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Contemporary Global Perspectives on the 1922 Havlandic Revolution

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Notes

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1. Abstract

The 1922 Revolution has arguably been the most divisive event in Havland's recent history. As a result, it has attracted considerable scholarly interest as a case

study, in particular in comparison with other Nordic nations. In this brief survey article, I present several of the perspectives commonly seen when non-Havlandic scholars discuss the 1922 Revolution in the hopes of providing some insight into common assumptions and theories employed.

2. Background

When the effects of the 1922 Revolution are considered, they are often discussed in semi-apocalyptic terms. Bringing massive social, cultural, and economic change to the island, it can credibly be said to have completely rewritten the Havlandic way of life.

What is notable about the revolution, besides its immediate effects, is the rapidity with which it occurred. Seven days after the initial uprising and declaration of martial law, revolutionaries had already burned down the Absalonsborg Palace

and taken over all of Havland's major cities, in many cases with the assistance of the army. The first provisional government was declared in three weeks and the first elections in two months.

The period immediately following the Revolution, referred to variously as the Transitional Period or the Single Party Rule Period, featured strong domination of the Havlandic People's Party in national and regional elections, as well as in the Havlandic parliament or *Folketing*. This lasted until after the Second World War and the liberalisation of Havland, an period that saw both the emergence of the first viable opposition parties, mass protest movements, and Havland's entry into the United Nations.

With these developments in mind, it is easy to pose the question: Why did Havland not experience the peaceful transition to democracy championed by states such as Denmark and Sweden? Furthermore, what external and internal factors influenced the path that it ultimately took? Before observing these questions, however, it is imperative that several misconceptions be clarified.

3. Common Misconceptions

When discussing Havland's formation, foreign media, scholars, and analysts have historically seized on the translation of Havland's full title (*Folkeriget Havland*) as a "people's republic", the ruling party

as the Havlandic People's Party (*Havske Folkesparti*) and the *Folketing* as a "people's council", thereby drawing relationships to the then-nascent threat of the Soviet Union. This is used to forward the theory that the 1922 Revolution was in some way sponsored by the Soviets as a ploy to gain influence in the Baltic.

This common characterisation (leaving aside the genuine question of Soviet influence) is due to a misunderstanding of the use of *Folk* in Havlandic titles. The "people" referred to in these titles should not be associated with the Marxist view of the working class, but rather the German concept of "*volk*", which is to say that they propose an ethnic rather than social categorisation. It should be noted that the official English translation of Havland's full name is the *Republic of Havland*, not the *People's Republic of Havland*, and the Havlandic name was intended to contrast against the previous title, which was *Kongeriget Havland* (roughly translated as the "King's Realm of Havland").

4. Despotism

The most obvious theory as to the reason for Havland's revolution arises out of the reluctance of the Havlandic royal family to relinquish power. Like many monarchs on mainland Europe, the Havlandic dynasty embraced Absolutism starting in 1695, codified in the *Havske Kongeloven* (Havlandic King's Law) which functioned as a state constitution until 1922. The Law gave the King absolute control over legis-

lation, the military, and the church, including in previously independent areas such as the city of Kongshavn (today Auldhavn) and its University. This imposition of total state power was effectively demonstrated in the Speech Reform (*Talereform*) of the 1740s, when King Absalon II orchestrated a comprehensive overhaul of the Havlandic language and script to make it more in line with mainland Danish.

In Maria Steinberg's influential 1977 work: *Havland – The Nordic Exception*, she argues that the Havlandic court subscribed strongly to the ideas of books such as Hobbes' *Leviathan*, wherein a monarch bears the responsibility of acting as the head of the body politic. She notes that successive kings reference the book in their speeches, to the point of including Hobbes' denunciation of metaphors, and that many policies of the period are officially explained as the actions of enlightened despots or patriarchs acting for the good of the people. This attitude, she argues, makes them less likely to accept democracy or popular mandate as alternatives to divinely-ordained royal rule, and therefore necessitated a violent uprising. Julius Reynhard also supports this theory, writing that "the fading of the Danish monarchy post-constitution [...] provided the necessary warning for a power-obsessed line of monarchs to never embrace constitutional rule."

Based on this theory, the popularity of the uprising can be explained as a reac-

tion of popular sentiment against royal overreach. Maria explains that "after four years of European war and instability, the people were ready for a change [...] by any means possible." The institution of martial law in Havland during the period of World War 1, an act that violated the rights guaranteed under a "mini-constitution" the then-monarch Frederick II approved only 2 years prior, is cited as the breaking point. A number of primary sources in the period corroborate this version of events, showing some signs of discontent in middle-class and professional circles.

However, several arguments against the Despotism theory can also be advanced credibly. The theory ignores Havland's interactions with other European and Scandinavian nations, and furthermore supposes a broad a popular base of anti-royal sentiment that is poorly supported by the existing evidence. Olson's analysis of popular literature during the late 19th century suggests that, at least until the end of that period, the kings enjoyed a certain degree of popular support, especially amongst the highly religious. Furthermore, sources from World War 1 suggest that patriotic sentiment, especially after the outbreak of general hostilities, rose significantly, and Havland's decision to remain neutral was a well-received one. These facts indicate that the revolution was not a long-awaited outburst of revolutionary fervour, but a more contained and localised phenomenon, one that points to significant influences other

than the royal family themselves.

5. External Influence

When discussing the foreign relations of Havland pre-1922, three nations emerge as primary influencers – the newly formed Soviet Union, the Kingdom of Denmark, and the German Empire as well as its successor state the Weimar Republic. Each had their own reasons to interact with Havland, and many theories abound about their influence over the revolutionaries.

The first candidate for consideration is the German state. Formed in 1871 after the Second Schleswig War, the new Empire had many reasons to maintain good relations with an independent state neighbouring Denmark. We know that in 1897 communiques between the two governments discussed the establishment of German naval bases on Havlandic soil in exchange for substantial payments, which were only terminated after the letters were leaked and neighbouring nations (including Denmark and the UK) strongly protested this move. German Foreign Minister Bülow's *Welt-politik* school of social imperialism has often been cited as the cause for these advances, but scholars such as Maximilian Weber have theorised that plans were in motion as early as 1893 under Kaiser Wilhelm II's aggressive foreign policy.

Besides the Bülow Incident, the German Empire made overtures to support the Havlandic monarchy internationally dur-

ing its existence, and trade relations between the two states remained cordial. There have been theories that the German government attempted to ensure that Havland remained Absolutist, usually citing a number of letters exchanged between Frederick II and Wilhelm II as well as the appointment of the German advisor Steiner to the Havlandic court in 1905, but the exact influence of the Kaiser in Havlandic affairs remains disputed.

After World War I, Germany was reformed as the Weimar Republic in accordance with the postwar Treaty of Versailles, and became a parliamentary democracy. The rise of parties within Germany, including most notably the German Communist Party, must then be examined. *Die Rote Fahne*, the Communist Party organ, published an editorial condemning "the barbaric continuation of the imperial institutions of oppression in Havland", but otherwise few public pronouncements were made. While right-wing groups occasionally cited Havland favourably, it attracted relatively little notice. Officially, the Weimar government primarily traded meat products, steel, and other refined resources with Havland, and Havland maintained a small embassy in Berlin. The case for Weimar involvement in the Revolution is even weaker, therefore, than the case for the German Empire.

Turning to Denmark, we find a much more complex situation with Havland's

largest trading partner. While the historic details of the relationships between the two countries is beyond the scope of this article, Havland has traditionally remained an ally of Denmark in order to prevent conflict between the nations, and both governments maintained a strong diplomatic presence in each others' respective capitals. However, relations became frayed after Denmark transitioned to civilian government and Havland courted German military bases, with Denmark expelling 6 Havlandic diplomats by declaring them *persona non grata* in June of 1897.

Internally, the presence of Havland as a despotic monarchy potentially allied with Germany was highly unpopular within Denmark. Havland was portrayed in the press as backwards, violent, feudal, and undeveloped, the "unruly younger brother" (*lillebror*) to the more mature Danish state. During this period, the Danish *Rigsdagen* considered several proposals to take over Havland as a colony and preserve Danish national security, although none were adopted, and Danish spending on maritime security increased instead.

As Havland's main economic partner and cultural influence, it is unsurprising to see Denmark named as one of the chief influencers of the Revolution. Many of the main revolutionary leaders – Olaf Christensen, Felix Nielsen, and Poul Andersen – travelled to Denmark frequently, and Christensen was educated in the Uni-

versity of Copenhagen. Denmark was one of the first states to recognise the new Republic of Havland, and the first to offer economic aid to its government. Rumours that the Danish military assisted the revolutionaries, however, remain rumours despite extensive investigations by both Danish and the Havlandic parties. Some historians such as Weber go so far as to say that "if the revolution did not happen with the encouragement of the Danish government, it certainly happened with its consent."

Several factors complicate the analysis. The Danish government's preference towards non-intervention and neutrality established after World War I is the chief amongst these, as well as the poor reception of the revolution within Denmark itself, where it was depicted as a violent and bloody affair in keeping with the image of Havland as rough and uncultured. Several comparisons to the Russian Revolution were also made by Danish politicians in the press, especially after the revolutionaries executed Frederick II publicly and burned down Absalonsborg Palace. Tacit consent, then, may be the only influence of the Danish government according to these countervailing suggestions, although it certainly had both the incentive and the resources to do much more.

The final subject of this analysis, and by far the most popular in foreign discourse surrounding Havland, is the Soviet Union. Interest in this theory has increased signi-

ificantly, since the publication of the historical novel *Red Snow*, which suggested that the Soviet Union orchestrated the revolution and would have dominated the government entirely were it not for the heroic actions of Felix Nielsen.

There are many immediate factors that point to this hypothesis. During its lifetime, and especially in the early periods of its existence, the Soviet government explicitly pursued a course of world revolution, attempting to incite Communist uprisings in both neighbouring and geographically distant states. An ally in the North Sea, close to many strategic shipping lanes, would be a huge asset to the Soviet geopolitical position. Several Soviet politicians visited Havland after the revolution, and an embassy was officially established in Auldhabn. The Soviet Union also rapidly recognised the new republic on the international stage, with *Pravda* celebrating it as “a triumph of the people”.

However, most of the evidence against a Soviet-orchestrated revolution comes from the actions of the government after the revolution – or more specifically, the lack of action. While a Communist Party existed officially in Auldhabn, its membership remained extremely small, and the government never declared itself socialist or communist. No Havlandic delegation participated in the Third Comintern, and while relations between Havland and the Soviet government was cordial no alliances or strategic partnerships were

formed, nor did Havland join the Warsaw Pact. Soviet foreign policy of the period reflected a focus in Central Asia as well as mainland Europe, rather than the Baltics. With these facts in mind, the argument for Soviet involvement is fairly weak, or at the very least points to a highly ill-advised and ultimately futile intervention.

6. “Unique Characteristics”

Another popular and extremely recent school of thought, originating from Jared Diamond’s new book *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*; suggests that Havland’s delayed entrance to the democratic world occurred due to unique environmental factors. The most popular of these works, published only six months after Diamond’s work, is *The Havlandic Mind* by Frank Ford-Milton Bradley. It should be noted that Bradley is American, and that the work unfortunately reflects many of the common misconceptions about the island including using the “People’s Republic” misnomer.

The book contains what Bradley calls “four unique characteristics” that suggests why Havlandic society is, on average, more violent, less harmonious, and less developed than Scandinavia in general, as well as why it supported Absolutism until the revolution. In brief, these four arguments are that:

1. The small territory of the island made resolving disputes peacefully difficult and encouraged the establishment of highly combative and hierarchial soci-

- eties,
2. The poor farming conditions of the Havlandic mainland made Havlandic society dependent on central authorities to maintain trade,
 3. Settlement by Danish settlers in 1400 reduced the “self-sustenance” of Havland and developed a “culture of dependence”,
 4. These factors created a negative feedback loop that hindered Havland’s development as a whole.

Since its publication the book has been met with strong denunciations from noted Havlandic and international scholars for its many mistakes and errors about Scandinavian culture as a whole and Havlandic culture specifically (See John Aland’s *A Havlandic Refutation of the Havlandic Mind* which is available in English), thus I will only reiterate the main counter-arguments here.

1. Island societies often develop into highly egalitarian and non-hierarchical forms – see the example of Polynesia,
2. The native populations of Havland have historically relied on seafood and fishing rather than farming for food, and the island was self-sufficient until Danish settlement increased the population drastically,
3. This argument ignores the legacy of colonialism on the material level and how colonial societies can develop into successful democracies peacefully,
4. There is little to no evidence of this

feedback loop, and furthermore the statistics used to prove Havland’s violence and lower social development are skewed due to low population numbers and a lack of urbanisation.

This concludes my examination of popular global theories for the 1922 Revolution.

7. Conclusion

What we see when we consider these theories as a whole is a lack of understanding of the unique cultural and political context that led to the 1922 Revolution, and a desire to place it in context of global sociopolitical developments that may or may not make sense. The exact origins of the Revolution require far more detailed inquiry, and remain to this day unsatisfactorily resolved.