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Internationalization and democratization interconnected: the Swedish and Finnish parliaments debating membership in the League of Nations in 1920

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of the First World War, constitutions of European states were widely democratized and parliamentarized, and similar turns were expected in international relations as a consequence of the creation of the League of Nations. This comparative analysis of Swedish and Finnish parliamentary debates on the League membership focusing on conceptualizations of the national versus international demonstrates how democratization and internationalization merged discursively. This happened to a greater extent than in the British parliament or the First Assembly of the League. Such entanglements followed from the interconnectedness of constitutional and foreign policy questions during preceding disputes on constitutional reform when Britain and Germany had provided competing models, the determination of the ministries to reconfirm national constitutional compromises by joining an international organization of democratic nations, an exceptional possibility for parliamentarians to debate foreign policy and willingness among the leftist oppositions to extend the democratization and parliamentarization of the constitutions to the field of foreign policy. After a turn from German to British political models and under a Bolshevik threat, British internationalist arguments found a positive reception among the Swedish Liberal–Social Democratic coalition and the Finnish bourgeois coalition as well as half of the redefined Finnish Social Democratic Party. Rightist and far-leftist opponents of the League were left to the margins as the membership was used to redefine the polities as internationally oriented democracies.

KEYWORDS

Internationalization; democratization; the League of Nations; British parliament; Finnish parliament; Swedish parliament

The First World War constituted a turning point both for parliamentary democracy at the level of nation states and for international relations.¹ Most European states were forced to

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¹R. Bessel, 'Revolution', in J. Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, 3 vols, (Cambridge, 2014–15), vol. 2, pp. 126–44; J. Leonhard, *Die Büchse der Pandora. Geschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Munich, 2014) on legitimacy crises. For summaries of the state of research, see P. Ihalainen and S. Matikainen, 'The British Parliament and Foreign Policy in the 20th Century: Towards Increasing Parliamentarisation?' *Parliamentary History* 35, (2016), pp. 1–14 and P. Ihalainen, *The Springs of Democracy: National and Transnational Debates on Constitutional Reform in the British, German, Swedish and Finnish Parliaments, 1917–1919* (Helsinki, 2017).

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reform their constitutions in order to restore the legitimacy of representative government, which had deteriorated as the result of inconsistencies between popular expectations and what the wartime states could offer. This restoration of legitimacy was commonly done by extending suffrage or by strengthening the parliamentary responsibility of the governments.

The publics of Western European states blamed secret diplomacy run by the executive for having led peoples to the war. The democratic supervision of foreign policy by the people through universal suffrage and national parliaments was generally seen as the way to avoid another war. Future expectations were high due to wartime rhetoric on fighting to make the world safe for democracy. They led to a brief international moment of democracy in the immediate aftermath of the war.² The year 1919 has been seen in recent research as ‘a global constitutional moment’ also due to the opening of international relations to nongovernmental organizations. What has been characterized theoretically as ‘cosmopolitan democracy’ aimed at the creation of an international assembly elected by peoples and responsible to them.³

While both democratization in nation states⁴ and attempts to move towards supranational decision making in international relations⁵ have been extensively explored in previous research, the interrelation between these developments in post-World War I political discourse has received less attention. While national historiographies typically view the constitutional reform processes as national phenomena, recent research has pointed at their transnational discursive interconnectedness.⁶ The transnational nature of changing international relations has been more obvious. Traumatic war experiences had given rise to ideas about a league of nations that would prevent future cycles of international tensions from leading to another conflict. British and American liberals and many Dutch, Scandinavian and Swiss politicians had been active in this field.⁷ It will be demonstrated in this article how many contemporaries viewed the democratization of nation states on the one hand and the formation of international organizations on the other as interconnected. We shall analyse how discourses on democracy at national and international level interacted in national parliaments.

The idea of parliamentary representation in international relations was an older one: it had surfaced in nineteenth-century British liberal internationalist ideas about a universal ‘Parliament of Man’.⁸ It had also been seen by the international labour movement as a way to advance the cause of the working class. The democratization of foreign policy had

²D.M. Green, ‘Liberal Moments and Democracy’s Durability: Comparing Global Outbreaks of Democracy – 1918, 1945, 1989’, *Studies in Comparative International Development* 34, (1999), p. 88; Ihalainen, *Springs*.

³S. Charnovitz, ‘The Emergence of Democratic Participation in Global Governance (Paris, 1919)’, *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 10, (2003), pp. 45–77, reviewing Susan Marks and David Held. For recent discussion in international relations and implications for democratic institutions at other levels, see D. Archibugi and D. Held, ‘Cosmopolitan Democracy: Paths and Agents’, *Ethics & International Affairs* 25, (2011), pp. 433–61, esp. p. 434.

⁴For an overview, see J.-W. Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-century Europe* (New Haven, 2011), pp. 19–20.

⁵D. Laguna (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements Between the World Wars* (London, 2011); M. Mazower, *Governing the World. The History of an Idea* (London, 2012); G. Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 2013); G. Sluga and P. Clavin (eds), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History* (Oxford, 2017).

⁶Ihalainen, *Springs*, with discussion on British, German, Swedish and Finnish research on constitutional reform.

⁷J.V. Tallqvist, *Nationernas Förbund* (Helsinki, 1920), p. 21. Initially a presentation at the society Pro lure Nationum, 31 January 1920.

⁸N. Götz, ‘On the Origins of “Parliamentary Diplomacy”: Scandinavian “Bloc Politics” and Delegation Policy in the League of Nations’, *Cooperation and Conflict* 40, (2005), p. 273; P. Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations* (New York, 2006), p. 8; H. McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c.1918–45* (Manchester, 2012), p. 2.

become a programmatic goal for some liberals and revisionist and Marxist socialists during the war, while for conservatives both further democratization at home and redefinition of international relations often appeared as violations of traditional social and political order. Conservatives generally continued to prioritize national sovereignty run by the government of the capable. Yet also within the competing ideological camps, the internationalization and democratization of foreign affairs were conceptualized in competing ways in the postwar situation. Here I discuss the complexity of reactions to League of Nations membership in two generally overlooked national contexts, in Sweden and Finland. Both countries were nexuses of great-power interests and competing transnational discourses on democracy and hence deserve more attention.

The early twentieth-century projects for an international court, wartime schemes for a league of nations and negotiations on its Covenant in Paris are well covered in literature. In research on British internationalism, the development of the principles of openness, democratic control and public opinion as means to revolutionize international relations has received attention.⁹ In Swedish and Finnish histories of foreign policy, the diplomatic aspects of and documents on League membership have been explored while the dynamism of parliamentary debate has received less attention.¹⁰ While the executive focused on the practicalities of membership, openly ideological discussion took place in parliaments and in the closely connected party press. These debates on membership can be analysed as nexuses of competing – partly transnational – discourses on the internationalization and democratization of foreign policy that encountered each other in Sweden and Finland in spring 1920.¹¹ This article – instead of focusing on formal diplomacy – is interested in how parliamentarians made use of the exceptional opportunity constituted by the membership issue to get involved in foreign policy debate and to (at least temporarily) extend their role in foreign policy.¹² The extension of international organizations since the First World War opened new possibilities for the democratic control of foreign policy and transnational interaction that affected the constitutional relationship between the parliaments and the executive in foreign affairs.¹³

Sweden and Finland had avoided direct involvement in the war but the war nevertheless led to such external and internal challenges to the legitimacy of their political systems that both polities were transformed. Sweden had observed neutrality though its monarch and the Right¹⁴ viewed Imperial Germany as their political model and potential ally while

⁹The diplomatic process has been covered by P.J. Yearwood, 'On the Safe and Right Lines': The Lloyd George Government and the Origins of the League of Nations, 1916–1918', *Historical Journal* 32, (1989), pp. 131–55; R. Henig, *Versailles and After 1919–1933*, 2nd edn (London, 1995); J. Wintzer, *Deutschland und der Völkerbund 1918–1926* (Paderborn, 2006); P.J. Yearwood, *Guarantee of Peace: The League of Nations in British Policy 1914–1925* (Oxford, 2009) and McCarthy, *British People*. Jörn Leonhard is currently working on a book on the peace conferences that followed the First World War. See also K. Millen-Penn, 'Democratic Control, Public Opinion, and League Diplomacy', *World Affairs* 157, (1995), pp. 207–18, and Sluga and Clavin (eds), *Internationalisms*.

¹⁰S. Tunberg, *Den svenska utrikesförvaltningens historia* (Uppsala, 1935), pp. 470–471; J. Nevakivi, *Ulkoasiainhallinnon historia, 1918–1956* (Helsinki, 1998). See, however, S. Shepard Jones, *The Scandinavian States and the League of Nations* (Princeton, 1939), pp. 78–9, and E. Lönnroth, *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, vol. 5 (Stockholm, 1959), in N. Ahnlund (ed.), *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, 5 vols (Stockholm, 1951–61), pp. 34–6.

¹¹On methodology, see M. Halonen, P. Ihalainen and T. Saarinen, 'Diverse Discourses in Time and Space: Historical, Discourse Analytical and Ethnographic Approaches to Multi-sited Language Policy Discourse', in M. Halonen, P. Ihalainen and T. Saarinen (eds), *Language Policies in Finland and Sweden: Interdisciplinary and Multi-sited Comparisons* (Bristol, 2015), pp. 3–26.

¹²See N. Edén, *Riksdagens protokoll vid lagtima riksmötet år ... , Andra kammaren* (AK, Second Chamber) (Stockholm, 1867–1948), 3 March 1920, 23:5–6.

¹³Ihalainen and Matikainen, 'British Parliament'.

¹⁴I capitalize 'the Right' in the Swedish case at times, as the proper name of the leading rightist party was 'the Right' (*Högern*). When including the smaller rightist groups I refer to 'the right'.

the left, consisting of the Social Democrats and Liberals, increasingly saw the Western Allies as the source of models for parliamentary democracy. This foreign policy division was directly linked to the parliamentarization and democratization of the Swedish government after the elections of 1917, which led to a shift from pro-German to pro-Allies policies, and, after the fall of the German monarchy, to the extension of suffrage, for which the left had long campaigned. In Finland, foreign policy in a newly independent state and constitutional questions were intermingled to an even greater extent: the impact of the Russian Revolution had after the February Revolution led to the radicalization of socialist political discourse and after the October Revolution to the break-up from Russia by a bourgeois government. After a civil war between the Reds and Whites and a pro-German monarchical reaction in 1918, a compromise on a presidential rather than a purely parliamentary republic had been reached in summer 1919 under pressures from the Western powers.¹⁵

Sweden and Finland during the war had faced pressures both from Germany to ally with the culturally dominant great power and from the Allies to reconsider their pro-German foreign policy. By including the Covenant of the League of Nations in the Treaty of Versailles, the Allies provided a further challenge by founding a potentially supranational organization. Sweden was invited to join simultaneously with Western European neutral powers and Finland among newly independent states, both in 1920. Both had been sidelined in the drafting of the Covenant but Finland had been successful in convincing the founding members that it should not be treated as one of the Central Powers despite its German alliance.¹⁶ Britain had refrained from recognizing Finnish independence until a breakaway from Germany but encouraged Finland thereafter to apply for League membership. From January 1920 onwards the Finnish Foreign Ministry, led by the Anglophile Rudolf Holsti, had prepared for an application.¹⁷ In the meantime, relations between Sweden and Finland continued to be exceptionally tense due to the Swedish occupation of Åland during the Finnish Civil War and concern about the status of the Swedish language in Finland. Britain wished to resolve such disputes to build a common front against Bolshevism and submitted the possession of Åland to arbitration by the League even before Finland had officially become a member.¹⁸

Membership of the League would potentially challenge national and parliamentary sovereignty in Sweden and Finland and hence reopened debates on the contested concepts of nation, state, the will of the people, representation, democracy and parliament. It is argued here that the Swedish and Finnish governments adapted themselves quickly to the initiative of the victors of the war and implicitly saw membership as supportive of their aims to strengthen the stability and legitimacy of the native polities in the aftermath of the reforms of 1919. I demonstrate this by analysing conceptualizations of ‘international’ or ‘supranational’ versus ‘national’¹⁹ in parliamentary debates on membership in February-March for Sweden and May 1920 for Finland, and by considering related

¹⁵More on these developments and related research literature in Ihalainen, *Springs*.

¹⁶Nevakivi, *Ulkoasiainhallinnon historia*, p. 47; L. Jonkari, *Kansainliitto Suomen turvallisuuspolitiikassa ja kansainvälisissä suhteissa. Vastaanotto ja vaikutus julkisessa sanassa ja yhteiskunnassa 1919–1936* (Turku, 2008), p. 40.

¹⁷Jonkari, *Kansainliitto*, p. 60.

¹⁸Nevakivi, *Ulkoasiainhallinnon historia*, pp. 48–9.

¹⁹Jonkari, *Kansainliitto*, pp. 13, 21, has also been interested in the interrelation between internationalism, states and nationalism but not from the point of view of conceptual history or with an analytical focus on parliamentary debates on foreign policy.

debates on democracy and parliamentarism as well. I explore how and why rival political groups discursively constructed the challenges of the League to national sovereignty and its implications for the democratic and parliamentary oversight of foreign policy at home and internationally.

The ratifications of the Covenant constituted exceptional democratic moments for Swedish and Finnish MPs to challenge the monopoly of the executive in foreign policy. Deliberation in parliamentary groups and plenaries opened possibilities to redefine not only the current foreign policy line but also the process of future foreign policy decision making. The issue gave rise to a high variety of competing, ideologically motivated interpretations. Swedish and Finnish receptions of the notion of collective security in post-World War I Europe are of some interest also from the point of view of evolving European security policies in the late 2010s as many of the dilemmas rising from the geopolitical locations of the two countries have remained the same. Considerable continuity in British views on international cooperation is also traceable.

British and Continental notions of the League of Nations

The British government believed that listening to the voices of the peoples and educating them politically would raise the quality of public debate and create a world opinion willing to solve conflicts through negotiation between representatives of the people. Foreign policy would become controlled by the enlightened public opinion as diplomacy would be democratized and made transparent.²⁰ Such visions found a vociferous exponent in Woodrow Wilson, the president of the United States, until the Congress turned down US membership, after which the League became an essentially British project. Some British Conservatives, too, doubted the efficiency of the League and were concerned about its challenge to national sovereignty.²¹ As the *Daily Telegraph* summarized regarding the British views, the League gave rise to ‘the highest hopes for a better regulation of the world’s affairs’ but ‘reservations and misgivings’ continued to be heard. ‘Human instincts’ might be ‘tamed and controlled’ but hardly changed, and public opinion was not to be counted on.²²

Views on the League were even more critical in other European great powers. In Germany, British internationalism was viewed as a new form of imperialism imposed on weaker nations and designed to favour other countries at the cost of Germany,²³ though there was also willingness to get involved and support from the neutral states for German membership as a counterweight to France.²⁴ The French prioritized national interests and military security, seeing the League as a means to control German militarism.²⁵ The Bolshevik government denounced the League as capitalist and anti-revolutionary, forming the Communist International as its counterforce.

²⁰E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations. With a New Introduction by Michael Fox* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 17, 33; McCarthy, *British People*, pp. 16–19; Yearwood, *Guarantee of Peace*, pp. 15–16.

²¹McCarthy, *British People*, p. 56.

²²*The Daily Telegraph*, 23 July 1919, 8.

²³Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, pp. 78–80.

²⁴Wintzer, *Deutschland*, p. 78.

The League hence remained a project of liberals and revisionist socialists from Britain and some smaller countries. Socialist internationalists had campaigned for the creation of a transnational assembly elected by the peoples that would support the goals of proletarian internationalism, advancing social progress across borders and constructing a post-capitalist peace.²⁶ The British Labour Party and some radical liberals hence called for a 'League of peoples' with representatives elected by popular vote and parliamentarization so that the delegates for the Assembly would represent national parliaments and parties in them and not governments.²⁷ Conservatives and many liberals, by contrast, prioritized the notion of an intergovernmental organization. Even if the readiness of the revisionists to move from revolutionary methods to parliamentary reformism during the war had been recognized, their advocacy of parliamentary means in international relations continued to lack support.²⁸ The founding of the International Labour Organization despite doubts about labour internationalism²⁹ was a concession to the socialist internationalist cause. Allowing socialist discourses to thrive *within* the League persuaded revisionists to accept this potentially 'imperialist' and 'capitalist' enterprise and to move towards an anti-Bolshevist consensus.

In the British Parliament, the idea of the League as a global promoter of democracy against Prussianism and a supporter of universal democratization was expressed, though it was rarely associated with the parliamentarization of foreign policy at home. Yet Arthur Murray of the Opposition Liberals insisted that:

[i]t is now incumbent upon this Parliament ... to study, to examine, and to take an interest in foreign and international affairs to an extent and in a manner which they have not previously done. ... the creation of the League of Nations is an additional reason why they should at once undertake the task of remodelling the Governmental system of the United Kingdom in order to leave this Imperial House free to study, to examine, and to deal with, ... , the questions of international moment and cooperation that are bound to arise under this Treaty.³⁰

Creating an international public opinion was generally seen as the way to advance democracy, the League working 'under the influences and the pressure of a more potent democratic body of opinion than has ever previously existed'.³¹ League internationalism was easy to view as supportive of the interests of the British Empire and in no way challenging to national sovereignty, and hence nationalism and internationalism were generally understood as compatible.³²

Related internationalist discourses emerged in smaller states as soon as the League membership came to the agenda. For Swedes and Finns, the League appeared as a

²⁵Henig, *Versailles*, pp. 30–32, 36, 43; M.-R. Mouton, *La Société des Nations et les intérêts de la France (1920–1924)* (Bern, 1995), pp. 3–4.

²⁶M. Albers, 'Between the Crisis of Democracy and World Parliament: The Development of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in the 1920s', *Journal of Global History* 7, (2012), pp. 198, 200, 204.

²⁷Millen-Penn, 'Democratic Control', p. 207; Henig, *Versailles*, pp. 14, 40; McCarthy, *British People*, p. 19; T.R. Davies, 'A "Great Experiment" of the League of Nations Era: International Nongovernmental Organizations, Global Governance, and Democracy Beyond State', *Global Governance* 18, (2012), pp. 412–13; Albers, 'Between the Crisis', p. 198.

²⁸Albers, 'Between the Crisis', p. 205.

²⁹A. Holmila and P. Ihalainen, 'Nationalism and Internationalism Reconciled: British Concepts for a New World Order During and After the First and the Second World War', *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 13, (2018), forthcoming.

³⁰Arthur Murray (Opposition Liberal), House of Commons Debates, in Hansard 1803–2005 (retrieved from <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/index.html>), 21 July 1919, c1024; McCarthy, *British People*, p. 9.

³¹J.R. Clynes (Labour), House of Commons Debates, 21 July 1919, c960.

³²Holmila and Ihalainen, 'Nationalism'.

world historical chance to rewrite some of the rules of international politics.³³ The notion of a parliamentarized League and the implications of the question for the democratic control of foreign affairs at home were extensively debated. In both countries, major adjustments in identities, traditions of foreign policy and understandings of supranational powers were needed before membership was possible. Yet the political nations adapted themselves to the British idea of the League, turning away from their traditional positions as hinterlands of Germany and becoming slightly more flexible about national sovereignty.

Sweden: great-power identity and neutrality challenged by supranational powers

Sweden was governed in February–March 1920 by the Liberal–Social Democratic coalition formed after their election victory and the introduction of parliamentary government in autumn 1917. Only the fall of the German monarchy in November 1918 had persuaded the Right to give in to electoral reform. Old controversies between the pro-German right and the pro-Entente left were reproduced in debates on League membership³⁴ as the issue could be seen as a choice between the two parties of the war. The debate was further accelerated by the availability of the Communist version of internationalism advocated by the far left.³⁵

The Liberal–Social Democratic coalition represented membership to be in line with the Danish, Dutch, Norwegian and Swiss policy.³⁶ Rejecting membership was seen as isolating Sweden and endangering Scandinavian cooperation, while joining meant a contribution to the attempt to build a new judicial community of states. Even if there were shortcomings in the inclusiveness and structure of the League as ‘a truly general supranational [överstatlig] organization’,³⁷ it was ‘for all the cultured world a must’ to contribute to the cause of humanity and the redefinition of international relations.³⁸ The League stood for a new kind of internationalism, even if transnational interaction between peace activists and liberal and social democratic parliamentarians had emerged already during the war. Scandinavians such as the Norwegian Christian Lange, secretary general of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, had also aimed at creating a league and called for the democratic control of foreign policy.³⁹

League membership entailed the final rejection of pro-German policies. I argue that it also meant the conscious reinforcement of parliamentarism and democratic suffrage by integrating Sweden into the sphere of Western parliamentary democracies. It challenged rightist opposition to the internationalist democracy of the working masses⁴⁰ but also the

³³Nils Edén, AK, 3 March 1920, 23:12.

³⁴This was pointed out by Carl Lindhagen, *Riksdagens protokoll vid lagtima riksmötet år ... , Första kammaren* (FK, First Chamber) (Stockholm, 1867–1948), 18 February 1920, 13:19; *Dagens Nyheter*, ‘Förpostfäktning på trumma’, 19 February 1920; Lönnroth, *Den svenska utrikespolitikens*, p. 30.

³⁵*Dagens Nyheter*, ‘Förpostfäktning på trumma’, 19 February 1920.

³⁶Nils Edén, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:18; Branting, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:32; *Dagens Nyheter*, ‘Ansvarstunga dagar’, 16 February 1920.

³⁷*Dagens Nyheter*, ‘Folkförbundet är en pliktsak för kulturfolken’, 18 February 1920, reviewed a speech by Professor Nils Alexanderson to the prime minister and other Liberals.

³⁸*Dagens Nyheter*, ‘Sveriges regering och nationernas förbund’, 18 February 1920; cf. Alexanderson’s correction in ‘Sveriges anslutning till folkförbundet’, 19 February 1920, emphasizing the partiality as opposed to the universality of the League; *Dagens Nyheter*, ‘Förpostfäktning på trumma’, 19 February 1920.

³⁹K. Gram-Skoldager and O. Toennesson, ‘Unity and Divergence: Scandinavian Internationalism, 1914–1921’, *Contemporary European History* 17, (2008), pp. 305–6, 308, 314.

⁴⁰Ernst Trygger, FK, 3 March 1920, 19:23, 113.

far-left criticism of ‘the so-called Western democracy’.⁴¹ The rightist opposition would continue at every level of administration,⁴² however, to defend national sovereignty, cultural ties to Germany, Germanic constitutional monarchy and inherited great-power identity.⁴³ Arvid Lindman, the Rightist leader for the lower house, suspected that membership violated Swedish ‘national security’ and weakened ‘national defence’ as the Council of the League of Nations could create ‘international obligations’. Defending a hundred years of neutrality, Lindman argued, the Rightists had no intention of becoming ‘internationalists’; they wanted to remain ‘Swedes’.⁴⁴ Ernst Trygger, professor in law at Uppsala University and leader of the upper chamber, defined the foreign policy of ‘the Swedish people’ as aiming at the maintenance of ‘our status as a sovereign, independent state’ and rejected intrusion by the representatives of foreign powers in it.⁴⁵ Karl Gustaf Westman, professor in legal history at Uppsala University and chairing a conservative agrarian party, presented membership in the League as destructive to Swedish sovereignty in the same way as the Kalmar Union (1397–1523) between the Scandinavian kingdoms, generally understood as repression of Swedes by Danes. Other Rightist politicians, too, favoured historical-political arguments – particularly those referring to Gustavus Adolphus (1594–1632), the Protestant hero of the Thirty Years’ War – when painting a picture of a glorious ‘cultured nation’ being drawn from the safe north to the middle of global troubles.⁴⁶

The far left, too, defended a neutrality threatened by the Western great powers that would decide on Swedish involvement in economic boycotts or military actions. The Leftist Social Democrats (with an electoral support of 8 per cent) opposed the League for ideological reasons but practically allied themselves with the right in this issue. Ivar Vennerström echoed military views on the location between Germany and Russia making Sweden vulnerable to economic and military conflicts.⁴⁷ Prime Minister Nils Edén conceded that traditional neutrality might no longer be possible in the postwar circumstances but emphasized that this would be the case independently of membership.⁴⁸ Hjalmar Branting of the Social Democrats, a pro-Allies member of a committee which had supported membership in spring 1919, and head of the special committee in 1920, responded to the Right by insisting that Swedish responsibilities in the past were compatible with a flexible understanding of neutrality and that it was ‘more proper, manly and Swedish’ to contribute to the new international legal order.⁴⁹

Parliamentarization and democratization of foreign policy – or procedural obstruction?

The League membership debates led to major parliamentarization of foreign policy in Sweden. For the opposition and individual Social Democrats,⁵⁰ however, parliamentary

⁴¹Ivar Vennerström, AK, 3 March 1920, 23:56; Oscar Lövgren, AK, 3 March 1920, 24:41.

⁴²Jones, *Scandinavian*, p. 77.

⁴³Malte Sommeliuss, AK, 3 March 1920, 24:21.

⁴⁴Arvid Lindman, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:13, 16; 3 March 1920, 23:33–4; Jones, *Scandinavian*, p. 77.

⁴⁵Ernst Trygger, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:3–4.

⁴⁶Karl Gustaf Westman, FK, 18 February 1920, 10; Samuel Clason, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:18; Hjalmar Branting, AK, 3 March 1920, 23:46; Malte Sommeliuss, AK, 3 March 1920, 24:31; David Norman, AK, 3 March 1920, 24:40.

⁴⁷Ivar Vennerström, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:5–7; Jones, *Scandinavian*, p. 77.

⁴⁸Nils Edén, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:23–4.

⁴⁹Hjalmar Branting, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:33; Lönnroth, *Den svenska utrikespolitikens*, pp. 31–3.

⁵⁰Per Albin Hansson, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:47.

deliberation appeared as delayed, secret and limited.⁵¹ Rightist leaders – while still doubtful about any ‘victory of democracy’ as a consequence of the war – presented the procedure as violating both democracy and parliamentarism: it concentrated foreign political power in the government instead of allowing the parliament to debate freely.⁵² More time was typically demanded by the opposition for the examination of the records of other national parliaments.⁵³ Foreign Minister Johannes Hellner himself had also consulted Danish, Dutch, Norwegian and Swiss as well as American, British and French parliamentary documents,⁵⁴ and Prime Minister Edén appealed to foreign political unity demonstrated by other parliaments.⁵⁵ While the ministerial MPs thanked the government for bringing an exceptionally detailed proposal on a foreign policy issue to the parliament,⁵⁶ the opposition headed for obstruction by demanding procedures required for a change of the constitution.⁵⁷ The Rightist press lamented the lack of time to form a public opinion, emphasized the incompleteness of ‘the so-called League of Nations’, reported on opposition in Denmark and Norway and pointed at the lack of enthusiasm within the Swedish ministry.⁵⁸

Arguments from the suffrage reform debates were reused and the proposal discussed in relation to ‘democracy’. For Ivar Vennerström of the Leftists, the structure of the League sidelined ‘the parliaments of the people’ in decision making and hence was unacceptable for the internationalist left. The principles of ‘real democracy’ (both *demokrati* and *folklighet*) had been bypassed when the neutral states had been excluded from planning. Vennerström challenged the claims of the coalition to be advocates of the cause of democracy by calling for a referendum;⁵⁹ this would democratize foreign policy.⁶⁰ Carl Lindhagen, an old critic of Western parliamentarism, lamented the vacuum of ‘parliamentary control’ in the League⁶¹ and took the Swedish procedure as evidence of the shortcomings of current parliamentarism as it allowed only members of the Secret Committee (committee discussing foreign relations) to be informed about and to influence foreign policy matters.⁶²

Arthur Engberg of the Social Democrats, a spokesman for ‘the world state’ and ‘the international state’, ironically noted how the far left and the right had joined forces to criticize the League for the lack of democracy – despite their shared opposition to democracy.⁶³ Mauritz Hellberg of the Liberals emphasized the overwhelming support for ‘the democracy of the West’ as opposed to the ‘despotism’ of the extremes.⁶⁴ The Right, by

⁵¹Ivar Vennerström, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:9; Arvid Lindman, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:17; Samuel Clason, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:16; Samuel Clason, FK, 3 March 1920, 19:56; Carl Winberg, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:30; Carl Axel Reuterskiöld, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:33.

⁵²Arvid Lindman, AK, 3 March 1920, 24:67, 69; Ernst Trygger, FK, 3 March 1920, 19:112; Samuel Clason, FK, 3 March 1920, 20:43, 47; Lönnroth, *Den svenska utrikespolitikens*, p. 35.

⁵³Samuel Clason, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:16.

⁵⁴Johannes Hellner, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:28.

⁵⁵Nils Edén, AK, 3 March 1920, 23:7.

⁵⁶Nils Alexanderson, professor in procedural law, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:27. The proposal was in line with Danish and Norwegian ones. Jones, *Scandinavian*, pp. 76–7.

⁵⁷Carl Axel Reuterskiöld, professor of constitutional law, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:14; also *Aftonbladet*, ‘Sverige och folkförbundet’, 17 February 1920.

⁵⁸*Aftonbladet*, ‘Frågetecken’, 19 February 1920; *Aftonbladet*, ‘Vi måste få betänketid’, 20 February 1920.

⁵⁹Ivar Vennerström, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:8–10; also Carl Lindhagen, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:21.

⁶⁰Carl Winberg, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:30.

⁶¹Carl Lindhagen, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:21.

⁶²Carl Lindhagen, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:42.

⁶³Arthur Engberg, AK, 3 March 1920, 24:1–2, 9.

⁶⁴Mauritz Hellberg, FK, 3 March 1920, 19:107.

contrast, saw the exclusion of Sweden from planning the League⁶⁵ and lack of representation in its Council as violations of the national sovereignty of a country that had considerable historical record in fighting for the highest values of humanity.⁶⁶ The party seemed to conceptualize the League as ‘an alliance led by victors’ and its organization as ‘an international dictatorship’.⁶⁷ For the government, a small-state identity was already self-evident. The good news was that there would be no ‘supra-state executive organization’ and that small states could be heard in the Assembly, which decreased the relative dominance of great powers.⁶⁸

Prime Minister Edén denounced Leftist attacks on the League as misuse of the rhetoric of democracy.⁶⁹ Hjalmar Branting, the revisionist Social Democrat leader who had defined Western democracy as peace, supported the plans⁷⁰ and wondered whether the Leftists wanted to refrain from attempts to improve existing reality and wait for ‘the general world revolution’ that would swipe away the old order, leading to a transition to another reality. Instead of being stuck with Marxist dreams about a ‘complete and clear democracy’, Sweden should contribute to ‘the beginning of universality’⁷¹ – interestingly not ‘internationalism’, a concept charged with socialism. Rightist concerns for democracy in the League were likewise hypocritical after their opposition to democratization at home.⁷²

Branting had led an attempt to retain the unity of the Socialist International and taken Wilsonianism as supportive of the interests of the working classes.⁷³ Now he argued that the League was congruent with the goals of social democracy, enabling the voices of the people to be heard in questions of war and peace.⁷⁴ Erik Palmstierna, naval minister from Branting’s party, pointed further at the potential for the creation of ‘a real world’s parliament’,⁷⁵ whereas Party Secretary Gustav Möller emphasized the beginning of ‘the international state’ (*internationalstaten*), initiated by ‘the democracy’ of labour and enabling a transition to a new epoch of cooperation between peoples.⁷⁶ According to Adolf Berge, the Social Democrats were obliged to participate in the creation of such ‘an inter-state democratic organization’.⁷⁷

Reluctant and emerging Swedish internationalisms

Such internationalism was exceptional; enthusiasm for membership was modest in Sweden.⁷⁸ Many wartime internationalists were unhappy with the exclusion of the

⁶⁵Jones, *Scandinavian*, p. 63.

⁶⁶Ernst Trygger, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:4–6.

⁶⁷Nils Edén, AK, 3 March 1920, 23:13–14; Hjalmar Branting, AK, 3 March 1920, 23:44.

⁶⁸Nils Alexanderson, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:26; see Z. Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History 1919–1933* (Oxford, 2007), p. 353.

⁶⁹Nils Edén, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:18–19.

⁷⁰T. Norman, ‘Hjalmar Branting, Nationernas Förbund och naturrätten’, in B. Huld and K. Misgeld (eds), *Socialdemokratin och svensk utrikespolitik. Från Branting till Palme* (Gothenburg, 1990), p. 22.

⁷¹Hjalmar Branting, AK, 18 February 1920, 27–8; also Per Albin Hansson, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:47; Hjalmar Branting, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:54.

⁷²Hjalmar Branting, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:32.

⁷³Norman, *Hjalmar Branting*, p. 22; U. Larsson, ‘Hjalmar Branting och Nationernas Förbund’, in U. Bjereld et al. (eds), *Socialdemokratin i krig och fred: Ingvar Carlsson 75 år* (Hedemora, 2009), p. 19.

⁷⁴Hjalmar Branting, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:33; cf. Norman, *Hjalmar Branting*, p. 22, on the ‘reactionary’ principle of maintaining existing political order.

⁷⁵Erik Palmstierna, AK, 3 March 1920, 24:55.

⁷⁶Gustav Möller, FK, 3 March 1920, 19:48.

⁷⁷Adolf Berge, FK, 3 March 1920, 19:87.

Central Powers, the modesty of plans for disarmament, limited means to settle international disputes, great-power dominance and the connection to the Treaty of Versailles.⁷⁹ As we saw, the ministry talked about ‘universal’ measures to distance itself from socialist internationalism. It wanted to cooperate with Denmark and Norway to make the League a universal legal organization for settling disputes, to ensure the influence of small states and to maintain neutrality.⁸⁰ For the domestic audience it emphasized that the League was not designed to ‘serve egoistic interests’ of the Western powers as all countries had made concessions.⁸¹ Outside the League Sweden would lose influence, while universal goals considering national special needs would be advanced inside.⁸²

The far leftists continued to declare themselves defenders of ‘the cause of internationalism’⁸³ and to oppose what they saw as the spirit of Allied militarism in the League:⁸⁴ it was a forum for the preparation for new wars, would make Germany and Russia cooperate and end up with the rise of a new ‘Napoleon’.⁸⁵ According to Carl Lindhagen, the fundamental problem of international relations at every level was the continued dominance of the executive.⁸⁶

The Rightists consistently denied both internationalist trends and transnational democratic breakthroughs. This was not ‘a league of all civilized nations all over the world’ but a club of the victors that would fall apart in due course.⁸⁷ Swedish MPs should not observe international relations from the point of view of all ‘humanity’ but ‘exclusively from a Swedish perspective, such as they appear to our country and our people’ and stay outside.⁸⁸ They should think about ‘the life interests of Sweden and its people’ while preparing for ‘the spirit of lust for power, egoism and recklessness’ in international relations.⁸⁹

In the meantime, Prime Minister Edén redefined Swedishness and its relation to international affairs by relating the Swedish point of view to ‘the more universal’.⁹⁰ Sweden, connected to the rest of Europe ‘with all the ties of world communications and the uniting world culture’, should get involved in this world historical project. The Swedes should ‘really think about the great universal problem of justice and peace in the world’ as part of national safety. Such a ‘universal point of view’ had become the responsibility of every people, including the Swedes as ‘a limb in the entire humanity’. Separating between the national and universal would just encourage other nations to do the same, ruining a unique chance to change the world.⁹¹ Mauritz Hellberg of the Liberals, for his part, reconciled patriotism and internationalism.⁹² Branting added that Sweden should consider its ‘responsibilities for all humanity’, serve ‘the policy of universality’ and aim

⁷⁸Jones, *Scandinavian*, p. 63; Norman, *Hjalmar Branting*, p. 21.

⁷⁹Gram-Skoldager and Toennesson, ‘Unity and Divergence’, p. 319.

⁸⁰Jones, *Scandinavian*, p. 76; Gram-Skoldager and Toennesson, ‘Unity and Divergence’, pp. 319–21.

⁸¹Nils Edén, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:23.

⁸²Gram-Skoldager and Toennesson, ‘Unity and Divergence’, pp. 319–20.

⁸³Ivar Vennerström, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:46.

⁸⁴Ivar Vennerström, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:5–6; on military costs see also Ernst Trygger, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:9.

⁸⁵Fabian Månsson, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:41.

⁸⁶Carl Lindhagen, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:19.

⁸⁷Arvid Lindman, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:11–12, 15; 3 March 1920, 23:31.

⁸⁸Arvid Lindman, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:16–18.

⁸⁹Ernst Trygger, FK, 18 February 1920, 3, 10; also Karl Gustaf Westman, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:11.

⁹⁰Nils Edén, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:40.

⁹¹Nils Edén, AK, 18 February 1920, 18:25–6.

⁹²Mauritz Hellberg, FK, 3 March 1920, 19:110.

at ‘a universal league of nations’.⁹³ Such speech acts integrated Sweden in the international community of Western parliamentary democracies, moulding ways in which the Swedes would understand themselves.

The proposal was approved by both houses despite consistent opposition. Rightist papers, societies and MPs continued to complain about the lack of proper public debate, claiming that ‘Swedish sovereignty’, ‘national honour’, neutrality and the equality of ‘cultured nations’ (Germany) were being surrendered to the Western powers. After the votes, however, *Aftonbladet* started to speak for bringing the small states, including Finland, together with the League,⁹⁴ which demonstrates the principled nature of the Rightist opposition. The Swedish parties would soon cooperate in foreign policy issues,⁹⁵ starting to formulate an internationalist outlook. Cooperation with Finland would be less successful.⁹⁶

Finland: emerging small-state internationalism of a nationalist government

In Finland, as a newly independent state reconstructing itself after a civil war, redefining nationalism was equally difficult. The government consisted of the parties of the victorious White side: the conservative and Finnish-speaking National Coalition Party, the liberal National Progress Party, the reformist and anti-elitist Agrarian League and the ultra-conservative Swedish People’s Party. The ministry led by Rafael Erich (National Coalition Party), professor of constitutional law at the University of Helsinki, had been advised to seek membership⁹⁷ and spoke forcefully for it by May 1920.⁹⁸ The coalition parties were distancing themselves from their previous pro-German views and counting on the League’s development. Its remaining shortcomings were explained in a positive light so that membership would not appear as challenging to national independence.⁹⁹

Foreign policy leadership was in the hands of Foreign Minister Rudolf Holsti (National Progress Party), an Anglophile who believed in the Western ideals of democracy and liberalism.¹⁰⁰ Also Erich, a previous sympathizer of Germany but also a legalist, had adopted a pro-League stand.¹⁰¹ Membership was for the ministry a way to strengthen the precarious international standing of Finland – particularly as there was still no peace treaty with the Bolshevik government and the country had territorial disputes in both east and west.¹⁰² Finnish democracy had proven very fragile before and after the Civil War, and much needed to be done to demonstrate to the West that Finland indeed was a

⁹³Branting, AK, 18 February 1920, 26, 28–9, 31–2; also Wavrinsky, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:39. See Larsson, *Hjalmar Branting*, p. 24.

⁹⁴*Aftonbladet*, ‘Versaillesfreden och Folkens förbund’, ‘Mot Sverges inträde’, ‘Neutralitetens uppgivande’ and ‘Meningsbrytningarna om folkbundsutskottet’, 2 March 1920; ‘Avgörandets dag’, 3 March 1920; ‘Positiva uppgifter’, 5 March 1920; *Svenska Dagbladet*, ‘Utlåtandet’, 2 March 1920; ‘Vittnesbördet inför all världen’, 3 March 1920; ‘Regeringstalare’, 4 March 1920; ‘Slutdebatten’, 5 March 1920.

⁹⁵Lönnroth, *Den svenska utrikespolitikens*, p. 36.

⁹⁶J. Kalela, *Grannar på skilda vägar: det finländsk-svenska samarbetet i den finländska och svenska utrikespolitiken 1921–1923* (Helsinki, 1971), p. 284.

⁹⁷Tallqvist, *Nationernas Förbund*.

⁹⁸Rafael Erich, *Valtiopäiväasiakirjat (VP) (Helsinki, 1908–1975)*, 4 May 1920, 474.

⁹⁹*Hufvudstadsbladet*, ‘Finland och nationernas förbund’, 5 May 1920, 4.

¹⁰⁰Nevakivi, *Ulkoasiainhallinnon historia*, pp. 63, 85; Jonkari, *Kansainliitto*, p. 24.

¹⁰¹Jonkari, *Kansainliitto*, pp. 23–4, 45, for his later career as a Finnish representative in the League.

¹⁰²Nevakivi, *Ulkoasiainhallinnon historia*, p. 48.

working parliamentary democracy.¹⁰³ In the aftermath of the constitutional compromise of July 1919, League membership appeared even for many conservatives as a way to stabilize the political system at home by integrating it – like the Scandinavian neighbours had done – into the sphere of the liberal Western parliamentary democracies. Such an understanding of the League would become dominant in the centrist parties and increasingly also among Social Democrats.¹⁰⁴

The League was presented as a universal organization without precedent in world history capable of producing ‘a happy and successful future for an alliance between different peoples’.¹⁰⁵ Such reproductions of Anglophone liberal internationalism were new in Finnish parliamentary discourse, which had been *very* nation-state centred in 1917 and 1918 and transnational only from opportunistic perspectives still in 1919.¹⁰⁶ In this new vision authored by Rudolf Holsti, humankind (the Finns included) would find a way out of their wartime sufferings to a lasting peace by building on international law and creating a foundation for future international solidarity. For many bourgeois politicians (often professors in the leadership of political parties) such international legalism was familiar from the inherited constitutionalism of Swedish law that had been defended against Russian Tsarist and Bolshevik innovations. Appeals to Western public opinion had been a major means to defend the special position of Finland as a ‘Western’ state within the Russian Empire, and the same logic was followed when counting on the League.

Prime Minister Erich viewed the League as an international association based on ‘the principle of evolution’. This meant that he expected future amendments in the problematic aspects of the Covenant and the inclusion of Germany later on. Erich was optimistic about the League’s capability of serving general human and international interests and advancing international cooperation.¹⁰⁷ The project fitted well with the goal of the ministry to stabilize Finland after its internal confrontations. The ministry aimed at creating an enlightened public opinion at home just as the League wanted to do globally. Challenges to neutrality were not a problem; the League rather appeared as a means to strengthen Finnish national sovereignty. Cooperation in the League not only allowed small states to retain their ‘individuality’ and security but also provided them – despite the lack of full equality between states – chances to have their voices heard. Even if great-power politics would not disappear, smaller states could be active in a forum where politics would increasingly be moulded.¹⁰⁸

As a member, Finland would be a recognized independent state like any other. The prevailing emphasis on the sovereignty of nation states and national self-determination served Finnish interests,¹⁰⁹ the League reinforcing ‘the idea of state’ which was central to Erich’s academic thought.¹¹⁰ It was a major task of the League to produce legal security to its member states.¹¹¹ This was exactly what was needed for a newly independent state

¹⁰³P. Ihalainen, ‘The Fragility of Finnish Parliamentary Democracy at the Moment when Prussianism Fell’, *Journal of Modern European History* 16, (2018), forthcoming.

¹⁰⁴Nevakivi, *Ulkoasiainhallinnon historia*, p. 57; Jonkari, *Kansainliitto*, pp. 15, 37.

¹⁰⁵Rafael Erich, VP, 4 May 1920, 474.

¹⁰⁶Ihalainen, *Springs*.

¹⁰⁷Rafael Erich, VP, 4 May 1920, 474–5; Nevakivi, *Ulkoasiainhallinnon historia*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁸Rafael Erich, VP, 4 May 1920, 474; Steiner, *Lights that Failed*, p. 353.

¹⁰⁹Steiner, *Lights that Failed*, p. 349.

¹¹⁰K. Palonen, ‘Politiikka’, in M. Hyvärinen et al. (eds), *Käsitteet liikkeessä: Suomen poliittisen kulttuurin käsitehistoria* (Tampere, 2003), pp. 467–518.

¹¹¹Rafael Erich, VP, 4 May 1920, 474.

whose statehood had been challenged by Russian policies of uniformity and which went on looking for international recognition. Backing was needed in relation to Soviet Russia, which had recognized Finnish independence but with which negotiations on peace were only about to start. League membership was an effective way to extend and establish foreign relations. As Erich concluded, Finland needed ‘both legal protection and also factual political guarantees and in addition to these broader possibilities for such peaceful international interaction for which the League can provide, ...’¹¹²

Former Prime Minister Juho Vennola (National Progress Party), professor of national economy at the University of Helsinki, echoed this understanding of the League as ‘the first more serious attempt to make justice a reality in international relations’ and as a chance for all peoples to be heard – particularly once Germany would be included. Vennola emphasized the role of developing economic relations bringing former enemies closer to each other. He saw in current international debates honest intentions to develop the League into as just and ‘democratic’ an organization as humanly possible. The geographic location of Finland made membership a means to gain ‘security to the existence and legitimacy of small nations against larger nations’. Even if defence would need to be national, the League would provide external help as a guarantor of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its member states.¹¹³ The supranational powers or defensive aspects of the League did not constitute a problem for the Finnish government. Some long-term continuity can be seen in Finnish views on international organizations such as the League, the United Nations, Nordic cooperation and the European Union.

E.N. Setälä (National Coalition Party), professor of Finnish language at the University of Helsinki and former leading minister, opined likewise that in its isolated position Finland could not afford to stay outside. This drafter of the republican constitutional proposal of late 1917 defended the sole right of the government to nominate delegates to the League Assembly and to thereby control views expressed on the international forum: the parliamentary form of government ensured that their foreign policy line could not differ from that of the majority of the parliament. It was unthinkable that the parliament would be allowed to elect delegates who might represent extreme (socialist) views and harm the national cause.¹¹⁴ In accordance with the Form of Government of July 1919, foreign policy would stay in the hands of the executive power balancing any extreme forms of parliamentarism.

Disputes on the degree of the parliamentarization of foreign policy and the League

Foreign relations had risen to the agenda of the Finnish parliament in connection with constitutional disputes surrounding the declaration of independence in December 1917, the dividing line having been between those inclined to cooperation with the Russians and those with the Germans. Radical Social Democratic constitutional discourse had been influenced by Bolshevik parlance, while the right had looked towards Germany as

¹¹²Rafael Erich, VP, 4 May 1920, 475.

¹¹³Juho Vennola, VP, 28 May 1920, 658–9. Santeri Alkio (Agrarian League) also seconded the motion though in less enthusiastic terms. VP, 28 May 1920, 660. On conceptions of the League as an anti-Bolshevist organization, see Nevakivi, *Ulkoasiainhallinnon historia*, p. 57, and Jonkari, *Kansainliitto*, p. 15.

¹¹⁴E.N. Setälä VP, 28 May 1920, 659–60.

a model monarchy and protector against Bolsheviks. Both schemes failed, and a reorientation of foreign models was needed to gain Anglophone recognition of Finnish independence in spring 1919.¹¹⁵

The Social Democrats remained willing to parliamentarize foreign policy as opposed to the bourgeois insistence on the duality of government following Swedish and German constitutional traditions which left foreign policy dominated by the executive.¹¹⁶ In December 1917, they had won the support of the Agrarians for the founding of a parliamentary committee for foreign affairs,¹¹⁷ which was early compared with other states. Also during battles on monarchy in 1918, when the Social Democrats were excluded from parliament, the republicans had emphasized the parliamentary supervision of foreign policy.¹¹⁸ In the republican compromise, the foreign policy powers of the parliament remained restricted to treaties and decisions on war. Much influence was left in the hands of the president, though first president K.J. Ståhlberg preferred to observe the views of the parliamentary majority¹¹⁹ and left issues such as the League membership to the ministry to manage.

A noteworthy feature in the parliamentary phase of decision making is the division of the Social Democrats – reflective of an international socialist division surrounding the League¹²⁰ – and the approaching of the revisionists to the governmental stand on membership despite bitterness originating from the Civil War and disagreements on parliamentarization. A far-left MP within the Social Democratic group, by contrast, challenged the limited time allowed for the examination of the governmental proposal.¹²¹ Obstructions had been part of the parliamentary strategy of the Social Democrats in the early Eduskunta (parliament),¹²² and readiness to violate parliamentary rules and to employ extra-parliamentary pressure had occurred in 1917.¹²³ The majority of the post-Civil War party had adopted a cooperative, pro-parliamentary line,¹²⁴ but the conservative organ *Uusi Suomi* accused them anyway of deliberate obstruction of parliamentary work.¹²⁵ Jonas Laherma's procedural remarks were symptomatic of a division within the party to revisionists supportive of Western parliamentarism and to orthodox Marxist critics of it. The latter condemned the League – in line with the stand of the Communist International and the Swedish Social Democratic Leftist Party. Transnational connections between Finnish and Swedish far-left discourses are visible in ways of speaking, and remaining sympathies to Bolshevik policies could also be heard at least by the political opponents.

¹¹⁵Ihalainen, *Springs*.

¹¹⁶Jonkari, *Kansainliitto*, p. 33.

¹¹⁷Nevakivi, *Ulkoasiainhallinnon historia*, p. 16.

¹¹⁸Nevakivi, *Ulkoasiainhallinnon historia*, p. 30.

¹¹⁹Nevakivi, *Ulkoasiainhallinnon historia*, pp. 78, 82.

¹²⁰Norman, *Hjalmar Branting*, p. 22.

¹²¹Jonas Laherma, VP, 4 May 1920, 476.

¹²²O. 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).

¹²³Ihalainen, *Springs*.

¹²⁴Ihalainen, *Springs*; Ihalainen, 'Fragility'.

¹²⁵*Uusi Suomi*, 'Valtiopäivät', 8 May 1920, 2; 'Sosialistien jarrutus eduskunnassa', 9 May 1920, 7. A proposal on obstruction against all governmental proposals had actually been voted down in the parliamentary group. The Labour Archive, The Minutes of the Social Democratic Parliamentary Group, 1920, part 1, 7 May 1920, paragraph 6, Väinö Voionmaa; 8 May 1920, paragraph 1.

The leftists did have a point in that the Finnish government provided minimal documentation and aimed at directing the issue swiftly through the parliament. Foreign policy had been placed in the hands of the monarch under the Gustavian constitution and throughout the Russian period, and the government was determined to retain executive control throughout the parliamentary process. Yet League membership appeared as unproblematic both to the governing bourgeois coalition and to the revisionist leaders of the Social Democrats. It became one of the first joint projects uniting the two sides in a positive spirit: the Finnish-speaking conservatives had rethought their stands and were now ready to invest in Western integration. For the Progressivists and the Agrarians, League membership appeared as supportive of their republican, liberal and parliamentary goals. The mainstream Social Democrats saw the League as a welcome connection to Western European parliamentary development and to the International Labour Organization, supportive of their rethought policies. They had already in 1918 made a party decision in favour of a league of nations,¹²⁶ but some remained sceptical. The argument of the supporters was often a practical one: membership was needed before the dispute on Åland would be decided in the League.¹²⁷

Foreign policy run by the executive was materialized in a procedure that allowed very limited time for reflection and deliberation on a major step towards internationalization. The Committee of Foreign Affairs delivered a report of just half a page, representing membership as supportive of Finnish independence, territorial integrity and labour conditions and setting it as a goal to develop the organization into 'a cosmopolitan league including all nations'. The Social Democrats, however, wished to engage the parliament more distinctly in the election of the delegates to the League.¹²⁸ The brief nature of the committee report made Jonas Laherma compare it with the Swedish governmental proposal (105 pages) and Secret Committee report (70 pages) and question the legitimacy of the Finnish hurried procedure. In the Scandinavian, Dutch and Swiss parliaments had spent two months on the issue and had still been unhappy with such a hurry.¹²⁹ Other Social Democrats and Georg Schauman of the Swedish Left demanded likewise more time for reading and preparing speeches.¹³⁰

The divisions of the Civil War were reproduced as Artturi Aalto accused a reactionary bourgeois alliance of hiding information and joining the League while disregarding Social Democratic views.¹³¹ Väinö Hakkila pointed out that the opposition lacked possibilities to observe international politics and hence expertise, experience and diplomatic skills and needed time for reflection before deliberation.¹³² J.W. Keto underscored the need to study documents and debates cross-nationally.¹³³ Comparative and transnational references are typical of parliaments especially in connection with constitutional and procedural debates,¹³⁴ and this example illustrates the increase in them as a consequence

¹²⁶Jonkari, *Kansainliitto*, p. 38.

¹²⁷Jonkari, *Kansainliitto*, p. 60.

¹²⁸*Hufvudstadsbladet*, 'Finland och nationernas förbund', 8 May 1920, 3; *Uusi Suomi*, 'Sosialistien jarrutus eduskunnassa', 9 May 1920, 7.

¹²⁹Jonas Laherma, VP, 7 May 1920, 563, 565.

¹³⁰Artturi Aalto, Johan Helo and Väinö Voionmaa, VP, 7 May 1920, 564, 566; Voionmaa also in VP, 8 May 1920, 631.

¹³¹Artturi Aalto, VP, 7 May 1920, 564–5.

¹³²Väinö Hakkila, VP, 7 May 1920, 565.

¹³³J.W. Keto, VP, 7 May 1920, 564.

¹³⁴Pekonen, *Debating*; Ihalainen, *Springs*.

of the founding of the League. Sweden provided a precedent especially for revisionist and Marxist socialists, but also others viewed the membership issue in an international context.

The executive wanted to keep foreign policy debate in control – in a country where confrontational parliamentary discourse on constitutional questions had got out of hand and the foreign political status of which remained insecure. Their representatives insisted that the question had been carefully deliberated in parliamentary groups and postponed in the committee to allow Social Democrats to discuss it.¹³⁵ Santeri Alkio (Agrarians) implied that the Social Democrats would have been better informed had they been ready to enter the ministry, something that the party was to vote on.¹³⁶ The leftist procedural points were interpreted as intentional politicking with time – particularly as their demand to extend the session had been discussed earlier that day.¹³⁷ The question on the League membership was postponed overnight by the left debating the following item at length.¹³⁸

As the debate resumed, the division was running across the Social Democrats¹³⁹ rather than between the ‘Whites’ and ‘Reds’. The revisionists, supportive of membership, aimed at modifications in representative practices. Väinö Voionmaa, professor of Nordic history at the University of Helsinki, seconded the governmental proposal but moved an amendment on the parliamentarization of representation in the League. This position, insisting that the parliament should have a say in the election of delegates as the League was supposed to be ‘a league of states and peoples and not only one of governments’,¹⁴⁰ was in line with the goals of the Socialist International (1919) and with the British opposition liberal demands for increased parliamentary control in foreign policy. Georg Schauman, a representative of the Swedish-speaking liberals, also joined the British Liberal Party in calling for the election of national delegates to the Assembly by parliaments.¹⁴¹

The left wing of the group, however, made an ideological onslaught on the League. This resulted in the postponement of the debate for weeks as the shocked Vice-Speaker Virkkunen prioritized the election of a new Speaker before the expected vacation.¹⁴² Echoing far-left criticism heard in the Swedish parliament,¹⁴³ Laherma, who had on the very same day resigned from the Social Democratic group,¹⁴⁴ proceeded with uncompromising Marxism that recalled the class discourse of 1917. The League was a mere ‘pan-European plague’ transmitted to Finland where the government had contracted it instead of starting to negotiate on peace with Soviet Russia.¹⁴⁵ The League was not one of peoples willing to discuss peace and progress in harmony but an imperialist creation of the Western powers which wished to determine the course of the world, declaring national self-determination

¹³⁵Paavo Virkkunen, VP, 7 May 1920, 564; Santeri Alkio, VP, 7 May 1920, 564.

¹³⁶Santeri Alkio, VP, 7 May 1920, 565; *Hufvudstadsbladet*, ‘Från kammare och kuloar’, 9 May 1920, 6.

¹³⁷*Uusi Suomi*, ‘Valtiopäivät’, 8 May 1920, 2.

¹³⁸*Uusi Suomi*, ‘Sosialistien jarrutus eduskunnassa’, 9 May 1920, 7.

¹³⁹See also Jonkari, *Kansainliitto*, p. 61.

¹⁴⁰Väinö Voionmaa, VP, 8 May 1920, 631.

¹⁴¹Georg Schauman, VP, 28 May 1920, 653.

¹⁴²Cf. *Uusi Suomi*’s party-political explanation that the debate tended to get lengthy. ‘Sosialistien jarrutus eduskunnassa’, 9 May 1920, 7; *Hufvudstadsbladet*, ‘Från kammare och kuloar’, 9 May 1920, 6; *Maakansa*, ‘Eduskunta’, 11 May 1920, 1.

¹⁴³Jonas Laherma’s points remind us to a great extent of those put forward by Carl Winberg, FK, 18 February 1920, 13:32–3. Winberg had rejected the League as being against the interests of the working class and as a reactionary organ aimed at retaining the status quo and crushing any expressions of labour opinion.

¹⁴⁴The Labour Archive, The Minutes of the Social Democratic Parliamentary Group, 1920, part 1, 8 May 1920, paragraph 3, and part 5, appendix, Jonas Laherma to the Social Democratic Parliamentary Group, 8 May 1920.

¹⁴⁵Jonas Laherma, VP, 8 May 1920, 632.

while violating the same in Austria, Germany, Hungary and Russia. Their goal was a hegemony over smaller nations and ‘over the working classes of all the world’.¹⁴⁶ This had resulted in an undemocratic organization with unclear procedures and supranational powers forcing peoples to war.¹⁴⁷ It was an instrument of capitalism and private property, designed to advance the interests of the exploiter classes while destroying the standard of living of the proletariat and preventing ‘the revolution of the labour’¹⁴⁸ – as seen in the treatment of the German working class.¹⁴⁹ What was more, the League had been planned by the worst militarists who legalized war and ‘hunger blockade’¹⁵⁰ and aimed at maintaining the status quo against any progress.¹⁵¹ The League had also been widely opposed in Norway and Sweden.¹⁵² In the United States, the International Union of Women saw it as destructive of democracy, and bourgeois authors in Britain and France had rejected it as well.¹⁵³ In Laherma’s world, proper anti-militaristic internationalism only originated from among the working class; this was not the league for which the Second International had campaigned but one of reaction and slavery and historically predetermined to fail. Any socialist supporting it was letting down the working class which, Laherma claimed, opposed the League in public meetings and press debates.¹⁵⁴ Leo Trotski had denounced the League as a bourgeois plot aiming at continued exploitation that should be stopped by rising working classes.¹⁵⁵

Such polarizing parliamentary discourse productive of enemy images of the type of 1917 was not tolerated. After three weeks, the item was back on the agenda, on a day when an interpellation on measures against the founding of a communist party was also presented.¹⁵⁶ J.W. Keto of the revisionist socialists responded to Jonas Laherma’s claims with extensive Kautskyite reflections. A popular labour conception might be that a proper league of nations aiming at a lasting peace remained impossible for as long as capitalism prevailed, leading to great-power competition, protectionism, imperialism and war. Yet anti-imperialistic, anti-reactionary, anti-militaristic and anti-protectionist forces existed in capitalist countries beyond the proletariat so that the capitalist system might fall also without a proletarian revolution. Kautsky had said that ‘[d]emocracy gives the supporters of world peace supremacy in the leading powers also in countries where the proletariat is not strong enough to rule on its own’. The Socialist International had concluded that the world war had made ‘the socialist ideal of a league of nations currently an urgent mission also for non-socialist politicians’, i.e. the League corresponded with socialist aims. Even if the current League excluded the Central Powers and Soviet Russia and concentrated power in its Council in an ‘undemocratic’ way, Finland should

¹⁴⁶Jonas Laherma, VP, 8 May 1920, 633.

¹⁴⁷Jonas Laherma, VP, 8 May 1920, 633–4.

¹⁴⁸Jonas Laherma, VP, 28 May 1920, 661; also Norman, *Hjalmar Branting*, p. 22.

¹⁴⁹Jonas Laherma, VP, 8 May 1920, 634–5. Laherma quoted Alfred Manes in German and translated, which is illustrative of the transnational intertextuality of the debates.

¹⁵⁰Jonas Laherma, VP, 8 May 1920, 633–4.

¹⁵¹Jonas Laherma, VP, 8 May 1920, 635; J.W. Keto, VP, 28 May 1920, 651.

¹⁵²Jonas Laherma, VP, 8 May 1920, 633.

¹⁵³Jonas Laherma, VP, 8 May 1920, 637.

¹⁵⁴This claim was disputed by J.W. Keto, VP, 28 May 1920, 652, according to whom debate had been limited but in favour of membership.

¹⁵⁵Jonas Laherma, VP, 8 May 1920, 636.

¹⁵⁶*Maakansa*, ‘Eduskunta’, 29 May 1920, 2.

join as it was possible to counteract Western imperialism and to speak for Germany inside the League.¹⁵⁷

Keto recycled contemporary Anglophone internationalist discourse when suggesting that public opinion would keep militarism in control even if the League served the interests and ideology of American bourgeoisie, had been accommodated to British and French imperialism and was in danger of becoming a mere ‘institution of speaking’ due to the weight of great powers and demands for unanimity. It nevertheless enabled cooperation between middle-sized and small states against great powers, and the presence of smaller states entailed a chance for renewed international relations. The League just needed to be parliamentarized so that ‘[t]he peoples should be represented ... according to their population figures and decisions should be majority decisions. The representative assembly should also be allowed to freely elect the Council.’¹⁵⁸ Likewise, Finnish delegates should be elected by the parliament so that the voice of the Finnish workers would be heard.¹⁵⁹ Measures taken by the International Labour Organization were progressive and favourable to the workers, and the Finnish labour should hence join Kautsky’s recommendation and support international organizations for peace as they advanced the ultimate victory of the working classes, even when established by bourgeois governments. Keto’s social democracy included cooperation with the bourgeoisie for this purpose.¹⁶⁰

Divergent understandings of the League divided the socialist opposition: while Western-oriented revisionists voted for membership together with the non-socialist government, 38 MPs voted against it.¹⁶¹ The parliamentary group or the party organ took no stand, printing the speeches of both Laherma and Keto *after* the parliamentary decision and letting the readers draw their own conclusions.¹⁶² Among the revisionists, Väinö Voionmaa spoke for the League as a chance to end the domination of modern nation states which had replaced ideological unity with changing alliances and constant warfare. The League built on experiences on the application of international law and included smaller states in the construction of justice and peace. It was ‘a really new trend of progress’, ‘a movement of civilized peoples’ and ‘an insurance company’ that served Finnish interests, unlike former alliances with Imperial Germany or Bolshevik Russia. Voionmaa insisted that ‘our representation in the League of Nations must be as democratic, as directly originating from the people, as possible’ and that this will would be best communicated through the parliament.¹⁶³ Such parliamentarization of foreign affairs lost the vote¹⁶⁴ but an agreement on internationalization by joining the League was nevertheless achieved, which can be considered a sign of a beginning post-Civil War reconciliation in a period of continued confrontations.

Internationalization and democratization went hand in hand. Yet the lack of enthusiasm and doubts about the truly ‘democratic’ nature of the League did not go away:

¹⁵⁷J.W. Keto, VP, 28 May 1920, 645–9.

¹⁵⁸J.W. Keto, VP, 28 May 1920, 649–51.

¹⁵⁹J.W. Keto, VP, 28 May 1920, 652.

¹⁶⁰J.W. Keto, VP, 28 May 1920, 651–3.

¹⁶¹Väinö Voionmaa, VP, 28 May 1920, 661.

¹⁶²Policies in the membership issue were not discussed in the group meetings. The Labour Archive, The Minutes of the Social Democratic Parliamentary Group, 1920, part 1, 7–8 and 29 May 1920; *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti*, ‘Suomen liittymisen kansainliittoon’, 29 May 1920, 3–4; 31 May 1920, 4–5; 1 June 1920, 3–4.

¹⁶³Väinö Voionmaa, VP, 28 May 1920, 654–8; also Heikki Törmä, VP, 28 May 1920, 660.

¹⁶⁴*Helsingin Sanomat*, ‘Eduskunta’, 29 May 1920, 3.

The liberal *Helsingin Sanomat*, the organ of the foreign minister's Progress Party, was the only major newspaper to welcome membership. It emphasized that the Finns as a small new nation benefited from protection provided by the League while isolationist policies might turn dangerous.¹⁶⁵ Even the columnist of *Uusi Suomi*, the organ of the party of the prime minister, implied that many took the League as nonsense but that the prime minister evidently knew what he was proposing.¹⁶⁶ Its editorial described the idealistic plans while emphasizing remaining doubts: the League's role as the guarantor the Treaty of Versailles, the absence of the United States and the exclusion of Germany. The Finnish national interest spoke for membership rather as a way to break the current isolation, ensure help in times of crisis and demonstrate readiness to cooperate in the advancement of the circumstances of labour¹⁶⁷ – the last point reflecting a search for reconciliation for a post-Civil War polity through League membership.

Epilogue and conclusion

The discourses on internationalization and democratization came together to some extent also in the First Assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva in December 1920 – Sweden being already a member and Finnish membership about to be approved.¹⁶⁸ President Paul Hymans emphasized 'international spirit' inspired by the League,¹⁶⁹ but vindications of national sovereignty continued to be heard.¹⁷⁰ The notion of the democratization or parliamentarization of international relations by no means prevailed: even indirect suggestions about a supranational parliamentary assembly were rejected, and democratization was interpreted to take place through the delegates of the representatives of governments rather than through any direct representation of the peoples.¹⁷¹ The Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Socialist International or the International Federation of League of Nations Societies – or the wishes of some liberal and revisionist parliamentarians – had made no breakthrough.¹⁷² The goal of building an international public opinion was better received in the Assembly,¹⁷³ but the League had hardly become 'the expression of the general democratization of the postwar world and an organ of international democracy'.¹⁷⁴

Yet democratization and internationalization had merged discursively during the debates on membership – at least in national cases such as the Swedish and Finnish.

¹⁶⁵*Helsingin Sanomat*, 'Suomen yhtyminen kansainliittoon', 13 May 1920, 2; *Hufvudstadsbladet* made no direct comment on membership at all. *Maakansa* wrote mainly about general disappointment with a league that had become one of the winners of the war and continued to observe 'secret diplomacy'. It also put forward racist comments on 'nigger republics' being invited before civilized, something that the Swedish Right also maintained. 'Pyhäposti', 9 May 1920, 2; *Aftonbladet*, 'Vi måste få betänketid', 20 February 1920.

¹⁶⁶*Uusi Suomi*, 'Korkokannasta ja kansainliitosta', 6 May 1920, 6.

¹⁶⁷*Uusi Suomi*, 'Suomen yhtyminen kansainliittoon', 8 May 1920, 4.

¹⁶⁸Jonkari, *Kansainliitto*, p. 63.

¹⁶⁹The Internet Archive, A League of Nations, vol. 4, no. 1, February 1921, The First Assembly of the League of Nations (FA), https://archive.org/stream/firstassemblyof00worlrich/firstassemblyof00worlrich_djvu.txt, 8; also Tommaso Tittoni (Italy), FA, 65, and G.N. Barnes (Great Britain), FA, 118. For civil society, see D. Laqua, 'Transnational Intellectual Cooperation, the League of Nations, and the Problem of Order', *Journal of Global History* 6, (2011), pp. 226–7, 237.

¹⁷⁰E.D. Millen (Australia), FA, 51.

¹⁷¹Cf. Paul Usteri (Switzerland) and Rene Viviani (France), FA, 40; cf. also Millen-Penn, 'Democratic Control', p. 207, on the Covenant as a 'democratic' document.

¹⁷²Albers, 'Between the Crisis', pp. 190, 198.

¹⁷³'Preface', FA, 1; Lord Robert Cecil (South Africa), FA, 19; Steiner, *Lights that Failed*, p. 353.

¹⁷⁴Eduard Beneš (1940), cited by Davies, "'Great Experiment'", p. 405.

This followed from the amalgamation of constitutional and foreign policy issues during preceding constitutional disputes, exceptional opportunities for MPs to get engaged in foreign policy debates, willingness in the oppositions to parliamentarize foreign policy decision making and the determination of the ministries to establish national constitutional compromises by joining an international organization of democratic nations. While many sympathized with Germany and some with Soviet Russia, British liberal internationalist arguments had made a strong impression and won over most revisionist social democrats and even a few Finnish conservatives side by side with liberals. Radical Marxism and rightist nationalism remained opposed in both countries, the arguments of the ideological extremes against the League being paradoxically close in Sweden. In Finland, a cross-bloc consensus was found in that the League membership was interpreted as strengthening both Finnish national sovereignty and its fragile parliamentary democracy. The parliamentarization of international relations did not follow but discursive turns towards internationalization were evident.

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