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The Ideal Nordic Type: Norwegian or Swede? Race biologists competing on the international scene.

Bakgrund/Frågeställning

In August 1925 a large group of people gathered in Uppsala, Sweden, for a Nordic conference on ‘race’. The so called “*Nordisk raskonferens*” was arranged by the Swedish professor in race biology Herman Lundborg, head of the *State Institute for Race Biology*, which claimed to be the world’s first *state* institute for race biology. Representatives from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden were invited, and the Swedes were eager to present themselves as leaders in the field. But what appeared to be a Nordic unity at the conference was in fact competitiveness. One of the participants was dr. Halfdan Bryn, a surgeon-major from Trondheim who was Norway’s leading physical anthropologist, and just as Lundborg, Bryn wanted to be seen as the foremost portrayer of this idealised Nordic man.

Three different races were assumed to be found in Scandinavia. First and foremost, there was the “Nordic type”, the descendants of the old Vikings. The other two were “Lapps” and “Finns” (also called “East Baltic type”), and they posed a threat to the “Nordic type”, due to the risk of miscegenation.

Race theories slotted into the strivings of the national states to gain more control over remote, northerly regions and over the means of harnessing natural resources there. Industrialisation was in full swing during those years; there was mining and forestry and there were hydroelectric installations, all in the North; and “research” into race biology could function as a “scientific” justification for exploiting the entire area.

The works of Lundborg and Bryn also fitted into a broader international development of race biology in a German-speaking context. But the Swede and the Norwegian developed different strategies to deal with their peripheral position in relation to the central core of the movement for racial hygiene in Germany. At an early stage, Bryn asked for Lundborg’s advice, but he did not respond favourably to the suggestion they maintain closer contact and collaboration. Instead, Bryn avoided referring to the major works that his colleague had published and in which the racial status of the Swedes as ‘Nordic types’ was displayed to an international audience. Instead he established good contact of his own within the German-language network for racial hygiene, and in highly respected scientific publications Bryn’s version of the true Nordic man – as being first and foremost a Norwegian – was spread.

Metod och Resultat

Konklusion