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50 years later – Reviewing Havland’s Second Revolution (50 ar efter – Havlands “2. Revolution”)

Jonn Borch, Politics Editor

[POLITICS SECTION – 7 januar. 2005] Sitting across from me Alma Boserup seems like a slight figure, grandma-like, as if she’s about to interrupt our interview and offer me a homemade jar of *rod fisk*, or maybe some hot tea. Yet, 50 years ago before I was even born, her name was splashed across the front pages of the paper I am writing for now for her role in what has come to be known as the Havland Democracy Movement, or (to those directly involved) the Second Revolution. I begin by asking her the obvious question, and you can almost see the tweed jacket shift as she gives a wry smile.

“I think today we don’t call it a revolution because we’re taught in school now that it was just a part of the movement to civilisation, that we started here (she mimes pointing at a point to her left), with tyranny and *ultima ratio regum*, and it was just a smooth walk over here (she points to her right), to democracy and the internet and cheap holidays in Hamburg. It was not, of course. Nothing ever is.”

I nod, as if I knew what it was like to be alive at the time. “And why do you think schools teach it that way?”

“It’s terrifying, to know that it could have so easily gone wrong so many ways. And also convenient, if the government could let us gently forget that it was indeed wrong, and could have stayed that way.”

“I take it you’re not much of a compatibilist, then.” I had just come from lunch with one of my friends who did belong to that school, who today holds a decent position as a Folketing member. She snorts.

“Compatibilism is for fools. You are not compatible with a tiger, no matter how desperate you are and how much the tiger promises to protect you.” Behind her storm-blue eyes there is a hint of steel. “Be sure to name your article correctly. I don’t want to be remembered as a *movement activist*.” There is a stress on the last two words.

I ask her about growing up under the post-Revolutionary era. She pauses, becomes more pensive. “I remember going to Blavand for a day trip, and thinking that the smells were different. Then I would go home, and on the boat across that strait you could feel the fatigue of the war sink back in. Sometimes, when the bullets stop, they leave scars in the air, scars you can feel. The air changes, and no longer runs through your fingers, but it slinks.” She pauses. “I can see why so many people – then and now – wanted us to integrate. It was clear that we had the short end of the stick, we’d fought and bled and... for what?”

For liberty, I suggest. There seems to be a palpable tension.

"Why us?"

"Excuse me?"

"Why us? Why did we have to fight for it? Not once, but twice? Why did my father and his lot leave the work unfinished?"

I point out that, in many post-revolutionary societies, it was common for a single party to seize power and establish a dictatorship.

"Yes, yes, I suppose you're right. We should count ourselves lucky, then. That the war came when it did, and showed us what it did."

"The Second World War?"

"Yes. Denmark occupied, Hitler ascendant, the death camps, the terror. It told us that it wasn't enough to be without a king, that being crownless was not being free. Of course, we learned that lesson through cowardice." Havland had escaped occupation through a policy of neutrality for much of the war. "I was going to go to university in Kobenhavn, before the war started. I ended up reading much of the philosophy course myself at home, and then at Auldhabn University. Then the war ended and I knew I had to do something."

Joining the burgeoning democratic movement, according to her, was simply common sense. "We had come out of 7, 8 years of seeing what happened to people who threw away democracy, who trusted in authoritarians. Of course we had to look at the authoritarians at home, the ones who said 'for the public good'." That line had been a favourite slogan of the People's Party government before and especially during the war, when they continued to suppress democratic elections and opposition parties. Despite this, they garnered significant support for "keeping Havland safe", and the protests were initially dismissed as merely students agitating. "That was their mistake," she says laughing. "they thought we were *only* students."

Beginning in 1949-1952, over the next few years the Second Revolution became the foremost topic in Havlandic civil life. "Very few people knew this, but the Home Ministry had a special office for us. The Office Against Internal Agitators, it was called. I know this because they would send us these cute little letters, saying that we were in danger of being prosecuted if we didn't stop. We didn't stop, and they kept prosecuting us. Quietly, of course, they had to keep up appearances, but they would do everything to get us to stop printing those damned leaflets." She maintains that a fire that started in the townhouse where they manufactured pro-democracy leaflets was set by police. "There was smoke, and screaming, and I walked out to see a police car leave. What were the odds?" Officials deemed the fire an accident, and the result of illegal printing equipment malfunction.

Still, in the end it was successful. A twenty day occupation of the seat of the government in Orienshabn forced the government to first negotiate with the protesters and then begin the process of liberalisation. "They would do anything to delay the process, you know. One consultative committee, another citizen's council. All the bureaucratic stops. But we won, in the end."

She's less certain about the future. Right before the end of the interview, she leans over in a playful half-whisper. "I misspoke earlier, actually." She pauses, gives a wide, sheepish grin. "Nothing ends, John. Nothing ever ends."