

*There are those who struggle for a day, and
they are good.*

*There are those who struggle for a year, and
they are better.*

*There are those who struggle for many years, and
they are better still.*

But there are those who struggle all their lives:

These are the indispensable ones.

—*Bertholt Brecht*

Archipelago Day

Stolkholm is built
on an archipelago.

I walk through the city,
on this first morning
after my arrival,
and an image emerges, as if
through a dissipating fog:
of all those who struggle
in that Brechtian way—
residents of this
and so many other nations—
as a global archipelago,
tiny islands rising above
our vast human sea of avarice,
arrogance,
 self-absorption,
 corruption.

Later, on Katarinavagen, my new
Swedish friend, one fellow citizen
of this archipelago, proudly displays
the monument—an abstract
of upturned hands—dedicated
to five hundred of his countrymen
who fought, 1936 to 1938.
"One in three fell."
He reads a list of battles
from that historic civil war,
carved into its stone base,
 as I remember another stone monument,
 in a cemetery (Belfast,
 visited two years ago) carved

with the names of IRA fighters
who died in the hunger strike,
H-Block, Long Kesh Prison,
March to October 1981.

In the evening there is a demonstration
outside the Slussen metro
to mark International Women's Day.

Here I recall another demonstration
by students demanding education reform
the first morning of my visit to Athens
one year ago, where police in riot gear
did not mingle quite so politely
with the crowd.

And I find myself for a time
swept away by the memories: visits
to different islands in the global
revolutionary archipelago
over the years, points of land
actually suitable for habitation
by our humanity.

We can find a dozen of my comrades here,
a few hundred there, perhaps
as many as a thousand or more in nations
where the tradition remains strong:
collectives of those who are,
at the very least, "better still,"
some even rising to the rank
of "indispensable," dedicating
entire lives—seventy years
and counting after so many (Swedes
and others) gave up theirs in places
with names like Guadalajara,
Aragon,
Madrid.

How often have we been told
that our goal is impossible?
Yet I believe, still, that one day
we will do the impossible, and
after a number of decades living
in the new way high school students
will have to be assigned research papers
to explain why, in that distant past,
women required a special day to mark
their struggle for equality while some people—
rich enough to feed the entire world—
allowed everyone else to starve.

“What kind of human beings were these?”
they will ask their history teachers
who in turn have some difficulty
formulating a comprehensible reply.

And on a newly-designated date each year—
to make sure we do not forget—
many will gather: at the monument
on Katarinavagen or outside the Slussen
metro, on Falls Road in Belfast,
in Cyntagma Square (Athens),
Plaza des tres Culturas (Mexico City),
Zucotti Park (New York),
Tahrir Square (Cairo) or
Tienanmen (Beijing). Poems
will be read aloud composed
in the pre-revolutionary days by
those who were able, even then,
to envision the triumph of something
that could not be measured
strictly in dollar signs.

And a small child, listening, turns:
"Mommy, why do we call this holiday
'Archipelago Day'?"

Explain again, so I
can try to understand."

Steve Bloom
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