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Parliamentary debate and the construction of the national characteristics of Swedish parliamentarism

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the characteristics of parliamentary debate were discussed in Sweden between the late nineteenth century and the Second World War, covering the period of parliamentary democratization and the interwar crisis of democracy. Focusing on the comments on the nature of parliamentary debates in the printed press, as well as the ways in which MPs comment on debate while they speak in parliament, this article shows that there is a remarkable continuity in the ways in which Swedish parliamentary debate was viewed, as a compromising negotiation in parliamentary committees was elevated to a national characteristic of Swedish parliamentary culture both by the conservative critics of parliamentary democracy and the social democratic and liberal defenders of democracy. What was in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth centuries characteristically a conservative argument in favour of safeguarding the quality and independence of the working procedures of parliament against the consequences of democratization was in the 1930s turned into an argument against the threats that political extremism and totalitarian ideas posed to parliamentary democracy. The study shows that the Swedish style of parliamentary debate was continuously contrasted with the *pro et contra* style of debate in the British Parliament, which was deemed unsuitable to the Swedish constitutional tradition even if it sometimes gained support as an ideal type. The main examples of debates on parliamentary procedures discussed in the study deal with the question of open voting and the rights of the Speaker to regulate debates.

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Introduction

A well-known collection of famous Swedish speeches opens with a quotation from a speech given by the Social Democratic PM Per Albin Hansson on the Day of the Swedish Flag in 1942. In that speech, Hansson said that a Swede ‘is not a hurrah patriot’ but shows his (sic) commitment in ‘deeds rather than in words’.¹ Although

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¹Quoted in K. Johannesson, O. Josephson and E. Åsard, *Svenska tal från Torgny lagman till Ingmar Bergman* (Stockholm, 1992), p. 9.

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expressed in wartime in the country trying to maintain its neutral status, Hansson was drawing on a national self-image that had been in the making for some decades. It was characteristically a political image, emphasizing facts and calmness before big words and emotions. Accordingly, while introducing the first speech given by a female MP at the *Riksdag* in 1922, the editors of the same volume argued that Swedish political speeches were characteristically simple and bureaucratic during the decades after the breakthrough of parliamentary democracy.² Their point was to say that not even the introduction of universal suffrage in 1919 and the entrance of women in the parliament changed the character of parliamentary speeches in the country. I will argue in this article that this self-appointed image of calm and fact-based political culture was in itself highly political of its nature. It was closely linked with the political struggle over the introduction of the principle of parliamentary government and the interwar defence of democracy. Assessments of the nature and the role of parliamentary debates were important in this regard. While there was a long tradition of emphasizing committee-based dealings of parliamentary matters in Sweden, the controversies regarding parliamentary government raised the issue of the nature of parliamentary speeches to another level.

Sweden was by no means an exception in this regard. Carl Schmitt's famous attack on parliamentarism in 1923 and 1926 is an illustrative example of how parliamentary debate was used as an argument in the contest over democracy within the specific context of mass democracy. He made a distinction between inherently liberal parliamentarism and mass democracy and claimed that parliamentary debates, which had been so crucial for parliamentarism, were not possible in the age of universal suffrage and mass parties. According to him, parliamentary representatives were no longer independent and able to debate freely because of their commitment to particular interests coming from class-based political parties.³ In his well-known reply to Schmitt, Richard Thoma argued that it was not correct to claim that there were no creative public discussions in modern parliament. According to him, these discussions had moved into committees and into internal party negotiations behind closed doors as well as into discussions with experts representing economic interests. Open plenum debates, in turn, served the function of educating public opinion.⁴

Having these two arguments from the Weimar Republic in mind, I will examine how parliamentary debate was described in Sweden and evaluated during a period in which the key issue moved from the question of the monarch's executive powers to the practices of a minority parliamentary government, and finally, to a majoritarian parliamentary government based on the strong political position of the Social Democratic Party in the 1930s. The study shows how the compromising style of parliamentary negotiation that takes place in the parliamentary committees, developed already during the times of the four-estate *Riksdag* before the 1866 Parliamentary Act,⁵ was shaped into a national standard in interwar Sweden. As I will show, an idealized picture of a proper

²Johannesson et al. *Svenska tal*, p. 215.

³C. Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1988 [1926]), pp. 15–17.

⁴R. Thoma, 'On the Ideology of Parliamentarism', in *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, translated by E. Kennedy (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1988), pp. 77–83.

⁵See O. Pekonen, 'Parliamentarizing the Estate Diet: The debate on plenum in late 19th-century Finland', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 42, (2017), p. 256.

parliamentary debate in Britain played an important role as a contrasting model against which a bureaucratic and committee-based negotiating and compromising parliamentary culture was judged.

In what follows, I will first outline how Swedish constitutional tradition and the question of parliamentary government have been discussed vis-à-vis the British model of parliamentarism in Swedish scholarly debates. I then analyze some reflections on parliamentary debate in the press during the time when parliamentary government became a topical issue in Sweden. While this section includes some voices of the MPs, the next section will focus solely on the ways in which the parliamentarians themselves characterized debates when they spoke in the *Riksdag*. The last section before the concluding remarks shows how a parliamentary practice in which parliamentary debates had a minor role was elevated to a national standard in the context of the international crisis of democracy in the 1930s.

‘British parliamentarism’ and ‘Swedish parliamentarism’

British parliamentary life was commonly viewed as an exemplary case of modern parliamentary culture among European liberal circles in the nineteenth century.⁶ During the first two decades of the twentieth century, in the context of struggles over parliamentary democratization and the subsequent breakthrough of universal suffrage and parliamentarism, the Victorian cabinet government was often used as a point of reference when discussing parliamentary government. In Sweden, reflections on English parliamentarism were particularly appealing, as it was commonly thought that the Swedish constitutional tradition and the system of political representation were exceptionally old and strong, second only to that of England.

As the concept of parliamentarism became topical around the turn of the twentieth century, many conservative academics seemed to think that it was necessary either to reject the concept of parliamentarism or to redefine it to make it compatible with their view of the Swedish constitutional tradition.⁷ With respect to the latter objective, the political scientist Pontus Fahlbeck made a distinction between British and Swedish parliamentarism. He defined the Swedish version as ‘dualistic parliamentarism’, which included the separation of powers between the governing monarch and political representation, and which elevated the practice of joint committee dealings on parliamentary matters, preserved from the era of the estate-based political representation before the 1866 reform. What he in fact did in 1904 was redescribing the existing Swedish system as parliamentarism.⁸ Although this kind of attempt to stretch the meaning of

⁶H. H. F. Eulau, ‘Early Theories of Parliamentarism’, *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 8, (1940), pp. 33–55.

⁷For earlier studies of the conceptual history and rhetoric of Swedish parliamentarism, see K. Paajaste, ‘Det parlamentariska tomrummet i Sverige: En studie i den statsvetenskapliga begreppsdebatten 1920–1939’, *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift* 103, (2000), pp. 241–58; J. Kurunmäki, ‘Rhetoric against Rhetoric: Swedish Parliamentarism and the Interwar Crisis of Democracy’, in K. Palonen, J. M. Rosales and T. Turkkä (eds), *The Politics of Dissensus: Parliament in Debate* (Santander, 2014), pp. 171–99; P. Ihalainen, ‘The 18th-Century Traditions of Representation in a New Age of Revolution: History Politics in the Swedish and Finnish Parliaments, 1917–1919’, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 40, (2015), pp. 70–96.

⁸P. Fahlbeck, *Sveriges författning och den moderna parlamentarismen* (Lund, 1904), pp. 104–49, 175–219. For an analysis of the emergence of parliamentarism within the framework of parliamentary committees, see T. Nyman, *Kommittépolitik och parlamentarism. Statsminister Boström och rikspolitiken 1891–1905: En studie av den svenska parlamentarismens framväxt* (Uppsala, 1999).

the concept of parliamentarism did not gain much support even among his conservative peers, it illustrates both the importance of the concept of parliamentarism and the weight of the idea of continuity in Swedish political tradition.

The conservatives' attempt to contrast the Swedish constitutional tradition with 'English parliamentarism' was further provoked by the Liberal Prime Minister Karl Staaff, who in 1906 claimed that 'the lower house' should have more say than 'the upper house' in the formation of the government.⁹ The point was that a majoritarian electoral system and the proposed universal male suffrage in the elections to the lower chamber of the *Riksdag* would make it possible to break the existing powerful coalition between upper-chamber conservatives and the monarch. Although Staaff claimed that his goal was based on the development of a domestic tradition, it was not difficult for his political opponents to see that his source of inspiration came from the British parliamentary system.

Many conservative scholars thought that the Liberal and the Social Democrat advocates of parliamentary government were supporting an anti-national standpoint. For instance, historian Carl Hallendorff claimed that they supported 'imitated' or 'secondary' parliamentarism. To him, the conditions that had shaped parliamentarism in Britain did not exist elsewhere, and even in Britain parliamentarism had experienced problems during the labour movement. He pointed to the unique political culture of England, which was based on a 'political class', and which allowed for political competition that was not based on ideological and socio-economic divisions. He also noted the existence of an organized opposition that was based on a solid two-party division, which was lacking in Sweden. Just like Schmitt would put it later, the criticism was not directed against the Victorian style of British parliamentarism, but against the alleged imitation of it in a new context and within a different political tradition. For Hallendorff, an imitated parliamentarism would lead to a governing parliament in Sweden, which was different from the cabinet parliamentarism in Britain. In Sweden, he claimed, political tradition was based on the strong position of the monarch and cooperation between the monarch and parliamentary representatives.¹⁰ In a similar vein, historian Ludvig Stavenow argued that parliamentary rule would lead to party controversies and weak governments with merely decorative monarchs, whereas the English form of parliamentarism had been able to produce strong governments.¹¹

However, despite Staaff's emphasis on the power of the lower chamber, neither the Liberals nor the emerging Social Democrats elaborated on their case for parliamentarism toward a Victorian style of debating parliament. The Swedish contest over parliamentarism mainly dealt with giving a competing interpretation of the national constitutional tradition. For instance, the Liberal MP and law professor Nils Alexanderson argued by reviewing nineteenth-century liberalism and constitutional debates that a Swedish form of parliamentarism had been developing under a long period of time and that it was based not on any direct application of foreign ideas or models but on the development of Swedish constitutional practice.¹²

⁹K. Staaff, *Politiska tal I* (Stockholm, 1918), pp. 136–7.

¹⁰C. Hallendorff, 'Parlamentarism', *Svensk Tidskrift* 1, (1911), pp. 391–401.

¹¹L. Stavenow, 'Frihetstidens parlamentarism och vår egen tid', *Svensk Tidskrift* 6, (1916), pp. 173–82; see also G. Rexius, 'Parlamentarismen och svensk tradition', *Svensk Tidskrift* 7, (1917), pp. 181–93.

It is important to note that both the conservative and the liberal-left argumentation of the Swedish parliamentary tradition were built on the idealization of committee-based negotiations and compromises rather than on the importance of parliamentary debates, which characterized British parliamentary politics. According to Stavenow, for instance, the Swedish parliamentary culture was based on 'a bureaucratic spirit of the Swedish people', which was displayed in detailed scrutiny of matters and in the production of official reports.¹³ Even Staaff noted in his posthumously published study of democracy that parliamentary committees characterized the Swedish constitutional tradition and the workings of the parliament.¹⁴ Nils Edén, the history professor and Staaff's successor as the leader of the Liberal Party as well as prime minister, shared this view.¹⁵ Regardless of their differences, both the left, i.e. the Liberals and the Social Democrats, and the right, i.e. the Conservatives and the Agrarians, were united in appreciating the parliamentary work being conducted in the committees.

Despite different political preferences regarding the realization of parliamentary government, the British model of parliamentarism with its *pro et contra* debates was deemed unsuitable for Sweden.¹⁶ For example, the conservative Hallendorff argued that the Victorian style of British parliamentarism was based on a unique political culture, in which one political class was able to engage in a 'gentlemanly sport' and produce 'talented agitators' and 'glorious parliamentary speakers' trained in 'parliamentary tactics'. These men were 'professional politicians' without being 'politicians who lived from politics'.¹⁷ In an almost identical manner, the most prominent liberal politician in early twentieth-century Sweden Karl Staaff described the Gladstonian and Disraelian forms of parliamentarism as part of an era of 'professional politicians', men who understood politics and were skilful rhetoricians. According to him, parliamentary speeches, especially in the Committee of the Whole House, were the core of that parliamentary culture.¹⁸ It seems that they both viewed the culture of parliamentary eloquence as belonging to a bygone era, although Staaff gave it some chance even in the age of democratic voting rights.¹⁹

The advent of parliamentary government in Sweden is commonly dated to the formation of Edén's cabinet in 1917, which was a coalition between the Liberals and the Social Democrats. The Social Democratic Party had been hesitant to participate in a parliamentary government, as there was a rather significant faction in the party which thought that the party should not participate in a bourgeois cabinet, something that was discussed in terms of 'minister socialism' among Marxist socialists in wartime Europe as well as among the Social Democrats in Sweden.²⁰ For instance, the MP Erik Palmstierna argued that, although parliamentarism was the result of long-term

¹²N. Alexanderson, 'Svensk Parlamentarism I,' *Forum* (1915), pp. 387–9, 387; 'Svensk Parlamentarism IV,' *Forum* (1915), pp. 448–51, 451.

¹³Stavenow, 'Frihetstidens Parlamentarism,' p. 176.

¹⁴K. Staaff, *Det demokratiska statsskicket II* (Stockholm, 1917), pp. 349–90.

¹⁵Nyman, *Kommittépolitik och parlamentarism*, pp. 63–4.

¹⁶For the *pro et contra* ideal type, see K. Palonen, *The Politics of Parliamentary Procedure. The Formation of the Westminster Procedure as a Parliamentary Ideal Type* (Opladen, 2014).

¹⁷Hallendorff, 'Parlamentarism', p. 392.

¹⁸It should be noted that the Committee of the Whole House in the British parliament was the main forum for deliberative debate, whereas other committees had a more investigating and controlling role. See Palonen *The Politics of Parliamentary Procedure*, pp. 126–35. The latter ones are more like the Swedish parliamentary committees.

¹⁹Staaff, *Det demokratiska statsskicket II*, pp. 366–9.

²⁰G. Möller, 'Ministersocialismen', *Tiden* 9, (1917), pp. 257–68.

developments in society, the Social Democrats should not participate in such a government. At the same time, however, he held that they could support a government run by the Liberals. In other words, the government should be based on a majority in the lower chamber, but only if the Liberals would form the cabinet. Such a system was, to him, ‘applied parliamentarism’.²¹

Palmstierna’s idea of applied parliamentarism had similarities with the Swedish practise of the 1920s. A proportional electoral system made it difficult to bring about broad government coalitions after universal suffrage was introduced in 1918/1921. In fact, Sweden did not have a government between 1920 and 1936 that was formed by the parties with a steady majority in the *Riksdag*. Parliamentarism was thus based on shifting majorities in parliament. Although minority cabinets were not a Swedish phenomenon alone, their existence triggered a research project aiming to show that the Swedish constitutional tradition had moved towards a practice that was compatible with the modern principle of parliamentary government. Professor Axel Brusewitz developed a categorization of different types of parliamentarism, which described Swedish minority cabinets as being parliamentary governments proper. Like his conservative and liberal predecessors, Brusewitz denied any imitation of the British form of parliamentarism. He argued that it was possible to view a minority cabinet as a parliamentary government if it had a shifting majority in parliament. The point was that the government needed to be tolerated by parliament. A ‘negative trust’ could therefore be counted as a basis for parliamentary government.²² Brusewitz was in this matter quite close to his conservative colleague Rexius who in his critique of the liberal view of parliamentarism had used in a positive tone the expressions ‘negative parliamentarism’ and ‘jumping parliamentarism’, referring to situations in which there was a link, albeit not a consequent one, between the government and the political constellation of the *Riksdag*. He positioned this kind of parliamentarism against the ‘lower house parliamentarism’ or the ‘new parliamentarism’ of the left.²³

Press opinion and parliamentary debate

When considering the style and quality of parliamentary speeches, one should keep in mind that the ideal view of parliamentary debate as a *pro et contra* argumentation between the MPs, guided by parliamentary procedures, cannot capture the whole rationale of parliamentary debate, not least because they have been directed at a broader public than just the fellow MPs. This was the case long before the emergence of mass parties and popular movements. The role of the printing press in particular has been important in this respect. The relationship between parliamentary meetings and the press has been mutually beneficial: the press needed material and the MPs needed publicity. Many parliamentary speeches have been written speeches that were delivered to newspapers before they were given in parliament or the diet. In Sweden, this kind of relationship between the meetings of the Swedish *Riksdag* and the press led to a reform in 1834, in which parliamentary debates were made open for the general public to attend. Although it was believed that such a level of openness would elevate ‘liberal principles’ when the first

²¹E. Palmstierna, ‘Parlamentarismens teori och praktik’, *Tiden* 5, (1913), pp. 33–40.

²²A. Brusewitz, ‘Vad menas med parlamentarism: Ett försök till typologisk bestämning’, *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift* 32, (1929), pp. 323–34.

²³Rexius, ‘Parlamentarismen’, pp. 185, 189–93.

initiative was proposed in the Noble Estate in 1818, there clearly were conservative and royal motivations involved in the reform as well. It was a time of an emerging liberal press and growing opposition against the king, and it was thought better to make the plenary sessions open in the hope of giving the politically engaged public the possibility to critically judge what the radical press wrote about parliamentary issues.²⁴

A search into late-nineteenth-century newspapers shows that a lively parliamentary debate was in general preferred to long and serious speeches.²⁵ For instance, we find characterizations in which a distinction was made between ‘firesome and splendid eloquence’ and ‘a debate in which a most interesting topic becomes uninteresting because of all too long and boring dealing with it,’²⁶ in which ‘courage and skilfulness’ and ‘highly lively battle’ were praised;²⁷ and in which it was argued that ‘critique... belongs to a real parliamentary debate, instead of general, colourless statements’.²⁸ Perhaps the best example of how a good speech in a parliamentary debate was different from a bad one was described in the conservative newspaper *Barometern* in 1894, as the paper discussed ‘two big speeches’ in the lower chamber by the former Prime Minister Robert Themptander (Agrarian Party) and by the leading liberal MP Adolf Hedin. According to the newspaper, Themptander’s speech was ‘one of the best political speeches in the lower chamber in recent times’ and its ‘form was clear and careful, thoughtful without giving an impression of a written lecture, substantial without being boring’. It was, the anonymous author maintained, ‘a true parliamentary speech’. The opposite was the case with Hedin’s speech, which the journalist described as ‘a lecture’, one which dealt with all possible topics a radical like him would say, from French history to the threat posed by reactionary politics in Europe.²⁹ For sure, this review in a conservative paper is also an instance of political journalism, and it is obvious that the paper’s view of the style of parliamentary speeches was coloured by the fact that Hedin was the most prominent left-wing liberal in the country during the late nineteenth century.³⁰ Another conservative paper *Aftonbladet*³¹ published an article in which a negative view of the principle of parliamentary government was combined with a critical view of parliamentary debate in the countries where there was a parliamentary government. This was not yet the case in Sweden, though. The author of the article argued that ‘our people are much too upright and serious to stand for such spectacle, in which the most important interests of the fatherland are decided merely for the pleasure of winning a parliamentary debate’.³²

Comments from the intensified contest over parliamentarism and the content of the Swedish constitution in the beginning of the twentieth century clearly indicate that there

²⁴C. Rosengren, *Tidevarvets bättre genius: Föreställningar om offentlighet och publicitet i Karl Johanstidens Sverige* (Stockholm, 1999), p. 137.

²⁵The overview is based on a search into the digitized press archive at the National Library of Sweden with the search words ‘parlamentarisk procedure,’ ‘parlamentarisk debatt,’ ‘parlamentariskt tal,’ ‘parlamentarisk stil,’ and ‘parlamentarisk retorik.’ See <http://tidningar.kb.se/> (accessed 11 April 2023).

²⁶*Aftonbladet*, 4 July 1862.

²⁷*Kalmar*, 9 March 1870.

²⁸*Aftonbladet*, 4 March 1871.

²⁹*Barometern*, 7 March 1894.

³⁰See, for example, L. Kihlberg, *Folktribunen Adolf Hedin. För frihet och rättvisa åt menige man* (Stockholm, 1972).

³¹Having been the most important liberal paper in Sweden since 1830, *Aftonbladet* became conservative toward the end of the century.

³²*Aftonbladet*, 13 April 1872.

was an increased concern among conservatives over how democracy would influence parliamentary debate. For instance, the former MP and bishop Gottfrid Billing argued in the conservative periodical *Svensk Tidskrift* in 1913 that an MP did not have enough time to become entirely familiar with the issues on which he was about to vote. He painted in his 'impressions from parliament' a picture of a rapidly changing era of parliamentary life, maintaining that '[i]n earlier times, one was comfortable with slow and careful deliberation on matters; now 'progress' has to take place at the speed of an automobile'.³³ According to him, this was not only a matter of the number of issues that parliament was handling, but also reflective of a degenerating culture in which parliamentary speeches have resulted in 'lengthy discussions, late-hour plenary sessions, and so forth'.³⁴ His point was that the speeches were too long and often given without a proper note of expertise. What they resembled instead were speeches held in electoral campaigns and mass meetings. The speeches were thus mainly directed at the general public in and outside the parliament. To become a skilful speaker in parliament, he argued, one had to speak differently from the way one spoke in

ceremonies, church services, academic or popular lectures, and popular meetings. ... One had to be able to 'feel' what the other members of the house felt and thought, what they could bear and take, as well as to know what the most decisive detail at the very moment was.³⁵

However, Billing argued that the most important work in parliament was done in the committees. It is in the committees where an MP learned to have an influence as a parliamentarian. It was also in committees where it was possible for an MP to keep himself calm and focus on details. Billing's point was that parliament should keep its distance from mass meetings and electoral campaigns in its manner of speaking. A member of parliament must not become a victim to a seemingly imperative mandate from the side of the public.³⁶

In another instance of conservative rhetoric, *Svensk Tidskrift* pointed out in 1914 that there were signs of decadence in the ways in which the parliament was conducting its work. This was, according to the editorial, a result of the diminishing quality of those MPs who had adapted to the democratization of parliamentary elections.³⁷ Three years later, the same journal was calling attention to an increased tendency to use referral debates as a platform for testing the support of the government and for promoting simplistic public expressions of ideological standpoints. Instead of creating 'a carnival before the working of a committee', Swedish parliamentarism should commit itself to 'work and compromises in committees, with detailed scrutiny of the propositions of the government'.³⁸

Although this kind of rhetoric was based on a principled rejection of democracy, some current parliamentary phenomena make it to some extent understandable that the conservatives thought that a plenary debate would become a platform for agitation. The

³³G. Billing, 'Några riksdagsintryck', *Svensk Tidskrift* 3, (1913), pp. 83–94, 89.

³⁴Billing, 'Några riksdagsintryck', p. 84.

³⁵Billing, 'Några riksdagsintryck', pp. 85–6.

³⁶Billing, 'Några riksdagsintryck', pp. 87–8, 93.

³⁷[Anonymous], 'Parlamentarisk kultur', *Svensk Tidskrift* 4, (1914), pp. 382–5.

³⁸[Anonymous], 'Remissdebatter', *Svensk Tidskrift* 7, (1917), pp. 66–8.

manifestation of ideological positions had become an integral aspect of parliamentary debates, especially in left-wing parliamentary speeches, at the time of the struggle for parliamentary democratization.³⁹ During the interwar years, the Communists, in particular, viewed parliamentary debates in the first place as a platform for political agitation, following instructions from the Communist International.⁴⁰ The Social Democrats, in turn, had still in the 1910s occasionally a somewhat complex view of deliberative parliamentary debates as the party had a tendency to see their parliamentary policy as an outcome of internal party decisions that were made by the party leadership and an elected group of party officials rather than by its parliamentary representatives, let alone as the result of a plenary debate in parliament. Political divisions within the party, especially before 1917, had led to a policy of party discipline, which obviously did not elevate the status of parliamentary debate among the party leadership.⁴¹

However, despite the conservative criticism of the lack of discipline and quality in parliamentary speeches, the way in which the *Riksdag* functioned was generally viewed in a positive light due to the central role of committees in the working methods of the parliament.⁴² In 1924, *Svensk Tidskrift* argued that the committees made it possible to deal with such phenomena as the increased pace of change, specialization and democratization as well as the extra-parliamentary influence in decision-making.⁴³ In the same spirit, the historian and conservative journalist Ivar Anderson argued in favour of an MP becoming a professional politician in an article that put the emphasis on the work done in parliamentary committees instead of plenary debates, which he identified as a forum for the ‘amateurish interests’ of an MP or an instance where one could be a passive bystander.⁴⁴

Debating parliamentarians on parliamentary debate

It is a common feature of parliamentary speeches that MPs make polite comments on previous speakers’ arguments and their manner of speaking. This is the case in the Swedish Parliament, too. Reflective and principled accounts of the nature and role of debates are quite rare, but there are cases in which the nature of speeches and parliamentary rhetoric has been raised.⁴⁵ Besides the critique of too long speeches and, consequently, too long debates, the most typical way of noting the parliamentary debate in this respect was to spell out the difference and tension between committee proposals and parliamentary debate. The argument was usually that the issue under debate had already been decided before the debate. To take an example, Carl Winberg of the far-left Social Democratic Left Party, in 1919, opened his speech concerning the proposal

³⁹See, for example, O. Pekonen, *Debating the ABCs of Parliamentary Life: The Learning of Parliamentary Rules and Practices in the Late Nineteenth-Century Finnish Diet and the Early Eduskunta* (Jyväskylä, 2014), pp. 302–4.

⁴⁰See, for example, T. Saarela, ‘International and National in the Communist Movement’, in T. Saarela and K. Rentola (eds), *Communism: National and International* (Helsinki, 1998), p. 33.

⁴¹G. Möller, ‘Disciplinestadgan’, *Tiden* 7, (1915), pp. 129–31; P. A. Hansson, ‘Riksdagsgruppen och partiet’, *Tiden* 7, (1915), pp. 309–312.

⁴²[Anonymous], ‘Riksdagen och oron i landet’, *Svensk Tidskrift* 6, (1916), p. 383.

⁴³[Anonymous], ‘Riksdagens arbetssätt’, *Svensk Tidskrift* 14, (1924), p. 290.

⁴⁴I. Anderson, ‘Riksdagsmannskapet: Några reflexioner’, *Svensk Tidskrift* 18, (1928), pp. 523–9, 524.

⁴⁵The search into digitized minutes of the plenary debates was done through the interface *People and Parliament*. See P. Ihalainen, B. Jenssen, J. Marjanen and V. Vaara, ‘Building and Testing a Comparative Interface on Northwest European Historical Parliamentary Debates: Relative Term Frequency Analysis of British Representative Democracy’, *Digital Parliamentary Data in Action (DiPaDA 2022) workshop, Uppsala, Sweden, March 15, 2022*.

dealing with the limitation of working time by saying that ‘I have not requested the floor here because I would think that I could affect either the principle or the detailed decisions in the present matter. I know that the matter has already been decided’. He referred to committees and parliamentary party groups as the real places of decision-making but, as he put it, he wanted to make a public remark on the matter.⁴⁶

Perhaps the best instance of the ways in which the role and the character of parliamentary debate was expressed by the MPs is the debate over the introduction of open voting in the chambers in 1920 and in 1921. The question of this procedural reform triggered principled arguments, such as a Conservative MP claiming that open voting would enhance ‘parliamentarism’,⁴⁷ a Social Democrat viewing the reform as being in accordance with ‘democratic opinion’,⁴⁸ and a Liberal maintaining that it was a part of ‘parliamentary life’.⁴⁹ In order to see how the issue was associated with the status of parliamentary debate, we may have a closer look at the 1921 speeches by three eminent politicians, the Conservative leader and a former Prime Minister Arvid Lindman, the Liberal leader and a former Prime Minister Nils Edén, and the Social Democrat Per Albin Hansson, who later became party leader and the PM, and eventually the symbol figure of the Social Democratic dominance in Sweden for the decades to come. The debate was to a large extent about the contrast between imperative mandate and a representative’s independence, the issue which eventually dealt with the question whether or not a parliamentary debate was about persuasion and being persuaded or whether an MP should vote in accordance with his or her voters.

Lindman claimed that the open voting procedure would lead to an imperative mandate because the MPs would have to take into account those who elected them. While this was a common conservative standpoint, he developed the argument in an interesting way toward a rhetorical understanding of parliamentary debates. Referring to the ongoing debate, he argued:

I imagine that when Mr. Larsson speaks in the second chamber, he is not only speaking for the record, he is not speaking only so that the newspapers can then tell the voters what he said. I suspect that he also intends to try to convince me and others, who are his opponents, of the viability and correctness of the reasons he presents. I assume that in all these debates in the chambers we really try to convince each other, in other words try to bring each other to a different meaning than what is otherwise covered. At least for my part, when I speak, I would like to hope and believe that someday I will succeed in convincing someone else that what he has been doing is wrong and that the reasons I give are so weighty that, as a result, he should change his mind.⁵⁰

Lindman raised the question whether an MP should be free to change his or her mind after having been convinced by other MPs or by any other new relevant information about the issue at stake. For sure, he was not defending the independence of the parliamentarians only because he preferred parliamentary deliberation. He was a conservative politician who was critical to the political parties, the dominating Social Democrats and Liberals in particular. It is obvious that he also had in mind the kind of party discipline

⁴⁶Carl Winberg, First Chamber [upper chamber], 27 September 1919, No. 7, pp. 42–3.

⁴⁷Karl Johan Ekman, First Chamber, 30 April 1920, No. 41, pp. 13–14.

⁴⁸Arthur Engberg, Second Chamber [lower chamber], 30 April 1920, No. 49, p. 42.

⁴⁹Fredrik Holmquist, First Chamber, 30 April 1920, No. 41, pp. 19–20.

⁵⁰Arvid Lindman, Second Chamber, 2 April 1921, No. 24, p. 26.

that made it possible to maintain governmental coalitions against, as he saw it, the will of the representatives.

Referring to the Conservative leader's speech, the Liberal leader Edén argued that it was obvious that Lindman 'strove to arouse within this assembly the feeling that the open voting would constitute some kind of undue control over the individual Member of the *Riksdag*, undue control from the party leadership, undue control from the newspapers, undue control from the electors'.⁵¹ According to him, open voting means that an MP makes his⁵² opinion known. It means, Edén argued, that 'if he receives criticism, he defends himself both in front of the electorate and the press and elsewhere'. He did not accept the argument that the opponents of open voting were protecting the independence of the parliamentarians. Referring to the open voting practice in municipal councils, he asked why it would be a sign of independence if MPs would hide behind a closed ballot. 'It must', he claimed,

be based on the fact that the person who reasons in this way believes that a *Riksdag* member, if he has the closed ballot at his disposal, can vote in a different way than he would vote if he had to vote openly.

The Liberal leader thought that independence meant that one was always 'honestly standing for one's opinion'.⁵³ The Social Democrat Hansson echoed Edén in defending an MP's independence and the possibility to vote against one's own party. At the same time, however, he used formulations that give the impression that a deviation from the opinion of the constituency was not acceptable. In the opening of his speech, he said that 'I dare to claim that Mr. Lindman has here spoken for the right of the member of parliament to deceive his constituents'. He also argued that it was impossible in the long run to defend a voting procedure that 'makes it possible for the member of parliament to be able to let his constituents live in the wrong perception of how he voted on a certain issue'.⁵⁴

While Lindman saw the possibility for a persuasive parliamentary debate in which opinions may change because of a convincing argument only if there was closed voting, Edén was less explicit on the nature and consequences of parliamentary debate, although it seems that he did not deny the possibility, or the ideal, of such a persuasive debate. Hansson, like his party at the time, was quite close to the Liberal Edén, but he nevertheless gave more explicitly room for the idea that the MPs should in the first place listen to those who had given them the mandate.

My second example of how the principles of parliamentary debate was debated by the MPs themselves is from the mid-1930s, the time of the crisis of parliamentary democracy in most European countries. It was about how to improve the quality of parliamentary debates against too long debates and demagoguery, in particular. It dealt with the question whether the Speaker of the chamber should be given increased powers to cut a debate. The Conservative MP Per Pehrsson called it 'a debate on debates'.⁵⁵ According to Pehrsson, the problem with the intended regulation of speech was that while it can be used

⁵¹Nils Edén, Second Chamber, 2 April 1921, No. 24, p. 36.

⁵²Although universal suffrage was finally introduced in Sweden in 1921, these men always used 'he' (*han*) and 'his' (*hans*) in their language. Due to the quotations, I follow that gendered pattern here.

⁵³Nils Edén, Second Chamber, 2 April 1921, No. 24, pp. 37–8.

⁵⁴Per Albin Hansson, Second Chamber, 2 April 1921, No. 24, pp. 44–5.

⁵⁵Per Pehrsson, Second Chamber, 6 March 1935, No. 17, p. 21.

against demagogic speeches and against unnecessary repetitions, it could also be used against necessary and good arguments. Therefore, he argued, it is not useful to limit freedom of expression. He even ventured to claim that Sweden had enjoyed freedom of speech for five hundred years. For him, the status of the *Riksdag* 'does not depend on whether the Speaker gets an extended right to take the floor from any speaker and limit the debate, it depends on the value of the work that is carried out here in sincerity and honesty for the benefit of the motherland'.⁵⁶

The emphasis put on the work and the sincerity of the MPs by Pehrsson was repeated in different ways during the debate. It seems that the MPs' self-discipline and keeping with the facts was deemed the best cure both against pressures from outside, such as a demagogic press opinion, and against anti-parliamentary speeches in the *Riksdag*. This was the case when the Social Democrat Ivan Pauli discussed the idea of introducing some of the British debating culture in the *Riksdag* by giving the Speaker a more prominent role. According to Pauli, '[c]laims have been made that, in order to prevent the oft-talked-about parliamentary row, a kind of direction should be organized for the *Riksdag* debates, so that they were partly reasonably long, partly better proportioned and dramatically staged'. For this to happen, he went on, the *Riksdag* would give the Speaker in both chambers the same kind of powers as the Speaker of the British House of Commons has. It would mean that the Speaker 'can, when an important issue is being discussed, distribute the lines so that the opposing sides get to speak equally, and make sure that it is the main points of view that come forward'.⁵⁷ However, it is obvious that the *pro et contra* ideal of parliamentary debate was not the ideal for the Swedish MP, although he maintained that it would have its advantages from the point of view that would increase the public's interest in the parliament's work. According to Pauli, '[s]uch an approach naturally has its advantages, and above all it has its advantages for those who wish to regard the *Riksdag's* negotiations as a spectacle'. His point was to elevate the Swedish way of seeing the value of parliamentary debate:

But here in Sweden, I think that we are generally not that accessible to these, if I may call them, parliamentary-aesthetic points of view. We are probably mostly concerned that there will be a satisfactory treatment of the issues from a factual point of view. And should it be that this factually satisfactory solution has already been reached in the committees, we here in the *Riksdag*, I think, generally would not have grieved so much that the chamber debates on the issue.⁵⁸

Against this background, it does not come as a surprise that Pauli was against making any changes to the ways in which the parliament debated. He also denied that 'the anti-parliamentary elements' would have a hold on the working of the two chambers of the *Riksdag*.⁵⁹ The MP who had raised the issue of anti-parliamentary elements in this debate was the Conservative Gösta Rahmn. He had the Communists' obstruction in his hometown Gothenburg in mind, and he was serious about the possibility that anti-parliamentary forces could 'break down' the debates in the *Riksdag*, as well. But what united the two parliamentarians in dispute was that they both emphasized the fact-

⁵⁶Per Pehrsson, Second Chamber, 6 March 1935, No. 17, p. 22.

⁵⁷Ivan Pauli, First Chamber, 6 March 1935, No. 14, p. 9.

⁵⁸Ivan Pauli, First Chamber, 6 March 1935, No. 14, p. 10.

⁵⁹Ivan Pauli, First Chamber, 6 March 1935, No. 14, p. 11.

based conduct of the members of parliament. As Rahmn put it, 'it is extremely important that precisely the factual viewpoints get the greatest possible room in the debates'. And then he added that 'this is too often prevented by these allegedly unnecessarily long speeches'.⁶⁰

My intention with these two parliamentary debates in which the debate itself has been thematized has not been to give any comprehensive picture of how the Swedish parliamentarians debate. What these examples show, however, is that the scholarly accounts on Swedish parliamentarism, discussed in the beginning of this article, have not been so detached from parliamentary practices as they sometimes tend to be. The latter example from the mid-thirties has also brought us to the times when parliamentary democracy was in many countries under severe pressure. Although the political situation in Sweden was in a comparative perspective very peaceful and well-functioning, there were concerns over the stability and vitality of Swedish parliamentary politics. As I will argue in the next section, this was the background for some official governmental investigations of parliamentary procedures and, eventually, the idealization of a bureaucratic form of parliamentarism.

The idealization of bureaucratic parliamentarism in the 1930s

The experience of minority cabinets gave rise not only to theoretical discussions on different types of parliamentarism, such as 'negative parliamentarism', but it also directed attention to parliamentary procedures and the nature of parliamentary speeches. For this purpose, the government in 1930 launched an official inquiry into the need for parliamentary procedures, which also illustrated a typical Swedish way of dealing with policy matters. The task of conducting a comparative review of parliamentary working forms was given to the political scientist Herbert Tingsten, who had started his academic career working under Bruswitz. In the Official Report of the Swedish Government from 1931, Tingsten emphasized the special character of parliamentary committees in Sweden (and in Finland) in the sense that their existence and tasks were regulated in the foundational laws, whereas in most countries parliament itself decided upon the matter. Moreover, unlike in other countries with a bicameral system, the most important committees of the Swedish parliament were joint ones between the two chambers.⁶¹

The point of departure in Tingsten's inquiry was the question of the relationship between government and parliament. Taking the British parliamentary committees as a point of comparison, Tingsten held that whereas in Britain the government had a leading role vis-à-vis parliament, in countries where committees played a strong role the parliamentary systems were associated with weak governments.⁶² He pointed out that in Sweden the need to regulate parliamentary speeches had not been as urgent as in most other countries where obstruction had made the need for such a regulation more desirable. He also noted that there were no rules in place in Sweden that aimed at guaranteeing a party-based order of speakers that would provide a *pro et contra* debate in parliament. In Sweden, a debate proceeded in the order of requested speeches.

⁶⁰Gösta Rahmn, 6 March 1935 (Upper Chamber).

⁶¹H. Tingsten, 'Utredning rörande parlamentens arbetssätt i vissa främmande länder', in *Betänkande med förslag angående vissa ändringar i Riksdagens arbetsformer m.m.: Statens offentliga utredningar* 26 (Stockholm, 1931), p. 170.

⁶²Tingsten, 'Utredning rörande', pp. 171–2, 174–5.

Nor were there rules that demanded a specific closure of a debate in the Swedish Parliament.⁶³

While the appointed official investigator seemed to be satisfied with the ways in which the Swedish Parliament functioned, the background for the inquiry was nevertheless that there was growing concern over how a clearer parliamentary accountability of the government would be achieved. It was thought, for instance, that the procedure of interpellation, which had been introduced in the lower chamber already in 1867 and in the upper chamber in 1912, would have increased the possibility for making the government more accountable to the parliament. However, its effect was reduced as there was no debate before a chamber voted on the interpellation and because there was no vote of confidence involved in the procedure, although there had developed a practice in which MPs gave their mass assent in the plenary debate after the interpellation. During the period of minority governments in the 1920s and early 1930s, this practice at times gave interpellations the character of a party demonstration in the parliament.⁶⁴

Since interpellations were regarded as being outside the normal parliamentary agenda, it was in many parliamentary cultures thought necessary to regulate the return to the normal parliamentary agenda (*dagordning*, cf. *Tagesordnung*), a vote that in practice decided whether a minister of the cabinet enjoyed trust on the part of parliament. Tingsten was also on this occasion appointed to investigate whether the instructions for such regulations in Sweden would make the relationship between parliament and the government more visible and enhance parliamentarism in the country.⁶⁵ He argued that a formal procedure regarding a return to the agenda had not made governments stronger and more stable in countries where it had been applied. His main point of reference in this matter was France, which was the country most often used as an example of unstable parliamentary life and constant changes in government. Moreover, Tingsten held that *dagordningsinstitut* was not suitable in a country where the two chambers were equal in power, as its introduction would create an overarching risk for a conflict between the chambers, as one chamber might vote for no-confidence at the same time as the other voted for a return to the agenda.⁶⁶ According to him, a majority parliamentarism was only possible if the political parties had an attitude that supported it; it could not be achieved through procedural changes. He even claimed that *dagordningsinstitut* would increase instability insofar as small minority groups and extremist parties would be able to use the procedure to prevent a normal parliamentary life.⁶⁷ What the Swedish system provided, instead, was a stable constitutional life thanks to the standing committees and the independent status of political administration. It was, according to Tingsten, what made parliamentarism in Sweden something that one could call 'bureaucratic parliamentarism'.⁶⁸

After the Social Democrats had won the parliamentary elections in 1932 and the party managed to forge a deal with the Agrarian Party, the Social Democratic government

⁶³Tingsten, 'Utredning rörande', pp. 183–4.

⁶⁴N. Andrén, 'Interpellationer och enkla frågor', in A. Thomson (ed.), *Samhälle och riksdag: Historisk och statsvetenskaplig framställning utgiven i anledning av tvåkammarriksdagens 100-åriga tillvaro II* (Stockholm, 1966), pp. 201–60, 201–13.

⁶⁵H. Tingsten, *Utredning angående införande av ett dagordningsinstitut m.m.: Statens offentliga utredningar 21* (Stockholm, 1935), pp. 7–11.

⁶⁶Tingsten, *Utredning angående*, p. 11.

⁶⁷Tingsten, *Utredning angående*, p. 14.

⁶⁸Tingsten, *Utredning angående*, p. 75.

enjoyed a strong parliamentary majority. As a consequence, the Conservatives began to show more interest in parliamentary debates than before. They no longer only criticized them for pandering to the lowest common denominator, but also argued that the governmental propositions be properly debated in plenary sessions. Under the editorship of Elis Håstad, a member of the Conservative Party who later became a professor of political science, the conservative periodical *Svensk Tidskrift* argued in 1938 that the Social Democratic government did not pay enough attention to the role of parliament, but, instead, seemed to ‘transport’ its proposals through the system with the help of its majoritarian position in the *Riksdag*. According to the journal, it was hard to find ‘any other debating assembly in the country in which the delegates were as disinterested in the plenary debates as in the *Riksdag*’.⁶⁹ Moreover, the journal demanded that the daily papers should show more interest in parliamentary debates in order to give all politically interested people ‘an objective picture through a simple and correct briefing of arguments and contra-arguments’.⁷⁰ The point was that parliament should be able to act as a controlling power vis-à-vis the government and not be reduced to a ratifying organ.⁷¹

However, the general call at that time in Swedish parliamentary politics was for compromise and consensus rather than debate given the fact that dictatorships were growing ever stronger in Europe. It was in this context that a parliamentary life without lively debates was elevated to a virtuous national feature. This idealized view of a compromising parliamentary culture was also a crucial ingredient in the rhetoric of Nordic democracy, which was rather successfully launched by the social democratic parties in the Nordic countries in the mid-thirties. The characterization of parliamentary life as seeking compromise was one crucial aspect of this rhetoric, in which the words ‘Nordic’ and ‘Swedish’ were used quite interchangeably.⁷²

Participating in the campaign for ‘Nordic democracy’, Tingsten once more emphasized the compromising style of Swedish parliamentary culture. Like many of his colleagues before him, he pointed to the parliamentary standing committees as the fora for working out such compromises. These committees functioned as a substitute for a majoritarian coalition government. Like Brusewitz, he maintained that a minority cabinet could in certain cases be more effective than a majority cabinet that had to find its internal policy and struggle against a united opposition. For him, the fact that past governments had been built on various coalitions was not a sign of weakness, but, rather, something that made the system more equal than a strict majority parliamentarism, as the system had developed into a sort of rotation system in which basically all parties had a chance to help build a new government. Accordingly, the minority parliamentarism that characterized the Swedish style of parliamentarism was not a sign of controversy between political parties, but rather a sign of their ability to work with each other.⁷³

⁶⁹[Anonymous], ‘Riksdagen och demokratin’, *Svensk Tidskrift* 25, (1938), p. 159.

⁷⁰‘Riksdagen och demokratin’, p. 163.

⁷¹[Anonymous], ‘Kring riksdagens kontrollmakt’, *Svensk Tidskrift* 25, (1938), pp. 373–376; [Anonymous], ‘Det representativa systemets krisfara’, *Svensk Tidskrift* 26, (1939), p. 344.

⁷²J. Kurunmäki, ‘“Nordic Democracy” in 1935’, in J. Kurunmäki and J. Strang 1935 (eds), *Rhetorics of Nordic Democracy* (Helsinki, 2010), pp. 37–82.

⁷³H. Tingsten, ‘Nordisk demokrati’, *Nordens kalender*, 9 (1938), pp. 41–50; H. Tingsten, ‘Folkstyret i Norden’, in K. Petander (ed.), *Nordisk gemenskap* (Stockholm, 1940), pp. 50–83.

To support this idealized picture of Swedish parliamentary life, Tingsten distinguished between a working parliament and a debating parliament. Using the Swedish case as his main example, Tingsten pointed out that Nordic parliamentarism had been able to achieve good results in practice. The Nordic representative bodies, he maintained, had 'less than in many other countries functioned as platforms for glorious rhetoric and dramatic deals, but instead their working had, during critical periods, been marked by passionless impartiality, which makes it correct to speak of working democracy'.⁷⁴ Tingsten pointed out that in some countries the authority of parliamentary government had been reduced due to partisan political intrigues and too many debates, too many deals, and too much corruption. In contrast, Nordic parliamentarism was characterized by matter-of-fact decisions.⁷⁵ For him, the broadly fragmented social background of the members of parliament had led to a 'matter-of-fact kind of serious and un-glorious' parliamentary debate precisely because the MPs had their main occupations outside politics and far away from the need for eloquence.⁷⁶ Building on the idea of bureaucratic parliamentarism that he had first discussed in 1935, he argued in this wartime account that the anti-partisan and anti-rhetorical ideal was, in fact, an administrative ideal: 'If one views the state as an administrative apparatus without any political regard, the Nordic countries seem to qualify well in any comparison'.⁷⁷

One explanation for the administrative nature of parliamentary culture was, in accordance with Tingsten, the fact that the Nordic countries had historically granted state officials an admission to political representation, unlike, according to him, in England, France,⁷⁸ and the US. It meant, he held, that such representation entailed a good deal of administrative knowledge. Since parliamentary experience was combined with technical expertise, there was no such antagonistic relationship between parliament and administration that had left its mark in many other countries. In emphasizing a parliamentary culture largely devoid of debate, Tingsten argued that rhetorical speeches were met with a mixture of suspicion and irony in Nordic parliamentary assemblies. Eloquence was taken as naïve and ridiculous. He even ventured to claim that rhetorical flourish was tantamount to political extremism if present in Nordic parliamentary debates.⁷⁹

Tingsten came to be known for his positivistic, or 'scientific' as he called it, method of studying ideologies and political behaviour, which may to some extent explain his negative view of rhetorical parliamentary debates.⁸⁰ However, in this matter he was not an exception, and we should regard him as a traditionalist rather than a positivist. He was drawing on an established view of what parliamentary politics was like in Sweden. To take a prominent conservative scholar as an example, we may note that Nils Herlitz, professor of public law and editor of the pro-Nordic journal *Nordisk Tidskrift*, emphasized in the lectures given and published in the United States in 1939 the long

⁷⁴Tingsten, 'Nordisk demokrati', p. 41.

⁷⁵Tingsten, 'Nordisk demokrati', p. 50.

⁷⁶Tingsten, 'Folkstyret i Norden', p. 75.

⁷⁷Tingsten, 'Folkstyret i Norden', p. 75.

⁷⁸Tingsten thus ignores the fact that Ministers and State Secretaries could be representatives in parliament at the same time.

⁷⁹Tingsten, 'Folkstyret i Norden', pp. 75–6, 78–9.

⁸⁰See J. Strang, 'Why "Nordic Democracy"', in J. Kurunmäki and J. Strang (eds), *Rhetorics of Nordic Democracy* (Helsinki, 2010), pp. 83–113.

Swedish democratic tradition and its compromising character. According to him, a parliament should be ‘a really thinking and acting body’ to prevent it from becoming merely ‘an instrument for debates, criticism, and expressing the policy of the government’.⁸¹

Conclusion

I have argued in this article that there is a remarkable continuity in the ways in which parliamentary debate has been viewed in Swedish public and scholarly discussions. It consists of the notion that parliamentary speeches should be of substance, although not overly long and boring on the one hand, and provide a thorough examination of the facts presented in parliamentary committees, on the other. What was in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century characteristically a conservative argument in favor of safeguarding the quality and independence of the working procedures of parliament against the consequences of democratization was in the 1930s turned into an argument against the threats that political extremism and totalitarian ideas posed to parliamentary democracy. In this context, the image of a calm and substantial parliamentary debate in combination with thorough scrutiny in the parliamentary committees was lifted to a cornerstone of a successful and resilient democracy.

On the other hand, the comments on parliamentary debate in the daily press and periodicals show that a *pro et contra* style of parliamentary debate has always been in certain ways desired. It was in this spirit that a columnist for the main conservative daily paper held in 1937 that a referential debate in the *Riksdag* reminded one of a school class gathering to hear the exam results that were already known to everyone. With an altogether different evaluation of parliamentary debate in mind than that expressed by Tingsten, the non-eloquent Swedish way of conducting parliamentary politics was once again contrasted to the real debates being held in Britain.⁸²

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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⁸¹N. Herlitz, *Sweden: A Modern Democracy on Ancient Foundations* (Minneapolis, 1939), p. 45, 55.

⁸²*Svenska Dagbladet*, 26 September 1937.