

Four Score

Failure to join the European Union hasn't harmed the holdouts.

By Neil Clark

"THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY." The favorite refrain of totalitarians throughout history is now uttered by the serial globalizers who insist that membership in sovereignty-sapping bodies such as the EU and NATO is the only option for any self-respecting European country. If you have not surrendered your sovereignty, then you're missing out. But is this really true?

Now it might just be a freak coincidence that the four countries in Europe who have best preserved their national sovereignty—Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Belarus, none of whom are in the EU and only two of whom are in NATO—are all doing quite well. Much better, in fact, than European countries who have handed over law-making powers.

Consider Switzerland, a country that gets bad press from Europhiles for not wanting to join the EU and from serial warmongers for resolutely staying out of military conflicts. The demise of Switzerland has long been predicted. We were told that once it was forced to reduce its banking secrecy, there would be a big outflow of capital and the Swiss franc would lose its position as the world's most secure currency. Moreover Switzerland's high-wage economy would not be able to compete in the cut and thrust of the globalized system. Poppycock. Switzerland stands at number six in the list of the world's richest countries, above the U.S., Japan, and Britain. Uncompetitive? The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report currently ranks Switzerland's high-wage economy as the most competitive in the

world. GDP growth is currently 3 percent, unemployment is only 3.3 percent (compared to the EU average of 7 percent). If Switzerland is suffering from staying out of the EU and the European Economic Area then suffering has never been so comfortable.

Switzerland's non-interventionist foreign policy—the country has not been involved in a war since 1815—has had a direct impact on its prosperity. Bombing and invading other states every few years tends to get rather expensive, as one look at the U.S. deficit evidences. The Swiss' admirable stance of minding their own business also means that, unlike Britain and the U.S., the country doesn't have to spend a fortune protecting its citizens from terrorist attacks.

There is a simple way to tell whether a country is following an interventionist foreign policy: the level of security at its main international airport. Heathrow, since Britain signed on to the Gospel of Scoop Jackson, has become a nightmare: the place is now more like Colditz than a civilian airport. Zurich, by contrast, is how British airports used to be. "Is that it?" my wife and I wondered recently as we passed through the splendidly low-key security. Then we remembered that we were in a country that doesn't attack others.

Switzerland's stubborn refusal to join the EU has led to its demonization. The passionately pro-EU *Independent* newspaper last year ran a headline: "Switzerland: Europe's Heart of Darkness?" drawing attention to a racist anti-immigration poster designed by the Swiss

People's Party. While the poster, which showed three white sheep kicking a black sheep off a Swiss flag was indefensible, the media's double standard toward Switzerland is glaring. The Swissophobes, in their determination to portray the country as the next Third Reich, ignore the fact that SPP's crude nationalism has strengthened the Left, with the Green Party getting almost 10 percent of the vote—one of the best showings of any Green party in Europe.

When it comes to democracy, it's the rest of Europe that should be learning from Switzerland—not the other way round. Switzerland practices the most direct form of people power on the continent. Referenda have been an integral part of the constitution since 1848. One can understand Swiss bewilderment at how surrendering legislative powers to unelected commissars in Brussels would make their country better run.

Norway, like Switzerland, is thriving. In 2006, it officially became the richest country in the world, and it has reached its lofty position by doing exactly the opposite of what the globalizers prescribe. While Britain, another European country that discovered oil off its coast in the 1960s, frittered away the revenues paying people not to work, Norway looked to the future, setting up a State Petroleum Fund. The fund is now worth over \$210 billion. Norway, unlike Britain, has maintained control of its destiny—and control of its own waters by staying out of the EU. Britain, a country built on coal and surrounded by fish, shut down its coalmines and signed up

to the EEC's Common Fisheries Policy, allowing other community member states that had over-fished their own waters to lower their nets in British seas. The result: Britain's fishing industry is all but wiped out. Norway, wisely, had none of it.

Not that Norway is a selfish country: it's the largest donor of overseas aid in the world. By keeping out of the EU, however, Norway has been able to dance to its own tune on foreign affairs. It has also been able to maintain a generous level of welfare provision. The contrast with neighboring Sweden is revealing. Having prospered for many years outside the EEC/EU, the Swedes, by a narrow majority, voted to join the EU in a referendum in November 1994. Thirteen years on, the benefits of membership are hard to discern. Unemployment is around 7 percent, and the national debt has risen to \$124 billion—39 percent of GDP. Young Swedes are unsurprisingly voting with their feet, with tens of thousands flooding over the border to non-EU Norway to work in restaurants or factories.

Iceland is another country that has thrived on independence. Once the poorest nation in Western Europe, it now has the fourth-highest per capita GDP in the world—around \$62,000, and it tops the UN Human Development Index. Growth in the last few years has been hugely impressive—in 2004, the economy grew by 6.4 percent. And Iceland has the lowest unemployment of any sizeable country in Western Europe—currently around 1 percent. As in Norway, concern over losing control over its fishing waters is a major factor in public opposition to joining the EU, as fishing accounts for 40 percent of Iceland's exports. And joining the EU would also threaten the country's cradle-to-grave welfare provision.

The per capita income in Belarus may pale into insignificance compared to

that of Switzerland, Norway, or Iceland, but the benefits of not surrendering decision-making powers to outside bodies is again clear. Upon achieving independence, other former Soviet republics blindly followed the “shock therapy” programs laid down by the IMF/World Bank and other globalist institutions. GDP plummeted, unemployment rose, and mass privatization led to the rise of corrupt oligarchies. Only Belarus bucked the trend.

President Alexander Lukashenko developed a mixed economy, reforming at his own pace and continuing to protect agriculture and heavy industry. The result is that unemployment in Belarus

demned by the EU and United States. Yet that same year in Hungary, over 100 people—including women and the elderly—were injured after police charged a crowd of anti-government protestors and fired rubber bullets and water canons. The Hungarian government's clampdown was barely reported in the Western media. Unlike Belarus, the country is a member of both the EU and NATO.

Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Belarus all operate on different economic systems. The Swiss have a largely low-tax, private-enterprise economy. Iceland and Norway operate high-tax, high-spend welfare-state models. Belarus, in

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is only 1.6 percent, and out of all the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, only Belarus has thus far equaled the pre-1991 Soviet level of GDP physical volume.

It's worth comparing the progress Belarus has made with that of neighboring Poland, the neocons' favorite European country. Poland followed the globalizers' instructions to the letter: it cut subsidies to its farmers and to industry, sold off its economy, and signed up to join the EU and NATO. The result has been a steep rise in unemployment and a massive exodus of its young people.

Of course, Lukashenko gets bad press for his refusal to sign away his country's sovereignty. Belarus has been labeled “the last dictatorship in Europe,” despite the holding of regular multi-party elections and referendums. Once again, the double standard is glaring. The removal by police of around 150 anti-government protestors from Minsk's main square nearly a week after the 2006 presidential elections was con-

the words of its president, runs a “socially orientated market economy.” But what all these models have in common is that they're organic: they've developed in time, in accordance with national history, religion, and tradition, and enjoy popular support.

By contrast, the EU is about imposing a one-size-fits-all economic and social model, which takes little or no account of regional or national differences or the heritage of the countries it absorbs.

I suggested earlier that the success of the four countries might be a coincidence. Yet I don't think it is. This quartet of countries has been successful because they have maintained crucial decision-making powers. By keeping their independence, and continuing to thrive in spite of the globalizers' forecasts, they have demonstrated a truth that we should never forget. There is always another way. ■

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Arts & Letters

FILM

[*Be Kind Rewind*]

Home Movies

By Steve Sailer

A NEW SATIRICAL WEBSITE called “Stuff White People Like,” which offers dead-on deadpan analyses of status symbols among the under-40 white middle class, has earned 3 million visits in the last ten days. Listed along with such *de rigueur* affectations of the more-sensitive-than-thou set as “Apple Products,” “Threatening to Move to Canada,” and “Barack Obama,” is “Michel Gondry,” the French director of Bjork’s music videos and “such white classics as ‘Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.’”

Christian Lander, who masterminds the site, helpfully advises:

[Mentioning Gondry] can be used to help find common ground with white people. Talk about how you wanted to direct music videos after you saw Michel Gondry’s video for ‘Around the World’ by Daft Punk. Then make a joke about how foolish you were at that age and everyone will have a good laugh. But they will also feel your pain about sacrificing your artistic dreams.

Like much of the stuff white people like, there is something to be said for the ingenious and ingenuous Gondry, whose video autobiography is aptly entitled “I’ve Been 12 Forever.” His twee trademarks are childlike sets and props that he might have made out of cardboard

and other junk he found in his dad’s garage. Indeed, I found Gondry’s surrealist comedy “The Science of Sleep,” with Gael García Bernal as a boyish graphics designer who can’t tell his waking and dreaming lives apart, the most delightful movie of 2006.

Yet while Apple can charge \$800 extra for a laptop, movie tickets all cost about the same, so having a small upscale fan base doesn’t do much financially for Gondry. To escape the status-striver’s ghetto and connect with the American mass market, Gondry is recycling the do-it-yourself aesthetic of “Science” in “Be Kind Rewind.” It stars part-time heavy metal singer Jack Black and part-time rapper Mos Def. Unfortunately, although not surprisingly, American lunkheadedness and French condescension make an ineffectual combination.

While Mos Def is #68 on the “Stuff White People Like” site, Jack Black’s reputation is in decline. Here he plays the same character he did in “School of Rock” and all his other films, the pop culture-obsessed loser. But the suspicion is growing that perhaps Black isn’t a genius who understands the common mind—maybe he just *has* the common mind.

The premise of “Be Kind Rewind” is even more rickety than that of “Science.” Mos Def is the mild-mannered clerk at Danny Glover’s dusty VHS-only video store in the slums of Passaic, New Jersey. While the owner is on vacation, the assistant’s paranoid friend (Black) tries to sabotage the next-door power plant. The electromagnetic pulse erases all the videotapes.

To prevent the owner’s dotty friend, played by Mia Farrow, from tattling when she finds out that “Ghostbusters” is blank, they reshoot it in an afternoon: “I’ll be Bill Murray; you be everyone

else.” Soon the whole neighborhood wants to appear in their 20-minute zero-budget remakes of famous movies.

“Be Kind Rewind” is a tribute to the YouTube generation’s devotion to making stuff up themselves—albeit, an inordinately expensive accolade to amateurism. Gondry, who spent only \$6 million on “Science,” somehow squandered \$20 million here. The endless credits list for this elephantine trifle includes 16 drivers and a “second second assistant director.”

There wasn’t enough in the budget, though, for a good script doctor. Gondry’s amusing trilingual screenplay for “Science of Sleep” showed that the screenwriting Oscar he won for co-authoring “Eternal Sunshine” with the great Charlie Kaufman wasn’t undeserved. But as talented as the *auteur* is, it’s asking too much of the visually oriented Frenchman to expect him to write witty dialogue in English.

Still, “Rewind” raises the question of whether, with an infinite number of choices in free entertainment (some of it as good as “Stuff”) just a click away, can going to the movies survive?

I think so. First, trying to perfect anything visual requires endless work, as the film’s three-month shooting schedule suggests. This means the nonprofessionals who have enough time and energy to make their own movies are generally so young they haven’t had a life yet and can merely parody the pop culture rattling around inside their heads.

Second, one big reason Americans still spend \$9.7 billion annually on movie tickets is that they want to be forced to sit still and watch a single story for two hours without the nagging sense that they could (and thus should) be surfing the Web for something cooler. ■

Rated PG-13 for some sexual references.