

Results of the Parliamentary Election and the Formation of the Cabinets of Teuvo Aura and Ahti Karjalainen in 1970

The results of the parliamentary election of 1970 in Finland were said to be unexpected as were those of the 1966 election. The distribution of seats, even the turnover of the representatives within every parliamentary group, was remarkable.

The parties which registered the greatest gains were the Finnish Rural Party (FRP) and the National Coalition (NC). The FRP received ten times as many votes as in 1966. In absolute numbers of votes the Swedish People's Party (SPP) and the Christian People's League (CPL) could record an increase. The NC got its greatest support in the industrial parts of Finland, even though its proportion in the constituencies of so-called underdeveloped areas increased, too. This difference between industrial and wealthy southern Finland and rural and poor northern Finland explains the success of the FRP to a high degree. Its proportional support was increased most of all in the underdeveloped areas (see the article by R. Sänkiäho: "A Model of the Rise of Populism and Support for Finnish Rural Party" in this volume).

As in the election of 1966, the parties which participated in governments during the period previous to the election had to register defeats in the vote. The Centre Party's (CP) losses in all constituencies were about 5 per cent, whereas the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Democratic League of the People of Finland (DLPF) suffered a rather unequal decline in support in different constituencies. When taking into consideration the small vote of the Social Democratic League (SDL), its defeats were of similar size throughout the country. The SPP had to register a decrease of about 1 per cent of the vote, with the exception of Åland where the changes in the support of parties are without any importance.

The Liberal People's Party differed from the other parties opposed to the government policy in that it was not able to increase its vote in every constituency, but suffered fairly substantial defeats in some parts of the country.

Changes in the distribution of seats were as great as those in party support. The Finnish proportional system of representation does not sufficiently favour small parties. In 1966, the Social Democratic League obtained 7 seats with a vote of 60,000, while it was now left without representation despite a vote of 35,000. This electoral system was most

Results of Parliament Elections in the Years 1966 and 1970

	<i>Votes</i>		<i>Percentages</i>		<i>Seats</i>	
	70	66	70	66	70	66
Social Democratic Party	594 185	645 339	23.4	27.2	52	55
National Coalition ¹	457 582	326 928	18.0	13.8	37	26
Centre Party	434 150	503 047	17.1	21.2	36	49
Finnish People's Democratic League ²	420 556	502 635	16.6	21.2	36	41
Finnish Rural Party	265 939	24 351	10.5	1.0	18	1
Liberal People's Party	150 823	153 259	5.9	6.5	8	9
Swedish People's Party	144 436	141 688	5.7	6.0	12	12
Social Democratic League	35 453	61 274	1.4	2.6	—	7
Christian People's League	28 547	—	1.1	—	1	—
Others ³	4 111	9 561	0.2	0.4	—	—
Total	2 535 782	2 370 046	99.9	99.9	200	200
Turnout	82.2	84.9				

¹ Conservatives

² Communists

³ Including variant votes of many different Christian groups in 1966

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beneficial to the Social Democrats, who, with a vote of 23.6 per cent, received more than 25.0 per cent of the seats. The explanation of the bad luck of the SDL lies to a great extent in the conflicts within the DLPF, with which the SDL had been in an electoral alliance in 1966 and 1970, although in the latter year in only 11 of the 15 constituencies. Both fighting groupings in the DLPF, "the revisionist" and "the socialist", concentrated their votes on some few candidates. Without this concentration of votes the SDL would perhaps have received 2 or 3 seats.

The turnovers within the parties were as remarkable as in the 1966 election, when 78 new representatives were elected. This time the corresponding figure amounted to 88. Even the average age of the elected candidates was lower than in 1966 and about 10 of them were younger than 30. The number of female representatives increased from 33 to 43.

Although the right recorded the greatest victory, the leftist circles within all parties strengthened their position. In 1966, the situation was just the reverse: instead of the victory of the left, the support for the right wing within the parties increased. This paradox is a consequence of the shifts of votes from one party to another. As the general political swing was to the right, those people who moved to the right now preferred a "leftist" candidate of their new party. Correspondingly, when the rightist voters of a party went over to a new one, the leftist powers in the former one were strengthened. This is what happened especially in the parliamentary groups of the DLPF, in which "the stalinists" received 15 seats, and the SDP, in which the left-wing Social Democrats ("pälkäneläiset") obtained many seats.

The election of 1970 provided a clear victory for the Finnish Rural Party. The party received votes primarily from the CP and the SDP throughout the country and from the DLPF in northern parts of Finland. In addition, the party succeeded in making people who earlier had considered voting useless go to the polls in large numbers. The leader of the FRP understood the importance of the personal approach to potential voters and thus they were able to reach people who were living far away from the centres and were therefore left outside the usual information channels employed by other parties. It must, however, be noted that shifts from other parties to the FRP were obvious as early as in the elections of 1968.

The National Coalition seems to have received votes from LPP and SDP. The latter party was forced to lose those bourgeois voters who gave their support to the SDP in the 1966 election. This group was not large; it amounted to only 20,000 or 30,000. The activity of the NC's potential voters was, however, the most logical explanation for the victory of the NC. In the election of 1966, the supporters of the NC were passive, a quite unusual situation for them: but by 1970 the party had succeeded in getting nearly all its supporters to turn out at the polls. Another factor with great influence on the election was the number of young people who used their franchise for the first time. In 1966, the SDP had obtained 38 per cent of the votes cast by the new voters, but now it was the NC which appealed to this group.

The Formation of the Cabinets of Teuvo Aura and Ahti Karjalainen in 1970

When opening the Diet in 1970, Urho Kekkonen, the president of Finland, said: "After the people who were called to the polls had cast their votes, which is necessary in a democracy, the situation, as far as the forming of a government is concerned, was difficult and confused. Even though we have had difficulties in making governments in the past, too, it will be no exaggeration to say that now especially it will be difficult to find useful alternatives." These words described well the fairly confused political situation and the problems in forming a new government after the parliamentary election of March 1970.

During the parliamentary period of 1966-1970, two "popular front" cabinets with leftist majorities, the coalitions of Paasio and Koivisto ruled the country. Now the victors, the NC and FRP, declared their willingness to join the government. The main problem was,

however, the fact that the left had insisted during the electoral campaign that any future government should under all circumstances be based on the leftist parties. In the election, the left had lost its majority in the parliament.

After the resignation of the Koivisto Cabinet, a so-called 'round of the president' was carried out: the chairmen of all parliamentary groups went to the president to express the position of their group toward government questions. All groups recommended that a majority government based on as broad parliamentary support as possible should be brought about. Accordingly, the president assigned Juha Rihtniemi, the chairman of the NC, the task of forming a broad-based majority cabinet.

Rihtniemi started negotiations with all parties, but his attempt failed at the very beginning. The leftist parties gave Rihtniemi a negative answer, while the Centre Party wanted to act in opposition or would only be a member of a government where all parties would be represented. The position of the SDP and DLPP to this question was not unexpected and could be seen during the electoral campaign in their demands for a popular front cabinet. The readiness of the CP to go into opposition can be explained by the great defeat of the party; an opposition status seemed to be the only way to get back the lost votes. An affirmative answer to Rihtniemi's offer of a coalition government was given by the parliamentary groups of the FRP, SPP and LPP. These groups were not able to produce a majority government, so Rihtniemi had to give up the task with which he was charged.

While the CP wanted to remain in opposition, two alternatives were left to form a majority government: either the government would consist of the SDP, SPP, LPP and NC; or of the DLPP, SDP, SPP and LPP. The SDP held the key position, and if neither of these alternatives was carried out, the possibility of forming a minority cabinet still remained. This was the situation concerning a new government when the second round negotiations were started when the president gave Rafael Paasio (SDP), the Speaker of the Parliament, the task of exploring the possibilities of creating a majority government.

At the beginning of May, Speaker Paasio received answers to his inquiries concerning the programme of a new government. Paasio considered these to differ from each other so much that it was impossible for him to find a common basis for the different viewpoints. He had to abandon the task. The negotiations were ineffectual and Paasio himself stated: "As a matter of fact we are still at the same starting point as we were three weeks ago when I was given the task."

Juha Rihtniemi was again called upon. His first endeavour about four weeks earlier had failed but now he received a new task: he was to find out if "a government, headed by him, could be brought about, which would be composed of those parties which were successful in the March election, eventually to be filled out with parties willing to participate in this government cooperation". This task of Rihtniemi was so interpreted that forming of a majority cabinet was not inevitably assumed by the president.

This attempt by Rihtniemi was also fruitless. The SDP and DLPP refused to enter into a government led by Rihtniemi. The CP persisted in its opposition and did not see any possibility of joining a bourgeois majority government, nor yet of joining a left - in other words any kind of government at all. Rihtniemi was thus forced to inform the president of his failure.

After these unsuccessful efforts, it seemed to be obvious that only exceptional measures could solve the situation: a caretaker cabinet would be the only possible one. On the 15th of May, the president appointed a caretaker cabinet led by Teuvo Aura, the Mayor of Helsinki. This cabinet was a quasi-political one, with ministers from all parties except the FRP and DLPP.

When the Aura cabinet had been in office a month, the president considered the displacement of the caretaker cabinet by one sanctioned by the Parliament. An effort toward this end was a decision made in the convention of the CP, held in June, which

stated that "it is imperative to form a vigorous parliamentary majority government in this country." Through this statement, the party withdrew its firm position of opposition and declared that "it preferred a majority government which would primarily be based on parties considered to belong to the middle of the political spectrum." This opportunity offered by the CP was seized by the president, and on the 6th of June he asked K. A. Fagerholm (SDP) to investigate the situation by starting negotiations concerning the formation of a new government.

Fagerholm's discussions with all parties resulted in a proposed six-party government and the scheme was given to the president on the 11th of June. According to it, the cabinet consisted of the SDP, DLPF, CP, FRP, SPP and LPP with 8 seats for the left and 8 for the right, with the addition of one official minister who would have been considered bourgeois. The next day Ahti Karjalainen was commissioned by the president to form a majority government based on the grounds Fagerholm had suggested.

This scheme did not prove to be useful, the main problem being the attitude of the FRP. The first provision made by the CP in the spring was for the participation of the FRP in a cabinet. On the other hand the DLPF had made it clear that it would not join the same government coalition with the FRP for reasons concerning foreign policy.

The situation on the government front was fairly confused as the party delegation of CP met on the 10th of July and decided whether the party would participate in the cabinet or not. The delegation determined by a vote of 80 to 42 that it would form a new government without the FRP. This was to a large extent due to the unreasonable demand made by the FRP concerning the programme and distribution of ministerial posts; they wanted, among others, the post of finance minister. In fact, it seemed that the FRP did not actually want to be represented in the government at all, being afraid of losing the image it had created and rescinding the promises it had made to the people during the electoral campaign.

The stand that the CP took on the question of the government base solved the problem and a parliamentary majority cabinet headed by Karjalainen was brought about in a fairly short time. The Cabinet was appointed by the president on the 15th of July, two days before his journey to the Soviet Union.

The Karjalainen Cabinet was based on five parties: the SDP, CP, DLPF, SPP and LPP. This popular front government with broad parliamentary support has a distinct majority of 142 seats in the parliament. These 142 seats are distributed 85-56 to the benefit of leftist parties which are in a minority in the government. Even though the majority of the cabinet is bourgeois, the greatest party of the right, the NC, was left in opposition, along with the FRP and CPL.

During the formation process of the Karjalainen Cabinet, a question was raised whether this kind of a government, based on the leftist parties, would mean that the will expressed by the people in the election had been overlooked. As the political swing in the election was to the right, this should have been taken into consideration. This opinion is to a large extent justified, but on the other hand such a majority government where the victorious parties of the 1970 election, the NC and FRP, would have been represented was not, in spite of several attempts, realized.

Four years earlier, the popular front cabinet of Paasio was formed in parliamentary circumstances resulting from the strong showing these parties had registered in the parliamentary election of 1966. The parties which were most victorious in 1970, the NC and FRP, have been put on the "political back bench" by other parties and partly by the president, and it seems to be difficult for them to get out of it. At the government level, the swing to the left which started in 1966, is continuing. But we may ask, as a historian did, what will happen if, some time in the future, those who are now in opposition succeed in obtaining an absolute majority.

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