



Photo by Ariella Pahlke/Dal Photo

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deliver the product to the government. They never go out in the civilian market. Because of that, they don't know anything about marketing.

But it is also a matter of the capital equipment of the defence industries, it's a matter of the production processes, it's a matter of the kind of workers they employ. They have a much greater proportion of scientists and engineers than in the civilian industries. There are lots of such things to go into.

People have asked me now, "What did you propose to the defence industries in terms of civilian products?" I always answer "This is not my job - I am a politician."

It's up to the management themselves and the trade unions of the defence industries to sit together and try to look into the market situation and see what we can do, where do we find the place in the civilian market where we can sell our products.

The Gazette: A situation where you have the government saying that the industries must do this or must make this is always a situation in which you have an industry unhappy about what they're doing.

Thorsson: The industries must find their own ways and must define for themselves what they can do in such a situation. It is another matter that they should have financial support from the government, and this is my very firm view, because for whom do the defence industries work?

They work for the society in which they are existing; they work for the defence forces, the volume of which is decided by the government and parliament.

Because of that, if suddenly the base for their production is not there any longer, society has, in my view, a duty to financially support their efforts to find a civilian market.

The Gazette: When could some of the work you have done in conversion actually begin to take place?

Thorsson saying "speak out!"

Thorsson: It is my absolute conviction, that because of the negative economic effects of the arms race, which of course are most harmful to countries of the developing world, but which affect every country, rich or poor, because of that, the military powers will have to change their course of action. I think that will happen towards the end of the 1980s or the early 1990s.

Even the US cannot for very much longer bear the burden of the present arms race, a military buildup which I said is without exception in peacetime. The American economy is at present so harmfully affected by the arms race, with the budget deficits, with the trade deficits, by the balance of payments deficits, that the mightiest economy in the world has become, in 1985, the biggest net debtor nation in the world. All this is due to the arms buildup in the US.

If the citizens of the US do not want to see their country and their economy and their own future go to pieces economically, they will have to change their course.

The same is true about the Soviet Union, of course; the same is true of all the dominant military powers. I'm confident that the time will come when people will understand that this must not continue.

The Gazette: A lot of what you've been talking about what has to happen in order for anything close to world peace to come about depends on countries working together in unison.

The UN can be seen as a major part of that but a lot of people in the western world, especially in the US, have been attacking the UN of late and calling it an obsolete creature, something that never really did achieve any of its original purposes. They are in some ways looking at the UN as already dead, not having any kind of role.

You're really a supporter of the UN. What do you see that could revitalize the UN?

"Even the U.S. cannot bear the burden of the present arms race."

Thorsson: I'm indeed a very strong supporter of the UN. I've been working for the UN in various capacities for almost half of its lifetime.

When I look at this problem historically, I remember the early days of the UN where the US could command a comfortable majority for its line of action and there was never any talk of the "tyranny of the majority" at that time.

Since then, the situation has changed and the US and other powers of the first world find themselves facing a majority of developing countries. Now we hear talk from the US about the tyranny of the majority as soon as any decision is taken in the UN which goes against what the US shortsightedly considers their interests.

Because of that, we have the crisis of multilateralism - because the United Nations cannot do anything on their own. It's the member states who rule the UN. There is a feeling that the small and medium sized member states of the UN should stick together much more than they do at present to keep a line of thought and action which is beneficial to the multilateral way of cooperation.

We cannot accept anymore to find ourselves dominated by the omnipotence

of the superpowers - not in the economic field, not in the technological field and definitely not in the military field.

A lot of things should be done to strengthen the UN and have the superpowers accept the UN as an intergovernmental organization in which they have to follow the rules which they freely signed when they signed the UN charter.

From this conviction came a now worldwide undertaking called the Great Peace Journey which visited Canada a short time ago. The idea behind the Great Peace Journey is, first, the need to strengthen the UN to make it an instrument for international cooperation. The second is that if you study the charter of the UN, it opens with the words, "We, the peoples of the United Nations." It does not speak about "We, the member states," or "We, the governments." It speaks of "We, the peoples."

"We cannot accept anymore to find ourselves dominated by the superpowers."

This is the foundation of the United Nations.

So when governments act in the UN or when they send instructions to their delegations in various bodies of the UN to act on their behalf, they are acting on our behalf. Because of that, we the peoples have the right to ask them questions, "What are you doing?", "What are you not doing?", to really pursue the role the UN was presumed to play. And they have the obligation to answer.

I'm always saying that the governments are accountable to the peoples. This is the first time, I think, in the history of the peace organizations that the people have really understood that we cannot remain humble and meek and plead with the governments and ask them to do their best.

This is how the five questions to the governments came about relating to the various aspects of the work of the UN.

The Gazette: What would these five questions be and how many different countries have you travelled to so far on the peace journey?

Thorsson: Well, first, a few words about the five questions.

Three of them relate to disarmament and they are all built on the same formula, that is, "If all other UN member states undertake to do the same, are you willing to: 1) initiate legislation to have your defence forces remain on your own territory, 2) stop all production and storage of mass destruction weapons including nuclear weapons, 3) stop the transfer of weapons and weapons technology?"

The fourth question deals with development and we did not add that formula because we felt that governments should feel their obligation to see to it that resources are used in such a way that the basic human needs are satisfied by peoples everywhere.

The fifth question relates to article 33 of the UN charter, providing examples of means to solve conflicts by peace formulas: "Are you willing to abide by article 33 of the UN charter?"

So far, it hasn't gone too bad. In May 1985 we had five delegations travelling in Europe, putting the questions to governments in European capitals. With 27 governments approached, 21 answered

yes to all the five questions and an additional 3 said yes to almost all the questions. With these governments I have a continuous dialogue to make them understand what the questions are all about.

During the months of October and November, the second phase of the Great Peace Journey, we had delegations travelling to all the continents of the world. The delegations are composed not of Swedish and not of Europeans but of people from their own regions. We have subdivided the continents in a number of regions, built up an international network, have representatives from the regions themselves working out the preparations and going around to the capitals in that particular region.

There has been a delegation quite recently in Canada. I am a little doubtful of their answers but I am inclined to interpret them in a positive way.

But, on the other hand, I am not very pleased at the level at which the delegation was received in Ottawa. It was not the prime minister, not the foreign minister, it was the minister of state within external affairs and I think it should have been better received.

The third phase is a visit to the capitals of the superpowers. In early December, we shall visit Moscow and Washington and put the same questions to Mr Gorbachev and to Mr Reagan. From there we go to New York and the UN and we'll report to the Secretary General and to the permanent missions of the member states the results.

Then there will be a follow-up. We shall follow very closely because we are not naive enough to believe that if we get yes answers from all the member states, there will be a revolutionary new world overnight. It is a very tedious and patient work that is waiting. As we have requested written and signed answers by governments, we believe that by that they have committed themselves to something and we'll have to see to it that they keep their word in future international negotiations.

I feel this is a new approach. This is a new way by which people look to their governments and say, "What have you done?", "What are you going to do to fulfill your obligations?"

"We, the peoples, have a right to ask them 'What are you doing?'"

The Gazette: Sweden and Canada are both medium sized countries. Can Sweden and Canada play similar roles in disarmament?

Thorsson: It is my feeling that in earlier years, there were much closer ties between Canada and Sweden. We were a neutral country in the north of Europe. Canada was not a neutral country in North America, but it tried to follow an independent course and promote issues which were of extreme importance to the world community.

I'm convinced that Canadians still would like to continue that course but my own impression is that Canada has become more tightly bound to the policies of the United States than it was in earlier days. This, of course, is an obstacle. But, really, people are people. We have very close ties and we are thinking very much on similar terms.