

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS: 1971-1972:  
A History of Self-Reliance

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1. Latin self-reliance: An Overview

One may ask: why all this talk about visions when things actually are functioning not too badly at all? Nobody in his or her good mind can talk about crises in the Nordic countries since 1984, except, perhaps, for the seemingly chronic unemployment rates for young people in Denmark. However, because non-crisis may turn into crisis given the long-term trends of the total world system, not for the world as a whole, but for those who have benefited most from the system, being challenged, the First World, and more specifically the First circle of countries comprising industrialized nations, and the Nordic nations, all nine of them, now in that circle. Moreover, visions should be discussed when we are in relatively tranquil waters. When the going is rough there is no time to discuss visions; reactions will be more ritualistic, almost instinctive. Social change is the legitimate child of crisis, it is not to be rejected a priori - but the gestation period takes time, not to mention the incubation period. Now is the time to start, not when the crisis is there, for all to see.

To elaborate a vision some assumptions are needed beyond the obvious that we want a qualitatively better society, quality of life and not in our own back yard, at the expense of one other part of the world (the addition being rather important, often that turn out to be the difference between right wing and left wing policies - the latter having more solidarity with countries, people, nature elsewhere). Of course we want this. But we also want some kind of security, some guarantee that our state of affairs can last. We want some basis that is relatively invulnerable, like a family building their house strong enough to withstand the shocks, inside from nature, perhaps not the shock that comes once a century but at least once - that come once a decade. And this is precisely where self-reliance enters: make your society so that you are able to survive on your own resources in times of crises, not in times of non-crisis so that the crises are less likely to hit you!

Enough introduction. Here is the basic scheme of thought:

	ECONOMIC relations	POLITICAL relations	MILITARY relations	CULTURAL relations
WORLD system	equitable exchange with all	more positive; less negative variations	non-provocative; defensive	open to the whole world
WORLD system	regional self-reliance	a Herd's parliament; executive; judiciary	a Herd's defense union; non-aligned	Herd's cultural institutions
NATIONAL system	national self-reliance	more federal structures; temporary, direct, indirect	cooperational para-military; non-military	such more amply to a Herd
LOCAL system	local self-reliance	more local autonomy; direct relations	strong local laws	strong local basis

To, this is evidently the vision of a social scientist. Here are four social "spaces", the whole world, the Herd's countries with nine nations, and the local level - which is not necessarily the same as the municipal level of today. One may have to enlarge a vision in order to be local enough; others may enlarge a vision -- in some cases borders will be redrawn. But all of that are processes going on all the time anyhow, nothing particularly new.

In concluding on the Herd's life let me say from the very beginning that nothing that particularly dramatic is contained in the vision; nor is anything that dramatic, in my view, needed. There are only some proposals about how to relate these four social spaces to each other so that quality of human life stands a better chance within the social structure provided, and the social structure itself can withstand some of the shocks that may be in the cards, since for us and in order to discover that, as a very cynical one has to say something about the three major forms of power, exchange power in the realm of economics, coercive power in the realm of politics/military and idea power in the realm of culture. For let us make no bones about it: what we are talking about is power. The question is what kind of power. And the rearrangement is this: the key to security is to have more power over ourselves, and the key to that is self-reliance

I think the way to start now is by commenting on the word "self-reliance". It refers to a particular, but not peculiar, way of organizing economic relations, according to the following key principles:

- (1) If you want something, try first to produce on the basis of your own resources (meaning economic "factors": nature, labor, capital, administration, research), in other words through production.
- (2) If these are insufficient, but only then, try to get it through exchange, in return for something you have in excess.
- (3) In choosing your exchange partners try to observe the following principles:
  - that they are at about the same level of technical development,
  - that the exchange stimulates or reveals their production capacity,
  - that the spin-off effects (research, education etc) are what count
  - that you do not become dependent on anyone, nor anyone on you
- (4) This reasoning applies not only for the national, but also for the local and regional levels.
- (5) At all these levels, but particularly the local ones, see to it that production capacity for essentials, meaning what is needed to satisfy the basic needs of the population is secured.

What this means in practice is a sort of economic relations, not the jungle type that is the consequence of own utility maximization using the ideology of "comparative advantages" as a guide (which may work between countries at the same level of development and then becomes similar to requirement no. 3 above - i.e. leaving the other four criteria out of the picture). A basic point about self-reliance is that it builds self-reliance in the other side through equitable interdependence, and by securing the basis, what is needed for basic needs, at least in times of crisis. In that setting self-reliance spells self-sufficiency, and is a condition for high level of power over ourselves, less vulnerable to the outside world, eg. to blackmail.

There is much politics in this. A basic idea is to build good relations through economics, like a good marriage where cooperation is on an equal basis, not securing that "comparative advantages" make it "logical" for the wife to spend the whole day in the kitchen and the husband the whole day in some office. Use your own resources and get the stimulation that entails; then exchange but with care -- and practice this at all levels of social organization.





Some of the exchanges might take the form known today as "development exchanges", but with three cautionary notes. First, the emphasis on self-reliance is a very development oriented since it is so basic needs oriented and aimed at promoting self-reliance capabilities in the other party. Second, with the emphasis here on the local level to work on, well, the people, not only national level agents in contact with each other. Organizations would need local level offices rather than top national headquarters - "exchanges" would be less of a problem of what goes on between existing offices. And thirdly, and that is the basic point: exchanges should be reciprocal. A gift is no benefit at all, it doesn't really imply any of creating a lasting dependence by making it, over time, or the gift as an investment. The rest is a question of imagination: what form should the reciprocity take? Technology against social services, for instance?

Some of the other issues to be dealt with will be dealt in later sections. In a world where economics is given primary by the (often) leading ideologies, and a crisis is seen basically in economic terms one is forced to give a certain primacy to economic relations. Politics is just an overlay, and here there are also some institutional variables to be noted, some innovations - but not exactly groundbreaking.

I think the argument can be made that democracy presupposes a high level of local autonomy. The reason is simple: the local level permits mutual visibility, people know where they stand, direct democracy is feasible even if not institutionalized, it exists in embryonic form. And yet, if under such conditions there is no local autonomy but steering from remote centers, then the discrepancy between the popular will and what actually happens simply becomes too great. Credibility is strained. But that autonomy has to have an economic basis, which is exactly what local self-reliance is about. And it must include the freedom to relate to the local level abroad.

But the consequence of this type of thinking - trivial in Federal countries like Switzerland and even the Federal Republic of Germany - will be a Federal rather than unitary state structure. The number of layers will depend on the size of the country. There will probably have to be a two chamber system in the national assembly, one representing individuals and one representing the local levels. In the latter these local levels can also participate, with easy direct contacts inside the country - the ball passing straight between them, it does not have to come - energy borrowing up and down from the national level.

At the Nordic level I see no reason why one should not be striving for replications of the state-carrying institutions of the national level: a legislative, executive and judiciary. They should not have too much to do, and be too small, but not too little either - maybe more than the local institutions have today, less than the corresponding institutions for the European Community. With the strong emphasis here on the local level there should be no fear that too much power is delegated upwards. Still it does seem and never comes back to the local level. However, direct elections to a Nordic parliament with serious debates would be meaningful, if not exactly sensational. A Nordic court for human rights issues might also be a good idea, maybe a Nordic sublime. But the Nordic system should not aim at becoming a Parley-class, a Stanley-hunt is enough.

And then the world, where many things happen, good and bad - and it looks as if the latter prevail. If it is not <sup>the</sup> experience that economic etc. sanctions are very helpful in bringing another country into the fold of well-behaving countries, then maybe one should abstain from this luxury. Maybe one should rather seek to reward countries for the good <sup>things</sup> than punish them for the bad things they do. This may seem naive, but the principle seems to work relatively well in raising children both in the family and at school. Consequently, to act to reward or alliances etc from which countries are, or can be excluded.

and that brings us to the military relations. The way forward is by far the most general policy for the Nordic countries as a whole would be to combine non-alignment, preferably even strict neutrality, with a totally non-provocative, defensive defense organization, exercised by a Nordic defense union. It would build on elements in Swedish and Finnish defense policies and would presuppose that Norway, Denmark and Iceland leave NATO or that NATO charges themselves so that either some (among them the Nordic) or all members not adopt a strictly defensive doctrine. There is nothing in this that would be incompatible with the content of the Soviet-Finnish Treaty of 1948. Russia/Soviet Union has a strong wish to see our countries from the North (and from English bases) that some kind of arrangement probably will remain a most crucial necessity still for decades, even generations to come.

The defense, then, is organized with the mixture of national, non-military and military components that would be found appropriate at each place. It would function as an occupation- rather than an invasion-defense, and be based on small, mobile, dispersed, autonomous and locally based units that cannot possibly constitute a threat to other countries, but be effective in defending their own. Very important is the idea of a strong local basis for the defense effort, meaning that the defense can continue after a national capital has been conquered or all air-traffic has been paralyzed.

This is not the place to go more into details; only one point should be emphasized. The word "union" in Nordic defense union can be interpreted in many ways. It stands for a joint effort, for a coordinated policy. Attack on one is attack on all. However, there should be a warning against any idea of long distance military assistance, at very short warning, in times of war or pre-war. Such logistic capabilities would also be what is needed for aggressive action, hence provocative. Consequently, equipping heavy military potential may be a goal idea, including troops from other Nordic countries, but not only for joint purposes.





at that point I should like to stop. The vision is there, sufficiently precise to identify a lot of problems. Just to mention some:

- 1st. The local level will have that essential character (probably yes, but only if it comes out, approximately right, as indicated)
- will the national stage remain what it has been, or be nationalized, though, of this or that kind? (probably not, but then the local might be strengthened the local level rather than weakening the national level - the example of the socialist high schools in Norway is a good one, the universities are there as before).
- will this not lead to a Nordic union, or would we expect that the people will be satisfied with the kind of arrangement that exists? (probably that might be an advantage for the rest of the world, however. But the vision is not that kind of arrangement, or of a present Nordic people to realize it in all possible ways, with all kinds of peacekeeping operations).
- will the rest of the world be involved or thing (probably yes, because to come out of an historical situation similar to their own, they of being overrun by other countries and by events, and because the methods, self-reliance including the local level, can be practiced everywhere if the political will is present).

But that is the vision, the goal - do you think it is correct?

The process can only be carried by all those movements that have come as a response to the crisis, a crisis that may be alleviated by international action but is not intimately tied to the rise of the Second and Third worlds that it will not go away. Each movement will do concrete participation, and the best contribution is not to pay, but simply, doing it. Realizing at the local level a high degree of self-reliance, practicing own foreign relations including development assistance in the Third world, gaining experience. Gradually it will reach the political level - so, indeed, it has done - the process is already there.

But some political realization to visions of this type must come, in the form of official Nordic declarations, at least of intent. That could be better than Kolmar 1957, six hundred years after the union that failed, negotiated by 17 Swedish, Danish and Norwegian gentlemen, but only signed by the Swedes? Or, Varldstat 1957 for the very urgent question of Nordic defense - as distant from the policies of the 1945 negotiations as they were from the 1905