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# **The Role of Professors in the Formation of Finnish Parliamentary Life: The Struggle between Two Conceptions of Parliament**

## **Abstract**

The Frankfurt Parliament (1848–49) was subsequently dismissively referred to as the “Professors’ Parliament” due to its heavy representation of scholars and the academic style of its lengthy discussions. Professors have played a prominent role in the deliberations and development of other European assemblies, too. This article examines the role of professors in the formation of Finnish parliamentary life. It moreover underlines the close relationship between the academia and national politics in late nineteenth-century Finland, starting from the European revolutions of 1848. The article highlights how politically active professors, together with the newspaper press, were crucial in transferring European ideas to Finnish debates. Professors promoted ideological conceptions of parliamentary politics, which were inspired by their scholarly interests and formulated by applying European discussions and concepts selectively to the Finnish context. The article focuses on a debate between Finnish professors and their competing conceptions of parliament. The struggle between the Hegelian philosopher J. V. Snellman and the liberal Professor of Law Leo Mechelin reflects a wider European debate on the role and purposes of parliaments as national representative and deliberative institutions. The article evaluates the role of Snellman’s and Mechelin’s conceptions of parliament in Finnish parliamentary culture in the longer term.

**Key words:** liberalism, nationalism, professors, university, parliaments

## **Introduction**

The Frankfurt Parliament (1848–49) was subsequently dismissively referred to as the “Professors’ Parliament” due to its heavy representation of scholars and the academic style of its lengthy discussions (Burkhardt, 2016: 177). Professors have played a prominent role in the deliberations and development of other European assemblies, too. This article examines the role of professors in the formation of Finnish parliamentary life. It highlights how politically active professors, together with the press, were crucial in introducing European ideas into Finnish debates.

The article underlines the close relationship between the University of Helsinki and national politics in late nineteenth-century Finland. I examine how parliamentary practices became a means to challenge old ideals, deal with disagreement and learn to deliberate public matters in the context of the European revolutions of 1848, which did not directly affect Finland. The university was the main intellectual home of the Finnish political elite and an arena for political organisation before the beginning of regular parliamentary life and the proliferation of the press.

I highlight in the article how professors promoted the ideological conceptions of parliamentary politics, which were inspired by their scholarly interests. Professors formulated their conceptions by applying European discussions and concepts selectively to the Finnish context. The article focuses on a debate among Finnish professors and their competing conceptions of parliament in the last third of the nineteenth century. The struggle between the Hegelian philosopher J. V. Snellman and the liberal Professor of Law Leo Mechelin reflects a wider European debate on the role and purposes of parliaments as national representative and deliberative institutions. In the concluding remarks, I shall evaluate the role of Snellman's and Mechelin's conceptions of parliament in Finnish parliamentary culture in the longer term.

### **University and Parliamentary Politics before the Regular Diet Meetings: Accepting and Benefitting from Disagreement around 1848**

Finland was an eastern part of the Kingdom of Sweden before becoming a grand duchy of the Russian Empire in 1809. The same year, the estates were summoned by Tsar Alexander I for the Diet of Porvoo, but were not convened again for over fifty years, until 1863. Finnish Professor of History Yrjö Koskinen used the metaphor "night of the state" (in Finnish *waltio-yö*) to describe the period between 1809 and 1863 when the Diet of Finland did not convene (Koskinen, 1863: 3). It was during this period, however, that the connections between the practices of parliamentary politics and academia were established in Finland.

Despite its remote location on the north-eastern edge of Europe, Finland was not excluded from European parliamentary discussions in the early nineteenth century. Finnish newspaper reporting on foreign parliamentary debates was an early sign of the young Finnish intelligentsia's interest in parliaments. While Russian censorship impeded the flow of literature, newspapers afforded the Finnish actors a means to follow topical discussions in the centres of European parliamentary development. For example, the Finnish newspapers reported on the British Parliament right from the 1810s on and published excerpts from its debates. (Pekonen, 2014: 16, 70)

The Finnish press followed European and American parliamentary politics throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, but the reporting on representative assemblies was most intense during revolutions of 1830 and 1848 and their ensuing constitutional struggles. On these occasions, the press focused on discussing the organisation and procedures of assemblies as well as their role in national and regional debates. Finnish actors reflected on constitutional matters and discussed them indirectly in Finland's newspapers by presenting foreign constitutions or by carrying on the discussion in Sweden's press (Jussila 1969: 125, 177; Pekonen, 2014: 16, 70; see also the ongoing project "State Night in a New Light" by Jussi Kurunmäki, Jani Marjanen, and Maren Jonasson, which examines these strategies in detail).

The Royal Academy of Åbo (established in 1640) was moved to the grand duchy's administrative capital of Helsinki in 1828 and renamed the Imperial Alexander University. In

the revolutionary period around 1848, a parliamentary style of debating became a means to challenge the old ideals, authority and practices of politics in the university's student life. Whereas unanimity, unity and deference to the old and wise had earlier been the prevailing ideals, the acceptance of disagreement, debate and voting were now highlighted as means for studying, understanding and deciding about common matters. The focus of this parliamentarisation was on the mini-parliaments of student associations, which debated about national and European topicalities. Debating in student associations was a means to deliberate on public matters at a time when Finland lacked national representation and proper public political arenas. Debaters learned to apply European ideas in the Finnish context. In addition, Finnish actors were now able to put into practice the parliamentary lessons, offered especially by the press. While a Finnish constitution was a distant dream, the student associations created their own "constitutions" and debates on them led to the organisation of political "parties" according to different standpoints. These groups took turns in opposition. Students acquired oratorical and debating skills. (Klinge, 1967a: 178–9; Klinge, 1989: 174; Suolahti, 1974: 90)

Student associations gave special emphasis to form and procedure. Debaters used the British Parliament as an authority when disputing the practices of their mini-parliaments (Suolahti, 1974: 112–13). Interest in these "democratic practices" was seen as an essential part of strengthening the national project. (Klinge, 1967a: 178–9; Klinge, 1989: 174) For example, the future nationalist leader Yrjö Koskinen (G. Z. Forsman at that point) described the student association's parliamentary debates to his fiancée: "Although the debates include infantile aspects as much as all things human, they focus on general matters. It is not only about this or that paragraph, but about the general purpose of laws, significance of student associations, and the hopes and fears of Finland." (Suolahti, 1974: 90)

In the European spirit of the time, Finnish students learned to understand parliamentary proceeding as a means to transform disagreement into common expressions of will in an orderly and democratic manner. Debates and votes revealed the existence of conflicting opinions, articulated them and indicated their relative strengths. Active students sought to transform the student associations' decisions into decisions of the entire student union. (Klinge, 1967a: 179; 1967b: 86)

The parliamentarisation of Finnish student politics followed foreign developments, for example in Uppsala, and the focus of political interest moved from German areas to Britain and France from the mid-1840s on. (Klinge, 1967a: 179; 1967b: 86; also see e.g. the article "Om Studentlifvet i Lund" in the newspaper *Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, 20 August 1851, p. 3) In Britain, the universities' debating societies had been training grounds for statesmen and their oratorical and debating skills since the mid-eighteenth century. Union societies, organised by students, began to adopt parliamentary procedures increasingly in the late 1830s and 1840s. (Haapala, 2016: 25–48, 65–6)

The political division that dominated Finnish parliamentary life from the 1860s to the mid-1880s had its roots in the student politics of the 1850s. The division was about two different

worldviews and approaches to progress and development. The first approach, associated in the 1850s with a group called the (*Jung*) *Fennomans*, drew mostly on German idealism. It used a homogeneous conception of the people both as a starting point and as goal for national development. The second approach was associated in the 1850s with the so-called *Scandinavians*, a group of liberals who highlighted national and personal freedom as necessary conditions for the free and spontaneous development of the nation. (Klinge, 1967a: 168; 1967b: 86)

Before the last third of the nineteenth century, Swedish was the language of government, politics and public debate in Finland (Hyvärinen et al., 2003). Whereas the Fennomans emphasised the idea of “one nation, one language” and sought to raise the Finnish language to the status of a national language and a defining characteristic of Finland’s national culture, the liberals saw language mainly as a vehicle for political participation and argued that nation-building could be based on the peaceful coexistence of Finnish and Swedish. The liberals emphasised that raising the status of the Finnish language was not to be used to promote monoculturalism. (Klinge, 1967a: 168; 1967b: 86)

The two movements grew and developed within the university. The university was *alma mater* to the future political elite, and the student associations’ political activities clarified and strengthened the opposition between the two groups. The division became apparent in the appointments of professors, who were considered to have great influence on the future of the nation through their educational role. (Klinge, 1989: 550–60) The Fennomans promoted the Hegelian ideal of state officials as servants of the general will (Pekonen, 1995: 13–18, 35). Although the Fennomans argued that scholarship was the primary function of the university, they noted that scientific excellence and its nurture would help to educate patriotic officials for the fight against the pro-Swedish bureaucracy. Thus, the idea of scientific excellence was also a political question. (See e.g. “Huolettavia huhuja.” in *Uusi Suometar*, 3 November 1870, p. 1; “Suomen yliopistosta sananen. I–III.” in *Uusi Suometar*, 31 January 1876, p. 1; 2 February 1876, p. 1; 4 February 1876, p. 1)

The idea of student associations as “societies in miniature” (in Finnish *pieni yhteiskunta*), in which students learned parliamentary and constitutional practices, persisted in the late nineteenth century. In contrast to the radicalism of 1848, later Fennoman estimates of the student activities emphasised civic education and the production of patriotic model citizens. (See e.g. J. A. Lyly in “Osakunnan walitsemisesta ylioppilaaksi tullessa.” in *Wiipurin Sanomat*, 6 May 1894, p. 2)

### **Efforts to Parliamentarise the Four-Estate Diet 1863–85**

Hopes that a diet might be convened grew in Finland in the mid-1850s with the defeat of imperial Russia in the Crimean War. The changed situation within the Russian Empire was manifest in Finland in the form of relaxed censorship and the reform programme of the new Tsar Alexander II. However, instead of an immediate Diet meeting, Finnish actors had to wait

until 1862 for the Diet to be convened. The Diet of Finland assembled on 15 September 1863. After the Diet of 1863–64 the estates, consisting of the Nobility, the Clergy, the Burghers, and the Peasants, convened mostly at intervals of five and three years until the Parliamentary Reform of 1906, which transformed the four-estate Diet into a unicameral parliament, elected by universal male and female suffrage.

Although Finnish political actors were content with the long-awaited beginning of Finnish parliamentary life, the Diet of estates was considered outdated already in the 1860s. Most political actors hoped for a transition to a bicameral parliament (as had been in Sweden in 1866). Finland's position as part of the Russian Empire, however, restricted the grand duchy's parliamentary development. While Russian autocracy ruled out the dissolution of the estate system and transition to a parliamentary government, Finnish political actors focused on developing the procedures of the Diet. Revisions and innovations in the Diet rules and practices were a crucial means to overcome the four-estate division and introduce characteristics of modern parliaments into the obsolete estate system. The project was motivated by a desire to raise Finland's status in the eyes of European nations, most importantly in relation to the Russian Empire. (In detail, see Pekonen, 2014; Pekonen, 2017a)

Finnish debaters could benefit from the grand duchy's position as a latecomer to parliamentary development and use the experience of other countries by evaluating and comparing their practices and applying their ideas in Finnish discussions. The Finnish press was a central means for studying foreign parliaments and an arena for debating Finnish practices. The interest of the Finnish press in parliaments reached new heights in the 1860s. Newspapers published an increased number of specialised articles on parliaments and their practices and translated long sections of foreign parliamentary debates. (Pekonen, 2014: 37–49; Pekonen, 2017b) Whereas until the 1860s the newspaper publications on parliaments had pointed out what Finland lacked and could only dream of, in the last third of the century the press articles presented standards for developing and adjusting the Finnish system. Finnish political actors viewed and reviewed Finnish discussions through the prism of foreign models. In this sense, the nineteenth-century parliamentary publications of newspapers were “deliberations with one's self” – means to work one's way through into a new paradigm. (Pekonen, 2017a; 2017b)

Models for Diet politics were sought from the West. Not only from Sweden, whose old constitutions and *Riksdag* practice formed the framework for the Finnish Diet. This procedural transition towards Western European parliamentary models was explicated in the Finnish debates by referring to “the ABCs of parliamentary life”, “rudiments of parliamentary work”, “parliamentary order”, and “(un)parliamentary language, “(un)parliamentary practice”, and “(un)parliamentary procedure”. The shortcomings of the Finnish system and practice were described as “parliamentary deficiencies” or “parliamentary flaws”. (For examples, see Pekonen, 2014: 99, 103, 105–6, 157, 164–6, 172–3, 185, 193, 196, 199, 219, 222, 246–7, 261–2, 280–1)

Learning from foreign experiences and practices was considered an essential part of the national project. The liberal Professor of Constitutional Law Leo Mechelin (1876a: 20) explained this in terms of education: “History clearly shows that in matters of constitutional legislation nations go to school to each other, and that nations must learn and borrow from other nations.” Even strict nationalists who urgently warned about the “blind adoption” and “careless use” of foreign models and examples highlighted Finnish characteristics in comparison to foreign examples and by invoking foreign conceptualizations (see e.g. Snellman, 1861: 532–3).

Finnish parliamentarisation was a struggle between competing conceptions of parliament. When the Diet meetings began in the 1860s, the Diet’s rules and practices were far from clear and fixed, and professors such as J. Ph. Palmén (1861) and J. W. Rosenborg (1863) served as authorities to interpret the rules (Lilius, 1974: 149–52; Krusius-Ahrenberg, 1981: 95, 127, 139–52). Political groups had different ideas about the role, purposes and character of the Finnish national assembly and about the rules and practices on which the assembly’s work should be based. These competing conceptions of parliament were largely formulated by academic politicians. In light of these conceptions, Finnish political groups looked to different foreign assemblies and discussions in search of applicable models (Pekonen, 2014: 55–6, 61–2, 65–84, 92–102; Pekonen, 2017a).

### **The Role of Professor Politicians**

Some general aspects can be noted about the role of professors in the late nineteenth-century Finnish political debates. Finnish professor politicians received their academic and political education mainly at the Imperial Alexander University of Helsinki, which was the only university in Finland. Professors were often leading figures and ideologists for political groups. They were frequently deemed the best and most active speakers and debaters in the Diet (see e.g. “L. Mechelin” in *Päivälehti*, 24 November 1899, p. 1). Whereas most Finnish political actors had very few opportunities to practise their oratorical skills, professors were accustomed to public speaking and a considerable number of them had been active debaters during their student years.

The professor politicians were eager to draw upon foreign discussions and examples in their argumentation. They followed foreign newspapers and literature, had foreign language skills, and spent periods abroad travelling and studying (Lilja, 2012; Mylly, 2002: 264–80; Tommila, 1989). Consequently, these professors examined developments in the peripheral Grand Duchy of Finland as part of a wider international context. In this sense, they played an important role in tying Finnish debates to European developments and in applying European ideas and concepts to the Finnish experience.

The professors discussed parliamentary politics in a wider historical and theoretical framework. These examinations often took place in the press, which formed a close extension and a preparatory arena for the Diet debates (Pekonen, 2014: 37–49; Pekonen, 2017b). The

professors founded, edited and were regular invited contributors in newspapers and periodicals (Klinge, 1989: 707–9). In the press, academic politicians were able to publish arguments and theorizations which, if delivered in parliamentary speeches, would have appeared excessive or irrelevant.

The second paragraph of § 11 of the Finnish Diet Act of 1869 granted two seats to professors in the Clergy estate and gave the university the right to elect them. The drafters of the Diet Act perceived § 11 as one of the sections designed to overcome the limitations of the obsolete system of estate representation. The Finnish estates and constitutional reformists justified the inclusion of professors and the university in the representation by noting the university's vital contribution to the development of the Finnish polity. According to them, the university had, among other things, initiated Finland's political development, educated Finland's finest men, and made possible the indispensable and fruitful interaction with other nations. The reformists and the estates took the view that professors could contribute their invaluable expertise and deeper insight to the Diet deliberations. (Borgareståndet, 1863–64, I: 117–19, 168–9; Hans Kejsarliga Majestäts Nådiga propositioner, 1867, I, N:o 1: 30, 39–40; Grundlagskomitén, 1866).

A similar decision to include professors among the Clergy was made in the Swedish *Riksdag* in 1823 (Rydin, 1873: 23), and professors such as E. G. Geijer of Uppsala University played a prominent role in the four-estate *Riksdag*. The transition to the bicameral *Riksdag* in 1866 reduced the influence of professors. (Klinge, 1989: 673) In Britain (and its colonies), university representation dated back to the beginning of the seventeenth century, yet university seats in parliament were not, however, designated for professors. In the nineteenth century, their purpose was more generally to return men of intellect and superior education. The franchise of the university constituencies was restricted to male graduates holding a doctoral or master's degree. (Meisel, 2011)

Although granting the professors two seats did not bring about a drastic change in the constitution of the Finnish Clergy estate, it paved the way for the rise of professor politicians, who later played a prominent role in Finnish political life, such as Professor of History Johan Rikhard Danielson(-Kalmari). Furthermore, the decision to give the university the right to elect professors to the Diet strengthened the ties between the university and national politics, which had been established when the university became a central political forum in the 1850s and early 1860s. It was a two-way process: In addition to educating state officials, journalists, and (university) teachers, the university and its student politics trained future Diet members. Professor representatives, for their part, brought their Diet experience back to the university. In this sense, the university's role was also important in the transition from the bureaucracy of the “night of the state” to the parliamentary practice of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In addition to the Clergy, professors were typically elected to the Nobility as representatives of their families. They were often personally ennobled. In the Peasant estate, university lecturers and other university staff worked as secretaries, interpreters, assistants, and officials.



University personnel were occasionally elected to the Burghers as representatives of small towns, which could not afford to send their representatives to the Diet in Helsinki. (Klinge, 1989: 683–5)

Professors were already elected to the Diet of 1863–64. Three professors of theology (G. Geitlin, F. L. Schauman, and A. F. Granfelt) were elected to the Clergy because they served as vicars. Professors E. af Brunér (Roman literature), K. F. von Willebrand (pathology), and A. E. Arppe (chemistry, the rector of the university) were members of the Nobility. The first professors elected to the Clergy by the university (the Diet of 1872) were Professor of Mathematics and Rector L. L. Lindelöf and Professor of Criminal Law and Legal History K. G. Ehrström. Professors were also elected to the Clergy as representatives of the teachers of the dioceses. In this manner, Professors Yrjö Koskinen (history), Z. J. Cleve (education), C. G. von Essen (theology), and A. F. Granfelt (theology) were also elected to the Diet of 1872, while Professors F. J. von Becker (pharmacology), R. A. Montgomery (civil law), J. A. J. Pippingsköld (obstetrics and paediatrics), and Th. Rein (philosophy) were members of the Nobility. (Klinge, 1989: 672–4) Thus, in the Diet of 1872, every sixth member of the Clergy was a professor (six out of thirty-six members; ~16.7 per cent).

The prominent role of professors in Finnish politics was quite exceptional by European standards. While professors became familiar faces in Diet politics and prominent defenders of Finland's constitutional status in relation to the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth century, lawyers dominated, especially in those countries with more established parliamentary cultures (e.g. Le Béguec, 2003; Van den Braak, 2015). Furthermore, Finnish professors maintained their position after the transition to the unicameral Parliament and universal suffrage in 1906. Although the democratisation of suffrage and organisation of mass parties reduced the influence of old elites and the Weberian *Honoratioren* ("political notables") internationally (Weber, 1919), many of the Diet professors stood for election and were elected to the new unicameral *Eduskunta* (*Lan[d]tdag* in Swedish until the Finnish Constitution Act of 1919). Altogether eighteen professors were MPs in the 200-seat Parliament between 1907 and 1914.<sup>1</sup> The relative share of professors in plenary debates, however, diminished if we compare the *Eduskunta* to the small Clergy estate, which had usually around thirty-five members. Yet the professors retained their expert roles in committees and were politically active outside the Parliament and in the press.

The professors played a crucial role in transferring practices and experiences from the Diet to the *Eduskunta*. Four members of the fourteen-member Parliamentary Reform Committee of 1905–06, which designed the electoral system and the procedures of the unicameral

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<sup>1</sup> Professors in the early *Eduskunta* (1907–14) with Diet experience: J. R. Danielson-Kalmari (history), E. Estlander (legal history), Kustavi Grotenfelt (history), Th. Homén (physics), L. Mechelin (law), E. G. Palmén (history), G. G. Rosenqvist (dogmatics and ethics), J. W. Runeberg (medicine), A. Serlachius (criminal law and legal history), E. N. Setälä (Finnish language and literature), K. J. Ståhlberg (law), and R. A. Wrede (law). Professors in the early *Eduskunta* (1907–14) without Diet experience: O. Aschan (chemistry), H. Gebhard (agricultural economics and statistics), F. V. Gustafsson (literature), A. Juselius (hydraulic engineering and site preparation), A. O. Kairamo (Kihlman) (botany), and M. Soininen (education). (Klinge, 1989: 686–9; Palonen, 2015: 174–7)

Parliament, had experience as both professors and Diet members.<sup>2</sup> (On the work of the Reform Committee in detail, see Mylly, 2006: 107–9, 118–21, 187–90). In terms of the *Eduskunta*'s procedures, the Reform of 1906 was a continuation of a learning process begun in the nineteenth century (Pekonen, 2014; Pekonen, 2017a). The trend of high representation of professors continued. For example, the number of professors among ministers remained high by international standards from 1917 until the Second World War (Palonen, 2015).

Professors were highly respected in Finnish political life. They were not publicly criticized for being politicians or vice versa, apart from occasional popular ridicule of their rhetorical style and concern about their absence from teaching duties (e.g. Serlachius, 1908: 273). Whereas the Diet typically convened at intervals of five and three years, parliamentary and academic calendars began to overlap more dramatically only after the transition to the unicameral *Eduskunta*, whose sessions were organised annually.

Professionalisation of parliamentary politics was vehemently opposed, especially by non-socialist parties. As a result, the remuneration system of the *Eduskunta* was designed to allow (or compel) the MPs to keep their extra-parliamentary jobs and offices, and the duration of parliamentary sessions was set at ninety days in the Parliament Act of 1906. (Eduskuntakomitea, 1906) The *Eduskunta* eventually adopted annual wages in 1947 as the sessions continued almost throughout the year.

Professors' expertise in the fields of (constitutional) law, history, and economy was highly appreciated in politics. These disciplines were considered to serve the national interest. Professors were leading authorities in the Diet's inter-estate committees, which were designed to overcome the division of four separately deliberating estates. The committees prepared matters for discussion and votes carried out in the four separate estates. At the final stage of the legislative process, the committees had the duty to accommodate the differences between the separate estate decisions. The committee system gave prominent estate members significant influence in the Diet deliberations. (On the committee system in detail, see Pekonen, 2017a)

For professors, the Diet afforded an opportunity to make good use of their expertise and perform a national duty, but it was also an arena in which professors could realise their ambitions. Although professors were part of the elite, the prestige of the Diet was undeniable and offered opportunities for further upward mobility. Taking an active role in Diet politics helped professors to enhance their social and political status in the grand duchy, for example in the Senate. If one wanted to be somebody in Finland, Diet politics could not be neglected.

### **J. V. Snellman, Yrjö Koskinen, and the Fennomans**

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Hermanson (law), Th. Rein (philosophy), E. N. Setälä (Finnish language and literature), and J. R. Danielson (history).

The Fennomans' theoretical foundations and practical political goals were formulated by Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806–81). Snellman was Professor of Philosophy 1856–63 at the University of Helsinki. He was a member of the Nobility 1867–78 and a member of the Senate, the “domestic government”, 1863–78. Snellman is considered Finland's national philosopher, who raised Hegelianism to the position of a “state philosophy” (Pulkkinen, 1987: 54–69). Snellman became a cult figure at an early age and continued to be a venerated master among Fennoman students decades after his death. A number of Fennoman leaders followed Snellman's Hegelian ideas. The most prominent of these was Yrjö Koskinen (1830–1903), who was Professor of General History 1863–76 and Professor of Finnish, Russian and Scandinavian History 1876–82 (on the scholarly connections between Snellman and Koskinen, see Koskimies, 1974: 242–55). Koskinen endowed the Fennoman ideological programme with concrete form in his active participation in daily politics in the press and as a member of the Diet (Clergy 1872–82, Nobility 1885–1900). Interestingly, Snellman has traditionally been treated as a “statesman” (in Finnish *valtiomies*) rather than as a “politician” (in Finnish *poliitikko*) in Finland, despite his significant role in national politics.

Snellman initially proclaimed his main political and philosophical ideas in the 1840s and repeated and explained them from the 1860s on, as Finnish political life became more active. Like Hegel, Snellman understood history as a process of the realisation of reason, as a movement towards a predetermined purpose composed of successive stages. (Rantala, 2013: 113, 235) According to Snellman, reasonable political reforms should be proportionate to each nation's level of education and phase of historical development. (Pulkkinen, 1989: 8) Hence he argued that the estate system was no insurmountable challenge to the realisation of the national interest in Finland, if representatives followed the prevailing opinion, in other words, the wishes and needs of the nation, articulated in rational public discussion and transformed into concrete proposals by the government.

Drawing on Hegel, Snellman perceived as the primary purpose of state institutions the consensual expression and enactment of actions that reflected the prevailing opinion. Snellman argued that the rational was not what an individual thought, but rather that which was commonly acknowledged. He tasked the public discussion conducted in the press with ascertaining what that rational prevailing opinion might be. (E.g. Pekonen, 2014: 74–7) Similarly to Bismarck's views on the German *Reichstag* (Palonen, 2012: 55), Snellman assigned “legislative assemblies” or “representative assemblies” a minimal deliberative character. For Snellman, legislation was not a task of parliament or any other state power, but of the nation. Legislation was an act of the general will, which could not be based on particular interests. (Pohjantammi, 2003: 370–1) Instead, Snellman argued that in a political system the representative assembly should be an efficient ratifier of governmental proposals in consultation with public opinion. Snellman saw the government as a safeguard against a representative assembly susceptible to the fleeting “opinions of the day”, “interests on an election day”, occasional majorities and party interests. (See e.g. Snellman, 1842: 387–97; 1862: 341; 1898: 79) For Snellman, parliamentary deliberation and debate had a fairly

insignificant role in the stream of historical becoming. Debate was a passing phase unable to influence the ultimate outcome of historical development.

Snellman's ideas on history and progress were linked not only to the German and Hegelian concepts, but also to French historians such as Jules Michelet and François Guizot (Rantala, 2013: 235). In addition, Snellman's political thought resembled Guizot's early doctrinarian texts, which, although considered old-fashioned by many, aroused interest in Finland again after the publication of Guizot's memoirs in the late 1850s and early 1860s. Guizot was continually acclaimed, for example, in Snellman's periodical *Litteraturblad* and Yrjö Koskinen's periodical *Kirjallinen Kuukauslehti*. (Pekonen, 2014: 79–84) Snellman and Guizot shared a predilection for reason and truth. They saw public discussion and representation as means to discern the rational principle amid the complexity and pluralism of society. The purpose was to create unity and consensus by banishing conflict and dissent. (Pekonen, 2014: 73–84; Rosanvallon, 2006: 117–26; 1985: 26–8, 55–7)

These aspects of the nationalist Fennomans ideology did not concur with the idea of accepting and benefitting from disagreement, which in nineteenth-century Europe was characteristic of the rise of parliaments, and which had also been highlighted in the parliamentarisation of Finnish student politics around 1848. The Fennomans turned their back on this aspiration. Drawing on Snellman, the mainstream Fennomans considered that the main purpose of the representative assembly was to implement a ready-made political programme, which they marketed as the prevailing public opinion, and especially under the influence of Yrjö Koskinen, as “the will of the people” (Liikanen, 2003: 276–7). Yet, due to Finland's backwardness and low level of education, the Fennomans spoke with suspicion about the extension of suffrage until the 1880s.

The Fennomans considered that the best and most efficient procedural means to carry out their programme was the Diet's committee system, which was developed from the Swedish *Riksdag* model in the 1860s. The aim of this elaborate committee system was to facilitate efficient inter-estate negotiation and reaching decisions by combining different decisions of the separate estates in a multi-phased process of accommodation. (Pekonen, 2017a) The committee negotiations might be continued and repeated several times until a sufficient majority of three estates (in most matters) was reached. The Fennomans emphasised that deliberation in representative assemblies (especially in their committees) was ideally about factual investigation, examination and clarification. (For detail, see Pekonen, 2017a; 2014: 145–80)

### **Leo Mechelin and the *Dagblad* Liberals**

A liberal group organized around the newspaper *Helsingfors Dagblad* (1861–89) challenged the Fennomans conception of politics and representative assemblies. Political groups were closely linked to newspapers in late nineteenth-century Finland. The newspapers' editorial offices were an important meeting point for the like-minded politically active. The main

newspapers published their political programmes and influenced (or even decided) the nominations of candidates for elections. Newspapers were the organs of political groups and political “parties” *per se*. Newspapers gave birth to the more established political parties with a proper party organisation at the beginning of the twentieth century. (Aarnio, 2003: 414)

Leo Mechelin (1839–1914) was a leading figure of the liberal *Dagbladist* group from the founding of *Helsingfors Dagblad* until the group’s dissolution in the mid-1880s. Mechelin was Professor of Constitutional Law 1874–82 and Acting Professor of Economics 1877–82. In the Diet he was a member of the Burghers in 1872 and thereafter a member of the Nobility until the Parliamentary Reform of 1906. Mechelin was over thirty years younger than Snellman. In the 1870s, however, the two engaged in joint debates, which culminated in 1880 in Snellman’s verbal destruction of the Liberal Party Programme drafted by Mechelin (see e.g. *Ridderskapet och Adeln*, 1877, II: 875–902; 1877, V: 947–1009; Snellman, 1878; Snellman, 1880).

Mechelin attended Snellman’s lectures on “philosophical jurisprudence” at the university in the spring semester of 1857, but German philosophy and its purely theoretical speculation never appealed to Mechelin (Rein, 1915: 13; Nordenstreng, 1936: 24). Instead, he turned to legal positivism and liberal political and constitutional theory (Stubb, 2012: 28, 37–8, 52–4, 57, 275–83, 291). As a student Mechelin was a keen debater. He had talent in improvised speech and could react to unexpected turns in disputes. Mechelin’s long-time friend, and colleague from the university and the Diet, Robert Montgomery, praised Mechelin’s debating skills by describing him as “a cat that always lands on its feet” (Rein, 1915: 15).

Mechelin’s interest in debate was not confined to celebrating his personal skills. Mechelin was fascinated by French and British political culture and followed the debates of the two countries closely. It is no surprise that when reporting about his trip to Paris in 1866 Mechelin devoted a considerable amount of space to describing current affairs in French parliamentary politics as well as speeches in parliament and their reception (Mechelin, 1866). Mechelin was spellbound by French eloquence (Nordenstreng, 1936: 65). He highlighted Britain and its fusion of powers as the prime and most emulated model for European constitutional systems. (Mechelin, 1876a: 20–2)

Studies on Mechelin have focused on his role as a defender of Finland’s constitutional status in relation to the Russian Empire (e.g. Stubb, 2012). Nevertheless, like Snellman, Mechelin was also a political theorist. Mechelin rejected Snellman’s Hegelianism and argued that the Fennoman stress on consensus was based on an erroneous and misleading interpretation of politics. For Mechelin, political questions could only be examined “from different sides”, and thus could not be based on any ultimate truths or rational spirit. Mechelin argued that “There is no absolute truth, no absolute wisdom in politics; new opinions, new proposals occur constantly only to be asserted or rejected.” (Mechelin, 1879: 116)

Mechelin argued that state institutions should encourage competition in a manner that allowed the best and the most able citizens and thoroughly debated decisions to guide political life. In

this vein, Mechelin described party formation and party disputes as normal symptoms of a vibrant political life. He argued that healthy party competition benefitted a country's political development by overcoming one-sidedness, abuse and exaggeration (Mechelin, 1879: 116–19). This was in stark contrast to Snellman and Yrjö Koskinen, who saw all parties and factions as a threat to national unity (with the exception of the Fennoman Finnish Party) (Liikanen, 1995: 133). Ideally, not even Fennomania was supposed to be a party; but the Finnish people were supposed to *be* Fennomania (Vares, 2000: 23). Mechelin took the view that the competition between opposing opinions and arguments was the lifeblood of parliamentary work. In contrast to the Fennomans' emphasis on finding consensus and unanimity, Mechelin noted that debate in parliament often clarified and intensified divergence of opinion. (Mechelin, 1876b: 170–1)

Mechelin and the Dagblad liberals aimed to develop the Diet procedures based on a conception of dissensual debate, which they claimed was characteristic of modern parliaments in contrast to the estate assemblies of the past. Whereas the Fennomans evaluated the Diet as a legislative or representative assembly by virtue of its ability to implement the necessary reforms regarding Finnish language and education, Dagbladists highlighted the assembly's debating qualities and their development. Dagblad liberals argued that the best, most effective and thorough means of deliberating a question was to debate it *pro et contra*, for and against. In parliament, opinions and arguments should be made to clash and test each other's strengths and weaknesses in an open plenary debate. Instead of seeking consensus, the purpose of parliamentary deliberation was that, after a direct procedurally regulated debate, the superiority of certain arguments over others was determined not on the basis of their truthfulness and rationality, but in terms of votes cast. Only the Diet had the right to speak in the name of the people after a thorough debate *pro et contra*. (Mechelin, 1876b: 170–1; 1879: 116–20)

The Dagbladists' conception of debate was especially indebted to their admiration for the British parliamentary culture of debate and liberal authors such as John Stuart Mill. *Helsingfors Dagblad* presented British procedures and debating practices regularly (e.g. “Det engelska parlamentet.” in *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 31 July 1862, pp. 2–3; 1 August 1862, pp. 2–3; 4 August 1862, pp. 2–3), and discussed and marketed Mill's books (Pekonen, 2014: 65–7).

The Fennomans criticized the Dagbladists' “blind adoption” and “careless use” of foreign models. For example, the Fennoman historian E. G. Palmén (professor 1882–1911) ridiculed Dagbladist Anders Herman Chydenius's way of imitating British parliamentary decorum; his manner of referring to estate members according to their constituencies rather than their names, and his style of speaking through the chair instead of fellow members directly in plenary debates. (Palmén, 1878: 99)

Dagbladists perceived committee negotiation and plenary debate as different modes of deliberation and gave the latter a higher parliamentary value. They sought to combat the dominance of the Diet's committee system by using an old Swedish procedure of *plenum plenorum* as a vehicle to import features of *pro et contra* debate into the estate Diet. *Plenum*

*plenorum*, introduced in Finland in the Diet Act of 1869, afforded an opportunity to assemble all four estates in the same plenary hall for a joint discussion. Dagblad liberals advocated a more popular use of *plenum plenorum* for over twenty years, proposed procedural amendments to it and even tried to make it a permanent and obligatory part of the Diet procedure. (Pekonen, 2017a)

While the competing conceptions of the Fennomans and the Dagbladists were indebted to European discussions, they were also connected to the Finnish political context. The Swedish-speaking liberals highlighted debate in order to challenge the Fennomans' definitions of the people and its best interest and the idea of the Fennomans as their sole advocates. For Dagbladists, debate was a means to get the voice of the "reasonable" minority heard, whereas the Fennomans thought that debate complicated and obstructed the passing of reforms necessary for the majority outside the assembly. (Pekonen, 2014)

The division between Dagblad liberals and Fennomans lost its significance on the political map at the beginning of the 1880s. The liberals failed to establish an official Liberal Party, and the old Fennomans were unable to stop their movement from breaking up into factions. First, in 1880, a group of liberal Fennomans who took a neutral stance on the language question broke away from the Finnish Party and established the periodical *Valvoja*. The main actors of the *Valvoja* group were the historians E. G. Palmén and J. R. Danielson (professors respectively since 1882 and 1880), the linguist O. E. Tudeer (professor since 1885), the literature scholar Valfrid Vasenius, and the Professor of Philosophy Thiodolf Rein. In the 1880s, the young student generation, born mostly in the 1860s, started to challenge the old Fennomans' leadership and ideology. A group of so-called Young Finns formed a liberal and internationally oriented faction within the Finnish Party in the 1880s and published their own programme in 1894. The Young Finns were strictly Fennomans regarding the language question, but active supporters of radical democratic reform.

These developments were fuelled by changes in the university and political climate in general. A generation change took place among the professors in the early 1880s. For example, Leo Mechelin and Yrjö Koskinen left the university and became senators. Snellman died in 1881. The old Fennomans' idealism was challenged by an unprecedented force. The young generation drew on empirical naturalism, individualism and moral relativism, and stressed the need for a wide and active application of European influences. Young students gave emphasis to the idea of progress that emanated from the doctrine of evolution and the developments and explanations of natural sciences. (Klinge, 1989: 632–5; Leino-Kaukiainen, 1988: 462; Paaskoski, 2002: 21–80; Vares, 2000: 31–3)

## **Concluding Remarks**

What was the long-term significance of these early debates? Did professor politicians leave a more permanent mark on Finnish parliamentary culture? The Finnish Parliament has been categorized as a "working parliament", in which the role of plenary speaking and debate are

traditionally belittled. Parliamentary and electoral rhetoric has emphasised representation of a homogeneous and unified people and nation. The work of the *Eduskunta* has largely focused on checking the details of bills and ratifying the governmental programme of the winning party or coalition. The primary work of the Parliament is seen as taking place in committees behind closed doors, where deliberative talk is practised freely and seen to have the real influence that plenary speech lacks. (Pekonen, 2011; Nousiainen, 2006: 332) The conception of the Finnish Parliament as a representative assembly has dominated both the political debates and scholarly discussions about the *Eduskunta*.

The roots of this tradition in Finland can be found in Snellman's and his Fennomans' conception of parliament. The late nineteenth-century Fennomans considered parliament to be a legislative and representative assembly, whose duty was to carry out a political programme and reforms based on the "prevailing opinion" and "will of the people". The Fennoman ideas were typical of nationalists in many European countries; they reflect a wider tension in the change in European parliamentary politics. In the late nineteenth century, parliaments faced growing pressure to lay themselves open to public scrutiny and participation and to representatives from wider circles of the population by extensions of suffrage. The Fennoman conception of parliament was a prelude to the breakthrough of party democracy and mass political parties in Finland.

The Fennomans presented themselves as the representatives of the majority, but they had problems realising their programme on a satisfactory schedule within the Diet, where, despite optimization of committee procedures, evaluation of different alternatives in different phases of deliberation was still inbuilt into the procedure. The Fennomans took the view that debate often merely complicated and obstructed the passing of reforms necessary for the Finnish-speaking majority of the people. Limitations of estate representation impeded the Fennomans from gaining a sufficient majority in the Diet until the end of the nineteenth century, as the Nobility and the Burghers remained in the hands of the pro-Swedish members of the Swedish Party. These aspects led to a Fennoman critique of debate as "all talk, no action", which resurfaced in the early *Eduskunta* (see e.g. "Puhetulwa eduskunnassa." in *Wiipuri*, 22 September 1907, p. 2).

The Diet's procedural emphasis on committee work and the Fennomans' belittlement of plenary debate for and against were transferred to the unicameral *Eduskunta*. The procedure of the *Eduskunta* was not designed to encourage the clash of sides in a debate but rather to restrain open dispute and controversy and to force parties to compromise (Eduskuntakomitea, 1906). The Parliamentary Reform of 1906 democratised suffrage and gave rise to mass parties. The Finnish Social Democratic Party (SDP), which became Europe's largest socialist party in the first *Eduskunta* elections of 1907 (eighty members out of two hundred; an absolute majority in the elections of 1916), highlighted a conception of parliament that was very similar to that of the Fennomans. The SDP focused on carrying out a predetermined programme grounded on the "will of the majority of the people", consisting of the workers and the poor. The Social Democrats shared the Fennomans' demand for urgent and historically inevitable reform, and they soon became frustrated with the *Eduskunta*'s inability



to implement important social and political reforms, especially in the lack of parliamentary government. On an ideological level, both Fennomans and socialist materialism were distrustful of *pro et contra* debate as a deliberative tool. Both groups saw the conception of a debating parliament as an old aristocratic ideal, which made parliament a mere elitist debating club designed to hamper the majority's influence in decision-making. As a result of universal suffrage, the Fennomans lost their monopoly as the representatives of the majority of the people and some of them began, in turn, to highlight the *Eduskunta*'s deliberative qualities against the socialist efforts to reduce it to a mere representative and legislative assembly. (For detail, see Pekonen, 2014: 64–5, 135–43, 301–5)

Eventually, the Dagbladist efforts to include aspects of debate for and against in the procedure became a lost history in Finnish parliamentary life, which has been neglected both in the research and public discussion about the Finnish Parliament. The Dagbladists were the only notable group in early Finnish parliamentary life that mounted a concerted challenge to the dominance of representative and legislative conceptions of parliament with their idea of dissensual debate that contested both the philosophical and procedural foundations of consensus. Similarly to the Fennomans and Social Democrats, the Dagbladists can be viewed as products of their time and wider European discussions. The fundamental ideas of the Dagbladist conception of a debating parliament were typical of liberals internationally (see e.g. Ihalainen, Ilie & Palonen, 2016).

The conception of a debating parliament is not, however, a mere sidenote or a bygone phase in the prehistory of modern parliaments. The balance between the representative, legislative and debating qualities of parliaments has been a question of continuous dispute; they have been given different priorities and emphases in different contexts. Despite democratisation, transition to party democracy and threats such as the rise of the radical far-right in the interwar period, many parliaments remained important arenas for debating, presenting dissent and challenging monolithic national culture. Some MPs and parliamentary staff continued to endorse debating as an inherent part of parliamentary politics and procedure. This is partly true also of the Finnish Parliament, although the introduction of a semi-presidential system after independence in 1919 further undermined the *Eduskunta*'s deliberative role. After the dissolution of the semi-presidential system in the constitutional reform of 2000, new procedural means have been introduced in order to facilitate the clash of opposing sides in plenary debates (Hidén, 2011: 88–95).

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