

IN ENGLISH

INDEPENDENCE  
*and*  
DEMOCRACY

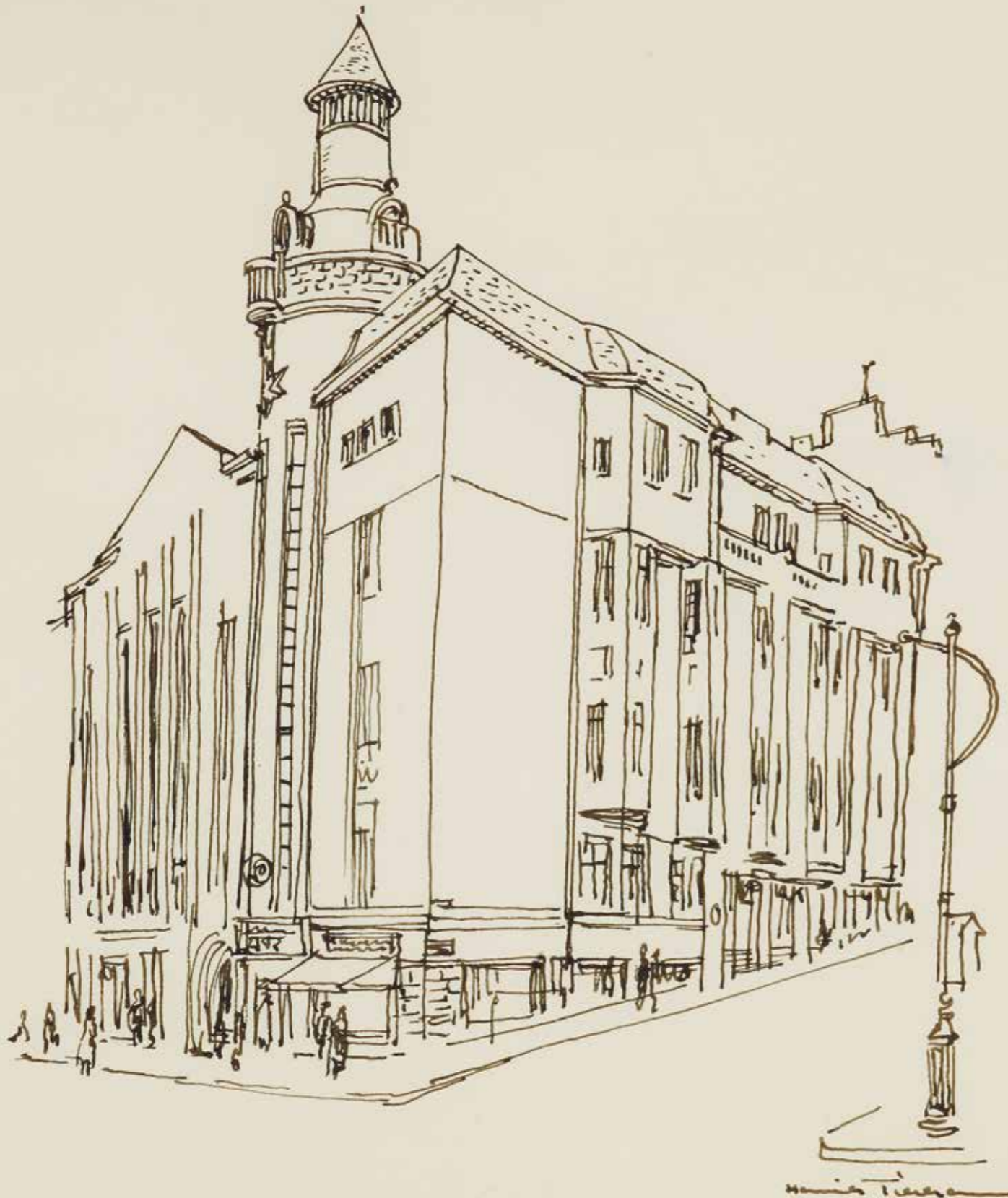
*The role of parliamentarians  
in the history of Finland 1917–1920*





»When the Parliament concluded its plenary on 6 December 1917, no toasts were raised or songs sang for the free Finland.»

As is often the case with turning points in history.



*The Finnish Declaration of Independence was given in the Heimola building, where parliament convened at the time, on December 6, 1917.  
Drawing by Henrik Tikkanen.*

6 December 1917 is perceived, with good reasons, as a turning point in the history of Finland and the date has been celebrated as Finland's national independence day since 1919. The Diet of Finland approved on this date the Senate's Declaration of Independence and gave it proxy to implement the decision.

At the same time, the decision was certainly not perceived as very formal or decisive. Greater driving forces were in motion. The First World War had been ongoing for more than three years and the development in Russia had, only a month earlier, turned in a new direction through the Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd. The members of the Finnish Diet understood, therefore, that a declaration of independence as such was not enough. Out in the community, the citizens were facing much more tangible challenges: increasing food shortages and crime, wild strikes and bitter attacks in the press, all of which intensified in pace with the arming of the White and Red Guards around the country. And soon everything would grow even worse.

Examining the history of Finland in a longer perspective, it is clear that the years 1917-1920 were some of the most dramatic and difficult, but also the most successful stages of the nation's history. After 600 years as a part of Sweden, and 108 years as a Grand Duchy of Russia, the country's democratically elected parliamentarians decided to step into a national sovereignty right in the middle of the chaos. And this step taken was successful.

Twenty months later, Finland received a republican form of government with a parliamentary democracy which, despite several internal and external political crises, has survived to this day. Only a small number of member states in the European Union of today have such a constitutional continuity. For that reason it is also worth noting that Finland's independence and political stability has been beneficial even for its neighbouring countries. But how did this happen and what role did the parliamentarians play in this drama?

# Greater Driving Forces



The direct cause of the Finnish liberation from the Russian Empire was the Bolshevik October Revolution. But behind these dramatic events lies a series of more profound historical processes which, working together, led to the outbreak of the First World War and the chaos in Russia.

The major powers' battle for the new colonies and market shares in an expanding world economy increased at the end of the 19th century in pace with

their industrialisation. And when this occurred parallel with an accelerated rearmament, and a mobilisation of the masses with nationalist slogans and attacks against other major powers, everything escalated into the First World War at the end of the summer of 1914.

Finland was also formed by these driving forces. The Finnish Diet had been meeting regularly since 1863 and pushed through many reforms, but less than

5 percent of its citizens had the right to vote in the parliamentary elections. In the 1890s, when Finland began to industrialise in earnest, demands increased for an extension of voting rights, while the tensions between the Grand Duchy and the Russian Empire intensified because of Russification.

The first major political upheaval occurred in 1905-1906 after the setbacks in the Russian-Japanese War. The whole of the Russian Empire was shaken by demonstrations and civil unrest. The Emperor now agreed to a radical representations reform in Finland, and in 1906 all men and women over 24 years received voting and representation rights.

A new transparent governance took shape. The number of voters increased tenfold overnight, newspaper censorship was eased and the mobilisation of the masses took momentum of the closely arranged parliamentary elections. Unfortunately, this also led to a more spiteful social climate. No significant reforms could be pushed through because of disagreements between the parties and the Emperor's frequent dissolutions of the Parliament.

Despite new Russification measures, from 1908 there were very few Finns that could even imagine a state sovereignty. Finnish accession to the Empire in 1809 had been dictated by Russia's growing concern over the security of Saint Petersburg. Up until 1917

Russian troops were, therefore, constantly stationed in the country and each time the Empire was drawn into a major power conflict its forces were strengthened.

This was the same as when the First World War broke out in the late summer of 1914. In the beginning Finland was only indirectly affected by the war. The Finns were exempted from military service and the front stayed at a safe distance for a long time. Moreover, the war led to there being a large demand for Finnish products in Russia. However, the state of war and stricter censorship was imposed throughout the Empire and in the autumn of 1914 the decision was announced for a new Russification program in Finland. Before the program could be implemented, in the early spring of 1917, the Empire was drawn into a revolutionary chaos and power vacuum.

Mistrust towards the rebellious Finns led to the Russian government refusing, after the outbreak of war, to convene the Finnish Parliament because there were reasons to believe that it would protest against the Russification program. The suspicions were also fuelled by information received about the Jaeger movement, an illegal solicitation of around 2000 Finns to the German army, which aimed to return home and with German flank support lead a war of liberation against Russia.

*Many aspirations and endeavors of the major powers affected Finland despite taking place in far away lands. For instance, the parliamentary reform of 1906 was an indirect result of Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese war. A Russian propaganda painting from 1904 (left).*

*Russian soldiers at the railway station in Riihimäki (right). Prior to Finnish independence Russian military presence in autonomous Finland was strengthened every time Russia became involved in a conflict with another major power.*



# The Russian Revolution

When the war situation had stabilised, parliamentary elections were held in Finland in July 1916, which gave a sensational victory to the Social Democrats, who alone conquered a majority (103 of 200) of the parliamentary slots. This majority was, however, of no worth as long as the Russian Government refused to convene the Parliament and the Emperor's right of veto also prevented all reform proposals.

While waiting for the situation to change, the parliamentarians, in the early spring of 1917, began to discuss the possibilities of exploiting the Russian weakness in order to strengthen Finnish autonomy or simply declare the country independent. All of the parliamentary parties were open to both options. While waiting for the imperial power to weaken, the parties prepared a joint proposal, which stated that Finland's autonomous status within the Empire would both be improved and clarified.

At the same time, more and more parliamentarians began to consider independence as a real alternative. Until then, the idea of a national

sovereignty had been the guiding principle only for one clique of bourgeois and socialist activists, who kept in contact with Russian revolutionaries in their underground activities against the empire. The same political variegated circuit stood behind the Jaeger movement, which meant that there was a fairly broad preparedness for an armed emancipation despite everything.

Then came what many had hoped for. In the beginning of March 1917, a revolution broke out in the Empire's capital, which had received the more Russian-sounding name Petrograd. The Emperor abdicated and the Russian State Duma appointed a provisional government which abolished a number of the Empire's restrictions also in Finland, which naturally was welcomed. In addition to the Russification program being abolished, the Parliament could be convened, and under the direction of the new Governor General Stahovitj, a senate was formed with 6 Social Democratic and 6 bourgeois senators. The Social Democrat Oskari

Tokoi was appointed vice president, which meant that the Social Democrats had the majority those times that Stahovitj did not lead the floor.

The Russian slogan, "Svaboda" - i.e. freedom, resounded everywhere in the crumbling empire. Even in Finland, the event was celebrated in a state of euphoria, but it was soon found that the unbridled freedom easily degenerated into chaos and disorder. The rebellious Russian soldiers killed dozens of their own officers. At the same time food shortage led to pillaging and strikes.

The Parliament realised that something must be done to restore order and began to discuss the possibility of a complete emancipation from Russia. In April 1917 the Senate vice president, Social Democrat Oskari Tokoi, held a much noted speech in

which he stated that the foundation of the Finnish people's independence was now laid and urged all to support its realisation. He also openly praised the Jaeger movement for its overall objective; a liberation of Finland from Russia with German help. What is also relevant is that a third of the Jaeger movement's men had been recruited from the working class, which had long been critical of the Imperial regime.

In the early summer of 1917, a circuit of Social Democrats and the Jaeger movement's leadership agreed that a domestic militia to restore order should be established. In addition, they agreed to try to push through a "Power Act", which transferred all power concerning Finnish internal affairs to the Parliament: ratification of laws, convening and dissolving of the Parliament, the Senate's appointment.



*Voting at the Hanho School in Ruovesi on July 3, 1916. Between the parliamentary reform in 1906 and independence 8 elections to the autonomous Finnish Diet were arranged.*

# The Power Act

The Parliament approved the Power Act on 18 July 1917 with a qualified majority (136-55) consisting of Social Democrats, Agrarians and other bourgeois sovereignists. The decision was made in the belief that the power coup by the Bolsheviks would dispel the resistance existing in Russia against the act. The Bolsheviks openly supported Finnish separatism, because it was in their interest to divide the empire to reach power for themselves.

Neither the Russian Provisional Government nor the majority of the Russian socialists were, however, prepared to accept such emancipation. They understood that a free Finland could be used as a military bridgehead by the Germans. After squelching the Bolshevik coup, the Russian Provisional Government issued a manifesto, in which the Power Act was annulled by a resolution of the Parliament and the announcement of new elections.

The Manifesto was authenticated by the Finnish Senate with votes 7-6. The bourgeois senators stood behind their chairman Governor General Stahovitj, who felt that the Power Act was legally unsustainable because such a shift in power would have required an agreement with the Russian Government. This interpretation aroused resentment in the opposing camp. The sovereignists accused the bourgeois senators for no less than treason. The Social Democrats stamped them again as selfish class intriguers who, with Russian help, tried to stop their reform proposals of an eight-hour working day and local democratic elections.

During the following three months chaos increased throughout the Empire and expanded the fracture that had arisen between the political blocs in Finland on the basis of the annulment of the Power Act and the Parliaments' dissolution. The Social Democrats sought, as did the bourgeois parties, as much independence as possible, but the parties now became increasingly at odds on how this should be achieved.

The Social Democrats saw Russia's Provisional Government as a definitive obstacle to the major reforms desired to transform Finland to a socialist society. They were therefore driven closer to the Bolsheviks, the only political grouping in Russia that supported a Finnish separatism and who also had a strong grip on the Russian troops' Revolutionary Council in Finland. On the bourgeois side, growing anarchy and crime led to a fast rapprochement between the legalistic and the activist-minded Parliament and societal actors.

In the beginning of October 1917, Parliamentary elections were held, which resulted in a majority (108-92) for the bourgeois bloc. When the new Parliament met on 1 November 1917 for its first plenary, there was an acrid atmosphere. Each camp had started to set up their own armed regime guards, which in the increasingly chaotic situation in the Empire, further increased the mutual mistrust. How long should the counterparty be prepared to discuss Finland's future in Heimola's chamber? When should weapons be allowed to speak instead?



*People standing in line for bread on Fabianinkatu in Helsinki during the 1917 spring demonstrations. Food shortage was more severe in cities than in the country side.*

## Parliamentary elections 1917

Party	Number of MPs elected	Compared to 1916 election
The Finnish Social Democratic Party	92	- 11
The Finnish Party	32	- 1
The Agrarian Party	26	+ 7
The Young Finnish Party	24	+ 1
The Swedish People's Party	21	0
The People's Party	5	+ 5
Total	200	

# We Demand!



That compromises would become more and more difficult to achieve was seen in the "We Demand"-program that the Social Democrats immediately presented in Parliament. The list of demands included an immediate implementation of the Power Act and a number of other social reforms, which in practice would have meant a transition to a socialist society. Along with the state seizing all food stocks, an immediate resolution and the disarming of the bourgeois regime guards was demanded. The demands were perceived as unreasonable and foreboding by the bourgeois.

The night of 7 November 1917 the "We Demand"-program received a whole new relevance because of the Bolshevik power overtake in Petrograd. Not least, the Navy's revolutionary council in Helsinki was one of their strong supports, which together with Lenin strongly urged the Finnish Social Democrats to seize power and consequently supplied their Red Guard with weapons. Two days later the leader of the Finnish labour movement formed, from a Bolshevik model, a revolutionary central council. Despite the strong demands for a power coup, the council chose to implement the "We Demand"-program with the aid of a general strike.

The strike was implemented on 13-19 November, i.e. at the same time as when the Bolsheviks fortified their power in Petrograd. This contributed greatly to the Social Democrats' renewed proposal for a Power Act being approved on 15 November by the Parliament with a resolute majority (127-68).

When Lenin seized power, a growing share of bourgeois in Finland was also convinced that all ties with Russia must be cut in order to restore order. Not least because the domestic strikers' hunt for food and weapons had, at the same time, degenerated into armed incidents in different parts of the country that claimed over 30 lives.

The Power Act's approval was in fact a declaration of independence. The Parliament took over, for the time being, the power that "according to current provisions was held by the Emperor and the Grand Duke". Moreover, all the reservations concerning the country's foreign policy and defences, which had been included in the earlier bill, were dissolved. These new proxies were

reinforced directly afterwards, with a large majority, by a democratic local law and the law for an eight-hour working day.

However, this did not bring forth a bipartisan conciliation. The revolutionaries now received, namely, a greater influence in the labour movement and were incited to action by the Bolshevik government in Petrograd and the Russian soldiers in Finland who, together with domestic hooligans, continued their pillaging forays in different parts of the country.

The other parties hastened to form a bourgeois senate, i.e. government which, together with legality fighter Pehr Evind Svinhufvud as President, went on to declare Finland independent in explicit terms and realise the sovereignty in practice. On the agenda was also the restoration of order, which intensified armament of the White Guard and the plans to call for the German army's help, which in October 1917 had reached Estonia.

Also relevant was that Svinhufvud's senate had actively been asked to declare Finland independent of the German government. Germany was, at the same time, part in a ceasefire with the Bolshevik regime and had set its sights on demanding, in the forthcoming German-Russian peace negotiations, that Russia withdraw their troops from Finland with reference to that the country had declared independence.

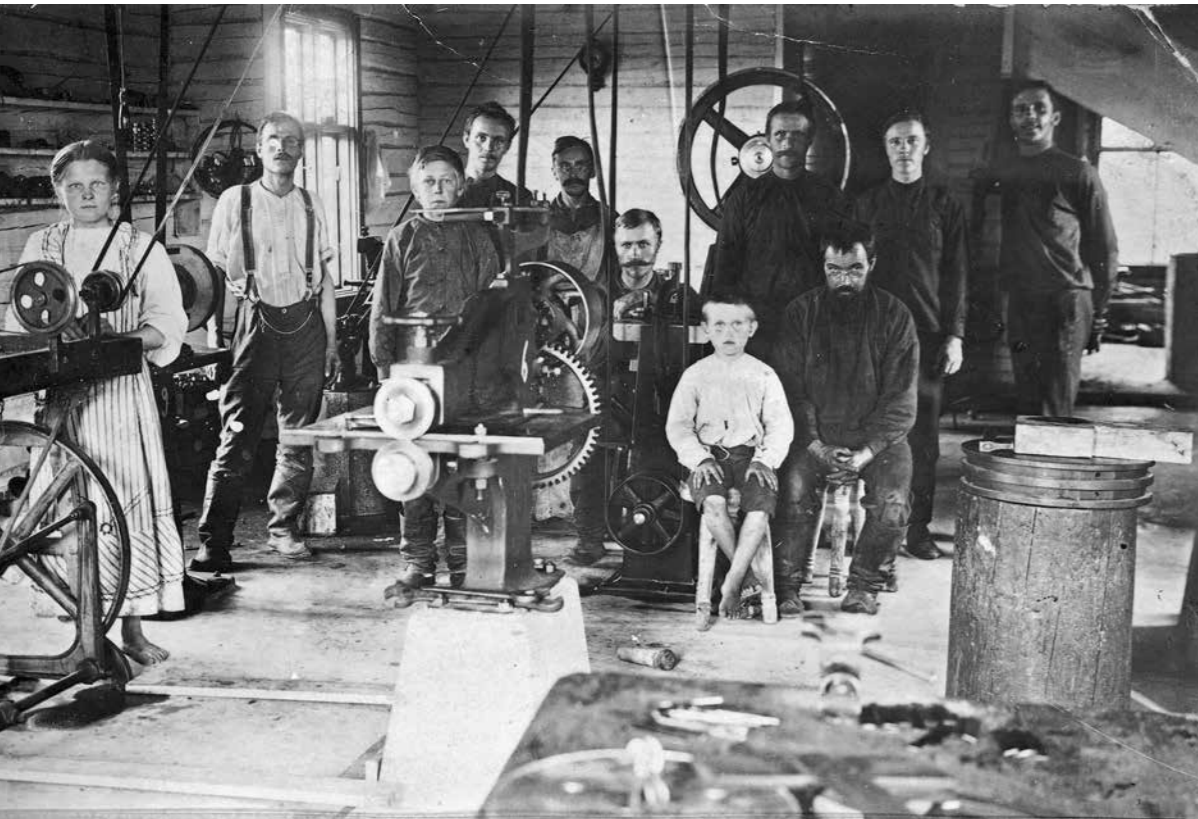


*Demonstration flag demanding 8-hour workday.*



Everyday life prior to independence

Finland saw much conflict and drama in the years before and after independence, but life in agrarian Finland was also one of toil in relative peace.





# The Declaration of Independence

On 4 December, Svinhufvud read the Senate's Declaration of Independence in the Parliament, in which there was a reference to a simultaneously presented proposal for a form of government Finland defined as an independent republic. The Senate promised to turn to other powers to have the independence "recognised between peoples"



Parliament approved Finnish independence in the Heimola building, in which it convened from 1911–1931. Drawing of the interior by Henrik Tikkanen.

and mentioned that a strong support for it was already obtained from Russia, i.e. by the Bolshevik government.

The following day the Declaration of Independence was made public. No parliamentary group protested against it as such, because in practice it was a clarification of the already approved Power Act. But the Social Democrats and the many bourgeois parliamentarians were dissatisfied that the declaration had been clubbed without the Parliament's approval, which was contrary to the newly approved Power Act. Decision could only, according to that, be made on the basis of the Parliament's motions. The bourgeois parties, therefore, agreed that the Senate's declaration should be treated as a Parliamentary motion. The procedure was also recommended by foreign consuls in Finland, as this gave the declaration more political authority.

On Thursday, 6 December 1917, the bourgeois party groups presented a motion, with the Agrarian Party's ideologue Santeri Alkio as the first signatory, in which the Senate was given proxy to implement their plans. The Social Democrats' counterproposal was that independence should first be negotiated in consultation with Russia's government, then be approved by the countries' parliaments, and finally implemented by the Parliament's committees and the plenary. Alkio's proposal won with votes 100-88.

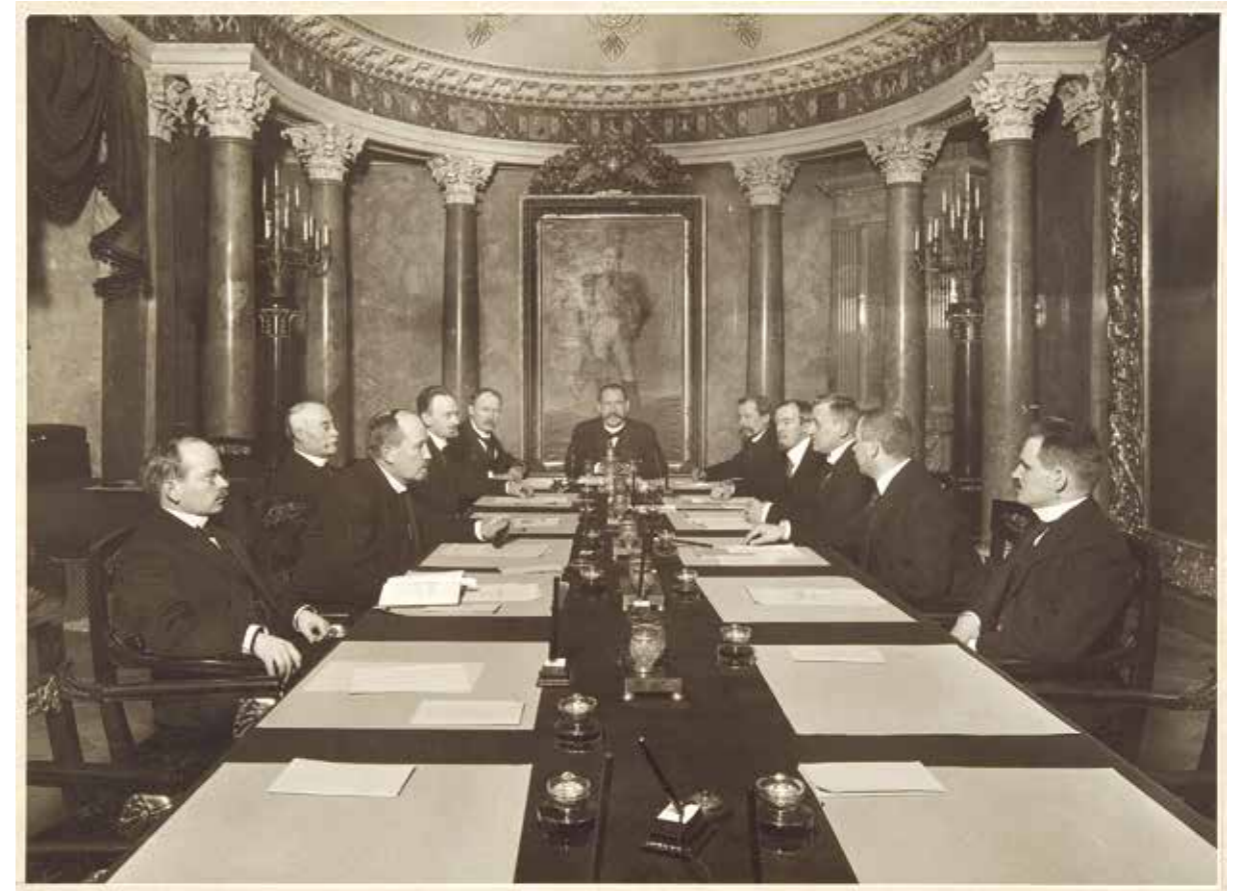
The Social Democrats' delaying attempts stemmed from the suspicion that a too rapid disengagement from Russia would complicate the transition to a Socialist Finland. As long as Russian troops remained

in the country, the bourgeois forces could not bring in German help to quell the labour movement and its Socialist objectives. The Social Democrats' ultimate goal was a national sovereignty, but they thought it wisest to handle the matter in consensus with Russia, and eventually after the end of the world war.

Although the Parliament's decision was primarily a precision of the Power Act that was implemented in November, it was specifically on December 6 two years later that the celebration began of Finland's Independence Day. The reason was that the

Parliament also implemented the Senate's plans to explicitly develop a Republican form of government. If the country had instead received a Socialist or Monarchical constitution, no doubt another date would have become a national commemoration day.

When the Parliament concluded its plenary on 6 December 1917, no toasts were raised or songs sang for the free Finland. As is often the case with turning points in history. They begin to be perceived as big and important only in retrospect, when what they led to is known.



P. E. Svinhufvud's first cabinet is also referred to as the independence senate. Behind Svinhufvud hangs a portrait of Alexander I. Since then the portrait has been replaced by portraits of Finnish presidents.

# War and Monarchy

During the following two months the political conflict degenerated in Finland, step by step, into a bloody war between the two camps' civil guards, whose actions were largely ruled by the governments in Berlin and Petrograd. The conflict was in no way dampened by the Bolshevik government, a few minutes before midnight on 31 December 1917, recognising Finland's independence, even though recognition meant that other countries important for Finland declared the same.

Lenin's intention was not to create an independent Finland as a parliamentary democracy. The aim was to persuade the Finnish Social Democrats that the Bolsheviks held its promise of the minority peoples' right to national sovereignty. When this was done they would finally shoulder their responsibility for the world revolution, and by their takeover of power, prevent the Germans' efforts to take advantage of the Finnish issue in the Russo-German peace negotiations.

The Parliament had no real ability to influence this major power political game. In mid-January of 1918 the bourgeois government gave Lieutenant General Gustaf Mannerheim, returned from Russian service, the mission to transform the bourgeois protection corps to the State's police force.

This intensified the further arming of both camp's civil guards and led to the parties blaming

*The first year of independence started with a conflict that effectively tore Finland in two, and brought with it destruction and suffering.*

*The part of Tampere called Kyttälä was severely damaged in the conflict.*

each other for pushing the country into a civil war. A few days later the Red Guard and the White Guard clashed in Viborg. And after intensive demands from the Bolshevik government, the Social Democrats decided to seize power in Helsinki the night before 28 January. The same night the White Guard disarmed, on Mannerheim's order, Russian troops in Pohjanmaa. A few weeks later, the White Guard was reinforced by the Jaeger Brigade returning home from Germany.

After three months of bloody conflict, the White side emerged as the victor. The final results were

decided largely by a German military intervention in southern Finland that was made possible by the German-Russian Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March of 1918, in which the Bolsheviks undertook to withdraw the Russian troops from Finland. The domestic contracting parties were likely to perceive the war as an internal or narrow Finnish-Russian conflict, which led to most Finns still calling the war a civil war or a war of liberation. But looking a little closer, it is easy to realise that the armed conflict in Finland, in reality, was a peripheral offshoot of the First World War.



A concrete expression of this was that in May of 1918 Finland, despite its new-found sovereignty, was strongly tied politically and economically to Germany, whose troops remained in the country and ensured that a German-minded government took office. Almost all of the Social Democrat parliamentarians were, as were 80,000 Red Guards, detained and put on trial because of their commitment to the side that lost.

This signalled a resurgence of the right wing's demands, awakened during the war, to abandon plans for a republican form of government with a parliamentary democracy, and instead introduce a strong kingship with a German Prince Regent. But as the sharply reduced Parliament took a position in July of 1918 on a bill concerning a monarchist constitution proved that it was impossible to obtain a qualified majority behind the proposal. The government turned

to the 1772 form of government which was still in force, which dictated that the Parliament would elect a new Regent if the Royal Family died out. Through this ploy, in August the government received, by a narrow majority, authorisations to officiate elections for King. On October 9, the Parliament met to conduct the election, and since only the German Prince Friedrich Karl of Hessen was proposed, he was appointed the country's new Regent.

By that time, however, faith in German victory had begun to crumble even among the most German-minded right-wing forces in the Parliament. After the German surrender in early November, the government was forced to quickly change their opinion. On 12 December 1918 the Parliament elected the explicitly western-minded Mannerheim, to State Regent to lead the country until a new government form took effect.



Blue cross on a white field

The Finnish parliament debated what the Finnish flag should look like in the spring of 1918, and on 27 May approved the proposal of its constitutional committee for a new national symbol. The act, making the design of Eero Snellman and Bruno Tuukkanen the official Finnish flag was issued two days later, and even though some of its provisions have been amended slightly since then, the design itself, a blue cross on a white field, remains unchanged.

## Republican Form of Government

Finland's legislative body was thus faced with the challenge of unearthing a new constitution while it was trying to solve the challenges of the new-found independence and the events the war had brought. In comparison with the chaos of autumn 1917, however, the situation was decidedly better. The World War had resulted in that which almost no one could predict – the Russian and German Empires' simultaneous disintegration – which gave Finland and the other new States in Eastern Europe a real chance to fortify their independence and stabilise domestic politics.

In the late winter of 1919 Finland re-established diplomatic relations with the Western powers. In the same spring Parliamentary elections were held, in which the Social Democrats also took part and won 80 of the 200 seats, which effectively facilitated efforts to bridge the deep rift that had emerged between the political blocs during the previous two years. That this could happen less than a year after the parties had been at war against each other showed, perhaps more than anything else, that the trust in representative democracy was, after all, rock-solid.

The majority of the Social Democrats now clearly distanced themselves from revolutionary socialism. The party's more radical wing broke out later and formed the Finnish Socialist Workers' Party, which was in close contact with the former Revolutionary leaders who escaped to Russia. The bourgeois were similarly regrouping because of the current constitutional issue. The Monarchist-minded old and young Finns formed the National Coalition Party, while their Republican-minded party colleagues instead founded the Progressive Party of Finland.

The Social Democrat's, the Progressive Party's, as well as the Republican-minded Agrarian Party's total seats in the parliamentary elections of 1919 (148 of 200) clearly showed that people preferred a republican form of government. The monarchist-minded parliamentarians were thus forced to retreat. But they could console themselves that the legislative proposals for a new constitution gave the President considerable powers, which was consistent with their demands for a strong government as a counterweight to the popularly elected Parliament. After various negotiations, a qualified majority stood behind an urgent treatment of the draft law, which

eventually was approved by a wide margin (165-22) on 21 June 1919.

On July 17, the new Constitution was confirmed by the Regent Mannerheim, who ran in the presidential election which was conducted a week later. The new Constitution dictated that the President be democratically elected by 300 electors. The Social Democrats and the Agrarians realised that this could benefit the right-wing candidate Mannerheim and it was, therefore, rushed through that it was the Parliament instead who must choose. The result was

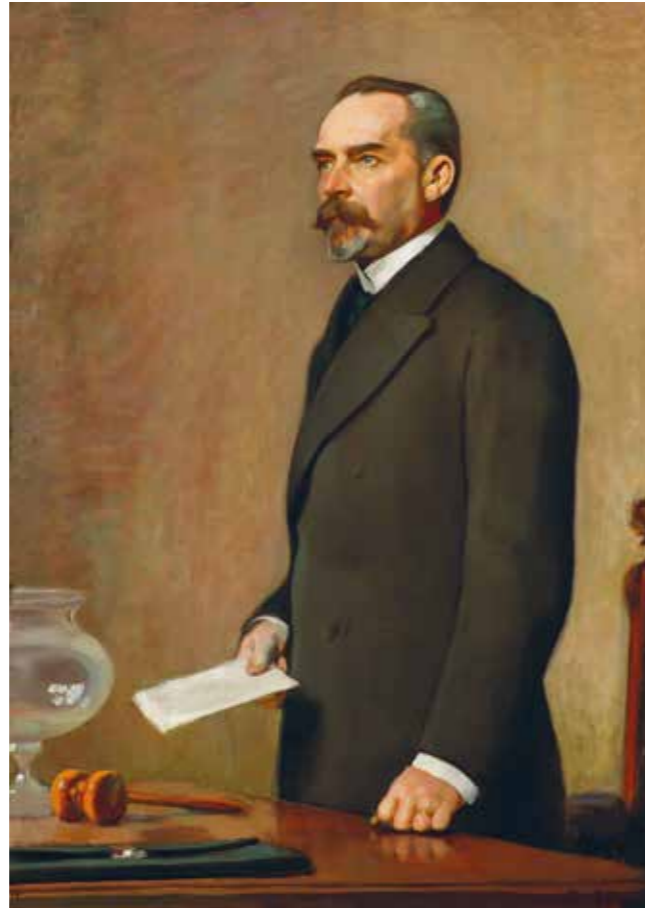
that the sworn republican and scholar, K. J. Ståhlberg, was elected as the republic's first President in the first round.

The manoeuvre was undoubtedly irritating for the political rights. But at the same time it accelerated a social conciliation between the political blocs and stabilised the country's parliamentary democracy, which made it possible to implement the important social reforms and conclude a peace with the Bolshevik Council of the Republic of Russia in October 1920.

*Kaarlo Juho Ståhlberg acted as Speaker of Parliament in 1914.*

*Following Finnish independence he was a central republican leader, who among other things, opposed aspirations to make Finland a monarchy. On July 25 1919 MPs elected him the first President of the Republic of Finland.*

*The portrait by Eero Järnefelt is in the Parliament of Finland art collection.*



1919

SUOMEN

N:o 94

# ASETUSKOKOELMA.

## Sisälllys:

- Siv. 1. Suomen Hallitusmuoto.  
» 24. Laki Suomen Hallitusmuodon täytäntöönpanemisesta.

## Suomen Hallitusmuoto.

Annettu Helsingissä, heinäkuun 17 päivänä 1919.

Koska, sen jälkeen kuin Suomi on tullut riippumattomaksi, täysivaltaiseksi valtioksi, on käynyt tarpeelliseksi kehittää ja vakaannuttaa sen valtiosääntöä uusilla perustuslain säännöksillä, jotka, samalla kuin ne takaavat valtiovallalle tarpeellisen lujuuden, laajentavat kansaneduskunnan oikeuksia ja turvaavat kansalaisten oikeutta ja lainalaista vapautta, vahvistetaan täten, Eduskunnan päätöksen mukaisesti, joka on tehty 20 päivänä heinäkuuta 1906 annetun Valtiopäiväjärjestyksen 60 §:ssä määrättyllä tavalla, seuraava hallitusmuoto Suomelle.

### I. Yleisiä säännöksiä.

#### 1 §.

Suomi on täysivaltainen tasavalta, jonka valtiosääntö on vahvistettu tässä hallitusmuodossa ja muissa perustuslaeissa.

#### 2 §.

Valtiovalta Suomessa kuuluu kansalle, jota edustaa valtiopäiville kokoontunut eduskunta.

Lainsäädäntövaltaa käyttää eduskunta yhdessä tasavallan presidentin kanssa.

Ylin toimeenpanovalta on uskottu tasavallan presidentille. Sen ohessa on valtion yleistä hallitusta varten oleva valtioneuvosto, johon kuuluu pääministeri ja tarvittava määrä ministereitä.

*The 1919 Constitution of Finland.*



## Independence and Democracy

But this did not mean that all of the Republic of Finland's problems were solved. During the following century the country's sovereignty and parliamentary democracy would end up in the serious crises or threatening situations many times. But none of these crises were as dangerous and unpredictable as the dramatic, brutal and also tragic stages the country had been through during the years 1917–1918.

What was the most important collective lesson from all this? Maybe that a representative democracy and responsible social debate is the best guarantee for a national sovereignty. This insight is reason to remember even in the twenty-first century.

*The Parliament Building was completed  
1931. It is the most important symbol for  
Finland's independence and democracy.*

**Text**

Henrik Meinander

**Photo credits**

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PARLIAMENT  
OF FINLAND

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