

Norway and the European Community:  
On the Outside Moving In?

by

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Prepared for presentation at the European Community Studies  
Association, Biennial Conference, May 22-24, 1991, George Mason  
University.

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## Abstract

After nearly two decades of silence, Norway has reopened debate over joining the EC. In 1972 the electorate rejected membership in a referendum after a divisive campaign. The wounds opened by the campaign were so deep that Norwegian elites refused to discuss publicly the possibilities for membership in the EC for over fifteen years.

Three events in the late 1980s have forced Norway to reopen the debate. The passage of the Single European Act encouraged a revitalization of the EC that EFTA countries could not ignore. The EC and EFTA began negotiations to establish a European Economic Area. The second event was the fall in oil prices in 1986 that reminded Norway of its economic vulnerability. Finally, the ending of the Cold War made it possible for Sweden to apply for membership. The Swedish application has added urgency to the debate in Norway.

The current debate is almost identical to the one in 1972. The supporters of membership come mainly from the urban business community. They are led by the Conservative party, a large portion of the Labor party, and the Progress party. The supporters are not well organized and the political parties do not work together. The opposition is made up of farmers, leftist intellectuals, and unions loyal to the Labor party. A large grassroots organization, Nei til EF, leads the opposition. Public opinion in Norway is split three ways between EC supporters, opponents, and the undecided.

The conflict in Norway is really between two competing visions of the country. Opponents see Norway as a shining example of how an industrialized democracy should be governed. Norway would lose its distinctiveness if it joined the EC. Supporters of membership believe Norway is too small to remain isolated. It must defend its vital interests by being part of the European unification process. The outcome of this debate is still in doubt.

On 17 January 1991, King Olav V, the "people's king" of Norway, died at the age of eighty-seven. For many Norwegians, King Olav represented all that was Norway. His valiant work for the resistance during World War Two exemplified the nation's love of freedom and independence; his world-class performances as an athlete and sportsman thrilled a nation of exercise enthusiasts and nature lovers; his kindness and compassion for those in need embodied the goals of the social democratic welfare state; and his easy, relaxed manner in the company of the world's great social and political figures symbolized the nation's coming of age as a full participant in international affairs. King Olav represented a wealthy, secure, and confident country; his passing, however, comes during a period of turmoil in Norwegian history where wealth and security seem in shorter supply. Ahead of the nation looms a major decision: will it join an expanding European Community, or will it reconfirm its decision of 1972 to stay out. Norwegian society is deeply divided on the question, and the outcome is very much in doubt.

At its core, the conflict over membership in the European Community (EC) is a fight between two clashing visions of Norway. EC opponents are inward looking. To them, Norway represents a refuge from a world of conflict, environmental degradation, economic exploitation, and poverty. To remain such a refuge, the country must maintain control of its internal affairs; to change the world it must protect its distinct society as an alternative for the international community to emulate. In contrast, supporters of Norwegian membership are outward looking. The world

they see is a tangle of interdependent relationships that already entwine tiny Norway. The country depends on others for its economic and military security and cannot afford to be isolated from its natural partners, cut off from the decision-making processes that profoundly affect Norway's well-being. Norway can only protect its interests from inside the system, which for European countries is the EC.

The reopening of the debate over Norwegian membership in the EC has sparked new clashes between champions of these two visions of Norway. For over fifteen years politicians have been hesitant to raise the EC question for fear of exposing deep wounds in Norwegian society. But the question is now being fully debated. Why has the issue reemerged at this time? What political coalitions are engaged in the debate? What is the likely outcome of the conflict? To answer these questions we begin by examining the last public debate of the issue.

#### THE 1972 REFERENDUM

On 25 September 1972 the Norwegian electorate rejected membership in the European Community, 53.5 to 46.5 percent, in a national consultative referendum. The event brought to a swift conclusion a fitful postwar process that seemed sure to end in Norwegian membership.

In the two decades following World War Two, Norway generally followed Britain's lead in relations with the European continent. Britain, then Norway's largest trading partner, formed the

European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in the late 1950s as an alternative to the European Economic Community. Norway joined the new group without hesitation. When Britain announced in July 1961 that it intended to apply for membership in the Common Market, Norway chose to do likewise, but made clear its intention to accept a Community invitation only if Britain did so. Charles de Gaulle vetoed British entry in January 1963, ending Norway's first attempt to join the European Community.

Norway's second chance to join the EC came in 1967 when it again followed Britain in applying for membership. France's second veto came at the end of 1967, before negotiations for membership could begin, but this time Norway left its application in Brussels and waited for the EC to make the next move. The resignation of Charles de Gaulle in April 1969 cleared the way for Community expansion, and negotiations with four countries-- Britain, Denmark, Ireland, and Norway--began during the summer of 1970. The Norwegian Storting (parliament) overwhelmingly reaffirmed its commitment to negotiations in 1970, but by 1971 the membership issue had become so divisive for the non-socialist coalition government, led by Prime Minister Per Borten of the agrarian Center party, that the coalition was forced to hand over power to a minority Labor government. Thus, it was left to Labor to conclude negotiations and lead the nation into the EC. That never happened. In September 1972, the voters rejected membership after a campaign so divisive that the EC issue, once settled, did not appear on the public agenda for the next seven-

teen years.

Why did the referendum fail when all signs appeared to point to a smooth entry into the Community? Observers have offered three explanations of the event, by no means mutually exclusive. The first emphasizes the social, economic, and political cleavages within the Norwegian electorate.<sup>1</sup> According to this view, Norway divided along three traditional faults: center-periphery, urban-rural, and right-left. Analysis of the referendum results and a wealth of polling data revealed that the farther away a voter was from the industrial and political center of the country--Oslo--and the farther away from an urban center of any type, the more likely the person would vote against membership. In addition, those who identified with left-wing parties or causes, including those in the left wing of the Labor party, were more likely to oppose membership. Thus on the issue of Norwegian membership in the EC, an unusual coalition of rural Norwegians and leftists, united by the belief that Norway's sovereignty was threatened by membership, stood opposed, while urban Norwegians of the right and center-left supported Norway's entry to the Community as the only alternative to economic and, possibly, military isolation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Henry Valen, "No to EEC," Scandinavian Political Studies, Vol. 8 1973, pp. 214-26; and Daniel Heradstveit, "The Red/Green Alliance in Norwegian Politics: A Strange Partnership," in Norway's No to Europe ed. Nils Ørvik, International Studies Association, Occasional Paper No. 5, 1975.

<sup>2</sup>For a complete analysis of the arguments presented by both sides at the time, see Hilary Allen, Norway and Europe in the 1970s (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1979), chap. 6.

The second explanation for the 1972 result focuses on the role of the two competing organizations in the referendum campaign: The People's Movement against Norwegian Membership in the Common Market (Folkebevegelsen mot norsk medlemskap i Fellesmarkedet), and Yes to EC (Ja til EF).<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, the success of the "People's Movement" in mobilizing a majority of voters against a policy advocated by most of the political, economic, and press elites in the country is testimony to its organizational strength. With the strong financial backing of the agricultural organizations, the People's Movement began its activities in late 1970, long before the pro-marketeters organized. The organization sought the active participation of all the disparate groups opposing membership and offered many of them positions on the board of directors. The People's Movement employed a simple, but very effective strategy: conduct an information campaign that described the issues in stark, uncomplicated terms, and spread the word largely through one-on-one contacts. Thus, with a clear message and evangelistic zeal, this cross-party, extraparliamentary, anti-establishment, grassroots organization skillfully led an unlikely coalition to victory.

As the result leads one to suspect, the pro-marketeters were not as well organized. Yes to EC had the support of the politi-

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<sup>3</sup>See Haakon Lei, "Hva var det egentlig som skjedde?" International Politikk, No. 4b, 1972: 783-94; Allen, 106-07; Daniel Heradstveit, "The Red/Green Alliance," 13-14; and David L. Larson, "Selected Foreign Policy Elites," in Norway's No to Europe ed. Nils Ørvik, International Studies Association, Occasional Paper No. 5, 1975.50-51.

cal and economic establishment, and spent more than twice the amount of money spent by the People's Movement. The organization, however, failed to mobilize all of its natural constituency, including many city-dwellers, big farmers, and Labor party supporters, who either voted with the opposition or joined the 21 percent of the eligible citizens (very large by Norwegian standards) who did not go to the polls.<sup>4</sup> Part of the problem was Yes to EC's late start (March 1972), but this merely reflects the overconfidence of the political elites who never seemed to doubt that the referendum would pass. Perhaps a more important reason for the pro-marketeers' inability to put together a competitive campaign organization was the unwillingness of the two main parties backing membership, the Conservatives and Labor, to work together. The parties were unable to bury their rivalry to concentrate on their common interest. Thus, while the Conservatives stressed the benefits of EC membership for Norwegian business, the Labor party was talking about building a socialist Europe. To make matters worse, the Labor party itself was divided.

The division within the governing Labor party is the third major explanation offered for the failure of the referendum.<sup>5</sup> On the surface, the party was united in its support for membership, with party leaders and major party organs, including the Central

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<sup>4</sup>Allen, Norway and Europe, 160.

<sup>5</sup>Nils Ørvik, "The Norwegian Labor Party (NLP) and the 1972 Referendum," in Norway's No to Europe ed. Nils Ørvik, International Studies Association, Occasional Paper No. 5, 1975, 19-41.



Committee and the National Convention, consistently calling for Norwegian entrance into the Community. But just below the surface the party was deeply divided. Two Labor party groups, the youth organization (AUF) and the Workers Information Committee (AIK), openly defied the party leadership and became active in the People's Movement without sanction from the party. In addition, Einar Gerhardsen, long-serving prime minister and grand old man of the party, spoke from the floor at the 1972 National Convention and said that "one can be a member of the Labor party and vote for the Labor party, even if one votes 'no' at the referendum."<sup>6</sup> This statement seemed to contradict the party's traditional emphasis on loyalty to party positions determined by the Convention and opened the door for many Labor voters to vote "no" with a clear conscience. Approximately 44 percent of self-identified Labor voters did in fact vote "no."<sup>7</sup> Thus, while the Labor party leaders were presenting a united front to the voters in support of EC membership, rank-and-file members were rebelling.

Each explanation of the result of the 1972 referendum emphasizes some aspect of the deep divisions in Norwegian society brought about by the campaign. Norwegians were not eager to irritate these wounds, so the EC issue was scarcely broached in public for over a decade and a half. Changes, however, were

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<sup>6</sup>Sidsel Bauck, "Nei-velger er også A-velger," Arbeiderbladet, 11 September 1972, quoted in Ørvik, "The Norwegian Labor Party," 36.

<sup>7</sup>Larson, "Selected Foreign Policy Elites," 38.

taking place during this period of public silence that once again forced the issue to the top of the national agenda.

#### EUROPE, OIL, AND THE COLD WAR

The failure of the referendum in 1972 left Norway with only one alternative regarding the EC: to follow the other EFTA countries and conclude a free trade pact with the Community. This is what the anti-marketeters had called for all along, and their objective became a reality on 1 July 1973 when the new trade agreement came into effect. The remainder of the 1970s seemed to verify the anti-marketeter's claim that a free trade settlement would be better than EC membership. The Community sank into recession while Norway, bolstered by development of newly discovered offshore oil reserves, pursued expansionary policies to avoid the stagnation experienced on the Continent and in Britain. Economic developments in the 1970s thus seemed to prove that Norway could enjoy the fruits of freer trade with the EC without losing its ability to pursue an independent economic policy at home. This perception did not last far into the next decade.

During the 1980s, three major events forced Norway to reevaluate its relationship to the EC: the passage of the Single European Act, the oil price collapse, and the ending of the Cold War. These events changed Norway's external environment and cast doubt on its ability to maintain the status quo. The political and economic elites in the country responded to the new situation

by breaking the long silence and beginning the debate now in progress.

The first significant event that changed Norway's external circumstances was the revitalization of the European Community encouraged by the signing of the Single European Act in February 1986. The Single Act represented the EC's new commitment to establishing a true internal market for goods, services, capital, and labor by the end of 1992, and it set in motion the machinery for accomplishing the task. But while the Single Act serves as a convenient starting point for many discussions about the quickening pace of Community integration, the renewal of the EC began several years before its passage. The first stirrings of renewal came early in the 1980s, when European elites became convinced that a United States in relative decline and a Japan in absolute ascendance demanded a strong European response. Separate European countries could no longer enjoy the luxury of national autonomy in all things, but would have to band together if Europe was to protect its interests in an increasingly competitive world.<sup>8</sup>

This new desire to compete in the world as a unified actor did not go unnoticed by the Norwegians and their EFTA partners. The EFTA countries were concerned that changing conditions both inside and outside the EC might result in higher common barriers to non-EC goods. Such a scenario would profoundly affect EFTA

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<sup>8</sup>See Wayne Sandholtz and John Zysman, "1992: Recasting the European Bargain," World Politics, October 1989, 95-128.

countries, including Norway, which sends over 70 percent of its exports to the EC<sup>9</sup> (just under 50 percent if petroleum is excluded<sup>10</sup>). To minimize such a threat to their economies, the EFTA countries initiated a set of negotiations with the EC for the purpose of creating a European Economic Area (EEA)<sup>11</sup> that would tie the two trading blocs even closer together. The specific objectives of this endeavor were laid down in the Luxembourg Declaration of 1984. The subsequent talks between the two sets of trading partners resulted in, among other things, closer cooperation in research and development and the removal of several obstacles to trade in industrial goods.

The EC passed the 1986 Single Act before EEA talks were completed, thus changing the context of the negotiations. The Single Act committed the EC to creating a "European Union" capable of standing up to the United States and Japan--a vision which proved "seductively compelling" to countries outside the EC.<sup>12</sup> EFTA nations were aware of the tremendous economic ad-

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<sup>9</sup>Martin Sæter and Olav F. Knudsen, "Norway," in The Wider Western Europe: Reshaping the EC/EFTA Relationship, ed. Helen Wallace (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), 180.

<sup>10</sup>Margarida Ponte Ferreira, "Structural Changes in Norway's Trade--The Impact of Integration," NUPI rapport Nr. 139, December 1989, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 12.

<sup>11</sup>The EEA was originally called the European Economic Space (EES), but was changed to European Economic Area in 1990.

<sup>12</sup>Helen Wallace and Wolfgang Wessels, "Introduction," in The Wider Western Europe: Reshaping the EC/EFTA Relationship, ed. Helen Wallace (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), 1.

vantages of being in the single market<sup>13</sup> and feared the economic, political, and even military consequences of isolation.<sup>14</sup> The gains achieved through recent negotiations now looked inadequate from the EFTA countries' perspective; their new goals were to gain inclusion in the single market, and expand the scope of EC-EFTA cooperation, all of which meant redefining the EEA.

A comprehensive and ambitious attempt to create a broader EEA began in early 1989 when Jacques Delors invited EFTA to join the EC in a new round of negotiations. EFTA responded positively with its Oslo Declaration of March 1989. This declaration committed EFTA countries to pursuing with the EC the "fullest possible realization of free movement of goods, services, capital and persons, with the aim of creating a dynamic and homogenous European Economic [Area]."<sup>15</sup> Cooperation would also be expanded

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<sup>13</sup>For the economic advantages of the single market for EFTA countries see Paul Krugman, "EFTA and 1992," Occasional Paper No. 23, European Free Trade Association, June 1988.

<sup>14</sup>The Norwegians, for example, recognized the obvious importance of the single market to their natural gas industry, which physically links Norway to its major customers in the EC. The restructuring of the natural gas industry in Europe could bring massive benefits to Norwegian producers, but as a non-member in the EC, Norway has limited influence over crucial decisions made in Brussels. See Janne Haaland Matlary, "Norway's New Interdependence with the European Community: The Political and Economic Implications of Gas Trade," NUPI rapport Nr. 141, March 1990, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs; and Janne Haaland Matlary, "The Consequences for EFTA of the Internal Energy Market," in The Wider Western Europe: Reshaping the EC/EFTA Relationship, ed. Helen Wallace (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991).

<sup>15</sup>Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Oslo Summit: Meeting of the EFTA Heads of Government, Oslo, 14-15 March 1989, Declaration," 15 March 1989.

in areas such as research and development, education, environmental policy, and economic and monetary policy. To facilitate this deeper and wider relationship between the two trading blocs, EFTA countries agreed to explore more structured relations with the EC that would mean strengthening EFTA as an organization and establishing joint EC-EFTA institutions to govern the EEA. How much decision-making power the EC would grant EFTA was a major issue for the talks.

Negotiations toward a redefined EEA began formally in the summer of 1990. Broad agreement has been reached on most of the economic issues, but fishing regulations and institutional issues, particularly the establishment of a new court for adjudicating disputes, have stalled progress. If a final agreement can be reached, EFTA is likely to gain representation on EC policy-making committees, but will not exercise voting rights. Participants hope the details of this arrangement can be worked out by the signing deadline of 24 June 1991.

For Norway, the most recent EEA negotiations represent a minimum response to changes within the EC. The talks offer the opportunity to reap the economic benefits of a large internal market without the sacrifices of sovereignty associated with full participation in the grander political vision of the EC. Many Norwegians would be satisfied with such an arrangement, but others wonder if the EEA would provide Norway with enough influence over EC policy to protect its vital interests. Economic problems caused by the collapse of oil prices in 1986 have

heightened awareness of Norway's vulnerability to external economic conditions. The price collapse, the second major event of the 1980s, helps explain why the EEA does not serve as a convenient compromise between supporters and opponents of Norwegian membership.

During the 1970s, Norway used petroleum revenues and offshore development to avoid the dramatic rises in unemployment experienced in EC countries. The price of this policy was inflation rates that remained above the OECD average and an erosion of the country's international competitiveness. High crude prices and rising oil exports in the early 1980s produced a large Norwegian current account surplus that masked a rapidly growing trade deficit in traditional (i.e., non-petroleum) products. A petroleum-padded krone hurt Norwegian exports of both primary products and manufactured goods, but manufactures were made even more uncompetitive by large wage increases that outstripped raises in other trading partners by 25 percent.<sup>16</sup> Higher wages, negative private savings rates, and a strong currency further increased the traditional trade deficit by fueling a consumer spending boom on imports that began in 1984 and peaked in mid-1986. Never before had Norwegians enjoyed such a high standard of living, but few realized how quickly it all could come tumbling down.

The long boom ended with the crash of crude oil prices in

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<sup>16</sup>Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD Economic Surveys: Norway, 1988/1989 (Paris: OECD, 1989), 49.

1986. This sent the total trade balance into deficit, erased 60 percent of the government's oil income, and prompted severe government austerity measures. No longer able to rely on oil to shield the economy from external competition, the Norwegians were now forced to stem the flow of imports and dramatically improve the competitiveness of its non-petroleum industries. Wage increases were dramatically curtailed; the tax system was altered to discourage consumer borrowing; and government subsidies to industry were cut. The result was a deep recession that slowed domestic spending to a crawl and sent unemployment to 7.2 percent, astronomical by Norwegian standards.

Aside from the real economic consequences, the oil market collapse deeply affected the morale of the Norwegian elite. Prior to 1986, Norwegians were confident that oil and gas reserves would protect them from the uncertainties of the international economy. They believed that proper management of their petroleum resources, meaning strict government control of offshore field development and petroleum production, could not only insulate the domestic economy from global down-turns, but could help Norway achieve a "qualitatively better society."<sup>17</sup> While Norwegian policy makers were aware that such an optimistic forecast depended upon a favorable oil market, they had never

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<sup>17</sup>Norway, Ministry of Industry, Parliamentary Report No. 25 (1973-74) Petroleum Industry in Norwegian Society, 15 February 1974, official translation, 6\*; see also Brent F. Nelsen, The State Offshore: Petroleum, Politics, and State Intervention on the British and Norwegian Continental Shelves (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991), chap. 3.



known the price of oil to go anywhere but up since 1971 (when production started) and had little reason to believe it would not continue to do so. The crash of 1986 shattered these illusions, and forced the country to reevaluate its ability to go it alone in the international market. Feeling vulnerable, Norwegians had further reason to watch with great interest developments taking place on the Continent. For the strongest supporters of EC membership, the economic crisis only proved that Norway needed more economic protection than the EEA could provide. The EEA could be a halfway house, but only membership could grant Norway a voice and a vote at the decision tables that really mattered. Thus, membership remained on the national agenda.

The dynamic changes taking place within the EC and an externally induced economic catastrophe were enough to get Norwegians thinking seriously again about EC membership. But the third event of the 1980s, the collapse of the Soviet Union as a political and military threat to Western Europe and the ending of the Cold War, added additional pressure to decide the issue quickly. The effect has been indirect. The elimination of East-West conflict has made Sweden's neutrality pointless and Finland's special relationship with Moscow obsolete; the way is now open for these two countries to apply for membership. Sweden will do so in the summer of 1991; Finland may not be far behind.

The possible EC membership for Sweden in particular has increased the possibility that Norway will be isolated from its closest ideological, as well as physical, neighbors. The Nordic

countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden have been tied together by history, culture, language, and social democratic principles. Close economic and political cooperation between some or all of these countries has been attempted on several occasions, without lasting success in this century. The divisive force has always been foreign policy. Postwar attempts at Nordic Union, the last being the Nordek negotiations of 1968-70, have faltered when the NATO ties of Norway, Denmark, and Iceland clashed with the neutrality of Sweden and Finland.<sup>18</sup> All of this has now changed with the elimination of the Soviet threat, but a Nordic solution seems just as remote as ever. The best chance for Nordic union now is if all of the countries form an interest bloc within the EC. This, of course, is not what Nordic unionists had in mind. Nevertheless, the Swedish dash for membership has put great pressure on Norway to decide whether it will join its neighbor or not. Thus, a sense of urgency has enveloped the current debate in Norway as activists on both sides sense a climax approaching.

#### THE CURRENT DEBATE

A revitalized EC, low oil prices, and the end of the Cold War made continuation of the conspiracy of silence in Norway untenable. By late 1988 the new debate was in the headlines as some of the political parties began taking positions in preparation for the 1989 general election. The debate took on a new

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<sup>18</sup>Allen, Norway and Europe, 64-68.

significance, however, when it brought down the right-center government of Conservative Prime Minister Jan P. Syse. After the 1989 elections, three nonsocialist parties (the Conservative, Christian People's, and Center parties) formed a coalition on the basis of a joint program that did not address the EC issue. When the Center party, a staunch opponent of membership, took issue with the government over its negotiating position at the EEA talks, the coalition began to unravel. The Center party withdrew from the government in October 1990, and Gro Harlem Brundtland and the Labor party returned to power after a year-long hiatus. Prime Minister Brundtland lost no time in making clear her intention to set Norway on the track toward EC membership. This put the issue firmly at the top of the Norwegian agenda.

To the observer of Norwegian politics, who is acquainted with the 1972 referendum, the current debate looks strangely familiar.<sup>19</sup> The arguments are nearly identical, the coalitions almost the same, even many of the prominent activists are recognizable, if a bit grayer. In short, the old debate continues; only the outcome is uncertain.

The societal cleavages deepened by the EC referendum have not healed in the nearly two decades since 1972. The fundamental splits between center and periphery, city and countryside, right and left still structure the EC debate. Thus, the Norwegian political and business establishment, supported by cosmopolitan

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<sup>19</sup>Olav Riste, "The Nordic Angle II: Norway--the Reluctant European," The World Today, November 1988, 194.

urbanites, calls for Norwegian membership, while primary producers in the country again link arms with the hard left to oppose it. As in 1972, a variety of arguments from both sides are offered, with many of the positions reflecting the particular concerns of various groups within the coalitions.

The coalition that supports membership is still a cursed monster with two heads. The most vocal political champion of the EC continues to be the Conservative party, although business associations have also been vociferous in their support of membership. As the establishment party of the right, the Conservatives speak for much of the business community, particularly industries most dependent on external markets. The party believes the best way for Norway to secure the benefits of the single market and maintain a say in the defense of Europe is to join the EC. Unfortunately for the Conservatives, they are only able to govern in coalition with two parties that represent rural constituencies opposed to membership. Such a coalition, like the one led by Jan P. Syse, effectively restrains the party from actively seeking membership, even when in power. Conservatives, no longer bound by coalition partners, and now energetically led by Kaci Kullmann Five, are in a position to express more wholehearted support for the EC, but must wait for the Labor party to act.

The other leader of the coalition in support of membership is the premier party on the left, the Norwegian Labor party. Both Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland and the Labor party

secretary, Thorbjørn Jagland, have been staunch supporters of EC membership for primarily the same reasons as the Conservatives.<sup>20</sup> But the party is again divided, and this time the opposition consists not only of the left wing (as in 1972) but also includes the major unions. Union leaders, already feeling the effects of international competition as factories close and wage rates fall, are openly opposed to taking Norway into a single market that will allow for companies to flee high-cost Norway for low-cost areas like Portugal or Greece. Pro-EC Labor leaders counter that that is already taking place; what will help the worker is the establishment, with Norwegian help, of a Community-wide welfare state that protects wages and benefits of the European laborer. So far the party leadership has controlled the argument by postponing full debate until the EEA agreement is signed. The plan is then to conduct an intra-party discussion that will lead to a unified party position in late 1992, in time for the 1993 general election campaign. Despite Gro Harlem Brundtland's strong stand in favor of membership, it is not inconceivable that the Labor party will refuse to endorse her position. What effect that will have on the Labor party as a whole is unknown.

Even if Labor somehow draws its factions together, the pro-EC side still faces significant organizational disadvantages. The Conservatives and Labor are no more willing to work together now than they were nineteen years ago, and neither wants anything

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<sup>20</sup>See Thorbjørn Jagland, Min Europeiske Drøm (Oslo: Tiden Norsk Forlag, 1990).

to do with the other major party in favor of membership, the Progress party. The Progress party, a post-1972 phenomenon that controls twenty-two seats in the Storting, is a right-wing populist party with a strong anti-immigrant flavor. It indeed advocates EC membership for Norway, although its enthusiasm is tempered by some fear among its rank-and-file that joining the EC will exacerbate Norway's current immigration problems. Nevertheless, it too will campaign for membership alongside Labor and the Conservatives if a referendum on membership is called.<sup>21</sup> So far no extra-party organization has been established to campaign for EC membership, and while a complacency reminiscent of 1972 may be the main cause of the delay, political differences among the supporters of membership certainly play a part. These differences, however, are not nearly as great as the differences between members of the coalition opposing membership, differences they have overcome.

As in 1972, farmers have allied with intellectual leftists to form the core of the opposition. For farmers and fishermen in the valleys and fjords of Norway, membership in the EC is a question of economic survival. These primary producers, through powerful organizations like the Norwegian Farmer's Association (Norges Bondelag) and the Center party, argue that they could not survive the flood of cheap agricultural and fish imports from Europe if import barriers and farm subsidies were reduced to

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<sup>21</sup>While no constitutional requirements exist, all of the major parties agree that a referendum on the question of membership will have to be held before Norway can enter the EC.

conform with current EC agricultural policy. This, they argue, would signal the end of Norway's "district policy" that has sought to preserve rural communities for national defense and cultural reasons. Deprived of the ability to make a living, primary producers would have to give up their farms and boats and move to the cities. Such an exodus would not only displace people, but would also depopulate large portions of strategically sensitive northern Norway, thus posing a security threat. In addition, the destruction of the economic foundation of rural Norwegian society and the intense cultural pressure from the Continent would, in their view, deal a death blow to traditional culture. Migration to the cities and the Europeanization of Norway would mean the end of rural dialects, ancient handicrafts, and other distinctive characteristics of "Norwegian" life. It would also mean further secularization, a particular concern of conservative Christians who are represented by the Christian People's party.

Allied with the rural populace in the Norwegian periphery are a variety of leftists, environmentalists, feminists, unionists, and young people--mainly supporters of the Socialist Left party, or the left-wing of the Labor party--who fear the EC will undermine the social democratic gains already realized in Norway. The Norwegian welfare state, democratization of the workplace, environmental regulations, and women's rights are all threatened by a less progressive European Community that would surely force Norway to halt or even reverse its march toward a

better quality of life. Overwhelmed by big capital, the exploitative demands of the market, and unmitigated economic growth, Norway will lose its distinction as a society that cares for its people and its environment. Furthermore, these groups argue that the political arrangements within the Community will surely entangle Norway in a web of military alliances that will constrain Norwegian foreign policy even more than NATO already does. Talk within the EC of political union and a common foreign policy further convinces these Norwegians that the nation, if a member, would lose its ability to be a bridgebuilder and moral voice in the international community.

The opponents of membership are once again far ahead of EC supporters in organizing a grassroots campaign. In November 1988, with the strong financial backing of the primary producer organizations, opponents of membership launched a group called "The Information Committee on Norway and the EC" (Opplysningsutvalget om Norge og EF) that immediately began disseminating information and establishing local chapters. Under the energetic leadership of Professor Kristen Nygaard, a veteran of the 1972 campaign, the organization renamed itself "Nei til EF" (No to the EC) in late 1990, elected a board of directors that represents the many disparate factions within the group, launched an aggressive drive to bring its dues-paying membership up to 50,000 or more by September 1991, and started a monthly newspaper. It has also sponsored action days that have featured marches and the distribution of leaflets. The group surprised nearly everyone by



turning out large numbers of supporters at this year's traditional May Day marches around the country.

The opposing sides on the EC question are directing their arguments toward an evenly divided electorate. Roughly one third of the voters falls into each of three categories: those who will vote "yes," those who will vote "no," and those who are undecided. When the undecided are asked to indicate which direction they are leaning, the no side wins by a significant margin.<sup>22</sup> Political party loyalists respond to the pollsters as expected. Center and Socialist Left party voters are most opposed to membership, with Christian People's party supporters right behind. The Conservative party supporters are most in favor of membership, with Progress party voters only slightly less supportive. The Labor party most closely reflects the overall electorate with a third favoring membership, a third opposed, and a third undecided. All of the parties' support the EEA negotiations, but the opposition forces are strongly opposed to making an EC-EFTA agreement Norway's first step into the Community. Thus, if an EEA agreement is eventually signed, the way will be cleared for a direct confrontation between the opposing groups over membership.

#### SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE

What happens in the near future regarding Norway's member-

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<sup>22</sup>Morten Malmø, "Nei-siden i siget," Aftenposten, 19 January 1991.

ship in the EC depends greatly on the outcome of the EEA negotiations. If the talks remain deadlocked the Labor government will have little choice but to follow Sweden in applying for membership. This would not guarantee Norwegian membership, but it would make it more likely that undecided voters would lean toward joining the EC to avoid Norwegian isolation.

If the EEA talks are concluded by June 1991, Norway will be in a better position to take its time to decide whether or not to pursue full membership. With the Norwegian political situation as confused as it is, it seems unlikely that Labor will be challenged in government before the 1993 election. That election will surely be fought over the EC issue, although other issues may cloud the situation enough to keep it from becoming a referendum on EC membership. A special referendum on the question will be held, perhaps in late 1994 if the 1993 election produces a new Labor government run by a still-united Labor party. If the 1993 campaign results in a severely divided Labor party and an anti-EC government, perhaps led by the Center party, a referendum on membership would be unlikely soon.

Assuming an EEA agreement can be reached this year, Norway faces three realistic scenarios in the medium term. Norway could find itself a participant in a new Nordic solution for the countries of northern Europe. Norway, along with Sweden, Finland, and Iceland may find the EEA agreement satisfactory and reject EC membership as a possibility for the immediate future. This solution may, in fact, be the first choice of most Nor-

wegians. A second scenario would be Norwegian isolation where Norway rejects membership in a referendum but is left alone as Sweden and Finland join the EC. While this may not be the most desirable outcome for Norway, it may be the most likely given the present international and domestic climate. The final scenario would be Norwegian membership in the European Community, probably joining Sweden, Finland, and Denmark to form an EC Nordic bloc. For this to occur a large number of Norwegians will have to be persuaded to support membership over the protests of a highly visible, enthusiastic, and increasingly powerful Nei til EF. EC supporters have good reason to fear that this will not happen.

Norway must decide which vision of the country will guide its policy makers into the twenty-first century. The country will either remain a shining city on a northern hill for the world to admire and, perhaps, imitate, or it will come off the mountain and join its European neighbors at work in the valley. For Norwegians, the choice is difficult. To their credit, they are now facing the question while most of their options are still open.