

# Home Rule for Greenland

By JENS BROSTED

The Home Rule Commission of the Department of Greenland has published its first report suggesting that the Land Council of Greenland take over the control of internal Greenlandic affairs. According to the report the Land Council would obtain the power of writing and passing laws for Greenland.

This power so far has been vested in the Danish Government and in the Parliament — allowing the Land Council only the right "to speak" on all measures pertaining to Greenland before the Parliament acted.

The Home Rule Commission was created in Jan. 1973 by the former Secretary of Greenland, Knud Hertling, the first Greenlandic ever to obtain that position. As something new the appointed commissioners were all native Greenlanders, the commission counting as its membership the two Greenlandic members of the Danish Parliament and five members of the Land Council.

Later a representative from the League of Greenlandic Municipalities was added to the commission.

In their discussion of the need of obtaining some kind of home rule the commissioners point out the vast differences between the native Greenlandic population and the Danish population. These differences are due to the differences in both cultural background and in the natural environment of the two population groups.

Furthermore, the commissioners discuss the long line of communications between

Greenland and Denmark and the difficulties created by the language gap.

"This easily gives the Greenlandic politician a feeling of lack of influence, a feeling of standing outside the door, when decisions are made," the report reads.

The commissioners have not suggested a total independence for Greenland. That must be up to the next generation, as one of the commissioners, Lars Emil Johansen, expressed it.

According to the report certain areas, particularly foreign relations and defense, but also some internal affairs (police, the Greenlandic court system, communications and health) are to be exercised jointly also in the future — funded by the Danish State.

## The Framework

Apart from this Home Rule Commission recommend to the Parliament that a law be passed to set up the framework for a gradual take over by the Land Council in the following areas: Economic policy and development, education and cultural affairs, hunting and fishing within territorial waters, tourism, certain areas of civil law, criminal law, and finally, control of mineral and oil resources.

The Home Rule Commission is to be financed through the income that the Land Council already has: tax on certain luxury items and beginning this year: income taxation. These revenues are, however, insufficient even to maintain the present level of activity.

The subsidy from the Danish State should therefore be continued but in a different form, leaving the independent administration of a general subsidy grant from the State in the hands of the Land Council.

## Mineral and Oil Revenues

Many Greenlandic politicians have in recent years stressed the possibility of basing a Home Rule system on the revenues that can be expected from oil and mineral exploration and exploitation.

Such income would leave the Land Council in a position less dependent on the Danish State. The Land Council's control in this area is therefore considered to be critical for the home rule movement.

This area, too, might prove critical to the political ability of the Greenlanders to obtain home rule. There exist no private ownership to the land in Greenland where land is supposed to belong to the "community." It is not clear, however, who the "community" is even though the State is claiming ultimate ownership on some doubtful legal evidence.

Presently, the right to issue use permits for home owners or businesses is vested in the municipal council.

It is uncertain, however, how willing the Parliament will be to release a potential source of income that might solve a good part of the heavy economic problems that have ridden the Parliament for years. None of the two Greenlandic members of Parliament have been given a seat on the Parliament Committee which considers concessions for exploration and exploitation of Greenland's mineral wealth.

Will Parliament give priority to the often repeated wish for maximum Greenlandic participation in Greenlandic affairs or will they turn around and honor its own economic interest?

Triggered by the "energy crisis" the pressure on the government to release Greenlandic oil and mineral has increased even more through the interest of Danish firms, the Common Market and the big international corporations.