

## Introduction

*Reflections on Political Thought in Finland*

Today 'Finland' can be understood as a contingent construct of thoughts, languages and practises. As opposed to the national historiography of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, 'Finland' appears as a plural and historical entity. For political thought Finland constitutes an arena in which opposed currents of thought and practices of several Empires have confronted and de- and recomposed with each other. The vocabularies of the central political cultures of Europe are transformed into a unique constellation. 'Finnish political thought' is, accordingly, not 'Finnish' in essence.

The construction of a specific Finnish polity is the result of successful decolonization. The politico-cultural location of Finland is a moving one. It has shifted from being a province in the Swedish Empire to an autonomous unit in 'Eastern' Europe, then to an independent state in 'Northern' Europe or 'Scandinavia'. After the joining the European Union, Finland has recently been included in 'Western Europe'.

The construction of 'Finland' can be seen through some symbolic dates (cf. *addendum*). A conventional periodization distinguishes between the political regimes: the Swedish period (up to 1809), the Russian era (1809-1917) and independent Finland (since 1917-1918). Political and intellectual life has often been divided into the First (-1944) and Second Republic, although no changes in the

constitution took place. Nowadays the slogan 'Third Republic' is sometimes used for the post-Kekkonen (1981-) era or for the time after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

To speak of 'Finnish' political thought in the Swedish period is questionable. Although the *autonomy* of Finland in the Russian Empire was, at least until the reopening of the Estate Diet sessions in 1863, administrative rather than political, it created space for nationalistic political thought in particular beginning in the 1840s, more or less simultaneously with other 'new nations' in Europe. 'Finnishness' was the official ideology of the Finnish '*First Republic*' (1919-1944), shaped by the experience of the civil war and of a right wing intellectual hegemony. The '*Second Republic*' in the post-war era has been shaped by the integration of the Left into Finnish political culture, by pro-Soviet neutrality and by the establishment of Finland as one of the 'Western parliamentary democracies'. Recent changes in its international orientation, reorientations in the party system, neocapitalist stripping of the welfare state, and privatizations, an increased acceptance of pluralism and heterogeneity of cultures and life-styles have reshaped the political coordinates in Finland.

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The most important Empire for Finnish politics has been, of course, the *Swedish* one. 'Finland' was only a common name for some of the provinces before 1809. The myth of the Free Nordic Peasant, the tradition of popular representation in the Estate Diet, the existence of Monarchic elements in the Republican Finnish Constitution, the Lutheran state church, the legal framework and the centralistic administrative structure combined with municipal autonomy are obvious aspects of this Swedish heritage. Even in independent Finland 'to follow the Swedish example' has been a common topos, although the populist opposition both to Sweden as a former imperial country and especially to Swedish as the language of the narrow Finnish establishment has also been strong, especially in the inter-war years. Today, however, the formerly nationalistic bourgeois parties are also proud of Finnish bilingualism. To be counted among the 'Nordic

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Welfare States' has been the latest demonstration of inclusion into the Swedish model.

To speak of a *Russian*, Czarist or even Byzantine impact on Finnish politics and culture is not so uncommon today. This is, however, an exaggeration: the Russian heritage in Finnish political and intellectual life is astonishingly narrow. Still, in the bureaucratic style, in terms of reverence towards the authorities etc., traits of the Russian heritage do have some significance, likewise in the relative strength of the revolutionary and Communist movements since 1905. Recently the old St. Petersburg 'multiculturality' has also been appreciated as something from which the Finns, too, could learn today.

*French* practices of the Enlightenment and bureaucracy were mediated to Finland both through Sweden and through Russia. French was also the language in which the Russian authorities communicated with the autonomous Finnish part of the Empire in the 19th century. Human rights, freedom of the press and organization, the Republic, the multi-party system etc. can be seen as expressions of the reception of French thought models into Finnish politics. The revolutionary Constitution proposal of the Reds in 1918 was also inspired by French parliamentarism and by *Swiss* ideals of direct democracy as much as by the Soviets in Russia.

The *German* heritage is in many respects in the background of the Swedish one, for instance, in Lutheran Christianity and in the continental legal system. Idealistic, especially Hegelian, philosophy was decisive for the Fennoman nationalistic movement, which was originally a linguistic, philosophical and political phenomenon all at the same time. Finland as a unitary and homogeneous nation-state was constructed according to the model provided by German philosophy, in opposition to the imperial models of Sweden and Russia. The university system, the state-guided economic and social policy as well as the reception of Marxist Socialism also belong to the German heritage in Finland. In similar fashion the engineering and medical sciences in Finland were based for a long time on German models. German dominance was greatest in the intellectual life of the 'First Republic' but vanished rapidly after World War II.

The *British* political heritage, such as that of the Glorious Revolution, did not enjoy much of a reception in Finland. Parliamentarism

in the Finnish Constitution of 1919 was also interpreted according to the French paradigm implying the multi-party system. Commerce and trade, which have also shaped Finnish culture and politics since the second half of the 19th century, contributed, however, to an Anglophone orientation, especially in urban and Swedish-speaking Finland.

*The United States* provided the main direction of Finnish emigration at the turn of the century. Through the returning emigrants the American heritage played a role not only in business but also in the formation of Finnish Socialism and Communism. After World War II the impact of US culture has become overwhelming: it is not uncommon to speak of Finland as the 'most American country in Europe'. The impact of the American style of thinking and type of empiricist research practice in the social sciences has been immense.

The plurality of imperial heritages has, today more than ever, an obvious significance for Finnish intellectual and political life. The plurality of competing intellectual metropolises and the distance to each of them has been one of the main advantages of Finnish political thinking. Anyone studying political thought in Finland has, as an implicit requirement of quality, to master several European languages. It is this plurality which gives specific opportunities for political thinking in the Finnish context.

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The conventional dichotomies of political language appear problematic, when applied to Finnish politics. A specification of various 'isms' is needed in order to understand the originality of Finnish political culture.

It is easy to understand why there has never been strong '*Conservatism*' in Finland. In this semi-colonial country neither aristocrats nor monarchists had a chance, while the strong bureaucratic component of the Swedish heritage did not mean an ideological conservatism. In particular, resistance to the parliamentary reform of 1906 remained marginal. The political influence of the Lutheran religion and the established State Church has also declined rapidly in

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the 20th century. Conservatism in Finland refers to a resistant attitude to political change rather than to a definite political ideology. In this sense it can be found in all colours of the political spectrum.

The Fennoman *nationalistic* movement was a complex intellectual phenomenon. Its first wave was a revival of Finnish language and culture, symbolized by the creation of the national epos, *Kalevala*. The politicization of the movement was due to the philosopher J.V. Snellman, whose Hegelianism had some original traits: he omitted economy from the civil society and made the moral-political nature of action the basis for the distinction between state and civil society. Fennoman cultural nationalism put an emphasis on the education and elevation of the people, and it became the leading force in the university sphere and in the bureaucracy. In the late 19th century Fennoman politics were more exclusively concentrated on the language question, trying to replace Swedish with Finnish in all fields of life. In the Old Finns party of the turn of the century the critical impulse of a mass movement was replaced by paternalistic social and cultural reform.

It is very common to speak of the weakness of Finnish *Liberalism*: liberal parties and movements have always remained marginal in this country. Despite this much of Western liberalism – including human rights, freedom of the press and a market economy – characterizes Finland. Liberalism has emerged as a by-product in Finnish politics. The liberalization of the Finnish economy, culture and political rights without strong liberalism has been common to different political currents and not to a monopoly of ‘liberals’.

The lack of a specific *republican* language is characteristic of Finnish politics. Questions of polity – constitutional alternatives, citizens’ participation and political rights, parliamentary procedures etc. – have not been a controversial subject in Finnish politics. Since nobody defended the old order, an active defence of democratization was not needed when the occasion for it arose in 1905. The Parliamentary reform of 1906 was defended as a measure to strengthen Finland’s position in relation to Russia and as an occasion for social reforms. It was not seen as a creation of new chances of politicking for the citizens or new conditions for the political judgement of politicians in parliamentary decision-making.

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Judging by their electoral support, the Social Democrats and also the Communists have been strong in Finland. *Socialistic* thinking has, however, not played an important role in Finnish politics. The “Socialists” have been those who emphasize “social reforms” more than others. This is partly due to the rural character of the early support for the Social Democrats and also for the Communists. The number of those on the academic Left remained small. The ‘November Socialists’ of 1905, the cultural leftists of the thirties and the academic Marxists of the seventies are all exceptions which never shaped the political thinking of the socialist parties.

The *agrarian* ideology in Finland had similarities to the Russian *narodniki* in its apology for a rural style of life and culture. Since the twenties the “Rural Union” (*Maalaisliitto*), later the Centre Party, has been a major force in Finnish governments. It combined rural populism with agrarian interest policies and with etatist identification with the Finnish State. The Kekkonen presidency incarnated the combination of populist sympathies and etatistic strategies of intervention, without worrying too much about legal and procedural obstacles.

The *totalitarian* tendency among the Whites in 1918 led to prison camps and to an ideology attempting to extinguish not only Communism but also all sorts of political and cultural pluralism. The right wing extremist Lapua movement around 1930 was an attempt to reaffirm the monolithic ideal of ‘White Finland’. Its strength is one of the features which located Finland’s ideology close to the new states of Eastern Europe after World War I.

The populist style, appealing to “the people”, has been common to several ideological currents in Finland. It has had, however, a common opponent, *legalistic* thinking. This is a mixture of the bureaucratic defence of the legal status quo, a constitutionalist defence of old “rights”, and a moderate liberalism defending the procedural approach to reforms against populist intervention and direct action. This legalism was part of the Swedish heritage in Finland and found use as a strategy against Russian imperial claims at the turn of the century.

Anarchists, syndicalists and the anti-authoritarian New Left of the sixties have been curiosities in Finland. The environmental and

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anti-nuclear movements of the seventies gained a certain amount of popularity while the *Greens*, however, entered the Finnish Parliament as long ago as 1983. Since then the Greens have enjoyed relatively strong intellectual and electoral support in urban Finland and are now also part of the coalition government. Intellectually the role of the Greens can be seen as a new expression of the German heritage.

Female suffrage was an inherent part of the Parliamentary Reform of 1906. Since then women's contribution to Finnish politics has been considerable and the trend is gaining strength. Egalitarian thinking has been the main current of *Feminism* in Finland. In the seventies there was a wave of Marxist feminism, while since the eighties feminism has been characterized by its pluralism. American, Scandinavian, French, German and Italian currents play a role in Feminist and Lesbian thinking in present-day Finland.

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To reflect upon the specificity of Finnish political thought from a present-day perspective makes it possible to look at certain less obvious features that also provide special potential for political thinking. Finland's *peripheral* position has, in certain respects, been relativized in the era of mondialization and, for as long as it remains, it can also be used as a resource against strong trends and fashions at the centre as well as to take advantage of Finland's inclusion in the European Union. The relative *lack of traditionalism* can be seen as an opportunity for liberation from the burden of history. The *rapidity* of intellectual and political changes, visible in sudden political turns, unknown in imperial cultures like Britain and Sweden, can now also be understood as an opportunity for flexibility in a world in which fixed conventions have become obstacles to action. The same holds for the decline of the strongly *organized* character of political movements.

Two features which still give Finnish thinking a special character are the *unitary* ideal in Finnish thought and the *ideological* character of political conflicts. As contradictory as they first appear,

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they are in fact closely related. The nature of this unity was always controversial, but the idea of 'Finland' as a unity was common to all parties and ideological currents. Since the 1970s the consensus of opposed projects appeared to be ideal, and the peak of consensual politics has been reached by the present Lipponen 'rainbow' government. It consists of Social Democrats, the bourgeois Coalition Party, the Swedish People's Party, the Left Union and the Greens. Ideological currents are made 'commensurable' in terms of daily politics through common participation in the government.

Thanks to the relative decline of ideological politics an opportunity for a deliberative style of politics may be noticed. Ideological conflicts presented positions as if they were 'deduced' from ideologies and the necessary compromises always appeared as potential treason, instead of being understood as clever moves in politicking. The decline of ideological politics can be seen as a chance for increased deliberation between open alternatives concerning courses of action: the 'line' of the party, compromises involved with participation in government coalitions as well as alternatives in foreign policy appear as matters of controversial discussion.

The decline of ideological and organizational politics also helps us to understand politics not as a symmetrical controversy of positions but rather as a horizon of asymmetric conflicts between different sorts of politicization, opening new faces of contingency. For a politics operating with the asymmetries between different types of politicization, political thought can have a greater role for political action than in the established politics of recent decades.

## **Historical Coordinates of Finnish Political Thought**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Events in Finland</b>	<b>Events around Finland</b>
12th century	Inclusion of 'Finnish' provinces into the Swedish Empire	
1530's		Protestant Reformation and State Church in the Swedish Empire
1640	University founded in Turku	
1703		St. Petersburg founded on Swedish soil
1721-1772		'Age of Freedom', the Four Estate Diet dominated Swedish politics
1772		Coup d'Etat of Gustav III for Enlightened Monarchy
1808-1809	War between Sweden and Russia, Finland occupied by Russian troops, Porvoo Diet, Alexander I granted Finland 'autonomy', Hamina Peace Treaty confirmed Finland's inclusion in the Russian Empire	
1811ff	Beginnings of a separate Finnish administration Helsinki became the capital of Finland	
1828	University moved from Turku to Helsinki	
1830s-1840s	Fennoman nationalist movement, first as a cultural and linguistic movement, then as a philosophical and political movement	
1847	Suometar, first modern Finnish language newspaper	

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<b>Date</b>	<b>Events in Finland</b>	<b>Events around Finland</b>
1863	Reopening of the Estate Diet sessions, beginning of Finnish party politics	
1899	February Manifesto attempted a reduction in Finnish autonomy	
1904-1907		Russo-Japanese War, Revolution in Russia
	Political general strike in Finland, Parliamentary reform with universal male and female suffrage, first elections to the Finnish Parliament (Eduskunta)	
1917	Law on Finnish internal independence	February Revolution in Russia Bolshevik Revolution
1918	Declaration of Independence Civil War between the Whites and the Reds, Defeat of the Reds with the help of intervention from German troops, Election of a German King by the Parliament (from which the Socialists were excluded), who never ascended the throne	
		Defeat of Germany in World War I
1919	Republican Constitution in Finland	
1929-1930	Beginning of the Right Wing extremist Lapua movement	
1937	Coalition between Centre parties and Social democrats	
1939-1940	Winter War against the Soviet Union, parts of Karelia ceded to the Soviet Union in the Moscow Peace Treaty	

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<b>Date</b>	<b>Events in Finland</b>	<b>Events around Finland</b>
1941-1944	Finnish participation in the war against the Soviet Union on the German side, reoccupation of lost areas and further parts of Karelia	
1944	Armistice with the Soviet Union, expulsion of German troops in the Lapland war,	
1945	Success of the Left in elections, coalition between Social Democrats, Agrarians and Communists & their allies	
1948	Pact of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union including the principle of Finnish neutrality in the disputes between the Great Powers	
1955	Return of the Porkkala area to Finland by the Soviet Union, Finnish membership of the United Nations and Nordic Council	
1961	Finland joins EFTA	
1973	Free Trade Treaty between Finland and the EEC	
1989-1991		Dissolution of the Soviet Union
1994-1995	Referendum in favour of Finnish EU membership with effect from the beginning of 1995	