

Processes of Modernisation: Scandinavian Experiences

Gunnar Skirbekk

Professor, Centre for the Study of the Sciences and the Humanities,
University of Bergen
gunnar.skirbekk@uib.no

Abstract

We may ask what is typical of processes of modernisation in Scandinavia? What does Scandinavia have, in this respect, that no one else has? As I see it, what is unique to modernisation processes in Scandinavia, from the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth, is a contentious *interplay between state officials and popular movements*; between enlightened state officials and successful popular movements. Prussia, too, had enlightened state officials; but, in the German realm, popular movements did not turn out to be successful in this respect.

Keywords

state officials – popular movements – people's enlightenment – forms of rationality – self-organization – trust

• • •

Francis Fukuyama: “the problem of ‘getting to Denmark’”¹

• •

1 F. Fukuyama *Political Order and Political Decay* (London: Profile Books, 2014), 25: “Denmark” as a society has “all three sets of political institutions in perfect balance: a competent state, strong rule of law, and democratic accountability”. 26: “How did Denmark come to be governed by bureaucracies that were characterized by strict subordination to public purposes, technical expertise, a functional division of labor, and recruitment on the basis of merits?”

Preliminary Remarks

In Norway there was a relatively smooth and peaceful transition from a traditional to a modern society, by the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth. The Polish observer, Nina Witoszek, referred to this transition as a “pastoral enlightenment”, since it was supported by *Protestant priests*, i.e. enlightened Lutheran state officials from above, and by enlightened *farmers* and their popular movements, from below. There was no revolution, as in France. And no restoration thereafter.

Throughout the nineteenth century we find on-going processes of modernisation, from the end of the Napoleonic War and the foundation of Norway as an independent state in 1814, up to the introduction of parliamentarianism in 1884: a shift of power in favour of the popular movements and the liberal intelligentsia, followed by self-organisation and institutional development into the early twentieth century, with progressive social laws and a national education system intended to foster equality and enlightenment, i.e. *folkeopplysning* (“people’s enlightenment”).

The union with Sweden was peacefully dissolved in 1905. In Norway, the blend of institutional development and socio-cultural learning processes went on steadily until 1940 and the Second World War, which marked the end of a long “interwar period” in Norway, from the Napoleonic war to the German occupation.

After the Second World War, there were new possibilities and new problems, *with increasing challenges*, internally and externally, *for the “modern project”*. For the whole story, as I see it, we should refer to the book *Multiple Modernities. A Tale of Scandinavian Experiences* – now also available in Russian.

Background

Modernisation processes are often seen from an Anglo-American perspective, but here our focus is Northern Europe – the Nordic countries and Russia. In this paper I shall look at Scandinavia, or more precisely Norway, for two reasons: I know that region fairly well, and it is supposedly an interesting case in terms of modernisation processes.

As a philosopher of the sciences and the humanities, I have an interest in different kinds of rationality and reasonableness and their role in various institutions and processes of modernisation. Moreover, two of us have written a history of Western thought, very much as a history of intellectual

modernisation.² (The book was published in Russian with the title *Istoriia filosofii*.) So, when I happened to get in contact with Chinese philosophers discussing cultural modernisation in Europe and East Asia, and thereby also discussing what it means to be Chinese and modern, that same question soon turned around and hit me head-on: what does it mean to be Norwegian and modern? As a response I decided to apply general modernisation theory to Norway (and Scandinavia) as a case study. The outcome was the book *Multiple Modernities. A Tale of Scandinavian Experiences*, later translated into Chinese and Norwegian, the latter with the title *Norsk og moderne* (“Norwegian and Modern”), a title that is also used for the Russian translation, *Norvezhskiy mentalitet i modernost*, published in Moscow by *Rosspen* 2017.³

My notion of modernisation processes is a Weberian one: the differentiation and rationalisation of “value spheres” and institutions, with the main focus on various kinds of rationality, situated socially and historically in various contexts and agents – hence, a notion of modernisation very different from a narrowly economic conception of modernisation.⁴

The Eighteenth Century

The absolute monarchy of Denmark-Norway at the end of the eighteenth century took the form of an enlightened despotism. In this regard, three important points should be made: (i) The monarchs were at times unfit to rule, and thus in reality leading state officials took control.⁵ (ii) In the 1730s it was decided to

2 N. Gilje and G. Skirbekk, *A History of Western Thought*, (English version) (London: Routledge, 2001).

3 G. Skirbekk, *Norsk og moderne* (Oslo: Res Publica, 2010). G. Skirbekk, *Multiple Modernities. A Tale of Scandinavian Experiences* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011). Cf also Ø. Sørensen and B. Stråth, eds., *The Construction of Norden* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997).

4 In this paper I refrain from commenting on the role of *culture* (literature, art, music) in the nation-building processes that were part of democratisation and modernisation processes in Norway. Likewise, I refrain from commenting on the special role of *nature* in this regard, mediated by literature and art and related to a form of life, not least by the way children were brought up, with much freedom in nature, and with nature as a realm of freedom. Cf. my paper ‘Nasjon og natur’, in: G. Skirbekk, *Undringa* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2002), 98–108, short version in English: ‘A Pragmatic Notion of Nature’, in: G. Skirbekk, *Eco-Philosophical Manuscripts* (Bergen: SVT Press, 1992), 89–98.

5 Such as Struensee, Reventlow, Bernstorff – many of them German-speaking.

install a basic school system for all children and mandatory confirmation for all youth. (iii) By the middle of the eighteenth century, Enlightenment ideas had gained support among state officials and also in the public sphere, not least due to the writings of Ludvig Holberg, a Nordic Voltaire and a cultural moderniser, who (among other things) taught the audience to laugh,⁶ and whose historical and philosophical writings were also widely read by Norwegian farmers. In this way, state administration and Enlightenment ideas were already there before 1814, meaning that in Norway we had a relatively smooth transition to modernity and no disrupting revolution, as in France. However, with the new Norwegian Constitution of 1814, there was a dramatic change.

During the old regime, legitimacy was rooted in royal power. Therefore, in 1814, the victorious kings could transfer a country, i.e. Norway, as royal property, from the Danish king to the Swedish king. But as Norwegian representatives, chosen by the people, met at the constitutional assembly at Eidsvoll in May 1814, the principle of *popular sovereignty* was in reality established. Legitimacy became rooted in the people, not in the king.

Before 1814, before the Constitution, one had to go to royal Copenhagen and, hat in hand, ask for an audience to be able to present petitions (grievances and applications). But with the Constitution we had a national assembly, the *Stortinget*, where laws were decided and changed. This meant that if we wanted to change a given law, we had to go into politics, into discussions and power fights within and around the national assembly, which became an arena and magnet for political learning processes. Thus we had a conflict relationship between state officials and popular movements throughout the nineteenth century.

Historical Presuppositions for “the Norwegian Model”

This is how it looked from 1814 onwards. But let us turn back time from where we are today: we got the Constitution, what else?

Today there is much talk (and bragging) about “the Norwegian model”, for instance, when Norwegian politicians go on a charm offensive at the economic summit in Davos. But what do they have in mind? At least this: a general and generous welfare state within the framework of a well-functioning constitutional democracy. However, not everyone wants such a welfare state (cf the strong opposition in the US), and many others want it, but do not bring it into being. So, why is it particularly in Scandinavia and in an extended sense in

6 Cf Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, and the subversive power of laughter.

North-Western Europe that we find such arrangements? The “model” may be described in administrative, juridical and economic terms, but in order to answer this question we need to look at history.

First, a reminder of two facts: in Norwegian society there is general support for the welfare state; that goes for all political parties (even though there are differing views on financing and redistribution⁷). Moreover, in our society there is a well-documented high degree of trust, both in other individuals and in political and judicial institutions.

So let us look to history. But history is so many things. What concepts should we use? And what events and incidents should we focus on? Here is my answer, my choice: (i) we should use concepts of modernisation and democratisation, and (ii) we should focus on decisive events and experiences, such as war and crisis, and enduring cultural and class conflicts – all of this against the background of natural conditions and political and economic factors, both internally, within the country, and externally.

Modernisation

Modernisation, too, can be so many things. Here the concept of modernisation is primarily understood as being the development of sciences and of institutions: on the one hand, institutional differentiation, such as between state, market and civil society, and between religion and politics; on the other hand, development and differentiation of various sciences and forms of rationality, such as the development of:

- a) causal explanatory sciences and rationality, for instrumental use, in interplay with technological development (cf the new natural sciences, from the Renaissance onwards);
- b) interpretive sciences and forms of rationality, e.g. of religious texts and legal laws (sciences already well-known in antiquity, but re-enforced by the emergence of alternative confessions during the Reformation and the rise of nation states, with new laws);
and at the same time
- c) discursive and argumentative rationality, since we are fallible and need to take counter-arguments seriously.⁸

7 For instance, between retired people on the one hand and the unemployed on the other.

8 The same applies within and between the various sciences, but also to the development of a public sphere, with opinion formative public discussions, tied up with Enlightenment ideals and later with the emergence of democracy.

These forms of rationality are not free-floating, but anchored in agents and institutions by the use of various forms of expertise and by practice-based learning processes, for instance by self-organisation and other practical activities (cf the early popular movements in Norway).

Modern Democracy

As an institution, democracy can be defined as political majority rule, based on free elections, by autonomous citizens who understand what they are doing. Democracy in modern societies thus requires public education and public enlightenment (*folkeopplysning*). As citizens in a democracy, we have political power and co-responsibility (dependent on personal position and resources). Thus, there is a difference between the role of a citizen (*Staatsbürger*) and the role of a subject (*Untertan*).

Norwegian Characteristics

So, given these definitions of modernisation and democracy, are there special characteristics of Norwegian modernisation and democratisation? Are there unique and decisive events and experiences?

My claim is the following: a peculiar feature of the Norwegian (and Scandinavian) history is a contentious interaction between Lutheran state officials and successful popular movements. It had started (with Hans Nielsen Hauge) already in the late eighteenth century. We had the Seven Years War 1807–1814 (the Napoleonic War) and the new Constitution in 1814 as decisive events, and then there were political learning processes up to the introduction of parliamentarianism in 1884, followed by the formation of political parties and further institution-building (trade unions included).

Besides Scandinavia, it was Prussia that had a significant Lutheran state administration. But what became Germany did not have successful popular movements like those in Scandinavia: the popular movements on German soil were less influential and some became undemocratic. In other words, the constellation of Protestant state officials and successful popular movements is typical of Scandinavia.

What does this imply? Here we stay close to Norwegian history and begin with a reminder about class relations.

Classes and Constitution

From 1814 onwards there were mainly three classes in Norway: state officials, bourgeoisie and farmers, with practically no nobility. State officials were jurists and theologians, and also military officers. They were politically powerful for two reasons: they had no nobility to “breathe down their necks”, and they were

at the same time state officers (administrators) and active politicians. They were few in number (less than 1%), but were well-educated: lawyers and theologians had to have the degree of “*embetsexamen*” (*Beamtenexamen*) from the university (at first in Copenhagen, later in Christiania), and that degree could not be inherited – for instance, a theologian had to know Greek, Hebrew and Latin, and that is not innate. Here we have a mighty meritocracy, paid by the treasury, in a newly founded state that was initially depleted by the Napoleonic wars – in short, a politically powerful group, but not wealthy economically (compared with ruling elites in other countries at that time).

Then there was the bourgeoisie, marked by recession after 1814, but free from a tradition-oriented landed gentry (cf Denmark, as a contrast) and with certain privileges (for sawmills and trade; otherwise, cf the urban citizenry in Ibsen’s plays – relatively liberal and enlightened).

Finally, there were the farmers, who were legally free (no serfdom), often literate and legal owners of their own farms. As early as the 1760s, farmers in the south-western part of the country had demonstrated their ability to successfully organise and argue against governmental decisions on extraordinary taxes (levied due to royal warfare). Moreover, since there was practically no national nobility, and because the state officials were shaped by the Danish language and culture, the Norwegian farmers appeared as the carriers of the national culture. At the same time, the farmers were the people, *folket*. They were the great majority, though there were class differences within the agrarian communities. Industrialisation came later, by the end of the nineteenth century. Hence, it was mainly among the farmers that popular movements arose.

The Constitution was progressive, for its time, but with restricted voting rights, covering only men. However, with the Constitution, and the Parliament (*Stortinget*), the foundation was established for increasing democratisation, in interplay with cultural and institutional processes of modernisation.⁹

Modernisation from Above

Already by the mid-eighteenth century, Danish-Norwegian state officials were marked by Enlightenment ideals and an Enlightenment zeal (cf the so-called “potato priests”, eager to teach their congregations how to cultivate potatoes; that is, eager to promote modern ways of improving practical tasks in daily life).

9 Modernisation went on both from the top down and bottom up, until 1884 and the introduction of parliamentarianism and further institutional developments; with an extended trust in laws and public procedures, with relatively moderate material differences and with a relatively egalitarian political culture – vital resources for what was to become a general and generous welfare state.

For example, Erik Pontoppidan, a theologian and man of enlightenment, was commissioned by the king in the 1730s to write an explanation of Luther's Catechism – a collection of 759 questions and answers (with a shorter version for slow learners) – for use at the Lutheran Confirmation (mandatory for all young people, boys and girls), under the title "Truth for Godliness" (*Sandhed for Gudfrygtighed*). This was serious! Whoever could not pass the examination with the Protestant priest and the congregation in attendance, was not "confirmed" that year; and those who were not "confirmed" could not marry (this is before the time of contraception). This was disciplinary regimentation of the people (cf Michel Foucault). But, at the same time, ordinary people learned to read, and when people read, the governing elite does not know what ordinary people are reading and what they are thinking – in other words, a modernising liberation of the people is taking place (cf Max Weber). The book *Sandhed for Gudfrygtighed* became the most used textbook in Norway for the next 150 years. At the same time, this arrangement implied that the Danish language was drilled into each Norwegian child for many generations to come.

After 1814, modernisation from above was promoted by both Protestant priests and lawyers, such as the jurist and politician Anton Martin Schweigaard, who actively modernised society, by promoting, for instance, statistics and other forms of scientific expertise, organised and implemented by the state. Hence, the state played a crucial role in the modernisation of Norway, and the ruling elite of powerful state officials was pro-state – a decisive difference from Anglo-American ideas about political and institutional modernisation.

Modernisation from Below

Modernisation from below was promoted by the popular movements, movements that started spontaneously and soon became well organised, one after the other, until 1884 and the introduction of parliamentarianism. The main movements were led by leaders such as Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824), Marcus Thrane (1817–1890) and Søren Jaabæk (1814–1894). These popular movements ultimately oriented themselves towards the *Stortinget*, the legislative assembly, but the many local municipalities were also important,¹⁰ not least as a springboard and training arena for politically interested persons.

Here we shall confine ourselves to a few comments on Hauge and the Haugean movement. As a young man, working in the fields, Hans Nielsen Hauge had a religious vision. He saw clearly, as a Christian, what was the true doctrine and the right way of life, and this vision stood in contrast to what the priests were preaching, and doing – those socially privileged persons who

10 Cf the municipality laws, *formannskapslovene*, of 1837.

drank wine, or even worse! He gathered people and preached the word of God, as he read it in the Holy Scriptures. But then he collided with a secular law (namely *konventikkelplakaten*) that prohibited public meetings. What should one do, then, as a rational agent? With the new Constitution and the National Assembly (*Stortinget*) the answer was given: one should try to change the laws, by gaining power in the national assembly. Haugeanism, which at the outset was a religious movement, then gradually and unintentionally became a political movement – due to the juridical and institutional framework created by the new Constitution.

But in order to get there, to have a political impact, they had to organise themselves and learn how to speak in meetings, how to interpret secular (legal) texts as well as religious ones, and how to argue for the interpretation that one held to be correct. Hence, there were many formative learning processes – in which women could also participate at all levels.

Furthermore, the Haugeans were convinced that they, as Christians, should praise God's creation through hard work and a sober lifestyle (in contrast to the sinful upper classes). However, with hard work and moderate consumption there will be money left, money that should not go to needless consumption, but which must then be put into new projects; thus there is an accumulation of capital, motivated by religious convictions (cf Calvinism) – an instrumental and secular modernisation process, from below.

Moreover, Hauge wrote various edifying booklets and pamphlets which were widely read. It is said that as many as one in four Norwegian citizens had bought one of Hauge's writings, at a time of strife and naked distress;¹¹ hence we may expect that these writings were also read – an impressive educational project!

In short, through their activities and practices, the Haugeans contributed to enlightenment and formative learning processes for all the different forms of rationality – interpretive and argumentative as well as instrumental and practical: in other words, this was a powerful modernisation from below.

In 1842, the legal prohibition of public meetings (*konventikkelplakaten*) was finally abolished. This victory, for the Haugeans and other political movements, demonstrated that it was possible to change unfavourable laws through the National Assembly. Moreover, this was an important issue: the right to organise oneself.

¹¹ Cf the poem *Terje Vigen*, by Henrik Ibsen. English translation by John Northam, internet: http://www.oftebro.com/Terje_Vigen_english.pdf (5–8).

Main Achievements of the Popular Movements

Summarising what I have said about popular movements and their elites, nationally and locally, I would like to emphasise a few points of general interest about these movements:

- They had an ability to *organise themselves*, to *transform* spontaneous popular movements into economic, political and educational institutions.¹²
- They operated on a *broad scale*: in the economic field, at the political level and in matters of education and formation.
- Deliberation and organisational work were *combined*.
- They discussed and organised *at all levels*, locally, regionally and nationally.
- They used the media of their time as an *alternative public sphere*.
- Education was conceived as *self-education*, an educational project that includes practical and theoretical training as well as consciousness-raising on behalf of one's identity and socio-cultural background.
- Their leaders behaved as civilised and reasonable persons. Thus the interaction between politically active state officials and the leaders of the popular movements resulted in some basic *mutual trust*.¹³
- All agents (state officials as well as the popular movements) operated within the same Constitution and the same Confession. The learning processes that worked in favour of a certain tolerance for "the other", a certain acceptance of "otherness", resulted from special experiences of *socio-cultural and linguistic differences*.¹⁴

12 The main movements came in three waves (as it were), each time as a process in which spontaneous movements or actions became organised and institutionalised; what could not easily be realised in a singular simultaneous event could thus be obtained by *renewed processes*, from spontaneity to organisation. For the social scientific discussions on "contentious politics" and "political opportunities" related to social movements, cf e.g. S. Tarrow, *Power in Movement. Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

13 Hence, when the state officials "abdicated" in 1884, they knew that nothing drastic would happen to them or to the country. This kind of basic trust is a cultural precondition for a well-functioning democracy, requiring a peaceful change of power.

14 Compared with a politically centralised and culturally and linguistically homogenised country such as France, Norway might look like an early "post-modernist" society with an inherent "multi-culturalism" – that is, cultural heterogeneity within a political homogeneity, though with some basic common virtues and common forms of life that are inherently required by these institutions.

The latter point, about cultural diversity, may deserve a special comment. Whereas many of the points referred to above have equivalents in the other Nordic countries, there are some peculiar factors in the case of Norway, due to the absence of a national nobility and the “foreignness” of the state officials: the Norwegian farmer was thus seen as the representative of the national heritage. Hence the popular fight for democracy merged with the fight for recognition of the national heritage. We thus had a democratic nationalism, from below – probably a unique constellation. Whereas Norway developed a homogeneous political culture (way of doing things), it remained somewhat heterogeneous in terms of cultural codes and identity.

Furthermore, the popular movements tended to be pro-modern. That is, they were pro-Enlightenment in the sense that they favoured science and new technology as well as education and a progressive public sphere, and they were to a large degree progressive in social politics, in favour of improved working conditions and social security.¹⁵

“Pastoral Enlightenment”

Hence, in Norway we had enlightenment and law orientation from above and from below – from Protestant priests and from farmers – in short, a “pastoral enlightenment”, which secured a smooth transition from tradition to renewal, without any upsetting revolution and Jacobin terror, and without subsequent reaction and restoration of the old regime, as in France.

In this context, we may consider the main question raised by Francis Fukuyama in his book *Political Order and Political Decay*: how to get from clan societies (and their autocratic models) to a modern and enlightened society with (i) a professional and loyal state administration, combined with (ii) the rule of law (also applying to the rulers), and (iii) democratic transparency and checks-and-balances? In Fukuyama’s catchwords: how to get to Denmark?

15 The question, then, is the following: can these processes, roughly similar across the Nordic countries, explain the fact that these countries, in the mid-twentieth century, were able to combine a universal welfare system and economic redistribution with a high degree of trust? At least we may say that there are some deep-rooted processes in the modernisation of the Nordic countries that are peculiar – for instance to the extent that Scandinavian words like *folkelighed*, *folkhem* and *folkeopplysning* remain almost untranslatable; but they are crucial, and they do allude to what could probably be seen as “the gentle charm of the Nordic countries”.

Interaction Between Protestant State Officials and Successful Popular Movements

In short, this is my main assertion: the contentious interaction between Protestant state officials and popular movements constitutes a fundamental dynamic in Norwegian modernisation and democratisation. This is not just something that happened long ago, without relevance for the situation today; it is a decisive feature of our society today. Moreover, the contributions from the popular movements cannot be dismissed as “counter-culture” (*motkultur*). On the contrary, these are decisive experiences and learning processes that have shaped Norwegian society as we know it today. All in all, these are some of the historical conditions for “the Norwegian model”.

I shall shortly give additional support to this allegation, but first a reminder about some of the main differences between Norwegian modernisation and central features of modernisation processes in England, France and Germany.

In Norway, modernisation was promoted by a strong and active state, with state officials in a governing position, in quite a different way to that in England or the US. In France, the state has had a crucial position in the processes of modernisation, but popular movements were rebuffed, again and again, in 1830, in 1848, in 1870. France has not had, as Norway (and Scandinavia) has had, successful and well-integrated popular movements as a basis of an egalitarian political culture and a counterforce to the hierarchical structure in French society. In addition, in Germany, the state played a crucial role in the processes of modernisation, but without the formative contribution of democratic popular movements, as in Norway (and Scandinavia).

Modernisation – Single and Multiple

This is the point: modernisation, as defined here, has certain general and basic characteristics (such as the development of various forms of rationality and institutions). But as to the way it happens, that is, the relationship between the basic institutions (e.g. the role of the state), and as to which agents and organisations shape crucial events and developments, all of this varies quite a lot from nation to nation, from state to state. In addition, different societies have lived through different crises and wars or have had different forms of enduring class struggle and socio-cultural tensions. In Norway, we had a long and peaceful “interwar period”, from 1814 to 1940; not everyone has been that fortunate. In this sense, there are diverse modernisation processes – in short, *multiple modernities*. At the same time, there are also features that are universal for

modernisation as it is here defined, related to basic forms of rationality, and in that sense, there is just *one* modernity.¹⁶

History Is With Us

The different ways that have been taken by the processes of modernisation have shaped the different societies in which we live today. Whoever thinks that we, living in modern societies, can forget about history, has gravely misunderstood. We will not travel further than to Germany, or France, before we notice the difference – not to mention the US or China. Therefore, to understand *where* we are and *who* we are, we need to know our own history, but also the histories of the others: what is it with the French Revolution? and what happened in China in 213 BC?

What Do the Events in 1884 Tell Us?

Back to Norwegian history: to what extent can we say that modernisation processes, due to the contentious interaction between state officials and popular movements, are still formative for Norwegian society today? First, a reminder about the point of departure, in our society today: in Norway we have a welfare state like few others, and we have a high degree of public trust, in both persons and institutions. How come? The answer, I would claim, is to a large degree embedded in the historical events and experiences referred to above. This argument can be sharpened by a reminder of the events of 1884, with the introduction of parliamentarianism.

In 1884, Sverdrup and the left-oriented opposition introduced parliamentarianism. “All power in this hall!” was the slogan. The government was to be shaped by the majority in the parliament, not by the king. In short, it was a change in the principle of division of powers, and thus a shift of power, from a state run by the state officials to parliamentarianism, initiated and supported by the urban intelligentsia, and the farmers’ opposition affiliated with the popular movements.¹⁷

16 When these basic forms of rationality are lacking, there is no full-scale modernity, according to our definition – but anomalies and pre-modern features, as in the case of militant Islamism, operating with modern technology and weaponry, combined with pre-modern attitudes and actions, without argumentative and self-critical rationality and reasonableness.

17 Cf Søren Jaabæk and “farmers’ friends”. The same year (1884) two political parties, The Left (*Venstre*) and The Right (*Høgre*), were founded; three years later, The Norwegian Labour Party came into existence.

So far, this is a harmonising narrative, as seen in retrospect. But at that time, these were dramatic events. Among the state officials there were spokespeople who were in favour of military intervention. They had the power (the army and the police), and they had arguments (against what they conceived of as a coup). Nevertheless, in the end, the state officials “abdicated”, peacefully. Why? We recall the following: After 70 years of peaceful political struggle, the state officials and the leaders of the popular movements had learnt to know each other. Through the contentious interaction between state officials and popular movements, a basic trust had gradually emerged, in both other human beings and institutions and procedures. After 70 years of mutual learning processes, from 1814 to 1884, most state officials were confident that the nation would prevail, and that they themselves would not experience any harm, even if the opposition gained power through a parliamentary government.

But it is not like this everywhere. Notice how reluctantly many people in power in other countries leave their political positions, even after an electoral defeat, particularly in countries where they fear a dramatic deterioration of their own living conditions and where they do not trust those who take over.

Trust as a Cultural Resource

So, this is the point: there were moderate material differences and a basic trust. Trust is a cultural resource (a lubricant, as it were) that keeps democracy going – it is a condition for a well-functioning democracy with peaceful power-changes and a reasonable concern for the minority. However, trust cannot simply be decided, nor can trust be introduced from the outside or obtained by threat. Trust, between social groups and between persons, can only emerge from mutual experience over time.¹⁸

Self-Organisation

The ability to self-organise prevailed into the next century. For instance, in 1905, the year of the dissolution of the union with Sweden, there was a referendum, for or against the Union. But only men were allowed to vote. However, women organised themselves for an unofficial vote. In two weeks, in a sparsely

18 The point is this: at the end of the nineteenth century, against the background of the contentious interaction between state officials and popular movements, and in spite of class struggle and cultural struggle, Norwegian society was marked by a basic trust. However, several factors were involved: the rule of law and a law-oriented way of life, moderate material differences, enlightenment (*folkeopplysning*) and a common school system, self-organisation and political participation, formative public discussions, an egalitarian political culture, and general solidarity beyond family and neighbourhood.

populated and geographically long country (only Russia is longer, among European countries), at a time without mobile phones and modern media, a large number of women took part in this unofficial referendum, numbering nearly as many as two-thirds of the male voters – an amazingly high number.

Politically Homogeneous, Socio-culturally Heterogeneous

In this way, the country was united as one nation, politically. Politically, and organisationally, the country became homogeneous. But socio-culturally we were heterogeneous, diverse. Note for instance that since 1885 we have had two official Norwegian languages.

And then, into the twentieth century, we have seen institutional development and industrialisation, but also progress in welfare legislation; laws for decent working conditions and laws for social security, and radical laws for family life, with all children having equal rights, whether they are born to married parents or not – a law fought through by the Left, who also strongly promoted a good-quality education system for everyone (*folkeskole*). Thus the foundation for a Nordic welfare state was there: trust and general solidarity, and a suitable legal system. With the increase in material wealth after the Second World War, welfare arrangements could be extended to become the welfare system we have in our societies today.

So far, these are my claims about the historical conditions for “the Norwegian model”, in the perspective of modernisation theory.

Some General Points on Institutions and Their Cultural Preconditions

As a final remark, I recall some general points underlying our comments on modernisation processes in Norway. Briefly stated, institutional modernisation and cultural modernisation are intertwined. Modern institutions presuppose modern virtues and forms of life. To make it explicit, I shall refer to three typically modern institutions – science, democracy, and welfare state – and their cultural presuppositions.

Science-based societies get lopsided if not all forms of rationality are included. Cf the risk of situations marked by modern technology and pre-modern attitudes, as seen in Fascism in the 1930s, and as we see it today, with Islamist extremism as a typical case. In short, there is a need for cultural and institutional modernisation in which all forms of science and rationality are involved, in an enlightened and self-critical interplay,

where better arguments are actively sought, and with a willingness to change one's own opinions and attitudes when such changes are asked for.

Constitutional democracy presupposes, and requires, sufficiently autonomous citizens who have a fair mastery of the public language, the political issues, and the society where they live. If they do not, a person can be a legal subject (*Untertan*), also in a constitutional welfare state, but not a responsible citizen (*mündiger Staatsbürger*) in a modern democracy. Hence there is an inherent interrelationship between democracy and enlightenment (*folkeopplysning*).

A *general and generous welfare state* presupposes, and requires, general solidarity, enlightenment, and a willingness to follow the laws – not clan identity and pre-modern attitudes. Moreover, such welfare states are only possible in modern democracies, and thus there is a need and demand for enlightenment and modern attitudes.

Consequently, in addition to moral and legal obligations there are also political-institutional obligations, i.e., obligations inherent in institutions such as a modern and constitutional democracy and a general and generous welfare state.

Modernity in Crisis

The long Norwegian “interwar period”, from 1814 to 1940, laid the foundation for modernisation and democratisation. For instance, due to legal and institutional conditions, and through self-organisation and active participation, there was a change from the status of legal subject (*Untertan*) to that of co-responsible citizen (*mitverantwortlicher Staatsbürger*). However, today there are opposing forces at work. Today, with modern technology and global capitalism, the situation is changing.¹⁹

In short, for various reasons, internally and externally, due to institutional and cultural inadequacies and severe natural limitations and challenges, the modern world is in crisis. Modernity is not easy. Nevertheless, there can hardly be a reasonable return to a pre-modern world.

19 Concerning challenges and crises in modern societies in general and in Norwegian society specially, cf the second half of my book *Multiple Modernities*.

Moreover, whatever could and should be done, in our world today, it is useful to have a clear idea as to how we got there; in short, we ought to study the formative modernisation processes in different regions of the world.

Bibliography

- Gilje, N. & Skirbekk, G., *A History of Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 2001).
- Fukuyama, F., *Political Order and Political Decay* (London: Profile Books, 2014).
- Sørensen, Ø, & Stråth, B., eds., *The Construction of Norden* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997).
- Skirbekk, G., *Eco-Philosophical Manuscripts* (Bergen: SVT Press, 1992).
- Skirbekk, G., *Undringa* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2002).
- Skirbekk, G., *Norsk og moderne* (Oslo: Res Publica, 2010).
- Skirbekk, G., *Multiple Modernities. A Tale of Scandinavian Experiences* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011).
- Tarrow, S., *Power in Movement. Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Tilly, C. & Tarrow, S., *Contentious Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).