

## ASPECTS OF THE UNION BETWEEN SWEDEN AND NORWAY (1814-1905)

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The union which was concluded between Sweden and Norway in 1814 was from the Swedish side, meant to be of a permanent character. 'My great ambition', the Swedish king, Carl Johan, declared in 1824, 'is to establish a complete union between Sweden and Norway' and similarity 'in all branches of the internal administration'.<sup>1</sup> This wish was shared by the dominant political circles in Sweden; and in Norway, too, strong forces through the most part of the 19th century gave their support to the union. Still, it ended in separation. This article aims to shed some light on why it ended this way and describe certain aspects of the relationship between the two countries up to the breach in 1905.

While the Danish king had sided with Napoleon in the last phase of struggle between the then Great Powers, Sweden had thrown its lot in with the opposition and had secured guarantees from Russia and Great Britain that Norway should be given to her provided that Swedish military forces took part in the war against France on the Continent. Carl Johan, one of Napoleon's former generals, who had been elected successor to the Swedish throne in 1809, was the principal strategist behind the campaign which led to victory in the decisive battle at Lipsk in October 1813. In spite of that he had reasons to suspect the Great Powers of wanting to renounce on the promises given to him concerning Norway. This forms the backdrop for his decision to take the matter in his own hands and – instead of leading his forces directly south to take part in the final operations against France – he turned north and invaded the Danish duchies of Sleswig-Holstein; thus hoping to force the Danish king

<sup>1</sup> Seip, Jens Arup, *Utsikt over Norges historie, første del*, s. 73, Oslo 1974.

to relinquish Norway and present the Great Powers with a *fait accompli* which it would be difficult to set aside.

The military part of the operation was soon accomplished. The Danish forces retreated and Fredrik VI could see no other course open to him than to ask for a negotiated settlement. The outcome was that Norway was ceded to the king of Sweden (incidentally without the old Norwegian dependencies of Greenland, Iceland and the Faeroe Island, about which history the Swedish negotiator was too little informed to make claims on). (The Treaty of Kiel, January 1814).

A period followed when Sweden, as a consequence of her military obligations on the Continent, was unable to grab the prey Denmark had been forced to give up. In the meantime the initiative was seized in Norway. Elections were held in a hurry to a constitutional assembly, which established the fact that more than four hundred years of union with Denmark had come to an end and declared Norway to be independent. Royal absolutism was replaced by a written constitution, which was remarkably liberal and democratic by the standards of the day. While Norwegian historians have agreed that the international situation opened the way for this transformation, there has been some debate about the role played by internal factors in the realization of the opportunities created. – Had Norway in the decades leading up to the 1814 seen a demonstrable growth in national consciousness which came to full bloom during this year; or would it perhaps be more in line with the facts to state that freedom and constitution were given the Norwegian people as a gift so to speak?

On the one hand historians have pointed to the economic development which had taken place in Norway and which had lent the country more weight within the union. The Napoleonic wars had led to separation (due to the English blockade) and had had as its consequence the establishment of central bodies of administration in Norway. Opposition had been voiced against the King's policies, which, it was felt, had sacrificed Norwegian interests for the benefit of Denmark. Some had even worked for a dissolution of the union and independence – not full independence but a greater extent of sovereignty, including a constitutional government, which, they hoped, could be realized in a new union with Sweden.

As things turned out, however, it was not these people who in the initial phase came to dominate the development; the initiative was seized by the party which congregated around Christian Fredrik, since 1813 Norwegian viceregent and heir to the Danish throne. It would seem evident that the only reasonable outcome of their endeavours could be nothing than a renewal of the old union. Stated in its extreme form, it has been said that Norwegian independence was born from a love of Den-

mark. The prince, however, was forced by the circumstances to mask his intentions and to put on a performance where Norwegian independence and a constitutional government were declared to be his objectives. Thus, it was hoped, it would be possible to secure the support of the population and at the same time to legitimize the revolt against the Treaty of Kiel in the eyes of The Great Powers.

It seems obvious that for the Prince's party to be able to appeal to a particular Norwegian national spirit, something of the kind must already have been in existence. In the course of the following hectic months this patriotism undoubtedly grew in strength, partly from a reaction against the Treaty of Kiel, partly as a consequence of the propaganda implemented by the 'Independence' Party. Words created the kind of feelings which they – albeit for tactical reasons – were meant to propagate. 1814, says the Norwegian historian Jens Arup Seip, saw not only the birth of a state but the 'rebirth of a nation'.<sup>2</sup>

On May 17th (Norway's National Day) the Constitution was approved and Christian Fredrik was elected king. At the time Norway was not recognized by any other country. Her shipping and trade were the subject of a boycott by the Great Powers. In the near future a war against the (battle) experienced and superior forces of a neighbouring country seemed likely. – The basic question remained, whether Norway's new-found independence could be maintained under the conditons.

Christian Fredrik had based his expectations on the attitude of the Great Powers, and in particular on that of Great Britain. When it became clear, however, that both Russia and Great Britain insisted that the promises given to Sweden must be fulfilled he seems at an early stage to have concluded that the answer to the above question must be negative. When, in spite of this, a war broke out between Norway and Sweden this was due partly to the fact that the Swedish demands, given in the form in which they initially were presented, were regarded as unacceptable; partly because a war which led to a military defeat, was considered necessary to force the Norwegian public opinion to accept some kind of union with Sweden.

The way he waged the war: defensively, retreating to avoid major battles, demaged his reputation at that time and in the eyes of several subsequent Norwegian historians; while others have pointed to the fact that a union with Sweden was inevitable under the circumstances and that the conditions for peace were in all probability, the best that could be achieved.

A major point in the peace treaty was an obligation undertaken by Carl Johan to accept the Norwegian constitution of May 17. The only

<sup>2</sup> Seip, *Utsikt...*, Første del, s. 15.

changes allowed for were those necessitated by the union. In this there lay a recognition of Norwegian sovereignty and equality within the union. There has been considerable speculation as to what motivated Carl Johan to go so far. One cause was certainly his wish to reach an agreement before the Congress of Vienna met and interference by the Great Powers might complicate the picture. A contributing factor may have been Carl Johan's ambitions to take power in France, which he could only achieve through the support of that country's liberal circles. Apart from the personal motives which may have influenced Carl Johan, historians have pointed to the consistency between an accomodating attitude and that line in Swedish policy towards Norway which had aimed to win support based on contacts with, and promises given to, constitutionally minded groups.

Most important, presumably, was the fact that the essential goals, from a Swedish point of view, had been achieved already. When Carl Johan had been appointed successor to the throne it had above all been with the expectation that he – with his military expertise, his position in France and many contacts around Europe – would help compensate for the loss of Finland (1809). Military and foreign political considerations were, in other words, at the very heart of the union. Through the unification with Norway and in view of the fact that the Constitution gave the king considerable authority concerning defence and foreign policy, Sweden's strategic position had been radically altered. The danger represented by Finland under Russian control had been reduced. Sweden no longer had to fear a two-front war. As to the unforeseen degree of independence obtained by Norway and the all too liberal character of the constitution, from Carl Johan's point of view, he could reasonably hope to change that when the situation had stabilized.

The social and economic transformations were missing from the Norwegian revolution of 1814; but added to the political aspect there was also a national one. A hitherto unknown patriotism had been created. Seen against the background of the events of this year the unification with Sweden, although formally it took place on a voluntary basis, was seen as a defeat. The new union, thus, was born with a defect.

The Norwegian constitution was built on a division of powers. Two state authorities were foreseen: the King and the parliament (*Storting*). Parliament was given the authority to pass laws and the budget. In addition it had a controlling function vis-a-vis the government and could impeach ministers who had exceeded their powers. Parliament met every third year and its session was stipulated to last three months. Prolongament had to be granted by the king.

Royal power was strong in that it possessed the initiative. The Storting debated bills which the king had brought before it. Furthermore the king was given a suspensive veto over ordinary Acts of Parliament (meaning in practice that if a bill was passed by three different Stortings over a period of nine years it came into effect without royal assent). It was unclear whether the same procedure applied to constitutional amendments, but it was not until the end of the union that this question was pushed to extremes. During the time when the Storting was not in session the king could enact temporary decrees, i.e. he could take measures which otherwise belonged within the Stortings sphere of influence, and whose legality would be decided upon by the next Storting.

As to defence and foreign policy, the Constitution provided that before the king could start a war the advice of the Norwegian government, as well as the Swedish, should be sought and a decision take place in an extraordinary cabinet meeting with ministers from both cabinets present. Only part of the Norwegian military forces could be deployed outside the country, and the king was dependent on Parliament for money to arm and wage war. Other foreign policy matters could, in theory, be regarded as either exclusively Swedish (in which case they should be discussed in the Swedish cabinet), or as exclusively Norwegian (discussed in the Norwegian cabinet) or as matters of common interest (the matter should be dealt with at a cabinet meeting including ministers from both Sweden and Norway).

It was up to the king personally to appoint his ministers. He was obliged to lay all matters of importance before cabinet. The ministers for their part had a duty to protest officially if they considered that king's decisions were not in compliance with the laws or would harm the nation's interests. Those who did not protest in this way ran the risk of impeachment.

In practice the authority of the king became divided in a way not intended by the Constitution: the main part of the Norwegian government was seated in Christiania, the capital of Norway (later to be called Oslo); while only a ministerial branch was maintained in Stockholm, close to the king's person.

An investigation of the kind of political system which developed must rely on a description of the balance of power in the constitutional triangle: king – government – Storting, and how they placed themselves in relation to each other over time. In the case of the Storting the agreement in constitutional matters is striking. This consensus undoubtedly developed because the Storting felt its authority threatened from the side of the king. Carl Johan may well have had a personal inclination towards a strong monarchy; he also had to take into consideration that

conservative forces in Sweden, and in particular the Nobility, looked upon Norway as a compensation for Finland and was bent on bringing about a closer union. For Carl Johan, who still could not feel secure in his position, it must have been essential to strengthen his standing through adherence to leading political circles in this matter.

The most far-reaching of the amendments put forward by Carl Johan during the 1820s was one which would have granted the king an absolute veto over ordinary Acts of Parliament. Other bills aimed at reducing freedom of expression, to increase the opportunity of the king to influence the debates in Parliament and to make the official class more dependent on the king personally. The Storting was also asked to allow the king to appoint a new nobility (after it had abolished the old one in 1814).

Initially the Constitution had not been looked upon as a sacrosanct unalterable document; Carl Johan's aggressive attitude changed the mood, however. The opinion took hold that to grant the king an absolute veto in reality implied granting it to Sweden. The struggle for national independence and equality came to be seen as a struggle against the authority of the king. In this context the Constitution was regarded as a bulwark. It might have ambiguities and deficiencies but you did not start tearing it down in a situation where the enemy was camped outside.

Carl Johan's extra-parliamentary methods included the use of bribes, from a royal coffer well-filled after many campaigns. His agents encouraged discontent among the farmers at a time when the country's finances were in dire straits. On a couple of occasions he gathered troops around the capital while the Storting was in session. Also he liked to refer to threats from the Great Powers, who allegedly would not tolerate a watered down royal veto and the abolition of the nobility.

He was up against a parliament that was dominated by the official class (meaning senior officials, both in the central and local administration). Their leading role went back to the time of absolutism. The reason why they continued to lead after 1814 had to do with the fact that no other class was in a position to do so. The nobility, always weak in Norway, had been voted out of existence. The bourgeoisie had seen their fortunes crumble in the crisis following the Napoleonic wars. The farmers (whose arable land was small in a European context) were not yet politically educated or conscious enough to assert themselves.

The official class descended, to a great extent, from families who had emigrated from Denmark. Their spoken language was in the main similar to Danish and they continued to be rooted in a culture outside the country's borders. One Norwegian historian has compared the situation in the decades following 1814 with that experienced in former colonies:

"The mother country had been forced to cut the ties and the colonists were faced with the task of establishing a system which enabled them to maintain the privileges that they formerly, by virtue of support from the mother country, had enjoyed."<sup>3</sup>

One way in which the official class could legitimize their standing, was to take the lead in the national struggle. It felt all the more natural for them to do so as several of Carl Johan's bills were aimed directly at undermining their own position. His flirtation with the farmers contributed to distance them further from the king. Thus, during the whole of Carl Johan's reign (which ended in 1844), the policy pursued by the official class aimed at reducing the king's powers in favour of those of the Storting.

The government for its part might consider greater freedom of movement and increased independence in its relation with Parliament as a good idea. But it harboured no plans aimed at altering the Constitution – that would have been surprising considering that the government, too, was a bastion of the official class. The government was however in a difficult position. Being closer to the monarch than most members of Parliament it received a clearer picture as to the king's intentions and the dangers involved in too much intransigence on part of the Storting, and often found itself in the unavoidable situation of having to perform a balancing act between royal anger and the Storting's watchful suspicion.

One by one the king's amendments were rejected by Parliament, accompanied by conciliatory phrases, but firmly enough. In spite of that there is reason to believe that gradually a consensus developed that the Union was in the best interest of the country. The national struggle was for equality, not for dissolution. Carl Johan's ambition to make good the rushed job of 1814, his temperament and lack of insight into Norwegian politics led, however, on several occasions to crisis. Dramatic gestures, involving threats of violence, created the impression that he moved all the way to the edge of a coup d'état – and then the whole affair came to nothing.

During the 1830s the shift in king's policy towards a more defensive attitude was remarkable. Several explanations have been put forward, one involving Carl Johan's personality: caution was a strong feature in his character and for him, an upstart among the royalty of Europe, it must have been important to stay within the boundaries of legitimacy – in other words, not to be seen as violating the Constitution. Also his requests to the Great Powers concerning Norway were negative, from his point of view (contrary to the impression he tried to give). Russia, on whose attitude the King placed particular weight, feared that Sweden might try to revenge the defeat of 1809 and consistently opposed a closer

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<sup>3</sup> Seip, *Utsikt...*, første del, s. 66.

and potentially stronger union. Another problem arose in that opposition in Sweden started looking across the border to Norway and taking inspiration from the more liberal political climate there, a development which served to make both the King and the conservatives more sceptical about a closer merger.

As Carl Johan's reign came to an end it was the Storting that was on the offensive. The King's authority to issue temporary decrees was curtailed and the Storting's right to have its sessions prolonged came to be regarded as customary.

While Carl Johan had thought that the Union had established its natural geographical borders, his son and successor, Oscar I, harboured expansionist plans more in line with earlier Swedish foreign policy. Finland was to be reconquered through an alliance with the Western powers during the Crimean War; while the conflict between Denmark and the German states was seen as an opportunity to expand the Union to include all three Scandinavian countries.

Scandinavism was a movement which made itself in the whole of Scandinavia, reaching its high point during Denmark's conflicts with Germany in 1848 and 1864. The underlying philosophy had its parallels abroad in pan-Slavism and pan-Germanism. A characteristic feature of Norwegian Scandinavism was the idea that Denmark could act as a counterweight against Swedish dominance. Several prominent Norwegian politicians were engaged in the movement; its social basis was, however, limited to academics and members of the higher bourgeoisie, while the farmers, who from the 1830s onwards made up the majority in Parliament, were clearly rejectionist in their attitude.

Oscar I – a charmless, introverted, intelligent and almost friendless manipulator<sup>4</sup> – had been able to direct the Union's foreign policy without much interference. But after the middle of the century the development of society undermined the premises for monarch's personal display of power. The decay in royal authority was accelerated under Oscar's successor, Carl XV (1859-1872), also as a consequence of this king's lack of interest in the ordinary business of government. In the diary of one of his longstanding ministers we are (more and more) frequently told about so-called 'standing cabinet meetings', where the king, before riding off with his 'dear staff', decides upon so many matters – in accordance with the ministers' recommendations – that he has hardly enough time to sign the bills in question.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Bjørge, Rian, Kaartvedt, *Norsk utenrikspolitisk historie, Selvstendighet og union, Fra middelalderen til 1905*, s. 272, Universitetsforlaget 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Aug. Chr., *Mantheys Dagbøger, Kra 1909-1919*.



The development in the constitutional triangle, king-government-Storting can be described in two stages: first the Storting, plundered the king's authority as much as it possibly could; after that the government seized the remaining assets. For the government in Christiania to be able to consolidate its position in relation to the king it was necessary, firstly, that the ministerial branch in Stockholm was reduced to a more forwarding office; secondly, that one minister emerged as the uncontested leader of the cabinet and, thirdly, that it became a body with power to co-opt (i.e. to recruit new ministers without royal interference). All of these conditions were fulfilled at an early stage after Fredrik Stang became senior minister in 1861.

There remained, however, one field in which the king continued to exert considerable influence, namely in military matters. The king was to sole connecting link between the two countries' armed forces, which goes some way to explain this anomaly; added to that was the fact that the strengthening of the Union's military capability and the foreign-political schemes connected with that were almost the only subjects that Carl took any interest in. In his imagination he saw himself as the man who would restore the Kalmar Union (between the three Nordic countries, lasting, with interruptions, from 1389 to 1521); and his dreams went even further. A quotation from 1863 may serve to illustrate the king's ambitions, 'I need a war, and a war I must have; either through the Poles against Russia or the Danes against Germany.'<sup>6</sup>

Although the government had no sympathy with Carl's foreign policy inspirations and worked, in tandem with the Swedish government, to thwart them, it was forced to put the king's plans for a reform of the armed forces before Storting. These included an amendment which would have made it possible to deploy a larger share of the Norwegian army outside the country. This part of the army was to receive more funds and training, making it into an elite unit, and a new organization which would facilitate cooperation with Swedish forces. The debate concerning military issues in the 1860s was to play an important part in the establishment of a more systematic opposition in the 1870s. It was possible to use these matters against the government, whose hands, to its regret, were tied by the royal initiative. The majority in the Storting, i.e. the farmers, had no liking for the king's expansionist plans and they came out decidedly against increases in the defence budget.

During the debate the leader of the opposition, Johan Sverdrup, argued that Norway had to be particularly on guard against letting its influence over defence be reduced – for the reason that she had no foreign

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<sup>6</sup> Jansson, Allan, *Den svenske utrikespolitikens historia*, bd. III: 1844-1872, s. 187, Stockholm 1961.

minister.<sup>7</sup> The fact was that since 1814 the minister for foreign affairs had been Swedish, although his nationality was not determined by any document defining the Union.

The issue was taken up by an official committee with members from both countries, appointed in 1865 after a Swedish initiative. It is probable that the timing of the Swedish revisionist drive had to do with the fact that after the Crimean War Russia was no longer in a position to act as a check on Sweden's old ambition of a closer union. In the committee's report the equality of the two countries was closely observed in most respects; however, in certain fields the committee proposed to legalize an opposite practice which had established itself, and in particular that the royal residence should be in Stockholm and that the Swedish minister for foreign affairs should be in charge of foreign policy on behalf of both countries. In spite of this the committee's proposals would have granted Norway more influence over foreign policy than previously – only, within the framework of a closer union.

Two lines of Norwegian nationalism manifested themselves in response: On the one hand, the government, still dominated by the official class, through a pragmatic cooperation with Sweden sought a step-by-step solution to the main issue and would be willing to accept that the institutional framework binding the two countries together was extended in return for joint consulation and a say on equal terms with Sweden in foreign policy matters. On the other hand an increasingly aggressive and nationalistic opposition set itself firmly against a closer union and was opposed to any formalizing of Swedish privileges. – The latter point of view won the day and the report from the Union committee was rejected by a large majority in the Storting in 1871.

After Sweden had ceased to be regarded as a threat the union could become a basis for internal political stability and a tool for those who wanted to maintain the status quo. The government could use the king's authority, which it had now largely taken over, and support from conservatives in Sweden against the opposition. The tendency became manifest during the 1870s. At the same time a polarization of the political debate took place in Norway.

The conflict between the state authorities came to a bend over the issue of the ministers' admittance to Parliament and a resulting obligation to defend their policies there. The reform would replace a formal-judicial ministerial responsibility with a political-moral one and make the government more dependent on having support from a majority in the Storting. The government, which had been frightened by the strength

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<sup>7</sup> *Stortingstidende 1866*, s. 256.

of the opposition and increasingly saw itself as the defender of a minority in society, felt that the reform would tip the balance of power dangerously in favour of the Storting, and in particular after annual sessions had been introduced in 1869.

The situation was complicated by the fact that the reform would demand a change in the Constitution. The question of the king's veto thus came to the forefront. Oscar II (Norwegian king 1872-1905) had received his education and formative impressions at a time when the king's personal authority was still strong, and he never resigned himself to its decline. A conservative by principle he was firmly in favour of maintaining the monarch's independence in relation to the Storting. The union dictated the same policy, in Oscar's judgement, since the monarch's authority represented the strongest tie between the two countries and was the only effective means for Swedish influence in Norwegian affairs. The constellation king-government on one side and the majority of Parliament on the other lent the conflict a democratic as well as a national aspect.

The battle was waged with increasing intensity. Attempts by the king and the government to enlist support in Sweden met little response at this stage. The conservative Swedish government accused their Norwegian colleagues of endangering the king's authority through their intransigence and thereby weakening the Union. The Liberals in Sweden displayed a great deal of understanding for the views held by the Norwegian opposition, so much so that if the conflict was allowed to develop further it might well become a dangerous ferment in Swedish political life as well. It should therefore be brought to an end as soon as possible, according to the Swedish government.

1884 marks a turning point in Norwegian political history. The old regime came to an end when the official class had to give up their bastion of power in the government and a greater degree of political accountability and dependency was introduced in the government's relationship to the Storting. It followed that the new government appointed by the king this year had the support of the majority in Parliament. As part of a compromise the issue of the king's veto was set aside.

It was only natural that the new government should insist that parliamentary accountability also had to include foreign policy. Hence two alternatives presented themselves: either a continual common foreign policy body responsible to a joint committee of parliamentarians from both countries – a solution rejected by the Liberals because they feared it would lead to a closer union (a common Parliament, possibly), or a separate Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which became the government's preferred option. In Sweden the exasperation in response to Norwegian demands was rising. It was felt that the Liberals

(‘Venstre’) in reality were aiming at a dissolution of the Union, which was seen as vital to Sweden’s security interests. In 1895 the danger of war between the two countries was acute, but a violent confrontation was averted through a climb-down on the part of the Norwegians. As far as the Norwegian Conservatives (‘Høyre’), they accepted that foreign policy should be included in the matters for which the government was answerable to Parliament; they emphasized, however, that a solution should be found through negotiations with the Swedes. Only at a later stage, after it had become clear that the party’s loyalty to the union was a liability with a more nationalistically minded electorate and when a satisfying solution, from a Norwegian point of view, apparently could not be found, did the party change its mind and sacrificed the union.

The Union between Norway and Sweden was not the outcome of the two nations approaching each other and growing together over time. We have been able to ascertain that the Norwegians felt that the Union had been forced upon them and thus that it was born with a defect. In principle it was to be a union between two equal partners, but from the start the Norwegians felt inferior and several factors contributed to keeping this sentiment alive (i.e. the issue of national symbols, the flag, the king’s title, etc) and in particular the conflict concerning Norway’s influence over foreign policy affairs. Sweden’s aggressiveness, aimed at a greater degree of amalgamation, resulted in a Norwegian counter-reaction, led by the official class, who traditionally had been closely attached to Denmark and also had the most to lose should the king’s plans be realized. The Norwegians were also on guard against Swedish influence on Norwegian (i.e. Danish) written language. As to cultural life in general, what was regarded as typically Norwegian was held in high esteem and encouraged. It should be underlined, however, that the national struggle at this stage aimed at equality within the Union, not dissolution of the same.

From the 1830s onwards a relaxation of tension takes place in matters related to the Union. The farmers now made up the majority in Parliament and their chief concern was a ‘cheap’ state and the transfer of public tasks to locally elected bodies. They had no enthusiasm for dynastic projects aimed at an extended or closer union. The same applied to the majority of the upper classes. Scandinavianism became a mere episode in Norwegian politics.

During the 1870s increasingly the conservative government allied itself with and exploited the authority of the king. The fact that the monarch became so closely associated with a regime condemned to downfall resulted in the undermining of the king’s position and, to a certain extent, also to that of the Union. King and Union came to be seen as obstacles in the way of democratic development.

During the last phase of the Union, controversy concerning the influence over foreign policy became the centre of attention. The Liberals, who were in power for most of the period 1895-1905, were the aggressive party. Venstre's need of such an issue for tactical reasons has been pointed out. The party's union-policy served to glue it together, functioning as a counterweight to a whole range of controversial issues (concerning social policy, universal suffrage, etc), which pressure groups and professional and industrial bodies threw into the arena during the 1890s. Some historians have even talked of the party's nationalism as a 'substitute motive'; while others have pointed out that on the international scene the same period was characterized by jingoism on the part of the Great Powers and by smaller nations' struggle to uphold their identity. This ideological climate presumably influenced Scandinavian politicians as well. Generally speaking, it is difficult to state with certainty what are the motives underlying political standpoints. In the case of Venstre's policy in the 1890s we have to confine ourselves to pointing out that its appeal to Norwegian nationalism found resonance in the population, and that it had a unifying function with regard to the party's followers.

At the time of the elections in 1903 it seemed as if a compromise with Sweden would be possible, and economic and social issues came to dominate the campaign. Victorious was a new constellation, called 'Samlingspartiet' (The Unitary Party), made up of conservative and moderate politicians, many of them businessmen. They were people who felt threatened by Venstre's costly reform policy and who saw it as their main task to speak up for business and to defend private ownership.

The constitutional conflict over foreign policy was only of secondary interest to these people. They hoped a compromise with Sweden would be possible and that this compromise would be so satisfactory, in Norwegian eyes, that it would also appeal to moderate forces within Venstre, so that a division between them and the radicals would result – a division coinciding with the one Samlingspartiet's men saw as desirable for internal political reasons.

It was only when these expectations proved illusory – after the mood in Sweden had changed and it seemed impossible to reach an acceptable solution – that the government made up its mind in favour of a unilateral liquidation of the Union. National feelings certainly played a part in the decision. Also – in that the conflict over the Union was terminated – Samlingspartiet hoped to prepare the way for the kind of anti-radical and anti-socialist alliance which was the party's main objective.

As for the economy, a breach was possible without serious consequences for either country. Sweden came only in the second rank of

Norway's trading partners. Internationally – both economically and culturally – Norway was markedly Western-oriented; while Sweden's most important ties were to the south, to the German 'Reich'. It is also clear that the Union had not led to emigration on a large scale from one country to the other. The two peoples had never mixed.

In a more general sense it has been pointed out that unions between two countries have proved problematic (to make work) – if a development towards amalgamation, in line with Swedish policy in 1814 and after, is not accepted.

'An alliance between two equally big nations can be problematic enough. But even greater – yes, in practice almost inextricable – are the difficulties which have to be faced in a union between a bigger and a smaller country; at least if the latter is to retain an acceptable degree of independence and equality.'<sup>8</sup>

In the larger context the dissolution in 1905 can be seen as resulting from the fact that during the 91 years the Union had lasted Norway had grown stronger. She had acquired the kind of political institutions belonging to an independent state. Economically she was now in a position that allowed her to stand on her own feet, and after the humiliating climb-down in 1895 Norway had consistently built up her armed forces so that she was able to defend herself. In this perspective independence comes as a consequence of a growth in national consciousness. In this context should be mentioned the development which had taken place in the country's cultural life, whose foremost representatives had attained international fame and recognition – this factor, too, had served to strengthen national identity and pride.

During the last years of the Union the Swedish foreign policy establishment had tried to influence the Great Powers to distance themselves from Norway's independence aspirations and had sought their support for a forced revision of the relations between the two countries. The reactions had been negative, and in 1905 Sweden had in reality suffered defeat in her attempts to mobilize the international community in aid of an aggressive policy towards Norway. More important for Sweden's attitude was, however, the development towards democracy which had taken place in the country and the rejection, by the liberals and the socialist, of an armed settlement of the conflict. The opinion had gained ground that an association which was not built on voluntary adherence and mutual trust, had no future. Hence, the Union between Norway and Sweden, which had been initiated on the battlefield, came to a peaceful conclusion.

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<sup>8</sup> Fuglun, Per, *Norges historie*, bd. 12 Norge i støpeskjeen 1884-1920, Oslo 1988.

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