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The Scandinavian Referenda

JOHN FITZMAURICE

John Fitzmaurice has studied European integration at the Institute of European Affairs of the University of Brussels and is preparing a thesis for Bristol University on political groups in the European Parliament. His article is based upon information gathered in Norway and Denmark during the recent referenda campaigns.

There were many similarities in the campaigns on entry into the EEC conducted in Norway and Denmark, and in both countries the effective decision was taken by referendum and not by the national Parliament. Yet the results of the referenda differed radically. In Norway 53% of the votes cast were against entry (turnout 77.6%); in Denmark one week later 64% of electors voted in favour of entry (turnout 90.1% — a national record). An analysis of the campaign in each country sheds an interesting light upon political attitudes in Norway and Denmark and upon the 'image' of the EEC in these countries.

Why a referendum?

In both countries a referendum was necessary for constitutional reasons. In Norway the constitution permits the transfer of sovereign powers to international institutions by parliament, providing that the *Storting* (Parliament) assents by a three-quarters majority. It was estimated that some 44 members of the *Storting* opposed entry, and 38 votes against would have provided a blocking quarter. Only a clear and unequivocal 'Yes' from the people would persuade a sufficient number of these members to vote for entry. But only in this way would a consultative referendum be 'binding' upon the *Storting*.

The Danish Constitution permits the transfer of sovereign power to international institutions by treaty. Treaties are made by the Crown, but require ratification where their implementation would need legislative action. If the *Folketing* does not assent to the transfer of sovereignty by a five-sixths majority the proposal must be submitted to a referendum, in which it is deemed to have been defeated if a majority of votes are cast against it, and the vote against constitutes at least 30% of the electorate. The final vote in the *Folketing* on the law ratifying the Treaty of Accession was 131 to 34 in favour; so the five-sixths majority required to avoid a referendum was not obtained.

The campaigns

In both countries the scales seemed heavily weighted in favour of entry, and in both it was supported by the largest and governing social-democratic parties.

In Denmark all the moderate non-socialist parties were in favour, indeed it was their government under Hilmar Baunsgaard which had initiated the negotiations with the EEC in July 1971. In Norway all the moderate parties except the *Senterpartiet* (the Centre Party, formerly the Agrarian Party) which had only 20 of the 150 seats in the *Storting*, supported EEC entry.

On the other hand, in Denmark, as in Norway, opinion in some parties was divided. At a special conference held in September 1972 the Danish Social Democrats voted 272-95 in favour of entry and 12 of the 70 Danish Social-Democrat MPs were to vote against. 11 of the 74 Norwegian Labour Party MPs voted against entry.

Five of the 27 Danish Radical MPs voted against joining the EEC, and in Norway both the *Venstre* (Liberals) and the Christian People's Party were split. In Denmark only the *Socialistisk Folkeparti* (Socialist People's Party), which had 17 of the 179 members in the *Folketing*, came out against entry, and they were joined by a number of small parties not represented in Parliament and which had together obtained only some 6% of the votes at the previous election.

Otherwise in both countries opposition was confined to a small number of extra-parliamentary groups. In both countries business and commercial organisations were in favour, as were the trades unions (although these had large dissenting minorities).

Two countries divided

Divisions of opinion within parties notwithstanding, most informed observers in Europe appeared to have been under the impression that the case for entry was overwhelmingly accepted, and that the negotiations with the Community had removed all real obstacles to entry. It soon became apparent however, at least in the Norwegian case, that in the opinion of the public vital economic interests had not been protected; and in both countries doubts arose over the non-economic issues. The result was an unexpectedly virulent and bitter campaign, which at times overstepped the bounds of tolerance and good taste. In Norway in particular, the campaign was in danger of degenerating into an exchange of recriminations and accusations of 'selling Norway out'. Not only political parties were split; so too were families and friendships. The campaign took on emotive and chauvinistic overtones (one slogan ran: "This is our country. No to EEC"). Hatred and fear of the Germans and anti-Catholic sentiment were revived. In Denmark the campaign was less virulent, but the same tendencies were noticeable.

In both countries a remarkable and unexpected prominence was given to non-economic issues,



and in both a broadly based *ad hoc* body, independent of the traditional parties, was formed to organise and coordinate opposition to EEC entry. This organisation, known in both countries as the *Popular Movement against the EEC*, acted as an 'umbrella' and rallying-point for all groups and individuals active in the opposition, regardless of ideology. The movement had affiliated to it political parties, committees of dissenters from political parties, *ad hoc* groups, student bodies and private individuals. It placed great emphasis on its popular origins, upon its status outside normal party politics, and upon its independence of the national 'Establishment', which tended to support entry. The Popular Movement played upon a widespread cynicism concerning politicians and those in authority, and sought to turn the campaign into a battle against the 'Establishment' which allegedly wished to impose entry into the EEC upon a reluctant people. The campaign was also depicted as a struggle between younger idealistic, and older materialistic citizens.

The economic issues

As is well known, northern Norway has a development problem and is dependent upon fisheries, and Norwegian agricultural price levels are higher than those fixed by the Common Agricultural

Policy of the Community; once the Norwegian and EEC markets are integrated certain price advantages and protections would have been lost. On economic grounds alone it was to be expected that the countryside would vote 'No'.

The situation in Denmark was quite different. Here there was no fisheries problem and the farming community and food processing industries stood to gain considerably from entry. Nor was there any regional problem to parallel that of Norway. Almost all social groups stood to gain from joining the EEC, and in Denmark the economic debate was about the size and nature of the economic benefits and the manner in which they should be distributed. Only the urban workers could have misgivings, and their apprehensions seem equally to have been based upon non-economic considerations.

The EEC 'Leviathan'

The opponents of entry depicted the Community as a dangerous 'Leviathan' which would devour the small states, and which was concerned only with the interests of the moneyed and the powerful. It was made out that the small man would not benefit, mainly because he would not have access to the decision-makers. The EEC was presented as an anti-democratic, remote, and bureaucratic



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entity. Was it not already hard enough to influence the national government? What then of the Commission in Brussels? Thus the spectre of distant rule was evoked — the EEC was alleged to be concerned only with economic growth, to be insensitive to human needs, and to be opposed to the model social legislation of Norway and Denmark.

Ideological opposition

For the socialist or *gauchiste* opposition the European Community was the economic arm of the Atlantic Alliance and part of the apparatus of a divided Europe. For these opponents the whole philosophy of the Treaty of Accession arose out of the need to overcome the increasing 'contradictions' within domestic capitalism. The free movement of labour, goods and capital was alleged to be essentially capitalistic in conception. EEC policies were said to benefit the capitalist and harm the worker by removing many of the controls which had been imposed upon the private sector by the national government, and to reduce the bargaining power of the working class. In Denmark these views were propagated by the Socialist People's Party, by the Communists and by the *Venstre Socialister* (Left Socialists), who had together obtained some 15% of the vote at the previous election, as well as by extra-parliamentary groups and by student activists. In Norway they were propagated only by students and other extra-parliamentary activists.

The 'Nordic Dream'

Nordic sentiment was a powerful weapon in the armoury of the opponents of entry. It was held that by joining the EEC Denmark and Norway would end Nordic cooperation, which was a promising alternative to entry. A strong Scandinavia, based on thorough-going Nordic cooperation, could pursue more acceptable social and economic policies, influence the EEC positively from outside (it was never explained why it should not do so from within) and act as a bridge between East and West. But the cultural and linguistic affinities of the Scandinavian countries (Finland excepted) merely obscure the fact that the fruits of Nordic cooperation over the last 150 years have been meagre. Apart from the creation of a unified labour market, from *ad hoc* cooperation in transport, and from the setting up of a consultative Nordic Council, nothing concrete has been achieved. The completely different economic structures of the four countries, the economic ties of Finland with the USSR, and the dominance of Sweden have impeded attempts at economic union, and diverging interests have prevented the most exposed Scandinavian countries, Denmark and Finland, from obtaining from Nordic cooperation the security which in their case is so basic a concern. It was after the collapse of negotiations for a Nordic Defence Union that Norway and Denmark joined NATO.

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Nationalist opposition

In both Denmark and Norway opposition to entry took in some cases an overt and virulently 'national' or patriotic form. Even the 'populist' arguments of the left exploited these sentiments. This 'national' theme was closely bound up with the 'Nordic' argument, and involved a dislike of great power politics, and the fear of large blocs which would increase tension in Europe and eventually lead to the formation of a 'European Army'. Sovereignty and independence were seen as priceless attributes which were not to be surrendered. This argument carried particular weight in Norway which has been independent only since 1905.

This was the more positive aspect of the 'nationalist' argument. The negative aspect was to be seen in the overt appeal to chauvinism. Much was made of the unlimited duration of the Rome Treaty; voters were reminded of their responsibility to the next generation; one placard showing a young child bore the caption: "I too want to be Danish when I grow up". A cartoon in *Information*, an intellectuals' newspaper, showed two children in a cart, one white, one of mixed race, and bore the caption: 'Our successors'.

Ebbe Reich, a well-known Danish author, argued in a television debate that language was the basis of any Community, and asked how Danes could have any effective understanding of or influence in a polygot community such as the EEC. Palle Lauring, a popular historian, compared the day of the referendum with the day the Nazis occupied Denmark.

In both Norway and Denmark (although to a lesser degree in Denmark, and to a surprisingly limited degree in frontier areas) overt anti-German sentiments were expressed, based upon memories of the Nazi occupation, and in the case of Denmark upon memories which went further back still. These sentiments also derived from fears of German land purchases, and of German domination of the EEC in general.

Religion

In Norway the evangelical wing of the Lutheran Church and in Denmark the *Indremission* (a low-church group with most of its support in rural Jutland) strongly opposed entry on the grounds that the EEC was a Catholic-dominated grouping with a cosmopolitan and materialistic outlook. Entry would threaten a certain rural attitude of mind and way of life (a way of life which has been satirised by Ibsen). Entry to the EEC would break down rural exclusiveness, and, in the opinion of these groups, would accentuate modern tendencies towards permissiveness and the breakdown of authority. One opposition grouping went so far as to proclaim: "A vote for the EEC is a vote against God". The appeal of such extremism was limited, but the force of this more general 'moral' and inward-looking opposition should not be underestimated.

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Arguments in favour of entry

The campaign in favour of entry was conducted in a lower emotive key. The principal argument deployed was that solid economic benefits could be expected in both industry and agriculture, benefits which were indeed essential to the achievement of the kind of social and human progress sought by the opponents of entry.

Supporters of entry condemned isolationist tendencies and appealed to idealism in their advocacy of progressive and peaceful cooperation in Europe. A great deal was made of the absence of a viable economic or political alternative to the EEC.

It was argued that refusal of full membership would lead in both Norway and Denmark to devaluation and widespread unemployment, and that these consequences could not be avoided by a Free Trade Agreement with the EEC. Indeed the prospect of economic disaster was at times over-emphasised.

It was pointed out that many of the fears of the opponents of entry were exaggerated or lacked foundation: much Nordic cooperation could continue inside the EEC; fears with regard to loss of sovereignty and domination by larger countries were groundless. Other small member states could live with the EEC, and its decision-making process was such as to provide them with ample safeguards. Further integration beyond the Rome Treaty was for the moment hypothetical; it would in any case require the members' unanimous consent and ratification by individual parliaments, and in Denmark it would even need a referendum.

Why different results?

As we have seen, the campaign on entry into the EEC took similar organisational and ideological forms in both Denmark and Norway. In both countries opponents of entry sought to create a broad populist coalition which would be composed of three groups: those who stood to lose from entry economically; the ideological left (the Marxist parties within both countries, a minority of social democrats, the student activists and some populist pressure group, e.g., the environmentalists); and the 'nationalist' opposition — rural conservatives, nationalists, and the evangelical movement, for whom defence of national sovereignty was paramount and who considered that entry would bring about an erosion of traditional values. In Norway the coalition proved to be a winning one, and it is significant that in Norway rural voters account for more than half the total (see Table). Naturally, those parts of the country which were most dependent upon farming and fishing, and which were at the same time conservative in outlook voted overwhelmingly against entry. The effect of the ideological opposition in the cities, together with the significantly lower urban turnout was to ensure that an insufficient number of 'Yes' votes would be cast in the urban areas to compensate for the 'No' votes from the countryside.

This disparate *bloc*, composed of those who sought to defend traditional moral, national and religious values on the one hand, and of the 'revolutionary' groups on the other hand, who were opposed to these very same values could agree on little or nothing beyond total opposition to the EEC, and they were indeed quite unconcerned about the consequences of their actions, being unable to agree on positive alternatives.

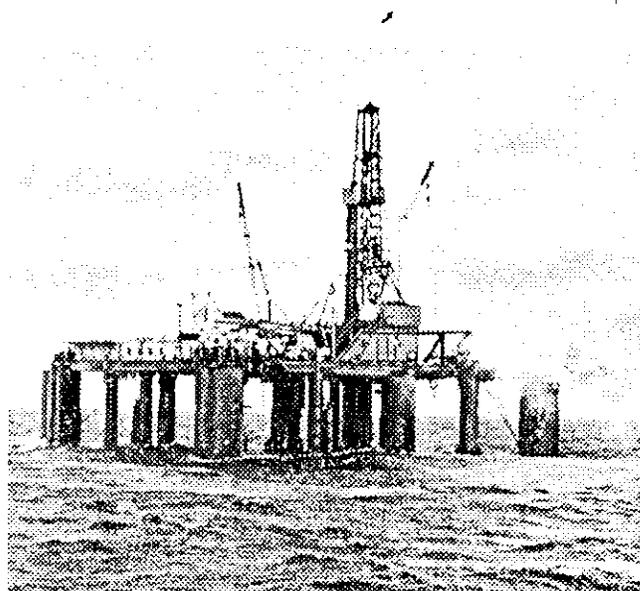
A similar coalition failed in Denmark. Here the decisive factor was the absence of a group which stood to lose economically. Unlike Norway the countryside in Denmark is neither starkly urban nor rural, but is for the most part a blend of the two; consequently it did not provide the basis for a strong nationalist or revivalist opposition. As in Norway the rural areas polled in force, but the Danish rural areas voted strongly in favour of entry, so that the weight of the 'No' in inner Copenhagen was offset.

Nor were the conditions for a broad socialist opposition to be found in Denmark, if one excepts the working-class 'ghettoes' of inner Copenhagen: outside Copenhagen the Marxist-orientated working class was too small. In Denmark the rural and the suburban voters saw themselves as beneficiaries of entry, and they were politically moderate. Indeed there is evidence to suggest that during the final period of the campaign in Denmark the opponents of entry, and in particular socialist opponents, overplayed their hand by the extremism of their propaganda and provoked a backlash amongst what is after all a tolerant, moderate, and unemotional people. Denmark therefore took what it saw to be a realistic decision, unclouded by sentiment or nationalism, and one which looked to the future rather than to the past. At the same time, both Denmark and Norway gave the European Communities notice that they cannot expect uncritical support in these countries, and that they must deliver the goods in human as well as economic terms, or else face relentless criticism.

Urban-rural population distribution in Norway and Denmark

Population of:	Percentage of total population	
	Norway	Denmark
The capital	12.5	26.8
The capital and three surrounding electoral districts	29.6	43.2
The capital; three surrounding electoral districts; fifteen next largest towns	44.3	51.4

Source: 1967 Population Estimates.



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