

## *Chapter 7*

### *Land Agitation and the Rise of Agrarian Socialism in South-Western Finland, 1899–1907*

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In the summer of 1904, the Finnish socialist leader Yrjö Mäkelin travelled from cottage to cottage in the province of Häme, south-western Finland, to canvass support for the socialist movement among the rural poor. When starting conversations with rural workers, he found it useful to bring up the recent assassination of Nikolay Bobrikov, who had served as the Governor General of Finland from 1898 until his death on 17 June 1904. Mäkelin, a devoted Finnish nationalist, considered Bobrikov the mastermind of the oppressive policies adopted in the Grand Duchy of Finland by the Russian government. While talking with the rural labourers of Häme, however, Mäkelin was astounded that many of them deeply mourned Bobrikov's demise:

They still believe that if Bobrikov had remained alive and continued his work, he would have executed a redistribution of land and belongings, in other words, he would have taken from the rich and given to the poor. Such madness did not appear elsewhere than in such places where they read nothing, but there are, God help us, still extremely many such places.<sup>1</sup>

The quote from Mäkelin's travelogue shows his anxiety over landless people's apparent lack of national consciousness. Like many other socialist activists, he believed that the rise of socialism in the Finnish countryside was impeded by the rural inhabitants' ignorance and loyalty to the imperial regime. Yet while commenting on landless people's attitudes towards

Bobrikov, Mäkelin touched on another major issue that socialists needed to tackle in order to gain the mass support of the rural proletariat. This issue was land ownership, the importance of which was reflected by the persistent circulation of land redistribution rumours in the countryside.

At the time of Mäkelin's tour in Häme, the socialist labour movement played only a minor role in the political life of Finland. Socialist ideas were gradually taking root, however, not only in the industrial centres but also in many rural areas. What was noteworthy in the rise of socialism in Finland was its concurrence with the collision between Finnish nationalists and the Russian government over the administrative autonomy of the Grand Duchy. The impact of this collision on the Finnish labour movement has been an important topic for Finnish historiography. Research has addressed the relationship of Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue (the Finnish Social Democratic Party, SDP) to the Russian government, and the particular way in which Finnish socialists combined class struggle with the defence of national autonomy.<sup>2</sup> Scholars have indicated that on the one hand, the socialist movement and the nationalist movement were closely integrated in Finland, but on the other hand, the labour movement benefited from the power struggle between the imperial authorities and the Finnish nationalist elite.<sup>3</sup>

While previous research on the relationship between the labour movement and imperial rule has focused on the views of socialist leaders and activists, some attention has also been paid to ordinary workers' conceptions of the political situation.<sup>4</sup> Some studies have even noted the appearance of pro-tsarist attitudes among agricultural workers and tenant farmers – that is, the rural people who were later the most responsive to socialism. These attitudes were expressed, for example, by the imperviousness of landless people to Finnish nationalists' agitation against imperial policies prior to 1905.<sup>5</sup>

Building on these previous findings, this chapter examines how the political clash between the Russian regime and Finnish nationalists fuelled landless labourers' protests and class consciousness at grass-roots level at the turn of the twentieth century. I argue that the rapid breakthrough of the socialist movement in Finland around 1905 would not have been possible without the preceding period of Russification, which gave the rural population new means and opportunities to engage in political action. By using sources such as rural people's letters to newspapers and their correspondence with the imperial authorities, I address the foundation of rural socialism in Finland. Although it has been recognized that the Finnish socialist movement was exceptionally agrarian in nature, these questions still require further elaboration.<sup>6</sup>

### **Map 7.1** South-western Häme

This analysis is confined to south-western Häme, officially the jurisdictional district of Tammela, with eleven parishes and 58,000 inhabitants in the year 1900.<sup>7</sup> South-western Häme belonged to the core region of Finland where urbanization and industrialization had been most rapid in the late nineteenth century. Nonetheless, two thirds of the region's inhabitants were still engaged in agriculture at the turn of the twentieth century. Of the agricultural households, 13 per cent owned their own land, whereas 26 per cent were tenant farmers (*maanvuokraaja*).<sup>8</sup> The remaining three-fifths of the households comprised cottagers (*mäkitupalainen*) and other agricultural labourers with their families. Not all agricultural labourers are included in this figure, however, because many farm servants and itinerant workers without their own dwelling do not appear in the statistics.<sup>9</sup>

South-western Häme represented the part of Finland where the question of landownership was most acute at this time. It was a region where a significant part of the land was owned by large manorial estates with numerous tenant farmers and workers. In this respect, south-western Häme resembled Skåne or the Mälaren valley in Sweden. Yet the region was also inhabited by hundreds of independent peasant farmers whose political position had been improved by the reforms of the national and local governments in the 1860s. Moreover, the landowners had benefited economically from the penetration of the capitalist market system into agriculture and forestry in the late nineteenth century. At the same time, the landless population expanded rapidly and access to land became more difficult. These changes widened the gap between the various groups of the agrarian population, and increased tensions between landowners and their tenants and agricultural labourers.<sup>10</sup>

This chapter examines how the evolving class conflict manifested itself in the countryside and intertwined with the Finno-Russian conflict and the rise of socialism during the years 1899–1907. The first two sections of the chapter focus on how the political crisis created by Russification presented landless labourers with a favourable opportunity to press the domestic upper class into carrying out social reforms. As the landless lacked formal representation in local and national politics, they turned to traditional instruments of peasant protest, such as spreading rumours and petitioning the imperial authorities.

In the third section of the chapter, I cover the concurrent penetration of the socialist labour movement in the countryside. Socialist agitators, aware of landless people's political significance, strove to address the landownership question and unite the fragmented rural proletariat. These efforts bore modest fruit, however, until the general strike of 1905 forced the Tsar to concede democratic reforms in Finland. The impact of the strike is discussed in the fourth section, which describes the surge of organization among landless labourers and

their alignment with the SDP in the parliamentary election of 1907. On the whole, the chapter elucidates how favourable twists in high politics turned landless people's informal protests into a strong backing for the socialists in a remarkably short period of time.

### **Finno-Russian Conflict-Boosting Rumours**

The Grand Duchy of Finland had been part of the Russian Empire since 1809, but it enjoyed more administrative autonomy than any other region of the Empire. In February 1899, however, Tsar Nicholas II declared the so-called February Manifesto, which limited the Finnish Diet's influence in the implementation of imperial legislation in Finland. The manifesto was orchestrated by the recently appointed Governor General Bobrikov, who mainly needed it to introduce a conscription law that enabled the incorporation of the Finnish armed forces into the Russian army. Finnish nationalists considered the manifesto a flagrant violation of the autonomy granted to Finland by the Tsar. To reverse the manifesto and prevent further integration measures, they organized peaceful mass opposition. In only two weeks, a petition known as the Great Address (*suuri addressi*) gathered over half a million signatures. As the petitioners comprised a quarter of the Finnish adult population, the petition was cherished as an indication of Finnish unanimity against the imperial policies.<sup>11</sup>

Not all Finns, however, mobilized against the manifesto or signed the Great Address. The signatures of tenant farmers, in particular, were under-represented in the petition. In southern Häme, tenants comprised only 7 per cent of the petitioners; the most passive areas being the manorial parishes of Jokioinen and Ypäjä where less than 2 per cent of the tenants signed the petition. The low proportions imply that some tenant farmers deliberately shunned the petition to avoid taking sides in the infighting between the imperial government and the Finnish upper classes.<sup>12</sup> This view is echoed by the author Väinö Linna in his famous novel

*Täällä Pohjantähden alla*, which has substantially influenced the popular image of early twentieth-century Finnish history. Linna, who sought inspiration for the novel from his birthplace in south-western Häme, represents some tenant farmers and cottagers as indifferent or hostile to the members of the upper class who collected signatures for the petition.<sup>13</sup> Linna's fictitious narrative bears a surprising similarity to some accounts written by rural workers soon after 1899. According to these accounts, many tenants and landless workers scorned the petition as an upper-class plot that deserved no support so long as the dominant groups overlooked their views on all other political issues.<sup>14</sup> Based on these accounts, the shunning of the Great Address seems more a protest against the local dominant groups than a statement of support for the imperial policies.

The view that the petition stirred underprivileged people to demonstrate against the domestic upper class is further supported by the simultaneous spread of rumours in the countryside. During the weeks following the introduction of the February Manifesto, rumours about a common redistribution of land swept through Finland. The rumours claimed that the Tsar would soon implement a nationwide land redistribution that would provide the landless with a plot of arable land either free of charge or for an affordable price. These rumblings not surprisingly struck a chord with tenants and day labourers, who eagerly linked the manifesto with a long-awaited land reform.<sup>15</sup>

Examining rumours provides useful perspectives on the peasants' political behaviour. Rumours tend to run loose, particularly in an atmosphere of fear and political upheaval; in such circumstances they often overpower official information channels.<sup>16</sup> Rumours can be defined as improvised news that hypothesizes about unverified realities and fuses material from many sources: official and unofficial, literary and oral. As such, they represent a tactic

for ordinary people to negotiate their way in society, or even an outright weapon of popular protest.<sup>17</sup>

The rumours that circulated in Finland 1899 can be traced, for example, by using rural letters to newspapers and citizens' complaints to officialdom. Both of these source types contain ample comments on the spread of unofficial news by local word-of-mouth networks. Although the authors of these texts sometimes treated rumours with disapproval or sarcasm, their texts give valuable insight into the content of the rumours and rural people's motives for their circulation.

Contemporaries who commented on the rumours in 1899 were well aware of the long tradition of whispers about land distribution in Russia. Particularly after the abolition of serfdom in the 1870s, rumours of a universal repartition of land had run loose around the Empire. In the Finnish provinces, similar rumours of land reform had circulated throughout the nineteenth century, often enhanced by crises in Finno-Russian relations. Nevertheless, previous rumours had always remained localized and scattered in Finland. It was only in the spring of 1899 that land redistribution rumours became widespread throughout the Grand Duchy, and south-western Häme was no exception. Although an official investigation found that the rumours did not gain as firm a foothold in Häme as in some other parts of Finland, the rural police chiefs reported that the rumours were running wild in Urjala and Jokioinen for example.<sup>18</sup> In Urjala it was claimed that the forthcoming imperial law would grant every cottager the ownership of the land surrounding the cottage. According to some rumours, the landless did not even need to wait for the law to be implemented; they could immediately claim landownership by contacting certain agents in a nearby city.<sup>19</sup>

The rumours in Urjala and in many other regions associated the forthcoming land redistribution with the implementation of a 'Russian law' in Finland. This idea of the Russian

law was based on rural inhabitants' vague conception of the collective land tenure system of Russian peasants known as '*mir*'.<sup>20</sup> In the electrified atmosphere following the February Manifesto in 1899, many rural inhabitants tended to interpret this old repartitional tenure as a general Russian landowning system that would come into effect in Finland and liberate the landless from their subordination. Spreading rumours was not, however, necessarily dependent on whether the rural inhabitants actually believed in the forthcoming land redistribution. Rather, the rumours should be understood as the landless people's attempt to use the discernible rupture in national power relations for their own purposes. Rumours offered them a means to put pressure on local landowners and to urge the state authorities to address the problems of landownership.

### **A Window of Opportunity for Petitioners and Denouncers**

Upper-class Finnish nationalists considered the rumours about land redistribution a menace to their attempts to unify the people against the Russification policies. The nationalists therefore strove to suppress the wave of rumours by sending speakers to the countryside and publishing innumerable pamphlets and articles about the harmfulness of spreading rumours. To downplay the rumours, they also associated rumour-mongering with Russian pedlars who travelled around Finland. In doing so, however, the nationalists failed to take seriously the growing social tension related to the land question implied by the rumours. Thus, even though the countermeasures helped to attenuate the rumours by the summer of 1899, they did not eliminate the ultimate source of restlessness in the countryside.<sup>21</sup> This soon became evident when landless people's discontent found new expressions, some of which were much more explicit than vague rumours.



In south-western Häme, the discontent of landless people was manifested, for example, in ‘counter-petitions’ collected by the Kalvola tenant farmer Adolf Nieminen in 1900. Nieminen’s two petitions were signed by sixty-seven landless labourers and tenant farmers from the surrounding countryside. The petitioners praised the Tsar for the February Manifesto, condemned the Great Address and appealed for an improvement in landless people’s conditions.<sup>22</sup> Both petitions were delivered to Governor General Bobrikov personally by a former parish clerk, August Erlund, who probably also aided Nieminen in formulating the petitions. Erlund was locally well known as an advocate of the tenants’ interests. He had recently been sacked from his post as the parish clerk of Kalvola and consequently employed himself as a ‘land agitator’.<sup>23</sup>

Erlund and Nieminen’s activities soon set them on a collision course with the nationalists, who tended to stigmatize any Finns who collaborated with the oppressive Governor General as unpatriotic and corrupted. As a result, the pair was subjected to a fierce attack by the nationalist newspapers.<sup>24</sup> The public gaze directed at Erlund and Nieminen also inspired a students’ association from Helsinki to send agitators to Kalvola in December 1900. The agitators, who went to acquaint themselves with the local conditions and educate the landless population, gave the following report on their observations in Kalvola:

What is most woeful is that besides moderate tenant farmers, there are many of those in the parish who live in hope of that golden land distribution. ... These people are led by the sacked parish clerk Erlund and the tenant Nieminen. These two gentlemen exercise downright provocation. ... Money is submitted to them regularly from Helsinki, which, by the way, they often visit personally. It should also be mentioned that last summer they had brought along gendarmes to some religious gatherings.

Furthermore, it seems that Nieminen has been given the task of nurturing itinerant pedlars. They [tenant farmers] said that there had once been 18 of them [pedlars] at his place at the same time.<sup>25</sup>

As the quotation indicates, the student agitators accused Erlund and Nieminen of being funded by Bobrikov and of cooperating with the hated Russian gendarmes (*santarmit*) and pedlars. By representing the pair as unpatriotic exploiters of the rural poor, the agitators essentially downplayed the existing tenancy conflict between the manor owners and their tenants in Kalvola. This was symptomatic for the nationalist intelligentsia in general. The intellectuals' tendency to blame corrupted individuals or foreign vagrants for provoking landless people implies a failure to acknowledge the evolution of a clear-cut class conflict in the countryside.<sup>26</sup>

By 1901, August Erlund and Adolf Nieminen had gained nationwide publicity as collaborators of the imperial regime. Due to the bad press, Nieminen was eventually evicted from his farm by an annoyed landlord and Erlund fell into outcast status in his community. These setbacks did not stop the pair from operating, however. Both men continued to communicate with the imperial government during the following years, requesting aid for themselves and for the rural poor of the region.<sup>27</sup> Erlund even engaged in composing land redistribution petitions to the Governor General on behalf of some illiterate tenants.<sup>28</sup> This brought him into still more disrepute as the newspapers proclaimed him to be a swindler who ripped off paupers with groundless promises.<sup>29</sup> Rather than being swindlers, however, Erlund and Nieminen probably truly aimed at improving the conditions of landless people, even if they were also motivated by the pursuance of personal prestige and financial support from the administration.

Erlund and Nieminen were not the only rural inhabitants of south-western Häme who engaged in political action by appealing to the imperial authorities. In 1902–1904, several lower-class people approached the Governor General’s Chancery with denunciations accusing local upper-class individuals of conspiring against the imperial government.<sup>30</sup> Such letters became common at the same time as the implementation of the new conscription law in Finland, and they were mainly directed against the nationalist activists, known as Constitutionalists (*perustuslailliset*), who had orchestrated boycotts against conscription in Häme.<sup>31</sup> These denunciations demonstrate that the Constitutionalist resistance to the government policies was far from unanimously supported by the rural population.

Letters of denunciation give valuable insight into internal tensions in local communities, for despite focusing on the conscription boycott, the letters usually carried other grievances as well. The denouncers included tenant farmers, agricultural workers and craftsmen who had personal disputes with landowners, bailiffs, priests or civil servants over issues such as evictions or debts.<sup>32</sup> For these lowly individuals, denunciations provided a means to argue for an administrative resolution in their favour or simply to cause harm to the individuals they were in dispute with.

An example of such a denunciation is provided by Vihtori Lindholm (1868–1918), a cobbler from Urjala, who wrote four letters to Bobrikov in the spring of 1903. In these letters Lindholm named several local landowners, a sawmill manager and a local priest as anti-government agitators who incited the local proletariat to boycott conscription. Moreover, Lindholm accused some local upper-class people of defaming the Tsar and the Governor General.<sup>33</sup> Lindholm justified these denunciations as loyalty to the imperial regime, but supporting evidence from his life story, such as trial documents and reminiscences, suggests alternative motives for the revelations. Lindholm’s letter-writing seems to have been fuelled

particularly by certain lawsuits that had led to him being jailed two years earlier. Apparently, the cobbler used denunciations to retaliate against the landowners and other upper-class people who had given negative testimonies against him in court or had otherwise contributed to his sentences.<sup>34</sup>

Amid the Finno-Russian conflict, mere rumours of denunciations were enough to generate political tensions and paranoia in local communities. Later on, during the general strike of 1905, several denouncers from south-western Häme were exposed when a crowd raided the gendarme station of Tampere and rummaged through its secret documents. In the patriotic atmosphere of the strike, nationalist newspapers published the names of the denouncers and stigmatized them as the henchmen of the oppressive regime.<sup>35</sup> As a result, these individuals became ostracized in their communities. Cobbler Lindholm, for example, was driven away from a popular meeting after being proclaimed as a traitor by the attendant crowd of local farmers and workers. He was also forced to repent publicly in the workers' association his intrigue with the imperial administration, in order to retain his membership of the association. Some years later, Lindholm therefore recalled the general strike as a personal tragedy rather than a celebration of democratic reforms.<sup>36</sup> He and others who had collaborated with the Russian regime became the losers of the strike, whereas for the Constitutionalists – and the socialist labour movement – the strike marked a triumph over tyranny.

### **The Socialist Movement Channelling the Protest**

At the same time as the wave of land distribution rumours, petitions and denunciations, the socialist movement penetrated the countryside of Häme. Socialist ideas were promulgated by the itinerant agitators of Suomen Työväenpuolue (the Finnish Labour Party, from 1903 SDP)

and by labour newspapers, whose circulation gradually increased from the 1890s. The labour newspapers gained a readership in the countryside, first and foremost by publishing rural letters that focused on the plight of the rural poor and the wrongdoings of the local elite. These letters were written mostly by local labour activists who themselves represented the rural proletariat, a group whose voice had been largely absent from the press before the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, the expanding labour press opened up a new public arena where working-class people who lacked full political rights were able to air their grievances and create class consciousness.<sup>37</sup>

The formation of working-class consciousness in south-western Häme was obviously linked with the escalating conflict between landowners and the landless. The status of tenant farmers became more insecure at the beginning of the twentieth century when landowners tightened rental terms or evicted their tenants in the fear that the forthcoming tenancy legislation would make leasing unprofitable. As shown above, tenants reacted to the insecurity by turning to rumour-mongering, petitions and denunciations. Tensions also emerged over the tenants' and agrarian workers' customary use of woodland, which caused an increasing number of litigations in the region.<sup>38</sup> All these developments benefited labour activists when canvassing for support among the landless for the socialist agrarian programme. The activists realized that in order to gain mass support, Työväenpuolue needed to respond to the rural proletariat's hunger for land. Hence, they tactically strove to adapt Marxist ideas of agriculture to suit the local circumstances. In this, the Finnish socialists followed the same path as their Scandinavian and German counterparts in seeking to win over the rural population by adopting a favourable stance towards small-scale farming.<sup>39</sup>

The rise of class politics in the countryside entailed a new form of collective protest, namely the strike. In the summer of 1903, several strikes of tenants and day labourers broke

out in Finland. In June 1903, one of the biggest conflicts occurred in south-western Häme, where the day labourers of Jokioinen manor went on strike to shorten their working hours. The strike ended after two weeks when the manor's bailiff – fearing that the strike would extend to the manor's other estates – partly conceded to workers' demands. Later on in July 1905, the tenants of Kartanonkylä manor in Ypäjä also went on strike for better conditions and forced the manor owner to compromise. Conflicts such as these had a wide-ranging impact; they frightened numerous other landowners into cutting their labourers' working hours even before it was demanded.<sup>40</sup>

The agricultural workers and tenant farmers who engaged in collective action in 1903–5 were mostly unorganized. Nonetheless, their demands were sometimes backed by visiting socialist agitators or local workers' associations, as in the case of Jokioinen. In general, the SDP warned the agricultural labourers not to launch thoughtless strikes because they lacked the necessary muscle to push through their demands. Instead of striking, the party organs advised the rural proletariat to organize and promote their cause through negotiation.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the socialists' vigorous agitation, the organization of rural workers proved sluggish in south-western Häme. In total, six new workers' associations with a socialist programme were established between 1900 and 1904, but the membership of most of them remained low. Agricultural workers and tenants were reluctant to join the associations, as they justly feared discrimination by landowners and other dominant groups. Moreover, the organization was hampered by rural workers' religiosity even though socialist activists roundly reassured them that socialist ideology was in tune with Christianity.<sup>42</sup>

In particular, the socialists agonized over the mobilization of tenant farmers. Even if the tenants had been actively voicing their grievances via rumours and petitions, they lacked the kind of collective identity vis-à-vis landowners that would have been the prerequisite for

concerted political action through workers' associations. Instead of organization, tenants tended to lean on the state, wanting the government, with its laws and statutes, to intervene in their personal relationships with landowners.<sup>43</sup> This faith in state intervention was a crucial factor behind the popularity of rumours about the Russian law in 1899 and the subsequent petitions to the Governor General. Labour party organs strongly deprecated the rural proletariat's resort to rumour-spreading and petitioning. From their viewpoint, involvement in such activities blatantly contradicted the aims of the socialist movement. For example, in an editorial of *Kansan Lehti* ('People's Journal'), Yrjö Mäkelin refuted the claims of some bourgeois nationalists that 'the labour movement was the instigator and spreader of land redistribution rumours'. He argued that instead of fostering rumours, the labour movement had effectively suppressed them through education.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, *Kansan Lehti* reprimanded landless people for pleading with the Governor General for land reform. According to the paper, the government would disregard such pleas and therefore the petitioners would receive nothing but the pity and contempt of their fellow citizens. Instead of vainly expecting help from officialdom, the labour organ argued, landless people could improve their lot only by organizing and furthering reforms patiently through legislation.<sup>45</sup>

### **A Surge of Organization after the General Strike of 1905**

The SDP essentially argued that the problems of land ownership and tenancy could only be solved by a parliament elected under universal and equal suffrage. Hence, up until 1905, socialist agitators focused on mobilizing the rural poor in support of demands for rapid suffrage reform. This strategy was problematic, however, because as long as universal suffrage remained a distant dream, the socialist alternative did not appear very attractive to most tenant farmers and agricultural workers.

Things were to change, however, when the revolutionary situation in Russia spread to Finland with the general strike of November 1905. The strike forced the Tsar to suspend Russification measures and to concede universal and equal suffrage for both men and women in parliamentary elections.<sup>46</sup> As a result, the political horizon was suddenly filled with expectations of radical social reforms.

**Illustration 7.2** Members of Honkola workers' association standing around their workers' hall in 1908. The Honkola workers' association (established in 1906) was one of the largest workers' associations in south-western Häme. Most of its members were tenant farmers and agricultural workers of the manor of Honkola. This particular manor and the workers' association inspired Väinö Linna in his novel *Under the North Star*. Linna was born in Honkola region. Courtesy of Alpo Hietanen.

Although the general strike was largely a non-violent process, it produced considerable restlessness in south-western Häme. As communications were halted during the strike days, rural inhabitants suffered a news blackout and were thus left with only a vague understanding of the strike aims. This created favourable circumstances for rumours to resurface.<sup>47</sup> The press reported on tenants who grumbled 'that in Russia the land has been taken away from the rich and divided equally among the poor, and the same will happen here as well'.<sup>48</sup> Newspapers also noted that agitators were on the move in Häme again, luring landless people with promises of land redistribution.<sup>49</sup> Such reports indicate that the strike with its prospects of democracy and societal change inspired the rural poor to highlight the importance of landownership reforms and to apply pressure on the authorities once more through rumour-spreading.



During the following months, however, the rumours of the landless people gave way to a different kind of mobilization. In south-western Häme, like elsewhere in Finland, the membership of local socialist associations multiplied: by the end of 1906, as many as thirty-four workers' associations with 3,800 members existed in the region. This meant that more than one in ten adults had joined the SDP. Women, who had previously been all but missing from rural workers' associations, also now enrolled.<sup>50</sup> The enthusiasm for organization was due primarily to the suffrage reform. This reform would apparently bring within reach all of the social reforms yearned for by the landless once the unicameral Parliament started its work. In this atmosphere, the Social Democrats seemed to the landless to be the political group most able to realize the dreamed-of reforms in Parliament.

In the first parliamentary election with universal and equal suffrage in 1907, the SDP gained 37 per cent of the ballot in Finland. South-western Häme was the strongest area of support for socialism, with the Social Democrats winning 64 per cent of the regional vote. In the parish of Humppila, no less than 84 per cent of voters backed the socialists, and in the former strike areas of Jokioinen and Ypäjä, the socialists verged on 80 per cent of the vote.<sup>51</sup> These huge percentages imply that not only agricultural workers but also most tenant farmers aligned themselves with the SDP. Despite considerable differences in social position, both these rural groups were essentially connected by political subjugation and hunger for land, which made them responsive to the socialists' promise of radical reform. Yet the appeal of socialism in the Finnish countryside also owed much to the inefficiency of the other parties in addressing the land question. In this respect, the situation differed from Sweden, Norway and Denmark, where the liberals competed successfully for the support of the rural proletariat.<sup>52</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Imperial integration policies turned south-western Häme into a battlefield of various agitators at the turn of the twentieth century. First, Finnish nationalist activists descended upon the countryside, striving to awaken national consciousness and quell pernicious rumours among the rural population. Second, a number of diverse advocates of landless people emerged to write up petitions and denunciations to the imperial government, thus representing a counterforce to nationalist agitation. These land agitators blatantly capitalized on the conflict between the Russian regime and the Finnish nationalists while presenting themselves as landless people's spokespersons vis-à-vis the local dominant groups.

Finally, the rural population also encountered socialist agitators, who represented the SDP and its local branches. Many of the socialist activists sympathized with Constitutional nationalism and, at least officially, disdained the land redistribution rumours cherished by the agrarian lower class. Nonetheless, they appealed successfully to the very people who seemed the most resilient to the nationalist agenda and the most inclined to tsarism. Amid the political turmoil, socialists managed to convince the landless that it was not the imperial government that would help them; instead, agricultural workers and tenants could improve their conditions only by organizing and voting for the Social Democrats.

As this chapter has shown, several indications of landless people's discontent preceded the rise of the socialist labour movement in Häme. The discontent presented itself, for example, in the persistent rumours about the forthcoming Russian law and in the letters sent to Bobrikov's government. These expressions of discontent remained, however, too disconnected and fickle to imply the formation of a homogenous 'social movement' among the unlanded. It was only with the support of socialist labour organizations that landless

people's campaigning became consistent, organized and programmatic, thus adopting the distinctive features of a social movement in the sense defined by Charles Tilly.<sup>53</sup>

Despite this organization, one can question altogether the meaningfulness of squeezing the rural protests of the turn of the twentieth century into the mould of a distinct movement. As Katrina Navickas argues, the new histories of collective action avoid reducing the complexities of collective actions to class-based 'riots' or 'movements'. Rather, these histories elucidate the geographically specific patterns of social conflict by stressing the constant negotiations, tensions and ambiguities involved in protest events.<sup>54</sup> As this chapter has illustrated, landless people's protests intertwined with imperial integration policies, nationalism and socialism in complex ways that cannot be grasped by confining oneself to the views of state officials and party elites. Instead, one needs to focus on local events and individual actors, who, despite belonging to the same 'class' or participating in the same collective actions, may have situated themselves in a very unorthodox way in relation to the political currents. Although the voices of the rank-and-file participants in protest events are often hard to recover, hints of their ideas can be found; for example, by tracing the rumours that spread in their local communities.

The specificity of the political struggle discussed in this chapter can be highlighted, for example, by contrasting it with the attempts of the Swedish Social Democrats to unionize agricultural workers in Skåne at the beginning of the twentieth century. There, the Social Democrats resorted to a radical nationalist agenda to fight against the import of cheap labour from the Austrian province of Galicia.<sup>55</sup> In those circumstances the socialists apparently considered patriotic discourse essential in appealing to the rural working class. In south-western Häme, however, the reverse was true; the socialists confronted a rural proletariat who regarded Finnish nationalism with suspicion and looked to the Tsar for land reform.

Nonetheless, the Social Democrats' ability to address the land question plausibly became their vehicle for introducing a socialist and nationalist discourse to the rural labouring classes of Häme.

The success of the Finnish socialists among the rural population had huge consequences; it helped the SDP gain a solid foothold in the Finnish political system from 1905. In fact, partly owing to the subsequent inability of Parliament to solve the land question, the Social Democrats were able to strengthen their agrarian support up until the revolutions of 1917–18. Not even the Civil War of 1918 – in which casualties were particularly high among the rural workers of south-western Häme – significantly dented the appeal of the socialist movement in the countryside. Thus, agrarian socialism proved to be a strikingly persistent phenomenon that characterized the political culture of Finland to an exceptional degree even by Nordic standards.

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*Aamulehti*

*Kansan Lehti*

*Päivälehti*

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Archive of Tammela jurisdiction, Records of regular affairs 1904

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> 'He nimittäin yhä vieläkin uskovat, että jos Bobrikoff olisi saanut elää ja jatkaa toimintaansa, olisi hän pannut toimeen maitten ja tavarain tasauksen, s.o.: olisi ottanut rikkailta ja antanut köyhille. Tällaista mielettömyyttä ei kyllä ilmennyt muualla kuin niissä paikoissa, joissa ei lueta mitään, mutta sellaisia paikkoja, Jumala paratkoon, on olemassa vielä tavattoman paljon'. Y. Mäkelin. 1904. 'Kertomus matkasta Ruoveden ja Virtain pitäjissä kesä- ja heinäkuun ajalla v. 1904', Arvid Neovius' archive, folder 24. National Archives of Finland (NA).

<sup>2</sup> J. Heikkilä. 1993. *Kansallista luokkapolitiikkaa. Sosiaalidemokraatit ja Suomen autonomian puolustus 1905–1917*, Helsinki: SHS; A. Kujala. 1989. *Vallankumous ja kansallinen itsemääräämisoikeus. Venäjän sosialistiset puolueet ja suomalainen radikalismi vuosisadan alussa*, Helsinki: SHS; A. Kujala. 1995. *Venäjän hallitus ja Suomen työväenliike 1899–1905*, Helsinki: SHS.

<sup>3</sup> R. Alapuro. 1998. *State and Revolution in Finland*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 110–14; T. Polvinen. 1995. *Imperial Borderland. Bobrikov and the Attempted Russification of Finland, 1898-1904*, London: Hurst, 232–34; H. Soikkanen. 1961. *Sosialismin tulo Suomeen*, Porvoo: WSOY, 131–37.

<sup>4</sup> For example, R. Alapuro. 1994. *Suomen synty paikallisena ilmiönä 1890–1933*, Helsinki: Hanki ja jää.

<sup>5</sup> E. Jutikkala. 1977. 'Laittomat asevelvollisuuskysymys ja torpparikysymys', in T. Rantanen (ed.), *Historiantutkijan sana. Maisterista akateemikoksi*, Helsinki: SHS, 183–93; C.L. Lundin. 1981. 'Finland', in E.C. Thaden (ed.), *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855-1914*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 430–31.

<sup>6</sup> Alapuro, *State and Revolution*, 117; D. Kirby. 1989. 'The Labour Movement', in M. Engman and D. Kirby (eds), *Finland: People, Nation, State*, London: Hurst, 196. So far, the most extensive accounts on the rise of agrarian socialism in Finland are included in V. Rasila.

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1961. *Suomen torpparikysymys vuoteen 1909*, Helsinki: SHS, 1961; Soikkanen, *Sosialismin tulo Suomeen*.

<sup>7</sup> The district includes the parishes of Akaa, Humppila, Jokioinen, Kalvola, Kylmäkoski, Somerniemi, Somero, Sääksmäki, Tammela, Urjala and Ypäjä.

<sup>8</sup> The term ‘tenant farmer’ refers to a person who leased a plot of land from a landlord for a fixed period and paid an annual rent for it by labour or in cash. The tenant farmers encompass both leaseholders of a minor part of a farm (*torppari*) and a smaller number of tenants who held a whole farm (*lampuoti*). In the English-language literature on Finnish history, *torppari* (cf. Swedish *torpare*) is usually translated as ‘crofter’, a term with a Scottish origin. However, this translation gives a misleading impression of the position of Finnish tenant farmers, who typically had more productive land than Scottish crofters. In fact, with regards to subsistence, the Scottish crofter was often closer to a Finnish ‘cottager’ (*mäkitupalainen*), who occupied a cottage under tenure in return for labour but usually did not have enough arable land for subsistence farming.

<sup>9</sup> H. Gebhard. 1913. *Maanviljelysväestö, sen suhde muihin elinkeinoryhmiin ja sen yhteiskunnallinen kokoonpano Suomen maalaiskunnissa v. 1901. Tilattoman väestön alakomitea. I*, Helsinki; Keisarillinen senaatti, table 2; Alapuro, *State and Revolution*, 43–47, 70–74. See also S. Heikkinen. 1997. *Labour and the Market. Workers, Wages and Living Standards in Finland, 1850–1913*, Helsinki: The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, 45–49.

<sup>10</sup> Gebhard, *Maanviljelysväestö*, table 2; E. Jutikkala. 1969. ‘Väestö teollistumisen alkuvaiheessa’, in E. Jutikkala et al. (eds), *Hämeen historia IV:1*, Hämeenlinna: Hämeen Heimoliitto, 8–74: 58, 67; Alapuro, *State and Revolution*, 43–47, 70–74; M. Morell. 2011. ‘Agriculture in Industrial Society, 1870–1945’, in J. Myrdal and M. Morell (eds), *The Agrarian History of Sweden*, Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 169–78.

<sup>11</sup> S.D. Huxley. 1990. *Constitutionalist Insurgency in Finland*, Helsinki: SHS, 145–47; Polvinen, *Imperial Borderland*, 82–84; A. Kujala. 2005. ‘Finland in 1905’, in J.D. Smele and A. Heywood (eds), *The Russian Revolution of 1905*, London: Routledge, 82–83; P. Tommila. 1999. *Suuri adressi*, Porvoo: WSOY, 153–56, 292.

<sup>12</sup> M. Peltonen. 1992. *Talolliset ja torpparit*, Helsinki: SHS, 258–59; Tommila, *Suuri adressi*, 154–55, 159; S. Halkosaari. 1972. ‘Etelä-Häme ja allekirjoitetut vastalauseadressit vuosina 1899–1901’, MA dissertation, University of Tampere, 24–25.

<sup>13</sup> V. Linna. 1959. *Täällä Pohjantähden alla I*, Porvoo: WSOY, 171–83.

<sup>14</sup> M. Grönqvist, ‘Viime vuoden tapahtumia’, 1900, manuscript, 2:1–3, 3:1. Matilda Grönqvist’s archive. Finnish Literature Society – Literary Archives; V. Lindholm, ‘Elämän raunioilla’, 1909, letter. Archive of Urjala Workers’ Association. Finnish Labour Archives (FLA).

<sup>15</sup> K.J. Ståhlberg. 1899. *Berättelse om verkställd undersökning angående utspridande af falska rykten i landet*, Helsingfors: Kejsarliga Senaten, 3–6; S. Suodenjoki. 2010. *Kuriton suutari ja kiistämisen rajat. Työväenliikkeen läpimurto hämäläisessä maalaisyhteisössä 1899–1909*, Helsinki: SKS, 96–97.

<sup>16</sup> A.A. Yang. 1987. ‘A Conversation of Rumors: The Language of Popular Mentalités in Late Nineteenth-Century Colonial India’, *Journal of Social History* 20(3), 485.

<sup>17</sup> T. Johnston. 2011. *Being Soviet: Identity, Rumour, and Everyday Life under Stalin 1939–1953*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, xxxii–xxxiv; L. Viola. 1996. *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, New York: Oxford University Press, 45–46; E.A. Aytekin. 2012. ‘Peasant Protest in<sup>24</sup>



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the Late Ottoman Empire: Moral Economy, Revolt, and the Tanzimat Reforms’, *International Review of Social History* 57(2), 223–27.

<sup>18</sup> Rasila, *Suomen torpparikysymys*, 139–43; Ståhlberg, *Berättelse om verkställd undersökning*, 5. On land redistribution rumours in Russia see, for example, D. Field. 1976. *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 24, 122–27.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Tietoja maanjakohuhuista’, *Päivälehti*, 16 May 1899, 2.

<sup>20</sup> H. Immonen. 1992. “‘Kun Venäjän laki tulee” – sivistyneistö, kansa ja helmikuun manifesti’, *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* 90(2), 120–25; Tommila, *Suuri adressi*, 247–48.

<sup>21</sup> Peltonen, *Talolliset ja torpparit*, 262–63; Suodenjoki, *Kuriton suutari*, 98–99.

<sup>22</sup> A. Nieminen to Bobrikov, January and March 1900. D: Toiminta-asiakirjat. Artur Kniper’s archive. NA.

<sup>23</sup> Suodenjoki, *Kuriton suutari*, 103.

<sup>24</sup> Suodenjoki, *Kuriton suutari*, 105–6.

<sup>25</sup> ‘*Surkeinta kuitenkin on, että paitsi näitä niin sanoakseni maltillisempia torppareita on pitäjässä suuri joukko sellaisia, jotka elävät tuon kultaisen maan jaon toiveissa ... Heidän johtajanaan on virasta erotettu lukkari Erlund sekä torppari Nieminen. Nämä molemmat herrat harjoittavat suoranaista kiihotusta ... Rahoja lähetetään heille säännöllisesti Helsingistä, jossa muuten itsekä käyvät usein vierailmassa. Mainittakoon heidän toiminnastaan vielä, että viime kesänä jo olivat tuoneet santarmeja mukanaan muutamaaan raamatunselitykseen. Niemisen tehtäväksi näyttää sitäpaitsi kulkukauppiaitten vaaliminen annettaneen. Niinpä kertoivat, että siellä kerrankin oli ollut hänen luonaan heitä 18 yhdellä kertaa*’. E. Laine and V. Bonsdorff, ‘Kertomus Hämäläis-osakunnan kansanvalistusvaliokunnan toimeenpanemista luentokursseista Kalvolan ja Sääksmäen pitäjissä joululomalla 1900’, 1901. Hd1: Kansanvalistus. Archive of Hämäläis-Osakunta. National Library of Finland – Manuscript Collection.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Peltonen, *Talolliset ja torpparit*, 264–65.

<sup>27</sup> A. Nieminen to Bobrikov, 18 November 1901. Archive of the Chancery of the Governor General (KKK) 1902, section I, delo 13. NA; ‘Tuhottavia papereita’, *Tampereen Sanomat*, 12 November 1905, 2–3.

<sup>28</sup> For petitions transcribed by Erlund see, for example, H. Lindgrén to Bobrikov, 9 June 1904. KKK 1904, section V, delo 27:103. NA; J. Kuusniemi to Obolenski, 14 August 1904. KKK 1904, section V, delo 27:186. NA.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Urjala’, *Tampereen Sanomat*, 29 December 1905, 2–3; ‘Petkuttajako liikkeellä?’, *Aamulehti*, 30 December 1905, 2.

<sup>30</sup> For example, J. Lehtonen to Bobrikov, 16 August 1902. KKK 1902, section I, delo 56. NA; K.O. Jalonen and H. Lindgrén to Bobrikov, 8 May 1903. KKK 1903, section V, delo 61. NA.

<sup>31</sup> I. Hakalehto. 1979. ‘Valtiolliset vaalit ja poliittiset puolueet’, in E. Jutikkala et al. (eds), *Hämeen historia* IV:3, Hämeenlinna: Hämeen Heimoliitto, 258–72; Kujala, ‘Finland in 1905’, 84.

<sup>32</sup> For example, O. Mäkilä to Bobrikov, 9 February 1904. KKK 1904, section V, delo 27:I. NA; H. Lindgrén to Bobrikov, 9 June 1904. KKK 1904, section V, delo 27:103. NA. See also S. Suodenjoki. 2014. ‘Whistleblowing from Below: Finnish Rural Inhabitants’ Letters to the Imperial Power at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, in A.C. Edlund, L.E. Edlund and S. Haugen (eds), *Vernacular Literacies – Past, Present and Future*, Umeå: Umeå University Press, 284–89.

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- <sup>33</sup>. V. Lindholm to Bobrikov, 24 March 1903, 26 March 1903, 29 March 1903 and 30 March 1903. KKK 1903, section I, delo 78:7. NA.
- <sup>34</sup>. Suodenjoki, *Kuriton suutari*, 200–1.
- <sup>35</sup>. Suodenjoki, *Kuriton suutari*, 199–203; E.I. Parmanen. 1941. *Taistelujen kirja IV*, Porvoo: Werner Söderström, 405.
- <sup>36</sup>. V. Lindholm, ‘Elämän raunioilla’, 1909, letter. Archive of Urjala Workers’ Association. FLA.
- <sup>37</sup>. S. Suodenjoki and J. Peltola. 2007. *Köyhä Suomen kansa katkoo kahleitansa*, Tampere: Tampere University Press, 71–72, 130–31; Suodenjoki, *Kuriton suutari*, 128–31.
- <sup>38</sup>. For example, records of regular affairs in Urjala and Akaa court district, 23 March 1904, § 16. Archive of Tammela jurisdiction. Provincial Archive of Häme; Suodenjoki, *Kuriton suutari*, 140–44. For woodland infractions as an indication of peasant resistance see C. Frías Corredor. 2007. ‘Disputes, Protest and Forms of Resistance in Rural Areas. Huesca, 1880–1914’, in J.A. Piqueras and V. Sanz Rozalén (eds), *A Social History of Spanish Labour*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 209, 217.
- <sup>39</sup>. Soikkanen, *Sosialismin tulo Suomeen*, 124–30; G. Callesen. 1990. ‘Denmark’, in M. van der Linden and J. Rojahn (eds), *The Formation of Labour Movements 1870-1914*, I, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 147–48; A. Thörnquist. 1989. *Lönearbete eller egen jord? Den svenska lantarbetarrörelsen och jordfrågan 1908–1936*, Uppsala: Uppsala University, 59–60; F. Sejersted. 2011. *The Age of Social Democracy. Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 132–35. For the evolvement of the agrarian programme of the SDP see P. Jussila. 2014. *Tilastomies torpparien asialla*, Tampere: THPTS, 94–194.
- <sup>40</sup>. Rasila, *Suomen torpparikysymys*, 258–63, 271–79.
- <sup>41</sup>. ‘Maalaistyöväestölle’, *Kansan Lehti*, 14 July 1903, 1–2; Rasila, *Suomen torpparikysymys*, 268–79.
- <sup>42</sup>. Statistics of the Labour Party/SDP (Puoluetilasto) 1900–1907. FLA; Soikkanen, *Sosialismin tulo Suomeen*, 196–98, 203–5; Suodenjoki, *Kuriton suutari*, 163, 171–83.
- <sup>43</sup>. P. Kettunen. 1986. *Poliittinen liike ja sosiaalinen kollektiivisuus*, Helsinki: SHS, 60.
- <sup>44</sup>. ‘... työväenliike on maanjakojuuttujen aiheuttaja ja levittäjä’. ‘Työväenliikettä häväisty’, *Kansan Lehti*, 28 May 1904, 1–2.
- <sup>45</sup>. ‘Hyljättävä tapa’, *Kansan Lehti*, 7 May 1904, 1.
- <sup>46</sup>. See chapter 8.
- <sup>47</sup>. S. Suodenjoki. 2008. ‘Suurlakon riitaisa yksimielisyys’, in P. Haapala et al. (eds), *Kansa kaikkivaltias. Suurlakko Suomessa 1905*, Helsinki: Teos, 111–14.
- <sup>48</sup>. ‘He kertovat, miten Venäjälläkin muka on rikkailta otettu maa pois ja jaettu tasan köyhille ja sama asia on tekeillä täälläkin’. ‘Maanjakoasia kummittelee’, *Aamulehti*, 30 November 1905, 3.
- <sup>49</sup>. For example, ‘Urjala’, *Tampereen Sanomat*, 29 December 1905, 2–3.
- <sup>50</sup>. Puoluetilasto 1904–1906. FLA; Halkosaari, ‘Etelä-Häme’, 135; Suodenjoki, *Kuriton suutari*, 220.
- <sup>51</sup>. Suomen Virallinen Tilasto XXIX, Vaalitulasto 1 (1907), table II.
- <sup>52</sup>. B. Simonson. 1990. ‘Sweden’, in M. van der Linden and J. Rojahn (eds), *The Formation of Labour Movements 1870-1914*, I, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 99–100; E.A. Terjesen. 1990. ‘Norway’, in M. van der Linden and J. Rojahn (eds), *The Formation of Labour Movements 1870-1914*, I, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 117–18; Callesen, ‘Denmark’, 144–52; Sejersted, *The Age of Social Democracy*, 103–5.

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- <sup>53</sup>. C. Tilly. 2004. *Social Movements, 1768–2004*, Boulder: Paradigm, 3–4, 7, 13.
- <sup>54</sup>. K. Navickas. 2011. ‘What Happened to Class? New Histories of Labour and Collective Action in Britain’, *Social History* 36(2), 197.
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