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Internal Changes and External Threats, 1810–12

Respite, Discontent and Dangers

The government in Copenhagen could breathe a sigh of relief when the peace treaty between Denmark-Norway and Sweden was signed at Jönköping on 10 December 1809. Moreover, the election of Prince Christian August as the heir to the Swedish throne promised more harmonious relations between Sweden and Denmark-Norway in the future. At the same time Sweden was gravitating towards France, suggesting that the Scandinavian countries would soon find themselves on the same side of the great conflict between Napoleon and Great Britain. The licensed trade with Great Britain was also warmly welcomed by the Danish-Norwegian government, as it would help to remedy the worst effects of the war with the British. For a while, the peace with Sweden and the licensed trade provided the Danish-Norwegian state with desperately needed respite and the opportunity to heal the wounds of war as well as to breathe new life into trade and financial life across the state.

However, many problems and dangers still loomed on the horizon. The crisis in Norway in 1808–09 had sowed the seeds of discontent, which, even in times of respite such as 1810–12, was never far below the surface and could emerge again. The same was true of Schleswig and Holstein. Following the incorporation of Holstein into Denmark after the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, a series of reforms and changes was suggested, planned or introduced, all of which threatened or could put an end to the autonomy Holstein had previously enjoyed as a duchy bound to the Oldenburg monarchy by a union and which came on top of the economic crisis suffered as a consequence of the Continental Blockade.1
Yet the most serious threat to Denmark-Norway was external. While Sweden’s peace with France in January 1810 brought her into Napoleon’s camp, Sweden was never destined to be a really faithful ally of Napoleonic France. And while Christian August’s arrival in Stockholm, also in January 1810, signalled friendlier Scandinavian relations, his tenure as Crown Prince Carl (Charles) August – the name he assumed after he crossed the border – proved to be brief. He suffered a stroke and died on 28 May 1810, which caused renewed destabilisation of the political situation in Scandinavia, as his death made it necessary to settle the issue of the Swedish succession once more.

The Society for the Welfare of Norway

The Norwegians held a magnificent farewell celebration for Christian August in Christiania on 29 December 1809. The entire town was illuminated, and its prominent citizens had been invited to a dinner in the rooms of the Cathedral School in honour of the prince. On the face of it, the celebration and the dinner seemed an innocent event for an extremely popular prince who had guided Norway through two years of deep crisis and, in the eyes of many people, had saved the country from destruction. Beneath the surface of the celebration, however, there was a clear political undertone that was packed with dynamite.

Count Herman Wedel Jarlsberg’s efforts earlier in the summer and autumn of 1809 to pave the way for a union of Norway and Sweden had yielded few, if any, practical results. Wedel Jarlsberg was obliged to change his plans and strategies, but his aim remained the same: to separate Norway from Denmark and unite it with Sweden. This was the reason underlying the foundation of the Society for the Welfare of Norway as part of the farewell festivities for Christian August. All who attended the dinner received an invitation to join the society, and the response was overwhelming, some 200 prominent citizens immediately accepting it.

Once the decision had been made to set up the society at a private meeting in Christiania on 9 December 1809, Count Wedel Jarlsberg energetically opposed its official founding on 28 January, which was Frederick VI’s birthday. Instead he wanted it to coincide with the farewell celebration for Christian August so that it would take on a completely different symbolic significance. This reflected the count’s desire to link the society to a new political course for Norway under Christian August and, by implication, to a union with Sweden. Furthermore, Count Wedel Jarlsberg refused to attach the prefix ‘Royal’ to the name of the