

Gro Harlem Brundtland

STATSMINISTERENS TALE VED STATPIPE-MIDDAG I HAUGESUND

25. AUGUST 1986

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to have the privilege of addressing so many prominent representatives of different walks of life in Norway and of the international petroleum community on this very special occasion, as we celebrate this new and extended connection between Norway and Continental Europe. Statpipe - this permanently installed transportation system follows the general direction of historical trade ties between this country and the Continent, which began centuries ago and developed under the German Hanse.

When the Ekofisk field was proven in 1969, it dawned upon us that something big was in the pipeline - if I may put it that way - also in the field of transportation. The opening of the Statpipe system today is in many ways symbolic as well as concrete - no pun intended - since it embodies a physical link between Norwegian industry onshore, as well as offshore, and our partners in Western Europe.

But allow me to say that we are by no means celebrating an industrial achievement alone. We are celebrating our own abilities as human beings to be creative, imaginative and innovative.

This brings to mind the well known story about a young tourist guide in Jerusalem who was asked by two Norwegian tourists to take them to the tomb of the unknown soldier. Wishing to please the tourists and knowing that there isn't any such tomb in Jerusalem, he took them to a monument inscribed in Hebrew.

After two minutes of silence one Norwegian, who apparently understood Hebrew asked if this was not in fact the tomb of Felix Mendelsohn. " Oh, yes", said the guide. Mendelsohn was, as we know, a famous composer, but as a soldier he was completely unknown." This was a very apt demonstration of the imaginative mind of man which, when refined and when having to face enormous challenges, will break new ground as we have witnessed here today at the opening of the Statpipe system, a record-breaking project which we have every reason to be proud of.

Looking back on the general debate we have had in this country for many years which has taken a marked upturn this summer, relating to the system of taxation which applies to the oil companies here in Norway, we are struck by the relevance of the Bible's Book of Proverbs, which states that "who loveth wine and oil shall not be rich". Indeed the economy of this country has been in love with oil for quite some time, and perhaps this love has been a little too blind at times. When my Government took over, this love affair was at its peak, resulting in an overheated economy with an aggregate flow of private consumption raising imports to new heights. Now we are experiencing the effects of the morning after. Our national revenues are expected to fall by about 6 % from 1985 to 1986 and we will face a considerable foreign deficit.

In the coming months and years we must exercise care and restraint. We cannot foresee that there can be any room for increasing our personal income. Government spending must also be kept within narrow limits. There is no room for complacency now, but we do have reason to be optimistic in the longer term.

My Government is very concerned that there shall not be any overreaction to the present low level of oil prices. Our proven petroleum reserves are substantial and it is expected that more is yet to be discovered. Thus, decisions should also be based on long term considerations. Norway will be a petroleum-producing country into the next century. We expect petroleum companies to take the same long-term view, and that their decisions will reflect the possibility for increases in the level of oil prices to a reasonable level.

Ladies and Gentlemen, today's opening of Statpipe represents a milestone in the development of Norway as a petroleum-producing country. Petroleum from our continental shelf is now being landed in Norway. This time it is gas. In a few years time we will have a separate pipeline for the transportation of oil to the west coast of Norway.

Statpipe represents a tangible reminder to us that problems are there to be solved, gaps exist to be bridged, defeat can be defied, challenges ought to be taken and victories can indeed be won.

I would like to propose a toast to the partners of the Statpipe Group, to their contractors and to all the people who have been involved in the planning and construction of Statpipe, as well as to the future energy cooperation between Norway and Continental Europe.