

A Bird's-Eye View of Norway's History
Lars Gule's Power-Point Presentation

There are social, cultural, and political events beginning from 200 years ago that provide an important background to understanding Norway's history. In 1814, following Norway's independence from Denmark, her Constitution was crafted, which provided a political framework for the development of a national identity. This identity, focused on "good" nationalism, also provided a framework for cultural development that limited inequality and ushered in 19th Century pietistic economic development and the Hans Nielsen Hauge movement. Both resulted in competent bureaucrats and civil society organizations that continued democratic policies through Parliamentarianism in 1884.

A growing industrialization resulted in a growing labour movement, which began with the Thrane movement in 1849, continued through the formation of the Labour Party in 1887 and the Trade Union Federation from the 1870s to 1899 – ultimately resulting in social policies and legislation that fueled an important and sustained class struggle from the end of the 19th Century into the beginning of the 20th Century.

That growing industrialization included shipping and shipbuilding, railroad construction of the Bergen line, and harnessing natural resources such as hydroelectric power. Local industrialization resulted in a "fierce but not violent" class struggle that continued into the 1930s, though somewhat ameliorated in the "Class Compromise" of 1928, which drew on – and reinforced – Norway's democratic roots. The General Agreement (*Hovedavtalen*) in 1935 initiated cooperative discussions between employers and employees to lay the foundation for an economic model. The Crisis Agreement (*Kriseforliket*) followed later that year and established government's role in the dynamic between employers and employees during the depressed global economy.

The German occupation in 1940 to 1945 created the sense of a common *internal* and *external* enemy that resulted in continued social cooperation and what is known as *three party cooperation* – an alliance between employees, employers, and the state that was initiated after 1945. The employees, primarily through the Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), and the employers, mainly through the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) and the state created an economic system that is best described in Kalle Moene's research, which limits wage differentials and fosters a competitive, dynamic, and efficient economic system in Norway as well as a vibrant democracy. While the three party cooperation arrangement pre-empts strikes and lockouts, it makes it possible for people to improve their salaries and situations while maintaining efficiency and production, allows for controlled capitalism with regulated markets, and has ensured the economic basis for the development of the unique Norwegian welfare state.

New resources such as the discovery and refinement of oil during the 60s and after have helped Norway maintain her welfare policies through processes of democratization and human rights. However, foreseen threats to the Norwegian model include:

1. Capitalism's internal dynamics and demands (e.g., the conflict between concern about climate change and the concern for 100,000 Norwegians working in the oil industry)
2. The continued growth of the capitalist mode of production, which is not unmanageable
3. The subsuming of the non-capitalist part of society under the capitalist imperative and dynamics
4. The undermining commodification and monetization of all human relations via privatization and for-profit public management