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The political transfer of parliamentary concepts and practices in the European periphery: the case of obstruction in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finland

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SUMMARY


This article examines parliaments as transnational institutions. It uses Finland as an example to analyze how nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European representative assemblies were part of a joint publicity. This publicity, facilitated by the press, was actively used in developing and shaping national practices, especially in countries without an established parliamentary tradition. The transnational parliamentary publicity changed how parliaments functioned and deliberated. It was utilized in assemblies' procedural formation and revision, democratization, and parliamentarization. The mediated models and examples were used selectively and innovatively to interpret, contextualize, and frame domestic political questions. The article examines the transfer of parliamentary obstruction from European parliaments to the four-estate Diet and the unicameral parliament of the Finnish Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. Obstruction became part of the Finnish political repertoire soon after the Irish obstruction appeared in the British House of Commons in the late 1870s. Although no systematic obstruction campaigns were organized in early Finnish parliamentary life, the concept of obstruction was a rhetorical and ideological tool of the Finnish nationalists and socialists. The article positions Finnish discussions within wider European debates on parliaments, democratization, the rise of mass parties, and the problematic relationship between representative and deliberative aspects of parliamentary politics.

KEYWORDS

Finnish parliament; political transfer; obstruction; newspapers; nationalism; socialism

Introduction

Although representative assemblies have been traditionally treated as national institutions, they have always been transnational. In the nineteenth century, parliaments emerged across Europe in countries with different political cultures and traditions. National assemblies were characterized by notable procedural similarities, and experienced parliamentarians in different countries used similar language and common vocabulary.

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National debates on parliamentary development revolved around internationally shared concepts.¹

This article uses Finland as an example to analyze how European representative assemblies of the period were part of a joint publicity. This publicity was actively utilized in parliaments' procedural formation and revision, democratization, and parliamentarization of government. In the European periphery, where it was difficult to acquire parliamentary literature, the newspaper press played an important role in tying the Finnish and European developments together.

Late nineteenth-century Finland was a periphery in the political and parliamentary development of Europe. Finland had been an eastern part of Sweden for over 500 years before becoming a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire in 1809. The Grand Duchy was under the autocratic rule of the Russian emperor until Finland's independence in 1917. Whereas European representative assemblies had been transforming mostly into bicameral parliaments, Sweden being the closest example in 1866, the four-estate Diet of Finland started holding regular meetings as late as in the 1860s after a hiatus of over 50 years. The Diet had merely an advisory role in relation to the emperor, and the Senate of Finland, acting as the 'domestic government', was appointed by and responsible to the emperor alone. The Finnish newspaper press proliferated and was properly transformed into an arena for public political debate from the mid nineteenth century onwards. Finland's remote location on the northeastern edge of Europe was maintained by Russian censorship that hindered the flow of foreign political and constitutional literature. The cultural, institutional, and geographical distance to the European parliamentary centers, such as Britain and France, seemed unbridgeable.

This article examines how and why Finnish political protagonists, despite the above-mentioned obstacles, followed and utilized Western European parliamentary discussions. Finnish protagonists studied developments of other countries, benefited from their experiences, and applied their examples and conceptualizations in the Finnish debates.

The first section of the article examines special circumstances that encouraged transnational transfers of parliamentary practices and concepts in Finland. The second section highlights the role of the newspaper press in creating and sustaining transnational parliamentary publicity that enabled parliaments to learn from the experiences of other countries. The section also discusses the politics of translation and transfer in the Finnish context. The third section examines the case of *parliamentary obstruction*. It analyzes in detail how parliamentary transfers and translations took place in Finland. Finnish protagonists were inspired by foreign developments and were eager users of foreign examples. Parliamentary concepts were used to influence national political practice: Finnish protagonists used translated concepts to interpret, contextualize, and frame domestic political questions. The case of obstruction also ties peripheral Finland to wider developments and changes in European parliamentary politics. It highlights the difficult relationship between the minority and the majority, which became an increasingly defining and heatedly disputed question in European parliaments towards the end of

¹P. Ihalainen, C. Ilie and K. Palonen (eds), *Parliament and Parliamentarism: A Comparative History of a European Concept* (New York and Oxford, 2016); P. Ihalainen and K. Palonen, 'Parliamentary Sources in the Comparative Study of Conceptual History: Methodological Aspects and Illustrations of a Research Proposal', *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* 29, (2009), pp. 17–34; K. Palonen, 'Towards a History of Parliamentary Concepts', *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* 32, (2012), pp. 123–38.

the nineteenth century. In Finland, Finnish-speaking nationalists in the estate Diet and socialists in the early unicameral parliament, the Eduskunta (or *Lan[d]tdag* in Swedish), used the concept of obstruction to advocate a majoritarian conception of politics and to attack the minorities of old political elites, whom they considered to obstruct reforms necessary for the people's majority. These conceptions of parliament and politics, which gave priority to predetermined political programs, tended to reduce the parliament to a representative or legislative machine at the cost of its deliberative qualities. To conclude, the article addresses the potential and characteristics of peripheral countries for transnational parliamentary studies and argues for a wider understanding of parliamentary publicity, as publicity between parliaments.

The diet of 1863–64 as a new beginning

'Finnish parliamentary life', as it was called by some contemporaries,² began in 1863 when the Finnish Diet reconvened for the first time since 1809, when Alexander I had summoned the estates for the Diet of Porvoo (*Borgå landtdag*). Owing to this 'state night' between the Diets,³ none of the estate members of 1863–64 had experience in Diet deliberations.

The beginning of the Diets in the 1860s was complicated by the confusion about the procedures of the Diet. Although an official collection of laws and books had been published in order to guide the Diet proceedings based on Swedish practices before 1809,⁴ the Diet members soon noticed that the existing collections of procedures still included rules that were insufficient, contradictory, and impossible to implement.⁵

The Swedish models given to the Diet's disposal by the Russian authorities before the Diet of 1863–64 (and again to the Constitutional Law Committee of 1865 when preparing the Finnish Diet Act of 1869) were taken from the Gustavian Riksdags. Much had happened, however, in European parliamentary development since 1809. By the second half of the nineteenth century, parliaments had become *the* arenas 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 a growing public pressure to open these aristocratic 'debating clubs' and closed shops to public scrutiny and to representatives from wider circles of the population by extensions of suffrage.⁶ Finnish actors showed an increasing desire to adapt and update the old Swedish system to meet modern, international demands of the time.

²See, for example, 'Helsingfors', *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 13 Jan. 1862, p. 2.

³The expression was used by the Finnish historian and politician Yrjö Koskinen: 'The importance of the upcoming Diet is constantly increasing due to the fact that more than a half century has passed since the previous one. A state night (*valtiöyö*) of a half century! How much time wasted sleeping, how much work undone!' 'Uusi vuosi 1863', *Helsingin Uutiset*, 2 Jan. 1863, p. 3.

⁴E. von Knorring, 'Sammanfattning af gällande stadganden och vedertagna bruk, hvilka ega tillämpning på ordningen vid landtdag i storfurstendömet Finland', *Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, 24 Apr. 1863, pp. 2–3; J.Ph. Palmén, *Storfurstendömet Finlands grundlagar jemte till dem hörande statshandlingar* (Helsingfors, 1861); W. Rosenborg, *Om Riksdagar* (Helsingfors, 1863).

⁵P. Lilius, 'Säätyvaltiopäivien työmuodot', in Olavi Salervo, Pentti Renvall and Eino Jutikkala (eds), *Suomen kansanedustuslaitoksen historia 4: Säätyedustuslaitoksen kokoonpano, työmuodot ja valtuudet* (Helsinki, 1974), pp. 149–52; L. Krusius-Ahrenberg, 'Uutta ja luovaa valtiopäivätoimintaa vanhoissa puitteissa (1863–1867)', in O. Salervo et al. (eds), *Suomen kansanedustuslaitoksen historia 2: Säätyedustuslaitos 1850-luvun puolivälistä 1870-luvun loppuun* (Helsinki, 1981), pp. 95, 127, 139–52.

⁶H. te Velde, *Sprekende politiek: redenaars en hun politiek in de parlementaire gouden eeuw* (Amsterdam, 2015); Ihalainen, Ilie and Palonen (eds), *Parliament and Parliamentarism*.

The discursive practice of the Finnish Diet was increasingly questioned by Finnish-speaking nationalists. Before the last third of the nineteenth century, Swedish was the language of government, politics, and public debate in Finland.⁷ All members of the political elite, apart from some members of the peasant estate, could speak Swedish. While Swedish had been continuously used in the Swedish Riksdags, Finnish had not been spoken in any diet or parliament after 1809. The early nineteenth-century discussions on parliaments in Finland, for example in the press, were conducted mainly in Swedish.

Finnish is unusual among European languages in that its political vocabulary was systematically constructed. In the mid nineteenth century, a so-called Fennomans elite began to fight against the backwardness of the Finnish language by systematically adopting European political and scholarly vocabulary.⁸ The aim of the Fennomans was to raise the Finnish language to the position of a national language and a defining characteristic of Finland's national culture. The Fennomans found their opponents in the Swedish-speaking ascendant bourgeoisie and aristocracy, who according to the Fennomans held on to their old privileges and obstructed reforms crucial to the development of the people's Finnish-speaking majority.

Finnish was spoken in the peasant estate from 1863 onwards, but was not spoken in the clerical estate before 1882 and in the burghal estate only from 1885. The first Finnish speech was held in the nobility estate as late as in 1894. The situation, however, changed. By the time of the parliamentary reform of 1906, which transformed Europe's last four-estate Diet directly into a unicameral parliament elected by universal suffrage, Finnish had become the main language of the parliament.

The late nineteenth-century Finnish Diet has been traditionally viewed as a continuation of the early modern Gustavian constitutional tradition that was maintained in Finland after 1809.⁹ A combined analysis of previously understudied newspaper sources and Diet debates has shown, however, that the discussions on the development of Finnish parliamentary life were based on a close following of a variety of European discussions. The Swedish Riksdag tradition formed a framework for the Finnish debates within which the procedural and discursive practices were actively disputed and partly reinvented.¹⁰

From the 1860s onwards, the new situation in relation to the members, practices, and language of the Diet fueled a process of translation and transfer in Finland. The Finnish actors looked to a variety of Western parliaments in search of models for Diet politics. It provoked discussion about how and to what degree parliamentary practices could be applied to the outdated Finnish Diet, and which models should and could be followed. This process of parliamentarization was explicated in the Finnish debates by referring to 'the ABCs of parliamentary life', 'the rudiments of parliamentary work', 'parliamentary education', 'parliamentarily correct', 'parliamentary order', '(un)parliamentary language', '(un)parliamentary practice', and '(un)parliamentary procedure'. Similarly, shortcomings

⁷M. Hyvärinen, J. Kurunmäki, K. Palonen, T. Pulkkinen and H. Stenius (eds), *Käsitteet liikkeessä: Suomen poliittisen kulttuurin käsitehistoria* (Tampere, 2003).

⁸Hyvärinen et al. (eds), *Käsitteet liikkeessä*.

⁹See, for example, the two vast histories of the Finnish Diet and the Eduskunta, *Suomen kansanedustuslaitoksen historia 1–12*, published by Eduskunnan historiakomitea, 1958–82 and *Suomen eduskunta 100 vuotta 1–12*, published by Suomen Eduskunta, 2006–08.

¹⁰O. Pekonen, 'Debating "the ABCs of Parliamentary Life": The Learning of Parliamentary Rules and Practices in the Late Nineteenth-century Finnish Diet and the Early Eduskunta', (University of Jyväskylä, PhD thesis, 2014), <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-39-5843-5>

of the Finnish system and practice were described as ‘parliamentary deficiencies’ or ‘parliamentary flaws’.¹¹

The concepts of parliament and parliamentarism and what constituted parliamentary activity were questions of great political dispute in late nineteenth-century Finland, well before the parliamentary reform of 1906. The interest in parliamentary politics was not limited to the system of government, but typically for the period internationally, parliaments were understood as arenas for deliberative politics – as forums for public speaking, oratory, debating, discussing, and making decisions in the interests of the common good.¹² While parliamentary government and dissolution of the estate representation were largely out of the question in the Finnish Grand Duchy, revisions and innovations on the Diet rules, practices, and discourse formed an essential means to introduce characteristics of modern parliaments within the estate system, generally acknowledged as obsolete in Finland.¹³ Debates on the Finnish parliamentary life were struggles between different conceptions or visions of parliament that gave the Diet different purposes and character.¹⁴

This (transnational) endeavor of developing Finnish parliamentary life promoted and reinforced the national project. It was motivated by a desire to strengthen Finland’s status in the eyes of European nations and in relation to the Russian Empire. The Diet, even with its limited suffrage, created a representation of and for the Finnish people. The Diet was considered, together with the Senate of Finland, as the leading arena for deliberating and making decisions based on the interests of the nation and its people.¹⁵ The publicity of the Diet and the expanding circulation of its discussions offered a potential means to reach a vast part of the population and to educate and motivate the people to strive for ‘common goals’.¹⁶ Parliamentary models were also applied beyond the Diet politics in different associations, meetings, local assemblies, and political parties.¹⁷

The role of the newspaper press and the politics of transfer

European parliaments became increasingly public political arenas during the nineteenth century. This was facilitated by decisions to allow reporters and the public to be present at plenary debates. Improvements to transportation and communication and new inexpensive means of publishing increased the circulation of the products of parliamentary reporting and shorthand minute-taking.¹⁸

¹¹See, for example, *Aatelissäädyn pöytäkirjat*, 1872, I, p. 53; ‘Landtdagstryck’, *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 9 Oct. 1874, p. 1; ‘Åbo den 15 november’, *Åbo Underrättelser*, 15 Nov. 1877, p. 1; ‘Plenum plenorum. II’, *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 17 Jan. 1885, p. 1; ‘Bilder från sista landtdagen. I. Ståndens allmänna yttre fysionomer’, *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 2 July 1885, p. 2; *Aatelissäädyn pöytäkirjat*, 1885, I, p. 51; ‘Kokouksiemme ulkonaisesta järjestämisestä sananen’, *Wiipurin Sanomat*, 10 Aug. 1892, pp. 1–2; ‘Eduskunnan lauantaisen istunnon johdosta’, *Uusi Suometar*, 28 May 1907, p. 2; *Eduskunnan pöytäkirjat*, PTK 11/1907, p. 506.

¹²See, for example, K. Palonen, *From Oratory to Debate. Parliamentarisation of Deliberative Rhetoric in Westminster* (Baden-Baden, 2016); Pekonen, ‘Debating “the ABCs”’; te Velde, *Sprekende politiek*.

¹³O. Pekonen, ‘Parliamentarizing the Estate Diet. The Debate on Plenum Plenorum in late 19th-century Finland’, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 42, (2017), pp. 245–72. doi:10.1080/03468755.2017.1315168.

¹⁴Pekonen, ‘Debating “the ABCs”’.

¹⁵The principles of the representation of the people and the ban on imperative mandates were introduced in Finland in the Diet Act of 1869. See Pekonen, ‘Debating “the ABCs”’, pp. 114–26.

¹⁶Pekonen, ‘Debating “the ABCs”’, pp. 226–82.

¹⁷Pekonen, ‘Debating “the ABCs”’, pp. 261–2, 279–81.

¹⁸R.A. Vieira, *Time and Politics: Parliament and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and the British World* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 19–28; Pekonen, ‘Debating “the ABCs”’, pp. 182–92, 200–9, 226–57.

In the European periphery, where topical political literature was difficult to acquire and circulate, newspapers and periodicals formed an important means for studying European parliamentary discussions, translating parliamentary vocabulary, and transferring ideas to the Finnish debates. The formation of Finnish political language and practices cannot be properly understood without a systematic study of newspaper sources.¹⁹

Finnish newspapers began to follow foreign parliamentary politics in the early decades of the nineteenth century, establishing a relatively regular connection to the European discussions.²⁰ The new beginning of the Diets in the 1860s and finally their regularization by the Diet Act of 1869 caused an enlivenment and proliferation of the press. The press became a central arena for public debate, reaching an increasingly large part of the population. This expansion was especially prominent among the Finnish-speaking public.²¹

In the 1860s, the interest of the Finnish newspapers in parliaments rose to a new level. They translated long sections of foreign parliamentary debates and published extensive articles on parliaments and their practices. Although the focus of this interest varied depending on what was happening, the most attention was given to the British and French parliaments. Finnish and foreign parliamentary politics were regular topics in the major Helsinki and provincial newspapers. Reports on foreign parliaments were usually compiled from foreign newspaper articles and telegrams. Provincial newspapers followed the major newspapers and often 'borrowed' their articles from major newspapers of their political color.

The Finnish newspapers formed a means to overcome obstacles set by Russian censorship. Whereas censorship delayed and hindered the flow of political literature in Finland and in this sense defined the limits of political modernization,²² newspapers could report on foreign parliamentary developments quickly and present topical discussions as daily news. Articles on foreign parliaments not only served to feed the political elite's interest in parliaments, but they filled gaps in the availability of foreign literature. Articles on parliaments included, for example, translations from procedure tracts or documents that were hardly, if at all, available in Finland.²³

Newspapers formed a close extension of, as well as a preparatory arena for, the debates in the Diet. The Diet's agenda items were frequently examined in newspapers before their treatment in the assembly. The proposals and arguments first presented in newspapers were taken up in individual estate sittings and then spread through committee reports and publicity to other estates. Newspapers also participated in ongoing debates by presenting more detailed and further-developed argumentation. They served the purpose of overcoming the division of four simultaneously deliberating estates by publishing their debates

¹⁹In Finland, the analysis of newspaper sources is facilitated by the digitized *Historical Newspaper Library of the Finnish National Library* (<http://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/>).

²⁰Pekonen, 'Debating "the ABCs"', p. 16. Jussi Kurunmäki, Jani Marjanen and Maren Jonasson are currently studying how Finnish newspapers reported on foreign political events and ideas during the state night in their project *Statsnatt i ny belysning*, which started in 2015.

²¹In 1860–89 the number of Finnish-language newspapers increased from 9 to 29 and the Swedish-language newspapers from 8 to 23. In 1860 the Finnish newspapers published 1.1 issues per week, in 1889 3.0 and in 1898 3.3; the respective numbers for the Swedish were 2.5, 3.9 and 3.5. Finnish-language newspapers accounted for 75 per cent of the total circulation in 1900. L. Landgren, 'Kieli ja aate – politisoituvaa sanomalehdistö 1860–1889', in P. Tommila (ed.), *Suomen lehdistön historia 1: Sanomalehdistön vaiheet vuoteen 1905* (Kuopio, 1988), pp. 267–420; P. Leino-Kaukiainen, 'Kasvava sanomalehdistö sensuurin kahleissa 1890–1905', in P. Tommila (ed.), *Suomen lehdistön historia 1* (Kuopio, 1988), pp. 421–632.

²²J. Mylly, *Kansallinen projekti: historiankirjoitus ja politiikka autonomisessa Suomessa* (Turku, 2002), p. 155.

²³Pekonen, 'Debating "the ABCs"', pp. 92–102.

and thus offering Diet members a possibility to hear the arguments presented in the other three estates.

The central role of newspapers in Diet debates was a result of their character and style of organization. Leading newspapers were mouthpieces for parties and political groups *per se*.²⁴ The main newspapers published their own political programs and influenced the nominations of candidates for elections. Newspapers' editorial offices formed an important meeting point for the politically active, and political groups were named after newspapers, for example, the 'Suomettarelaiset' after the Fennoman newspaper *Suometar* and 'Dagbladistit' after the liberal *Helsingfors Dagblad*.

Newspapers' editors, reporters, and visiting writers typically belonged to the political elite. They were often officials, members of the Diet, and members of academia, who especially during the early Diets also formed the core of the readership of the main Helsinki-based political newspapers. This affected the character of the press discussions on parliaments. Newspapers discussed parliamentary topics with an analytical outlook and theoretical depth.²⁵ In the press, debaters were able to publish arguments and theorizing that would have been considered excessive or irrelevant in speeches held in parliament. Newspapers gave the debaters the possibility to reflect and analyze topics from a wider historical and theoretical perspective – speeches in the assembly could be reserved for shorter, more focused, and programmatic argumentation.

The interplay between the press and the parliament was clear in discussions on the Diet's rules and practices, whose interpretation and application were frequently disputed in newspapers outside of the plenary debates. In this sense, the Diet debates could be reserved for deliberating the actual 'subject matters'. During the long five- and three-year intervals between Diets, foreign parliamentary debates compensated for the lack of Finnish ones in newspapers, and in this sense kept the Finnish political actors and the readership in contact and familiar with parliamentary life and its practices.

The press was an arena where the Finnish debates came into contact with foreign models and concepts. The juxtaposition of the Finnish and foreign debates on newspapers' pages resulted in viewing and reviewing Finnish discussions through the prism of foreign conceptualizations. Foreign discussions offered tools for understanding, but also for actively explaining and framing Finnish events and experiences. Foreign experiences were used as means to influence what was seen possible and desirable in Finnish parliamentary life. Finnish political groups took sides in foreign discussions and used them to debate Finnish topics in an indirect form.²⁶ Foreign examples, often presented concurrently with the Finnish debates, were referred to and applied actively in the discussions about Finnish parliamentary life.²⁷

Finnish newspapers played a crucial role in popularizing parliamentary topics and translating and coining vocabulary to describe them. Whereas the Swedish-speakers in the Diet and the press could largely benefit from the language tradition of the former mother country Sweden, the Finnish parliamentary vocabulary had to be coined and established. When reporting foreign developments, newspapers faced and reacted to

²⁴E. Aarnio, 'Puolue', in M. Hyvärinen et al. (eds), *Käsitteet liikkeessä* (Tampere, 2003), p. 414.

²⁵See, for example, discussions on free mandate and parliamentary debating in Pekonen, 'Debating "the ABCs"', pp. 135–43, 145–80.

²⁶See, for example, Finnish liberals and Fennoman nationalists on Guizot in Pekonen, 'Debating "the ABCs"', pp. 81–2.

²⁷Pekonen, 'Debating "the ABCs"', pp. 95, 128–9.

topics for which no established Finnish expressions existed. Thus, in nineteenth-century newspapers, new words were constantly coined, parliamentary meaning was given to old words and other words were rendered obsolete. As the case of parliamentary obstruction illustrates, the interest in foreign parliamentary discussions, which reached its peak during the formative years of the Finnish political language, had an important role in the development of political vocabulary.

European parliamentary concepts were often considered to carry additional argumentative weight and actively used in Finnish political rhetoric. Even strict Fennoman nationalists, who were keen to warn about the 'blind adoption' and 'careless use' of foreign models and examples, highlighted the special characteristics of the Finnish case by using foreign conceptualizations.²⁸ In this sense, the primacy of the national was a rhetorical means for the Fennomans to distance themselves from their liberal opponents, who had an explicitly international program.

Generally speaking, concepts are prone to alteration in translation: during translation it is always possible that 'something else' or unintended will creep into the concept. Following this line of thought, translation of parliamentary concepts in Finland was a selective process that sought to regulate, but not necessarily eliminate, this 'something else'.²⁹ Parliamentary concepts were also used varyingly depending on their context of use. For example, specialist reform committees, such as the parliamentary reform committee responsible for preparing the parliamentary reform of 1906, did not resort to the blatant rhetorical use of established parliamentary concepts that was typical of the press and parliamentary debates of the same period.³⁰

Despite the centrality of the newspaper press, other means of translation and transfer were also used. These included personal contacts between academics, political protagonists, and parliamentary personnel as well as more official contacts and exchange of literature and papers between political institutions and parties.³¹ Finnish parliamentarians and parliamentary experts travelled abroad to learn from foreign assemblies or came into contact with them during their other trips. The most illustrative examples of these 'parliamentary excursions' were related to the introduction of parliamentary stenography in Finland and to field trips to European parliaments to learn procedures on minutes.³² Finnish delegations also participated in international parliamentary conferences from 1906 on.³³ Furthermore, the censorship could never stop the flow of foreign literature altogether.

The newspapers' role was, however, unsurpassed. Newspapers were the only source by which the Finnish political actors and the public could gain accessible and up-to-date

²⁸See, for example, J.V. Snellman, 'Om utskottets verksamhet', *Litteraturblad för allmän medborgerlig bildning* 15, (1861), pp. 532–3; J.R. Danielson, 'Edustuslaitoksemme kehittämistä', *Valvoja* 2, (1881), pp. 459–72; E.G. Palmén, 'Puolueitten nykyinen asema Suomessa', *Valvoja* 4, (1884), pp. 32–3; E.G. Palmén, 'Jatkoa Suomen puolueitten nykyisestä asemasta', *Valvoja* 4, (1884), p. 122.

²⁹K. Palonen, 'Translation, Politics and Conceptual Change', *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought* 7, (2003), p. 16.

³⁰See *Eduskunnan uudistamiskomitean pöytäkirjat 1905–1906* (Kansallisarkisto, 1906).

³¹See, for example, Pekonen, 'Debating "the ABCs"' on the libraries of the Diet and the parliament as tools for transnational exchange of documents and literature (pp. 278–9) and the role of J.J. Nordström, a Finnish expert on constitutional law who had moved to Sweden and became a member of the Riksdag (pp. 17, 19).

³²K. Kallioniemi, *Pikakirjoitus ja säätyvaltiopäivät* (Helsinki, 1946), p. 7; Pekonen, 'Debating "the ABCs"', pp. 181–225.

³³I. Seppinen, 'Eduskunnan ulkosuhteet', in J. Kallenautio et al. (eds), *Kansainvälinen eduskunta. Suomen eduskunta 100 vuotta; 11* (Helsinki, 2007), pp. 334–42.

information about parliamentary matters. Printing, publication, and circulation of official Diet minutes lagged far behind.³⁴

The transfer of ‘obstruction’ into the Finnish parliamentary discourse

The introduction of obstruction in Finland: the presentation of the Irish obstruction in the Finnish press

In parliamentary literature and debates, the concept of obstruction generally refers to actions aimed at intentional and systematic delay and obstruction of parliamentary business. The Irish obstruction in the British House of Commons in the late 1870s and early 1880s has been highlighted as an epoch-making event in parliamentary history. The rules of the British parliament had been designed to give its members wide liberties and possibilities for thorough discussion, to ensure reasonable delays in parliamentary deliberations, and to guard the rights of minorities. The Irish nationalist minority led by Charles Stewart Parnell aimed its obstruction initially against the Irish Coercion Bill and the majority of the House. The Irish exploited as their main instrument the parliament’s freedom of speech. Unlimited freedom of speech had been used earlier in an obstructing manner in the British parliament, but only as momentary protests against an overbearing majority; in that form, it had been regarded as a permissible means in parliamentary business. What made the Irish obstruction exceptional was how it eventually aimed to bring the whole parliament to a standstill. The Irish obstruction resulted in reforms of the parliamentary procedure, including new rules to suspend obstructing members, the imposition of limitations on the right to speak, the *clôture*, and the guillotine.³⁵ Following the example of the Irish campaign, obstruction became popular in parliaments across Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Obstruction forced parliaments to change their procedures, and new punitive measures as well as limitations on the MPs’ right of speech and initiative were implemented.³⁶

The topic of parliamentary obstruction as a systematic parliamentary tactic became a regular news item in the Finnish press during the Irish campaign. It was introduced in Finland in the Swedish-language press in the beginning of August 1877. On 10 August 1877 the newspaper *Hufvudstadsbladet* wrote:

The British House of Commons has been a scene for extraordinary incidents. A part of its Irish members have taken it into their heads to hinder the proceedings by making unnecessary amendments and long speeches for their justification. ... One of these ‘obstructionists’ (*obstructiva*), who during discussion has let himself make highly improper expressions against the Speaker and the House, was shown the door and suffered a vote of censure from the House. On Tuesday ... the Irish knew how to drag out the discussion so that the House did not separate until late in the afternoon the following day. It was a meeting

³⁴Pekonen, ‘Debating “the ABCs”’, pp. 181–225.

³⁵The *clôture* is a motion that gives the parliament the possibility to bring debate to a quick end. The guillotine, a motion to strictly allocate the time available, is used to ensure that certain stages of a bill are completed by a certain date or within a fixed number of sittings.

³⁶For detailed description of the Irish obstruction, see J. Redlich, *The Procedure of the House of Commons, a Study of its History and Present Form*, Vol. 1, trans. A.E. Stenthal (London, 1908), pp. 133–85; T. Erskine May, *A Treatise upon the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament* (London, 1883), pp. 380–384. For the international significance of the Irish obstruction, see H. te Velde, ‘Parliamentary Obstruction and the “Crisis” of European Parliamentary Politics Around 1900’, *Redescriptions. Yearbook of Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 16, (2013), pp. 125–47; G. Jellinek, ‘Parliamentary Obstruction’, *Political Science Quarterly* 19, (1904), pp. 579–88.

of 26 consecutive hours. The speaker, ministers and the delegates of the people changed at fixed hours in order to give the weary time to sleep. The behavior of the Irish has naturally raised general resentment.³⁷

At first the Finnish newspapers used the English term *obstruction* and its Swedish modifications such as *obstructive(r)*, *obstructionister*, *obstruction-taktik*, and *obstructive-parti*. In the beginning of the 1880s, the letter ‘c’ was replaced by ‘k’ (*obstruktionist*, *obstruktionspolitik*, etc.). The Finnish-language newspapers referred to *obstruktion* along with variations such as *obstruktionismi*, *obstruktio(-)politiki*, *obstruktionisti*, and later also *obstruksioni*, *obstruksiooni*, *obstruksioni(-)politiki*. With this, an old word was given a parliamentary meaning: before the Irish campaign *obstruction* and *obstruktion* were used in Finland as medical terms to describe illness and bad health.

When the Irish took their obstructive tactics to a new level of intensity and duration in the early 1880s, brief telegrams on the obstruction were replaced by detailed descriptions. Newspaper reports translated speeches and explained the procedural revisions made to fight the obstructionists.³⁸ The Finnish-language newspapers became interested in the Irish obstruction when on 24 January 1881 the obstructionists caused a sitting to last 22 hours, followed by a sitting of 41½ hours the next day. At this point the debate was closed by Speaker Brand, who, acting in contravention of traditional procedure, terminated the debate on his own authority. The Fennoman *Uusi Suometar* wrote:

The sittings of the British parliament have lately been peculiar and strange, since they have pointed out some aspects in its standing orders, to which nothing similar can be found anywhere in the world. No decision to end discussion is ever made, but everyone can hold speeches as long as they want. Like this, anyone who wants to disturb an urgent matter can stall it forever and thus tire the whole parliament. Such a trick is called ‘obstruction’. ... The Irish are proceeding as follows: they hold speeches so long that it becomes late and then they propose that the sitting be closed and adjourned to another occasion. Thus, the passage of this urgent and important bill is prolonged again and again. Then there is no other choice but to continue the sitting until the Irish gentlemen are tired. ... One finds it hard to believe that such a ridiculous arrangement could ever be possible in such a dignified company as the British parliament. The government is finally about to propose a law according to which the house has the right to decide on closing a discussion.³⁹

The Finnish press continued actively reporting on the introduction of Gladstone’s urgency procedure and other rules to fight obstruction, such as closure (*clôture*).⁴⁰ Finnish newspapers were able to report on the debates of the House of Commons relatively quickly: they published telegrams two days after the debates and longer translated excerpts a week later. Newspapers defined obstruction as a new parliamentary tactic of intentional delay, which aimed at testing the patience of and eventually exhausting one’s opponents, the majority, or the government by intentionally prolonging the

³⁷‘Engelska underhuset’, *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 10 Aug. 1877, p. 1.

³⁸For descriptions of the Irish obstruction tactics, see ‘Engelska parlamentet’, *Wiborgs Tidning*, 9 Mar. 1880, p. 3; ‘Den s. k. irländska natten’, *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 6 Sep. 1880, p. 2; on the decisions to increase the speaker’s powers to define systematic obstruction and suspend obstructionists, see ‘Från England’, *Åbo Underrättelser*, 11 Mar. 1880, p. 3; on Lord Redesdale’s plan, see ‘Tillståndet uti Irland’, *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 4 Jan. 1881, p. 2; ‘Det engelska parlamentet’, *Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, 13 Jan. 1881, p. 1.

³⁹‘Ulkomaalta’, *Uusi Suometar*, 4 Feb. 1881, p. 3.

⁴⁰For example, ‘De stormiga scenerna i engelska underhuset’, *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 16 Feb. 1881, p. 2; ‘I engelska underhuset’, *Östra Finland*, 7 Feb. 1881, p. 2; ‘Förslaget till ändringar i engelska underhusets arbetsordning’, *Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, 21 Feb. 1882, p. 2; ‘Förslaget till ändringar i underhusets arbetsordning’, *Åbo Underrättelser*, 21 Feb. 1882, p. 3.

debate. Newspapers described speech as the main vehicle for obstruction, showing less interest towards other tactics, such as repetitive amendments, proposals, and motions for adjournment. As the obstruction grew ever more prolonged, the campaign was seen to have consequences for the parliament as a whole: it set a dangerous example for future parliamentary life, threatened to paralyze the legislative machine, and damaged the prestige of parliament causing its unpopularity among the public. The articles described the growing unease of both the House and the British public. Obstruction was considered to endanger the tradition of free speech, and finally, the introduction of *clôture* was described as a revolution and an overthrow of old rules and principles.⁴¹

Obstruction in the Fennoman rhetoric of progress and reform

At the height of the Irish obstruction campaign, Finnish political groups reacted to the events in the House of Commons by adopting the concept of obstruction in their political rhetoric in the Diet and the press. The idea of playing with scarce time and delay was not new in the context of the Finnish Diet. Earlier, verbs such as *wiiwyttää* and *förhala* (Finnish and Swedish words for delay or play for time) and their derivatives had been used to refer to delaying questions on the agenda. The Irish campaign, however, gave an understanding of obstruction as a systematic tactic; above all, it offered a useful and credible rhetorical *topos* to highlight the severity of such actions. Obstruction became a part of the political struggle between the Fennoman Finnish Party and their 'Svecoman' opponents, namely the Swedish-speaking liberals and the Swedish Party. The Finnish political opponents accused each other of obstructing the Diet proceedings by excessive deliberation and speech. Definitions of what constituted obstruction were disputed in reference to the British House of Commons.

The first appearances of the term *obstruction* in relation to Diet politics were connected to a petition on the reorganization of the school system in 1882. The petition raised debate on the role of Finnish language in education, which was a central question in the Fennoman's political program. The Fennoman newspaper *Uusi Suometar* demanded that, before the reform, the question should be renegotiated in the Diet, because the planned government actions were based on the opinions of the nobility and the burghers that had Svecoman majorities.⁴² As a result, liberal Swedish-language newspaper *Helsingfors Dagblad* accused *Uusi Suometar* of 'obstruction politics' (*obstruktionspolitik*). *Dagblad* argued that a question already decided in the Diet could not be re-deliberated in the next Diet without reasonable grounds.⁴³ *Uusi Suometar* responded by pointing to what it saw as the original British and internationally accepted definition of obstruction. It argued that obstruction was a weapon of the minority, in Finland's case of the Svecomans, not of the people's Finnish-speaking majority:

⁴¹For example, 'Förslaget till ändringar i engelska underhusets arbetsordning', *Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, 21 Feb. 1882, p. 2; 'Förslaget till ändringar i underhusets arbetsordning', *Åbo Underrättelser*, 21 Feb. 1882, p. 3; 'Vid engelska parlamentets öppnande', *Östra Finland*, 15 Feb. 1882, p. 2; 'Det viktigaste föremålet för det närvarande engelska parlamentsmötet', *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 3 Nov. 1882, p. 2; 'Debatten om ändringar i engelska underhusets arbetsordning', *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 16 Nov. 1882, p. 2; 'Engelska parlamentet', *Morgonbladet*, 13 Nov. 1882, p. 2; 'Engelska underhusets arbetsordning', *Åbo Underrättelser*, 5 Dec. 1882, p. 3.

⁴²'Dagblad ja säätyjen anomus kouluasiassa', *Uusi Suometar*, 8 Apr. 1881, p. 1.

⁴³'Helsingfors den 1 April', *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 1 Apr. 1881, pp. 1–2.

As the newspaper *Dagblad* has called our demands pure obstruction politics (*'obstruktio-politiki'*) – the word is borrowed from the British parliament's derisive name for the Irish minority – we would like to tell *Dagblad* what kind of obstruction is practiced in this country. ... Obstruction (*'obstruction'*) is all of the obstacles that are repeatedly used against furthering the cause of the Finnish language. ... Attempts made to block government reforms that would neglect representation of the people are not, at least elsewhere in the world, called obstruction (*obstruktioni*).⁴⁴

The Fennomans began to use the ideas, arguments, and vocabulary of obstruction to attack their opponents wherever reforms on the Finnish language or the 'interests of the people's Finnish-speaking majority' were being challenged. Accusations of obstructive politics as excessive speech, deliberation, and debate were mainly aimed at opposing estates and political groups in the Diet, but they were also stated at the level of local politics and social movements.⁴⁵

The native Finnish-language term for parliamentary obstruction still used today, (*parlamentaarinen*) *jarrutus*, was introduced in the early 1890s. At first, *jarrutus* was used when referring to foreign obstruction campaigns and then to general obstruction and delay of progress or reform. In Finnish, the noun *jarru* and verb *jarruttaa* referred originally to brakes and the braking of vehicles,⁴⁶ in the late nineteenth century mostly of trains. In the late nineteenth-century Fennoman political rhetoric, they were used metaphorically, giving a sense of Fennoman progress as a steady and inevitable forward motion which could only be slowed down, but not halted.

Fennoman ideas on progress and reform were based on their leading ideologist Johan Vilhelm Snellman's Hegelian thought. Similarly to Hegel, Snellman saw history as a rational process that consisted of successive stages. The past always carried the seeds of the future that demanded to be realized. History was a progressive movement towards a predetermined purpose – a realization of historical reason, which also set the pace for reasonable political reform. According to Snellman, the Finnish people's becoming a nation was guided by the national spirit. A nation could only come into existence if its foundations were laid on a single language.⁴⁷

The Fennomans spoke with suspicion about extension of suffrage until the 1880s owing to Finland's backwardness and low level of education. The Fennomans preferred to give, following Snellman's ideas, the task of mediating the national interest and the will of the people to publicity and the public opinion.⁴⁸ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, European demands for democratization also reached the Fennoman Finnish Party, whose radical young wing stressed the need for political and social reform. The younger generation of Fennomans shared Snellman's strict language program, but began to pay more attention to the idea of progress that emanated from the doctrine of evolution and the developments and explanations of the natural sciences. They emphasized that the world

⁴⁴'Dagblad ja säätyjen anomus kouluasiassa', p. 1.

⁴⁵For example, in the Diet of 1885 Fennoman leader Yrjö Koskinen accused the Svecoman estate of the nobility of obstruction. See 'Senaattori Yrjö-Koskisen lausunto rusthollikysymyksessä', *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti*, 2 May 1885, pp. 5–6.

⁴⁶E. Itkonen (ed.), *Suomen sanojen alkuperä: etymologinen sanakirja. Osa 1* (Helsinki, 1992), p. 237.

⁴⁷H. Rantala, 'Sivistyksestä sivilisaatioon: Kulttuurikäsitys J.V. Snellmanin historiallisessa ajattelussa' (University of Turku, PhD thesis, 2013), pp. 107, 113, 170, 235, 241–3. Rantala notes that Snellman was also indebted to French historians such as Jules Michelet and François Guizot. See also Pekonen, 'Debating "the ABCs"', pp. 77–84; T. Pulkkinen, *Valtio ja vapaus* (Jyväskylä, 1989).

⁴⁸Pekonen, 'Debating "the ABCs"', pp. 73–7, 271–2.

and progress could be explained empirically on other grounds than mere speculation about the realization of the spirit or reason.⁴⁹

As a result, in the Finnish press debates of the 1890s, *jarru* and *jarrutus* were used in criticizing procedures and institutions that hindered democratic reform. For example the Fennoman newspaper *Wiipuri* called the British House of Lords a brake (*jarru*) that drags on the side of the wheel of progress, the House of Commons, and slows it down.⁵⁰ When discussing parliaments, metaphorical uses of *jarru* were used in relation to trains⁵¹ and machines⁵² in expressions such as ‘the wheel of progress’ (*edistyspyörä, edistyksen [vauhti]pyöräit*) and ‘the brake system’ (*jarrutuslaitos, jarrut*). These modes of speech also gave birth to conservative and moderate views that saw *jarru* and *jarrutaa* as positive features against the irrationality of unrestrained change and progress: reasonable brakemen took care that the train would not tip onto its side in every turn or downhill.⁵³

The rhetoric was fed by foreign newspapers, which, especially in Britain, were prominent users of machine and technology metaphors. The popularity of such metaphors reflected a general and transnational belief in progress and fascination for technical inventions. They were also used to highlight the disparity between scientific and social progress. In this rhetoric, the parliament, which was increasingly responsible for social and political reform, was described as unable to keep pace with progress and the requirements of the modern society. These pressures were reflected to the expectations towards the parliament and parliamentarians, who were demanded to work faster and harder, produce concrete results, and make their deliberations more efficient.⁵⁴

Against this backdrop, the Fennomans employed metaphors of machines, trains, and brakes to attack their political opponents. The Fennomans highlighted the Swedish-speaking Svecomans as the main obstructionists of political reform. According to the Fennomans, in the four-estate Diet where the passing of bills required a majority of three estates, the Svecoman burghers and the nobility ‘obstructed (*jarrutaa*) all efforts of Finnishness’ and were ‘a brake to all progress’. Actors who did not support the right national cause were ‘a real brake against the natural progress of Finnishness’, and instead of ‘rotating the wheel of progress forward’ were ‘only braking it down’.⁵⁵

Interestingly, Fennoman political vocabulary did not make a distinction between parliamentary obstruction and the more general obstruction of progress and reform. Instead,

⁴⁹J. Paaskoski, “Tuo siunattu 80-luku” – Nuorsuomalaisuuden aatteellinen tausta, in V. Vares (ed.), *Valta, vapaus, edistys ja kasvatus: liberaalisten liikkeiden ja liberaalisen ajattelun vaiheita Suomessa ja Ruotsissa 1800-luvulta 1960-luvun puoliväliin* (Jyväskylä, 2002), pp. 21–80; V. Vares, *Varpuset ja pääskysel: nuorsuomalaisuus ja Nuorsuomalainen puolue 1870-luvulta vuoteen 1918* (Helsinki, 2000), pp. 32–3.

⁵⁰‘Waltiollinen katsaus’, *Wiipuri*, 19 May 1894, p. 2. See also, for example, ‘Ylähuone’, *Keski-Suomi*, 8 Feb. 1894, p. 4; ‘Kansallislitto ylähuonetta vastaan’, *Uusi Suometar*, 29 Sep. 1893, p. 2; ‘Vuosi 1893 muualla maailmassa’, *Wiipuri*, 5 Jan. 1894, p. 2.

⁵¹For example, ‘Homerule: “Kuonokoppalaki”’, *Päivälehti*, 14 July 1893, pp. 3–4 on the procedure of the guillotine as a ‘brake’ (*jarru*) which could stop ‘even the strongest system of obstruction’ (*jarrutusjärjestelmä*) or ‘train of speech’ (*puhejunan*) in the House of Commons.

⁵²For example, on the argument about old conservative candidates as ‘brakes’ (*jarruna*) instead of ‘progressive parts’ (*edistävänä jäsenenä*) of ‘the great machine of the society’ (*yhdyskunnan suuressa koneessa*) in ‘Silmäyksiä uuteen holhouslakiin’, *Mikkelin Sanomat*, 9 Mar. 1899, p. 2.

⁵³‘Kirje Helsingistä’, *Tampereen Sanomat*, 21 Mar. 1894, p. 2; ‘Kirje Tukholmasta’, *Päivälehti*, 30 May 1891, p. 2.

⁵⁴See Vieira, *Time and Politics*. For earlier uses of machine metaphors, see M. Janse, “Association is a Mighty Engine”: Mass Organization and the Machine Metaphor, 1825–1840’, in M. Janse and H. te Velde (eds), *Organizing Democracy: Reflections on the Rise of Political Organizations in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 2017), pp. 19–42.

⁵⁵‘Waalit porwarissäätöyn’, *Uusi Savo*, 12 Aug. 1893, p. 1; ‘Tohtori N.R. af Ursinille’, *Aura*, 6 Oct. 1893, p. 3; ‘Sananen puoleurheilujen johdosta’, *Uusi Suometar*, 17 Apr. 1901, p. 5; ‘Waltiopiäiwämieswaalin johdosta. I’, *Päivälehti*, 20 July 1893, p. 2.

the word originally used to describe obstruction in parliaments (*jarrutus*) was used to describe all delay of reform practiced by the Svecomans. In contrast to this rhetoric of *jarrutus*, in the Swedish-language political vocabulary *obstruktion* (and the rarely used *obstruera*) was limited to parliamentary obstruction, whereas (*för*)*hindra* was used to refer to delay of progress and reform. The Swedish equivalents for *jarruttaa*, *bromsa* (brake) and *bromsning* (braking), were used only as translations when referring to the Fennomans' rhetoric.⁵⁶ This reflects the central role that the idea of an obstructing minority had in the Fennomans' overall understanding of politics. In addition, it highlights how closely the Fennomans' determinist ideology of nation and language influenced and was intertwined with their political rhetoric and practice.

Obstruction and the rise of party politics

The Finnish press continued to report on obstruction in European countries throughout the 1880s and 1890s, but a new peak was reached when obstruction by the German, Hungarian, and Czech minorities became popular in the parliaments of Austria–Hungary in 1897. Obstruction was almost a daily topic on the Finnish news agenda. The press described the obstruction in Austria to have reached a new scale of severity in parliamentary history: speeches broke records in length, their verbal brutality was unprintable, and the chaos and violence unparalleled. A year later, obstruction occurred in the Hungarian parliament and remained a central news item for the first decade of the twentieth century. Newspapers described obstruction not only as a tactic, but as a dangerous parliamentary weapon.⁵⁷

While in the reports on the Irish and Austro-Hungarian campaigns obstruction was connected to questions of nationality and language, towards the end of the nineteenth century the threats of obstruction were increasingly and more explicitly linked to the harmful character of party politics. Expressions for obstructionists were now used more often in relation to party. It became common to speak (especially in the Finnish-language newspapers) of obstruction parties (e.g. *jarrutuspuolue*). Party conflicts, manifested for example as party hatred (*puoluewiha*), party quarrels (*puolueriita*), and party rage (*puolueraiwo*), were now described as causes of obstruction. Socialist obstruction in Belgian, Italian, and German parliaments appeared on the Finnish news agenda. In the beginning of the twentieth century, obstruction had become an international phenomenon that was considered to threaten not only the power of the majority, but the whole future of parliamentarism.⁵⁸

In the Diets, leading conservative Fennomans spoke against party politics and warned about its dissolving character and intrusion into the calm Finnish political life. Fennomania was not supposed to be a party, but the Finnish people were supposed to be the Fennomania.⁵⁹ The old Fennomans could not, however, prevent the movement from

⁵⁶For example, *bromsningspolitik* in 'Tidningar', *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 19 Jan. 1896, p. 3; 'Morgontidningarna', *Aftonposten*, 4 Mar. 1896, p. 2.

⁵⁷For example, 'Pula Unkarissa', *Aamulehti*, 31 Dec. 1898, p. 4; 'Uusi meteli Itäwallan edustajahuoneessa', *Wiipurin*, 18 June 1898, p. 3; 'Itävallan puolueriidat', *Uusi Suometar*, 30 Oct. 1897, p. 3.

⁵⁸See, for example, the translation of the legal scholar Georg Jellinek's article 'Hvart den parlamentariska obstruktion leder', *Åbo Tidning*, 5 Aug. 1903, p. 3, originally published in the Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse*; also Jellinek, 'Parliamentary Obstruction'.

⁵⁹Vares, *Varpuset ja pääskysel*, p. 23.

breaking into factions. The Fennomans' inner controversies led to the birth of the Valvoja group in the 1880s and the Young Finns finally in the 1890s.

As a result of the rise of new factions in Finland, the rhetorical focus of *jarrutus* moved away from the language question between Finnish and Swedish towards new political divisions and policy disputes. The Diet of 1904–05 was an interlude in this respect. The Old Finns, the Fennomans' conservative faction, used the term *jarrutus* to attack the Constitutionalists, an alliance consisting of the more liberal Fennoman Young Finns and the Swedish Party. The Constitutionalist majority in the Diet, who called for a more active resistance against the tightening Russian constraints on the Finnish Grand Duchy, refused to continue the Diet under the prevailing 'illegitimate' conditions until the Emperor Nicholas II responded to the Great Petition of 1904. The Constitutionalists, for instance, abstained from committee sittings so that quorums could not be reached. In the Diet and the press, the Old Finns described the Constitutionalist tactics with expressions taken from newspaper reports on recent foreign obstruction campaigns: the Constitutionalist *jarrutus* was 'a parliamentary tactic of delay' that 'consumed valuable time', was 'aimed against questions on the agenda' and 'the majority of the people', 'endangered the whole legislative and representative body', 'diminished its prestige', and 'gave it a bad reputation in the eyes of the people'.⁶⁰ The Old Finns compared the Constitutionalist actions to Austrian and Hungarian obstruction campaigns.⁶¹

Fears of obstruction and the unlimited freedom of speech in the parliamentary reform of 1906

The breakthrough of party democracy took place in Finland in the parliamentary reform of 1906, when the transition to the unicameral Eduskunta and the introduction of universal suffrage gave birth to organized mass parties. Despite the reforms on representation and number of chambers, the powers of the parliament remained modest: parliamentary government was not adopted in Finland until after the independence of 1917. A central question of the parliamentary reform was how to create a balance between the Eduskunta's representative and deliberative aspects.

The threat of obstruction was acknowledged in the parliamentary reform and resulted in proposals to limit MPs' freedom of speech according to foreign models. The parliamentary reform committee of 1905–06, whose members were experienced frontline politicians and university professors, was well aware of foreign obstruction campaigns and procedural arrangements created to prevent and end obstruction.⁶² The procedures, such as *clôture*, guillotine, and suspension of members, and problems related to quorums had been discussed in the Finnish press throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶³

Regardless of the stated fear of obstruction, referred to interchangeably as *obstruktion*, *obstruksioni*, or *jarrutus* in the reform committee, no limitations were set on the length

⁶⁰See, for example, *Porvarissäädyn pöytäkirjat*, 1904–05, II, pp. 532–5, 565; *Talonpoikaissäädyn pöytäkirjat*, 1904–05, II, p. 632; *Pappissäädyn pöytäkirjat*, 1904–05, pp. 371–2, 375–6, 388–9; 'Porvarissääty', *Uusi Suometar*, 28 Jan. 1905, p. 3; 'Kirje waltiopäiviltä', *Uusi Aura*, 29 Jan. 1905, p. 1.

⁶¹Poskeisen pakinoita: Keskustelua waltiopäiwistä', *Wiipuri*, 5 Feb. 1905, p. 3.

⁶²*Eduskunnan uudistamiskomitean pöytäkirjat 1905–1906; Eduskunnan uudistamiskomitean mietintö. Ehdotus waltiopäiväjärjestykseksi. Ehdotus vaalilaiksi. Perustelmat ja vastalauseita* (Helsinki, 1906).

⁶³For a thorough account on the measures to fight obstruction in parliaments of Europe and the Americas, see Auguste Ghislain Reynaert, *Histoire de la discipline parlementaire: règles et usages des assemblées politiques des deux mondes*, 2 vols (Paris, 1884).

or number of speeches in the Parliament Act of 1906 or the unicameral Eduskunta's rules of procedure. Despite the fact that scarcity of time had been acknowledged as a central challenge already in the Diets⁶⁴ and limitations on estate members' freedom of speech had been imposed following the widely established international practice,⁶⁵ the Eduskunta's plenary discussions were allowed to continue as long as there were members willing to speak to the matter under deliberation. The only limitations on members' freedom of speech were connected to respectful parliamentary language and to speaking to the question. Parliamentary freedom of speech was considered, especially in the imperial context, as a sacred privilege that was not considered worth limiting even against the fear of obstruction. The Eduskunta's procedures on speaking in parliament were designed to protect the prestige of the parliament and its members rather than to restrain undue obstructive speech.⁶⁶

Instead of limiting speech, the majority of the parliamentary reform committee of 1905–06 emphasized the morality of the MPs and the importance of holding 'many-sided', 'rich', 'thorough', and 'calm' discussions and readings as a protection against 'immature', 'fluctuating', and 'hasty' decision-making by 'occasional majorities'. These arguments were related to the concerns that the old political elite had about how the democratization of suffrage would influence the quality of legislation. The same fears motivated the reform committee to design procedures, such as the Grand Committee (*suuri valiokunta; stora utskottet*) and adjournment of legislation to the next elected parliament (*lepäämään jättäminen; hvilande förslag*), whose purpose was to control the potential risks of the abrupt democratization and to restrict the influence of the uneducated masses.⁶⁷

Obstruction in the rhetoric of the Social Democrats

Whereas in the Diet of 1904–05 accusations of obstruction were aimed against the Constitutionalist 'strike' and the Diet's lacking legislation and deliberation, in the context of the early unicameral Eduskunta, the concept of *jarrutus* was again harnessed in criticizing excessive debate and inefficiency in executing reform.

The Social Democratic Party of Finland was established in 1903, when the Finnish Labor Party (est. 1899) changed its name and proclaimed to be part of the international social democrat movement. The party's first program was an almost direct translation from the *Hainfelder Programm* of the Social Democratic Party of Austria (1888–89). Similarly to Karl Kautsky, the Finnish Social Democrats saw the parliamentary majority rule, *Beauftragte* model of party mandates, and universal suffrage as the most important means for social reform.⁶⁸ The party adopted parliamentary procedures as part of its organization.⁶⁹

Socialists were the most typical obstructionists in the parliaments of Europe next to national minorities. However, contrary to several other European parliaments, such as

⁶⁴See, for example, the rapid increase of petitions in the Diet in 'Petitionerna', *Nya Pressen*, 11 Feb. 1885, pp. 1–2; slowness of the Finnish legislative system in 'Långsamt, men säkert', *Nya Pressen*, 26 Jan. 1886, p. 2; heavy workload, long working hours, and tired members in 'Helsingfors-bref, Åbo Underrättelser', 19 Apr. 1891, pp. 1–2; Pekonen, 'Debating' the ABCs'', pp. 163, 197.

⁶⁵See, for example, *Talonpoikaissäädyn pöytäkirjat*, 1863–64, I, p. 12.

⁶⁶*Eduskunnan uudistamiskomitean pöytäkirjat 1905–1906*.

⁶⁷*Eduskunnan uudistamiskomitean pöytäkirjat 1905–1906; Eduskunnan uudistamiskomitean mietintö*; Pekonen, 'Debating "the ABCs"', pp. 177, 302.

⁶⁸K. Kautsky, *Der Parlamentarismus, die Volksgesetzgebung und die Sozialdemokratie* (Stuttgart, 1893), https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_FkbiAAAAMAAJ; Pekonen, 'Debating "the ABCs"', pp. 135–8; Y.K. Laine, *Suomen poliittisen työväenliikkeen historia: 1, Kansanvaltauuden läpimurto* (Helsinki, 1951).

⁶⁹*Työväen kalenteri 1909 II*. (Helsinki, 1908), p. 34; *Työväen kalenteri 1912 V*. (Helsinki, 1911), pp. 212–3.

Belgium and Germany,⁷⁰ the Finnish Social Democrats did not engage in obstruction. Instead, they converted the concept into a systematic rhetorical tool. Such contestations or hijacks of traditional and relatively established parliamentary concepts were typical of the socialist discourse during the early Eduskunta.

The Finnish Social Democrats adopted the term *jarrutus* in the debates preceding the parliamentary reform and used it to describe policies of the conservative and bourgeois minority, whom they argued were attempting to obstruct the will of the majority of the people, comprising of the workers and the poor. The socialists aimed the charge of *jarrutus* at proposals that supported limitations on suffrage, bicameralism over unicameralism, the Senate's unaccountability, and procedures that slowed down the legislative process by giving the minority significant power in parliamentary deliberations.⁷¹

The Social Democrats made significant victories in the first elections of the Eduskunta. In 1907 they became the largest party in parliament with 80 members out of the 200 total, and thus the largest socialist party in Europe.⁷² The number of Social Democrat representatives continued to rise, reaching an absolute majority in the elections of 1916.

In 1907, the Eduskunta started its work in an atmosphere of high hopes. The great expectations were not fulfilled, however, as the short 90-day sessions were characterized by dissolutions of parliament by the emperor and the scarce time resulting from a heavy workload and large number of agenda items. The Social Democrats soon became disappointed with the Eduskunta's inability to realize urgent social and political reforms. As a result, the socialists accused their political opponents of obstructive tactics and highlighted the failures of the Parliament Act to prevent them. Although no large-scale obstruction debates took place, the Social Democrats repeatedly stated their frustration over excessive speech. A major ingredient in the Social Democrats' rhetoric was *jarrutus*, which during its existence in the Finnish political vocabulary had acquired a strong negative meaning, particularly among the Finnish-speaking majority. Their rhetoric described excessive speech and debate as the main instruments of *jarrutus*, which had the goal of maintaining the status quo and the *ancien régime*, instead of promoting change, reform, and democratization.

The socialist disappointment with the Eduskunta led to pejorative statements and cynicism about procedure and debate in parliament. Social Democrats compared the Eduskunta's work to parliaments that were suffering from obstruction and described it with expressions taken from newspaper reports on foreign obstruction campaigns. Their newspapers published articles titled 'Obstruction in the Eduskunta' and 'Away with the Eduskunta's Obstruction System'.⁷³ The socialists described how the bourgeois parties' *jarrutus* 'brought the whole Eduskunta to a standstill': the Eduskunta was possessed by 'inundation of words', 'rage for speaking', 'mouthing off', 'useless chatter', and even 'verbal diarrhea', which led to 'waste of time' 'at the cost of the matter'. Social Democrat newspapers called their conservative and bourgeois opponents' time-wasting oratory as 'unparliamentary'

⁷⁰Te Velde, 'Parliamentary Obstruction', pp. 136–42.

⁷¹See, for example, O.V. Kuusinen, 'Eduskuntakomiteaa puolustetaan', *Työmies*, 15 Mar. 1906, p. 2; O.V. Kuusinen, 'Eduskuntatuudistuksen viimeiset vaiheet', *Sosialistinen Aikakauslehti* 2, (1906), pp. 242–7; 'Senaatti kunnostaa itseään', *Länsi-Suomi*, 10 Mar. 1906, p. 1.

⁷²R. Alapuro, 'The Construction of the Voter in Finland, c.1860–1907', *Redescriptions* 10, (2006), p. 56.

⁷³'Jarrutus eduskunnassa', *Sosialidemokraatti*, 18 June 1907, p. 2; 'Eduskunnan työtä hidastawa jarrutuslaitos pois', *Sosialidemokraatti*, 5 Mar. 1908, p. 1.

and ‘parliamentarily immature’ and published statistics on the biggest time-wasters based on the length and number of their speeches.⁷⁴

Although the practice of obstruction was adopted in the political repertoire, it was not used in the Eduskunta until in the aftermath of the Civil War in 1920.⁷⁵ It was considered inappropriate, but also unnecessary in view of the scarce time, fragmentary deliberations interrupted by the dissolutions, and the existing procedural arrangements that made delaying parliamentary work possible without systematic use of lengthy speech.⁷⁶

Intra-parliamentary versus extra-parliamentary majorities

The Eduskunta’s disputes on *jarrutus* were clashes between different conceptions of parliament. Whereas the non-socialist parties highlighted an ideal of many-sided, thorough, and calm deliberations (in which the minority had notable procedural powers to force the majority into compromise), the Social Democrats saw the Eduskunta as a working, voting, and decision-making assembly whose primary duty was to realize the will of the majority of the people and execute necessary reforms.

Social Democrats emphasized that they were themselves interested in the big questions of principle, not in the obstructive and time-consuming, petty hair-splitting of their opponents: the parliament was a place for ‘real work’ and decision-making, not for ‘idle words’ and ‘useless debate’. In order to execute the reforms, the Eduskunta procedure was to be simplified and the government made responsible. International Social Democrat theory, the Eduskunta’s scarce time, and the urgency of the social reforms motivated the Social Democratic Party to contrast action, work, and decisions with speech, deliberation, and debate.

It is notable that the idea of ‘all talk, no action’ was not purely a socialist invention in the Finnish context, but had been typical of the late nineteenth-century Fennoman nationalists as well. It resurfaced in the Eduskunta also among the conservative Fennoman camp.⁷⁷ It was no coincidence that both the Fennomans and Social Democrats found the concept of obstruction useful in their political rhetoric. Both groups highlighted themselves as the representatives of the ‘will of the people’, the majority outside the representative assembly, whose interests would sooner or later be realized. Both the Fennoman Hegelianism and the socialist materialism seemed to consider the national interest or the will of the people as something already determined – it was not the task of parliamentary deliberation to try to change these priorities listed in the political program.

In the Diet and the early Eduskunta, reforms on language, representation, and social welfare were hindered by, for instance, an obsolete political and electoral system, Russian rule, and scarcity of time. When the possibility for reform came, swift decisions were seen as a necessity instead of time-consuming debates and many-sided evaluation of alternatives. In this setting, parliamentary obstruction and its idea of excessive

⁷⁴See, for example, ‘Kunnallislain wiiwytyt – häwettäwiä aikeita’, *Savon Työmies*, 29 Sep. 1908, p. 1; ‘Jälleenkö pettymys?’ *Kansan Tahto*, 29 Sep. 1908, p. 1; ‘Kirje eduskunnasta’, *Työ*, 20 Oct. 1907, p. 1; ‘Eduskunta ja uudistusksymykset’, *Työ*, 10 Oct. 1908, p. 2; ‘Torpparilaki suuressa waliokunnassa’, *Työmies*, 29 Sep. 1908, p. 5; ‘Ketkä hidastuttivat Eduskunnan työtä. Tilastoa Eduskunnassa käytetyistä puheenwuoroista’, *Vapaus*, 25 Jan. 1908, p. 4.

⁷⁵Maartje Janse has called this kind of transfer, in which a learned option is available yet rejected as inappropriate, as ‘inverse transfer’. See M. Janse, ‘“Holland as Little England?” British Anti-slavery Missionaries and Continental Abolitionist Movements in the Mid Nineteenth Century’, *Past and Present* 229, (2015), p. 230.

⁷⁶For example, the Grand Committee and adjournment of legislation to the next elected parliament mentioned above.

⁷⁷For an illustrative example, see ‘Puhetulwa eduskunnassa’, *Wiipuri*, 22 Sep. 1907, p. 2.

speech were found useful in consolidating an understanding of politics that was based on the idea of ratifying the already determined ‘best option’. Instead of plenary debate, the most important and efficient part of parliamentary deliberation was considered to take place in committees. This focus on committee work was highlighted also by the Fennomans both in the Diet and the early Eduskunta.

As a result of the breakthrough of universal suffrage in 1906, the Fennomans finally lost their monopoly and credibility as the sole representatives of the majority. In the early Eduskunta, Fennoman leaders emphasized, in contrast to their Diet rhetoric, that the majority should be determined in parliamentary deliberations, not outside the assembly based on party programs or electoral promises. They also actively advocated the Burkean trustee model of representation, which had been highlighted in the Diets especially by the Swedish-language liberals.⁷⁸

In this sense, the changing relations and estimations between the minority and the majority maintained the appreciation of the Finnish parliament’s deliberative and debating characteristics despite the transition to party democracy. The parliament continued to be an important arena for challenging consensual and uniform national culture.

Conclusions: parliamentary publicity as publicity between parliaments

The peripheral Grand Duchy of Finland with its outdated Diet system was not excluded from European debates, but was part of a transnational discourse and development. The formulation of the modern Finnish political language was a continuous process of applying European ways of using and defining political concepts to the Finnish experience.⁷⁹ Translations and transfers of European concepts were used to interpret, contextualize, and frame domestic political questions and to influence what was considered possible and desirable in Finnish political life.

Parliamentary publicity is traditionally used to refer to the publicity of parliamentary deliberations in relation to the public and the represented. It has been highlighted how publicity changed how parliamentarians acted and spoke in parliament.⁸⁰ Parliamentary publicity should be, however, understood more broadly as a transnational space and phenomenon – as a publicity between parliaments. Publicity also changed how parliaments functioned and deliberated. It was used actively by parliamentarians and parliamentary staff in developing and shaping national practices. As a result of this joint publicity, parliaments had an increasingly joint agenda, used similar concepts and vocabularies, and, when facing common challenges, responded to them by similar legislation and procedural means.

There was, however, an asymmetry between the European parliamentary centers and the periphery in this respect. Political reforms discussed in the prominent European parliaments were soon in the thoughts and minds, and consequently often also in the agendas, of representatives in other countries. In contrast, the parliamentary life of peripheral countries, such as Finland, rarely made headlines for example in Britain and France. The relation was not reciprocal: Finland as a latecomer in the periphery did not actively contribute to the discussions in the center before the radical parliamentary reform of

⁷⁸Pekonen, ‘Debating “the ABCs”’, pp. 139–43.

⁷⁹H. Stenius, ‘Kansalainen’, in M. Hyvärinen et al. (eds), *Käsitteet liikkeessä* (Tampere, 2003), p. 309.

⁸⁰See, for example, te Velde, *Sprekende politiek*; Vieira, *Time and Politics*.

1906. Finnish actors and debaters, on the other hand, could benefit from the experience of the other countries. Peripheral countries did not imitate the center of parliamentary development, but used these examples selectively and innovatively.

Notes on contributor

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