals’ discomfort at incorporating “the masses” into the democratic fold, and similarly he could be harsh in his criticism of Grundtvigians when they emphasised popular character at the expense of democracy. During the constitutional struggle, he formulated...
the well-known rallying cry for parliamentarianism: “The Folketing, nothing above it, nothing beside it.” For Hørup, popular sovereignty lay at the heart of democracy. In a Constitution Day speech in 1884, he emphasised that the future should not be built on “faith and the altar”, but on “the civic spirit in our people”.

“I am not a democrat; that is, I do not believe in the value of majority decisions. I obviously concede to the necessity of having the majority decide, where the issue is the people’s right to self-determination. But like most thinking individuals: In the few areas where I have an expertise, nothing is more irrelevant to me than what hundreds of thousands opine who have no expertise or insight (…). Democracy is one of the forms of government we have known so far, and the least evil one. But a good thing it is not, in my opinion. All decisive progress issues from single individuals, not from the masses of people.”

GEORG BRANDES: CONSTITUTIONAL DAY SPEECH IN SOMMERLYST, FREDERIKSBERG, 5 JUNE 1884.

Reason

Individualism was a prominent feature of the understanding of modernity developed by Georg Brandes, which made the discussion about the relationship between democracy and individualism important. The philosopher, Harald Høffding (1843-1931) and the politician, Viggo Hørup, were among those who in that debate expressed reservation about Brandes’ aristocratic individualism. Tocqueville (1805-1859) also addresses the issue of democracy and individualism. He points out that individualism is “a novel expression, to which a novel idea has given birth”. Whilst selfishness is an age-old phenomenon, individualism is of democratic origin. For Tocqueville, individualism is both a precondition for and a threat to democracy.
Identification

The earliest seeds of the women’s movement showed during the French Revolution. The feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), was the first person to tie her own and other women’s experience of oppression to democracy’s new ideals of equality. Her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, published in 1790, was a glowing speech in defence of the rights of man. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792, is regarded as a pioneering work within feminist philosophy. In it, Mary Wollstonecraft argued for education as the way to the liberation of women. In Denmark, the author, Mathilde Fibiger (1830-1872), surprised her contemporaries with the novel, *Clara Raphael, Twelve Letters*, published in 1851, in which she drew a connection between the national-democratic movement and the liberation of women.

Even though women did not take part in the large-scale procession to the king on 21 March 1848, Mathilde Fibiger nevertheless made the event the starting point of the first feminist novel in Denmark, *Clara Raphael, Twelve Letters*, which was published in 1951. In her first letter to her female friend, Clara writes enthusiastically about the event in 1848: “21st March opened up a new life for me. I saw the Danish people, who I only knew from legends and songs; I heard the words spoken, which resonated deeply in my soul. My ideals stepped forward to meet me in the real world, and my heart pounded in proud self-awareness.” In the novel, Clara Raphael thus draws a connection between the introduction of democracy and her own ideals of freedom and liberation. However, it was difficult for her to share her enthusiasm for the new ideas with the people she lived among on the island of Lolland. “I have personally tried to talk “about something” with people here, but the only effect it has had is to make them believe I have a screw loose.” Clara Raphael despairs at the position of women. “Our position in society is tragic, and why? What right does man have to suppress us? For subjugated we are, despite the chains being gilded.” To cast off these chains is, however, no easy matter, because they are embedded in the mind and the consciousness: “When the peasants were granted their freedom, some of them wept, begging for permission to keep things as they had been.” Clara Raphael’s hope of breaking with the existing patriarchal system of society required national and democratic self-awareness, which for her constituted a promise of freedom. In response to her female friend’s question about what it was that she was actually fighting for, she answered: “I will fight and live for what I understand by the emancipation of women.”

Mathilde Fibiger’s book created a great furore and resulted in the so-called *Clara Raphael Dispute*, in which N.F.S. Grundtvig defended Mathilde Fibiger. In 1869, Georg Brandes entered the battle for women’s rights with a translation of John Stuart Mill’s (1806-1873) book, *The Subjection of Women*, in which Brandes wrote an enthusiastic preface.

In 1871, Frederik Bajer (1837-1922) and Matilde Bajer (1840-1934) founded the Danish Women’s Society, the first women’s organisation in Denmark. Mathilde Fibiger was one of the earliest members of the Society. When the Danish Women’s Society was established, it did not demand female suffrage. It was not until 1906 that a majority of the members became in favour of making the demand the Society’s official policy. Since then, women have gained increasing representation in society’s institutions. Whether they have achieved full equal rights is still the subject of debate.
“Widows, abandoned and separated wives and unmarried women aged 25 or older, of age, with or without trustee, shall have equal opportunity with male persons to engage in trading activities when they satisfy the prescribed conditions laid down for men.”

TRADE LICENSING ACT 1857, SECTION 7.

In 1924, Nina Bang (1866-1928) became Minister of Education in the first Social Democratic Party government and thus the world’s first female minister.

Reason

In history books, it is still possible to come across the wording that universal suffrage was introduced in Denmark in connection with the adoption of the Constitution in 1849. Such use of language hides the fact that women – not to mention male servants without an independent household – fell outside the classical liberalism definition of the term “citizen”. For around the first 50 years of the history of Danish democracy, only the male head of a household had the right to vote. It was not until 1903 that women were allowed to vote in parochial church council elections, not until 1908 in parish council and local council elections, and not until 1915 in the Folketing and the Landsting elections. It was not until then that women became fully-fledged citizens in a political sense.

The leadership of the Danish Women’s Society waiting outside Amalienborg Palace on 5 June 1915 to thank the king for the enfranchisement of Danish women.
Identification

The election to the Folketing in Denmark on 3 April 1901 was epoch-making, in that the Liberal Party (Venstre)’s demand for parliamentarianism was finally realised – albeit in the first few decades only as a fragile practice and not as a constitutionalised principle. This did not happen until the amended constitution of 1953. After a long constitutional struggle, the Change of System in 1901 brought recognition of the principle of parliamentarianism, which in Denmark implies that no government (and no minister) may continue in office in the face of an opposition majority. Thus, Denmark took a large step towards realising Viggo Hørup’s demand: “The Folketing, nothing above it, nothing beside it.”

With the constitutional revision in 1866, the landowner and civil servant interests succeeded in narrowing the Constitution’s democratic elements. This led to the formation of the protest party, the Liberal Party (Venstre), which during the constitutional struggle developed into a party for both peasant farmers and the progressive intellectuals in the town and cities. However, even though the Liberal Party had a majority in the Folketing, the king continued to appoint Conservative Party (Højre) governments. Conservative politician, J.B.S. Estrup (1825-1913), who was government leader from 1875 to 1894, constantly clashed with the Folketing’s majority, whose leaders were Liberal Party politicians, Chresten Berg (1829-1891) and Viggo Hørup (1841-1913). Similar conflicts existed in a number of European countries, but rarely as prolonged and entrenched as in Denmark. The conflict culminated in the 1880s, with the national defence issue as the immediate cause. The Conservative Party wished to build defence fortifications around the capital, to which Viggo Hørup asked: “What is the point?” It was not an expression of pacifism, but a reflection of the Liberal Party’s wish that defence appropriations should benefit the entire country and not just the capital. However, the Conservative Party maintained the fortifications and financed them in periods by means of provisional finance acts in accordance with a section in the Constitution regarding provisional acts that gave the king the right in special circumstances to issue provisional laws.

The constitutional struggle and the Change of System did not just sharpen the debate on the significance of democracy. It also gave rise to an era of exceptional flourishing of literature, art and music, in which in particular the future Nobel Prize Winner, Henrik Pontoppidan (1857-1943), used the political atmosphere as a backdrop for his novels. His writings give an idea of how the Change of System was not just a political revolution in a narrow sense, but also led to a new type of politics in Denmark.

Jacob Brønnum Scavenius Estrup (1825-1913).
When the introduction of parliamentarianism paved the way for the first Liberal Party government, J.C. Christensen (1856-1930), who was a teacher and leader of the party, did not become government leader. Even though the teaching profession during the 19th century had made its way up from the bottom to the top of the social pyramid, appointing the Parish Clerk of Stadil prime minister was too much of a break with accustomed thinking. However, he did become head of government in 1905 – the same year that the Social Liberal Party (Det Radikale Venstre) was founded as a result of internal disagreement in the Liberal Party on the national defence issue.

Crowds in Gothersgade taking part in the large-scale procession to Amalienborg to celebrate the Change of System on 1 September 1901.

"Now there’s only one course of action open: Hand in hand and on down the direct path if the Constitution is once more to be honoured in Denmark. Our unifying words must be popular self-rule. These are not royal words. These words were peasant-born. They were born in struggle. They are now heavy under the weight of an entire people’s rightful anger. But they shall become words of peace for our people. That day will come; when such rule shall become a daily necessity for a self-respecting people, as natural as the air we breathe, as the language we speak. Yes, that day will come, because these words lie over our country, high and warm as the light of a summer’s day. This is a necessity of life for a small people like ours. Our whole future depends on it, our whole right to be something for ourselves, our whole welfare and happiness. It has become this generation’s task to win freedom a second time; it shall become this generation’s honour to ensure freedom is passed safely onto our sons – shame on us if we relinquish our grasp! (...) My final words shall be popular self-rule. Three cheers for a self-respecting and self-ruling people."

Viggo Hørup, Speech in Højby on Funen, 24 June 1883.

Reason

The Change of System is one of the key turning points in Danish political history since the introduction of the Constitution in 1849. The change took place two years after the signing of the Basic Agreement in 1899, which marked the transition to the modern labour market. With the Change of System, the modern political landscape began to emerge with the two major parties – the Liberal Party of the farmers and the Social Democratic Party of the workers – as the driving forces. However, it was not until the introduction of elections by proportional representation in 1915 that the landscape took final shape. Whilst elections in single-member constituencies are synonymous with few parties and a clear division between government and opposition, elections by proportional representation, together with a low minimum vote threshold of two per cent, means several parties. In this way, coalitions are generally the norm and consensus politics the preferred method. The introduction of elections by proportional representation has without doubt contributed to the development of consensus democracy in Denmark.
The Kanslergade Settlement

Identification

The Kanslergade settlement is a political-economic settlement that was reached at the private home of Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning in Kanslergade in Copenhagen on 29-30 January 1933 between the Liberal Party (Venstre) and the government parties, the Social Democratic Party (Socialdemokratiet) and the Social Liberal Party (Det Radikale Venstre).

The gloomy background to the Kanslergade settlement was the global economic crisis that had developed in the wake of the Wall Street Crash in 1929. The crisis brought numerous companies to their knees and agricultural exports dropped dramatically. The result was galloping unemployment and a sharp rise in the number of forced sales of farms. In the labour market, a destructive general strike loomed on the horizon.

With the settlement, a number of measures were instituted to support the agricultural community, including the devaluation of the Danish krone, a reduction of property taxes and other minor relief. In the labour market, the employers’ demand of a 20 per cent pay-cut under threat of a general lock-out was averted by law. Lastly, the green light was given by all sides to implement Social Affairs Minister K.K. Steincke’s major social welfare reform, which generally abolished the means-testing criteria for receipt of social welfare benefits in favour of a legal principle. This immediately alleviated the pressure on the most vulnerable groups in several areas. According to Stauning, all parties to the settlement had sacrificed some principles, but had in return saved the country as well as democracy. The Liberal Party had given in on its liberalist viewpoints, whilst the Social Democratic Party had definitively cast off its original Marxist foundation and transformed itself into a widely embracing popular, workers’ party. This ideological shift was strongly and clearly indicated in Stauning’s party manifesto from 1934, which was aptly called Denmark for the People. The settlement’s importance was thrown into further relief by the fact that it was signed the same day as Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor in Berlin and subsequently led Germany towards totalitarianism and later collapse.
The Kanslergade settlement was perceived by contemporaries and posterity as a convincing demonstration of the dynamic nature of parliamentary democracy. The settlement prepared the ground for the idea of cooperative democracy, which successfully withstood the pressure from the totalitarian currents of the time. In the long term, the settlement laid the foundation for the broad political agreement and willingness to compromise which was the political prerequisite for the widely accepted social welfare system of the post-war period.

“If by a patriot you envisage a man who loves his country and will work for it to the best of his ability, then I confess to being one.

I have always felt love for my country. But I did not have the slightest respect for those in my childhood and youth who spoke grandiosely about our country whilst despising the people who created our country’s values. These were people who kept large sections of the population in misery and squalor without the provision of social welfare that is necessary in a good and well-ordered society.

In that period, our country was only made for the rich; and we who belonged among the oppressed, we came to hate those who called themselves patriots and who regarded us as belonging to no country.

We swore that we would win a place in this country, that we would reform it in such a way that we could feel that it was our country and our home. This has now happened, and I have made my contribution.

The country we have is the people’s, and the Danish worker is a patriot. As such he will endeavour to make the country a good home for the whole of the Danish population.”

Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning (1873-1942) in an interview in Workers’ Almanac (1939, p. 20) with journalist Sigurd Thomsen, who asked him whether he saw himself as a patriot.
Identification

In the Versailles peace conference in 1919-1920, the liberal principle of the “people’s right to self-determination” was laid down as the prevailing international principle. In terms of international law, the principle was institutionalised by the establishment of the League of Nations in 1919. However, it soon became evident that the reorganisation of Europe after the First World War was a victory not only for democracy, but also for nationalistic ideas and totalitarian political systems.

In Denmark, Hartvig Frisch (1893-1950) in his book, Plague over Europe, published in 1933, was one of the first to draw a clear front against communism, fascism and nazism. Frisch equated the three isms as being anti-democratic and a threat to the democratic system. In particular, Hartvig Frisch devoted considerable attention to the labour movement’s position in the ideological struggle. In Frisch’s eyes, the movement was squeezed between communist agitation on the one side and fascist and nazi propaganda on the other. “Therefore every democrat who wishes to address the problem must be aware that it cannot be done academically as a theoretical choice between democracy and dictatorship, but that the problem at this present time centres around the working class’ position in society and its relations to other classes.”

According to Frisch, the working class throughout Europe was seduced by the communist theory about the proletariat’s dictatorship as a necessary step towards a more just society and also by radical nationalism’s criticism of parliamentary democracy. For the working class in Denmark, it was a matter of holding firmly onto Nordic democracy, whose essence, according to Hartvig Frisch, was that the nation is seen as the starting point for cooperation between workers, farmers and other population groups: “It was the peasant farmers in the Nordic countries that had led parliamentarianism to victory and created political democracy – it is to their credit. It is the labour movement that has built on this platform and forged the foundation for social democracy.” Hartvig Frisch did not believe that dictatorship was the way to reaching the goal, but that it was necessary to go beyond liberal democracy in order to create social democracy. Plague over Europe was dedicated to Thorvald Stauning on his 60th birthday.
Reason

With Lenin (1870-1924) at the helm, Russia from 1917 evolved according to socialist principles; with Mussolini (1883-1945) as the front figure, Italy was from 1922 reformed according to fascist principles; and with Hitler (1889-1945) as Führer, Germany was from 1933 restructured according to national socialist principles. According to Lenin, the prerequisite for the communist society’s first phase was the abolition of the concept of citizen. In *The State and Revolution*, published in 1917, he proclaimed: ”All citizens will become employers and workers of a single countrywide state syndicate.” In *Mein Kampf*, published in 1925, Hitler emphasised that “language do not determine race – blood determines it”, and that the nation state’s primary function is to ensure a racially pure people. Based on this interpretation of the term *people*, the Jews were excluded from being part of the German people and were later targeted for annihilation.

“In the glare of the Reichstag fire (in Berlin 1933), greeted by applause from the party supporters and their henchmen and accompanied by the half-choked screams emanating from the concentration camps, the new system now celebrates itself; and there are enough feeble-minded people outside Germany who are ready to raise their right arm and shout “Heil” (...) . But the reaction does not confine itself to rejoicing at the state of benightedness. The support for Mussolini’s and Hitler’s tirades feeds it with energy and proclaims the advent of dictatorship as a victory for progress itself.”

*HARTVIG FRISCH: PLAGUE OVER EUROPE: BOLSHEVISM – FASCISM – NAZISM, 1933.*
Identification

“The world has suddenly awoken and to its astonishment discovered that it has become democratic.” It was at that point – according to the church historian and folk high school man Hal Koch (1904-1963) – and not before! In his book What is democracy?, published in 1945, Koch opens by making reference to the fact that many prominent figures in the 1930s had been quite certain that the future did not belong to democracy. The Western European form of democracy as a political system had supposedly no longer a role to play. Those sentiments were held not just in the actual dictator states but also in democratic countries such as Denmark. However, during the Second World War, support for democracy became almost universal, and after the war democracy was so strong in the public mind as perhaps never before.

On the morning of 9 April 1940, Denmark was occupied by Germany. After few skirmishes, the Government decided to capitulate, declaring subsequently that, under protest to Germany, it would continue to govern the country. Shortly after, a national coalition government was established, which governed with broad electoral support in collaboration with the occupying power until 29 August 1943. The policy of collaboration was built upon the understanding that Germany would not “violate the Kingdom of Denmark’s territorial integrity or political independence”.

The coalition government, however, was quickly confronted with demands from the occupying power that could not be met without violating central principles of law. In this way, the policy of collaboration raised fundamental questions about the relationship between democracy and the rule of law. Can democracy defend compromising with injustice and thus take co-responsibility for such injustice when the aim is to avoid that which is worse? How deep can democracy cut into the rule of law before the very idea and legitimacy of democracy is lost? The general election in 1943 showed overwhelming support for the democratic parties which accepted the breaches of law that the occupation necessitated. These breaches were the price that democracy had to pay for its survival. However, the occupying power’s intensified demands and the resistance movement’s increasing strength gradually undermined the rationale of both the coalition government’s existence and the policy of collaboration. After a series of popular strikes in summer 1943, the policy of collaboration came to an end on 29 August 1943, after which support for the resistance movement increased dramatically. In the final phase of the war, the Danish resistance movement contributed to changing the image of Denmark – both to the outside world and among ourselves.

The collapse of the policy of collaboration placed the Danish Jews in a far more precarious position than earlier. Until September 1943, the policy of collaboration had effectively protected the Danish Jews at a time when the systematic implementation of the Holocaust had long begun in the German-controlled areas of Europe. When Jews fleeing across the Sound in autumn 1943.
rumours of an impending action against the Danish Jews began to circulate in September 1943, the majority of them sought refuge among non-Jewish friends and acquaintances. The fleeing Jews were to a large extent helped by fellow Danish citizens and sailed to Sweden before the German arrest operation on 2 October. The rescue of the Danish Jews from the Holocaust has since stood as the Danes’ finest hour. The arrest operation contributed to changing people’s view of the war: from regarding it as a national struggle against Germany to regarding it as a struggle against nazism.

“What is worse, however, is that based on this overestimation of “the vote”, one is by inner necessity almost forced into the conclusion which more than anything else has contributed to bringing democracy into disrepute; namely the assertion that the majority is always right. To anyone who reflects on this, such a claim is outrageous. There is no doubt that the majority in Germany before the war wished to deny Jews the right to earn a living and to deprive them of their belongings. Perhaps such a majority still exists. Even if 99 per cent of all people in the world are so inclined, that form of anti-Semitism would continue to be both criminal and incompatible with democracy.”

HAL KOCH: WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?, 1945.

Street riots in Odense during the General Strike in 1943. The crowds have overturned a police car.
Identification

In Denmark, the discussion about democracy is linked to two names: the theologian Hal Koch (1904-1963), who in 1945 (during the judicial settlement after the occupation) published *What is democracy?*, and the lawyer Alf Ross (1899-1979), who during the occupation and as a reaction to nazism wrote *Why democracy?*, published in 1946. In the two books, two different perceptions of democracy are presented.

Democracy has always been linked to discussion. Freedom of expression is central, because all parties must be able to present their interests and arguments publicly. The democratic discussion is an intimate ritual, whether it takes place in the Folketing (Danish Parliament) or the village hall. But what is its purpose? Is it to convince the other participants in the discussion, so that everyone ends up in agreement? Or is the aim to bring aspects of an issue into the light, whereupon the parties can maintain their disagreement or let an election determine which viewpoint weighs the heaviest and can gather a majority?

A good discussion allows the parties involved to convince each other as well as change opinion. A democratic discussion should not just present an interest, but also argue for it and place it in relation to what serves the common good. A democratic process should also bend interests towards each other, either towards agreement on a matter or towards reaching a fair compromise. But in the end, what determines the outcome is neither the good argument nor the appeal to the Truth with a capital ‘T’, but the mathematical majority, which in the Folketing requires 90 seats. The living conversation collides with the ritual conversation, which is only pursued for appearances’ sake or to convince invisible voters.

For Hal Koch, democracy is first and foremost a *way of life*, at the heart of which is conversation.

What is crucial is that the parties are willing to listen, understand, learn and contextualise. Democracy is not a system or a theory, but a way of life and a mentality that has slowly developed. It is the degeneration of democracy if a majority simply goes through the motions of discussion before imposing its will. For this reason, Hal Koch uses words like “fruitful meetings” and “sincere debate”.

For Alf Ross, democracy is primarily a *form of government*, at the heart of which is freedom. What freedom leads to is undetermined. Democracy does not determine what people are to think, and it is not about finding the Truth. It is a formal procedure, in which all interests can be voiced and given political force in relation to a majority principle. However, a majority only has the right to make decisions for a limited period, so that democracy is also a formal procedure for dismissing those in power in a civilised way. Therefore, fundamental freedoms and legal rights are crucial for democracy.

Even though Hal Koch and Alf Ross each highlight their own view of democracy, they are not fundamentally in disagreement. Hal Koch also believes that democracy requires a formal apparatus, whilst Alf Ross also believes that democracy rests on social preconditions such as an informed population and freedom from hardship and misery.
Hal Koch: “In general, there are only two ways to find this solution [to the conflict between different interests]:
One can use violence, which means that the will of the stronger prevails; as happens in the jungle. Often it is difficult, however, to discern the difference between human and jungle animal behaviour. One can use reason, which means that through a conversation between the disputing parties effort is made to throw light on all aspects of the matter in question, and that the conversing parties truly endeavour – which should not be overlooked – through conversation to reach a more correct and more reasonable understanding of the conflict’s problem.
This is democracy. It is conversation (dialogue) coupled with mutual understanding and respect; that is the essence of democracy. In the absence of this, one will invariably revert back to a power struggle. Understanding democracy in this way is somewhat far more extensive than a particular societal form of government.”
FROM WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?, 1945.

Alf Ross: “To sum up, the ideology of representative democracy may perhaps be expressed like this: Man is not essentially a rational being. The great masses are predominantly sluggish and conservative, full of prejudice and traditions, suspicious of everything new. The people require leadership. The idea of individual self-determination and responsibility is linked up with the idea of trust in leadership. Along with the urge for independence, there lies in man the urge to put his faith in leadership of those who are wiser and more competent than himself. Whilst direct democracy builds only upon the urge for personal independence, these two tendencies are harmoniously united in representative democracy: the leadership remains under popular control and depends on the leaders’ ability to hold the people’s confidence on a basis free of criticism and expression of opinion.”
FROM WHY DEMOCRACY?, 1946.
Identification

In 1949, the Council of Europe was established as one of several attempts to unite Europe and prevent the divisions that in the 1930s had evolved into a world war. The creation of the United Nations (1945) and NATO (1949) had the same objective. In terms of the division of labour, the Council of Europe was charged with leading an ideological battle against the communist world; the European Coal and Steel Community (1951 – later the EC and eventually the EU) and the OECD (1961) were assigned responsibility for the economic battle; and NATO was given responsibility for the military battle.

The Council of Europe was an attempt to create a system of institutions and procedures which on the basis of international law could guarantee democracy and human rights. If necessary, the legislation in the respective Member States could be tailored to Council of Europe rules. The first major result was the adoption of the European Convention on Human Rights in 1950.

The Council of Europe’s task from the beginning was to serve as a forum for cooperation on democracy and human rights. The purpose of the Council is not to create a united European democracy whereby the movement which in the 17th century led from local areas to unified nations can be repeated at a higher level: from nations to union. In each nation, the democratic institutions should be developed, with due respect for the individual nation’s right to preserve its own democratic tradition. It is not crucial whether there are one or two chambers, whether the electoral systems reflect elections by majority vote or by proportional representation, or whether the nation’s unity is represented by a monarch or a president.

In 1950, in extension of the UN *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, the Council of Europe adopted its own human rights convention, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The goal was not just to formulate the rights, which are a condition for participating in political life and for enjoying protection against government invasion of privacy (ban against discrimination, requirement for swift and fair trial, and freedom of expression, assembly and religion). What was equally important was that the Convention was given substance by the establishment of two institutions: the Commission on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights. In 1997, the Court of Human Rights was restructured, and has subsequently been alone in enforcing the Convention.

A problem for human rights is that the state which is meant to protect the individual’s freedom is often the same state which threatens the said freedom. If the rights of the individual are violated, the violation will perhaps simply be repeated at a national court. This problem is manifested in the old distinction between right and justice. The European Court was intended to be a body that stood above the Member States and a body which...
the Member States committed themselves to respecting.

With the Convention, a potential conflict arose between national and European legislation. In 1953, Denmark acceded to the Convention, which until 1992 was implemented in Denmark in the same way as other treaties. It was not until 1992 that a law was passed in Denmark incorporating the Convention in its entirety, which means that its provisions can now be claimed to be Danish law. This has clearly increased the impact of the Convention in Denmark.

**Reason**

Since the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* was adopted during the French Revolution (1789), human rights have faced a problem. It is one thing to muster broad agreement on their importance, but another thing to ensure they are respected. With the UN *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* (1948), the rights acquired a universal objective, although the Declaration was still in danger of being a non-binding idea of justice outside the reach of governing national law. Without a formal and binding legal framework, human rights could be violated with impunity. It was this problem that the Council of Europe aimed to solve.

The Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.
Identification

In 1972, Denmark ratified the Treaty of Rome, at that time the legal framework for The European Communities (known today as the European Union (EU)). The decision was approved on 2 October by a solid majority in a referendum that was preceded by a dramatic debate. In the Folketing (Danish Parliament), only the Socialist People’s Party (SF) had opposed membership. However, there were also many social democrats among the opponents along with many intellectuals and media people. In the years leading up to the referendum, and especially in summer 1972, a unique Danish pattern formed: the left wing opposed membership, whilst the liberals and conservatives supported membership. The contrary was true south of the border, where resistance was to be found among the right wing, whilst the left wing, including the communists in Italy and France, were supporters of membership.

The dramatic referendum campaign in 1972 revealed sharp divides among the electorate in a way that cut across traditional left-wing/right-wing classifications. Admittedly, the majority of right-wing voters supported membership, whilst the majority of opponents of membership were to be found on the left wing. This alone made the Danish debate unique in Europe, where opposition to the EC was otherwise confined to the right wing.

Another divide among voters was between those who asserted that the Danish economy would not survive without membership of the EC, and those who demanded a fundamental political debate on the future of Europe and Denmark’s role in this Europe. Today, with the left wing also an EU supporter, this fundamental debate has become even more important. In order to understand the debate, the run-up to the referendum in 1972 is very instructive – besides being a dramatic piece of history.

It was characteristic for those who supported membership that they rarely presented principled arguments, for example on the moral and political significance of European integration, but confined themselves to economic arguments. The Danes would become more affluent as an EC member, people said. There are two possible reasons why supporters avoided using principled arguments: one was the fear that voters would react negatively to grand speeches about Europe’s moral and political significance, and that principled rhetoric would scare away people who wanted only economic union, not political union with the European Communities. The other reason could be that the supporters disagreed among themselves about the political significance of membership. As late as 1986, the Conservative Party prime minister, Poul Schlüter, declared that “the union is stone-dead”. This has proved not to be the case.

The tension and excitement continued right to the end. One week before the Danish referendum, the Norwegians voted against membership. The result in Denmark, however, was a clear “Yes”,
with two-thirds of the votes cast in favour of membership. Denmark officially became an EC Member State on 1 January 1973. Few predicted in 1972 that the EC would turn into the EU, and that the integration would later assume quite different forms than most people expected: Denmark still has a Folketing, a government and an independent taxation policy, but integration has progressed in other ways; for example, within the field of legislation and regulation, which to a considerable extent is now determined in the EU.

Since 1972, Danish membership of the EC/EU has taken Danish politics and societal development in new directions. A very large proportion of the legislative work involves adapting Danish law and administration to common EU standards, and Danish economic policy is no longer a separate Danish matter. But also culturally, the referendum campaign in 1972 brought a shift: it crystallised attitudes to the EC/EU that have been fundamental for all later political culture in Denmark, also even though EU opposition today is more pronounced among the right wing than on the left.

24.4.72: “Pleasant conversation with [former Belgian Prime Minister Paul-Henri] Spaak, who is totally unsympathetic to the ‘arguments’ put forward by EU opponents; a young lady said to him that membership would weaken the position of women. He was dumbfounded.”

31.8.72: “Evidently, the summer has – contrary to our expectation – strengthened the opponents. At any rate, they presented their arguments in Helsingør with greater outspokenness than before.”

2.10.72: “Today is polling day.... We are not taking victory for granted. My guess is a large Yes in Jutland. Declining as we move towards Copenhagen. But a No in Copenhagen. If it is a moderately big No majority, then a Yes should be in the bag.”


Reason

The referendum campaign in 1972 illustrated democratic politics engaged in a drama rarely seen in modern Danish history. Principle-based and pragmatic attitudes to the significance of EC membership stood in open conflict – different perceptions of sovereignty, of economic arguments and of democracy lined up opposite each other as never seen before.

Exhibit: Demonstrators protesting against Denmark’s entry into the EC (EU).
Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay, the son of a wealthy Muslim businessman. He was brought up and educated in England, attending the top public school, Rugby School, and gaining a Master’s degree from Cambridge University. His writings emerge from his own experience of finding himself between two cultures: the collectivist, Muslim-Indian culture and the individualist, modern Western culture. It centres around the relationship between the duty to believe and the right to doubt. This dilemma finds its clearest expression in the novel, *The Satanic Verses*, in which the author in a sceptical and imaginative way seeks to create meaning and clarity in a world of alienation and multicultural awareness by, among other things, exercising religious criticism in relation to the Koran and practising satire in relation to the Prophet Mohammed. It was particularly the latter that aroused the anger of fundamentalist Muslims and triggered the *fatwa*. However, the anger of these groups was also tied to the cultural clash resulting from the fact that Rushdie used the Western novel form as a framework for his criticism and thereby arrogated the right to create his own fictive universe where nothing was sacred. This provoked the fundamentalist Muslim circles, for whom such a way of thinking and approach was not just alien, but positively blasphemous in regard to the Prophet, whose commandments according to these groups cannot be contested.

The violent reaction of Islamic fundamentalists to Rushdie’s disrespectful criticism of religion and civilisation has parallels on Danish soil – most recently in the form of the hefty reaction to the caricature drawings of the Prophet Mohammed that were published by the newspaper, Jyllands-Posten, in 2005. The Rushdie debate contribution to the defence of religious liberty and freedom of expression is an apt point of departure for well-informed consideration of these issues.

Identification

With the publication of the novel, *The Satanic Verses*, in 1988, the Indian-British author Salman Rushdie (b. 1947) incurred the wrath of fundamentalist Muslims. In 1989, the cleric regime in Tehran under Ayatolla Khomeini issued a *fatwa* that condemned the content of the novel as blasphemous and offered a reward to whoever killed Rushdie. Since then, Rushdie has partially lived underground under police protection.
“What is most satanic in this venture of Rushdie is that he has written this novel to satirise the Prophets and his Companions, to ridicule religious consciousness of people, to remove from the hearts of people any sense of reverence for angels, prophets, holy books, and hence any faith in God and the Hereafter. He has intentionally and deliberately distorted the history of the Blessed Prophet and his Companions though he has retained the names of the Companions and chosen the name that vicious missionaries in the Middle Ages used to give to the Prophet (peace be upon him) only in order to tell people that he was not writing history.

Here we are faced with a fundamental problem. If some writer uses my name and the names of some of my friends and also selects some situations and incidents in my life and distorts them and vilifies them do I not have the right to charge that person for slander and defamation? Should not the Muslim community have the right to condemn this man, for blasphemy because he is using a thin veil of fiction in order to vilify the Prophet and all that they hold dear to them? As the author is not interested in presenting his own realisation of any truth, as he is preaching an anti-Islamic theory in the guise of a novel, his liberty as a writer ends and he should be treated as anyone producing blasphemous writing is treated.”


Reason

In essence, the Rushdie Affair is about the right of the individual to express himself freely in a democratic society, and also – in the light of the violent reaction in Muslim circles – about the cultural clash between western traditions of freedom and Muslim fundamentalism. The affair pointedly illustrates the two standpoints and must therefore be regarded as a well-suited point of departure for the necessary clarifying debate, also on Danish soil, on the conditions governing how people should live and behave in a democratic society.

 PakiFwoman shouting anti-British slogans at a protest meeting in Lahore in June 2007 – as a reaction to the British Queen’s decision to knight Salman Rushdie.
Identification

On the evening of 9 November 1989, the East German Communist Party almost by mistake decided to allow free passage from the east through the wall that the party had erected in 1961. Within no time, thousands of East Berliners swarmed westwards and met up with their countrymen in a state of euphoria that hardly anybody had dared hoped for. The fall of the Berlin Wall was a symbolic and political highpoint of the process that from the middle of the 1980s led to the downfall of the East European communist regimes.

In August 1961, the ruling Communist Party in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) decided in agreement with the Soviet Union to build a wall around West Berlin, i.e. around the parts of the city that in 1945 had been assigned to the Western Allies – the USA, the UK and France – as sectors. The reason was that the free access to the western sectors lured hundreds of thousands of East Germans who for political and economic reasons – most often both – to seek personal, political and economic freedom in the West. Berlin was the only place where the Iron Curtain – the closed border between democratic Western Europe and totalitarian Eastern Europe – stood reasonably open, and this migration had to be stopped.

From 1961 to 1989, the East Germans lived imprisoned, only able to travel to other communist-ruled countries. Exceptions were pensioners – due to the fact that the GDR regime saved money by allowing them to travel to stay with relatives in the West. Gradually, the GDR regime also built up a lucrative business from imprisoning citizens and subsequently allowing the West German government to buy their freedom in return for hard currency.

From spring 1989, popular pressure arose in the GDR demanding the right to free movement. The pressure came from an alliance of protestant clergymen, free-thinking academics and other intellectuals. The regime proved unable to silence this group with the same force that it had used in 1953 when it suppressed workers demonstrating for freedom. In September 1989, a large group of East Germans were given permission to travel to West Germany via Prague. At the same time, Hungary opened the border to Austria, whereupon thousands of GDR citizens made their way to Hungary and from there westwards. The Iron Curtain was disintegrating.

Also in other Eastern European countries, movements calling for democracy were rapidly growing during the second half of the 1980s. In this regard, Solidarity (Solidarnosc) in Poland and Charta 77 in the former Czechoslovakia, as well as other dissident movements in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union were decisive sources of inspiration and driving forces. The dissidents drew attention to how important it is that there is a difference between state and society, and that citizens have fundamental freedoms in relation to the state. In the face of the omnipresent state, dissidents sought to create a free space where they
could live as free citizens. This demand spelt the downfall of the communist regimes.

It was a bewildered GDR government which opened the Berlin Wall on 9 November. Within a few hours, West Berlin’s streets were filled with celebrating East Berliners. The fall of the Berlin Wall and its ramifications in the form of the reunification of Germany and the geopolitical transformation of Central Europe was one of the clearest examples of a massive and spontaneous expression of will since spring 1848. An overwhelming majority of Germans in the East wished to trade, think, travel and decide freely – the fall of the Berlin Wall was democracy in action.

The opening of the old Eastern Europe has led to new economic, EU-political and societal challenges. Not all consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall have been easy to tackle, neither for the Germans nor for others. But as the former vice-chancellor of Humboldt University, the GDR regime’s leading university, stated in 1990: “The events that have happened mean that we now have our freedom.”

Reason

The fall of the Berlin Wall is a major event in Europe’s history. The fall paved the way for the spread of democracy on a far greater scale than earlier. The event also had importance for Danish democracy, in that the drafting and adoption of the Treaty of Maastricht was a response to the new geopolitical landscape that arose in Europe as a result of Germany’s reunification and the collapse of the Soviet Union. With the Treaty of Maastricht of 1992, the European Union (EU) was established, whereby the political dimension of the cooperation was strengthened.

A man smashing a hole in the Berlin Wall, which divided West and East Berlin for more than 28 years.
The dream or hope of promoting peace, trade, relations and growth by means of political cooperation between European states is old. In the Age of Enlightenment, the idea of a European union enjoyed great support, especially with the philosopher Immanuel Kant, who tied the hope of peace to the development of an international legal system. After the First World War, the European movement of the time attempted to formalise the hope of peace by means of the League of Nations, albeit with little success. After the Second World War, the establishment of the Council of Europe in 1949 was the first concrete expression of organised cooperation. However, the Council of Europe has no authority to make binding majority decisions and has primarily confined itself to the discussion of democracy, human rights and judicial cooperation. Nevertheless, the Council of Europe with the European Convention on Human Rights and the attached International Court of Justice has provided a system of wide-reaching importance in the organisation’s many Member States.

It was not until the Treaty of Rome that the idea of cooperation was effectively manifested, in that the Member States transferred important powers to common bodies, particularly with respect to the development of a “common market”. Later, the EU’s powers have been strengthened by the fact the Council has to an increasing extent been authorised to make decisions by qualified majority among the Council’s members. In the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the European Union (EU) was established. This happened in 1992 with the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht, which gave the cooperation a far stronger political dimension. The Treaty led to the establishment of the Economic Monetary Union (EMU) and the European Central Bank (ECB), and it also gave the European Parliament greater influence in legislative decision-making. In addition, a number of new areas of cooperation, such as culture and education, were inserted into the EC Treaty.

With the Treaty of Maastricht, the values upon which the cooperation is founded are accentuated. The Treaty of Maastricht makes reference to
human rights; rights which the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1998 highlighted as the very foundation of the Union. Furthermore, with the Treaty of Nice in 2000, work was done to draw up a politically binding charter of fundamental human rights, which became legally binding with the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007. Besides human rights, the values encompassed tolerance, solidarity and gender equality. The ambition is that cooperation in the EU should build upon “European values” and constitute the foundation for a European sense of community. In other words: common values are to create cohesion.

At the beginning of the 21st century, there is every reason to ask the question: Has democracy found its final form, with nation states as the framework? Or do we stand at the gateway to a third phase in the history of democracy? In Greek democracy, citizenship and democratic participation were limited to city-states. With the establishment of the modern nation states, citizenship and democracy are widened to include millions of people. With the development of European cooperation over the last few decades, it is possible, according to the American democracy theorist, Robert A. Dahl (1915), to glimpse the preliminary stages of development towards democratic institutions of a transnational nature. Whether these preliminary stages will develop to an extent that can be characterised as a third phase in the history of democracy remains an open question.

“Our constant aim must be to build and fortify the strength of the United Nations organisation. Under and within that world concept we must recreate the European family in a regional structure called – it may be – the United States of Europe…”

The committee has been asked to present proposals for how the democracy canon can be introduced and communicated in text, film, internet, etc. for use in teaching at primary and lower secondary school, general and vocational upper secondary school, etc.

The broad target group for the democracy canon is the Danish population. The committee has decided that the democracy canon should be presented in book form and as an internet publication. The committee wishes to highlight the following proposals for further promoting awareness and knowledge of the democracy canon among the general public.

- Production of a documentary TV series of 35 episodes (one episode for each canon item), in which the significance of democracy and human rights in each of the selected canon items is examined.

- Theme Saturday on DR2 on democracy based around the democracy canon and the historical explanation of democracy as a form of government and philosophical concept up to the present day.

- Production of debate and quiz programmes for radio and TV about the canon items and the knowledge that Danes have about them.

- Development of board games and internet-based games with a point of departure in the democracy canon.

- Organisation of national and local lectures and other events about democracy with a point of departure in the democracy canon.

The efforts to promote awareness and knowledge of the democracy canon should particularly focus on the education system, and in this regard targeted efforts should be made to disseminate the ideas behind the canon and the history of democracy in today’s Denmark. Children in primary and lower secondary school are an obvious target group for the dissemination efforts, but the democracy canon should likewise be disseminated in other parts of the education system where education for democratic citizenship is an integral part of the teaching and aims of the programme. In the objects clause of the Folkeskole (Danish Primary and Lower Secondary School), it is stipulated that the Folkeskole shall prepare pupils for participation, joint responsibility, rights and duties in a society based on freedom and democracy. The school’s activities must therefore reflect intellectual freedom, equality and democracy. In the Act on Free Schools and Private Basic Schools, etc., it is stipulated that free basic schools depending on their purpose and in all their activities shall prepare pupils to live in a society like the Danish one with freedom and democracy and shall also develop and improve the pupils’ knowledge of and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights, including equality between the sexes.

Also the running of the municipal school system is organised on the basis of local democratic co-involvement. Parents and pupils are represented on school boards, and pupils from 5th form upwards have the right to establish pupil councils. The pupil council appoints representatives to participate in committees and working groups set up by the school to tackle issues of importance to pupils. After lower secondary school, democratic citizenship education continues to be provided in the education system in the form of classes in democracy and opportunity for co-involvement through participation in collegiate bodies. The statement of aims for general and vocational upper secondary education programmes as well as short-cycle and medium-cycle higher education programmes stipulates that the programmes must contribute to developing the students’ desire and ability to participate actively in a democratic society. In the private independent boarding schools, including folk high schools and continuation schools, the primary objective is to provide life-related education, general education and democratic citizenship education.
Historically, this form of schooling is closely linked to democratic governance and the development of democracy in Denmark.

The democratic values must be protected and safeguarded, and children and young people must be brought up with, and educated to use, democratic practice in a broad sense. There is a need for frontier delimitation and discussion about the fact that democracy is not just about rights but also about duties and about consideration for both the individual and the community. A well-functioning pupil council or another collegiate body is a perfect forum for testing representative democracy and at the same time a space where the culture of debate and desire for discussion can be promoted and developed.

In relation to using the democracy canon for teaching purposes, it is proposed that each educational institution once a year places particular focus on the concept of democracy. The specific planning will naturally depend on whether the institution is a primary and lower secondary school, an upper secondary school/college or an institution of higher education. In this respect, the committee calls on those working in the education system to focus on democracy from a broad perspective, so as to reflect the scope of the democracy canon.

In relation to the dissemination efforts in primary and lower secondary education, the committee finds that all canon items should be integrated into the teaching and daily life of the school. The committee wishes to highlight the following proposals for the further adoption and use of the democracy canon in primary and lower secondary education.

1. The democracy canon should be included with the teaching manuals in the new course booklets for history and social studies in the Folkeskole (the teaching manual is not meant to be a binding text for the teacher, but rather a guidance manual, which the teacher can choose to follow or disregard).

2. The democracy canon should be used as the focus of theme weeks, especially in 2009 in connection with the 160th anniversary of the Constitution.
3. A history canon/democracy canon game should be developed for 5th form upwards, where pupils can test their general knowledge about democracy and history.

4. The democracy canon should be used as a source of inspiration for interdisciplinary projects which lower secondary school and upper secondary school seek to pursue in the specialisation components, e.g. project assignments with thematic readings across the canon texts.

5. In 2009, at least one initiative of a popular informative nature should be organised by the Folketing, e.g. a public meeting in the Landsting Room for researchers, experts, folk high school teachers, etc. with the aim of discussing the democracy canon and the present state of democracy.

Finally, the committee should identify a few specific examples of how a canon item might be presented and taught to pupils in primary and lower secondary school.

**Democracy’s roots**
- Mounting of the words Demos and Kratos in the classroom or at the school’s entrance.
- Dramatisation of a popular assembly or a people’s court.
- Inclusion of themes from Greek tragedies in the subject drama.
- Performance of Greek chain dance to Greek folk music in the subject music.
- Drawing and painting of relevant motifs from ancient Athens in the subject the visual arts.

**The French Revolution**
- Examination of France’s geography and the historical role of the capital, with focus also on the relatively close ties between France and Denmark during that period.
- Presentation of the attire and fashion of that period, with special focus on uniforms as well as the clothes worn by women and men at Court.

**The labour movement**
Introductory visit to the Workers’ Museum in order to gain a picture of the period and the conditions of the working class.
- Presentation of Pio’s thoughts and ideas about the first trade union and the road forward towards political democracy.
- Narratives about the Battle of Fælleden and the strikes.
- Inclusion of songs representing the labour movement in the subject music.
The Present Conditions for Democracy – Four Challenges

That democracy is a global success does not mean that it is problem-free. Democracy began in closed nation states which endeavoured to maintain the idea of a people. Changing conditions in the international community present new challenges for democracy. We can identify four.

1. Multiculturalism. It can be difficult to maintain the idea of a people when mass media, tourism, immigration and the search for identity make all nations multicultural. How can democracy prosper with a diverse mix of cultures that all of them pull in different directions and perhaps aspire to be dominant?

2. Locally-based democracy. The emphasis on the individual and his/her rights intensifies the wish for direct democratic influence. As this cannot be achieved in a society with many millions of inhabitants, locally-based democracy provides a stronger feeling of making a difference. It creates conflict between efficiency and co-determination.

3. Global democracy. Democracy does not stop at the national borders, which are becoming increasingly less important. Is it possible to talk of European or even global democracy?

4. Presentative democracy. While ancient democracy congregated all citizens in the square, representative democracy had to make do with congregating the popularly elected in the parliament. The advent of the mass media, especially TV, has brought with it far more democracy than ever before. Everyone can keep themselves informed about politicians, programmes and issues – locally, nationally and globally. However, this is increasingly taking place on the mass media’s terms. The important political discussions cannot be followed on the basis of personal inspection, taking place as they do on TV. This means that citizens watch the democratic discussion like a theatre play instead of participating in it. Instead of representing the citizens, politicians end up presenting themselves to the citizens.

Let us briefly examine these four challenges.

1. Multiculturalism

Even though the majority of the world’s nations profess democracy, it is not something that can be taken for granted. Democracy comes in all shades and forms. In some places, it is a matter of blatant hypocrisy; in some places one can discern a tiny and ambiguous beginning, and in some places representative democracy has stabilised itself over a period of several hundred years.

It is possible to distinguish between traditional societies, where politics has an ideological or religious foundation that does not tolerate deviation, and modern societies where politics is a question of discussing and voting.

All cultures are built on prejudices that cannot be proven, but are taken for granted. Some cultures go further and defend not only their prejudices with words, but also with violence and force. Throughout history, this has caused countless wars and civil wars. The democratic solution to the problem of how cultures can live side by side is to put law before culture.

There is something comforting about the word Truth with a capital ‘T’. You do not need to know or trouble yourself with proving; you can make do with believing. If contradicted, you do not need to argue; instead you can turn your back on your opponent or lunge at his throat. Heretics are not entitled to tolerance; they must be fought, not understood.

A society with many cultures each nurturing its own Truth will be like a powder keg that easily explodes. Such an explosion can perhaps be prevented by physical force. Democracy employs another method. It seeks to create social order by spelling all truths with a small ‘t’. These truths can
be discussed in public, and everyone can personally agree or disagree with them. A democratic election is not concerned with what is true and what is false, but with which views can gain majority support. All views have a right to be voiced and discussed; none are automatically wrong.

A democratic discussion does not normally lead to agreement among the parties involved. But discussion is an expression of two things: firstly, respect for the opponent’s right to think differently, and secondly, an acceptance that the majority – not the Truth – determines the way things are governed. What is discussed, and who is voted into power can vary. Democracy offers a peaceful way to solving conflicts and deposing political leaders. It is not just a form of government, but it also protects the minority by means of political and social rights.

With democracy, we wave goodbye to Truth with a capital ‘T’. Even though a democratic society allows people freedom to express their opinions and to choose their religion and
ideology, it does not permit religion and ideology to supersede law. In the event of conflicts, the law decides. In this way, restraints are put on fundamentalist groups, in the hope that many cultures can find their place next to each other.

The demand is for different cultures to tolerate each other, even when it hurts to do so. But tolerance is a self-contradictory concept, which in its radical form is also self-destructive. Showing tolerance towards those who are intolerant allows intolerance to run unchecked and thus undermines tolerance. In order to solve the problem, it is necessary, democratically, to distinguish between two levels: substance and form. In terms of form, a common democratic culture must be recognised by all, because it allows everyone freedom to express themselves and assert themselves. In terms of substance, people must be given the freedom to choose their special culture in the form of religion or ideology.

This makes being human complicated. One must distinguish between what applies to a special culture and what applies to society as a whole. The strong words spoken in the religious or ideological group are transformed into weak and personal opinions in the public arena. One must also accept that, despite having the freedom to speak, one does not automatically have the freedom to translate one’s words into action.

A common democratic culture is not neutral. Whilst it makes different cultures equal before the law, it can reject cultural customs that have been practised for many centuries. All cultures are subjected to a test in order to see whether they meet the requirement of fundamental freedoms. Democracy represents an attempt to foster civilised social interaction between different cultures that all contribute to a rich society. The American philosopher, John Rawls (1921-2002), believed that it required an area of overlapping consensus – an area of principles that everyone can agree on, despite disagreeing otherwise.

This is still unacceptable for those who insist on having Truth with a capital ‘T’ on their side. But no ideological or religious Truth can prove itself true. If it had such proof, it would be a matter of knowledge, not faith. For this reason, democracy does not yield. No Truth has the right to prevent other truths from being expressed. No Truth has the right to punish people for having other truths. No Truth has the right to prevent people from thinking, speaking and changing standpoint.

Democracy is a culture for cultures. It allows freedom of choice regarding creed and way of life, but it obliges such choices to fit into a common system of order, so that politics triumphs over both religion and ideology.

2. Locally-based democracy
In antiquity and even with the philosopher, Rousseau (1712-1778), democracy means that people decide directly. They physically turn up, participate in the discussion and at the end put their hand in the air. This type of democracy is a thing of the past, and already in antiquity it was only selected segments of the population that were allowed to turn up, participate and vote. That “the people” decide does not mean that everyone can feel that they are the one deciding. Consequently, democracy can be experienced as something remote: You cast your vote and become silent. You are a drop in the popular ocean and your cross on the ballot card is purified of the thoughts that lay behind.

For this reason, municipal democracy can be perceived as being more pertinent than national democracy. In small municipalities, people know the person(s) they are voting for, and if they have confidence in a person, they may be willing to turn a blind eye if they do not fully agree with that person’s party manifesto.

The smaller the group, the more each single person makes a difference. Your voice is heard. Therefore, the demand for democracy can repeat itself in ever decreasing circles, so that democracy becomes the form of government not just in the nation and the municipality, but also at the
workplace, in the union association, in the neighbourhhood and even in the family.

Even though on the internet you can become a “friend” to an almost infinite number of people, your attention is limited. Furthermore, in practice, you cannot develop a meaningful relationship with more than a couple of hundred people – a number which corresponds to an old-fashioned village. That is not many. So the joy at participating in the decision-making that takes place in a local community is dampened by the limited reach of the decisions that are made.

Democracy is confronted by two opposing demands: on the one hand, efficiency, which often requires large units; and on the other hand, proximity, which requires small units. Whilst the world integrates and becomes a global community, people are maintaining their interest in the near and the local, so that economies of scale prosper side by side with exceptions, special rules and opt-outs. Even political leaders who claim that their eyes are fixed rigidly on what benefits everyone are often caught showing special consideration to family and friends.

Modern societies place many demands on loyalty, and it cannot be determined in advance what carries the most weight. Family, group, religion, workplace, municipality and nation all form part of a person’s identity as a basis for a “we-feeling”. Which “we” is the strongest: “We the family” or “we Danes”? If a person ranks their family highest, they risk being accused of nepotism.

On the other side of the municipality, the “we-feeling” begins to fade away. “We, Danes” has lost ground in the last 50 years, and it is difficult to appeal to national patriotism. Larger community entities such as “we Europeans” or “we people” are thin and have little motivating power. Few people are willing to accept deprivation for the sake of Europe.

If one examines the two local government reforms that Denmark has implemented during the last 50 years, the trend is towards larger units.
With the Local Government Reform of 1970, the number of municipalities was reduced from around 1,300 to 275. With the Local Government Reform of 2005, municipalities were again merged, this time reducing their number to 98, whilst the 14 counties were replaced by five regions.

Even though Denmark is one of the most democratic societies in the world, one hears complaints about a democratic deficit and a demand for “real democracy”. But a Denmark with five million inhabitants and an EU with 400 million inhabitants cannot have real democracy if by that one believes that every single citizen must have personal influence.

The technical problems that are associated with governing Denmark or integrating the EU make it an open question as to whether the most direct relic from locally-based democracy, the referendum, is an appropriate method for making decisions. The population can vote about parties, individuals and issues that require a yes or no – e.g. on whether Denmark is to or is not to cede sovereignty to the EU. But the consequences of such a decision are not something the people can fathom. Not even politicians are fully able to acquaint themselves with the technical, legal and administrative issues that Denmark or the EU raise. Politicians have to communicate between the general public, who look at what affects them; civil servants, who look at the technical side; the mass media, which are critical and very much focused on what goes wrong; and other politicians, who are also seeking office.

What becomes of democracy if the population’s size and experience prevents it from participating in politics in a qualified manner? Is sober discussion, which requires time and insight, to be replaced by simple slogans that require repetition and feeling? And how can people have faith in elected representatives who they have no contact with in their daily life and who weigh their words on a professional set of gold scales, so that strategy becomes more important than conviction.

There are many reasons for having reservations. But democracy prevails nonetheless, because it has three great advantages: firstly, it allows all aspects of an issue to be illuminated; secondly, it forces political rulers to be aware of what preoccupies the population; and thirdly, it can depose rulers without further ado.

3. Global democracy

The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 turned the state into the political unit in Europe. State formation, which was given the stamp of approval by the Peace, was the first large movement forward towards global integration if one disregards military conquests. Local regions – Vendsyssel, Zealand and Southern Jutland – had during a century-long process become united under one umbrella, and many of them gradually lost their desire for independence.

Europe became a continent of states. In the 19th century, these states transformed into nations, in which political integration was followed up by cultural integration. The transformation into a nation happened in several ways. In some instances, for example in France, there was first a state and then a nation. In other instances, for example in Italy and Germany, there was first a nation with a common language and then a state. From the middle of the 19th century, the nations evolved into democratic nations, and after the Second World War, they further evolved into welfare states.

The desire for national self-determination has not ceased. Many states incorporate several nations, in the sense of being cultural communities, and many of these communities are fighting to become independent. Ex-Yugoslavia is divided into several nations, and in the Basque country and Scotland strong forces are fighting for secession.

The democratic nation is currently experiencing global success. While the UN had around 50 members in 1945, it now has around 200. But does this mean we have reached our journey’s end? Is the trend moving steadily towards more
nations, or is there a counter-trend whereby nations are joining together in alliances and federations? Globalisation is a reflection of the world becoming increasingly more integrated – economically, politically and legally. But even though we can speak of a “global community”, there is no corresponding “global state”.

Between the individual nation and the global community there are middle steps. In the same way that the USA in the 19th century became a model for European democracy to emulate, there are also forces that are currently striving to create a United States of Europe or – less ambitiously – a European federation, a union of independent states. If the nation is perceived as a weakened entity, pressed from below by demands for local self-government and from above by global markets, alliances and treaties, the idea of a united Europe is alluring. A Europe with a single voice would be a strong voice in the global community.

Democracy and nation are at the present time closely connected, because popular rule is based on the idea of a people, irrespective of the fact that “the people” in practical terms is heterogeneous. The nation provides a collective framework for the personal identity, and even though the national sense of community is weakened, the nation remains the place where one belongs by virtue of language, culture, citizenship and family. But is it not possible to supplement national democracy with European democracy and later global democracy, so that democracy works on multiple levels – from municipality and nation to federation and the entire planet?

At the present time, the idea of European democracy does not enjoy popular support. Many perceive EU institutions as distant and bureaucratic, and the absence of a common language makes it difficult to create a European public. In both large and small countries, there is resistance to a united Europe, where each nation would always be in the minority. Even though the idea of national sovereignty is only a few hundred years old, it is not an idea that is easy to relinquish. Europe does not have a strong identity and does not enjoy strong loyalty.

So while the world is being integrated by free markets, treaties, cooperation and tourism, European democracy and global democracy are an idea for the future, depending on whether one views the ever more expanding democracy as an attractive or frightening image of the future.

4. Presentative democracy

According to the philosopher, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), the great advantage of democracy is that all interests are voiced. Any group in the population can choose the “best among equals” and send him or her to popular assemblies in order to represent the group. Together with other representatives, they can then discuss their way to what benefits the whole community.

This idea of representative democracy rests on certain preconditions: firstly, that the population
actively keeps abreast of societal developments; secondly, that the various groups become clear in their own mind about how they can benefit their own interests and at the same time contribute to creating a better society; and thirdly, that each group out of their midst finds the best-suited person to promote and defend their interests.

On the one hand, mass media represent a dramatic expansion of democracy. Everyone can, from one moment to the next, inform themselves about events near and far; not just about what is happening locally, but about what is happening throughout the country and in other countries. And when politicians appear on the news and give interviews, one gets a feeling of knowing them far better than if one saw them live in person once a year – if at all. Mass media can ask pointed questions on behalf of the voters, and they can deliver effective arguments in defence of fundamental freedoms. Through its mass media, a society learns something about itself each day. Mass media are not democracy’s enemy, but its best friend and guarantor.

On the other hand, all these things come at a price. Politicians do not appear up-close in person, but on TV, so voters have no opportunity to the old questions comes a new one: What is the impact of modern mass media, especially TV, on democracy? Here, we shall examine two features of the relationship between democracy and mass media.

Former US President Bill Clinton during an election campaign in 1992.
to test their credibility through direct contact. A professional politician must be in close proximity to parliament and does not need to have local connection. Conversely, a local party association might be pleased to have a well-known politician – a TV personality – as its candidate. This presents politicians with a challenge: to convince people who they do not know personally, but only through opinion poll surveys and focus groups. As a result, rhetoric takes centre stage; the art of seducing an audience. A politician must appear convincing on TV and preferably have charisma.

Instead of representing the group to which they themselves belong, politicians end up presenting themselves to a public who are not known to them personally. For better or for worse, TV becomes the key democratic battleground. Politicians become professionals, and in the chase for a majority they adopt a clinical approach to finding out partly what the population wishes and partly how they can influence the population’s wishes. What theologian, Hal Koch (1904-1963) called “democratic conversation” between electors and elected is replaced by strategic communication, controlled by spin doctors who do not have political viewpoints but who are experts in methods designed to influence the voters. It becomes tempting for politicians to abandon their

Finance Minister Poul Møller having make-up applied before a TV duel with Mogens Glistrup in 1971.
firm ideological standpoint, their cause, and instead flexibly adapt to the prevailing mood of the moment. All the family silver is up for grabs.

Even though the population still elects the Folketing’s members, democracy has lost its innocence and some of its old soul. The distance between democratic ideals and democratic reality is so considerable that it has ceased to be a problem. A politically ignorant population informs itself through the mass media and is onlookers at spectacular TV shows, where politicians, like sports stars and rock stars, battle for victory in carefully staged duels. Only top politicians are visible and can sell tickets. The result can be presentative democracy, where “democracy” does not mean “rule of the people”, but “ruling of the people”.

Ole Thyssen
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The terms of reference for the committee established for the purpose of drawing up a democracy canon

The Government deems it important to strengthen knowledge of the principles of freedom and democracy on which Danish society is based.

Therefore, a committee shall be appointed to identify the key events, philosophical trends and political texts that have contributed to the debate about and impacted on the development of the fundamental freedoms and democracy in Denmark. This collection should include both foreign and Danish as well as historical and more present-day contributions.

The result of the committee’s work shall be presented in a democracy canon comprising the events, philosophers and texts that have had a special impact on the view of the individual’s fundamental freedoms, the cohesion of society, and the development of Danish democracy.

A democracy canon can contribute to an ongoing, lively debate on freedom and democracy by providing some benchmarks and by identifying certain important directions and milestones in the development of democracy and fundamental freedoms.

The committee shall present proposals for ways in which the democracy canon can be introduced and communicated in text, film, internet, etc. for use in the teaching at primary and lower secondary school (the Folkeskole), general and vocational upper secondary education, etc.

The committee is composed of nine members appointed by the Government. The secretariat for the committee is anchored in the Ministry of Education and comprises representatives from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and the Prime Minister’s Office.

The work shall conclude in January 2008 with the publication of the democracy canon.
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The Danish Democracy Canon

Authors: The committee established for the purpose of drawing up a democracy canon

Editors: The secretariat for the committee established for the purpose of drawing up a democracy canon has been anchored in the Ministry of Education, comprising representatives from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and the Prime Minister's Office

Translation: UMKC Translate

Production: Werner Hedegaard, Ministry of Education

Graphic layout: Schwander Kommunikation

Illustrations: See list of illustrations, page 98

Front cover photos: NASA/Scanpix, Keld Nævtoft/Scanpix and Svend Åge Mortensen/Scanpix

Cover: Schwander Kommunikation

1st edition, 1st impression, August 2008: 5,000 copies

ISBN (WWW) 978-87-603-2704-9

Internet address: pub.uvm.dk/2008/democracycanon

Published by the Danish Ministry of Education, 2008

Available for order (ISBN 978-87-603-2703-2) at:
NBC Ekspedition
Phone: (+45) 56 36 40 40
Fax: (+45) 56 36 40 39
E-mail: ekspedition@ncas.dk
Phone hours: Monday-Thursday 9.30-16.00, Friday 9.30-15.00

Available also from bookstores

Print: Scanprint A/S

Printed in Denmark 2008

For enquiries about content, contact the Communication Unit at the Danish Ministry of Education, phone (+45) 33 92 50 57 or e-mail: pub@uvm.dk
On 31 May 2007, the Danish Government set up a committee whose task was to draw up a democracy canon. The democracy canon contains what the committee believes to be key events, philosophical trends and political texts that have played an important role in the development of Danish democracy. The committee has pointed to 35 canon items as key landmarks in the long evolutionary history of democracy.

The democracy canon is envisaged as a source of inspiration for debate about and understanding of the preconditions for modern democracy in Denmark.