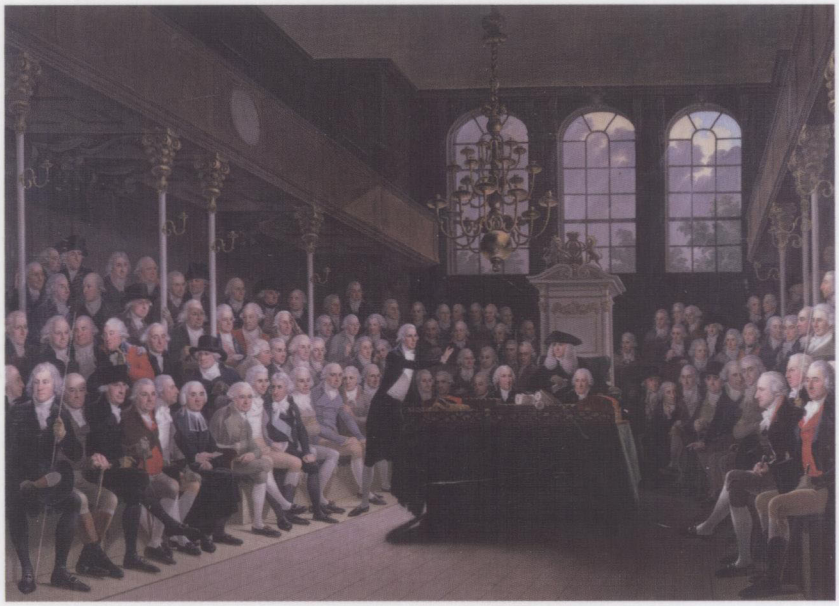
STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT 4

AGENTS OF THE PEOPLE

DEMOCRACY AND POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY IN BRITISH AND SWEDISH PARLIAMENTARY AND PUBLIC DEBATES, 1734–1800



By

PASI IHALAINEN

Series Editors: TERENCE BALL, JÖRN LEONHARD & WYGER VELEMA

BRILL

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On the cover: The House of Commons 1793–1794, by Karl Anton Hickel, oil on canvas, 1793–1795. Given by Francis Joseph I, Emperor of Austria, 1885. On display at the Palace of Westminster, London. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

The Prime Minister, William Pitt, is speaking, probably in connection with the outbreak of war with France. The opposition leader Charles James Fox is seated, wearing a hat, on the right side of the Speaker.

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Agents of the People

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For Sari and in memory of Fridolf

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If there is a political forum in which things are done by using words, it is definitely Parliament. After analysing the linguistic construction of national identities in Protestant parliamentary sermons in *Protestant Nations Redefined: Changing Perceptions of National Identity in the Rhetoric of the English, Dutch and Swedish Public Churches, 1685–1772* (Brill, 2005), I felt a need to look at the more secular debate in the plenary sessions of the same institutions. Likewise, having analysed how and why 'the nation' began to supplement and even bypass religion as the major definer of political identity in one genre, it seemed necessary to analyse the changing uses of references to 'the people' in connection with the actual decision-making process. This change of emphasis took me from the study of the roots of modern nationalism to the study of the emergence of the modern concept of democracy in the context of late-eighteenth-century parliamentary institutions. In both cases, I was studying conceptual evolution that took place in traditional institutions—not revolutionary change, which has previously received much more scholarly attention.

Several organizations and individuals have made this exploration of the early modernization of political references to the people, popular representation, democracy and the sovereignty of the people not only possible but also a pleasant experience. First of all, I need to thank the anonymous panelists and members of the Research Council for Culture and Society of the Academy of Finland for allowing me to concentrate on the preparation of this project as a Research Fellow in 2004–2006 and for providing me with supportive research funding during my work as a Professor in General History in 2006–2009. I am likewise grateful to the Department of History and Ethnology at the University of Jyväskylä for providing me with the latter position and a convenient research environment. I am particularly grateful for Professors Petri Karonen, Jari Ojala and Seppo Zetterberg for freeing me from much of administrative work and allowing me to focus on research and teaching. The other members of staff of the Department deserve an apology for my occasional absent-mindedness caused by the writing of this book and thanks for their help in solving various practical problems I have come across when working on it.

Research on European history is by no means a lonely or discipline-bound adventure. Special thanks are due to Charlotta Wolff and Jouko

Nurmiainen, who cooperated with me in 2005–2007 in the Academy of Finland project "Enlightened Loyalties" and whose knowledge of the eighteenth-century Swedish Diet and critical comments on previous versions of some of the chapters have contributed significantly to the final result. I have also benefited considerably from the methodological inspiration provided by the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in Political Thought and Conceptual Change (CoE PolCon), its research team "Political Thought and Conceptual History" and more particularly by Academy Professor Kari Palonen. A shared interest in parliamentary discourse in Political Science and General History has brought the two areas of scholarship closer together, leading to the enrichment of the methodological and source basis of the research carried out in both.

Papers given in conferences organized by CoE PolCon, the Department of History and Ethnology, the History of Political and Social Concepts Group, the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions, the Institute of Historical Research and the British and Finnish Societies for Eighteenth-Century Studies in Jyväskylä, Helsinki, Uppsala, Härnösand, London, Oxford, St Andrews and Istanbul have provided forums for testing some of my ideas. I would like to thank Alex Barber, Pim den Boer, Martin Burke, Piia Einonen, Michael Freeden, Taru Haapala, Jonas Harvard, Irène Herrmann, Helge Jordheim, Jussi Kurunmäki, Jörn Leonhard, Bo Lindberg, Jani Marjanen, Raymonde Monnier, Jonas Nordin, Kyösti Pekonen, Markku Peltonen, Kari Saastamoinen, Paul Seaward, Quentin Skinner, Marie-Christine Skuncke, Willibald Steinmetz, Henrik Stenius, Henrika Tandefelt, Adam Tomkins, Tapani Turkka, Timo Turja, Anthony F. Upton, Nadja Urbinati, Wyger Velema and Patrik Winton for their comments. It has been an equally motivating experience to supervise master and doctoral students who are working on parliamentary discourses and to receive feedback from them.

CoE PolCon has strengthened the infrastructure of this research by funding access to key databases, employing temporary research assistants and financing first-class copy-editing. Timo Särkkä helped me in database searches and the compilation of background information on speakers in autumn 2007. Oili Pulkkinen, Ph.D., as a co-editor, critically pointed at weaknesses in my argumentation in autumn 2008. For those that remain, after our excellent cooperation, I alone am responsible. The same holds for my English language, which has at times

been considerably reformulated by Gerard McAlester, whose sensitivity for historical discourse is remarkable.

My wife and family have loyally supported my never-ending writing of the "dissertation" beyond reasonable working hours. As a demonstration of my deep gratitude, I am dedicating this book to Sari and to the memory of my grandfather Fridolf, who tirelessly debated with me on interpretations of the past.

ABBREVIATIONS

Roman numerals given in brackets without any preceding abbreviation always refer to *Cobbett's Parliamentary History of England: From the Norman Conquest in 1066 to the Year 1803* (London 1806–1820), indicating the volume number and column number(s), e.g. (XII, 397–398).

BdP	*Bondeståndets riksdagsprotokoll*
BrP	*Borgarståndets riksdagsprotokoll*
ECCO	*Eighteenth Century Collections Online*
HPHC	*The History and Proceedings of the House of Commons of Great Britain*
MOMW	*The Making of the Modern World*
PR	*The Parliamentary Register; or, History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons*
PrP	*Prästeståndets riksdagsprotokoll*
PSUSJD	*Protocoller, hållne vid 1769 års Riksdag uti Sammanträdet mellan Secrete Utskottet samt Secrete och Justitiae Deputationerne angående Lagarnes Verkställighet*
R	*Riksdagsarkivet, Riksarkivet, Stockholm*
SPL	*Sveriges periodiska litteratur*
SRARP	*Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdagsprotokoll från och med år 1719*
SUP	*Sekreta utskottets protokoll*
SUBP	*Secreta Utskottets Beredrings Protocoller och Handlingar Rörande Svea Konunga Försäkran*

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The rise of democracy is one of the great narratives of Western history. The principle of political power originating from the people is so widely held an assumption in modern democratic states that we do not necessarily come to think about the far from self-evident rise of such a notion even in the history of countries that now regard themselves as leading democracies. "Popular sovereignty and representative democracy emerged with the Enlightenment and the American and French Revolutions," we are apt to think, without delving any deeper into an analysis of the problematic aspects of the rise and association of these originally separate concepts in the eighteenth century.

The rise of democracy has also been a constant object of interest for political scientists and philosophers, sometimes also for historians.[1] This book does not follow a conventional approach to the history of political philosophy; it does not focus on the contextualization and analysis of the thinking of individual political philosophers. Instead, I suggest that the histories of the concepts of popular sovereignty and democracy should *also* be studied by analysing the debates in which leading political decision-makers were involved. I am thus interested in the practical everyday use of political language and the recycling and creation of new meanings for political concepts by their active use in political arguments. What is of special interest here is the use of references to the people to legitimate political order in the past, not some philosophical or sociological concept of 'the people'. While the conceptualizations of past political phenomena by individual thinkers provide the starting point of the analysis, our main interest will rather lie in how entire political communities understood the political role of the people in a wide variety of ways. The object of study is the use of references to the political role of the people in eighteenth-century parliamentary debates by a large number of leading politicians. This is also a comparative study in that the debates are analysed not only in their relevant political contexts at the national level but also through

[1] For an attempt to write a total history of the events of the late eighteenth century as a "democratic" movement, see Palmer 1959, 4, and Palmer 1964, 572.

comparisons with parallel debates in the representative institution of another country.

The main question is how—and to what extent—the political establishments of two Western European countries with inherited representative institutions adopted the notions of democracy and the sovereignty of the people in the eighteenth century, which is when such concepts received clearer expression, recognition and acceptance in parliamentary and public debates. What was the actual *reception* of the notions of democracy and popular sovereignty—as formulated by philosophers—in parliamentary debates? And what kind of interaction was there between political thinking and the practical everyday use of the language of politics? After all, by the mid-eighteenth century, significant debates on the political role of the people were emerging both within representative institutions and in the expanding and increasingly free published literature. It is worth considering the importance of the different types of political discourse in moulding prevalent notions of democracy and the sovereignty of the people: was the agenda of political discourse set by the published literature or by parliamentary debates? And if both of them set it, did they do so separately or in interaction?

Britain and Sweden have been chosen for comparison for three reasons. Firstly, the people of the time felt that the constitutions of the two countries had a lot in common and differed from those of the rest of Europe. Both were countries with a mixed constitution of some sort: Britain was a kingdom in which Parliament had enjoyed considerable financial and legislative power ever since the 1690s, while Sweden was a kingdom in which royal political influence had been taken over by the Senate and a Diet controlled by the higher estates since the 1720s. Secondly, Britain and Sweden are countries in which there exist significant comparable records of parliamentary debates at the national level. The third reason for choosing Britain and Sweden is that relatively little work on such evolutionary representative governments is available in comparison with the monumental amount of work done on the American and French Revolutions. The reception of ideas from these revolutions in systems that experienced no open revolution themselves yet contributed to the modernization of European political cultures deserves more attention. Research has quite recently suggested that the British opposed rather than contributed to the formation of a modern concept of democracy in the 1790s, whereas the suggestion with regard to Sweden has been that an early

democracy was already emerging there by 1772. Both claims call for qualifications.

The representative institutions from which the debates analysed here have been selected are the Houses of Parliament in Britain and the Swedish four-estate Diet. Although these institutions differed significantly in structure and procedure, as we shall learn in Chapter One, the debates which took place in them had surprisingly many subjects, popular arguments and cross-border references in common so that a contextualized comparison of the use of political language in them seems highly applicable. Indeed, the contemporaries themselves carried out such comparisons. Thus there should be no impediment to describing the debates of the British House of Lords and discussions in some joint committees of the Swedish Estates under the umbrella concept 'parliamentary debates' or to studying them side by side, albeit in their own particular contexts.[2] Naturally, such a procedure is not intended to imply that the estate system of the Swedish realm constituted a "parliament" entirely like the British one. The relative importance of the British House of Commons certainly grew towards the end of the eighteenth century, whereas the Swedish Diet lost most of its political significance with the Gustavian coup in 1772. Both were representative institutions, however, and in both the leading statesmen of the time debated the issues of the day and, as a side effect, defined the classical political concepts of the people and democracy and adapted to new political ideas such as the sovereignty of the people. The contemporaries were happy to view the two constitutions as comparable, although they did tend to regard their own constitution as superior to the other one. The Dutch estate system was also occasionally seen as comparable in some respects.

A possible subject for future research would be the comparative analysis of the concepts of democracy and popular sovereignty in

[2] For corresponding comparative research on the use of concepts in debates in the present-day British and Swedish parliaments, see Ilie 2004a, 1–3, which analyses the "cross-institutional conceptual features" of "the roughly comparable discursive uses and argumentative functions" of British and Swedish "key words (and their collocates)" as used in parliamentary debates. Ilie has been particularly interested in "the shifting semantic properties, as well as the discursive and argumentative functions" of two nearly synonymous English and Swedish words and in "the connotations that they acquire in connection with their respective collocates in [...] parliamentary debates." The comparative study of the semantics of parliamentary debates thus turns out to be highly relevant from the point of view of present-day linguistics as well.

parliamentary speaking in all late eighteenth-century representative assemblies. Such a study should include not only Britain and Sweden but also the United States, France and the Batavian Republic, and perhaps also Poland and some regional assemblies of the German-speaking countries, including Switzerland. The people of the time occasionally regarded Poland as a free state alongside Britain, Sweden and the Dutch Republic, though almost always referring to it as a warning example rather than a model instance of such a state. Poland has been excluded from this study on the basis of its weakening political situation as a country subject to divisions and because of the more limited availability of records on the debates. The German regional assemblies lacked equivalent national contexts with a free public debate. There was free debate in Denmark for some time after 1770, but Denmark had no representative estates. There are no extant minutes of the debates of the General Estates or the Estates of Holland, and the debates of the Batavian National Assembly are perhaps better compared with those of the French revolutionary assemblies. Immediate democracy was realized in Switzerland only at the local and cantonal levels, not at the national level. Debates in the assemblies of the early United States certainly came to play a role in the long run, but their influence on contemporary Europe remained limited and was communicated mainly through published literature. As far as France is concerned, this book utilizes the existing research on the political language of the Revolution rather than embarking on an analysis of the distinctly innovative revolutionary assemblies.

Focusing on the British Parliament and the Swedish Diet, therefore, I shall address the following questions: how was the notion that all political power is derived from the people expressed in these traditional representative institutions, and how strong was it at different times in the eighteenth century? The emergence of neologisms such as "the sovereignty of the people" deserves extra attention here. It is also worth considering whether the idea of the popular origin of power led to calls for the active participation of the people in politics. This question can be extended to concern the limits of such participation and attempts to solve the contrast between original and active sovereignty of the people through the concept of representation.

I am also interested in finding out at what point the people of the time began to view "democracy" in a positive way that differed from the pejorative classical concept of democracy. It is not evident that they yet used the concept to define their political system, their political