

EuParl.net Newsletter

**EU
PARL
NET**

European Information and
Research Network on
Parliamentary History

Autumn/Winter 2020

Dear readers,

In the Spring, we sought to understand the striking divide in the intensity of the Covid-19 pandemic between East-Central Europe and the “old” West and South. Autumn has brought rapidly filling intensive care units all over Europe, while the difference is only between better and more poorly organized health-care systems and governments.

We are witnessing not only a frightening pandemic, but also its social and political consequences. Most national leaders are unable to mobilize their public to win support and loyalty. Protests against coronavirus measures, mixing up long-term social experience, medical expertise, and disinformation, produce a fundamental lack of confidence and common sense.

*Do join us on **3 December 2020 at EuParl.net online seminar.** It will bring a number of reports on recent research into parliamentary history, along with a reflection on how to think, write and network in the time of pandemic. Full programme is on page 4.*

*Best wishes,
Adéla Gjuričová*

NEWS



Celebrating 30 Years of Free Elections

On 19 November 2020, the Czech Institute of Contemporary History along with the Czech Chamber of Deputies held an online conference *The Idea of Parliament in Central Europe after 1989*. The papers in the first panel analysed the experiments with semi-free elections in the late-Socialist era, the presence of parliamentary democracy in the mind of the dissident movements, and the clash between parliamentary and presidential systems in the early post-Communist transformations in Central Europe. The second panel focused on the first free elections of 1990 in Czechoslovakia. It offered sociological interpretation of the elections results, explored the Slovak political scene before the election, and highlighted the municipal election and re-establishment of local government in November 1990.

An exhibition of parliamentary photos by Dagmar Hochová (see page 2) opened as a part of the event in the Chamber of Deputies in Prague. Check this short video to enjoy the atmosphere. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4qTTCGPhrg>



Czech Deputy Dagmar Hochová with Alexander Dubček, the Chairman of the Federal Assembly, June 1990



NEWS

GDR Volkskammer Election in 1990



Bettina Tüffers of the KGParl in Berlin had a challenging calendar this Spring, as the pandemic forced them to cancel most of the events scheduled to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the March 1990 Volkskammer elections – the first democratic elections in the former GDR. Eventually, though, a seminar convened by the Ettersberg Foundation and the Federal Agency for Civic Education was held on 26 September 2020. The thought-provoking lecture by Bettina Tüffers dedicated to the 10th Volkskammer is available on YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NizA4N4W064>

The Problem of Justice



In November 2020, the Dutch Center for Parliamentary History of Radboud University, Nijmegen, published another in the series of yearbooks, *The Plagued Ministry of Justice*. It examines why, during the past 25 years, this particular department was so often involved in controversial political affairs, and why so many of its ministers were forced to resign prematurely.

On Parliaments and Pandemics

How do parliaments do when facing pandemics? Tobias Kaiser explained the birth of the politics of health in the 19th century and explored the reactions by German parliaments to major epidemics of the 20th century. In his fascinating essay, Kaiser concludes that “to date, the Bundestag, which has managed to react quickly and remain functional, has done well in the stress test.” (see here for text in German). <https://www.kas.de/de/einzeltitel/-/content/bewaehrungsprobe-fuer-den-parlamentarismus>



The quarantining German Bundestag on March 25, 2020]

PROJECTS

Deputy Behind the Camera

Czech photographer Dagmar Hochová (1926–2012) became widely acknowledged for her humanist style of photography, showing various motives ranging from the 1968 Soviet invasion and May Day Parades, to children playing in their neighbourhoods – images that have never been acknowledged and shown by the official imagery. Yet, Hochová’s estate, acquired by the Moravian Gallery in Brno, reveals her as a committed witness to the period when she stood behind the camera during later ground-breaking political events, as a Civic Forum activist and Member of Czech National Council in 1990–1992.

Tomáš Zahradníček from the Institute of Contemporary History in Prague leads the team of historians in an interdisciplinary project *The Democratic Revolution through the Lens of Dagmar Hochová*. The objective is to digitise c. 10,000 negatives, label them and make accessible in an open-access online database. The photos show the most influential politicians of the time with whom Hochová was on friendly terms, as well as some exclusive material that will further facilitate the study of parliamentary proceedings. Zahradníček reflects on the amiable photographer: “As an MP, Hochová was also taking photos from her bench in the Chamber. The unostentatious elderly lady with a charming smile, she knew all too well how to make most of those opportunities.”

SAVE THE DATE

The 1990 Elections in East-Central Europe: Parliamentary History Research in the Time of Pandemic. EuParl.net Online Seminar. **Dec. 3, 2020**. Online. See page 4 for programme.

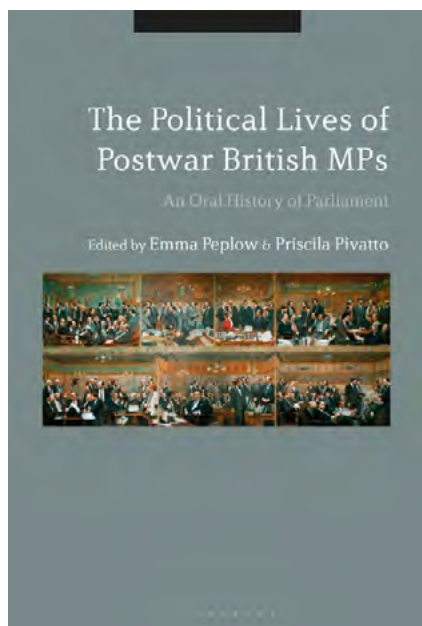
Association for Political History: PhD Nordic Webinar. **Feb. 12, 2021**. Online. Registration at pasi.t.ihalainen@jyu.fi

Ende der Bonner Republik? Der Berlin-Beschluss 1991 und sein zeithistorischer Kontext. Conference. **June 24-25, 2021**. Berlin. CfP here https://kgparl.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/cfp_bonn-berlin.pdf



REVIEW

An Extraordinary History of Parliament



PEPLOW, Emma – PIVATTO, Priscila: *The Political Lives of Postwar British MPs: An Oral History of Parliament*. London, Bloomsbury 2020

The thin volume is a result of years of systematic work. In 2011, the History of Parliament Trust together with the British Library launched an ambitious project to conduct life-story interviews with over 180 MPs, recording

their experiences before, during and after their public service. The project leaders Emma Peplow and Priscila Pivatto are now publishing the first comprehensive analysis.

The book explores how and why MPs became interested in politics, how they won their seat and fought election campaigns, what it felt like to speak in the chamber and balance the competing needs of party, constituency, and personal conscience (or ambition). Readers are given a rare glimpse into the spaces inhabited by MPs, political rivalries and friendships, but also their career rise and fall.

The life-long perspective, not limited to the years in parliament, draws a picture that shows and interprets political career as part of human life. One can reflect on the background of most MPs, on how their education and family shaped them for politics. The authors also offer a nuanced view of political activity – and of Parliament which, like other institutions, has its own work culture that involves recruitment, demanding schedules, hierarchies, collegiality, rivalry, formal and unwritten rules, traditions that defy logic, and strains on family life.

Oral history has grown out of a specific context of the Cultural Turn in Great Britain. While for example, oral historians in East-Central Europe have focused on interviewing the leaders of their 1989 revolutions, in Britain “a fisherman was more likely to be asked to do oral history than a Member of Parliament” (p. viii). British oral history has traditionally focused on previously unheard narratives from communities that were excluded from conventional historical sources.

It may seem that Peplow and Pivatto stop at just giving the voice, since their brief analytical conclusions are accompanied by numerous and long excerpts from the interviews. Nonetheless, being aware of the challenges of oral history, their approach significantly benefits the outcome: “The accounts of political life presented here are partial, biased and filtered by memory. Yet they demonstrate it vividly in personal terms. Collectively, they present a diverse and overwhelmingly human perspective on British politics.” (p. 9) Plus, they offer a piece of political-history writing which is so invigorating fun to read!

Petra Švardová

BOOKS/SOURCES

GILBERT, Mark – PASQUINUCCI, Daniele (eds.): *Euroscepticisms: The Historical Roots of a Political Challenge*. Leiden, Brill 2020

HALAINEN, Pasi – SAHALA, Aleks: Evolving Conceptualisations of Internationalism in the UK Parliament: Collocation Analyses from the League to Brexit. In: M. Fridlund, M. Oiva, & P. Paju (eds.), *Digital histories: Emergent approaches within the new digital history*, pp. 199–219. Helsinki UP 2020.

SELINGER, William: *Parliamentarism. From Burke to Weber*. Cambridge UP 2019

RENDLE, Matthew: *The State versus the People. Revolutionary Justice in Russia's Civil War, 1917–1922*. Oxford UP 2020

BIAGI, Francesco – FROSINI, Justin O. – MAZZONE, Jason Mazzone (eds.): *Comparative Constitutional History. Volume One: Principles, Developments, Challenges*. Leiden, Brill 2020

ACHEN, Christopher H. – BARTELS, Larry M.: *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*. Princeton UP 2016

VAN HEUMEN, Lennaert – ROOS, Mechthild (eds.): *The Informal Construction of Europe*. London, Routledge 2019

GROßBÖLTING, Thomas – LEHR, Stefan (eds.): *Politisches Entscheiden im Kalten Krieg. Orte, Praktiken und Ressourcen in Ost und West*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2020



European Information and
Research Network on
Parliamentary History

DEC
3
2020

EUPARL.NET ONLINE SEMINAR

The 1990 Elections in East-Central Europe: Parliamentary History Research in the Time of Pandemic

PROGRAMME

I. REFLECTING THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY

9:30 – 11:00

CHAired BY Jure Gašparič

Ivan Sablin: Assembling Post-Imperial Russia: Democracy through Nomination and the Provisional Parliament, 1917

Bettina Tüffers: All the Enthusiasm already gone? 1990: The Year of Elections in the GDR

Matej Ivančík: Slovakia's Coming to Terms with History as a Political Factor in the 1990 Elections

Tjaša Konovšek: Election, Reconciliation, and the Plebiscite: Building Slovenia's Parliamentarism in 1990

Adéla Gjuričová: Big Little Elections: Re-Establishing of Municipalities in Czechoslovakia

Tomáš Zahradníček: Parliamentarism, or Presidentialism? The Region's Institutional Dilemma, 1985 – 1995

Discussion

II. THINKING, WRITING AND NETWORKING IN THE TIME OF PANDEMIC

11:15 – 12:15

CHAired BY Adéla Gjuričová

Discussion by EuParl.net board members and representatives of member organizations

Opening statement by **Andreas Schulz**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/96109811984?pwd=b3JRTGE0cGcrNjdjTHArL1ZpbUxqUT09>

Meeting ID: 961 0981 1984
Passcode: 236637