

Giving New Meaning to the Rules of the Game? New Political Parties and Parliamentary Debate, 1870-1940

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Abstract

In the late nineteenth-century, the extension of suffrage rights changed the social and political composition of parliaments. In Germany, Social Democrats used universal male suffrage to establish an initially small minority in the Reichstag. In Britain the issue of Home Rule provided Irish Nationalists with an issue that allowed them to exploit suffrage rights extension to their electoral advantage. As political newcomers and social outsiders, these new parliamentarians questioned the legitimacy of parliament. They introduced a new understanding of accountability where the party organization played a more decisive role in determining policy positions than the individual opinion of parliamentarians. This naturally led to a tension between the parliamentary culture of debate and party discipline. At the same time, the new parliamentarians recognized that parliamentary tradition of debate provided a safe haven for public debate that they rigorously studied. Soon they became experts in parliamentary regulations and used them as an argument against the political elite. This paper explores the way these newcomers in parliament defined their role as the (better) representatives of the people. The focus will be on the discussions about parliamentary rules where parliament could be questioned and redefined toward a more democratic notion of representation.

Author information

Anne Heyer is an Assistant Professor with a research interest in the ideas and practices of political participation in different European countries (1800-today) at the Institute for History at Leiden University (the Netherlands). She currently works on the changing perception and practices of mass politics in Germany, Netherlands, Britain and Spain. She currently also prepares a monograph “The Making of the Democratic Party”, based on her doctoral dissertation, about the emergence of modern party organizations as transnational and comparative history in the 1860s and 1870s in Germany, Netherlands and Britain. Her publications focus on political parties, participation, democracy and populism.

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Wednesday, 16 June - Session 4 - **9,00-10,30 CET (Webex)** - Panel – *The culture of debate in and beyond parliament: a comparison of Britain, Germany and The Netherlands, c. 1870-1990*

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