

'The Scandinavian test' from L'Europe en formation

Caption: In its November 1972 issue, the federalist journal L'Europe en formation draws lessons from the positive and negative results of the referendums organised in Denmark and Norway in autumn 1972 on these country's accession to the European Communities.

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The Scandinavian test

In contrast to the French, who, when questioned last spring by President Pompidou, supposedly on the 'enlargement of Europe' but implicitly on the idea of a federal Europe, answered 'yes', 'no' or left the ballot paper blank, for reasons that often had nothing to do with the actual question, the smaller countries, Ireland, Norway and Denmark, gave us a lesson in democracy by showing us how seriously they took the vote to take their country into the European Community. In Ireland, on 10 May, there was a massive majority in favour of Europe: 83 % of the votes cast. In Norway, on 20 September, the vote was unfortunately against, but, let us not forget that the 'yes' vote accounts for 44 % of the votes cast. As for the Danes, on 2 October, in spite of the refusal of their Norwegian neighbours, 57 % voted 'yes' (63 % of votes cast) following a favourable straw poll in the Folketing (Parliament): 141 for and 34 against.

In Norway, the turnout was 75 %; in Denmark, it was nearly 90 % ... The Scandinavian test of democracy is worthy of an editorial and, at a later stage, of some serious political analysis.

Norway, it is often said, is 'another world': it represents the road to the North and the delights of wide-open spaces. A country crossed by the Arctic Circle, snowed-in for five months of the year, with nothing but subsistence farming and having acquired independence only in 1905, after centuries of foreign domination, anxious to preserve a fishing industry that provides a livelihood for its coastal population, a life-style that is typically Nordic and an exemplary environment which, it fears, will be sacrificed one day to industrialisation by the frantic race for productivity, Norway was always a 'difficult' case for the European Community. It is not by chance that its big cities (Oslo and Bergen, for example) came out strongly in favour of the EEC, whilst the country folk rejected it. Nor is it by chance that the people living in the far north were the most hostile (up to 80 % on average).

Could these results be put down to the errors made by the Six during the actual negotiations? It was not made sufficiently clear that the issue was whether to vote for or against joining a democratic Community with a specific political goal and not merely whether to join a 'common market' offering only economic and trading advantages. And the Norwegians judged the issue purely on those grounds. To compound matters, the Six, especially France, insisted firmly on the rights of their fishermen one day to come and fish the rich fishing grounds of the Norwegian coast. Was it necessary to seek this concession from a poor nation, obviously not prepared for the challenge, when an exception to the Community rule in this specific area would have done no harm? In addition, it was not obvious that Norwegian agriculture would have benefited from joining the Community. Since the Six had offered the former members of EFTA, notably Sweden, Finland and Iceland, Norway's neighbours, all the advantages of a free-trade area without requiring from them any of the Community disciplines, a majority of Norwegians thought it would be enough to negotiate a similar agreement with Brussels.

Much has been said in the press about the negative role of the 'young people', especially the students in this matter. Not convinced by the current 'Community Model' seen as bureaucratic, technocratic, concerned mainly with financial and trade issues resulting in hours of mindless bargaining, it is claimed that they forced the wrong decision. We believe, however, that their influence remained marginal, whilst that of the fishermen of the fjords, the foresters and the mountain farmers was decisive. This Community failure, even if it is just a minor blip and, let us hope, merely temporary, will give Brussels something to think about. Europe will not be constructed without some impetus, without a 'project', without generosity. The cynically intergovernmental regime that exists at the moment is but a caricature of what the founding fathers, and even more the federalists, had in mind.

Fortunately, the accession of Denmark preserves the future of the Community in northern Europe. But there, too, the 'yes' vote must not lead us to take too much for granted. For the moment, Denmark has given a bare 'yes' to the Common Market but not to the Europe envisaged by Schuman, that of an economic community with a federalist goal. Not only did the Prime Minister declare that Denmark would immediately withdraw from the Community if Great Britain was to leave one day, during the whole referendum campaign he also emphasised his rejection of anything that might resemble an increase in supranational institutions or powers. On this point, the Danish position is at the opposite end of the scale from that of the Dutch or Belgians but

quite close to that of the French; it will be strongly influenced by the attitude of the British.

Of course, this attitude may change. The people of northern Europe are very attached to true democracy; their independence of thought is also well known. If, one day, the British decide to strengthen the European Parliament by agreeing to its democratic election in order to have better control of Community affairs, the Danes will not object; the European Parliament, however, must represent only truly free people. When President Pompidou declares that he would like to see Franco's Spain in the Common Market, the result would be representatives in Strasbourg appointed by the Cortès. This outcome would be unbearable for the Danes, who are already wary of the possible return to power in Germany of the supporters of the noisy right-wing leader of the CDU-CSU, Franz-Josef Strauss.

One day, the country of Kierkegaard will abandon its objections to the notion of Europe as a community, but this Europe must not be allowed to disappoint. At present, the Danish 'yes' is the consent of a country which, unlike Norway, has the most competitive agriculture in the world. It simply needs the EEC as a market to which it can export the produce of its cooperative farms. Forty per cent of these products are exported to Great Britain, and we are all aware of the role that bacon plays in good relations between London and Copenhagen. If saying 'no' to the Community had not spelt the end of the export business of mass-produced pork from Jutland and the islands at the entrance to the Baltic Sea, can we be sure that the Danes would not have answered in the same way as the Norwegians?

This conclusion is fairly obvious, but the question is no longer relevant. We must consider that a 'no' in the Danish referendum would have had very awkward consequences for the British themselves; it would have strengthened the camp of the rabid anti-Europeans who are plentiful and very active in Britain, especially in Labour circles. The fact that Harold Wilson, if he came back to power, would insist on 'renegotiation' makes one realise the obstacles to an 'enlarged Europe'.

Let us turn once again to the future. Western Europe is becoming synonymous with a strong, new economic and trading zone. It remains, however, in today's world a 'political dwarf'. It has not chosen as yet between a federal future and one of national sovereignty. It has undertaken neither institutional nor social change. It has not yet had its revolution. It is advancing slowly and, in the process, is creating enormous contradictions. It is gradually establishing itself in the thoughts of old-fashioned, largely conservative people but, as the Scandinavian test has shown, governments steeped in the psychological and administrative customs of the past often influence opinion. 'Making Europe' is not 'losing one's identity', be it cultural, linguistic or political, as federalism elsewhere has shown us. However, millions of people who have not yet grasped the meaning of this adventure remain to be convinced.