

# Antero Jyränki

\* 9.8.1933 † 29.4.2020



**PROFESSOR EMERITUS** Antero Jyränki died in Helsinki on April 29, 2020, at the age of 86. He was a prominent scholar of constitutional law and legal history, an influential figure in society and a critic of presidential power. He became a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1987.

Born in Hamina, Jyränki spent his childhood in Kontioniemi in North Karelia. He graduated from secondary school in 1950 and started his studies in the Faculty of Law at the University of Helsinki in the autumn of the same year, at the age of 17. The old-fashioned and doctrinal faculty did not fully meet up to his expectations, however, and the subject that he found most interesting was public law, taught by Professor Veli Merikoski. This was not only because of the substance of the teaching but also because of the easy-going style, which differed from the rigidity of the other faculty scholars.

Jyränki was active in student associations during his studies. The university's Student Union became a central interest and activity for him, giving the direction for his later career, so that he returned to the University of Helsinki as Secretary General of the Student Union in the spring of 1957. Inspired by Paavo Kastari's dis-

sertation in constitutional law, he went on to postgraduate studies. Professor Kastari showed that legal scholarship could be interesting, in contrast to the rigid faculty mainstream, so that once Jyränki had completed his licentiate degree in the summer of 1961, Kastari proposed that he should write a doctoral thesis on constitutional law. This work, on the supreme command of the military forces (1967), received the grade of *Laudatur*, paving the way for a research career.

As a young academic, Jyränki also worked at the University of Tampere, where he not only took part in research and teaching but was also actively involved in national political debates. At the same time, as a legal scholar, he was open to new issues and approaches, partly influenced by the fact that the discipline of public law was closer to the other social sciences in Tampere than it was in the Faculty of Law in Helsinki. The acceptance of new ideas fitted in well with Kastari's way of thinking, marked by an interest in the historical background of constitutional phenomena and in political realities. Accordingly, Jyränki also started to perceive constitutional law from a social science perspective.

The Tampere period transformed Jyränki into an active constitutional reformer and a notable debater, so that he remained a public figure until the end of his life. His three-year stint as President Urho Kekkonen's Chief of Staff (1970-1973) gave him a permanent status in the public eye, but it was also relevant as far as his later career was concerned that President Kekkonen allowed him to continue with his scholarly work. Hence the role of a Mandarin was only an intermediate phase. This experience made Jyränki even more critical of strong presidential power, and accordingly led him to underline the importance of the parliamentary features of the Finnish Constitution. For decades, Jyränki was an expert whose opinions were heard and respected by the Parliamentary Constitution Committee.

Jyränki started as a senior researcher with the Academy of Finland in 1973, and followed this with a couple of years spent in Tampere as an associate professor. His long-standing permanent position then came to be that of Professor of Constitutional and International Law at the University of Turku, a chair from which he retired in 1998 after eighteen years of service. He also had a period as a research professor with the Academy of Finland in the mid-1980s which resulted in the publication of his most important scholarly work, dealing with the constitution and its binding force in European and North American legal thought in the period from the Great Revolutions to World War II. This not only became a classic of Finnish legal literature but was also an impressive display of scholarship which bears com-

parison with the international classics. During his active years Jyränki also took part in international cooperation through the International Association of Constitutional Law.

Most importantly, Jyränki never abandoned the role of a constitutional reformer. Although the Finnish constitutional reform of the 1970s failed, the partial reforms of the 1980s and 1990s and the comprehensive reform embodied in the 2000 Constitution took place along the lines that Jyränki had been instrumental in forging. He also served as a permanent expert on the Constitution 2000 Committee in the 1990s and actively continued his research work in his retirement years. In his last years he returned to legal history, penning two books dealing with the legal aftermath of the 1918 Civil War and the precarious position of Finland between the Great Powers.

As a legal scholar Jyränki had strong views, but he would always listen carefully to his opponents and was prepared to modify his views in the face of convincing arguments. This was a hallmark of his scholarly qualities. Disagreement was not a problem for him, but he could not tolerate weakness or inaccuracy in the arguments put forward in a debate. Antero Jyränki's legacy to Finnish legal scholarship, and especially constitutional law and legal history, takes the form of his numerous written works. Nowadays it is reflected in the way Finnish legal scholars think about constitutional law and research into it while also taking into account the socio-political context. He will have a lasting impact on Finnish constitutional thinking.

*Obituary by Jaakko Husa*