

Independent Finland, 1917 - 2013, 96 Years Old

In the previous three years of this event we have gone through the history of Finland from the ancient times that have left signs of people having lived in Finland through centuries of events, and through the Civil War, Independence, Winter War, Continuation War, Lapland War, Industrial Evolution and all the way to today.

Now we'll take a look into the minds of the Finns. Why and how did they get the idea of becoming independent, forming an independent country?

The northern climate forced people to learn to stock up for the winter and to build homes to keep them warm. They included all living creatures in their household in buildings that could be kept warm through the cold period of the year. All events of life happened in these close quarters, which taught people to live with each other, help each other and combine their efforts to perform the necessary tasks. Talkoohenki, barnraising spirit, was born hundreds of years ago, first as a necessity, and later it became a way of life, a norm.

The Russian rule in Finland brought 50 years of consolidation, 35 years of increased independence and the last 20 years of efforts to 'Russify' Finland.

1899 February Manifesto weakened the powers of the diet in Finland's internal affairs and were transferred to the Russian ministers, but the diet's legal committee adopted the opinion that the manifesto was not legally valid in Finland.

General unrest during the Russo-Japanese War resulted in a general strike in Finland in October 1905. The most immediate result was the Emperor's manifesto that cancelled all illegal regulations. A unicameral parliament of 200 members based on universal and equal suffrage was demanded and promised.

The reforms were approved and came to force on October 01, 1906. The universal suffrage gave all men and women, 24 years or older, the right to vote and stand for election. Acts on the right of parliament to monitor members of the government, on the Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association, and on the Freedom of the Press were also introduced. These reforms established the hallmarks of today's Parliament of Finland.

The first election to the new parliament was arranged in 1907. 181 men and 19 women were elected to the first Parliament.

Finland was the third country in the world to give women the right to vote and stand for election. New Zealand was the first in 1893, Australia the second in 1902, but they excluded the Aborigines, so they don't really count. Finland had elected female members of Parliament before New Zealand.

Interesting statistics about universal suffrage in other countries: Norway 1913, Denmark 1915 (includes Iceland), USA 1920, Sweden 1921, Switzerland 1971, Lichtenstein 1984, Saudi Arabia Not Yet.

Onnellista syntymäpäivää Suomelle! Happy Anniversary to Finland!

Seppo Saarinen