

Interview with Trygve Bratteli from Der Spiegel (19 July 1971)

Caption: On 19 July 1971, in an interview with the German weekly Der Spiegel, Trygve Bratteli, Norwegian Prime Minister, lists the stumbling blocks holding up the diplomatic negotiations on Norway's accession to the European common market.

Source: Der Spiegel. Das Deutsche Nachrichten-Magazin. Hrsg. Augstein, Rudolf ; R Herausgeber Engel K., Johannes; Gaus, Günter. 19.07.1971, Nr. 30; 25. Jg. Hamburg: Spiegel Verlag Rudolf Augstein KG. "Gespräch mit Trygve Bratteli", p. 66-67.

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Interview with Trygve Bratteli

SPIEGEL: Prime Minister, Norway's fishermen fear for their livelihood. They do not want any EEC competition in Norwegian coastal waters and are demanding that, in the event of Norway joining the EEC, their fellow European fishermen be prohibited from fishing within the 12-mile limit. Your Government has backed this demand. Will Norway's accession to the EEC be thwarted by her 37 000 fishermen?

BRATTELI: I don't think so. The six countries of the EEC have shown a great deal of understanding for Norway's specific problems with regard to fisheries and for the people who have to earn their living on the long Norwegian coastline.

SPIEGEL: What will happen if Brussels actually shows less understanding for the plight of your fishermen than you expect it to? Will Norway then remain outside the EEC?

BRATTELI: Without a satisfactory arrangement regarding our fishing limits, it would be politically impossible to secure consent in Norway for accession to the EEC. As you know, we are holding a referendum on EEC membership.

SPIEGEL: You are asking Brussels to make an exception to the EEC rule that allows all EEC vessels to fish in the territorial waters of the Member States. An exceptional arrangement would be detrimental to German, French or Dutch fishermen.

BRATTELI: No. Under our proposal, they could establish themselves in Norway and then fish in our waters.

SPIEGEL: But that is very hypothetical. In principle, what you are asking for is an exceptional arrangement whereby your twelve-mile limit remains Norwegian and does not become an EEC border.

BRATTELI: We have not proposed it as an exception; if other fishing countries did likewise, we should find that acceptable too. We want to find ways of precluding any discrimination whatsoever against other nations.

SPIEGEL: Britain has requested and received a special arrangement for her butter suppliers in New Zealand; Norway wants a coastal sanctuary for her fishing crews and special dispensations for her farmers. By making such concessions, is the EEC not deviating from its aim of integration?

BRATTELI: Every country has specific climatic or social conditions. That is why the Community is already showing particular interest in regional policies. These regional problems will undoubtedly become even more awkward with the enlargement of the EEC ...

SPIEGEL: ... and Community decisions will be even harder to make than has been the case in the little Europe of the Six. Will not those sceptics who warned against an enlargement of the EEC then be proved right when the pace of integration, which is already sluggish, is slowed down still further?

BRATTELI: I am very sure that the four countries whose accession is currently under discussion have just as great an interest in the strength and development of the Community as its present members.

SPIEGEL: We are not so sure, because, unlike the six countries that founded the EEC in 1957, the four aspirants to EEC membership are certainly motivated primarily by topical economic considerations and less by the long-term political goal of a united Europe. Norway, for example, wants to join the EEC so that she can follow Britain into the sanctuary afforded by the secure EEC customs barriers and not because she has set her sights on a politically united Europe.

BRATTELI: I can only reply by giving you my own personal view. I have always drawn inspiration from the general political aspects of the development of Western Europe, and I see economic unification first and

foremost as the basis for political integration. I regard British accession to the EEC as a great investment in the future of Europe from a political point of view.

SPIEGEL: If British entry into the EEC were to be rejected by the House of Commons, would Norway then remain outside the EEC?

BRATTELI: The most natural thing for us in that case would be to remain in EFTA.

SPIEGEL: So you would take that decision on purely economic grounds?

BRATTELI: Essentially, because Anglo-Norwegian economic relations have, after all, been developing quite satisfactorily in many areas.

SPIEGEL: Opinion polls show that only a third of Norwegians would vote for accession to the EEC and that more than 30 % have yet to make up their minds. What will you be doing to secure a majority in the referendum after the conclusion of your negotiations in Brussels?

BRATTELI: First of all, we must present the issue to the people in all its aspects, so that they can actually understand what it is all about. Should an acceptable result be obtained at the negotiating table, we shall use the political means at our disposal to campaign for a 'yes' vote.

SPIEGEL: And you believe that the majority will then vote for accession?

BRATTELI: In politics, you know, we always have to assume that our nation consists of sensible and rational people and that they will give their approval to a good result.

SPIEGEL: But has not the debate on EEC membership in Norway to date been conducted on a level more emotional than rational? For example, opponents of accession have been scaring God-fearing Norwegian Protestants with the prospect of Norway falling under the rule of the Pope if the country joins the EEC.

BRATTELI: Well, yes, there are certain underground movements within some religious circles, but these groups do not play a major role, although I admit that their arguments do make an impression on particular sections of the population.

SPIEGEL: No less irrational, surely, is the fear whipped up by opponents of accession that Norway, having won her national independence as recently as 1905, is about to surrender it to a bunch of technocrats in Brussels.

BRATTELI: Scepticism about the EEC is certainly no stronger here than in, say, Denmark or Sweden. The Norwegian mentality, of course, is very complex. Norwegians are largely outward-looking, because foreign trade accounts for 40 % of our national income. But there is also a contrasting attitude, which turns to fear when people sense that changes in Europe will alter fundamental characteristics of our country.

SPIEGEL: Does anti-German sentiment also play a part in the attitudes of these EEC opponents?

BRATTELI: I hardly think so.

SPIEGEL: You can scarcely find any comfort in the fact that almost all of the political youth organisations in Norway are voting against EEC membership. How do you explain this?

BRATTELI: These emotional instincts are very difficult to explain. Many youngsters see the EEC as an unbridled capitalist monster, and they fear that, by joining the EEC, Norway will lose her freedom to resolve the manifold environmental problems that beset her.

SPIEGEL: Prime Minister, your Conservative predecessor, Mr Per Borten, was brought down by splits in his

coalition government over the EEC. Will Mr Trygve Bratteli, the Labour Prime Minister, resign if the Norwegians vote against his policy on the EEC?

BRATTELI: You will appreciate that I have no wish to make my political existence dependent on hypothetical considerations. I do not deliver assessments of situations until they have actually arisen.

SPIEGEL: Prime Minister, thank you for talking to us.