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To cite this article: Onni Pekonen (2017) Parliamentarizing the Estate Diet, Scandinavian Journal of History, 42:3, 245-272, DOI: [10.1080/03468755.2017.1315168](https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2017.1315168)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2017.1315168>



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Published online: 20 Apr 2017.



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PARLIAMENTARIZING THE ESTATE DIET

The debate on plenum plenum in late 19th-century Finland

This article examines the transformation of estate assemblies into parliaments by analysing the case of the late 19th-century Diet of Finland. Furthermore, it positions the procedural discussions of the peripheral Finnish Diet within a wider European debate on parliaments and parliamentarism. While parliamentary government and the dissolution of Europe's last four-estate representation were largely out of the question in the Finnish Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire, revisions and innovations on Diet rules and practices formed an essential means to introduce elements of modern parliaments within the obsolete estate system. By analysing Finnish Diet and press discussions, the article re-examines the significance and reception of the Swedish Riksdag institution of plenum plenum, the joint discussion of all four estates, in Finland. The article highlights a struggle between two concepts of deliberation. A liberal group organized around the newspaper Helsingfors Dagblad used plenum plenum to challenge their Fennoman opponents' consensual idea of deliberation and the Diet's deliberative model, which was based on committee negotiation. The Dagbladists advocated plenum plenum in order to transform the estates into a single debating parliamentary assembly.

Keywords plenum plenum, estate assemblies, parliaments, liberalism, Finland, Sweden, 19th century

Introduction

The Diet of the Grand Duchy of Finland (*landtdag* in Swedish; [*sääty*]valtiopäivät in Finnish) was the last European diet in which the division of four mainly separately deliberating and voting estates prevailed. Remarkably, it was transformed directly into a unicameral parliament elected by universal suffrage (*lan[d]tdag; eduskunta*) by the Finnish Parliamentary Reform of 1906.¹

Due to the reforms on representation and number of chambers, histories of the Finnish parliament have highlighted the Reform of 1906 as a significant turning

point in Finnish parliamentary life; the ‘estate diet’ was replaced by ‘parliament’.² Studies on late 19th-century Finnish politics have argued that during the Diets, ‘there was no sign of parliamentarism’, or, if parliamentarism existed, it was ‘weak’.³ This article offers an alternative interpretation by focusing on the procedural aspects of the shift. It illustrates how, in terms of procedure, the Reform of 1906 was a continuation of a process of parliamentarization that had started in Finland in the 19th century.

Finland’s position as part of the Russian Empire set the limits for Finland’s parliamentary development until 1917. While reforms on the system of representation and parliamentary government were largely out of the question during the Diets, discussions in Finland focused on parliamentary rules and practices. The Diet’s rules and practices offered a means to introduce parliamentary elements within an estate system widely recognized as obsolete among Finnish political actors. Procedures also gave the Finnish actors the possibility to utilize the Grand Duchy’s position as a latecomer in parliamentary development: Finnish debaters could benefit from the experience of other countries by evaluating and comparing their practices and applying their ideas in Finnish discussions. Combining these lessons with the tactical use of Swedish *Riksdag* rules formed a central strategy for Finnish reformists and procedural innovators.

These early efforts alleviated the radical transition to the deliberative procedure of the unicameral parliament in 1906. Despite its comparatively outdated political system and Finland’s position on the European periphery, by the time the Reform of 1906 was adopted, the Finnish Diet had already obtained features of more developed Western parliaments. The Diet Act of 1869 had banned imperative mandates, and the ‘parliamentary’ character of Diet practices on plenary speaking, stenographic minutes, and publicity had already been actively debated in the press and the estates for decades.⁴

This article examines how revisions on procedure were aimed at moving the Diet towards a parliamentary style of deliberation, a thorough transition to full-blown parliamentarism and uni/bicameralism. In this respect, one of the most compelling efforts to ‘parliamentarize’ the Finnish Diet was the procedure of plenum plenum, which signified a possibility of assembling all four estates in the same plenary hall to discuss a question. Plenum plenum, originally adopted from the Swedish *Riksdag*,⁵ was the most significant single effort to introduce features of egalitarian deliberation characteristic of modern Western parliaments into the Finnish system while at the same time preserving the forms of estate representation.⁶

Due to its limited practical success in the Diets – only two plena plenum were ever organized – the procedure has been disregarded as a mere curiosity in the early history of the Finnish parliament and as an imitation of the Swedish model.⁷ Although plena plenum of the Swedish *Riksdag* have received scholarly attention,⁸ no detailed analysis of the Finnish discussions on the institution has been conducted. Consequently, the existing studies have not properly acknowledged plenum plenum’s special character, further application, and long-term significance in Finland. In addition to bringing a new perspective to the already-studied discussions on the Diet Act of 1869, this article also takes into account the disputes on plenum plenum in the estates as well as in the recently digitized Finnish newspapers.⁹

The article is part of a trend of transnational parliamentary history that is opening national histories to a broader understanding of parliamentary culture and deliberation.¹⁰

In Finland, the transnational analysis of parliamentary practices and discourses is still taking its first steps.¹¹ Instead of analysing the ideas, arguments, and discussions behind Finnish procedures, studies on the early phases of the Finnish parliament have focused on the national context, the Swedish model, and political processes connected to the reforms of the Diet Act of 1869 and the Parliament Act of 1906.¹² This article offers a new interpretation of plenum plenum and its reception in Finland by positioning it as part of a wider European discussion on parliaments and parliamentarism. In addition, the article contributes to current transnational parliamentary history by highlighting the significance of procedures.¹³ Debates on procedures and their revision help to detect and understand changes in parliamentary politics.

While parliaments are typically seen as arenas for ideological disputes, the article illustrates how assemblies and their procedures are also products of such controversies. The article highlights two competing concepts of deliberation: dissensual debate and consensual negotiation. In Finland, a group of *Dagblad* liberals (also called 'the Dagbladists' below) saw plenum plenum as a key instrument in moving the Diet towards their ideal of a debating parliament, which was based on the group's admiration for the British parliament and liberal authors such as John Stuart Mill. Whereas Dagbladists highlighted plenary debate as an arena in which competing opinions and arguments were made to clash and test each other's strengths and weaknesses, their Fennoman opponents, in contrast, stressed committee negotiation as an effective means for reaching consensus and carrying out their predetermined programme. The Fennoman approach to deliberation was especially indebted to the German Hegelian tradition.

The *Dagblad* group's prominent role in the introduction of parliamentary procedures and ideas in Finland has not been previously acknowledged by research. Dagbladists' strategy of applying foreign ideas in Finnish debates paved the way for later practices. In their project of moving the Diet towards 'parliamentary' forms of deliberation, the *Dagblad* liberals took the role of what Quentin Skinner has referred to as the 'innovating ideologist': Dagbladists used old Swedish practices as a means to create and justify something new; in this case a transition from the old Diet system to a new paradigm of parliamentary deliberation.¹⁴

Although Dagbladists were pioneers and reformists in parliamentary development in peripheral, latecomer Finland, in a European comparison they can also be considered as defenders of the 19th-century ideal of a debating parliament that lost a great deal of its popularity by the early 20th century.¹⁵ The dispute between the Dagbladists and the Fennomans highlights a tension in the change of European parliamentary politics. It was a prelude to party democracy and mass parties in Finland.

Finland's parliamentary development as part of the Russian empire, the Swedish legacy, and the rising interest in foreign parliaments

By European standards, Finland was a latecomer in parliamentary development. In 1809, Finland, until then an eastern part of Sweden, became a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. The same year, the Finnish estates were summoned by Tsar Alexander I for the Diet of Porvoo, but were not convened again for over 50 years until 1863. In Porvoo in 1809, Alexander I promised to uphold Finland's legal status, and old Swedish

constitutions remained in force. The Swedish Instrument of Government of 1772 and the Union and Security Act of 1789 prescribed a strict system of dualism in which the monarch, with his government bodies, and the Diet were considered independent of each other. The Diet had an advisory role in relation to the monarch: the estates' task was mainly to examine, negotiate, and approve or reject proposals of the emperor prepared by the Senate of Finland and to present their wishes in the form of petitions. Individual estate members did not have the right to introduce motions, and the estates were not given the right until 1886. The emperor had the right to reject any bill. The Senate, known as the 'domestic government', was appointed by and responsible to the emperor alone. The representation was narrow: estate representatives were chosen from a small part of the population, consisting of the Grand Duchy's most wealthy elite. The Nobility's representation was based on family origin, the Clergy's on official rank, the Burghers' on occupation and tax-paying capacity, and the Peasants' on land ownership. The prerogatives of the emperor, separation of powers between the executive and the legislature, and the idea that the government must enjoy the confidence of the representative assembly were questions that Finnish actors trod carefully about in relation to the imperial powers. These questions were considered 'delicate', and thorough reforms regarding them were understood to be difficult, if not impossible, to implement.

'Finnish parliamentary life', as it was called by some of the contemporaries, began on 15 September 1863, when the Diet convened after a more than 50-year hiatus. Due to this 'night of the state', none of the estate members of 1863–1864 had experience in Diet work. Diet procedures were still in the making, although an official collection of rules and several books had been published in order to guide the Diet's work and to help avoid possible confusion about the use of the old Swedish practices.¹⁶ Early on during the Diet's work it was noticed that the existing collections of Diet procedures still included rules that were obsolete, insufficient, contradictory, and impossible to implement.¹⁷

The new situation opened up the question of the rules and practices of the Diet. It provoked discussion about how and to what degree 'parliamentary' manners of proceeding could be applied to the Finnish Diet and which models should be followed.

The first efforts to define standing orders for the Diet did not satisfy Finnish political actors, who saw a new Diet Act as the primary and most important question regarding the Diet.¹⁸ At the end of the Diet of 1863–1864, a Constitutional Law Committee was established to prepare a proposal for a revised Constitution Act and a new Diet Act that would set the procedures for the organization and proceedings of the Finnish Diet. The Committee was in session for two months in early 1865. The Diet Act was ratified by the emperor on 15 April 1869. The reform on the Constitution Act failed due to the radical character of the revisions proposed by the Constitutional Law Committee, especially on reducing the prerogatives of the emperor.

The Constitutional Law Committee of 1865 was instructed by the emperor to model the Diet Act mainly after Sweden's *Riksdag* Act of 1617 as well as the parts of the *Riksdag* Act of 1723 that were established in *Riksdag* practice after 1772. Experiences from the Diet of 1863–1864 could also be used.¹⁹ The Constitutional Law Committee's proposal could not, due to the given instructions and under the political circumstances, refer to any Swedish laws or practices instituted after 1809, when Finland was incorporated into Russia. The Finnish reformists were forced to maintain the division of four estates.

Much had happened, however, in European parliamentary development since the Gustavian period. European representative assemblies had been mostly transformed into bicameral parliaments; Sweden, as the closest example, in 1866. By the second half of the 19th century, parliaments had become *the* forums for national politics in Europe. Depending on the assembly, parliaments were either going through or had already gone through a period of procedural codification. There was growing public pressure to open these closed shops to public scrutiny and participation and to representatives from wider circles of the population by extensions of suffrage. In Finland, there was an increasing desire to adapt and update the old Swedish system to meet modern, international standards of the time.²⁰

Against the backdrop of these European developments, the Committee of 1865 was able to circumvent the Russian orders and adopt later Swedish models, particularly concerning the *Riksdag* Act of 1810, by tracing its legal roots to precedents set during the Swedish-Finnish era and partly by hiding the examples used. In view of the estates' more detailed rules and practices and the committee system, the emperor's instructions left considerable room for manoeuvre.²¹ The old Swedish framework offered Finnish actors the possibility to import more modern elements into the estate system.

The press formed a central means for connecting the Finnish debates to European discussions. From the beginning of the Diets in the 1860s, Finnish members of the estates, political groups, and academia showed increasing enthusiasm towards foreign parliaments. Newspapers examined foreign parliaments and their procedures in extensive articles and published long translations of their verbatim records. Newspaper discussions on foreign parliaments offered inspiration and conceptual tools for Finnish debaters. Models of foreign parliaments were applied actively but selectively in the Finnish debates with the purpose of influencing what was seen as possible and desirable in Finnish parliamentary life. After 1863–1864 the estates assembled in 1867. Based on the Diet Act of 1869, the Diet was convened regularly, every five years until 1882, and then at three-year intervals until the Parliamentary Reform of 1906, with extraordinary Diet sessions in 1899 and 1905–1906. During the period, the press was a means for studying, spreading, and filtering ideas from European discussions and a preparatory arena for, and a close extension of, the deliberations of the Diet.²²

While the Swedish tradition offered a framework for organizing the Finnish Diet, the rules and practices of Finnish parliamentary life were further shaped by close attention to a variety of European discussions. The interest in foreign parliamentary topics was motivated by a desire to develop the Finnish system towards principles and procedures of modern parliaments, and consequently also to strengthen Finland's status in the eyes of European nations, most importantly in relation to the Russian Empire. Finnish parliamentarization, the transition towards modern parliamentary rules and practices, was explicated in the Finnish debates by referring to 'the ABCs of parliamentary life', 'the rudiments of parliamentary work', 'parliamentarily correct', 'parliamentary order', and '(un)parliamentary language, practice and procedure'.²³

Plenum plenum in the Diet Act of 1869

Discussions on plenum plenum started in Finland after the rumours of a Diet session spread and activated the debate on possible and valid Diet procedures in the

early 1860s. In 1863 Professor Johan Wilhelm Rosenborg wrote a book on the Swedish *Riksdags*, *Om Riksdagar*, based on his lecture series at the University of Helsinki, in order to clarify and guide the establishment of Finnish procedures. Rosenborg highlighted plenum plenum as a question of great value and importance. He argued that the joint sitting could bring together the experience and expertise of the four separate estates, which was otherwise impossible due to the practice of four simultaneous readings. Rosenborg saw this as essential for close examination of questions and strengthening the possible final passing of the Diet decisions. According to Rosenborg, in joint discussions, the estates would ‘develop and compare different opinions before each other’ and would ‘more easily come to an accord and collaboration’.²⁴

The Constitutional Law Committee of 1865 included plenum plenum in the Diet Act of 1869. According to § 47 of the Act, ‘the Estates can assemble in a room for joint discussion of a general question that is under consideration in the Diet, however, without the right to decide’. The joint sitting was held if an estate made a proposal for such a meeting and another estate seconded it.²⁵

Rosenborg was a member of the Constitutional Law Committee of 1865, and the arguments he had presented in *Om Riksdagar* in support of plenum plenum were transferred to the Committee’s report. In its preamble for the Diet Act, the Constitutional Law Committee grounded plenum plenum in the *Riksdag* Act of 1617. The Committee noted that the *Riksdag* Act of 1723 did not mention joint meetings of the estates, and even after 1772 no such meetings took place, although the *Riksdag* Act of 1617 was *de jure* valid.²⁶

In fact, the model for the Finnish plenum plenum was taken from much later discussions, which the Committee did not openly admit. The joint discussions, as prescribed by the *Riksdag* Act of 1617, had been held in the presence of the king, who primarily dictated the outcomes of the meetings. Plena plenum as more independent deliberative fora became popular in Sweden after 1823, first as private and then as semi-official conferences.²⁷ They were included in the *Riksdag* Act of 1810 in 1856–1858.²⁸ Based on a proposal of the Constitutional Committee of the *Riksdag* of 1853–1854, the new subsection of § 46 gave the estates the right to assemble in a room without the right to decide there.²⁹ Section 47 of the Finnish Diet Act was a reformulation of this Swedish rule. The drafters of the Finnish Diet Act had taken their arguments concerning plenum plenum from the report of the Constitutional Committee of the *Riksdag* of 1853–1854.³⁰ This move was openly acknowledged 10 years after the preparation of the Diet Act, when the Finnish newspaper *Helsingfors Dagblad* admitted that the Swedish sections and the work of the Swedish Constitutional Committee had served as the starting point for the Finnish plenum plenum.³¹

In Sweden, plena plenum had not proven their practicality as deliberative fora and had finally become obsolete as a result of the adoption of a bicameral parliament in 1866. The Swedish plenum plenum had remained a work in progress. In 19th-century Sweden, the institution became at first a popular success and joint meetings were organized often. However, complaints about the long and time-consuming discussions soon became common. The procedure did not shorten the *Riksdag* deliberations as hoped, as, in addition to the joint meetings, discussions continued to be conducted within the individual estates, where members felt more comfortable speaking.³²

The expression ‘plenum plenorum’, popular from the 17th century on, was not used in the Swedish constitutions. The constitutions instead referred to ‘joint discussion’ (*gemensam öfverläggning*), which was used to highlight that the four estates only held discussions together but did not vote on these occasions. The wording was also used to distinguish the procedure from the ceremonial events before the king.³³ The term plenum plenorum was actively used in the Finnish discussions, although not mentioned in the Diet Act. In the Finnish language the terms ‘joint meeting’ (*yhteiskokous, yhteinen kokous, -täysikokous*) and ‘joint sitting’ (*yhteisistunto, yhteinen istunto, yleisistunto, -täysi-kokous*) were also used.

The terms reflect a more general tendency to downplay the role of oratory and discussion in the Finnish-language parliamentary vocabulary compared to dominant European languages. For example, *eduskunta*, which was also a general term for parliaments in the 19th century, highlights the act of representation (*edustaa*) instead of speaking in ‘parliament’ (*parlare*).³⁴ In addition, the term ‘member of the Diet/parliament’ (*valtiopäivämies*) was replaced with ‘representative (of the people)’ (*[kansan]edustaja*) in the Finnish-language parliamentary vocabulary in the Parliamentary Reform of 1906. Interestingly, while the term *eduskunta* associated the Finnish unicameral assembly with European parliaments, the Swedish-language name *lan(d)tdag*, which was used until it was replaced with *riksdag* in 1919, was a continuation of the Diet’s discursive practice. Whereas the Swedish-language name emphasized continuity and ties to the Swedish tradition, the Finnish terms highlighted a rupture in the Finnish system of representation.³⁵ The Finnish terms for plenum plenorum also illustrate a strong interrelation between juridical and parliamentary vocabulary in the Finnish language.

Regardless of the wide public interest in plenum plenorum, only two joint discussions of the estates were organized in the Finnish Diet. The first was held on 13 June 1872 on the question of a new House of the Estates in the Nobility’s session hall at the House of the Knights. The Peasants proposed the joint sitting, arguing it would lead to ‘a better and more unanimous decision’.³⁶ The plenum plenorum lasted three hours; 20 speeches were given.³⁷ The second plenum plenorum convened on 11 April 1885 in the Nobility’s session hall. The question under discussion was a government proposal on suffrage in the Burgers’ elections. The plenary began at 6 pm and continued until 5:30 am the next morning.³⁸ The initiative for the joint discussion came from the Clergy, with liberal Professor Otto Donner advocating for it, arguing it would ‘provide an opportunity for contrasting opinions to struggle against each other’.³⁹ The Peasants’ and Donner’s arguments for organizing the joint discussion reflect two different approaches to the institution and two competing concepts of deliberation.

Competing concepts of deliberation: dissensual debate and consensual negotiation

Whereas the drafters of the Finnish Diet Act highlighted the joint discussions as a means to produce consensus and collaboration between the estates, a different emphasis was given to the institution during the following two decades. A liberal group organized around the newspaper *Helsingfors Dagblad* gave plenum plenorum a key role in developing Diet practices towards what they saw as a ‘parliamentary’ style of deliberation.

From the 1860s on, the diffuse group of *Dagblad* liberals was defined by their opponents and in part by themselves in relation to the heated language question that served as the basis for Finnish party formation. Although the *Dagblad* liberals were Swedish speakers, they tried to be (or at least presented themselves as) neutral in the question and thus remain between the polarized groups of the Finnish-speaking Fennomans and the Swedish-speaking Svecomans.⁴⁰ The *Dagbladists* advocated the idea of ‘two languages and one people’ and emphasized the need to move the political focus from language to other reforms. The *Dagblad* liberals as a political group came to its end in the mid-1880s after an unsuccessful attempt to establish a Liberal Party by publishing a party programme in 1880.⁴¹

Revision of Diet rules and practices in relation to foreign models was high on the *Dagbladists*’ agenda from the birth of their newspaper in late 1861. Their interest in procedure differed from other political groups in two respects. First, in the search for foreign models, *Dagbladists*’ focus was on the British parliament and its culture of debate. Although their chief organ, *Helsingfors Dagblad*, reported actively on the discussions of a variety of European parliaments, it was the British parliament’s practices the newspaper presented most eagerly and extensively. *Dagblad* published a large number of specialized articles on Westminster procedure.⁴²

Second, *Dagblad* liberals’ interest in developing the Diet was strongly built on their notion of dissensual debate. This notion of debate was indebted to their admiration of the British parliament and liberal authors such as John Stuart Mill, the ideas of which the group presented extensively in the press. *Dagbladists*’ idea of debate was based on a perspectivist outlook according to which political questions could be examined only ‘from different sides’. They argued that the most effective, many-sided, and thorough means of deliberating a question was to debate it *pro et contra*: for and against. According to *Dagbladists*, in parliament, opinions and arguments should be made to clash and test each other’s strengths and weaknesses in an open plenary debate.⁴³

This idea of debate was in strong contrast to *Dagbladists*’ Fennomans’ opponents, whose conceptions of politics and deliberation were largely indebted to their leading ideologist, Johan Wilhelm Snellman, and his Hegelian ideas.⁴⁴ The mainstream of the Fennomans saw the primary purpose of deliberation as being to consensually express and bring about actions that reflected ‘the prevailing opinion’, ‘national interest’, and especially on the influence of Yrjö Koskinen, the alleged opinion of the people.⁴⁵ In this respect, the estate division was not an insurmountable challenge for the realization of the national interest if sufficient possibilities for inter-estate negotiation were guaranteed and the Finnish-speaking majority of the population were given the majority also in the Diet, for example through the reform on the Burghers’ suffrage. The Fennomans’ approach to deliberation shared similarities with German discussions, especially with the ideas of Otto von Bismarck.⁴⁶ This consensual approach to deliberation was also challenged within the Fennomans’ movement by individuals such as E. G. Palmén and later by the Young Finns.

The competing concepts of deliberation, one based on dissensual debate and the other on consensual negotiation, were also connected to the politics of the Finnish polity. The Swedish-speaking liberals highlighted debate in order to challenge the Fennomans’ definitions of the people and its best interest and the idea of the Fennomans as their sole

advocates. For Dagbladists, debate was a means to get the voice of the minority of the people heard, whereas the Fennomans thought that debate often merely complicated and obstructed the passing of reforms necessary for the majority outside the assembly. According to *Dagblad* liberals, 'the best interest of the nation', or rather the winning opinion on it, could be justifiably invoked only after debate. Only the Diet, the decisions of which could not be based on any rational principle or general spirit, could speak in the name of the people. Whereas the Fennomans evaluated the Diet based on its ability to fulfil the necessary reforms on Finnish language and education, Dagbladists highlighted the assembly's deliberative 'parliamentary' qualities and their development. According to the leading *Dagblad* liberals, who adopted the idea of the Burkean trustee, in a representative assembly the educated and capable representatives of the people, as trustees bound by moral responsibility, debated on the questions and direction of the nation.⁴⁷

The Fennomans anticipated the breakthrough of party democracy and mass political parties, which happened in Finland after the Parliamentary Reform of 1906.⁴⁸ In this regard, the debate between the Fennomans and the Dagbladists took place during a transformative period. Fennomans were guided by the idea of the 'best option' defined by their programme and declared in the name of the national interest or the majority of the people. The Fennomans considered that the fulfilment of their programme was inevitable and could only be delayed by time-consuming debates and many-sided evaluation of alternatives. However, the Fennomans, who spoke with suspicion about extensions of suffrage until the mid-1880s, did not yet approve the idea of the people's active influence on Diet politics, mainly due to Finland's backwardness and low level of education. Instead, following Snellman's Hegelian ideas, the Fennomans gave the task of mediating the interests and the will of the people to publicity and the public opinion.⁴⁹ The Dagbladist and Fennomans stands reflect a division in understanding parliamentary politics that became prominent in Europe from the late 19th century onwards. The debating parliament was typically supported by liberals, whose nationalist and socialist opponents tended to reduce parliaments to mere representative or legislative assemblies.⁵⁰

The Dagbladists argued against the Fennomans idea of consensus as the motivation and the aim of a deliberative assembly. Prominent liberal Leo Mechelin, for example, saw the competition between opposing opinions and arguments as the lifeblood of parliamentary work and noted that debate in parliament often clarified and intensified the divergence in opinions. Instead of looking for consensus, the purpose of parliamentary deliberation was to weigh different opinions and arguments and to make them struggle against each other. According to Mechelin, in parliament, after a direct, procedurally regulated debate, the superiority of some arguments over others was determined and measured primarily in numbers; that is, in votes.⁵¹ For Mechelin, the idea of consensus was based on a false and misleading interpretation of politics. According to him, 'there is no absolute truth, no absolute wisdom in politics; new opinions and ideas occur constantly, new proposals become defining or are rejected'.⁵² Mechelin's view on parliamentary politics shared Mill's idea that deliberation was not aimed at reaching a consensus by burying dissent, but reaching decisions that did not imply consensus.⁵³

Dagblad liberals repeatedly criticized the obsolete four-estate system and the hindrances it posed for deliberation. Although Dagbladists did not abandon their

demands for thorough reform of the political system, a uni/bicameral parliament, increases in the powers of the Diet, and a Senate responsible to the parliament, due to the improbability and possibly uncontrolled risks of such reforms, their efforts focused on gradually developing the procedures. Dagbladist Robert Castrén's presentation in a meeting of the liberal club *LXI* in 1879 was illustrative of their tactics. Castrén noted that there existed two possible approaches to parliamentary reform: Finland either had to change over to a bicameral system or it had to develop the existing system step by step. According to Castrén, it would be more secure to ground reform on the old foundations, as Britain had done. He argued that 'it might seem hopeless to build on ruins, but it is better to fix a hut with construction defects than to move to a palace whose suitability is yet unknown'.⁵⁴

Dagblad liberals positioned plenum plenum within this line of politics. In 1871, two months before the first Diet session under the new Diet Act, *Helsingfors Dagblad's* editorial argued that the Act included aspects that were dependent on Finnish historical development, such as the division of four estates, but also institutions that were new to Finnish political life and constituted 'a transition to representative forms that were unfolding in the constitutional life of European states'. Dagbladists saw plenum plenum as such a feature *par excellence*.⁵⁵ In 1877, *Dagblad* liberals noted that there was a prevailing conviction that the system of four estates was obsolete and unsuitable, but at the same time there was recognition that it would be impossible, for the time being, to replace the existing system entirely with another. According to Dagbladists, these tendencies had become apparent in the Diet Act in a number of reforms that, while letting the foundations of the old system remain, had essentially altered its character and forced 'the old four-wheeled representative assembly onto new tracks'. A way to overcome the defects of the four-estate division had been paved by the introduction of the plenum plenum.⁵⁶

Committee negotiation as a means to overcome the division of four estates: a comparison between Finland and Sweden

In order to understand the Dagbladist position, we have to take a look at the deliberative procedure of the Finnish Diet. The existing studies on the Finnish plenum plenum have emphasized the estates' joint discussion as a consensus-seeking institution.⁵⁷ Consequently, it has been considered as a mere addition to a set of procedures that were adopted in Finland in order to enhance inter-estate negotiation; in other words, fitting together the opinions of the four individual estates. In this sense, the existing studies have repeated the Fennoman interpretation of plenum plenum and neglected the Dagbladist approach.

In the Diet of Finland, the estates held discussions separately and voted separately in plenary sessions. In the first reading, all government proposals were either sent to committee unanimously or tabled until a later meeting; petitions were either rejected or sent to a committee.⁵⁸ Other estates were able to take part in the reading of a petition only after they had received the committee report on the matter.⁵⁹ In the second plenary reading, a question could be either resolved or returned to the committee.⁶⁰ In the separate estates, the speaker of the estate formulated a proposal, on which a vote of 'yes' or 'no' was held. Decisions were made based on a simple

majority of the members voting.⁶¹ According to the Diet Act of 1869, most of the questions in the Diets were decided by a majority of three estates, while matters of constitution and privileges required unanimity.⁶² Financial matters also required, in principle, the approval of all four estates.

In the 1860s, Finnish actors developed several procedural innovations that helped to overcome the four-estate division. One of these was the *deputations*, a remnant of the 17th-century *Riksdag* practice, through which the estates negotiated questions on the agenda with each other during proceedings for the purpose of reaching consistent decisions. Deputations were used in Sweden throughout the period of the *Riksdag* Act of 1810, although they were not mentioned in the constitution. The Finnish estates adopted the procedure in 1863 in the form of 'invitations', although it had no grounds in the procedural framework at the estates' disposal. Based on the practices of the first Diet, the procedure was included in § 66 of the Diet Act of 1869: the estates were obliged to inform each other about their proceedings by excerpts of minutes or by sending deputations. The deputations and communications usually sought another estate's support for a proposal.⁶³ They were also used to communicate the decisions of one estate to all the others.

The Constitutional Law Committee of 1865 effectively used the room for manoeuvre it had in relation to the Diet committees. The Committee of 1865 sought to remove the four-estate division in the Diet's committee procedures and formulated the Diet Act so that the estates' *joint standing committees*, consisting of 12 to 16 members, voted on a per capita basis with each estate given the same number of seats.⁶⁴

Combined committees, developed by the Committee of 1865, were another procedural innovation created to enhance inter-estate negotiation and to bring the estate members' expertise together. Based on § 41 of the Diet Act, the combined committees were assembled with members of different estates in different standing committees. The standing committees chose the members for the combined committees; an equal number from each estate. In the 1870s the combined committees were organized as the combined finance and economy committee and the combined law and economy committee. No more than two committees were combined at a time. Combined committees disappeared from the Diet by the mid-1880s, as, from 1872 on, combined committees were replaced by simultaneously preparing questions in two standing committees and also by organizing *ad hoc* select committees as defined in § 30 of the Diet Act.⁶⁵

The Diet's negotiation style of proceeding became most apparent in the *accommodation* process, which, through a carefully designed committee system, aimed at producing uniform resolutions by reconciling the differences between the separate estate decisions. Section 67 of the Diet Act gave the responsibility of the accommodation decisions to the committee that had prepared and reported on the matter. The procedure was adopted from the *Riksdag* Act of 1810.⁶⁶

In § 67, the committee's duty to negotiate and to resolve the estate differences was written in the form of an imperative: 'If the committee finds the decisions so divergent that no lawful plurality of the different opinions can be composed, the committee *must* seek, in so far as possible, to accommodate the different opinions and to give the estates a proposal on the accommodation'.⁶⁷ As a result, negotiation was pushed to the extreme in the Finnish Diets. In contrast to Sweden, in Finland

accommodation was used even in situations in which two estates were opposed by two other estates.⁶⁸ In addition, a second round of accommodation in the committee could be organized from the Diet of 1877–1878 on. Twice it occurred that accommodation was organized three times on a matter. Whereas in Sweden accommodation had played a rather minor role in the *Riksdag*'s deliberations, in the Finnish Diets it became of essence.⁶⁹

Furthermore, in the case of an unsuccessful accommodation, the committee could be transformed into a *strengthened committee*. The Swedish reformists formulated the procedure in 1809 as a means to overcome the endless disputes between the estates.⁷⁰ Based on § 74 and § 72 of the Finnish Diet Act, after an unsuccessful accommodation the number of members in the committee was multiplied to 15 from each estate and it was authorized to make a decision by a simple majority in questions that required approval of three estates and by a majority of two-thirds in financial matters.

According to § 77 and § 78 of the Diet Act, after accommodation, the question was sent to the *expediting committee*, consisting of two members from each estate to check the formulation of the estates' decision. After this the decision was either approved or revised in the *checking committee*, which consisted similarly of two trustees appointed by each estate. In the case of a revision, the question was remitted to the expediting committee. If that effort also proved unsuccessful, the two committees organized a joint sitting to discuss the problem. The checking committee was a Finnish invention of the 1860s that had no direct foreign model or grounds in the constitutions.⁷¹

Thus, Finnish reformists of the Diet Act of 1869 sought to raise the importance of the Diet by establishing procedures that enhanced cooperation between the estates and increased their possibilities to produce strong resolutions effectively. Government proposals had priority over other matters and were to be treated first in the Diet. Petitions passed in the Diet were delivered to the emperor as 'requests' through the Senate.⁷² Petitions passed were rarely turned down at the highest level, and even the ones that the Senate of Finland did not second were delivered to the emperor in the form of wishes and concerns of the people.⁷³ The appearance of unanimity and consensus between the estates was seen as leverage that could augment the Diet's significance as a 'political power' in relation to the Senate of Finland and the emperor. Also, the long intervals between Diets increased the stress on consensus, when given the rare chance, decisions had to be reached.

The Dagbladist critique of the committee model

Dagblad liberals' ideas on plenum plenum were a radical departure from the Diet's existing deliberative model. Dagbladists argued that the uniqueness of plenum plenum as a Diet procedure was its 'possibility to present representatives' different points of view in a joint debate'.⁷⁴ Dagbladists emphasized plenum plenum as an arena for a fair and open struggle between different sides: when all arguments and opinions were placed in the same plenary hall, they were made to clash, confront, and test each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Dagblad liberals highlighted negotiation and debate as different modes of deliberation and gave the latter a higher parliamentary value. In 1867, *Helsingfors Dagblad*'s editorial argued that it was a great weakness of the estate Diet that arguments

presented did not 'meet in mutual confrontation'. This had been addressed through obligatory committee readings, which, however, had harmfully become 'the crux of the diet machinery' and made the actual plenary discussions less important elements of the parliamentary deliberation. Dagbladists argued that until the multi-cameral system would be changed, estates' joint plenary debates were the only means to fight the dominating role of committee work.⁷⁵

Similarly, in 1876, Leo Mechelin argued that whereas the strengthened committee was a means to bring together opinions that had been uttered in individual estates, plenum plenorum's aim was 'to let all different arguments clash against each other in direct and joint deliberation'.⁷⁶ For Mechelin, the main advantage of plenum plenorum was that 'the great assembly of all four estates raised debate to parliamentary sublimity', which differed from the 'committee-like negotiations' in the estates.⁷⁷ Instead of leaning on the estate majority, plenum plenorum offered the possibility of truly many-sided deliberation.

In 1885, Dagbladists asked: what was a decision of the Diet and who was responsible for it? The group argued that there was no clear answer to this due to the dominating role of committee negotiation and turned their critique against the ambiguous multi-phased accommodation process.⁷⁸

In fact, no detailed instructions on the formulation of the final Diet decision existed. According to the Diet Act, the accommodation was to be extended 'as far as possible'. In the Diets it was argued that the accommodation was to be based on the estates' decisions by avoiding any resolution that was not in accordance with them. This criterion was not always followed. Instead, differing and rather vague principles were presented for accommodation. For example, in the Diet of 1885, the law committee justified its formulation by arguing that the accommodation should pursue 'a middle way between the decisions of the separate estates'.⁷⁹ In the Diet of 1888, V. M. von Born argued that 'accommodation cannot take place other than in a way based on mathematical-logical grounds'.⁸⁰ In practice, accommodation was grounded on improvised rules and justifications, especially when two estates were opposed by two other estates.⁸¹ In addition, the editing and articulating of the estates' decisions were left to the expediting and checking committees, which worked long after the Diet sessions had concluded without any supervision by the estates.⁸²

Dagblad liberals noted that a decision of the Diet was mainly produced by the committees that had the authority to examine possibilities for fitting together the four different decisions of the four separate estates, which, to top it all, were often made from very differently formulated voting proposals. From these the committees were to decide whether some kind of lawful unanimity or (qualified) majority could be found. Dagbladists noted that no procedural guidance for the process was available or possible. Sometimes the committees considered all four estate decisions together as such and, if finding that they could not be harmonized, the matter was considered rejected. Sometimes the separate decisions were broken into pieces and the different parts were gathered and reassembled; if three estates were in some point seen as unanimous, plurality was seen to have been reached and an estates' decision was made. *Dagblad* liberals noted that these decisions, however, did not necessarily correspond to the decision made by any individual estate. Consequently, great uncertainty existed as to what the estates had actually decided and what they had not. The disorderly procedure was reflected also in harmful forethought and manoeuvring in the

estates' deliberations.⁸³ According to *Dagbladists*, compared to the obscure negotiation in committees, joint plenary debate offered an arena in which sides could be taken openly, deliberation could be procedurally regulated and legitimated, and clear grounds for decisions could be presented.

Supplements to the Swedish model: from a negotiating assembly towards a debating parliament

Dagblad liberals sought to combat the deficiencies of the accommodation process by raising the Finnish assembly to 'a parliamentary grade' with the help of plenum plenum. They emphasized that plenum plenum had been developed in the Diet Act beyond the Swedish model in order to introduce 'parliamentary characteristics' in the Finnish system. They noted that, in contrast to some procedures that were a mere utilization of the experiences from the last period of the Swedish estate representation, plenum plenum stood out as 'an effort to apply aspects that belonged to the higher development of modern parliamentarism'. The legislator's mission had not been to use the estates' joint discussions as 'a mere secondary complement' to the estate sittings. On the contrary, plenum plenum was 'a vital parliamentary institution' that had 'greater importance for the Finnish parliamentary system' than being 'the mere political decoration' it had been in Sweden.⁸⁴

Dagbladists noted that the Finnish Constitutional Law Committee of 1865 had not limited itself to copying the Swedish paragraphs, but had made additions of great political importance that the Swedish plenum plenum had never contained. Some of these were simple, but nonetheless important, modifications. A subsection of § 47 of the Diet Act ordered the estates to make their decisions immediately after the joint meeting without further discussion on the matter. In other words, similarly to parliaments, the vote was to be a direct result of the joint deliberation. *Dagblad* liberals noted that, as this rule had not been adopted in the *Riksdag*, joint discussions had become 'mere parliamentary parades' without any real importance or direct influence on the decision, thus leaving the institution with 'the character of a club discussion'. Consequently, the decisive debates for which the members saved their energy had taken place in the individual estates. In contrast, the Finnish clause banning further discussion was introduced in order to give plenum plenum the importance and significance of 'a decisive debate'.⁸⁵

For the same reasons, *Dagbladists* argued that proposals for the votes should be formulated at the joint sitting, not in the individual estates. Alternatively, the task could be given to the speaker's council.⁸⁶ If proposals for voting were offered in the plenum plenum, identical proposals could be simply answered with 'yes' or 'no', preferably immediately in a location close to the joint sitting.⁸⁷

Dagblad liberals not only advocated the more popular use of plenum plenum but also saw it as a means to shake the grounds of the whole estate mode of proceeding. As early as 1867, *Dagbladists* argued that, over time, plenum plenum could become a practice that would transform the separate estates into a single assembly.⁸⁸ In line with this idea, the group went on to propose that joint discussions be made a permanent and obligatory part of Diet procedure. The Diet's 'stiff and ponderous multi-divided political organization' was to be transformed to approach the model of three readings of a bill, which had been part of the British parliamentary

procedure from the Middle Ages.⁸⁹ According to *Dagblad* liberals, plenum plenum would help to develop the Finnish ‘four-legged absurdity’, in which the estates were ‘like four voices shouting from different directions’, into a form that gave the presenters of the different opinions the possibility to ‘confront each other in a joint debate’ several times in a question.⁹⁰ This analogy to a parliament would also save time by reducing or eliminating multiple discussions, useless repeating of arguments, and complex time-consuming accommodations.⁹¹

In the Burghers’ estate on 2 February 1885, *Helsingfors Dagblad*’s editor Anders Herman Chydenius presented a petition memorandum concerning revision of plenum plenum in the Diet Act. According to the proposal, which was thoroughly reported in *Helsingfors Dagblad*, plenum plenum should be made obligatory for all government proposals and petitions. The proposal included a variation on the principle of three plenary readings, in which plenum plenum was obligatory in two different stages. The first reading would be a plenum plenum to debate the question regarding to which committee a matter was to be referred for examination. In the second phase the matter was discussed in the committee. In the second reading the committee report was debated in the individual estates that decided on the matter and then remitted it to committee. Finally, the committee submitted a report on the estates’ decision or accommodation to a third reading in a plenum plenum. Thus, ‘four stages of a matter’s parliamentary deliberation’ would be organized: two of these, the first and the last, would take place in joint discussions, with committee and individual estates’ discussions as phases in between. *Dagbladists* saw that such an organization could mould the Diet procedure to correspond to ‘the procedure of separate readings, which has been accepted in most other parliamentary assemblies’.⁹² The model of three readings, with national variations, had been adopted also in France, the Austrian Chamber of Deputies, the German *Reichstag*, and the Danish *Folketing*.⁹³ The liberal stronghold, the Burghers’ estate, voted in support of referring the proposal to the law committee, which declined to examine the question.

Dagbladists argued that Chydenius’s proposal could be used as a means of moving ‘the most defective parliamentary mechanism that could be found’ closer to foreign parliamentary practice, and thus prepare the Finnish system for the inevitable, but yet distant, representation reform. According to *Dagblad* liberals, as the Finnish reform should equally concern the internal division of the representative assembly and its rules of procedure, the reform would be easier to carry out if the procedure was already ‘leaning towards it’.⁹⁴ For *Dagbladists*, the practice of multiple readings of a bill constituted ‘one of the elements of modern parliamentary procedure most suitable for its purpose’. Although the suggested procedure could not, within the four-estate system, be fully equivalent to a regular parliamentary deliberation of several readings, the revision could be a way to approach this goal. According to *Dagblad* liberals, plenum plenum had ‘the seeds of a more developed parliamentarism’.⁹⁵

Plenum plenum as an instrument for parliamentary oversight and responsibility

The idea of parliamentary government began to gain ground relatively early in Sweden. The constitution of 1809 made individual ministers judicially

responsible to the *Riksdag* in their advice to the monarch. During the following decades, discussions continued to draw on British parliamentary politics, Benjamin Constant, and sovereignty of the people. In Finland, any attempt to create parliamentary government was unrealistic, starting with the fact that the Diet did not convene between 1809 and 1863. The press kept Finnish political actors updated with European, especially British and French, developments. In the second half of the 19th century, first the Danish campaign for parliamentarism in the 1870s and then the establishment of parliamentary government in Norway in 1884 fuelled discussions on parliamentary government in the Nordic countries.⁹⁶ Finnish debates on parliamentary responsibility and oversight focused on Diet procedures. Both Dagbladists and Fennomans highlighted the British parliamentary system as exemplary. However, for example, Fennomans Yrjö Koskinen's admiration for the British system in the 1860s⁹⁷ did not extend to procedures as the regulators of dissensual intra-parliamentary debate.

The differences in the Dagbladist and Fennomans' concepts of deliberation became apparent in the discussions on plenum plenorum's potential for making the Finnish Senate responsible to the Diet. Under the rule of the Russian Empire, the Gustavian constitutions prescribed that the monarch possessed the highest governmental power and that the Diet's significance was limited to a mere contribution. In practice, a great part of the emperor's executive power in Finland was distributed to other organs, primarily to the Senate, which had significant power of decision in matters of governance and administration. The Senate prepared and enforced the decisions of the emperor and prepared the government proposals for the Diet. According to law, the senators were responsible to the emperor alone, who appointed them for periods of three years.⁹⁸ Hopes for a new Constitution Act that could have changed the parliamentary system were buried time and time again.⁹⁹

During the Diets, Finnish actors made several procedural proposals in order to gradually develop the relationship between the government and the representative assembly. One of the main issues was the estates' right to review government actions for the periods between Diet sessions. The idea was that a regularly appointed audit committee would check the minutes of the Senate and report back to the estates on Senate adherence to the constitutions, the law, and the best interest of the nation. The proposal was modelled on the Constitutional Committee in Sweden's Instrument of Government of 1809 and in the *Riksdag* Act of 1810.¹⁰⁰ Proposals for such a committee were turned down in the Diet or rejected or left unratified by the emperor.¹⁰¹

However, during the late 19th-century Diets it became practice to appoint senators who enjoyed the confidence of the estates. This was seen as important regardless of the fact that the Finnish constitution 'was not cast in the mould of parliamentarism'.¹⁰² In 1882, the first political party representatives were appointed to the Senate, and by 1885 the composition of the Senate reflected the relative strengths of the parties in the Diet. At the same time, the Senate began to consist of persons supporting a shared political programme, who all resigned if the programme could not be implemented.¹⁰³

Early on, plenum plenorum was seen as a means of overcoming the strict system of dualism in Finland. The Constitutional Law Committee of 1865 supported joint discussions by arguing that they could serve the purpose of exchanging ideas between the representative assembly and the government. Senate members could receive information valuable for the

examination of the questions in plenum plenum, especially as, under the existing system, Senate members could take part in the discussions of the Nobility only if they were members of that estate. The Committee included in § 47 of the Diet Act: 'The Chairman and the members of the Senate have admission to the Estates' joint meetings with the right to participate in the discussions'.¹⁰⁴ A clause that gave the members of the Council of the Realm the right to take part in the estates' joint discussions had been included in § 41 of the Swedish *Riksdag* Act in the *Riksdag* of 1859–1860.¹⁰⁵ The Finnish Constitutional Law Committee of 1865 took the arguments from the report of the *Riksdag*'s Constitution Committee of 1857.¹⁰⁶

In practice, the idea was to introduce a modest version of cabinet government, in which the estates together controlled or oversaw the work of the Senate. For example, when discussing the Diet Act in the Senate, Johan Vilhelm Snellman proposed that the Senate should appoint 'a government commissioner' for each plenum plenum to communicate the required information and defend the government proposals. The commissioners could be appointed according to different sorts of Diet matters. According to Snellman, this would place the Finnish system closer to what was found in all representative assemblies.¹⁰⁷ Yrjö Koskinen's Fennoman periodical *Kirjallinen Kuukauslehti* wrote that the joint discussions gave the government a very different position than before, as they obliged the members of the government to 'report on the true nature and purpose of the government's actions in front of the estates'. According to the periodical, this was 'ministerial responsibility to the extent that such was possible in the Finnish circumstances'.¹⁰⁸

In this respect, the Fennomans highlighted plenum plenum as a means to help the government avoid opinions that did not understand and correspond to the needs and wishes of the nation.¹⁰⁹ They built their hope on plenum plenum on its ability to assist cooperation and the exchange of opinions between the government and the legislative and representative assembly.¹¹⁰ Fennomans argued that, rather than complicating and confusing questions' treatment in a debate, plenum plenum should be used to investigate a real or factual state of affairs.¹¹¹ Eventually, the Fennomans rather focused on procedures that enhanced legal accountability of the government, such as the audit committee, which they saw as increasing the trust of the people in government, eliminating dissent between the government and the assembly, and assisting in the passage of important reforms on language and education.¹¹²

In contrast to legal accountability, Dagbladists emphasized plenum plenum and its debating characteristics as a means for political responsibility. For John Stuart Mill, the idea of parliamentary debate was to plead interests and opinions 'in the face of the government'.¹¹³ *Dagblad* liberals saw efficient use of plenum plenum as the only means in the existing system to have 'parliamentary influence' through a joint debate with the government.¹¹⁴ In such debates, members of the government could give detailed clarifications and defences of government opinions and policies, and know whether the government had support for the programme it wished to carry out.¹¹⁵ Dagbladists saw these aspects as 'modern demands and essential preconditions of representative government'.¹¹⁶ They noted that, in contrast to Finland, where no interpellations could be made in order to become convinced of the government's point of view or to propose amendments to its positions, in countries with one or two chambers, ministers were interpellated during debates, especially in questions the

approval of which raised doubts within the assembly. In Finland, *Dagbladists* highlighted *plenum plenum* as the only possibility for such parliamentary features.¹¹⁷

Dagblad liberals included mechanisms of parliamentary responsibility in Chydenius's proposal to make *plena plenum* an obligatory part of the Diet procedure. According to *Dagbladists*, in the case of government proposals the government was to be given the possibility to present and defend its views in the joint referral debate of all four estates. Thus, the government members' statements would become binding on further treatment of the question. In this way, 'a step onwards would be taken in the development of parliamentarism'. In addition, not all petition memoranda would need to be sent to the committees after the first reading, as the government would be informed and questioned about them directly. Petitions could thus serve as something similar to interpellations in the other countries' chambers, or even 'as a seed for parliamentary manner of proceeding and government responsibility vis-à-vis the estates'. Petitions, which could be made on any question, would serve the purpose of questioning the government about its actions or intentions on a matter.¹¹⁸

The *Dagbladists*' proposal followed the idea of 'questions' to the government in the British parliament, which had been called 'interpellations' in the Swedish-language press in Finland.¹¹⁹ Unlike the French interpellations of the time, which served as the model for the later Finnish system of interpellations, *Dagblad* liberals' version of them could be made orally and did not include a vote.¹²⁰ A modest sort of written interpellation that did not lead to a vote, or necessarily to any answer or discussion, was made in the bicameral Swedish *Riksdag*, although they were not included in the constitution and could be made only by the chambers separately.¹²¹

The long prelude to the reform of 1906

Despite the *Dagblad* liberals' repeated efforts, *plenum plenum* seemed destined to remain a dead letter in the Diet Act. Several reasons were presented for the unpopularity of the institution. It was argued that the unaccustomedness to speaking before large audiences caused trepidation and timidity among the members of the Diet, who preferred to speak more freely and often within the smaller circle of an estate sitting.¹²² Members' attachment to the practices and principles of estate representation discouraged more popular use of joint discussions. It was argued that the rule on immediate decision-making after joint sittings made the estates hesitant, as it was seen to contravene the estates' procedures and to threaten the estates' rights and privileges.¹²³ In addition, it was argued that *plena plenum* were organized on the wrong questions and that the lack of a proper plenary hall hindered their more frequent use.¹²⁴

After the second *plenum plenum*, held in 1885, none of the political groups were satisfied with the institution. *Plenum plenum* in the way it was procedurally organized and put into practice suited neither the *Dagblad* liberal nor the Fennoman ideals of deliberation. The *Dagbladists* saw *plenum plenum*'s existing procedural form as insufficient to fulfil the debating purpose it was designed for. The Fennomans, in contrast, felt that the estates' joint meetings were incapable of

producing concrete results or consensus, and thus brought no additional value to the committee system or to the accommodation model it facilitated.

The disappointment led to criticism and mockery of the institution in the conservative Fennoman press that called plenum plenorum 'comical' and 'ever so hilarious',¹²⁵ and published statistics on who had spoken and for how long.¹²⁶ Such critiques are understandable in view of the fact that Finnish politicians and the public were not accustomed to heated party disputes typical to large plenary debates: the plenum plenorum of 1885 was seen as a significant rupture in the calm and severe Finnish deliberations with its heated debate, interjections, and whistling.¹²⁷ The Fennoman attitude also reflects a growing scepticism towards plenary discussion, which was partly a result of the overloaded Diet's work and the long intervals between the Diet sessions. In this context, thorough debate was difficult to legitimize, especially without democratic representation.

Despite the joint discussions' apparent failure, the institution and the discussions concerning them were not insignificant. The small but influential *Dagblad* liberal group played an important role in introducing parliamentary models, procedures, and concepts into Finnish discussions. The group's emphasis on dissensual debate can be easily interpreted as a mere curiosity in the history of the Finnish parliament. However, although not always passed, *Dagbladists'* proposals, presented in their leading Finnish newspaper and brought to the Diet agendas, had to be taken into account by their adversaries. Their procedure proposals forced opponents to react, reflect and argue. The *Dagbladist* procedural innovations made within the estate system should be understood as presentations and examinations to work one's way into a new paradigm and to legitimize it. They introduced new ideas and possibilities for later practices.

Three readings and interpellations, included in the *Dagbladist* version of plenum plenorum, were adopted in the *Eduskunta* as ordinary and established parliamentary elements. The Parliament Act of 1906 gave the chairmen and members of the Senate the right to participate in the *Eduskunta* discussions and included an elementary system of interpellations in the form of members' questions to the senators on matters concerning their branch of administration.¹²⁸ The Parliamentary Reform Committee of 1905–1906, consisting of persons who had been active in Finnish political life and in the Diets for decades, included a system of a referral debate, three plenary readings and examinations in committee, and the Grand Committee in the *Eduskunta* procedure.¹²⁹ Most importantly, plenum plenorum, in the form of assembling all political opponents in a joint plenary hall, became reality in the unicameral *Eduskunta*.

While the claimed radicalism and unexpectedness of the Parliamentary Reform of 1906 concerned the suffrage and electoral system, in terms of the *Eduskunta's* procedures, the Reform was a continuation of the debates that had begun in Finland in the Diets. In this respect, the barrier between the estate assembly and the parliament had already been partly overcome before the reforms on representation and system of government.

The *Dagbladist* ideas on parliamentary debate were in no sense exceptional in the 19th century. Similar stands were presented, especially in Britain, but also in several other European parliaments.¹³⁰ The ideal of dissensual debate was challenged in Europe in around 1900. Broadening suffrage allowed new groups in parliaments, who often equated debating with the liberal tradition. They considered debate as a

tool of the old political elite, who hampered the people's influence in decision-making; parliaments were closed shops and elitist debating clubs. As a result, discussions on procedures began to lose their theoretical and principled quality, and instead of debate, emphasis was given to parliaments' ability to reform and legislate efficiently. Debating was further challenged by obstruction campaigns of national and socialist minorities and by increasing party discipline that controlled parliamentarians' speeches and votes.¹³¹

Finland was part of these transnational developments. The Fennomans, as well as the Social Democrats in the early *Eduskunta*, criticized parliamentary debating as being 'all talk, no action'. The priority of efficient committee negotiation over plenary debate was transferred to the unicameral parliament.¹³² The debating character of the unicameral model was belittled in the Parliamentary Reform of 1906. In contrast to the Dagbladist ideas, the compromise-building style of argumentation of the Parliamentary Reform Committee emphasized the need for national consensus during difficult times. The unicameral parliament was adopted by highlighting its representative character and its ability to unify the Finnish people. Whereas unicameral assemblies had often been opposed due to their revolutionary character, supporters argued that the unicameral *Eduskunta* could integrate different opinions and help representatives to understand their opponents' standpoints.¹³³ In contrast to the Dagbladist project, the *Eduskunta*'s deliberative procedure was not designed to encourage dissensual clash and test of opinions and arguments. Instead, it was aimed at restraining controversy and forcing political groups into compromise. Despite these efforts, the early *Eduskunta*'s proceedings were characterized by struggles between competing conceptions of parliament.¹³⁴

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

- 1 The Reform of 1906 gave the right to vote and right to stand for election to Finnish citizens, both women and men, above the age of 24. The suffrage, however, excluded one-seventh of the population of voting age: restrictions concerned the poor, the unemployed, the homeless, the disabled, persons convicted of crimes, and members of the military especially.
- 2 See e.g. the history of the Finnish parliament, *Suomen eduskunta 100 vuotta 1–12*, published 2006–2008.
- 3 Vares, *Varpuset ja pääskyset*, 23; Pulkkinen, 'Valtio', 238.
- 4 Pekonen, *Debating 'the ABCs of Parliamentary Life'*, 87–113, 114–44, 181–225, 226–82.
- 5 Joint discussions of all estates have been also tried, for example, in the French Estates-General of 1789.
- 6 The article is based on a case study presented in the author's doctoral dissertation, *Debating 'the ABCs of Parliamentary Life' – The Learning of Parliamentary Rules and Practices in the Late Nineteenth-Century Finnish Diet and the Early Eduskunta*.

- 7 See e.g. Krusius-Ahrenberg, 'Vuoden 1869 valtiopäiväjärjestys', 306–10; Lilius, 'Säätyvaltiopäivien työmuodot', 272–80.
- 8 See especially Gränström, *Om plenum plenorum*.
- 9 Finnish National Library's Digital Collections include newspapers published in Finland 1771–1920, <http://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/?language=en>
- 10 See especially events and publications of *European Information and Research Network on Parliamentary History* (www.EuParl.net) and *International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions* (www.ichrpi.com). Also e.g. Ihalainen, Ilie, and Palonen, eds., *Parliament and Parliamentarism*; Palonen, Rosales, and Turkkka, eds., *The Politics of Dissensus*; Roussellier, *Le Parlement de l'éloquence*; Te Velde, *Sprekende politiek*.
- 11 See e.g. Ihalainen, 'Vertaileva Euroopan historian tutkimus'; Ihalainen, 'Suomalaisen kansanvallan ja parlamentarismin legitimititeettikriisi'; Kurunmäki, 'Different Styles of Parliamentary Democratisation'; Pekonen, *Debating 'the ABCs of Parliamentary Life'*; Pekonen, 'The Political Transfer'.
- 12 Krusius-Ahrenberg, 'Vuoden 1869 valtiopäiväjärjestys'; Mylly, *Edustuksellisen kansanvallan läpimurto*. For an exception, see Pekonen, *Debating 'the ABCs of Parliamentary Life'*.
- 13 Procedures are still often ignored in transnational parliamentary history. See even Ihalainen, Ilie, and Palonen, eds., *Parliament and Parliamentarism*.
- 14 Skinner, 'Some Problems', 294–5.
- 15 See e.g. Te Velde, *Sprekende politiek*; Te Velde, 'Parliamentary Obstruction'; Vieira, *Time and Politics*; Pekonen, *Debating 'the ABCs of Parliamentary Life'*; Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*.
- 16 Jurist Eugen von Knorring, assigned by the Senate of Finland, compiled a collection of rules for the Diet titled *Sammanfattning af gällande stadganden och vedertagna bruk, hvilka ega tillämpning på ordningen vid landtdag i storfurstendömet Finland*. For books see Palmén, *Storfurstendömet Finlands grundlagar*; Rosenborg, *Om Riksdagar*; Nordström, *Promemoria*.
- 17 Lilius, 'Säätyvaltiopäivien työmuodot', 149–52; Krusius-Ahrenberg, 'Uutta ja luovaa valtiopäivätoimintaa', 95, 127, 139–52.
- 18 See e.g. J. Ph. Palmén in the newspaper *Helsingfors Dagblad* (hereafter *HDB*), 28 July 1863, 1.
- 19 Bergh, *Vår styrelse och våra landtdagar*, 476–7.
- 20 Ihalainen, Ilie, and Palonen, eds., *Parliament and Parliamentarism*; Te Velde, *Sprekende politiek*; Te Velde, 'Parliamentary Obstruction'; Vieira, *Time and Politics*; Pekonen, *Debating 'the ABCs of Parliamentary Life'*.
- 21 Krusius-Ahrenberg, 'Vuoden 1869 valtiopäiväjärjestys', 258–9.
- 22 For details about the role of the press, see Pekonen, *Debating 'the ABCs of Parliamentary Life'*, 37–50; Pekonen, 'The Political Transfer'.
- 23 See Pekonen, *Debating 'the ABCs of Parliamentary Life'* for a variety of examples.
- 24 Rosenborg, *Om Riksdagar*, 179–80.
- 25 *Valtiopäiväjärjestys Suomen Suuriruhtinaanmaalle 1869* (hereafter *VJ 1869*), § 47.
- 26 Grundlagskomitén, *Motiver till förslaget till Landtdagsordning*.
- 27 Gränström, *Om plenum plenorum*, 37–50.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 72–9. For arguments in support of plenum plenorum in Sweden, which were not highlighted in the Finnish discussions on the institution, such as the

- greater influence of the public opinion on the decisions of the estates, see Harvard, *En helig allmännelig opinion*, 122–4.
- 29 Gränström, *Om plenum plenorum*, 72.
- 30 See Naumann, *Sveriges grundlagar*, 482.
- 31 ‘Plenum plenorum’, *HDB*, 7 April 1877, 1.
- 32 Gränström, *Om plenum plenorum*; Fahlbeck, *Ståndsriksdagens sista skede*; Lilius, ‘Säätyvaltiopäivien työmuodot’, 273.
- 33 Gränström, *Om plenum plenorum*, 8–9.
- 34 Pohjantammi, ‘Edustus’, 366–9, 371–4.
- 35 *Eduskunnanuudistamiskomitean pöytäkirjat*, 30 December 1905.
- 36 *Talonpoikaissäädyn pöytäkirjat*, 1872, II, 668.
- 37 *Aatelissäädyn pöytäkirjat*, 1872, III, 415–30.
- 38 *Porvarissäädyn pöytäkirjat*, 1885, III, bihang.
- 39 *Pappissäädyn pöytäkirjat*, 1885, I, 446.
- 40 Stenius and Turunen, ‘Finnish Liberalism’, 51.
- 41 For a more detailed presentation of the group and their newspaper, see Pekonen, *Debating ‘the ABCs of Parliamentary Life’*, 51–6.
- 42 See e.g. the extensive three-part series on the British parliament, which took up one-third of the newspaper’s total page space in three different issues: ‘Det engelska parlamentet’, *HDB*, 31 July 1862, 2–3; *HDB*, 1 August 1862, 2–3; *HDB*, 4 August 1862, 2–3.
- 43 In detail, see Pekonen, *Debating ‘the ABCs of Parliamentary Life’*, especially 65–73. See Mill on the role of debate and collision of adverse opinions in Mill, ‘On Liberty’, ch. II, 229, 231–2, 250–9; Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy*, 82–5. For the British House of Commons as a procedural ideal type of *pro et contra* debate, see Palonen, *The Politics of Parliamentary Procedure*.
- 44 Pekonen, *Debating ‘the ABCs of Parliamentary Life’*, 73–7.
- 45 On the shift of emphasis from Snellman’s ‘national spirit’ to Koskinen’s ‘people’ see Liikanen, ‘Kansa’, 276–7.
- 46 See e.g. Palonen, *Rhetorik des Unbeliebten*.
- 47 Burke, ‘Speech to the electors of Bristol’; also Mill, ‘Considerations on Representative Government’, 510.
- 48 Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government*, 193–238; Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties*.
- 49 Pekonen, *Debating ‘the ABCs of Parliamentary Life’*, 73–7, 271–2.
- 50 Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government*, 193–238; Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*. See the final section of this article for more discussion. Instead of Schmitt’s division between ‘liberalism’ and ‘democracy’, it can be argued that parliaments maintained their deliberative and debating characteristics despite democratization and continued to be arenas for challenging consensual and uniform national culture.
- 51 Mechelin, ‘De fyra Stånden’, 170–1; Mechelin, ‘De politiska partierna’, 116–20.
- 52 Mechelin, ‘De politiska partierna’, 116.
- 53 Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy*, 4.
- 54 Robert Castrén’s presentation in *LXI*, 12 March 1879, in Numminen, ‘G.V–LXI–K.’, 179.
- 55 Editorial, *HDB*, 27 November 1871, 1.

- 56 'Plenum plenorum', *HDB*, 7 April 1877, 1; 'Plenum plenorum. II', *HDB*, 8 April 1877, 1.
- 57 Krusius-Ahrenberg, 'Vuoden 1869 valtiopäiväjärjestys', 306–10; Lilius, 'Säätyvaltiopäivien työmuodot', 272–80.
- 58 VJ 1869, § 53.
- 59 Lilius, 'Säätyvaltiopäivien työmuodot', 234.
- 60 VJ 1869, § 56–57.
- 61 *Ibid.*, § 58–61.
- 62 *Ibid.*, § 71–73.
- 63 Lilius, 'Säätyvaltiopäivien työmuodot', 291–3.
- 64 Krusius-Ahrenberg, 'Vuoden 1869 valtiopäiväjärjestys', 282–4; VJ 1869, § 29.
- 65 Lilius, 'Säätyvaltiopäivien työmuodot', 224–5, 227.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 281, 284.
- 67 VJ 1869, § 67. *Italics added.*
- 68 Lilius, 'Säätyvaltiopäivien työmuodot', 285–6.
- 69 Krusius-Ahrenberg, 'Vuoden 1869 valtiopäiväjärjestys', 318–19; Lilius, 'Säätyvaltiopäivien työmuodot', 291.
- 70 Lilius, 'Säätyvaltiopäivien työmuodot', 296–301.
- 71 Lilius, 'Säätyvaltiopäivien työmuodot', 323–7.
- 72 In practice, Diet decisions on questions of legislation could be circulated to the emperor through the governor-general's secretariat, the Finnish minister-secretary's secretariat and through the Russian bureaucracy. Jyränki, 'Kansanedustuslaitos ja valtiosääntö 1906–2005', 25–6.
- 73 Lilius, 'Säätyvaltiopäivien työmuodot', 267.
- 74 'Plenum plenorum. II', *HDB*, 17 January 1885, 1.
- 75 Editorial, *HDB*, 1 February 1867, 1.
- 76 Mechelin, 'De fyra Stånden', 163.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 165–6.
- 78 'Några brister i vårt representationssystem', *HDB*, 8 January 1885, 2.
- 79 Lakivaliokunta, *Yhteensovitusehdotus esitykseen n:o 18*, Valtiopäiväasiakirjat 1885, II, 3.
- 80 Born, vastalause lakivaliokunnan yhteensovitusehdotukseen esityksen n:o 36 käsittelyssä, valtiopäiväasiakirjat 1888, III.
- 81 Lilius, 'Säätyvaltiopäivien työmuodot', 286–95.
- 82 *Ibid.*, 329.
- 83 'Några brister i vårt representationssystem', *HDB*, 8 January 1885, 2. *HDB* used the example of a railway question from the previous Diet. According to *Dagblad*, many members of the Diet had hoped that a railway would be built to both Oulu and Kuopio; however, none of the estates dared to vote for both railways, as they feared that if they did so and two other estates voted for only one, the majority would thereby go to building only one. Thus, each estate decided to vote strategically for only one railway to avoid the risk of losing their actual goal. Thus the possibility to build both railways became impossible because of the Diet procedure.
- 84 'Plenum plenorum. II', *HDB*, 8 April 1877, 1.
- 85 'Plenum plenorum', *HDB*, 7 April 1877, 1; 'Plenum plenorum', *HDB*, 15 January 1885, 1–2; 'Plenum plenorum. II', *HDB*, 17 January 1885, 1.
- 86 'Plenum plenorum. II', *HDB*, 8 April 1877, 1; Mechelin, 'De fyra Stånden', 166–7.

- 87 *Porvarissäädyn pöytäkirjat*, 1885, I, 173–5; ‘Plenum plenorum. II’, *HDB*, 8 April 1877, 1; ‘Plenum plenorum. II’, *HDB*, 17 January 1885, 1; Mechelin ‘De fyra Stånden’, 166–7.
- 88 ‘Nya landtdagsordningen’, *HDB*, 1 February 1867, 1.
- 89 ‘Plenum plenorum’, *HDB*, 7 April 1877, 1; Redlich, *The Procedure of the House of Commons*, ix.
- 90 Editorial, *HDB*, 28 March 1872, 1; *Porvarissäädyn pöytäkirjat*, 1885, I, 175.
- 91 ‘Plenum plenorum’, *HDB*, 7 April 1877, 1; ‘Plenum plenorum. II’, *HDB*, 8 April 1877, 1.
- 92 *Porvarissäädyn pöytäkirjat*, 1885, I, 173–5; ‘Några brister i vårt representations-system’, *HDB*, 8 January 1885, 2; ‘Plenum plenorum’, *HDB*, 15 January 1885, 1–2; ‘Plenum plenorum. II’, *HDB*, 17 January 1885, 1; ‘Plenum plenorum. III’, *HDB*, 18 January 1885, 1–2.
- 93 Pierre, *Traité*, 845, 851–2.
- 94 ‘Några brister i vårt representationssystem’, *HDB*, 8 January 1885, 2; ‘Plenum plenorum. III’, *HDB*, 18 January 1885, 2.
- 95 ‘Plenum plenorum. II’, *HDB*, 17 January 1885, 1.
- 96 Jakobsen and Kurunmäki, ‘The Formation of Parliamentarism’, 101–2, 105–6.
- 97 Kurunmäki, ‘On the Difficulty of Being a National Liberal’, 86.
- 98 Brotherus, *Suomen valtiollisen järjestysmuodon kehitys*, 86–7; Jansson, *Eduskunta ja toimeenpanovalta*, 12–3, 15–16, 21–2.
- 99 Jansson, *Eduskunta ja toimeenpanovalta*, 12–13, 15–16.
- 100 See Thiodolf Rein, ‘Om ministeransvarighet i Finland. I’, *Morgonbladet*, 7 March 1882, 1–2; Thiodolf Rein, ‘Om ministeransvarighet i Finland. II’, *Morgonbladet*, 11 March 1882, 1–2; ‘Valtiopäiwiltä’, *Hämäläinen*, 25 February 1882, 3.
- 101 Tuominen, *Säätiedustuslaitos 1880-luvun alusta vuoteen 1906*, 205–7.
- 102 Palmén, ‘Mietteitä puolueista 1877–1878 valtiopäivillä’, 266.
- 103 Brotherus, *Suomen valtiollisen järjestysmuodon kehitys*, 87–8; Jansson, *Eduskunta ja toimeenpanovalta*, 21–2; Tuominen, *Säätiedustuslaitos 1880-luvun alusta vuoteen 1906*, 21–2.
- 104 Grundlagskomitén, *Motiver till förslaget till Landtdagsordning*.
- 105 Naumann, *Sveriges grundlagar*, 303, 476–7.
- 106 Cf. *ibid.*, 477.
- 107 Senat, *Förslaget till Landtdagsordning*, § 49.
- 108 ‘Kuukauskirje’, *Kirjallinen Kuukauslehti*, April 1869, 107.
- 109 *Ibid.*
- 110 *Ibid.* On the relationship between the government and the estates, see also Editorial, *Morgonbladet*, 1 February 1872, 1; Editorial, *Morgonbladet*, 20 January 1882, 1; Editorial, *Morgonbladet*, 21 February 1882, 1–2.
- 111 Editorial, *Morgonbladet*, 21 February 1882, 1–2.
- 112 ‘Anomus-esitys senaatin toimia tarkastawan waliokunnan asettamisesta’, *Hämeen Sanomat*, 14 February 1882, 1; ‘Valtiopäiwiltä’, *Hämäläinen*, 25 February 1882, 3; ‘Tarkastuswaliokunta’, *Hämeen Sanomat*, 28 February 1882, 1–2.
- 113 Mill, ‘Considerations on Representative Government’, ch. V, 433.
- 114 *Porvarissäädyn pöytäkirjat*, 1885, I, 173–5; Mechelin, ‘De fyra Stånden’, 166.
- 115 Mechelin, ‘De fyra Stånden’, 166–7.
- 116 ‘Plenum plenorum’, *HDB*, 7 April 1877, 1.

- 117 Editorial, *HDB*, 3 October 1872, 1.
- 118 ‘Plenum plenorum. III’, *HDB*, 18 January 1885, 2.
- 119 Cf. May, *Treatise*, 354–6.
- 120 Pierre, *Traité*, 693–709.
- 121 Rydin, *Svenska riksdagen*, 358–60.
- 122 Lakivaliokunta, *Mietintö n:o 12 anomusmietintöön n:o 28*, Valtioapäiväasiakirjat 1882, V, 17–18.
- 123 Ibid.
- 124 Editorial, *HDB*, 14 June 1872, 1; Editorial, *HDB*, 28 March 1872, 1; Editorial, *HDB*, 27 November 1871, 1; ‘Ständerhusfrågan’, *Nya Pressen*, 2 February 1885, 1.
- 125 ‘Katsahdus waltioapäiwiin’, *Hämäläinen*, 30 May 1885, 2–3; ‘Jälkimuistoja wiime waltioapäiwiltä’, *Hämäläinen*, 29 July 1885, 2.
- 126 ‘Talförhetsstatistik’, *Finland*, 14 November 1885, 3.
- 127 See e.g. ‘Ditt och datt från landtdagen. V’, *Åbo Tidning*, 21 April 1885, 1–2.
- 128 *Suomen Suuriruhtinaanmaan Valtioapäiväjärjestys 1906*, § 51, § 32.
- 129 Ibid., § 57.
- 130 Palonen, *The Politics of Parliamentary Procedure*; Palonen, *From Oratory to Debate*; Ihalainen, Ilie, and Palonen, eds., *Parliament and Parliamentarism*.
- 131 These developments in Europe will be examined in detail in a comparative volume, which is currently being edited by Henk te Velde and Onni Pekonen under the working title *Democracy and Debate: The History of Parliamentary Reform in Europe*. See also Te Velde, *Sprekende politiek*; Te Velde, ‘Parliamentary Obstruction’; Vieira, *Time and Politics*. It is notable that the developments in no sense resulted in an inevitable and total loss of parliamentary debating. Especially in Britain, the debating tradition was strongly defended. See Palonen, *From Oratory to Debate*; Palonen, *The Politics of Parliamentary Procedure*.
- 132 Pekonen, *Debating ‘the ABCs of Parliamentary Life’*, especially 135–43, 296–304.
- 133 *Eduskannanuudistamiskomitean pöytäkirjat 1905–1906*.
- 134 Pekonen, ‘The Political Transfer’; Pekonen, *Debating ‘the ABCs of Parliamentary Life’*.

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