



BRILL

FASCISM 4 (2015) 134-154

F A S C I S M
JOURNAL
OF
COMPARATIVE
FASCIST
STUDIES
brill.com/fasc

‘Home, Religion, Fatherland’: Movements of the Radical Right in Finland

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Abstract

This article charts the history of fascism in Finland and looks for the causes of its failure. Like most of its European contemporaries, Finnish nationalism was radicalized in similar processes which produced successful fascist movements elsewhere. After the end of the Great War, Finnish nationalists were engaged first in a bitter civil war, and then in a number of *Freikorps*-style attempts to expand the borders of the newly-made Finnish state. Like elsewhere, these experiences produced a generation of frustrated and embittered, radicalized nationalists to serve as the cadre of Finnish fascist movements. The article concentrates on the Lapua movement, in which fascist influences and individuals were in a prominent position, even though the movement publicly adopted a predominantly conservative anti-communist outlook centred on the values of home, religion and fatherland.

Keywords

fascism – nationalism – Nordic countries – Finland – conservatism – anti-communism – radicalism – Lapua movement

‘Right now Finland is living an ethically strong period,’ wrote the Finnish composer Yrjö Kilpinen to his German publisher Hans Tischer in August 1930: ‘We shall see how the irreligious, materialistic and aesthetically superficial values will go up in the air like smoke. The Lapua movement is a vital ethical

counter-reaction to materialistic communism, which respects neither the traditional values nor the Finnish soul.¹

Kilpinen was speaking of the Lapua movement, then at the height of its popularity and the only mass movement of radical nationalism to attract wide popular support in inter-war Finland. He was also seeing in the movement a spiritual rebirth to halt a threatening degeneration of a nation, a reassertion of values he thought would be crucial to sustaining both Finland's independence, and to the realization of the further goals of radical Finnish nationalism. The movement Kilpinen was referring to had gotten its name from Lapua, a town in southern Bothnia in the west of the country. The town became the spiritual home to a movement openly admiring Italian Fascism and proclaiming to be about protecting 'home, religion and fatherland'. At the same time, hoped Kilpinen and many others, it would bring about a return to traditional, essentially agrarian, conservative values and mystical heroism fit for a nation of peasant-warriors.

The Lapua movement is the best known fascist-style organization in Finland, and the only one to ever gain true mass support for any period of time. Yet the movement remained nebulous. Within its heterogeneous ranks, there nevertheless operated a core group of radical nationalists displaying many of the, by now familiar, characteristics of European fascism. This article will therefore explore the ideological background of this core of Finnish fascist radicals and examine it within the history of the Lapua movement. It will explain the mass support for the movement from the – ultimately short-lived – confluence of popular anti-communism with the much more ideologically uncompromising world of ideas stemming from the agenda of the counter-Enlightenment (or *Gegenaufklärung*), war and unfulfilled nationalist aspirations.

In the Land of the *Freikorps*

Finland had been part of the Swedish Empire since the Middle Ages, and as a result had participated in the very same processes that in Sweden proper from the medieval period onwards came to create the rudiments of centralized government, local administration and the concept of the rule of law. As part of the Napoleonic era of conflict in Europe, Finland was in 1809 conquered by Russia and incorporated into the Russian Empire as an autonomous grand duchy.

1 Yrjö Kilpinen to Hans Tischer, Helsinki August 16, 1930, quoted in: 'Yrjö Kilpinen kirje palasi Suomeen [Yrjö Kilpinen's letter returns to Finland],' *Helsingin Sanomat*, March 15, 2011.

Nevertheless, Finland's legislation and administrative system were left largely intact, which proved to have a decisive effect on Finland's future development.

Demographically Finland was, and is, a remarkably homogenous country. The evangelic-Lutheran church enjoyed a position of almost total hegemony, with the Russian Orthodox minority tolerated because of Russian overlordship in the country. Representatives of other major creeds, Muslims and Jews, established themselves as tiny minorities in Finland only during the nineteenth century. While the majority of Finland's population spoke Finnish, the country nevertheless harbored a strong Swedish-speaking minority. The Swedish language, formerly the only language of government, was to lose its dominant position step by step in a process which in the 1930s occasionally erupted even into violence.

Finland's economic and cultural ties to northern Germany across the common waterway, the Baltic Sea, had traditionally been close. The area of present-day Finland had become part of the Protestant world through the adoption of the Lutheran creed by the Swedish crown in the sixteenth century. In the late nineteenth century, with the consolidation of Germany into a powerful continental power and an intensifying clash of Finnish nationalism with Russian imperialism, Imperial Germany rose to a position of a would-be guarantor power in case of Finnish independence.

The Russian government reacted to these symptoms of developing separatism with policies designed to tie Finland more closely to the rest of the realm. These rather spasmodic efforts of streamlining and uniforming Finnish law and administration with the rest of the empire were in Finland widely interpreted as attempts to russify the Finns and put an end to Finland's autonomous status. By the time of the beginning of the First World War, Finnish separatism had become a reality no more confined to the imagination of the Russian gendarmerie. From 1915 onwards, young men of military age began to clandestinely leave Finland in order to receive military training in ranks of the Imperial German army. The Finnish volunteers were organized into the *Königliches Preussisches Jägerbataillon 27*. The basic motivation of the Germans was to the benefit of a movement active within Russia's borders and capable of armed resistance. After the collapse of the Imperial Russian government in March 1917, and the subsequent Bolshevik *coup d'état* the hour of destiny was at hand. German-trained Finnish *Jäger*s began to be infiltrated back to their native country to start organizing an anti-Russian uprising, and their vision of a new, independent, German-guaranteed Finland.²

2 Max Engman, 'Legionärer och jägare: Skapandet av en nationell officerskår i mellankrigstidens nya stater [Legionaries and Jägers: Creating National Corps of Officers in Inter-war

What the planners in Berlin failed to realize, however, was that the Finns by this time were anything but unanimous about the kind of society independence would actually lead to. While support for remaining a part of Russia, in whatever shape it might emerge from the turmoil of war and revolution, was rapidly evaporating among the Finns, the working class had also been organizing themselves. As a result, a civil war was fought in 1918 between the Reds, the forces mobilized by the radical wing of the *Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue* [SDP; Finnish Social Democratic Party] and backed by the Bolshevik government, and the Whites, the forces of the Finnish government, backed by Imperial Germany. In the resulting short conflict, termed the War of Liberation by the Whites, they triumphed largely due to their superior training and organization, before Germany also intervened by sending combat troops to Finland in the spring of 1918.

The Red leadership escaped to Soviet Russia, and there formed the Finnish Communist Party to bring about the armed uprising that had so signally failed in 1918. Those Reds still remaining in Finland were subjected to a brutal revenge with summary executions and prison-camps ravaged by malnutrition and disease. Still, the spectre of an armed uprising by the working class, resulting in a Bolshevik-dominated Finland, never receded from the minds of the most ideologically driven actors of the White side.

The independence drive had by now created a new political entity. The shape of Finland's future polity was decided in late 1918, causing the new state to adopt a republican model of government, to the bitter disappointment of conservatives, nationalists favouring a monarchical, or in any case a more authoritarian solution. Yet, the conclusion of the civil war in Finland did not usher in a period of peace, because the goals the radical nationalists had set for themselves went much further than mere independence. With the Russian civil war, the collapse of Imperial Germany, and the flaring up of local nationalisms in Eastern Europe from the Kola Peninsula all the way to Trieste on the Adriatic, the land of collapsed empires became a battleground between local nationalist movements, German and other *Freikorps*, Russian Whites and Bolsheviks.³

A series of *Freikorps*-style officially unsanctioned and ultimately largely fruitless interventions in the Russian civil war by radical Finnish nationalists followed. The *Jägers* were strongly represented in these irredentist attempts to

New States]; in *Snellmanin ja Mannerheimin välissä: Kirjoituksia sodasta, rauhasta ja isänmaan historiasta* [Between Snellman and Mannerheim: Essays on War, Peace and the History of the Fatherland], ed. Jussi Kuusanmäki and Kauko Rumpunen (Helsinki: SHS, 2000), 37–38.

3 Vesa Vares, *Kuninkaan tekijät: Suomalainen monarkia 1917–1919, Myytti ja todellisuus* [The Kingmakers: Finnish Monarchy 1917–1919, Myth and Reality] (Porvoo: WSOY, 1998), 56–62.

push Finland's borders further in virtually every direction. As one *Jäger* summarized the tour of duty and the wide sphere of interest of the radical Finnish nationalists:

First to the Lockstedt camp [the training camp of the *Jägers*] and to the front against the Russian in Germany, then to Finland's War of Liberation, then to liberate Estonia, then to Eastern Karelia, via Petrograd to Ingermanland, and we'll sleep in Västerbotten [the part of Sweden bordering Finland in the north]. There the Lord will let his old warrior to rest.⁴

The quote, while not necessarily authentic, nevertheless accurately captures the wide-ranging aspirations of those wedded to the thought of a Greater Finland, including all the neighbouring areas inhabited by linguistic and cultural relatives of the Finns. The most notable gain for the nascent Finnish state was the area of Petsamo, a slice of territory between Norway and Soviet Russia in the far north, giving Finland access to the Barents Sea. Attempts to support the anti-Bolshevik uprisings of Finnic inhabitants in Russian Karelia and Ingermanland came to naught, however. Finland's borders were finally defined in the peace agreement of Dorpat (Tartu) between Soviet Russia, Finland and Estonia in 1920, a treaty considered by the radicals an abject betrayal of the nationalist cause.

Geographically, the new state of Finland was to be isolated from Western Europe. With Soviet Russia, Finland had a border of more than one thousand kilometres in length, and its sea lanes towards the West ran almost exclusively through the Baltic Sea. Finland's only outlet to the ocean, the port of Petsamo was connected to the rest of the country through a single road, severely limiting Petsamo's value as an outlet of trade. Moreover, Finland was situated squarely in the European periphery but away from the continental centres of power. Geographical isolation bred political isolation, and Finland's status as a neighbour to the Soviet Union made her an unappealing partner for most mutual security arrangements.

Among the Nordic countries Finland thus stood solidly in two camps. Politically and culturally it could claim to be a Western democracy and a part of the Nordic community, but the long border with the Soviet Union was a feature shared with no other Nordic partner. Finland's security problem was dominated by the Soviet Union, and this very fact also made the most natural

4 Jussi Niinistö, *Suomalaisia vapaustaistelijoita* [Finnish Freedom Fighters] (Helsinki: Nimox, 2003), 59.

partner to Finland, Sweden, reluctant to enter into any agreements that might entangle Sweden in a conflict with Stalin.

It is here that the wellsprings of the mental landscape of the inter-war radical nationalism are to be sought. The consciousness of the Finnish bourgeoisie and moderate social democrats alike had been seared by the experience of the civil war, and the fear of a new uprising of the communists. It is due to the radicalizing influence of the traumatic experience of the civil war that even the moderate non-socialists were willing to tolerate, and at times support, even the increasingly radicalized expressions of anticommunism. In the process, they came to lend support to the radical nationalists, who had styled themselves as the most committed guardians of Finland's independence against the Soviet menace.

'The Revolutionary Right': The Nationalist Radical Core

Yrjö Kilpinen was a good representative of his group. He was definitely one, in the words of the chief of the Finnish security police Esko Riekkö, of the 'patriotic circles, who never sit in the government, but nevertheless follow affairs closely, for some reason regarding the responsibility of the welfare of the whole country to lie on their shoulders.'⁵

The uncompromisingly anti-communist Kilpinen was during the 1930s and 40s the second-most famous Finnish composer after Jean Sibelius, and went on to be lionized in Hitler's Germany. Throughout the war years, Kilpinen was a well-known 'friend of Germany'. At the same time, he was a visible member of Finnish radical circles, active in *Suomen Valtakunnan Liitto* [SVL; Federation of the Finnish Realm], a war-time attempt to gather together all the forces of the radical, German-friendly nationalism, including Finnish National Socialist splinter groups.⁶

There were several strands of generational experience coming together to form the mindset from which Finnish nationalist radicalism and fascism sprung. Nationalism was the indispensable first. All the core activists had been nursed with visions of apocalyptic nationalism. The other key component was anti-communism. While anti-communism in inter-war Finland was a kind of civic religion, of which only the communists and radical left wing of the social democrats consciously excluded themselves into the political margin, there

5 Juha Siltala, *Lapuan liike ja kyyditykset 1930* [Lapua Movement and Kidnappings 1930] (Helsinki: Otava, 1985), 57.

6 Henrik Ekberg, *Führerns trogna följeslagare: Den finländska nazismen 1932–1944* [Führer's Loyal Followers: Finnish Nazism 1932–1944] (Ekenäs: Schildts, 1991), 227–228.

were deep differences in the anti-communism of various political groups. These differences came to be decisive in determining the nature of anti-communist action.

A survey of Finnish inter-war politics, undertaken by Kari Immonen in 1987, divides the flavors of Finnish anti-communism into four distinct categories. Immonen defines as the first category the followers of the social democratic mainstream who, despite some ideological sympathies towards the worker's and peasant's state were conscious of the need to counter the attempts of the communists to control the trade unions, and of the growing military threat posed by the Soviet Union towards the end of the 1930s. The moderate non-socialists were close to this group in their pragmatic view, which recognized the existence of the Soviet Union as a fact that had to be accommodated. The mainstream moderate right was more unforgiving in its mode of thinking, and never accommodated itself fully to the inter-war political reality. The Soviet Union was seen as a relentless threat to the continued independence and existence of the Finnish state. The most radical fourth group combined fervent patriotism with an express hatred of Russia and Russians, and tended to demonize the Soviet Union in every aspect. Their thinking tended to fuse the ethnic and political aspects together, whereby both communists and Russians were equated and equally despised. Among them it was easy to find examples of apocalyptic visions about a coming war with the Soviet Union, which would lead to the final destruction of the arch-enemy and confirm Finland's independence into perpetuity.⁷

Members of this last group also formed the core of the fascist movements in Finland. In their ranks, nationalism and anti-communism were combined with the ideals of what Isaiah Berlin has termed the counter-Enlightenment, manifesting itself as opposition to the French Enlightenment and the French Revolution. If the Enlightenment had sought a world transcending the boundaries of national states and nationalities, ushering in a world of universal fraternity in equality and liberty, these 'ideas of 1789' had found their very first critics to be with them from the start.⁸

7 Kari Immonen, *Ryssästä saa puhua...: Neuvostoliitto suomalaisessa julkisuudessa ja kirjat julkisuuden muotona 1918–39* [Of the Russian One May Speak...: The Soviet Union in Finnish Publicity and Literature as a Form of Publicity] (Helsinki: Otava, 1987), 425–428.

8 Isaiah Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 243–244; Nils Erik Forsgård, 'Tattarmossmysteriet: Kring motupplysnings idéhistoria i 1930-talets Finland ['The Tattarmoss Mystery': In Regard the Counter-Enlightenment in the History of Ideas of 1930's Finland]', *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 4 (2000): 468–469.

The author and poet Kyösti Wilkuna was the quintessential representative of this mindset. In his 1913 poem *Tulkohon sota* [Let War Come] he expressed the very ideological core of counter-Enlightenment along with virtually all the staple ingredients of inter-war radical nationalist rhetoric. Wilkuna vehemently condemned all the 'musty ideologies' of the modern world: its 'limp pacifism', 'obstreperous fraternity-liberty-equality-ideals', 'esperantos and women's-rights-movements' and the 'candy-sucking temperance-men'. True to his creed, his radicalism culminated in exhortations to violence. Violence in Wilkuna's world of ideas also assumed an easily recognizable redemptive nature: 'Thus: come war and bloody clothes!' While Wilkuna was a true activist of the counter-Enlightenment, it was his destiny never to be part of the later fascist movements in Finland. He went on to participate in the Finnish irredentist interventions in the Russian civil war, only to disappoint himself, as an ardent monarchist, in the struggle for the polity of Finland. Remaining true to his uncompromising nature to the very end, Wilkuna shot himself in 1922.⁹

Amongst this radical right, there was a readiness to use redemptive violence combined with distinct anti-democratism and anti-parliamentarianism, aiming to effect a 'house-cleaning' otherwise unattainable through the supposedly ineffectual and corrupt republican and parliamentary system. As Paavo Susitaival, a career officer with impeccable credentials both as a nationalist radical and as a self-avowed fascist, aptly summarized: 'even though the merit for the independence of Finland belonged to the activists and the *Jägers*, all the decision-making and governmental power was transferred to politicians, to parties. Already in the beginning of the 1920's we erred into party squabbles. "Democracy" was so fashionable, that even the communist party – a group favoring treason and preparing for a rebellion – was considered a legal party.'¹⁰

The same attitude combined with a readiness to reckless action is also clearly discernible in the vicissitudes of K. M. (Kurt Martti) Wallenius. Wallenius's background showed the common ingredients of a Finnish nationalist activist: participation in both the *Jäger* movement and the subsequent interventions in the Russian civil war. Wallenius went on to make a meteoric career in the armed forces of the young republic, and by thirty-four years of age he was the chief of the general staff of the Finnish Army. He was promoted to

9 Martti Ahti, *Salaliiton ääriviivat: Oikeistoradikalismi ja hyökkäävä idänpolitiikka 1918–1919* [The Contours of a Conspiracy: Right Radicalism and Aggressive Eastern Policy 1918–1919] (Espoo, Weilin+Göös, 1987), 260–270.

10 Paavo Susitaival, *Aktivist ei hellitä: Tapahtumia, muistelmia, mielipiteitä 1917–1939* [An Activist Won't Give Up: Events, Reminiscences, Opinions 1917–1939] (Hämeenlinna: Karisto 1981), 211.

the rank of a general in August 1930. Despite his prominent position he allowed himself to be publicly associated with the Lapua movement.¹¹

Wallenius was also a good example of a member of the 'patriotic circles' who considered themselves the only responsible bearers of the cause of Finland. They firmly believed to have every right to resort to extralegal action if the interest of the country, interpreted by themselves, so dictated. After serving a prison sentence, Wallenius found a new calling as an accomplished writer of travel and nature stories, but never lost his anti-parliamentarian and anti-democratic world of ideas. His peculiar inversion of the very concept of democracy was displayed in his idealization of the militarism and wars of conquest of Imperial Japan, which was, according to him: 'a democratic country, much more democratic than Finland, and democratic in a pleasant way, in a way based on nationalistic feeling, if not even on national pride.'¹²

A comparison of Finnish radical nationalist movements readily brings to view the similarities with proponents of early fascism in Italy and Germany. The fascist core comprised members of the more or less imagined Finnish community of *Frontkämpfer*, disappointed by the outcome of the civil war, yearning for a renewed showdown with both the internal enemy, communists, and the external enemy, the Soviet Union, and the fulfillment of irredentist dreams of Greater Finland. Their hostility towards parliamentarism, democracy and the Republican system stemmed from the same wellspring as their ideological brethren in black or brown shirts: a nation divided ethnically or politically could not stand. Parliamentary government could only divide, whereas the creation of an internally solid and unanimous nation would anyway render parliamentarism superfluous. A unified nation would need a strong leader at its head.¹³

For the nationalists, the Civil War should have been Finland's *guerra rivoluzionaria*, leading to the creation of a politically harmonious, unified nation and an aggrandized Greater Finland. But it had yielded only a *vittoria mutilata*, a republican, parliamentary government with its political bickering, and the dashing of irredentist hopes in the Treaty of Dorpat. The Finnish version of a *Dolchstosslegende* spoke of the betrayal of the White cause by opportunists

11 Veli-Pekka Lehtola, *Presidentin kyyditys: Presidentti Ståhlberg, kenraali Wallenius ja kiihkon aika 1930* [Kidnapping the President: President Ståhlberg, General Wallenius and the Era of Zeal 1930] (Helsinki: Otava 2010), 64–65.

12 K.M. Wallenius, *Japani marssi* [Japan on the March] (Helsinki: Otava, 1938), 173–178.

13 MacGregor Knox, *To the Threshold of Power, 1922/33: Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and National Socialist Dictatorships*, Volume 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 232–233.

riding the White bandwagon but with only their own interests at heart. In the words of the hero of a novel penned in late 1930s by Johan Fabritius, one of the most intellectually consistent members of Finnish war-time fascist circles, who went on to join the Germans after Finland's armistice with the Soviet Union in 1944: 'No, we White warriors are not fighting for rewards.'¹⁴

The Heyday: The Lapua Movement

On the evening of 23 November 1929, tension was tangible in the air in Lapua (Swedish: Lappo), a small town in Finnish Bothnia. The town lay on a stretch of countryside known as the cradle of the *Jäger* movement, noted for its religiosity, where the memory of the civil war as a War of Liberation was deeply venerated. The site had also been chosen by the youth organization of the Finnish Communist Party for a show of strength. Youth activists, wearing conspicuous red shirts, were on that day to gather to the town to celebrate a *soirée* laden with propaganda and agitation. Having publicized their intention in newspapers, it was hardly a surprise that they were expected. The local house of the workers' union became a scene for a subsequent riot, in which around one thousand activists broke up proceedings, ordered the communist youth to leave the town and finally started a fistfight in which red shirts were torn from many of the participants. The communists were chased away and a public meeting was held in the beginning of December, in which calls for 'informal action', even of an armed march into the capital, were voiced. A wave of similar public meetings swept the country, all aimed at pressuring the government and the parliament into decisive action against the communists and to safeguard the heritage of the civil war White movement. The Lapua movement had seen daylight.¹⁵

The roots of the Lapua movement were inextricably tied to the experience of the civil war. Fear and hatred intertwined, and the post-war frustrations of those who viewed themselves as the best and most steadfast core of the victors, yet having been robbed of the fruits of victory, were instrumental in shaping the mental landscape. It was easy to see in the Lapua movement the theme of continuation of the civil war, this time bringing the struggle to the definitive conclusion. As P. H. Norrmén, a journalist, banker, activist and one of the most eloquent and refined voices of the political far right later put it: 'The

14 Knox, *To the Threshold of Power*, 174–182, 223; J. Chr. Fabritius, *Miehiä jotka eivät unohda* [Män som inte glömma] [Men, Who Won't Forget] (Helsinki: Otava, 1938), 137–140.

15 Siltala, *Lapuan lüke ja kyyditykset*, 51–54.

movement cannot be separated from its deep roots in the soil of 1918 without losing its vitality.¹⁶

The Lapua movement became the focus of not just the radical nationalist core, but also of the wide sections of society that considered themselves anti-communist. Nevertheless, the heyday of the movement proved to be very short-lived, in practice comprising the year 1930, finally fizzling out in 1932 in an ill-considered and ill-executed attempt at an armed *putsch*. After that, the Finnish nationalist radicals were thrown into disarray. Yet the radicals continued to enjoy influence within the Finnish society, and their final moment of glory was yet to come. Instead of dissolving, the radical nationalists continued their life under an umbrella of numerous different organizations all nursing ultra-nationalistic and vehemently anti-communist agendas, displaying the features Robert A. Paxton has forwarded in his attempt at a definition of fascism: ‘a form of political behavior marked by community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.’¹⁷

It is easy to distinguish these ingredients in P. H. Norrmén's characterization of the true nature and origins of the Lapua movement:

What in 1918 put the fury into the advance of the White army, as the rebellion was crushed and the Russian troops driven out of the country, was neither conservative-constitutional indignation, nor a youthful love of freedom. It was the same grim, rustic outrage over the Red infection, which again gave force to the famed confrontation with the red-shirted communist youth in Lapua town in the autumn of 1929.¹⁸

In the case of the Lapua movement and its spiritual brethren and successors, all these ingredients were present: a sense of a community endangered and in

16 Siltala, *Lapuan liike ja kyyditykset*, 32; Ahti, *Salaliiton ääriiviivat*, 297–298; P. H. Norrmén, *Politiska essäer* (Helsingfors: Söderström & Co., 1941), 99.

17 Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 218.

18 Norrmén, *Politiska essäer*, 115: ‘Vad som 1918 gav furian åt den vita arméns framryckning, då upproret nedslags och de ryska trupperna drevos ur landet, var varken gammalkonstitutionell indignation eller ungdomlig frihetslängtan. Det var samma tunga och bondska ursinne över den röda besmittelsen, som gick igen vid det ryktbara uppträdet med de rödskjortade kommunistynglingarna i Lappo kyrkoby hösten 1929.’

decline, a cult of decisive action and energy, a mass-movement of nationalistic militants, a temporary but effective collaboration with the conservative elites, leading to a breakaway from democracy and parliamentarianism accompanied by an abandonment of the principle of the rule of law, and a project of internal cleansing pursued with violence that was nothing if not redemptive in nature. In short, the movement was aimed at a national rebirth, sweeping away communism and finally concluding the struggle of 1918. This would pave the way for an ideal state and a strong nation capable of realizing the project of territorial aggrandizement. The Lapua movement, considered from the viewpoint of its ideologically committed core, was a fascist one. This was not necessarily true with the mass of the movement's one-time supporters, though. The crucial question regarding the movement's future was whether the broad common denominator, anti-communism, could be turned into a more specific political program.¹⁹

The common enemy of the developing movement, the Finnish Communist Party, had been established in Moscow in 1918. Its core was formed by Reds who had fled from Finland after the civil war. From the beginning, the Communist Party was banned in Finland, but it operated clandestinely under a number of shifting umbrella-organizations. As a front for renewed public political activity in Finland, *Suomen Sosialistinen Työväenpuolue* [Finnish Socialist Workers' Party] was established. It had participated in the parliamentary elections 1922 and won twenty-seven seats in the two-hundred-seat parliament. After its abolition in 1923 the party reinvented itself as an electoral coalition under the name of the *Sosialistinen Työväen ja Pienviljelijäin Vaaliliitto* [Socialist Workers' and Smallholders' Electoral Alliance]. The party leadership sat in Moscow, and tried to organize party work from there with mixed results. Throughout the 1920s the communists were thus in practice taking part in politics, a fact which caused much consternation and frustration especially among the political right. P. H. Norrmén put this feeling into words:

White Finland had by 1919 been swindled of most of what 1918 should have won in the way of domestic politics. The system of government, its eventual consequences represented by the mocking march of red-shirted communists in Lapua, was by no means anything that would have been on the minds of the White peasant-army in 1918. Neither was it anything the legislators of the constitution had wished – but it was an inevitable

19 Roger Griffin, 'Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age: From New Consensus to New Wave?' *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 1 (2012): 5–7, accessed October 16, 2015, doi:10.1163/221162512X623601; Siltala, *Lapuan liike ja kyyditykset*, 56–57.

consequence from a decade of limp parliamentary formalism and unrestrained politicking.²⁰

The Lapua movement aimed to change all that with Vihtori Kosola, who became the leader and figurehead of the movement. Hailing himself from Lapua, of wealthy peasant origin and with a background in the *Jäger* movement, Kosola was a typical representative of the core of the White Finland. Imprisoned by the Russian authorities for his clandestine activities in 1916, he was released after the Russian revolution and participated in the Finnish civil war, in the Civic Guards organization and in *Yhtymä Vientirauha* [Export Peace], a strike-breaker organization set up by Finnish industrialists in the 1920s. With the rise of the Lapua movement, Kosola rose in summer of 1930 to a position of unchallenged leadership, parading himself as the 'Mussolini of the North'. Kosola's home in Lapua served as the headquarters of the movement. Never shy to strike an assertive pose consciously modelled after Mussolini's public antics, 'Kosolini' was nevertheless seen by many as an indecisive leader who was merely a follower in a movement claiming to act at his command.²¹

After the abortive uprising in 1932, Kosola's fall from the public view was rapid. He was shortly imprisoned, and while still the elected chairman of the successor of the Lapua movement, the political party by the name of *Isänmaallinen Kansanliike* [IKL; Patriotic People's Movement], he was increasingly sidelined and died of pneumonia in 1936. Erratic, hesitant and prone to bouts of drinking at critical moments, Kosola never became the strong man his supporters clamoured for. Nevertheless, neither the Lapua movement nor the Patriotic People's Movement ever found another leader who so aptly could surround himself with the same appeal radiated by the real fascist dictators of the day. As a contemporary Finnish witticism put it: 'They've got Hitler, we've got Kosola, others have Mussolini, the rest have Stalin.'²²

20 Norrmén, *Politiska essäer*, 116: 'Det vita Finland hade 1919 bedragits på det mesta av vad det 1918 trodde sig inrikespolitiskt ha vunnit. Det styrelsesystem, som i sina yttersta konsekvenser representerades av de hänflinande rödskjortade kommunisternas uppmarsch i Lappo, var på intet sätt vad som hade föresvävat den vita bondearmén 1918. Det var för övrigt knappast heller vad landets grundlagsstiftare hade tänkt sig – men det var en ofrånkomlig konsekvens av ett decenniums slappa riksdagslention och ohejdade partikiv.'

21 Oula Silvennoinen, *Paperisydän: Gösta Serlachiuksen elämä* [Paper Heart: The Life of Gösta Serlachius] (Helsinki: Siltala, 2012), 354–366.

22 In Finnish: 'Heil' Hitler, meil' Kosola, muil' Mussoliin, lopuil' Stalin.'

The spring of 1930 saw an uneasy co-existence of the radicals and the parliamentary system, with both parties still superficially respecting each other and attempting to work in cooperation. A meeting in Lapua established an organization called *Suomen Lukko* [Finland's Lock] as a country-wide body to coordinate anti-communist activities: spread propaganda, shut the communist influence out of workplaces and -sites, and to create an atmosphere conducive to legislation which would prevent subversive and treasonous activities of the communists. In March 1930, the activists ransacked a communist newspaper's printing facility. The incident divided the movement into those willing to work within the boundaries of law, and the activists willing to use illegal means, those who would choose 'patriotic illegality' over 'unpatriotic legality'.²³

In June 1930 the situation came to a head in Vaasa, where a court process against those that had ransacked the printing house took place. Some two thousand movement supporters gathered in the town, broke up the court session, beating up one of the witnesses for the prosecution, kidnapping the lawyer for the plaintiff and instigating a riot in which they openly defied the police and the provincial governor. The stage was set for the summer during which the Lapua movement rose to its supreme moment. The Vaasa riot was an open challenge to the government, which failed the test by failing to act decisively. The road seemed open and the possibilities incalculable. The pent-up energy behind the movement was released into political terror, and a wave of violence was unleashed against those deemed enemies. The most characteristic form of terror was kidnapping, in which the victim was taken by car a symbolic distance towards the east, and the victims' supposed dream society, the Soviet Union.²⁴

A wave of sympathy towards the anti-communist goals of the movement swept the country, typically brought out in telegrams sent to the movement's headquarters and eagerly published by sympathetic newspapers. A telegram sent to the newspaper *Aktivistti*, signed by 'A group of men of the spirit of 1918' concentrated many key ingredients of 'the spirit of Lapua'. In unmistakable terms, it expressed both a readiness for violence, and the common understanding of the inextricable relation between anti-communism and ethnic hatred of Russians: 'There are so few bolshies here, and even those are so afraid and silent, that we haven't had an opportunity to "pull their hair"... we are waiting

23 Siltala, *Lapuan liike ja kydytykset*, 63–67; Niinistö, *Suomalaisia vapaustaistelijoita*, 103; The motto of Kosti Paavo Eerolainen: 'Better to go through illegality to legality, than through legality to illegality'; Silvennoinen, *Paperisydän*, 365–366.

24 Siltala, *Lapuan liike ja kydytykset*, 74–78, 90–94; Uuno Hannula, *Me teemme mitä tahdomme* [We Do As We Please] (Helsinki: Helsingin Uusi Kirjapaino, 1933), 17–31, 40–57.

for a signal from you, wherever our destiny may us lead, to fight together against the Russian and the Russians' henchmen'.²⁵

The heyday of the movement was at hand in July 1930. The main objectives were to be forced through by openly pressurizing the government. The method chosen was the so-called Peasants' March, consciously modelled after the March on Rome by Italian Fascists. It gathered some twelve thousand marchers from all across Finland into a disciplined show of strength in Helsinki, and culminated on a ceremonial parade, received by representatives of the government. This signified more than a symbolic approval, because the government by this time had already conceded most of the movement's demands, and had submitted a number of new laws and modifications to the existing legislation. Before the end of 1930 and after a new round of elections, the so-called Communist Laws had been put into effect. Their most important consequence was to make the members of certain organizations of the far left ineligible for election, thus shutting them out of the political decision-making process.²⁶

The key feature explaining the success and influence of the Lapua movement in Finnish politics and society is that large segments of the population sympathized with the goals of the movement. The most important of them was to curtail the influence of the communists in Finnish political life, a goal shared by virtually everyone from the most radical right to mainstream left. This made the masses to stand, for a time, alongside the representatives of an uncompromisingly radical political outlook firmly anchored in the ideas of radical nationalism and counter-Enlightenment.

The Peasants' March and the passing of the Communist Laws marked the greatest victories of the Lapua movement. Almost immediately after the march cracks began to appear in the supposedly monolithic facade of a nominally dictatorially-led, but in reality multi-polar movement. After the passing of the Communist Laws, the question of the next step became acute. What should one do with the political left in general, that is to say, the socialists? And how should one do it? Would one be allowed to use more extra-parliamentary means, and even violence, to attain one's goals? However, a series of public relations blunders began to alienate the general public. Soon after the march on Helsinki, in July 1930, the movements' activists kidnapped the co-speaker of the parliament, the social democrat Väinö Hakkila. He was taken by car to Lapua to be executed according to a 'death sentence' supposedly passed to him

25 Siltala, *Lapuan liike ja kyyditykset*, 206.

26 *Ibid.*, 119–134.

by the movement's leadership. Though beaten, Hakkila survived his ordeal and was finally released and returned home by train.²⁷

More was to come. While violence and threats of violence had been part and parcel of the movement's praxis, the kidnapping of the former president of the republic, K. J. Ståhlberg, in October 1930 proved the tipping point. Ståhlberg had been elected in 1919 as the first president of the newly created republic of Finland. A lawyer by profession, Ståhlberg was a principled republican, whose politics emphasized his attachment to the rule of law, and who sought to reconcile the losing side of the civil war with republican Finland. These efforts had earned him the vehement animosity, as well as numerous enemies, among the radical circles of the political right. Ståhlberg's conciliatory measures were denounced as appeasement that would bring forth a renewed armed uprising of the left. Thus, Ståhlberg was kidnapped, together with his wife, driven symbolically some distance toward the east, and then, like Hakkila, released to return home by train.²⁸

The return journey of the presidential couple, became a triumphal procession, however, and the incident caused many to reconsider their support for the movement. General K. M. Wallenius was implicated as a main instigator of the act, finally precipitating his fall from grace. But even if the radicals of the Lapua movement had miscalculated the veneration Ståhlberg's position enjoyed among the majority of Finns, the movement still soldiered on. In February 1932 it finally rose in open rebellion in Mäntsälä, a country town in the south of Finland. At the core of the attempted *putsch* were the Civic Guards, a country-wide paramilitary reservist organization treated as a part of the Finnish Armed Forces. The leadership of the Civic Guards tended to consider themselves as the bearers of the heritage of the White Army of 1918, and therefore formed a hotbed of radical nationalist scheming. The idea behind the uprising was for the Civic Guards to rise up and complete what had begun in 1918, continued in 1930, and was only awaiting a final show of unity of all those who thought that no other options existed for the Finnish people than to choose between communism and radical anti-communism. By threatening military action it would force the government into measures that would ban the activities of not just the communists, but the social democrats as well.²⁹

27 Hannula, *Me teemme mitä tahdomme*, 32–34.

28 Lehtola, *Presidentin kyyditys*, 9–12, 22–23.

29 Risto Alapuro, ed., *Raja railona: Näkökulmia suojeluskuntaan* [A Border Like a Crevasse: Insights into the Civic Guards] (Porvoo: WSOY, 1998), 209–211, 243–247; Siltala, *Lapuan liike ja kyyditykset*, 197.

The uprising failed spectacularly. The armed forces and the majority of the Civic Guards remained loyal to the government, and surrounded the rebels in Mäntsälä. After a tense standoff lasting a few days, during which Kosola and the leadership of the movement in Lapua fell to drinking excessively, the would-be *putschists* finally skulked to their homes after a decisive radio address by the president of the republic, Pehr Evind Svinhufvud. The narrowness of the movement's base of support was evident for all to see. The allies of 1930 had by now largely melted away.³⁰

The movement, however, was not done with. The end result of the uprising meant that the path of extra-parliamentary methods had, at least for the time being, reached an end. The movement would now enter parliamentary politics and organize itself as a regular political party. There was nothing unusual about this by inter-war European standards. It was exactly what the NSDAP had done in Germany after its near-catastrophic defeat in the hands of Munich police in 1923. By 1933 the Nazi party was in full control in Germany. The defeat in Mäntsälä, or the decision to reform the Lapua movement into the Patriotic People's Movement and enter the parliamentary elections in 1933, did not mean the demise of the organized radical nationalism in Finland. Once the heyday of the Lapua movement had passed, a new phase of development in its history began.

Swansong: From War to Abolition

The aim of the new party was to 'build a strong and unitary Finland', as one sympathetic commentator has put it. In practice this meant, as the party program unhesitatingly stated, 'creating a solid White front to secure the achievements of the War of Liberation [i.e. the Civil War]'. The party program pledged 'implacable struggle against not only communism, but against the equally dangerous international socialism [which] instigates class hatred, is alien to the patriotic ideals and despises the religious and nationalistic spirit.'³¹

The program was vague, however. It promised only to get rid of party-mindedness and politicking by strengthening the executive arm of government at the expense of the parliament. Neither was it particularly radical in regard to its vision of the political future of Finland; it merely called for a

30 Alapuro, *Raja railona*, 209–211.

31 Niinistö, *Suomalaisia vapaustaistelijoina*, 94; *Isänmaallisen kansanliikkeen yleiset ohjelmaperusteet* [The General Program of the Patriotic People's Movement], 1932, *Pohtiva*, accessed October 16, 2015, <http://www.fsd.uta.fi/pohtiva/ohjelmat/IKL/iklyleis1932>.

stronger government and promised to weaken, but not abolish, the parliamentary system, and called for referenda to have a prominent place in the political life of the nation. It vowed to fight the social democrats and called for the party to be abolished as 'contrary to our constitutional laws and corruptive of the fundamentals of society inherited from our fathers.'³² On foreign affairs, the program was much more uncompromising. It called for the creation of a Greater Finland, comprising all the Finnic nationalities, while proposing a 'common bond of blood, destiny and culture' as the only valid basis of citizenship. Among the demands was also a moral program to fight 'materialism, selfishness, indifference and inertia', betraying a thought of a community in mortal danger and of the movement as an energetic antidote.³³

The first parliamentary election in 1933 that the new party contested brought it fourteen seats from a total of two hundred. The elections brought forward both the extent of the support enjoyed by radical nationalism, as well as its primary constituency. The election results meant a catastrophic defeat for the main party of the political right, *Kansallinen Kokoomus* [National Coalition Party]. What this party lost, the inheritors of the Lapua movement gained in terms of seats in the parliament. Yet later electoral success proved less than impressive. The Patriotic People's Movement was unable to increase its share of the seats in the elections of 1936, and the last pre-war elections in the increasingly oppressive atmosphere in July 1939 gave the party only eight seats in the parliament. The result showed that the radicals were losing whatever appeal they had enjoyed among the Finns.

The war brought on the final blooming of radical nationalist political activity in Finland. Wartime gave the Patriotic People's Movement its final moment of relevance, and it gained a ministerial position in the government in 1941–1943. Finland's alliance with Nazi Germany in the war against the Soviet Union seemed to give added political momentum also to other numerous organizations of the 'revolutionary right', Finnish National Socialist groups among them. For a time, during 1941–1942, it was possible once more to harbour grandiose visions of the future of a White Finland in a German-dominated New Europe. Thus, for instance, the discussions in the coffee-room of a police department of Kemi, a town in northern Finland, for a time in 1941 concentrated on the form of Finland's future political establishment and on drawing up lists of those to be 'liquidated'. For the Patriotic People's Movement, the parliamentary

32 *Isänmaallisen kansanliikkeen yleiset ohjelmaperusteet*, 1932.

33 *Ibid.*; Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 218.

way ultimately failed. The party was abolished following the signing of the armistice between Finland and the Soviet Union in September 1944.³⁴

Actual German political support for Finnish radical nationalism failed to materialize, as the Nazi leadership preferred to deal with Finland through the existing political establishment. It was only in the last phase of the war when the last opportunity for action presented itself. In late 1944 Germany began to sound out possibilities for resistance in the areas soon to be overrun by the Allied forces. The resistance activities were controlled by the SS, resulting in the creation of several *SS-Jagdverbände* to undertake partisan activities, sabotage, targeted killings and intelligence-gathering to spearhead popular uprisings in the Allied-occupied area. In Finland, it proved to be the very same core group of activists who joined these German efforts in this eleventh hour. This was a final ideological threshing separating the seed from hay. Those who chose the path of continued resistance, turning their weapons against their own country if necessary, shared almost uniformly a background in activism and membership in the organizations of the most radical nationalists.³⁵

Large segments of Finnish non-socialists had, for a time, joined forces with the nationalistic 'revolutionary right'. After 1932, these same segments had been alienated again. What had in the long run undermined the moderates' support for the Lapua movement were precisely the extralegal means of the movement, kidnappings, beatings and *putschs*, reeking of revolution and anarchy despite their unquestionable anti-communist motivation. The reason is to be sought from the position of legalism and the concept of the rule of law in the political tradition of the Finnish political right. It had become wedded to legalism during the struggle for independence from late nineteenth century onwards, and repeatedly appealed to the law of the land in attempts to resist the policies of the Imperial Russian government.

Few of such veterans of the struggle for independence could count better credentials among the nationalist radicals than Pehr Evind Svinhufvud, a lawyer by training, who went on to become president of Finland in 1931–1937. Svinhufvud was also a 'friend of Germany', who in his public wartime addresses consistently called for Finland to stay with Germany to the bitter end. A commentator most certainly not unsympathetic to the goals of the Finnish fascism characterized Svinhufvud as seeing: 'in the written law, both under and above it,

34 Oula Silvennoinen, *Geheime Waffenbrüderschaft: Die sicherheitspolizeiliche Zusammenarbeit zwischen Finnland und Deutschland 1933–1944* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010), 156–157.

35 Juha Pohjonen and Oula Silvennoinen, *Tuntematon Lauri Törni* [The Unknown Larry Thorne] (Helsinki: Otava, 2013); Ekberg, *Führerns trogna följeslagare*, 255–256.

an unconditional justice, and a righteous, moral order of the world. He abided by the Finnish law and justice, no matter how imprudent it may have seemed.' It was perhaps ironic that these words were printed, to be distributed in Finland in 1944, by the SS, seeking to make a final propaganda effort in Finland.³⁶

The war many had believed and fervently hoped to have been the war to end the menace of the Soviet Union and to realize the nationalist visions of a Greater Finland, was at an end. From the radicals' point of view, the end result was an unmitigated disaster. As in Italy and Germany, also in Finland the Great War had given birth to a *Frontkämpfer*-community, whose reaction to the outbreak of peace in 1919–1920, had also been to seek to continue the war with other means, this time against the internal enemy. At the end of the road, the nationalist goal of a strong state and a unified nation, attained through the silencing of special interest groups, the eradication of minorities and the suppression of political factionalism, had beckoned.³⁷

The outcome of the Second World War, however, came to mean a transformative cataclysm for the self-styled 'revolutionary Right'. The radicals were forced to reinvent themselves, most commonly as 'patriots', and reorient themselves into the post-war reality dominated by the heavy influence of the Soviet Union in Finland. There was no more room for acting under the old symbols, no room for the old pretensions. The very term 'fascist' lost whatever political clout it may have enjoyed during the interwar years. Backed with the influence of Soviet propagandistic usage, it became a term with nothing but negative connotations, indicating an unrepentant hardliner, an unrealistic and irresponsible 'anti-Soviet element', who would jeopardize the interests of the whole Finnish people for the realization of hateful and aggressive pipe-dreams. For the radicals themselves, nothing else was left than to either distance oneself from politics, or to try to readjust to the new political realities. A refusal to speak in veiled terms unavoidably led to political marginalization. Only someone who had already become marginalized because of his past, like the former quintessential nationalist activist and a former Member of Parliament of the Patriotic People's Movement, Paavo Susitaival, could to the very end remain an unrepentant, self-avowed 'mussolionic fascist'.³⁸

The 'ethical strength' Yrjö Kilpinen had praised in 1930, turned out to have been a mirage, another betrayal by opportunists who had marched with the radicals for a time, but left them again at the critical moment, short of the

36 Pehr Evind Svinhufvud, *Testamentti kansalleni* [A Testament to My People] (Stockholm, 1944), 3–4.

37 Knox, *To the Threshold of Power*, 176, 261.

38 Niinistö, *Suomalaisia vapaustaistelijoita*, 98.

realization of the true goals. Fascism and fascist movements in Finland proved failures. The eventual failure of Finnish fascism has ensured the continued marginalization of fascism as a research subject in the Finnish academic tradition. Yet, as Roger Griffin suggests, studies of peripheral and failed fascisms can also contribute important insights for understanding both the 'centre' of fascism, as well as modern nationalist extremist movements. Fascism as an international political phenomenon cannot be understood from rigidly national interpretative frameworks.³⁹

39 Griffin, 'Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age', 2, 14–17.