

**THE END OF LOYALTY.
CRISIS IN FINNISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS
IN EARLY 20th CENTURY**

**КІНЕЦЬ ЛОЯЛЬНОСТІ.
КРИЗА ФІНСЬКО-РОСІЙСЬКИХ ВІДНОСИН
НА ПОЧАТКУ ХХ СТОЛІТТЯ**

Sweden ceded Finland to Russia according to the Hamina (Fredrikshamn) peace treaty of 1809. Although Finland was being called Grand Duchy since the 16th century, it had no special central administration of its own within the Swedish state.

Now, however, Finland was not incorporated into the Russian state-body, but formed an autonomous whole with its own laws, citizenship, government, parliament, official languages (Swedish and later also Finnish), own state economy and later also its own money (markka) and even a national army, consisting of infantry battalions.

When Finland became part of the Russian empire, Alexander I also gave other, rather remarkable, privileges to the elite, including ownership of their land estates without the obligation to serve the state.

The territory of Finland was also enlarged in 1812 by returning to it the regions, which had been taken from it in the peace treaties of 1721 and 1743. This so called Old Finland included several towns, Vyborg, Hamina, Sortavala and Savolinna for instance.

All Finnish estates were quite happy with their new situation. Divided by a border from Russia proper and having their own citizenship, Finland began more and more to resemble a state of its own, albeit united with Russia by the person of the monarch-emperor in Russia, Grand Duke in Finland.

No repressive measures were taken against Finland or any Finnish political group in the 19th Century. No separatist or radical movements even existed.

The golden age of the Grand Duchy coincided with the reign of Alexander II. In those years liberal reforms took place and economic and social progress followed rapidly. The Finnish parliament began regular work and legislation was modernized. Foreign capital helped to establish export industry and also popular education reached remarkable heights.

In domestic politics, the Finnish national movement was now rising, as against the dominant positions of the old, Swedish-speaking elites.

Russian leadership, including the Emperor-Grand duke himself, promoted the Finnish movement against the Swedish-speaking elite, which was considered to be potentially separatist and dangerous for the integrity of the empire.

For instance, the language statute of 1863 decreed that the Finnish language will have equal rights with Swedish within twenty years.

The prosperity and cultural progress in Finland did not go unheeded by such elements, who resented the fact that the pace of modernization in Finland was rapidly leaving Russia behind.

Nationalist-minded elements in Russia began to criticize the privileges of the Grand Duchy of Finland. This happened especially since the 1880s. Certain organs of the Russian press accused Finland of separatism and for living «on Russia's expense».

Russian nationalists demanded that Finland should be more closely linked into Russia and it was hinted that Finnish separatism should be understood to be as dangerous as that of Poland.

After that the united Germany had been born in 1871, new political constellation began to develop in the Baltic region. Threat on part of united Germany and also of Sweden was seriously considered to make an almost independent Finland a weak point for Russian defense.

Russian-French political cooperation, since the 1890s, made the potential «German threat» against St. Petersburg even more acute. The Russian reaction to that new situation included unifying the administrative structures of the Empire.

As regards Finland, this meant russification of administration and use of Russian language in the bureaucratic apparatus of the Grand Duchy.

In 1897 Finland had 2,7 million inhabitants, only 6000 of whom were Russians (0,2%). Finnish-speaking were about 85% of the population and Swedish speaking 15%.

Since 1863, Finnish had the status of the second official language. However, Swedish was still prominent in many fields. Equilibrium between the two languages in administration was attained as late as by the year 1900.

The Finnish national party had, during the 19th century, been traditionally helped by the Russian administration. This was understood as a policy, which would ensure the support of the Finnish population for the Empire against Swedish separatism.

The Swedes, on their part warned for the prospect of Russification, which would destroy the precarious Finnish state and its national institutions and culture, be the language Finnish or Swedish.

They maintained that only Swedish language and the culture created in that language could be a feasible alternative against a future Russian cultural and political invasion, which was to come.

The attack against the Finnish autonomy did, indeed begin. It happened in the year 1899, when the emperor issues so called February Manifesto, which unilaterally neglected the right of the Finnish Diet (parliament).

The Emperors and, thereafter, the Russian administrators claimed to have the right of dismissing the Finnish Diet when issuing laws, which have «all-Empire» importance.

The Finnish polity was now split into two parts.

The «Old Finns» party recommended complying with the Russian demands in order to ensure continuing dialogue with the Russians and to minimize the damage inflicted to Finnish autonomy.

The Swedish party and the «Young Finns» adopted a strictly legalistic stand and refused to implement or obey such laws, which had been given in «illegal» order.

Russian Revolution of 1905 did spread also into Finland and gave rise to a General Strike («National Strike»).

«Illegal» laws and orders violating the Finnish constitution were, however, annulled by the Emperor in November 1905 after the revolutionary uprising in Russia. In Finland this revolution had caused a general strike, which had turned into a mighty national demonstration.

As a result of the revolutionary movement of 1905 Russia received the State Duma. In Finland a one-chambered Parliament (Eduskunta), elected by universal vote including women, was established.

The Finnish parliament was now most modern in the whole world. The vote was universal and equal; women not only had the right to vote but were also eligible to the parliament. Several were elected in the first elections in 1907.

As we know, Premier Minister Stolypin soon after the 1905 revolution «returned order» to Russia. He also once again began a policy of oppression towards Finland.

Against Finnish Constitution, the Russian Council of Ministers claimed right to make decisions also in Finnish affairs.

An «Equality law» in 1912 made possible for Russians to have administrative positions in Finland and even other rights, which formerly had belonged only to Finnish citizens.

In 1909 «Old Finns» (the party, which had promoted collaboration with Russians) left the Finnish Senate (government). It was understood that compromises with the new order were useless.

In their lieu, Russians and Russianized Finns were denominated. A Senate led by General Vladimir Markov was formed.

Cooperation, as a political stance, was now discontinued in Finland.

Also passive resistance was mainly considered obsolete and was practiced only by some individuals.

Active resistance, such as terroristic activity, which had taken place to some extent in the early years of 20th century, was also discontinued as a movement. One can speak about a general political depression.

When the World War began, the Russian administrators were counting on Finnish resistance, but it did not take place. Finland remained loyal to the Empire, at least outwardly.

Moreover, Finland was in the happy position that was not obliged to send recruits to the front. This was because its own national army had been dispersed in 1901. Conscriptations were planned, but not

implemented, because there were reasons to expect that they would cause trouble in the otherwise peaceful country.

In the autumn of 1914 a «Russification program» for Finland leaked into the press. This caused alarm among nationally minded elite, especially young academics.

Almost immediately, a clandestine movement for the liberation of Finland with German help was organized.

In a couple of years, it sent about 2000 Finnish young men to Germany to receive military schooling (The Jaeger Movement). They were to form the nucleus of a Finnish national liberation army.

The Russian February Revolution of 1917 came as a surprise to everybody, both in Finland and in Russia. For Finland the revolution had very positive consequences. The Russian Provisional Government cancelled the «illegal laws» of the «Second Oppression period» in March 1917.

However, in the new, revolutionary atmosphere, this was not enough for the leading political groups in Finland. Finland now strived for more sovereignty («the law of power»), which the Provisional Government did not yield.

The Provisional Government did not yield to the aspirations of the Finnish parliament, but dispersed it and sent soldiers to prevent the old Diet to continue its work.

This conflict between Finland and Russia was expected to be definitively settled by the Constituent Assembly, but as we know, the Bolsheviks' October coup sealed the fate of the Assembly, which never settled any questions.

After the Bolshevik takeover, Finland no more recognized any kind of Russian suzerainty, but declared itself independent.

The Finnish social democrats, who had been disappointed with parliamentary politics, resumed into armed revolution with Russian help at the end of January 1918.

A three-month civil war followed and the White Finns won it with German help. The members of the *Jaeger movement* played a crucial role in the war.

In Finland, as in elsewhere in the Russian empire, the crazy year 1917 produced unexpected outcomes. It is true that Finland had been quite happy in the framework of the Russian Empire in the 19th century, when its autonomy had not been offended.

In the beginning of the 20th century the situation had changed and Finnish political groupings developed different tactics to survive new challenges.

The final blow came in Stolypin's time, when Finland was attacked with the support of the State Duma, which represented the Russian nation, however defectively.

Now it was understood that resistance was the only remaining way to cope with the Russia pressure. When the February Revolution came in 1917, the Finnish polity already was not happy to have the illegal laws annulled; it tried to ensure a new, more independent legal status for the Grand Duchy.

After the Bolshevik coup, the «bourgeois» Finnish government and parliamentary majority saw no possibility for remaining under Russian suzerainty. The country was declared independent.

The Bolshevik government did recognize this political act on the last day of 1917. This did not prevent it from forsaking the Finnish government, which it had just recognized and declaring the «red» Finnish government as the lawful one at the end of January 1918, when the Finnish Civil War began.

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