



FOLKETINGET

The Danish Parliament and Christiansborg Palace



Welcome to the Danish Parliament

Christiansborg Palace is the hub of democracy in Denmark. The Danish Parliament resides here, and it is here that 179 popularly elected members debate and adopt the Acts, by which this country is governed.

More than 100,000 people visit the Danish Parliament each year to meet politicians or to explore the halls, in which our democracy is exercised. In addition, up to 1,200 party employees, civil servants, journalists and other people work at Christiansborg Palace.

Christiansborg Palace

Christiansborg Palace is located on Slotsholmen, an island surrounded by narrow canals. Deep in the cellars below Christiansborg Palace lie the remnants of the first castle on the island, Bishop Absalon's Castle, which was built in 1167.

In 1369, the Hanseatic Union stormed Absalon's Castle and then razed it to the ground. Copenhagen Castle was erected here shortly after, and the King took up residence in 1443. After a time, the Castle became too small to meet the King's needs. King Christian VI had it demolished and started the construction, in 1736, of a magnificent





rococo palace, the first Christiansborg Palace. This Palace burned down in 1794. Only the Riding Ground Wing and the Palace Church survived the flames. A more modest Palace, the second Christiansborg Palace, was built on the ruins of the first. In 1850, the first Danish Parliament, Rigsdagen, moved its seat to one wing. In 1884, the second Christiansborg Palace was destroyed by fire.

Christiansborg Palace today

At the time of the terrible fire in 1884, the most serious political crisis in the history of Denmark was at its zenith. The two parties, Højre (Right) and Venstre (Left), had reached political deadlock. The Danish Constitution contained no provisions for arbitration. For some years, the Government led by the Højre with the support of the Landsting (at that time the upper chamber of Parliament, in which the landowning classes were heavily represented), adopted a number of provisional Bills, thus circumventing the Folketing, in which Venstre had a majority. It was only after the election in 1901, which resulted in the very first Government led by Venstre, that the parties could agree to pass an Act to rebuild the palace. The present Neo-baroque Christiansborg Palace has been the seat of democracy in Denmark since 1918.

Christiansborg Palace was also more recently devastated by fire. In 1992, part of Provianthuset (the Warehouse) burned during refurbishment of the 400-year old building, and, during Copenhagen Carnival in the same year, the Palace Church was severely damaged in a fire caused by fireworks.

The Folketing Chamber, the Landsting Chamber and the Lobby

The three-storey Folketing Chamber looks out on the Grand Square. Rising to three storeys, it is an impressive space. The dominant feature of the Chamber is the horseshoe-shaped Members' seating with the Speaker's seat at its centre.

The Landsting Chamber is a remnant of the bicameral system of Government, as it housed the Landsting until this was abolished in 1953. The Landsting Chamber is now primarily used for conferences, public meetings and similar gatherings.

The Lobby is located between the Folketing Chamber and the Landsting Chamber. It is decorated with a 268-metre long floral frieze that is spiced with painter Rasmus Larsen's comments on political life. Larsen painted the frieze in the period 1918-1921. His scorching irony earned him a nickname, "the cheeky painter". As they pass the frieze on their way to the Chamber, politicians can read the cheeky painter's admonitions, e.g. "not every crowing cock heralds a new dawn" and "everybody wants to be the boss but where work's concerned, they're at a loss".

In the Lobby, you will find the Conversation Room, which is the Danish Parliament's finest reception room. Heads of State and other important guests are received here.

The Danish Constitutional Acts of 1849, 1866, 1915 and 1953 are exhibited in the Lobby.

The Danish Constitution

The Danish Constitution outlines conditions for the exercise of Danish democracy. The Constitution sets out the fundamental liberties and rights of Danish citizens, which include freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and rights that protect the citizen against injustice on the part of the State. In enacting the Constitution, citizens of Denmark also acknowledge the principles of majority rule and that every citizen is bound by law. Every citizen is duty bound to observe the laws. At elections, the Danes exercise universal suffrage, i.e. they vote for the politicians who they believe will represent them best in the Danish Parliament.



“NOT EVERY CROWING COCK HERALDS A NEW DAWN.”
FROM THE CHEEKY PAINTER’S FRIEZE IN THE LOBBY.



To prevent the abuse of power, the Constitution separates power into three instances:

- **The Parliament and the Government** constitute the legislative power, drawing up and passing legislation.
- **The Government** constitutes the executive power, enacting the laws of the country.
- **The courts of law** constitute the judicial power, pronouncing judgements in disputes between citizens and between the authorities and citizens.

The Prime Minister decides when to call a general election. There must be a general election at least once every four years. The Prime Minister can only be forced to call a general election if the Government loses its majority.

Political work

The parliamentary year commences on the first Tuesday in October and runs until the same day in the following year. As a rule, however, parliamentary work ends before Constitution Day (5 June). There are just over 100 days of meetings in the Chamber during a parliamentary year.

A Bill must be read three times in the Chamber before it can be adopted. At the first reading, a Bill is discussed in principle. As a rule, only the relevant Minister and spokespersons for each party for the remit in question are present in the Chamber.

After the first reading, the Bill is examined in great detail by a parliamentary committee. For example, a Bill concerning taxation will be examined by the Fiscal Affairs Committee.

The second and third readings follow. During the second reading of the Bill, any amendments are put to the vote. The Bill will then usually be passed directly to its third reading, although it may be sent back to the parliamentary committee for further examination. During the vote on the second and third readings, more than half of the Members must be present in the Chamber. A Bill only becomes law if it is passed by a majority of Members.



In addition to its legislative tasks, the Danish Parliament also exercises parliamentary scrutiny of Government work. Members in opposition naturally have greatest interest in exercising close scrutiny of the Government in office. Parliamentary scrutiny may include Members of Parliament and parliamentary committees asking questions of the Ministers. Such questions may be answered orally or in writing. For example, a parliamentary committee is entitled to table questions to the Minister at a committee meeting. This is called “inviting the Minister to consultation”.

Parliamentary scrutiny can also take the form of an interpellation, i.e. a debate in the Chamber lasting several hours, which can result in an expression of criticism of the government. Ultimately, a majority in the Danish Parliament can pass a vote of no confidence in the Government and force it to resign.

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