

Comments on Northern Neighbours by John Bryden, March 10th 2015

I have been very happy working on this project over several years with Lesley, Ottar and the very bright contributors. It has been a long ambition of mine to try to understand the comparative development of Norway and Scotland, which has always seemed to me to be a story which is relevant to many other parts of the world, and perhaps all of it. However, if there was ever any doubt in my mind about the relevance of the comparison to contemporary debates in countries like Scotland and the UK, I have certainly lost them in the process!

While working in the Highlands and Islands in the 1970s, Bob Storey introduced me to the work of Norwegian scholar and politician, Ottar Brox, who later became a friend and colleague on a number of writing projects. I was also at the sharp end of some of Lesley Riddoch's roving broadcasts during the 1990s, and admired her approach and standpoints which grew as she also became interested in Norway as a useful comparator for Scotland. Thus it was that we came together for the current project.

Although we settled a proposal with Edinburgh University Press, the editors are and have been politically active in wider arenas. We are not value-neutral social scientists or historians who disdain contact and debate with politicians, civil servants, civil society organisations and activists for change. Indeed we want to be part of a process of change, and in the present case we want to take active part in contemporary debates on change in both Scotland, and Norway, both of which face challenges, if of different kinds. Studying the long term political, social and economic development of two neighbouring countries, one of which became increasingly integrated within a larger nation state and one of which became increasingly independent between the 18th and early 19th century shows clearly that there are very long term path dependencies which have formed the particular development paths of both countries, but it also shows that there are key junctures where the possibility or actuality of rupturing such path dependencies become very real. For Scotland, the independence debate in 2014 will surely be seen as one such key juncture, just as Norway's independence from Denmark was two hundred years earlier in 1814.

We hope that the volume will be useful for scholars and students, policy makers, and organisations seeking to improve conditions of life for ordinary citizens, as well as to the many active citizens out there doing it for themselves and their communities. The book is unfortunately too expensive, but if we sell enough hardback copies then EUP will produce a softback edition much more cheaply, and this is what we are aiming for by enthusiastically joining the sales effort. So please do recommend the book to your professional and local libraries, to students, to friends and help to get it noticed and talked about! If you are responsible for a course, or know someone who is, get the book recommended for that course. In any case, read it, even if you have to borrow it! And give us feedback! If you like it, spread the word.