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Title: Max Weber on parliamentarism and democracy

Year: 2023

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

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Please cite the original version:

Palonen, K. (2023). Max Weber on parliamentarism and democracy. In A. Sica (Ed.), The Routledge International Handbook on Max Weber (pp. 432-445). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003089537-40

MAX WEBER ON PARLIAMENTARISM AND DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

Democracy and parliamentarism have different and partly opposed histories. In Britain parliamentary government preceded the democratisation of the suffrage, in Germany the Reichstag was elected with manhood suffrage but parliamentarism was suspicious. During the early years of the twentieth century several attempts to introduce some version of parliamentary government were made, although the federal structure and the Prussian domination within it made them difficult. In this political context Max Weber was among the few German academics who supported both, as counterweights to the universal tendency towards bureaucratisation. The chapter provides a historical account of Weber's writings dealing with the conceptualisation and evaluation of parliamentary and democratic aspects of politics as well as their mutual relationships. Both concepts are mentioned in Weber's early writings and correspondence, discussed more consistently in the first decade of the 20th century but become a main topic in his war-time publications, in particular in the books on suffrage and parliamentarism as well as in some of his post-war writings.

Keywords: Max Weber, democracy, parliamentarism, universal suffrage, control of the officialdom, Wilhelmine empire, Weimar constitution

Abbreviations for Max Weber editions used in the chapter

AS = The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilisations

EW = The Essential Weber

MWG = Max-Weber-Gesamtausgabe

MWS = Max-Weber-Studienausgabe

PW = Political Writings

Democracy and parliamentarism have different and partly opposed histories. In Britain parliamentary government preceded the democratisation of the suffrage, in Germany Reichstag was elected with manhood suffrage but parliamentarism was suspicious. During the early years of the twentieth century several attempts to introduce some version of parliamentary government were made, although the federal structure and the Prussian domination within it made them difficult (see for example Whimster 2018).

In this political context Max Weber was among the few German academics who supported both, as counterweights to the universal tendency towards bureaucratisation (see Beetham 1974, Llanque 2000). The chapter provides a historical account of Weber's minor and major writings dealing with the conceptualisation and evaluation of parliamentary and democratic aspects of politics as well as their mutual relationships. Both concepts are mentioned in Weber's early writings and correspondence, discussed more consistently in the first decade of the 20th century but become a main topic in his war-time publications, in particular in the books on suffrage and parliamentarism as well as in some of his post-war writings.

All references in the chapter without further qualification are from Max Weber.

The early Weber

Max Weber was a thoroughly political person ('ein durch und durch politischer Mensch'), judges Rita Aldenhoff-Hübinger in her introduction of Weber's letters (MWG II/3, 2017, 17). As a son of, the Berlin National-liberal politician Max Weber senior, a member of the Reichstag and Prussian Landtag, the young Weber followed political debates at home. He gained a classical humanistic education, read Machiavelli at 12 (MWG II/1, 43) and criticised Cicero's 'short-sighted policy' against Catilina' at 14 (ibid. 121-122) (see also Käsler 2014, 169-190).

Guenther Roth has called Max Weber 'the would-be-Englishman' and mentions Weber's admiration for Joseph Chamberlain and William Gladstone (1987, 83-84). When did Max Weber learn the history and practices of the Westminster parliament cannot be exactly identified from his writings and letters (see a mention of visiting 'Westminster' in September 1893 (*Reisebriefe*, 24).

Weber criticised both the *Realpolitik* of Prussian government (e.g. the letter to Hermann Baumgarten from 25 April 1887, in MWG II/1, 70) and the tactics of German Liberal parties. He used the parliamentary vocabulary fluently, supported annual parliamentary grant of the Reichstag to the military and looked for a 'party of bourgeois freedom' and 'national democracy' in a critique of Friedrich Naumann, (1896, MWG I/4, 621).

How well Weber was acquainted with British parliamentary history is illustrated by his 1904 polemic against Eugen Jagemann's idea to disempower the Reichstag by a joint decision of German monarchs. The belief that parliamentarism was obsolete was 'heard in England 250 years ago' (MWS 1/8, 17). Weber noted at several occasions that Germany has all the weaknesses of parliamentarism without its strengths (MWG I/4, 1894, 709; MWS I/8, 1904, 62: MWS I/8, 1905, 96), in the last context specifying that Germany does not have a 'parliamentary state'. In 1908 Weber saw that there is no need for brakes (*Bremser*) to parliamentarism, due to guarantees against its unlimited growth in Germany (MWS I/8, 134).

Weber's main contributions to parliamentarism and democracy in early the twentieth century are his two 'journalistic' studies on the Russian Revolution of 1905. The Liberal Pjotr Struve did not hold parliamentarism obsolete but supports neither the English parliamentary sovereignty nor the French parliamentary majority rule and remains too conciliant towards the czar. The Russian government's draft did not either correspond to the US style completely separation (MWS I/10, 19-20). The Constitutional Democrats' second draft, however, supported the responsibility of ministers to the parliament on political grounds (ibid, 21), The peasants' programme was for Weber also incompatible with the 'modern parliamentarism' and its idea of a bureaucracy led by the parliament (ibid. 86). We can identify Weber's thorough knowledge and unconditional support for a Westminster-style parliamentary government with ministers selected from the members of parliament, as Walter Bagehot and others had demanded.

Regarding democracy, the young Weber spoke of the capriciousness (*Launenhaftigkeit*) of the universal suffrage and called it a double-edged Greek gift (*Danaergeschenk)* of Bismarck's Caesarism (8 November 1884, MWG II/1,471). As quoted above he supported 'national democracy' in the 1896 comment to Naumann. In the first Russian essay Weber explicitly spoke of 'democratic suffrage' (MWS1/10, 50-51) and 'equal suffrage' (ibid. 89). When rejecting the 'adaptation to the development' argument he insisted that 'against the tide' of material constellations 'we are "individualists" and partisan of "democratic" institutions' (ibid. 99-100; PW, 69). With his quotation marks Weber separated himself from the concept of Russian 'democrats'. In a footnote he used the adjective *parlamentarisch-demokratisch* (MWS 1/10, 19).

Weber's conception of democracy thus differed from the common justifications in terms of 'evolution' and 'progress'. He further opposed the doctrine of natural rights and supported human

rights (*Menschenrechte*) on strictly political grounds (see ibid. 98-99). His defence of parliamentary sovereignty was also directed against 'popular sovereignty' (ibid. 20), and in a letter to Robert Michels Weber emphasised that speaking of 'true will of the people' is a fiction (4 August 1908, MWG II/5, 615). In the *'Objektivität'* essay he rejects these kinds of 'collective concepts' (1904, in MWG I/7, 228-231). The parliamentary sovereignty as a democracy of debaters is closer to his 'individualist' ideals.

Weber's main target against the czarist regime was bureaucratisation, a historical trend which the Western countries shared but which had reached its extreme form in Russia. In the following years polemic against bureaucratisation became his key topic. In 1909 Weber turned against the German passion for bureaucratisation, thinking that human beings need above all *Ordnung*. Weber's dystopia is a world of *Ordnungs-Menschen*, and he asked how to 'keep a remainder of humanness free against the exclusive rule of bureaucratic ideals of life' (MWS I/8, 1909, 128).

In the final paragraph of his lexicon article 'Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum' Weber presented a drastic story on the irresistible expansion of bureaucracies (MWG I/6, 1909, 721). He characterizes the condition of the contemporary citizen (*Bürger*) as follows: 'The German bourgeois now strives above all for "order", usually even if he is a "Social democrat". Thus in all probability some day the bureaucratisation of the German society will encompass capitalism too, as it did in the antiquity' (AS, 256); bureaucratisation was not restricted to Germany in the original, MWG I/6, 722).

In his subsequent discussions on democracy and parliamentarism Weber emphasised looking for counterweights to the seemingly irresistible trend towards bureaucratisation. Weber did not try the impossible abolishment of the efficient modern bureaucracy but demanded to put it under a thorough political control.

Democracy and parliamentarism in wartime journalism

Since 1916 Max Weber engaged journalistically in German politics. Besides the polemic against annexionism in the Great War he presented his views on parliamentarisation and democratisation with the post-war situation of Germany in sight. In these articles he offered his own normative criteria and situational judgments (on Weber and World War I see Bruhns, 2017)

In the article 'Deutschland unter europäischen Weltmächten' Weber presented his view on European and world politics from the 'Westphalian' perspective of a balance between great powers (*Weltmächte*) and was sceptical of the chances for democratisation of the great powers. In terms of political values small states, such as Denmark or Switzerland, are necessarily superior to great

powers. Only in them can the entire population oversee the administration and a genuine (*echte*) democracy is at all possible (*überhaupt möglich*) (MWS I/15, 1916, 76-77, see Palonen 2020).

Nonetheless Weber saw chances for democratisation and parliamentarisation even in Germany. His most obvious target was the abolishment of the Prussian 'plutocratic' division of the electorate to three taxation classes of voters, opposed to the equal male suffrage in the Reichstag elections. In a series of *Frankurter Zeitung* articles, Weber advocated reforms as an answer to the chancellor Theobald Bethmann-Hollweg's promise of a constitutional reform. In March 1917 he proposed a war-emergency law, aiming at the enfranchisement of every full-age citizen who has served in the military (*Heeresdienst*) during the war – in the highest class, if the tripartite division of the electorate would still persist (ibid. 90). This argument was directed against the war profiters (ibid. 91), and the reform should hold for the entire *Reich*, independently of the constitutions of the federal states, because it is the empire that was engaged in war (ibid. 92).

In the 'Das preußische Wahlrecht' article a month later Weber referred to the February revolution in Russia and to the war-time electoral reform in Britain. He concluded that soldiers returning to home would experience anything less than full the Reichstag suffrage as a cheat (*Schwindel*) (MWS I/15, 95). He rejected plural votes based on degrees (*Examensfabriken*, ibid. 97), illustrating this with the example of university teachers' complete lack of political judgement (*Augenmaß*) during the war. Businessmen, private clerks or workers, who are all exposed to market and state in their lives, do possess a better sense for political realities (ibid. 97-98). Weber equally rejected the additional votes for marriage, military achievements or corporate representation, when in the modern state individuals are judged solely as citizens (*Staatsbürger*) (ibid, 99).

Democracy was for Weber no aim in itself (*Selbstzweck*), but he realised that the Reichstag suffrage would terminate enfranchisement controversies (ibid. 100). He understood the main merit of general suffrage (*allgemeine Volkswahl*) in the opening of a free platform (*freie Bühne*) for political talents (ibid. 100-101). In July 1917 he spoke in favour the enfranchisement of women in equal terms (MWS I/15, 345).

Parallel to the proposals for democratisation Weber proposed reforms in order to move towards parliamentary government. In 1917 spring the Reichstag parties agreed upon a committee, *interfraktioneller Ausschuß,* an indirect political device for controlling the government. Weber demanded an institutional reform, first of all to abolish the paragraph 9 that prevented the Reichstag and Landtag members to retain their seat, when appointed as ministers (in Prussia and other states, no Reich government existed). For him there was no justification (*sachliche Gründe*) for a system in which parliament and government were treated as if they would be necessarily opposed powers ('Vorschläge zur Reform der Verfassung des Deutschen Reichs,' MWS I/15, 1917, 124). Weber

follows again Bagehot in considering the British parliamentary government as superior to the separation of powers system of the United States.

The Reichstag parties obliged Bethmann-Hollweg to resign in July 1917, but the new Chancellor, Georg Michaelis, did not move for constitutional reforms. In a further *Frankfurter Zeitung* article Weber argued against the exclusion of parliamentary ministers as well as against the Prussian practice of treating ministers as state officials and demanded that parliamentary ministers should be allowed to act as party leaders (MWS I/15, 1917, 137). For Weber ministers as politicians should act according their own convictions, whereas officials must follow the instructions of their political superiors (ibid. 139). A parliament without a chance for members becoming ministers retaining their political influence would be doomed to powerlessness (ibid. 152-153).

The *Wahlrecht* booklet

Weber's proposals in his wartime journalism were also included in his programmatic writings on both democracy and parliamentarism, published at the final stage of the war. The booklet *Wahlrecht und Demokratie in Deutschland,* published at the end of 1917, is a major contribution to political theorising and a rhetorical masterpiece. Weber took the German situation as his point of departure for discussing more general principles. He referred to Bismarck's caesaristic tactics in using male suffrage in Reichstag elections to exploit the cowardly (*feige*) bourgeoisie, powerless in facing the rule of officialdom (PW, 80; MWS I/15, 155). He admitted that in the early German empire some British-style voting privileges would perhaps have better taught the value of parliamentary cooperation to the parties. But in the light of the Austria's parliamentary reforms, which had led to procedural corruption, he again excluded anything else but the Reichstag suffrage (ibid. 155-156; 81; PW 93). The equality of suffrage was for him a purely political (*staatspolitisch*) principle illustrated with the German war experience. Equal voting rights 'imposed on the elected the responsibility of persons with a real say and share in the power of the state' (ibid. 156; 82),

Three 'alternatives' to universal suffrage were debated in the early 20th century Europe. The first was the tripartite division of electorate according to the taxation classes, as practised in the Prussian Landtag. The second was the plural voting, adopted in Belgium in 1893 in order to mitigate the effects of manhood suffrage, and supported among others by John Stuart Mill. The third consisted or neo-corporatist ideas of the anti-capitalist and anti-parliamentary currents across Europe on the extreme right (Boulanger, Stöcker etc.) and on the extreme left (Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the syndicalists and the soviets of Russian revolutions).

Weber rejected all three. Against the 'plutocratic' system Weber insisted on the consequences of the war: soldiers on the front would remain relegated to the lowest class but the war-profiteers

(*Kriegsparvenüs*) would rise to the first. He parodied the privileges for family, exam qualification and property in the plural voting proposals. The lowest social strata have most children, and Weber doubted the political maturity of doctors in physics, philosophy or philology (PW 83-8; MWS 1/15, 156-157; 4). The 'middle-class franchise' of property-owners would support the French-style rentier capitalism instead of the English entrepreneurial capitalism (*Erwerbskapitalismus*) (PW, 84-87; MWS 1/15, 157-160). Universal suffrage was for Weber a prerequisite for the post-war Germany: 'Thus it is a compelling political necessity for us to grant to those who are bearers of this rational work at least at a minimum level of political influence, which only the equal voting rights can give them' (PW, 87; MWS I/15, 159).

In Weber's judgement the political consequences of corporate representation (*berufsständische Vertretung*) were even worse. They joined to the wartime 'communitarian' (*Gemeinwirtschaft*) anti-market pamphlets of economists of Johann Plenge and Werner Sombart, which for Weber was a sign of complete ignorance of capitalism among the *literati.* Replacing the opposition between state and private bureaucracies would result in 'a system of bringing under "communal control" by a unitary bureaucracy to which the workers would be subordinated and which would no longer be counterbalanced by anything outside itself' (PW, 90; MWS I/15, 161). In the modern economy the function cannot be derived from occupational structure, but political parties will break with the 'occupational solidarity' in every regime shaped by the ballot and agitation, including 'municipal authorities, cooperatives, sickness insurance schemes etc.' (PW, 94; MWS I/15, 164). For advisory upper chambers Weber also relied rather on former politicians instead of corporative assemblies (PW, 97-98; MWS I/15,165-166).

The main point of the *Wahlrecht* essay is that the struggle between parties as voluntary organisations will be decided by the number of supporters.

> By contrast, political parties are organisations which have as their starting point the (legally) 'free' recruitment of supporters, while their goal is to determine policy through the *number* of their supporters. The *ultima ratio* of all modern party politics is the voting or ballot slip. (PW, 99; MWS I/15, 167)

> The link between free recruitment, equal vote and parties as voluntary organisations, which set up the candidates for elections, are key principles for Weber's defence of democratic and parliamentary politics. The role of the last resort (*ultima ratio*) of the vote marks the difference to the compromise-based estate regimes. Compromise remains a tool of democratic and parliamentary politics, but the counting of votes remains on the background: Weber speaks of *Zifferndemokratie*, democracy of numbers (PW, 102; MWG I/15, 169).

The citizens in the ballot box, the *Staatsbürger,* are for Weber equal, as opposed to the their unequal occupational and familial positions. The equal parliamentary voting right is a

counterweight to these everyday inequalities and provides minimal power shares for the controlling and leader-selecting institution (PW,104; MWS 170). Weber further justified this with the equality of the human beings before death:

> In the face of the levelling, inescapable rule of bureaucracy, which first brought the modern concept of the 'citizen of the state' into being, the ballot slip is the only instrument of power which is *capable* of giving the people who are subject to bureaucratic rule a minimal right of co-determination in the affairs of the community for which they are obliged to give their lives. (PW 105-106; MWS I/15, 172)

This defence of democracy is disenchanted, but not pessimistic, although for Weber it does not mean self-government of citizens or their representatives. For him the replacement of an efficient bureaucracy would lead to an irresponsible political dilettantism – he speaks of *demokratische Parvenüstaaten*, such as Italy (PW, 108; MWS I/15, 174). The inequalities and the bureaucratic rule are historical products, which are not possible to be superseded in the foreseeable future, but equal voting rights give to the citizens political chances to limit the range of their effects and to construct counterweights in parliaments and democratic elections. Weber discusses, how a political aristocracy could serve democracy but concludes that this is not possible in Germany with its 'plebeian' people (PW, 120; MWS I/15, 183). The modern problems of parliamentarism and democracy as well as of the modern state in general remained beyond the sight of the German philosophical and literal classics (PW 123, MWS I/15, 185;).

From this perspective Weber reconsiders the relationship between parliamentarism and democracy. A parody of democracy combines *Kaffeehausintellektuellen* with street demagogy, both opposed to responsible parliamentary leadership (PW, 124; MWS I/15, 185-186). Weber presents a thought experiment:

> First, what organ would democracy have with which to control the administration by officials in turn, if one imagines that parliamentary power did not exist? There is no answer to this question. Secondly, what would be put in place of rule by parliamentary 'cliques'? Rule by much more hidden and – usually – smaller 'cliques'. (PW, 126; MWS I/15, 187)

The direct or 'so-called immediate democracy' is for Weber only possible in small *Kantons*, whereas in mass states democracy requires bureaucracy, and the parliament is indispensable in order to control it. The Paris Commune of 1871 or the Soviets in the Russian revolution of 1905 tried to abolish the division between representative and administrative powers and did not recognise the necessity of controlling the officialdom. Weber points out, as did many British writers (see Palonen 2016), that the very art of speaking in parliaments and mass meetings is different. A parliamentarian is able to judge the weight of the argument (PW, 127; MWS I/15, 187). A

parliament presupposes, unlike direct democracy, presenting opposed points of views and a political competence to judge them. In particular Weber emphasises that nowhere has there been an attempt to leave the state budget to be decided by a referendum (PW; 128; MWS I/15, 188).

When in a democracy the votes are counted and not weighed (PW, 99; MWS I/15, 167) elections are no mere registration of the existing division of opinions. Voting is preceded by debate, and the parliament is the debating institution *par excellence*, including committee reports, resolutions and plenary debates, and the parliament also provides the model for other assemblies and meetings as well for electoral campaigns. Rousseau's slogan that the English are free only on the election day could be interpreted that for Weber the ideal-typical voter would be a parliamentarian on the day of the election (see Palonen 2010b).

The *Parlament* Pamphlet

After the Russian February revolution in 1917 the parties in the German Reichstag initiated a new Constitutional committee (*Verfassungsausschuss*). Max Weber wrote from April to June 1917 a series of articles on parliamentarisation. After the parties failed to reform the constitution, Weber revised the articles in autumn 1917 into a book, published in March 1918 as *Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland* (for the background see Mommsen in MWS I/15, 395-398, on the difference between the articles and the book see Llanque 2000, 179-191, 237-263). Weber himself noted, a letter to the publisher Duncker & Humblot that the book had become an academic pamphlet (*akademische Streitschrift*, MWG II/9, 745). I limit my analysis to this book version.

In his initial remarks Weber maintains that it is time to answer to the dilettantish academic *Literati* who don't even want to understand the conditions for efficient (*leistungsfähige*) parliaments. Due to his articles Weber had been denounced as a *Demagoge*, *undeutsch* and *Agent des Auslandes* (PW, 130-131; MWS I/15, 202). He regards Bismarck as an extraordinary statesman (PW, 135; MWS I/15, 205-206), who, however, prevented political talents to rise to responsible parliamentary leaders (PW, 137-140; MWS I/15, 207-209;) and left behind 'a nation *entirely lacking in any kind of political education*' (PW, 144; MWS I/15, 211).

In the section on the rule by officials (*Beamtenherrschaft*) Weber marks his distinctive interpretation of the contemporary situation. 'In a modern state real *rule* … through the day-to-day management of administration … lies in the hands of *officialdom*' (PW, 145; MWS I/15, 212). With this insight Weber justifies, why with democratisation and parliamentarisation neither the hopes of popular or parliamentary rule nor the fears of mob rule or 'aristocracy of orators' (Hobbes) were realised. In the modern states the professional officialdom rules over the everyday life of citizens.

The tendency towards bureaucratisation concerns for equally the state administration, the military, capitalism as well as parties and organisations. Following the works of James Bryce (1888/1914), Moisei Ostrogorski (1903) and Robert Michels (1910), Weber recognised that parties without a bureaucratic apparatus remain powerless (PW, 149-156; MWS I/15, 215-220, see also *Politik als Beruf*, MWS 1/17). Weber again views bureaucracy as something inescapable (*unentrinnbar*, PW, 156; MWS I/15, 220), but sees in bureaucratisation a process of 'manufacturing of housing of that future serfdom' (*Gehäuse der Hörigkeit*), in which human beings must recognise as '*the ultimate and only value ... a good administration by officials*' (PW, 158; MWS I/15, 221).

What is inescapable is still not inevitable. Weber asked three questions about bureaucratisation:

> 1) how is it *at all possible* to salvage any remnants of 'individual' freedom of movement *in any sense*?...
> 2) how can there be *any* guarantee of power that forces exists which can impose limits on the enormous, crushing power … and control it effectively…
> 3) what is *not* performed by bureaucracy as such (PW, 159; MWS I/15, 222).

Weber first responded to the third question by opposing the ideal types of the official and the politician. He sees the decisive difference in the art of their responsibility. 'The official … must remain outside the *struggle* for the power of his own. The struggle for personal power and the acceptance of full *personal responsibility for one's cause* (*Sache*)… is the very element in which the politician and the entrepreneur live and breathe' (PW, 161; MWS I/15, 223).

With this formulation Weber situated himself outside the mainstream in European political thought, which is suspicious of politics as struggle for power. The bureaucratisation was close to realising the Saint-Simonian dream of 'replacement of the rule over persons by administration,' a stable order without political struggles over alternative courses of action. For Weber this was a nightmare and he was looking for the chances to rehabilitate the struggle between politicians with the parliaments as the paradigmatic medium of this struggle.

This cannot, of course, be done by declarations. Weber began his defence of parliaments with a concession: 'First and foremost, modern parliaments are representing the people who are *ruled* by the means of bureaucracy' ('Vertretungen der durch die Mittel der Bürokratie *Beherrschten*') (PW, 165; MWS I/15, 226). The parliaments are for him the most important counterforce to the persisting bureaucratic rule that Weber was looking for. Parliaments are no complements to government and bureaucracy, but institutions of politicians debating *pro et contra* in order to limit and control the everyday rule of bureaucracy. Parliaments are not 'sovereign' in the classical sense of an arbitrary rule by majority (see Dicey 1883), but depend themselves on the same bureaucratic apparatus, whose powers they hold in check and offer an alternative to. As Weber previously stated,

parliamentary powers cannot reach the 'heavens' in Germany. Parliaments with competent politicians can defend *the ruled* rank-and-file citizens against the bureaucracy better than the citizens could do themselves.

Almost in passing Weber presented his interpretation of what parliaments can do:

> The situation is different in countries where parliament has established the principle that the leaders of the administration must either be directly drawn from its own ranks (a '*parliamentary system*' in the true sense) or that such leaders require the expressly stated confidence of a majority in parliament if they are to remain in office, or that they must at least yield to an expression of no confidence (*parliamentary selection* of the leaders). For this reason they must give an account of themselves, exhaustively and subject to listen and respond to the parliament (*Rede und Antwort stehen*) or its committees (*parliamentary responsibility* of the leaders), and they must lead the administration in accordance with guidelines approved by parliament (*parliamentary control of administration*). In this case the leaders of the decisive parties in parliament at any moment share the responsibility for the power of the state. (translation modified, PW, 166; MWS I/15, 227)

This vision of parliamentary politics (see also Palonen 2012) is more extensive than the post-WW II political science textbook view that concentrates on the possibility of parliament to dismiss government by a vote of no confidence. It is much broader than Wolfgang J. Mommsen's (1959/1974) interpretation that Weber restricts the defence of parliament to the selection of political leaders. Both aspects are present here, but only as parts of a more comprehensive conception.

In the German empire ministers were considered as officials, and Weber's most important demand was the Bagehotian criterion (1867/1872, esp. 127-138) to select the ministers among the parliamentarians and retain their seat in parliament as ministers, which would enable party leaders a ministerial career (see also Selinger 2019). The German empire did not acknowledge the dismissal of government by the vote of no confidence. With Bagehot Weber shared, furthermore, the rhetorical dimension of parliamentary government, including the obligation of government to report and to respond to parliament and its committees as well as the extension of parliamentary control to control the entire administration. For Weber *Arbeitsparlament* (working parliament) and *Redeparlament* (talking parliament) were no opposition, although the latter alone was insufficient (PW, 170-177; MWS I/15, 230-234, see Palonen 2014).

Bureaucratic and parliamentary visions of knowledge

The most original part of Weber's *Parlament* book lies in the few pages on the parliamentary control of officialdom. In order to enable this, he proposes the cross-examination of officials from different ministries in parliamentary committees, the access of committee members' to on-spot-examination of the official's sources and parliamentary examination commissions as the strongest

measure. All of them practices that were lacking from the Reichstag but well known in the British parliament (PW, 177-182; MWS I/15, 235-238).

These measures themselves are, however, not Weber's main point but they make visible the deeper opposition between bureaucratic and parliamentary visions of knowledge. Weber emphasises how the officials claim to monopolise knowledge for themselves and through it to justify their superiority over the parliamentarians. He speaks of *Fachwissen, Dienstwissen* and *Geheimwissen* (MWS I/15, 235-236), of specialist knowledge, the official information and the official secrecy (PW, 177-178). The suggested practices of parliamentary control through committees could not only dispute the knowledge monopoly of the officials, but also make visible a different vision of knowledge. The officials tend to subscribe to the traditional view of knowledge as a possession, which can be gained by training and experience, which the parliamentarians by necessity are lacking. Weber's point is that this is a bureaucratic type of knowledge which should be confronted with an entirely different concept.

To understand Weber's point better we have to return to his methodological essay on *Die 'Objektivität'* from 1904. Weber speaks there merely on academic knowledge, *Erkenntnis*, but in the *Parlament* book he applies the same idea to the practical or everyday knowledge, *Wissen*. In the 1904 essay Weber insists on three main points, the perspectivity of all knowledge; EW, 374, MWG I/7, 174) the regular 'struggle on methods, "basic concepts", presuppositions, the constant change of "viewpoints" and the continuous redefinition of "concepts"' (EW, 367; MWG I/7, 161) as well on 'the social and *political* character of the problem … *argument* can and *must* rise over the regulating standards of value' (*die regulativen Wertmaßstäbe*), translation modified (EW, 363; MWG I/7, 151).

Indebted to Nietzsche and the rhetorical tradition, Weber concluded that 'objectivity' is not in the 'things themselves', not in the quality of the individual scholar and not either in a consensus between the views or the middle position in the debate. The 'objectivity' lies for Weber in the debate itself, more closely in the procedure applied to scholarly debates themselves ruled by *fair play* principle. The *fair play* forms a regulative idea for the 'objectivity' in the struggle between opposed ideal-typical perspectives, by which the claims in the debate can be judged. Weber tacitly assumes that the research as the activity of scholars does not differ in its thoroughly contingent and controversial character from that of parliamentarians (see Palonen 2010a, 2017).

This rhetorical vision of knowledge is illustrated in Weber's discussion of the parliamentary control of officials' and experts' knowledge. The practices to dispute and control their knowledge claims correspond to the rhetorical principle of *in utramque partem disputare* (see e.g. Skinner 1996, 1999). The Westminster parliamentary procedure and rhetorical culture have institutionalised them. Weber's critique of the officials' knowledge claims not only concern the difference between

the Reichstag and the House of Commons, but tacitly recognises the Westminster procedure as an historical approximation of the *fair play* principle for political and scholarly debates (for an application of Weber's parliamentary views to science studies see Asdal and Hobæk 2020).

Weber's reform proposals aimed at making of Reichstag a more Westminster-like parliament. This change cannot be achieved by institutional reforms alone but requires politically competent personnel. His central question is: '*How is parliament to be made capable of assuming power*?' (PW, 190) – '*wie macht man das Parlament fähig zur Macht*?' (MWS I/15, 244). Weber relies on the professional members of parliament (*Berufsparlamentarier*), who exercise their mandate 'as the main content of his life work, equipped with his own office and staff and every means of information' (PW, 190; MWS I/15, 244).

Except the US Congress, no parliament in Weber's time provided good conditions for professional parliamentarians. The ideal was still what Frank Ankersmit (1996) calls mimetic representation, that the members of parliament should form a miniature of their electorate. Weber with his ideal of the parliament as a counterforce to bureaucratisation would regard such a parliament as an assembly of dilettantes. It would be unable to counter the rule of officialdom, when its members necessarily lacked the procedural and rhetorical competences and political judgment to confront the officials and their knowledge claims (see Weber's critique of passive democratisation, PW, 222; MWS I/15, 267).

The party functionaries are suspicious of professional parliamentarians: 'For the professional parliamentarian as such is instinctively felt as a thorn in the flesh by the heads of bureaucratic administration' (PW, 191; MWS I/15, 245). Weber's view of *Arbeitsparliament* by professional parliamentarians requires intensive committee debates, through which they learn both to look for alternatives and judge between competing motions on the agenda.

Weber recognised the ambiguous relationship between parliamentarisation and democratisation. He admits that in mass democracies with universal suffrage are faced with strong plebiscitarian tendencies, and even the British prime minister has become a plebiscitarian trustee of the masses. This makes the parliamentary counterpowers even more important:

> the existence of parliament guarantees the following things: (1) the *stability* and (2) *controlled nature* of his position of power; (3) the preservation of civil *legal safeguards* against him; (4) an ordered form of *proving*, through parliamentary work, the political abilities of politicians who seek the trust of the masses; (5) a peaceful way of *eliminating* the Caesarist dictator when he has *lost* the trust of the masses. (PW, 222; MWS I/15, 267)

For Weber the dilettantish forms of democratisation as well the dependence on party and interest group bureaucracies could be countered only with parliaments with fair and thorough procedures of debate and professional politicians as their members. The formal equality of citizens in their

relationship to politics was guaranteed by universal suffrage, but Weber was ready to accept certain 'privileges' for parliamentarians in order to build efficient counterforces to the tendency towards bureaucratisation, which he saw as the main danger in the contemporary world.

A turn towards plebiscitarian presidentialism?

The parliamentarisation of the German government including a number of members of Reichstag as ministers was initiated in October 1918 with the Prince Max von Baden as the new chancellor. For the parliamentary monarchy – which Weber in the *Parlament* pamphlet still presupposed – no time was, however, left. The loss of the war provoked the declaration of the German republic on 9 November in 1918 with universal suffrage and parliamentary government, which was, however, immediately confronted with revolutionary soviets (*Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte*). The republican constitution was drafted in a committee, chaired by the Liberal lawyer Hugo Preuß, to which Max Weber was invited to participate in December 1918. The constituent assembly was elected in January and Weber was a candidate for the Left-liberal Deutsche Demokratische Partei (DDP), although the locals put him to a low place on the party list without a chance of being elected.

Wolfgang J. Mommsen in his pioneering study on the formation of Weber's political thought offers the now standard interpretation that after the German revolution Weber moved from the defence of parliamentarism to support the 'plebiscitarian leadership democracy' (*plebiszitäre Führerdemokratie*). His main justification of this view lies in Weber's support for the directly elected *Reichspräsident* in the Weimar constitution (Mommsen 1959/1974, esp. 416-441). Among Weber scholars Mommsen's interpretation is disputed, with good grounds (see for example Beetham 2006, 346-347; Anter 2016, 101-103, 134-136).

Sharing this criticism, I acknowledge, however, that Weber changed his views on the modus of electing the Reichspräsident. In an article originally published on 30 November and included into the brochure *Deutschlands künftige Staatsform* published in January 1919, Weber argued against the directly elected president (MWS I/16, 40-41; see Mommsen's report on the origins and dating ibid. 182-184). In the article 'Der Reichspräsident' from February 1919 Weber supported the direct election of the president (PW, 304-308; MWS I/16, 75-77;). Why did he change his mind?

Preuß and other drafters of the Weimar constitution supported the directly elected president against what they called *Parlamentsabsolutismus*. Weber's first point is to connect presidency with democracy is, 'to create a *head of the state* resting *unquestionably on the will of the whole people*' (PW, 304; MWS I/16, 75). He further understood the president would be an extraordinary support for the *Reich* in a parliamentary crisis (PW, 307; MWS I/16, 76), and recognised a need for political continuity over changes in parliamentary constellations (PW, 308, MWS I/16, 77).

The decisive ground, to which the two last points also allude, is Weber's distrust of the electoral system that was applied in the election of the constituent assembly in January 1919. The old party notables (*Honoratioren*) prevented the selection of best political leaders. Above all, Weber strongly rejected a list system version of proportional representation, in which the local party organisations determined the order of candidates on the list. He saw such an electoral system as producing a weak parliament with a membership approaching the imperative mandate based economic interest groups. The Weimar Reichstag was far from Weber's parliamentary ideals of leadership, debate and controlling the bureaucracy (PW, 306, MWS I/16, 76), although the Reichstag could dismiss the government by vote of no confidence, and the Reichspräsident was intended to stay above daily politics. For Weber the Reichspräsident complements the weak Reichstag as a counterweight to bureaucratisation.

In *Politik als Beruf*, based on the lecture in Munich in January 1919 and published as a booklet in July 1919, Weber seems to admit that party functionaries have replaced parliamentarians as the main contemporary type of professional politicians. He still looked for political leaders living for politics. A key sentence, indebted to Bryce's and Michels's work, lies in the alternative leadership democracy with a 'machine' vs. leaderless democracy; *Führerdemokratie mit 'Maschine'* vs. *führerlose Demokratie* (PW, 351; MWS I/17, 72). Both parliamentarians and presidents can act as leaders in a democracy, whereas the dilettantish leaderless democracy has no chances to resist bureaucratisation efficiently. Weber hoped for charismatic leadership, but with an 'anti-authoritarian charisma', which is no quality of the person but a rhetorical practice that can be gained and lost in elections (MWS 1/23, 191-193).

From today's perspective Weber is unduly pessimistic, because those full-time parliamentarians with staff and other resources, which he advocated in the *Parlament* pamphlet, have become the paradigm of professional politicians, including ministers and party leaders, and party functionaries have been pushed back to the second rank (see Borchert 2003). Other more recent tendencies, such as the extensions of the means of parliamentary control over administration (see Siefcken 2018) or the strengthening of the chances of back-bench cooperation in Westminster (see Evans ed. 2017) have also reactivated parliaments. Studies insisting on the priority of political representation over direct democracy (see Ankersmit 2002, Urbinati 2006) are additional signs of a renewed parliamentary democracy today. To this debate Max Weber would have much more to say than many contemporary studies on democracy and parliamentarism.

Nonetheless, Max Weber's final words on parliamentarism and democracy (see also the student notes to his last lectures in spring 1920, in MWG III/7) leave us with a certain tension. Does he support the search for strong political leadership more than the parliamentary style politics of debate and control? Weber was worried about the lacking political leadership in post-war Germany

and was willing to support to some degree of a presidential-cum-plebiscitarian rule. This could be opposed by his methodological views, for which the parliamentary procedure and lively debate are the main values. In the former aspect we can identify which chance Weber has chosen in a situation, in the latter the way in which he presents the parliamentary politics as a palette of a series of chances which the members are expected to debate and finally choose. Today, when we are facing an anti-parliamentary populist fashion, it is the second Weber, the defender of freedom as manifested in the parliamentary politics and way of thinking, to which we should turn.

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