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## A Battle for Democracy

### The Concept of Democracy in the Constitutional Struggle, Denmark 1848–1849

Today, most of us claim to be democrats regardless of our specific political convictions. Though we rarely hear anyone opposing democracy, the accusation of being or acting in an undemocratic fashion is a useful rhetorical tool. One might easily forget that democracy for a large part of its history has been a contested concept, which has been object of political struggles and has had many opponents. This article zooms in on a period when the concept was still a relative newcomer to the vocabulary of politics, and a highly contested one at that. Focusing on the year 1848, when democracy became a popular rallying call among revolutionaries across Europe, I investigate how the concept was introduced to everyday political language in Denmark.

Researchers generally agree that the year 1848 marks a turning point in the modern history of »democracy«. While the concept had been significantly broadened in the late 18th century, 1848 meant its wider politicisation and ideologisation.<sup>1</sup> In the preceding decades, it had predominantly been used as a negative reference to radical revolutionaries, often in academic discourse, but in 1848 it became a popular and commonly used concept adopted as a slogan by many revolutionaries and those who welcomed the European revolutions.<sup>2</sup>

In 1848, Denmark was on the periphery of revolutionary Europe. In March, the outbreak of revolution in several European cities inspired Danish liberals and radicals to convene mass meetings that demanded a free constitution and universal suffrage. King Frederik VII and his advisors were equally affected by the European developments and abolished absolutism before the threat of violent conflict could be realised in the capital. The developments of March 1848 initiated a constitutional struggle that ended on 5 June 1849 when Frederik VII signed the country's first free constitution, which came to be known as the June Constitution. In contrast to the experience in many European states, counter-revolution was absent in the Danish kingdom, and the June Constitution remained in function beyond the revolutionary years. The exception to this picture of a non-violent, almost gentle revolution are of course the developments in the duchies of Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg, where violence erupted in March 1848. Thus, the constitutional struggle in the capital was played out alongside the First Schleswig War (1848–1851) in Jutland and the duchies.

New research shows that democracy went from being a rarely used academic concept in Denmark before 1848 to becoming popular in everyday political language within a few

1 *Christian Meier/Hans Leo Reimann/Hans Maier et al.*, Demokratie, in: *Otto Brunner/Werner Conze/Reinhart Koselleck* (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 1, Stuttgart 1972, pp. 821–899, here: p. 861.

2 *Bertel Nygaard*, Demokratibegrebets gennembrud i Danmark i 1848, in: *Historisk Tidsskrift* 111, 2011, pp. 37–73; *Pierre Rosanvallon*, The History of the Word »Democracy« in France, in: *Journal of Democracy* 6, 1995, no. 4, pp. 140–154, here: pp. 140 and 152f.; *Jonathan Sperber*, *The European Revolutions 1848–1851*, Cambridge/New York etc. 2005 (first published 1994), p. 162; *Michael Wettengel*, Party Formation in Germany. Political Associations in the Revolution of 1848, in: *Dieter Dowe/Heinz-Gerhard Haupt/Dieter Langewiesche et al.* (eds.), *Europe in 1848. Revolution and Reform*, New York/Oxford 2001, pp. 529–558, here: pp. 533f.

months in 1848, reflecting the general tendency in revolutionary Europe.<sup>3</sup> This article investigates the concept of democracy in the constitutional struggle in Denmark. It focuses on the development in the Danish-speaking parts of the monarchy, and consequently the emphasis in the following is on the kingdom proper. I ask how the concept was interpreted and used by different actors in the constitutional struggle, and how the different social interests affected its usage. I follow the development of the concept through the period between January 1848 and June 1849. Here, I focus on the usage in a conflict on representation, which was a central point of dispute in the constitutional struggle.

The article examines the usage and rhetoric of four political currents, which dominated public debate during the Danish constitutional struggle and each of which corresponded to particular social interests. While these political currents do not resemble organised political parties (the extent of organisation varied), each is characterised by frequent usage of certain types of argument, common conceptual usage, plus efforts to represent certain social groups. These were: a liberal current, which demanded a constitution and a complete integration of Schleswig into the Danish nation; a small radical opposition that fought for social reform and a broad suffrage; a peasant association, »Bondevennernes Selskab« (Association for the Friends of Peasants, AFP), which worked for social reforms as well as political rights of the peasantry; and finally a conservative current that voiced a critique of the constitutional monarchy and of the integration of »commoners« into political conversation. The four currents are presented in greater detail below. The texts analysed comprise material published during the constitutional struggle, mainly newspaper articles, journals, pamphlets and speeches on parliament.

Theoretically, this article is inspired by conceptual history in its formulation by Reinhart Koselleck and his thesis that concepts, in contrast to words, are always open to interpretation. Koselleck demonstrated that it is the multiplicity of possible interpretations that defines a concept and makes it possible to write conceptual history.<sup>4</sup> Not being fixed to a certain meaning, the concept may be an object of contestation. This was precisely what happened when the concept of democracy was introduced to everyday political language in Denmark in 1848. Here, its meaning became an object of struggle, and the concept came to be used as a weapon in existing social and political conflicts as well.

As I focus on a limited period of time, it can be difficult to separate changes in the concept's meaning from existing differences in meaning and usage. This is made even more challenging by the fact that some participants in the constitutional struggle only contributed with a single pamphlet or perhaps a few speeches on parliament. Here I find it useful to apply a method inspired by the work of Quentin Skinner, in particular his theory of speech acts<sup>5</sup>, which offers a possibility to focus on the performativity of conceptual usage. Skinner suggests that most texts may be analysed as speech acts that have a motive and an intention, which implies a focus on the individual language user rather than structural changes in meaning and usage over long periods of time.<sup>6</sup> The aims of this article differ slightly here, as I am indeed interested in the changes of the concept over a period of time and less so in the individual language user. Yet in reading the different contributions to public debate during the constitutional struggle, I ask to what end the participant applied the concept of democracy and how (and if) the concept of democracy was used to further political and social interests beyond the immediate, individual interests of the agent.

3 *Nygaard*, Demokratibegrebets gennembrud i Danmark i 1848, pp. 37–73.

4 *Reinhart Koselleck*, Einleitung, in: *Brunner/Conze/Koselleck*, Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, pp. XXII–XXIII.

5 *Quentin Skinner*, Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts, in: *New Literary History* 3, 1972, pp. 393–408, here: pp. 396f.

6 *Quentin Skinner*, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1: *Regarding Method*, Cambridge 2002, p. 100.

This article consists of two parts. The first introduces to the constitutional struggle in the Danish monarchy 1848–1849, whereas the second part focuses on the conceptual history of democracy in this period. The first part includes a short presentation of the four political currents or movements analysed and different fronts in the conflict on representation in the mid-nineteenth century Danish monarchy. The second part examines the usage of the concept of democracy in the context of the constitutional struggle in Denmark. The analysis is divided into separate phases of the constitutional struggle. I argue that the concept was subject to fundamental changes between January 1848 and June 1849.

## I. THE ABOLISHMENT OF ABSOLUTISM AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL STRUGGLE

Denmark was an absolute monarchy from 1660 to 1849. Frederik VII (reigned 1848–1863) signed the June Constitution on 5 June 1849, which marked the beginning of the constitutional monarchy. This development followed two decades of growing liberal critique, which culminated in March 1848.

In 1831, Frederik VI (reigned 1808–1839) had introduced regional assemblies of the estates in the kingdom proper and the duchies. This followed the July revolutions in 1830 and was an attempt to alleviate revolutionary impulses. In the 1830s and 1840s, the liberal opposition grew steadily and expressed itself in a likewise growing number of liberal journals, papers, associations etc., which pressed the constitutional question as far as restrictions on the press permitted. The Assembly of the Estates became an arena for recurring discussion of the constitutional matter, raised by liberal assembly members. When Christian VIII (reigned 1839–1848) assumed the throne in 1839, many hoped that he would initiate constitutional changes, which he had done in Norway in 1814. This hope was disappointed, and Christian VIII ruled as absolute monarch.<sup>7</sup> In 1847, however, the king and his cabinet had begun a process of reforming the Assembly of the Estates towards more citizen involvement. The completion of this task was left to his son, Frederik VII, when Christian VIII suddenly died on 20 January 1848.

The new king continued his father's work when, on 28 January, he published a constitutional rescript with a promise of constitutional reform and simultaneously repealed restrictions on the freedom of the press. This triggered an intensified public debate on the future of the monarchy. Yet the outbreak of revolution in Paris and in many other European cities accelerated the events.

When reports from the European revolutions and uprisings reached Copenhagen, political activities intensified with public meetings, distributed pamphlets, etc. Liberals hosted public meetings at the Casino Theatre with participation of middle class burghers. Similarly, the more radical »Haandværkerdannelsesforeningen« (Society for the Education of Craftsmen) hosted public meetings at the Hippodrome. The liberal hosts at the Casino Theatre were determined to obtain a free constitution and to secure the constitutional bond between the monarchy and Schleswig, while the radical Hippodrome group agitated for a broad suffrage. Claiming that a broad suffrage was a shared ambition for the entire opposition, the leading liberal figure, Orla Lehmann, turned the radical Hippodrome meeting in favour of a constitutional solution for a Denmark-Schleswig.<sup>8</sup> On 20 March 1848, plans were made to march on Christiansborg, the king's residence, the following day at the municipal council as well as at the Casino theatre. Between 12,000 and 15,000 Copenhageners participated in the march on Christiansborg on 21 March.<sup>9</sup>

7 Hans Jensen, *De danske Stænderforsamlings Historie 1830–1848*, vol. 2, Copenhagen 1931–34, pp. 210–215.

8 Claus Bjørn, 1848. Borgerkrig og revolution, Haslev 1998, pp. 56f.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 71 and 74.

Behind the scenes, members of the network surrounding Frederik VII had convinced him that a constitution was now unavoidable. On the morning of 21 March the king informed his cabinet that he agreed with the opinion of the Casino meeting, after which most ministers gave him their resignation. Approaching the castle, the crowd was informed that King Frederik had already acceded to their wishes and unseated the old ministry. On 22 March, a new »March Ministry«, as it was popularly termed, was gathered. Of its nine ministers, four had participated in the liberal opposition in the 1830s and 1840s. Before the new ministry, Frederik VII declared that he now considered himself to be constitutional king.<sup>10</sup>

As mentioned above, the initial developments in the kingdom were not violent, in contrast to those in many other European states. This changed, however, when a provisional government was proclaimed in Kiel on 23 March, quickly escalating into an armed conflict. This conflict continued until its temporary settlement in 1850, with Prussia and most states in the German Confederation now supporting Schleswig-Holstein. As a consequence of the First Schleswig War, the duchies were absent from the constitutional struggle in 1848–1849. When Frederik VII signed the constitution in June 1849, it applied only to the kingdom proper, and until 1864 changing ministries faced the problem of creating a constitutional model that would apply to both the kingdom proper and the duchies.

The months of April to August 1848 were dominated by the war, which was brought to a halt in late August by a ceasefire that lasted until April 1849. During these months, the March Ministry summoned the Assembly of the Estates in northern Jutland and on Zealand for the last time to discuss an electoral law for the coming constituent assembly. Here, suffrage was proposed to be granted to all independent men above the age of 30 who were householders of untarnished reputation.<sup>11</sup> The liberal Orla Lehmann, now minister, and his ministerial colleagues added an element to the expected »universal suffrage« and suggested supplementing the public vote with a quarter of royalty (in effect ministerially) appointed members of parliament.<sup>12</sup> This clause became subject of heavy critique and caused the radical milieu as well as the peasant association to distance themselves from the liberals.

The months of August and September were dominated by election campaigns. Here, the peasant association AFP as well as the radical opposition fought well-organised election campaigns, to the great distress of liberal and conservative partisans. This period saw a vast increase in established journals, associations, clubs and public meetings, both in the capital and the countryside. This meant that political debate and communication were spread both geographically and socially, reflecting the general tendency in revolutionary Europe.<sup>13</sup> The election took place on 5 October 1848 and was a victory for the peasant association, which won more than a third of the votes. Including the royally appointed members, the assembly consisted of three roughly equally sized groups; a well-organised left dominated by the AFP; a less organised moderate, liberal centre; and an unorganised conservative right. The constituent assembly gathered from 23 October 1848 to June 1849.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82f.

<sup>11</sup> *Anon.*, [The March Ministry], in: *Tidende for Forhandlingerne ved Provindsialstænderne for Sjællands, Fyens og Lollands-Falsters Stifter, samt for Island og Færøerne i 1848*, Copenhagen/Roskilde 1848, pp. XX–XL and 14f.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> *Sperber*, *The European Revolutions 1848–1851*, pp. 157–207; *Heinz-Gerhard Haupt/Dieter Langewiesche*, *The European Revolution of 1848. Its Political and Social Reforms, Its Politics of Nationalism, and Its Short- and Long-Term Consequences*, in: *Dowe/Haupt/Langewiesche et al.*, *Europe in 1848*, pp. 1–24, here: pp. 2f. and 6; *Dieter Langewiesche*, *Revolution in Germany. Constitutional State – Nation State – Social Reform*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 120–143, here: p. 124; *Manfred Gailus*, *The Revolution of 1848 as »Politics of the Streets«*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 779–796, here: pp. 779f.

The constituent assembly discussed the draft for a constitution written by liberal March ministers Ditlev Gothard Monrad and Orla Lehmann from February to May 1849. In November 1848, the March ministry fell and was replaced by a less liberal November ministry. The central struggle in the assembly became the extent of the suffrage and whether parliament should be unicameral or bicameral. For months, the debates remained futile, and in April 1849 the war resumed and German troops entered Jutland. In May, a group of conservative deputies conspired to let the constitution fall, and rumours concerning these endeavours caused the AFP-dominated group secretly to arrange a unanimous vote against their own proposition and for a proposition made by liberal assembly members in order to reach a compromise.<sup>14</sup> On 7 May, the chairman of the AFP, Balthasar Christensen, announced that the AFP group would vote for the liberal proposition, thereby effectively ending the constitutional struggle with a compromise that remained close to the original draft granting a two-chamber system with what was considered to be universal suffrage (all men above the age of 30, with their own household and who had not received unreturned social aid) and with a stricter eligibility for the first chamber.<sup>15</sup>

## II. POLITICAL CURRENTS AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL STRUGGLE 1848–1849

The four main political currents examined in this analysis were: a liberal current, a radical current, a peasant association and a conservative current.

The liberals or the constitutional monarchists (in Danish termed the »national liberals«, here simply »liberals«) were a network of predominantly middle-class burghers of Copenhagen and the larger towns who led the opposition to absolutist rule in the 1830s and 1840s. In the conflict over representation, the position of the liberals changed from being in opposition before March 1848, when liberals had spoken in favour of a constitution and broad suffrage, to becoming ministerial supporters from 21 March 1848. At the constituent assembly, liberals argued for a bicameral legislature and other measures that would hamper what was now considered the perhaps too broad suffrage promised in March 1848. Liberals often articulated the interests of the intelligentsia and the middle classes of the cities.

A small radical current had emerged in the 1840s as well, but this grew and diversified significantly between March and August 1848. As Denmark was in the early stages of industrialisation, there were still only few industrial workers in the cities, and the main initiators for mobilisation were former journeymen, now master craftsmen, who had been inspired by radical ideas and activities in Paris.<sup>16</sup> This amounted to the establishment of a radical association »Valgreformforeningen« (Association for Election Reform, AER) that published Denmark's first election programme and lists of recommended candidates for the constituent assembly in August 1848. Yet the result of the election to the constituent assembly was disappointing to the AER. Most radicals retired from the constitutional struggle after the election. In the constitutional struggle, radicals predominantly expressed the interests of the lower middle classes of the cities, particularly journeymen and master craftsmen.

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14 *Claus Bjørn*, *Kampen om grundloven*, Copenhagen 1999, pp. 82–98.

15 The suffrage for the first chamber was to be the same as for the second chamber, but elections were to be indirect and subject to an eligibility qualification of 1200 Danish Thalers (»Rigsdaler«) in yearly income or 200 Danish Thalers in direct taxes. *Niels Neergaard*, *Under Juni-grundloven. En Fremstilling af det danske Folks politiske Historie fra 1848 til 1866*, Copenhagen 1892, pp. 430–444; *Bjørn*, *Kampen om grundloven*, pp. 82–98.

16 *Bertel Nygaard*, *Arbejderpolitik i 1848. De københavnske »pariserhåndværkere«*, in: *Kulturstudier* 3, 2012, no. 1, pp. 55–77.

The third current or political movement, the AFP, is the only precisely demarcated political group to be analysed here. In contrast to the other currents, the AFP was an organised political movement with a clear leadership and a membership of about 10,000 in 1848. The AFP worked for social reforms including the abolition of the system of tenure, equal taxation and other concerns close to the rural middle and lower classes. Liberals had established the AFP in 1846 to gain broader support for their liberal and national cause. In the first months of 1848, the AFP supported the liberal opposition against absolutism. This changed over the spring and summer of 1848, when the association's liberal board was replaced by a board dominated by experienced members of local community councils in the countryside. In August 1848, the AFP broke the alliance with the liberals and initiated an election campaign which proved very successful. The AFP dominated the left side of the constituent assembly and worked towards what they referred to as a democratic constitution. The AFP had a strong organisation on Zealand and the islands where the system of tenure was still prevalent, while the association was less successful in Jutland, where freehold was more common. From August 1848, members of the AFP explicitly stated that the association sought to represent the interests of the peasantry in parliament, in effect those of farmers and smallholders, whereas landless rural workers were hardly ever mentioned.

The fourth and final current I examine in this article consists of various conservative actors. These included estate owners, clergymen, academics and other supporters of the absolute and conglomerate state, who held a critical stance towards the new constitutional monarchy and the national program of the liberals. The »Godsejerforeningen« (Association of Estate Owners) was established in 1843 as an answer to the growing agitation among the rural lower classes, and in 1848 its membership increased significantly. Other than that, what is termed the conservative current saw very little organisation before the establishment of the »Patriotisk Selskab« (Patriotic Society) in March 1849, which only had little impact on the constitutional struggle. About a third of the members of the constituent assembly belonged to the conservative right wing, which voiced concern for the protection of property and »minority rights« in the new constitutional monarchy.

It should be noted that one must distinguish social background and political position of the individual agent, as these did not always correspond. The text-producing actors in the constitutional struggle belonged predominantly to a well-educated elite. This was particularly true for liberals and actors belonging to the conservative current, whereas the AFP and the radical milieu functioned as a gateway into political conversations for many with no previous experience of political communication, including farmers, craftsmen and even a few smallholders. Reports from local community meetings as well as a petition for universal suffrage in the spring 1849 (which obtained more than 58,000 signatures, mainly among the rural lower classes) suggest that the constitutional struggle engaged a wide public far beyond the intellectual milieu in the larger cities.<sup>17</sup>

17 *Anon.*, n. t., in: *Thisted Kongelig allernaadigst privilegerede Amtsavis og Avertissementstidende*, 26.9.1848; *anon.*, n. t., in: *Aalborg Stiftstidende*, 31.8.1848; *anon.*, n. t., in: *Berlingske Tidende*, 21.8.1848 and 22.8.1848; *anon.*, n. t., in: *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen II* [Minutes from the Constituent Assembly, from here: *Beretning*], Copenhagen 1848–1849, pp. LIII–LVI; *Neergaard*, *Under Junigrundloven*, p. 405. This reflected a general European tendency, see *Sperber*, *The European Revolutions 1848–1851*, p. 162. Regarding the authors of these and the following newspaper articles: most newspaper articles of this period in Danish history appear without a named author. Furthermore, most newspaper articles also appear without a title. Authors and titles are given when possible. With regard to the papers mentioned here we know that translator Johan Grøn Lund edited »Thisted Kongelig allernaadigst privilegerede Amtsavis og Avertissementstiden« (Thisted County Paper), that Bernhard Rée, who was associated with the AFP and elected to the Constituent Assembly, edited and authored most pieces in »Aalborg Stiftstidende«, and further that »Berlingske Tidende« was run by Carl Berling and Mendel Levin

## III. SOCIAL CONFLICTS AND REPRESENTATION

When, on 22 March 1848, Frederik VII declared that he now considered himself to be a constitutional monarch, this meant that the existing privileges and obligations assigned to the different social groups could no longer be guaranteed, as they had been previously, by an absolute king. Hence, the struggle for the constitution was affected by several conflicts over privilege. Among these were a conflict over property rights, which was particularly fierce in regions where the system of tenure was still in operation; a conflict over freedom of trade and the existing guild system between liberal ideals on one side and the wishes of the lower middle class in the cities on the other; and a conflict over military service, which fell exclusively on the peasantry. These conflicts were all pre-existing but gained a new dimension with the end of absolutism, and they were all subject to much debate in the period examined here. As this article focuses on the concept of democracy in the struggle for representation, I will briefly sketch the fronts in the conflict on representation 1848–1849.

The conflict over representation was an existing conflict with several fronts running between different social groups. Before March 1848, liberals had pressed for wider participation of »the people« in government. According to this point of view, an independent and well-educated middle class would, as »the people's core«, be able to represent all interests in society.<sup>18</sup> With the promise of a constitution on 21 March 1848, the fronts shifted. The turning point came when the board of the AFP in August 1848 declared that it would seek to represent the interests of the peasantry in the constituent assembly. This declaration was a reaction to the introduction of royally appointed members of parliament, since »the king's election« was interpreted as an attempt at moderating the influence of the numerically strong peasant population. In the summer of 1848, the central conflict on representation stood then on »the king's election«.<sup>19</sup>

The declared ambition to represent particular social groups in parliament was met with criticism from liberals, radicals and conservative actors alike, who feared that a numerically superior peasantry would be too powerful under the new constitution. In the words of conservatives, in particular estate owners, this was expressed as a concern for property rights; liberals expressed concerns for the preservation of the state if not all »interests« in society were represented equally; and while the AER formed an election collaboration with the AFP, several radicals also voiced concern for the representation of the cities and spoke in favour of special elections for the cities.

During the meetings of the constituent assembly, the central conflict over representation changed from being centred on »the king's election« to what was termed »universal suffrage«<sup>20</sup> with reference to the suffrage granted by the March ministry (and the king) in July for the constituent assembly. Interestingly, and probably reflecting that the political climate in Europe had shifted towards the reaction in the spring of 1849, no one proposed a broadening of the suffrage granted in July 1848. Instead, the AFP-dominated left wing fought for a preservation of what they termed »rights already gained« and a unicameral

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Nathanson. Known authors of »Berlingske Tidende« are Nathanson, P. L. Møller, A. E. Boye and David Dessau. »Thisted Amtsavis« was a local paper without a clear political stance. »Aalborg Stiftstidende« supported the line of the AFP, and »Berlingske Tidende« mainly published conservative viewpoints.

18 *Søren Juelstorp*, Den store forfatningsdebat 1841–42, in: *Historie/Jyske Samlinger*, 1995, no. 1, pp. 60–80, p. 68; *Bertel Nygaard*, D. G. Monrads liberale manifest fra 1839, in: *K&K* 37, 2009, no. 107, pp. 92–115, here: pp. 104ff.; *Jeppe Nevers*, Fra Skældsord til slagord. Demokratibegrebet i dansk politisk historie, Odense 1997, p. 103.

19 Danish: »Kongevalg«.

20 Danish: »Almindelig stemmeret«.

legislature to prevent any restrictions on the suffrage. Liberals argued for a preservation of the suffrage and a bicameral legislature in order to moderate the popular vote. Conservatives argued for a bicameral legislature for the same reasons as liberals and hoped for some kind of property qualification or even an abrogation of »universal suffrage«. Interestingly, no actor expressed a wish to return to some form of absolutism in the period from April 1848 to June 1849, not even the former supporters of the absolutist state. This indicates that it was no longer politically feasible to denounce the constitutional monarchy.

#### IV. THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY UNTIL MARCH 1848

The next part of this article addresses the concept of democracy. It begins with a very brief introduction to the concept in early modern history in Europe and in particular the Danish-speaking parts of the Danish monarchy. This is followed by an analysis of the concept of democracy through the lens of the constitutional struggle in Denmark.

From the discussion of the concept of democracy in »Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe«, it is possible to distil some general tendencies in the concept's modern history in the Germanic-speaking world. For most of the 18th century, the concept was primarily academic, referring to one of several possible forms of government in ancient Greece.<sup>21</sup> Between 1780 and 1800, it was significantly broadened and developed, becoming a contested and more frequently used concept that defined different party stances. This meant a broadening of the possible meanings of the concept, which was given social meaning and attached to a philosophy of history.<sup>22</sup> However, the academic sense continued to predominate, and from 1800 to 1848 the concept was often used to discuss contemporary developments only pejoratively, with reference to radicals and revolutionaries. Only in 1848 did the concept gain a broader and more positive meaning.<sup>23</sup> Similar observations on the word democracy have been made for the case of France.<sup>24</sup>

The same general trends can be observed in Denmark. Here, the concept appeared primarily as an academic concept before 1789, after which it became more frequently used to describe radical French revolutionaries, still mainly by scholars. Between 1800 and 1840, the concept came to be associated with the concept of the »people« where it previously had been associated with the concept »republic«.<sup>25</sup>

In the 1840s, the concept started to appear more frequently in political language. From 1841, a radical paper, »Kjøbenhavnsposten« (Copenhagen Post), began to criticise absolutist rule in the name of »democracy«, which entailed suffrage for all adult men.<sup>26</sup> This change occurred with the constitutional debates following Christian VIII's accession to the throne in 1839. In 1844, prominent liberals published a Danish translation of Alexis de Tocqueville's »De la démocratie en Amérique«.<sup>27</sup> In an introduction to the text, the translator, Hother Hage, discussed »democracy« and compared Tocqueville's analysis to his

21 *Meier/Reimann/Maier et al.*, *Demokratie*, p. 839.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 847f.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 861. See also *Joanna Innes/Mark Philp*, Introduction, in: *id.* (eds.), *Re-imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions. America, France, Britain, Ireland 1750–1850*, Oxford/New York etc. 2013, pp. 1–10, here: p. 2.

24 *Rosenvallon*, *The History of the Word »Democracy« in France*, pp. 152f.

25 *Nevers*, *Fra Skældsord til slagord*, p. 79.

26 *Nygaard*, *Demokratibegrebets gennembrud i Danmark i 1848*, p. 46.

27 The translation was produced by the less prominent liberal, Hother Hage, and published in Ditlev Gothard Monrad's journal »Gjengangeren«. *Hother Hage*, *Demokratiet i Amerika*, efter Alexis Tocqueville af Hother Hage, in: *Ditlev Gothard Monrad*, *Gjengangeren indeholdende Bidrag til den nyeste Tids Historie*, Copenhagen 1844.



own analysis of Danish society. In doing so, Hage introduced a concept of democracy that referred to a tendency in European societies involving the rise of the middle classes and the abolition of aristocratic privileges. In this respect, Hage claimed, democracy was indeed developing in Denmark.

In the first months of 1848, participants in public discourse only occasionally invoked the concept of democracy. Following the publication of the constitutional rescript of 28 January, several liberals were outspoken in their wishes for a free constitution rather than the promised constitutional reform. Here, the concept of »the people« was central to the rhetoric of liberals – not the concept of democracy.<sup>28</sup> When it did appear in liberal rhetoric, it did so with the counterconcept of »aristocracy«. Both concepts were used with reference to vaguely defined social groups that were to be integrated as elements of the constitution, though it was not clear how.<sup>29</sup>

The same general tendencies can be observed for usage in the radical milieu in the first months of 1848. Articles in »Kjøbenhavnsposten« continued to apply a concept of democracy associated with the sovereignty of the people. Here, the concept occurred occasionally with reference to a non-specified political group.<sup>30</sup> Apart from these examples, it was used most often in the international columns of the daily papers that brought news of developments in Paris and other European cities.

Several conservative anti-democrats reacted to Frederik VII's promise for constitutional reform between 28 January and 20 March. Among these were voices that argued for a preservation of the conglomerate state combined with a bicameral system in which the nobility would be strongly represented.<sup>31</sup> Here, the concept of democracy was used with reference to the liberals as »the party« that was pressing for a constitution. Again, the concept appeared in tandem with its counter-concept »aristocracy« and was neither positively nor negatively connoted.

## V. MARCH 1848 AND THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY

The selection of prominent liberals as ministers on 22 March had the immediate effect that liberals ceased to use »democracy« as part of their oppositional rhetoric, which came to a halt altogether. Conservatives also ceased to use the concept to refer to specific liberal actors and the liberal milieu. Indeed, the concept rarely surfaced in public discourse between late March and late July 1848. Even the leading figures of the AFP, who later became vo-

28 *Anon.*, n. t., in: *Fædrelandet*, 10.2.1848 and 16.3.1848; *anon.*, Om en Valgreform, in: *Fædrelandet*, 1.3.1848. For this and the following quotes from »Fædrelandet«: The paper was edited by the liberal student Carl Ploug, who was also a member of the constituent assembly and authored the majority of the paper's articles in 1848–1849. The paper was the leading liberal paper in 1848–1849 and among its known contributors in 1848–1849 were Hother Hage and Ditlev Gothard Monrad.

29 *Henrik Nicolai Clausen/Joachim Frederik Schouw*, *Ved Thronskiftet*, Copenhagen 1848, pp. 47 and 68.

30 *Anon.*, En fri Forfatning. I., in: *Kjøbenhavnsposten*, 27.1.1848; *anon.*, Forfatnings-Betingelser, in: *Kjøbenhavnsposten*, 23.2.1848; *anon.*, n. t., in *Kjøbenhavnsposten*, 16.3.1848; »Kjøbenhavnsposten« was the leading radical paper in 1848–1849. It was edited by the former turner Johan Peter Martin Grüne.

31 *J. B. Scavenius*, *Endnu et par Ord om den paatænkte danske Rigsforfatning*, Copenhagen 1848, p. 14; *H. Christensen*, *Bidrag til Oplysning om Begrebet af et første kammer, og om Hensigtsmæssigheden af et Tokammersystems Anvendelse i den danske Stats Repræsentativforfatning*, Copenhagen 1848.

cal advocates of »democracy«, did not apply the concept in sessions of the Assembly of the Estates meetings between April and June.

In July, the conservative economist Christian Nathan David published a new translation of selections from Tocqueville's »De la démocratie en Amérique«. The passages selected mainly examined the social and historical conditions of the development of »democracy« in the American states. David argued that the social conditions in America and in Denmark were so fundamentally different that an introduction of democratic institutions on the American model was not feasible in the foreseeable future.<sup>32</sup> The publication of this translation reflects that »democracy« was becoming a popular concept in Europe, and it appears to have been motivated by a desire to deny the relevance of democracy in relation to the Danish case. As it turned out in the following months, many disagreed with this view, and David's translation appeared when the concept of democracy was about to become central to the constitutional struggle in Denmark.

## VI. AUGUST 1848: FROM SELDOM GUEST TO CENTRAL CONCEPT

The usage of the concept of democracy changed fundamentally in August 1848, when it went from being a rare occurrence in political communication to being a central concept in the struggle for the constitution. Here, »democracy« was applied as a weapon in the struggle for the constitution, and the meaning of the concept itself became an object of struggle as well.

The AER and the AFP brought about this change in beginning to use democracy as their principal rallying call. This change of rhetoric and conceptual usage accompanied an estrangement of the associations from their former allies in the liberal milieu. This split of the opposition resembles the split of the liberal-democratic movement in several German states in 1848. However, while conflicts between German liberals and democrats often concerned the form of government and whether a future German nation should be a republic or a constitutional monarchy<sup>33</sup>, hardly anyone expressed republican or even merely anti-monarchic opinions in the Danish constitutional struggle.<sup>34</sup>

The immediate cause for the split of the opposition was the so-called »king's election«. In late July, the mouthpiece for the AFP, »Almuevennen« (Commoner's Friend), launched a campaign against anyone who had supported the provision at the Assembly of the Estates. The paper referred to them as »the white ties«<sup>35</sup> – men in expensive clothes not suited for physical labour – to create an opponent against which a new political identity could be created. Peasants were to be offered candidates they »could trust«. <sup>36</sup> On 7 August, this came with a demand for »democratic elections«. <sup>37</sup> Reading the texts produced by members of the

32 *Christian Nathan David*, *Demokratiet i Nordamerika*, in: *Borger-Vennen*, 22.7.1848.

33 *Wettengel*, *Party Formation in Germany*, pp. 532ff.

34 In fact, the self-proclaimed democrats from the AFP went to great lengths to create a conceptual link between the concept of democracy and a strong monarch, as I have argued elsewhere. *Anne Engelst Nørgaard*, »Hvoraf kommer det, at vi alle ere saa demokratiske som vi ere?«. *Demokratisk-monarkiske bondevenner i den danske grundlovs-kamp*, in: *Slagmark*, 2014, no. 69, pp. 71–87.

35 Danish: »kjoleklædte Folk«. It directly translates into »men in dress«. *Anon.*, *De forestaaende Valg til en Rigsforsamling*, in: *Almuevennen*, 21.7.1848. »Almuevennen« was edited by shoemaker Jens Andreas Hansen, whom also authored many of its articles. Another known contributor was the smallholder Peter Hansen from Lundby.

36 Danish: »de kunne stole paa«, *ibid.*

37 Danish: »demokratiske Valg«, *anon.*, *Hvem bør Folket ikke vælge til Rigs-forsamlingen?*, in: *Almuevennen*, 7.8.1848.

AFP in August and September 1848, it is possible to observe how the usage of the concept developed over the course of the months into being the association's central catchword. On 18 August, the board of the AFP publicly announced its support for the campaign and declared that it had decided »to its ability to work towards the best possible outcome in a democratic direction in the coming elections«.<sup>38</sup> The chairman, jurist Balthasar Christensen, declared on 31 July that the peasant association was working towards the election of »democrats« and for »democracy« at the coming election.<sup>39</sup> And on 11 September, the board of the AFP declared to »above all recommend the election of real democrats«.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile, the AER went through a process of organisation. The association had constituted itself on 26 April with a programme for a broad suffrage and eligibility. At meetings in Copenhagen on 14 and 16 August, the association passed an election programme including a demand for a people's representation (and rejecting royal or ministerial appointments), universal suffrage, equality in duties and rights, equal taxation, the abolition of all hereditary ranks and titles, freedom of religion, freedom of the press and freedom of association, a reform of the freedom of trade, and the king's suspensive rather than absolute veto, which was suggested in the draft for and incorporated into the final constitution.<sup>41</sup> At the meeting on 16 August, the liberal editor Carl Ploug and a craftsman by the name of Frederiksen were asked to withdraw from the committee with the hope of removing any »moderating elements«.<sup>42</sup> The AER and the AFP formed an election alliance in August with the purpose of supporting one another's candidates and securing the best possible outcome.

In this process, members of both associations began to identify as democrats and to place their programmes under the name »democracy«. One example of this usage is found in a pamphlet by the officer Hans Egede Schack, who was a member of both associations. In this pamphlet, published with the stated intention of answering to the criticisms (described below) made against the associations, Schack declared that one should support the election manifesto if one wished to be called a »democrat«:

»The fact is that we have often witnessed how little people's declarations to be liberal, democratic etc. mean, for everybody later defines the concept as he pleases. Thus we have, in declaring ourselves to be democrats, listed a few points which in our opinion more or less belong to the concept democrat: These are now presented to our candidates, and we ask them whether they, with regard to the concept outlined here, are able to declare themselves to be democrats.«<sup>43</sup>

From this quote it is evident how the concept of democracy was used to distinguish the democratic political identity from others and that Schack attempted to use »democracy«

38 Danish: »efter Evne at bidrage til det bedst mulige Udfald i demokratisk Retning af de forestaaende Valg«, *Balthasar Christensen/Ole Nielsen/Carl Wilhelm Thalbitzer et al.*, *Bondevennernes Selskab*, in: *Almuevennen*, 18.8.1848.

39 *Balthasar Christensen*, Svar til Bladet »Fædrelandet«, in: *Almuevennen*, 31.7.1848.

40 *Balthasar Christensen/Ole Nielsen/Carl Wilhelm Thalbitzer et al.*, Erklæring, in: *Almuevennen*, 11.9.1848.

41 *Anon.*, Forhandling i det offentlige Møde i Hippodromet den 14. August 1848, Copenhagen 1848.

42 Danish: »dæmpende Elementer«, *anon.*, n. t., in: *Nyeste Postefterretninger*, 17.8.1848. On »Nyeste Postefterretninger«, see note 44.

43 Danish: »Sagen er blot den, at vi ofte have seet, hvorlidet Folks Erklæringer om at være liberal, Demokrat o. s. v. betyde, idet Enhver siden forklarer Begrebet, som han lyster. Vi have derfor, idet vi erklærede os for Demokrater, opstillet en Del punkter, som efter vor Mening mere eller mindre nødvendig høre med til Begrebet Demokrat: disse forelægge vi nu vore Kandidater og spørge dem, om de med Hensyn til det saaledes opstillede Begreb kunne erklære sig for Demokrater.« *Hans Egede Schack*, *Om Valgreform-Selskabets Virksomhed og Angrebene paa samme*, Copenhagen 1848, pp. 14f.

as an exclusive reference to the associations – and thus to deny any pretenders the right to call themselves democrats.

»Democracy« had previously appeared as a counterpart to »aristocracy«, but the members of both associations now began also to speak of a contrast between »democracy« and the »bourgeoisie«, the »white ties« or »doctrinaires«, with reference to the liberal milieu. The democrat was presented as something *other* than the political subject advanced by liberals and indeed as an opponent of the intelligentsia. Both the AER and the AFP used the concept of democracy to argue that education was not a prerequisite for political agency. The entry on the political stage of »commoners« in the cities and the countryside was thus legitimised in terms of democracy.

Another example of this usage may be found in an article in »Nyeste Postefterretninger« (Latest Post-News), mouthpiece for the AER, which criticised »the doctrinaire, reacting against democracy, so-called liberal party«. <sup>44</sup> The writer Meir Aron Goldschmidt, who was associated with the AER for a period of time in 1848, also distinguished »democracy« from the »bourgeoisie« in the September issue of his journal »Nord og Syd«. <sup>45</sup> And in »Almuevennen«, liberal criticism was rebutted in the following terms: »We ask only that one note be taken of from which side scholarship and wide reading is expected of election candidates, and one will see that it is from those who fear democracy. They know very well that love of freedom and not of scholarship is what makes a democrat.« <sup>46</sup>

Liberal and conservative actors responded to the invocation of democracy as well as to the formation of a self-proclaimed democratic election confederation. Initially, »Almuevennen«'s campaign against supporters of the »king's election« and the publication of an election programme met with considerable criticism in liberal circles, in particular the leading liberal paper »Fædrelandet« (Fatherland). <sup>47</sup> The critique focused on the negative consequences of the attempts to represent particular social interests in parliament, which were also fundamentally at odds with the liberal ideal of an enlightened »people's core« representing the different interests in parliament.

In September, this strategy was supplemented by a change of rhetoric. Liberals began to apply a concept of democracy to supporters of the March ministry, and prominent liberals initiated the establishment of an election committee as well. This committee also recommended candidates of whose »capabilities« it felt certain. In contrast to the AER, this committee did not publish an election manifesto but in a declaration published on 8 September argued that the future state should be a »constitutional monarchy built on a democratic foundation«, thus connecting the concept of democracy to that of constitutional monarchy. <sup>48</sup>

44 *Anon.*, Om »Fædrelandet« og de Reactionaire, eller: hvo ere de Reactionaire, in: Nyeste Postefterretninger, 25.8.1848; *anon.*, n.t., in: Nyeste Postefterretninger, 28.8.1848. »Nyeste Postefterretninger« was edited by a circle of master craftsmen, printer Sally B. Salomon, gunsmith Georg Christensen, tailor Johan R. Lund and compositor Johan R. Dein. They were among the former journeymen who participated in the establishment of the AER, see note 16.

45 *Meir Goldschmidt*, Bourgeoisiet og Demokratiet, in: Nord og Syd, September 1848, pp. 294–302.

46 Danish: »Vi bede blot lægge Mærke til, fra hvilken Side disse store Fordringer om Lærdom og Belæstthed til valgkandidaten opstilles, og man vil see, at det er dem, der frygte Demokratiet, som tale saaledes. De vide meget godt, at Kjærlighed til Friheden og ikke Boglærdom gjør Demokraten.« *Anon.*, Hvo bør vælges til Rigsdagsmedlemmer?, in: *Almuevennen*, 28.8.1848.

47 *Anon.*, n.t., in: *Fædrelandet*, 27.7.1848, 28.7.1848, 29.7.1848 and 11.8.1848; *Hother Hage*, De forestaaende Valg, Copenhagen 1848.

48 Danish: »Et Constitutionelt Monarchi bygget paa et demokratisk Grundlag«, *Joachim Frederik Schouw/Carl Christian Hall/Alfred Hage* et al., n.t., in: *Fædrelandet*, 8.9.1848. The declaration was signed by 113 men, predominantly professors, jurists and businessmen.

The conceptual connection between democracy and constitutional monarchy was made several times by liberal actors in the fall 1848, and should be read as an attempt at re-describing the concept of democracy against the meaning given to it by the AER and AFP. Liberals argued that »the people« were going through a »constitutional democratic development« and that the future parliament members needed a »democratic constitutional character«. <sup>49</sup> What is more, »Fædrelandet« entered the struggle over who could rightfully lay claim to the title of democrats by applying expressions such as »the real democrats« <sup>50</sup>, »the better democrats« <sup>51</sup>, »the democratic constitutionalist« <sup>52</sup> and »the reasonable democratic party« to liberals and supporters of the March ministry. <sup>53</sup> Members of the AER and the AFP were here referred to as the »new democrats«, who focused on attacking the ministry rather than helping it build a »democracy«. <sup>54</sup> The attempts at re-defining the concept and winning the right to call oneself a »democrat« attest to the success of »democracy« as a rhetorical tool in the hands of the AER and AFP.

This contest also affected several actors of more conservative opinions, among whom two different types of usage can be observed: one that tried to appropriate the concept of democracy and speak from the »truly democratic« position, and one that dismissed it and applied a negatively connoted concept of democracy to political opponents.

In a pamphlet entitled »Democracy and Elections«, the lawyer Niels Levinsen argued that it was possible to be a good democrat even if one did not hold that power should be granted to the people immediately after the abolishment of absolutism. <sup>55</sup> In another pamphlet, the clergyman Mouritz Mørk-Hansen discussed the AER's election programme and concluded that one could easily be a democrat and support a bicameral system, the King's absolute veto, etc. He went through each point of the AER manifesto and concluded: »The real democrat [...] wants only a freedom that does not offend what the people hold dear, he does not demolish the old except to build something better in its place.« <sup>56</sup> In these words, Mørk-Hansen opposed the claim of the AER to be called democrats and that to be called a democrat oneself, one had to support its programme. It was perfectly possible, he argued, to oppose such radical measures as the suspensive veto and still be a good democrat.

The other strategy, which appeared in conservative discourse in August 1848, was one of a complete dismissal of the concept. This strategy is apparent mainly in the newspapers »Flyveposten« (The Flying Post) and »Den danske Folkeven« (The Danish People's Friend), which used a negatively connoted concept of democracy with reference to either the AER or the AFP. »Flyveposten« began to apply it to the radical »Kjøbenhavnsposten« and the AER, whereas »Den danske Folkeven« referred by it to the AFP and the newspaper »Almuevennen«. <sup>57</sup> Thus, it was argued in »Den danske Folkeven« that »democracy« was mere-

49 *Anon.*, n. t., in: *Fædrelandet*, 28.9.1848 and 17.11.1848.

50 Danish: »virkelige Demokrater«, *anon.*, *Almindelig Stemmeret og de forstaaende Valg*. I., in: *Fædrelandet*, 14.9.1848.

51 Danish: »bedre Demokrater«, *Hother Hage*, n. t., in: *Fædrelandet*, 26.9.1848.

52 Danish: »de demokratiske Constitutionelle«, *anon.*, n. t., in: *Fædrelandet*, 6.10.1848.

53 Danish: »det fornøftige demokratiske Parti«, *ibid.*

54 *Ibid.*

55 *Niels Levinsen*, *Democratiet af Valgene*, Copenhagen 1848, p. 6.

56 Danish: »Den ægte Demokrat [...] vil kun en Frihed, som ikke krænker, hvad der er Folket dyrebart, som ikke nedriver det Gamle uden for at opføre noget Bedre i dets Sted.« *Mouritz Mørk-Hansen*, *Til Danmarks Vælgere! Et Alvorsord af En Demokrat*, Copenhagen 1848, p. 7.

57 *Thomas Overskou*, *Valgene*, in: *Flyveposten*, 17.8.1848; *id.*, *De kongelige Valg*, in: *Flyveposten*, 18.8.1848; *id.*, *Den saakaldte Valgreform-Comitee og Forening*, in: *Flyveposten*, 23.8.1848; *anon.*, *Nogle Bemærkninger ved Valg-reformforeningens Møder i Hippodromen*, in: *Flyveposten*, 25.8.1848; *anon.*, *Kjøbenhavnsposten*. III., in: *Flyveposten*, 29.8.1848; *anon.*, *Hvem er Folket?*, in: *Den danske Folkeven*, 8.9.1848; *anon.*, *Hvad er Hovedsagen ved de forestaaende Valg? I.*,

ly a modern word<sup>58</sup> – that is to say, a political fad – and the concept was applied in both papers to argue against any formation of parties.<sup>59</sup> This latter type of usage became dominant in the rhetoric of conservative actors under the constituent assembly.

## VII. SPRING 1849: LOCALISATION OF THE CONCEPT

During the first months of the constituent assembly (October 1848 to February 1849), the conflict over representation was not at the centre of discussions. Here, the members waited for the draft to be presented for discussion, during which time the assembly dealt with other issues, including the introduction of universal military service, lifting a burden that had previously fallen exclusively on the peasantry. In this period, the concept was used occasionally but was not central to debates. As mentioned, the AER had a poor election in October, and for the remainder of the constitutional struggle, the AFP dominated the opposition, which was clamouring for reform.

The assembly debated the draft constitution between late February and late May 1849. Here, questions regarding representation – that is the extent of suffrage, eligibility and the arrangement of parliament – were among the key issues. In these debates the concept of democracy was again central. But while actors across the political spectrum had tried to stake their claim to call themselves democrats in August and September 1848, the concept was now primarily associated with the AFP – either used as a reference to the association, which was common among members of the AFP, or more loosely with reference to the political programme of the association and the social group it sought to represent, applied by liberal and conservative actors.

Conservative participants in public debate as well as members of the constituent assembly now unanimously rejected the concept of democracy, which had become associated with demands for »universal suffrage«.<sup>60</sup> Criticism of »universal suffrage« was expressed as a concern for the preservation of property rights. Here, the conflict over representation and the concept of democracy was influenced by the ongoing property conflict between estate owners and copyhold farmers. Concern for property was expressed as a wish to protect »minorities« against the numerically superior rural lower classes.<sup>61</sup>

»Democracy« once again became a rarity in the discourse of liberals between February and May 1849. When it did appear, it was as one element in a mixed constitution, a meaning similar to the one often ascribed to it before March 1848. As public opinion in the cities

in: *Den danske Folkeven*, 15.9.1848; *anon.*, *Hvad er Hovedsagen ved de forestaaende Valg? II.*, in: *Den danske Folkeven*, 19.9.1848. »Flyveposten« was edited by journalist Eduard Meyer. The political position of the paper was conservative, and the paper was popular both at the court and in the lower middle classes of Copenhagen. »Den danske Folkeven« was established by the Association for Estate Owners in July 1848 and generally expressed views convergent with the association. The paper was an attempt at creating an alternative to the communication aimed at peasants from the paper »Almuevennen«, associated with the AFP.

58 *Anon.*, *Hvad er Hovedsagen ved de forestaaende Valg? II.*

59 *Anon.*, *Til hvilket Parti høre vi?*, in: *Flyveposten*, 13.10.1848; *anon.*, »Almuevennens« Færd, in: *Den danske Folkeven*, 5.9.1848.

60 See i. e. Christian Nathan David, in: *Beretning*, 30.4.1849, p. 2975; Thomas Funder, in: *Beretning*, 22.3.1849, p. 2095; Carl de Neergaard, in: *Beretning*, 26.3.1849, p. 2209; *Ditlev Ræder*, in: *Beretning*, 12.3.1849, p. 1871; Frederik Christian von Haven, in: *Beretning*, 27.3.1849, p. 2231; Johannes Ephraim Larsen, in: *Beretning*, 19.3.1849, p. 1985; *anon.*, *Den danske Grundlov*, in: *Den danske Folkeven*, 14.11.1849; *anon.*, *Valgloven*, in: *Den danske Folkeven*, 5.12.1849.

61 I. e. Johannes Ephraim Larsen, in: *Beretning*, 19.3.1849, p. 1986; Carl de Neergaard, in: *Beretning*, 26.3.1849, p. 2209.

turned against »universal suffrage« in the spring of 1849, many liberals defended the suffrage proposed by the March ministry although most of them found it to be too broad. The concept of democracy was used mainly as a vaguely defined adjective or an abstract academic term. Occasionally it was used with direct reference to the AFP. This included references to »the democratic side« of the assembly and »the democratic party«. <sup>62</sup> Interestingly, some liberals now used the concept of »constitutional« as an opposite to »democratic«. This usage contrasts with that of September 1848, when liberal actors attempted to tie these concepts together. In a dispute between Andreas Frederik Krieger and Balthasar Christensen, the latter argued that »from a democratic point of view« it was important that future parliaments met annually. <sup>63</sup> Krieger replied that he agreed as long as the word »democratic« was replaced with »constitutional«. <sup>64</sup>

Earlier attempts to claim the concept and define it in line with one's own political programme gave way to a usage that identified the concept with the position of the AFP and argued against that party's call for universal suffrage and a unicameral legislature. The members of the AFP continued to use the concept of democracy as a name for their association during the meetings of the constituent assembly. This type of usage occurred in references to »democrats« and, less specifically, to »democracy«. The latter term could simultaneously refer to a more abstract principle of the time as well as to the social groups the AFP claimed to represent. Furthermore, the concept was now also used with reference to the constitution the AFP strove to achieve. As a consequence of the usage of the AFP as well as liberals and conservative actors, the concept of democracy became increasingly identified with the position of the AFP during the spring of 1849. <sup>65</sup>

## VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article, I have shown that the concept of democracy went from being a rarity in political communication to become a central and contested concept in the Danish-speaking parts of the Danish monarchy in August and September 1848. Before August 1848, »democracy« appeared only occasionally and without clear reference to contemporary issues. This changed when the AER and the AFP began to use it as their central catchword from late July. They used the concept to create a new political identity – that of the »democrat«. Moreover, the AER and the AFP used it to legitimise the political subjectivity of actors belonging to the lower classes in the cities and the countryside, as well as the association's aspirations to represent these social groups in parliament. This was a rhetoric and political practice that forced political opponents to address the concept as well. This developed into a struggle over the right to call oneself a »democrat« in August and September 1848, a conflict over who were the »true« or »right« democrats, and a debate on the »true« meaning of the concept. At this point, »democracy« was a central concept in the constitutional struggle and functioned as a powerful rhetorical tool.

This changed in the spring 1849, when the concept was increasingly associated with the AFP and its policies. Liberals and conservative actors now abandoned their claims to be

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62 Danish: »den demokratiske side«, Andreas Frederik Krieger, in: *Beretning*, 29.3.1849, p. 2292; Danish: »det demokratiske Parti«, Henrik Nicolai Clausen, in: *Beretning*, 1.5.1849, p. 2990. See also: *Joachim Frederik Schouw*, *Nogle Bemærkninger om Forfatningsværket*, in: *Dansk Tidsskrift* 1849, pp. 214f. and 221.

63 Danish: »det demokratiske Standpunkt«, Balthasar Christensen, in: *Beretning*, 24.4.1849, p. 2838.

64 Danish: »Constitutionelle«, Andreas Frederik Krieger, in: *Beretning*, 24.4.1849, p. 2838.

65 Hans Egede Schack, in: *Beretning*, 29.12.1848, p. 705; Balthasar Christensen, in: *Beretning*, 16.3.1849, p. 1949; Bernhard Rée, in: *Beretning*, 28.3.1849, p. 2263.

called »democrats« and instead began to apply a negatively connoted concept of democracy associated with the AFP. As the AFP continued to apply it to itself, the concept now became localised, and though it still appeared ambiguous it was also more fixed to a certain body of meaning than it had been just months earlier.

The concept of democracy remained associated with the AFP after 1849. Throughout the 19th century, »democracy« was used in rural circles to describe a group working in the interests of the people.<sup>66</sup> Danish historian Jeppe Nevers has argued that »democracy« only became a basic political concept in the interwar years in Denmark.<sup>67</sup> Here, I argue that for a few months in 1848, democracy was indeed a popular and widely contested concept, open to various interpretations, before becoming localised and attached to a certain political position in the spring of 1849. The June constitution remained in force beyond the revolutionary years. The revised constitution of 1866, which restricted the suffrage for the first chamber, is commonly regarded as a result of both liberal and conservative perceptions that the suffrage granted in 1849 was too broad. In this light, the prospect of a numerically superior peasantry and the ensuing localisation of »democracy« at the position of the AFP in the spring of 1849 may be interpreted as the beginning of this reaction, which lasted for decades.

One might ask why participants in the Danish constitutional struggle suddenly made »democracy« their central catchword in 1848. It seems natural to assume that they were in many ways inspired by developments in other European countries, perhaps particularly by their German neighbours. It is, however, not easy to tell from the source material if and how the concept was transferred from European revolutionaries to the new Danish democrats in 1848. Referring to German antecedents was considered bad form in 1848–1849 because of the First Schleswig War, and French democrats, being republicans, were considered no better. It is easier to decipher the international inspiration of liberal and conservative actors, who also tended to be better educated than those belonging to the AER and AFP. Here, Tocqueville seems to have been particularly important. Apart from the translations of his work discussed in this article, liberal and conservative actors used references to Tocqueville as a scholarly authority in support of their arguments in the constituent assembly.<sup>68</sup> Returning to the AER and AFP, there can be no doubt that the associations made »democracy« their central catchword in late July 1848 and connected what had previously been a largely academic concept to a social struggle for the inclusion of the lower classes in the cities and the countryside.

<sup>66</sup> *Nevers*, *Fra skældsord til slagord*, p. 106.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21–26, 172–174 and 199.

<sup>68</sup> Christian Nathan David, in: *Beretning*, 12.3.1849, p. 1855; Johannes Ephraim Larsen, in: *Beretning*, 19.3.1849, p. 1984; Carl Ploug, in: *Beretning*, 20.3.1849, p. 2024; Peter Daniel Bruun, in: *Beretning*, 30.4.1849, p. 2950; Georg Aagaard, in: *Beretning*, 23.3.1849, p. 2124; Carl Emil Bardenfleth, in: *Beretning*, 10.4.1849, p. 2485.