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KARLSTAD 1905, KARLSTAD 1949,  
KARLSTAD 19-- ?

Speech on the occasion of the Karlstad  
Fourth Centenary, June 1984

by Johan Galtung

Université Nouvelle Transnationale  
154 rue de Tolbiac  
F75013 PARIS

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Mrs Birgit Andersson, Chairperson of the Karlstad Municipal Council;  
Mr Lennart Andersson, Rector, University of Karlstad;  
Mr Bengt Abrahamsson, Convenor of the Symposium WORK in 1984  
Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends -

It is a great honour and pleasure for all of us to be here in this beautiful hall on the occasion of the fourth centenary of the founding of Karlstad, by decree of Hertug Karl in 1584. And it is, indeed, an intellectual delight to be participant to this important symposium of such far-reaching importance on a far-reaching theme. Of course, our conference does remind me, in some way of a UN conference some years ago on children. Some children asked whether there had been any children present at that conference discussing children, and the answer was, of course, no. Ah ha, the children said, a normal conference in other words. And in a sense, ours is also a normal conference: on work, with no workers present.

As the foreign guests from outside Scandinavia no doubt have become aware by now: we are sitting in the very room where the personal union between Sweden and Norway, in the person of the King Oscar II whom you can see right there, was formally dissolved through the First Karlstad negotiations, 31 August - 23 September 1905 - with a week's recess in the middle. It is a room of momentous importance in Norwegian history, and the "normal conference" in this room would be, of course, a conference with no Norwegians present. But I am a Norwegian so this is an a-normal conference, and I have been given the great honour of addressing you at this gracious banquet.

Norway had declared, unilaterally, the secession as of 7 June that year; what happened here in Karlstad was the negotiation of the corresponding instruments, still considered model documents in international law. No doubt this was a popular decision in Norway, carried, as it was, by 368,200 to 184 votes (half of one per mille) in popular referendum. The secession was probably a psycho-political necessity for that young country, Norway, which had been through a somewhat similar experience in 1814, celebrating its independence from Denmark, 17 May that year. In peacefulness the only parallel is the Singapore-Malaysia secession of 1957 - and in a sense, the arrangement for Åland of 1921.

I shall not trouble you with the story of how the "personal union" with Sweden was forged, suffice it only to say that when Sweden in 1964 started what later has become the rightly famous Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (IP), it was in commemoration of 150 years of unbroken peace after the war with --- Norway.

Anyhow, the negotiations succeeded. I have in front of me a photo of the eleven negotiators, six from Sweden and five from Norway. As a good social scientist, I am immediately looking for the second variable and find one in addition to the Norway/Sweden dichotomy: moustache/no moustache. There are only two non-moustachioed persons present, both were Norwegians, giving a Yule Q correlation of 1.0. That particular coefficient exaggerates what, however, was the theme: Norwegians being considerably less aristocratic, considerably more uncouth, considerably less moustachioed.

I have been told by a local historian a fascinating story of how the instruments finally were signed. The Norwegian prime minister, Mr Christian Michelsen arrived but had forgotten his seal with CM on it. These were not in the days of rapid SAS transportation so you can imagine the consternation. However, one Swede pointed out that the mayor of Karlstad had recently died, a Mr Carl Moberg, in other words with the correct initials. One problem was that he belonged to the hardliners, those who would not let Norway secede except over their dead bodies. On the other hand, his body was by that time dead, so in a sense the condition was fulfilled although he might have been thinking of a more heroic sortie from this life. The widow was consulted, she consented, the seal was used and the agreement was sealed. In retrospect one can only express one's admiration for the parents of Mr Moberg who had used the old fashioned spelling with a C and not the modern one with a K, also found in the name of this beautiful city we are celebrating today.

But then there are the Second Karlstad negotiations, January 1949, over a possible Nordic defense union as an alternative to NATO membership for Denmark and Norway, together with non-aligned /neutral Sweden. The Swedish prime minister at that time, Tage Erlander, very much hoped for a solution that would keep unity among the Nordic countries, not divide them and perhaps also offer more

security for Sweden by presenting a joint Nordic alternative rather than making Norway and Denmark front states in case of a confrontation between NATO and the Soviet Union (it will be remembered that the Warsaw Treaty Organisation came into being in 1955). The negotiations stranded, and it was very clear that responsible for their failure was the Norwegian foreign minister, Mr Halvard Lange with a very strong Atlanticist orientation, perhaps also a certain scepticism towards Sweden - the typical product of wartime experiences in Norway. Denmark's prime minister, Hans Hedtoft, was with Erlander - but unity had to be based on unanimity.

I belong to those who strongly believe that it would have been much better if the negotiations had succeeded. We could have become a model for much of the rest of Europe particularly if similar processes could take place in the extreme South East of our continent, Balkan. Today there are desperate efforts to make nuclear free zones in both territories. Had the Karlstad negotiations of succeeded, a nuclear-free zone would have been among the conclusions as it is highly unlikely that a Nordic defence union would be based on nuclear arms. Rather, it would have been based on strongly defensive defence, the type of military doctrine that today seems to offer most security, as can be seen when contemplating the likely outcomes of a major war in Europe comparing, for instance, Switzerland and Austria with their neighbours to the north and the south, Yugoslavia with WTO members, Sweden with Norway and Denmark, etc.

Dear friends, I would like to conclude my talk not only by congratulating this 400 year old city baby, a very young age for a city, as well as its young and forceful university, but by wishing for the city something very concrete. And that something very concrete would be the Third Karlstad negotiations. Their aim would be the crowning achievement. Norway's secession from Sweden was, as mentioned, a psycho-political necessity, a condition for the mobilisation of a considerable level of national self-reliance in my country. What happened in 1949 was the logical outcome of very distinct experiences during the Second World War. But whereas these two symbolic dates, 1905 and 1949, makes Karlstad a symbol of separation, the third negotiations, by arithmetic extrapolation in 1993, with a 44-year interval, should be for cooperation and some type of Nordic union/confederation. We'll leave the agenda open. I only want to express the strong hope that there could be a psycho-political reversal of the separation process. We need togetherness. We need a Third Karlstad.