

The Peaceful Revolts – 1968 in the Nordic Welfare States

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The student revolts of 1968 in the Nordic countries were peaceful in comparison with what happened in places like Berlin, Paris or Rome. Students in the Nordic countries also protested and revolted against the authoritarian traditions of higher education, but only rarely did they take to the streets like their German and French counterparts. As this chapter argues, the relative peacefulness of the Nordic 1968 must be understood within a wider political context. The growth within higher education went hand in hand with the development of the welfare state. Students' demands for reform converged with university policy development, especially in terms of democratization in higher education. Still, by drawing on examples from Copenhagen, Oslo, Reykjavik and Trondheim, the chapter shows that there were many tensions and paradoxes related to the various ways these peaceful revolts were played out in the Nordic countries. A long-term effect of the student movement of the 1960s was, ironically, that it helped pave the way for the 'freedom revolution' of the 1980s and 1990s.

In 1968 students in the Nordic welfare states protested against stiff hierarchies in universities and in society. They also took part in the general leftist mobilization, spurred by national and international currents, notably the Vietnam War. Inspiration from the United States, Italy, Germany, and France was particularly important. The legitimacy of authorities was called into question. New cultural expressions came to public awareness, in such fields as music, clothing, and living. Although Nordic students engaged in protests and revolts like students elsewhere in the Western sphere, the student revolts in these countries took different form than in countries such as Germany or France, not manifesting themselves to the same degree in direct confrontation and street conflict. Still, while the term 'revolt' may seem a bit exaggerated, the students and, not least, the authorities and the general public, experienced this period as a time of revolt. To understand why the 1968 student revolts in the Nordic countries were so peaceful we must take into consideration the political context of this period. Political developments within academia dovetailed with the growth of the Nordic welfare state in the 1960s. Important student demands converged with central elements of contemporary university and state policies, especially those regarding the democratization of the universities. However, this did not mean harmony and consensus in the relationships between students, university officials and governments. As we will show, tensions and paradoxes characterized the period.

Examples from the Nordic capitals Reykjavik, Oslo and Copenhagen as well as from provincial Trondheim and Roskilde will show a certain diversity within the Nordic countries, but also how students' demands coincided with political pressure for change within universities. However, the students' protests must be related to the national governments' higher education policies as well as to national university traditions. National differences between the three countries led to slightly different conflicts and alliances between students,

faculty and government. Besides this national variation we will also expose differences between capital and province – between old and new universities. The overall picture is that the students' protests influenced the modernization of the Nordic universities in the years around 1968.

The Nordic context

There can be no doubt that the cultural and institutional tensions produced by the almost explosive growth in higher education in the 1960s and early 1970s were a fundamental precondition of the student revolt in the Nordic countries as nearly everywhere else in the West. This rapid expansion, which in the course of a few years transformed a time-honoured elite institution into a mass university, was largely planned and implemented by government. It was a response partly to a general shift in economic thought whereby an increased educational level was identified as a critical precondition of further economic growth and social development, and partly to prognoses pointing toward an imminent, dramatic rise in the demand for higher education among the post-war baby boomers that were now about to come of age. Hence, while seeking to satisfy the youth's rising demand for higher education in ways that would meet the functional requirements of the welfare state and an advanced industrial economy, the government bred a new generation of rebellious students who hesitated to accept their future roles in capitalist society.

The period from the 1950s until the 1980s has been characterized as the golden age of welfare. The social-democratic parties and, to a lesser degree, the liberal and the conservative parties, saw social security and health services as well as education and research as elements of one integrated model of society: the welfare state. An important ideological foundation of the welfare state system is to be found in the notion of universalism. The equality and human rights of citizens were to guide the development of welfare institutions, including educational institutions.

In every Nordic country we see governmental commissions dealing with the future of the expanding higher-education systems. The commissions were charged with providing in-depth analyses of the structure of higher education in order to advise the governments. Student and faculty representatives took part in some commissions. Others were made by government officials without consulting universities. The detailed reports from these commissions were subject to intense public discussions as well as student protests.

Inherent in the picture of the radical students in the 1960s and 1970s is the idea of a revolt against the stagnated values represented by the university authorities and professorial rule. But this polarized image of rebellious students opposing a conservative professorial rule implies a certain simplification and homogenization, not allowing for the fact that the faculty also consisted of different individuals with diverse views of the ongoing changes. It should also be kept in mind that a significant part of the students were conservatives and liberals.

Instead of operating with a simple dichotomy we find it more appropriate to focus on the interrelationship between three groups of actors: faculty, government agencies and

students. The changes of the period seem to have been shaped in interplay between these three parties. As we will demonstrate, they were highly diverse, representing very different worldviews or values. But they were all influential in different ways.

The student revolt at the University of Oslo

The student movement in Norway began as a general political mobilization in the mid-1960s, centering on the Norwegian Student Society in Oslo, a time-honoured political scene of the national academic elite. When radical students at the University of Oslo began to turn their neo-Marxist criticism against the university itself, from 1968-69, their principal target was not the professors, but the government. From 1966 to 1970, a government commission (known as the 'Ottosen committee' after its chairman, director Kristian Ottosen) presented a series of reform proposals to expand and streamline the national higher education system. Student reactions towards these proposals aptly illustrate how the confident post-war cooperation between students and government, based on a cooperative system of student welfare, was abruptly broken by the student revolt. While the first two commission reports had been largely well received by the students' organizations, the third and fourth reports were immediately identified with the technocratic master plans for higher education that had antagonized students in France, Germany and Sweden. The commission recommended a cut of all academic degrees down to four years of study, a stricter selection of students, more structured, course-based curricula, and the introduction of more vocation-oriented regional colleges with a shorter curriculum alongside the universities. The students strongly argued that this would destroy the university as a home of critical scholarship, reducing it to a mere instrument for the reproduction of the capitalist system. In this campaign, students and professors largely found themselves on the same side in defending traditional academic freedom and the autonomy of universities against governmental calls for rationalization.

The relatively cooperative climate that existed between students and faculty in the late 1960s was reflective of a tradition of give-and-take. Since the early twentieth century, students had become increasingly integrated in the governing bodies of the universities of Oslo and Bergen. In 1969–70 the student revolt spread from the Norwegian Student Society to these representative student agencies, enforcing a new policy of confrontation within the university itself. However, when the student revolt broke out, the University of Oslo was about to transform and democratize its system of academic self-government. The initiative came from reform-oriented professors and administrative leaders rather than from students – largely as an answer to structural tensions caused by the strong expansion of the teaching staff. But the reform process was easily adapted to growing demands for democratic participation among students and subordinate teachers. Although leftist students would later complain that these reform proposals were not reflective of a sufficiently radical political consciousness, they clearly contributed to appease the local student revolt within the university, at least in its early phase.

However, alliances and antagonisms between students, faculty, and government

shifted rapidly with the logic of the situation. By the early 1970s professors in the humanities and social sciences had become scared by the Machiavellian methods employed by part of the student left. They therefore attempted to stop the proposed scheme for a new, radically democratized academic self-government, advocating instead a much more limited revision of the existing system. In this situation, the government supported the most radical proposals and overruled the faculty. Likewise, an internal revolt at the Department of Education, led by radical students and supported by a minority of the faculty, was actively supported by Labour MPs and eventually by the government. Neither those reform-oriented professors who had supported the most radical proposals, nor Labour politicians seem to have been in much sympathy with the most extreme student activists. Yet both parties shared a strong belief that the participation of students in an extended "academic democracy" would ultimately integrate them in the academic community and a wider democratic culture in society. Such firm belief in the integrative impact of democratic participation, which was in itself deeply characteristic of the Nordic welfare states, had also overruled objections from conservative professors when the students had gained representation in the academic senate in 1955.

In the long run, therefore, the students were thus barely punished by the government for their harsh confrontational rhetoric. Neither were the professors much rewarded for their readiness to abdicate from their old position as the university's sovereign masters, to which many of their colleagues abroad clung much more stubbornly.

In 1968-69, the student rebels had presented themselves as protagonists of the university against the "totalitarian" thrust of a technocratic-capitalist society. In their analysis, academic autonomy did not imply scientific objectivity, but rather a freedom to consciously choose whose interests one wanted to serve by one's scholarship. This view triumphed in the general referendum of 1972, in which a slim majority rejected national membership in the European Economic Community (EEC) against a massive campaign from the politico-socio-economic elites. That moment clearly constituted the high point of the New Left in Norway. Academics had played an active part in the anti-EEC movement as "organic intellectuals" or "counter-expertise", serving popular interests rather than those of the "establishment", and continued to do so in various popular movements that flourished in the 1970s, such as the women's liberation movement, the environmental movement, and the Sámi movement. The University of Tromsø, established in 1972, was explicitly designed to serve interests of the North Norwegian periphery against those of the geographical and political centre, and the university was infused with an ideology of hybridization and inter-disciplinarity from the outset.

These examples testify to the relative susceptibility of the national political system to the new ideas and political style of the student movement. Commentators have pointed to the ease with which the political youth organizations persuaded their mother parties to adopt parts of the agenda of the new social movements. Particularly significant was the change of attitude toward the Vietnam War that took place in Norwegian politics in general and within the Labour Party in particular, from the late 1960s. The fact that the student movement actually led to the formation of two new political parties in Norway, the Socialist People's Party in 1961 and the Maoist party AKP in 1973, has been taken as a sign of the movement's

penetrating power at the national political scene. In a wider perspective, it has been argued that the student movement and the new social movements impelled a renewal of the social-democratic project. Democratic ambitions were expanded to new spheres of life, such as the family and the work-place, and a new, holistic concept of social policy was developed to counteract the human costs of modernization, urbanization, and rationalization. While the Labour Party was still seen by the New Left as a major advocate of such "client-making" social trends, a new reflective doubt was introduced and to some extent institutionalized which modified the welfare state project and national political culture.

This largely fruitful impact of the student movement within the political sphere stands out in some contrast to its more problematical effects on the University of Oslo itself. Student activism and protests strongly affected daily life especially in the humanities and social sciences. At some departments they introduced an aggressive "hermeneutics of suspicion" that tended to disrupt and politicize scholarly communication. But study programs and the faculty/department structure were in general only moderately affected. Gifted students from the movement were not tenured for many years to come, as the previous explosive growth of the academic staff came to a sudden halt after the oil crisis of 1973. Only at one arena, the time-honoured Norwegian Student Society, did the student movement have a thorough and lasting impact, and indeed a largely destructive one: through political mobilization and manipulation, the faction of Marxist-Leninists dominated the student society for a decade, transforming it into a propaganda vehicle of the Maoist movement. A more than 150-year-old academic agora was in effect ruined, and would never become properly reconstructed again.

University reform and student protest in Trondheim

The situation at the University of Trondheim illustrates the heterogeneity of the Nordic academic landscape around 1968. The university was in fact formally established only in 1968, after some years of heated debate. The Norwegian Institute of Technology (NTH), established in 1910, was the dominating part of the new, loosely integrated university, alongside the Norwegian Teachers' Training College (1922) and the Science Museum (1760).

The level of conflict between the students and the academic and government authorities was even lower in Trondheim than in Copenhagen and Oslo in 1968 and the ensuing years. One of the reasons for this was that the NTH was explicitly kept out of the reforms suggested by the Ottosen Committee, at least in its main report. According to this report, the NTH was one among several other higher college institutions in Norway that worked well in terms of students graduating on time and with very high completion rates. Another reason was that the student activism, so closely tied to the New Left movements, was soon funnelled into the struggle against Norway's negotiations for EEC membership that by and large came to overshadow conflicts over reform in higher education.

Yet, the academic community in Trondheim was by no means insulated from the university discussions in Oslo or from those unfolding elsewhere in the world during the late 1960s and early 1970s. These impulses influenced Trondheim's academic culture, although

chiefly on the level of discourse. Only on rare occasions did the Trondheim students take to the streets to protest. One such instance came after the attempted assassination of the German student leader Rudi Dutschke in April 1968, when students in Trondheim organized a protest march against the local news coverage, accusing the local daily *Adresseavisen* of being an accomplice of the detested German *Springer Press*. Campus protests like teach-ins, sit-ins, strikes and boycotts did happen, but only in a few isolated cases. Apart from that the students' arena for voicing their criticism was mainly the Student Society meetings. In addition, the students' newspaper *Under Dusken* was flooded with critical discussion between left wing and right-leaning students over international political issues. Moreover, from 1968 on students began to address critically the forms and contents of their education.

The students at the NTH criticized their institution along three lines, sometimes intersecting with each other, at other times causing conflicts among the students themselves. Firstly, they launched a plea for a thorough curricular reform, which was basically a criticism of an existentialist kind directed towards the (supposed) lack of meaning and purpose in their education; secondly, the NTH was criticized from an ideological perspective, based on the assumption that the institution had become one of the cogs in the imperialist machinery of Western capitalism; thirdly, the students were striving for democratic reforms that stemmed from a frustration with the students' lack of formal influence in the governing bodies of the college.

During 1968, an increasing number of left-leaning students voiced their criticism of the engineering and architecture education. Among the students at the NTH there existed a strongly felt and multi-layered discontent with the educational system. They wanted a university education with time for critical reflection, not a technical school marred by intense cramming. They wanted meaningful influence for the students, not uncontested professorial oligarchy; ultimately then, the student activists demanded a different society than the established "technocratic order". It should also be kept in mind that the various academic cultures within the university would frame the students' critical acts and thoughts. For instance, the architect students would vent their opposition against their allegedly reactionary professors through avant-garde urban planning theory, while the science and engineering students would raise environmentalist questions.

The NTH students were also concerned with the question of university democracy. Before 1968 students were not formally represented in the highest governing body of the NTH, although their representatives were allowed to meet when issues of particular interest to them were discussed. The students looked for inspiration for a less authoritarian model of university governance, and they found Copenhagen's Rector Mogens Fog to be the kind of reform-minded leading figure they would like to see in Trondheim. More importantly, the students proposed different approaches to democratic reform, some of them with radical implications: university democracy could either take form as a three-part equilibrium of influence between professors, non-tenured staff and students, or through general assemblies appointing "energetic persons with interests and skills to take on administrative tasks".ⁱ Both of these proposals would entail a radical shift of influence away from the professors to the benefit of students and other staff.

Just like in Oslo, the processes of democratic reform were already on course. During the 1960s it had dawned upon the professors that a thorough assessment of the governing structure at the NTH was long overdue. Pressure for reform was growing, and it was not only coming from disgruntled students. Junior staff members were increasingly demanding more influence in running the college business. By 1968, they had become a force to be reckoned with. While in 1936 there had been only two junior faculty members per professor, the ratio had now soared to more than five. The strains on the existing rules and regulations were evident, and with the new university structure looming, solutions had to be found for future governing bodies at the NTH, along with ideas about how these could function within the new university. These processes resulted in the inclusion of junior faculty and student representatives in the governing bodies of both the NTH and the new university.

Initially, the reform received a mixed reception from the students. Some argued that the inclusion of student representatives only served as a formal concession to the claims for more influence that would yield no significant improvement. Others realized that the struggle for change had to take place at the lower levels of the university; in the departments and at the faculties. In the longer term, the discussions within the NTH were overshadowed by the heated debates about the integration of the new university. Here, students and faculty members at the NTH formed an alliance in protecting their prestigious technical college from losing autonomy to a regional university targeted on mass education.

Thus, on the one hand the students' cry for educational reform served to push forward new directions in the engineering and architectural training at the NTH, but on the other hand the democratic influence gained was of a formal rather than a real nature. The most dramatic outcome of 1968 in Trondheim, however, was by all accounts felt in the Student Society. This institution had functioned as a vital arena for debate, but due to its radicalization and the hostile ideological climate many were alienated from participating. Still, unlike the fate of the Norwegian Student Society in Oslo, many of the venerated academic traditions of Trondheim's Student Society survived '1968'.

Changing universities and protesting students in Denmark

In 1968, tensions between the Danish government and the Danish universities were heightened. The government wanted universities to open up to societal needs. The students demanded influence on university matters. And university professors stuck to traditions. In 1968-70, the centre-right government and the left-wing students acted together in an unexpected alliance to deprive the professors of their previous dominant position in universities' internal affairs. The rebellious students contributed to the modernization of the universities. Basically, their demands concerning the universities did not differ from those of the government.

The background for this paradoxical convergence of interests is to be found in the hesitant policy of the social democratic governments in the 1960s towards the universities. Although the growing number of students was welcomed by the government, no initiatives

were taken to adjust the universities to the new situation. Danish professors were appalled by the growing number of students. At an early stage, they predicted that university traditions would be overthrown if the number of students kept increasing. However, they did not follow their Norwegian colleagues in Oslo who themselves began an internal restructuring of the university. The Danish way was to establish new universities in the hope that the old ones could limit the number of students at a fixed level. This strategy failed, and the two Danish universities tripled their number of students in ten years. In 1960 the University of Copenhagen had nearly 7,000 students, in 1970 it had 24,000 students. The smaller provincial University of Aarhus had 2,400 students in 1960 and 11,000 in 1970.

The growing number of students matched the policy of the government of social democrats and social liberals. They did not want to hinder the young generation from attending universities. On the contrary, the new students were welcomed, despite tacit protests from the professors. First of all, it was foreseen that an educational increase in the workforce would soon be needed in the name of economic growth. Secondly, the growing number of university students was seen as a proof of more equal access to universities, regardless of social background or geographical origin.

In comparison to Norway and Sweden, Danish politicians were very hesitant to impose new internal structures upon the universities, concerning the structure of the studies and the internal structures of decision-making. The Danish governmental commissions' advice to the government was more in line with the universities' interests than with the government's policies, because representatives from the universities influenced the commissions' recommendations to a great extent.

The catalyst for the students' protests was the launch of a commission report on university democracy in January 1968. The Commission on University Administration had only recommended a few changes, which still left junior staff and students without decisive influence on the universities' internal matters. Politicians supported the students' request for internal academic democracy rather than the professors clinging to traditions. This was partly because it was in line with the welfare state ideology of democratic participation and the competent citizen, and partly because politicians felt a need to weaken the professors' firm grip on internal university affairs.

The Danish student rebellion of 1968 triggered intensive discussions and new regulations concerning universities' internal organization. The students' demands were "Break professorial rule" and "Participation now". This was painted on the wall of one of the University of Copenhagen's buildings on the day of the very first student action, 21 March 1968. The following week the students occupied part of the university premises, and university matters were put on the public agenda in a very effective way. Now, the politicians were not only concerned with societal demands for more open universities, but with students' demands as well.

During the following two years the students arranged demonstrations, occupations of university premises, and public meetings. The students' actions meant that public discussions about university matters were continuously on the public agenda, but direct confrontations with the authorities were kept at a very low level.

At this early stage of the student revolt, the major demand was to establish educational committees with an equal number of teachers and students. These committees should be responsible for planning of education in each subject within the regulations issued by the government. This would put an end to professors' dominance. Such committees were already established at some faculties, albeit the final decisions were still in the hands of the professors. Now it was claimed that the educational committees should have the authority to make decisions about educational affairs without consulting the faculty.

The rector of the University of Copenhagen, Mogens Fog, strongly supported the students' demands. The government agreed with the students' fierce demands for participation on educational matters, but not with the students' demands for half of the votes in matters of research and budget. This demand was rejected by the government as well as by the professors, including those who had so far supported students' participation in educational matters. In 1970 the first law on Danish universities was imposed. It gave the students half of the votes in the educational committees and one third of the votes in the governing bodies where matters of economics and research were addressed. However, the law also provided the rules for election of student representatives in order to protect minorities and thereby weaken the left-wing students, who responded by boycotting the elections for the first two years.

The new law gave rise to the establishment of a new organization of moderate students, while the leftist students controlled the existing students' councils in the universities. In addition to this, Denmark had the Students' Society since the 1820s. This Society was divided into political factions and had often hosted lectures of a political nature. Although the Society in 1968 experienced a weakened economic base, not least because the left-wing students did not participate, the old organization managed to continue as a social but rather non-political society while left-wing discussions about student politics took place within the national student movement.

After 1970 there was no alliance or convergence between the Danish government and the left-wing student movement. Leading government officials put a new agenda forward in reports that were written without consulting university representatives. By adjusting the number of students to the predicted demand for academics, the government emphasized the new instrumental role of the universities and became a target of student protests.

The most outspoken criticism in the 1970s came from the students of the university in Roskilde, established in 1972. This university was planned to be the home of a new kind of studies, with two-year broad introductory study programs, inter-disciplinarity, and intensive use of student group work. Students and government agreed to establish a modular system at the new university. The university attracted left-wing students who soon declared Roskilde to be "a university in the interest of the working class".

Though students and politicians had agreed in 1968 to break with professorial rule, that did not mean they agreed on who should now govern the universities. The students felt that they should usurp decisive influence from the professors. However, state policies went in another direction, pursuing the technocratic dream of smooth higher-education planning.

The government intervened at Roskilde University, but only after years of hard confrontations was the university actually adapted to the national scheme.

The transformation of universities was not only a transition from elite to mass education, but also gave universities a role in the building of the welfare state, defined as a state that provided equal opportunities to citizens and co-determination on matters vital to the individual. On the other hand, the welfare state also meant a strong state, an aspect experienced by the universities in the 1970s when new government agencies introduced strict control over the economy of universities and the "production" of candidates.

Danish politicians were positive towards the changes that introduced welfare state ideology in the universities, such as giving the students the right to be represented in the university's governing bodies and to student allowances. Furthermore, increasing student numbers widened the social and geographical access to the university. The students' revolt led to relatively strong student influence on the universities' internal affairs, but the students' most important contribution to Danish higher education politics was to put university politics on the public agenda.

Iceland: rebellion from the inside and the outside

In the history of the University of Iceland, few periods are as consequential as the decade from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. The University, located in the capital Reykjavík, was the only university in the country at the time and thus the main arena for the changes taking place. The period of the 1968 student revolt coincided with a profound reorganization of the university, a fact which profoundly affected the development in these years.

Until the 1960s the primary role of the university had been to train professionals, providing education for Icelandic medical doctors, lawyers, clergymen, and in the so-called Norse or Icelandic Studies. From the mid-1960s the school was expanding into a different and much larger institution with a broader emphasis, providing a basic education in most subjects. Moreover, the university was restructured with the introduction of new departments and faculties, such as the faculty of natural sciences in 1966, the Department of General Sociology 1970 and, finally, the faculty of social sciences in 1976. At the same time the university was dealing with serious financial difficulties.

A primary factor causing the changes was of course the huge increase in the number of university students. The student population rose from around 850 in 1965 to 2,200 in 1975, or more than a doubling in one decade. Icelandic society had been undergoing an enormous transformation in the 1950s and 1960s, demographically and in terms of such factors as urbanization, industrialization, and the structure of labour. The country, which had been among the poorer countries in Europe up to the Second World War, now joined the ranks of the most economically developed countries. The university was now a part of and working in a society which in many ways had changed fundamentally throughout the previous 20 to 25 years.

The radical waves of the 1960s and the critical ideas of the so-called 68-generation manifested themselves and shaped developments as well. In this respect it should be pointed out that the radical movement of the 1960s arrived rather late in Iceland. The 1968 movement

as characterized by the emergence of a new "counter-cultural" lifestyle, political criticism and rock music culture, did not really begin to shape the way of life at the university until about 1970 or 1971. However, it may be stated that the movement did influence the development of the university in the late 1960s in other ways, giving incentives to criticism and encouraging new attitudes towards university authorities.

In 1966 a university commission was established, at the behest of the Ministry of Education. The university commission played an important role in all debates on the university in the late 1960s. In 1969, the commission submitted a detailed report with a comprehensive description and interpretation of the main challenges of the university and how they should be met. This was probably one of the most important results of the foundation of this commission, as an extensive analysis of the situation of the university in these years, combined with an analysis of the development of Icelandic society, was provided.

One of the main themes of the report was a structural reform of university education in Iceland. The main proposal of the commission was that university education should generally be based on a "rather short basic education" of about three or four years, leading to a bachelor's degree. It is thus clear that the university commission sought inspiration in the Anglo-American university tradition. Education underwent a fundamental restructuring. A "modular system" was introduced where subjects were divided into shorter courses. The university commission also took up the theme of the scientific status of the university. It is noteworthy that the commission expressed concerns regarding the possibilities of the university to conduct research in a satisfying manner under the current circumstances. It was important to change the organization of scientific work and at the same time to expand the funding of research.

A study conference held at the university in August 1969 shows that the students demanded a reform that was not wholly different from the proposal of the university commission. The participants consisted of twenty people nominated by the students' council and ten nominated by the association of Icelandic students abroad. Apart from that, Icelandic university students in general were allowed to participate. The students concluded that due to the university's position as a school to train civil servants its scientific basis was incomplete. The conference made various claims concerning the restructuring of training in the university. For example the students required a review of the theoretical basis, demanding a training in "pure methodology" within the humanities, and also a more detailed scientific training in the faculty of engineering and science, both of which the students claimed were inadequate.

The student conference also expressed a criticism which was different from the university commission, stating that it was necessary to view the "social base (and thus the moral [base])" of each subject. The conference's conclusion seems to have been influenced by the left-wing socialist criticism that was to become more prominent after 1970 with a critique of the strong link between education and economic growth. It must thus be emphasized that in the 1970s Icelandic students began to express much stronger criticism against the goals of university education. According to the Icelandic sociologists Gestur Guðmundsson and Kristín Ólafsdóttir, radical views were especially prominent among students in the humanities and sociology, the medical faculty, as well as in "natural history". Icelandic students also

fought for their right to participate in the government of the university in the late 1960s and the 1970s. In 1968 the battle took place in the students' paper *Stúdentablaðið*. Early in the following year, 1969, the students arranged a sit-in in the university building, claiming a participation in the election of the university rector. This was indeed momentous as the votes of the students were decisive for the outcome of the election of a new rector in the Spring of 1969. The struggle for the right to participate in the government of the University continued in the 1970s and in 1975 the students got two representatives out of nine in the university council, and almost one third of representatives in the faculty councils.

In many important conflicts related to the structural change of the university in this period it is difficult to clearly distinguish between students' criticism on the one hand and the criticism put forward by professors and the university rector on the other. The discussion of new teaching methods and increased student participation in education is a good example of this. This debate was part of the overall restructuring of teaching which was also discussed in the commission's report.

This process is quite interesting for the light it sheds on how change was implemented and how it fits in with the image of radical students in turmoil with professors, which forms an important part of the "social memory" of the 1968 generation. For example the university's rector stated that he agreed that it was necessary to change teaching methods in various subjects, and the students had to become more active in teaching. The main tool in this regard was teaching in small groups, and consequently reducing the weight of lectures. The same view was expressed in the report from the university commission.

However, there is little doubt that it was the students themselves who were the most active participants in this discussion and, possibly, were the first to put it on the agenda in a decisive manner. In 1966, a sub-committee within the student council, called the student council education committee engaged itself in a campaign against "the lecture format". This involved meetings and decisions which aimed at changing this form of teaching. It was a campaign which thus involved a direct struggle against the professors.

It is also noteworthy that the proposal to include a "modular system" did not come from university authorities, but from the student council. It was student representatives within the university council who in 1970 put forward a proposal to include a "modular system" as soon as possible. On the other hand, the proposal was adopted unanimously by the university council.

As mentioned, it is not possible to distinguish clearly between the criticism of the students on the one hand and the professors and rector on the other. It is more accurate to say that the university as an institution was scrutinized and criticized severely from different sides. Of course the students expressed themselves differently and had in many ways a different world view. Neither was criticism only expressed by the students, it was also articulated by the rector and some of the teachers and professors of the university. Students were undoubtedly major players in the reform of teaching structure and teaching methods. The "student revolution" and thus the "revolt against professorial rule" seem to have had a crucial impact on the implementation of these changes. But at the same time, the process concerned a profound structural change which had quite extensive support, both among

students and university authorities. Regarding the changes as they happened at the University of Iceland, there is therefore hardly any reason to look at professors and students as two separate poles with opposite views on the university's future.

Student revolts: the Nordic way

The demands of the protesting students in 1968 concerned matters of democracy, education and research at the universities, state plans for restructuring of the universities and a general criticism of the so-called monopolistic capitalist society. It is striking that although the students took to the streets or organized sit-ins, confrontations between students and police were very rare and never had very violent implications. The Nordic student revolts were peaceful, but nevertheless full of protest and demands towards politicians and university authorities. Although we see national differences in the Nordic countries in state policies towards the universities and in university cultures, all the Nordic countries expanded their welfare states in the 1960s.

In other countries, students' demands for free speech and freedom of association were crucial. This was not the case in the Nordic countries where the students had enjoyed such freedoms in the student unions for decades. After 1968 the forums for students' political discussions profoundly changed. The heated debates in the 1970s took place in organizations based on left-wing politics. The question of students' participation in internal university bodies became crucial in Denmark where the professors up to 1968 had been absolutely dominant. In Norway the students had had influence on internal university affairs for some years. The governments were absolutely in favour of integrating the students in the universities' internal affairs. When professors tried to limit student participation, governments sided with the students against the professors. This is one explanation for the peaceful revolts of the Nordic students.

In the Nordic countries, students' demands on university matters in 1968 coincided with the ideas of the Nordic welfare state and universalism. The development of the mass university is consistent with the idea of the individual who is free to choose his or her own style of life, independent of geographical or social traditions. Free admission to universities and state grants or study loans should make university studies a social right for every gifted student. The responsible citizen was a key figure in the Nordic welfare states, an idea that also applied to university students, even when they were protesting and demonstrating.

The students' rebellion in the Nordic countries pushed forward a modernization of the universities. Demands for participation in universities' internal affairs and demands for new forms of teaching are examples. Both initiatives meant a substantial change from the traditional, professor-centred university. Lectures were often replaced or supplemented by students working in groups. This was not only due to student action but often supported by part of the professors. In addition, in many cases the curriculum was affected as students succeeded in introducing Marxist theories. More voices in internal decision-making at universities meant that professors' dominance was broken. The same applies for students'

group work as an alternative to lectures. Such changes, pushed forward by revolting students, made the university more open to societal needs.

The peaceful revolts in the Nordic countries were made possible by the fact that anti-authoritarian aspects of the students' demands, such as participation and new ways of education, were in line with the idea of the welfare state and were generally welcomed by the politicians. The activists in 1968 gained crucial influence when some of the new institutions were built up. Examples are the Norwegian regional colleges, the University of Tromsø (Norway), and Roskilde University (Denmark).

While starting out in defence of the university's autonomy against the instrumentalizing thrust of a technocratic-capitalist state, the student movement in effect worked to deconstruct the very cultural basis of this autonomy, thereby making the university more vulnerable to various forms of external social control. On the other hand, the welfare state turned out to be much more attentive to the leftist students' agenda than their crude conflation of it with "monopoly capitalism" would suggest. The student movement in fact largely failed to recognize that the expansion of higher education did not only reply to the functional requirements of the economy, but also to the wishes of thousands of young people voting with their feet. They thus grossly understated their own role as active participants in, rather than "victims" of the ongoing transformation in higher education.

The history of the student revolt in the Nordic countries thus eminently illustrates an old wisdom: the long-term historical effects of human actions are seldom those intended. The governments intended to produce high-skilled, productive labour and got the student revolt. The students wanted to defend the university as a bulwark of intellectual and political freedom against its instrumentalization in late capitalism, but in effect weakened some of the traditional institutional and ideological defences of the university's autonomy. On the other hand, some of its agenda was co-opted by the political system and the social-democratic welfare state.

The deepest irony, however, only became visible at a later historical stage. For by dramatizing the underlying conflict between social order and individual freedom – that very antagonism which the welfare state was meant to reconcile – the student movement and the wider cultural upheaval of the 1960s of which it was part, helped fertilize the soil for the "freedom revolution" of the 1980s and 1990s in which the individual triumphed over society. Populism from the left ultimately bred populism from the right. The dialectics which the student left had cultivated in theory thus ultimately caught up with it in practice. "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please" (Karl Marx).

Further reading

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Else Hansen, Ph.D., senior researcher (historian) at Danish National Archives. Chairs the Danish Society of Educational History (2015 -). Doing research on Danish universities in the 20th century.

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ⁱ Bjørn Bjølseth, "Universitetet i samfunnet – og studenten i universitetssamfunnet" [The University in Society – and the Student in the University Society] *Under Dusken*, (14-09-1968): 171.