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REPRESENTATION, NATION AND TIME

Jussi Kurunmäki (2000): Representation, nation and time: the political rhetoric of the 1866 parliamentary reform in Sweden. Jyväskylä studies in education, psychology and social research, Jyväskylän yliopisto. 253 pages.

Jussi Kurunmäki's PhD thesis *Representation, Nation and Time. The Political Rhetoric of the 1866 Parliamentary Reform in Sweden* throws much new light on a crucial period in Swedish history. However, the interest and the relevance of this thesis go much beyond Swedish history in the 1860s. The theoretical and methodological approach of the author opens up new perspectives on the conditions of policy-making and politics and how to analyse them. The general problem the thesis confronts is how the past is mobilised to legitimatise politics, and how the construction of a specific history is related to images of the future. The question of social inclusion and exclusion in such processes is discussed as well as how a nation is defined both in terms of its demarcation to other nations and in terms of its domestic democratic potential. Moreover, the thesis connects the Swedish parliamentary reform in the 1860s to broader and more long-term trends in European political thought and institutional change. Therefore, the problems addressed in the thesis are not only the problems of the 1860s but very much also the problems of today in politics.

The historical example sheds light on the preconditions of our own times.

The main question deals with the concept of “national representation”: what is a nation? How and by whom is the nation represented? Who are in and who are out in what with concepts like “nation,” “folk,” “society,” and so on is described as an entity and entirety. Jussi Kurumäki demonstrates how the concept of national representation is embedded in a semantic field of adjacent concepts like “patriotic,” “citizen,” “society,” “public opinion,” and “progress”. The mobilisation of history, of the past, and the political legitimatising construction of continuity is central in the analysis as is the image of time among the constructors. The reform was as so many other reforms a redefinition of the Swedish polity. Kurumäki introduces two analytical tools to investigate this redefinition: nation by representation and representation by nation, which express constitutive and constructive views on the phenomenon of the nation. The problem of representation became particularly relevant after the Jacobin experiences in the French Revolution. These experiences had long-lasting impacts and played no doubt a role in the Swedish debate in the 1860s. The issue of representation was a matter of how to establish social freedom and equality under protection from violent influences by the masses. From here a link is built from questions of democracy and equality to the question of social inclusion and exclusion.

The method can be described as conceptual history where Jussi Kurumäki has two points of reference: the German “founding father” of *Begriffsgeschichte* Reinhart Koselleck and the English specialist in political theory Quentin Skinner, who in his approach has emphasised the contextualisation of political thought. The two points of reference are in crucial respects different, and therefore the combination of them can at the first glance seem astonishing. However, the author is convincing in his argument for using both of them together as an intellectual source of inspiration.

The main argument of the thesis confronts the conventional wisdom where the transformation from an order of estates to a parliamentary order of two or one chamber is the consequence of democratisation and modernisation processes where in a more or less functional way claims and pressures from below are integrated and chan-

nelled by the elites into political reforms. Basically this conventional view reflects an evolutionary and linear view on historical change where there is some “deeper” structural meaning (“cause,” “reason”) under/behind the change. In both Marxist and liberal versions of this view modern societies proceed more or less according to plan to ever higher and more sophisticated levels. Jussi Kurunmäki questions and challenges this view. The architects of the reform in the 1860s in Sweden did not at all envisage any break-through of a new era of bourgeois and liberal individualism. Particular interests were not rejected but they represented/reflected the entirety of society rather than the interests of the individuals as such in the view of the reformers. In the obsolete old order the estates represented the entirety of society. By the mid-19th century new social groups and classes had emerged without being represented in that order. The “reform” was a kind of refiguration of the institutional arrangements to cope with this development. It was nothing but a kind of up-dating or fine-tuning of the representation of the entirety (“the society,” “the nation”). The issue at stake was not to turn the social organisation upside down and take the individual instead of the nation as the point of departure. The problem was to save the entirety. The reform was not a democratisation of the suffrage rules and a step towards a more universal suffrage. Nobody was interested in an extension of the suffrage to the masses. Neither was it the matter of a step towards parliamentarism, i.e. a displacement of power from the king and his government to the Diet. It was in this respect rather the matter of saving the existing balance of power established in the Constitution of 1809. The reading of the Parliamentary Reform in 1866 as an important evolutionary step towards democracy with universal suffrage and parliamentarism is nothing but a retrospect reading in the light of later developments.

Jussi Kurunmäki comes to this conclusion through a distinction between *ex ante* and *ex post* views. *Ex ante* is the view of the actors before they knew what was going to happen. What concepts, what language, what images of future horizons did they develop and what did they mean? How did they use their language? *Ex post* is the retrospect view from a position of knowledge about what happened. Much reflection on society has taken this *ex post* position as the point of departure for describing social developments, which have got the

touch of being predetermined. Kurumäki confronts this view and suggests historical processes with much more open outcomes and where alternatives to what actually happens always exist although they often are forgotten by the posterity.

In conclusion, this is a convincing and in many respects innovative PhD thesis. It is well written and well argued. The text is based on the reading of an extensive literature. The research in this field is presented convincingly and from this presentation Kurumäki defines his own fruitful problem, which he attacks with both energy, consequence, and creativity. The connection of the Swedish reform debate to the broader European context of politics and theoretical reflection is made with precision and accuracy.