

Danish newspaper Jyllandsposten, May 27, 2014:

Aalborg University fires the country's leading noise researcher

Professor Henrik Møller, who is an internationally recognized noise researcher, is dismissed at Aalborg University.

AXEL PIHL-ANDERSEN

axel.andersen@jp.dk

He is not only known as the country's leading noise researcher, but also as a person who with his academic qualifications has repeatedly challenged and criticized both the EPA and the wind turbine industry for misinforming others about the low-frequency noise that large wind turbines emit.

Now the 63-year-old professor Henrik Møller has been fired from Aalborg University after 38 years of service, and the reason is that the professor is no longer sufficient financially lucrative for its faculty.

»The official explanation is that I do not earn enough money. Apparently I am not my money's worth, because I've spent my time on wind turbines. But I know there have been many years where my activities have resulted in quite a substantial income. Besides, statistically, it is probably about half of the faculty members who make a loss, « says Henrik Møller.

They wonder

The dismissal attracts attention and wonder - both among colleagues and among wind turbine critics of the National Association Neighbors of Giant Windmills.

»It's weird and very strange that they just dismiss him as an internationally renowned acoustician. But he is not popular in the wind turbine industry and with the authorities because he dared to speak his mind and thus confronted both the authorities and a powerful industry « says the president of the National Association Neighbors of Giant Windmills, Tone F. Brix Hansen, who calls it » a great loss « that the North Jutland noise researcher has been dismissed.

Like others, she points to the fact that the Wind Industry Association, through its CEO Jan Hylleberg, emailed Henrik Møller's boss, Dean Eskild Holm Nielsen, several times during 2011 where he complained that Professor Henrik Møller publicly interfered in the debate about low-frequency noise and also criticized both the wind turbine industry and the Environmental Protection Agency for manipulating the numbers.

Keynote speaker

Dean Eskild Holm Nielsen, who is behind the dismissal, was himself a keynote speaker at the Wind Industry Association's meeting, the day after he fired Henrik Møller. But both the dean and Aalborg University's rector until May 1, professor emeritus Finn Kjærdsdam, denied that there were any other than economic reasons behind the dismissal of the noise researcher.

Eskild Holm Nielsen says he will not comment on individual cases but consistently refutes that Henrik Møller's critical messages and articles in relation to the wind power industry have anything to do with the firing.

»There is nothing in it. On the contrary, we defend the researchers' freedom of expression, and they are actually obliged to speak out if they think there is something that is not illuminated properly, « says Eskild Holm Nielsen, adding:

»We have carried out some personnel adjustments including dismissals in relation to the economy. We need to consider making the team that is needed to solve the tasks. «

Henrik Møller received his dismissal in March, and the university's rector until May 1st, Finn Kjærdsdam, also denies that there were political motives behind the dismissal.

»Henrik Møller has been working in an area where there are no longer students. We need to hire people, where there are students, and if no money is made either from students or research, then it clearly will not work, « says Finn Kjærdsdam.

Professors at risk

Vice-president Ingrid Stage from the Danish Confederation of Professional Associations, AC, says that it is not very common for fire professors.

»But it also should not be. However, we can see that some of them are in the danger zone when downsizing - typically associated with budget deficits, « says Ingrid Stage, who is also chairman of the Danish Association of Masters and PhDs.

Danish newspaper "Jyllandsposten", Editorial, May 30, 2014:

Mysterious dismissal

On 26 and 27 March, the Danish Wind Industry Annual Event 2014, organized by the trade organization Danish Wind Industry Association, was held in Herning.

Nearly 400 participants from Denmark and abroad participated in the sessions, highlighting many aspects of wind energy and wind turbines, including noise, but quite remarkably, one of the leading noise researchers, Professor Henrik Møller from Aalborg University, was not to be found among the many speakers.

However, Professor Møller's superior, Eskild Holm Nielsen, dean of Aalborg University's Faculty of Engineering and Science, was present, and spoke about closer cooperation between industry and research institutions. Nielsen pointed out that it was important that the industry demonstrated a greater willingness to open up and share technology issues with the research world, according to the Wind Industry Association's record.

The message is thought provoking, since the very same Eskild Holm Nielsen had the day before sacked the country's leading noise researcher, Professor Henrik Møller, who has repeatedly challenged and criticized the EPA as well as the wind industry, for misinforming the public about the low frequency noise, which particularly large turbines emit. Long-term exposure to low frequency noise is suspected to reduce life quality and be directly harmful.

It is a very rare occasion in Denmark that a recognized professor is fired. In Henrik Møller's case the argument is the failing economy, but the real reason is inaccessible to the public due to the lack of rights of access to documents in such staff cases.

The wind turbine industry has a very close collaboration with the Department of Wind Energy at the Technical University of Denmark (DTU) and DTU also provided a considerable share of the speakers and panelists at the Danish Wind Industry Annual Event 2014.

DTU's Department of Wind Energy is in charge of construction and operation of the National Test Centre for Large Wind Turbines at Østerild, and we hardly reveal a national secret by thinking aloud, that Professor Henrik Møller's research-based opinions about low-frequency noise from large wind turbines may have been on a collision course with his academic competitors at the Technical University.

It is academic tradition to argue, and because of DTU's deep mingling of interests with the wind industry, it has been life-giving to have an alternative voice - especially for all those people who feel seriously annoyed by noise from wind turbines and feel that they are not taken seriously due the political consensus about the unrestrained expansion of wind power in Denmark.

With Professor Henrik Møller now gone, it is DTU's own researchers, who will start with assessing possible low frequency noise nuisances from giant turbines in the National Test Center, for which the same DTU is responsible.

We have no evidence to claim that DTU does not deliver valuable research, but given the vast billions that taxpayers directly and indirectly are forced to pay for wind energy in a broad sense, it is crucial to have critical researchers like Professor Henrik Møller, who undertakes the role of the Devil's advocate.

The 'greedy for growth' university in Aalborg must therefore accept that members of the public will find that the sacking of Professor Henrik Møller with economics as a justification is of a nature which at least shows that Franz Kafka has not lived in vain.

Danish newspaper "Information", June 2, 2014:

Critical professor fired for giving deficit

An economically pressed Aalborg University has fired a critical wind turbine professor for his bad 'revenue generating performance'. The academic unions believe that the dismissal criterion conflicts with academic freedom.

By Emil Rottbøll

The 63-year-old professor of acoustics Henrik Møller is internationally recognized in his field. Yet he was the one chosen when his department at Aalborg University had to fire a researcher in the Acoustics section because of the university's financial problems.

The management explains in Henrik Møller's dismissal letter that they have selected the Acoustics section because of its »imbalance« between income and expenses and its »declining revenues of external projects«. In the same way, the management has put an emphasis on comparing the seven employees of the Acoustics section from the revenue they provide the department. And this is where Henrik Møller has been found deficient:

»From an overall consideration based on the selection criteria, comprising specifically revenue generating performance, you are thus the employee that can best be omitted, « it says in the letter.

As an expert in low-frequency noise, Henrik Møller has repeatedly criticized both the wind industry and the Environmental Protection Agency for misinformation about the noise that wind turbines emit. Therefore, among others, the National Association of Neighbors of Giant Wind Turbines has questioned the motives that the choice just fell on him, to Jyllands-Posten.

Before the notice of dismissal, Henrik Møller had not heard any word that he did not create enough revenue for the department. He criticizes that his performance is assessed solely on areas that are economically measurable.

»It's not normal at a university that you look at whether it is worthwhile to have a researcher employed. My employment has never depended on external financing, « says Henrik Møller.

He thinks it conflicts with freedom of research if the individual researcher must be profitable.

»As a researcher you must work with the subjects in your field which you find most relevant. Not what gains the most money, « says Henrik Møller.

Conflicts the law

Universities are increasingly dependent on external financing, and therefore unions have for years been aware of its possible use as a firing argument.

In a note from 2011 concludes, among others, the Danish Society of Engineers, DJØF and the Danish Association of Masters and PhDs that it is unreasonable to dismiss researchers due to lack of acquisition of research funding.

For one thing it is contrary to the University Act, which specifies the university purposes to be research and education and not profit-making activity.

For another it depends on external factors in society that the employee has no influence on.

»It must of course be based on the employee's circumstances, and not whether the individual's or the research group's area is in great demand in the community. This would be fundamentally against the basic principles of academic freedom, « write the unions.

The Danish Society of Engineers, of which Henrik Møller is a member, has chosen not to comment at this stage of the case.

Chairman of the Danish Association of Masters and PhDs, Ingrid Stage, called it a disagreeable trend, if professors can now be fired for lack of external financing.

»There may well be many reasons for not having external funding. This is not necessarily because there is no future in the research. In this way you leave the willingness to risk and find new areas to external companies instead of assuming this task as a university, « says Ingrid Stage.

At the Faculty of Engineering and Science, where Henrik Møller comes from, the external funding significantly exceeds the basic funding that comes directly to the university from the Finance Act, says Dean Eskild Holm Nielsen. Still he does not think it poses a threat to academic freedom to prioritize according to the external money.

»The majority of the funding subject to competition is for independent research. You just have to convince others that your ideas for independent research have sufficient quality and utility value, « says Eskild Holm Nielsen.

At the same time he disagrees that it is beyond the requirements for a professor to retrieve research funding. »Professors are exactly appointed to develop an area. You cannot do this without attracting external funding, « says Eskild Holm Nielsen.

Danish newspaper "Information", June 3, 2014:

Dismissed noise professor selected amongst 200 researchers

Less than a year before Aalborg University dismissed the critical noise Professor Henrik Møller, the University employed two other researchers in the small Acoustics section. It wasn't found until afterwards that they could not afford as many employees, says the dean explanation.

By Emil Rottbøll

Insufficient financial resources was Aalborg University's justification that a researcher in the Acoustics section had to be fired, and that the choice fell exactly on the critical noise Professor Henrik Møller.

But less than a year before Henrik Møller received his dismissal notice, the university employed two new lecturers in acoustics.

This reinforces the suspicion that there are other motives behind the sacking of Henrik Møller than economic factors, critics believe. From Information's description the Vice President of The Danish Confederation of Professional Associations, Ingrid Stage calls the case strange.

»It looks quite peculiar. One can easily get the idea that the lack of resources is a convenient justification, « she says.

The chairman of the National Association Neighbors of Giant Wind Turbines, Tone F. Brix Hansen, is of the same opinion.

»The entire dismissal looks very mysterious, « she says.

Henrik Møller is internationally recognized for his research on low frequency noise that has repeatedly brought him on a collision course with the Danish Wind Industry Association and the Danish EPA, which he has accused of making knowingly incorrect calculation methods for the noise emitted by wind turbines.

The National Association Neighbors of Giant Windmills fears that this has been instrumental in the targeting of Møller.

One out of 200

Apart from three staff members in a closed research section in Esbjerg, Henrik Møller is the only one out of about 200 researchers at the institute, who has been fired.

In the dismissal letter, the management notes that there are too many staff members in the Acoustics section related to how many students there are, and how much income they gain from external projects and publications. Nevertheless, since May last year, two new associate professors have been employed, by which the section went from five to seven permanent researchers.

Before the new appointments, it was already known that Aalborg University's result for 2012 was considerably worse than expected. In an email dated March 13, 2013, Henrik Møller's superior, Dean Eskild Holm Nielsen, writes to all employees at the Faculty of Engineering and Science, that the Faculty has been put under enhanced economic surveillance because of the serious cost overruns, and that all units must examine their budgets to obtain cost savings and new revenues. At the same time, the Dean announces a full hiring freeze, where the Rector must grant special permission for any employment to take place anyway.

Danish Journal "Information", Editorial, June 10, 2014:

Research without invoice

A remarkable firing has taken place at Aalborg University. Because of the university's financial problems, acclaimed researcher in low-frequency noise Professor Henrik Møller lost his position with the official explanation that he had the lowest 'income generating performance' amongst his colleagues.

The dismissal marks the latest decline of values at Danish universities, where the political and managerial pressure to participate in business cooperation and attract external funding can now be truly said to threaten the freedom of research.

In itself, one can question the management's motives for firing a professor who has frequently been critical of the noise calculations made for wind turbines, when Aalborg University at the same time is trying hard to expand cooperation with wind turbine industry.

But even if one takes the management's firing criteria at face value that the professor was simply the one 'that best could be omitted', there is reason to firmly reject the economic unit his research is measured by. Good research is not necessarily equal to what corporations and foundations are currently interested in and can set aside money for.

Universities' official purpose is to teach, conduct research and mediate results, not to run gainful activity. From this definition we must urge the professor's union, the Society of Engineers, to raise the issue in principle, to determine whether the university's firing criteria are valid.

As far as we know this professor's sacking is so far the only one of its kind with so much emphasis on the economy, but the secondary normative impact on other researchers' work is far worse.

Right now it requires a certain courage for the individual to research what is academically most relevant, and not only what is most likely to lead to the next invoice.