**The 5th conference of European Information and Research Network on Parliamentary History: *Parlamentarismuskritik und Antiparlamentarismus in Europa*, Berlin, 7th–8th May 2015**

Although important historical ideas can be implemented in a number of different ways, each is accompanied by criticism. The challenges may have a number of structural starting points; however, their goal is always the same: to provoke distrust in the new values or to materially impede the life force of the idea and the social and political practices based on it. One of the fundamental European historical developments – rule by elected representatives – proves this in a number of ways. The topic, which remains relevant even today, has been the subject of the 5th conference of the European Information and Research Network on Parliamentary History hosted on 7th and 8th May 2015 in Berlin. The conference, titled *Criticism of Parliamentarism and Anti-parliamentarism in Europe*, was organized by the Commission of Parliamentary History and History of Parliamentarian Parties operating under the German Bundestag. The conference was held at the Representation of Land Rheinland-Pfalz.

The discussion was divided into three general topics. The objective of the first topic – *Arguments and Pictures* – was to analyse discrepancies between an ideal parliament and the actual parliamentary practice. As pointed out by Marie-Luise Recker (Frankfurt am Main), Chairwoman of the Council of the Commission of Parliamentary History and History of Parliamentarian Parties, in her introductory speech to the conference, these discrepancies are best demonstrated by the endurance and harmonious nature of the anti-parliamentary discourse in Europe. This was the subject of the main reflection on the conference (Criticism of Parliamentarism & Anti-parliamentarism in Europe) given by Jean Garrigues (Orléans) prior to the opening of the first topic. Anti-parliamentarism began with the French Revolution and developed as theocratic opposition to democracy and the republican idea, by refuting the legitimacy of parliamentary representation, building public distrust of the new social and political elites, and was expressed as distrust and disregard for elections and their results by the press, caricature, and various pamphlets. Garrigues focused on French examples, presenting the Bonapartist, Pétainist and Gaulliest regimes as well as the Boulangist and Poujadist movements that turned their backs on the parliamentary system. Their actions questioned the principle of representation, which the European anti-parliamentarists saw as an imperfect institutional practice of democracy: they believed the parliamentarism as a form of popular sovereignty merely substituted the lost Sovereign. This was also the interpretation of the anti-parliamentary attitudes of the critics of the French revolutionary National Assembly presented in the first paper of the *Arguments and Pictures* general topic, authored by Paul Friedland (New York) (The Assembly that Pretends to be National. Anti-Theatricality and Anti-Parliamentarism in Revolutionary France). Friedland stressed that the Assembly was seen as a group of political players imagining they were something that they actually were not.

The issue of anti-parliamentarism in France was also tackled by Nicolas Roussellier (Paris) (The impact of a repertoire anti-parliamentarian attitudes in the French Republican experience). Roussellier pointed out that the anti-parliamentarian attitudes in France are as old as the French republican experience. In the Second Republic, from 1848 to 1851, such attitudes were expressed both by right- and left-wing political groups. Anti-parliamentarism has been present in the Third Republic from its beginning as well. Despite its legislative successes (voting to institute the national education system in the 1880s, secularization in the early 20th century, and social insurance in the 1920s), the parliament was target of frequent criticism. The objections were twofold. On the one hand, they stemmed from the general anti-parliamentary repertoire of the early 19th century, and on the other hand they developed – in a more subtle but much more damaging way – within the framework of the existing administration ("a public servant who dedicates his life to the country is worth more than a politician"). The encounter of both anti-parliamentary stances in the 1930s resulted in the collapse of French republicanism at the time.

Within the *Arguments and Pictures* topic, Adéla Gjuríčova (Prague) presented the issue of anti-parliamentarism in Eastern Europe. Her presentation (Anti-politics and anti-parliamentarism. Václav Havel and the Czechoslovak parliament in the 1990s) enriched the conference with an overview of the political dynamics in Eastern Europe following the historical changes that occurred in the late 1980s and early 90s. In the Czechoslovak socialist period, Havel based his political stance on the so-called anti-political politics, i.e. the expression of political views in a non-political manner. For the dissident movements of the eastern Central Europe, the latter was essential for social activism as well as for individual spiritual survival in the systems of political restrictions. However, the "anti-political" efforts to change the regime were marked by a conspicuous lack of the parliamentary idea. This lack was also characteristic of Havel's presidency in the post-Communist Czechoslovakia. Havel systematically criticized the parliament for being too slow and hesitant, and for mostly upholding the interests of individual political parties instead of the will of the people. Havel's anti-parliamentarism was reflected in his mobilization of the public against the federal parliament and by his attempts to pressure the representatives on how to vote on various issues. Furthermore, he worked systematically to increase the presidential powers at the expense of the parliament's. The author pointed out that Havel's contemporaries, as well as researchers investigating his political career, tended to overlook the mentioned characteristics of his presidency.

The presentation of the driving forces, self-perception and forms of anti-parliamentarism in Europe was followed by the discussion of the sphere of its manifestation. Within the *Media and Arenas* general topic, the subject was discussed by Theo Jung (Freiburg), Thomas Lindenberger (Potsdam) and Barbara Wolbring (Frankfurt am Main). Theo Jung (Parliament as a stage of criticism. Vox populi, vox bovis – Anti-Parliamentarism in the Reichtag) shed some light on the anti-parliamentary nature of the Reichstag of the German Empire. Jung's presentation was tied to the current shift in the research of the Reichstag's role in the German political system at the time. While research used to focus on the constitutional aspects of its operation, today's studies are mostly concerned with the aspects associated with cultural history. These studies are concerned both with the public perception of the Reichstag and the extent to which the representatives have crossed party boundaries to develop an *esprit de corps* that would allow them to cooperate with other political institutions.

Jung was interested in the extent to which the extraparliamentary criticism of parliamentarism had penetrated the Reichstag itself. Such criticism presented a paradox, as many representatives – social democrats, conservatives and national minority delegates – doubted the Reichstag's legitimacy. They expressed their doubts by demanding *true* parliamentarism, i.e. an improved version of it (with rules of procedure, and a system of warnings and punishments). Other than that, the representatives expressed unreserved support for parliamentarism. The anti-parliamentarism, widespread among the political public and politicians themselves, was overlooked in the parliament. The representatives in the Reichstag followed the parliament's internal logic and self-perception that underestimated the extent of the "anti-parliamentarism" targeted at the proverbial "weakness" of the German Reichstag.

The antipode of parliamentary discourse – the politics of the street – was addressed by Thomas Lindenberger. In his presentation (The street as an arena of politics in the long 20th centrury), Linderberger pointed out that the street or public spaces have been used for political purposes since the French Revolution. The street is a mass medium supported by its own physical presence, which enables people to demonstrate their political goals and identities. However, the street is also the place where conflicts unfold between different groups regarding their acknowledgement by the society and their collaboration with the public – the conflicts that may have political and cultural consequences based on their adherence to law and order. The concept of "street politics" connects various dimensions of everything political expressed on and by the street, with the street thus becoming a separate political arena alongside the parliament, the government, the press, etc. In Germany, modern street protests began in the late empire, and Linderberger outlined their diverse development until the German re-unification.

Barbara Wolbring spoke about the space of extraparliamentary discourse between the street and the building of the parliament. Her critical discussion (The mass media as stage and tribunal. Parliament in the “media democracy”) describes today's Bundestag as follows: Empty benches in the plenary chamber. Prefabricated and predictable atatements by both the opposition and the governing parties instead of controversy and struggle for optimal solutions. It has become widely popular to say that in parliaments like the German Bundestag political decisions nowadays are merely announced. Whereas discussion and decision-making takes place behind closed doors in committees, parliamentary group meetings or informal consultations.

Barbara Wolbring determined that the political debate that had vanished from the parliament moved to TV talk shows. We are living in the age of media democracy and mass media, which had, by refusing to exclude the public, become the place of political action. Since 1998, when Sabina Christiansen created the Sonntagabend show, politicians, journalists, representatives of various interests, and scientists have been discussing public matters in a number of talk shows; however, it is uncertain what this means for the parliamentary culture and for the recognition of representative democracy. We can understand the spatial transition of the parliamentary debate and its duration as a categorical political shift, i.e. the adaptation of politics to popular tastes, which only accept TV-ready political slogans rather than reasoned arguments appropriate to the complexity of the political subjects they address.

The third topic – *Actors and Practicians of Anti-Parliamentarism* – focused on the manifestation of anti-parliamentary attitudes. The first paper on this issue (The Non-Voter. Rethinking the Category) was presented by James Retallack (Toronto). He pointed out that the findings on the non-voter category in relevant literature are not static as they are the result of the variable development of intellectual and political environments. New possibilities of action in the civil society offered by technology and the mass culture – e.g. online voting, spontaneous mass protests organized through Twitter – have forced researchers to take into account the largest possible set of institutions as well as individual and psychological reasons associated with the "performance of the individual's duty" of voting. Citizens' activity is present behind political curtains, in legislative bodies, study halls, in media and in the streets.

Faced with the remarkable variation and inconsistency of interpretations trying to explain where and why non-voters can be found, James Retallack focused on the historical example of German non-voters from 1867 to 1918. He stressed that the category of non-voters must be evaluated in a new, broad perspective, based on historical documents, not on political theories or moral imperatives, and not even necessarily on international comparisons. Retallack's evaluation was not concerned with non-voters who voluntarily practise their "democratic abstention" (like a responsible drinker who takes a turn to avoid the pub), but rather with the exclusion practised by the authoritarian state. In Germany, the latter used voter censuses and indirect elections to limit the electoral weight of millions of citizens. The metaphor of "democratic abstention" is thus turned on its head. After 1900, mass politics and its implications spurred the desire of the common people to gain a voice in the society through full participation in the elections. However, the "cup of democracy" was in other hands. It was held by anti-Semites who strived for indirect elections in the name of the blocked middle class, as well as reactionaries who claimed that the social democrats would suffer a defeat should all bourgeois voters actually go to the polling stations. As the defeated right termed the "red" election of 1912 as "Judenwahlen", this delusion took a sinister turn. The "national habit" of voting representatives into the Reichstag thus did not mean that the Germans actually practised democracy – at least not in a manner that would prepare them for the opportunity represented by the Weimar Republic.

Political caricature may be seen as another tool for expressing anti-parliamentarist attitudes. It was studied by Andreas Biefang (Berlin), whose paper ("Kiss my rump". An indecent imagery as a means of criticism of parliament?) dealt with the motif of the – sometimes naked – backside as the depiction of the politician's main characteristic. The motif of the backside is deeply rooted in the European history. It was first used in Great Britain in the 18th century and was taken up by the French and the Germans by the 1830s to express critical attitude towards the parliament. In contrast to the theoretical critique of parliamentarism, political caricature stems from the ideological opposition to it.

Obstructionism often goes side by side with anti-parliamentarism. It was addressed by Benjamin Conrad (Mainz). In his presentation (Opposition by obstruction. The strategies of fundamental oppositional parliamentarian of national minority in Eastern Europe during the interwar period), Conrad analysed the conduct of the national minority representatives in Eastern-European countries that were established or expanded after the First World War – Latvia, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Conrad focused on the representatives who defied the country of the majority. Their parliamentary strategies and methods often opposed parliamentarism and included boycotting the parliamentary procedure and interrupting sessions with songs or speeches in their language, especially if only the language of the national majority was permitted in the parliament. With regard to obstructionist practices, Conrad pointed out the behaviour of nationally diverse parties that were opposed to the political system of rival parties (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia) and of representatives belonging to the national majority that were opposed to the system as well.

Pasi Ihalainen (Jyväskylä) focused on an international comparison of anti-parliamentary attitudes. In his paper (Royalists, republicans, revolutionaries. Criticism of parliamentarism in Swedish and Finnish debates and practices in comparison with Britain, Germany and Russia, 1917–1919), Ihalainen examined the constitutional unrest that gripped Finland and Sweden after the Russian revolution, in 1917–1919. In both countries, left- and right-wing political camps of the time were critical of their parliamentary systems in comparison with the Western (British and French) systems as well as with German and Bolshevik anti-parliamentarism. Leading Finnish and Swedish parliamentary representatives openly opposed (unlimited) parliamentarism, and some even renounced parliamentary principles altogether (or were alleged to have done so by their political rivals). In Finland, both leftist and rightist critics of parliamentarism based their attitudes on the obvious discrepancy between the expectations and the reality of parliamentarism following the radical parliamentary reform of 1906 that was supposed to establish the "most democratic popular representation in the world"). In Sweden, left-wing critique was prompted by the shortcomings of the existing parliamentary system that the right wanted to preserve.

Both the Finnish and the Swedish left were influenced by the German leftist interpretation of parliamentarism. In 1917–1919, various levels of critique and rejection of the "bourgeois" parliamentarism existed among Finnish social democrats, ranging from the willingness to break parliamentary rules in the parliament wherein they had the majority, through challenging the legitimacy of the parliament with a bourgeois majority, to an armed uprising inspired by the Russian revolutionary anti-parliamentary practice. The Finnish civil war of 1918 that reflected the concepts of the German left was accompanied by a consistently pro-parliamentary attitude of the Swedish social-democratic workers' party. After 1918, the "Western" or "bourgeois" parliamentarism was rejected in both countries only by the extreme left.

The Finnish and Swedish right with their royalist and anti-parliamentary sentiments, the admiration of the "constitutional monarchy" and their criticism of the weakness of the "Western" parliamentarism did not differ much from the Prussian right. However, they respected the parliament and, unlike the German right, did not threaten to resist the existing order. Some Finnish right-wing supporters were already defending parliamentarism by 1917, while their Swedish colleagues began accepting the parliamentary reality in 1919. Both countries' governments were parliamentary, although they implemented limitations reminiscent of the Weimar Constitution. Their adjustment to parliamentarism was successful thanks to a long-standing common tradition of popular representation that also included the peasantry. In Sweden, parliamentarism was most consistently supported by the liberals, while the main Finnish political force defending parliamentarism from left- and right-wing extremes was the agrarian centre.

Ihalainen's paper wrapped up the discussion of the conference's topics. The conference itself was concluded by Andreas Schulz, Secretary-General of the Commission of Parliamentary History and History of Parliamentarian Parties. In his concluding speech (Balance and Perspectives), Schulz summarized its findings, stating that the critiques of parliamentarism and anti-parliamentarism constitute a discussion complex that is intertwined with parliamentary practice. The arguments presented by the critics of parliamentarism remain more or less unchanged and are compatible with extremely diverse political tendencies. Since the line between the critique of parliamentarism and parliamentary practice is blurred, the presenters at the conference treated the main factors and arguments of anti-parliamentarism in a common context.

Schulz pointed out that European critique of parliamentarism was generally affirmative in its intentions. Critics demanded "true" democracy and were rarely destructive, a fact also true of the practice of the obstructionist parties. On the other hand, even extremist factions and parties protected against criminal sanctions by virtue of being in the parliament were exposed to the integrational absorption of parliamentarism, despite their radical critique of the system and their anti-democratic rhetoric.

The same is true for the streets as a place for expressing the critique of parliamentarism, although activism by the masses actually eliminates the principle of representation. As pointed out by Schulz, the public space is rarely the scene of a *civil war* and usually functions as a symbol and an arena for the manifestation of the democratic public, as in 1989. In their protests against the government and parliament, the democratic elements of the street also agitate for the implementation of the "true" will of the people. Their credibility and influence is determined by their ability to draw crowds that represent the significance of the manifested democratic demands. In this sense, democracy of the street and parliamentarism are interacting with each other.

According to Schulz, the conference posited abstention from voting as the "normal example" and "normal" critique of parliamentarism. However, we should take note of his emphasis that the category of non-voters, a flexible class posited by the democratic interpretation of politics, has parliamentary potential nonetheless. That is, the democratic legitimacy of the elected parliament is *by definition* dependent on the voter turnout. We should thus differentiate between temporary "democratic abstention", i.e. the disinterest for fundamental political issues, and the principled refusal of voting as a silent anti-parliamentary protest.

Schulz then discussed anti-parliamentary attitudes of the executive branch of the government and tied it to the institutional reservations manifested at the executive level in an ideological assessment of the social importance of political parties. Their importance is lessened by authoritarian constitutional revisions or periods of a state of emergency. In the recent populist atmosphere, the anti-parliamentary interventions of the executive branch and the critique of parliamentarism and political parties share a common political frequency if they had been imbued by the authority of the eliminated constitutional institution. There is no *pouvoir neutre* in this case, as the fake authoritarian power holder and his presidential diction do not represent it, even if they act in place of the "lost sovereign" in agreement with the general critical attitude towards parliamentarism. The opinions of the executive branch of the government regarding the institutional arrangement certainly represent a challenge for the parliamentary system.

Nowadays, political activities typical for the parliament have shifted to the arena of the visual media. Because representatives and their voters rarely communicate directly, the interpretation of parliamentarism was taken over by the media. According to Shulz, professional players in the media have established new rules of political conduct, which have, in the markedly focused environment of the media public, dramatically increased the pressure on the elected representatives of the people to communicate well and in a credible manner. An impression is forming of an extraparliamentary democracy, in which the "voice of the people" is represented by the media players, politicians and the virtual public. The illusion of a media-based popular representation is gradually taking place of the actual parliamentary sovereign.

Schulz concluded his closing speech for the conference by noting that the history of anti-parliamentarism in Europe is a complementary part of the history of European parliamentarism. For Europe, as had been previously pointed out by Marie-Luise Recker, has developed within the broad and unified context of anti-parliamentary criticism ever since the introduction of parliamentarism itself. The conference was an explicit display of the interconnectedness and complexity of the creative democratic social process, the dialectic of its rejection, and of the triumphant will to ensure individual and societal freedom that persists in spite of all obstacles placed in front of it by history. This desire can exist in various ideological and political forms, but the realization of the philosophical *good* has always cut short the reign of *evil*. In this regard, we would have perhaps wished for a more pointed warning against the (anti)parliamentary attitudes of the totalitarian systems of today; however, the main point of the conference was explicit enough. This message was also expanded upon by Norbert Lammert, President of the German Bundestag, who was a guest at the end of the first day of the conference. With the eloquence of a master of social sciences and an experienced politician, Lammert spoke about German and European politics and answered a number of questions. It was a pleasure to listen to the deeply confident parliamentarian and his entertaining comments. Let us conclude with one of them, which Lammert used to answer a question regarding non-voters and the general level of interest in politics: "ADAC (Allgemeiner Deutscher Automobil-Club – General German Automobile-Club, comment J. P.) has more members than all of the German political parties."

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