

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF SKEPPSHOLMEN:  
AN ADVANCE HISTORY OF AN EVENT IN THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

by D.

Stockholm

July 13, 1971

The idea of the People's Republic of Skeppsholmen originated, in one sense, with P. The Committee for the Alternative Conference on the Human Environment, then known as the Powwow Group, was attempting to develop plans for events which collectively would constitute a more meaningful and a more significant contribution to the thinking and acting on solutions to the real problems of the human condition than the UN would make during their conference June 5-16, 1972. P. listed a number of events, and the People's Republic was one of them.

In a greater sense, however, the idea originated not with P. alone or even with the Committee. It originated out of the collective consciousness of a new, vital, and growing culture. Some call it the "counter-culture;" some call it the "youth culture." But all names are inadequate, for a culture is not analysis, but a living, changing, growing consciousness. The People's Republic was an idea in the process of being; an idea in the consciousness of the people who came to Skeppsholmen and participated in the way of life that was manifested there. It was an experience that has changed the lives of those who were there. It was an experience which has reached out and touched the lives, in small--almost imperceptible--but very important ways, of countless people all over the world.

No history can fully capture the experience of life. Others will record, with the printed word, with music, with theater, with pictures, and in their memories, the various aspects of the People's Republic they experienced. Here, however, we will record what few others will ever be

able to record--the history as seen through the hopes and dreams of those who made up the June Fifth Committee--those conspirators who plotted in secret for almost a year to bring about the Liberation of Skeppsholmen and make possible the creation of the People's Republic of Skeppsholmen.

P., as noted, announced the idea first. He merely offered the idea without much discussion as he spoke to D. about planning the events which would the following summer at the Alternative Conference. The day was Sunday, July 11, 1971. The following day D. began to write this advance history. It symbolized the faith that he had, and his co-conspirators were soon to have, in the idea and in the culture. During the next month P. and D. discussed the idea among themselves and those others who later formed the revolutionary committee.

In the middle of August B., I., G., and D. met. P. was travelling abroad but was kept informed of progress that was being made. Having discussed the matter at great length, as usual, they decided to form a revolutionary committee to plan the Liberation of Skeppsholmen and the formation of a Provisional Revolutionary Government. The target date for the Liberation was June 5, 1972, coinciding with the opening day of the UN Conference. The Provisional Revolutionary Government's plan was to govern for just long enough to provide for the formation of an open committee to handle the press and foreign relations. That was expected to be about one day, hence the name June Fifth Committee.

The plan of the June Fifth Committee was simple in principle--to create at Skeppsholmen an area of complete freedom where the culture can grow

in its own way, experiencing and dealing with as best it can, the difficulties of learning to live together with others, with ourselves, and with the earth and her resources in a more human way. Looking back, the June Fifth Committee can recognize that even its most guarded optimism was too naive, too simple-minded. Yet, that it rose to the challenge has provided an experience so rich, to themselves and to those near and far who were involved as to make that audacious--almost foolhardy--venture worthwhile.

In terms of practical details of the planning that began in August, the first step of the June Fifth Committee was to map out a strategy of revolution. The questions that it would have to answer by June 1972 were almost without limit. At first they were without answers also, and it was mainly on faith that they moved gradually step by step to the date of the Liberation. What does it mean to be free? What does it mean to be in independent state? What is a state? What is independence in this interdependent age when more than three billion people inhabit the same limited planet? How should we look upon a state in this age in which the states we know oppress the people with military power, ideology, bureaucratic immobility, and an ever-present corporate capitalism--indeed with the culture it creates and lives on? And of foreign relations: how should the People's Republic of Skeppsholmen--an island of cultural growth in an ocean of cultural decay--relate itself to other states, especially to the Swedish state? Shall the People's Republic of Skeppsholmen apply for admission to the United Nations? Shall it apply to send a representative to the UN Conference? Shall it demand that Sweden remove all military troops and bases? Shall it recognize any governments? All

governments? Liberation movements? Shall it seek diplomatic recognition with governments? The Swedish government? Shall it have a police system? Shall it have laws? Can it make and change laws without creating a bureaucracy? Shall it trade with capitalist states? Are all these questions meaningful? Are any of them meaningful? What about housing? What about the infinity of small and large administrative tasks? Who will provide the necessary resources? How does the People's republic relate to the Alternative Experts Conference? To the UN Conference?

The questions that appeared before the June Fifth Committee at times seemed to present an insurmountable barrier over the next twelve months. Gradually, however, becoming turned into being, and in surprising ways answers--not all good, but not all bad--were found. In August negotiations were held with the Swedish government to get space on the island of Skeppsholmen. The plan of the government was to put the Alternative Conference in the Tennis Stadium--near enough for credibility in their own propaganda and far enough away to be harmless and quiet. But it became increasingly clear to the government that the Tennis Stadium would be an inadequate assurance against violent disruption of the UN Conference. Too many people, too many groups, from Sweden and from other countries, will be coming to Stockholm wanting to be involved and frustrated by the realization of the extreme limitations under which the governments represented in the Conference must operate. It would be too easy for small incidents to mount into tragic confrontation that would harm even those limited efforts of the UN Conference and also the image of the Swedish government around the world. At first there was postponement. That was expected. Then there were half promises. But time was on the side of the June Fifth Committee.

The government would only get more worried--never less worried. Eventually, in March 1972, the official promise came...not, of course, without attempts at constraint. There was a list of rules that had to be followed to protect the grounds and buildings--tents could not be set up, police would be present and had to have free access, certain buildings, though not in active use, were not to be used by the Alternative Conference, etc. By that time, however, the word of the Alternative Conference to be held at Skeppsholmen had spread so widely that the government had little choice--the Alternative Conference Committee would accept no rules whatsoever. It would make its own rules. It would have tents and would have no police. It would keep the peace without the interference of the armed might of the state. The government could neither concede nor refuse, so the matter remained at an impasse with the superior numbers of the Alternative Conference winning out in the end--June 5.

The government, of course, knew nothing about the plans to liberate the island. In fact, up until the last few days no one not either in the original June Fifth Committee or working directly with it (for example a few law students working on the question of our legal rights under international law) knew of the plans. Even then, until the dawn of June 5, no one who was not deeply involved in the planning of the Alternative Conference knew.

During the months prior to the Conference the June Fifth Committee were most centrally involved in the plans for the Alternative Conference. This enabled it to assure that the right kinds of activities would happen to create a pedagogic atmosphere on the island--to create a situation where people would come and get involved and have experiences in which they learn new understandings, new attitudes and new behaviors.

In the first minutes of June 5, the June Fifth Committee set up road blocks on the bridge to Skeppsholmen. One of the earliest decisions of the June Fifth Committee was that the whole island should be car-free (with the exception of any residents of the island who could not be persuaded not to use his car or to park it off the island). While still in the night the flag of the People's Republic was raised over the island. (The idea of a flag was accepted only after long debate. Such nationalistic symbolism, some argued, was one thing the People's Republic of Skeppsholmen could well do without. Eventually the idea prevailed, however, on the argument that a flag is a symbol but not necessarily a symbol of nationalism--ie. a symbol commanding loyalty to an institution or an ideology or even an idea or culture.)

The first challenger to the People's Republic was a police car early in the morning of June 5. When it tried to carry out a routine patrol it suddenly found itself accused of illegally entering foreign territory, a theatrical performance for which the press was adequately prepared. The police had to consult higher authority, who in turn had to consult still higher authority, who in turn.... With a bureaucracy, the Committee had already learned, initiative is power. Eventually word of the liberation got around to the people with whom the Committee had held negotiations for the use of Skeppsholmen. No thanks to bureaucratic communications, however. As soon as those unsuspecting souls (perhaps, in fact not all so unsuspecting) arrived at their offices in the morning they were greeted with a telegram: THIS IS TO INFORM YOU THAT THE PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF SKEPPSHOLMEN HAS THIS MORNING LIBERATED SKEPPSHOLMEN AND DECLARED ITSELF INDEPENDENT! THE PEOPLE OF SKEPPSHOLMEN ARE FRIENDLY TO ALL PEOPLE OF THE WORLD! WELCOME, BROTHER! This theater proved too much for one of the

negotiators--he actually left his office joined the revolution for the next two weeks! Certain conservative members of the Swedish Parliament became suddenly ill and had to be taken to the hospital.

Important heads of state around the world received telegrams telling of the liberation and of the good will of the new People's Republic. These heads of governments included Palme, Nixon, and Mao. In addition U Thant and Maurice Strong received similar telegrams. The People's Republic did apply for admission to the UN, but that huge bureaucracy was too slow. Maurice Strong, however, did respond by inviting the new People's Republic to send a delegate to the UN Conference, which it did. Nixon was told that even though the new People's Republic was occupied by foreign troops and military bases, it would not under any circumstances accept US interference in its domestic or foreign affairs. The telegram also protested the residual of troops the US had left in Southeast Asia. Letters released to the press carried greetings to people all over the world struggling for control of their own lives. They encouraged people all over the world to struggle for independence and a more human way of life. The press was delighted with all these theatricals because they were being bored out of their minds with the dull stuff of the UN Conference.

The People's Republic representative at the UN Conference, without the constraints of other governments, raised the issue of war as an unsatisfactory human environment. Naturally his ideas were not well received, especially by those currently or recently at war, but it was a good show to point out to the conference that the People's Republic of Skeppsholmen was the only country in the world without even a domestic police force and completely free of crime. It did prove difficult,

however, to explain that the reason there was no crime was that there were no laws except the culture itself which was an innate part of every human being who is free. Only one person at the whole UN Conference understood that, but he withdrew to the Alternative Conference the first day.

In domestic affairs many good things happened and a few bad things happened. On the good side, all kinds of people, all ages, all social classes, from at least eighty three countries, came and saw and got involved in the seemingly endless activities. The new People's Republic was clearly the most creative, most highly motivated, and the most free country in the world. For the most part people got along beautifully, working together, playing together, learning together, and living together. On the bad side there were some less pleasant incidents. A few people got sick from drugs or alcohol. A few fights broke out. Some of the more anarchistic people did try to storm the Parliament building when the Conference was in session. Though the June Fifth Committee had long hoped that such events would not occur, it was not possible to prevent it. Some government officials tried to lay the blame on the People's Republic of Skeppsholmen<sup>but</sup> the press and the Stockholm inhabitants were not receptive to their claims.

In foreign affairs the scene was too beautiful. The new People's Republic was not only visited by people from many different countries, but it also provided opportunity for people's groups from all over the world to get in contact with each other. This happened partly through the "International Contact Office" set up for the purpose but also through the many personal contacts that such an environment provides. Although it is too

early to tell, it is likely that a number of worldwide decentralized people's actions will emerge. It is very probable that there will be more liberations such as the Liberation of Skeppsholmen, simply because of the model it set. On the establishment side the Alternative Conference and the People's Republic was visited by no less than five cultural attachés of foreign states. They refused, however to discuss the possibility of diplomatic recognition or anything at all, but at least they showed up to see what was happening and to report to their worried governments on the state of the revolution. The CIA was invited and at least one agent, a local journalist, was seen.

In relations with the Swedish Foreign Department the results were less dramatic but it was quite good theater. With an appropriate gathering of newsmen a delegation from the People's Republic went to the Foreign Ministry to demand that Sweden remove all troops and bases from Skeppsholmen. The delegation was met by some lower level officials and distributed their demands to the Department and to the press. A similar delegation, with lots of press (who really dig theater, it seems, especially when life is dull) presented a set of demands to the Stockholm Sanitation Department to clean up the water in the sea around the island, because in continuing to dump in pollutants they were violating the human rights of the citizens of the People's Republic of Skeppsholmen to clean water-recreation areas.

In the last days of the UN Conference the People's Republic of Skeppsholmen, using the press as its world mouthpiece, called upon all governments of the world to end imperialism, to stop their insane rape of the earth for the sake of economic growth, and to struggle, together with the people, to clean the air and the waters and to create more human cities.

At the same time, through the press and through the medium of culture itself, the People's Republic of Skeppsholmen called upon all people of the world to struggle to seize control of their governments and create new more responsive governments. It warned them, however, that once they had control they should hold that control with the greatest tenacity.

Now the People's Republic of Skeppsholmen stands at a cross-road. The culture also stands at a cross-road. The future is in our hands.

More suggestions:

The Peoples Republic of Skeppsholmen (PROS, even called ~~The~~ Prosit) should not merely claim from the Kingdom of Sweden to stop polluting the water in the Skeppsholmen area but also the polluting of the air above Skeppsholmen and the crazy concentration of people to the area. Etc.

PROS should also proclaim the Alternative Conference as the one and only Conference for the people and every day collect the results of the A.C. and spread it to the people of the Republic and to the World Press. And have big meetings every night on the issues the A.S. has dealt with during that day. And make them understandable to everyone.