

'Stabbing themselves in the back' from Die Welt (27 September 1972)

Caption: On 25 September 1972, through a referendum, Norwegians oppose the accession of their country to the European common market. Two days later, German daily newspaper Die Welt considers the reasons for this refusal. .

Source: Die Welt. Unabhängige Tageszeitung für Deutschland. Herausgeber Kremp, Herbert. 27.09.1972, Nr. 225. Hamburg: Die Welt. "Dolchstoß von eigener Hand", auteur:Schützsack, Axel , p. 4.

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Stabbing themselves in the back

By Axel Schützsack

Currently in Oslo

Norway's 'No' to the EEC — setback for Europe, defeat for the country

The die has been cast in Norway. The margin of victory of opponents of accession in the EEC referendum was higher than expected, the defeat of its supporters worse than feared. The political destruction left behind by the referendum result already became clearly apparent during the night of the referendum. Norway is facing hard times. All those who bear political responsibility are aware of this.

Prime Minister Trygve Bratteli confirmed immediately after the referendum that he and his Cabinet would resign. The Conservatives also reiterated that they were not ready to participate in the formation of a new Government whose first task would be to negotiate a Norwegian Free Trade Agreement with Brussels. The two parties together nearly hold 70 % of the seats in the Norwegian Storting. The Liberals and the Christian People's Party, with a total of 18 % of Storting mandates, are divided over the EEC. Per Borten's Centrist Party, which holds the remaining 10 % or so of Storting seats, is the only party to be unanimously against accession.

Poll night already clearly showed that one of the politicians mainly responsible for this result, the former Prime Minister, Per Borten, does not know what to do with his victory. Mr Borten evaded all questions on what he thought about taking over the political responsibility after the poll victory of the EEC opponents. While Mr Borten persistently refused to answer this question, his most active and militant helpers in the fight against the EEC Treaties, the Socialist People's Party and the Communists, knew the solution. The Socialist People's Party Leader, Finn Gustafson, proposed that a new Social Democratic Government be formed, though obviously not headed by Mr Bratteli, because, in Mr Gustafson's opinion, the poll victory of the EEC opponents was, at the same time, a victory over the Establishment's power elite. Per Borten even continued his persistent silence after Mr Gustafson had fired an entire broadside against representative democracy.

Representative democracy has, indeed, suffered a defeat in the Norwegian EEC referendum, and direct democracy has revealed its dangerous questionability. The poll campaign has opened the floodgates for demagogues who appealed to the Norwegian's deeply rooted national feeling without consideration for the real and serious political consequences that a 'No' must inevitably entail. They will not be able to avoid the charge that the campaigns of the EEC opponents have, in some cases, shamelessly exploited the national feeling of simple Norwegians. This charge is all the more significant as they knew that they would not have to bear any real political responsibility for their deeds, they simply had to leave as victors on poll night.

The reasons for this tragedy, which turned into a certainty for Norway with the poll result, may be summarised in a few sentences. A group of militant EEC opponents has succeeded in preventing a debate on the advantages and disadvantages of full membership by blowing up, in national-romantic transfiguration, the Norwegian EEC problem into a national testimony of faith. In the end, it was no longer a question of being for or against the EEC but of being a good or a bad Norwegian.

It cannot be denied that a large number of members of the People's Movement against the EEC were watching with growing concern this degeneration of the referendum campaign. But they, too, will now have to accept the charge that they did not do much to prevent this development. Nor can it be denied that the large majority, especially among Norway's farming and fishing communities, had, from the outset, viewed the EEC with scepticism.

The most elegant and politically cleanest solution to the EEC question would undoubtedly have been if the decision had been taken in the Norwegian Storting in accordance with the principles of representative parliamentary democracy. But this course was no longer viable after the defection of the former Prime

Minister, Per Borten, who had originally been one of the EEC supporters, into the camp of the EEC opponents because the qualified majority of three quarters of Storting Members required under the Norwegian Basic Law for constitutional changes could hardly have been secured any longer. Mr Borten's change of allegiance to the opponents of accession also ensured the People's Movement against the EEC of the votes of the farmers and small consumers. Given the overwhelming majority against accession among the rural population, the Social Democrat's rural voters also deserted Mr Bratteli.

One day after the referendum, Norway seems to be facing a permanent crisis in domestic politics whose end cannot be foreseen. This crisis is further exacerbated by the fact that the ghosts who had been called up during the poll campaign will now, in the interests of the smooth running of parliamentary democracy, have to be chased away as quickly as possible. Calm and prudence are now of the highest order in Norway's deeply upset political and emotional landscape. The outcome of the referendum may be a setback for Europe, but it is, above all, a defeat for Norway.