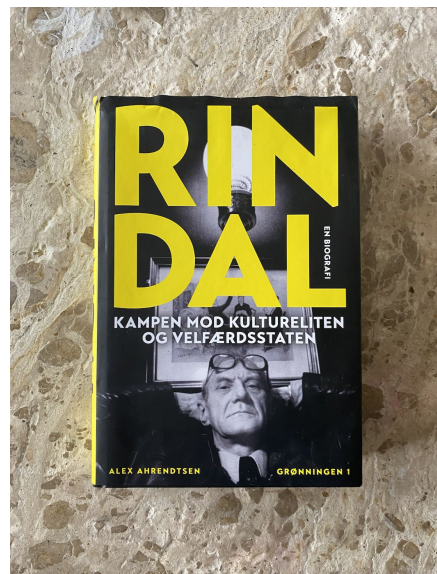


Rindal Reviewed. Letters from 1960s Denmark

Interview by Kristy Theissling



On 18th February 1965, Peter Rindal, a 42 year old Danish linen factory manager was at his factory in Kolding, Denmark, when he opened the daily newspaper and read an article. It would change the direction of his life, the lives of the citizens around him & set Rindal on a journey that would transform the trajectory of Danish parliament indefinitely.



The Linen Factory, Kolding, Denmark

The newspaper informed him that approximately 1.6M DKK or 242K USD per/annum would be distributed amongst 141 Danish artists, every year, for the rest of each of their lives through a state-funded endowment, administered by a state-initiated governing body Statens Kunstfond.

In 1960s Denmark, this news infuriated its working-class citizens, especially in the rural areas of Jutland and Kolding. In post-world war Europe, it seemed a questionable investment given its citizens were struggling with stagnated wage-growth and other economic scenarios.

Rindal's opposition to the endowment fund symbolised his discontent with leaders decision making on spending of public funds.



“The market for Rindal was freedom. Suppression of that market was suppression of his freedom.” - Ahrendtsen

It also captured what *The Good Global* describes as a disconnection in the 1960s between Copenhagen, its Christiansborg Palace (the home of the Danish Parliament and where the subsidisation bill was passed in 1964) and its rural areas and citizens, like those in Kolding and Jutland.

It seemed questionable, however, no one had raised their voice. Until Rindal.

Rindal put the newspaper down and in these moments, his biographer Alex Ahrendtsen describes in his book, *Rindal: Kampen mod kultureliten og velfærdsstaten* (Rindal: The struggle against the cultural elite and the welfare state) that at 42 years old “he stepped completely into his own energy.”

In his Kolding linen factory of three hundred employees, some bustled around him as he read the newspaper and urged Rindal to write a letter of protest.

With only six years of school education, Rindal was far from the intellectual elite. However, he'd been an avid letter writer all his life and was an eloquent speaker and confident community member. He took the idea to his wife Lilly over the evening meal and discussed writing a protest.

Their simple home held memories of his mother and her own art pieces. Their own table was often set with “peking fish” that Rindal sourced from Norway. Many letters were exchanged between Rindal and his younger brother, stored and kept like treasures about their experiences in life with humour and wit and an extensive stamp collection.

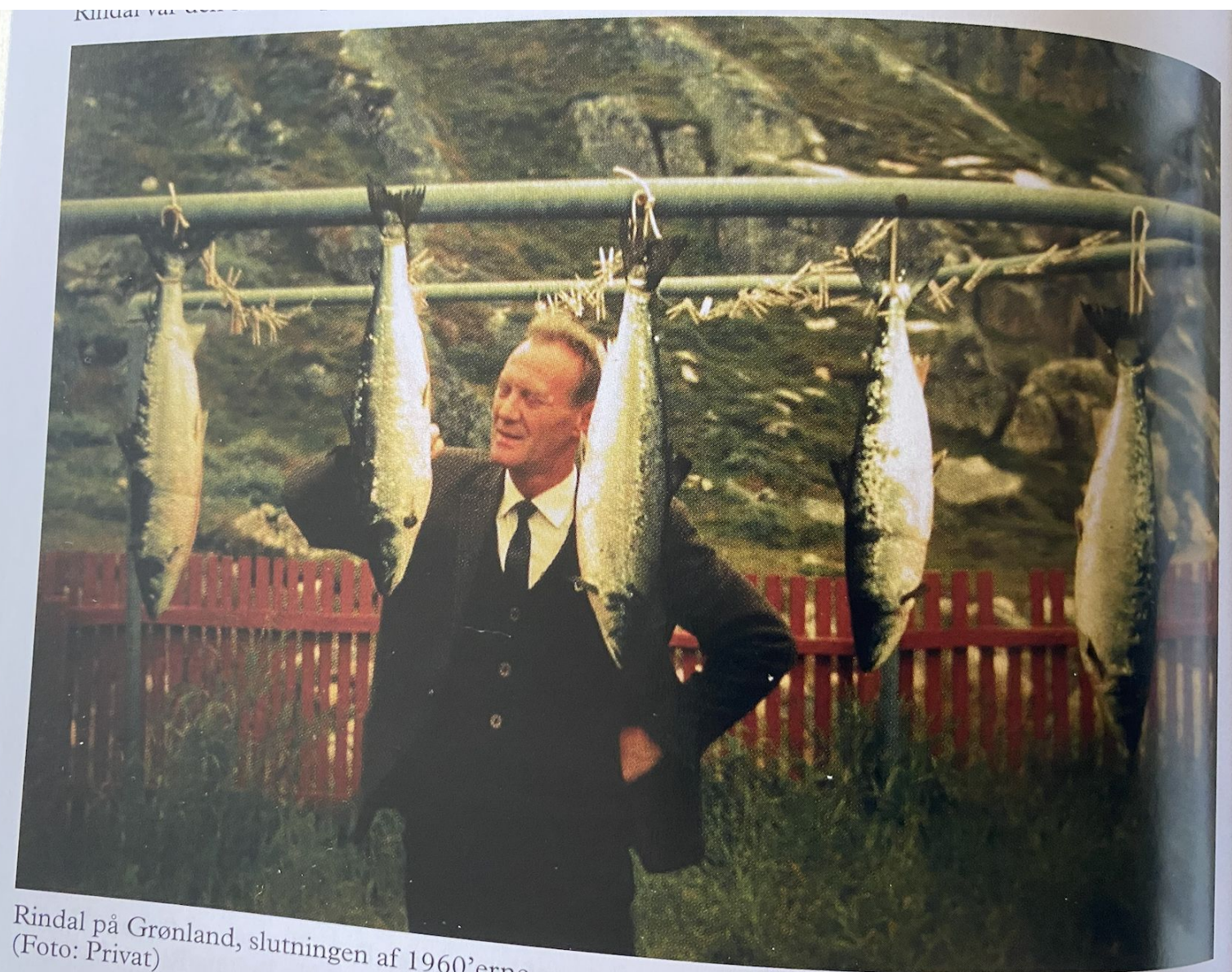
5 kilometers away in Kolding was another home where a boy would grow up hearing about Rindal. Born two years after the 1965 Kolding Folkeblad publication of Rindal's protest, Alex Ahrendtsen would one day become his biographer, and in 2023 publish *Rindal: Kampen mod kultureliten og velfærdsstaten* (Rindal: The struggle against the cultural elite and the welfare state)

“Rindal was very transparent.” says Ahrendtsen. “This is me. This is my life. This is what I think. I think you're wrong. I think this is nonsense. And people engaged him and a discussion ensued...”

Rindal knew that on 27 May 1964, the parties in the Danish Parliament (with the exception of De Uafhængige) voted for a law that would introduce a new administrative body, Statens Kunstfond, as well as a re prioritisation and massive expansion of art support.

“Rindal didn't want the state or some pedagogue to tell him what to like... The market for Rindal was freedom. Suppression of that market was suppression of his freedom... Rindal saw also, that if the state becomes too big, it will threaten the freedom of the individual.” said Ahrendtsen.

The newspaper ignited and affirmed Rindal's belief in the right for a countries' citizens to inform decisions about how public funds should be spent. Rindal identified that the endowment fund would be a provocative topic and enable a message to be told to the Danish people.



Rindal på Grønland, slutningen af 1960'erne.
(Foto: Privat)

Danish politician Alex Ahrendtsen, member of the Folketing for the Danish People's Party.



Peter Rindal from 2023 book, *Rindal: Kampen mod kultureliten og velfærdsstaten* (Rindal: The struggle against the cultural elite and the welfare state) by Alex Ahrendtsen



Back at the linen factory the next day, while sitting famously with rye bread in his left hand, he wrote a letter of protest. Promising to send it to Christiansborg (Christiansborg Palace, the seat of the three branches of government: the Folketing, the Prime Minister's Office and the Supreme Court) by the end of the day. Over 300 signatures were collected through his warehouse. Rindal put his signature at the top and sent the list to Member of Parliament Poul Hartling.

Rindal's protest would become click-bait of 1960s Danish political journalism.

A linen factory staff member mentioned the protest activity in her workplace to her boyfriend, who was a journalist at Kolding Folkeblad. On February 24, 1965 the newspaper put the story on the front page. A Danish broadcaster picked up the story, and knowing that the workers of Lego and others were also protesting, invited Rindal to speak on radio about his protest. This sparked a number of presentations to groups, also protesting the endowment.

‘He stood like a Minister’ tells Ahrendtsen. “His courage and indisputable abilities as a speaker and system critic was evident in his presentations and delivery. He had this grip with people because he was strong, although he was also sensitive, and his demeanor was strong. People believed he was one of them.” And he was. “He delivered passion and anger, with eloquence.”

Two weeks later, by the 2nd of March 1965, Rindal was invited to and traveled 230 kilometers to Copenhagen to take his seat at a round table that the biography describes to include Knud Leif Thomsen, Minister of Culture Hans Sølvhøj, chief inspector at the Statens Museum for Art associate professor Erik Fischer and former Member of Parliament Ms. Birthe Wetlesen from the small liberal party The Independents, who was the only one to vote against the art fund.

Rindal took the opportunity to meet on the same day with Minister of Culture Hans Sølvhøj, to whom he handed 2,135 protest signatures.

Overall, 60,000 signatures protesting the endowment fund distributions were collected. The countries leadership were shocked.

Ahrendtsen's book recaps the interest the journalists had in Rindal, one assigned by his editor to stay in Rindal's home every night for two months. The provocative nature of the topic drew people in. The biography replays a journalist asking a chief inspector several times what art is, but the chief. inspector does not manage to define it. The journalist hints, you can not give a definition of it. It cannot be done. "Art is an indefinable concept, and it is perceived as a value," tells the biography.

‘Rindal had showed other people that people were not satisfied.’ says the biography.

The biography goes on to describe Rindal's protest being unsuccessful and ultimately lost against the politicians and the artists. Despite this, in the biography Ahrendtsen explains that parties including Progress Party, Christian People's Party, the Center Democrats, the Danish People's Party, the Liberal Alliance and New Borgelige may not have ever happened, if not for Rindal speaking up. A two-volume work was also produced on Rindalism in 1979 by Anne Marie Kastrup and Ivar Lærkesen.

From the 1960s, the Statens Kunstfond and its administrations budget quickly grew from 3,5 million kr. in 1965 to 41,8 million kr. in 1993 and 73,1 million kr. in 2005.

Rindal disappeared from public life. He spent his senior years with his wife in their home.

Christiansborg Palace, Copenhagen, Denmark 2023

“Time passed and he was forgotten.” says Alex Ahrendtsen as he sits across the table from me inside Christiansborg Palace in Copenhagen, Denmark. We sit in the offices nearby ‘Folketinget’, Danish Parliament (pictured).

Now 57 years old, not only is Ahrendtsen Rindal's biographer, he was also successfully elected into Danish Parliament, the Folketing in the 2011 general election; reelected in 2015 and in 2019 for the Danish Progress Party, one of the parties inspired by Rindal.

Ahrendtsen also became Rindals biographer and in 2023 published *Rindal: Kampen mod kultureliten og velfærdsstaten* (Rindal: The struggle against the cultural elite and the welfare state).

“You have to understand how violent it can be for a person to be a public figure. I've been doing this for decades. And it's still difficult for me. Rindal, he came from nowhere, with no training whatsoever. So I was very, very impressed that he took this task on them and did it.”

Ahrendtsen was first inspired to write Rindal from an email prompting him to formulate a different approach to funding culture. Ahrendtsen, despite being born two years after the 1965 Kolding Folkeblad publication of Rindal's protest, knew it well and shared with Rindal common ground in their positions on endowment funds and the use of public spending.

“When seeing no biographies existed about Rindal, nothing about him and his background, and his struggle, whatsoever.. I became curious”. explains Ahrendtsen.

His book covers not only the birth of the protest and the uprising of the working class in Denmark, but Rindal's life as a youth, the anguish of love, and a life built upon resilience, grit and independence.

There were other Danish prose and performances that included Rindal, but outside of this, Ahrendtsen felt, “Only artists and journalists and some politicians knew about him and what they thought was that he was an art hater. And that was it. They didn't know what he actually created.”

Ahrendtsen could see the catalyst of Rindals actions. “I wanted to tell the story that things don't just happen because they happen.” There was more to it.

“Rindal saw, if I want to speak to the voters and the citizens, I have to use this endowment as a means to make them understand. ‘This is what you're going to get, if we let the politicians enhance the welfare state, more and more..’ which I think is brilliant to see that so clearly.... I took my inspiration from him.” said Ahrendtsen.

“I wanted a more market oriented model.... The outcome is about quality. And the driving force behind it is about the public and the way we spend public funds.” says Ahrendtsen.

Ahrendtsen said, “I felt that the present model excluded a lot of artists, and [included those that developed their art] in a very narrow, artistic idea ideology... I didn't like that. I like diversity. In order to get diversity [we need to] have a more market driven model. That was my take on it.”

Ahrendtsen said, “If you have state funding behind you, you don't need to reach out to the audience.”

Ahrendtsen said, “It's also a question of believing in the individual and his ability to make a choice. That's right for him. Rindal's opponents, they thought no, people cannot choose for themselves. The state must do it for them.”

Lessons

When Ahrendtsen entered Parliament in 2011, the same endowment fund existed, only larger. I wondered, if we encounter recurring patterns across time, and they remain unresolved, looking back on Rindal’s experience, what lessons have we learned to carry forward to create change?

1: Listen

“You have to listen carefully. As a leader, or if you have power, don’t think everything is good and cool.” “When the protest came, it was a shock.”

“The (leaders thought) everything was good, the artists and the unions, the politicians, the intellectuals, and suddenly, it appears with such a resonance among voters, [the protest].

“If it’s quiet, they forgot to listen. They didn’t see what was coming. The word is complacency.” says Ahrendtsen.

“So we need to listen.”

2: Speak Up

“Speak up... Very simple and so difficult ... people forget to speak up. They hide their feelings. They hide their opinions. They’re afraid of showing their true faces.”

“[Rindal] was very transparent. ‘This is me. This is my life. This is what I think. I think you’re wrong. I think this is nonsense.’ says Ahrendtsen.

“[This allowed] people to engage him and debate, a discussion... so small and big, speak up. It’s so simple.”

“Don’t be afraid. Be honest. What do you think?”

“And if you don’t think anything, then shut up. Or support the guy who speaks up for you.”

3: Take Action when inspired

“Rindal had the courage to stand up and say yes, when the opportunity was beautiful. And that’s why he is so inspirational for me. Because when he can do it, everyone can do it.” reflects Ahredstend.

“Do what you think is right. Maybe others will be inspired, and create the change... Take action where you can.”

From the book, *Rindal: Kampen mod kultureliten og velfærdsstaten* (Rindal: The struggle against the cultural elite and the welfare state):



“On 23 February 2009, Rindal fell asleep. He was buried in silence at Sorterup Kirke, a classic Danish village church with whitewashed walls and red bricks not far from the Rindal family’s home in Ollerup. A stone wall runs around the cemetery and large deciduous trees watch over the cemetery. Present at the funeral were Lene Rindal, Rindal’s brother Aksel and sister-in-law Lilian as well as their children and grandchildren, relatives and friends from Ollerup and the Slagelse area. Rindal was buried opposite the parents’ grave. The family had found the tombstone in the garden at the childhood home in Ollerup. If any words had been said, it would have been that Rindal was a friend of his friends and a great family man who rested within himself.”



Danish politician Alex Ahrendtsen, member of the Folketing for the Danish People’s Party.