

A defeated revolution: Finland 1918

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In the years immediately following the Russian Revolution workers across Europe took to the streets, often with arms in hand, to spread the world workers' revolution. The heroic fight of the Finnish workers in 1918 tends to be unfairly overlooked when these struggles are recounted. Ninety years since the Finnish Civil War, Jens-Hugo Nyberg, recalls these great events and draws out the lessons for today.

Until 1809, Finland had belonged to Sweden for centuries.¹ There were close connections between the countries' upper classes, and the layers that economically, socially and culturally dominated Finland spoke Swedish, in contrast to the Finnish-speaking impoverished peasant masses. As a consequence of their defeat in the Napoleonic wars, the Swedish ruling class lost Finland, and the country was transferred to the Russian Tsar. However, it was not fully integrated into the empire; it kept its own laws, its borders, its army and its currency. Henceforth it was ruled as a grand dukedom under Tsar Alexander I, who swore, however, to uphold its constitution.

By European standards, Finland was an underdeveloped country until industrialisation took off in the last thirty years of the 19th century, creating a modern proletariat. During the fifty years preceding World War I, the population increased from 1.7 to 3.2 million, of which about 110,000 were industrial workers. To that can be added 300,000 agrarian workers, and 150,000 tenant farmers. Counting their families, as well as all other poor peasants, it is clear that the great majority of the people were poor, and subjected to the richer classes economically and socially, as well as legally. A law from 1865, one of those expressing the subjugation of the workers, gave the employer the right to search through a worker's belongings, if they lived on his premises. That law was still in force in 1917. The inferior position of the working classes formed the basis for their radical positions in 1917-18.

The working class movement emerges

Within the growing working class there also arose an organised movement. At the start, in the 1880s, it was led and organised by humanitarian liberals who wanted to create a better society for workers and employers alike. However, along with modern class conditions, class struggle slowly made its appearance. The 1890s saw the emergence of trade unions, as well as strikes. The bourgeois "friends of labour" could be thanked for their unconscious help in creating the class organisations of the workers but were rightly pushed aside in favour of Marxist socialists, who took control of the Finnish Labour Party at the congress of 1899. At the congress at Forssa, in 1903, the name was changed to Social Democratic Party of Finland (SDP).

The Marxism that was adopted took German Social-Democracy as its role model and in particular the ideas of Karl Kautsky. This was of course quite natural in the Second International. The Russian Bolsheviks also looked to the German party and Kautsky for a certain leadership and guidance. However, where the Bolsheviks developed their principles and methods by participating and attempting to lead concrete struggles, the Finnish Social Democrats, in their relatively calm corner of the Tsar's empire, felt closer to the "civilised" West than the "barbarian" East.

Unfortunately, they adopted the worst aspects of Kautsky's approach, its passive and deterministic tendencies. They kept to the formal principles of the class struggle and their revolutionary conclusions with a purity almost unsurpassed amongst socialist parties, but in an entirely abstract manner. The revolution was seen as something that would come by itself, rather than something that was to be led and, when it came, socialists only had to do their duty and endure it. The fatalistic approach of the Finnish socialists was to reveal itself in full during the revolutionary storm of 1917-18.

The revolution of 1905

The Russian revolution of 1905 also shook Finland. The general strike was as powerful as in any other part of the empire, and it was in Finland that the name Red Guard was first used for the most militant of the workers' defence organisations. Already, conflicts were emerging between the party leadership and the Red Guards. The following year, 1906, the revolution continued in spite of its defeats, and Lenin thought that the overthrow of the Tsar was on the agenda. One of the most radical struggles of that year came in July with the mutiny at Sveaborg, the naval fort just outside Helsinki. If everything had gone according to plan, the Red Guard would at the same time have seized Helsinki. Instead, the socialist leaders were hesitant to join the fight, and the mutiny was rapidly subdued. The first armed clashes of the Finnish revolution with the "home guards" of the bourgeoisie also took place at this time, resulting in seven dead home guardsmen and two dead workers. In contrast to how Lenin's comrades reacted, the militancy of the Red Guards scared, rather than encouraged, the Finnish socialist leaders. This was to reveal itself later in a reluctance to develop armed workers' organisations in 1917. At the congress at Oulo, in August 1906, the party renounced armed struggle, dissolved the guards and declared itself in favour of struggle on purely constitutional grounds.

One result of the revolutionary wave of 1905-06, and a major cause of the moderate tendencies of the August congress, was the formation in Finland of a one-chamber parliament, with universal suffrage for men and women over 21 years of age. The municipal elections were still based on income, however, so the municipalities were to remain organs of the rich. Nonetheless, at the first general elections in 1907, the SDP received 80 seats out of 200, and many socialists started to see the legal, parliamentary road to power as representing the most realistic strategy. Despite being subject to a veto by the Tsar, the national parliament, as opposed to the municipalities, did constitute a form of democratic representation that was the equal of the most developed bourgeois democratic institutions in the rest of Europe.

Finland's autonomy

In 1898, despite Finland's long-standing autonomy, the new Tsar, Nicholas II, soon to be known as Nicholas the Bloody, embarked on a programme of "Russification" of the empire. Finland's autonomy was now to be limited and this created resistance amongst broad layers. A mainly bourgeois movement, the so-called activism, strove to liberate Finland. During the first years of the 20th century, and especially around 1905, the movement had considerable popular support, and did not shrink from cooperating with the Russian revolutionaries.

The support for activism varied in the Finnish socialist camp. A few wanted, in the current situation, to place the struggle against Russian rule as the primary goal, but most of the SDP did not see the struggle for independence as something separate, and attacked the Russian supremacy mainly because, in the last analysis, it protected the Finnish ruling class against the workers' movement.

Although the hold of the Tsar eased somewhat following the 1905 revolution, it stiffened again as he regained control over the rest of his empire and, in 1907, the entire revolutionary movement was pushed underground by Stolypin's government. Finnish nationalism was also tempered by the fact that many Finnish capitalists did good business with Russia. It should also be added that the national oppression of

Finland, even after the autonomy was further restricted, was relatively mild when compared to the treatment of many other oppressed nations. Many criticised Russian rule, but only a minority were ready to actively fight it.

First World War

The outbreak of the world war in 1914 naturally changed the whole situation. As a primarily military move to guard against a possible invasion by the Germans, large numbers of Russian troops were stationed in Finland. The country was now under direct military occupation by some 50,000 soldiers, and autonomy was further restricted.

One important development during the war was that the elections in 1916 gave the Social Democrats a majority in parliament, making it the first parliament in history with a socialist majority; 47.3 per cent of the votes gave them 103 out of 200 seats.

At least as important during the war were the developing connections between the ever more pro-German activists and the German military. Their plans and promises to the Germans to organise an anti-Russian insurrection in Finland turned out to be empty, but an important concrete result came out of the negotiations; Finnish volunteers, Jaegers as they were to be called, were sent to Germany for training and participation in the imperial army. About 1500 Jaegers were trained and, although they did not live up to the more optimistic hopes during the war, they were to form the backbone of the victorious white army that, together with German troops, crushed the Finnish revolution.

The February Revolution

The frailty of Tsarism revealed itself in full when the mere word of the February Revolution in Petrograd was enough to bring about similar overturns throughout the empire. This was also the case in Finland, where the old rule collapsed. The foremost representatives of the Tsar were arrested, and the sailors of the Baltic fleet executed a selection of their most hated officers. The defunct police force was replaced by a militia, which largely reflected the local and regional balance of power. Where the workers' movement was strong, the militia came to be dominated by the proletariat, and were to prove reluctant to be used against the strivings of the poor. At the outbreak of the civil war, militias increasingly came to be incorporated into either the Red or the White Guard. This was one of the most important peculiarities of the Finnish Revolution; there was no armed, centralised state power to defend the ruling classes.

The most important armed force consisted of the Russian soldiers that were placed in garrisons throughout Finland. Their numbers varied between 40,000 and 100,000, with more during the summer. This part of the Russian Army followed the development of the army at large, revolutionaries, primarily the Bolsheviks, gained an ever-increasing influence. At the same time, discipline tended to decline. By late autumn, the elected organs of the Russian soldiers and sailors, the Tsentrobalt of the Baltic fleet and the highest organ of the Russian army in Finland, the Area Committee, were completely led by Bolsheviks.

The SDP with its parliamentary majority had an advantageous position to shape developments. Unfortunately, they now showed, as throughout the year that followed, a striking incapability to lead the struggles of the workers. This had an important source in the passive, deterministic view of development they had adopted, which was inspired by Kautsky. It is, perhaps, not entirely surprising that an untested party, at the fringe of big events, failed to act boldly and seize power when the opportunity presented itself, no one had done it before them. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the SDP did not advance a revolutionary policy for the working class.

In the power vacuum that emerged when the old administration was crushed, the SDP was unwilling to take on government responsibility alone. Negotiations with the bourgeois parties finally led to a coalition

government, the Senate. This consisted of six socialists and six bourgeois representatives and the SDP had the decisive vote through the chairman, Oskari Tokoi. However, even this only held true as long as the Russian governor, Stahovich, did not use his right to cast the decisive veto. This he did only once, but at the most critical time.

The question of independence

All the Finnish parties, contrary to an often-repeated myth, advocated an independent Finland. Even the SDP had its share of nationalist inclinations. The question of independence did not, however, stand above class conflicts, and so it was not possible to unite the Finnish parties for an independent Finland, and postpone other questions. The February Revolution created an ambiguous relationship between Finland and Russia. Finnish autonomy was acknowledged but, at the same time, the Tsar's sovereignty was simply transferred to the Provisional Government. Lvov and Kerensky were prepared to give Finns a bigger measure of self-rule, provided they supported the Russian war effort and cut their ties to the Jaegers. No Finnish party was prepared to do that, and the attitude of the Provisional government hardened.

The SDP had always connected the question of independence to the class struggle. Now, in 1917, this was expressed above all in the demand for a radical democratic constitution. The so-called power law, the *valtalaki*, that the party put forward during the spring, proclaimed Finland's full sovereignty in everything but military questions and foreign policy. At the same time, it asserted the sovereignty of the elected parliament, with a subordinate role for the strictly executive government. This was combined with the demand for universal and equal suffrage in municipal elections. Although acceptable to the more liberally inclined bourgeois, this was too much for the conservatives. No independence in the world was worth this lack of a guarantee against the subversive inclinations of the poor masses. The parliament adopted the *valtalaki* on June 18 with a two-thirds majority, with the support of a minority of the more progressive bourgeois representatives, even though this was to some extent a concession to the massive popular support for the law.

The right of nations to self-determination

The right to self-determination for all nations of the Russian empire was written into the programme of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party and the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks alike agreed on it, at least formally. The Socialist Revolutionaries had taken a similar position, but several of their leaders had since made clear that they were not ready to accept any dissolution of the Russian empire. Events were to show that, even in Russian social democracy, there was confusion, or disagreement, on the link between democratic and class struggle demands.

When Lenin clarified the issue in *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* shortly before the outbreak of the world war, he specified that the oppressed nation had the right to decide its own future; it should have self-determination without any condition. To let an All-Russian constituent assembly settle the issue would still mean that the oppressed nations were subordinated to the Russians. Accordingly, the Bolshevik position was that Finland had the right to declare independence, without waiting for permission from anyone. The Mensheviks and the SRs, from May a part of Lvov and Kerensky's coalition government, referred this question, as they did all others, to the repeatedly postponed constituent assembly.

Kerensky dissolves the Finnish parliament

As soon as it had recovered somewhat from the July days in Petrograd, the Provisional Government was forced to deal with the situation created by the adoption of the *valtalaki*. The moderate socialists' flare for the constitutional and gradual was strengthened by their self-imposed duty to keep the front against Germany active. To pre-empt the democratic will of the constituent assembly would evidently be undemocratic, Kerensky's socialists explained. Only the Russian and Finnish peoples could break the

agreement of 1809. These brave democrats did not dwell on the fact that this "agreement" consisted of the Swedish ruling class, following its poor performance in the war, handing over Finland to Tsar Alexander. To add substance to these words they were now ready to dissolve the Finnish parliament, and use military force to prevent it regathering! In all the debates that have raged over the Russian Revolution, this terribly undemocratic and oppressive act has never been given sufficient attention. Whenever the followers of the Mensheviks, the Socialist Revolutionaries or liberals denounce the actions of the Bolsheviks, they should be reminded that their champions, basing themselves on the dictates of the dead Tsarist regime, dissolved the first democratically elected parliament with a socialist majority, thus paving the way for the Finnish counter-revolution!2

The bourgeoisie attacked the Finnish socialists for not putting the question of independence above the class struggle. It is certainly true that the question of class was always primary for them and, as Marxists, it could not be otherwise. However, when the Russian government dissolved the parliament and the question of self-determination was posed concretely, the bourgeoisie became apologists for this Russian provisional government. They were unhappy with the radical democratic content of the *valtalaki*, and the socialist parliamentary majority and thus were inclined to accept the dissolution, hoping for better luck in the next election. Actually, Carl Enckell, Finnish minister-secretary in Petrograd, called on Kerensky to take this step, and many of his fellow conservatives were behind him. Unfortunately, the SDP did not show itself capable of resisting this. The socialists in the Senate proposed that the decree on the dissolution should not to be published or obeyed but the bourgeois members showed their national characters by voting for its publication and, since the Russian governor now stepped in and utilised his right to a decisive vote, this became the position of the Senate.

The speaker of parliament, the socialist Kullervo Manner, instead of calling for radical resistance on the streets, announced parliament was taking a holiday! Only on the 29 August did the SDP try to reassemble the parliament for a new session but the socialist deputies were unprepared for this confrontational approach and did not organise any defence. Consequently, when Kerensky, after some serious effort, found a unit loyal enough to stop the parliament reassembling, the attempt at retaining the socialist majority was quickly snuffed out. The SDP's readiness for a struggle was also diminished by their belief that they would be able to move their positions even further forward in the new elections that were now planned. Of course, they condemned the dissolution, but they did not advocate a boycott of the elections and the reinstatement of the socialist government.

Seldom, if ever, has the result of a parliamentary election had such fatal consequences as the one in Finland in October 1917. The socialists did increase their number of votes but, unfortunately, the bourgeois parties were able to pull themselves together and succeeded in increasing their total vote even more. The SDP went from a narrow majority to a narrow minority: 45.6 per cent of the votes gave it 92 out of 200 deputies. The bourgeoisie consequently gained the democratic legitimacy that was to cost Red Finland so dearly in the year to come.

The SDP continued to criticise the dissolution of the old parliament, and they started to agitate for elections to a constituent assembly, with the voting age lowered to 18 years, and with full suffrage for all tenant farmers. Progressive as these demands were, there is an obvious problem with this purely democratic approach to the struggle. The socialists had a majority in the old parliament that was undemocratically dissolved but, by participating in the elections that followed, they lent legitimacy to them. The new elections they advocated would be a little more representative, but what if the bourgeoisie acted in the same way again and dissolved another socialist government? What would the socialists do then?

Marxists should have no problem in answering. History in Finland and elsewhere tells us the bourgeoisie

will frequently resort to anti-democratic measures to resist socialist transformation, our task is to fight for workers' interests, to empower the working class and nullify the power of the exploiters. This was of course summarised by Marx in his call for the "dictatorship of the proletariat". By calling only for a more democratic form of bourgeois democracy, the socialists fostered illusions in the idea that the existing state could be an instrument of socialist transformation, when it was in fact a disguised dictatorship of capital. This was, after all, the lesson of the dissolution of parliament. Now the socialists faced the problem that their narrow but legitimate majority had been turned into a narrow but, from the point of view of formal, bourgeois democracy, equally legitimate minority.

Sharpening of class struggle

1917 saw a sharpening of class struggle. Amongst the most important events, apart from the strikes in industry, were the farm workers' strikes that broke out in May. These showed not only that the poor classes were increasingly prepared to fight for their rights, but it also convinced the Finnish bourgeoisie that the militia could not defend their privileges, as it was frequently unwilling to be used against the poor agricultural workers. The first farm workers' strikes were followed by the formation of the first "Home Guards", as the petit bourgeois militias that attempted to restore order and put down the strikes were called. In some places, the formation of the Home Guards was caused by an understandable concern for order and safety in the increasing chaos. In other places, they were formed to drive out the Russians. Where the Home Guards were formed as a direct consequence of the farm workers' strikes, or of the unwillingness of the militia to interfere in all kinds of disturbances from the poor, they were, to varying degrees, anti-socialist and directed against the working class from the outset. They may not have been motivated at the outset with a thirst for blood and hatred of the poor, but the sharpening class struggles would swiftly turn the Home Guards into just that: butchers' guards.

Among the most important developments in the rising tide of unrest were the events at Turku in early May. The firemen went on strike, which triggered a local general strike. Soon angry crowds besieged the municipal board which, like all municipal boards, represented only the wealthy, demanding that they include 25 representatives of the workers' organisations. The militia stood aside, unwilling to interfere. Occurrences like this clearly showed the bourgeoisie that the militia was not the reliable force they needed. At the same time, the struggle was symptomatic of the still limited horizons of the workers' movement; the militant struggle tried to pressure the bourgeoisie into concessions. This was also how the socialist leaders articulated the tasks of the movement; radical pressure on the capitalists. For many months yet they would stubbornly resist workers seizing power.

The single most important question was food. After the February Revolution, grain imported from Russia had all but stopped, and inflation made food even more expensive. As usual, the richer farmers wanted good payment for their products and, as usual, the workers and poorer peasants had a hard time accepting that they would get less to eat than the wealthy. During the spring, and increasingly throughout the year, hunger led the working masses to question the right to private property. Stocks of food were beginning to be seized. At first, as at Turku in August, the owners received payment for their butter, if not the right to any control over the transactions. Increasingly, however, the hungry masses tended towards confiscation of the food stocks.

In spite of all the ruling class claims of the Red's willingness to use violence, the socialist leaders were for a long time completely against arming the workers. During spring and summer, they actively tried to hinder the formation of any armed organisation apart from the militia. It was not until the crisis had developed quite considerably in October, when the willingness of the bourgeoisie to organise themselves to retain "order" was clearly revealed, that the unions advocated forming workers' defence guards. The SDP leaders only did the same in November and it was only in December that the name Red Guards was

officially adopted.

General strike

On 7 November, according to the calendar that was used in Finland, the Russian Provisional Government was overthrown. Apart from the other effects on the struggle in Finland, it also meant that the legal order lost yet more support. The Tsar's supremacy had been more or less taken over by the Provisional Government. But now what? From the bourgeoisie came the idea, based on the Swedish (!) and now defunct constitution of 1772, to appoint a regency to hold the power. The SDP had consistently advocated the sovereignty of the parliament, and was worried by the new, more authoritarian proposal, with an independent executive not fully, if at all, subordinated to the parliament. Regardless of whether claims of a coup-d'etat are exaggerated, the new proposal of the bourgeois parties was obviously meant as a protection against the attempts of the poor masses to further their interests through the democratic structures.

The new position of the socialists, after the elections, was expressed in *We demand*. This confirmed the *valtalaki* and declared the dissolution of the parliament illegal. It thus argued that power should remain in the old parliament, until a new constituent assembly could be convoked. An important factor behind the new, radical line was the huge pressure from below. That the masses demanded action was something the whole leadership could agree on, although they also frequently expressed their concern at these demands.

The new bourgeois speaker of parliament refused to even allow discussion of *We demand*. At the same time, on 12 November, the congress of the unions opened. This was not a soviet congress but, nevertheless, the representatives of the organised working class gathered. The discussions were completely dominated by calls for action and the formation of a workers' government. That same demand had for some time been put forward by workers' organisations and mass meetings in a growing number of localities, in the workers' foremost strongholds, like Helsinki, mass meetings had demanded action ever since April.

The result was the calling of a general strike from 14 November with the clearly stated political aim of stopping the undemocratic plans of the bourgeoisie. The strike clearly showed the power of the working class movement. In the cities, and in many more places, they simply took the power, or had it within easy grasp, while the bourgeois forces were very weak. According to Upton: "It remains true that within 48 hours most of the country was firmly under the control of the local revolutionary committees."³

The newly formed Workers' Revolutionary Central Council, the common leadership of all branches of the workers' movement, discussed the obvious question; shall we seize power? In fact, the radicalism of the mass movement was strong enough, and the situation advantageous enough, to allow the hesitant socialists, on November 16, to decide to pick up the power that was at their feet. Alas, their courage failed them. They made a concession to the right wing of the SDP who opposed this move. In a characteristic way, they decided to postpone the decision to the extraordinary congress of the SDP at the end of the month. In Upton's words: "The Finnish revolution aborted at 7:00 A.M. on 16 November".⁴ On 20 November, the general strike was called off under the slogan: "the strike ends, but the revolution continues"!

The prospects of revolution in November 1917

There can be little doubt that this was the best moment for the workers' organisations to seize power. The pressure from below was enormous, and the will to fight was at its greatest. Also, the Russian soldiers, whose sympathies rested with the workers, were less demoralised than they would be in January. Easier to measure, however, is the readiness of the Whites. They were a lot less determined than they would be later, and they were further away from the coming spring's military help in the form of arms and troops from

Germany, Swedish officers and the returning Jaegers. Their decisive leader, Mannerheim, had not yet even returned to Finland, let alone been appointed commander in chief. Above all else, the Finnish bourgeoisie did not have an armed state force. The Finnish bourgeois parties, as yet, were not even unanimously hostile to the workers' movement before the general strike, parts of the agrarians and the Young Finns were still at the beginning of November ready to co-govern with the socialists on the question of independence. The general strike convinced the bourgeoisie, with few exceptions, however, of the acute danger of the socialists. They used the time until the outbreak of the open civil war to organise themselves under a firm leadership. On 27 November, the new Senate, under Svinhufvud, formed the White government that would give Mannerheim the mandate he needed.

By contrast, for the next two months the SDP hesitated constantly, something that hardly strengthened the determination of the workers. Right up until the division of Finland into two armed camps, they would debate the possibility of a coalition government with the more progressive bourgeoisie, even if they now at least realised that the socialists would have to dominate the government. It was symptomatic of the socialist leaders' politics that, when the general strike was cancelled, they showed their good will by partly disarming the Red Guards, a clear indication of their willingness to compromise, but clearly not the best way to prepare for a revolutionary struggle for power by the working class.

During the general strike, the Red Guards could have seized power and fortified it throughout the country with relative ease, if they had possessed an energetic and determined leadership. The only question mark was whether they could take the Whites' main strongholds, Finnish Karelia and southern Pohjanmaa. However, the Whites could not have secured their power there without disarming the Russian garrisons, and this they could do at the end of January only thanks to the demoralisation of the Russian soldiers. In all likelihood, this would also explain Mannerheim's deal with the Russian officers in southern Pohjanmaa. In mid-November, the dissolution of the Russian army had not progressed very far, and Mannerheim was not even in the country yet, so the task of the Whites would have been much more difficult.

The alternative to seizing power, for which the prospects would worsen as time went on, would have been to prepare for a lengthy time of legality and order without a revolution. This would have demanded the creation of normal capitalist relations, including a centralised bourgeois state apparatus that, under existing circumstances, could only be dominated by the now clearly antisocialist Home Guards and, thus, the disarming of the workers' defence organisations. This would have demanded the holding back of the demands of the workers, possibly with force, as well as the isolation of the more militant sections, with the inevitable demoralisation of the whole class.

It is therefore quite clear that the only alternative to a determined revolutionary offensive policy would have been a thoroughly reformist one, which would have been seen as an absolute betrayal by the majority of the class. The right wing of the movement, like Tanner, might have been ready for such a change, but they were neither determined nor in the leadership. The leading group around Manner, Kuusinen and Valpas did not even consider such a solution. They were worried at the radicalism of the most militant sections, but they also had no intention of breaking with them. The problem was that their policy of radical class struggle, a constant pressure on the bourgeoisie but one that was never brought to a head, was utopian. At a certain level of pressure, and particularly when the system is in social, political or economic crisis, the capitalists will inevitably counter-attack. By denouncing the rich farmers and the bourgeoisie for starving the workers in the interests of ever higher profits, by supporting the struggle of the agrarian workers, demanding the dissolution of the Home Guards and, if only after considerable hesitation, supporting the formation of Red Guards, as well as denouncing the bourgeoisie's plans for a *cou-pd'etat*, the socialist leaders had helped create a situation that now demanded either an insurrection or a full retreat.

Either the working class movement had to seize the initiative and create a new order, with full rights for the working masses, or they had to call a full retreat and with that acknowledge that the bourgeoisie and the wealthy would lead the country in the period ahead.

Rebellion against the legal government?

In White history writing, the Reds rebelled against the legal, democratic government. However, the more balanced of the non-socialist historians, like Jakko Paavolainen, Heikki Ylikangas and Anthony Upton, all question this view. The claim of the White historians is based on the fact the bourgeois parties won the election in October. But the Reds, on the other hand, can point to having the majority in the earlier parliament, which was undemocratically dissolved by Kerensky. The bottom line, however, is that Finland was pulled apart by the ever-growing class struggle from workers and bosses alike. As Upton describes it: "From August onward... the country became increasingly both ungoverned and ungovernable, until by the beginning of November, the society was close to total breakdown."⁵

The working class stood united, with the support of the poor peasants on the socialist side, whereas the other side consisted of the wealthy, the powerful, and most of the educated. Finland was relentlessly and spontaneously sliding towards full civil war. The SDP was swept along, rather than shaping events. Its leadership and radical wing, men (truly, there were not many women in leading positions in either camp) like Kullervo Manner, Valpas, Sirola and Kuusinen, were all agreed on the necessity of the revolution. At the same time, they were adamant that it would develop, rather than be consciously called forth, and it was seldom without a sense of regret that they accepted that, once it did develop, they would have to be in the front of it. Still, in mid-January, Turckia could sum up SDP policy as "we shall wait until the revolutionary moment comes, but not strive towards it, and certainly not desire it."⁶

On January 12 1918, the Senate decided to create a strong, armed force. It is true that this was something quite normal for the bourgeoisie, and no particular thirst for blood would have to be invoked to explain it. At the same time, it was obvious that under the circumstances, a united proletariat would see this as a huge provocation. This was emphasised even more when the Senate on 25 January decided that the Home Guards would form the backbone of the new government troops. The bourgeoisie were also pre-paring for battle. In Finnish Karelia, and especially at Viipuri, close to the Russian border, armed clashes occurred, and a situation of virtual civil war took shape in the latter half of January. On January 23, the Russian garrisons in Karelia were disarmed, and a trainload of weapons was sent, on Lenin's orders, to the Finnish comrades, which caused a mobilisation of both Red and White guards.

Finally, both the Red and the White side, at the same time and independent of each other, took the course of action. The White's new commander in chief, Mannerheim, decided to attack the Russian troops in Pohjanmaa the same day as the workers' movement's leaders, after so much hesitation, at long last decided on seizing power.

Finland split in two

At 11 pm on January 27, 1918, the red lantern was finally raised on the Workers' House in Helsinki, as the signal that the working class would seize power, according to the decision made a few days earlier. As an inverse reflection of the vote on November 16, the position not to take power received a majority, but the moderate wing were not pre-pared to take over the leadership, and simply yielded to those finally intent on seizing the reins of government. The civil war was underway, and could only have been stopped by a more determined leadership anyway, determined to stop the revolution that is, and willing to sacrifice those Red Guardists who had broken the laws of bourgeois society.

Just by virtue of their decision, power fell into Red hands in most of the more developed southern Finland. The Svinhufvud Senate had no real control of the cities even before this point. In the towns in the south,

the Whites stood no chance. The Red Guards just had to pick up the power that lay within their easy grasp. In the White strongholds, the counter-revolution also seized power without any problem. In between, there were several uncertain areas. Factors like availability of weapons, or subjective factors like the qualities of the local leaders, could be decisive. Local initiatives thus influenced how the border between Red and White Finland was drawn - a large part of what was to be included in White Finland should be considered as fairly uncertain. To the north of the Whites' strong hold, in northern Pohjanmaa, and even more in Finnish Lapland, the relations of power were also more even. Of course, it is hard to say what a few more energetic Red Guard leaders could have achieved, but the Reds held power briefly in towns like Tornio and Rovaniemi, and were strong throughout the region. It would take some considerable effort before the Whites controlled all of northern Finland. Finally, however, the fronts that were to be largely intact up until mid-March were established.

Red Finland

The socialist leaders had reluctantly seized power. Apart from the Finnish members of the Bolshevik party, hardly one member of the left wing of the SDP had not vacillated back and forth. On several occasions, when bold decisions were necessary, they only managed to convoke an extraordinary congress or similar. In contrast, an ever more radical tendency existed in the leadership of the Red Guards, particularly in Helsinki. Their position was also problematic, however. Rather than being able to form a leadership that could place itself at the head of the movement, they pushed the reluctant leaders forward, by the force of their support amongst the armed workers. The leaders were pushed into forming the new government, the People's Delegation, but they appeared incapable of crystallising a determined revolutionary vanguard.

The socialist leaders' reluctance in the face of bold actions by the workers continued even once they were in power. The Russian Soviet government also at first proceeded cautiously with nationalisations, but with state power securely in Red hands, and with no thought of concessions to bourgeois politicians. The banks were also nationalised quickly. The Finnish Red government did not go that far. They seized the Finnish state bank, but the private banks and their assets were left untouched.

Red rule was not based on soviets. Instead, it was the leadership of the party and the unions, with the inclusion of representatives of the Red Guards, who finally decided on taking power. This does not diminish their revolutionary legitimacy, all of the proletariat, and large parts of the poorer peasants, stood behind their organisations. In any case, the most important issue was not to work out the most ideal representation, but to secure the power of the workers. At the same time, it was obviously a disadvantage that there was no organised expression of the whole working population. The creation of semi-soviet type organs was to some extent helped by the civil servants' strike, prompted by their refusal to cooperate with Red rule. Here, as in many other areas, the Red government showed more hesitation than ought to be the case during a civil war. Nonetheless, elected workers' organs slowly replaced the old state officials.

The draft constitution that was prepared by the future "leader" of Stalin's Comintern, Kuusinen, clearly showed how the government of the revolution perceived its tasks. Power was to be held by the democratically elected parliament, the government was to be strictly executive, and the president was to have no particular powers. To confirm important issues, referendums were to be held. It had less to say about socialism, how-ever. For a White Guardist, it was natural to see the constitution as a deception to fool people long enough to win the war. That would be incorrect. The draft reflected the idealistic world-view that not even open class war could tear away from the socialist leaders. They could not let go of their view that the country was not yet ripe for social-ism, and they firmly believed that the numerical dominance of the working classes would be enough to secure socialist victories at future elections. A somewhat contradictory aspect of the draft claimed that not even a victory at the elections could give them mandate to re-impose minority rule, which hinted that new revolutions would be justified in such cases. This was not,

however, developed into any kind of revolutionary realism.

In March, Soviet Russia signed a treaty with Red Finland, the Socialist Workers' Republic, as they reluctantly agreed to call themselves after Lenin insisted. The Finnish leaders were not ready for a federation, and their lingering nationalistic tendencies revealed themselves among other things in their insistence on adjustment of the borders. They were also unwilling to give full political rights to all Russian workers living in Finland. All Finnish workers and peasants residing in Soviet Russia were to receive full rights. The Finns, however, restricted themselves to promising that any Russian citizen moving there would receive political rights "on as easy terms as possible".

The immediate tasks of the revolution

In his analysis of the German Revolution of 1848-49, Engels stressed the necessity for revolutionaries, once the insurrection had started, to act boldly and offensively. Lenin, too, insisted on this when he wrote on the subject shortly before the October Revolution, as he had in 1905. Marx stressed the same thing in his advice to the Paris Commune of 1871. The Commune, however, did not heed his advice to go on the offensive against the government troops, which were to have exactly consequences Marx had warned against: the troops of the Versailles Government had time to gather and crushed the Commune in the worst white terror Europe had witnessed. This was to be only the most tragic of a number of parallels between the Paris Commune and the Finnish Revolution.

The best prospects for a Red victory in the whole of Finland were undoubtedly during the general strike in November. At the end of January, the bourgeoisie were more organised, while the situation for the Reds had, if anything, worsened. This does not mean that all possibility of victory had already evaporated by the time the civil war broke out. A determined revolutionary leadership would have boldly taken to the offensive, before the Whites had time to gather further. Several advantages still lay with the Red side. The Red Guard had mobilised more people than the White Guard. Most of the industrial capacity was in the hands of the workers, which meant that only they could make proper armoured trains, an important factor in a war that to such a high degree was fought on the railways.

Above all, the Whites suffered from a lack of weapons, at least until they received a large delivery from Germany on February 17. They had also received a large delivery on the last day of October, and they had taken the stocks of the Russian garrisons in White Finland, but still the shortages were severe, especially when it came to ammunition. It is true that the Reds also had shortages, but help in the form of supplies from Russia was closer than White help from Germany, which faced the severe hindrance of the frozen sea. Unfortunately, before mid-February, the socialist leaders had not realised the extent of their needs, which flowed from their failure to see the need for a decisive military offensive. They started the civil war in the belief that their programme of reforms alone would secure victory. Once they made clear the requirements to their Russian comrades, they received several loads. 50,000 rifles were sent in late February and, when Adolf Taimi came to Petrograd for a second order, Lenin instructed the War Commissariat that his requests were to be met in full.

An important factor in the situation was nonetheless, the Bolshevik leaders' insufficient attention to Finland. It was of course natural that their main concerns were Petrograd and Russia, but one would wish they had paid a little more attention to Finnish developments. Lenin, after all, was in Helsinki for a time in the autumn of 1917, and had plenty of time to get acquainted with the situation and the socialist leaders, perhaps convincing them of the necessity of bold offensives, at appropriate points, to develop revolutions. This no doubt stemmed in part from the fact that the Bolsheviks had not yet fully taken upon themselves the role of building an international communist leadership, which would only be fully apparent after the formation of the Communist International (Comintern).

As the war to a large extent was dependent on trains for troop movements, the roads were poorly developed, and the ground was still covered with snow, control over the railways was one of the most important factors. The Red leaders' lack of initiative here became a military blunder of the first degree. The military situation of the Whites would have been considerably worsened if the Red Guards had succeeded in cutting the railway between the two major counter-revolutionary strongholds, southern Pohjanmaa and Karelia. The prerequisites for an offensive in the area were not lacking either. At Jyväskylä and Haapamaeki, among other towns, the Reds were strong, and at Varkaus they even seized power. Also, Red Tampere, the biggest town in that part of Finland, could easily have sent reinforcements. In Upton's estimation: "the substantial forces of Red Guards and Russian soldiers in Tampere could easily have rushed out a force to Haapamaeki and secured it".⁷

A Red offensive in central Finland could thus have cut the counter-revolution's two main forces off from each other, moved the front considerably to the north, and thereby gained reinforcements in the form of the Red workers and peasants that lived in the area. Instead, these were neutralised as the Whites gained control, and the resources were put at the service of the counter-revolution. Not least, the Whites' military and, de facto, political, headquarters at Saeinaejoki would have been considerably more threatened if the Reds had pressed north. Naturally, there would have been no guarantees, revolutions never come with guarantees, but these were their best options, and several factors spoke of the prospects being quite favourable. The main thing lacking was a determined leadership that understood the basic military necessities.

The Reds' lack of action was perhaps most clearly shown by the fact that they did not succeed in arresting a single member of the Svinhufvud Senate, despite the fact that it was in session in Helsinki the entire day preceding the Red seizure of power that very evening! Instead of this blow at the White leaders, they were given the chance to appoint Mannerheim commander in chief and to call on the civil servants to go on a strike that would create severe problems for Red Finland.

Petit-bourgeois counter-revolution

The Finnish civil war was a distinct class war. On one side stood a united proletariat, which naturally had strong support amongst the poor peasants and agrarian workers. The working class movement was united, with one party, and one union. Although a considerable part of the leadership of the SDP was hesitant to embark on open revolution, only a tiny few crossed over to the enemy during the war. When the White parliament reassembled, for example, in May 1918, only one out of 92 socialist deputies was present. It was only after the war that the workers' movement would split, with a legal social democratic party that denounced all forms of revolution, and an illegal communist party.

The White side was led by the privileged and rich classes, and in most parts of Finland, property owners, students, officials and rich farmers made up a majority of the Home Guards. There were, however, important exceptions. In the areas where the Home Guards were strongest, the bulk of them consisted of working, poor peasants. In Finnish Karelia, the area closest to Russia, and even more in southern Pohjanmaa, modern class structures were less developed. Especially in southern Pohjanmaa, the landless and the poorest peasants did not exist in large numbers and neither did the landlords and richest farmers. One of the reasons was that the poorest had already emigrated to America. This area was, in other words, dominated by independent, toiling peasants; a pronounced petit-bourgeois strata. These had little quarrel with the working class, but were traditionally anti-socialist. They instead fought under the banner of a war of liberation against the Russians. Nowhere did the combatants believe in White propaganda so strongly.

It was, in the first instance, the voluntarily mobilised Home Guards from these areas that stopped the expansion of Red rule, and they held the front until the White leadership managed to create a more

disciplined and better trained conscript army that would eventually crush the Finnish Revolution.

Since the French Revolution, the Vendee has been a symbol for mass-based, objectively counter-revolutionary peasants' insurrections. The poor peasants' rebellion against the French government was, however, subdued, and could not stop the social transformation. For really serious counter-revolutionary peasants' movements, Finnish history has thus created a new symbol: southern Pohjanmaa.

Revolution and military strategy

For a Marxist, military strategy is subordinated to revolutionary politics. It is on the basis of politics that we gather our forces, and undermine the enemy. This, however, does not mean that military questions can be reduced to politics, any more than politics can be reduced to economics and sociology. A military victory, nonetheless, can solve political issues. A Red military victory would have meant an opportunity to come into contact with, and organise, all poor peasant and workers in the northern part of Finland, as well as gaining access to all the supplies, and showing the bourgeoisie that resistance would be futile. Conversely, the White victory created the possibility for the counter-revolution to solve the crisis in their favour.

Since the French Revolution, progressive forces advocated the replacement of hierarchal armies by democratic militias, or the arming of the people. This was also in the programme of the Second International, and Bolsheviks and Mensheviks alike supported it. It should be noted though, that it was part of the minimum programme, and should not to be confused with the crushing of the bourgeois state. One purpose of the arming of the people was to stop the armed forces being used against the people. Also, a somewhat romanticised view of the victories of the French revolutionary armies of 1792-94 had become established, that is, a belief that the combination of fully democratic organisation and revolutionary enthusiasm would automatically create a more effective military force. The Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries claimed that the new freedom after the February Revolution would mean a more efficient military defence against Germany, and the Bolsheviks claimed that Soviet power would mean that the Red forces would be more battle-worthy.

Once in power, the Bolsheviks developed their position, however.⁸ They did decree the full democratisation of the armed forces, and this even seemed to be an effective way to defeat counter-revolution, as long as it was poorly organised. Krasnov's Cossack troops were dissolved, Kaledin's Don Cossacks were beaten, and Soviet power spread relentlessly to far away Siberia. It was different, however, when the German army went on the offensive in February 1918.⁹ The second and third-rate German troops, not fit for deployment on the Western Front, swept away the Red troops with ease in what General Hoffman called "the most comical war I ever saw". By this time, the Russian army had largely dissolved, and the formation of voluntary units, and even more the creation of a disciplined force from them, proved considerably more difficult than the Bolsheviks had thought it would be.

The Finnish experience demonstrated that the call for voluntary struggle for the cause of the working class was insufficient on its own. The Red Guard was organised, as it was in Russia, on a voluntary membership basis with elections of commanders and democratic discussions about what should be done. The disadvantages, from a military perspective, were obvious; orders to attack were discussed, sometimes for hours, before they were carried out. Things were actually similar in the White Guard, which also had elections of commanders, and the butchers also considered themselves to have the right to make decisions about warfare which, by the way, demonstrates that the internal organisation of an armed force does not, in itself, determine its character.

Both sides thus had problems creating an offensive force. There was a lot of shooting from covered positions, and from far away, and so ammunition was spent at an alarming rate, resulting, however, in surprisingly low numbers of casualties. Yet, it was on the offensive that the Reds would have needed to go.

Time was on the side of the Whites as they could count on rearmament from the imperialists.

The offensive of the Whites

When parliament was dissolved in August, and the socialists failed in their attempts to reassemble it, they left the Senate. There were of course several good arguments in favour of this, and it is true that all attempts to rule jointly with the bourgeoisie became ever more farcical. At the same time, it was now that the bourgeoisie came to realise the need for a government that expressed its class interests. With the socialists gone, the Senate could give its direct support to building the Home Guards.

The aristocratic and militaristic Mannerheim, appointed White Commander in Chief in late January, was not satisfied with the undisciplined Home Guards. He successfully argued that a more efficient force should be assembled through conscription in the White areas. An important component in this were the Jaegers who returned in late February, as well as some Swedish officers that were to make up most of his staff. There was not as much time for training as he would have liked, but enough to make the White army a more powerful offensive force than the Red Guard. That was to be the decisive advantage of the Whites. The army took Red Tampere and together with German troops crushed Red Finland.

As late as mid-March, the Reds around Tampere went on the offensive to take Haapamaeki and, thereby, sever the railway connection to Karelia, as well as threaten the White headquarters. They were, however, soon overtaken by a White offensive; from 16 March on, the Whites relentlessly moved forward in this decisive sector and moved in on Tampere, which fell on 6 April. At the same time, a German force under von der Goltz had landed at Hanko on April 3 and a smaller force under Brandenstein at Valko. The Reds were from now on steadily pushed back. Helsinki was taken on 11-14 April, primarily by Germans, which, however, meant that the White vengeance was considerably milder than in Tampere and the other places that were taken by the White Finns.

In early May, the White counter-revolution was victorious in all of Finland, and only the revolutionaries that had succeeded in fleeing to Russia escaped the terrible White vengeance.

Red terror in Finland¹⁰

In bourgeois propaganda, the Red government is depicted as thoroughly dictatorial and bent on terror. This could not be further from the truth. The SDP had, from the start, far more democratic ideals than they had realism. Not even the outbreak of open civil war changed this, only the White terror was able to do this. The Red government of Finland was always against the death penalty, even naively so. They realised the need for using arms at the front, but would never execute White prisoners. Red courts were formed, but the punishments they meted out were astonishingly lenient.

At the same time, there was, nonetheless, a real Red terror. Amongst the poor workers and peasants, considerable class hatred had accumulated over time. Without discipline this resulted in a massive outbreak during the revolution. The White side made a great deal out of Red atrocities and exaggerated the scale of them considerably. Especially after the war, with the obvious goal of covering up their own terror, a wealth of purely fantastic reports of Red cruelty substituted for any fair analysis of events. It cannot be denied though that arbitrary and pointless executions did occur. Sometimes this happened on a fairly large scale, during the autumn of 1917, from the 1 - 24 September, more political murders were carried out by the Reds than the Whites. Jaakko Paavolainen counts 1649 murders by the Reds during the whole revolution. The victors carefully investigated the Red terror, so this figure should be considered quite conclusive and final. It must also be observed that it included all cases of execution by the Reds, including those that were justified in civil war conditions. It must also be emphasised that the terror was in no way sanctioned from above. Anthony Upton, in spite of his careful study, managed to find only one article in the Red press that advocated terror. The Red leadership were not able to take effective counter-measures

against it, but in no way did they encourage Red terror.

The White terror unleashed

Things were different on the White side. Their highest leader was about as far as you could get from a sentimental pacifist. Baron Gustaf Mannerheim came from the highest aristocracy, although his Swedish speaking family had lost some influence as the Finnish speakers came to dominate amongst the ruling classes. In contrast to the majority of the White leaders, he was not anti-Russian or pro-German. He had faithfully served the Tsars for 30 years and reached the rank of Lieutenant General. During this time he never once worked for the liberation of Finland. After the October Revolution, he wanted nothing more than to fight the Bolsheviks. That he did it in Finland, in a supposed war of liberation against Russia, was entirely secondary.

From the outset, official White policy was that all who participated in the insurrection were traitors, and could expect nothing but the most severe punishments. Attempts at negotiations were turned down, as any deals with traitors were considered unthinkable. The Reds had also, on some occasions, executed prisoners who had surrendered. At Varkaus at the beginning of the war, the surrounded Reds had resorted to the only execution of hostages of their side during the war, and at Suinila, a group of Red Guards had shot surrendered Whites, until they were stopped by their comrades. This had no support from the leadership. For the Whites, by contrast, this was rather the rule and, especially in the earlier part of the war, the officers led the killing.

During the White offensive in March, which led to Tampere, Red prisoners were executed habitually at Laenkipohja, and Koreakoski, among other places.¹¹ This was an important reason why the Red front crumbled; they were terrified of being captured. The high incidence of Red Guards killed by precisely aimed bullets to the head or heart, testifies to their being executed, rather than casualties on the field of battle. It is true that the White leaders did to some extent, at the beginning of the battle for Tampere at the end of March, try to limit executions. One explanation for this is that the White terror, which earlier had led to the Reds fleeing for their lives, now started to have the opposite effect. In surrounded Red Tampere, with nowhere to run, many soldiers recognised that their only choice was between fighting, and possibly dying, or fleeing and facing execution.

The newly found humanism of the White leaders should not be exaggerated either. For Red commanders, agitators and Russians there was never any mercy.¹² For the entire war, anyone captured carrying his socialist party card, a party that in the previous months had carried nearly half the votes in the election, there was nothing to expect but a bullet. The scale of the White terror was not as carefully investigated by the victors, and is therefore harder to estimate. Pavvolainen finds 8380 executed Reds but, as Ylikangas shows, neither those executed directly after battle or those who were summarily shot after surrendering, were included, and many of the disappeared were simply registered as "fled to Russia". The figure 8380 is, therefore, the absolute minimum; the real figure was in all probability considerably higher.

To this must be added the enormously high mortality rate in the camps erected after the war to intern all captured prisoners of war. Of the at least 80,000 workers and peasants locked up, remember Finland had merely 110,000 industrial workers before the revolution, as many as 12,500 died. Some of these were shot for breaking petty rules, but most died from the catastrophic overcrowding, severe lack of hygiene and, above all, the shortage of food, all of which can be blamed entirely on the White victors. In total, then, the number of Reds killed in the White terror, both by executions and the grotesque number of deaths in White concentration camps, comes to at least 20,000 and perhaps as many as 30,000, from Finland's lower classes. This was on a par with the frenzied terror after the defeat of the Paris Commune 1871. It would take full-fledged fascism to exceed it on European soil.

The results of the White victory

The White victory did not lead to fascism. When the furious counter-revolution had eased, a form of bourgeois-democracy was stabilised, with a state led by White Guardists, a Communist Party banned until the defeat by the Soviet Union in 1944, and with a thoroughly crushed proletariat. The immediate result of the war was that Finland, in spite of the Whites' brave talk of a "war of liberation", became a de facto protectorate of imperial Germany. The dominant tendency in the White leadership was pro-German. The White forces had won the war largely with German aid. The Jaegers were trained in the German army, it was mainly with German guns that the Reds were defeated, and in April, two German forces landed in Finland, the largest of these consisted of 10,000 trained and disciplined soldiers.

Germany thus played a considerably bigger role in the war than the Russians did. In exchange, Germany was promised very advantageous terms of trade with Finland, part of the control over the country's foreign policy, and the new Finnish army was to be built under the control of German officers. As the finishing touch, a Bavarian prince was elected King of Finland! Only the defeat of Germany in the First World War, in November 1918, saved Finland from being a German satellite, or, as Upton puts it, "a mockery of an independent state".¹³

If the Reds had won...

Finland was a small country on the margins of Europe, and had little prospect of surviving as an isolated revolutionary state for a long period. The only possibility for the Finnish Revolution was to unite with the Russian Revolution as a contingent, in Lenin's words, of the international army of socialism. Analysing what a Red victory in Finland could have meant is necessarily speculative, but can still be based on some facts. Soviet Russia could have profited from some of the deceased tsarist empire's best industries, accompanied by a militant and well-organised proletariat. Both functioning factories and skilled workers were at a premium in the Russian civil war. Petrograd would not have lived under the constant threat from White Finland; instead, a reliable Red base could have protected it. No White Finns would have been sent to tip the scales in favour of counter-revolution in the Baltic areas; instead, the help from Finland would have benefited the Baltic revolutionaries, who had always been strong. This could well have altered the outcome of the class battles in these areas.

Yudenich's offensive against Petrograd in the autumn of 1919 would not have been much of a threat with a Red Finland close by. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the white forces of Murmansk and Archangelsk in northern Russia could have appeared at all, and it is quite uncertain if Poland would have dared attack in 1920 against a stronger opponent. In short, every sector in the Russian civil war could have advanced more smoothly and with less destruction and bloodshed. Therefore, the prospects of continued revolutionary development after the civil war would have been much brighter. In other words, a Red Victory in Finland would have been an important weight in the scales of world revolution.

Lenin and self-determination

For Lenin, the right of nations to self-determination was an important principle. However, it has been frequently misunderstood, not least in relation to Finland, where it was more sharply posed than anywhere else previously. Lenin recognised that one of the most important forms of oppression to fight against was national oppression. He also, along with other revolutionary Marxists, knew the international class struggle of the workers for socialism was the ultimate criterion for all democratic demands. Therefore, he was insistent that the oppressed nations must have the right to national self-determination, including separation, primarily because this would benefit international workers' solidarity. He was consequently very clear that the oppressed nations, like Poland, Finland and the Ukraine, must have an unconditional right to settle their own destinies. The potential conflict in this, between nationalism and working class internationalism, found its logical clarification shortly after the October Revolution, when real developments posed the question concretely in Finland and Ukraine. The oppressed nations were to have the right to self-

determination, but this did not at all rule out the Bolsheviks doing everything in their power to aid the revolutionary movements across all borders.

In the case of Finland, it was obvious that national oppression had bred Finnish nationalism and, above all, strengthened anti-Russian sentiments, even within the Finnish proletariat. At the same time, the Russian soldiers stationed in Finland were a radical force. They became steadily more dominated by the Bolsheviks, although their discipline and battle-worthiness at the same time diminished. Ever since the February Revolution, the Finnish workers had repeatedly made common cause with the Red soldiers. Time and again, the Red Guards asked for help, and when the leaders of the Finnish socialists discussed the possibilities of radical action, they always returned to one question; will the Russians help us? This really settles the basic question of principle: the Finnish revolutionaries viewed the Red Russians as brothers in arms, and not as oppressors.

In Conclusion

Seldom, if ever, has the need for an energetic, revolutionary leadership been more clearly revealed than in Finland, 1917-18. There was a striking lack of revolutionary vision and strategy from the leaders. The heroism of the masses was, however, equally striking. The workers did not succeed in creating an effective offensive force but, nonetheless, the butchers were repeatedly thrown back. After the Red front had collapsed, the Whites received an unexpected cold shower when, three days before Easter, Red Tampere proved willing to fight and die for yet another week of severe fighting. During this week, under the leadership of Eino Rahja in his armoured train, the Reds took back Orivesi. Even trained German troops were actually beaten back by desperate but heroic Red Guards on 28 April.

The will to fight was certainly there. Of course, this does not mean an ideal, uniform proletarian consciousness existed across the masses, levels of radicalisation and political awareness will always be uneven. But what the workers fundamentally lacked was a party like the Bolsheviks.

The Finnish Communist Party was later created in exile, in Moscow, in the summer of 1918 and was led by mainly by the old leadership, like Manner, Sirola and Kuusinen. They admitted their earlier shortcomings, if only at a somewhat abstract level, and pledged allegiance to the communist programme.¹⁴ Even if the Finnish workers had the most revolutionary of all possible leaderships in the years following 1918 it is not at all clear whether more could have been achieved. The sad truth is that they had been thoroughly beaten. It is hard to see how the workers could have risen in the absence of a massive shock from without, or the emergence of a new generation of fighters. The tragedy of history is that Stalinism swallowed up the Communist Party and, of course, the Communist International and, as time went on, it worked to extinguish rather than stimulate the revolutionary impulse amongst the workers. But new upswings of struggle will come. It is our task to help the new generation learn the lessons of history, in order to prepare for the battles ahead.

ENDNOTES

1 Most facts can be found in Anthony Upton's outstanding *The Finnish revolution 1917-18* (Minneapolis 1980)

2 Apart from Upton, the literature consulted are in Swedish, mostly translated from Finnish, and are not available in English. The declaration of the Russian Provisional Government is in Hannu Soikkanen's (ed) excellent collection of document, *Dokument från finska inbördeskriget* (Documents from the Finnish civil war), (Ystad 1980), p 69

3 Upton, *The Finnish revolution 1917-18*, p 153

4 *Ibid.*, p 157

5 Upton, p 102

6 Upton, p 231

7 Upton, p 280

8 For the best expressions of the new Bolshevik view on the matter, see Leon Trotsky, How the revolution armed, volume 1

9 It would be incorrect though to claim that this only revealed itself with the German offensive. Rather, this is the case every time the revolutionary troops face strong organised counter-revolutionary contingents, that can't be dissolved by political means any time soon. In spite of a huge numerical advantage, the Reds were for over a year unable to crush Kornilov's, later Denikin's so-called Voluntary army in south Russia.

10 The most thorough investigation of both sides' terror is made by Jaakko Paavolainen. A shortened version is available in Swedish, Röd och vit terror (Red and White terror), (Stockholm 1986)

11 The White offensive against Red Tampere, and the summary executions is described in Heikki Ylikangas excellent Vägen till Tammerfors (The road to Tampere) (Atlantis 1995), p 110-187

12 The White's hatred of Russians, although not shared by Mannerheim and the other ex-employees of Tsar Nicholas, bore clear marks of racism. At the end of the war, genocidal sentiments were whipped up, and even some White Russians were shot

13 Upton, p. 534-35

14 The documents from the founding congress of the Finnish Communist Party is in Den finska revolutionen (The Finnish Revolution) (Aurora 1972). The self-criticism of Kuusinen is at least translated into English, albeit out of print, and was published by The workers' socialist federation in 1919 as O.W. Kuusinen, The Finnish revolution: A self-criticism

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