

REVIEW: GREENLAND AND ARCTIC ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ISSUES

Clive Archer

Lise Lyck (ed.) **Greenland and Arctic Economic and Political Issues.**
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The United Kingdom is by no means the only West European state that is undergoing a period of constitutional review whereby parts of the realm are becoming more autonomous and even considering independence. Denmark is undergoing this process, but is less prominent in the academic literature than, say, the UK or Spain. The Danish realm consists not just of metropolitan Denmark – Jutland and the islands at the mouth of the Baltic – but also Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

After the Second World War the Faroe Islands, perhaps mimicking Iceland, tried to use their wartime separation from Copenhagen as a lead-in to full independence. However, opinion was divided in the islands and the Danish government was able to outmanoeuvre those wishing full independence. The Nordic virtue of consensus was seen as preferable to pushing ahead with independence after a referendum produced only a wafer-thin majority for that option. Instead, greater autonomy was agreed for the islands, and there it remained until Faroese banks went belly-up in the 1990s. It certainly looked as if the Social Democratic government of Denmark, which left office at the end of 2001, was telling the Faroese the political equivalent of 'put up or get out'. The new right-wing government in Copenhagen seems to have decided to be more diplomatic.

*Clive Archer is Jean Monnet Professor in the Department of Politics and Philosophy,
Manchester Metropolitan University.*

Review: Greenland and Arctic Economic and Political Issues

Greenland was the third element in the Danish realm left after the Icelandic exit at the end of the First World War. (More correctly, Iceland became a separate state in personal union with the Danish crown in December 1918.) Greenland's position has always been complicated by the presence of a native population – the Inuit – before Danish settlement and by the geographical position (in North America) and size (the world's largest island) of the country. Until 1953 Greenland was a Danish colony, though one that had in effect been occupied by the US military during the Second World War and where the US had a residual presence after 1953. After 1953 Greenland was a county of Denmark, if a somewhat large one. This meant that after the September 1972 referendum on Denmark joining the European Communities, Greenland – which had voted solidly against – had to join, but the Faroe Islands could stay out. This issue, and the subsequent Danish negotiations on oil concessions offshore from Greenland, mobilised a new generation of Greenlandic politicians. By 1979 Greenland had Home Rule with its own assembly and executive in the capital of Nuuk, and by 1985 it had left the EC. Since then, the Greenland executive has taken over increasing responsibility for its own affairs and has broadened its external representation. A committee has been established to examine the consequences of greater autonomy within the Danish realm, and some politicians have started to talk about independence. One of the catalysts has been the US desire to use its Thule Base, in north-west Greenland, to service President George W. Bush's plans for US Missile Defence. Handled correctly, the 'Base card' could increase Greenland's income, though perhaps at the cost of their leaders' principles about missile defence.

One therefore looks to this edited book for some guidance on where Greenland may be heading, both politically and economically. There are some hints among the range of information provided in this publication arising from a symposium arranged by Lise Lyck, one of the leading experts on the politics and economics of the Danish realm. A number of the papers are rather specialist (such as that on 'The Black Honeybee in South-Greenland') or are perhaps good conference papers that gain little in print. However, there are some contributions that are of wider interest in understanding the national and international politics of Greenland.

Of these, Lise Lyck's own chapter on 'Politics and Elections in Greenland' provides a host of information about a political system that is not much studied. It also demonstrates the remarkable stability of the Greenlandic system which has had only two premiers in the period since 1979 – the UK

Scottish Affairs

has had four – and its personalism, understandable in a country of some 55,000. This chapter makes special reference to economic and sustainable development policies in the elections and notes that the latter assumes both economic growth and also a high rate of resource conservation. Greenland has produced legislation for conservation and preservation, though the author notes the importance of the Danish government's block grant in upholding the system. Other weaknesses in the political system are recorded: the domination of politics by a few persons, the failure to undertake a generational change in politics, the low level of debate of key issues and the weakness of local government.

The chapter by Hans Junker Mortensen examines 'The Development in International Relations in Greenland', especially the way that the interests of the country are represented in the foreign relations of the Danish state. Foreign affairs and defence were reserved subjects for the Danish state in the Greenlandic Home Rule system, and thus Greenland cannot represent itself as may a sovereign state. Nevertheless, the Danish foreign ministry has helped the Greenlanders to involve themselves at the international level when their interests are involved. In 1999 Jonathan Motzfeldt, the Greenlandic prime minister, presented an 'Arctic Window' to the EU's Northern Dimension (which is also covered in a separate chapter by Lassi Heininen) with the aim of tying in the Arctic regions to this EU initiative. Currently the Greenlandic government is discussing how they may improve their involvement in the international sphere.

One policy area that may well face the Greenlanders with some difficult choices is that of the Thule Base, mentioned above. There is already a history attached to the base – Inuit hunters were moved in order to build it, and in 1968 a US bomber with nuclear weapons on board crashed nearby. Nevertheless, it has been accepted by most Danes and Greenlanders, with the provision that it was defensive in nature. The US government will wish to upgrade its facilities at the base in the light of the Missile Defence initiative. The former Social Democrat government in Copenhagen and the Greenlandic government have both said that they would deal with any request when it arrived, but both indicated that existing international treaties should be honoured, suggesting that they would look unkindly on any American renunciation of the Anti-Ballistic-Missile treaty. The new right-wing government in Copenhagen has taken a more positive view of President Bush's plans, basically accepting the reasons behind the Missile Defence policy. This would suggest a conflict should the executive in Nuuk stick to its

Review: Greenland and Arctic Economic and Political Issues

line. It could well be the issue that pulls Nuuk and Copenhagen apart. However, should the US manage to 're-negotiate' the ABM treaty, and to sell the defensive aspects of Missile Defence, there may be an agreed settlement. Anyway, it could mean the United States dealing much more directly with the Greenlandic administration than before and becoming more involved in the economic future of the country. Perhaps it is ironic that their residual links with Denmark shield the Greenlanders from the full attention of the US, and the closer they get to independence, the more they will find themselves the subject of American attention, welcome or otherwise.

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