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Greenland: the politics of a new northern nation

Few Canadians realize that Europe begins twenty-six kilometres from Canada's eastern coast at Nares Strait in the Northwest Territories. Unlike the two small French islands, St Pierre and Miquelon, in the Gulf of St Lawrence, Greenland is a huge piece of Danish real estate, which at some two million square kilometres is the largest island in the world, covering about the same area as continental Western Europe. However, close to nine-tenths of Greenland is uninhabitable. A huge ice cap, in some places 1 to 2 kilometres thick, covers most of the island. Only the coast, particularly in the southwest, offers conditions which even in Arctic terms are suitable for habitation and the building and the maintenance of a society. Although the coastline is about 40,000 kilometres, Greenland's total population is only 52,347, most of whom live along the southwestern coast.

Why are there so few inhabitants? There are several reasons. First, northern conditions do not encourage large populations. Canada's Northwest Territories (3,379,684 square kilometres) has a population of only 43,000. Second, people do not usually settle in a place unless they can live off the land in one way or another. And until recently living off the land, or rather the sea, in Greenland as in northern Canada, meant depending on hunting and fishing for one's living. With permafrost and

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temperatures dipping to 40 to 50 degrees below freezing, with virtually no means of communication and transportation but small boats and dog sleds, there was not much encouragement from Mother Nature to proliferate or to settle.

To some extent this is still the case. There is as much ice in Greenland as ever. Overall climatic conditions are basically the same as they have been for centuries. But the means to cope with these natural obstacles have changed dramatically. Drawing on modern technology people can now live virtually anywhere regardless of climate and natural conditions. It may not be pleasant, but it is certainly possible. Modern technology also provides ways of making a living which did not exist just a few decades ago. There are still problems of adjustment, but the point is fast approaching when the enormous natural resources of the north, particularly the non-renewable ones, can be developed at a cost which makes it profitable in business terms. There are indications that oil and gas and a wide range of important precious minerals exist in significant quantities and can be extracted from Greenland's craggy mountains and its offshore. Greenland, or indeed any part of the north, is not the first choice of resource developers, but as demand increases and supplies elsewhere become scarce it is just a matter of time until Greenland's various resources attract large-scale development. The question is not, can it be done? It is rather, should it be done, and, if so, when, under what conditions, and by whom?

THE NORTHERN OPTIONS

Development is inevitably a matter of gains and losses. The major decisions that Greenland makes in this decade will set the pace and the direction of its development for the remainder of this century. And these decisions rest, in the final analysis, on values or their lack. The Greenlanders are at a major crossroads. They have, or think they have, a wide range of options. On the one hand, there is maintenance of traditional

ways of life which existed almost intact as late as two or three decades ago. At the other extreme is full-scale modernization, building cities and communities on the southern model with all the hustle and bustle which goes with a new modern society.

In fact, the first option no longer exists. Northern native societies, in northern Europe as in North America, continued largely unchanged well into the second half of the twentieth century mainly because of special circumstances and conditions that are now largely gone.[1] In my view, a discussion as to whether to accept or to reject modernization in the north is a futile exercise. The important question, which needs full attention, is what kind of modernization: how many of the traditional elements can or should be preserved? Once a society has tasted the first sweet fruits of the modern world, it cannot be turned back to its primitive past. Modernization is a kind of addiction. Even the heavy transitional penalties of alcoholism and social upheaval cannot turn people back to the stage of development which they recently left. What remain as real options therefore are the various compromises, accommodations, and modifications which can soften the stunning blow of modernization and give at least some elements of native society a chance to survive. Survival often means time to adjust. In a society which is obsessed with catching up that time may not be available. As modernization cannot be prevented, the goal is to try to find ways of easing the transition in Greenland through modifications of the kind of society which now represents the norm in North America and in northern Europe.

Social science is poorly equipped with methodological tools for this kind of analysis. The variables which will determine the success or failure of this process are for the most part intangible. There is no way to measure the adjustments which will be required to make northern values compatible with the values of traditional society or the sacrifices that are necessary to pre-

1 Nils Ørvik, *Northern Development: Northern Security*, Northern Studies Series 1/83 (Kingston: Centre for International Relations, Queen's University, 1983).

serve them. Plans and projects aside, it is all a matter of political judgment of issues that cannot be weighed or measured. Therefore, to get some idea of developments in Greenland in this and other respects, one has to adopt a *political* approach in analyzing the present situation as well as the future.

HOME RULE

Any new nation emerging from a past of total dependence faces a number of problems. Some of them are general, to be found in emerging societies in Africa and Asia as well as in the north. Others are special, growing partly from climatic and geographical conditions, partly from the unique relationship with the former colonial master which often remains a dominant influence in the new state.

Greenland's formal semi-independence from Denmark through a home rule arrangement is as recent as 1979. In certain respects this development was too much and too little – all at the same time. In terms of national decision-making it was a great leap forward from the state of phoney lopsided equality which the 1953 Danish constitution had given Greenland, in making it a province like other Danish provinces. While home rule certainly widened the range of national options, it also created problems that are unlikely to be satisfactorily resolved in the near future. Some of them stem from the system of shared decision-making, others from the pressure of the economic problems.

The 1979 home rule arrangements divide decisions on matters relating to Greenland into three categories. Responsibility for local and regional issues concerning internal Greenland affairs only rests with the Landsstyre and the Landsting which make all decisions on these matters with no Danish interference. Although there are significant constitutional differences, the Landsstyre corresponds roughly to a Canadian provincial government, the Landsting to a provincial legislature. The chairman of the Landsstyre corresponds to a provincial premier and its members to provincial cabinet ministers. The

Landsting and the Landsstyre together form the Greenland government which is located in Nuuk.

A second category of issues are those on which the Danish state has the exclusive right to make the decisions, though as a matter of course it always consults with the Greenland government. These Danish prerogatives relate mainly to foreign and defence policies and fiscal matters. The currency in Greenland is the Danish krone, and most money matters are handled by branch offices of Danish banks.

The third and most controversial category of matters covers the grey area of *fellesanliggende*, that is, matters of joint concern that may be decided either by the Danish state or by the Greenland government. If no special arrangement is made, the *fellesanliggende* will be handled and paid for by the relevant Danish ministry. However, all items in this category can be transferred in full or in part to the Greenland government. Nuuk can at any time decide to take over a certain issue-area and transfer it to its own regional jurisdiction. It will then have the authority to make all the decisions, but it will also carry the responsibility for running the programme and for paying all the costs. Elsewhere I have called this transfer system 'the cafeteria principle,'[2] because it allows Nuuk to pick and choose among the areas listed in this joint category, but once it has transferred one or more to its own 'tray' it must henceforth shoulder all the expenses. Thus an appetite in excess of its available means may lead an administration to return certain items to the shelf. The hard facts of the 'cafeteria principle' place sobering restraints on a new administration with a strong yearning for the power to decide.

The home rule arrangement was first applied to the Faeroe Islands in 1948.[3] It has worked well for the Faeroese who have had a very sound economy since World War II. They can pay their own way. Greenlanders, however, cannot. This remains

2 *Ibid*, 70.
3 *Aarbog for Faeroyene* (1980), 13-19.

their most serious problem under home rule and has far reaching political implications.

For close to a hundred years Greenland society has depended on subsidies from Denmark. Prior to the introduction of home rule the Danish government covered an annual deficit of two billion Danish kroner. The traditional model of home rule implies that the nation which requests it is able to pay for the policies it decides to pursue. The home rule arrangement that was designed for Greenland was unique in the sense that Greenland will continue to receive support from Denmark in the form of huge block contributions. Nuuk does levy some taxes, and it also collects fees on certain imported articles, one of the most important being liquor. But, in total terms, Greenland's own earnings amount to very little compared to the weight of the Danish subsidy. Therefore, the budget on which the Greenland government operates is for the most part based on money transferred directly from the Danish government. In other words, the Danish treasury still pays most of the expenses incurred by the Greenland government.[4] As well, even though Greenland is no longer a member of the European Communities (EC), some much needed money is still coming in from Brussels. While the massive grants for development of the pre-1984 years are gone, Greenland will nevertheless collect more than two hundred million kroner a year for the next few years in payment for EC fishing rights within Greenland's 200-mile fishing zone.

HOME RULE VERSUS FULL INDEPENDENCE

Greenland's continued dependence on funding from Denmark and, to a lesser extent, from the EC is a thorn in the side of many Greenlanders, particularly the younger generation. Nuuk is free to choose from the decision-making areas on display in the Danish 'cafeteria,' but they know that most of the money which enables them to take up such transfers of respon-

4 *Berlingske Tidende* (Copenhagen), kronik by Nils Ørvik, 21, 22 July 1976.

sibility and authority is provided by the Danish state. It does not come from Greenland enterprises run by Greenlanders.

Greenlanders, like most Inuit, are by nature cautious, wary people who are not prone to opt for extremist positions. Many take the continued Danish presence and Denmark's economic assistance for granted. For two hundred years the Danish government has been looking after them and, in most cases, has met their most pressing needs. That the Danes have continued to do this, even after the introduction of home rule, is unusual by international standards. Nevertheless, to many Greenlanders, it is obvious that to try to change this system would be foolish and unnecessary – perhaps even dangerous.

Cautious conservatism may be the norm, but there are some exceptions. Among some a deeply felt resentment against Denmark's continued dominance within Greenland society has led to the well-known combination of nationalism and socialism. Some separatists are familiar with the Marxist-Leninist models of national liberation practised elsewhere, but they find it difficult to transfer these models to the situation in Greenland. The reasons why they do not apply are not hard to find. Among the developing countries Greenland is unique. No other colony has received such special attention from its colonial master before as well as after 'liberation'. The British have at times disengaged quite gracefully from their dependencies, but even in their grandest hour of decolonization they never showed the kind of deep-felt concern and financial generosity which has been a main characteristic of Denmark's relations with Greenland. The Danes seem emotionally attached to Greenland and they continue to feel responsible for its future. In social and economic improvements, in criminal law and education, in almost every aspect of Greenland affairs, the Danish government has gone out of its way to help build a model developing society. Greed, profit, the traditional colonialist urge to save souls and make money at the same time may have been relevant to the exploitation of Greenland in the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth centuries, but this has not been true of more recent

times. For the past hundred years Greenland has provided Denmark with increasing deficits rather than any financial return on its investment.

Until World War II Greenland was an exclusive Danish preserve, blocked off from the outside world. No foreigners were allowed to participate in Greenland's affairs for economic or other reasons. After World War II had broken Denmark's policy of total isolation, the Danish government reacted by making Greenland a province (*amt*) of the kingdom of Denmark in 1953, with all the rights and privileges of the Danish people. In effect, this was a policy of long-term assimilation, based on the assumption that political equality and a high social and economic standard of living would over time neutralize and perhaps even eliminate the ethnic and regional differences. When it became evident after about twenty years that the equality which the constitution guaranteed them would never be realized, the Danes acceded to the Greenlanders' request for home rule. They also willingly accepted the increased financial burdens needed to make it work. To make the home rule arrangement work is still the major goal of the Danish government. Though the Danish economy is not doing very well, there is so far no public pressure on the government to cut out the block grants and other forms of assistance to Greenland. On the contrary, the Danes seem more determined than ever to have the home rule experiment firmly established. With the colonial 'master' displaying such an unusual attitude, the extremist wing of Greenland's nationalists/socialists finds it very hard to apply the methods described in the socialist textbooks for staging revolutions, coups, and other forms of takeovers by the indigenous peoples. These methods of national liberation, which proved effective in other developing countries, simply do not fit the Greenland case.

In fact the Greenland situation has raised some general questions about the relevance of international socialism and the struggles for national liberation. The perception of a vicious, deadly enemy seems to be a necessary ingredient in all socialist

societies. If there is no identifiable enemy, someone to hate, fear, and vilify, the socialist model does not seem to work. With the Danes being not only generous but almost apologetic about their continued presence and decisive influence in Greenland, the cries of being enslaved by capitalist imperialism and other anti-colonialist slogans seem strangely out of place. When the repressive imperialist power works as hard as Denmark does to make the home rule arrangement function and to increase the native role in regional decision-making, the traditional perceptions about colonialism and decolonization simply do not apply. An attempt to whip up a hate campaign against the Danes in a struggle for national liberation from Denmark would elicit little response in Greenland.

Therefore, the socialist-nationalist groups which now talk in muffled voices about full independence and separation from Denmark cannot hope to succeed unless they can find and raise in a credible way some much bigger issues than the rather trivial discussions on fish and trade which characterize Greenland-Danish relations today. They would need to find some highly emotional issues that appeal directly to people's fears and hopes for the future in order to fuel a combined hope and hate campaign, raising hopes for great gains on the one hand and whipping up hate and fear on the other against those who seem to reap the benefits which some feel that full independence might bring Greenland.

At present any suggestion of a separatist movement gaining ground in Greenland is emphatically, even indignantly, rejected by Danes and Greenlanders alike. Both sides claim that they are very satisfied with the way home rule is working and have no expectations of full independence. The smooth transfer of Greenland from full membership in the European Communities to the associate membership available to overseas countries and territories – OCT – is often cited as proof of the ability of the Danish and Greenland governments to co-operate to secure agreements that are mutually satisfactory to both.

The firm intention, based on reason and common sense, to

avoid any major conflict between Denmark and Greenland is as genuine as it is impressive. There can be little doubt that this sentiment is supported by a large majority of Greenlanders. Yet, looking down the road, one can see at least two developments on the horizon which might bring about the kind of discord that could lead to a demand for complete separation. One is a major oil and gas development in east Greenland where exploration is now being initiated. If there is a major oil strike, will the two governments agree on joint exploration as prescribed in the home rule agreement? Or will the Greenlanders demand full national (Greenland) control over the development and revenues from these resources? The other potential source of conflict relates to defence and security. If the Greenlanders should join the other Nordic countries in forming a nuclear-free zone, with or without a northern European attachment, the issue of the continued presence in Greenland of the bases of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) manned by the United States might drive a wedge between the Greenlanders and Denmark.

For the moment all responsible and well-established politicians in both countries consider both these scenarios farfetched and improbable, but this cannot and should not keep strategic analysts from probing the issue. The key factor in the future development of this issue is the positions of the three political parties, the Siumut party, the Atassut party, and the Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA) party. If all three continue to support the present policies of a joint Danish-Greenland exploration of oil and gas and the maintenance of American bases, the home rule arrangement is likely to work as satisfactorily in the future as it has done in the past. If one or more of the three parties should develop different views on either of these two major issues, however, the ghost of separatism might soon materialize as the evil spirit of Danish-Greenlandic relations.

GREENLAND'S POLITICAL PARTIES

The Inuit peoples of Greenland have a natural flair for the

kind of politics which represent the norm in the Western world. Democratic politics today is a slow-moving process with the large number of actors usually pursuing consensus and conciliation rather than open controversy and confrontation. Though they are new to the game, the Inuit are catching on very quickly. Their feel for politics may be a part of the Inuit heritage, the product of a precarious life in which almost everything in the natural environment was against them and in which nothing could be conquered by bold blows or sudden major confrontations. The survival of the individual depended on the cohesion of the group and the ability of its members to work together, to adjust and to compromise, and to avoid any claims or actions which might lead to conflict and confrontation. Unlike the Indians with their chiefs and band autocracy, the Inuit developed subtle forms of leadership based on unwritten rules and unspoken words. The leaders emerged from within the group and stayed in it rather than rising above it. They led, not by shouting orders, but by observing certain procedures and practices that had been established and accepted by the group as the norm. The Inuit leaders, who were frequently the most successful seal hunters, were recognized more by what they did than what they said.

As in most primitive societies, leadership was a personal rather than an institutional matter. To some extent this still is true in Greenland. The first two political parties, both formed in the late 1960s, grew up in this way. Erling Hoegh, a Lutheran minister who rose to political prominence in Greenland in the 1950s and 1960s, formed the Inuit party whose main goal was to gain more equality for the Inuit among the ethnic groups in Greenland. When Hoegh suffered a resounding defeat in the 1966 elections, he left politics altogether and his party which was really his personal following also disappeared. Then in 1970 Knud Hertling set up the Sukaq party and experienced the same lack of success. The predominance of personalities is illustrated by the fact that despite the demise of his party Hertling was later elected to the Danish parliament and

rose to become minister of Greenland affairs, the first native Greenlander to be a Danish cabinet minister. In both these early cases the parties were little more than a loose framework for building support for individual politicians who were running for office.

The Siumut party

The first political organization in Greenland corresponding roughly to a party in Western terms was the Siumut party which entered the political arena in 1977. Its origins lay partly in a student group in Copenhagen, the Council of Young Greenlanders (Unge Gronlenders Raad), and partly among local and regional politicians in Greenland, many of them school teachers. It began with scattered groups of people getting together for informal discussions on political matters which eventually gave rise to an attempt to organize these groups into a national political party. As the idea of home rule came to be accepted in principle and the drive toward home rule for Greenland increased in the middle 1970s, the Siumut party came into being in 1977, two years before the home rule arrangement became official.

Ever since its first appearance, the Siumut party has been ably led by a group of three young men who all quickly became first-rate regional politicians. Jonathan Motzfeldt, Lars Emil Johansen, and Moses Olsen differ in their approaches, their ideological orientations, and their views on many current issues in Greenland politics, but they are all equally committed to the advancement of Greenland self-rule. None of them is a separatist; they are all firmly committed to the Rigsfellesskab – home rule with Denmark on a shared basis and continued association with the EC. The Siumut goal is the maximum degree of self-determination within the present framework. The arrangement they seem to have in mind appears to be similar to the status of a province in Canada.

The Siumut leadership has tried to present their party as a social democratic party on the Scandinavian model, well to the

left of the centre on a left/right continuum. Throughout most of the 1970s its representatives in the Danish parliament, the Folketing, voted with the Socialistisk Folkeparti (Socialist People's party – SPP). However, as the much larger Socialdemokratiet (Social-Democratic party – SDP) increasingly moved toward the left, the Siumut has for the past couple of years been drawing closer to the SDP.

Internally the Siumut presents the same general picture as do other north European social democratic parties. Although no one in the party would qualify as a right-wing social democrat of the Helmut Schmidt stripe, Jonathan Motzfeldt, the party's chairman, is considered to be closer to the centre than most of the other Siumut leaders. It is very hard to make any judgment about who else at the top of the party shares Motzfeldt's orientation. The fact that his chairmanship is unchallenged after close to five years indicates a strong following which may arise more from personal motivations than ideological orientations. The average Greenlander does not have a strong ideological commitment. To most people the handling of social and economic problems appears far more crucial than ideological nuances and differences. Jonathan Motzfeldt's appeal is that of a very strong leader, vigorously pushing many programmes and policies at the same time.

Members of Siumut's left wing may be easier to identify. Many of them are highly placed and therefore easily seen and heard. The man considered to be the leader of the Siumut left is Lars Emil Johansen, minister for industry. In pre-home-rule days he was an effective and outspoken MP in the Folketing. Mr Johansen appears to be the number two man in the Siumut hierarchy, with Moses Olsen, the economy and trade minister, as a close third. During the 'seventies, Mr Olsen had the reputation of being far to the left of the Motzfeldt group. Today most people tend to place him somewhere between Mr Motzfeldt and Mr Johansen. In the past couple of years, he has appeared to be the one who, next to the premier, takes the most interest in foreign policy matters.

The Atassut party

Siumut's major opponent, the Atassut party, was slower to develop an organizational structure and did not formally acquire party status until 1981. All through the 1970s it existed as an informal group of local and regional politicians, whose undisputed and unchallenged leader was Lars Chemnitz, with two brothers, Otto and Konrad Stenholdt, next in line. When Mr Chemnitz stepped down early in 1984, he was succeeded as party leader by Otto Stenholdt. The new Atassut chairman has for many years represented his party in the Folketing and is a well-trained, hard-hitting, and seasoned parliamentarian. Because of his direct approach, which is quite different from that of Lars Chemnitz, there were doubts about his chances of getting to the top position. However, Otto Stenholdt has for years been a top vote getter in elections, and his position in the party is now confirmed with his ascendance to party chairman.

The Atassut party is generally considered to represent the non-socialist alternative in Greenland politics. Yet, when compared to north European models, it does not fit the definition of a true-blue conservative party. In the early years before the home rule arrangement the Atassut MPs in the Folketing voted as frequently with the Social-Democratic party as with the non-socialist parties. Otto Stenholdt often identified himself as a social democrat, and in those days other high-ranking members of the party such as Lars Chemnitz and Konrad Stenholdt readily grouped themselves with the Social Democrats.

Since 1979 however Atassut's affiliation with the Danish conservative and centre-oriented parties has become strong and consistent. This does not necessarily mean that the Atassut party is moving toward the right. Rather, the apparent change in its orientation may relate more to the leftward movement of the Danish Social Democrats. The Atassut party presents in many ways a more complex and intriguing programme than does the Siumut. It supports free enterprise and the liberalization of trade, and it puts competition above privilege. It opposes excessive centralization and argues for more authority

for local and regional communities. The latter objective has a high priority on the party's list of future tasks. It is also deeply concerned with Greenland's Inuit heritage and feels that the cultural values of the traditional society can best be preserved by strengthening local communities and municipal councils.

The Atassut leaders are not of course the only ones who stress the importance of preserving the Inuit tradition; this is a major concern of all three Greenland parties. But the Atassut ties this policy closely to decentralization and the strengthening of local communities rather than to the regional centre. This emphasis on Inuit tradition and culture makes Atassut a strongly nationalist party. At the same time, however, it is the most Denmark-oriented of the three parties. While steadfastly supporting the home rule arrangement, it consistently argues that home rule must be practised in a way which does not jeopardize Greenland's close and intimate relations with Denmark.

The Atassut party initially opposed Greenland's withdrawal from full membership in the EC on the grounds that to do so might weaken its ties to Denmark. However, when the 1982 referendum on whether to leave or stay produced a small majority in favour of withdrawal, the Atassut leaders loyally accepted the outcome. They also agreed not to make membership or withdrawal an issue in the 1983 elections and kept that promise. Moreover, during the negotiations with the EC on the terms of withdrawal, the Siumut government could count on the support of the opposition party on most major issues. The Atassut party has all along proved to be a reasonable, moderate, and responsible opposition party. Its leaders recognize the experimental character of the Greenland home rule arrangement. They know it is fragile. For the two major parties to engage in a vicious internal struggle might damage both and, more importantly, reduce the chances of gaining the external as well as the internal support which they will need to improve the range and the quality of Greenland's self-rule.

The socialist left

Until the introduction of home rule in 1979 the Siumut and

Atassut parties were the only two alternatives. The 1979 election saw the emergence of two new parties, both on the far left, the Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA) party and the Sulissartut party.

The IA was founded by Arqaluk Lynge and a number of young radicals most of whom had spent their formative years in the Council of Young Greenlanders in Copenhagen. In the late 1970s, when it became evident that self-determination and home rule were in the wind, many of them moved back to Greenland, forming 'cells' or small discussion groups in some of the towns on the west coast, primarily in Egedesminde (Aasiaat) and Holstenborg (Sisimiut). When Arqaluk Lynge and his group presented the IA to the Greenland electorate in 1979, they defined the party as Marxist-Leninist or communist. Their main objectives were full and immediate separation from Denmark and from Denmark's international attachments to the EC and NATO. Separation, which was their main demand, would be followed by the transformation of Greenland into a socialist society.

The other party on the far left, the Sulissartut, posed as an independent political organization, but it remained for all practical purposes an arm of Greenland's largest trade union, SIK. Ideologically, the Sulissartut party was diffused and fuzzy, but clearly left-socialist in orientation, trying to place itself somewhere between the IA and the Siumut party.

THE 1983 ELECTION: THE POLITICS OF COMPROMISE

In the 1979 election, neither of the left-socialist parties won enough votes to be represented in the Landsting. Yet they remained active, sniping at the two major parties from the sidelines, with the IA gradually winning ground as the communist ideological representative of the far left with a distinctive Marxist-Leninist flavour. The Sulissartut remained closely tied to the trade unions, and consequently it never really gained status as a full-scale political party. Shortly before the 1983 election, its most influential leader, Jens Lybert, disbanded the party altogether. Although Lybert himself joined the Siumut party, it was generally assumed that by dissolving the Sulissartut on the very

eve of the election the intention was to have that party's faithful supporters turn to the only remaining alternative on the far left, the IA, and, by casting their votes for Arqaluk Lynge and his young radicals, increase the chances of getting representatives of the far left elected to the Landsting. Whether or not this was their strategy, this goal was fulfilled. The IA chairman, Arqaluk Lynge, and his second in command, Jens Geisler, were both elected to the Landsting. The far left now had two votes and two loud voices in the regional assembly. In certain respects it marked a watershed in Greenland politics.

As is the case with most parties of the far left operating in a Western democratic system, an effective share in parliamentary power can only be bought through ideological concessions. The IA proved ready and willing to do just that. It dropped its criticisms of home rule as too little, too late. It shelved its demands for full separation from Denmark and its wholesale rejection of the EC and NATO. When the IA's ideological 'strip show' was over, there was very little left to distinguish Arqaluk Lynge and the other IA leaders from those of the Siumut party.

When the new Landsting met in the spring of 1983, the Siumut had 12 representatives, the Atassut 12, and the IA 2. Counting Lynge and Geisler there was a socialist majority in the Landsting. Deprived of the comfortable majority which it had enjoyed for four years, the Siumut had a choice between striking a co-operative arrangement with the Atassut, the non-socialists whose parliamentary representation matched its own, aiming for a 'grand coalition' of the two major parties which would mean a virtual elimination of parliamentary opposition or making some kind of deal with the IA.

The Atassut leaders worked hard toward an agreement to share the reins of power with the Siumut in a centre-oriented coalition government. Lars Chemnitz is known to have suggested a number of significant concessions, even giving up his secure position as the chairman of the Landsting. Jonathan Motzfeldt initiated discussions with the Atassut for a possible power-sharing arrangement, but it is hard to believe that he

seriously wanted a coalition with a right-of-centre orientation. The costs must have appeared too high. It would most likely have driven a large number of Siumut socialists over to the IA and could have led to a formal split in the Siumut party.

When it became evident that the negotiations with the Atassut were at an impasse, Arqaluk Lynge's hopes grew to the point that despite his party's slim representation of 2 in the Landsting, he demanded two of the five cabinet posts in the Landsstyre. Mr Motzfeldt's answer was a quick and clear 'no.' The most he would offer was to place the two IA representatives on some of the more important committees and to give Lynge the chairmanship of the taxation committee. With the IA taken care of, Chairman Motzfeldt could present to the Landsting a minority Siumut government with himself as the chairman (premier).

Though there is little doubt that Lars Chemnitz would have been a reasonable and responsible coalition partner, there is no way of knowing whether Motzfeldt really would have wanted a coalition with the Atassut. Chemnitz and Motzfeldt were equally aware of Greenland's need for political stability. But a coalition government of the two large parties would have given the IA room to expand as the only truly socialist alternative. What then would be the Siumut position at the next election? The Siumut party has firmly advocated socialism, centralization, progressive taxation, and a number of other socialist policies. The Atassut remain firmly opposed to most of these objectives. A coalition would have been based on so many compromises that its life would have been difficult, with an open break the most likely outcome.

One can understand the frustrations of the Atassut leaders at being relegated once again to the opposition benches for what seemed an indefinite time. With the present distribution in the Landsting, the IA had much to gain and little or nothing to lose. Whatever the two large parties might work out would be to the IA's advantage. Impressed with his success and his promotion to respectability and responsibility, Arqaluk Lynge

made a solemn pledge to support a socialist majority in the Landsting from then on. His promise brought spontaneous applause from the Siumut, now seemingly assured of another four years of uninterrupted rule.

However, the radical far left programme on which the IA had based its first campaign must have left doubts in some minds. By totally ignoring its ideological commitments, the IA would be digging its own grave. There was a limit to the extent and the content of the pragmatic compromises that the IA could accept without causing serious internal problems, embarrassing its supporters, and jeopardizing its credibility as a party of the left. Thus both socialist parties engaged in a political gamble. Yet, they limped along with an increasingly confident Siumut party brashly pushing positions and programmes that were far removed from the policies which the IA considered to be pillars of its socialist separatist platform.

During 1984 it became evident that the IA's limits of tolerance had been reached. Frustration was building within both the IA leadership and its rank and file. With every month it became harder for Lynge to explain how to promote the high ideals of socialism when all that the IA party did was to support loyally the pragmatic compromises put forth by the Siumut government. For a party basing its support on the most radical elements in the Greenland population, to tag behind the Siumut government through thick and thin had become an untenable position. The alternative options were also filled with dangers, however. If the IA voted against the Siumut government on an issue where the premier had the support of the opposition Atassut party, the reaction of most Greenlanders to this 2 versus 24 confrontation most likely would be – so what? Who do those youngsters think they are? If the IA joined the non-socialist Atassut in a vote of non-confidence on some major political issue, in order to throw the socialist Siumut government out of office, it would be seen as a betrayal of the socialist brotherhood, as a stab in the back to a comrade sharing the same ideology.

The IA's only chance of extricating itself from its humiliating and subservient position was to find an issue which filled three conditions: first, it had to be big enough to have the Siumut government put all its weight and prestige behind it; second, it had to be consistent with the major ideological positions and principles in IA's political programme; and, finally, it would also have to enlist the full and firm support of the Atassut party. It was indeed a tall order!

This unlikely combination of conditions arose in March 1984 when, after two years of long and hard negotiations with the European Community, the Siumut government finally accepted a fisheries agreement with the EC as part of Greenland's transfer from full membership to associate status. Ever since the negotiations began in 1982 all three Greenland parties had agreed that OCT status should not be bought by granting EC fishermen any rights to fish in Greenland waters. As the negotiations revealed the magnitude of the financial sacrifices that unilateral and unqualified withdrawal from the EC entailed and the lack of alternatives, the Motzfeldt government gradually changed its mind. The loss of 200-300 million kroner, the EC's annual input into Greenland's economy, would cost the government too much both politically and in other ways. Some concession was necessary to secure continued EC support. Consequently, the final agreement which emerged in the spring of 1984 granted the EC extensive fishing rights in Greenland waters for five years; in return the EC would pay Nuuk 216 million kroner a year.

This was too much for the Atassut party. One of the main planks in its platform was decentralization, free enterprise, and determined Greenlandization of the fishing industry. The Atassut has consistently argued that Greenlanders should do all the fishing themselves with smaller or larger boats, thus eliminating the need for foreign fishermen in Greenland waters.[5] The Atassut position on the EC issue was a rather complex one.

5 *Atuagagdliutit/Grønlandsposten* (Godthåb), 17 April 1984.

While it supported Greenland's membership in the EC and had opposed withdrawal until after the 1982 referendum, it now rejected the large quota of fish granted to the Community as a part of the final agreement with the EC. The Atassut has always taken a pro-EC position and had no objections to Greenland becoming an OCT member. But its Danish and European orientation is combined with a strong nationalist leaning. Allowing EC fishermen to catch such large quantities of fish would, its spokesmen argued, delay the day when the Greenlanders themselves could net all the total allowable catch of fish within their own 200-mile fishing zone.

The Atassut's negative reaction to the EC fishing agreement gave Arqaluk Lynge and his IA party the long-sought opportunity to break its humiliating and politically damaging dependence on the Siumut government by joining the Atassut in opposition to the EC fishing agreement. The real issue was politics rather than fish. 'The EC fishing agreement was just the straw that broke the camel's back,' said A. Lynge; 'now,' he added triumphantly, 'there is no other choice for the government than to call for a new election.'[6] This action by the IA ended with a non-confidence vote in the Landsting supported by both the IA and the Atassut parties. The Motzfeldt government was forced to dissolve the Greenland assembly, thereby introducing the principle of parliamentary responsibility into Greenland politics. Though defeated in the assembly, the government continued to rule as an administrative body.

The fall of Jonathan Motzfeldt's government did not wreck the fishing agreement which crowned the final settlement and assured Greenland OCT status as a substitute for EC membership. At a later session of the Landsting the Atassut party reversed its previous position and added its 12 votes to those of the Siumut party which secured the acceptance of the new agreement with the EC. Its stand was slightly modified to argue that a substantial portion of the EC money derived from the fishing agreement

6 *Ibid*, 17 March 1984.

should be used for the further development of Greenland's own fishing industry, thereby helping to make the participation of other fishing nations unnecessary.[7]

THE 1984 ELECTION

Acceptance of the fishing agreement marked the final stage of Greenland's transition to the status of an associate EC member. The IA could now at no political cost persist in a formal rejection of the EC fishing agreement as totally unsatisfactory and unacceptable to Greenland. With the settlement of the touchy EC issue safely behind them, the 1984 election campaign focussed mainly on the ownership of Greenland's natural resources, including oil and gas, along with the conditions for and the timing of Greenland's assumption of full responsibility for some of the areas which still are matters for joint Greenland/Denmark decision-making.

Shortly before the election, Lars Chemnitz, Atassut's chairman and founding father, 'the grand old man' of Greenland politics, resigned from politics. His successor, Otto Stenholdt, is considered a hardliner, a right-leaning conservative, who also is a strong supporter of the trappers and fishermen in the more remote districts of Greenland. Moreover, he is identified with the Atassut support for firm and unshakable co-operation with Denmark. Greenland and Denmark must not be allowed to drift apart. In developing its Self-rule Greenland must refrain from any move or action that might initiate a separatist trend. While favouring strong ties with Denmark, Otto Stenholdt is also a Greenland nationalist. He firmly believes in the home rule arrangement, which he feels is far more advantageous for Greenland than any other alternative. He and his party flatly oppose the separatism of the IA and also the Siumut party's vague references to a more independent position for Greenland sometime in the distant future. Stenholdt is also a tight-

7 *Ibid.*

money man who sharply criticizes what he sees as the wasteful and irresponsible extravagance of the ruling Siumut party.

During the election campaign in the spring of 1984 the two major parties both defended the present home rule arrangement on natural resources. This implies a continuation of shared authority over oil, gas, and minerals and forms a focal point of the Greenland home rule arrangement. The IA is the only Greenland party which puts forward the claim for Greenland's sole ownership over all natural resources along with a number of other demands which could only be met by Greenland moving to national sovereignty and full independence.

To the surprise of many outside observers the June 1984 election gave further proof of the basic conservativeness of the Greenlanders' character. The two major parties, the Siumut and the Atassut, were once again tied with 11 representatives each. This deadlock again allowed the IA to emerge as the potential balancer, this time with three rather than two representatives in the assembly.[8] The three IA representatives in the Landsting were Arqaluk Lynge, Henrietta Rasmussen, and Joseph Motzfeldt (not a relative of the premier) – the latter a substitute for Jens Geisler who has been relieved of his parliamentary duties.

Jonathan Motzfeldt's negotiations with the Atassut and the IA were essentially a replay of the 1983 power game. He first approached the Atassut leadership seeking a coalition government. As did Lars Chemnitz the previous year, the new Atassut chairman, Otto Stenholdt, seemed willing to go quite far in seeking compromises on some major issues so as to enable his party to participate in a centre-oriented government. Arqaluk Lynge was also accommodating, suddenly adopting the pose of the moderate middle-of-the-roader ready to discuss, modify, and, if necessary, disavow most of the extremist, separatist, and other radical views on which the IA had campaigned.

8 The total number of representatives in the Landsting varies with the proportional distribution of votes in the constituencies. This time it gave a total of 25 rather than 26 as in the previous year.

As in 1983 one wonders whether Jonathan Motzfeldt seriously considered forming a coalition government with the Atassut party. Whatever his thoughts may have been, the outcome was a distinct move to the left by the Siumut party and the elevation of the IA to the status of a coalition partner in an all-socialist government. It appears a clever move on Motzfeldt's part, but it poses high and incalculable risks for the future.

While pledging loyal support to the Siumut leadership and the socialist cause, the IA is likely to experience some of the same frustrations which led to its 'insurrection' in the spring of 1984. The stakes are higher this time, but so are the potential gains. The major lesson of the IA's recent confrontation with the Siumut is that the gains will likely outweigh the losses. Rather than being punished for its insubordination, the 1984 election led to a 50-per-cent increase in the IA's representation in the Greenland assembly. Moreover, it achieved the almost incredible feat of having two of its three representatives fill a third of the existing cabinet posts.[9] The IA's two ministers are Arqaluk Lynge (minister of social affairs and labour relations) and Joseph Motzfeldt who is in charge of a new ministry with vaguely defined responsibilities. Both men are able and knowledgeable people who can be expected to provide good and effective leadership to their respective departments. With such a spectacular success and so much to show for having toppled the Siumut government, the temptatin for the IA to reach for higher prizes and larger gains, should an opportunity arise, will surely be close to irresistible.

THE IA'S DILEMMA: CONFRONTATION OR COMPROMISE?

Few would disagree that with the parties shifting about in this fashion, Greenland politics is exciting and interesting. But such volatility also raises significant questions about the future development of parliamentary democracy in Greenland. It may also affect relations with Denmark and with the EC and NATO. Will

9 The number of ministers has now increased to 7.

the new Siumut-IA coalition lead to a polarization of Greenland politics, with the Atassut party, now led by Otto Stenholdt, moving farther to the right? Or will the IA push the Siumut party towards a more clearly pronounced left-socialist position which might precipitate a split in the Siumut party? Any polarization would most likely weaken the chances of a stable constellation of political forces remaining in charge of the Greenland political scene.

It should be recalled however that both status quo parties, the Siumut and the Atassut, share a common interest in maintaining political stability. They will try to prevent the growth of the sort of extremist views that could impair Greenland's well-established reputation as a mature and responsible political entity and as a reliable partner in its external relations. Moreover Otto Stenholdt, the new leader of the Atassut party, is a tougher and more power-conscious politician than Lars Chemnitz, his mild-mannered and conciliatory predecessor. If the IA should try to stage another coup or initiate actions to topple the present government, it might find Jonathan Motzfeldt and Otto Stenholdt ready and willing to form a centre-oriented coalition, the option which nearly came to fruition after both the 1983 and the 1984 elections. The IA would then have the disadvantage of being ousted from the cabinet, with the additional risk of public opprobrium for acting irresponsibly and unreliably and impairing Greenland's long-term national interests. These losses might however be amply outweighed by the IA's position as the sole parliamentary opposition and the only party to march under a socialist banner in Greenlandic politics. The coalition might well cause a split in the Siumut party over ideology – the tension has been there for a long time, but has so far been glossed over by the skilful efforts of Jonathan Motzfeldt.

The three main political players in this game are shrewd and clever. One cannot predict which strategies the party chairmen, J. Motzfeldt, O. Stenholdt, and A. Lynge, may choose in the next couple of years. Much will depend on events that are beyond their control – the timing and visibility of a major oil

and gas development in Greenland, possible new moves by the EC, the effect of the West European peace movement on northern politics, and, further, the gradual deterioration of NATO and the sensitive issue of the American bases in Greenland.

While the Siumut and Atassut parties may have diverging ideological orientations, they agree on some important basic policies. They are in principle oriented to the status quo. Both have made it to the top in Greenland politics. Both enjoy the support of a large number of Greenland's voters. Neither has any illusions about eliminating the other. They are prepared and willing to co-exist and to compromise pragmatically on most major issues. Both parties have a vested interest in continued political stability. They must be expected to act accordingly to preserve it.

There seems no good reason why the young people in the IA should not share this view. Through consistent reasonable and responsible behaviour the IA might be able not just to continue as an independent political unit, but by gradual incremental growth to approach the size and importance of the two major parties, perhaps even to overtake them by demonstrating higher standards and better performance. However, at this point all the indications are that the IA will *not* choose this option. Two years of bold gambling and experimentation have taught its leaders that confrontation will probably bring political gains. Its two opponents in the political arena seem like paper tigers, giants on feet of clay. Attack and they will crumble and fall! The IA appears to see itself as the irreconcilable challenger, not as a younger partner content to wait in the wings for its turn. For the IA political stability means the effective freezing of a situation of permanent inferiority which it finds very unsatisfactory.

In this sense the IA represents a revolutionary element in the Greenland situation. Judging from the statements they have made since the party was established, Arqaluk Lynge and his young supporters want to see Greenland develop as a socialist society (with the IA firmly in charge), fully independent, with

no ties or commitments to Denmark or to any other country. To reach this goal calls for conflict rather than consensus, for confrontation rather than compromise. Only by deliberately initiating crises and controversy can the IA hope to break the grip which the two established parties now have on the main political levers of power.

While such a course of conflict and confrontation seems the IA's preferred line of action, there is still a chance that the massive influence which all cabinet ministers enjoy may modify the present turbulent trends in the IA leadership. Having tasted the rewards of power and public prestige, Arqaluk Lynge may find a return to the lonely trails in Greenland's political wilderness less attractive. Indeed the changes wrought by power and recognition may well have been in Premier Motzfeldt's mind when he invited the IA to join his cabinet. On the other hand the ease and relatively low cost of moving from the political wilderness to the highest level of government in less than two years must create a strong urge in the IA to gamble for more. With so much to show for a high-pitched policy of conflict and confrontation, it seems unlikely that the IA's leadership will opt for more than a short-term consolidation. If this analysis is correct, the IA will use all levers readily available to it to stage more confrontations with the Siumut party, under Jonathan Motzfeldt's direction. If Motzfeldt should stumble and fall, the IA might draw a fair portion of the left socialists in the Siumut party to its side. This could split the Siumut into a far-left and a centre-oriented faction, with Motzfeldt drawing closer to the Atassut and the left-leaners merging with the IA.

The most important and also the most sensitive issue in Greenland's politics is the ownership of its natural resources. Premier Motzfeldt has tried to de-fuse this time bomb by appointing a four-member, two-party committee to prepare for a possible re-negotiation of the resources issue at some future date. This committee includes both Arqaluk Lynge and the premier. Lynge is on the record as consistently supporting full ownership for Greenland alone. He must be expected to raise

this issue whenever and wherever he spots political gains from doing so. But oil production is not a matter for immediate action. It will be at least another couple of years before it is known whether the deposits of oil and gas are as substantial as assumed. Further, much more information is needed on whether extracting them and transporting them to the customer is a viable economic and technological proposition. Until there are more facts on these issues, a demand for full ownership of Greenland's natural resources will be a cry in the wilderness.

The issue which seems to offer more promising opportunities for the creation of an immediate crisis is the highly emotional one of the American bases and Greenland's possible inclusion in a Nordic nuclear-free zone. The anti-nuclear movements and the multinational peace groups established their Greenland branch office on 1 May 1983 under the name Sorsunnata.[10] Within less than a year it had a network of persons covering virtually all major population centres in Greenland. It now boasts local organizational groups in as many as eight towns.[11] The co-ordinators of the peace movement in the Nordic countries have recently announced an intensified campaign during 1984-5 for whipping up public awareness of the nuclear danger and the need for a nuclear-free zone.[12] The need was recognized on 15 November 1984 when the Landsstyre unanimously declared Greenland a nuclear-free zone.[13]

The criteria for the kind of crisis which can bring quick and easy political gains to the IA are the general nature of these two major issues and the existence of groups of dedicated proponents in the other two political parties. While the resources issue is too closely linked to Denmark to justify immediate

10 *Atuagagdliutit/Grønlandsposten*, 11 March 1984.

11 *Ibid*, 1 June 1984.

12 Norwegian peace group leader Eva Nordland to *Aftenposten* (Oslo), 7 August 1984.

13 *Kingston Whig-Standard* 19 November 1984. None of the Nordic countries has moved toward such a position which is generally held to be incompatible with NATO membership. Premier Motzfeldt commented at the time: 'This decision has to be co-ordinated with the foreign policy and the security policy of the Danish government. We can however recommend that our attitude is considered.'

probing, the anti-nuclear and pro-nuclear-free zone proposals invite exploitation during 1984-5. These concerns are widely shared in all parties. So is Greenland nationalism and the anti-foreign feelings which could arise when the propaganda focusses on the international aspects of the anti-nuclear and pro-zone campaign.

Arqaluk Lynge and the IA are too clever to attack openly their nation's affiliation with the Western alliance. They will accept continued membership in NATO as a necessary evil and instead focus people's attention on the United States bases in Greenland and claim that the American presence creates a deadly danger to all Greenlanders. Why should Greenland have United States bases when for 35 years Denmark has pursued a no-bases policy? Skilful variations of the two themes, anti-nuclear and pro-zone, may well help to create the kind of atmosphere of suspicion and division in the major parties which is a pre-condition for the IA to stage another move to split these two parties and establish a socialist/non-socialist polarization. A clear-cut division on ideological grounds might put the left-socialists in a position where they could pose as proponents of full independence for Greenland and the leaders of the nationalist and anti-foreign forces which are now scattered amongst all three parties.

CONCLUSION

As this account of recent events may have shown, Greenland's political scene is brimming with actions and reactions. The constellations of political forces can change more quickly and more radically here than in older well-established Nordic societies. Compared to most other national assemblies and governments, the political stage is small, the actors are few, and the issues may at times seem very trivial and insignificant. But Greenland's location on the periphery of both Europe and North America gives it a central position in international politics. Greenland's global strategic significance is no longer a debatable issue. Home rule has given a handful of 50,000 Greenlanders a say in

determining the fate of the island and the direction it may take in future years. With its attachments to Denmark, to NATO, and to the European Community, the Greenland government has also become an actor on the international scene, which amply justifies efforts to keep track of events in Greenland's small but significant political arena.

As part of the same educational process it is important to realize that the people who live in Greenland are no longer Eskimos living in igloos, eating seals and polar bears, and acting as children of nature. During their first five years of self-government and home rule Greenlanders have proven that they have the qualities and the insight needed to master the Western political game. In terms of sophistication and observance of the basic rules for parliamentary democracies, the Greenlanders are up to the mark of Western political performance.

Some of the harsher realities of their special situation may not yet be fully appreciated. They seem largely unaware of the strategic significance of their island, and the dangers and opportunities which grow out of that position. In that regard they operate in a vacuum with little sense of the long-term implications of their local struggles for power and influence. But the Greenlanders' unquestionable feel for politics and their natural preference for moderation and compromise lead one to hope that they will continue to make rational, pragmatic choices and to resist the temptation to let ideological confrontations destroy the political stability which they have enjoyed so far. Short of some sort of political disruption, Greenland seems to have a fair chance to solve its internal problems in an atmosphere of conciliation and consensus and to make rational choices for its future role and position on the international scene.