

# #309: NORWAY'S INDEPENDENCE IN 1905

Fra Barnetoget 17de Mai 1906.

Image: Nasjonalbiblioteket/ National Library of Norway, <http://www.nb.no>

Norway celebrates its National Day on May 17th, the day their constitution was signed in 1814, declaring independence from Denmark. But this is not their official independence day. Following the signing of their constitution in 1814, Norway found itself in an unwanted union with Sweden. It wasn't until June 7, 1905 that Norway finally celebrated its independence as a free country, dissolving its 90-year union with Sweden.

When Norway fell under the rule of Sweden in 1814, the Norwegian people understandably disliked the fact that they were being represented by Swedish diplomats abroad. They had to settle for a Norwegian flag that donned a union mark indicating Sweden's control. They did not have their own king and they were not a free country. These, along with other key problems led to an increasing dissatisfaction for the union and in 1905 things came to a head.

To clear things up, Norway and Sweden both worked as independent states. Norway had a Storting (Norwegian National Assembly) which controlled the country's day to day

laws according to their constitution. However, Norway had no foreign diplomacy. King Oscar II of Sweden ruled both countries but resided primarily in Stockholm where all foreign negotiations took place. These hindrances affirmed the fact that Norway was inferior and had no room for global development while in a union with Sweden.

What really upset Norway was that Swedish diplomats represented both Norway and Sweden in consulate offices around the world. For 10 years leading up to 1905, King Oscar II received proposals from the Norwegian government that they be in charge of their own consular services abroad. The King refused each proposal and set even stricter conditions on Norway. On March 11, 1905, Norway's new prime minister and proponent for the dissolution of the union, Christian Michelsen, figured out a way to supersede the king.

When Sweden refused to accept Norway's ability for growth, Michelsen decided to form a new government within in Norway. This government declared that they would execute, "Norway's constitutional right to its own consular service and assert Norway's sovereignty as a free and independent state." Norway's Storting supported the new government but Sweden responded by refusing to sanction it.

In turn, the Norwegian Cabinet Ministers collectively resigned in an act of protest.

However, no further action was taken by the king to create a new government. Michelsen, in following the laws of the union and constitution, called the king out on his inability to form a new government in Norway. Therefore, he believed the king was no longer fulfilling his duties according to the constitution and could no longer act as king of Norway. The Storting ordered the resigned officials to return and perform their duties according to the Norwegian Constitution and on June 7th they passed a resolution to single handedly dissolve the union.

Sweden did not like this and they refused to accept the dissolution. They required a Norwegian referendum. So the Storting did just that. "On 13 August 1905 the country went to the polls. There were 368,208 votes in favour of dissolution and 184 against. Only men had the vote, but 244,765 women had signed lists supporting dissolution," according to the Royal House of Norway ([www.royalcourt.no](http://www.royalcourt.no)).

