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**Title:** From estate representation to the representation of the people and the nation in the Age of Revolutions

**Year:** 2020

**Version:** Accepted version (Final draft)

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**Please cite the original version:**

Ihalainen, P., & Haaparinne, Z. (2020). From estate representation to the representation of the people and the nation in the Age of Revolutions. In M. Cotta, & F. Russo (Eds.), *Research Handbook on Political Representation* (pp. 84-97). Edward Elgar.  
<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788977098.00014>

## From estate representation to the representation of the people and the nation in the Age of Revolutions

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In Western countries since the Age of Revolutions, the legitimacy of political rule has typically been constructed with the concepts of popular sovereignty and parliamentary representation. Inherent tensions between the ideals of popular sovereignty, democracy, political representation and parliamentary government have never been fully resolved, however. It is important to understand the trajectories of tension that revolutionary applications of the ideal of popular sovereignty left in modern systems of representation.

This chapter focuses on parliaments as the conventional institutional solution for representative government. Instead of functionalist approaches defining, evaluating or measuring ‘representation’ analytically or theoretically (Morgan 1988; Urbinati 2006; Congleton 2010) or focusing on the ‘mechanisms’ of representation in state building (Jansson 2007; Albareda & Sánchez 2019), we have adopted an empirical, source-based and language-sensitive approach, analysing competing meanings assigned to popular sovereignty and representation in their historical contexts. We aim to grasp what past political actors themselves meant when they talked about representation. We use digitized parliamentary sources to locate competing conceptualizations of representation. Our examples originate from the British parliament, Swedish-Finnish four-estate diet and French revolutionary assemblies. As a special case we analyse British conceptualizations of representation in petitions. We also review related literature on the German lands, the North American Colonies and the Netherlands.

Our analysis focuses on the transition from the conventional early modern representation of the interests of estates by delegates (managed by monarchical rulers) to the ideal of the representation of the people or the nation by independent representatives. We explore how tensions between the representation of privileged groups and the more individualistic representation of the people manifested themselves conceptually in the Age of Revolutions. We start from the domestic political crises following the Seven Years' War in the 1760s and conclude with the Restoration after the fall of Napoleon around 1815, when new representative institutions were created in several countries. This period also leads us to address conflicting meanings assigned to democracy and representation – a divide that still manifests itself in political battles today.

### **From functionalist to linguistically sensitive histories of representation**

Democratic representation did not exist before the nineteenth century; in early modern Europe representation was based on estates with differing privileges. In much research, comparison between representative systems continues to stand for separate national narratives presented side by side. Jansson, for instance, examines representative systems on two sides of the Atlantic from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, concluding that the 'tension between monarchy and early representative institutions . . . provides its own dynamic for understanding early modern state building' (Jansson 2007, 2). Albarede and Sánchez have been interested in the mechanisms of representation at diverse levels of estate societies. They have explored diversities of representation and interactions between social groups that either contributed to or resisted monarchical sovereignty in the building of the modern state characterized by constant wars and growing bureaucracies. Continental systems of representation were typically multi-layered and diversified structures used to defend local autonomy and the privileges of each corporation (Albarede and Sánchez 2019, 1–2). Such functionalist approaches to the

history of representation focus on macro-level societal processes and their social historical aspects, not on the discursive formation of the concept of representation.

Transformations in the German concept of representation have been explored most comprehensively by Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger: in her view, the fiction that the estates were identical with and representative of the entity of subjects was based on late medieval theories of corporations. Such representation was intended to produce binding decisions serving the interests of monarchs, not to legitimize the estates as a political elite. In the course of the eighteenth century, a new concept of citizen introduced by natural law theorists and supported by influences from American, British and French debates challenged this understanding by viewing the estates as a party in a social contract made by the people. The dilemma of appropriate 'national representation' consequently emerged. The Revolutionary Wars temporarily increased the powers of some German estate assemblies, and differences between privileged and non-privileged groups decreased, but it was far from simple to modernize estates that had concentrated on preserving corporate privileges. Distinct breaks with the early modern concept followed, introduced by reformist bureaucrats who saw the estates as a means to articulate the economic interests of various classes. Some wished to retain old estate privileges, denying the role of the estates as representatives of the people, while others wanted to open the estates up to new forms of participation in the name of supposedly ancient traditions of popular representation. After the Restoration, French revolutionary innovations were rejected and the estates were generally defined as representatives of particular interests, though no longer in the traditional sense. There was thus no direct continuity between old estates and emerging representative bodies despite terminological similarities and historical-political narratives created to bridge them (Stollberg-Rilinger 1999, 298–304; Gehrke 2005, 6–7). This point constitutes a starting hypothesis for our review of other national cases below.

## **Representation in late eighteenth-century Britain**

Continental experiences of representation differed from Anglo-American ones, which have often been interpreted through teleological narratives on the rise of popular sovereignty and the representation of the people. It has been typical to draw a line from the Commonwealthmen of the 1640s to the Continental Congress and modern representative democracy (Morgan 1988). According to George Yerby, the English revolutionaries ‘could set a value on the services of parliament which heralded a change in the political position of the representative assembly’: the people were ready to use parliament through their representatives (Yerby 2008, 1).

British early modern traditions of representation became a model for continental reformists challenging deficiencies in their native political systems. Seaward and Ihalainen (2016, 32–3) have pointed at considerable continuity in concepts that defined the British parliament but also at an accelerated change in their meanings from the late eighteenth century onwards. Representation became one of the concepts through which an increasingly modern understanding of parliamentary government was defined.

While the legitimacy of the English parliament had built on the notion of representation since the thirteenth century, when representatives were required to arrive in parliament with full power from their community (Morgan 1988, 39), the Civil War and the republican experiment clarified the implications. The House of Commons, and not the monarch only, became understood as ‘representative of the people’. Yet, particularly once party disputes arose from the 1680s, the electors continued to doubt whether ‘the voice of the people’ was properly represented in parliament. Wealthy men paid for parliamentary seats, the ministry arranged seats for office holders, very limited groups could vote in most constituencies, MPs did not necessarily feel responsible to their voters, and the lack of parliamentary publicity made it impossible for the public to control the representatives. It was justifiable to ask how well the

constituencies actually were represented (Seaward & Ihalainen 2016, 33–4, 39–40, 42–3; Dickinson 2007, 20–22).

Representation often stood for representing information or the opinion of a community to the monarch or parliament with expectations that a decision favourable to the community would follow. Alternatively, representation could stand for the process of electing representatives that reflected the views of the community (Seaward & Ihalainen 2016, 39–40). Parliament was defined as ‘the grand Inquest of the Nation, they are to represent the grievances of the People to their Sovereign; and the People are always to choose proper representatives for that Purpose’ (House of Commons/House of Lords [HC/HL], 1734/35, 421, 674). The opposition considered that Robert Walpole’s government of 1721–42 was disrupting this relationship, as the Commons was becoming ‘a Representative of an Administration, or of one single Minister, but could no longer be a true Representative of the People’ (HL, Protest by Several Lords, 29 March 1732, 1059).

Calls for parliamentary reform and more frequent elections were loud during the American Crisis in the 1760s. The ministry reacted by presenting ‘the people’ as a collective political agent independent of the monarch and represented by parliament, while pamphleteers placed ‘national representation’ and ‘sovereignty’ in parliament. The ministerial side insisted that it was the elected MPs rather than the population at large or even the voters that constituted ‘the People’ (Ihalainen 2010, 476–7, 486).

A period of intense argumentation for parliamentary reform followed, leading politicians such as William Pitt the Younger and Charles James Fox to call for the restoration of the democratic element of a constitution that suffered from corrupt representation, emphasizing the people’s trust in their representatives in the Commons as opposed to the monarchy and ministry (Ihalainen 2010, 486). Such rhetoric reinforced the principle of representation of the people as

an essential element in the parliamentary system; yet it did not lead to reform until 1832. A typical response to reformists was that ‘interests’ rather than communities needed to be represented, that ‘a virtual representation’ assured that the interests of the entire realm were heard or that increasing parliamentary publicity compensated for the lack of representation (Seaward & Ihalainen 2016, 43–4). According to Charles Jenkinson, publicity created a link between the members and the people and increased accountability in a way that made a French-style universal suffrage unnecessary (HC, 26 May 1797, 689).

The British form of parliamentary representation, like most representative systems, was based on the free mandate. Although chosen by particular communities, electors could not dictate how their MPs should vote. It differed from the so-called imperative mandate of representation in which representatives ought to follow the advice of their constituents (Dickinson 2007, 30). In other words, the will of the people only existed, in the procedural sense, during elections. Once elected, the MPs became independent of electors’ interests. Opposing calls to dissolve parliament in 1770, the author of *An Address to the People of England* recognized electors’ right to criticize representatives’ decisions, but maintained that, ‘at the same time, they, to whom the people have entrusted their rights, are to act for themselves, and to be governed by their own consciences’. The author claimed that the MPs should recognize electors’ desires and opinions, but also act on their own – ‘otherwise they were mere machines and lifeless instruments, meant only to echo the voices of others’. (*An Address to the People of England* 1770, 10.) Although often referred to as representatives of the people, elected agents in the House of Commons remained, primarily, members of parliament – chosen by the people, but, formally, independent of the people.

Contemporaries used two specific arguments to legitimize the independence of the Commons and the MPs. Firstly, parliament consisted of the ablest individuals (Dickinson 2009, 23–7).

Charles Jenkinson, a Lord of Treasury, castigating mass petitions in 1770, questioned the abilities of people ‘out-of-doors’: common people were easily misinformed and misled by opposition agents and, therefore, could not ‘be judges of the motives that lead to those decisions [of the House of Commons]’. Jenkinson claimed that ‘were the authority of this House to depend upon the popular opinion, scarce any laws would be regarded: all laws, in their immediate effects, are restraint and inconvenience, and the multitude never consider remote advantages’. Hence, he concluded, ‘to found . . . the authority of this House upon the popular voice, is vain and idle’. (HC, 9 January 1770, 690–91.) William De Gray, the Attorney General, even encouraged representatives to ‘preserve the independence of our own body, as involving the liberty of our people, and defend it against the people themselves misguided and inflamed by faction and self-interest’ (HC, 25 January 1770, 796–7). As the ablest individuals, members of parliament could resist the temptations of passion and self-interest. Hence they, rather than the easily misled members of the public, ought to judge the advantages and disadvantages of legislation.

Secondly, the nature of parliament ensured that, in principle, decision-making was based on the common good. Once elected to parliament, MPs became representatives of the nation instead of particular constituencies (Dickinson 2007, 28–30). Edmund Burke, for instance, declared to Bristol electors in 1774 that ‘Parliament is not a Congress of Ambassadors from different and hostile interests; which interests each must maintain, as an Agent and Advocate, against other Agents and Advocates’. Instead of serving ‘local Purposes’ and ‘local Prejudices’, ‘Parliament is a deliberative Assembly of one Nation, with one Interest, that of the whole’. (Burke 1775, 28–9.) Consequently, representatives could not be obligated to follow constituents’ instructions. Instead of courting popular opinion, members of parliament ought to guard the common interest by protecting the constitution. Charles James Fox, then an ardent opponent of the opposition out-of-doors, claimed in 1771 that representatives ‘have higher



obligations to justice, than to our constituents; we are . . . bound to promote [people's] true interests in preference to the dearest desires of their hearts'. Fox claimed that the constitution made representatives 'the sole arbiters of those interests, notwithstanding the imaginary infallibility of the people'. (HC, 25 March 1771, 145–6.) Both arguments referred to the superior nature of the MPs, though the second one also made use of the unique nature of parliament as an institution.

### **Challenges to free mandate in Britain**

Even if the free mandate remained the dominant principle of British parliamentary representation throughout the eighteenth century, it was not absolute. Several agents used implicit means to challenge it and to oblige representatives to act as desired. Petitioners employed three discursive strategies to challenge representatives' independence (Haaparinne 2020).

Firstly, petitioners used representative claims to persuade representatives to observe their recommendations. They often emphasized their status as officials, as members of corporations, assizes and quarter sessions and as representatives of local communities who, if discontented, could complicate the MP's re-election. After the Middlesex election dispute surrounding the numerous elections and expulsions of the radical John Wilkes to and from parliament, constituents reintroduced mass petitions emphasizing the scale of subscriptions that had been used in the late seventeenth century (Knights 1993; Knights 2009, 45–6). Mass petitions became an important feature of British political culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: campaigners against the slave trade used mass petitions in 1788 (Knights 2009, 45) and later on, so did the Chartists. Representative claims were used to convince MPs that instead of speaking for themselves, the petitioners represented the sentiments of the nation.

Secondly, petitioners sought to persuade representatives using ideals and counter-ideals. They could claim that their objectives were essential to the common interest, even on explicitly local issues. Petitioners could also characterize themselves as ‘determined to act the Part of Free-born Englishmen’ (*London Evening Post*, 4 December 1756), anticipating that representatives shared their definition of Englishness and hence their objectives. Petitioners’ opponents, by contrast, were depicted as servants of the faction (*General Evening Post*, 4–6 January 1770), prioritizing the interest of a corrupt administration over that of the nation. Ideals and counter-ideals functioned as implicit signals of petitioners’ desires and expectations. Ideal representatives, of course, shared petitioners’ senses of right and wrong.

Thirdly, petitioners’ choices of verb mattered. Most petitioners used humble verbs, desiring and beseeching representatives to act. Others used more authoritative verbs. The mayor, magistrates and inhabitants of Wareham claimed that Walpole’s tax reform would demolish consent-based politics and deprive electors of the right to choose their representatives. Hence the petitioners ‘intreat[ed] and require[d]’ their MPs to oppose the excise scheme because ‘we that have chosen you are zealously against it’ (*London Magazine*, June 1733). As both of the borough’s representatives voted in favour of excises, Nathaniel Gould lost his seat in 1734 and Thomas Tower moved to represent another constituency; Wareham elected two supporters of the opposition.

An analysis of petitions reveals that the free mandate was less authoritative than is often assumed. Although direct challenges to it remained infrequent, political agents implicitly challenged the independence of MPs. The discourses of the petitions did not constitute any consistent doctrine: though endeavouring to influence their opinions, most petitioners recognized representatives’ independence. Even uses of authoritative language were ad hoc

rather than explicit defences of the imperative mandate. Yet petitions demonstrate how the public outside the political elite participated in defining the nature of representation.

### **Peculiarities of representation in the North American Colonies**

Britain also encountered a more explicit challenge to the legitimacy of its representative government. The colonies in North America, most of which had long traditions of political autonomy and local representative institutions (Greene 2007, 172–4, 176–83), began to question the boundaries of the sovereignty of parliament in London. Tensions between the Colonies and the mother country started to mount after the passing of the Sugar Act of 1764 and the Stamp Act of 1765. Whereas the British parliament maintained its sovereign right to impose taxes on the Colonies, colonists and the British opposition insisted that such taxes could only be enacted by the consent of the colonial assemblies.

Defenders of the Colonies generally used references to the British constitutional canon to resist the imposition of British taxes on American colonists. According to the canon, subjects could not be taxed without their consent, and as the Colonies did not elect representatives to the Commons, parliament could not enact taxes on them. British opposition MPs sometimes used similar arguments to delegitimize taxes on the American Colonies. Lord Camden, for instance, argued that ‘taxation and representation are inseparably united; God hath joined them, no British parliament can separate them’. Whoever confiscates private property without consent, he continued, ‘commits a robbery’ and ‘destroys the distinction between liberty and slavery’. (HL, 10 February 1766, 178.)

The proponents of colonial taxation by and subordination to London disputed such assertions by claiming that the inhabitants of the American Colonies were in fact represented in the British parliament. Even if they lacked the right to send representatives to the Commons, they were represented through an instrument referred to as ‘virtual representation’. George Grenville,

former prime minister, claimed in 1766 that parliament had always used its power to tax people, entities and regions without actual representation in the Commons. Such a right was exercised over the East India Company, merchants of London and ‘many great manufacturing towns’ and several regions ‘before they sent any representatives to parliament’ (HC, 14 January 1766, 101–3). Lord Lyttelton recognized that ‘[n]o subject is bound by any law to which he is not actually or virtually consenting’ but noted that ‘[i]f the Colonies are subjects of Great Britain, they are represented and consent to all statutes’ (HL, 10 February 1766, 167).

Such reasoning was based on a collective conception of representation: once elected to parliament, representatives did not merely represent their constituencies, but the nation as a whole. Hence, according to the proponents of taxes, the MPs also represented places such as Manchester, Birmingham and the Thirteen Colonies even if these did not elect any members; the representatives considered only the common good of the nation and thus the interest of the virtually represented subjects and entities. After gaining independence, the former Colonies preferred the opposite of the British form of centralized government. The United States came to favour local assemblies and decentralized rule, both geographically and institutionally.

### **Swedish estate representation**

In the meantime, the Swedish Diet, especially in the so-called late Age of Liberty (1766–72), has sometimes been seen as a herald of modern popular sovereignty and representative democracy (for historiography, see Ihalainen 2010, ch. 3 and 477–84; Ihalainen & Sundin 2011; Ihalainen 2015). The Swedish version of representative government was based on the electoral rights of an exceptionally broad proportion of the population, the free peasant estate covering, in principle, a fourth of the male population alongside the noble, clerical and burgher estates. The rule by the estates was extensive when the diet was in session. By the late 1760s, the concepts of ‘the people’ (*folket*) and *nation* were used to legitimize political demands by

the competing estates and parties known as the Hats and Caps. Even if the *Riksdag* could be presented in the free press as representatives of the people, it by no means yet constituted a ‘representative democracy’.

Disputes over estate privileges led to politicization of the concept of the people. The noble estate had traditionally viewed itself as the people who made use of the supreme power of the nation. Some of its Hat opposition radicalized the concept of the people in 1769, extending it to cover the lower orders, to challenge the government. However, as the peasant estate demanded more political influence, most noblemen rejected such ‘democratic’ participation. In 1771–72, the Cap opposition of the peasant, burgher and clerical estates likewise employed the concept of the people to challenge the Hat ministry and increase their privileges. The Hats of the nobility responded by appealing to the king to save the established order. All members of the estates typically prioritized their own representation and privileges over general popular representation.

The popular origin of political power in the past was recognized by many contemporary politicians, the supreme power of the estates by most and the relevance of popular opinion in decision-making by some. Yet the basic assumption remained that political power had been surrendered by the people to the estates, who constituted the people rather than simply representing them. The members of the diet defined themselves as ‘plenipotentiaries’ (*fullmäktige*), emphasizing their independence from the electors and avoiding references to responsibility to the people. References to ‘representatives of the nation’ occasionally appeared yet it was more common to talk about ‘the representation of an estate’ in the Council of the Realm (Swedish Diet [SD], RAP 1769–70, 1:35; all translations are ours). Noble members represented their entire family, clerical members a group of the clergy or ‘class of civil

servants’, burghers ‘all the inhabitants of their town’ and peasants ‘their brothers at home’ or ‘the Swedish commoners’ (SD, RAP 1771–72, 3:76–7; BgP 1809, 415; BnP 1809–10, 3:448).

After a royal coup in 1772 the regime became increasingly autocratic. King Gustavus III referred to the people to legitimize his power against the nobility, emphasizing the common interests of the monarch and the three lower estates as (re)presenting (*föreställa*) ‘the entire people of Sweden’ (SD, RAP 1778–79, 48, 89). Just before the outbreak of the French Revolution, the Swedish king broadened his prerogative further and increased the rights of the lower estates. The nobility responded by emphasizing ‘the knowledge, free will and consent of the Estates of the Realm which historically represents the Swedish people, and with which the king has in all times taken counsel and consulted’ (SD, RAP 1789, 1:406). The king, for his part, encouraged the peasants to claim that their estate expressed ‘the voice of the nation’ (P.Z. Ahlman, SD, BnP 1789, 6–8), reinforcing the myth of a uniquely free Swedish or Finnish peasant. In reaction to regicides in Sweden and France, however, the interests of the monarch and his subjects were presented as identical.

Napoleon destroyed this fiction by persuading Alexander I of Russia to force Sweden to join his blockade against Britain by conquering Finland in 1808. The war led to a change of Swedish monarch and to the adoption of a constitution that updated conceptualizations of representation. Discourse on representation grew exponentially in all estates. ‘The improvement of national representation’, ‘the election of plenipotentiaries to the Diet’ (SD, BgP 1809, 179; BnP 1809–10, 1:312) and the creation of a five-estate assembly or a uni- or bicameral legislative body were discussed (SD, RAP 1809, 1:190) emphasizing the political rights, liberties and duties of citizens, not those of the estates alone. The revolutionary notion of popular sovereignty was rejected but the Swedish nation was

viewed as an active political agent rewriting its mixed constitution through its representatives (Sundin 2006, 75–83; SD, BgP 1809, 6:129–30). The estates were defined as ‘the representatives of the Swedish people’ (SD, BgP 1809, 8:494–5), and some noblemen boasted about the title of ‘representative of the people’ (*folk-representant*, SD, RAP 1809, 5:259).

These redefinitions, echoing those made in the German-speaking lands, reflected parallel difficulties in updating early modern principles of representation. The object of estate representation could be the said estates but also ‘the nation’, ‘the country’, ‘the native country’ (*fosterlandet*), ‘the public’ or ‘the realm’ (SD, BgP 1809, 2: 124, 551, 553; 1809–10, 1:49; BnP 1809–10, 1:49, 10:197; PrP 1815, 1:143). Critical debate on ‘the general right of representation’ (SD, BgP 1809, 3:693) as ‘the right of a citizen’ (SD, BgP 1809, 8:807), ‘the system of representation’ and ‘the transformation of representation’ (SD, RAP 1809, 2:157, 4474) still concerned a very small group of landowners and entrepreneurs as a potential new ‘body of representation’ (SD, BnP 1809–10, 1:112). The traditional conclusion was that ‘the entire Swedish people’ and ‘every Swedish man’ was ‘represented through the four Estates of the Realm’ even if there was no ‘direct contribution to representation’ (SD, RAP, 1800, 2:920, 1110–11). All innovation in representation and the structure of the diet were postponed, the peasant estate representing ‘the mass of the people’, the burghers ‘a population of 60 000’, the clerics 14 000 and the noblemen 9 500 persons, the latter including both sexes (SD, KU 1810/1812/1815, 324). The estates wished to retain their immemorial rights. Yet any conflict between members of the government and the representatives of the people was seen as unthinkable (SD, RAP 1815, 4: 631, 641–3, 5:218), and the representatives recognized their responsibility to the nation (SD, RAP 1815, 5:484). Such updates were recorded even by members of the clerical estate who viewed the Swedish system as

‘representative government’ by 1815 (*ett representatift styrelse-sätt*, SD, PrP 1815, 3:1335).

Conceptions of representation were gradually changing even on the peripheries of Europe, as reflected in the ways in which Alexander I, when summoning the Finnish Estates in 1809, updated the language of politics. Educated in Enlightenment ideals as he was, the Russian Czar reinforced his role as a constitutional monarch of his new Finnish grand duchy, referring to the estates as the representatives of the people and flattering the Finns as a brave and loyal people ‘[p]lacé désormais au rang des nations, sous l’empire de ses loix’ (Alexander I, FD, PrP 1809, 514). In reality, 54 years of monarchical rule without representation followed. While both Swedish and Finnish political elites continued to hold the inherited principle of the representation of the people, the Finns were bound to articulate it more forcefully when opposing Russian rejections of the same.

### **Radically redefined representation during the French Revolution**

Representation was one of the central terms of the French Revolution. Theories and practices of representation had previously been based on corporate bodies and unequal representation in provincial estates. The monarchy had made modest attempts to reform representation by delegating prerogative to provincial estates but a major transformation was seen only when, on 17 June 1789, the Third Estate declared that sovereignty belonged solely to the nation and that they, as the National Assembly, represented the will of the people constituted by individuals (Jones 1995). Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès had famously argued for a representative government based on national sovereignty and equality among citizens and, like most contemporaries, preferred representation to ‘real democracy’ (Rosanvallon 1995; Wright 2002; Dunn 2005; Urbinati 2006). The representative institution would speak on behalf of the nation and all



citizens participate in legislative work through their representatives (Baker 1990; Wright 2002).

By summer 1789, even conservative and initially moderate members of the National Assembly saw it as their duty to ‘secourir le peuple, ce peuple qui souffre, ce peuple que nous avons l’honneur de représenter, et l’obligation de défendre’ (Archives parlementaires [AP], Gérard de Lally-Tollendal, 5 July 1789, 195) as they possessed ‘la puissance législative de la nation, représentée par la collection de ses députés’ (AP, Bertrand Barrère, 6 July 1789, 205). According to Sieyès, ‘la nation française’ was ‘toujours toute entière légitimement représentée par la pluralité de ses députés, ni les mandats impératifs’ (AP, 8 July 1789, 207). The principle of representation of the nation, people or citizens was extended to different levels of the revolutionary political system, and the French Constitution was claimed to provide ‘un modèle de la représentation la plus exacte’ for all other European nations (AP, 15 January 1790, 495). It is noteworthy that, despite the status of the revolutionary assemblies as representatives of national sovereignty, debate continued on representation derived from inheritance, the question being whether the royal representation of national dignity, the French people and France in relation to other nations was still valid (AP, Pierre Louis Rœderer, 10 August 1791, 323, 325; Antoine Barnave, 331). Most revolutionaries, in line with Sieyès, prioritized parliamentary representation over direct democracy as the means to express national sovereignty (Rosanvallon 1995), while others underscored the original sovereignty of the people.

As the revolution became increasingly radical with the Revolutionary Wars and the founding of the republic, the assemblies adopted the identity of the defenders of ‘les droits sacrés de l’humanité et la représentation nationale’ (AP, President Armand Gensonné, 20 March 1793, 344). As ‘la puissance la plus sacrée que le peuple souverain puisse former’ the members saw themselves as deliberating ‘des destinées du genre humain’ threatened by counter-

revolutionaries (AP, 30 May 1793, 630), viewing the goals of French revolutionary national representation as universal. Yet disagreements on the best ways of obtaining ‘national opinion’ through representation and on the proper representatives of the people deepened (AP, Bertrand Barère, 21 March 1792, 425; 29 April 1793, 585), challenging the revolutionary ideal of the unity of the sovereign nation and its representatives (Gauchet 1995). Radical calls for the most ‘democratic’ representation possible rose in response to concerns that the people tended to lose their sovereignty with representation (AP, Jean Joseph Victor Genissieu, 14 June 1793, 518).

As some revolutionaries believed that the representatives would turn into a new aristocracy out of popular control (Markoff 1999), they prioritized the active participation of the people. During the Jacobin Republic of 1793, associations between the revolution, republic and democracy rather than representative government gained popularity. In February 1794 – during the Terror – Maximilien Robespierre combined the concepts of representation and democratic rule into ‘representative democracy’, which has generally been seen as a turning point in the history of democracy (Dunn 2005; Hobson 2008). This conceptual innovation identified the people as the source of power through representation instead of direct popular rule. It was made possible by Robespierre’s understanding of both democracy and representative government as originating from the revolutionary principle of the sovereignty of the people (Rosanvallon 1995).

In the British parliament, such radicalization of representation led to defences of the status quo. The early phase of the revolution was still open to visions for rethinking the British political system. In March 1790, Henry Flood made ‘the representation of the people’ the key idea of his motion for parliamentary reform. Flood wished to see a stronger ‘popular form of government’, replacing virtual with actual representation so that the majority of the people (men) would be entitled to vote. In his view, representation enabled ‘a great people’ to ‘possess

an efficient influence in their own legislature, without being legislators themselves'. It would turn the Commons into an institution no longer 'under another influence than that of the people'. (HC, 4 March 1790, 453–64.)

A new discourse cycle started in 1792 with Thomas Paine's suggestion that combining representation and democracy (in the American way) would produce a constitution embracing and confederating all the various interests of the population (Paine 1792, 33). Prime Minister Pitt responded by recognizing that the 'legitimate authority' of 'a proper representative assembly' was based on the people feeling the identity of interests between themselves and the MPs. Yet the British political order already enabled both representation of the people (if not the nation at large) as well as 'the true spirit of proper democracy'. (HC, 30 April 1792, 1309–12.) The Association of the Friends of the People soon demanded the use of the concept of representation 'in its fair and obvious sense' rather than in its current unconstitutional one. The reformist Charles Grey welcomed the creation of 'a free and fair representation of the people' instead of the current Commons (Ihalainen 2010, 399), but the majority of the House turned increasingly suspicious of reform after the opening of hostilities with Revolutionary France. Rhetorical redefinitions of the established system were the usual response in the late 1790s, John Thelwall calling the Commons 'representative democracy' (*The Tribune*, No. 25, 217–218). The realization of representation continued to be debated but there were limited prospects in post-revolutionary Britain for extending representation as in France.

In the Batavian Republic, formed on the ruins of the Dutch Republic after a French intervention in 1795, representation was radically redefined in line with the revolutionary regime. The ideas of popular sovereignty, representation and democracy were supported by American influences and native debates. Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck, for instance, had argued in 1785 for popular sovereignty delegated to representatives, and some of his fellow authors associated popular

sovereignty with (representative) democracy. The ideas of popular sovereignty and representation were amalgamated with French revolutionary ones into ‘popular government by representation’ (Rutjes 2012, 8–9, 11, 27, 71–4, 77, 79–80, 118). The experiment did not lead to lasting representative democracy, as the notion of purely popular representation was rejected in connection with the Restoration in the Netherlands. Yet elements of a representative system were included in the monarchical government, just as in France and Southern Germany (Prutsch, 206, 208, 212–13).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has compared contemporaries’ perceptions of representation in Britain and its American Colonies, Sweden, Finland, Russia, France, the German lands and the Netherlands, considering transnational interaction as well. Our conceptual historical approach has foregrounded the coexistence of competing understandings of representation in late eighteenth-century representative assemblies. We have pointed both to patterns of continuity of early modern conceptions and to the rise of more modern ones during the critical and turbulent period between 1760 and 1815.

Not only the German but also the British, Swedish and Finnish cases exemplify the durability of early modern conceptions of representation in the revolutionary period. In Britain, representation had been a highly politicized concept in constructing and challenging parliamentary legitimacy as early as the seventeenth century. It became increasingly so under Robert Walpole’s government and with popular challenges to parliament, the American troubles and calls for reform from the 1760s onwards. The majority of the British parliament maintained an interpretation of representation supportive of parliamentary sovereignty under transnational revolutionary pressure, turning into a counter-force to French forms of popular representation and making mere rhetorical adjustments to maintain established order. Petitions

and reform proposals exemplify that rather than being uniform and stable, representation was essentially a process of constant negotiation. Constituents and representatives may not have been equal partners, but neither was eighteenth-century representation as one-sided as is often assumed. Britain's former colonies in North America, although revolutionary in their conduct, claimed to perfect the British system of representation, emphasizing their republican interpretation of a mixed constitution and checks and balances. In international comparison, the Swedish case reminds one of the German and to some extent the British one. Early modern ideas of representing the competing interests of the estates – abused by an autocratic monarchy in the late eighteenth century – continued to flourish in Sweden with just minor adjustments towards recognizing popular sovereignty under transnational pressures that had culminated in the French Revolution. Due to the very gradual nature of change, the national narrative has sometimes overemphasized the modernity of eighteenth-century forms of representation in Sweden.

In Revolutionary France, representation became a major tool for realizing popular sovereignty but remained an object of dispute between those who preferred revolutionary assemblies to direct democracy and those who believed that the latter form of representation endangered popular sovereignty. This tension supported adoption of the concept of representative democracy. The radicalized revolutionary concept of representation evidently had a transnational impact in all the studied countries, including Britain and Sweden (and Germany, and even Finland and Russia). Confrontations between representation and democracy were also seen in the Netherlands where pre-revolutionary transnational debates on popular sovereignty, representation and democracy had created opportunities for their positive reception. No permanent representative democracy was created by the French revolutionaries or their sister republics, however. The post-Napoleonic regimes typically aimed at restoring traditional forms of representation, only to find themselves updating forms of interest representation. The

amalgamation of democracy and representation nevertheless remained part of the legacy of the French Revolution. Ever since, the inherent tensions between representation and democracy in the realization of popular sovereignty have contributed to the contestability of representation. Representation remains a central rhetorical concept, especially in parliaments: parliamentary government can be both legitimized and delegitimized with references to representation.

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