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European and American Factors Attending the Confrontation between
Finnish Radical Labor and the Finnish Church during the Steel Strike
of 1907 on the Mesabi Range.

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By Raymond W. Wargelin
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Various authorities have estimated that at least 75% of the miners involved
(1)
in the 1907 steel strike were Finns. Like the Finns, practically all of the
other nationalities making up the labor force of the Oliver Iron Mining Company
were foreign-born, half had been in the United States less than two years, and
(2)
12.4% less than one year. The church-labor confrontation was not the obvious
nor chief subject of conflict in the Minnesota Steel Strike of 1907. Yet it was
sufficiently prominent to permanently separate the lives of thousands of Finns.
Most of the time the confrontation was rather an inconspicuous happening involving
Finnish people wherever they met. Finnish boarding houses certainly were a
frequent setting inasmuch as single miners had no other place to go for their
food and shelter. Other places of confrontation were neighborhoods, business
establishments and places for social gathering such as the Finnish Temperance
halls and churches. There were occasions when sizeable deputations of Finnish
Socialist workers attended worship services in a Finnish church for the purpose
(3)
of disrupting ongoing worship. Perhaps the highest profile achieved in the
confrontation between Finnish radical labor and members of the Finnish churches
occurred in the public meeting called on February 9, 1908 at the Walon Lähde
Temperance Hall in Eveleth, Minnesota, for the purpose of drawing up resolutions
(4)
which would dissociate the "patriotic Finns" from radical Finns. Hoglund

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- (1) "Strike on the Mesabi Range, 1907", MINNESOTA HISTORY, Fall 1967; Neil Betten.
- (2) "The People of the Mesabi Range", MINNESOTA HISTORY, Vol. 27, No. 3,
September 1946; John Sirjanaki.
- (3) A Highway to America, John Wargelin, Book Concern, Hancock, Michigan; page 48
- (4) Resolutions passed at Public Meeting held Feb. 9, 1908 at the Walon Lähde
Temperance Hall of Eveleth, Minn.; from the Archival Papers of the late Dr.
John Wargelin.

states that the motivation of the "patriotic Finns" was "to work without belonging to unions". (5) Over 600 persons signed the Resolutions. (6)

The operations conducted by the mining companies on the Mesabi Range in early 1900 were particularly directed to the exploitation of the raw physical power of unskilled laborers. Various immigrant groups were played off against each other to their respective economic disadvantage. Some sociologists described the deployment of manpower by the mining industry as a graduated scale according to roughness of work corresponding to the degree of acculturation into the American system.

The earliest Finnish migration into northern Minnesota was from the provinces of Vaasa and Oulu, both of which were predominantly rural. There were two factors especially characteristic of the early migration. First, the people being from rural villages were a landless class whose economic position was extremely low. Secondly, up until 1900 the migration from the provinces of Vaasa and Oulu had scarcely been touched by socialist ideology since both provinces were influenced strongly by historical revival movements, notably the Awakened as well as the Laestadian revival movements. As a result, immigrants before 1900 were affected only superficially by socialist thought. (7) The religious revival movements developed closer inter-personal ties between people; it would appear as a result that harsh economic situations seemed more tolerable.

Professor Yrjö Alanen provides figures illustrating the varying length of a workday in Finland during the 1880's and 1890's. In no case was the workday

(5) Finnish Immigrants in America, 1880-1920, A. William Hoglund; University of Wisconsin Press; page 73.

(6) A Highway to America, John Wargelin, Book Concern, Hancock, Michigan; page 49

(7) Finnish Immigrants in America 1880-1920, A. William Hoglund; page 74.

less than 12 hours, and in most cases it was at least 14 to 16 hours. In the city of Tampere, when industrialization was just beginning, workdays were 18 hours long. (8)

Antti Pietila, Professor of Dogmatics and Ethics at the University of Helsinki during the second and third decades of this century, has provided figures on the housing circumstances in Finnish factory towns immediately after the Civil War of 1917-1918.

<u>Dwelling Units with 3 or more people per room:</u>		<u>Factory Areas with 3 or more persons per room:</u>	
Kotka	54.9%	Kuusankoski	61.1%
Kajaani	54.9%	Värtsilä	64.1%
Kuopio	46.0%	Varkaus	72.7%
Oulu	46.0%	Pankakoski	73.6%
Turku	41.0%	Juantehtaala	78.2%
Helsinki	38.1%		
Tampere	35.9%	<u>Factory Areas with 6 people per room:</u>	
		Kajaani	15.7%
		Juantehdas	39.6%
		Pankakoski	30.7%
		Värtsilä	26.7%

It is helpful for the understanding of our subject if we have some idea of the social patterns which prevailed in Finland at the turn of the century. The earlier immigrant had departed from an agricultural-village economy which was strongly patriarchal. With the incipient breakup of the old agrarian economy and the explosive unfoldment of an industrial economy, the tenant farmers, cotters, and other landless were actually without ranking in society. Bishop Koskimies made an enlightening comment about the traditional rigidity of Finnish social structures of 19th century Finland when he spoke about the sudden freedom that the immigrant felt as he entered the New World. "What was his life like in the conditions of the Western World? During the last half of the 19th century the social conditions prevailing in Finland in the church as well as in the community were tightly controlled by the officials." (9) Actually the local "Kirkkoherra"

(8) "Kirkko Ja Yhteiskunnan Uudistus", Kristillinen Palveluskeskus; 1946
Prof. Yrjö Alanen.

(9) Amerikan Matkalta, Juho Rudolph Koskimies, WSOY, 1925; page 71;
The Uprooted, Oscar Handlin, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1951.

(literally, "Lord of the Church") was the conscience of the community and the enforcer of all moral sanctions. He was both respected and feared. Much of the intense resentment of socialists towards the church and the clergy stems from this patriarchal image of the clergymen. A description of a typical parish history inadvertently describes the well-known and awesome dignity of the "Kirkkoherra" at the turn of the century in the following manner: "Even oncoming horses instinctively turned off the road when they met the 'Kirkkoherra'". The account in the parish history continued: "'Kirkkoherra' maintained especially good order in all things. This took place in an inconspicuous manner. For example, if someone came into church after he had commenced preaching, it sometimes happened that he would stand completely silent in the pulpit until the latecomer would be seated. The latecomer received so much attention that he was particularly careful not to be late a second time." This writer recalls his own grandmother giving a description of her parish "Kirkkoherra" who, upon rising into the pulpit, immediately took command of his congregation by projecting his rumbling bass voice in the words of the Salutation, giving added dimension to the majesty of God by pompously rolling his consonants, especially his "r's".

There are valid reasons for the Church to provide moral and spiritual reinforcement for the values, the institutions, the practices that represent the best in the social, economic and cultural structures of society, particularly of the nation. However, the temptation of the Church has frequently been either to establish its own "establishment" or, for reason of its own protection, to maintain a relationship of acquiescence with power structures of society which oppress. Jesus Christ, founder of the Church, did not claim any earthly establishment nor did He in truth direct His followers to strenuous organizational efforts in this direction. For this reason segments in our society who suffer because of the disproportionate division of powers frequently find the Church aligned with

discriminatory "establishments". William M. Balch said in 1912:

"The Church has always stood by the ruling classes, because it did not dare to oppose the men or the government which gave it support."
.... "The workingman asks, Is it not a fact that in most churches today the great majority of the so-called better class people look down upon the workingman who spends his life in toiling for their necessities and luxuries and do not associate with him as a brother?" (10)

The early Christian church did not have this image; Glock and Stark state that there is a "long tradition in Western thought (which) has viewed religion, and Christianity in particular, as a haven for the dispossessed." (11)

We will devote a short sketch of the opportunity that the Church of Finland had to meet the challenge of socialism; first, before general radicalization took place, and, secondly, after the issue of radicalization had been drawn. The clergy of Finland had been aware of the rise of socialism throughout the 19th century, particularly during the 1870's and 1880's. The happenings on the Continent, in France and Germany, were well known to them. In 1873 Professor A. F. Granfelt spoke out in favor of recognizing the rights of laborers to strike. (12) Juva states:

"Too little attention was given by the Church to the course of events. A hundred years ago the majority of the nations of Europe still confessed the Christian faith in one form or another. The national life and societal style were everywhere bound together officially and, at least, outwardly by Christian principles. Religion had the unchallenged position of being the essential supporter of culture. However during the last third of the century circumstances changed rapidly and conclusively. The churches were attacked again and again by threats which were not mere demands for remodeling Christianity or reforming it, but attempts to destroy it and to eliminate it even though it had been the foundation for European civilization for thousands of years." (13)

The specter, provoked by the words of Marx and Engel in the opening phrase of the Communist Manifesto of 1848, began to assume realistic dimensions in the minds of

(10) Christianity and the Labor Movement, William M. Balch, Sherman, French & Co., Boston, Mass., 1912; page 19

(11) Religion and Society in Tension, Charles Y. Glock & Rodney Stark; Rand McNally, Chicago, 1965; page 185; St. Paul wrote to his converts that "not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many of you were of noble birth." I Cor. 1:26; The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, Ernst Troeltsch, Vol. II, MacMillan Co., 1931, esp. I, pgs. 45-46; 86-87.

(12) Rajuilman Alla, Mikko Juva, Porvoo, 1956; page 39

(13) TLA

Finnish churchmen. Other voices like Y. S. Yrjö-Koskinen and Th. Rein warned of the evil of unlimited free competition and pled for workers' rights. (14) In the meantime socialist ideas began to penetrate into the rank and file of the urbanized factory workers. Topics related to socialism were presented from time to time at pastoral conferences with particular attention given to the upsetting conditions prevailing in Germany. (15) Bishop Gustaf Johansson viewed the things transpiring on the Continent as a literal fulfillment of the apocalyptic visions prophesied in the Bible. (16) In 1885 Archbishop Renvall squashed the effort of Rector S. Hirvinen to present a resolution of concern at the Vaasa synodical meeting as a part of the protocol of the meeting. (17)

Soikkanen indicates that many of the laboring class, who were now rapidly becoming a proletarian group, originally looked in the direction of the Church and its clergy for support for their cause. The radical scene in the country had not as yet become so critical that it should have made for a breakdown of communication. Soikkanen indicates that the lack of appreciation and tolerance on the part of the Church at this critical period was decisive in the continued rise of radical socialism. Very few of the leaders of the Church understood the just aspirations of the landless proletariat. When the people were exhorted in terms of righteousness to yield to the prevailing social and economic order, despite all of the injustices, it wasn't long before the lines were drawn between the radicals and the Church. (18) The landless class was admonished to "remain humble", to "remain in the station of life where they were". Many an emigrant experienced

(14) Työväen kysymys ja Työväenliike Suomessa, R. H. Oittinen; pages 54; 67-85

(15) Valtiokirkosta Kansankirkoksi, Mikko Juva (From State Church to People's Church), Helsinki, 1960; page 121.

(16) Ibid

(17) Vaasansynodaalik. ptk. 1885; page 107.

(18) "Työväenliikkeen Nousu Ja Kristillisyyys", Hannu Soikkanen; Kirkko Keskellä Elämästä, Tampere Diocese, 1960.

extreme resentment when he went to the local "Kirkkoherra" to secure his official departure papers and received at that time criticism for his lack of patriotism and destruction of the social fabric of the nation. In their hearts, many a member of the proletariat never actually departed from the church, although their membership ties were weak. The actual cleavage from the Church began to manifest itself only after the full Marxian dialectic was adopted by the Social Democratic Party at its 1903 meeting in Forssa. (19)

We would now like to allude to some factors which took place in the national life of the Finnish nation which served to radicalize the Finnish worker. These were the individuals who shared in the confrontation which actually took place during the Mesabi Steel Strike of 1907. New winds were blowing in northern Europe in the late 19th century. Novelists and dramatists were taken up with the spirit of realism: Emile Zola of France, Strindberg and Ibsen of Norway, Selma Lagerlof of Sweden. Finland also had her champions of realism, people who were influential in developing a social consciousness not only among intellectuals but among rank and file society as well, such as: Peter Brofeldt, Alexis Kivi and Juhani Aho. Minna Canth, a woman of letters, was particularly effective in reaching the ears of the masses. Her proletariat drama, "The Worker's Wife", presented in the Finnish theater January 1885 (containing a good share of women liberation ideology) was a sensation. It provoked a large amount of counter-criticism which was indicative of the fact that the shafts from her bow had struck home in many a bosom. (20)

(19)

Punainen Terrori, Jaakko Paavolainen; page 3; Laukon Kartanon Torpparih~~ä~~dot; page 25.

(20)

Minna Canth, V. Tarkkainen, pages 48-50; Agathon Meurman, III, Paavo Virkkunen; pages 212-213

Another author who proved to be even more of a sensation was Arvid Jarnevelt; his book, My Awakening, introduced Tolstoy's social philosophy to the learned levels of Finnish society. He was a close friend of the philosopher; corresponded with him and was a leading advocate of Tolstoism in the country. Tolstoism was also very popular throughout Europe; it had a double fascination: (1) its message of love (ultimately humanistic); and (2) its powerful anti-establishmentarianism, meaning condemnatory message against the Church and clergy. Dr. Jussi Kuoppala in his doctoral dissertation makes a strong case for the strategic influence of Tolstoy in facilitating the spread of Communism in Russia. The historical significance of Tolstoy is the resultant undue channelization of hostility against the Church and clergy by the Finnish proletariat. Kurikka, one of the earliest and most vitreolic agitator to work among the immigrant Finns, had become deeply immersed in Tolstoy's thinking. As editor of worker papers in Finland, as well as similar journals in this country, he directed streams of animosity against the Church and the clergy. The relative importance of Tolstoy in Marxian literature can be judged by the fact that he is rated today above Dostojevsky by the Communist Part of Russia.

The antecedent Finnish facts that we have assembled here have a realistic purpose, namely, to demonstrate that there is an extremely close relationship between the growth and development of the proletariat movement in Finland, and the events that transpired in the steel strike of 1907 on the Mesabi Range.

(21) Tolstoilaisuus Suomessa, Armo Nokkola; page 376

(22) Suomen Papisto Ja Työväen kysymys Ennen Työväenliikkeensyntymistä, Jussi Kuoppala; Onko Tolstoita Pidettävä Venäjän Vallankumouksen Isänä, Arvid Jarnevelt, "Sininen Kirja", No. 8, 1928.

(23) Glock and Stark (Religion and Society in Tension, Dept. of Sociology, University of California), use the word "corrosive" to describe mutually destructive attitudes shown by extreme radicals and traditional religionists towards each other; page 202.

(24) Tolstoilaisuus Suomessa, Armo Nokkola.

It is our contention that there existed an unofficial reciprocating relationship between political and social events transpiring in Finland among the proletariat of that day and the events transpiring in Finnish communities in the United States of America. The Finnish agitators seemed to realize that the conditions in the New World provided the opportunity to move quickly into socialist action programs. There were aspects in American economic life of that day, which many a European socialist understood as portending the possibility of a rapid growth of an American proletariat. Marxist thought abounded in quantity in many American cities in the violent 1870's. Russian revolutionaries like Kropotkin and Bakunin, we are told, were close observers of the American scene. (25)

The only thing that prevented their entering the American proletarian scene at that time was their inability to disengage themselves from events on the Continent. Finnish radical labor has, generally unnoticed to the American public and historians, had a significantly larger share in party membership and radical leadership in the United States than is generally known. The politically oriented Finnish socialist wanted to move quickly from mere theory to action programs. Our characterization is particularly true of the select group of individuals known as agitators, who appeared first in Finland and very shortly afterwards appeared in Finnish communities in America stoking the fires of revolution. Shortly afterward these same leaders were back again in Finland. It is truly remarkable to trace how many of these agitators played important roles both in America as well as in the Great Strike of Finland in 1905. Matti Kurikka was one of them; so was Taavi Tainio and Victor Kosonen; others were Leo Laukki and Kaapo Murros. They had been in Finland during the Great Strike but appeared very shortly afterwards in the United States as "comrades fresh from the throes of real revolution". (26)

(25) Dynamite, Louis Adamic; page 45.

(26) History of the Finns in Michigan (Michiganen Suomalaisten Historia), A. Holmio; page 386.

Reference has been made to the Great Strike of 1905 in Finland. It was not an industrial strike but a general strike occasioned by the defeat of the Czarist army and navy in the Russo-Japanese War; it spread across the entire empire paralyzing life in general. The strike proved to be a tremendous breakthrough of opportunity for the proletarian class in Finland. The proletarian class achieved the cherished privilege of voting; also a new unicameral parliament came into existence. The interest level of the rank and file of the proletariat was very high; it is estimated that 70% of the new electorate participated in the first election in 1906. In the national elections of 1907 the Social Democratic Party became the majority party, gaining a plurality of 330,000 votes. Some incidents marred the political horizon; some activities suggestive of Red Guard and White Guard behavior during the Civil War of 1917 were in evidence at the time of the General Strike. (27) The Social Democratic Party, in the main, was led by individuals who strove to achieve party programs by parliamentary methods. Without doubt, this era is one of the greatest group experiences of the Finnish people through all of their history. It is comparable, in a secular sense, to the stirring experienced by masses of people in times of great religious revival. Sigfried Sirenus describes the dedication that the ordinary socialist member had for his party and his cause:

"Socialism is the implicit and intentional striving of the lowest rank of the fourth estate towards the rewards of life. It has meant the first real cultural awakening of the full reaches of the rank-and-file of society, the first broadening vision beyond the narrow confines of everyday activity, the earnest striving to reach liberating levels of world-wide cultural activity." (28)

(27)

"Sosialismin Tulo Suomeen", Soikkanen; page 84; "Punainen Terrori", Jaakko Paavolainen; page 24; "Kahden Sataluvun Vaiheita", Paavo Virkkunen (Suurlakko Marraskuussa, 1905); pages 257-266.

(28)

A Religionless World and a Secularized Religion, Sigfried Sirenus; page 250.

Unfortunately, the attempt at possible rapprochement between the Church of Finland and the estranged Finnish proletariat after the Great Strike did not take place as had been hoped. The Pan-Slav Party of Russia renewed its oppression and, as the varied political groupings in the country jockeyed for positions of power, one tragic circumstance after another swept the country further along the path leading to a civil war. The Civil War was not of the Social Democratic Party's making (the party in office) but rather the extreme radicals caused it by seeking to capitalize on the newly achieved independence. Their desire was to make Finland a member of Soviet Russia. In the inevitable backlash of this tragic conflict many of those who had developed attitudes and patterns of co-operation with the just aspirations of the newly enfranchised working class were swept back into reprisal and ultra-conservatism.

The era immediately after the Great Strike had seemingly opened up new and promising possibilities of cooperation between the estranged classes. The Inner Mission Society of the Church of Finland originated at this time. The KOTIMAA newspaper was established also at this time to be a voice of cooperation and understanding.⁽²⁹⁾ As far as the younger clergy were concerned, the era after the Great Strike can very successfully be compared in its enthusiasm and concern for justice and social change to the 1960's in the United States of America. Sirenus describes this period in life of the Finnish Church as follows:

"It was as though fresh spring breezes were blowing through the Church. It was a joy to work with energetic young men in the best years of their life, who were consumed with enthusiasm, courage and fearless desire to serve. They were Jaakko Gummerus, Toivo Helo, Arthur Hjelt, Antti J. Pietila, Uno Wegelius, G. G. Rosenquist."⁽³⁰⁾

After the tragic circumstances of the Civil War, as we stated, the backlash swept

(29)

A Religionless World and a Secularized Religion, Sigfried Sirenus; page 47.

(30)

Ibid; pages 51-52.

the clergy back into conservatism and reactionarianism; only a few men, such as Antti J. Pietila, continued to advocate the social implications of the Gospel. Sirenus states: "No one has proclaimed this holy uneasiness more powerfully (31) to the Church of Finland than Pietila." To this we can also add the name (32) of Bishop Elis G. Gulin.

The threats by Russia to Finland's independence in 1939, 1940 and 1941 (in spite of the tremendous cost in terms of manpower and reparations) proved to be a healing experience for separated brethren in the country. Comrades from both sides of the ideological lines, in many cases clergy, shared the same bivouacs and trenches. More than one Finnish clergyman, upon returning from the front, made a holy vow that he would never again be at odds with his fellow-man, socialism or no socialism. Väinö Linna in his book, The Unknown Soldier, articulates the resentment that had lived in the bosom of the Finnish proletariat for many decades. His feelings poured out in the incidents experienced by the rank and file soldiers as they bivouaced in the marshy and wood-covered areas of the Karelian front. Official rank, educational status, bourgeoisie values had very little significance there; a man's fundamental worth was his bravery, his word, and his commitment to his comrades. Many have described the book as (33) a catharsis for the Finnish soul.

A sequel to the fratricide that we have referred to was the honor accorded Oskar Tokoi, the first prime minister of independent Finland, forty years after his being swept aside in the throes of the Civil War of 1917. He was called from exile in the United States to address the Finnish Parliament in a ceremonial of respect.

(31) A Religionless World and a Secularized Religion, Sigfried Sirenus; page 55.

(32) Työväenliike ja Kirkko, E. G. Gulin.

(33) The Unknown Soldier, Väinö Linna.

The factors bearing upon the confrontation between Finnish radical labor and the Finnish Church were not all of European antecedence; many of them are native to circumstances in the United States. We would like to take these matters up one by one and consider them for ^{the} extra meaning and light they throw upon the actual confrontation. One of these interesting lights was the fact that the Finnish radical labor leaders were the ones responsible for involving the Western Federation of Mines and its parent body (the Industrial Workers of the World) into the position of being the bargaining agent. Professor Hoglund indicates that the intermediary in this transaction was the editor and agitator, Kaapro Murros, who through his reading knowledge of American labor journals had become aware of the organization of the I.W.W. in Chicago, Illinois, in 1905.

Unfortunately the Western Federation of Miners and its parent body were the most violent union organizations in American labor history. In fact, they were so violent by reputation that even their rhetoric brought cold sweat to the brows of industrial leaders and corporations. One of the tenets of the I.W.W. was to destroy capitalism. Its secretary said: "There is but one bargain the I.W.W. will make with the employing class complete surrender of all control of industry to the organized workers." (34) The I.W.W., like the W.F. of M., had been involved in some especially violent strikes, for example, in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and Telluride, Colorado. Big Bill ^{Hayward} ~~Hayward~~, strike leader, had frequently shot it out with company militias. (35) Industrial America had gone through some particularly violent periods of labor history, especially during the 1870's. (36) Large industries developed reprisal strategies; the great armories that are

(34)

Proposed Roads of Freedom, Bertram Russell; Blue Ribbons Books, Socialism, Anarchism, and Syndicalism, New York; page 77.

(35)

Dynamite, Louis Adamic; page 124.

(36)

Dynamite, Louis Adamic; page 36; The I.W.W., Its First Fifty Years, Fred Thompson; History of Labor in the United States, 1896-1922, Selig Perlman-Phillip Taffe.

now found in our industrial cities were erected at this time because of labor unrest. Sulkanen states that following the 1907 Mesabi Range Steel Strike a sizeable portion of the Finnish Socialists rejected the I.W.W. as their bargaining agent. (37) Yet ten years later the extreme radical wing of the Socialists had again involved the identical bargaining agent in the second steel strike. The double tragedy of the 1907 as well as the 1916 steel strikes for the Finns was that they not only lost the strikes but that they were ^{blacklisted} "blackballed" from the hiring halls of the mining industry. Word went out into other industries (38) as well to be on the alert for radical Finns. This same blacklisting of Finns took place over widespread areas of the United States. It is also possible that one fruit of this repression against the Finns was the restricted immigration policy that the government adopted in regard to Finns. In utter desperation many ostracized Finns sought refuge by becoming a stump farmer on the "cut over lands" of northern Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. Louis Adamic says: "He was the cheapest commodity on the industrial market and was lucky if his immediate circumstances permitted him to throw up his job in the mill, or mine, or find (39) a track of land in the wilderness."

It is not fair to dismiss the Industrial Workers of the World without stating such facts as redound to their credit. It was the only union of that day which adopted the cause of America's proletariat! It fought for the principle of unionization for all industrial workers, regardless of the craft or industry to which they belonged. The American Federation of Labor under Samuel Gompers was a self-protecting middle class organization, not interested in the newcomer

(37) Amerikan Suomalaisten Työväenliikkeen Historia, Ellis Sulkanen, Raivaaja Press, Fitchburg, 1951.

(38) "Getting Rid of the Finns", Engineering and Mining Journal XCVII, April 18, 1914; May 21, 1914; Finnish Immigrant in America, 1880-1920, Hoglund; page 63.

(39) Dynamite, Louis Adamic; page 11.

from Europe and avoiding all possible involvement as bargaining agent for the
"dregs and scum of the Old World".⁽⁴⁰⁾ The principle of industrial unionism,
for which the I.W.W. fought, a union for all workers regardless of industry or
craft, became a reality in 1937 when the Congress of Industrial Organization
was established under the leadership of John L. Lewis. Industrial unionism
had finally accepted and recognized "the dreams of the Wobblies and Socialists....
and the vast mass of unskilled and semi-skilled workers finally entered the
American labor movement."⁽⁴¹⁾

In turning our attention to American factors in the subject matter of
our confrontation we need to note that there were several varieties of Finnish
Lutherans: the Finnish National Church, the Finnish Congregational Church,
the Finnish Unitarian Church, the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church, and the
Suomi Synod. The confrontation was a matter of great concern to the Finnish
National Church, particularly because it had lost control of its college in
1905 to the Finnish Socialists.⁽⁴²⁾ It seems that some elements of the Finnish
National Church originally had a community of interest with members of the socialist
movement inasmuch as both elements held shares in the college. Longer range inter-
relationships of the Finnish National Church with the Lutheran Church-Missouri
Synod will be referred to later. ^{Because} ~~Being that~~ the Suomi Synod outnumbered the
other church bodies considerably on the Mesabi Range, it appears fair to devote
some attention to the social thinking of this body.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Dynamite, Louis Adamic; page 90.

⁽⁴¹⁾ "Socialism", Michael Harrington; Saturday Review Press, 1972; page 259.

⁽⁴²⁾ History of the Finns in Minnesota, Hans R. Wasastjerna; page 227.

The usual characterization of the Suomi Synod is that it is a projection of the nature and essence of the Church of Finland in the United States. It tended to have the same latitudinal social scope as the Church of Finland inasmuch as it enclosed "ordinary church people", people with an evangelical background, a few Apostolic Lutherans, and a rather sizeable number of people from those provinces in Finland having concentrations of the Awakened (Pietists). A fairly significant factor concerning the social quotient of this body can be secured from an appraisal of the textbooks used in the theological seminary in Hancock at the time of the 1907 steel strike. ~~There is no doubt but that these~~ ^{These} texts were largely from Finland. By the late 1930's, at least fifty percent of the theological textbooks were still being ordered from Finland. The synod constituency continued to insist that faculty members of the seminary be clergymen trained in Finland. This request was repeated again and again through the Suomi seminary's history. The presence of an "American faculty member" on the seminary staff for a period of eight years in the 1920's provoked considerable reverberations through the church body and its conventions. Even though textbooks in the field of ethics and systematic theology, written by Professor A. J. Pietila, were used in the Suomi Theological Seminary, the instruction did not underscore any clear concept of social change and social justice. As theological texts in the seminary curriculum gradually became American, they still followed conservative Lutheran thinking, long on doctrine and short on social application. Names like Whitaker, Leander S. Kaiser, M. Reu, J. L. Neve, Roth, G. H. Gerberding, Weidner, Joseph Stump, Charles M. Jacobs, C. P. Krauth, are an honor roll of conservative Lutheran stalwarts.

The confrontation between church Finns and Finnish radical socialists in Eveleth, Minnesota, in connection with the resolution meetings of February 9, 1908, was one among the recurring confrontations experienced by the Suomi Synod in practically every Finnish community in the United States and Canada. In some areas

the conflict was so severe that no Finnish church was really able to get started.
(43)
In other places, the extreme socialist yielded the field. An interesting question relating to the above battle lines, as they were drawn in Finnish American communities, is related to the type of social structures the immigrants established upon the soil of the new country. As far as churches are concerned, there is a close cultural and ritual relationship between the European antecedent structures and the American versions. However, as far as the preservation of a patriarchal image is concerned with its authoritarian clergy, none of the Finnish churches on the North American continent ever did this. The "Eloheimo affair" in the Suomi Synod was immediately aborted in the founding convention. Of the churches constituting the Lutheran Church in America today, the Suomi Synod was the most congregational in polity.

There are a number of underlying assumptions which would deserve articulation in evaluating the actions of those church people who signed the resolutions in Eveleth on February 9, 1908. In thinking about these underlying assumptions, let us also be aware that we may be using categories of evaluation which belong to the 1970's! Our current national investigation of political donations speak to the folly of receiving large gifts from outside vested interests. The churches in general on the Mesabi Range have been reckless in this regard in the past. However the right of these citizens to affirm their love for their churches, their country, and maintenance of orderly conditions in their home communities is undeniable. One cannot help, however, noting the silence of the document on the self-righteous assumptions of laissez faire capitalism. Unfortunately, the situation was radicalized by the extreme amount of anti-religious rhetoric broadcast during the strike. A series of articles by the Suomi Synod pastor in Eveleth

(43)

"A Second Look at Suomi", Raymond W. Wargelin, THE LUTHERAN, May 9, 1962; pages 24-27.

revealed that he had an extensive knowledge of socialism and was appreciative of many of its aspirations within a Christian socio-ethical context. (44) Arthur

Puotinen has recorded the story of the Copper Country strike of 1913 in which another Suomi Synod pastor gave much more open and genuine support to the striking miners. (45)

There is reason to evaluate the actions of the Suomi Synod in terms of the church situation in general and Lutherans in particular. Lutheranism had a unique opportunity of moving into the vanguard of American churches on the issue of social justice and social change in the last quarter of the 19th century. J. H. W. Stuckenberg, Professor at Wittenberg College, Springfield, Ohio, worked out a theology of social concern in a book, Christian Sociology. (46) This was twenty years before Walter Rauschenbusch came on the American church scene as the fiery apostle of the Social Gospel Movement. (47) Due to the one-sided understanding that Lutherans of that date had of the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, Stuckenberg as well as Rauschenbusch were disregarded by the Lutherans. After the Second World War the new Luther studies in Germany and Scandinavia provided new insights into these doctrines. Dr. A. D. Matson's Christian Ethics was one of the first seminary textbooks to reflect this change. (48)

Walter Rauschenbusch did have considerable influence upon the theology and practice of some of the older mainline denominations, such as the Congregational, Episcopal, Presbyterian and Methodist. While these denominations did not shift

(44)

"Kirkko Ja Sosialismi", John Wargelin, AMERIKAN SUOMI, June 1911.

(45)

"Pastor Reaction in Labor Relations", Arthur E. Puotinen, LUTHERAN FORUM, August/September 1971; "Ameliorative Factors" -- Faith of the Finns, A. E. Puotinen.

(46)

Christian Sociology, J. H. W. Stuckenberg, 1880.

(47)

Christianizing the Social Order, Walter Rauschenbusch, MacMillan Co. 1912; pgs. 24-25.

(48)

Christian Ethics, A. D. Matson, Book Concern, Rock Island, Ill., 1947; Christian Social Consciousness, 1953, A. D. Matson; The Reinterpretation of Luther, Dr. Edgar Carlson, Philadelphia, 1948; The Church and Public Conscience, Edgar Carlson, Philadelphia, 1956.

markedly in their entirety, it is to be noted that they developed cadres of significant leadership who were influential in the Federal Council of Churches (49) as well as in the National Council of Churches. The Roman Catholic Church in the United States achieved clarity for its favorable stand on unionism through statements on labor, such as Pope Leo XIII's statement on Labor: "Rerum Novarum" (50) in 1891.

The Suomi Synod never got to the point that it would have developed a statement on social change and social justice. However, it is significant to note what the historian of a parallel Lutheran body (now a part of the Lutheran Church in America) had to say:

"For the first three quarters of its existence, the Augustana Church exhibited the same spirit of quietism which has characterized so much of Lutheran history both in Europe and in America. Reasons for this quietistic spirit in Augustana lie near at hand. In the first place it must recall that for approximately the first sixty years of its life, Augustana was predominantly an immigrant church, preoccupied with the immense task of ministering to masses of incoming immigrants. As long as this pattern prevailed, this synod was isolated, both by choice and by circumstance, from many of the pervasive American influences which, like the Social Gospel, might otherwise have invaded the thinking and practice of the synod. In the second place, until the process of Americanization had reshaped basic Augustana attitudes, the synod stood aloof from the ecumenical movement with its powerful social action. In the third place, the most challenging social problems resulted first from urban situations. As long as the Augustana Church remained largely a rural church, it was neither ready nor equipped to handle acutely unique social problems posed by an urban society. Finally, quietism in the Augustana Church as in Lutheranism generally, has theological motivations. It may be said that this confessional tradition has tended to make the entire Lutheran Church, including Augustana, somewhat tardy in adapting to the complexities of an American environment." (51)

The Finnish National Church found its long-range destiny in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The LC-MS experienced something, which this writer judges

(49)

The Protestant Search for Political Realism, Donald B. Meyer, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1960; page 46; The Protestant Establishment, Aristocracy and Caste in America, E. Digby Baltzell, Random House, 1964.

(50)

Christianity and World Issues, T.P. Maston, MacMillan Co., N.Y., 1957; page 126.

(51)

Augustana Heritage, G. Everett Arden, Augustana Press, Rock Island, Ill., 1963; Additional: For any of the numerous social studies of the Lutheran Church in America write to: Department of Church and Society, Division for Mission in North America, Lutheran Church in America, 231 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

as approximating what the Suomi Synod had experienced, namely, beleaguerment by radical socialism. LC-MS congregations in the large urban centers of the country in the late 19th century felt the threat and contention of competition for the minds of German people due to the propaganda of radical German-language papers. Dr. C. F. W. Walther's articles on the subject are in a book entitled, Socialism and Communism; in it he clearly berates not only the radical agitators but also the capitalists for their self-interest, avarice and cruelty. (52)

The name of one man stands out heroically amidst the spokesmen of the churches of the land on the subject of social and economic responsibility, namely, the late Reinhold Niebuhr. The theological substance of his thinking is not based on the Social Gospel Movement, a hollow hope since the gospel it proclaims has become a mere sociology. The substance is the prophetic word which is to be spoken to every condition of man and society, to every establishment. (53)

Reinhold Niebuhr states:

"The pretensions of Russia must be judged as those of any other nation. A proletarian civilization cannot be assumed to be good merely because it is proletarian. The belief that a proletarian dictatorship destroys itself by destroying bourgeoisie egoism is a useless thought. History teaches that any oligarchy whether priestly, military, capitalistic or communistic is not to be trusted if no form of social control is maintained over it." (54)

-- Raymond W. Wargelin
March 1974

(52) Socialism and Communism, C.F.W. Walther; page 29.

(53) The Protestant Search for Political Realism, Donald B. Meyer, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1960; pages 222, 296-297, 303.

(54) Christianity and Power Politics, Reinhold Niebuhr, Scribners, 1948; pgs. 113, 149.