

Nordic Exceptionalism

Professor Ove Korsgaard
Faculty of Arts, University of
Aarhus

Nordic Exceptionalism back from?

- Protestantism from early 1600-century?
- Scandinavism from early 1900-century?
- Social Democrats in 1930-s

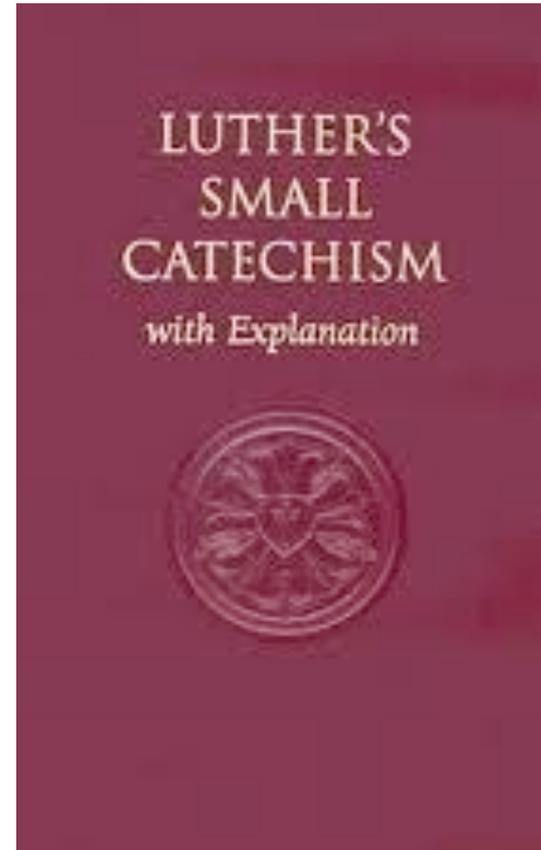
Protestantism

All of Scandinavia ultimately adopted Lutheranism over the course of the 16th century, as the monarchs of Denmark, (who also ruled Norway and Iceland) and Sweden (who also ruled Finland) converted to that faith.



Protestantism as a Common Religion

- Christian enlightenment
- Christian upbringing
- Luther's small catechism as a canon
- Confirmation ordinance



Scandinavism

The movement was initiated by Danish and Swedish university students in the 1840s who supported the idea of Scandinavia as a unified region or a single nation, based on common linguistic, political and cultural heritage of Denmark, Norway and Sweden - which were referred to as “three brothers”.

However, as opposed to the German and Italian unification in the 19th century, the Scandinavian state-building project was not successful and is no longer pursued.



How to address the social and economic crisis?

- An important background for the Nordic exceptionalism was the global economic crisis that developed in the wake of the Wall Street Crash in 1929. The crisis brought numerous companies to their knees and agricultural exports dropped dramatically. The result was galloping unemployment and a sharp rise in the number of forced sales of farms. In Sweden, a coalition that united workers and peasants was developed in the late twenties and got the symbolic name *folkehemmet* or *people's home*; in Denmark the so-called Kanslergade agreement was reached at January 30 1933 - the very same day as Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor in Berlin

Plague Across Europe

- In his book, *Plague Across Europe*, from 1933, the Social Democratic politician Hartvig Frisch was one of the first to draw a clear front against communism, fascism and nazism. According to Frisch, the working class throughout Europe was seduced by the communist theory about the proletariat's dictatorship as a necessary step towards a more just society and also by radical nationalism's criticism of parliamentary democracy.

Nordic democracy

For the working class in Denmark, it was a matter of holding firmly onto Nordic democracy, whose essence, according to Hartvig Frisch, was that the nation is seen as the starting point for cooperation between workers, farmers and other population groups. This idea formed the basis for the development of a Nordic model of democratic welfare system in contrast to a communist and national socialist system.

From political to social democracy

According to Hartvig Frisch 1933:

"It was the peasant farmers in the Nordic countries that had led parliamentarianism to victory and created political democracy - it is to their credit. It is the labour movement that has built on this platform and forged the foundation for *social* democracy"

The Swedish 'folkhemmet' or people's home

It was the Swedish Social Democrat Per Albin Hansson, who launched the concept of "folkhemmet", when he at the Social Democratic Party Congress in 1928 said, "It must be so once that class society Sweden must be replaced by the welfare state Sweden."



Per Albin Hansson described the project thus:

- "The basis of the home is community and togetherness. The good home does not recognize any privileged or neglected members, nor any favorite of stepchildren. In the good home there is equality, consideration, cooperation, and helpfulness"
- Hansson stressed the importance of education in making the working class build and maintain their socialist home: "Socialist society will not come to us ... before the masses are educated and – ways of thinking have been changed".

Kanslergade Settlement in Denmark

30th January 1933, Prime minister Torvald Stauning's government entered into what was then the most extensive settlement yet in Danish politics with the farmers party Venstre. The settlement, which was named after Stauning's apartment in Kanslergade in Copenhagen, included extensive agricultural subsidies and reforms of the legislation and administration in the social sector.



Liberalism and socialism

- The Kanslergade settlement blurred the ideological division between the parties and social Groups in the country. On the one hand, purely liberalistic objectives were in decline and on the other, the Social Democratic Party had abandoned its original socialist goals and was becoming a party for the workers and the people with greater appeal for a wider sector of the population. Their new position was underlined in 1934 by the introduction of Stauning's program entitled "Denmark for the People".

Different models of welfare

It was not only the Nordic Social Democrats that stressed social welfare. Soviet communism and German National Socialism had distinct ideas about the welfare state (Mazower 1999, 76–103). The combination of socialism and nationalism was a common element in Stalin's communism, Hitler's National Socialism, and Stauning's socialism, but only in Stauning's version were these elements combined with democracy.

Hitler's welfare system

- According to the German historian Götz Aly, Hitler's welfare system played a crucial role for the support he got from the masses.
- “The National Socialist leadership created a welfare dictatorship, a leadership by socio-political appeasement”



Denmark for the people

- Stauning's greatest political feat was to make the Social Democrats accept the notion of the people as political correct, a feat that was completed by the party platform of 1934 *Denmark for the People*.



Denmark for the People 1934

“We totally oppose the attempt to deprive the people of their right to self-determination. We are fighting against the movement towards dictatorship that bears the name of communism, and we are fighting the various forms of fascism that are now appearing in Denmark (....), we will continue to cooperate with nations that rest on democracy’s foundations, first and foremost with the Nordic peoples, whose social and political views coincide with the Danish people’s traditions, views, and will”.

The Nordic welfare state model

The formation of 'a national compromise' between the two powerful ideologies of liberalism and socialism. After the Second World War the national compromise was instrumental in creating the ideological foundation for the construction of not only the Danish welfare state model, but similar models in Sweden and Norway based on both liberal and socialist principles.