LAPPLAND: NORTHERN EUROPE'S STRATEGIC PROBLEM AREA

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In the far north of Europe, where the elongated countries of Norway, Sweden, and Finland come together, lies the region of Lappland. Although it is politically divided among three states, Lappland may well be considered a single region, for it is unified by common economic and social problems.

At the root of many of Lappland's problems is its geographic isolation. By virtue of this isolation, Lappland still retains much of its primitive, frontier character. This is evidenced, not only by the highest birth rate of any region in Northern Europe, but also by the highest rate of infant mortality. Because it is difficult to recruit doctors, dentists, and teachers who are willing to serve in this remote region, Lappland's standards of health and education are considerably below those found elsewhere in Scandinavia. Isolation has likewise left its imprint on the people's temperament and character, though there is little evidence to support the commonly held beliefs of other Scandinavians that the Lapplanders are a backward, unambitious, and morally decadent group. Such beliefs and opinions, however, have done much to nurture a regional consciousness among the people of Lappland and, indeed, to foster antagonism and separatism. Situated far from the political centers that govern it, Lappland and its interests have long been neglected by politicians in Oslo, Stockholm, and Helsinki. In fact, a recent Swedish study concludes that geographic isolation is an important contributing factor to the prevalence of Communism in Lappland, for since the end of the Second World War the Communists have consistently polled a larger per capita share of their votes in Lappland than in any other major region of Northern Europe.

Although the same Swedish study tends to minimize the role of economic distress in the rise of Communism, at least in Scandinavia, there is ample evidence to indicate that Lappland's standard of living is significantly lower than that of the rest of Norway, Sweden, and Finland. A variety of indices may be cited, such as lower wages, fewer savings accounts, and a lower per capita ratio of material goods and services including telephones, electricity, radios, and automobiles. Another index which sheds light on the insecure economic structure of Lappland is the high rate of illegitimate births, which varies from from half-again as great as the national average in Finland to between two and four times the national average in Norway. Much of this insecurity would seem to stem from the fact that the economic life of Lappland is so little diversified, at least when viewed by its national segments. Lappland, viewed as a single region, however, does not demonstrate the same lop-sided economy.

World War II and its aftermath, the "Cold War", brought Lappland's long period of political neglect and indifference to an abrupt end. During the last decade, much of the national attention of Norway, Sweden, and Finland has tended to focus upon the northern borderlands of these three countries. In Norway and Finland, this attention first took the form of extensive reconstruction programs to rehabilitate the areas scorched by the
retreating Germans in 1944. In all three countries, the pressures and intrigues of the "Cold War" have increasingly pointed up the strategic importance of Lappland. Lying, as it does, athwart the only land approaches to the Scandinavian Peninsula, Lappland is the site of an extensive Swedish fortifications system - the Boden Line - built in the days when the Maginot psychology was in vogue. Lappland likewise occupies a key position with reference to trans-polar air routes between North America and Eastern Europe. The ice-free ports of the Norwegian coasts with their protected, deep-water harbors, offer tempting bases to the surface and submarine units of any navy operating in Arctic waters. And, the great wealth of resources, both developed and undeveloped, which is found in Lappland would constitute a rich prize in itself for a potential aggressor. A recognition of these facts, coupled with the realization that something must be done to solve the age-old economic and social problems of Lappland, has resulted in an unparalleled burst of activity in the Scandinavian north.

Lappland, as defined in this paper, comprises the three northern counties of Norway, the two northern counties of Sweden, and the northernmost county of Finland. While it must be conceded that the name "Lappland" has never been applied to portions of the Norwegian coast herein included, no other single regional name would seem better suited to the entire area under discussion. (Thus, in the instance of Norway, the whole of the region known as "North Norway" is included. In Sweden, both Västerbotten and Norrboten counties have been included, inasmuch as the original province of Lappland comprised the interior districts of both. In Finland, only the county of Lappi -- set off as a separate administrative unit in 1938 -- is included within the area.

The vast region thus defined totals more than 145,000 square miles -- an area nearly one-fifth again as large as either Norway or Finland. It is not a region that embraces a single physiographic or climatic province; rather, it is a region of great diversity in surface features, temperature, and precipitation. This may, perhaps, be illustrated most concisely by reference to a vegetation map of the area. From this, the sharp contrast between the higher, maritime Norwegian sector and the lower, continental Swedish and Finnish sectors can be readily appreciated. It is this contrast which accounts, in large part, for the differing economic potentials of the three national sectors.

In 1950 the population of Lappland numbered just over one million, of whom 77% may be linguistically classified as Scandinavians, 20% as Finns, and 3% as Lapps. During the past two centuries, the region's population has increased almost ten-fold, having grown from about 100,000 in the 1750's. During this time, a rather significant change in distribution has taken place, for in the mid-eighteenth century nearly 3/5 of the region's people lived along the Norwegian coast; today less than 2/5 do. Though there is no really large urban center anywhere in Lappland, about 45% of the region's people live in cities, towns, and villages. There are nearly four-score settlements which number over 1000 inhabitants each but only 11 of them exceed 5,000, nine of them surpass 10,000, and five of them total more than 20,000. The largest city in Lappland is the Swedish port of Luleå with some 27,000 inhabitants.

The economy of Lappland is dominated by the primary occupations of agriculture, forestry, and fishing. Indeed, they give support to 44% of the region's population. To be sure, the great bulk of Lappland is quite unfit for agricultural pursuits and less than one per cent of its total area has been taken under cultivation. The land in crops is very
unevenly distributed, the Swedish sector having 5/8 of the total, Norway one-quarter and Finland only 1/8. Due to the short growing season, potatoes, hay, and root crops are the chief commodities grown. Normally the region is self-sufficient with respect to dairy products, potatoes, and meat, though virtually all bread grains, vegetables, and fruits must be imported.

Logging, as a supplement to farming, is essentially restricted to the Swedish and Finnish sectors, for, as any vegetation map will reveal, the Norwegian sector is nearly devoid of forest cover. Timber is the only commercially-abundant resource that Finnish Lappland possesses; hence, it is of singular importance to that sector's economy. (In Swedish Lappland it is likewise of great importance, though there it constitutes only one of several resources that are being commercially exploited.) The forest industries of both sectors are handicapped by an extremely long period of regrowth and a relatively short annual shipping season. Because of the inadequacy of intra-regional transport facilities, the treeless fringes of the Norwegian sector are obliged to import virtually all of their construction timber from the south of Norway.

In Norwegian Lappland the principal livelihood is fishing. There the economy is so overwhelmingly oriented toward the sea that nearly half of all the people in Norway who live by fishing are to be found in this one region, which otherwise contains only one-eighth of the country's total population. This heavy concentration of fishermen in North Norway boost the proportion of people in Lappland who live by fishing to almost one in ten and accounts for 95% of all the commercial fishermen within the region.

The secondary occupations of mining and manufacturing support another 27% of the population of Lappland. Of the two, mining is deoidely the more important. The largest mining operations in Lappland--and in all of Northern Europe-are, of course, the iron mines at Kiruna and Gällivare. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of these mines to the economic life of Swedish Lappland. Their exploitation has given rise to many new population centers, (witness Kiruna and Narvik ) spurred the growth of several older ones (such as Luleå), and caused Scandinavia's northernmost railway to be built -- a railway which was one of the first to be electrified and one which still boasts the heaviest freight traffic of any line in Northern Europe. Their presence has likewise provided a strong motivation for the construction of Sweden's Boden Line, with the result that military expenditures pump considerable money into the local. economy.

Mining is also a leading activity in the Skellefte river district of Swedish Lappland where important quantities of copper, lead, zinc, gold and silver are produced. In Norwegian Lappland, the largest mining operations are the digging of iron ore from open pits in the Syd Varanger district near Kirkenes and the digging of copper ore at Sulitjelma, some 40 miles north of the Arctic Circle. In Finnish Lappland, mining activity has been negligible since the loss of the Petsamo nickel mines at the close of the war, though several deposits of iron ore are known to exist.

The few industries of Lappland closely reflect the resources of the region. In the Swedish and Finnish sectors there are several large sawmills and pulp mills along the coast, while in the Norwegian sector numerous fish canning and freezing installations are to be found. In both Swedish and Norwegian Lappland the respective governments have built electric steel mills. The Swedish plant, located in Luleå, began operation during the Second World War, while its Norwegian counterpart, situated at Mo i Rana, started production in April, 1955.
Another contribution to the industrialization of Lappland was made in 1949 when the famous Norsk Hydro concern put a large electro-chemical plant into operation at Glomfjord, on the Norwegian coast just north of the Arctic Circle.

The construction of the two state-owned steel mills and of the Glomfjord chemical plant mark the first important steps in the utilization of one of Lappland's most bountiful resources, namely hydroelectric energy. Of the estimated potential of nearly nine million kilowatts within the area, less than one million kilowatts have as yet been developed. The distribution of these power resources is very uneven, for most of them are concentrated in the Swedish sector. In fact, half of Sweden's entire hydroelectric potential is to be found in her two northern counties. Finnish Lappland in turn accounts for about a third of Finland's total potential. In contrast, North Norway contains only one sixth of that country's estimated waterpower resources. These differences in the relative importance of Lappland power to the respective economies of the three countries are reflected in differing national policies of development and utilization. In both Sweden and Finland, Lappland power is being, and will continue to be, developed principally for transmission to the more densely settled and more industrialized regions of the south, a fact which local residents cite as a further example of "colonialism". Be that as it may, it is understandable that this development has high priority in the economic plans of both countries. Only in Norway does Lappland power show prospects of being developed chiefly for local consumption. In consequence, however, its development will progress only as rapidly as the economic evolution of the region dictates.

An increasingly important contribution to the economic life of Lappland is being made by tourism. Besides a great store of splendid and varied scenery, Lappland affords such obvious attractions as the North Cape, the Midnight Sun, and the Lapp nomads and their herds of reindeer. Nevertheless, Lappland's appeal is markedly seasonal, for the long grip that winter holds over the region acts as an effective deterrent to most travel. Yet, in both Swedish and Finnish Lappland there are large ski-resorts which draw crowds of winter-sports enthusiasts to the only real mountain areas that either of these countries possess. Winter is also the season when the colorful Lapp markets are held and when the age-old spectacle of the Lofoten cod-fisheries take place along the Norwegian coast.

The key to the further development of tourism in Lappland, and indeed, of virtually all phases of Lappland's economy, is held by communications. Today there some 17,500 miles of roads within the region, of which scarcely 100 miles are hard-surfaced. The great disparities in road density among the three sectors can readily be seen from any road map of the region. If, as James Watt is quoted as having said, "The road map of a country is a likeness of its welfare", then there is little doubt as to which sector of Lappland is the most prosperous. That the road net of Lappland has been built to serve the national interests of the three states rather than the local interests of the region is likewise demonstrated by the paucity of international highway links. Along the entire Norwegian-Swedish frontier of Lappland -- a distance of more than 430 miles -- there are only two road crossings, both in the far south. Along the Norwegian-Finnish border, a distance of over 450 miles, there are likewise only two road crossings. Even the Swedish-Finnish frontier -- some 330 miles in length is crossed by roads in only three places.

The railways of Lappland total 1700 miles in length, of which over two-thirds is found in the Swedish sector. Through international service is maintained on only one line, namely
the railway linking the mines of Kiruna with the shipping port of Narvik. Although a railway bridge provides a link between the Swedish and Finnish rail systems at Haparanda-Tornio, the difference in gauge between the two systems makes the direct interchange of traffic impossible. It should also be pointed out that one of Finland's three rail links with the Soviet Union is to be found within the region (via Kemijärvi to Kelloselkä). (Note: At the time of writing this paper, this was the best information available, though whether the Russians ever completed the link into their country is not known. The number of total border crossings into Russia appears to have since been increased to at least five.)

Historically, the most important access to Lappland was provided by the sea. This is still true for many of the coastal districts of Norway which are served by daily express steamers sailing between Bergen and Kirkenes. In contrast, the ports of Swedish and Finnish Lappland are closed to shipping by ice for six to seven months of the year. It is no surprise that the Norwegian port of Narvik ranks as Lappland's busiest when measured in terms of the tons of foreign shipping it handles. In second place is Swedish Luleå, the other important outlet for Lappland iron ore. The fact that exports far outweigh imports in the trade of all major ports except Tromsø, Harstad, and Svolvaer testifies to the extractive nature of the region's economy.

The long distances which separate the population centers of Lappland from the regions to the south have been bridged in part by the airplane. Now regular air service is maintained by all three countries between their respective capitals and the main towns of the region. There are no international flights within Lappland, however, so the traveler must resort to the regular surface means of transport if he wishes to cross from one country to another.

Since the end of World War II, the increased attention which Lappland has received has helped to bring the region's many problems into focus. For the first time in the region's history, concerted attempts are being made on the parts of the governments of all three states to find a solution to these problems. In Norway, a long-range development program was set in motion in 1951 -- the so-called "North Norway Plan". It has as its ultimate aim the raising of the regional living standard by such measures as improving conditions of health and education, diversifying industry, searching out new resources, and expanding communications. Although initiated, and in large measure guided, by the government, the plan will depend chiefly on private enterprise for its fulfillment.

In Swedish Lappland, similar measures have been underway for some time, and, though they lack the integration of an overall regional plan, their goal is much the same. The construction of the Inland Railway in the 1930's and the building of the steel mill at Luleå during the Second World War mark but two attempts on the part of the Swedish government to broaden and diversify the region's economic base. Currently underway is an intensive program of hydroelectric dam construction. While it is in progress, this program promises to provide many employment opportunities within the region. Next year, in 1957, the vital iron mines at Kiruna will pass into complete state ownership. Exercising an option granted it when the mining company was formed in 1907, the government will take this step ostensibly to insure the economic and social stability of the one-industry town and the vast northern empire which is dependent upon it.

In Finland, post-war activity in Lappland has had two goals. One of these - reconstruction -- had been effectively completed already in 1950. The other -- finding an outlet on the
ice-free Arctic Ocean to supplant the ceded Petsamo corridor -- has yet to be realized. Such an outlet, coupled with an improved communications network would do much to facilitate the exploitation of timber -- Finnish Lappland's single exportable surplus. Without an ice-free port of her own in Lappland -- or elsewhere for that matter -- Finland is particularly desirous of securing a workable arrangement with Norway, pointing out that such an arrangement would be of mutual advantage. Not only would Finnish timber find an all-year outlet to the world market but the tree-less fringes of Norway's coast would also have ready access to forest products. In addition, Norwegian fish would find a new, and hitherto undeveloped market in northern Finland. Thus, although motivated by national interests, Finland is dependent upon international cooperation for the successful realization of the planned development of her sector of Lappland. Accordingly, she alone among the three states has tended to conceive of Lappland's problems as being regional and international in scope.

In a part of the world which has long demonstrated an exemplary international harmony and willingness to cooperate, it would seem, in the opinion of the speaker, that Lappland poses a unique and absorbing challenge. Here, there is an unparalleled opportunity for the regional planner, working not just along narrow national lines, but on a broad international front. How far such cooperation and planning could proceed, of course, will depend in large part on the continuance of the "Cold War" and its repercussions within the area. Certainly, as long as the region is divided among three states, of which the one is an active member of NATO, the second is a determined neutral, and the third is a virtual military vacuum., the prospects of far-reaching international cooperation in solving the problems of strategic Lappland are not bright.

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