

It is OVER: The West Destroys Itself. Final Words. | Tord Björk

Tord Björk, co-founder of People and Peace, International Peace Bureau council member, and Helsinki Plus 50 coordinator, discusses the Helsinki Final Act, Finland's move from neutrality to NATO, and the decline of peace movements. He argues that peace, climate, labor, rural, and human rights groups should work together through practical local action, shared research, and building friendships across borders. Read the Nordic Peace Alliance Manifesto here: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com/p/appeal-for-the-spirit-of-helsinki> Links: People and Peace YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@folkochfred/> Helsinki Plus 50: <https://helsinkiplus.org> International Peace Bureau: <https://ipb.org> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction 00:00:42 The Helsinki Final Act's legacy 00:07:47 Finland, NATO, and erased peace history 00:16:31 Why peace movements declined 00:24:39 NATO, technology, and economic control 00:32:21 Rebuilding popular movements 00:38:34 Cooperation without more bureaucracy 00:45:03 Decentralized movements and local action 00:54:05 Where to follow Tord Björk

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today, for the first time, with Tord Björk, a co-founder of the network People and Peace, a council member of the International Peace Bureau, and a coordinator of the working group Helsinki Plus 50. Tord, welcome.

#Tord Björk

Well, I'm very pleased and honored to be in this very important program.

#Pascal

Well, you are an activist, and you've been an activist for peace in Sweden and in Scandinavia more generally for many years. And I wanted to pick your brain on what the Helsinki Plus 50 working group is now doing. Can you give us some insights?

#Tord Björk

Well, what we did was to realize that the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act was of global importance. The thing is that in 1975, it was possible for all the state leaders that were confronting each other, including both Turkey and Cyprus, who were at war with each other one year before, to unite upon a call for détente, but not only détente, not only what is called indivisible security in the

Final Act, but also cooperation—economic, environmental, cultural—and including also human rights without double standards. So this was sort of an opening for a very long period of opening up for cooperation among movements, a mass popular peace movement, and a mass movement for human rights.

#Pascal

Yeah, and just to set this into its context, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 was signed after five, almost six years of constant negotiations for a conference on security and cooperation. The CSCE, that was the brainchild, actually, of the Soviets in Moscow, who forwarded that request to Finland. Finland then sent out invitations, and after five years of negotiations, everybody from the United States and Canada all the way to, I think, even Mongolia were part of the Helsinki Final Act. About 50 countries then signed the basic principles of peaceful coexistence, basically. And to me, 1975 is the beginning of the end of the first Cold War, because that's where the principles were hammered out. Now, how are you assessing this, like 50 years on, how the development of the CSCE went on? Because, you know, there were other successes, like the institutionalization in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the OSCE, making this process permanent. What's your take?

#Tord Björk

Well, it goes through different stages. What we can see is the successful first stages. In spite of very strong criticism in Eastern Europe among those who were in opposition to the rule that was then over Central and Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union, they were very much against this. They thought it was only to help the Soviet Union in establishing that the borders should be recognized as they were. But the totally different thing happened when the Moscow Helsinki Group started with Sakharov and others in 1976. And this opened up for a very dynamic relationship between a mass popular movement, peace movement, for instance, the European Nuclear Disarmament movement, and these dissident groups in Central and Eastern Europe.

So this ended then, finally, in that we got this change, nonviolent change, in all of the so-called kitchen revolutions. So this was a stage where this was very helpful also in terms of producing a lot of agreements on reducing nuclear arms and trust-building measures, a lot of agreements on that. Then came 1990, and it seemed like a total success for the Helsinki process in terms of a meeting in Paris where everybody agreed upon it again: indivisible security, human rights, et cetera, et cetera. But in reality, the Helsinki Final Act had a clause when it came to economic cooperation, claiming that the UN Commission for Europe was very important.

In other words, it was not saying that the Bretton Woods institutions and financial institutions totally ruled by the US and the West was the solution to economic problems. But in reality, the opposite happened. It has been very clearly documented that Russia was treated completely differently in this transition period from, let's say, Poland. Poland received all the kind of specific help they needed to make this transition in a good way, while Russia was denied. And we got this complete breakdown

of the situation in Russian society, which actually also took place in Ukraine, but less in Belarus. So, in other words, this idea from '75 was never completed when it comes to economy. And what we instead got was this development of more and more away from what was later called common security.

And instead, we got this very polarization on all issues, economic and military and so on. So that is interesting then, because 50 years afterwards, Finland had to do something. This was the biggest success ever in Finnish diplomatic history, and they were forced to do something. And that became really comical. To dig into the way they organized this 50-year anniversary, it shows a lot. And what we now see is that by claiming to be the legitimate followers of the Helsinki Final Act, all the movements can claim that we are now fulfilling what the state leaders decided in '75. So it gives us legitimacy to produce ideas about change, not only in terms of security, but also cooperation and human rights.

#Pascal

Yeah. And, you know, you're saying it was almost comical because, of course, the 50th anniversary was last year, in 2025. And that was already two years after Finland joined NATO, right? Finland was neutral together with Sweden, where you are, by the way. So Finland, Sweden, and Norway, these Nordic countries, you closely cooperate. The importance, actually, of 1975—and 1969, actually, this started, right?—was that the Soviets told the Finns to do something because the Finns were neutral and they were able to access both sides, right? And one of the success stories of the Helsinki process is that these different neutral countries, including also Sweden and Switzerland, were able to help grease the wheels to make sure that the communist and capitalist countries actually met and had those negotiations, partially in Helsinki, then in Geneva, then again in Helsinki for the Final Act.

And that's, however, a very, very different mindset from what then grew in the early 2000s. Finland first redefined its neutrality to non-alignment, and then after 2022 completely discarded it, applied for NATO, went in, and is now a proud member of the alliance with U.S. bases, 17 U.S. bases, and even recently the agreement that the United States could station nuclear weapons. I mean, it went into a complete reverse gear. So this, together with the memory of having been a neutral and a very successful one at that, how did that go down last year? As you said, Finland couldn't but try to remember its diplomatic past.

#Tord Björk

It was really interesting, and we've been studying this very much in detail, following every step in how they prepared it and what was said, etc. Much of it is online, so it's possible to look for everyone. The problem was, of course, that they had to kill peace as a concept. So they mass-produced this idea that there is no such thing as peace anymore and no peace movement. The story

behind this Helsinki Final Act in 1975 is not at all mainly a story of the states, the Soviet acting, or Kekkonen, the president of Finland. It's a very different story. It's the story that the Finnish peace movement is totally unique in all the Western world.

It was the only place where more, what can be said, bourgeois pacifist organizations joined with the peace committees. The only place on Earth that it could take place, and that they developed already in the 1940s. And that made it possible for the Peace Committee to have their world headquarters in Helsinki. It also made it possible to have a student and youth festival, which had been going on since the late 1940s in many places on Earth. And for the first time ever, it was in Vienna, in the West. But in 1961, it took place in Helsinki. And it was so violently attacked by the right-wing activists that it was possible for President Kekkonen to go to the cultural activities of this festival, which made an explosion of popular interest in building friendship societies.

So Finland still has something like hundreds of friendship societies with any kind of countries. So it became a mass interest in, oh, well, why don't we build friendship with people? And with that popular base, it was fully possible for President Kekkonen then to move forward with this Helsinki thing. That is totally erased in the history, never mentioned, not even by the peace movement themselves in Finland. I had to bring it up. And it's very clear when you see pictures from peace manifestations already today. You see the symbols: the pacifists, the anti-imperialists, and the militarists, you know, they go there side by side.

The second step was to erase the peace movement from the follow-up of the Helsinki Agreement. So the president, Stubb, the president at the moment, he claimed that the whole result of Helsinki was the defeat of communism. Capitalism defeated communism. So the only result of the whole effort was how this was enabling liberty in the Soviet bloc, and that brought down this communist regime. There was never any mass peace movement. It doesn't exist in the narrative of the Finnish politicians. So this way they sort of erase the memory that it was the combination of these things that produced the results.

#Pascal

It's a complete rewriting of history. And as you said, killing peace and also killing the whole concept of neutrality, of the ability to access everybody, complete erasure and just absolute total victory of us against the others, of good versus evil. A really stupid conception. And honestly, the difference between Alexander Stubb, your president today, and Urho Kekkonen, your president in the '60s and '70s, I mean, it couldn't be larger. Urho Kekkonen was a mastermind and also a brilliant geostrategist. And I would say the second probably most important neutral leader of the Cold War besides Tito. But all of that memory is gone, isn't it?

#Tord Björk

Yeah, we'll see if the memory is gone because, you know, history tends to place things back in place again. It's not only that he was geopolitical. The interesting thing, he had the background in the rural party, the Center Party. And there was this class alliance between the very radical working-class movement and the rural. And that built sort of—it was not only that, well, I talked about the peace movement, but there was a sort of mass base in terms of when they did things, it happened all over the country, both in the cities and the rural districts and so on. So it was a very specific class alliance building here as well. But if one digs deeper, it becomes really horrendous.

There was this cooperation between the Finnish official organizers and a so-called Network for European Memory and Solidarity, or something like that. A network with the Germans as very prominent, but a Polish director, and supported by many of the Eastern European countries as a part of their sort of efforts to claim a view about history and so on. And this director started a conference that was one month prior to this 50-year anniversary by stating that Russian horrendous activities in Ukraine, that's sort of the only problem that we have, while Israel is defending civilians. So this double standard was very much promoted, and they made a video where they claimed this concept: if you want peace, you have to prepare for war. And that's where you destroy peace as a concept, because you have nothing else than preparing for war or war.

#Pascal

What is your explanation? How do you make sense of this, that these peace movements, the way we had them in Europe, that they basically imploded? Because a lot of people bought this line: if you want peace, prepare for war. It's like a stupid tagline, but it is very popular. The other one is the former Norwegian head of NATO, Mr. Stoltenberg, who said, "Weapons are the way to peace," in the context of Ukraine. Or the third thing is this stupid, absolutely dumb reliance on deterrence. You know, you need to deter. If you don't deter, you cannot have peace.

It is so dumb that people, even in Switzerland, do not think anymore of how to create friends because, you know, if you have friends and not enemies, then the problem is also solved. That's the other way of doing it, right? You can either scare somebody to not attack you, or you can be friends with them so they don't attack you. It's like, why don't the Germans attack the French and the French attack the Germans anymore? Because they're friends, not because they deter each other. But the idea of deterrence is so deeply ingrained now that it has completely crowded out the peace movement. How do you explain to yourself that that happened? Because in the '70s, these movements were very, very strong.

#Tord Björk

I think it's very simple. These movements were part of middle-class mobilization, the so-called new social movements, and they all became professionalized, including my own movement, which has mainly been the environmental movement. That's the same thing with the solidarity movement. And

that meant that they got specialized. They needed to use their human capital, as it's called, and to be specialists on security. And this means that you totally destroy the peace movement, because the peace movement has to address all the aspects of human life, economy, etc., human rights, etc., which are included in the Helsinki Final Act.

But they lost that capacity and went into this very narrow-minded situation where they were not able to address the issues of today. And the same thing on the environment. The environmental movement got split up, and suddenly we had the climate movement, and then we didn't have a climate movement. We had only the fossil-free future movement, which is not at all the whole climate issue, as it's also a rural issue for agriculture and so on. So these movements became specialized, and they avoided any kind of interest in the other issues.

#Pascal

Can I dig into this a little bit more? Because this is a very interesting explanation, actually. So is it the specialization, as in the breaking up? So these different organizations then having a need to have their own little niche, which makes them blind? Or is it the professionalization drive, right? We have to be more professional. We have to have high-gloss brochures. We need to get more members. We need to have more funds. We need to apply for grants. And that then made them docile.

#Tord Björk

I mean, which one is more important? They're both. It's a combination, which means that also the idealists who still are there, they always refer to the 1980s. In Sweden, they love to refer to the Vietnam War movement because they were so extremely successful then, they think. And they live in the past, and that connects very well with this professionalization. So you don't dig into the harder issues of today. But I don't think at all the peace movement did that. On the contrary, that's where very much of the unification of the movements now starts to grow. So I have the sense that we are in a very new stage of the peace movement where we can get forward. And one of the issues then is to be helped by looking at the Helsinki and how we can follow up on that, because the politicians are totally gone. In Sweden, and the same in Finland and all Nordic countries, every parliamentary party is totally for raising the military budgets and into this whole scheme of NATO and so on.

#Pascal

So, you know, it's fascinating. I mean, is this, I mean, in a very sad sense, the late victory of the capitalist system over the left socialist peace movements of the day because it managed, through a natural process, to domesticate them, break them up, and put them somewhere where they don't hurt anybody, or even, on the contrary, makes them useful? And this atomization, you know, it's also very useful because you can always tell people, oh, but you cannot march with these ones. I mean, if you, as a green supporter who's in favor of CO2 emission reduction, if you walk with somebody

who is even just slightly xenophobic, who even slightly argues for less immigration, then you are a xenophobe yourself, and you must be demonized. So you make sure that these movements never come together and actually fight each other instead of fighting upward. Is that what happened in Europe?

#Tord Björk

I don't believe in capitalism being so strong. The reason why I never became a leftist in the '70s was very simple. I thought that I didn't need to make double work. They can do their thing, and I tried to focus on how to organize a little bit these environmental issues and the idea that popular movements are important together. And finally, what happens in the very moment when capitalism is not strong? Because the idea of capitalism as this totalitarian system that controls everything is totally false, because there are openings. And these openings, then I claim that people like myself who are good at speaking, that's also power in these movements. And we have to watch out for people like me. We have to look out for the power in ideology. And that's where the leftists...

#Tord Björk

They didn't like that at all, of course.

#Tord Björk

So, in other words, I think we cannot sort of only blame the system. We have to look into how do we relate to daily life. And this was lost by the peace movement, the environmental movement, solidarity movement. What they lost was that, oh yes, we are focusing on the military-industrial complex. Completely not possible for people in common to understand. Or we have to be against growth. Also completely impossible for people in common to understand. So you created a lot of sort of compartmentalized understanding, which is not because of capitalism. It's because it's hard to change society. That's a simple thing. And what is the interesting thing now is, as far as I know, the system is imploding. All these walls between the issues are destroyed by the system itself. And the movement is still believing that these things exist, but they don't. So that is sort of now we suddenly are faced with the necessity of starting to wonder: what civilization do we want?

#Pascal

So, in what sense is the system taking apart these walls that it itself erected before? Do you mean these issues of, like, holistic defense and everything is a war? Therefore, actually, the system is now arguing that everybody has to care about everything? Or what are you referring to?

#Tord Björk

Well, let's take an example. We had this NATO foreign ministerial meeting in Helsingborg, in Sweden, recently in May. And the public service report about that meeting—what was the news? Well, they said nothing happened, actually. The only thing that happened was that we were not beaten by the US. That was a great success, that nothing happened. What happened was that Sweden made a technical agreement with the United States, which has nothing to do with military issues, nothing to do with security. In other words, the whole system understands that there is no such thing anymore as security separated from economy or whatever.

And it's extremely clear now what happens with the whole NATO 3.0, the new NATO, where we totally integrate and turn Europe into a factory line for NATO under U.S. control. And this is not only a question of NATO; it's a question of the whole technological drive towards being dependent on the U.S. tech monopolies, the energy monopoly that the U.S. is striving for. And it's situated in such things like Pax Silica, which is this agreement which Sweden was among the first to sign, which says that the critical minerals we have—we have the biggest deposits in all of the European Union. We have a lot of uranium, the biggest deposits. We have a lot of good places for putting computer centers and so on.

And we are wanting to be part of a strategic development of these things in the hands of the U.S., which seems to be in contrast to the EU, who wants to have some strategic autonomy in this field as well, because it's key for the future of the economy. But now, recently, also the EU signed its death warrant in terms of having any kind of possibility to have strategic autonomy when it comes to technology and developing the economy. So they are destroying everything. And what happens is that the environmental movement recognizes this. And then all over Sweden, there have been protests against the uranium mining and the link to nuclear power and the nuclear power terror.

So there have been manifestations in four cities. The peace movement don't understand this issue at all. They don't want to cooperate. So, with other words, we get issues above the single issues. And it's moving ahead. And that's where we get the possibilities for opening up for one movement, and not with different aspects. Instead of peace movement here, environmental movement, we have one popular movement who has to face this new stage in society, in the way the world order is organized. A typical aspect is this: before, you could separate foreign policy from domestic policy; you can't anymore.

#Pascal

Yeah. But this is a drive, as you correctly pointed out, it's coming from the system that is doing this and that's trying to create an all-encompassing kind of issue matter. And most of it actually centers around the concept of war. Everything's a war: war on the outside, war on the inside, war in the brain, war in the heart. And it's absolutely crazy. I mean, coincidentally enough, I know that you also know Nell Bonilla, right? Yeah. And I talked to her yesterday. She pointed that out, the NATO 3.0 and the drive toward the bunker state of everything being centered around the citizen having to

sacrifice himself or herself to the greater good of collective defense against whatever the threat is that is being portrayed from above. And that drive is now, in your interpretation, actually fueling the possibility to public resistance because it creates the drive for these different movements to actually join hands again.

#Tord Björk

Yeah, but I also put the blame on the movements. I'm not saying that it's only the capitalists. We are no victims. And on the other hand, I think we have to be understanding that this idea, which one could accuse me of, in terms of believing in these popular movements as a sort of drive for change: people in common cannot be mobilized in trying to fight all the time. So it's quite understandable that you, for a time being, give up these hopes, and then you give your hope that some very professional organizations will help, or a trade union, or whatever. So it's fully understandable. But it is caused also by this, because it's been fully possible to look at what has happened.

It's not so that this happens out of nowhere. I mean, you're just looking at anything. And the militarization of the frontiers, this Fortress Europe—is it 70,000 people who have been murdered now when they try to enter the EU? The whole trade agreements, killing farming in West Africa, etc., and then producing these refugees. You have it... And whenever you look into it, you find that this is not coming out of nowhere. But there hasn't been enough sort of intellectual interest in trying to put these things together. And now we can be helped because what the system is doing is because it's weak.

This repression, which we've felt very strongly from the very start when we initially started this cooperation between the environmental and peace movements, the Atlantic Council immediately targeted us together with the business think tank in Sweden. And they saw that we were a great threat, and they looked into 10 Western countries for Russian, so-called Russian disinformation. And they didn't find anything similar in any other country except for Sweden. So there is interest in how what is happening is sort of fully possible to address somehow. And then we have to see if this can happen in different countries. And what we see is, it is going on. Something is happening.

#Pascal

What is your recommendation? What can be done? Because what you said just earlier is very important, right? People, people on the ground, like everybody, you know, I mean, the day only has 24 hours for all of us. And a lot of people, they have children, they have a job, they have parents and people to take care of here and there. You know, there's a life, right? You just don't have infinite amounts of time even to listen to podcasts, even to read the books, even to read the pamphlets, right? There's just a limited amount of time, but there is somehow a need for this popular movement.

How can we square that circle? Because as you said, the hope is quite high that you can just become a member, pay a membership fee to the Greens, pay a membership fee to some organization, and thereby be done with your popular movement kind of engagement, call it a day, and leave it to the professionals. But that didn't work. That's what created the problem. So how can we structure that alternatively as a proper grassroots movement network that, however, does not overburden the individual? Because then the network won't work.

#Tord Björk

The problem with me is, I think it's simple. I like simple. No, the simple thing is that we have to see that there is a difference between governments and business and civil society. In spite of that, I'm critical, as you've understood, including my own movement and organization. I do believe that it's different, that these organizations are more in need of having genuine popular support. And when they start to realize that that genuine popular support is not possible through these very top-down professional means, and to keep their issue in a cage, sort of, that is within the system, they start to be a bit worried. And this is exactly what we've been doing with the Helsinki Plus 50 process, but primarily also by doing specific actions.

What happens in the Helsinki Plus 50 process is that we got this very odd situation that it's mainly environmentalists who have challenged the peace movement. I'm from the environmental movement, and I'm sort of constantly in a crisis with the peace movements. And I've actually been placed in the International Peace Bureau Council. That's because I have this background. And it works. It's provocative, but they start to, oh, okay. So, in other words, that connection, peace and environmental movements, has been the key to the success of what we've been developing with the Helsinki Plus 50 process without any funding, more or less. The second thing is the human rights movement.

A two-hour meeting in Helsinki, which was very small, but the people came. And one of them was Makarov from the Moscow Helsinki Group. In other words, the core of the whole Helsinki Committee movement. And he was very self-critical against the professionalization of the movement. And this process is developing not only because there is self-criticism against this enormous institutionalization, which means that you are lost, sort of, and have no real popular support. You are also totally destroyed by the double standards when it comes to Ukraine and Palestine. So even the bigger, influential persons in the human rights movement understand this is the end. So, in other words, there is a shift which you can just go double standard.

We are against double standards. That's sort of our key demand in relation to civil society. The next step is then what we are now trying to do, because we have to go beyond—the 50-year anniversary was last year—is to develop stronger contacts with the trade unions, with the rural movements, and researchers like you. So what we want to establish is a council of researchers and movements that together start to develop studies, research, you name it, to develop this link with the movements

and not, you know, individual fantastic YouTubers who everybody knows and have an extremely much bigger audience than we have. But anyway, that combination, starting to develop certain sort of themes.

And that's what we started on this Sunday with Mel Bonilla, when we at People and Peace had initiated, together with the International Peace Bureau, World Beyond War, and World Social Assembly of Struggles and Resistances, which related to the World Social Forum process. So we do it step by step. And then finally, I'm quite certain that this kind of knowledge that one can produce by this kind of cooperation makes it possible both to address these new issues, which people in common are very worried about: the tech companies, the AI, the whole way that the economy is now translated into some kind of subordination to the monopolies in the US. These are issues that are new and really cross-cutting, but also fighting against repression.

#Pascal

What is, in your esteem, the best way for these different groups and these different individuals to support each other? Because one thing that I realized from my work with different groups is that the tendency is that you—or the gut feeling is—let's get together and let's create something new. And then what happens is that you, instead of solving problems for each other, you create a new organizational challenge, and you swallow up more time than you resolve.

And my feeling is that we should work on, instead of creating more overhead, trying to figure out how to spread vertically and how to make life easier for each other. By me hosting you on my channel, I can spread your word, and you get something, and so on. We don't necessarily need to create a joint forum for something. We just need to figure out how to work in a way that we empower each other. How do you go about that? Because again, the gut feeling is like, "Oh, let's sit together and make a council of something, something." And then the council actually needs to get together and have a constitution and blah, blah, blah.

#Tord Björk

No, I mean, the International Peace Bureau was established in 1891. So there is, of course, one has to build on the institutions we have. But it's no coincidence that they cooperate very well, World Beyond War and International Peace Bureau. It's no coincidence that it's what one could call mainstream international peace organizations that are in the forefront of seeing this need.

#Pascal

Institutions are still important, you're saying?

#Tord Björk

Yeah, of course. And secondly, we had this discussion. It was a very funny discussion. In Barcelona, you see, this organization, this International Peace Bureau, has very, very little resources. You know, 140,000 euro for campaigning, working all over the world. And it's really tough. So one can meet physically only every third year. And then it's only 19 people who can come, you know. But that is so essential. And then we had a resolution by young Emily Molinari, Italian, at the IPB office, on popular movement cooperation. And I, of course, as an environmentalist, I said I was against it. I said that this will end up that we will have too much to do, which refers to what you say as well. So, because of course, the Via Campesina, which is this huge mass small farmers' union, as big as the trade union organizations, were not included.

And then we can add, you know, you start to add and add and add, and you get an endless list of movements. I said we have to look in a totally different way. We have to look at these movements which address the daily life problems of people in common, that have a local, national, international level, and are multi-issue interested, although they maybe have their core interests. And they are part of one movement. And we are different aspects of that one movement. And to my surprise, the former deputy general secretary of ITUC, who is on the board of IPB, immediately said yes. So, with other words, it's not at all impossible to create a sort of organic process where you start to create a culture rather than a new constitution and whatever, a new organization.

But you create a culture where it's equally important that someone writes a small letter to the editor about common security as introducing Nel Bonilla as the latest fantastic analyst. It's sort of, they are equally important, and you have to relate to practical daily life things. What we do in Sweden, for instance, is when we saw the problems with civil contingency after the COVID crisis and so on, there was a farmer who said, "Now we have to plant potatoes collectively together in the municipalities." And it took place in 150 out of 292 Swedish municipalities. This is a kind of totally different way of working. And it's completely—intellectuals don't understand it. They look at this system level sort of.

Olga Karach, who is the director of Our House, is a Belarusian organization in exile in Vilnius. When we have meetings, people talk about this system. And then she said, we have to look at this new phenomenon: that soldiers coming back from the front are harassing and violently attacking women in public. With other words, a direct thing that is happening, which one has to relate to. There is a sort of new step of violence in society, which is—you don't need to say that now you have to understand the whole system theory, etc. You can address issues, plant potatoes, be against this growing violence in society. And it can be combined somehow in understanding that all these things can fit into a sort of awakening, which has a practical component.

#Pascal

So, in a sense, you're arguing for more attention to the symptoms instead of constantly trying to go to the underlying or overarching system theory about it. Just, like, look at what's happening and try to dig deeper into what motivates people to do things.

#Tord Björk

Now, of course, you have to do this. But the problem is, we have to understand the movement has to be eclectic. I cannot say this is the main ideological frame that all of us—anti-capitalism or anti-growth or patriarchy—we have to live with. There are different sorts of ideological motivations.

#Pascal

True, but a movement also has to move somehow. And the question is how to do that without central leadership, right? And, you know, a lot of people have this hope that swarm intelligence and so on will coordinate, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But that's very—it's very hard. It's like, how to have a movement without, you know, ideological leadership, right? Without an overarching ideology, without a leadership structure, without the pyramid. But that's actually what's needed.

#Tord Björk

Once again, you're talking with a person who claims to have solutions to everything.

#Pascal

I like that.

#Tord Björk

In 1983, we had this group in Stockholm who was very active already in relation to the first UN Conference on the Environment and Development in Stockholm in 1972. And we have had a continuity since then, and this group is still active. But what we saw was that we had perfect ideas about changing state policies, world order, etc., but we didn't believe that states or market routines could help. What was necessary was a popular movement. And since then, we've been developing this very clearly. And we defined a popular movement in terms of combining trying to live as you preach and trying to change society, which, of course, is impossible. But that's exactly the core of why movements sort of develop all the time. That's sort of the dynamics in it. Because if you want to change society, you have to make your hands dirty. You have to build institutions.

But if you only build institutions and make your hands dirty, you will lose your soul. So this is repeating, this kind of what sort of builds the movements, and it's repeating. Then the second thing we did was to empirically analyze all global popular movements the last two and a half thousand years, and wrote a book about it. My friend Jan Miklund did. This is, of course, very much against academics who hate these kinds of attempts because they want to have neat, nice boxes, you know. So this is completely not understandable for academics. But, of course, some movements, they make

study circles out of it. But we've never been able to get a publisher, a normal publishing house, to do it. It's a print-on-demand thing. But that makes us fairly strong. And what happens is every time when the movement is in total crisis, they call upon us.

#Pascal

The last man standing, the one you can rely on, that he's still there. Or they are still there.

#Tord Björk

For some odd reason, we have some sort of answers to these things. And what we do is, at the same time as we have developed these contacts with the Transition Network in Sweden, with those people who do all these practical things and who are not scared. I mean, if we talk to our farmer company friends, "Oh, I don't like Putin, but I don't like John Deere and Monsanto to take over the black soil in Ukraine. I will sign. They will call me a Putinist. I give a damn shit." This is completely different from the middle class, you know, who are so scared of having a stand somehow.

But these kinds of people, they are not afraid of the PCC. And they have this practical base, and they are stronger than, you know, formal organizations. So that's where we develop, and that's where we have this idea: we have to go to Russia to meet the ecovillages. They have the biggest ecovillage movement in the whole world. Also, in Ukraine, it's very strong. And then, how to develop this need for peace on Earth, peace with Earth, we call it, which has now developed into—we started it in 2015 as a platform for an organization. Now it's festivals all over the place with these kinds of concepts, and it's sort of just culture, you know. That's another way of moving to awaken people.

So I don't think that if we sort of find that the essence is not to be against institutions or for them, it's the dynamics of the whole awakening and organizing that is possible now. Sometimes you get really wondering, but I think they are weak. They are not able, they are not creating hegemony anymore. And Nel Bonilla, I think, is very essential in analyzing this in terms of showing that competence is not interesting anymore in politics and many things, because then you have to deliver results. The top leaders have to be competent in networking with the other elites in other countries, what he calls the transatlantic elite.

And that sort of understanding that there is no master plan, there is no one actor who controls everything, but there is a sort of networking going on, which is exactly what happened with the free trade regimes and the privatization thing, the revolving doors, but also what I myself analyzed already in the 1990s in the NGOs, the same kind of process. The top leadership of NGOs, so human rights organizations, big established peace organizations, they have more in common with other top leaders of other civil society organizations and in political parties than they have with the base.

#Pascal

Yeah, yeah, I also completely agree. It's a sociological issue. The problem is we are 8 billion people on this planet, and we are condemned to self-organization. Unfortunately, we're not very good at organization. And then you have these networks and these groups and so on meeting. And of course, the money elite has more common interests than the middle-class and lower-class people. So it's natural. And then they start doing things. But in a sense, then the antidote to militarization and the poisoning of the planet is not so much to go into why is it happening and everything is bad, bad, bad, overthinking. It's trying to do something and just do. And in a sense, you know, as you said, you cannot do one—I mean, you constantly need to do both, right? Thinking and working. So you remind me very much of that Franciscan or Benedictine dictum, ora et labora, pray and work. You got to do both.

#Tord Björk

Yeah, yeah. And the same thing: you have to both do resistance and constructive solutions. And what we are lacking now very much is the constructive solutions. That's why I'm talking about planting potatoes or building friendship across East, West, and South, building friendship also [between] Ukraine, Russia, etcetera. So these kind of— which is, you know, a Gandhian concept, actually, very much— you know, total resistance against imperialists, but also building your own way of doing things. So that is what we're doing now with this peace on Earth, peace with the Earth concept, is that we're trying to go forward also in terms of constructive solutions.

#Pascal

I like that very much. Thank you for very practical advice as well. It's like, it doesn't matter. Plant potatoes, create friendship organizations. I mean, whatever it is that you're reasonably sure is at least not hurtful, that it's not a step back, it's actually a step forward. You don't need to be perfect. You don't need to have figured it out. It's just like, gauge it a little bit, probably not the wrong direction, and then take a step. That's very practical advice, actually, Tori. Maybe we are nearing the end here. People want to follow you or to hear more from you or to get in touch with you. What should they do? Where should they go?

#Tord Björk

Yeah, that's the problem, that I'm constantly organizing these things, so I have very little time to publish what I do on Substack. I have a Substack, but I haven't put anything there, more or less. So we have this YouTube channel, People in Peace, with more than 100 entries, and quite a few of them in English, you know, with titles like "You Cannot Eat Money." That is how we address, for instance, the whole EU trade policies when it comes to Mercosur and these agriculture issues. So there is a lot where we also have—we are addressing this issue that anti-racism has to be combined with anti-colonialism, which is the official UN concept, which is one way of doing it.

We also address, for instance, the need for opposing relativization of the Holocaust, which is used as a way to whitewash Western countries by claiming that the Soviet Union is equally genocidal as Germany, which is, of course, a total kind of way of distorting that the terror in the Soviet Union is equal to the terror that was done by the British in, for instance, Bengal in 1942 or so. So there's a lot of material there. And then we have a specific website for the Helsinki Plus 50. And it's, as some maybe know, you cannot use plus signs when you have an address. So it's plus in letters, Helsinkiplus.org.

That's where we try to publish material in this process concerning follow-up, which seems to be developing more and more. So that's two ways. Then, of course, International Peace Bureau, their main website is always useful in terms of things. For instance, there is a report about the World Social Forum, which took place now in Benin, where I was unfortunately deported. There was a bit of a problem to carry forward what we wanted to do down there because they closed down temporarily. But they opened it again, contrary to the NATO counter-summit, where all international delegates were deported.

#Pascal

Including the IPB chief, Sean Conner.

#Tord Björk

Yeah. So, with other words, IPB, Helsinki Plus 50, and this People's MP's YouTube channel are some ways of doing it. Hopefully, in the future, I will maybe put more text on Substack. I have this—well, it's funny—I produced it in 1998, this criticism against the whole NGO system. And people are looking every week. I get this from academia. People are looking into it from any quarter of the world, in Arab or Malaysia or wherever. So it seems like it's more interesting now, this kind of NGO criticism, because it's totally different, of course, from the kind of criticism that is used by Musk and these kind of people.

#Pascal

So I will make sure to put all of the links or addresses that you gave me into the description box below so you can find them. Please do reach out. And as Tord said, "Do something and think about it." Tord Björk, thank you so much for your time today.

#Tord Björk

Thank you, Asghar.

#Tord Björk

Max, nice to be with you.