

SEMINAR

# The long history of the Nordic welfare state and its current challenges

STEFAN NYGÅRD  
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Frederick William III's assertion that military defeat can pave the way for national rejuvenation, made after Prussia's loss at Jena-Auerstedt in 1806, resonates deeply within the modern histories of Denmark and Sweden. As these countries relinquished their status as European powers, they were compelled to redefine themselves as small or middle powers in the nineteenth century. Against this backdrop, the first part of the presentation offers a long-term perspective on the strategies employed by Scandinavian intellectuals and political actors to deal with military decline by projecting their societies as progressive models on the international stage and as intermediaries between the core and periphery of the world-system. Subsequently, the Cold-War constellation created favourable conditions for this program, which culminated with the peak of Swedish social democracy in the 1970s. The second part of the discussion highlights the contemporary consequences of the "long 1990s" for Nordic social democracy. In this period, Finland and Scandinavia gradually distanced themselves from the idea of Nordic exceptionalism, by not only adopting but also exporting – to the Baltic states in particular – a neoliberalised form of democracy.

STEFAN  
NYGÅRD



Stefan Nygård is Senior Researcher in the Centre for Nordic Studies and in the Department of Cultures at the University of Helsinki. The seminar presentation will be based on an ongoing research project on the rise of neoliberalism in Nordic democracies. Among Stefan's numerous publications on European intellectual and political history are the two co-edited volumes *Rethinking European Social Democracy and Socialism. The History of the Centre-Left in Northern and Southern Europe in the Late 20th Century* (Routledge, 2022) and *Decentering European Intellectual Space* (Brill, 2018)

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FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY

MONTALEGRE 6  
08001 BARCELONA