

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Parliament and Revolution: Poland, Finland, and the End of Empire in the Early Twentieth Century

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## Abstract

This article explores the political trajectories of the early twentieth-century Grand Duchy of Finland and the Kingdom of Poland in the context of the “global parliamentary moment,” when the constitutional script of revolution competed with the more daring script of social revolution. We scrutinize contrastive political choices of socialist parties in these two western borderlands of the Russian Empire. Finland and Poland emerged as independent parliamentary states in 1917–1918 but under manifestly different circumstances. The Finnish socialist party had enjoyed a stable foothold in the formally democratic but practically impotent national parliament since 1907, whereas the Polish socialists boycotted the Russian Duma and envisioned a democratic legislature as a guaranty of a Poland with true people’s power. The Finnish socialists later abandoned parliamentarism in favor of an armed revolution, in 1918, whereas most of their Polish counterparts used the parliamentary ideal of popular sovereignty to restrain the revolutionary upsurge. We argue that the socialist understandings of parliamentarism and revolution were of crucial importance at this juncture. We draw from a broad corpora of political press reports, handwritten newspapers, and leaflets to show how the diachronic sequence of events and synchronic power relations inside the Russian Empire made certain stances toward parliamentarism and revolution more likely at different points in time.

**Keywords:** parliamentarism; revolution; socialism; Russian Empire; Finland; Poland; revolutionary scripts; parliament; democracy; civil war

## Introduction

### *Revolution and State from Parliamentary Aspirations and Disappointments*

When the Russian Empire entered the First World War, many people in different regions were striving to change their status within the empire. Finnish socialists had won universal suffrage in 1906 after a successful general strike and the

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country embarked on a parliamentary road.<sup>1</sup> The Social Democratic Party of Finland became integrated into the parliamentary system by polling over 37 percent in the first election of 1907 and was able to push an eight-hour day down the legislative pipeline in 1917.<sup>2</sup> However, the inclusion into the political system did not pave way for political moderation and institutionalized mediation of class conflict. In 1918, Finnish socialists put into practice the strategy of “revolutionary social democracy” and attempted a proletarian revolution, with catastrophic results.<sup>3</sup>

In turn, Russian Poland was among the most militant tsarist borderlands during the 1905–1907 Revolution. Harboring long-lasting strikes and breeding bellicose street fighters, Poland witnessed an unprecedented political upheaval manifest in the emergence of mass parties, labor unions, and a new public culture.<sup>4</sup> However, only a decade later, when revolutionary movements again loomed large and shook the whole region, Poland remained relatively calm. Forging a new Polish statehood marginalized the earlier popular drive toward social revolution. Despite the Bolsheviks’ march on Warsaw to spread the socialist revolution westwards, the popular mood stuck with national unity. Polish workers, wage earners, and peasants stood almost unanimously on the side of the Polish nation-state, even after it failed to deliver on its promise to be a socialist-leaning one. Why, then, did the Finns choose the revolutionary road, whereas Poland remained on the parliamentary road despite an ongoing military conflict and wide-spread economic misery?

During the global revolutionary wave in the early twentieth century, initiated and finalized in Russia, two revolutionary scripts were available for political actors, who often mixed them in various proportions.<sup>5</sup> The constitutional revolution boosted by the post-war advance of parliamentary governments competed with a more daring social revolution that aimed at wiping out not only the old autocracy but also economic elites and their nascent liberal establishments. In the two borderlands of the Russian Empire, the clash between constitutional and social revolution led to manifestly divergent trajectories but with surprisingly similar outcomes. The Finnish civil war was followed by a democratic republic co-opting the most moderate socialists, and the Polish state emerged with socialist support against the threat of Bolshevism. This bifurcation questions the assertion that parliamentarization fosters

<sup>1</sup>Antti Kujala, “Finland in 1905: The Political and Social History of the Revolution,” in Jon Smele and Anthony Heywood, eds., *The Russian Revolution of 1905: Centenary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2005), 79–93.

<sup>2</sup>Risto Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 106–17, 137–60.

<sup>3</sup>Eric Blanc, *Revolutionary Social Democracy: Working-Class Politics across the Russian Empire (1882–1917)* (Leiden: Brill, 2021); Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution, 1917–1918* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).

<sup>4</sup>Robert Blobaum, *Rewolucja: Russian Poland, 1904–1907* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Wiktor Marzec, *Rising Subjects: The 1905 Revolution and the Origins of Modern Polish Politics*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).

<sup>5</sup>Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein, eds., *Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Charles Kurzman, *Democracy Denied, 1905–1915: Intellectuals and the Fate of Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

political moderation, whereas unrestrained repressive autocracy breeds uncompromised radicalism.<sup>6</sup> The solution needs to be sought elsewhere.

In this paper, we ask how these imperial pathways unfolded from the experiences regarding parliamentary politics and resulting shifts in political scripts. After situating ourselves amidst existing approaches, we first contextualize the imperial parliamentary landscape at the turn of the twentieth century and then proceed to an empirical examination of the problem of parliamentarism versus revolution. We analyze the political practices and imaginations inside the Polish and Finnish socialist parties from the 1905 Revolution until the aftermath of the great upheavals in 1917–1918. We claim that longer cycles of parliamentary aspiration, disappointment, and adaptation caused these imperial borderlands to pass through this revolutionary juncture differently. This finding encourages us to revise the emergence of the state in both cases.

### Entangling the Past-Bound Projections of the Nation

Although there is vast literature on both Finnish civil war and Polish independence, it often lacks a comparative outlook and embeddedness in the disintegrating imperial realm which determined the range of choices available for regional actors. Despite its stubborn presence within the Russian Empire for more than a hundred years, early twentieth-century Finland is compared with “Western” states or placed among “Nordic” countries, as a state with a strong labor movement and welfare, as a pioneer of democracy based on universal suffrage, or as a state successfully defending parliamentarism in the interwar period.<sup>7</sup> Poland, in turn, sits comfortably in the comparative context of “Central Europe.” Its entanglement with the Russian Empire is presented as either undiversified and unidirectional oppression<sup>8</sup> or a negotiation of Jewish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Belarusian multi-ethnic spaces.<sup>9</sup> The rare attempts to juxtapose Finland and Poland directly have remained either preliminary or disconnected from the larger imperial context.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Tim McDaniel, *Autocracy, Capitalism, and Revolution in Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Charles Tilly, “Parliamentarization of Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834,” *Theory and Society* 26, 2/3 (1997): 245–73. This was also the assumption of socialist leaders themselves; see, for instance, Ignacy Daszyński, *Teksty*, Jerzy Myśliński, ed. (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1986), 127.

<sup>7</sup>Stefano Bartolini, *The Political Mobilization of the European Left, 1860–1980: The Class Cleavage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Giovanni Capocchia, *Defending Democracy: Reactions to Extremism in Interwar Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup>Exceptions are focused on Russian Poland in the imperial context but are rarely comparative. See Jörg Ganzenmüller, *Russische Staatsgewalt Und Polnischer Adel: Elitenintegration und Staatsausbau im Westen Des Zarenreiches (1772–1850)* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2013); and Malte Rolf, *Imperiale Herrschaft im Weichselland: Das Königreich Polen im Russischen Imperium (1864–1915)* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015).

<sup>9</sup>Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863–1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); Darius Staliūnas and Yoko Aoshima, eds., *The Tsar, the Empire, and the Nation: Dilemmas of Nationalization in Russia's Western Borderlands, 1905–1915* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2021).

<sup>10</sup>Jussi Jalonen, “The Shared Experience of the Imperial Past: The Era of Tsarist Russian Rule in Polish and Finnish Historical Perspectives,” *Slovo* 21, 3 (2009): 4–15; Michael Branch, Janet M. Hartley, and Antoni

In contrast, here we will read Polish and Finnish trajectories from within the imperial framework, hence subscribing to the decentralized and situational approach often called “new imperial history.”<sup>11</sup> We see both cases as entangled parts of a larger, relational system of dependencies with diverse but interconnected regimes of power and corresponding forms of political contention, conditioned by adaptation and resilience. Such an approach offers a way to tackle situated responses to political confrontations in the hybrid empire.

Moreover, the scholarship on parliamentarism to date has centered temporally around either those moments when the parliaments were first established or the revolutionary periods when the parliaments were under threat.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, we look at longer-term, “cumulative” experiences and assumptions of parliaments preceding and following the critical junctures. To put it bluntly, we take parliament not as a seat of political decision making but rather as a concept in dialog with its moving counter-concepts, and political scripts it nourishes.<sup>13</sup> We embed Polish and Finnish encounters with deliberative assemblies into the context of global shifts in the nexus of parliamentarism and revolution<sup>14</sup> and ask about the impact of parliamentary trajectories on future state-crafting. These responses were rooted in transnational scripts of political action, whose popularity changed over time, rendering the choices made locally appropriate for the moment because of the assumed macro-timelines, imagined geographies, or impromptu political urgency.

### Comparing the Incomparable with the Help of Source-Driven Methods

Our study is a process-oriented narrative, incorporating comparison of two contexts connected within the same larger political system in different but not disjointed ways.<sup>15</sup> The cases are in certain aspects homologous, as distinct, “overdeveloped” fringes of the same empire, experiencing its collapse and the ensuing power vacuum.

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Mączak, eds., *Finland and Poland in the Russian Empire: A Comparative Study* (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1995); Kati Katajisto and Veikko Aitosalo, eds., *On the Edge of Empire: Poland and Finland at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2012); Wiktor Marzec and Risto Juhani Turunen, “Socialisms in the Tsarist Borderlands: Poland and Finland in a Contrastive Comparison, 1830–1907,” *Contributions to the History of Concept* 13, 1 (2018): 22–50.

<sup>11</sup>Ilya Gerasimov, et al., “In Search of a New Imperial History,” *Ab Imperio* 1 (2005): 33–56.

<sup>12</sup>Pasi Ihalainen, *The Springs of Democracy: National and Transnational Debates on Constitutional Reform in the British, German, Swedish and Finnish Parliaments, 1917–1919* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2017); Andrzej Ajnenkiel, *Spór o model parlamentaryzmu polskiego do roku 1926* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1972).

<sup>13</sup>Remieg Aerts, et al., eds., *The Ideal of Parliament in Europe since 1800* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Pasi Ihalainen, Cornelia Ilie, and Kari Palonen, eds., *Parliaments and Parliamentarism: A Comparative History of a European Concept* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016).

<sup>14</sup>Kurzman, *Democracy Denied*; Ivan Sablin, “Russia in the Global Parliamentary Moment, 1905–1918: Between a Subaltern Empire and an Empire of Subalterns,” in Holger Weiss, ed., *Locating the Global: Spaces, Networks and Interactions from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2020), 257–82; Ivan Sablin and Egas Moniz Bandeira, eds., *Planting Parliaments in Eurasia, 1850–1950: Concepts, Practices, and Mythologies* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2021).

<sup>15</sup>Matthew Lange, *Comparative-Historical Methods* (London: Sage, 2013); Philip McMichael, “Incorporating Comparison within a World-Historical Perspective: An Alternative Comparative Method,” *American Sociological Review* 55, 3 (1990): 385–97.

However, they are also manifestly different in respect to the sequence of events, their mode of integration with the imperial state, and conditions for political action.

Accordingly, we construct two focused narratives assisted with process tracing and use multiple sources for each case with a larger picture in mind. The two cases are too small to directly disentangle the endogenic factors of change from the exogenic ones. However, one can construct a narrative comparison of strategies taken by political actors facing bewildering historical choices. In such cases, one needs to compare ideas and mobilizations and not only the outcomes (as the final state regime) since they were interdependent on powerful factors not explainable from within each case. In addition, in small units with a low level of institutionalization of social conflict, the results of political mobilizations tend to be more contingent. Opportunity windows, external impacts, and political hubris of individuals play larger roles than in relatively self-contained larger states with established structures of legitimacy and political articulation of social cleavages. We use source-driven methods, dependent upon the characteristic of each case, determining the available data.

The Grand Duchy of Finland had a fully developed press circulation with newspapers representing a broad spectrum of party-political ideologies.<sup>16</sup> Newspapers not only distributed political ideas among the rank-and-file but also reported extensively and relatively freely on various political practices at the grassroots of Finnish civil society. For the socialist party, newspapers were the main medium for communicating with the party members and sympathizers. The labor press followed parliamentary debates carefully as plenary speeches were frequently republished and many labor journalists became socialist MPs themselves.<sup>17</sup> To counterbalance the elite bias of printed sources, we have also included handwritten newspapers produced and consumed collectively by agrarian and industrial workers who were interested in socialism but could not publish their ideas in print.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, the Kingdom of Poland was under heavier censorship, and there was little chance to publish newspapers openly, so the socialist periodicals were printed and distributed illegally.<sup>19</sup> This makes their genre characteristics different and their quantity smaller (because of the lower number of copies printed and lower preservation rates). Reading practices were also different, and because possessing an illicit print was heavily persecuted the outreach was limited mainly to the adepts of socialism. To mitigate these limitations, socialist parties used leaflets to communicate with their sympathizers. Leaflets were cheaper, quickly readable, and disposable. Compared to socialist journals, their outreach was more extensive and their tone less

<sup>16</sup>Päiviö Tommila, *Suomen lehdistön historia 2: Sanomalehdistö suurlakosta talvisotaan* (Kuopio: Kustannuskiila, 1987).

<sup>17</sup>Pentti Salmelin, "The Transition of the Finnish Workers' Papers to the Social Democratic Press," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 3 (1968): 70–84; Risto Turunen, *Shades of Red: Evolution of Finnish Socialism from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century until the Civil War of 1918* (Helsinki: Finnish Society for Labour History, 2021).

<sup>18</sup>The corpus consists of five handwritten newspapers, totaling 177 issues, from 1899–1917. They were produced in the context of local workers associations, trade unions, and social-democratic youth associations. See Turunen, *Shades of Red*, 75–80. For handwritten newspapers in general, see Heiko Droste and Kirsti Salmi-Niklander, eds., *Handwritten Newspapers: An Alternative Medium during the Early Modern and Modern Periods* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2019).

<sup>19</sup>Jerzy Myśliński, *Polska prasa socjalistyczna w okresie zaborów* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1982).

theoretical, so the feedback loop between the messages sent and their resonance with the audience was closer and more immediate.<sup>20</sup>

### *Parliaments in the Hybrid Empire*

The new twentieth century brought a global parliamentary moment. The Russian Empire in 1905 initiated a global cycle of revolutions, and autocratic rulers reacted to the political crisis in various ways. The parliamentary model adopted in Russia after the 1905 Revolution was truly a hybrid one. Not only was the Duma a microcosm of the heterogenous empire because of multiple ethnicities, but representatives were elected according to different principles reflecting inequalities inside the empire. For example, the socially skewed curial electoral law was not homogenous and there were multiple ethnic-based modifications.<sup>21</sup> The Duma was not a genuine legislative assembly and satisfied neither the constitutional visionaries nor the population at large.<sup>22</sup> However, it did serve to improve imperial rule by mediating interest from various social and ethnic groups no longer effectively governable by the sovereign monarch.<sup>23</sup> Its internal organization was similarly heterogenous, with most members building political blocks around their ethnicities. But one significant group was an exception: the Polish circle.

The Polish representatives were dominated by the nationalist National Democracy party. The party profited from its anti-revolutionary stance which allowed it to act relatively undisturbed under the post-1905 martial law and to monopolize the electoral bid.<sup>24</sup> National democrats successfully hegemonized the Polish activity in the Duma, binding “Polishness” with their own political program. The Polish circle willingly opposed reforms and selfishly acted against other ethnic groups (who usually cooperated with the liberals against great Russian nationalism) in the vain hope of gaining governmental concessions to their own national aspirations.<sup>25</sup> Major political forces in the Kingdom had Polish independence as their ultimate goal but pursued very different strategies for attaining it, up to wide-reaching cooperation with the imperial government in the Duma. Meanwhile, the socialists (some of them internationalists postulating imperial parliament) were not represented in the Duma up to 1912, and later there was only one socialist member from the Kingdom, who understandably did not join the Polish circle.

In contrast, there were no Finnish members in the Russian Duma because the Grand Duchy had its own parliament. The old Diet of four estates was democratized

<sup>20</sup>For this research we have drawn on a corpus of 3,569 leaflets of various parties, about two-thirds of them socialist, which were scanned into a machine-readable format. An additional source is the digitized, illicit socialist press. See also Wiktor Marzec, “Vernacular Marxism: Proletarian Readings in Russian Poland around the 1905 Revolution,” *Historical Materialism* 25, 4 (2017): 65–104.

<sup>21</sup>Alexander Semyonov, “Imperial Parliament for a Hybrid Empire: Representative Experiments in the Early 20th-Century Russian Empire,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 11, 1 (2020): 30–39.

<sup>22</sup>Sablin, “Russia in the Global Parliamentary Moment.”

<sup>23</sup>Sablin and Moniz Bandeira, *Planting Parliaments*, ch. 2.

<sup>24</sup>Pascal Trees, *Wahlen im Weichselland: Die Nationaldemokraten in Russisch-Polen und die Dumawahlen 1905–1912* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007), 74.

<sup>25</sup>Edward Chmielewski, *The Polish Question in the Russian State Duma* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970).

with the suffrage reform after the general strike in 1906.<sup>26</sup> Thus, a western part of the autocratic Russian Empire was the first country in Europe to introduce a parliament based on universal suffrage. This modern solution to the global parliamentary moment was only possible as a continuation of the old estate privileges promised to Finland after Russia took the area from Sweden a century earlier in 1809. Here the imperial sovereignty acted in a traditional, layered way, leaving space for heterogenous legality by occasionally defending local peculiarities instead of nationalizing the whole empire.<sup>27</sup> Electing Finnish delegates to the Russian Duma would have minoritized the Grand Duchy under the imperial legislative parliament and endangered its special legal status.<sup>28</sup> The Finnish parliamentarians were well aware of the danger of “Russification,” since they perceived the situation and refused to send representatives to the imperial Duma.<sup>29</sup> This predicament was also debated in Polish public opinion, especially among circles opposing participation in the Duma as a form of validating incorporation.<sup>30</sup> But there was no legislative alternative, so the only solution was to boycott the elections. Arguably, these contrasting imperial contexts pushed the two regions to very different pathways. Composed of aspiration, disappointment, and adaptation to the broader imperial entanglement, both cases were mutations of the same two scripts of parliamentarism and revolutionary politics.

## Political Pathways through and against Parliaments

### *The 1905 Threshold*

1905 was a threshold of mass politics both in the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Finland. Large groups of people were exposed to new political ideas and practices.<sup>31</sup> Among these was also parliamentarism, and this moment was for many their first serious encounter with electoral politics. Polish socialist parties proposed the introduction of legislative assembly from the very beginning of the revolutionary surge (see figure 1). Along with the entire Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Poland entered on a parliamentary path with the introduction of the Duma in 1906. Even if for many socialists this was a mere sham parliamentarism, the ensuing debates and practices were real exposure to parliamentary forms, if not performed then at least discussed.<sup>32</sup> Initially, the socialist parties unanimously rejected the Duma as a bogus parliament designed to cheat on people and take the steam out of radical politics.<sup>33</sup> The preliminary project of Alexander Bułygin was mocked as a “ridiculous advisory

<sup>26</sup>Osmo Jussila, Seppo Hentilä, and Jukka Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State: A Political History of Finland since 1809* (London: Hurst & Co., 1999), 79–83; Kujala, “Finland in 1905.”

<sup>27</sup>Jane Burbank, “An Imperial Rights Regime: Law and Citizenship in the Russian Empire,” *Kritika* 7, 3 (2006): 397–431; Alexei Miller, “The Romanov Empire and the Russian Nation,” in Stefan Berger and Alexei I. Miller, eds., *Nationalizing Empires* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), 309–68.

<sup>28</sup>Semyonov, “Imperial Parliament.”

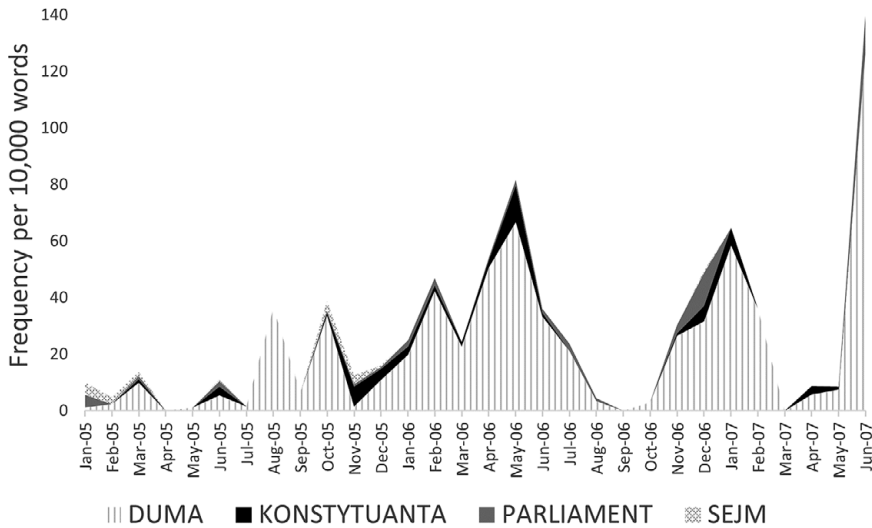
<sup>29</sup>Jussila, Hentilä, and Nevakivi, *Grand Duchy*, 84–88.

<sup>30</sup>*Robotnik*, Dec. 1909; *Przedświt*, May 1910.

<sup>31</sup>Pertti Haapala et al., eds., *Kansa kaikkivaltias: Suurlakko Suomessa 1905* (Helsinki: Teos, 2008); Blobaum, *Rewolucja*.

<sup>32</sup>Sablin and Moniz Bandeira, *Planting Parliaments*.

<sup>33</sup>Z powodu wyborów, Pismo ulotne no. 5, a printing of the central committee of SDKPiL, Jan. 1907, Archiwum Główne Akt Nowych w Warszawie (henceforth AAN), SDKPiL, 9/VII-t. 7, pp. 4–5a.



**Figure 1.** Duma and other parliamentary vocabulary ushered in along with the Duma debate by socialist leaflets, frequency rate per 10,000 words, 1905–1907. Source: Lemmatized raw text corpus of socialist leaflets prepared by the author.

council with very limited suffrage only for the rich.”<sup>34</sup> The first Duma was also boycotted by all socialist parties. However, facing the genuine rush to the polls by agency-hungry people and nationalist political gains from monopolizing the electoral bid, some socialists changed their minds. Thus, while the right wing of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) boycotted all the election rounds, the more internationalist, class-oriented Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL) joined the bid for seats from the second Duma onward.<sup>35</sup>

These twists and turns made it necessary to explain the reasons behind the boycott and its later abandonment. Socialist parties put much effort into describing their fluid positions which were not easily graspable. To provide arguments for the boycott, one needed to explain why the Duma was a deficient parliament. The propaganda material—leaflets and journals—carried the burden of ushering the ideal of parliament as a reference point. The emergence of Polish parliamentary discourses was reactive toward the introduction of the Duma, and parliamentarism was a polemical idea, popularized with the help of various counter-concepts.

While simultaneously criticizing the Duma, the socialist leaflets explained the ideal of a parliament composed of universal, equal suffrage and an assembly with legislative power and a government accountable to it. The call for a legislative assembly (*Konstytuanta*) “elected in universal, equal, direct and secret ballot in

<sup>34</sup>[Towarzysze! Przerazony coraz bardziej...], a leaflet of the Central Committee of the PPS, July 1905, Biblioteka Narodowa, Dział Dokumentów Życia Społecznego (henceforth BN DŻS), IA 4g Cim.

<sup>35</sup>Paweł Samuś, “Rola socjalistów w edukacji politycznej społeczeństwa Królestwa Polskiego w latach rewolucji 1905–1907,” *Przegląd Nauk Historycznych* 2 (2005): 127–46. An expanded analysis of these debates may be found in Wiktor Marzec, “A Sub-Imperial Realm amidst the Global Parliamentary Moment: Legislative Imaginations of Russian Poland, 1905–18,” *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, 20 Oct. 2022: 1–16.



order to arrange the political system of Russia<sup>36</sup> was widely present in these parliamentary discourses, often being the main claim uttered in the final section of the leaflet. The exact ideal of parliament worth fighting for differed between socialist parties, however.

The party most interested in parliamentarism, judging from the references of the related vocabulary, was SDKPiL. Interestingly, the future revolutionary party that would support the Bolshevik Revolution was already criticizing “bourgeoisie parliamentarism” in 1905, but at the same time the party’s leaflets preached equal, universal suffrage as a legitimate political form that would give the workers adequate representation. While scornful expressions such as “tsarist constitution” and “the Duma under the Cossack whip” are the hallmarks of SDKPiL’s political repertoire, the party consequently called for a pan-imperial legislative parliament (*Konstytuanta*), seen as the embodiment of “people’s power.”<sup>37</sup> According to the SDKPiL writers, only pan-imperial transformation would bring about real change and “only a complete crush of the tsarat can bring us a real legislative assembly and freedom.”<sup>38</sup> Their pan-imperial focus made the coverage of the Duma the most comprehensive.

SDKPiL was an unquestioned leader in spreading the gospel of constitutionalism and parliamentary democracy. A pan-imperial parliament with a four-tail suffrage—equal, direct, secret, and universal—was an important part of the party program and was explained in detail in the commentary to it.<sup>39</sup> Not only did the party voice a demand for democratic constitutionalism, but it also offered an idea of pan-imperial parliamentary reform in the direction of “a constitution without the tsar for the toiling people, a peoples’ republic,” where “one can elect a general legislative assembly for the whole state according to the universal, direct, equal, and secret ballot.” There, the leaflet continued, “freedom will flow for the working class, for all nations of the Russian state and for our country with its own peoples’ autonomy and a people’s *Sejm* [see below].”<sup>40</sup> The proposed legislative assembly in Petersburg did not question the existing borders of the imperial polity, in stark contrast to the irredentist PPS, but it also did not reject the subsequent formation of local assemblies.

The PPS (and later its left splinter group) supported parliament, too, but opted for a legislative body in Warsaw in addition to the Russian one. This was complicit with the national agenda of the party. As one of their leaflets claimed, “To bring down the tsarat completely, and to call a legislative assembly based on universal, equal, direct, and secret ballot is our main slogan!”<sup>41</sup> “The Polish parliament” was juxtaposed to the Duma, which was rejected not only as undemocratic and impotent but also as Russian

<sup>36</sup>[Towarzysze! Przerażony coraz bardziej...].

<sup>37</sup>[Robotnicy! W niezwykłych czasach...], leaflet of the organizational commission of the council of workers’ delegates (SDKPiL-controlled), Warsaw, 12 Feb., BN DŻS, IA 4g Cim.

<sup>38</sup>Z powodu wyborów, Pismo ulotne no. 5, printing of the central committee of SDKPiL, Jan. 1907, Archiwum Główne Akt Nowych w Warszawie (AAN), SDKPiL, 9/VII-t. 7, pp. 4–5a.

<sup>39</sup>Rosa Luxemburg, “Czego chcemy?” in Feliks Tyche, ed., *Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878–1918* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1975), 336.

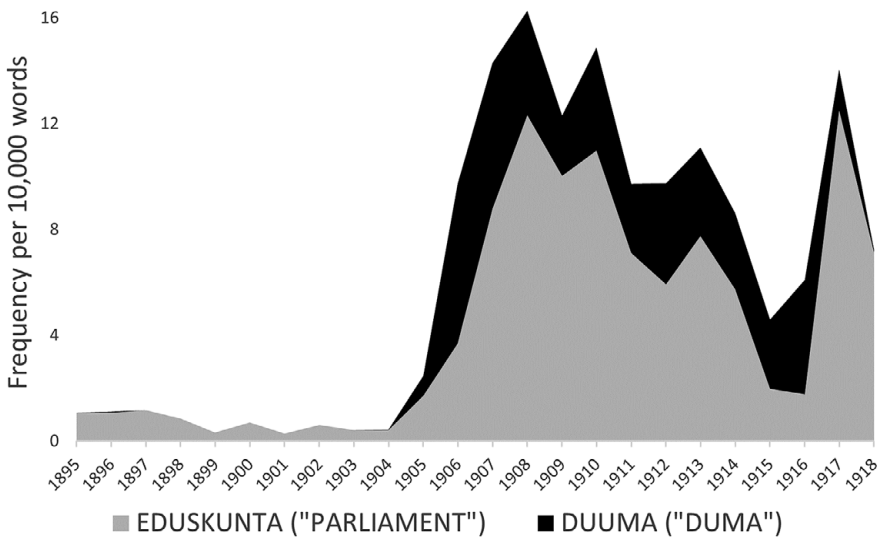
<sup>40</sup>[Robotnicy! Kiedy zbrodnicy rząd carski...], central committee, SDKPiL, 14 Nov. 1905, in Tadeusz Daniszewski, ed., *SDKPiL w rewolucji 1905 roku: zbiór publikacji* (Książka i Wiedza, 1955), 263–65. See also Luxemburg, “Czego chcemy?” 345.

<sup>41</sup>[Robotnicy! Kiedy w styczniu roku...], Central Committee of the PPS, Warsaw, 8 May 1906, BN DŻS, IA 4g Cim.

and not apt for local governance.<sup>42</sup> Generally, their leaflets preferred ridiculing the tsar to imagining broader parliamentary visions for after the revolution.

In contrast to the Polish aborted revolution, Finland gained a radical reform—unicameral parliament based on universal suffrage—as the result of the general strike in 1905. The reform of 1906 increased the number of entitled voters from 8 percent to 85 percent of the adult population, but the Finnish socialists were still not satisfied for they had hoped for a lower voting age (twenty-one years instead of twenty-four) and less restrictions on voting rights.<sup>43</sup> Figure 2 shows how the discourses on the Finnish parliament (*eduskunta*) and the Russian Duma (*duuma*) increased significantly after the general strike of 1905. Based on the labor press, the defining emotion inside the Finnish labor movement was disappointment with the reform, with not only voting restrictions but also the government having too much power over the parliament and the highest power remaining in Russian hands.<sup>44</sup>

This feeling was based partly on the unrealistically high expectations for suffrage reform and partly on the bitter mistrust of the domestic bourgeoisie left by the strike. The experience of “being in power” for a week had left strong memories in the proletarian imaginations. On the other hand, the united national front against



**Figure 2.** Relative frequency of parliament and Duma in the leading socialist newspaper (*Työmies*), 1895–1918. Source: Lemmatized raw text files downloaded from the National Library of Finland (<https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/search?formats=NEWSPAPER>), 16 July 2022.

<sup>42</sup>[Towarzysze! Rząd carski znowu ogłosił...], Central Committee of the PPS, Warsaw, Dec. 1906, BN DŻS, IA 4g Cim.

<sup>43</sup>Minna Harjula, “Excluded from Universal Suffrage: Finland 1906–1917,” in Irma Sulkunen, Seija-Leena Nevala-Nurmi, and Pirjo Markkola, eds., *Suffrage, Gender and Citizenship: International Perspectives on Parliamentary Reforms* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 106–19.

<sup>44</sup>See, for example, “Luokkalaitoksen hävitessä,” *Vapaa Sana*, 1 June 1906; “Uuden eduskunnan valta,” *Kansan Lehti*, 1 July 1906; and “Valtiopäiväjärjestys ja vaalilaki vahvistettu,” *Työmies*, 21 July 1906.

Nicholas II and his Russification measures had quickly collapsed because, from the non-socialist perspective, socialist demands for a civic meeting to replace the current Senate had gone too far.<sup>45</sup> The socialists framed the idea of a national assembly based on universal suffrage as a counter to privileged representation and saw it as a continuation of the French Revolution.<sup>46</sup> In socialist eyes, the collective action of the working people had been the driving force of the general strike, but the fruits of 1905 were later seized by the privileged classes. The post-strike Senate was formed without any civic meetings and included only one politician with a socialist background.<sup>47</sup> Socialists openly threatened the new temporary Senate with another general strike if it failed to fulfill the promise to democratize the parliament.<sup>48</sup>

Although the socialists' response was critical, they were nevertheless committed to the idea of a new democratic parliament in the interim period between the parliamentary reform accepted in July 1906 and the first elections based on universal suffrage in March 1907. Their commitment was tested both for internal and external reasons. First, there was a wave of spontaneous strike actions in Finland after the general strike. The two most famous cases were the mass evictions of striking crofters at the Laukko Manor and the industrial strike of around 2,700 workers in Tampere. Both ended in a total defeat for the strikers; crofters and their families lost homes, while factory activists were sacked.<sup>49</sup> Yet the socialist newspapers did not heat the situation up with calls to direct action, but rather advocated going to the polls instead.<sup>50</sup> Their argument for voting was based on the gap between what was legally correct and what was morally right; many of the prevailing laws existed only because the agrarian and industrial proletariat had no representation in the old estate-based system. The cautious, pro-parliamentary approach created some discontent among the rank and file, but in general socialists were able to channel the bottom-up pressure for parliamentary politics. They capitalized on the revolutionary aftermath of 1905 in the first election by becoming the largest party in the Grand Duchy.<sup>51</sup>

The Sveaborg rebellion in the summer 1906 was another major test for socialist parliamentarism. The mutiny by Russian soldiers garrisoned near Helsinki was fueled by local grievances and imperial tensions. Soldiers unhappy with food, wages, and bullying were receptive to revolutionary agitation by the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. In addition, the dissolution of the Duma by Nicholas II in July 1906 added fuel to the fire of dissatisfaction across the empire. Finnish socialists had to choose

<sup>45</sup>Marko Tikka, "Strike in Finland, Revolution in Russia: The Role of Workers in the 1905 General Strike in the Grand Duchy of Finland," in Mary Hilson, Silke Neunsinger, and Iben Vyff, eds., *Labour Unions and Politics under the Northern Star* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 197–217.

<sup>46</sup>Jussi Kurunmäki, "The Breakthrough of Universal Suffrage in Finland, 1905–1906," in Kari Palonen, Tuija Pulkkinen, and José María Rosales, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Politics of Democratization in Europe: Concepts and Histories* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 357, 364.

<sup>47</sup>Blanc, *Revolutionary Social Democracy*, 246; Hannu Soikkanen, "Revisionism, Reformism and the Finnish Labour Movement before the First World War," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 3 (1978): 347–60.

<sup>48</sup>See, for example, "Suurlakko," *Kansan Lehti*, 4 Feb. 1906; "Mielenosoitukset maaseudulla," *Työmies*, 9 Jan. 1906; and "Kansalaiset! Taistelupalmit toverit!," *Vapaa Sana*, 23 May 1906.

<sup>49</sup>Viljo Rasila, *Suomen torpparikysymys vuoteen 1909* (Helsinki: Finnish Historical Society, 1961), 378–83; Pertti Haapala, *Tehtaan valossa: Teollistuminen ja työväestön muodostuminen Tampereella 1820–1920* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 1986), 306–7.

<sup>50</sup>"Laukon torpparihädät," *Työmies*, 24 Jan. 1907.

<sup>51</sup>Hannu Soikkanen, *Sosialismin tulo Suomeen: Ensimmäisiin yksikamarisen eduskunnan vaaleihin asti* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1961), 357–89.

between supporting the mutiny or committing to the new parliamentary road. Some Finnish radicals in the Red Guards supported the mutiny, but the SDP chose not to get involved, and the rebellion was quickly suppressed. The Finns had much more to lose than their Russian comrades: a legal status combined with a new parliamentary representation based on universal suffrage.<sup>52</sup>

The socialists saw the faults inherent in the reformed parliament, but nevertheless believed in its potential to change the world: “The parliament, no matter how democratic it is, is only a means to realize great social reforms.”<sup>53</sup> That comment characterizes socialist parliamentarism in the early twentieth century; the new parliament was not perfect, but it was useful, nonetheless. Compared to other forms of democracy available to the Finnish working people, the national parliament represented the people’s power most credibly; at the local level of democracy—that is, in the municipal elections—the number of votes was tied to the amount of income, whereas in the imperial level, Finns had no representation in the Duma.<sup>54</sup> Respect, or disapproval, can be heard in the phrases referring to the different institutions. The common label the labor press used to refer to the new parliament was “the people’s parliament,” whereas unequal municipal elections stood for “purse power.”<sup>55</sup> The First Duma and the Second Duma received sympathy, but the composition and politics of the Third Duma changed the mood in the Finnish labor press, which gave it many negative labels, such as “the black Duma,” “the Duma of the Lackeys,” “not a real people’s parliament,” and a “fake parliament.”<sup>56</sup>

Thus, the mass mobilization of 1905 and its end results had pushed western borderlands of the Russian Empire along divergent parliamentary trajectories. Polish socialists with their limited representation in the Duma, did not accept it as an embodiment of parliamentarism and still cherished their own (empire-wide or national) parliamentary dreams after the failed revolution. The Finns, on the other hand, moved from the era of struggle for suffrage to the realities of parliamentary life. Contrasting experiences shaped the understanding of the parliamentary idea itself and affected the political decisions socialist actors were to make in the future.

### *Intermezzo—Constant Campaigning*

The general strikes of 1905 across the Russian Empire led to a new period of political campaigning in which parties tried to approach their potential voters with election promises. In Russian Poland, the perpetual dissolution of the Duma by the tsar was a double-edged sword. There was space for debating the preferred parliamentary

<sup>52</sup>Antti Kujala, “Finnish Radicals and the Russian Revolutionary Movement, 1899–1907,” *Revolutionary Russia* 2 (1992): 184–85; Turunen, *Shades of Red*, 250–51.

<sup>53</sup>“Luokkalaitoksen hävitessä,” *Vapaa Sana*, 1 June 1906.

<sup>54</sup>Sami Suodenjoki, “Kohti edustuksellista harvainvaltaa? Kunnanvaltuustojen perustaminen työväestön huolenaiheena 1890–1917,” in Ilkka Kärrylä, Pete Pesonen, and Anna Rajavuori, eds., *Työväestö ja demokratia* (Helsinki: Finnish Society for Labour History, 2019), 119–20.

<sup>55</sup>Based on a keyword search in the digital newspaper archive (using the fuzzy search “kansan eduskunta” OR kansaneduskunta), the phrase “people’s parliament” appeared on 420 pages in the leading socialist newspaper, *Työmies*, in 1906–1907. Available at: <https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/search?formats=NEWSPAPER>. For “purse power” referring to local elections, see, for example, “Kunnallinen äänioikeus,” *Työmies*, 30 Apr. 1907.

<sup>56</sup>Turunen, *Shades of Red*, 256.

designs against the backdrop of the imperial reality. But simultaneously, the condition of constant campaigning heated the political antagonism beyond measure. The limited suffrage, nonetheless, inviting new groups of people into politics, brought about a new mode of campaigning, and, as Scott Ury put it, tsarist “democracy” demonstrated its discontents.<sup>57</sup> The initial socialist boycott of the Duma allowed the National Democracy party to dominate electoral politics. Their political propaganda was largely propelled by antisemitism. As Stephen Corrsin and others have shown, the main theme in the National Democrats’ press prior to election day was the “defense of Warsaw against the Jews” and the “Jewish danger.”<sup>58</sup> While everybody not supporting the nationalists was easily accused of siding with the Jews, the ethnic split assumed the mantle of the main political cleavage. There were only minor attempts to shift the levers to other lines of division.

Not finding its place in these quibbles, the mainstream PPS (former Revolutionary Faction) dropped the topic for the time being and spared no occasion to condemn the idea of pan-imperial political collaboration in the Duma “as a visible sign, one of the means to integrate divergent elements of the tsarist state.” As “the presence of our representants would be a manifested acceptance of the incorporation of the Polish lands ... the Duma can play no role [in] our socialist strivings,” and only “the parliament of the Polish toiling masses” is worth struggling for.<sup>59</sup> These condemnations notwithstanding, other socialist parties entered the electoral bid for agitational purposes.

The PPS-Left entered the competition during the elections for the Third Duma, joining the already campaigning SDKPiL and the Jewish Bund.<sup>60</sup> These parties mastered critical arguments against the Duma, and their journals extensively reported on the proceedings, explaining that despite the necessity for “people’s revolution which would bring freedom,” the socialist presence in the Duma was not in vain.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, these were the parties that later rejected the ideals of parliamentary democracy in favor of the communist seizure of power. It was, again, exactly the most radical SDKPiL who dedicated the greatest proportion of their texts to the critique of the Duma and explained the idea of a genuine legislative assembly (see figure 3). In a way, among the rank-and-file socialist workers, the ideal of parliament was ushered in by the political force that would later become the most outspoken in the rejection of parliamentary democracy.

Despite the low leverage of non-propertied social strata in the highly tiered electoral system,<sup>62</sup> from the first electoral bid voting rates were high and reached 74 percent in the workers’ curia. The vote of a landowner was equal to that of three

<sup>57</sup>Scott Ury, *Barricades and Banners: The Revolution of 1905 and the Transformation of Warsaw Jewry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

<sup>58</sup>Stephen D. Corrsin, *Warsaw before the First World War: Poles and Jews in the Third City of the Russian Empire, 1880–1914* (New York: East European Monographs, 1989); Theodore R. Weeks, *From Assimilation to Antisemitism: The “Jewish Question” in Poland, 1850–1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006).

<sup>59</sup>“Wobec wyborów do Dumy,” *Przedświt* 7, 1 July 1912: 54.

<sup>60</sup>Paweł Samuś, *Wasza kartka wyborcza jest silniejsza niż karabin, niż armata...: z dziejów kultury politycznej na ziemiach polskich pod zaborami* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2013).

<sup>61</sup>“Nasz zjazd partyjny,” *Czerwony Sztandar* 164, 8 Feb. 1909; “O posłów robotniczych II Dumy,” *Czerwony Sztandar* 184, 1 Mar. 1912.

<sup>62</sup>Joshua D Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality: The Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia, 1892–1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 215.

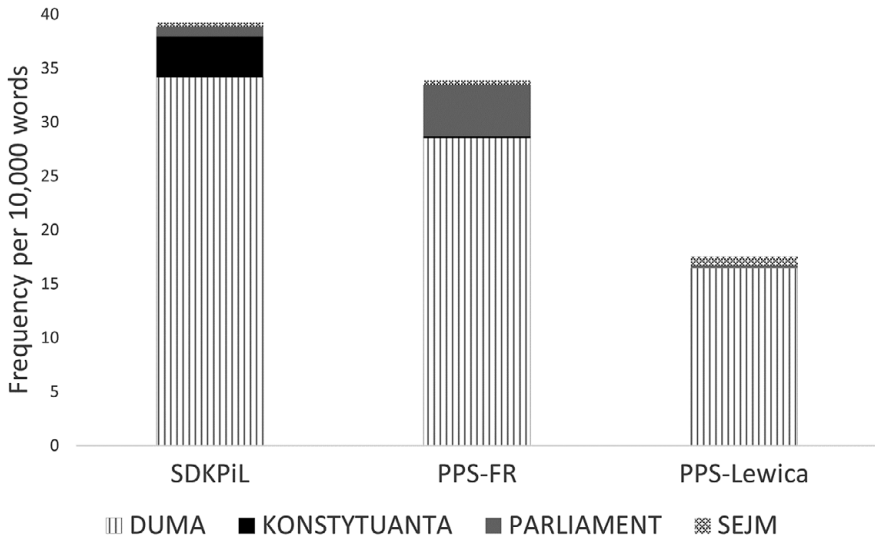


Figure 3. Duma discourse in leaflets according to party, frequency rate per 10,000 words, 1907-1914, Source: Lemmatized raw text corpus of socialist leaflets prepared by the author.

and one half city dwellers, of fifteen peasants, and of forty-five workers, but already in the elections to the Second Duma, the socialists failed to get the mandate only because of fraudulent electoral intrigues and repeated elections in Łódź.<sup>63</sup> In the elections to the Fourth Duma in 1912, the PPS-Left, allied with the Jewish Bund, won the majority of electors reserved for the workers' curia and the socialists finally got a representative in the Duma, Eugeniusz Jagiełło.<sup>64</sup> His activities remained limited, as he remained the only Polish socialist representative, and the Polish circle in the Duma was dominated by the National Democrats.

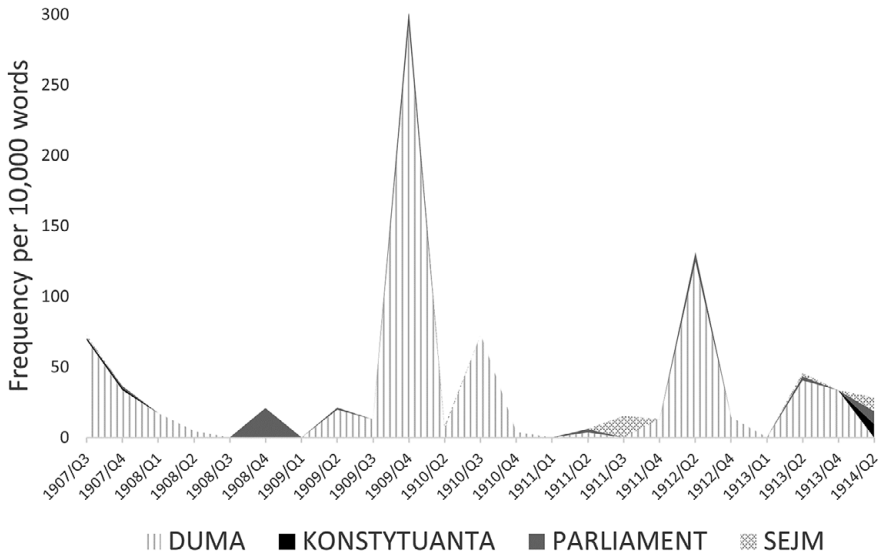
The general radicalization of socialism and its drift toward economic protest (SDKPiL) or militarist irredenta (PPS) notwithstanding, both parties kept the parliamentary idea in different iterations relatively constant in time. Around elections, the debate resurfaced to focus on the current electoral bid, but the parliamentary institution was no longer debated so extensively (see figure 4). What is worth noting is the ongoing interest in the parliamentary politics of the PPS-Left (partially because of the successful campaigning for Jagiełło). Party publications kept interest in the Duma politics alive, and the nationalist Polish circle was often criticized for its "demonstrated faithfulness to the government."<sup>65</sup>

Meanwhile, in Finland socialists won elections but parliamentary work yielded poor results. Bakery and lease holding acts, ratified in 1908-1909 by Nicholas II, were at best minor improvements for the working people. According to the labor press, the bosses ridiculed the new law limiting weekly working hours of bakery workers and

<sup>63</sup>Samuś, *Wasza kartka*, 337.

<sup>64</sup>Zimmerman, *Poles*, 271.

<sup>65</sup>Archiwum Państwowe w Płocku, Zarząd Żandarmerii Powiatów Włocławskiego, Nieszawskiego i Gostynińskiego, 300, p. 5.



**Figure 4.** Duma and parliamentary discourse in time 1907–1914, frequency rate per 10,000 words. Source: Lemmatized raw text corpus of socialist leaflets prepared by the author.

continued the illegal overwork.<sup>66</sup> The lease holding act secured crofters against immediate evictions by extending their contracts tenancies but only for a limited amount of time.<sup>67</sup> The main problem of the Finnish parliament was that Nicholas II repeatedly dissolved it, blocking social reforms through legislation. In addition, from 1909, the government consisted of pro-Russian puppet ministers chosen by the governor-general. Not surprisingly, the voter turnout decreased; in the first elections of 1907 it was 71 percent, but in 1913 only 51 percent.<sup>68</sup>

The negative parliamentary experiences redirected the ideological currents inside Finnish socialism. There had been two major lines at the dawn of the new democratic parliament: reformism and orthodox Marxism. Reformism favored cooperation with bourgeois parties to safeguard national autonomy against Russian imperialism, while orthodox Marxism supported uncompromised class struggle and ideological isolation in the parliament. After a few years in the parliament, the class struggle line had become dominant in the socialist party.<sup>69</sup> It was more suited to local conditions since the parliament functioned more as a forum for agitation than as a legislative body.<sup>70</sup> In fact, far-reaching democratic suffrage in the national parliament, coupled with limited power of the elected body in relation to the

<sup>66</sup>“Mestarit ivaamassa leipurilakia rikoksillaan,” *Työmies*, 24 Feb. 1913.

<sup>67</sup>Rasila, *Suomen torpparikysymys vuoteen 1909*, 447–50.

<sup>68</sup>Turunen, *Shades of Red*, 248, 259–60.

<sup>69</sup>Jouko Heikkilä, *Kansallista luokkapolitiikkaa: Sosiaalidemokraatit ja Suomen autonomian puolustus 1905–1917* (Helsinki: Finnish Historical Society, 1993), 390; Turunen, *Shades of Red*, 253–54.

<sup>70</sup>Hannu Soikkanen, *Kohti kansanvaltaa 1, 1899–1937: Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue 75 vuotta* (Helsinki: Social Democratic Party of Finland, 1975), 126–28.

autocratic empire, was not unheard of in European history.<sup>71</sup> However, this cleft taken to extreme made Finnish socialism an ideological outlier. As Eric Blanc has remarked, in contrast to typical reformist, moderate socialist parties of Western Europe, the Finnish SDP was the “only major socialist party in Europe to become more orthodox after 1905.”<sup>72</sup>

Despite the dysfunctional parliament and the turn towards a fiercer class struggle, the SDP stood firmly on the side of parliamentarism up to 1917. The standard response to the parliamentary setbacks was similar both at the top and the bottom of the socialist labor movement: “Let us show both the domestic and Russki oppressors that we will be even stronger in the new elections.”<sup>73</sup> The working people contributing to the handwritten newspapers were outraged by Russian interventions into the Finnish parliament, and their hatred can be read as a sign of the proletarian commitment to parliamentarism. In their own words, voting was not a mere civic duty but “the highest point to which an individual could aspire in temporal life” and a chance to deliver a message from the “real people.”<sup>74</sup> In addition to emotional language, many practical texts targeting various constituencies appeared in the handwritten newspapers. They introduced the parliament as a proletarian tool to change the prevailing legislation such as laws concerning maids’ working conditions, factory women’s night work, and the lack of an old-age pension for the working people.<sup>75</sup>

Why did the Finnish parliamentary dream persist despite difficulties? The answer lies in the conceptual trinity between parliament, bourgeoisie, and Russki, three key political concepts that rose to prominence in the labor press in this era.<sup>76</sup> Socialists believed that the Finnish bourgeoisie sought to secure its own privileges by collaborating with the imperial authorities instead of expanding democracy through the parliament: “Better to be the whip of the Russkis than under the people’s power.”<sup>77</sup> However, socialists also believed that history was on their side. When the labor papers reported on the proletarian meetings that sharply criticized bourgeois parliamentary politics, with headlines such as “the judgement of the people,”<sup>78</sup> the angry outbursts carried hope; if the alliance of the Finnish

<sup>71</sup>Andreas Biefang and Andreas Schulz, “From Monarchical Constitutionalism to a Parliamentary Republic,” in Pasi Ihalainen, Cornelia Ilie, and Kari Palonen, eds., *Parliaments and Parliamentarism: A Comparative History of a European Concept* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 62–80.

<sup>72</sup>Blanc, *Revolutionary Social Democracy*, 195.

<sup>73</sup>For variations of this idea in the printed newspapers, see, for instance, “Kirjeitä matkoiltani,” *Savon Työmies*, 16 Jul. 1908; “Olisiko pohjalainen kurjimus?” *Vapaa Sana*, 28 Jan. 1910; and “Millä mielellä vaaleihin,” *Työmies*, 19 Jan. 1910. For handwritten newspapers, see “Vaalit lähenevät,” *Tehtaalainen*, 15 Dec. 1909; “Taisteluun köyhälistö,” *Kuritus*, 12 Dec. 1909; and “Nyt olisi toiminnan aika,” *Kuritus*, 11 Dec. 1910.

<sup>74</sup>“Mihin meidän on pyrittävä,” *Kuritus*, 3 Apr. 1910; “Pakinaa,” *Kuritus*, 13 Nov. 1910; Turunen, *Shades of Red*, 350.

<sup>75</sup>“Selostus siitä Helsingissä pidetystä...,” *Tehtaalainen*, 19 Mar. 1908; “Työväenliike,” *Tehtaalainen*, 1 Feb. 1911; “Kevät sarastuksia,” *Palvelijatar*, 12 May 1910; “Iltakatsaus,” *Palvelijatar*, 23 Mar. 1911; “Katsauksia,” *Kuritus*, 24 July 1910. See also Risto Turunen, “Making of Modernity in the Vernacular: On the Grassroots Variations of Finnish Socialism in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 39, 1 (22 May 2021): 73–94.

<sup>76</sup>Turunen, *Shades of Red*, 257–59.

<sup>77</sup>“Porvariston mustia toiveita,” *Työmies*, 25 Feb. 1908.

<sup>78</sup>“Kansan tuomioita,” *Työmies*, 27 Sept. 1911.



bourgeoisie and the Russki oppressors was broken in the future, the parliament would be released from its imperial control and true democracy would flourish. This understanding of parliamentarism, which had its roots in the cumulative, incremental disappointments since the suffrage reform, was decisive for the events that unfolded in Finland during 1917 when the Russian Empire de facto collapsed.<sup>79</sup>

The intermediary period between 1905 and the revolutionary period initiated by the First World War kept Finnish and Polish socialists in a state of constant campaigning. Both the pan-Russian Duma and the Finnish Diet were repeatedly dissolved, but the socialist parties adopted different stances toward them. While for the Polish socialists the Duma was a boycotted bogus parliament at worst and a platform for tactical agitation at best, the Finns committed themselves to the reformed national parliament in order to improve their electoral fortunes and gain more power. The Poles kept explaining that there was no chance for real parliamentarism in the Duma, while the Finns for the time being swallowed their parliamentary disappointments and believed a societal turnover through voting lay somewhere in the near future. This balance was a fragile one, though.

### *The First World War and the 1917 Conuncture*

The onset of the First World War reshuffled the political scene in both western borderlands of the Russian Empire. The Kingdom of Poland was seized by Germany, and the new regime started to court Polish elites in a hope of building a dependent puppet state useful for their war aims and later desired territorial settlement.<sup>80</sup> Coupled with the generally more liberal press regime, this opened a broader space for Polish politics; new ideas emerged and they were expressed more freely.<sup>81</sup> The mainstream PPS re-evaluated its relation to parliamentarism and took a more active stance: “The war,” announced a PPS proclamation, “removed all these questions of Russian constitution, democratization of Russia, the Russian Duma. (...) The war freed us from Russia.”<sup>82</sup> Along with their hopes for a major geopolitical reconfiguration in Europe, the PPS became increasingly involved in disputes over Poland’s future political shape. Already in 1915, the PPS was reminding its readers of how the old idea of a constitutional assembly in Warsaw was irreplaceably connected with “national sovereignty,”<sup>83</sup> and at the beginning of 1916, the PPS brought this back into its propagandistic material. Especially in connection with the Act of 5 November—the declaration by the two emperors of the central powers on the creation of the Polish state out of the former Russian Poland—socialists relaunched their campaigning for this prospective state to have a democratic apparatus.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>79</sup>Turunen, *Shades of Red*, 257–59.

<sup>80</sup>Jesse Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance: The German Occupation of Poland in World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>81</sup>Keya Thakur-Smolarek, *Der Erste Weltkrieg und die polnische Frage: die Interpretationen des Kriegsgeschehens durch die zeitgenössischen polnischen Wortführer* (Berlin Münster: LIT-Verl, 2014).

<sup>82</sup>[Do wszystkich świadomych robotników. Towarzysze! Jedną z największych bolączek...], PPS-FR leaflet, 2 Feb. 1916.

<sup>83</sup>[Do towarzyszy robotników z t. zw. lewicy PPS], PPS publication, July 1915, AAN, Central Committee of the PPS 1909–1914, 15/III-3, k. 42.

<sup>84</sup>See, for instance, [Towarzysze i Obywatele! Wszędzie po całym Królestwie...], a leaflet of the Radom committee of the PPS, APŁ, ZDiPU 10701. See also Włodzimierz Suleja, “Polish Democratic Thought during

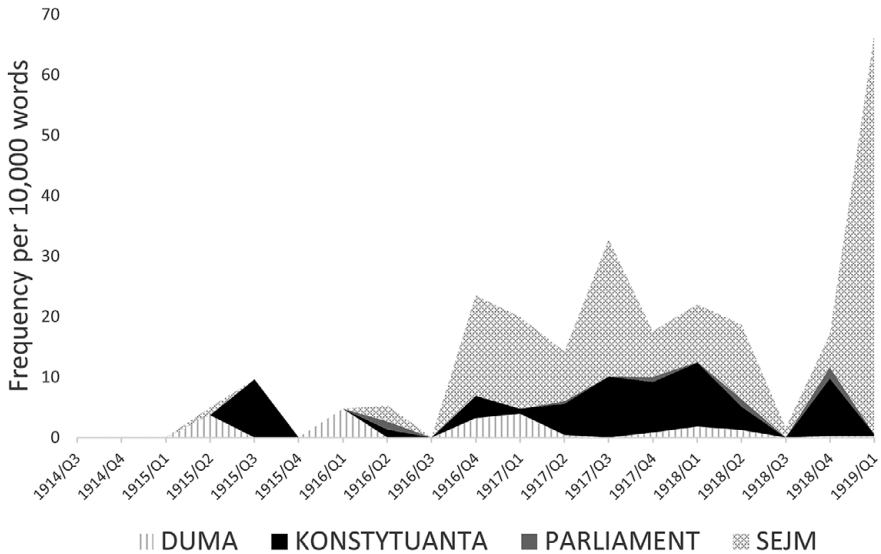


Figure 5. Changes in Parliamentary vocabulary in Poland from the outbreak of the First World War to the first Parliamentary Elections, 1914-1919, frequency rate per 10,000 words. Source: Lemmatized raw text corpus of socialist leaflets prepared by the author.

Meanwhile, the PPS made a sharp left turn and distanced itself from collaboration with central powers. Moreover, after the revolution in Russia, when the temporary government announced the acceptance of Polish claims to independent statehood, a space opened up within which to challenge German domination.<sup>85</sup> Correspondingly, in early 1918, a fully-fledged proposal to institute a legislative body elected in four tail electoral law entered the socialist agenda, and it was also adopted by other parties catering to popular classes.<sup>86</sup> Soon proportionality was added and that proposal, as well as voting rights for women, had become established for good in the socialist repertoire.<sup>87</sup> Here the imaginations of parliamentarism and its interactions with popular constituencies bifurcated, however. Almost all parties supported some form of democratic sovereignty, but they saw its role differently (see figure 5).

For the PPS, the *Sejm* would be a core of the desired democratic state but also a means to stabilize the revolutionary situation. The promise of the *Sejm* was used to assuage radical demands for immediate, more daring reforms. This duality came to the fore when the parliamentary ideal ceased to be a mere reference point for criticizing non-elected bodies under the tutelage of central powers. Meanwhile, the

the First World War,” in Mieczysław B. Biskupski, James S. Pula, and Piotr J. Wróbel, eds., *The Origins of Modern Polish Democracy* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 106. On the Act of 5 November, see Kauffmann, *Elusive Alliance*.

<sup>85</sup>Jerzy Holzer, *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna w latach 1917–1919* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1962).

<sup>86</sup>[Towarzysze i Towarzyszek! W dniu 23 czerwca ma się odbyć], PPS leaflet, June 1918, BN, Polona digital collection.

<sup>87</sup>[Polska Partja Socjalistyczna. Niech żyje zjednoczona Niepodległa Republika Ludowa], leaflet of the Lublin committee of the PPS, AAN PPS, 15/IV-5, p. 25; “Robotnik,” 1 Oct. 1918, p. 6.

revolution was no longer a distant event, but a viable political alternative to reject Russian domination in Poland for good. When the initial admiration for a swift action in Russia faded away, the revolution here and now was declared madness that was incompatible with the principles of materialism and historical development. In these circumstances, the revolution became the main counter-concept to parliamentarism, instead of the conservative, undemocratic political designs that had been juxtaposed to parliamentarism before.<sup>88</sup>

The PPS chose the way of democratic parliamentarism, which would allegedly lead to socialism with democratic means applied within an initially capitalistic state.<sup>89</sup> Hence, the parliamentary ideal was consciously used to take the steam out of the revolutionary surge, which was seen as an outside force “which should not be produced on purpose, but once it comes, one has to harness it,” as one of the future parliamentary representatives of the PPS, Feliks Perl, expressed it.<sup>90</sup> Simultaneously, party members demonstrated in October 1918 for parliamentary elections to take place as soon as possible, but they were already qualifying their support as being for the unicameral model only.<sup>91</sup> The parliament began to be the embodiment of people’s power in the new Poland, and the PPS used most of its leaflets and papers to agitate for parliamentarism. The party put forward universal suffrage as “the most urgent need” which would provide the legislative body with popular legitimacy.<sup>92</sup> The idea of descriptive representation was a cornerstone of this strategy—PPS members should be elected as naturally representing the working class, and the left-leaning peasant party, the PSL-Wyzwolenie, should attract the peasant voters, in sharp contrast to national-democratic usurpers.<sup>93</sup> In the end, though, their hopes that in the land of workers and peasants, workers’ and peasant parties would hold “people’s power” proved to be in vain.

Contrary to the Polish case, in the Grand Duchy of Finland the First World War decreased political space due to the imposition of martial law and war censorship.<sup>94</sup> Initially, the socialist relationship with the parliament did not change much in a time of war, especially because the Finnish Diet was not convened and the political discussions of parliament disappeared from the public eye (see figure 2).<sup>95</sup> However, the February Revolution forced Finnish socialists to rethink the question of parliamentarism. The SDP had won the elections of 1916, and while that victory had been insignificant while the Russian Empire still controlled the Grand Duchy, the

<sup>88</sup>See socialist voices in Marek Kornat, ed., *Polska myśl polityczna wobec rewolucji bolszewickiej: pierwsze komentarze, refleksje, przewidywania antologia* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2021).

<sup>89</sup>Michał Śliwa, *Mysł państwowa socjalistów polskich w latach 1918–1921* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe WSP, 1980).

<sup>90</sup>Jerzy Holzer, ed., “Narada krakowska z lutego 1918 r.,” *Przegląd Historyczny* 49, 3 (1958), 538–67, 545.

<sup>91</sup>[Towarzysze i Towarzyski! W dniu 23 czerwca ma się odbyć Rada Stanu], PPS leaflet, 06.1918, BN, Polona digital collection.

<sup>92</sup>“Nasz zjazd,” *Robotnik* (PPS FR), 1 July 1917, p. 3.

<sup>93</sup>[Robotnicy i Robotnice! Już w niedziele ma się rozstrzygnąć...], leaflet of the local PPS committee in Siedlce, 25 Jan. 1919, AAN, PPS, Siedlecki OKR PPS, 15/IV-10, p. 4; [Towarzysze i bracia włościanie! Nareszcie przyszedł czas...], leaflet of the local committee of the PPS in Lublin, Jan. 1917, HI PC, box 1.

<sup>94</sup>Pertti Luntinen, *F. A. Seyn: A Political Biography of a Tsarist Imperialist as Administrator of Finland* (Helsinki: Finnish Historical Society), 235–37; Jussi Kuusanmäki, “Ensimmäisen maailmansodan lehtisensuuri,” in Pirjo Leino-Kaukiainen, ed., *Sensuuri ja sananvapaus Suomessa* (Helsinki: History of the Finnish Press), 85–105.

<sup>95</sup>Turunen, *Shades of Red*, 256–57, 262.

situation had completely changed by the spring 1917, since the SDP now held a narrow majority in a national parliament in the borderland, at the brink of secession. Socialists decided to form a coalition government, and Oskari Tokoi became the world's first socialist prime minister.<sup>96</sup>

The Finnish socialists were unable to introduce the freedoms demanded from below, since they were in a coalition government with their political opponents, in an unstable international environment, and under worsening material conditions. In a way, what happened during 1917 can be interpreted as a fast repetition of the first ten years of Finnish parliamentary democracy: high expectations faded into disappointment. When the socialist-led government accepted the "The Law of Supreme Power" that would have increased the Grand Duchy's independence, the Russian Provisional Government dissolved the power-hungry borderland parliament and ordered new elections for the summer 1917.<sup>97</sup> Finland became independent just six months later under the leadership of the bourgeois Senate, but at this point in time the socialists were the most energetic force trying to liberate the Grand Duchy from the Russian Empire. They understood increasing autonomy as boosting people's power, which would finally lead to a societal revolution through the parliament, the road that Russian imperialism had thus far blocked.<sup>98</sup> Although the idea of a more capable national parliament found some support in the pro-peasant Agrarian League, and even among the liberal bourgeoisie, the conservative right was suspicious of the Law of Supreme Power because they thought it transferred too much power from the government to the parliament.<sup>99</sup>

The dissolution was a watershed moment in the socialist understanding of parliamentarism. The popularity of the concepts of democracy and people's power rose to all-time highs in the labor press (figure 6). As in 1906–1907, when socialists had actively speculated about the future of Finnish democracy, the ideal of the people's parliament returned to the core of their political thinking.<sup>100</sup> In their understanding, the socialist-majority parliament had represented genuine people's power, and its dissolution, aided by bourgeois politicians, had been illegal.<sup>101</sup> Some socialist MPs even tried to continue their parliamentary work despite the dissolution, and in September they even broke into the parliament building.<sup>102</sup> The following month the SDP suffered a bitter loss in the new election, despite receiving almost seventy thousand votes more than in the previous, 1916 election.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>96</sup>Eino Ketola, *Kansalliseen kansanvaltaan: Suomen itsenäisyys, sosialidemokraatit ja Venäjän vallankumous 1917* (Helsinki: Tammi, 1987), 27–42; Turunen, *Shades of Red*, 273–74.

<sup>97</sup>Ketola, *Kansalliseen kansanvaltaan*, 200, 209–15, 228–39.

<sup>98</sup>"Kunnallislait," *Kansan Lehti*, 14 July 1917; "Eduskunta julistautunut Suomen valtiollan omistajaksi," *Työmies*, 20 July 1917.

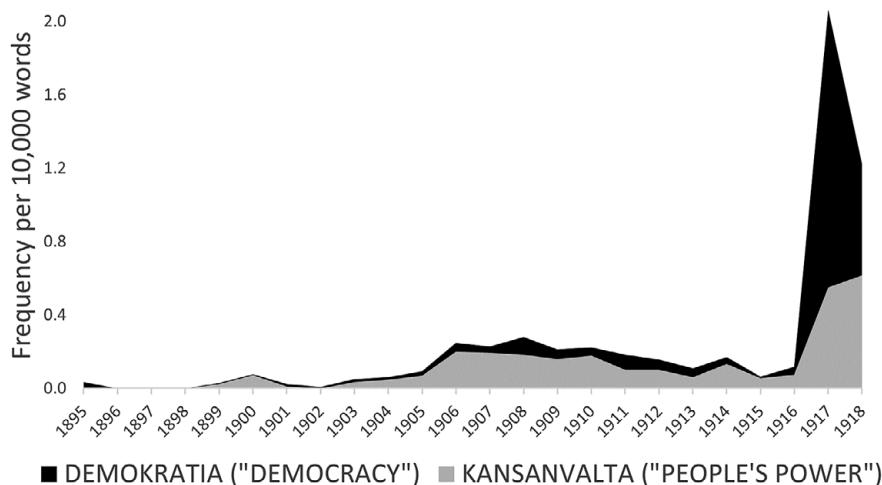
<sup>99</sup>Upton, *Finnish Revolution*, 86–96.

<sup>100</sup>Based on a keyword search in the digital newspaper archive (<https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/search?formats=NEWSPAPER>), the phrase "people's parliament" (using the fuzzy search "kansan eduskunta" OR kansaneduskunta) peaked in the leading socialist newspaper (*Työmies*) during 1917 in September (21 hits), followed by August (15 hits) and June (15 hits).

<sup>101</sup>"Soron yöstä nouskaa!," *Työmies*, 15 Sept. 1917.

<sup>102</sup>Ketola, *Kansalliseen kansanvaltaan*, 284–85; Upton, *Finnish Revolution*, 125–26.

<sup>103</sup>The voter turnout increased from 55.5 percent to 69.2 percent; *Suomen Virallinen Tilasto 1917, XXIX Vaalitulasto: Eduskuntavaalit vuonna 1917*, 14.



**Figure 6.** Relative frequency of democracy and people's power in the leading socialist newspaper (*Työmies*), 1895–1918. Source: Lemmatized raw text files downloaded from the National Library of Finland (<https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/search?formats=NEWSPAPER>), 16 July 2022.

The socialists blamed their loss on the new bourgeois weapon of electoral alliance: non-socialist parties had united tactically to tackle socialism.<sup>104</sup> The Kautskyan left also blamed their own party for the “Senate adventure.” They said that taking up government responsibilities had given bourgeois parties a strong argument for not voting socialists again, because many people thought the SDP squandered its power in the spring, effecting no results but much chaos.<sup>105</sup> Overall, socialist rhetoric had clearly changed by the fall of 1917: the spring’s dreams of freedom were replaced by unprecedentedly aggressive criticisms of the domestic bourgeoisie, and the legitimacy of the newly formed parliament was undermined by constant references to the dissolved parliament.<sup>106</sup>

The leap from parliamentarism to a proletarian revolution was near at hand in November 1917 during the second general strike in Finnish history. The leaders SDP thought the agitated field would retake power from the bourgeoisie in one way or another; the key question was whether that would take place via the parliament or armed revolution.<sup>107</sup> Growing pressure from below was also felt in the labor movement’s grassroots; long-term activists still believed in taking the parliamentary road, but newcomers were demanding direct action.<sup>108</sup> In addition there was pressure from the East: the Bolsheviks as Russia’s new masters had encouraged the hesitant Finnish SDP to

<sup>104</sup>“Mitä porvarien liittoutuminen merkitsi,” *Kansan Lehti*, 9 Oct. 1917; “Vaalitappiomme ja sen syyt,” *Vapaa Sana*, 19 Oct. 1917; “Ajan varrelta,” *Työmies*, 18 Oct. 1917.

<sup>105</sup>“Vaalien tuloksen johdosta,” *Työmies*, 14 Oct. 1917.

<sup>106</sup>See, for example, “Kansallisuusvihan lietsominen,” *Kansan Lehti*, 30 Oct. 1917; “Eduskunnan kokoontuessa,” *Työmies*, 2 Nov. 1917; “Suuri työväenkokous Helsingissä,” *Työmies*, 11 Nov. 1917.

<sup>107</sup>Upton, *Finnish Revolution, 1917–1918*, 140–42.

<sup>108</sup>“Muutamia mietteitä osaston viime kokouksesta,” *Tehtaalainen*, 9 Sept. 1917; “Vieläkin työväenopistosta,” *Tehtaalainen*, 23 Oct. 1917; “Edellä olevaan kirjoitukseen hieman selitystä,” *Tehtaalainen*, 23 Oct. 1917.

seize power, which had in fact voted for the armed revolution during the strike only to cancel the call shortly after. The SDP was unable to restore the old parliament with a socialist majority, but, with the help of general strike, they did manage to push through an eight-hour workday and new municipal laws.<sup>109</sup> Instead of being a tool for improving society through innovative legislation, the reactive parliament merely approved societal changes after they already happened. For example, the eight-hour workday was won through strike actions six months before parliament recognized it. Further, the second general strike—which involved food riots, violent clashes, and murders—revealed that labor politicians could no longer control “the parliament of the streets.”

While there were several interconnected factors behind 1918’s failed attempt at revolution, many of them were connected to the damaged image of parliamentarism. First, though there had been food shortages since the beginning of World War I, they became severe only in the latter half of 1917.<sup>110</sup> Politicians failed to solve the hunger crisis, which undermined the parliament’s credibility among the common people. Second, the two greatest victories of the Finnish labor movement—universal suffrage in 1906 and the eight-hour working day in 1917—had not been achieved through parliamentary politics but mainly by extra-parliamentary means. Third, the collapse of the Russian Empire had opened a power vacuum in Finland, and both the socialist and bourgeois camps formed their own civil guards in 1917, and these paramilitary forces acted outside parliamentary control. When the bourgeois Senate declared their civil guards the state army in January 1918, the socialists refused to surrender the monopoly on violence and instead labeled the “butcher guards” enemies of the working people and true people’s power.<sup>111</sup> When the revolution began it was framed as “revolutionary self-defense.”<sup>112</sup>

During the civil war, the socialists remained faithful to parliamentary ideals on paper but not in practice. The bourgeois Senate fled from the capital and was replaced by the Finnish People’s Deputation, which was supposed to work with the parliamentary body of the Workers’ Supreme Council. The socialist government wrote a new constitution that was extremely democratic, inspired by Switzerland, but not revolutionary in nature.<sup>113</sup> The Finnish People’s Parliament, as it was called, would be chosen in free elections with multiple parties, and anyone over twenty years old would be able to vote. The new constitution directed a transfer of power from the government not only to the parliament but also directly to the people, who would be able to formulate their own popular initiatives and even overturn parliamentary decisions with referendums.<sup>114</sup> Each MP was supposed to take the following public

<sup>109</sup>Upton, *Finnish Revolution, 1917–1918*, 138–61.

<sup>110</sup>Pertti Haapala, “The Expected and Non-Expected Roots of Chaos: Preconditions of the Finnish Civil War,” in Tuomas Tepora and Aapo Roselius, eds., *The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 44.

<sup>111</sup>“Porvarien aseelliset joukot,” *Työmies*, 23 Jan. 1918; “Lahtarikaartien käyttämisestä aseellisena voimana,” *Vapaa Sana*, 21 Jan. 1918; “Porvarit sotaisia,” *Kansan Lehti*, 18 Jan. 1918.

<sup>112</sup>Juha Matikainen, *Parlamentarismin kannattajasta vallankumouksen äänitorveksi: Suomen Sosialidemokraattisen Puolueen lehdistö 1917–1918* (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylä University, 2018), 233–36.

<sup>113</sup>Upton, *Finnish Revolution*, 275–76, 287–88, 390–91.

<sup>114</sup>*Suomen Kansanvaltuuskunnan ehdotus Suomen valtiosäännöksi: Esitetty Työväen Pääneuvostolle tarkastettavaksi ja päätettäväksi yleistä kansanäänestystä varten* (Helsinki: Suomen Kansanvaltuuskunta, 1918), 7–8, 15–16.

oath if elected: "If I do not faithfully represent the people's power according to the constitution accepted in the referendum, I deserve people's judgement."<sup>115</sup>

Despite the democratic ideals of the new constitution, during the revolution power was concentrated in the hands of the socialist ministers and Red Guards, and the Prime Minister of Red Finland (Kullervo Manner) was nominated as the dictator at war's end. The proletarian revolution was crushed in three months, and when the Finnish parliament returned to its work in May, only one socialist who had remained outside the revolution was allowed to return. Most socialist MPs were either imprisoned, dead, or had escaped to Russia.<sup>116</sup> The winning side struggled in its stance toward parliamentarism after the civil war; agrarian populists favored a republic with a parliament and a strong president, whereas the Swedish Party and the conservative Finnish Party, especially, wanted a monarchy led by a German king. The monarchist viewpoint won temporarily, partly due to a belief that the suffrage reform of 1906 had been too radical for the Finnish people, as shown by the events in 1918.<sup>117</sup>

In a rollercoaster of political emotions, the Finnish socialists reached the heyday of their parliamentary agenda by winning the majority in 1916, and then being in the government in the spring of 1917, only to experience their greatest political disappointment later that same year. Unable to fulfill their promises to the working people through the parliament, and losing parliamentary power because of the events on the imperial level, they opted for a revolutionary power seizure in 1918. Meanwhile, the invigorated Polish public debated parliament as a final realization of national aspirations, simultaneously mediating social tensions looming large in the late empire and intensified by the war crisis. The German occupation removed Poland from the reach of the revolutionary turmoil within the Russian Empire. When the opportunity window for independence opened, most of the political forces, socialists included, were ready to take up the challenge to mediate the conflict via parliament.

### *Out of the Empire toward a Unifying Nation-State*

Once the Polish state was created in November 1918, the bid for power led through a complex sequence of containment of social unrest through reform and repression. Important factors were self-moderation by the main political contenders and the imperative of preserving the state under conditions of contested borders and international danger.<sup>118</sup> The first government, formed under the Prime Minister Ignacy Daszyński, was socialist but short-lived. It nevertheless had an impact on the hopes and imaginations of the Polish people. The government's promises to the people were intended to keep them demanding but also loyal to the nation-state. The government announced important reforms to lessen the popular pressure on the state but it did not face the same demands from below as in Finland. This strategy proved successful to a degree, allowing the state to stabilize amidst the

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>116</sup>Upton, *Finnish Revolution*, 490–92, 518.

<sup>117</sup>Jussila, Hentilä, and Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy*, 123.

<sup>118</sup>Jochen Böhrer, *Civil War in Central Europe, 1918–1921: The Reconstruction of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

border wars and revolutionary shockwaves spreading across Europe. As Mieczysław Niedziałkowski, one leading theoretician of socialist parliamentarism in the PPS commented later, “Due to its very creation, and thanks to its manifesto and the enthusiasm which it triggered, [this government] directed firmly, in a manly way, irreversibly, the building of the state on the democratic path, or more precisely the pathway of parliamentary democracy. (...) It executed the lethal blow against communism.”<sup>119</sup> Notably, the revolution was not an enemy, and many—in the PPS and among its supporters—still considered an independent, parliamentary Poland, introducing social reforms, to be a revolutionary project, one in line with the constitutional script of revolution and the party’s message. It deemed national self-assertion against empire a revolutionary goal as well.

Soon the power was handed to a new, more conciliatory government, still led by a socialist, Jędrzej Moraczewski, but backed by a charismatic military commander, Józef Piłsudski. The idea of legitimizing reforms in parliament was kept alive and more daring reforms were postponed “until the *Sejm* decides.” This approach was intended to bring more solid legitimacy for economic redistribution, but also to take the steam out of the social revolutionary surge. After all, such a position was in tune with the general line of the party, for which Polish independent statehood was the primary goal and establishing a socialist system only secondary.<sup>120</sup> Accompanying maneuvers, especially the handing over of power to a coalition government more acceptable to the nationalists, disappointed the party’s constituencies, and the PPS fared far worse than expected in the election of January 1919.

This sequence might have led to rejection of parliamentarism, as occurred in Finland, but PPS propaganda defended the parliamentary ideal. They blamed the defeat on “corrupt antisocialist agitation,” “terror applied during elections,” and “deceitful, duplicitous action of the clergy.”<sup>121</sup> Simultaneously, workers were encouraged to vigilantly observe the newly elected legislative *Sejm* and pressure it when needed. After all, the *Sejm* was there to forge the new statehood and the place of workers and peasants in it. These groups should, despite their minuscule socialist representation, maintain a close “bond of trust and support for the socialist part of the *Sejm*.” “Let [the *Sejm*] know that the handful of genuine defenders of the people in the *Sejm* are the majority in the nation,” announced one leaflet intended to bolster the legitimacy of parliamentarism.<sup>122</sup> Peasant parties, left and right, and nationalist workers remained firmly committed to it,<sup>123</sup> but the electoral disappointment was grist to the mill for the communist assault.

The former PPS-L and SDKPiL, now united as the Communist Party of Poland (KPP), had already called for a boycott, declaring elections to be “treacherous suggestions,” “lies and misleading promises.”<sup>124</sup> Their critique of the “bourgeois

<sup>119</sup>Mieczysław Niedziałkowski, *Demokracja parlamentarna w Polsce* (Warszawa: Księgarnia Robotnicza, 1930), 12–13.

<sup>120</sup>Adam Próchnik, *Pierwsze Piętnastolecie Polski Niepodległej (1918–1933): Zarys Dziejów Politycznych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Robotnik, 1933).

<sup>121</sup>[Towarzysze i Towarzyszki! Obywatele i Obywatelki! Za parę dni zbiera się pierwszy Sejm...], leaflet of the central committee of the PPS, 4 Feb. 1919, HI PC, box 1.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

<sup>123</sup>Henryk Cimek, “The Peasant Movement vis-à-vis the Idea of Polish Parliament in the Period 1918–1919,” *Polityka i Społeczeństwo* 2 (2005): 36–45.

<sup>124</sup>[Towarzysze! Robotnicy! Do udziału w wyborach do sejmu...], KPP leaflet, Jan. 1919, HI PC, box 1.



parliamentarism” and “the *Sejm* of Polish counterrevolution” scorned it as a “cheat not satisfying the claim for peoples’ power” but rather serving “lords and lackeys of the *Sejm* who want the power over the people.”<sup>125</sup> Now the communists had a straight confirmation of their earlier warnings that PPS was pacifying the revolutionary moment by leading workers to elections. The parliament had become the main target as a “means of struggle against workers and peasants” who did “not want to endure hunger, poverty and mishandling in silence anymore.”<sup>126</sup> By throwing against the new *Sejm* the stock phrases used previously against the Duma, the communists wanted to resuscitate the revolutionary shockwaves through reverberations of 1905 in Poland and 1917 in Russia.

This moment was a severe crisis for the parliament’s legitimacy. Many feared the effects of the communist assaults and called for workers’ to continue supporting parliamentarism.<sup>127</sup> The PPS clearly positioned itself as a force both capable of and necessary for stopping communism. The party had an ambiguous role, clearly trying to extinguish workers’ protests in order to stabilize the new state. They proved successful and the revolutionary surge was aborted. The left split permanently into parliamentary socialists and communists contesting the state. All in all, the disappointment with parliamentarism came too late to delegitimize the state among the socialists. The state was able to stabilize in the parliamentary form against attempts to overthrow it by external forces helped by the internal communist alternative. Nonetheless, by 1926 parliamentarism was being questioned from within. The political setting had changed but one of the reasons, as before, was people’s weariness of parliament’s lack of agency.

In Finland, the idea of a parliamentary republic was first challenged by monarchism. Prince Friedrich Karl of Hesse was elected as the first king of an independent state in 1918, but he never set foot in his kingdom. The defeat of Germany and pressure from the Allies forced Finns to seek a new orientation in both domestic and foreign politics.<sup>128</sup> The majority of “Reds” were released from the prison camps, where more than ten thousand had died of hunger and disease.<sup>129</sup> Although over forty thousand of those convicted of taking part in the revolution lost their right to vote for several years, the re-established SDP was still able to win the parliamentary elections in 1919, followed by the pro-republican Agrarian League.<sup>130</sup> The moderate SDP distanced itself from the revolution and blamed the radicals for leading the working people into the bloody revolution, while the Finnish Communist Party, established in Moscow, regretted only the timing of the revolution and believed the working class should have seized power in 1917, when the bourgeoisie was yet not ready for a civil war.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>125</sup>[*Sejm chce wznowić stan wyjątkowy...*], KPP leaflet, Apr. 1919, HI PC, box 1.

<sup>126</sup>[*Do robotników wsi i do bezrolnych. Precz z sejmem...*], KPP leaflet, Jan. 1919, HI PC, box 1.

<sup>127</sup>[*Robotnicy! Wrogowie ludy polskiego...*], leaflet of the central council of the NZR, Mar. 1919, APL ZDiPU 10249.

<sup>128</sup>Vesa Vares, “An Honourable U-Turn? Finland and New Europe after the End of the First World War,” *TalTech Journal of European Studies* 11, 1 (2021): 20–40, 22, 30–31.

<sup>129</sup>Marko Tikka, “Warfare and Terror in 1918,” in Tuomas Tepora and Aapo Roselius, eds., *The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 118.

<sup>130</sup>Jussila, Hentilä, and Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy*, 128, 135.

<sup>131</sup>Tauno Saarela, “To Commemorate or Not: The Finnish Labor Movement and the Memory of the Civil War in the Interwar Period,” in Tuomas Tepora and Aapo Roselius, eds., *The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 331–63.

Although the SDP had lost the revolution, the parliament passed many of their pre-revolutionary demands after the civil war. The land question had been central in the socialist agitation since the suffrage of 1906, and the crofters' liberation law, passed in October 1918, led to 123,000 rented farms becoming independent. In 1926, the same year that the democratically elected parliament was overthrown in Poland, the Finnish SDP even formed a minority government, which illustrates how rapidly Finland returned to parliamentarism.<sup>132</sup> The transition was difficult, since both the far right and the far left tried to challenge the national parliament in the 1920s, but Finland was one of the few European countries that remained a democracy through the interwar period.<sup>133</sup>

The socialist fight for parliamentary reform before 1907 and against the "illegal" parliament in late 1917, and then the quick return to parliamentarism after the failed revolution, can all be explained by the political ideas guiding their actions. For one thing, democracy understood as a formal process seemed to have little value at the grassroots of the Finnish labor movement in the first decade of the reformed parliament. In the leading socialist newspaper, appearances of the words "people's power" and "democracy" were infrequent but nonetheless constant from 1907–1917 (see figure 6). However, the word *demokratia*, "democracy," was never mentioned in the handwritten newspapers we studied, and its Finnicized equivalent, *kansanvalta*, literally "the people's power," was mentioned just a few times. On the other hand, the parliament (*eduskunta*) itself was among the most common topics in the handwritten newspapers.<sup>134</sup> The parliament was often linked with the Marxist terms "interest" (*etu*) and "class interest" (*luokkaetu*) in the handwritten formulations that portrayed parliamentary work as a rational, zero-sum game with winners and losers.<sup>135</sup> The parliament was evaluated based on how authentically it reflected the people's will rather than as valuable in its own right as a form of government.<sup>136</sup>

The revolution has occasionally been interpreted as Finnish socialists succumbing to mob rule and Russian radicalism, and thus rejecting Western parliamentarism.<sup>137</sup> Recently, Pasi Ihalainen compared European parliamentary discourses in 1917–1919 and the Finnish SDP seems to have been an ideological outlier: "The concept of democracy used by the Finnish Social Democratic Party during 1917 was exceptionally exclusive and divisive, resembling that of Russian revolutionary discourse, which to a large extent explains the ideological confrontation leading to the civil war, particularly as the center and the right concluded that the Social Democrats had adopted the Bolshevik concept of revolutionary democracy."<sup>138</sup> However, seen from a longer-term, conceptual perspective the parliament's

<sup>132</sup>Jussila, Hentilä, and Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy*, 122, 150–51.

<sup>133</sup>Capoccia, *Defending Democracy*, 138–76.

<sup>134</sup>"*Demokratia*" was not mentioned in any of the five handwritten newspapers analyzed; "*kansanvalta*" was mentioned four times, and "*eduskunta*" eighty-nine times.

<sup>135</sup>"Porvarien ääni torvet," *Nuija*, 1 Jun. 1907; "Vaalit," *Yritys*, 21 June 1916; "Mietteitä," *Kuritus*, 26 Dec. 1909.

<sup>136</sup>For a clear expression of this idea in print, see "Onko vallankumous suunnattu parlamentarista toimintaa vastaan?" *Työmies*, 23 Nov. 1917.

<sup>137</sup>Eino Jutikkala, "Maaliskuun vallankumouksesta 1917 toukokuun paraatiin 1918," in Juhana Aunesluoma and Martti Häikiö, eds., *Suomen vapaussota 1918: Kartasto ja tutkimusopas* (Helsinki: WSOY, 1995), 11–20.

<sup>138</sup>Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, 517.

legitimacy among the Finnish proletariat was tied to its capacity to represent the power of the masses. Even before the suffrage reform of 1906, the socialists had openly declared what they wanted; the most famous pamphlet from this era (1899) was not entitled “Why the Working People Want Democracy,” but rather, “Why the Working People Want Power.”<sup>139</sup>

Instead of looking to explain just one event—the failed proletarian revolution—it is more useful to ask why the socialist relationship to parliamentarism shifted in different situations. After the civil war, both radical and anti-revolutionary socialists acknowledged that societal reforms had failed because there was no government responsible to parliament. The conclusions they drew from this, however, were different: the radicals believed another revolution was necessary whereas the moderates still believed that a parliament free of external constraints could be a means for social change.<sup>140</sup> These contrasting stances highlight the importance of expectations and experiences in the socialist understanding of parliamentarism. Despite the attempt at revolution, most Finnish socialists remained committed to the parliament when its failings could be blamed on Russian imperialism (before the February Revolution), or when parliamentary work was indeed delivering concrete improvements (after the civil war). That said, their support for the parliament was never unconditional, and in early 1918 many had given up on it.

Moreover, the shifting positions of the Finnish SDP must be seen in the context of an emerging parliamentary democracy where no one had a fixed idea of the proper relationship between the parliament and democracy. At the time of the civil war, Finland had only briefly experienced a weak form of parliamentary democracy within an autocratic empire. Even if elections were formally democratic, parliamentary decisions had a very moderate impact. According to the winning side of the civil war, they had been defending a “legal societal order,” whereas the SDP had attacked the “most democratic parliament in the world.”<sup>141</sup> This argument hides the fact that the socialists had maintained the most consistent defense of parliamentarism before the suffrage reform,<sup>142</sup> while, both before and after the civil war, the right-wing parties had difficulties accepting parliamentarism based on the equal inclusion of the masses in the political process, especially when the masses voted for the socialists. Thus, the question of who promoted parliamentary democracy most convincingly depends on the precise moment being studied, and it may be more fruitful to instead focus on the differences between various conceptualizations of parliamentary democracy. In general, the left stressed the moral argument, that the parliament must faithfully represent the people’s power, whereas the right insisted that parliament had to be legal.<sup>143</sup> Significantly, these roles were partially reversed in the late 1920s when some

<sup>139</sup>Eetu Salin, *Esitelmiä: miksi työväestö tahtoo valtaa? Äänioikeudesta sekä kappale äänioik. tilastoa* (Helsinki: Gutenberg, 1899).

<sup>140</sup>Saarela, “To Commemorate or Not,” 331–39.

<sup>141</sup>Turo Manninen, *Vapaustaistelu, kansalaissota ja kapina*, (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 1982), 35, 115, 141–44.

<sup>142</sup>Uffe Jakobsen and Jussi Kurunmäki, “The Formation of Parliamentarism in the Nordic Countries from the Napoleonic Wars to the First World War,” in Pasi Ihalainen, Cornelia Ilie, and Kari Palonen, eds., *Parliaments and Parliamentarism: A Comparative History of a European Concept* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 108.

<sup>143</sup>On these differences in 1918, see Matti Hyvärinen, “Valta,” in M. Hyvärinen et al., eds., *Käsitteet liikkeessä: Suomen poliittisen kulttuurin käsitehistoria* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2003), 80–82.

forces on the right, disappointed with the new parliamentary trajectory, turned towards fascism and claimed to thereby represent the true will of the people.<sup>144</sup>

## Conclusions

In this article we have scrutinized contrasting political choices made by socialist parties in two western borderlands in the process of departing the Russian Empire. While the Finnish SDP from 1907 enjoyed a stable foothold in the formally democratic but practically impotent national parliament, the Polish socialists boycotted the Russian Duma and envisioned a democratic legislature as a guarantee of a Poland with true people's power. The Finnish socialists momentarily abandoned parliamentarism in favor of an armed revolution but returned to the parliamentary road soon after the revolution's tragic failure. Their Polish counterparts had faced post-revolutionary reaction after 1907 and later wanted to avoid a repeat of that, so they backed parliament as an embodiment of popular democracy. The Finns questioned parliament's legitimacy in the name of revolution, while the Poles used the parliamentary idea to dampen the revolutionary upsurge. Disappointment with parliamentarism came only later when the new state appeared distant from the socialist dreams of a people's Poland. These two state-building trajectories in respect to parliamentarism can be figuratively presented as an X-shaped chiasm of refracted path dependencies.

These divergent paths notwithstanding, both countries ended up as independent republics with parliamentary democracies after the First World War. In both cases, the idea of revolutionary power seizure and wide-reaching social revolution lost momentum. Yet the success or failure of actual revolutionary movements was not decisive. That different processes led to the formally similar outcomes demonstrates entangled and indirect effects of the hybrid political arrangements in the vast imperial system. Polish and Finnish ways out of the hybrid empire depended on the broader framework and were affected by adaptation and learning. They do not, however, confirm the simplistic theorem that autocracy breeds radicalism and political freedom brings moderation. Democratic suffrage must be analytically decoupled from the effective agency of elected bodies, since one without the other can bring a more decisive shift toward extra-parliamentary power seizures, which Finland demonstrated in 1918 and as did Poland, in a way, in 1926. Moreover, a set of synchronic and diachronic refraction effects were at play that determined the possibilities for local decision-making. Our point is not that the political choices made by Polish and Finnish socialist were determined by systemic effects. Instead, based on our analysis of these two cases, we claim that both the diachronic sequence of events and the synchronic power relations inside the Russian Empire made certain stances towards parliamentarism and revolution more likely at different points in time.

Regarding the diachronic factor, the sequence within the broader imperial make-up tipped the scales at crucial junctures. Crises of the Russian Empire offered tempting windows of opportunity for local players. The Finnish SDP succeeded in winning a parliament with one chamber, as well as universal suffrage, during the imperial mass mobilizations of 1905, whereas the first major proletarian uprising in Poland did not lead to a democratic national parliament. On the other hand, this

<sup>144</sup>Capoccia, *Defending Democracy*, 153–62.

sequence of events regarding parliamentarism later partly pushed the two borderlands along different paths. When the path to full independence opened in 1917, the Finnish parliament had already failed to deliver social improvements for ten years, which reduced its credibility and increased the risk of a civil war. Especially so among those supporting the SDP, for that party had the largest share of votes in every election from 1907 to 1917. The emerging Polish state, on the other hand, carried no similar burden of a failed parliament and could thus convincingly portray national self-determination and democratic parliamentarism as not only mutually supportive but also a realistic combination that could change the world.

Synchronic relational effects mattered no less than sequential ones inside the hybrid empire. The interests of Finnish, Polish, and Russian socialist and non-socialist actors could align or collide, depending on the moment analyzed. Before 1917, parliamentarism was not perceived as contradictory to socialist revolution, and the introduction of parliamentary government was within the Russian Empire perceived as a result of revolution, taken as its necessary condition.<sup>145</sup> For a decade, the parliamentary script of revolution was shared in both borderlands but deployed differently in respect to regionally varying political institutions of the empire. When the Bolsheviks took power, they offered both ideological and material support for the proletarian revolution in Finland, which the Finnish SDP ultimately accepted in a situation that seemed to lack better options. In this case, the parliamentary script was questioned simultaneously with the pan-imperial shift. Meanwhile in Poland, national parliamentarism was seen as a militant idea that remained within the revolutionary script, while its Bolshevik contestation was perceived as a foreign, imperial intrusion.

On another note, endogenic articulations reversed broader imperial forces in the Polish “negative” case, when local affection for the national body politic and parliamentarism harnessed enough people to oppose the Bolsheviks in 1920. The endogenic revolutionary zeal of the Finns, by contrast, was not strong enough to seize power with revolutionary violence when the pan-imperial conjuncture stopped the Bolsheviks, busy on other fronts of the Russian civil war, from directly assisting them.<sup>146</sup> In hindsight, the Finnish attempt, compared to the Bolshevik success, was perhaps not revolutionary enough; rhetoric was based on the defense of the dissolved parliament, and the political terror there was not as brutal as in Russia and peaked when the revolution had already been lost.<sup>147</sup> The broader implication regarding the nexus of state and revolution is that the state without revolution (interwar Poland) appeared to be verbally progressive yet moderate in practice. The aborted revolution from outside assisted the weak state in containment and concentrating power. The initial wave of reforms stopped or was even partially reversed.<sup>148</sup> Post-revolution Finland was verbally reactionary but countered the inner socialist threat with

<sup>145</sup>Ian D. Thatcher, “Scripting the Russian Revolution,” in Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein, eds., *Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 213–30; Sablin, “Russia in the Global Parliamentary Moment.”

<sup>146</sup>Jon Smele, *The “Russian” Civil Wars, 1916–1926: Ten Years that Shook the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Borislav Chernev, *Twilight of Empire: The Brest-Litovsk Conference and the Remaking of East-Central Europe, 1917–1918* (Toronto: University Press of Toronto), 2019.

<sup>147</sup>Tikka, “Warfare and Terror,” 96, 101, 106–8; Alapuro, *State and Revolution*, 152–72.

<sup>148</sup>Wiktor Marzec, “Forging Polity in Times of International Class War: The Parliamentary Rhetoric on Labour in the First Polish Diet, 1919–1922,” *International Review of Social History* 66, 3 (2021): 443–67.

containment via land redistribution and societal reforms.<sup>149</sup> Both pathways remained possible outcomes of the great imperial revolution, restructuring the figuration of the state in post-imperial Eurasia.

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<sup>149</sup>Ilkka Alanen, "Finland as a Peasant Society and the Agrarian Reforms," in Leo Granberg and Jouko Nikula, eds., *The Peasant State: The State and Rural Questions in 20th Century Finland* (Rovaniemi: University of Lapland, 1995), 42–52.

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