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Article

“Approaching an Abyss”: Liberalist Ideology in a Norwegian Cold War Business Paper

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Abstract

The international business press has been a powerful and influential voice in modern societies and, as its formative years took place during the Cold War, a closer look at the ideologies that were promoted in this part of the press is of interest. Until the 1970s, *Farmand* was the only Norwegian business magazine of any size and standing. Trygve J. B. Hoff, *Farmand*'s editor from 1935, was part of the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS), a neoliberal intellectual collective established in 1947 with participants such as Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises. This article is a study of the ideas that Hoff promoted, particularly in *Farmand*, from the 1940s to the 1970s.

Keywords

business press; Cold War; democracy; liberalism; media; media history; Mont Pèlerin Society; Norway

Issue

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1. Introduction

During the Cold War, throughout the Western world business media extended its readership and increased its influence over the production of public knowledge, ideology and meaning in society—in particular with regard to what we understand as “neoliberal” ideas (Kjær & Slaatta, 2007; Parsons, 1989). According to Kjær and Slaatta (2007, pp. 35–36), the business press has been so significant that it should be considered a noteworthy element in the writing of the modern history of Western countries.

In the Nordic countries, the main expansion of the business press took place from the 1970s onwards, coinciding with a general rise, internationally, of neoliberal ideas. New business magazines emerged and existing business newspapers went “pink” (assuming the colour associated with the *Financial Times*). They all extended their scope far beyond their traditional readership.

This expansion does, however, have a prehistory in the Nordic countries as well: In Norway, the only business magazine of any considerable size and standing,

until the 1970s, was *Farmand*. This magazine, first established in 1891, is an interesting case because it was an early proponent of neoliberalism in the media during the post-war era—a time when neoliberal thought was still rather marginal. Despite the hegemony of social democracy and Keynesian economics, *Farmand* doubled its number of subscribers six times during the post-war period (Eia, 1992, p. 34). Post-war Norway experienced unprecedented social mobility and increasing prosperity and, consequently, an increasing number of potential business press readers. *Farmand*'s success, however, also owed much to its longstanding editor, the economist Trygve J. B. Hoff. Hoff “was” *Farmand* from 1935 until around 1970, when his son took on an increasing responsibility for the magazine. In the 1980s its circulation dropped, partly as a result of competition from new business publications but probably also because the voice of Hoff Sr. had disappeared (he died in 1982). In 1989 (ironically, the same year as the Berlin Wall came down) the magazine ceased publishing.

Farmand is also—and by no means least—interesting because Hoff was one of the approximately 40 founders

of the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS), a neoliberal intellectual collective named after the place in Switzerland where it first met. The MPS was established in 1947 with prominent members like Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, and was made up of scholars, politicians, corporate leaders, and journalists, all of whom developed a long-term strategy to secure liberal ideas and free markets (Plehwe, 2009). In order to achieve this goal, the MPS used what they termed “long-range artillery” (e.g. publications and think-tanks) and “short-range artillery” (e.g. book reviews and interviews) throughout the post-war decades. According to Plehwe (2009, p. 3), the strategy gained these intellectuals increasing and considerable influence—he describes neoliberalism as “one of the most powerful bodies of political knowledge of the current era”.

Liberalism is a difficult ideology to pin down because it can be interpreted in so many ways. There were also differences between the MPS members, a group with a range of different backgrounds, aspirations and goals. In Plehwe’s words, neoliberalism consists of several different schools and varieties and is a “major ideology that is poorly understood but, curiously, draws some of its prodigious strength from that obscurity” (2009, pp. 1–3).

Hoff was one of the original journalists in the MPS; he was among those who attended the greatest number of its meetings—and he was the only Norwegian. As the owner and editor of the only proper Norwegian business magazine, Hoff was consequently the MPS’s spearhead into the Norwegian public space. In this article, I assess the kind of political opinions that Hoff promoted by examining, in particular, samples of his editorials in *Farmand* at regular intervals during the first three post-war decades. I analyse the rhetorical strategies Hoff used and interpret them in light of the ongoing ideological war, but I also discuss the type of liberalism—or political views at large—that he represented. Finally, I briefly discuss whether the views he represented have had any long-term influence.

There have been some earlier studies on *Farmand* and on Hoff, but they concentrated either on the transition from “old-school” to “new-school” business media in the 1970s and 1980s, mainly after Hoff’s active period (Eia, 1992), or on Hoff as an economist (Mjøset, 2011a, 2011b; Sæther & Hanisch, 2005). Although Hoff can be regarded as one of the progenitors of neoliberalism in Norway, the contents of *Farmand* during his reign have not been studied systematically. There are, however, good reasons for doing so. Hoff was an influential editor, but the value of studying a magazine like *Farmand* also lies in its broad focus on ideology, history and culture. It published essays and op-eds on business but also on art, philosophy and politics during the Cold War, and these traits also characterise its editorials. The new business media, on the other hand, was far more technical, news-oriented and investigative (Eia, 1992); hence Hoff’s writings can provide an insight into a broader “cosmol-

ogy” of thought, as far as both business issues and wider societal issues are concerned.

It should also be noted that in 1939 Hoff defended a doctoral thesis, having been encouraged to do so by the professor of Economics—and later the very first winner of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics—Ragnar Frisch. The thesis was praised in several newspapers and international journals (Sæther & Hanisch, 2005, p. 1), but in later years scholars disagreed on the importance of Hoff’s academic work (Mjøset 2011a, 2011b; Sæther & Hanisch, 2005). After his PhD, Hoff never used his training in economics to seek a career in academia, but it was an important backdrop to his use of the magazine to advocate a political and economic ideology that would eventually exert considerable influence in society.

2. Corpus, Literature and Approach

This article is largely a study of *Farmand*’s editorials from two months of a year, every fifth year, from the late 1940s through to the early 1970s. I have also read Hoff’s commentaries in other issues, or on other pages, in cases where they were referred to in the selected editorials, as in certain cases this has supplemented the depiction of the themes he brought up in his editorials. Public access to *Farmand* is limited, as it is one of the few Norwegian publications unavailable at the Norwegian National Library.¹ To make sure the limited number of issues studied—49 in all—does not give a distorted impression of Hoff’s writing, I also consulted the book *Trygve J. B. Hoff. Tanker og ideer (Trygve J. B. Hoff. Thoughts and Ideas)*, which was published in connection with his 80th birthday in 1975. One must assume that the excerpts of Hoff’s texts collected in this book—from *Farmand* and elsewhere—were picked because they were regarded as particularly representative of the messages he wanted to convey. In addition, I scrutinised his book *Fred og fremtid (Peace and Future)*, a combination of a political philosophy and a liberalist manifesto of 1945, written during the war. Media texts are immediate reactions to ongoing events, and sometimes need more contextualisation—and thus both these books have contributed to my attempts to draw a picture of Hoff that is as accurate as possible. Finally, I based my article on other studies of Hoff, and on other relevant literature.

Most of the editorials are from March and October in 1948, 1953, 1958, 1963, 1968 and 1973, although the last week of March 1948 is replaced by the first week of April due to the Easter holiday. October 1963 was unavailable and therefore replaced by September. Most of the main editorials are more like op-eds in scope, but many issues also include one or two shorter editorials. I decided not to extend my study beyond the first half of the 1970s because at that point many of the editorials no longer bear Hoff’s unmistakable signature (they were all unsigned, but Hoff Sr. had his own, easily detectable style).

¹ I am therefore very grateful to the Norwegian Central Bank for having lent me the volumes in their possession necessary to carry out this study.

My approach is based on critical discourse analysis, an approach in which text is analysed according to its political and social context. Fairclough (2016) has developed a three-dimensional framework describing discourse as a “mode of political and ideological practice” which “establishes, sustains and changes power relations” in society and “contributes to reproducing and to transforming society and to the construction of knowledge and belief” (Fairclough, 2016, pp. 62ff.). In Fairclough’s view, the text cannot be seen independently of the discursive practice surrounding it (production, distribution and consumption)—or of the outer layer of social practice—and all these layers also overlap to a degree. I will present examples that are representative of Hoff’s views on a set of issues, more specifically the relationship between economic and political freedom, his views on political friends and foes, the relationship between liberalism and conservatism, between economic and cultural liberalism, and between liberalism and democracy.

3. Context and Biography

3.1. National Context

First, some context. In the post-war years, the Norwegian Labour Party was more or less permanently in office until 1965, its position only being disrupted by a two-month centre-right government in 1963. The party had a revolutionary past, but defined itself as reformist from the 1930s onwards. The Soviet Union’s contribution to winning the war in 1945 prompted a short-lived but strong surge of support for the Norwegian Communist Party (NKP). The NKP gained almost 12 percent of the votes in the general election, and the party even had two seats in a post-war national government coalition (which included all political parties) for just over four months. The public sentiment that brought the communists to power, however, soon changed. As we step into *Farmand’s* universe in 1948, the Czech Communist Party had just staged its *coup-d’état*, and the Soviet Union offered Norway’s neighbour Finland a so-called friendship pact. There was widespread fear that Norway would be subjected to the same treatment, and the Communist Party was reduced by half in the ensuing general election and it became politically marginalised. After this, no totalitarian party emerged in Norway until a minor Marxist-Leninist party was established in the early 1970s.

There were naturally profound differences between the two major political parties of the country, Labour and the Conservatives, but there was also a certain degree of consensus during the post-war era, and the Conservatives were even Keynesians to some extent (Sejersted, 1984, pp. 61ff.). Partly as result of Norway’s participation in the Marshall Plan, the country was rebuilt after the war within the frames of what Ruggie (1992) termed “embedded liberalism”—a liberalisation of the international trade regime combined with sufficient domestic elbow-room to build up a well-functioning wel-

fare state at home. Some Labour politicians advocated a bridge-building approach to Moscow but, as a NATO member from 1949, Norway also became one of the US’s most loyal allies, so loyal indeed that representatives of the Labour Party’s left wing later broke away and established a new party.

3.2. Hoff’s Background

Born in 1895, Hoff had been opposed to communism since being a young man, and he had feared the European Labour parties since they started to gain power. As a young economist who had studied in the US and France, he worked for a time as a financial commentator, including at *Dagbladet*, a major Norwegian daily, under the name “Investor”. In 1935 he bought *Farmand* as a reaction to the first Norwegian Labour government (after a 1928 government that had lasted less than three weeks) and immediately started using the magazine to advocate individualism against collectivism.

Hoff was also a staunch anti-Nazi. When German warships sailed unhindered into Norwegian harbours in 1940, his worst expectations of Nazism—but also of the Labour government—were confirmed. The occupation was made possible partly by the government’s neutrality policy, which made Norway quite unprepared when the German attack struck (Sverdrup, 1996, pp. 17ff.). To Hoff, this event remained—throughout his many years as a *Farmand* writer—an illustration of the many deficiencies of social democratic politics (see, for instance, 4 October 1958, 9 March 1963; see also “Day of shame”, 18 April 1970, as cited in Hoff, 1975, p. 217). That in June 1940 *Farmand* was forbidden “forever” (*für immer*) by the occupiers probably contributed to his disapproval of both the Germans and the poor Norwegian defence—as well as the fact that he also spent time in a Nazi prison camp.

In the 1930s, he had taken an interest in the so-called calculation debate—a debate regarding whether or not it is possible to perform economic calculations in socialist societies. This debate had been initiated by the economist Ludwig von Mises (Plehwé, 2009, p. 20) and was followed up by Friedrich Hayek, a later winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics. Although Hoff first published the study as a book, Ragnar Frisch recommended that he submit it as a dissertation—but Frisch also disagreed with Hoff’s conclusions and in 1941 the two had a fierce exchange of letters initiated by Hoff (see e.g., Hoff, 1975, pp. 49ff.). *Fred og fremtid*, published a few years later, has been described as the Norwegian version of Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* (Mjøset, 2011a). After the war, Hoff resumed publication of *Farmand*, and when the MPS was established in 1947 he was invited to join by Hayek.

The MPS consisted of a wide range of groups and individuals with differing ideas about what liberalism meant. As the scholars included people as diverse as Mises and Hayek or other economists such as Wilhelm Röpke and Milton Friedman, as well as the philosopher Karl R. Pop-

per, their viewpoints varied a great deal. The first detailed ten-point draft amendment proved too explicit for the attendants to agree on, and had to be redrafted into a more diluted “statement of aims” stating that the central values of civilisation were in danger. It pointed out that the crisis had to be analysed and the misuse of history for the furtherance of creeds hostile to liberty had to be combatted; rule of law re-established; private rights secured; minimum standards for the functioning of the market established; and an international order conducive to peace and liberty encouraged (Plehwe, 2009, pp. 22–26).

Hoff translated and published material from the MPS network in *Farmand*, and he also circulated *Farmand* articles to the network. In a special issue on the magazine’s 50th anniversary in 1951, most of the founders of the MPS were represented (Mjøset, 2011a, p. 184). In a foreword to *Trygve J. B. Hoff: Tanker og ideer* (Hoff, 1975), Arvid Brodersen, professor of Sociology at the New School for Social Research in New York, made special mention of the numerous contributions from people such as Mises, Hayek, Friedman and Popper (but also Gottfried Haberler, Joseph Schumpeter and Jacques Rueff) in *Farmand* through the years (Brodersen, 1975, p. XX). Hoff, on his part, described the prominent MPS members Mises and Röpke as his personal friends (8 March 1958). In connection with the tenth anniversary of the MPS, Hoff wrote an article touching upon the difficulties that the MPS had had in overcoming their differences, but he also asserted that there had been common ground: “Everybody present agreed that a socialist economy will end in serfdom and misery. They all regarded collectivism as a serious danger to our Western civilisation”, Hoff wrote (22 March 1958).

4. *Farmand* in the Post-War Years

4.1. *Economic and Political Freedom*

Hoff used his magazine to criticise taxation, price regulation and all other kinds of state intervention. In his opinion, regulation was at the root of all economic problems. Price subsidies would not speed up the economy and would only impose more taxes on the citizens (30 October 1948). The cause of rising prices was the politics of the Labour Party (14 March 1953). The reasons behind housing shortages in the capital, Oslo, were the mortgage regulations and the interventions in the real estate market (31 October 1953, 18 October 1958). In Hoff’s view, Norwegians quite simply did not understand the laws of economics. This caused him a lot of frustration, but it also provided him with an important mission:

We regard the Norwegian people as uneducated when it comes to economics, and they know depressingly little about the connection between politics,

economics and individual existence....There is everywhere a need for ever new knowledge and new recognition about how humans live together. We see it as our clear duty to do what we can to share this knowledge. (17 October 1953)

So far, Hoff’s opinions are in line with how mainstream economic liberalism is normally understood: regulation is bad for the economy, deregulation good. However, Hoff was also of the opinion that economic and political freedom were inseparable. And not only did he regard political liberalism as a prerequisite for economic liberalism, he was also of the opinion that political freedom could not exist without economic freedom. This is evident, for example, in one of the excerpts that he chose for his 80th birthday collection: “A consistent state price regulation is not only an economic measure. If it is to be implemented, it is not only the free price formation that will be destroyed but freedom itself” (1 March 1952, as cited in Hoff, 1975, p. 201). According to Tribe (2009, pp. 75–76), this turning of the idea of classical liberalism on its head was in itself one of the defining characteristics of the new liberalism found at the MPS: economic liberalism became a prerequisite for a free society, not a part of it.

In several of his texts, Hoff expressed serious concern for what regulation of business would lead to in terms of political freedom—as, for example, in 1953, when he opposed the proposal for a law on the date stamping of eggs and milk. He claimed that he was not against date stamping, but that it was something consumers and housewives should take care of, not the state. “If the state begins to protect us in one way, then it will start protecting us in another way, and then the next thing we will have is the entire absolutist state that also tells us what to say and write” (14 March 1953).²

Hoff repeatedly expressed support and concern for human rights (see, for example, 20 March 1948, 25 October 1958, 9 March 1963). In 1975 he also reprinted text samples—from both the beginning and the end of his career—in which he stressed the importance of a free press. In 1949 he wrote:

Our modern democracy must build on the principle of the rights of the opposition. But no opposition is able to perform activities that are important for society without press organs as a mouthpiece. This principle must always be maintained and honoured. (30 July 1949, as cited in Hoff, 1975, p. 195)

This point was repeated again in 1973: “A free press—a prerequisite for the freedom of the people” (17 November 1973, as cited in Hoff, 1975, p. 221).

As the relationship between the allies and the Soviet Union cooled after the Second World War, the mem-

² The discussion about the relationship between economic and liberal freedom was also a main topic in Hoff’s correspondence with Frisch from 1941. He did not understand how Frisch could be in favour of a free intellectual life and at the same time in favour of regulating business. “If you want to fight for a free intellectual life, you have to fight for free business as well. It is the same front” (Hoff, 1975, p. 53).

ory of Nazi totalitarianism was transformed into an argument against the Soviet Union and also against any real or assumed sympathisers with the Soviet Union. Hoff was not alone in this. For many Norwegians, the coup in Czechoslovakia and the “offer that Finland could not refuse” in the spring of 1948 were defining moments. In fact, by the end of the 1940s, it became quite common, in both the Labour and the Conservative press, to draw parallels between Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union (Skre, 2010), and many Norwegian politicians wanted to take measures against home-grown communists. From 1947 the authorities stepped up a massive but secret surveillance scheme directed against anyone believed to have any kind of (widely defined) communist sympathies—a scheme that later became a scandal when its full scope was revealed. In 1948 the parliament’s foreign affairs committee was actually closed down in order to keep the communist MPs out and was not reopened until 1950 when the NKP was no longer represented in parliament (Løvold, 2002).

The fear of a new totalitarian occupation remained a recurrent theme in Hoff’s writings throughout his life. But as a liberal who claimed to be in favour of all manner of freedom of speech and other political freedoms, his reactions to the communist threat were conspicuous. In practice, he was willing to impose both *Berufsverbot* and press censorship if necessary.

In Hoff’s opinion, Norwegian NKP members should not only be excluded from the foreign affairs committee, but should also not be allowed to work in the army, in the police—or even in the higher ranks of the Norwegian equivalent of the BBC, the Norwegian Broadcasting Company, NRK (6 March 1948). This was in stark contrast to his liberal views on the rights of the opposition cited above—as well as, for that matter, in the same editorial, where he also stated that he was against press censorship. He said that he was aware of the kinship between his opinions and the McCarthyism of the US—which, he assured his readers, he did not like.

But this incident apparently called for an exception and is an indication that he did not always grant his opponents the same political freedoms that he enjoyed himself. A similar episode took place some years later when Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen visited Tito’s Yugoslavia (often called a socialist state with a human face). The prime minister was heavily criticised for being “celebrated by communist executioners and enemies of the West” (4 October 1958). To have these opinions was, of course, Hoff’s democratic right, but the interesting thing is that he also stated that there should not have been any press reports of the visit. Apart from his opinions of the NRK, this is the only instance of opposition to press freedom in my limited sample. On the other hand, it is a rather strong view—an influential editor in the free Western press publicly stating that a Norwegian state visit to another country should have been censored.

4.2. Social Democrats

In Hoff’s view, one did not have to be a communist to be a threat to society. He regularly also indicated that representatives of the elected Labour government were unreliable in that respect.

The relative consensus in practical politics between Labour and the Conservatives did not make a particularly strong impression on Hoff. He accused the Labour leaders of being liars and of “deceiving their voters” (3 October 1953), and he did not shy away from exaggeration, as when he stated that Labour assured everyone of their “indomitable love of freedom, but all attempts at independence from workers, shop stewards, managers are smashed” (25 October 1958). Sometimes he seemed indifferent to the fact that Norwegian post-war politics was run by an elected government in a parliamentary democracy, and he expressed a measure of offence at the fact that it was “obvious” parliament was “going to pursue the politics of its majority” (10 October 1953). Lawmaking that introduced even minor levels of increased planning in the mixed economy—as was the case in Norway (and most nations)—was equal to “going East”, or “going to Moscow” (8 March 1958, 21 September 1963), and was even described as “infiltrating the economy” (10 October 1953).

Some of his statements could be seen primarily as the rhetoric of a man who disagreed with the current government and hoped to convert a few voters to the right. But the way in which allusions to the lack of “freedom” was regularly used to try to create a link between social democracy and totalitarianism was rather more serious. He indirectly accused the elected government of “depriving Norway of the freedom we have had for a 150 years” (10 October 1953) (since independence from Denmark in the nineteenth century—author’s note)³ or used phrases such as “[i]n 1945 Norway regained its freedom, at least from its Hitlerian oppression” (1 March 1958). According to Hoff, Norway had even “slid away from rule of law, from a state which takes care of *individual* rights, to an administrative state which exercises close to unrestricted power in the name of the *collective*” (22 March 1958, italics in original).

In the first issue following Constitution Day (17 May) in 1954, he wrote that instead of talking about the constitution and the freedom the Norwegian people had gained one and a half centuries earlier, the speakers should have called for the freedom that the Norwegian people had *lost* (22 May 1954, italics in original, as cited in Hoff, 1975, p. 203).

On some occasions, he was also close to alleging that the Labour Party was secretly trying to impose socialism (understood as communism, not social democracy). An article with his signature from autumn 1963, entitled *Society’s Danger no. 1*, following up the editorial in the same issue, is particularly interesting. It problema-

³ Norway was under Danish rule for 400 years until 1814, then in a union with Sweden, headed by the Swedish king, until 1905.

tises Labour's own use of the word "socialism", which Hoff found unclear. In a public document, the Labour Party had defined socialism as quite simply the direction that Norway had taken during the last decades—in other words, social democracy. But Hoff insisted that socialism was something else: state ownership of the means of production and total state control of business. Hoff's underlying argument was that when Labour did not admit this they were trying to blur their real intentions (28 September 1963).

In all the cases above we see that Hoff uses different rhetorical strategies to promote his views. Examples are *presuppositions* (a communist is by definition disloyal to his nation); *metaphors* ("going East" for social-democratic lawmaking); *coherence* (connecting Stalin to Hitler and social democrats to Stalin, or connecting the loss of freedom during the German occupation to post-war lawmaking), and *straw man argumentation* (arguing against his own definition of post-war social democracy). But Hoff's terminology also frequently indicates that this is more than strategy and that he really expects social democracy to deprive Norway of its freedom. Sometimes his expressions are so conspicuously controversial that it is unlikely he would have risked the social costs of uttering them if he had not meant what he said. For example, ahead of the general election of 1953, Hoff not only expressed concern for the country but even alarm, if Labour were re-elected. "When you see individuals or groups of people march steadily towards an abyss, it is our simple human duty to stop them", he wrote. It was necessary to act before it was too late: "For we are approaching an abyss, the abyss that is called the slumming of society and the debasement of the individual" (10 October 1953).

4.3. Non-Socialist Parties

Hoff's fear of totalitarianism did not apply only to the political left. The non-socialist party "Venstre" (Liberal Democrats) represented a danger as well: the politics of Venstre was "just as dangerous as socialism itself. If the weak gives the strong his little finger, he can be sure he will lose his whole hand" (10 October 1953). He later claimed that the Conservatives cooperated with both "total and half-socialist parties" (8 March 1958), and the term half-socialist for the Liberal Democrats was repeated when Liberal Democrats and Conservatives (and two additional non-socialist parties) formed a coalition government in 1963 (21 September 1963).

To Hoff, even the Conservatives were playing with dangerous socialist thoughts. In 1953 there are several interesting references to an important ongoing debate, a debate that contributed to changing the Norwegian Conservative party. Some prominent younger members of the party had set out to disclose the ideological roots of conservatism, inter alia by studying the eighteenth-century philosopher Edmund Burke (see, for example, Langslet, 1975; Sejersted, 1984, pp. 172ff.). Burke was

a deeply conservative philosopher who was disgusted by the social uprooting that had resulted from the French Revolution but who was nevertheless in favour of personal freedom and careful social reform because he was ultimately of the opinion that society had to change. He also acknowledged that free people needed to live in a community with others—he did not understand freedom as something "lonely, individual, detached, egotistic" (as cited in Langslet, 1975, p. 34). In other words, Burke took a position not only in opposition to totalitarian communism, or to what would later be known as fast-track social democratic reform, but also in opposition to the most extreme forms of liberalism.

In Hoff's view, this was also too leftist. The young Conservatives had moved to the left, and the mother party with them: "We, who think it is more important to be non-socialists than conservative, characterise it as regrettable that Norway does not have a real conservative party" (8 March 1958, italics in original). When in 1963 the Conservatives proposed a programme for old age pensions, it was *Farmand's* opinion that this would lead to the state taking control of "almost all private savings in Norway" (30 March 1963). The conservative-centre coalition in the autumn of 1963 was also commented on in this way: the non-socialist parties "would in the long run gain from stating that they do not want a socialist society with full state-directed corporate governance and with the abolition of private ownership of the...means of production" (21 September 1963). He again regretted that the Conservatives had "ceased being a conservative party and become liberal", which made him miss "having a really conservative party in Norway".

5. Hoff's Liberalism

5.1. A Liberal Dilemma

How could it be that Hoff, a declared liberal, could use "liberal" almost as a word of insult, and at the same time regret that the Conservative Party was not conservative enough? One reason, of course, is that the word "liberalism" entails different meanings. Both Plehwe (2009, p. 2) and Hoff himself touches upon the fact that "liberal" is also used to describe more leftist views. As Hoff puts it on 8 March 1958: "Even opponents of free markets call themselves liberal".

However, from a democratic perspective, there is a problem with a liberalism where political freedom presupposes economic freedom, as it practically rules out political opinions which limit economic freedom in any way, as the examples above indicate. Hoff's writings display these tensions in full.

At this point, it is important to step out of *Farmand's* universe again and consult Hoff's *Fred og fremtid*, his overall manifesto of 1945, which gives an even more comprehensive account of his worldview. The book was written in the middle of a devastating war, but there is little doubt that he continued to stand by many of the opin-

ions it expressed—over 100 pages of it were reprinted in *Tanker og ideer* in 1975.

The main theme in *Fred og fremtid* is how to avoid war. It was difficult, but not impossible. The argument, which is built up over almost 500 pages including notes and an appendix, goes partly like this: human beings have three basic needs and instincts—for nutrition, sex and recognition (Hoff, 1945, p. 395). If they get these things, they will be less aggressive and war will be easier to avoid.

That nutrition, sex and recognition are fairly basic needs is relatively uncontroversial. From this point of departure, however, Hoff concluded that societies under economic liberalism were best at avoiding war whereas war propaganda would find particularly fertile soil in authoritarian societies. Socialist societies were the case in point, as they reduced the populace to poverty and unhappiness, and made them long for improvements (Hoff, 1975, pp. 386ff.).

But even societies with economic freedom had to overcome a few challenges. Hoff then embarked on a lengthy discussion about the possibilities of achieving sexual happiness, which is of little interest to this article. More relevant were his opinions on nutrition and recognition. The best way of securing the maximum amount of *nutrition* for human beings was by allowing free enterprise (Hoff, 1945, p. 395). *Recognition* was a concept with two sides, one related to envy—which was normally fuelled by the fact that a society contains different social strata. This was impossible to change. But there was a solution: to teach children from an early age that there are differences in talents and rank and that there are winners and losers. People accepted this in sport and they should accept it in society as well, and thereby become more tolerant, as they would then understand that this was only part of the natural order (Hoff, 1945, pp. 399ff.).

In a society with noticeable inequality, a certain degree of unemployment was unavoidable. The solution was to teach people that unemployment was not shameful but a necessity, and a prerequisite for the economy to function. Unemployment was, of course, a strain for those affected, but this could also be solved by offering them therapy. “Mental-hygienic measures of this kind can contribute strongly to reducing friction, discontent and aggression, and is, therefore, an important tool to eliminate war”, Hoff wrote (1945, p. 404).

This, in short, was Hoff’s recipe for avoiding war. The book gives the impression of a man with a total belief in liberalism as the solution to all problems. This may explain his denouncement of all kinds of politics that did not guarantee full freedom. It also explains why social democracy—and most other democratic approaches that did not stand for total liberalism—could only be regarded as different degrees of totalitarianism.

But this also poses an intriguing paradox. It may seem that Hoff was a victim of what the philosopher Hans Skjervheim has called “the liberal dilemma”. In an essay from 1968, Skjervheim claims that unlimited liberalism

has a totalitarian side because it demands that everybody subscribes to it—otherwise they would not be proper liberals. The protagonist in Skjervheim’s example “accepts and tolerates everything, as long as it does not conflict with his fundamental view: everybody should be free, but within the frame that he has defined” (Skjervheim, 1968, p. 13). In other words, there are types of liberalism that are so extreme that they become illiberal.

5.2. Cultural Liberalism

It should be noted that Skjervheim’s essay included all kinds of liberalism—including what we could call cultural liberalism—and argued that the liberal dilemma also affected the most consistent cultural liberals. There is, however, little evidence that Hoff was a liberal in the cultural sense of the word, but this only proves the point. For one thing, his magazine is relatively devoid of the liberal currents that characterised the period from the 1960s at least—for example, women’s liberation. *Farmand* was not only a magazine by business people and economists for business people and economists, it was also a magazine by men for men. The women were always very few and far between, and they were mostly found in jokes or cartoons—as buxom, blonde secretaries or even more buxom, fur-clad, discontented, middle-aged wives. This joke is typical: a wife disapproved with her husband’s propensity to watch other women’s legs. The husband answered: “When on a diet, is a man not even allowed to look at the menu?” (23 March 1963). I see no visible change in the presentation of gender from the 1940s to the 1970s.

In fact, Hoff directly opposed measures that were liberal in the cultural sense. The debate about a new and more modern orthographic norm in the 1950s is illustrative. After 400 years under Danish rule, Norway’s official written language had come to be based on Danish. As part of the democracy and independence movement of the nineteenth century, a new written language was constructed, based more on vernacular Norwegian. In the twentieth century, there were attempts to merge the two into so-called *samnorsk*, and fierce debates about this took place in the post-war decades. Hoff was very much against not only this reform (11 October 1958), but also against the fact that people campaigned for this and for other issues he disapproved of. When the possibility that both *samnorsk* campaigners and teetotallers—another group he disapproved of—could establish new political parties was discussed, he scorned the idea and claimed that these were already minorities with too much power (23 March 1963). There may have been good reasons for his disapproval, but it also indicates that when it came to cultural issues Hoff was not particularly supportive of the diversity he promoted in business life.

The interesting thing, however, is the element of alarmism also in his argumentation against orthographic reform, and the cultural conservatism it displays: “*Samnorsk* will contribute to Norwegians continuing on their

way to becoming a people of slobs”, he wrote (11 October 1958). The reform was dangerous in both a cultural and national sense: For one thing, he feared that it would affect the precise language of science—but he also pointed out that language was one of the most important factors for binding a nation together. Fortunately, he concluded, human beings, after all, had a “natural urge to better their position” and there were subsequently people in all parts of society who wanted “their children to speak a language...that reveals that they are cultivated people” (11 October 1958).

It is natural to see his opposition (or indifference, as with regard to women’s liberation) to cultural change in connection with his fears for Western civilisation. His forceful wording when it came to cultural matters indicates that he regarded not only the demise of economic liberalism but also the rise of more cultural liberalism as a threat to the world as he knew and preferred it.

5.3. “The Best of Liberalism, Democracy and Aristocracy”

So, to return to the initial question, what kind of liberalism, or political views, was Hoff promoting? Was Hoff, born in 1895, just an old-fashioned man with limited ability to accept that he was living in a new world? He could definitely be seen that way—after all, when he wrote *Fred og fremtid* he was already nearing 50, an age considered fairly old a few generations ago. In one editorial, Hoff harked back to the “free circumstances in an internationalised world as we knew it before 1914”, when “free conditions” were still “a natural world order” and “the economic approach based on Adam Smith’s ideas was...still dominant” (20 March 1948).

Could it be that he was not really a liberal in any sense of the word, but a conservative free-market supporter? If one accepts Skjervheim’s “liberal dilemma”, his “liberalism” excluded most other views—and, in a way, representative democracy as such. His programme in *Fred og fremtid* supports this interpretation. In this book, he invented what he called “liberocracy—a government by the free for the free”. He elaborates: “The word was originally a combination of ‘liberalism’ and ‘democracy’. My enthusiasm for democracy is however relatively restrained and in some cases, I prefer the aristocratic (not by birth) government, in which ‘the best’ will govern”. He proposed a kind of half-representative government, where the worthy would govern and the unworthy were kept out: liberocracy was, therefore, a combination of “the best of liberalism, democracy and aristocratic government” (Hoff, 1945, p. 46).

6. Wider Implications

What are the wider implications of this? Based on one single outlet and a book from 1945 we cannot, of course, draw the conclusion that this is what neoliberalism has really been about. But we may suggest that this is what

one of the different neoliberalisms was about. Plehwe (2009, p. 26) has noted that the MPS manifesto had a notable lack of reference to the range of human and political rights traditionally embraced by liberals. They were all “driven by the desire to learn how to effectively oppose what they summarily described as collectivism”, but the democratic spirit of the members varied (Plehwe, 2009, p. 6). Some kinds of liberalism may subsequently be seen more as a replay for the idea of free markets—a contest that had been lost following two devastating wars and the Great Depression—than a fight for liberal societies as such.

Based on the corpus presented above, it seems that the liberalism that Hoff promoted was primarily another such chance to fight for free markets, and maybe also for the world of yesterday. But did the fact that Hoff was an influential Norwegian journalist affect Norwegian politics, or the Norwegian press, in the long run?

There was some kind of continuity between the old and new school business press in Norway. Some prominent representatives of the new outlets did write in *Farmand* at an early stage of their careers. When the Berlin Wall fell, the new business press often took it more or less for granted that a victory for democracy and a victory for free markets were the same thing (a paradox, since most democracies at the time were, and still are, mixed economies in one sense or other of the word) (Fonn, 2015). But as Tribe (2009) noted, this was an idea that originated much earlier and was shared by far more people than Hoff alone.

There were occasions where the opportunity to confuse social democracy with communism was happily seized upon in the new school outlets as well (Fonn, 2015), but it was generally obvious that this was primarily used as an effective rhetoric tool. The mixture of free-market ideology and cultural conservatism that Hoff represented seemed to be less common in the business press of the early post-Soviet era.

The Conservative Party in Norway did also not develop in this direction. The party has been characterised by a tension between more free-market liberalism and the socially responsible conservatism that the discussion in the 1950s was all about (Notaker, 2013), but it has not in general combined extreme economic liberalism with alarmist cultural conservatism. Mjøset (2011b, pp. 55–56) also points to the fact that the neoliberal ideology that eventually did gain ground in the Norwegian political administration was different from the ideas promoted by Hoff. They were more pragmatic and more indebted to the macroeconomic ideas developed by Ragnar Frisch and his fellow economists during the initial post-war years.

On the other hand, in many European countries, the relatively moderate politics of the conservative parties also opened new opportunities to their right. In modern right-wing populism, the combination of anti-state economic approaches and cultural alarmism is not uncommon. Since 1989, the perceived threat of communism

has furthermore been replaced by a perceived threat from immigration, and in particular from Islam. For example, the Norwegian populist right-wing party, established in 1973, started as an anti-tax and anti-regulation party but developed into an anti-immigration party that has thrived on public concerns for the future of Western civilisation. (This party is currently also in government with the Conservatives, so the political landscape is still changing).

It must be said that Hoff was no racist. On one occasion he claimed to support the American Civil Rights movement (although this editorial, of 22 March 1958, seemed to be as much about the oppression of businesspeople in Norway as of black people in the US). He also found the “broad sympathy” for the black majority in South Africa very understandable—although at one point he described the sympathy as so uncritical that there was “reason to put things a bit in place before the sense of proportion is completely lost” (14 January 1961). It would also be unfair to call Hoff a populist, especially in view of his “restrained enthusiasm for democracy”. But there is also little doubt that his anti-state rhetoric and expressed fear for Western culture played on the same strings as has right-wing populism in subsequent years. Some of his phrases bear a significant resemblance to current-day Eurabia conspiracy theories and doomsday prophecies according to which Islam is believed to take over the free world. In other words, right-wing populism could well be the political heritage of the kind of neoliberalism Hoff advocated.

There is an indication of this in the last year of my sample. Despite his criticism, at times Hoff also expressed support for a Conservative government as the best to hope for. However, in 1973 he endorsed Mogens Glistrup, the leader of a new Danish populist party (17 March 1973) which started as an anti-tax party, was a model for the Norwegian populist party established the same year, and later became an anti-immigration party.

Currently, the press and public debate often expresses concern regarding the rapid changes in the political landscapes of the post-war democracies, and many find it difficult to understand their origins. New political currents certainly have multiple backgrounds, but some seem to have developed over decades as a part of the public debate. More research should, therefore, be done into the tensions between various ideologies as they developed in the press during the Cold War.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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