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Monarchists, Republicans, Revolutionaries: Criticism of Parliamentarism and the reception of Anti-Parliamentarism among the Finnish and Swedish left and right 1917–1919

The collective experiences of the First World War brought about major transformations in conceptualisations of parliamentarism throughout Europe: sacrifices by the populations of the countries involved were understood to require the extension of possibilities for political participation by the people at large. Universal suffrage and parliament were increasingly considered proper ways for the representation of the will of the people. The traditions of critical attitudes to parliamentarism, however, meant that the transition to parliamentary government would not be unproblematic even in countries with long traditions of representation through diets and parliaments such as Finland and Sweden.

In the case of these two countries, continuities in representative traditions from the early modern period are evident even though the representative institutions in both countries had gone through major transformations since the division of the early modern Swedish polity in 1809:¹ In Sweden, the Gustavian constitution of 1772 was reformed in 1809, after the Russian conquest of Finland, and the royal prerogative cut. In 1865, the four-estate Riksdag was reformed to become a two-chamber parliament. Parliamentary government was introduced in autumn 1917 under the pressure of transnational political transformations. However, an electoral reform introducing universal and equal suffrage – replacing the 40-grade suffrage – only followed in the aftermath of the German Revolution of 1918.

In Finland, separated from the Swedish system of representation as a consequence of the Napoleonic Wars, the eighteenth-century Swedish constitution remained in force under Russian rule, the four-estate diet convening once in 1809 and regularly between 1863 and 1906. The radical parliamentary reform of 1906, simultaneous with the introduction of the Imperial Duma in Russia, introduced universal suffrage (including women) and a unicameral parliament. However, it failed to fulfil public expectations as a means of reform towards parliamentary government as the tsar continued to hold the final veto on all parliamentary decisions. Numerous uneducated and inexperienced members (especially Social Democrats and Agrarians), unfamiliar with parliamentary practice, were elected to the reformed Finnish parliament, only to encounter there members of the older elites who were familiar with constitutionalist argumentation and legalistic scheming and aimed at safeguarding the inherited Swedish political culture against Russian or socialist innovation. In the elections of 1916,

¹ P. IHALAINEN, *The 18th-Century Traditions of Representation*, 2015.

after a campaign full of class antagonism, the Finnish socialists won the first absolute majority in a national parliament. In March 1917, the Russian Revolution suddenly opened the way to parliamentary democracy, albeit one dominated by the socialists, which made the bourgeoisie parties reserved about further extensions of parliamentarism.

1. German models of anti-parliamentarism

Finland and Sweden have traditionally followed Germany and especially Prussia in culture and politics, and this was certainly the case at the time of the First World War. In Imperial Germany, support for a stronger political role for the Reichstag had remained limited: even most Liberals did not support Social Democratic calls for a constitutional reform that would strengthen the political influence of the parliament. The German centre and right generally opposed parliamentarism of the French or British type.² And for the Finnish and Swedish right, imperial Germany represented the model of a well organised state, including the political role of the parliament. Academics in all fields had transnational links with Germany and mostly took their theories from there.

The Finnish and Swedish left also looked to Germany with regard to views on parliamentarism. For many Social Democrats, Karl Kautsky's democratic justification of parliamentarism – built on the assumption that a revolution and transition to socialism could be realised through universal suffrage once the social democratic working class won a parliamentary majority – provided a starting point. Theorists such as Rosa Luxemburg, on the other hand, rejected »bourgeois« parliamentarism as a compromise that advanced the interests of the bourgeoisie and hindered the transition to socialism. Parliament could hence only serve as a forum for socialist agitation to intensify the class struggle.³

The attitudes of the German centre parties to parliamentarism differed from those in Sweden and Finland. In Sweden, Liberals and Social Democrats had cooperated for years to extend suffrage and parliamentarise government. In Finland, the Agrarians and most Liberals defended parliamentarism though they wished to see a strong executive power as a balancing force. In Germany, the centrist and leftist parties had from spring 1917 on partly similar constitutional demands and would cooperate in the Weimar coalition, but the Catholic Zentrum and most National Liberals did not fully support parliamentarism.

The existence of so-called constitutional monarchies was a major hindrance to parliamentarisation in all three countries: the German and Swedish monarchs (and the Swedish queen who was Kaiser Wilhelm's cousin) were vehement opponents of parliamentarism. In Finland, where the Russian monarchy was generally despised on ac-

² E.-A. SEILS, *Weltmachtstreben und Kampf für den Frieden*, 2011, p. 72.

³ D. KIRBY, *War, Peace and Revolution*, 1986, p. 7; D. JÖRKE/M. LLANQUE, *Parliamentarism and Democracy*, 2016, pp. 266–268.

count of its Russification policies, the monarchists of the White winners of the Civil War of 1918 nevertheless elected Friedrich Karl von Hessen (the Kaiser's son-in-law) King of Finland on 9 October despite the inception of constitutional changes in Germany – for foreign-political reasons but also to counter extended parliamentarism. When the Hohenzollern monarchy fell in November so did much of the rightist and monarchist opposition to parliamentarism in Sweden and Finland: the Swedish royal couple became depressed about the situation, and the King of Finland abdicated without ever visiting his realm.

I shall next discuss socialist ideological criticism of parliamentarism in Finland and Sweden,⁴ which was mainly derived from various versions of Marxism, and then proceed to analyse the respective views of the right, based on support for the duality of government more often than the rejection of representative government as such. Finally, I shall draw some conclusions about the Finnish and Swedish criticism of parliamentarism especially in relation to German debates during a period (1917–1919) when it was being extended, and try to explain some differences in the accommodation to parliamentarism in these three countries, which initially had much in common in terms of political culture.

2. Socialist criticism of parliamentarism in Finland

The political responsibility of the government to parliament was brought up by the Finnish Social Democrats right after the abdication of Nicholas II in March 1917. Their enthusiasm was received with caution among the bourgeois parties, who feared a takeover by the socialist majority and pointed out that no legislation guaranteeing such parliamentarism was in force in any other country. However, parliamentarism was recognised by the majority of the Constitutional Committee as the norm on the basis of which relations between the parliament and the government should be regulated. Parliamentarism in a sense that was close to that of the French Third Republic appeared an easy principle to approve after experiencing the imposition of Russian-nominated ministers who lacked the confidence of the Finnish parliament;⁵ in that sense, many members of the Finnish political elite were revolutionaries in spring 1917.

Doubts about the honesty of the intentions of the Social Democrats with regard to parliamentarism survived for obvious reasons. In the party convention of June 1917 – which was attended by the Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai, who persuaded the Finnish Social Democrats to join the Zimmerwald International – the party saw participation in the government of a capitalist country as just part of the current tactics of the class struggle, and it retained the right to either support or reject the decisions of the government as best suited the interests of the workers.⁶

⁴ For a more extensive analysis, see P. IHALAINEN, *Springs of Democracy*, 2017.

⁵ S. LINDMAN, *Eduskunnan aseman muuttuminen*, 1968, pp. 90–92.

⁶ E. KETOLA, *Kansalliseen kansanvaltaan*, 1987, pp. 72–73, 80, 136–139, 146.

When the future constitutional arrangement was debated in July, some Social Democrats openly expressed their contempt of parliament as an institution. Evert Eloranta accused the anti-reform policies of the Finnish and Russian bourgeoisie of having imposed on the lower classes the unhappy conception that it was impossible to gain reforms by parliamentary means.⁷ For many radicals, the Social Democratic proposal for the sovereignty of parliament – motivated partly by an expected Bolshevik takeover in Petrograd and the activation of the majority parties in Berlin – represented their last effort to make the representative institution responsive to their reform demands. A Social Democratic member spoke for the creation of »a parliamentary democracy or a democracy of the Social Democratic workers«,⁸ seeing a political order dominated by the Social Democrats as synonymous with parliamentary democracy and implying that the bourgeoisie were incapable of such a democracy. The Russian revolutionary and especially the Bolshevik understanding of democracy as the dictatorship of the proletariat tended to take over Finnish radical Social Democratic discourse, particularly as many of their leaders had direct contacts with Lenin, Stalin and Kollontai and sometimes themselves attended revolutionary assemblies in Petrograd. The Finnish Social Democratic Party was considering proceeding with the law proposal on the basis of a simple majority as opposed to the required 5/6 majority for immediate constitutional changes – something that it did not need to do in the end thanks to support from the centre – but even the plan was interpreted as unparliamentary by the right. The new law was not sent to the Russian Provisional Government for promulgation, which led to the dissolution of the parliament and to new elections in which the Social Democrats lost their parliamentary majority.

Not only the voters but also the leaders of the Finnish Social Democratic Party were losing faith in parliamentary cooperation with the bourgeois parties.⁹ When the new parliament met on 8 November, a day after the October Revolution in Russia, Yrjö Sirola presented the revolution and parliament as alternatives. He claimed: »The parliament of the streets will speak its language with thousands of voices.«¹⁰ An even more striking challenge to current parliamentary government came from Kullervo Manner, the Speaker of the previous parliament, according to whom this »meeting« was not the legal Finnish parliament, no decisions that would assuage the working people could be expected from it, and hence the Social Democrats had no reason to respect it.¹¹ Such a denial of the legitimacy of a democratically elected parliament by the Speaker of its predecessor shows that the radicals among the Finnish Social Democrats had moved from Kautskyist to Bolshevik understandings of parliament – which was seen as a mere forum for propaganda in which the bourgeois polity

⁷ VP, 12.6.1917, p. 518.

⁸ Frans Rantanen, VP, 17.7.1917, p. 1029.

⁹ Jaakko Mäki, VP, 8.11.1917, p. 16.

¹⁰ VP, 8.11.1917, p. 26.

¹¹ VP, 8.11.1917, pp. 37–38.

could be challenged from within.¹² The legitimacy of the institution had disintegrated among the Social Democrats and was also deteriorating among the bourgeois parties when they encountered such revolutionary discourse. The bourgeois parties were defined as the enemy by the Social Democrats, lacking honest intentions to advance parliamentarism and ready to employ violence to suppress the demands of the working class. The militant revolutionary rhetoric of Finnish Social Democracy was leading the Finnish parliamentary system towards an impasse in which either waging an open revolution – or fighting against one – appeared as the only alternatives. At the level of rhetoric, a revolutionary and increasingly anti-parliamentary struggle had started; and this struggle was already turning violent at the local level.

By the time of the Finnish declaration of independence in December, Otto Wille Kuusinen (a would-be member of the Soviet Politburo) refused to recognise any »parliamentary democracy« in the constitutional proposal for a presidential republic by the bourgeois parties: it would create mere »bourgeois parliamentarism« of the Western type based on the power of parties. Kuusinen's »parliamentary democracy« in a Marxist sense would include an imperative mandate and popular power over parliament.¹³ His constitutional proposal for Red Finland (the rebel state established during the Civil War) in February 1918, would likewise have created a class-based political system and rejected parliamentarism of the Western type. In that sense, the Finnish Civil War was indeed a conflict for and against parliamentarism of an indefinite Western type.

The Social Democrats were excluded from the parliament after the Civil War, and their radical leaders mostly emigrated to Soviet Russia, where they founded the openly anti-parliamentary Finnish Communist Party. By early summer 1919, the Social Democratic Party was again promoting parliamentarism – albeit without the former militancy aiming at rule by a socialist majority – but continued to challenge the rightist advocates of the duality of government. The Social Democrats began to adapt themselves to »Western« and even »bourgeois« parliamentarism as already recognised by the revisionist social democratic parties in Germany and Sweden.

3. Socialist criticism of parliamentarism in Sweden

In Sweden, parliamentary government was introduced after the elections of the Second Chamber in September 1917 as a Liberal-Social Democratic administration based on a parliamentary majority was nominated – against the wishes of the monarch and the right. However, the adoption of equal and universal suffrage still had to wait. Debate on parliamentarism between rightist and leftist (including Liberals) political scientists and historians had been intensive for decades, the alternative arguments being

¹² P. KETTUNEN, *Poliittinen liike ja sosiaalinen kollektiivisuus*, 1986, p. 93; I. HERRMANN, *The Conceptual History of the Russian State Duma*, 2016, p. 118.

¹³ VP, 5.12.1917, pp. 348, 350–351, 353, 355.

that Sweden already possessed a native parliamentarism that should not be replaced with any *Western* alternatives or that Sweden had a thousand-year old parliamentary tradition that had been destroyed by the bourgeoisie and should hence be restored.¹⁴

Among Swedish socialists, a division in attitudes to parliamentarism was becoming increasingly evident. Leftist Social Democrats were annoyed by the willingness of the Majority Social Democrats to distinguish between »politics in popular assemblies« and »politics in parliament«, as Carl Lindhagen put it, accusing them of surrendering to »parliamentary politics« of the bourgeois type.¹⁵ Instead of calling for the mere parliamentarisation of government in the British or French sense, Lindhagen rejected it as »the opposite of democracy«,¹⁶ suggesting that government should be seen as no more than a committee of parliament and that parliament could be overruled by the people – all ways of thinking that were general among the far left.

Such views made the Swedish Majority Social Democrats outspokenly defend parliamentarism as a political process. According to Harald Hallén, »parliamentary battles« were indeed more than a mere campaign for power: parliamentary debate was a battle through which a better society was sought.¹⁷ The revisionist leaders of the Swedish Social Democrats had clearly set the introduction of parliamentarism of the Western type in Sweden as their goal. This was part of an ongoing turn in Swedish politics from German political models to those provided by the politics of the Entente.

The far left, by contrast, openly considered the possibility of using extra-parliamentary methods in ways that recalled the radicalisation of Finnish Social Democratic discourse. Zeth Höglund, an old revolutionary and a comrade of Lenin who had just been released from prison, concluded that »the parliamentary way alone is not enough to carry through the demands of the people; instead really large-scale mass action is needed« and applauded »the parliament of the streets«. ¹⁸ This challenge to parliamentarism constituted the most revolutionary moment in Sweden during spring 1917 and remained an exception, support for it being marginal.

The outbreak of the Finnish Civil War made it all the more necessary for the Majority Social Democrats to distance themselves from the far left and to demonstrate that Swedish parliamentarism was working and involved no risks of a crisis of the Finnish type. Their leaders consistently rejected the uprising of the Finnish Social Democratic Party against the parliamentary majority as a violation of the principles of democracy.

¹⁴ J. KURUNMÄKI, *Rhetoric Against Rhetoric*, 2014, pp. 177–178; P. IHALAINEN, *The 18th-Century Traditions of Representation*, 2015

¹⁵ AK, 21.3.1917, 34:13.

¹⁶ AK, 21.3.1917, 33:64.

¹⁷ AK, 21.3.1917, 34:9, 11.

¹⁸ AK, 5.6.1917, 72:49–50.

4. Rightist criticism of parliamentarism in Finland

The views of many of the spokesmen of the Finnish and Swedish right did not initially differ much from those of German academic critics of parliamentarism since all areas of scholarship in both countries drew their theoretical inspiration from Germany. Theories that were sceptical of parliamentarism had been inspired in Finland by negative interpretations of the eighteenth-century rule of the estates in the Swedish realm in domestic historiography¹⁹ and were supported by the frustrating experiences of the reformed parliament since 1907. They had been further aggravated by the activities of the socialist majority during the first parliament of 1917 and became extreme as a result of the Civil War.

Revealing of the suspicious attitude towards full parliamentarism among the Finnish right are the parallels drawn between the eighteenth-century Swedish Diet and the extensive parliamentary sovereignty proposed in summer 1917. Kaarle Rantakari of the Finnish Party simply maintained that the proposal would reintroduce »the state in which our country was when joined with Sweden during the so-called Age of Liberty: the tyranny of parliament«. ²⁰ Minister of Justice Antti Tulenheimo of the same party warned about the risks of disregarding the old constitution by giving all legislative and administrative powers to the parliament. ²¹ The Swedish People's Party was represented by numerous constitutionalists who opposed what they saw as a tendency to carry parliamentarism to the extreme. Ernst Estlander, a professor of legal history, saw the practical measures of the socialist majority in parliamentary work as turning »the not so seldom advertised parliamentarism of the left« into a mere hoax. ²²

In the autumn of 1917, however, the rising criticism of the parliament by the Social Democrats made the right and centre view themselves as defenders of parliamentarism opposing the Bolshevik type of revolutionary power of the minority. Rhetorically at least, the Finnish-speaking right tended to be on the side of parliamentarism, but the bourgeois parties consistently expressed their wish to limit parliamentarism with a strong presidency. Onni Talas of the liberal Young Finns, an assistant professor of administrative law, argued that even under the most democratic suffrage the parliament did not always express the true will of the people, as »the parliament is by no means the same thing as the people«. Instead of making parliament an omnipotent user of potentially »oligarchic« power, Talas preferred that the people should be able to decide through presidential power whether the parliament had interpreted their wishes correctly. ²³ This logic of balancing parliamentarism with presidential power, planned by the Finnish Constitutional Committee during 1917, was similar to the one that would be used in the Weimar Constitution; both arose from a transnational de-

¹⁹ P. IHALAINEN, *The 18th-Century Traditions of Representation*, 2014.

²⁰ VP, 10.7.1917, p. 896.

²¹ VP, 17.7.1917, p. 1007.

²² VP, 17.7.1917, p. 1054.

²³ VP, 6.12.1917, pp. 368–369.

bate that was critical of the excesses of parliamentarism and was indirectly affected by the experiences and debates of the French Third Republic.

Parliamentarism was viewed in a much more negative light in the aftermath of the Civil War, which could be interpreted as a product of the excessively democratic suffrage, a unicameral parliament and the inherent weaknesses of parliamentary as opposed to monarchical government. Repeated elections and the parliamentary process had not been able to solve the problems of the country or to prevent the escalation of the domestic conflict; on the contrary, violent and uncompromising parliamentary discourse had rather contributed to its escalation. These critical views were bolstered by the presence of German troops in Helsinki after a German intervention had supported the White government in crushing the Red rebellion and also by the patent foreign political dependency of the Finnish state on Germany.

Revealing of the strength of parliamentary ideals in Finland in the circumstances of 1918, however, is the fact that even the most fervent advocates of a monarchical constitution of the Prussian type defined the current and future constitution of Finland as essentially parliamentary.²⁴ These definitions of parliamentarism, which suggested that a German prince would be a guarantor of parliamentarism, differed radically from the conceptions of the republicans – the Agrarians and some of the liberal Young Finns. While such rhetorical redescrptions were typical of conservative political discourse, the Finnish monarchists in fact took extreme measures to get their German king. At the same time, the anti-parliamentary views among them were undeniable: for example, Prime Minister J.K. Paasikivi maintained, referring explicitly to German authors and implicitly to the achievements of Bismarck's Germany, that a monarchy of the German type would advance social reforms while decreasing »parliamentary and party problems«. ²⁵ When the monarchical parliamentary majority proceeded to the election of a king in early October – at a time when the German transition to parliamentary monarchy had already been announced – Paasikivi insisted that the monarchical constitution would realise »the parliamentary way of government« and guarantee »the influence of parliament in the course of affairs« if »parliament with its party divisions can realise this – which admittedly may be questionable«. ²⁶ The Finnish prime minister thus spoke in favour of parliamentary democracy in name while questioning its potential in practice. At the same time, the hard-liners of the Finnish Party were openly attacking parliamentarism. Oswald Kairamo, a land-owner embittered by the Civil War, associated all proponents of parliamentarism with socialism. ²⁷ The election of the king took place on 9 October 1918. When the German monarchy fell in November, however, the Finnish monarchy also came into nothing. When Britain, France and the United States refused to recognise Finnish independence under a German prince, Friedrich Karl abdicated,

²⁴ Ernst Estlander, VP, 13.7.1918, p. 1703.

²⁵ VP, 7.8.1918, p. 1816.

²⁶ VP, 8.10.1918, pp. 53–54.

²⁷ VP, 8.10.1918, p. 65.

and in the elections of March 1919 an overwhelming republican majority returned to the Finnish parliament.

In June 1919, simultaneously with the committee stage of the Weimar National Assembly, the Finnish parliament debated a republican constitutional proposal that attempted to reconcile parliamentarism and strong presidential power. In particular, many representatives of the National Coalition Party (the former Finnish Party), who had been campaigning for monarchy in 1918, had to rethink their relationship to parliamentarism before voting for a republican constitution. Rafael Erich, a professor of constitutional and international law, had in his academic texts criticised French parliamentarism, rejected parties as problematic political actors and wished to limit democracy to the mere election of the parliament.²⁸ Erich insisted that »correctly understood and healthy parliamentarism« required the creation of a balance between the parliament and the government so that the parliamentary control of the government remained within the correct limits. A strong presidency was hence needed as a moderator between the government and the people on the one hand and the people and the parliament on the other.²⁹ Erich's definition of »healthy« parliamentarism – in line with Hugo Preuß and Max Weber among other designers of the Weimar Constitution – stood for the presidential right to dissolve parliament as without it »no parliamentary system can function in the first place; then we are taken to an entirely different level and leave parliamentarism for good«. This was also what Léon Duguit, a leading French authority on constitutional law, had argued: »A parliamentary system is not possible unless we have, side by side with a parliament based on universal suffrage, a head of state who personifies executive power.«³⁰ Erich thus supported the updated goal of the National Coalition Party to create a presidential republic of the kind suggested by German and French authors who were critical of extreme parliamentarism. Such political theorising enabled the Finnish conservatives to recognise parliamentarism as a valuable element within the traditional notion of the duality of government. The Finnish conservatives campaigned for a government that possessed expertise, influence and authority in the eyes of both the parliament and the people and a president who would regulate and balance parliamentarism.³¹ After rejecting the first compromise proposal, the conservatives managed to obtain a sufficiently strong presidency and voted for the republican constitution. A large majority of the former monarchists had now officially, and revealingly, recognised parliament as the representative of »the majesty of the nation«,³² albeit one controlled by a separately elected president. In the meantime, the Swedish People's Party did not give in, partly for language-policy reasons, retaining its anti-parliamentary views to the very end of the legislative process.

²⁸ K. PEKONEN, *Hallitseminen*, 2003, p. 144.

²⁹ VP, 24.5.1919, pp. 524–527; 2.6.1919, pp. 658, 661; 4.6.1919, pp. 742, 745; 21.6.1919, pp. 1022–1023.

³⁰ VP, 24.5.1919, p. 526.

³¹ VP, 2.6.1919, pp. 658–660.

³² VP, 21.6.1919, p. 1025.

Despite the remaining doubts, the republican compromise between a strong presidency and limited parliamentarism would turn out to be a lasting one, integrating both the Social Democrats and the National Coalition in parliamentary government in the early 1930s and the Winter War of 1939–1940. It would survive an alliance with Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union in 1941–1944 and the Cold War under Soviet foreign-political pressures. However, the development towards a clearly parliamentary government as opposed to a presidential republic was postponed in Finland and has only made progress since the early 1980s.

5. Rightist criticism of parliamentarism in Sweden

The Swedish right – unwilling to violate the native constitutional tradition based on the duality of government – consistently argued against majority parliamentarism on the basis of its conservative conception of human nature and society, German and Swedish political theory and historical experiences at home. Professor Carl Hallendorff, the Rector of the Stockholm School of Economics, who had published a book on parliamentarism, saw the international »criticism of the not insignificant mistakes and failures that can be found in parliamentarism« as entirely justified. Experiences in several countries demonstrated that the people tended to »overestimate the entire parliamentary apparatus so that this apparatus is expected to be able to improve everything possible«. When the expected improvements were never realised, the people simply became disappointed with parliamentarism. In Hallendorff's organic understanding of the Swedish living body politic, the Riksdag appeared as one powerful institution among others, but not the sole forum in which decisions should be made.³³ He clearly shared in the transnational parliament-critical theoretical discourse that was typical of the academic debates of the early twentieth century.

Building on a rhetorical redescription of the prevailing political system as healthy parliamentarism of the Swedish type, the right appealed to the legitimacy of the established order and rejected extra-parliamentary challenges to it. In the opinion of Dr Karl Hildebrand, a pro-German historian, Sweden already possessed a parliamentary system of two chambers that was »organically embodied in our social structure« and in no need of renovation.³⁴ Neither did non-academic conservatives, who were regularly accused by the left of Prussianism, hide their doubts about parliamentarism. According to a Junker-like landowner called Erik Räf, favourable weather conditions would improve the state of Sweden more than useless vindications of parliamentarism.³⁵

After the elections of autumn 1917, a parliamentary government nevertheless became a reality in Sweden. Despite their opposition in principle to parliamentarism,

³³ AK, 21.3.1917, 33:55.

³⁴ AK, 5.6.1917, 72:51, 53–54.

³⁵ AK, 5.6.1917, 72:30.

the right decided to tolerate it for the meantime since it seemed to be on the retreat globally thanks to the continued German success in the war. The consistent defence of parliamentary strategies by the Swedish Social Democrats during the Finnish Civil War had demonstrated to some that the social order might not be jeopardised by parliamentary ministries. At the same time, the export industry wanted to secure Western markets and was ready to experiment with parliamentary democracy for that purpose. The rightist leaders nevertheless carried on their criticism of parliamentarism when the government attempted to introduce a suffrage reform in April 1918. Karl Hildebrand questioned the reform by referring to the rise of anti-parliamentary sentiments among the public arising from the unparliamentary behaviour of members elected after previous reforms.³⁶

By November 1918 it had become difficult for the right to question parliamentarism once nations with more or less parliamentary democracies had won the war, the German monarchy had fallen and parliamentary democracies were being implemented in neighbouring countries. Conservative concerns about the problems of parliamentarism did not suddenly wither away, but parliamentarism as a principle was no longer questioned. This differs from the relentlessly anti-parliamentary stands of the German right. In Sweden, too, the right would move fully over to the side of parliamentarism only in the early 1930s.

6. Conclusion

I have explored transnational aspects of anti-parliamentary discourse by focusing on the two-year period of constitutional ferment that followed the Russian Revolution. I have reconstructed leftist and rightist criticisms of parliamentarism in two interconnected national debates, paying special attention to the reception of »Western« (British and French) parliamentarism and German and Bolshevik anti-parliamentarism. I have reviewed how leading Finnish and Swedish parliamentarians argued against (unlimited) parliamentarism and how some turned to practices that violated (or were claimed to violate) the principles of parliamentarism.

My discussion suggests that we cannot fully understand Finnish and Swedish constitutional history, especially in the period examined, without studying it side by side with German constitutional debates. Indeed, German historiography, too, would benefit from comparisons with political systems that were in many ways similar to the German one, such as those of Finland and Sweden, rather than only with those of the other great powers with their rather different polities.

In Finland, both the leftist and rightist criticism of parliamentarism in 1917–1919 built on an obvious discrepancy between the high expectations and the depressing realities of parliamentary life after the radical parliamentary reform of 1906, which had in theory created the most democratic representation of the people in the world but

³⁶ AK, 27.4.1918, 44:26.

had not produced any truly parliamentary government. The inefficiency of the nominal parliamentary government after spring 1917, the declaration of parliamentary sovereignty by the socialist majority of parliament in summer 1917, and the failure of the bourgeois majority to introduce all the reforms demanded by the socialists contributed to the deterioration of the legitimacy of parliamentarism. In Sweden, leftist criticism arose from the shortcomings of the established inequitable parliamentary and electoral system, the reform of which the right opposed, claiming that proper parliamentarism already existed in Sweden in contradistinction to degenerate Western forms of parliamentarism.

Finnish and Swedish criticism of parliamentarism was based to a great extent on German political theory, British and French experiences of parliamentarism and the Russian revolutionary questioning of bourgeois parliamentarism. Various versions of German leftist thought on parliament also affected Finnish and Swedish leftist attitudes, with both Kautskyists and radical Marxists finding supporters. Among the Finnish Social Democrats, various degrees of criticism and rejection of »bourgeois« parliamentarism occurred in 1917–1918, starting with a readiness to break parliamentary rules in a parliament in which they held a majority in order to gain a constitution to their liking, continuing with the questioning of the legitimacy of a parliament with a bourgeois majority, and ending with an armed uprising against that majority encouraged by Leninist anti-parliamentary revolutionaries from Russia. In Sweden, the Finnish Civil War, together with the parliamentary model of the German SPD, confirmed the strictly parliamentary stand of the Social Democratic Labour Party and facilitated the recognition of parliamentarism by the right. Once the German monarchy had fallen, »Western« or »bourgeois« parliamentarism – though still criticised for its shortcomings by some – was no longer openly rejected in Finland and Sweden by others than the extreme right or the far left.

The Finnish and Swedish right did not initially differ much from the Prussian right in their anti-parliamentary views and admiration of constitutional monarchy and their deprecation of the weaknesses of »Western« parliamentarism. Typical of rightist opposition to parliamentarism was the strong stand of conservative professors who appealed to theory, practical experiences in Britain, France and Germany and national history. However, these professors were ready to discuss the shortcomings of parliamentarism, to defend the established order by redescribing it rhetorically as »parliamentary« or to manipulate parliamentary procedure, rather than to reject parliamentary debate or to threaten outright opposition to the system as practised by the German right. Some members of the Finnish right had already defended limited parliamentarism in 1917, and the Swedish right, too, began to reconcile themselves to the realities of parliamentarism in late 1918. Both regimes were parliamentarised, though in the Finnish case with limitations that resembled those of the Weimar Constitution and reflected a continuous distrust in unrestricted parliamentarism.

Despite shared historical experiences and transnational theoretical debates, the Finnish and Swedish adaptations to parliamentarism turned out to be more successful than that in Germany. This was primarily due to a long Swedish-Finnish tradition

of popular representation, including the integration of the free peasant estate; this had become an inseparable part of the political identity of the right, the centre and the left in both countries. The Swedish Liberals were consistently in favour of parliamentarism, while in Finland the pro-parliamentary centrist Agrarians played a major role in the defence of parliamentarism against both leftist and rightist extremes. The majority of the left were induced to adopt a parliamentary line – in Sweden before the First World War, in Finland after the Civil War. The right was persuaded to tolerate parliamentarism by pragmatic factors rather than by any radical theoretical rethinking: once the anti-parliamentary Prussian regime had fallen, it made no longer sense to attempt to retain the old order at home. Besides, consensual parliamentarism might help to stop further revolutionary attempts by the Bolsheviks and at the same time open up lucrative markets in the West, so why not give it a try?

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