



*Photo: C. Vibe*

Fishing vessels at Julianhaab.

## PLANNED REFORMS IN GREENLAND

By Finn Nielsen\*

**D**URING the greater part of the present period of colonization, which dates back to 1721, the economic structure of the Greenland community has been based mainly on production for subsistence. Sealing, which yielded the necessary food and clothing, was the only occupation of any importance and, sheltered by the Danish protective colonial system (in particular by a ban on the free entry into the country and a Government trading monopoly), the Greenland population led a life which was, indeed, primitive but no doubt a happy one in many respects.

As is well-known climatic changes have occurred all over the world since the 1920's. In Greenland the climate is becoming constantly milder with the result that the abundance of seal known in former days has almost disappeared. The seal have drawn north, away from the inhabited regions, and in their stead great quantities of codfish have appeared in the waters

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round Greenland. This change in the fauna and the consequent change in the pursuits of the Greenlanders have brought about a great upheaval in the life of the Greenland community. To the Greenlander the transition from sealing to fishing meant that the free, primitive life had to be abandoned and that he had to adjust himself to an entirely different mode of existence. The economic cooperation and collaboration of modern communities now became necessary in Greenland.

This development had been followed with close interest in Denmark. In the summer of 1948 Mr. Hans Hedtoft, then Prime Minister, visited Greenland at the request of Mr. Eske Brun, then Inspector in Greenland (now Permanent Under-Secretary of State), in order to get a clear understanding of the wishes of the Greenland population through talks with the two Provincial Councils.

Three main wishes were voiced by the Councils:

- 1) that the existing ban on the free entry into the country be repealed,
- 2) that the Danish Government trading monopoly be abolished and replaced by a more flexible system admitting Danish private enterprise to trade in Greenland, subject, however, to a certain measure of Government control,
- 3) that the diversified state of law for Danes and Greenlanders be abolished and replaced by a common judicial system.

On his return home the Prime Minister, in conformity with a wish expressed by the Greenland Provincial Councils, appointed a Greenland Commission, on which the Greenland Provincial Councils were also represented. Under the chairmanship of Mr. H. H. Koch, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, the Commissioners started work in the last week of January 1949, and in February 1950 they submitted a Report of 1100 pages.<sup>1</sup> In connection with the Report, the Commission drew up eight bills covering practically every aspect of social life in Greenland. These bills were passed by the Danish Rigsdag (Parliament) in May 1950.

The impact of the recommendations of the Commission and of the new bills, when implemented, will make itself felt in many ways in the Greenland community during the next few years. A brief account of the main changes involved in the new era will be given in this paper.

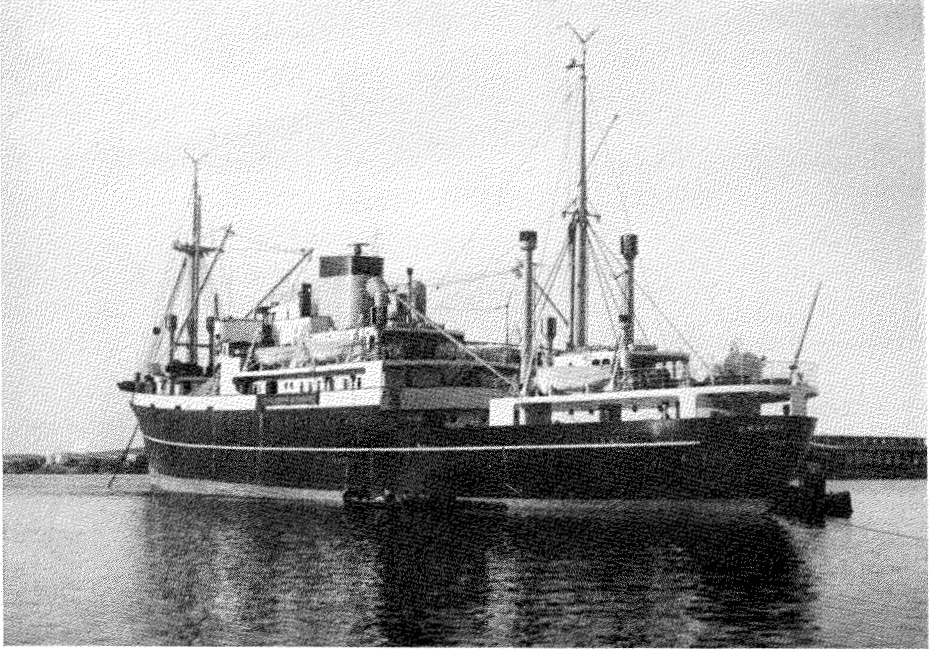
### *Population policy*

It is planned that the population movement towards larger and more compact settlements, which has existed in recent years, will be encouraged. The extreme difficulty of creating a modern community in Greenland, where the population is distributed in more than 200 small settlements along a coastline of over 1200 miles needs no further comment.

<sup>1</sup>'Grønlandskommissionens Betænkning', Copenhagen, 1950.

### *Administration and local government*

In the future the administration and local government will be made more effective and more centralized. The sixty-six small local districts will be superseded by sixteen larger districts and the two Provincial Councils, one for North and one for South Greenland, will be replaced by a single Council. The Provincial Council will be presided over by



The *Umanaq*, the new Greenland ship.

Photo: C. Vibe

the Governor (Landshøvding) whose powers in many respects correspond to those of the Prefect of a Danish county. The Governor is appointed by the King.

The members of the Local Councils and of the Provincial Council will in future be elected by direct elections, and franchise is extended to all men and women who have completed their 23rd year, and who have been permanently resident in Greenland for a certain time. The Greenland Provincial Council elects two of their members to join the Greenland Committee appointed by the Rigsdag.

Several decisions which were formerly made in Denmark are in future to be made in Greenland, and it is intended gradually to extend the powers of the Provincial Council. First and foremost, the Local Councils in Greenland will be empowered to decide upon matters of social policy, but in return they will have to defray the expense. The revenue which must be made available for administering such social legislation and

other local government affairs, will be found by indirect taxation, in particular from duties on luxury goods.

### *Trade conditions*

It will doubtless be in the field of trade activities that sweeping changes first make themselves felt in the Greenland community. In accordance with the wish of the native population, and in conformity with the recommendations of the Greenland Commission, the ban on the free entry into the country will be repealed on the coming into force of the new Trade Acts. At the same time the Government trading monopoly will practically cease to exist and Danish private enterprise will be admitted, though under some Government control. This development, however, implies the abandonment of the prices policy that has been pursued up to now. So far the price of goods to the Greenland population has often been considerably below cost, while the price paid to the Greenland population for their products has, in times of prosperity, been somewhat below the probable price on the open world market. In future the Greenland population will have to pay the true expenses involved in the purchase and transportation of consumer goods, but in return prices paid for goods produced will be more dependent on the prices ruling on the world market.

In this way production in Greenland will be encouraged, but at the same time the population will lose the benefits derived from the smoothing out of fluctuations in prices. To counteract in some measure the detrimental effects of a fall in the value of goods produced, an organization for the sale of Greenland products will be set up. In times of prosperity this organization will provide for proper appropriations to be made to a fund for less prosperous periods.

The Greenlanders are already able fishermen, and there are hundreds of motor vessels in Greenland. To expand the fishing industry an effort will be made to supply the Greenlanders with larger vessels and better gear on favourable terms, and to give them an adequate training.

To encourage Danish private enterprise to take part in the export of fishery products from Greenland, a special loan fund has been established. Although the Greenland waters abound with fish, the exploitation of these riches is attended with some risk owing to the climatic and geographic conditions, and this special fund will give some financial protection to the exporters.

### *Health service*

Considerable efforts will be made to improve the health service in the next few years. The sickness rate among the Greenland population is very high, and such diseases as tuberculosis and gonorrhoea are prevalent.

Bad housing and defective water supply are largely responsible for this fact, and much energy will be given to solving these problems. New hospitals will be built, the medical staff will be increased, and a Chief Medical Officer (Landslæge) will be appointed for the medical service outside the actual hospital service. The position of this physician will, in many respects, be similar to that of the Chief Medical Officer of a Danish county.

### *Judicial administration*

In the past there have been two different judicial systems in existence in Greenland: some of the people, in particular Danes sent out from the home country, were subject to Danish law, while the Greenland population in general lived under the special Greenland law, which was based on old customs. Particularly the more cultured Greenlanders considered that this dualism discriminated against the Greenland population, and the Greenland Commission has accordingly recommended the introduction of a common judicial system which is to apply to all people living in Greenland.

Bills for a new Criminal Code and a new Administration of Justice Act will be laid before the Rigsdag in the near future. Both bills are based on the principle of equality for all persons living in Greenland, but the bills are adapted to Greenland conditions.

Under the Administration of Justice Act the Prosecution and the Judiciary authority, which in Greenland have hitherto been combined in one person, will, in conformity with the recommendations of the Greenland Commission, be separated in the same manner as in Denmark. Further, the supreme judiciary authority in Greenland will be vested in a Court of Appeal, presided over by a Danish lawyer. The lack of such a superior court in Greenland itself has been seriously felt.

It must not be thought that all Danish Acts will immediately apply to Greenland. The differences in conditions will for a long time to come be too wide. But the endeavour must be to apply fundamental Danish Acts, with such modifications as may be necessary, to Greenland as soon as conditions are suitable.

### *Education and cultural conditions*

One point of importance remains to be mentioned, namely the very considerable effort that must be made to raise the general educational and cultural level. The efforts made in this field will obviously be decisive in obtaining the desired effects of the planned reforms as a whole. At present only a very small proportion of the Greenlanders understand Danish. As there is practically no literature in Greenlandic and no pro-

fessional books, it is obvious that the bulk of the Greenlanders are virtually barred from the world outside Greenland.

The Greenlanders have themselves recognized this fact, and it is in full concord with their wish that the teaching of Danish will now be considerably extended and developed.

A greater number of Danish teachers will be sent to Greenland, and, by way of experiment, a few forms in the primary school will be taught exclusively in Danish. New and larger schools will be erected, and in general an attempt will be made to provide better conditions of training and education.

Education for the adult population will be made available through public lectures, study groups, evening classes, and the radio.

The various measures which are now being implemented in full concord with the Greenland population, will mean a considerable financial burden to the Danish people during the next ten or fifteen years in which the planned reforms will be carried out. Denmark has, however, recognized her responsibility towards Greenland, and it is worth mentioning that the reform program was adopted unanimously by the Commission, and that the bills in connection with the program were passed unanimously by the Danish Rigsdag.