

## Women's Full Political Rights In Finland

Finnish Women became the first Women in the world in 1906 to gain full political rights. It was the gateway to a new world. Raising to the full citizen's rights was the biggest change during 150 years!

However, in New Zealand the women got the right to vote in 1893 and in Australia in 1902. But on the contrary, they were not able to be candidate and so they could not vote for a woman.

Then, first in the world Finnish women over 21 got the right to vote for a woman candidate. Europe's most reactionary system of representation, the Diet of the four Estates, was reformed in one fell swoop in 1906. In its place came Europe's most modern single chamber parliament, whose 200 members were chosen by universal and equal suffrage.

The first initiative in the Diet on Women's suffrage was proposed by three male members of Kuopio, the city where I live, at the initiative of Kuopio's feminist association in 1897. The pressure to give women the vote was great, for many reasons.

First, women had already risen to leading social positions, women had been admitted to universities and women had assumed an important role in education and culture.

Second, women took part in working life alongside men in Finland more than in any other European country. Third, women's organizations, on both the right and left, had also worked hard for women's voting rights.

Then, men's opinions had also matured. Furthermore, women had joint men in the constitutional struggle against the Russian General Governor Bobrikov administration . By and large, all these arguments for giving women the vote were used. Finally, after many discussions, the Diet took its decision on the reform in May 1906.

## First Election in Finland

In spring 1907, nineteen Finnish women became the first women in the world to become Members of Parliament. They formed 9,5 % of the first members of Parliament in Finland. By the way, nine out of 19 were single. These Finnish women were the first in Europe to receive the right to vote for parliamentary representatives, and at the same time, they became eligible for public office, in other words they were able to stand as candidates for parliament. At that time Finland belonged to the Russian Empire. Finland got the independence in 1917.

## Nineteen Female Members of Parliament

The themes that women brought to the parliament rose from the everyday life, such as the system of health care and social security, free basic education, the right to parental leave and a day-care system. The women carried out the idea of a social motherhood. The Finnish welfare state is to a great extent the result of women's work, expertise and innovations. Therefore, the welfare state is reason behind the high fertility rate and women's employment numbers staying high.

Hundred years later

The most important event during centennial is the parliamentary elections on 18 March 2007. Then, every Finnish citizen who had reached the age of 18 by the election date, was entitled to vote. The number of women in parliament increased significantly from 75 to 84 among 200 members. As result of the elections, the composition of the Cabinet of 20 members was 12 women and 8 men, which made 60 % of women. This implies that Finland had the cabinet of the highest proportion of women in the whole world. Now the situation has changed. We have 83 female members in Parliament at the moment, which means 41,5 %.

Female Ministers

The first female minister was appointed in 1926 as Minister in Charge of Social Affairs and Health. By the way was "housemaid" (criada) before she got MP's post. Accordingly, the number of female ministers began rise significantly in the 1960 s. Then in 1972 a woman was nominated Second Minister of Finance and in 1975 Minister of Justice, prof. Inkeri Anttila, founding and honorary member of Women Lawyers in Finland Association. Furthermore, in 1990 Finland acquired the world's first woman Minister of Defence. In 1994 a woman was appointed to Speaker of Parliament. In 1995 a woman was appointed to Foreign Minister, Mrs. Tarja Halonen. She is honorary member of Women Lawyers in Finland Association. The President of Finland is elected by direct popular vote for a period of six years and can be re-elected once. In 2000 Finland gained the first female President of the Republic, Tarja Halonen and she was re-elected in 2006. Finally, Finland gained the first female Prime Minister in 2003, Mrs Anneli Jäätteenmäki. She is also member of Women Lawyers in Finland Association. Now she is MEP in the European Parliament.

Situation now

In the 74th Cabinet after the independence of Finland there are at the moment 17 ministers : 11 male ministers and only 6 female ministers. Spokesman of the Parliament is female at the moment, also the other vice spokesman.

European Parliament

Elections will happen every fifth years. Voting age is 18 except in Austria it is 16. Member states of European Union

(28) are represented by 751 Members of European Parliament (MEP). Finland has 13 MEPs: 10 female MEPs and only 3 male MEPs. .

#### Municipal elections

In Finland women got full political municipal voting rights in 1917, same year than its independence. Unfortunately, during 100 years women did not gain equality in municipal elections in numbers. In the last Municipal elections 2017 only 39 % of women have been elected to the City Councils. Even though women have voted since 1984 more actively than than men.

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