

## The Finnish Recession Elections of 1975

General elections were called in Finland on the 21st and 22nd September, 1975, after the President dissolved the Finnish *Eduskunta* (Parliament). Like the previous parliament, which was dissolved for the January 1972 General Elections, the new elections ended the work of the *Eduskunta* before the term ran its normal four year course. In both cases the decision to call new elections resulted when the government became incapacitated by a series of conflicts involving economic policy. And in both instances the election results did not lead to a solution to the problems; rather, even greater efforts seemed to be required to form the new cabinets.

### 1. The Situation before the Elections

The effects of the economic recession which struck the capitalist countries began to be felt in the Finnish economy already by 1974. The most conspicuous indications were soaring inflation and a growing trade deficit and international debt.

As the recession deepened, internal disagreements also began to appear within the Cabinet. The majority government formed by the Social Democratic Party, the Center Party, the Liberal People's Party, and the Swedish People's Party could not come to agreement on the reasons for the economic straits the country found itself in, and had even greater difficulties trying to develop measures to cope with the crisis. Along with these differences of opinion, the general dissatisfaction of the opposition led to a situation in the early spring of 1975 where all parties were eager to have new elections. A dispute arose prior to the President's dissolution order over the dates for the elections, but the views of the left won and elections were ordered for September.

### 2. The Election Campaign

A total of 12 registered parties ran in the election. In the aftermath of the January 1972 elections the Finnish party system added four additional 'splinter parties', a term used to describe the five to seven smallest parties in the campaign. The newcomers were: (1) the Finnish People's Unity Party (FPUP), formed by the defection of a majority of M.P.'s from the Finnish Rural Party (FRP); (2) the Finnish Constitutional People's Party – formed by extreme rightist elements dissatisfied with the conduct of Finnish foreign policy, and joined during the period between elections by one M.P. defecting from the conservative National Coalition Party and another from the Swedish People's Party; (3) the Finnish Private Entrepreneur's Party Organization; and (4) the Socialist Workers' Party, which rose out of the ruins of the discontinued Workers' and Small Farmers' Social Democratic League.

Numerous electoral alliances were formed. The small parties, in particular, sought to form cooperative electoral list combinations with the large parties as well as among themselves. A national electoral alliance was formed by the Center Party and the Liberal People's Party. In fact, in only one of the 14 constituencies did they fail to join lists. The second major national alliance was created between the Finnish People's Democratic League and the Socialist Workers' Party. The Finnish Christian League, the Swedish People's Party and the Finnish People's Unity Party were almost without exception in alliances with either the National Coalition Party or with centrist groups. The Finnish Rural Party and the Entrepreneurs' Party combined in several constitu-

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encies, and in several cases were joined by the Constitutional People's Party. The Finnish Social Democratic Party was the only party which did not enter into any electoral alliances.

The campaign itself got off to a rather late start, with most activity being delayed until voters returned from their summer vacations. In addition, the electoral contest ended up being rather dull and spiritless; with the exception of concerns over economic policy, no clear issues emerged. The opposition attempted to turn arguments against the government by laying the cause of the economic recession at their feet. The Center Party refused to accept any responsibility for its Cabinet actions. The SDP announced that its party was partially responsible, but noted that it was in a minority in the government and had to deal with an *Eduskunta* presided over by a bourgeois majority. The Liberal People's Party defended its positions as having been constructive.

A record number of election-forecasting attempts were made. During the six month period preceding the elections, close to a dozen predictions of party support and distribution of parliamentary seats were generated from national research data. The most accurate assessment was made by the Finnish Gallup organization, whose prognosis of the returns was off the mark by at most only one percentage point for each party.

### 3. The Election Results

73.9% of Finns eligible to vote cast their votes on the two election days, a considerable decline in turnout from 1972 when the percentage voting was 81.4%. The figures are somewhat misleading, however. In the 1975 elections Finns residing abroad were for the first time given the right to vote and their numbers accounted for 8% of all registered voters. Election officials did not have very exact information on the composition of this group – presumably many had died well before the election – and a mere 7.1% of these 'foreign Finns' ended up voting. If we wish to compare the voting activity with the 1972 turnout, we may note that 79.9% of the 'domestic' Finns on the voting register ended up voting.

The percentage of the vote and distribution of seats in the *Eduskunta* in 1972 and in 1975 may be seen in the following table:

	Percentage of votes		Seats in the <i>Eduskunta</i>	
	1972	1975	1972	1975
Finnish People's Democratic League	17.0	19.0	37	40
Socialist Workers' Party (Socialist League of Workers and Small Farmers)	1.0	0.3	–	–
Social Democratic Party	25.8	25.0	55	54
<b>Socialist parties</b>	<b>43.8</b>	<b>44.3</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>94</b>
Center Party	16.4	17.7	35	39
Finnish Rural Party	9.2	3.6	18	2
Finnish People's Unity Party	–	1.7	–	1
Liberal People's Party	5.3	4.3	7	9
Swedish People's Party	5.2	4.7	10	10
Finnish Christian League	2.5	3.3	4	9
Finnish Small Entrepreneurs' Party Organization	–	0.4	–	–
National Coalition Party	17.6	18.4	34	35
Finnish Constitutional People's Party	–	1.6	–	1
<b>Non-socialist parties</b>	<b>56.2</b>	<b>55.7</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>106</b>

For most of the parties the change in support represented less than one percentage point. The most significant changes were the decline of the Finnish Rural Party by 5.6 percentage points and the increase by 2 percentage points in the votes received by

the Finnish People's Democratic League. These two most marked changes were not interrelated, however. The Rural Party lost most of its support to the Unity Party, formed, as mentioned above, by dissident Rural Party M.P.'s, and to the Center Party, which had lost a greater share of its voter support than any other party to the Rural Party during the latter's years of growth, 1968-1970.

The electoral victory of the People's Democrats resulted primarily from shifts in support within the left. The general dissatisfaction in worker circles with the performance of the Social Democratic Party in the government as well as the advantageous position of the People's Democrats in opposition - from which vantage point they were able to criticize the ineptness of the Cabinet - caused a transfer of support from the Social Democrats to the People's Democrats. The shift in support for the two parties was most apparent in the southernmost developed constituencies, where SDP defeats were considerable. On the other hand, in the constituencies of the less developed region of the north and east, the SDP picked up votes from the Rural Party, resulting in some areas in increases in support.

The changes in the distribution of seats did not exactly correspond to the shifts in the support base. It is symptomatic of the Finnish system of proportional representation for the larger parties to receive disproportionately more seats in relation to their share of the vote than the small parties. Thus, the small parties are anxious to form electoral alliances with larger parties so that the votes for their candidates will be pooled on the list with those of the larger party and thereby receive higher comparison numbers used to allocate the seats by constituency. In this election the Christian League and Liberal People's Party used their alliance tactics to good advantage and even managed to secure proportionately more seats than their percentage share of the vote should have entitled them.

#### 4. The Situation after the Elections

The 'dissolution' elections of 1975 produced generally the same situation as in the previous 'dissolution' elections. The people were consulted and when the results were in the changes in party support were slight. It was correctly assumed after the returns were confirmed that the formation of a new government would be a very difficult and tedious task. After the Speaker of Parliament sounded out the views of the parties on the composition and program of a future government, President Urho Kekkonen assigned retired Provincial Governor Martti Miettunen, a seasoned Center Party politician, the task of constructing a broad-based center-left coalition government. The socialist parties, the Center Party, and the Liberal and Swedish people's parties were in principle willing to enter into a cabinet coalition if agreement could be reached on the program. After a series of very difficult negotiations, Miettunen announced two months after the election that his efforts had failed. Then Kekkonen intervened in the cabinet crisis and with an exceptionally bold gesture put all his prestige at stake. He called together the parties which had been participating in the cabinet negotiations and demanded that in the national interest, and with a sense of responsibility, they form a 'national emergency government'. The main task would be to combat unemployment. Early in December the President obtained the government he demanded; only the details of the program remained and they were promised within two months.

However, the disagreements over the conduct of economic policy which manifested themselves in the lengthy cabinet formation negotiations hardly seemed to provide a stable basis of consensus within the government. As the Christmas holiday approached the Cabinet had already been riven with internal disagreement over how to balance the 1976 state budget.

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