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# The Welfare Defence: Military Security and Social Welfare in Denmark from 1848 to the Cold War

*Klaus Petersen\**

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**Abstract:** *»Die Wohlfahrtsverteidigung: Militrische Sicherheit und Soziale Wohlfahrt in Dnemark von 1848 bis zum kalten Krieg«.* In this article, I discuss the connection between security and social policy strategies in Denmark from 1848 up to the 1950s. Denmark is not the first country that comes to mind when discussing the connections between war, military conscription, and social reforms. Research into social reforms and the role war and the military play in this field has traditionally focused on superpowers and regional powers. The main argument in the article is that even though we do not find policy-makers legitimizing specific welfare reforms using security policy motives, or the military playing any significant role in policy-making, it is nevertheless relevant to discuss the links between war and welfare in Denmark. This article focuses on three historical periods where the Danish state was under pressure: First, the decades from 1848 to the end of the 19th century, during which the military challenge from Germany influenced Danish state building. Second, the interwar period, during which Danish society was under severe strain from political radicalization and growing international tensions, culminating with the German occupation of Denmark (1940–45); and lastly, the early Cold War period (1947–1960), marked by the fear of conflict between the superpowers and the risk posed by an internal enemy (the communists). In all three periods, external and internal security threats influenced the welfare agenda in Denmark by evoking questions on the use of social policy for loyalty building and the safeguarding of the country’s democracy as well as trade-offs between welfare and military.

**Keywords:** Denmark, welfare state, military, social policy, 20th Century, 19th Century.

“When we all cried out together ‘Life and blood for the fatherland’ we defined our relationship to those who fought when we were speaking, those who suffered when we were enjoying the conveniences of life, and those who risked life and limb for Denmark’s existence.”  
(August Bournonville 1849, translation from the Danish)

“Of course, we should not end up a poor farmstead with barbed-wire around it. We acknowledge that all fronts – the defence, the social and the cultural – require their efforts. But the real question is whether we will make sacrifices for the freedom of our country and our people, for our

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ideals and our sense of being free and righteous men – or whether we will sell our freedom for more daily conveniences and material well-being.” (Forsvarsministeriet 1941, 5, translation from the Danish).

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## 1. Social Policy as Defence Strategy

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Denmark’s national brand, and Danish self-understanding, is as a peaceful small state with democratic stability, tolerance, and a comprehensive welfare system with deep historical roots. Consequently, Denmark is not the first country that comes to mind when discussing the connections between war, military conscription, and social reforms.<sup>1</sup> Research into social reforms and the role war and the military play in this field has mostly been focused on superpowers and regional powers such as the United States, Great Britain, Germany, France, etc. (Obinger, Petersen, and Starke 2018). These states typically have an activist approach to security, and the role of the military has tended to be prominent. Denmark, by contrast, seems a least likely case to choose when studying the importance of war for the development of social rights.

War and the threat of war, however, are also concrete historical experiences for small states, which precisely because of their size have been greatly vulnerable to armed conflict. They live in the shadow of great powers. In a Danish context, Denmark’s relationship with Germany has been a decisive factor for Danish nation building. Historically, small states have attempted to ensure their survival through alliances or through neutrality. Hence, Denmark was neutral in the period 1815-1949, and only following the German occupation (1940-45) and the outbreak of the Cold War, did it join the NATO Alliance in 1949. But within this timeframe of neutrality and NATO membership, Denmark has experienced an intense debate on defence strategy, military expenditure, and conscription. In a 1922 parliamentary debate, one MP noted that “in this small and, in a military sense, weak country, the sharpest and most uncompromising struggles take place regarding the way the country’s military defence should be organized” (*Rigsdagstidende 1921-22*, Folketingets Forhandlinger, col. 7038).

The military defence debate was not just about military spending but also about conscription and the links between military and social development. National conscription, introduced in 1849,<sup>2</sup> was not only a military endeavour. It was also an issue of fostering citizenship and social cohesion (Enevoldsen

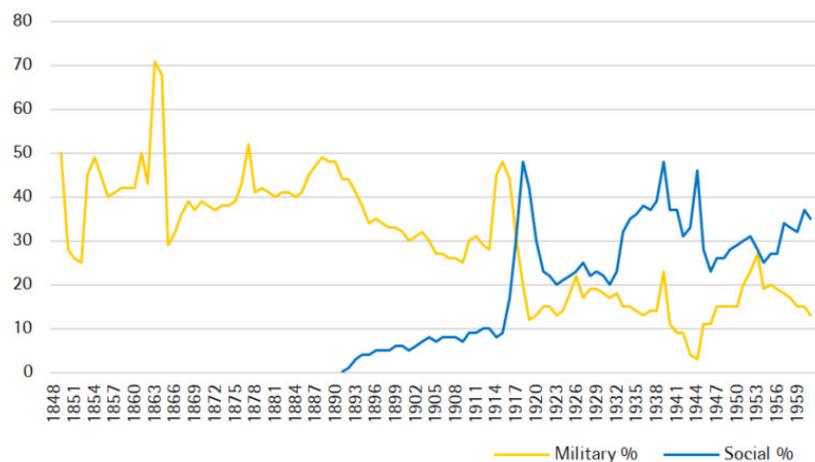
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<sup>1</sup> This article builds upon earlier work within the theme of “war and welfare”: see Petersen 2013; Petersen and Sørensen 2018; Mariager and Petersen 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Conscription for people living in the countryside had been introduced in 1788. In 1849, general conscription became part of the new democratic constitution; it was based on a drafting system and included no buy-out options. There were exemptions for certain groups (doctors, priests, or school teachers) until 1867, and, from 1914 onwards, conscription could also take non-military forms.

2003). Military and security considerations were entangled with the development of social policy. For a neutral small state that did not have any real chance of matching the military forces of the superpowers, social policy became part of the overall national security strategy. It helped to ensure the state's legitimacy and create the kind of domestic stability that could help the nation survive dramatic periods. This is part of the explanation for the fact that while defence spending took up almost half of the state budget in 1854, it had fallen to only 18% one hundred years later – and looking at social expenditure, we find the opposite pattern (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Defence and social spending as percent of total state budget



In this article, I discuss the connection between security and social policy strategies in Denmark from 1848 up to the 1950s. In such a small state, the link between social rights and national security must be analysed rather than observed empirically, no matter whether it involves studying debates over social reforms or debates about military spending and compulsory military service. The connection is not something that is explicit in, say, parliamentary debates, nor is it a topic in which the Danish military was particularly interested in or spoke of. However, even though we find no “smoking guns” whereby policy-makers legitimize a retirement pension reform using security policy motives, or the military staff demand a family policy initiative, it is nevertheless possible and important to discuss the links between war and welfare in Denmark.

This article focuses on three historical phases where the Danish state was under pressure:

- The decades from 1848 to the end of the 19th century, which were not only about state building after the breakthrough of democracy (1849), but also about managing a very specific military challenge from Germany.
- The interwar period, when European democracies were under severe pressure from political radicalization and growing international tensions, culminating with the German occupation of Denmark (1940-45).
- The early Cold War period (about 1947-1960), marked as it was by the fear of conflict between the superpowers and especially the risk posed by an internal enemy (the communists).

My argument is that an analysis of the three periods can show how social policy has been part of a broader Danish defence strategy. This premise relates to classical theories within welfare research, where social policy is interpreted as an insurance against social revolution and as creating stability and legitimacy. This research typically refers to Napoleon III in France and to the so-called Bismarckian social policy in Germany in the 1880s, where a heavy-handed repression of the socialist movement was complemented by social reforms that would strengthen working class loyalty toward the state. As in France and Germany, the struggle to ensure the loyalty of the masses was also a theme in the small democratic Danish state.

With a point of departure in this perspective, recent Danish research has referred to the welfare society as a defence of Denmark's sovereignty within a threatening international system (Højrup and Lidegaard 2007; Kaspersen 2008). The theoretical argument being, that the external pressure has been decisive for the formation and design of the Danish welfare state. The security policy dilemmas associated with periods of intensified external pressure on Danish sovereignty (such as the three periods discussed in this article), confronted the country with an important choice: Should it be setting up a military or a "social" defence? Similarly, the political scientist Ove K. Pedersen (2014) has pointed to external events, especially Denmark's defeat by Prussia in 1864 (loss of Schleswig) and Denmark's subsequent small state status, as the start of a process where the sense of being vulnerable on the foreign policy front was followed by social policy development. This idea can be traced back to the 1930s, when the historian and politician Peter Munch based his term as foreign minister (see below) on a recognition that Denmark could never match its great neighbour Germany's military strength. Instead, the goal should be to maintain neutrality and strengthen Danish popular sovereignty (the cultural and social *folkestyre*/rule of the people) so that Denmark could survive critical periods and even occupation (Pedersen 1970). Petersen and Sørensen (2018) also point to this argument in their more systematic study of the interaction between war and welfare in Denmark; and Mariager and Petersen (2018) have shown how Denmark, compared to Germany in 1933-1945, used the Danish social policy tradition as a defence against German interference and occupation. Based on these discussions, I will examine the security policy function of the welfare

state during the three periods mentioned above: What was the relationship between military and social policy strategies? Did war and external threats lead to the upgrading of social policy? In what ways was social policy used to create social loyalty and legitimacy? My focus here is on the actors during these periods and how they addressed these issues. In the Danish context, the key actors are the government and the political parties, but I will also touch on the roles of the trade union movement and the military. Concerning the latter, however, it is worth emphasizing that after the defeats in 1848 and 1864, the Danish military became a marginalized actor, which, in contrast to the militaries of the European superpowers (such as Austria-Hungary, Germany, or France) played a very limited role in Danish political life (Lind 1999; Petersen and Sørensen 2018). For a small state, a defensive approach to war and security was a basic premise, and this defensive foundation created preferences for a strong social policy rather than a focus on building a military force. As a security doctrine, military defence gave way to the welfare defence.

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## 2. Modern Denmark: From the Military State to a Small Democracy 1848-1900

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From the 17th century on, when it was a regional power controlling the strategically important Øresund Strait, Denmark gradually became smaller and more peaceful (Bregnsbo and Jensen 2004, 148-200). It was defeated in the European Thirty Years' War and again by the neighbouring Sweden, leading to the loss of Scania in 1658. Danish participation in the Napoleonic wars on the French side resulted in the British bombing of Copenhagen in 1801 and the destruction of the Danish fleet. With the Treaty of Kiel in January 1814, Denmark lost control over Norway. What remained was the Kingdom of Denmark, some colonies (including Greenland) and the Danish-controlled duchies of Holstein, Schleswig, and Lauenburg. The latter became a problem when the German princely states, after the Congress of Vienna, became part of the German Confederation, thus giving the Central European superpowers of Prussia and Austria a strong interest in the Danish-controlled duchies. Despite a reorganization of the army in 1816, Denmark remained militarily weakened because of limited finances and the decimation of its navy following the defeat in the Napoleonic Wars. A limited degree of military modernization occurred, with the establishment of the Military College in 1830, and in 1842, Danish became the common language of command for the entire army. At that time, there were already advocates within the officer corps calling for the introduction of universal conscription, a topic that was also taken up by the liberal press and which became part of Denmark's 1848 democratic constitution (see below).

A few decades later, Denmark was confronted with German interests in a highly tense situation. The 1848 revolution in Paris had spread across Europe, all the way to Holstein, where it ignited a national conflict that took on the character of a civil war. It was a political game; the social estates Schleswig and Holstein demanded a free constitution and wanted to become part of the German Confederation, while the leading national-liberal circles in Copenhagen rejected any negotiation in what they termed a rebellion. The Danish king chose to follow the latter line; the result was a rapidly escalating conflict. In the duchies, a provisional government was formed on 23 March 1848. On March 24th, the new provisional Holstein government overran a Danish military fortress in Rendsburg, and with a Danish army on its way to Rendsburg, and Prussia's intervention on the side of Holstein, war had become a reality. Pressure from the European superpowers led Prussia to enter into a peace agreement in 1850, and in 1851, the Holstein troops suffered a final defeat. This situation was maintained with the 1852 peace treaty, whereby Schleswig and Holstein remained part of the Kingdom of Denmark. The war was also the direct cause for the democratization of Denmark (Bjørn and Due-Nielsen 2003, 502-7). It and the associated national revival contributed to King Frederik VII's initiative to replace the absolute monarchy with a democratic constitution. One might say that the Danish "revolution" was rather nonviolent, in that the king accepted democratization, but this democratization took place before a bloody backdrop. Furthermore, as pointed out by Lind (1999), the Danish case was peculiar, as the liberal revolution did not trigger any reaction from the military. Due to the social structure of the military officers, their loyalty to the king, and the nationalistic character of the liberal movement, the military did not turn against the new constitution.

The King signed the Danish democratic Constitution on June 5th, 1849. It included both conscription and social rights, both relatively unspecified. The concrete provisions regarding universal military service were left to a commission, in which representatives of the army advocated a general armed citizen militia (Bjerg 1991, 60). However, the government did not want to go this far, and in February 1849, the constitutional assembly introduced a system of general male conscription.<sup>3</sup> It became part of the new democratic Constitution and was based on a drafting system without buy-out options. In other words, whereas conscription previously had existed for the rural population (farmers), now it was expanded to include the entire male population. There were exemptions for certain groups (doctors, priests, or schoolteachers, and it was possible to have another person drafted in one's place. This option was however abol-

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<sup>3</sup> See Lov om almindelig Værnepligt for Kongeriget Danmark, 12 February 1849. Online version: <<http://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/lov-om-almindelig-vaernepligt-for-kongeriget-danmark-12-februar-1849/>>.

ished in 1867 (Klint 1970, 91), and in 1914 conscription was changed such that it could also take on non-military forms.

The social rights included in the 1849 Constitution were also formulated quite generally, and it was only by the end of the century that major national social reforms were enacted. Nevertheless, from 1848 onwards, we can observe the implementation of individual social policy measures that compensated citizens for their military efforts and cemented the loyalty between the military and the state. The subsequently world-renowned ballet master in Copenhagen, August Bournonville, wrote a long newspaper article in 1849 about the need for the nation to take good care of its war invalids (Bournonville 1849, see also the introductory quotation). Inspired by his own French origins, Bournonville developed a proposal for public relief for war invalids. For the ballet master, the nation's duty to its soldiers lay at the heart of this issue, in addition to cementing a will to defend the nation, as state aid for war invalids would also "be an encouragement for the younger generation to dare everything for a king and fatherland, which appreciate bravery and faithfulness" (Bournonville 1849). His political influence was limited, but he raised awareness for a genuine problem. War and the military service had always been a cause of social troubles, not just for war invalids. For example, the English Wars (1801-1814) caused a crisis in agriculture, many self-employed farmers ended up having their farms foreclosed, without the government intervening. Under the democratic Constitution in Denmark after 1849, however, the government proved to be more responsive to the needs and problems of the population.

There were two types of government responses: the allocation of special rights to the military and special dispensations that avoided the most negative consequences of social measures. During this period in time, we find both types of measures: The Constitution introduced a right to retirement for royally appointed officials (and from 1858, those appointed by the ministries), including officers (Petersen 2010, 348). In 1876, old-age pensions and invalidity allowances were introduced for those lower-ranking officers and soldiers in the army and navy that had served faultlessly for 20 years (Law on Retirement of Lower-Ranking Officers and Recruits, 1876). Some of these programs for the military were implemented significantly earlier than the corresponding national legislation (such as the old age pensions in 1891 and sickness pensions in 1921). In May 1848, shortly after the beginning of the war against the North Schleswigians and their German allies, the government urged municipalities to provide extraordinary assistance within the existing poor relief system to impoverished families where the father was at war, without them having to suffer the loss of civic rights normally following this type of social assistance (Kolstrup 2010, 245-6).

Sixteen years later, in 1864, the conflict with Prussia reignited and Denmark suffered defeat at its hands. The Danish government introduced a law on special support for families where the provider was in active military service, an

allowance that could be received without the legal deprivations that accompanied poor relief (loss of civil and political rights).<sup>4</sup> In 1876, citizens obtained the right to be provided for by a state disability fund if they had lost their capacity to work or were otherwise impaired due to war. This also included – based on means-testing – the possibility of compensation for war widows and children (Kolstrup 2010, 278). The military’s special position could also be seen in the complex of social policy reforms enacted in the 1890s: elderly pension (1891), the poor law (1891), sickness insurance (1892), and work-related accident insurance (1898). The new poverty act, for example, awarded assistance to the families of conscripted soldiers and lost sailors without the otherwise normal loss of political and civil rights. The sickness insurance law from 1892 contained an exemption for conscripts. During their service, they did not have to make payments, even though the fund provided assistance to the conscript’s children (Indenrigsministeriet 1921, II-III, 87-88). As stated 100 years later, in a report from the US Embassy in Copenhagen to the State Department in Washington about the post-1864 situation: “It was then that Denmark felt disillusioned with its ability to engage in foreign wars and decided to disarm and concentrate its energies on domestic problems.”<sup>5</sup>

This development occurred against the background of an increasing dispute over military expenditures. In 1864, military spending amounted to an impressive 67.5 percent of total state spending (see Fig. 1 above). The wars in 1848 and 1864 had led to significant tax increases and contributed to the introduction of an income tax in 1903 (Johansen 2007). However, there was growing scepticism about the high level of military spending. The Social Democrats (and from 1905 the Social-Liberal Party) were advocates of disarmament and saw military spending as an obstacle to social reforms. The dominant liberal-agrarian party, called Venstre (Liberals), was also sceptical of expensive defence and rising taxes (Petersen 2014, 47). However, a constitutional reform in 1866 had favoured the Conservative Party, which had control over Parliament’s second chamber (Landstinget), and as the king had the right to appoint the government, the Conservatives held the reins of power.

In the 1890s, the conflict came out into the open (Dybdahl 1971, 121-208). The liberal-agrarian party was not against a strong military defence but conditioned their support on the acceptance of the principle of parliamentarianism and the introduction of a national income tax. The first would pave the way to the party’s seats in government, and the latter would benefit their constituency, the farmers. The military leadership and Conservative government advocated a military strategy based on the defence of Copenhagen, which included fortifications and artificial islands surrounding the city to strengthening the naval

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<sup>4</sup> Lov om forsørgelse af deslige familier af 12 marts 1864.

<sup>5</sup> Dispatch from the American Embassy Copenhagen to the U.S. State Department (28 May 1957: National Archives Washington), 611.5/5-257.

defence. These were grand, very expensive projects. The growing conflicts led to the government being unable to see the state budget approved by parliament, dominated by the liberal-agrarians, for a number of years. Instead, the government ruled using provisional budget laws, and in the mid-1880s, the situation in Denmark became highly socially and politically instable. In the end, however, concerns about the Social Democrats' political advances grew stronger than the struggle over military budgets between the two major bourgeois parties. The Liberals (Venstre) and the Conservatives (Højre), entered into a compromise that included both the desired military fortifications and the introduction of social reforms which, among other things, would moderate the Social Democratic pressure to reform.

There are not many indications that the military was an active player with respect to social policy. A review of the military journals of the day shows no commentaries or statements on the subject.<sup>6</sup> As a small state, the Danes were outnumbered in any modern mass war against a European superpower such as Germany, and the military's priority was more that of avoiding excessive cuts in the defence budgets (and the choice of specific defence strategies). It is the kind of complaint that reappears among military commentators, but without it being explicitly represented as a trade-off between military and social expenditures. The closest the armed forces came to stating their opinion is an observation by the military that social security presupposes the maintenance of national sovereignty. As stated in a critique of the Social Democrats' disarmament thinking from 1915:

As Social Democracy is fighting with all possible domestic policy weapons to gain its rightful place in society, so shall the nation fight with all possible foreign policy weapons, guns and canons for example, to maintain its independence, thereby elevating its own social democracy and its citizens, a hope for which they will stand up unrelentingly. (Klein 1915, 109)

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### 3. The Interwar Period: Expanding Social and Political Rights

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In spite of Denmark's neutrality during the First World War, the consequences of the conflict were noticeable. As in other European countries (Obinger, Petersen and Starke 2018), the war led to a significant increase in the state's role. With the establishment of the "Superior Commission," there emerged a detailed state regulation of production and consumption in the form of import regulation, price controls, raw materials allocation, and rationing (Petersen and

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<sup>6</sup> This is based on a reading of *Militært Tidsskrift* and *Tidsskrift for Søværnen* from 1870 to 1940; See for example the article "De militære budgetter," *Militært Tidsskrift*, vol. 60 (1931): 381-395.

Sørensen 2018). The political backdrop was the formation of a broad-based coalition government in 1915, which for the first time included a Social Democratic minister (party leader and future prime minister Thorvald Stauning).

In 1912, the military conscription system was reformed (Berg 1991, 72-5). Even though the Social Democrats and Liberals expressed scepticism regarding conscription, the new law maintained the compulsory element, and exceptions for schoolteachers and priests were abolished. From 1917 onward, Danes had the possibility to fulfil their military service obligation without weapons, a change inspired by British legislation and the peace movement (Bjerg 1991, 74-5). The civilian service period was longer than that in the military and could take the form of, for example, forestry working. Thus, the idea of military service was transformed from a duty (for men) to participate in the country's military defence into a duty to work for the state, even though the number of conscientious objectors was very low. Developments in the 1930s, a reduction in military expenditures, and a smaller Danish defence meant a decrease in the need for conscripts. Hence, a lottery system was introduced, and priority was given to those who volunteered for military service (Berg 1991, 75-7).

World War I, although Denmark found itself on the periphery of the conflict, led to increased mobilization (Frantzen et al. 2008, 185) and rising military spending (see Fig.1). The war was also the reason for a special state subsidy given to municipalities during the years 1914-1917, providing "needed support" to conscripts' families.<sup>7</sup> This aid was paid through the municipal assistance funds, intended for especially needy groups. The assessment of need was left to the municipal authorities, but it is significant that the Ministry of the Interior intervened in November 1914 when a municipality refused to aid a family because the conscripted husband had served time in prison (Indenrigsministeriet 1921, I, 201).

The end of the war created an increased need to ensure the loyalty of both the working class and the returning soldiers to the democratic state. The Russian Revolution in 1917 had sent shock waves through the Western world, and in many countries returning soldiers and workers took matters into their own hands and carried out local revolutions, resulting in "workers and soldier's councils" that briefly took power. Such dramatic events were only a marginal phenomenon in southern Denmark. Nevertheless, Danish society was affected. For example, one can point to the introduction of universal suffrage in 1915, thus granting women and servants the right to vote, the establishment of a Ministry for Social Affairs in 1919, and the introduction of an eight-hour working day in 1919. Universal suffrage was a prerequisite for the Social Democratic Party's barrage of parliamentary victories over the decades that followed. The left wing also flourished, with the founding of the Communist Party of

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<sup>7</sup> Midlertidig lov Nr. 162 af 7 August 1914.

Denmark (DKP) in 1921. The emergence of the DKP reinforced a Social Democratic pragmatic reform agenda, which became a defensive strategy against the internal (communist) enemy.

A very special situation arose because of the 1920 revision of the Danish border, in which South Jutland (Sønderjylland, the northern part of Schleswig lost in 1864) was reunited with Denmark. This meant that many veterans and war invalids who had served in the German army now became Danish citizens. The new border brought to a head the question of the link between military and social rights: did Denmark have an obligation to provide pension rights to former German soldiers? The War Invalid Act of 1920 ensured temporary care of all South Jutlanders who had been injured in war and for families of those soldiers who had died in military service (Østergaard Schultz 2002). The law also covered those who had received compensation from the German state prior to 1920. The condition for receiving services and assistance (e.g. medical treatment) was documentation of Danish citizenship (including permanent dwelling and long-term residence in Denmark). There were several practical challenges related to this scheme (Marckmann 2001), and there was a recurring problem, as the Danish state claimed that it was the nationality held during the period of military service that determined the right to benefits, and demanded Germany pay the costs of Danish social payments to its ex-soldiers. For this reason, the Danish parliament had only adopted a temporary arrangement. Negotiations with Germany took place until 1922, when a bilateral treaty was concluded, and Denmark had to grudgingly take over financial responsibility. The final law of 1924 stipulated that the war invalids (and their survivors) would be paid an allowance according to fixed rules based on a medical certificate. The scheme was administered by a special Council of Invalids, made up of representatives of the state, the invalids' organisations, and doctors. It was a model that deviated from the existing Danish system, where it was the Ministry of Finance's medical consultant who decided on the applications and where benefits were based on the Ministry's assessments. In this way, as an irony of history, the introduction of a legal principle for war invalids occurred on the background of these national conflicts.

The Social Liberal government's reduction in military spending caused some displeasure in military circles (Hedegaard 1991, 67-80; Frantzen et al., 2008, 214-7). In 1919-1920, the conflict became acute. A government commission, with representatives of the army (though without voting rights), proposed cuts in both the naval fleet and the army. The army leadership rejected the proposal. Scepticism towards the Social Liberal government turned into what was effectively a coup d'état with the so-called "Easter Crisis" in 1920 (Kaarsted 1968). Following the Versailles Treaty of 1919, a plebiscite was to take place in Schleswig to decide the new border between Denmark and Germany. The Social Liberal government was hesitant to push for including all of Schleswig into Denmark, which created strong resistance among more nation-

alist groups including both national conservative politicians, business leaders, and leading military figures. The increasing state regulation developed during wartime and the social reform agenda did not increase the government's popularity with this group either (Kaarsted 1968, 48). Those unhappy with the government's scheme secretly managed to convince the king that he should dissolve it and appoint a more defence-oriented prime minister. However, the reactions by a large parliamentary majority and the labour movement were unambiguous, and following a parliamentary election, the king's initiative was quickly rolled back. The result was a strengthened parliamentary democracy and a further weakening of the military's influence.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the new Defence Act in 1922 led to cuts in military spending. There was consensus among the parties to reduce defence costs and to recruit significantly fewer soldiers, but there was disagreement about how this should be done. The comprehensive parliamentary debate gave room for both technical and more fundamental considerations.<sup>8</sup> The two bourgeois parties wanted to safeguard Danish neutrality by military means, such that Denmark could be defended at least until other powers came to its aid. The Social Democrats and the Social Liberal Party, on the other hand, led by the former (and future) foreign minister P. Munch, expressed strong scepticism about militarism and the military possibilities to defend Denmark; they wanted more disarmament (Pedersen 1970). A key element in the debate was general conscription. The Social Liberals – with the support of the Social Democrats – proposed abolishing military service in favour of an all-volunteer army. The centre-right parties, on the other hand, defended conscription, even though only a minority of men in any specific age cohort would end up actually being drafted. Recruitment into the army would be decided by lottery. The argument from the centre-right was that it would create an army that represented all social groups, thus ensuring that the army would not be used as a domestic political tool. The conservatives were terrified by the experiences from the end of the war, where several local revolts had taken place with the establishment of workers and soldier's councils, as well as the 1920 Easter Crisis. The analysis of general conscription as an insurance against revolution was rejected by both the Social Liberals and the Social Democrats, and in a bombastic analysis of World War I's total unfortunate events by the Social Democratic speaker, conscription and the ability to mobilize large major armies was equated with militarism and aggressive nationalism. The centre-right parties ended up winning the debate, and conscription remained.

This did not change after the Social Democrats came to power, initially in 1924-26 and again from 1929 onwards. The party's conquest of the country's most powerful political positions led to a downgrading of the antimilitaristic

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<sup>8</sup> See especially the first discussion of the draft proposal: Rigsdagstidende 1921-22, Folketingets Forhandling, sp. 7038 ff.

and development of a national discourse (Christiansen 1992). The Social Democratic Party went from being a class party to becoming a national people's party. It did not disturb the defence arrangements, but instead chose to put its energy into building a strong democratic culture and extending social rights. In the words of Social Democratic politician Hans Nielsen:

We Social Democrats [...] love our country and our people and our language and our history as fully as other citizens in this country. Of course, we do not measure our love of country by the number of canons, but rather, by the number of good and happy homes, with nice furniture and nice clothes and the daily bread on the table. (Cited from Dich 1991, 8-11)

This was an argument with two elements: first, there was a trade-off between guns and butter. Second, the welfare of the population was a prerequisite for having something to be defended (see also *Socialt Oplysningsforbund* 1936, 15). Following the 1922 conscription discussion, there was also a third related topic up for political debate: drafting that portion of the youth who did not enter military service into some kind of civil physical training. It was an idea that had been circulating at the time, voiced by several sides. But again, there were quite different models and ambitions. There was agreement that it would be good for Denmark's youth to have physical training and to acquire a bit of discipline. The Conservatives suggested that this should take place within a military regime, to be led by military personnel and include weapons training. From the Social Democratic and Social Liberal side, however, it was a training in democratic citizenship, where the schooling of youth should be a pedagogical project without connections to the military. These ideas were not realized in the 1922 Defence Act, but they gained in importance and prevalence when the economic crisis began in the 1930s.

The issue was raised by defence-friendly circles (see, for example, Møller 1939; Forsvarsministeriet 1941), but also from the Social Democratic side (*Socialt Oplysningsforbund* 1936, 15). Youth unemployment was seen as not only a social problem but also a potential threat because of widespread political radicalization during the interwar period. This gave renewed support to the advocates of a kind of civilian service corps.<sup>9</sup> In February 1933, the Danish Minister of Social Affairs and leading Social Democrat Karl Kristian Steincke took the unusual step of appealing directly to the public, soliciting people's ideas for how to activate the youth. The Social Democratic newspaper *Social-Demokraten*, expressed the government's view thusly:

In other countries, Germany for example, measures have already been taken for this purpose, such as the establishment of a voluntary labour service and of collective farm colonies. We do not know if it is possible to simply transplant these forms into Danish conditions and achieve a positive result, but we know

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<sup>9</sup> This following discussion is based on Mariager and Petersen 2018.

that something must be done, and done soon, in order to save the Danish youth from impending destruction.<sup>10</sup>

Over the weeks that followed, the ministry received 145 proposals covering a variety of possibilities for employing the youth.<sup>11</sup> In the ensuing debate it was often pointed out, that the Danish initiatives had to be different from the German Labour Service, which was labelled as being militaristic, coercive and undemocratic.

In April 1933, Steincke presented a draft law on “Employment in Special Forms of the Young Unemployed in Colonies, Camps, Work Teams or the Like” (Topp 2008, 87-90; Christensen 2012, 459-63). The law allowed municipalities and local associations to obtain government subsidies for initiatives aimed at 18-22 year olds. The measures offered would combine physical work, sports, and education. The legislative initiative, however, had a quite limited effect, among other things because the law was based on support for local initiatives. This led the Conservative Carsten Raft, in 1936, to introduce the idea of labour conscription for the two-thirds of the male cohort who had not been drafted into the armed forces (Raft 1938). Similar ideas were found in parts of the military establishment as well as in organized sports.

Such ambitious plans for work obligation as national conscription were never realized, but they paved the way toward state initiatives, which in the years that followed included the establishment of a number of youth camps, typically located in rural areas and built to engage the youth in agricultural work, forestry, etc. The Danish work camp system continued to operate during the Nazi wartime occupation (1940-45) and even into the late 1940s (Sode-Madsen 1984, 126-226).

The interwar period was a major breakthrough in which the balance between military defence and social welfare build-up changed significantly. The combination of neutrality and anti-militarism did not eliminate the military defence, but military spending declined, the military was further marginalized, and the political winds drifted in favour of social policy (see Fig. 1). Social welfare was seen as a foundation for national stability and social cohesion and an effective Danish military defence against the European superpowers (especially Germany) was considered unrealistic.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Social-Demokraten 4 Feb. 1933. See also Politiken 5 Feb. 1933; Dagens Nyheder 4 Feb. 1933; Berlingske Tidende 4 Feb. 1933; Politiken 4 Feb. 1933.

<sup>11</sup> Archives of Ministry of Social Affairs, Box: Selection of 10 Jun. 1933 on unemployment.

<sup>12</sup> My analysis does not include the former Danish colonies of Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands. The German occupation in April 1940 meant that Denmark lost control of these North Atlantic territories. Iceland, which from 1919 had been an independent region in the Danish kingdom, was for military strategic reasons occupied first by the Brits (in May 1940) and beginning in July 1941 by the US (see Sørensen 2000). This paved the way for Iceland declaring itself an independent republic in 1944. Greenland formally remained a Danish colony; however, the Danish ambassador Henrik Kauffmann, against the will of the

During the period of 1940-1945, Denmark was occupied by Nazi-Germany, and all debates on military spending and conscription were put to a halt (for more details see Mariager and Petersen 2018).

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#### 4. The Early Cold War: The Welfare State and the Battle for Hearts and Minds, 1945-1960

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The liberation of Denmark in May 1945 and the post-war era quickly evolved into the Cold War, which especially in its early stages to the end of the 1950s dominated Europe's security policy agenda. In a Danish context, 100 years of fear of the German neighbour was replaced by fear of the Soviet Union and its satellite states in Eastern Europe. This was not only a fear of military defeat, but also a fear of communism spreading to the home front. Military security and social stability were high on the agenda, setting the framework for the development of the Danish post-war welfare state.

Denmark's liberation in May 1945 led to a rethinking of Danish defence (Berg 1991, 79-86). The country's capitulation – largely without any military battle – to the invading German army on April 9th, 1940, led to a desire for stronger and more effective defence. Military expenses therefore increased in Denmark during the early Cold War period (see Fig. 1). In 1948, just as the Cold War had begun to take form, an armed Home Guard was established that would serve as a supplement to the regular military forces. A civil defence force was formed in 1949, consisting of conscripts and local volunteers, and in 1951, recruiting soldiers on contracts was made possible. In sum, one can characterize this development as a military mobilization of Danish society. This mobilization was further bolstered by Denmark's joining NATO in 1949, where especially the US urged higher defence expenditures and longer service periods for recruits (Ringsmose 2018).

The military mobilization coincided with two key stages in the construction of the welfare state. In the first post-war years, the focus was on restoring the standard of social welfare, as the years of Nazi occupation had led to relative deterioration of a number of social benefits and held back developments and new initiatives in the public sector (Mariager and Petersen 2018). The period after the occupation was thus characterized by many ad hoc improvements, mainly to restore the purchasing power of cash benefits (Petersen 1998, 76-87).

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government in occupied Denmark, in 1941 signed a treaty allowing US military bases on Greenland (Lidegaard 2005). Consequently, the US gained a strong position there (see Boel and Thuesen 2010). In a similar way, the Faroe Islands were occupied by the British army in April 1940 (Sørensen 2000). Whereas Iceland remained an independent republic after the war, Denmark regained control over Greenland and the Faroe Islands after the end of World War II.

At the same time, the image of a new and more activist welfare state began to take form. Plans for a family policy initiative, originally advanced in the 1930s, resurfaced. In addition, the political parties, in their post-war programs, generally drew a picture of a society with a more active state. This was especially evident in the Social Democratic 1945 programme entitled “Future of Denmark,” which promised a number of social policy reforms (Olesen 1998). The programme was aimed at workers who might find themselves attracted to communism and could possibly be brought back into the fold. Although the universal Danish welfare state first fully emerged in the mid-1950s, the idea had been on the drawing board as early as the late 1940s.

However, this was a period marked by significant socioeconomic uncertainty. The European economic boom reached Denmark relatively late, starting in the late 1950s, and in the following years, economic growth was unstable, public budgets under pressure, and there was considerable fear of post-war economic depression (Rasmussen and Rüdiger 1990, 27-35). This meant that military and social spending could be seen in opposition to each other, not least in a situation where significant American pressure (and from 1950 the Korean War) entailed increased Danish defence spending. Once again, military spending made up a larger portion of the growing state budget (see Figure 1). It was the price of alliance membership, even though it could be perceived as inhibiting welfare policy ambitions (Villaume 1995, 296ff).

The increasing defence budget could be instrumentalized for communist rhetoric; it was portrayed as proof of the government’s prioritizing weapons over the well-being of ordinary people. In 1949-1950, when Danish politicians were debating the purchase of American fighter jets, communist-initiated demonstrations did not fail to emphasize that the price for one such plane corresponded to five days of butter rationing for everyone, four bedsheets for every newly married couple, the total annual taxes of 4,000 workers, etc.<sup>13</sup> In August 1950, the Social Democratic government introduced a special “military tax” (*Værneskat*) to finance the increasing military spending. The argument was that the military expenditures should be kept from threatening the social structure, seeing as they were weakening the population’s support for NATO membership and helping the communists gain ground (Lidegaard 2001, 379-383). The military tax was maintained until 1956. However, the government still saw it as necessary to emphasize that there was no contradiction between external security and social reforms. In 1952, therefore, the Conservative Defence Minister Poul Sørensen found himself forced to defend the government’s policies against criticism in a radio speech (Sørensen 1952). Despite the military tax and the minister’s defence, the political debates until the end of the 1950s were characterised by a concern for large-scale state spending programs

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<sup>13</sup> See also the pamphlet DKP, “Et enkelt spørgsmål” (1952).

and the national economy, which led to increased spending in one sector limiting spending in other sectors. Consequently, a “defence-tax” (*Værneskat*) was introduced in 1950 to cover the growing military expenditure.<sup>14</sup> Such ideas had circulated earlier. In 1912, parliament had originally agreed on a defence tax for persons who were covered by general conscription but not actually drafted for military service (Bjerg 1991, 71). However, this bill was never implemented. The new law of 1950 was instead a progressive taxation of all income and existed until 1956.

The military not only played an important part in Denmark’s external security strategy. In the wake of discussions in the 1930s, there was a widespread wish that the military should also act as a channel for democratic education. The Conservative Party’s post-war program of 1945 mentioned that compulsory military service was not just about military defence but should “also be a means of raising youth for civic solidarity” (Det konservative Folkeparti 1945). Similar ideas were on the table of the National Youth Commission (Ungdomskommissionen 1945-1952), which was tasked with assessing how the youth could be immunized against political radicalization (Sode Madsen 1984). In its 1949 report on “The Conditions of Conscripts,” the commission proposed a genuine democratization of the officers’ corps (so that it would reflect all segments of the population), improvements in the rights and service conditions of conscripts, and a civic education program as part of their military service. They felt these changes could kill two birds with one stone:

Firstly, the general need to give our youth an understanding of democracy and the changing obligations and rights would be satisfied, and they would be old enough to be deemed sufficiently mature to receive such an education. Secondly, the military would be positioned as a part of democracy, with an active task towards furthering it, in addition to the task of educating citizens so as to protect popular rule. (Ungdomskommissionen 1952, 55)

The Cold War in Denmark was not only about the survival of the Danish small state in a bipolar world order. With its entry into NATO in 1949, Denmark became part of Pax Americana and was protected under the American nuclear umbrella (Villaume 1996). The security policy agenda was an issue of internal security as well. One might argue that the main conflict of the Cold War in Denmark was that between the Danish communists and the Danish political establishment (Mariager and Petersen 2004). This was reflected, for example, in the Fifth Column Act of 1948, which made it a criminal offense to cooperate with hostile powers against Denmark, and in the struggle to control what remained of the Danish resistance movement. The creation of the Home Guard, a voluntary and armed military corps, in 1947 (see above) was a part of this control effort.

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<sup>14</sup> <<http://www.skm.dk/media/112481/skatteberegningsreglerne100aar.pdf>>.

The great struggle against the communists, however, took place within the labour movement (Mariager and Petersen 2004). The Communists had come out of the occupation years and World War II with relatively high prestige. The Soviet Union was one of the four victorious alliance powers, and the Danish communists had engaged early and actively in the resistance movement against the German occupying power. The Danish Communist Party's high expectations of a voting dividend were put to shame in the parliamentary elections in October 1945, where they only received 12.5 percent of the votes (Jacobsen 1993). However, their voting result and their growing influence among workers was enough to create an atmosphere of crisis within the Social Democratically dominated labour movement, whose leaders had been moulded in the intense struggle against the Communists in the 1930s. The conflict intensified through the 1940s and early 1950s, especially as it seemed that although the Communists had little influence, they nevertheless controlled central elements of the Danish infrastructure, such as railways, trams, radio, shipyards, airports, and ports (Mariager and Petersen 2004, 66-72). The social democratic labour movement had established the Information Center of the Labour Movement (Arbejderbevægelsens Informationscentral) in 1948, the primary objective of which was to register Communist activity and counter Communist propaganda (Bjørnsson 2012). In this struggle for the "hearts and minds," of the workers, social policy was one of the main weapons.

During the Cold War, the Social Democratic leadership of the labour movement and the Social Democratic Party published numerous pamphlets and articles pointing out that Danish workers had a high standard of living compared to their counterparts behind the Iron Curtain. The main argument was that the pragmatic social democracy combined freedom with real social reforms that benefitted the working class, while the communists had only empty promises and the subjugation in "people's democracies" to offer (see, e.g., Steincke 1945). It was a direct confrontation with communist propaganda and the communist criticism of Danish military re-armament (see above, as well as *Socialdemokratiet* 1953, 20). However, communist rhetoric was not just about the comparison and systemic competition, it was also based upon an immanent critique of the Social Democratic welfare policy. The Communists spoke of "the so-called welfare state," pointing out that the Social Democrats could not achieve their high-sounding promises within a liberal democracy. Hence, a commonly used tactic in parliament was for the Communists to promulgate proposals from the expensive Social Democratic Party Program, which the Social Democratic government had to reject because of lack of funds. Of course, this tactic was gratuitous for the DKP, and although the Social Democratic Prime Minister Hans Hedtoft, in 1949, ironically pointed out that the Communists were more "resolutionary" than revolutionary (*De Samvirkende Forbund* 1949, 42), this kind of performance was rather embarrassing for the Social Democratic government, e.g., in the field of family policy (Petersen

2012, 659-60). Hence, even though Communist influence was marginal, it put a significant amount of pressure on the Social Democrats. This became clear with the major pension reform in 1956. After having struggled to implement a universal old-age pension since 1952, the Social Democratic government, in early 1956, succeeded in achieving a broad political compromise (Petersen and Petersen, 2008). At the end, however, the government wavered. Could Denmark stem the costs of such an expensive reform? Here it became crucial that during the spring of 1956, the country was in the midst of a major labour market conflict that ended in a general strike that crippled the country and boosted the Communists' support. This crisis was a strong incentive for the government to push the popular idea of a universal retirement pension through parliament (Kolstrup 1996, 410-12).

The Social Democratic labour movement's struggle against communism encompassed everything from surveillance and cooperation with the intelligence service to mobilization at work places and discussions in the public realm about the legitimacy of and loyalty to the Danish social model. Overall, however, Danish (and Nordic) anti-communism must be considered "soft" in relation to what occurred in other countries, where, for example, the communist parties were outlawed, or communist employees purged (Schmidt and Petersen 2001). Based on intensified Nordic cooperation in the field of social policy (Petersen 2006), the idea of comprehensive social security, within the ideological framework of the Social Democratic "Middle way" between communism and US-capitalism, became an efficient alternative in the domestic competition between the Social Democratic labour movement and their communist rivals.

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## 5. Conclusion and Perspectives

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External security and internal social stability were the two core elements of the nation-building project that took place in Denmark from the breakthrough of democracy in 1848 until the development of social rights in the 1930s and expansion of the welfare state in the years after 1945. I have focused on three critical periods: nation-building and the Schleswig wars in the latter half of the 19th century, the threats against Denmark during the interwar period, and the bipolar world order after 1945. My argument is not that military agendas and the need for external security alone can explain the progress of the Danish welfare state (or vice versa), the story is much more complex. The point actually being made is that the topic of external security and social reforms interlink (see also Kaspersen 2008 as well as Obinger and Petersen 2017 for this reasoning). In this article, I have focused on the state's need for loyalty and legitimacy and how this has been reflected in the views of the military (especially military service) and social rights in a small state like Denmark.

In the first period, military considerations began to penetrate the social legislation. In a number of areas, new legislation for military personnel was introduced before national legislation concerning the whole population, or special favourable rules were implemented, which exempted military personnel from stigmatization. In these cases, social policy was used to promote military loyalty in the context of a nation-building process, without the construction of a parallel military welfare state, as occurred in countries such as Great Britain and the United States.

In the interwar period, the context changed: not only was the security policy situation different following Germany's defeat in World War I and the establishment of the League of Nations, but the power constellations within Denmark changed as well, and recognition of Denmark's small state status was widespread. The goal now was defending democracy and the burgeoning welfare state. From social policy being a means of strengthening military loyalty, the new task at hand was to ensure that military spending would not pose an obstacle to national social reforms. The overarching security goal was less about defending national sovereignty or Danish borders, but rather of defending Danish democracy and the Danish way of life.

In the post-war phase, conditions changed once more. In the bipolar world order of the Cold War, it became clear to Danish politicians that military security must be found through alliances, and from 1949 onwards, Danish NATO membership entailed a rise in military spending. However, the Cold War was also a war against the Communists on the home front (and their fellow travelers), fought with a social mobilization to win the "hearts and minds" of the Danish working class. Social reforms became an important part of the Social Democratic arsenal in the struggle to ensure the Danish social model.

While we do not find any "smoking guns" whereby policy-makers explicitly legitimize a social welfare state using security policy motives, or where the military develops an explicit social policy agenda, it is nevertheless possible and meaningful to discuss connections between war, the military, and welfare in the Danish democratic small state. Indeed, Denmark is an example of how social welfare can become a national defence policy.

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# Historical Social Research

## Historische Sozialforschung

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