

Gro Harlem Brundtland

Prime Minister of Norway

ADDRESS TO THE PARTY CONGRESS OF PARTIJ VAN DE ARBEID,  
AMSTERDAM, 11 DECEMBER 1993.

I am honoured to have been invited to address this Congress at a time when the situation in Europe calls for courage, choices and commitments that can pave the way out of recession towards a new and brighter future for the people of Europe. In the past the family of Social Democratic parties in Europe has served as an engine of change and renewal. We must redouble our efforts to continue to act, acknowledging change and relentlessly pursuing renewal. We must fight for reforms today if we want a secure tomorrow.

Changes are taking place at great speed. They are challenging many of our political achievements. They are challenging our political system's ability to respond and to set directions. They are even challenging people's belief in a better and safer future. About 20 million people are out of work in Europe. No wonder if sometimes the prospects of peril prevail over the promise of prosperity. We must turn any such tendency!

We cannot and we shall not surrender to the prophets of doom. We are committed to a new future for Europe, with reduced unemployment, with increased economic growth and social justice - and constantly improving the environment. This future will not come by means of liberalist approaches - not to speak of pure monetarism - so popular among conservatives in the 1980s. This future will only come if we exploit the cooperative advantage of European social democrats.

The situation calls not only for new but for coordinated measures. The fight against unemployment is job No 1. European countries can no longer achieve prosperity one by one. We are too interdependent. Our economies are interwoven, and yet our common efforts in economic and social policy has in recent years been struggling with the advances of invisible powers. The forces of technology and financial transaction have taken their own course - challenging the ability of the political system to take charge and set directions. To succeed we have to take great care that measures adopted in one country are not neutralized or nullified by measures taken by others.

We must take seriously that uncoordinated economic measures may lead to unwanted effects in other countries and in turn strike back across borders.

We have reached a stage in our development where we can no longer take for granted that economic growth will lead to increased employment. Technological advances may lead to lay-offs rather than to new jobs. We are obviously on the wrong track when Europe spends 100 billion ECU on unemployment compensation and far less on active measures for reemployment. Paying people such sums for not doing anything is neither sustainable nor socially acceptable.

Countries and regions outside Europe will not solve our problems. We must show, individually and through a strengthened economic cooperation in our own region, that we really are willing and able to be a dynamic and competitive contributor to global growth. We need a credible and offensive common strategy for increased employment. The alternative is yielding ground to those forces which prefer nationalistic, defensive and populist policies.

There is no alternative to strengthening the competitiveness of European economies in a global context. Our experience in Norway is that income policies and a broadly based dialogue and cooperation with the social partners have been effective.

We must use active labour market policies and measures to improve the functioning of the labour market to put the young and the long-term unemployed back to work. We have invested in education to develop skills and close the technological gap between Europe and US and Japan.

Europe must be able to build the industries, infrastructures and technologies of the future. And we need investments in physical capital to increase capacity and develop productivity.

Such policies will be easier to carry out if they are a part of a larger European strategy. This is what we have argued, as social democrats, and what we have focused in our manifesto before the elections to the European Parliament: "We all have different traditions and responsibilities in our home countries. But we share a vision: Europe must grow together."

As demonstrated both by the EU White Book and by the work of the Allan Larsson group of the Party of European Socialists, the fight against unemployment has now risen to the top of our agenda for European cooperation. It is becoming increasingly clear that unemployment has not received the attention it deserved and that our recent history in Europe is one of too little cooperation rather than of too much.

It is of vital importance that the dialogue between the EC and EFTA is developed further at the ministerial meeting due to take place in Brussels on Monday. There is so much that needs to be done in all our societies.

The belief in a united Europe where we can work together with people who share our values and priorities led the Norwegian Labour Party to the decision last fall that we should apply for membership.

We came to this conclusion following an intensive political debate involving thousands of party members. While Europe is not the answer to all our problems it became evident that our sovereignty would be expanded rather than curtailed by having the option to participate in the decisions that will shape the Europe of tomorrow.

Even if the question of membership is a difficult one in Norway and even if there is a considerable scepticism, we gained new and increased confidence. We increased our vote from 34 per cent in the 1989 election to 37 per cent last September.

We made it very clear before the Parliamentary elections in September that our ambition is to complete the negotiations on accession. We will make every effort to achieve a satisfactory result in the negotiations, one that we can recommend to the Norwegian people. Then the people will decide in a referendum if Norway will take full part in the shaping of a new Europe.

Our application is based on the wish to participate in realizing the political objectives of Maastricht, not only as framework for an integrated European economy, but to achieve the larger vision of peace and security, and to couple the internal market with increased environmental cooperation, better coordinated economic policies and stronger bulwarks against speculation and monetary instability.

For us as social democrats, it obvious that when strong forces operate on the international level, outside the control of national political institutions, - we must pursue these forces and engage them on the international scene. The European Union is the only European institution with sufficient clout to address the broad spectrum of our present challenges, in economy, social development, environment, communication and security and foreign policy.

In my country and in my party there are voices arguing against uncontrolled economic growth. Not least among the youth movement there are many who feel that increased economic growth may ruin the environment on which future generations depend.

And they are absolutely right. Uncontrolled economic growth will inevitably lead to the destruction of this planet. Traditionally, economic growth has meant producing more and more goods, using more and more natural resources and placing an increasing strain on an already fragile environment. But growth should not mean that we perpetuate existing economic activity. Growth must come by means of a pattern of change where we use less finite resources and produce better goods and more services.

There is a growing need to focus on knowledge as the ultimate resource and as an engine of growth and change. It is not natural resources in themselves that give us wealth, but the way we utilize these resources. If resources alone could make us wealthy, we could have reached our present standard of living thousands of years ago.

Our economies do need growth, but it must be a new kind of growth, a growth that enhances the environment and the resource base instead of reducing it. We need a type of growth that enhances the quality of life for all instead of leading to congestion, more pollution and the overuse of resources.

Technological breakthroughs will be needed in many areas if we are to make the transition to sustainable development. Since many needs are public needs they must be articulated by people acting together.

The best prospects for our future seems to lie in the inexhaustible potential of the human mind. Knowledge is an infinite resource. There should be more than enough for everybody. It is timely that the White Book and the Allan Larsson report focus on education and on life-long learning. We in Europe can achieve such goals if we all agree to pursue them.

Our agenda must always include the developing world. It is morally repugnant and contrary to our interest if more than 1 billion people shall continue to live in poverty and squalor. We must acknowledge the link between poverty, environmental degradation, the population explosion and the economic opportunities of developing countries.

Development assistance has been much discredited recently by opponents of the whole idea, who have called attention to unsatisfactory results, abuse and even corruption in the recipient states. However, aid fatigue has aggravated the plight of the poor and made a mockery of the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for development aid. At Rio all countries supported, finally, the legitimate demand that new and additional resources be transferred to developing countries to address global environment problems. Nevertheless contributions so far have been small.

Brutal facts of science tell us how the natural resources on which people depend, that will feed them and provide them with a livelihood, are already today being severely depleted. Not only are the rainforests vanishing, and topsoil eroding. Even the total food production of the world is reaching limits. The world's oceans have already reached the limit of their protein yield. Increases in production of meat, soybeans and grain are slower, and global warming seems likely to accelerate erosion and dry up large parts of the world.

The prospects of feeding a growing world population are grimmer than ever. And the world population keeps increasing at an exponential rate.

Had it not been for the contribution of the Nordic countries and of the Netherlands, who are on the top of every list of donor countries in per capita terms, the record of industrial countries would have been even more shameful. I commend the Partij van de Arbeid for having ambitious goals for its country's future achievements in the field of aid and global responsibility. We need much greater efforts also by other countries, in shouldering global bills for peace, development, environment and the growing refugee problem.

We need to pursue the goal of global governance, to work with other countries and regions to expand and improve their institutions. Other regions are currently looking to Europe for inspiration. They look to the European Union as a model and goal for their own development. The potential is evident such as in the Middle East.

We must never lose our ability to think the seemingly unthinkable or to work for goals that may seem impossible. Today, anyone who does not believe in miracles is not a realist. It was due to our common social democratic tradition of working hard to make our dreams become reality that the Middle East Peace Accord could be finalized one night last August in Oslo.

Years of work and contacts in the Socialist International and labour movement contacts with both parties to the conflict came to play an important role. The handshake between our party colleague Prime Minister Rabin and Chairman Arafat electrified an entire world.

Now the peace accord is under attack from forces on both sides. Now is the time for social democrats to work with positive forces on both sides and to continue to play a supportive and positive role.

If peace can be brought to the Middle East, there is no limit to what can be achieved by common efforts.

I have come directly from the Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony in Oslo yesterday. There another handshake took place - between the political opponents Nelson Mandela and Frederik de Klerk.

Again - we must think the unthinkable and work for goals that seemed impossible - that peace and equal rights can come to all the people of South Africa.

Today, we are experiencing a reinvigorated social democratic movement. The trend is clear in a number of countries. Social democracy is on the move forward. Our goals are ambitious, our visions are large. But nothing less will serve us.

The closing years of this century will be decisive. We cannot focus exclusively on full employment, environmental protection or international solidarity, but must pursue all these goals at the very same time. Our greatest resource is our own political

will and ability to cooperate based on common values. The ultimate resource we must tap is human potential and creativity. This Congress in itself is an important building-block in our future common house where everybody can be fully at home.