

## The lost Scandinavism. From Indian summer to Nordic winter

Ruth Hemstad  
Fra Indian summer til  
nordisk vinter:  
Skandinavisk  
samarbeid,  
skandinavisme og  
unionsoppløsningen

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**T**HE SCANDINAVISM OF the 19<sup>th</sup> century is depicted mostly as a movement on the losing end of history. When the idea of a unification of the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish peoples was put to the test during the Second Schleswig War (also known as the Danish-Prussian War) in 1863–64, it fell victim to the realpolitik of national egoism. Despite previous (Swedish) pledges, the Danes were left to their own devices. Scandinavism failed the test when its rhetoric was confronted with harsh reality. Denmark lost the war and ended up in the shadow of the powerful German empire that was created in 1871. Scandinavism appeared to have been buried forever.

In the preceding decades, the tone had been different. Scandinavian student meetings in Uppsala in 1843, Copenhagen in 1845, Kristiania (Oslo) in 1851, Uppsala in 1856, and Copenhagen in 1862, to name just a few, had garnered much attention. In emotional speeches and countless toasts, the friendship among the three peoples was cemented. Swedish monarchs such as Oscar I and Charles XV committed themselves to Scandinavism in a variety of ways. Their motives were less idealistic than those of the enthusiastic students – the monarchs wanted to create a super-Nordic kingdom under Swedish leadership.

**THE PAINFUL DEFEAT** of political Scandinavism has contributed to other forms of Scandinavism being neglected by research. In general, the myriad of forms of cooperation between the associations of a highly diverse nature that characterized the Scandinavism of late 19<sup>th</sup> century has been overlooked by researchers. These shortcomings have now been largely overcome, thanks to a comprehensive, wide-reaching dissertation by Ruth Hemstad, a historian at the University of Oslo, currently working at Norway's National Library. The dissertation has recently been published in book form. In addition, through her work over the course of several years as project coordinator for the Norwegian-Swedish "Project 1905", Hemstad has dealt with other, closely related issues as well.

The primary thesis of her book is that, contrary to the conventional view, Scandinavism as a cultural movement did not die out after the student Scandinavism movement and the defeat in



FROM GEDDEHOLMS GÅRD, VÄSTERÅS STADSARKIV

1864 of the idea of a unified political entity, but rather experienced a – albeit brief – heyday. She refers to this period in the 1890s with a concept taken from Erik Rudeng: "Indian summer", a time of warmth before the cold sets in with the coming of "the Nordic winter". These metaphors based on the seasons are central in Hemstad's account.

**AS NOTED,** THE dissertation is extensive – 653 pages. The notes alone (2,252 of them, some very detailed) fill up nearly 160 pages, itself the size recommended in Sweden in the 1970s for an entire doctoral thesis. That norm is however long since dead and gone, and Swedish dissertations in history often tend to be tomes. In Hemstad's dissertation, incidentally, an appendix with the results of the survey of Nordic arrangements (that is, not simply Scandinavian, but at times also including Finnish participation), from the period 1839–1929, is also included. In addition, a separate register of gatherings makes it possible to find all the meetings, from conferences on schools for disabled children (*abnormskolor*) to conventions of eye doctors, which she found in her assiduous examination of the source material. We see then that the book has a strong empirical character. Nonetheless, a number of important threads in the history of Scandinavism are followed with the help of theoretical concepts and discussion. The analytical components are not buried in the account of all the meetings, gatherings, and other activities – something to which the scope and ambition of the project easily could have led.

In recent years, researchers other than Hemstad have noted the multifaceted cooperation that took place in Scandinavia during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Göran B. Nilsson, in connection with his research on André Oscar Wallenberg (*The Founder: André Oscar Wallenberg (1816-1886): Swedish Banker, Politician & Journalist*, 2005), has addressed "practical Scandinavism" via gatherings of economists at which

matters such as banking questions were discussed. Bo Stråth, in his *Union och demokrati: De förenade rikena Sverige-Norge 1814-1905* [Union and Democracy: The United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway, 1814-1905] (2005), has also drawn attention to the issue, partly with the help of Hemstad's previously published articles. The cooperation has however not heretofore been set into a broader historical perspective, and the numerous and varied types of meetings have not been investigated systematically in the way that Hemstad has now done. About a hundred different types of meetings, conferences, and the like have been identified in the period from 1839 to 1905, and an equal number can be added from the period beginning with the dissolution of the Union, and ending in 1929.

The concept *Scandinavism* is not identical with *Scandinavian cooperation*. In order to speak of Scandinavism *per se*, more is needed than pathologists, folk dance enthusiasts, and orthopedists have conferences or gatherings that bring together people from across the Nordic borders. There is a risk that the rich flora of types of exchange presented in the book will necessarily yield a picture of a grand, immense Scandinavism. The author is aware of the problem, and strives to elucidate that which is not merely the sort of cooperation that results from practical professional interests or other practical reasons, but which, in addition, has some connection to Scandinavism's message of a shared identity and culture. The cooperation or collaborative effort must be seen by those involved to have a value in itself in order to qualify as Scandinavism. Scandinavism and Scandinavian cooperation are two phenomena that for a time developed along parallel lines, and in mutual interaction – or, as it is put in the title of Hemstad's book: from Indian summer to the Nordic winter – without the process needing to be seen as in any way fated.

The Indian summer variant is referred to as *Neo-Scandinavism* – less political and more cultural than its predecessor. The earlier Scandinavism that existed during the time of the student meetings and the dynastic intrigues was cast in a different mold: specifically, it was more far-reaching. The three states would be gathered together into one realm, or would at a minimum try to make changes needed to make political

and institutional cooperation easier. It was very much a unifying nationalism, and thus parallel to the contemporary national aspirations found in other attempts to create unity, Germany and Italy. With its primarily cultural orientation, Neo-Scandinavism was not a competitor in the same way to the nationalism of the individual countries, which led to a flowering of the movement at the turn of the century. Nonetheless, it was seen as a threat in Norwegian patriotic circles. Why strive for cooperation with the state whose influence over language and culture one wished to counteract (Denmark), and with the state with which one wanted to sever ties (Sweden)?

**HEMSTAD'S DISSERTATION** has a basis in conceptual history. Within the tradition of conceptual history, represented primarily by the German researcher Reinhart Koselleck, concepts are seen as ambiguous, malleable, and context-dependent. Often, there are debates over how the concepts should be interpreted, debates that may shed light on the relevant political history, among other things. A standard work in the area is the extensive lexicon that Koselleck, along with Otto Brunner and Werner Conze, starting in the 1970s, prepared over the course of twenty years: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*. The polemical force of concepts appears to be strongest in the tension between what is described as the space of experience (*Erfahrungsraum*) and horizon of expectations (*Erwartungshorizont*). The discussion of concepts plays a central role in Hemstad's book, something seen both in the title and in the actual approach to the problem. In addition, the analyses in the empirical studies are continually connected to the sphere of theory. By way of introducing her thesis, she also refers to discourse theory, network theory and – though it plays a more subordinate role – theories of nationalism. These approaches, however, are not very noticeable in the presentation itself. Even if these research areas may have inspired the author, they have no real function in the text.

**DURING THE YEAR** of the dissolution, 1905, Norway began boycotting various Nordic meetings and gatherings. Norwegians refused for example to partici-

pate in the first Nordic history conference, the Nordic Games, and the third Nordic Chess Congress. For Swedes, Scandinavism was seen almost as an invective after 1905. In 1906, the Swedes boycotted a Nordic student meeting with a Christian program, as well as a Nordic meeting on colleges and universities the year after. Countless other meetings were canceled or postponed. A veterinary congress planned for 1907 wasn't held until 1921. The sixth Nordic peace conference in 1906 didn't take place until 1910. After difficult negotiations, the eighth Nordic Sunday school meeting was also canceled in 1907. Even these forms of seemingly peaceful meetings could resume only after the Great War. The women's movements in the two countries also came into conflict with each other, something that Inger Hammar has shown in her *För freden och rösträtten: Kvinnorna och den svensk-norska unionens sista dagar* [For Peace and the Right to Vote: Women and the Final Days of the Swedish-Norwegian Union] (2004). The 1905 Nordic Conference on the Woman's Question [*Kvinnosaksrådet*] was canceled and held in 1914 instead. Thus, after 1905, winter prevailed. In view of the meetings and conferences that were canceled or cut back because of conflict surrounding the Union, one can even speak of an ice age.

When the exchange slowly resumed around the First World War, not gaining much momentum until the 1920s, people didn't look back to the experiences of Scandinavism. The term "Nordic" fit much better – partly to suppress Scandinavism, a suppression for which the parties involved might have different incentives, partly to include Finland as well, which had achieved independence in 1917. Also, as a symptom of this, *Föreningen Norden* (The Nordic Association) was founded in 1919.

**IT IS THE DISSOLUTION** of the Union in 1905 which constitutes the true breakdown of the Scandinavian movement, or movements, as one should perhaps say – there were of course countless exchanges and cooperative efforts of various sorts. The Indian summer during the preceding decade had been overshadowed by the sharp contradictions of the dissolution of the Union. The warmth doesn't harmonize particularly well with a Norwegian national image of a unified opposition to the Union ever since the 1880s.

In this way, the poor state of research on the heyday of Scandinavism around 1900 also illustrates the connection between historical research and political/ideological developments. That various epochs and perspectives have been put at a disadvantage is rarely a coincidence, but rather the result of dominant ideological currents of the time. This also became clear during the work with the period of the Union and its dissolution, with which both the author and reviewer were involved a few years ago (*Projekt 1905*). The rather weak official Swedish interest, at least at first, in the centenary of 1905, reflects the relative unimportance of the issue here in Sweden. Aside from the period right after 1905, the matter has not occasioned any controversy; the Union has rather been forgotten. From a Norwegian perspective, 1905 is a memorable

year in the group of nationally significant years. 1814, 1905, and 1940/1945 jointly contribute to an overarching national story of the country's struggle for liberation. The interpretation of the Union period is still politically explosive in Norway. In 2005, groups who are against the EU equated – as they did earlier in the battle over Norwegian membership – the Swedish governance of the Union from Stockholm with the power of today's European Union in Brussels. A critical attitude towards the EU often went hand in hand with a downplaying of the harmonious elements from the time of the Union in favor of an image of Swedish oppression and Norwegian resistance.

**ALTHOUGH THE QUESTION** of the Union and the conflicts of the previous turn of the century do not elicit any significant excitement in today's Sweden, the symbolic force of the history has not disappeared. In the fall of 2008, the municipality of Malmö (Sweden) discussed a proposal to invite the three royal families to the city in connection with the centenary of the meeting of the three kings ("trekungenmötet") there in 1914, in which the monarchs and foreign ministers of the countries participated. The meeting was mainly intended to show the world that the countries were united in their neutrality during the world war that had broken out earlier that year. At the same time, the meeting helped accelerate the cooperation that the Nordic winter had left frozen. The proposal at hand, however, fell victim to opposition from the left. One argument from the Social Democrats involved the undemocratic circumstances of that period. To highlight the contributions of the kings would be to oppose the very idea of democracy. However, the possibility had existed of placing more of an emphasis on the idea of peace (in line with the bloodless dissolution of the Union) and the significance of Nordic cooperation, areas that, in Nordic contexts, are often described in high-flown language. The meeting of the kings in 1914 and its significance were probably too unknown to politicians for its symbolic potential to be visible. Now, rather, it was the general form of government of the time that constituted an obstacle to a focus on historical knowledge.

One important feature of Scandinavian cooperation is its voluntary nature. Those who took the initiative were



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