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Second International Marxism and the Finnish Revolution

Luke Brodersen
Portland State University

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by

Luke Brodersen

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Cassio de Oliveira

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“If Russia was, as Lenin often remarked, one of the most backward countries of Europe, Finland was one of the most advanced in the world. Her customs, her advanced political education, the victories of her socialist movement, even her industrial structure, seemed to ensure the easy victory of socialism.” –Victor Serge, “The Truce and the Great Retrenchment” in *Year One of the Russian Revolution*

Abstract

This paper will consider the Finnish revolution of 1917-1918 as it was understood by Second International Marxists—not because these Marxists were right, but because the revolution was led by Marxists of a socialist party formed in the Second International. By dint of the constraints of time, of resources, and of a language barrier, this paper cannot be an exhaustive historical account of the activities of the Finnish socialists, nor a comprehensive explanation of Marxism, nor would it assume to provide a proper 'Marxist' analysis of this history. Of the two 20th century English language histories of this revolution—the work of Anthony Upton and David Kirby—there is substantial engagement with Second International Marxism; this thesis seeks to draw it out into the open. Though this author cannot repeat their full immersion in the subject, there are nevertheless examples among their contemporaries, such as J. P. Nettl's study of the German Social Democrats, which can serve as a model for approaching the Finnish revolution with a focus on the Marxist Left's self-critique. Thus, along with reflections by Finnish socialist leaders, and writings by Marxist socialist intellectuals before and after the Finnish revolution, this paper will draw on the above resources for the purpose of placing the failure of the Finnish revolution and the defeat of the Red Guard by the White army in the Finnish civil war of 1918 into the context of a broader crisis within Marxism; that is, the global breakdown of the international socialist movement, and the red tide of revolutions (and counterrevolutions) spawned across the globe post-First World War.

Situating the events in the crisis of the International will permit 1) the evaluation and elaboration of the Marxist claim that the causes for the defeat of the Finnish revolution were both international and internal to the FSDP (Finnish Social Democratic Party), i.e. they came from within the global socialist camp and specifically from the party's leadership and 2) a comparative analysis of this hypothesis against related and dissimilar, non-Marxist socialist, or non-socialist accounts of the revolution. Both groups, in their analysis of this history, come to

grips with the same fundamental question: How did a revolutionary party become a blockage to revolution? It is not the intention of this paper to settle or resolve the question of how this revolution failed, but merely to reiterate and restate the stakes involved for those who tried to answer it; whether by participating in revolutionary socialist politics at the time, or by opening a post mortem investigation. Their ideas have bearing on the general political questions of the modern age—questions about the trajectory of mass political parties opposed to the existing social order, the organization, composition, and theoretical outlook of those parties, and how this related to their ability to take advantage of and create a moment of accelerated social change in the direction of greater freedom. Hopefully, this paper will answer the question as to how an understanding of the Finnish revolution can be enriched and deepened by the ideas of Marx and Engels and their followers in the Second International.

Introduction

This thesis concerns an historical episode which is perhaps little known. The Finnish revolution was part of the wave of revolutions which swept across Europe after the Great War; being only a small part, it is often dwarfed by the magnitude of the whole. Like the mostly forgotten German and Hungarian revolutions of this same period, which both ended in defeat, the revolutionaries in Finland were also unsuccessful in holding onto power. But this thesis is not an historical overview. It does not present new facts or new research. Its contribution, if successful, will be to make explicit some of the basic assumptions held by the participants in the revolution, and to show how their self-conception was derived from an international socialist movement, dominated by the theoretical outlook of Marxism. This movement produced, at the moment of its profoundest crisis and disintegration, from 1917-1919, the most significant concerted attempt to change the world in the last 200 years. In doing so, it produced both revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries, both Left and Right-wing Marxists; and no better a

case can be found in Finland, where the socialist party of orthodox, revolutionary Marxists undermined their own revolution.

Marxism in Finland

Our starting point will be these two related theses: 1) that the Second International (1889—1914) period was the historical height of the political organizations of the Marxist, socialist Left—such as the FSDP. They were political bodies of the working class thought to be necessary to overcome capitalism's mass-democratic discontents. Or in the words of historian Leo Panitch:

> Between the 1870s and 1920, in the development of capitalism and in the struggles for freedom of association and the right to vote that took place in a great many countries in that period, there emerged for the first time in human history permanent, self-organized, representative political bodies of the subordinate class.[1]

And 2) that by the standards of the Marxists of the Second International, not only did the Finnish revolution end in defeat, but all the revolutions of that period—including what is often regarded as the 'successful' Russian revolution—were failures. In 1920, no other than V. I. Lenin was clear about the truncated state of the Bolsheviks' tragically incomplete achievement. He wrote, soberly, that the RSDLP(B) (Russian Social Democratic Labor Party-Bolshevik) had but "wound up the bourgeois-democratic revolution more thoroughly than had ever been done before anywhere in the world," analogizing the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, Left-SRs (Socialist Revolutionaries), and the workers' Soviets to that of the mountaineer who has nearly reached the peak, only to realize he has done this over and above the heads of his fellow climbers:

> [T]here is nothing more dangerous than illusions (and vertigo, particularly at high altitudes). And there is absolutely nothing terrible, nothing that should give legitimate grounds for the slightest despondency, in admitting this bitter truth; for we have always urged and reiterated the

[1] This quote comes from Panitch's opening remarks on a panel. Leo Panitch, Jackie Barkley, Antoni Wysocki, and Carlos Pessoa, "What is political party for the Left?", *Platypus Review 74*, March, 2015, https://platypus1917.org/2015/03/01/political-party-left-2/.

> elementary truth of Marxism—that the joint efforts of the workers of several advanced countries are needed for the victory of socialism. We are still alone and in a backward country…[2]

SPD (German Social Democratic Party) Marxist intellectual and radical Rosa Luxemburg, only months after the 1917 October revolution, was keen on the mounting difficulties and narrowed horizons which might follow from the national isolation of the abortive world revolution if left in the lurch and surrounded by the German Imperial Army:

> The awkward position that the Bolsheviks are in today, however, is, together with most of their mistakes, a consequence of basic insolubility of the problem posed to them by the international, above all the German, proletariat. To carry out the dictatorship of the proletariat and a socialist revolution in a single country surrounded by reactionary imperialist rule and in the fury of the bloodiest world war in human history – that is squaring the circle. Any socialist party would have to fail in this task and perish…[3]

It might not have necessarily been so, but with hindsight one can say that, on the whole, the events of the period directly following the Great War were at once an unparalleled heroic risk and a mortal blow taken by the Marxist Left. Whatever the achievements of the revolutions, the summit would never be reached. But for Second International Marxists such as Lenin, what was the criterion of success, and why?

Socialist politics were conceived as the heir to the bourgeois revolution in France and America, an heir which would make good on its unfulfilled promises of freedom. The first socialists, such as Charles Fourier, Saint-Simon, and Robert Owen, were primarily concerned with solving age-old social problems like that of inequality and exploitation, and focused their efforts on imagining or building a perfected society.[4] Karl Marx, by contrast, developed an incisive critique of these earlier socialists, as well as those of his own generation, and their dogmatic ideal of “communism”; out of this critique he arrived at a historically specific notion of the problem of industrial capital’s domination of the progress of bourgeois society as a

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[2] V. I. Lenin, “Notes of a Publicist,” *Marxist Archive*, 1920, https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1922/feb/x01.htm.
[3] Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Tragedy,” *Marxist Archive*, 1918, https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/09/11.htm.
[4] Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station*, (New York: New York Review of Books, 2003), 71-87.

world-historic whole—bourgeois society's domination by its own social surplus, its own potential, its own free labor, its own form of *freedom*.[5] Marx understood socialism as an ideal which was not a concrete state of affairs to be established, but rather as a "one-sided" aspiration which expressed the self-contradiction and crisis of bourgeois society; a self-contradiction of the right of social labor to private property, and the large-scale industrial production which was its consequence.[6] The proletariat was what ought to become the self-conscious locus of this contradiction, as they were propertyless property owners with the greatest interest in working through society's crisis and consequently overcoming their own condition. Therefore, Marx sought to demonstrate *how* and on *what basis* this society might be overcome, *not* what it must become. In Lenin's words, the "gigantic step forward taken by Marx in this respect consisted precisely in that he discarded all these arguments about society and progress in general and produced a *scientific* analysis of *one* society and of *one* progress—capitalist."[7] For Marx, to attempt to transform modern, capitalist society was to understand it. In the aftermath of the failure of the revolutions of 1848, this meant giving a politically independent form to the existing workers' movement which would not succumb to "petit-bourgeois democracy", to the marginality of conspiratorial bands or assimilation into the administration of the Bonapartist state, but would rather provide the self-discipline, preparation, and self-criticism required to put the workers themselves into power by smashing the existing state.[8] Marx founded the First International for this purpose in 1864.[9]

This is why the socialist intellectuals who took up Marx's ideas in later years placed their emphasis on the organization of independent, civil-social, political organs of the newly

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[5] Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, (New York: Harpers & Row, 1971), 118-143.
[6] Karl Marx, "For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing" in *The Marx-Engels Reader* ed. Robert C. Tucker, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 12-14.
[7] V. I. Lenin, "What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats," *Marxist Archive*, 1894. https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1894/friends/01.htm#fwV01P134F01.
[8] Karl Marx, "The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" in *The Marx-Engels Reader* ed. Robert C. Tucker, 596-603.
Karl Marx, "The Class Struggles in France," in *The Marx-Engels Reader* ed. Robert C. Tucker, 592-593.
[9] Karl Marx, "Letter to Bebel, Liebknecht, Bracke" in *The Marx-Engels Reader* ed. Robert C. Tucker, 555.

preponderant wage-laboring working class (or socialist parties) and the international transitional government they ought to establish—the dictatorship of the proletariat, a government whose task would be the "appropriation of the means of production by society as a whole."[10] The revolution which produced the Paris Commune of 1871 and its destruction at the hands of the French and German troops was the bloody lesson to the world's socialists which later informed the creation of the mass parties of the Second International; either the workers themselves take power in concert, or they are crushed alone.[11] The SPD, which had become the "center of gravity" of the socialist movement, was the focus of Marx and Engels until their death. The leaders they schooled in their ideas—such as Wilhelm Leibneckt, August Bebel, and Karl Kautsky—were to reforge the International by 1889.[12] To further this task, Kautsky, student of Marx and Engels and the chief theoretician of the SPD, put forward the Marxist case for socialist leadership, internationalism, and independence in his 1892 pamphlet, *The Class Struggle*. The abridged version of which, *The Erfurt Program*, was henceforth adopted as a founding document by fellow Social Democratic parties in France, Italy, America, Austria, and Russia (which then included Finland). The SPD was widely considered the crown jewel of socialist politics—its enduring success was unprecedented.[13] The phrase 'Social Democracy' went from Lasallean artifact to being synonymous with Marxist socialism. Its message was received from the jail cells of America—where Eugene Debs read *Capital*—to the icy forests of the Russian Empire—where the Finnish schoolteacher Nils Robert af Ursin first encountered the works of Marx and Engels.

After Alexander II began his reign and lifted restrictions on industry in the Russian territories, the Duchy of Finland was given favorable trade conditions which spurred the growth

[10] Fredric Engels, "The Tactics of Social Democracy" in *The Marx-Engels Reader* ed. Robert C. Tucker, 559.
[11] Karl Marx, "The Possibility of Non-Violent Revolution" in *The Marx-Engels Reader* ed. Robert C. Tucker, 524.
[12] James Joll, The Second International 1889-1914, (New York: Praeger, 1956), 7-12. 26-29. 35-36. 53-55.
[13] Fredric Engels, "The Tactics of Social Democracy" in *The Marx-Engels Reader* ed. Robert C. Tucker, 560-573.

of its nascent urban working class. In the 1880s and early 1890s, when the Finnish labor movement was in its earliest stages, it was led by social reformers like V.J. Von Wright, a staunch anti-socialist who, defining himself against the SPD, sought to bring the best of the Bismarckian welfare state to the Finnish workers. Von Wright and his followers set up workers halls and associations throughout Finland for the self-improvement and self-education of the working class, but the results exceeded his intentions, and due to the persistent radical agitation of worker-intellectuals like Ursin—who forged contacts with Second International members and reported on his progress to Alexandra Kollontai, who was writing a book on the conditions of the Finnish workers—the rank and file demanded socialist leadership. The workers halls, the basic social unit of the Finnish working class, thereby became the base of the socialist movement.[14] By 1897, workers hall member and socialist Matti Kurikka had assumed editorship of the two-year-old workers' weekly paper *Tyomies* and Von Wright had quit the movement over the radicals' consistent winning performances in the halls' debate clubs. Future leaders and soon-to-be prominent members of the FSDP such as Edvard Valpas-Häinnien, Taavi Tainio, Yrjö Sirola, Matti Turkia, and Eetu Salin were exposed to socialism in this period through the workers' halls, the handful of translated Marxist texts, the news of the International conferences reported by *Tyomies* and similar newspapers, or via meetings with Social Democrats in Russia or Sweden.[15] From the first, the developing Finnish workers movement was a child of the world-embracing vision of Marxist socialism.

According to historian of Finland, David Kirby, "the most influential [Finnish translated socialist literature] in the development of a socialist party was the Erfurt programme."[16] Therein, the SPD outlined the necessity of socialist politics for the workers movement:

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[14] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 10.
[15] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," *The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918*, Thesis, University of London, 1971, 9-17.
[16] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 17.

> The struggle of the working class against capitalist exploitation is necessarily a political struggle. Without political rights, the working class cannot carry on its economic struggles and develop its economic organization. It cannot bring about the transfer of the means of production into the possession of the community without first having obtained political power.[17]

It is no wonder then that in the latter years of the 1890s, chafing against the exclusion of labor leaders from the political arena—where for instance contentious issues of the Duchy's restrictive voting requirements, the (il)legal status of the Finnish language, and opposition to russification were put to the unrepresentative, Russian Empire-controlled Diet of 'four estates'—as well as energized by the cooperation of industrialists with state police in repressing strikes, the workers and their chosen representatives were increasingly in favor of establishing their own party. Headquartered first in Turku, and temporarily eschewing the 'socialist' label, a Finnish labor party was founded in 1899, but eventually decided on joining the Second International by 1902. A year later, as crackdowns on strikes and exclusion of workers from government had only continued to be exacerbated by the growth of the labor movement, the second party congress in Forssa recognized the changed climate and renamed the party to 'Social Democratic', adopting the Erfurt program in full.[18]

Finland in the Russian Empire

For the reason of what David Kirby called "the overall distortion of the political life of Finland produced by the pressure of russification," a brief exposition of other forces involved in Finnish politics during this period is indispensable.[19] Beginning officially with the February Manifesto of Nicholas II at the end of the 19th century, the Tsarist Imperial state had committed itself to a policy of doing away with privileges formerly granted to Finland, like its small standing army and internal legislative powers. Before 1906, all decisions of their four chamber

[17] Eduard Bernstein, August Bebel, Karl Kautsky, "The Erfurt Program," *Marxist Archive*, 1891, https://www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/1891/erfurt-program.htm.
[18] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 17-28.
[19] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 25.

Diet—convokable and dissolvable only by Imperial order—were to become a formality, and similar to a petition in that they were subject to rejection or overrule by the Imperial Russian government and its representatives in Finland, the governor general Nikolai A. Bobrikov and the senate, the executive authority appointed by the Tsar.[20] Thus, the bourgeois (non-socialist) Finnish parties were predominantly occupied with the question of what degree of national-regional *autonomy* under Russian rule was possible or desirable for the Finnish people; this was the "passive resistance" of the Constitutionalists who advocated a return to the pre-1899 political order, of legislative autonomy. However any struggle for national *independence*, on the other hand, was confined to the underground, nationalist "active resistance" or Activist movement founded in 1904, with ties to the revolutionary underground in Russia and later with the German Imperial government.[21]

The FSDP, as it emerged from this political situation of ideological "heterodoxy," had in its earliest years members who belonged both to the passive and active resistance movements. With the advent of the Russo-Japanese war in 1904 and under the yoke of russification, there were commonly calls from the non-socialists for the FSDP to put aside its own bid for working class power and wholly align itself with either illegal or legal non-socialist opposition to Tsarism. But coming on the heels of the revisionist controversy in the Second International, the FSDP was swayed decisively by Valpas' arguments at its 1904 party congress and rejected any cooperation with bourgeois parties that would weaken the self-direction of the labor movement and the pursuit of the final goal of socialism; yet it must be made clear that this did not preclude individual members from forming ties with the active resistance, nor did it prohibit provisional alliances between the socialists and the Constitutionalists in short-term, democratic efforts such

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[20] C. Jay Smith, "Russia and the Origins of the Finnish Civil War of 1918," *American Slavic and East European Review* 14, no. 4 (1955), 481–485. https://doi.org/10.2307/3001208.
[21] Anthony F. Upton, The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918, 4-6.
D. Kirby, Stockholm-Petrograd-Berlin: International Social Democracy and Finnish Independence, 1917," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 52, no. 126 (1974), 63-65. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4206835.

as electoral reform or ending the draft of Finns into the Russian army.[22] The active resistance, for its part, had no issue with forming alliances with the socialists in this period, and indeed had more extensive organizational connections with the revolutionary movement inside Russia than the FSDP. But the revolution of 1905 significantly undermined Activist support. Many of their demands were met during the strike, and the workers movement saw its future with the FSDP, who vowed no compromise politically, even for the improbable overthrow of Tsarist rule in Finland by the Activists. The movement, made up of romantic revolutionaries, petit-bourgeois students, and Swedish-speaking Finns, was depressed and exasperated by the FSDP's seeming disregard of all-important national independence, and the disinterest shown for their cause by socialist sympathizers; thus they began seeking foreign aid for Finland's plight. During World War I, this effort culminated in a deal with officers in the Imperial German army who agreed to train and equip a battalion of native-born Finns for the eventual reconquest of their homeland in the aftermath of the war. Around 2,000 of these Finnish "Jägers" were smuggled into Germany and saw combat on the Eastern front.[23]

The Crisis of Social Democracy

In 1903, Finland's socialists were organizing a still minor party in a small country, and the SPD was a mass party with hundreds of thousands of members in one of the world's most powerful capitalist states. Owing to the Finns intentional mimicry of the Second International example, which lead to enormous similarities between the ideology, tactics, and party composition of the SPD and FSDP, it is worth unpacking British historian J. P. Nettl's case study of the model SPD. To better understand the problem of revolution for Marxists, and its centrality among the political problems facing the Second International and the FSDP, Nettl critically

[22] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 29-39.
[23] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918*, 20-25.

examines the SPD during the period it became an “inheritor party,” namely, after the repeal of the anti-socialist laws in Germany and after the foundation of the International. This is when the SPD became a legal party with a mass base—made up of party schools, workers’ associations and clubs, trade unions, party medical clinics, etc.—yet the SPD was defined by its “non-participating opposition” to the status quo and its aim of inheriting power upon the cataclysmic collapse of the current political order. For such a party, inherently at issue was its actual relationship to the state and society it was premised on transforming, and to the revolutionary crisis it sought to bring about; or in Nettl’s terms, the “proximity” or “distance” between inheritor party and society:[24]

> …in the long run the position of an inheritor party becomes impossible if the inheritance will not mature. A state of isolation cannot be indefinitely maintained. Either it will lead to violence or success. … The third possibility is disintegration … The last possibility, presented by the SPD in conditions in which success or violence were impossible, was gradual acceptance of the role of a pressure group…[25]

Within the SPD at the turn of the century, there were both forces that wanted to bring the party into closer contact with society, and those who sought to remain steadfastly isolated. Nettl’s researches into the crisis of this untenably oppositional stance of the party lead him to address the effects and causes of the SPD’s internal become International-wide debate on “revisionism”—hence be referred to as the “revisionist controversy” or the “reform-revolution dispute”. Contemporaneous with the founding of the Finnish labor party and concluding in the same year as the founding of the FSDP in 1903, the debate was kicked off in 1898 by the intensely critical reaction within the SPD towards party member Eduard Bernstein’s pamphlets on reform and his book *Evolutionary Socialism* (1899). In these works Bernstein argued that capitalist society no longer necessitated an 1848-style violent overthrow, and that through its organization of the working class the SPD was already—in substance—the revolution itself, gradually ameliorating capitalism, socializing production, and removing the conditions for

[24] Peter Nettl, “The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a Political Model,” *Past & Present*, no. 30 (1965), 67. http://www.jstor.org/stable/649929.
[25] Peter Nettl, “The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a Political Model,” 86.

political and economic crises for a peaceful transition into socialism. Therefore, in a leading capacity, the SPD must accept the responsibility for governing the existing state under capitalism until the transition is completed by the organized workers. Bernstein summarized his "revisionism" in his famous phrase: "the movement is everything; the goal is nothing."

Thus Bernstein stood, according to Nettl, against the party's now largely self-enforced isolation from society.[26] Opposed to him in the "orthodox" wing of the party was the majority of the rank and file, the party Executive, and Marxist party intellectuals like Luxemburg, Bebel, and Kautsky who saw the SPD's peculiar form of isolation as the adequate politics for an independent movement of the working class—one whose goal was not to be better off or win concessions from the state and industrial capitalists (as would be the goal of a "pressure group") but to overthrow the existing state, conquer power for the working class, and build socialism. Luxemburg understood Bernstein's position as one which—symptomatic of the growth and success of their party, and dutifully laying out the opportunist case for the cessation of struggling for socialism—had supplanted the goal with the movement, and thereby confused means with ends, which would mean abandoning the task of Social Democracy;[27] to this she countered:

> ...the final goal of socialism constitutes the only decisive factor distinguishing the Social-Democratic movement … from a vain effort to repair the capitalist order into a class struggle against this order, for the suppression of this order – the question: 'Reform or Revolution?' as it is posed by Bernstein, equals for the Social-Democracy the question: 'To be or not to be?'[28]

At the 1903 SPD congress in Dresden—where the FSDP's Valpas-Hänninen was in attendance—the four year long public debate was concluded in favor of the orthodox wing, and the party resolved to non-participation in the administration of capitalism and to pursue the goal of socialism.[29] However—and for Nettl this is paramount to understanding what became of the SPD, and thereby the Second International as a whole, on August 4th, 1914—*within the*

[26] Peter Nettl, "The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a Political Model," 68-70.
[27] Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 93-98.
[28] Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*, 14.
[29] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 28.

victorious orthodox camp, though obscured by rhetorical appeals to the same goal, there lay hidden an irreconcilable fissure between the SPD's Right-center and Left-wing factions of the leadership.[30] Verbal commitment to intransigent opposition, according to Nettl, provided cover for the former group, predominantly in the Reichstag (parliamentary) delegation, to draw itself closer to the Imperial government for the practical co-management of the Reich.[31] This idea of a unacknowledged split within the avowedly revolutionary orthodoxy prior to World War I is not Nettl's own, but Luxemburg's:

> With the partial exception of Luxemburg, no pre-war social democrat located the main source of reformism in the conservatism of the socially privileged bureaucracy created by the growth and strength of the labor movement, of the social-democratic parties and their trade-union affiliates.[32]

In this way, by the 1910s, she saw the opportunism of the orthodox wing as a *new* challenge to the revolutionary party *from within*, produced by the growth of the workers movement whose leadership grew detached from the society which it ought to change. This was not unique to the SPD, but a problem which was reproduced throughout the Second International.

David Kirby, in his 1971 PhD thesis on the Finnish Social Democrats cites Nettl to claim: "Like the German social democratic party, the Finnish SDP was an 'inheritor party', and not a revolutionary activist group like the Bolsheviks."[33] Though this cannot be fully explored at this juncture, this is the way in which Kirby grasps the later dissonance between FSDP's revolutionary aims, and its organizational strategy. This view is echoed by Upton without mention of Nettl, but he reaches much further to conclude the talk of revolution was a sham from the start: "In truth, [the Finnish] SDP had never been a revolutionary party, except in the rhetoric of its leaders and newspapers."[34] With Nettl's recovery of Luxemburg's critique in mind, one could pose the question another way: Was the lack of revolutionary potential always already the case in the FSDP? Or did internal party dynamics produce an incapacity for revolutionary

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[30] Joll, James. *The Second International 1889-1914*, 94.
[31] Peter Nettl, "The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a Political Model," 82-85.
[32] Spartacist League, *Lenin and the Vanguard Party*, (New York: Spartacist Publishing Co., 1997), 13.
[33] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 130.
[34] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918*, 30-31.

struggle? Doubts over tactical choices and revolutionary bonafides aside, it will suffice to say that the FSDP entered into the political arena of the Second International at a profound moment of its crisis over revisionism and over the reappearance of tumult in society after a long period of relative peace for the workers movement.[35]

1905: Revolution and Independence

In the development of the FSDP before World War I, hardly any event is more significant than the Russian revolution of 1905, which catapulted the party out of relative obscurity and into the center of political life.[36] The same is true of the RSDLP. So too was 1905 significant for the Second International more broadly:

> Thus the revolution of 1905 was of enormous emotional importance, for not only did it raise hopes that even the severest of despotisms could be overthrown or at least curbed if it started an unpopular war; it also revived a belief in the efficacy of direct popular action of a revolutionary kind.[37]

The revolution had the effect of sharpening the International's both subdermal and open conflicts, especially over the questions raised in the revisionist dispute and the possibility of preventing imperialist war; the revolution of 1905 had ended the Russo-Japanese war, and thus it was asked: should socialists expect war followed by revolution for peace? Central to the International's debates on and after 1905 was the general strike, and the supposed "backwardness" or "unripeness" of the Russian empire for socialist revolution.[38] For the leading exponent of orthodox Marxism, Karl Kautsky, the Russian revolution was the seed of a revolution of a new type, owing to the fact that:

> Now, at the beginning of the 20th century, international relations have become so close that the beginning of the revolution in Russia was enough to awaken the enthusiastic echo in the

[35] V. I. Lenin, "The Historical Destiny of the Doctrine of Karl Marx," *Marxist Archive*, 1913, https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/mar/01.htm.
[36] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 57.
[37] James Joll, *The Second International 1889-1914,* 127.
[38] James Joll, *The Second International 1889-1914*, 126-140.

> proletariat of the whole world […] Its promise is rather the ushering in of an era of European revolutions that will end with the *dictatorship of the socialist society*.[39]

Likewise, in the minds of Second International radicals such as Trotsky, Lenin, and Luxemburg, there was in the arc of this revolution something more than just a spontaneous, chaotic uprising or merely a necessarily late bourgeois revolution against Tsarist absolutism—it was a proletarian revolution, brought on by the Second International. Nettl notes that this was a pivotal moment in the evolution of their political thought. Nettl paraphrases Luxemburg's argument in her 1906 pamphlet *The Mass Strike* this way:

> She attempted to show that in the Russian revolution action had in fact created organization; that an unorganized and weak Social Democracy without any Trade Union organization at all had emerged from active struggle with strong and powerful organizations for party as well as unions.[40]

In Germany, on the other hand, Luxemburg observed the revolutionary period had been allowed to pass without the SPD's involvement. She saw in the mass strike a corrective to the problem of the growing immobility—or distance from society—of the SPD, and sought to show how the revolution in Russia had not destroyed, but revitalized the Social Democratic parties there by bringing them into closer proximity with capitalist society and its discontents.[41] This view of Luxemburg's is confirmed by the trajectory of the FSDP and the Finnish labor movement during and post-1905, which saw memberships spike alongside increased organization. Party membership peaked in 1906 at 108,000 (up from 16,500 in 1904) and in the following year the Finnish trade union federation (SAJ) was established.[42] A discussion of the FSDP's developments before, during, and after Finland's general strike in 1905, and the adventurism and political terrorism which followed in 1906 is necessary for grasping revolutionary and counterrevolutionary tendencies which would resurface during the crisis of 1917-18.

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[39] Karl Kautsky, "Revolutions, Past and Present," *Marxist Archive*, 1906, https://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1906/xx/revolutions.htm.
[40] Peter Nettl, "The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a Political Model," 87.
[41] Peter Nettl, "The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a Political Model," 87-88.
[42] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 57, 114.

Before 1905—as discussed above within the framework of the whole International—the central problem facing the fledgling FSDP was the challenge of charting a politically independent course while nevertheless participating as an opposition party in existing state institutions; or how to have a legal mass movement which would remain committed to extra-legal goals. Full cooperation with other parties off the table, the FSDP was interested in agitating for franchise reform and for the formation of a democratically elected parliament. Socialists had long recognized the tactical importance of winning electoral victories, for seats in parliament meant broader reach for their ideas and organization in society. No Marxists denied the potential within the current government in its bourgeois parliamentary form for making such gains for the party, however extra-parliamentary their liberal, civil-social aim of working class self-governance; but for Finnish socialists in 1904 this electoral potential was excluded by the derelict structure of the Russian autocracy. Thus the FSDP, in line with the workers movement, saw it crucial to demand maximum reforms to the Diet, that is, to call for a democratically elected constituent assembly with legislative autonomy. This hardly distinguished them on the surface from the other opposition parties in Finland, and indeed the period from 1903-1905 was one of personnel overlap between these factions. Socialists such as Yrjö Makelin advocated for forming a 'national front' with the underground Activists, and Ursin, because the FSDP was excluded from the four-chamber Diet, ran as a candidate for the "Old Finn" Constitutionalist party.[43] Valpas-Hänninen, as mentioned above, having witnessed the reform-revolution debates, stressed the relationship of any and all activity to the party's goal of socialism—a national front was an unacceptable ordering of priorities, and the Constitutionalists were only short-term allies insofar as they might support a national assembly where socialists could run their own candidates. Valpas' orthodox Marxism was accepted as the official party position at their 1904 Forssa conference.[44] But this early phase of admixture and collaboration was significantly

[43] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 88-95.
[44] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 28-30.

altered by the course of the revolution, wherein political differences between socialists and non-socialists became open conflict, one too clear for compromise or unity: “Tampere labor paper *Kansan Lehti* summed up the strike as begun in a spirit of nationalism and patriotism and ending as a class struggle.”[45] For Marxists, the essential character of this conflict was revealed in two related phenomena—the mass or general strike, and the formation of the Red Guard or workers’ militias; the unifying aspect of each being the assertion by the working class of its right and duty to rule, of its ability to govern society. The FSDP, like their Russian counterpart—though organizing the working class and advocating its seizure of power—were not yet in a position to lead the forces mobilized by the revolution into a major confrontation with the Tsarist state, but both were in a position to learn from the trajectory of the revolution what it might mean to stand at the helm.

What in Russia began days prior at the end of October 1905—but which was the product of revolutionary momentum that had been escalating since January—spread as the germ of a general strike to Finland on October 28th after meetings between socialists and Activists from Helsinki and the railway workers running the lines towards St. Petersburg. By the 31st, the railway strikers were joined by workers across Finland, whose organizations had set up strike committees for the task of running society and making political demands that, in addition to those outlined above, “included complete freedom of speech, press, assembly and the right of association.” The Constitutionalists, quick to try and win over workers with their anti-russification reforms to the Diet, were quickly repelled by the workers’ confident demands for a unicameral legislature and universal suffrage for those over the age of 21. The Constitutionalists decided shortly after to take their reforms to the Tsar directly and departed for Russia. Notably, the FSDP was not directing the strike through its official channels, though its members participated actively and in leadership positions within the committees. Kirby explains that the FSDP was delayed in finding a strategic orientation towards the strike, “partly as a result of the deficiencies of their

[45] D. G. Kirby, “The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918,” 30-32. 37-39. 42-45. 58.

party organization." Thus, "the running of the strike devolved largely upon locally elected strike committees."[46] Yet what the workers ultimately advanced was the necessity of the political leadership of the FSDP:

> The central strike committee had resolved earlier that day to end all negotiations with other parties. The feeling of power which the committee evidently had can be seen in the resolve that in no circumstances would the committee give up its demand that the governor-general form a provisional government, half of whose members were to be social democrats. The first task of the government would be to call a national assembly.[47]

The FSDP, though it had not and could not have simply called the strike into existence, nevertheless had become responsible for the actions of the majority of organized workers—who were now the decisive democratic force in Finnish politics. As Rosa Luxemburg wrote one year later, drawing on her experience in the Polish section of RSDLP during 1905:

> If, however, the direction of the mass strike in the sense of command over its origin, and in the sense of the calculating and reckoning of the cost, is a matter of the revolutionary period itself, the directing of the mass strike becomes, in an altogether different sense, the duty of social democracy and its leading organs. Instead of puzzling their heads with the technical side, with the mechanism, of the mass strike, the social democrats are called upon to assume political leadership in the midst of the revolutionary period.[48]

Contra German trade union leaders and members of her own party who understood the mass strike like a faucet to be turned on or off, she insisted on its spontaneous character as inaugurating and belonging to a *revolutionary period*, a window of opportunity illumined by Social-Democracy and thrown open by the workers which could either be grasped or let close. The Finnish workers in 1905 had reached the outer limit of bourgeois politics, and were deserted by both the nationalist Activists and liberal Constitutionalists alike. Leon Trotsky, reflecting on the 1905 revolution and his leading role in the St. Petersburg Soviet, saw in it Marx's idea of the "revolution in permanence"; he thought, like Kautsky, Lenin, and Luxemburg, that what began as a bourgeois, democratic revolution against the Tsar and autocracy—at this

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[46] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 43-44.
[47] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 51.
[48] Rosa Luxemburg, "The Mass Strike," *Marxist Archive*, 1906, https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/index.htm.

late date, in a developed, world-wide capitalist crisis haunted by the specter of an international socialist politics—would in all likelihood spill over into a proletarian-led, socialist revolution.[49] In the words of Luxemburg:

> Another half century, and the present Russian Revolution stands at a point of the historical path which is already over the summit, which is on the other side of the culminating point of capitalist society, at which the bourgeois revolutions cannot again be smothered by the antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, but, will, on the contrary, expand into a new lengthy period of violent social struggles, at which the balancing of the account with absolutism appears a trifle in comparison with the many new accounts which the revolution itself opens up. The present revolution realizes in the particular affairs of absolutist Russia the general results of international capitalist development, and appears not so much as the last successor of the old bourgeois revolutions as the forerunner of the new series of proletarian revolutions of the West.[50]

Like the RSDLP, the FSDP was the only party which claimed to be willing to lead the workers' struggle for a free society to its conclusion.

With the police either disarmed, disbanded or striking everywhere in Finland, and Russian soldiers standing imposingly yet idly by, the workers assumed for themselves the protection of the law—or the repressive function of the state. The arming of a single volunteer civilian militia or national guard was a priority among all factions, but the selection process of the leadership of such a guard became a matter of political dispute between workers, and the Constitutionalists, Activists, and their supporters among university students. Workers elected socialists, like the ex-soldier and radical Johan Kock, to command the guard in Helsinki. For the others, this was unacceptably partisan. At the end of the strike, the national guard throughout Finland—hardly unified at the outset—had split into two distinct and opposed groups—one wearing red armbands, the other white.[51] The Constitutionalists, on their mission for a compromise with the Tsar, had been received and saw their proposal for a new government and legislature speedily approved. Returning to Finland on November 1st and hoping to dampen revolutionary fervor, they shared the news of the strikes winding down in Russia after the Tsar's

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[49] Leon Trotsky, "Results and Prospects," *Marxist Archive*, 1906, https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/rp-index.htm.
[50] Rosa Luxemburg, "The Mass Strike."
[51] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 55.

manifesto had promised a representative parliament and civil liberties, and Finns received word from the Tsar of their own constitutional reforms on November 4th. This news was slow to travel in the jubilant, self-assured atmosphere of the strike, and the workers were not immediately prepared to stand down. One such instance came on November 5th, when fighting was narrowly averted by the intervention of Kock as Whites confronted Red Guards threatening to forcibly close Helsinki's reopening storefronts. By November 6th FSDP secretary Sirola had convinced the central strike committee of the need for a tactical pause of the strike for fear of Russian reprisals. A Russian fleet had surrounded the harbor outside Helsinki, and the Governor-General, aboard a battleship, had threatened to shell the town.

It was over the next two months that the FSDP began integrating itself directly into the organizational forms of the strike committees, which despite the pause in the strike, voted to maintain their existence. The party, alongside the workers, maintained a ready posture to renew the general strike well into the following year. Indeed, 1906 saw five times the number of local strike actions than in the year before the revolution, as workers were more confident of their ability to win economic concessions in the lingering revolutionary atmosphere.[52] The strike committees, along with Red Guards, remained considerably independent despite motion towards party control. As 1906 wore on, the mood among Red Guards, organized workers, and a majority of party members was one which appraised the general strike as incomplete and its gains insufficient, but by the party leadership's judgment of the array of forces, continuing "such a tactic [of the general strike] without corresponding strike action in Russia would be doomed to failure."[53] In other words, without the existence of an international, revolutionary period, summoning a general strike could be disastrous politically; it was largely on this basis, of "a new consciousness that the future of Finland was bound up with what happened in Russia," that the party adopted a defensive attitude.[54] This can be seen in the party's order—against the claim of

[52] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 59-60.
[53] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 59.
[54] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 70.

the central strike committee—that the Red Guard should be subject to party discipline and eventually demobilization when the Tsar's manifesto was made into law.[55] Like Luxemburg wrote, for the FSDP leadership:

> …the mass strike in Russia has been realized not as means of evading the political struggle of the working-class, and especially of parliamentarism, not as a means of jumping suddenly into the social revolution by means of a theatrical coup, but as a means, firstly, of creating for the proletariat the conditions of the daily political struggle and especially of parliamentarism.[56]

In just this sense, the party's leadership held the view that the general strike's offensive potential had been temporarily exhausted, and legal, parliamentary work could resume. This perspective defined itself in political opposition to the 'tactics' of sporadic banditry, terrorism, and "anarchistic excesses" carried out both before the revolution—as in Governor-General Bobikov's assassination by an Activist in 1904—and especially afterwards in 1906 by revolutionists of various stripes—sometimes agent provocateurs or opportunistic criminals, in other cases genuine socialist sympathizers or members of the Red Guard.

By July 20th, when the Tsar signed into law Finland's newly won political liberties and guaranteed the new constitution—that is, when the parliamentary path was opening ahead of them, conflict within the party, affiliated strike committees, and the Red Guard over a potential renewal of the revolutionary period was about to reach its height. While the popular phase of the revolution had died down, the real possibility of a "theatrical coup" was brewing: Imperial soldiers, under the influence of the Russian SRs and stationed at the fortress of Sveaborg outside Helsinki, made the Red Guard aware of their intention to mutiny through newly developed contacts between Russian and Finnish revolutionaries. The party was caught completely by surprise, only notified of the soldiers' plot by Kock's sudden—and of his own initiative—declaration on July 31st that the workers needed to follow the soldiers' rising by means of a general strike. The Red Guard sent some members to assist the sailors, who were now threatening to shell the town if the Helsinki workers did not join them in an insurrection, but

[55] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 9.
[56] Rosa Luxemburg, "The Mass Strike."

an overwhelming majority of the estimated 25,000 in the whole Guard remained only alert, in anticipation, and inactive. The party leaders, including its new secretary, former underground gun runner, Matti Turkia, refused to issue the call for a strike and deferred to the general strike committee—much to its chagrin. This act of indecision proved largely inconsequential, however, for while the committee indeed called a strike, the mutineers were handily defeated two days later, and the strike was promptly ended.[57] It was exactly the kind of "propaganda of the deed" and conspiratorial adventurism which the Marxists had criticized for its invitation of repression and its being based on a mistaken view of the revolution as a mere act of will, rather than as a result of the historical process.[58] As a result of months of irresponsible and undisciplined behavior, at the FSDP's 1906 August conference, and after much impassioned deliberation, the party voted that the Red Guard should be indefinitely disbanded until the next general strike. Nevertheless, following the conference, some party members met secretly for a vote to maintain its existence underground.[59]

The FSDP cannot properly be said to have suffered a defeat, though what transpired was not exactly a victory either, and this was likely because the possible task of the seizure of power seemed a small, speculative one against the might of the Tsarist state. In refusing to either give or deny their support to the sailors, the FSDP had failed to demonstrate decisive leadership. Yet in calling off the strike at one peak of the revolutionary wave in the Russian empire, it certainly proved an ability to lead—but where? Though there were those in the workers movement who were dissatisfied with the party leadership, a newly won majority trusted their judgment. The failed putsch of the sailors appeared to justify the FSDP's tactical retreat from further open confrontation with the Tsarist state. The FSDP had won the workers to the strategic path of Second International Marxism—intransigent opposition. The "class war" politics

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[57] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 62-80.
[58] James Joll, *The Second International 1889-1914,* 24-25. Upton notes that during these clashes, two Reds, and seven White Guards were killed—making this appear retroactively as the first act of killing in the Finnish civil war. Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 9.
[59] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 67-68.

that Upton calls, “narrow dogmatism and refusal to compromise” was born of a political necessity. If the FSDP was to become *the* party of the whole working class—to use Kautsky’s turn of phrase—this meant it must become the party of the mass strike, and of the workers' defense of their interests through self-organized militias. If, as Upton observes, “the class war was not something the workers learned from Karl Marx but a living fact of their daily existence”, then one ought also to consider that the FSDP’s adherence to the principle of political independence arrived at by the Second International orthodoxy was not entirely a fortuitous, dogmatic imposition of the SPD’s ideas upon their own situation, but a choice which corresponded to the real conditions of the growing politicization of the working class—now a cohering subject with its own goals and interests—to whom the FSDP gave a historical mission: to realize utopia through the dictatorship of the proletariat.[60] The revolution of 1905 was seen by Marxists not as this transitional form itself, but a step indicating the concrete possibility of this aim:

> …we do not yet have the complete domination of the dictatorship of the proletariat – not yet the socialist revolution, but only its beginnings. The proletariat of Russia is breaking its chains, only in order to free its hands for the class struggle against capitalism; it does not yet feel itself strong enough to attempt the expropriation of capital. But that the watchword of a proletarian class struggle has been raised is a tremendous advance from the socialist standpoint, as contrasted with the revolutions of 1648 and 1789.[61]

The FSDP, as Marxists, were determined to neither succumb to the reform-ism of the Constitutionalist or Activist sympathizers, nor the revolution-ism of the anarchist Russian soldiers; these tendencies were criticized in the Second International for their being historically antecedent dead-ends, repetitions of the bourgeois revolution by and for the petit-bourgeois radicals—i.e. without proletarian, class conscious, Social-Democratic leadership.[62] After the events of 1905 had more thoroughly integrated the FSDP and the workers’ movement, the party “[August 1906 conference] report embodied what [newly recruited radical, Otto] Kuusinen called

[60] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 8. 13.
[61] Karl Kautsky, “Revolutions, Past and Present.”
[62] Spartacist League, *Lenin and the Vanguard Party*, 42.

a dual standpoint: the party should prepare for a renewal of the revolutionary struggle but in the meantime it should pursue a peaceful class struggle in the new assembly."[63]

1906—1916: What are socialist parties for?

In the wake of the revolution of 1905, the FSDP changed dramatically. It was overwhelmed by an influx of new members—radical intellectuals, formerly unorganized workers, newly politicized farmers—and it was restructured accordingly, transforming from an agitational group into a professionalized mass party. Despite the reshuffling, the party remained tethered to its civil-social foundation in the workers' hall and workers' and farmers' associations. Its reorganization meant the party's local Workers' Associations were to combine beneath, and elect representatives to its regional, electoral district organization. Members of these district organizations could be elected to their 15 allotted seats on the 27-person party Council at the whole party Congress; of the other 12 seats, five of these were for foreign delegates (four from Finnish-Swedish worker's organizations, and one from the Russian), with the remaining seven for the party Executive, responsible for enforcing the Congress' resolutions. Though they were not so called at the time, a layer of bureaucrats formed in the party's upper ranks; a parliamentary delegation was created, and power was centralized in the Executive.[64] The daily operation of this "machine" was specifically geared towards winning elections. However, like in the SPD, over time it became less clear exactly what this electioneering, and the resulting seats won, were *for.* More precisely, it was during this period that the growth of the party became practically and theoretically disconnected from the goal of revolution.

Party Congresses reflected minor tensions within the leadership which continued to grapple with the full implications of principled, orthodox Marxist independence from capitalist

[63] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 92.
[64] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 83-85. 102.

politics; many of these centered on the question of how members of the FSDP ought to behave within the new assembly. Not least because, according to Kirby:

> Although the [constitutional] reforms were still not far-reaching enough for the radical socialists, they did provide a forum where none had properly existed before for the SDP, and no doubt in the normal run of events Finland would have adapted to its democratic institutions. But there remained a fatal flaw, dooming Finland to a stillborn form of democracy: the autocracy was still there, and the final decision rested with the autocrat.[65]

The FSDP had expelled members after the election of 1907 who favored participation in the senate government, on the grounds that this was revisionist, "minister socialism".[66] Even so, any hopes of passing minimum reforms to working conditions from the legislature were quickly quashed in the deadlock between the constitutionalist senate-government and the increasingly socialist-packed assembly. Disenchantment with parliamentary activities may have been among the causes for the decline in party membership and participation between 1907 and 1909. In this same period, the SAJ experienced growth and presided over a combative trade union movement.[67] However, the SAJ never developed any strong current of syndicalism—a variant of anarchism whose central premise was the rejection of the need for a socialist party or a transitional state in achieving the aims of the workers movement. These "anti-parliamentarian" ideas were encountered by the émigré socialists from the Finnish working class who took part in the disputes between the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and Socialist Party of America (SPA) in the USA. According to Kirby, the SPA was second only to the SPD in its influence on the FSDP. That neither anarchism nor revisionism ever properly took hold in the workers movement, and were roundly criticized in the leadership, rank-and-file, and affiliated unions during this period shows that despite poor returns in the assembly, and the organizational alterations undergone since its role in 1905, the party's fidelity to Marxist revolutionary principle was unchallenged.[68] With the possibility of their own legal reforms foreclosed, the FSDP

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[65] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 81.
[66] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 86-90.
Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 7.
[67] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 86-102
[68] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 115-122.

debated the importance of obstructing the efforts of the government and the assembly, and resolved at their 1911 Congress that members of the Parliamentary Group would refuse to approve all taxes put to the assembly by the senate. This deadlocked Finnish government was enough of a thorn for the Russian Empire that by 1912 the senate was staffed entirely by Russian appointees who were wholly hostile to the assembly. The FSDP continued to refuse collaboration with other parties, even as pressure to do so mounted with the renewed Imperial intervention in the 'autonomous' legislature. The FSDP could easily afford to do so, for it had effectively positioned itself as the only credible, and total, opposition.[69]

It is at this point in the history of the FSDP where comparisons with its model Second International counterpart in Germany, as well as the RSDLP, become necessary to expand upon. For both Upton and Kirby, the likeness or unlikeness of the FSDP to other parties of the International turns on this question: Was the FSDP a party organized practically and working theoretically to advance the goal of revolution? Kirby, as was mentioned above, identifies the FSDP with Nettl's concept of the "inheritor party" which Nettl coined to critically examine the "unusual phenomenon" of the pre-1914 SPD.[70] When Kirby contrasts the FSDP to the Bolsheviks, he calls the latter a "revolutionary activist group".[71] For Nettl, the inheritor party is fundamentally a revolutionary party; it is one which is "committed to the total destruction and overthrow of existing government", which becomes a "legal mass movement" rather than remaining a conspiracy.[72] In other words, the conditions of legality, the mass appeal, and the frustrations in opposition and isolation of both parties make the FSDP and SPD easily comparable, but the question of their revolutionary potential is not as straightforward. On the one hand, they both led revolutions to defeat, but on the other, they educated, trained, and inspired the revolutionaries whom they consciously or unconsciously foiled. Nettl's essay on the

[69] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 90-102.
[70] Peter Nettl, "The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a Political Model," 66.
[71] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 123-126. 130.
[72] Peter Nettl, "The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a Political Model," 66.

SPD, and his concept of the inheritor party, can pose this question acutely because he takes up the frame of the German, and Russian, Marxist Left faction's *critique* of the SPD Executive's growing distance from capitalist society and the task of transforming it. Nettl, through the critical thought of Luxemburg and Lenin, shows that it was a self-enforced gap that—while supposedly a principled means to the party's strategic aim—became an end in itself. He concludes:

> …the vacuum which the deliberate and unconscious policies of the SPD leadership had created and sustained … was a direct consequence of victory in the revisionist controversy. Instead of helping to keep the party revolutionary as was believed at the time, the defeat - in votes if not in practice - of the revisionists in fact did the opposite. By isolating the SPD and creating a condition general and increasing alienation from society, the possibilities of revolutionary stimulation were blocked, since these could only be provided by *contact* with society. Moreover, isolation provided a political culture in which self-deception became general, since the means of checking the existing revolutionary myths against real achievements were destroyed. In these conditions a new philosophy was evolved (Kautsky's) which emptied revolutionary Marxism of its dynamic content and in the last resort divorced the collapse of society from the policies and activities of Social Democracy except in a purely formal sense. It was natural therefore that anyone who opposed this concept would start with the urge to crack the party out of its isolation and self-absorption.[73]

The FSDP leadership, like that of the SPD, fell out of step with the progress of the movement for which they themselves claimed to become the active, leading agent. But as noted above, this comes with the caveat that there was no meaningful opposition to the orthodox center, no emerging critical consciousness of the FSDP's inertia. Thus the most substantive difference between the FSDP, and the socialist parties in Russia and Germany, appears to be that no resolute, Left faction cohered within the party before 1914 which could critique—let alone break with—the Kautskyian, orthodox leadership for its drift into complacency and immobility. This resulted in the predominance of a fatalistic conception of revolution within the FSDP leadership—or in Upton's words, a version of "Marx's doctrine" in which the concept of revolution was that of "passive determinism" and corresponded to the "negation of true political leadership".[74] This is the kernel of truth behind Upton's dismissals of the revolutionary potential of the FSDP which was doing "nothing to prepare for it", and Kirby's judgment that, "[t]he role

[73] Peter Nettl, "The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a Political Model," 91-92.
[74] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 7. 52.

which the [F]SDP created for itself in the decade before the 1917 revolution was one of class-conscious, revolutionary passivity."[75] But it was not only the lack of a consistent Left-wing, but also the lack of any clear Right—or any conscious revisionism—which characterized the FSDP. Kirby writes, "the term 'revisionist' was often thrown around indiscriminately," but ultimately "revisionism as such never found a proper foothold in Finland."[76] The political confusion in the party was evinced by its lack of self-designations of allegiance. The result of this being Upton and Kirby's consistent usage of the terms 'radicals' or 'militants' and 'moderates' when describing the shifting bodies of the opposing blocs at Party Congresses. The only named faction in the leadership was, unsurprisingly, the orthodox Centrist "Siltasaari group" consisting of Oskari Tokoi, Kullervo Manner, Otto Kuusinen, and Sirola, who became the dominant intellectual influence on the party after 1905.[77] Therefore, in Nettl's critique of the orthodox center of the SPD as "an attempt to aggregate interests through superimposition of conflicts but without political articulation," it is the lack of self-critical, organizational clarity suggested by the phrase "without political articulation" that stands out for its applicability to the FSDP. [78]

As the concrete example of the workers' mass rising in 1905 faded from prognostic cause for political debate into distant memory, Kuusinen delivered a speech at the 1911 Party Congress in which he cautioned the party against choosing their tactics based on the slimming probability of another imminent Russian revolution. Prompted by these suggestions, at the same congress the party removed the general strike from their "resolutions on tactics". In the same year, the FSDP responded with a 'nay' to the International's Valliant-Hardie circular to all affiliated parties asking about the possibility of calling a general strike in the event of war. The FSDP leaders, citing the danger of repression by the Tsarist state, thought the general strike

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[75] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 14. 31.
D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 129.
[76] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 129.
[77] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 10. 177.
[78] Peter Nettl, "The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a Political Model," 94.

would result in the destruction of the party.[79] With the augmenting prospects of the outbreak of war, its attendant political questions—or how it might be possible to stop war *and* advance the struggle for socialism—consumed the Second International party leadership of Germany, France, Austria, and Russia. Still the revolution of 1905 remained the strongest historical precedent.[80] Already in 1906, no other than the SPD's famed leader Bebel had:

> …realized how far the whole apparatus of the German Party, which he personally had done so much to construct over the past fifty years, was bound up with the structure of contemporary society: any violent attempt to destroy the latter might well demolish the former too.[81]

But Bebel, who might have been willing to risk the party in a stand against the war, died in 1913. The Second International, whose optimistic leaders maintained that "the existence of over four million German Socialists seemed the strongest guarantee of peace in Europe" received on August 4th, 1914 a self-inflicted blow that irreparably shattered its confidence, organization, and self-understanding.[82]

On that day the orthodox Marxist German Social Democrats in the Reichstag delegation—buckled under pressure from the Kaiser's military men—voted in favor of credits, or government spending, for the Imperial war effort. Precisely on the above basis—i.e. the need for conserving the party—they justified their decision by recourse to the external threat of Tsarist reaction, bent on devouring the European liberties which sustained her socialist parties. The disorienting and destructive effects of the counterrevolution of August 4th can hardly be overstated. Overnight, the International had ceased to exist. The SPD split apart, and its anti-war socialists were jailed. Similar acts of repression were carried out against International parties across Europe, Russia and America.[83] Like members of the SPD who faced the impossible situation of preserving or risking the party in the face of German militarism and patriotic enthusiasm, the FSDP leaders thought they were in no position to face off against the

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[79] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 125-126.
[80] James Joll, *The Second International 1889-1914,* 126-157.
[81] James Joll, *The Second International 1889-1914,* 137.
[82] James Joll, *The Second International 1889-1914,* 144.
[83] James Joll, *The Second International 1889-1914,* 158-183.

Russian Imperial army. Yet unlike their German counterparts, they were not in any immediate danger of imprisonment or draft. For Upton, it was because the party was enabled by the protective buffer of the Russian Empire that it issued a statement “adopt[ing] the correct Marxist view that this was an imperialist war in which the workers had no interest”.[84] According to Kirby, “[the Great] war isolated the [F]SDP even more than previously from the mainstream of European socialism.”[85] Nevertheless, despite the wartime censorship and the dissolution of the International, the Finnish party had joined, directly or indirectly, a minority of socialists who refused to support the war—a minority which formed the Zimmerwald International in 1915, though no FSDP members attended their conference. Lenin, at the head of the Bolshevik Left in the RSDLP(B) thought that war presented above all an *opportunity* for world revolution or seizure of power by socialists, as it had once been understood by the International.[86] Kautsky, representing orthodox opinion at Zimmerwald, thought that the war was a catastrophe which had to be weathered by socialists. He did not see it as an opportune moment to ‘turn the guns around’ in revolutionary defeatism as advocated by Lenin’s minority.[87] Members of the FSDP were certainly aware of the 1914 split, but no record exists of organizational contact with the revolutionary Zimmerwald congress pre-1917. Kirby writes of the wartime attempt by the RSDLP(B) to make contact with the leadership of the Finnish party:

> When Alexander Shlapnikov, the Bolshevik underground organizer, entered Finland from Sweden in 1915, he was told by local socialists that the [F]SDP was dominated by 'parliamentary' moderates and the party executive was thoroughly opportunist. The executive was apparently 'greatly encouraged' by Shlapnikov's news of impending revolution in Russia, but appears to have done little about it.[88]

The political crisis of the ‘old’, Imperial European powers which had brought on the horror of the Great War was both a consequence of, and was mirrored by a crisis within the

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[84] Anthony F. *Upton, The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 16.
[85] D. G. Kirby, “The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918,” 133.
[86] Karl Katusky, “Our Road to Power,” *Marxist Archive,* 1909, https://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1909/power/ch09.htm.
[87] V. I. Lenin, “The Defeat of One’s Own Government in the Imperialist War,” *Marxist Archive*, 1915, https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/jul/26.htm.
[88] D. G. Kirby, “The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918,” 125-126.

international socialist movement. Two rival internationals—the Hague, and the Zimmerwald—claimed the mantle of progress toward socialism and ruthlessly criticized the other for betraying the interests and the historical mission of the world's working class. In 1916, a unified FSDP won its largest share of the vote in its history, but with their majority in government they got nothing in return—the assembly was promptly shuttered by the Tsar. On top of this political clampdown, inflated prices, scarcity of foodstuffs, disruptions by Russian migrant labor and quartered soldiers, as well as mutinies and strikes, all pointed, Marxists thought, towards the opening of another revolutionary period. It took until 1917 for this crisis to manifestly appear within the Finnish party.

March—November 1917: Whose dictatorship?

The demonstration on the International socialist holiday 'Women's Day' held by soldiers' wives against food shortages in the Russian Empire exploded into lasting unrest. News reached Finland on March 12 of an uprising in Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg), but due to state censorship, reports were not yet clear as to its scope or severity. The FSDP sent a delegation alongside a handful of representatives of the bourgeois parties on March 14 to assess the situation. When they arrived a day later, they were informed by Finnish socialists living in Petrograd that Russian authority was to be reestablished under a revolutionary Provisional Government, with whom they might negotiate and make headway on the "Finnish Question". On their return to Finland, they were encouraged to draft a manifesto on Finno-Russian relations for this new, democratic-republican Russian Government, amenable to the realization of the promised autonomy of Finnish politics. An order for the arrest of the Governor-General and his deputy, suggested by the Petrograd Finns, arrived from Russia in Helsinki on March 15. The two were invited onto the Baltic fleet and arrested by its captain the following day. It was the signal flare of the long-awaited collapse of the autocracy; exuberant crowds of workers and soldiers

raised red flags over the town. The revolution had only just begun; the question of who would take power was far from decided.[89] The split in the socialist movement, in addition to producing different approaches to the Great War, also produced different answers to this revolutionary question. In his history of the Russian revolution written in 1923, Trotsky summarized, for Marxists, what was suddenly at stake with this opening act:

> The fundamental controversial question around which everything else centered was this: whether or not we [Bolsheviks] should struggle for power; whether or not we should assume power. This alone is ample proof that we were not then dealing with a mere episodic difference of opinion but with two tendencies of the utmost principled significance. The first and principal tendency was proletarian and led to the road of world revolution. The other was "democratic," i.e., petty-bourgeois, and led, in the last analysis, to the subordination of proletarian policies to the requirements of bourgeois society in the process of reform. These two tendencies came into hostile conflict over every essential question that arose throughout the year 1917. …the struggle between social democratic tendencies and Bolshevism is bound to reveal itself in its most clear, open, and uncamouflaged form during the immediate revolutionary period when the question of power is posed point-blank.[90]

It was Russian soldiers, long the targets of socialist organizing cells, whether Menshevik, Bolshevik or SR, who took the initiative alongside Finnish workers in setting up Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, alongside the parallel Helsinki Workers' Council. The FSDP leadership, for their part, were focused solely on reviving their parliament and senate to determine their legal relationship to the new Provisional Government. It was a complicated legal and political question, and the FSDP's March manifesto did not resolve these difficulties. The document simultaneously acknowledged that the Provisional Government held the Tsar's sovereignty over the Finnish state and asserted that the right to determine Finland's political autonomy rested with its assembly. In this extra-legal situation, political power appeared split between parliament (backed by the Provisional Government), and the Workers' Councils and Soviets. This was the system of dual power which was reproduced across the former Russian Empire.[91] Although not formerly recognized in these terms, what in 1905 went under the

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[89] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 135-138.
Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 26-27. 31-32.
[90] Leon Trotsky, "Lessons of October," *Marxist Archive,* 1923, https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lessons/ch2.htm.
[91] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918,"

heading “general strike committee” was presently, according to Lenin, Trotsky, and Luxemburg the form of workers’ self-governance in embryo—the revolution only need spread throughout the world. The Bolshevik slogan, “all power to the soviets” was a sincere attempted answer to the question of what might become the basis of the workers state; or as Lenin wrote in 1915, “Soviets of Workers’ Deputies and similar institutions must be regarded as organs of insurrection, of revolutionary rule.”[92] By March 22nd, 1917, over a week into the ‘democratic’ phase of the Russian revolution, Lenin was explicit in calling for a workers’ government based on Soviets:

> The proletariat has approached, and will approach, this singular task in different ways. In some parts of Russia the February-March Revolution puts nearly complete power in its hands. In others the proletariat may, perhaps, in a “usurpatory” manner, begin to form and develop a proletarian militia. In still others, it will probably strive for immediate elections of urban and rural local government bodies on the basis of universal, etc., suffrage, in order to turn them into revolutionary centers, etc., until the growth of proletarian organization, the coming together of the soldiers with the workers, the movement among the peasantry and the disillusionment of very many in the war-imperialist government of Guchkov and Milyukov bring near the hour when this government will be replaced by the “government” of the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies.[93]

As in 1905, the territory of Finland had no standing army, and now after the overthrow of autocracy, it had no legally recognized police force. Through the Soviets and other civil assemblies, the workers again chose to rule themselves. The organized workers formed militias for the protection and maintenance of their ongoing mass meetings and strike actions; and if they were challenged, behind the workers stood the revolutionary soldiers. Into the spring and summer, emboldened strikes, demonstrations, and partisan militia actions became commonplace.[94] The socialist press, *Tyomies*, reported:

Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 31-34.
[92] V. I. Lenin, “Several Theses,” *Marxist Archive,* 1915, https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/oct/13.htm#thesis04.
[93] V. I. Lenin, “Third Letter: Concerning a Proletarian Militia,” *Marxist Archive,* 1917, https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/lfafar/third.htm#v23pp64h-320.
[94] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 57-70.
D. G. Kirby, “The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918,” 202-236.

> …the bourgeoisie must learn to live with the mass meeting, for "in the political activity of the working class a new form of action, direct mass action, is coming to support and assist the former, purely parliamentary form."[95]

Whereas for the Bolsheviks, as early as March, this formulation would have expressed a contradiction—the crisis of the bourgeois dictatorship atop or alongside the potential proletarian dictatorship—for the Finnish socialists, the problem of taking power did not yet appear to them in this way. Kuusinen, reflecting in his 1918 self-criticism of FSDP's conduct during the revolution, wrote that he did not see this as his task at the revolution's first stage. Like the revisionists, the workers' further control of society appeared sufficiently assured that he did not see the necessity of the transformation of the structure of the state—or of what little remained of that state in the assembly and senate government. He was only granted this clarity with hindsight:

> It is easy enough at this distance to discover this important truth, but it was more difficult to do so in Finland last year. The relative feebleness of the Finnish bourgeoisie, its inability to carry on a Parliamentary struggle, and the fact that it had no armed forces, were so many factors through which we Social-Democrats were predestined to suffer from the democratic illusion, inasmuch as we wished to reach Socialism by means of a struggle in the Diet and by democratic representation of the people. This was equivalent to entering on a course which could not agree with the true postulates of history—to seek to avoid a Socialist Revolution, to shun the real bridge between Capitalism and Socialism, i.e., the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is an historical necessity.[96]

This hypothetical "bridge"—the necessity of establishing a transitory, global dictatorship of the working class—which was the essential difference, and historical result of the Marxist critique of socialist politics, was thought to have distinguished orthodox from revisionist and revolutionary from opportunist. In 1905, the orthodox center and Left-wing in the International were in agreement that the Russian revolution had indicated to Social Democracy its historical trajectory towards this goal. But after 1914, and by 1917, the orthodox had split over the question of whether its impetus would come from Russia. It was not absent from the program of

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[95] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 57.
[96] Otto Kuusinen, "The Finnish Revolution: A Self-Criticism," *Marxist Archive*, 1919, https://www.marxists.org/archive/kuusinen/1919/self-criticism.htm

the FSDP nor from their imagination at this time, but it was continually refused, deferred or avoided by the orthodox leadership on basically the same grounds as the Mensheviks in Russia; the socialists—and by extension the working class—needed to participate in the bourgeois revolution (of March 1917) as the opposition, not undertake to lead society beyond the bourgeois revolution, because the world socialist revolution had not yet matured:[97]

> To understand [the FSDP leadership's] continuing lack of positive enthusiasm for power, it has to be remembered how they saw their revolution. Kuusinen was to explain this in parliament [on November 10th, 1917] when he said that the socialists "wish from our hearts for a socialist society and also hope for the revolution of the European proletariat" but this issue "will not be decided in Finland, it will be decided in Europe. . . . if there is no proletarian revolution there, then there will not be one in Finland either." To these Finnish socialists in 1917 the heresy of socialism in one country was unthinkable, so that the purpose of their taking power was only to hold it until a constituent assembly could be elected. And although they expected a socialist majority for this, its task could be only to legislate for a liberal-democratic, but still capitalist Finland—the socialist revolution would lie in the future.[98]

Lenin, Trotsky, and Luxemburg thought otherwise, and judged the situation ripe for world revolution. Lenin, even as a vehement critic of the Menshevik politics of the subordination of proletarian socialism to petit-bourgeois democracy, seemed to grant that the peculiarities of the FSDP's circumstances might give the party a different path toward transitional dictatorship than the Bolsheviks—insofar as they both shared the obstacle of the Provisional Government.[99] The FSDP would be enabled a "peaceful" assumption of power by the Russian revolutionary "shield":

> Nor ought we to forget that close to St. Petersburg we have one of the most advanced, factually republican, countries, namely, Finland, which, from 1905 to 1917, shielded by the revolutionary battles of Russia, has in a relatively peaceful way developed democracy and has won the *majority* of the people for socialism. The Russian proletariat will guarantee the Finnish Republic complete freedom, including freedom to secede … and precisely in this way will win the *complete* confidence and comradely assistance of the Finnish workers for the all-Russian proletarian cause. In a difficult and big undertaking mistakes are inevitable, nor will we avoid them. The Finnish workers are better organizers, they will help us in this sphere, they will, *in their own way*, push forward the establishment of the socialist republic. Revolutionary victories in Russia

[97] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 144-146. 160-163. 172-173.
D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 263.
[98] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 144.
[99] D. G. Kirby, "Stockholm-Petrograd-Berlin: International Social Democracy and Finnish Independence, 1917," 69-73.
Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 42-43.

> proper—peaceful organizational successes in Finland shielded by these victories—the Russian workers' transition to revolutionary organizational tasks on a new scale—capture of power by the proletariat and poorest strata of the population—encouragement and development of the socialist revolution in the West—this is the road that will lead us to *peace* and *socialism*.[100]

But whereas in March and April "peaceful organizational successes" might have been plausible, the escalating confrontations within the Finnish government and upheaval in society had the effect of strengthening and consolidating the bourgeois opposition to the FSDP's potential bid for power. For the Finnish bourgeoisie, their political representatives in parliament, and their supporters, this state of affairs was unconscionable and abhorrent, and they clamored for, and sought by every means to restore a police and army beholden to the impartiality of the law and theirs and the nation's interests. In the meantime they accused the socialists of not only "hooliganism" and criminality, but "political and racial treason." The bourgeois parties agreed on one platform: law and order. Throughout August, September, and October, the Home (or White) Guard was slowly, and in small groups, becoming covertly reestablished, armed by German weapons smuggled into Finland with the help of the Activists' secret Military Committee. Likewise, in May, the Red Guard was already in talks to reassemble, and by the summer, its detachments were petitioning the party for recognition through the Helsinki Workers' Council. It took until October for the Red Guard to be officially reinstated by the FSDP, and this was in response to the socialist press' reporting on the newly raised bourgeois "butcher guards", and the counterrevolutionary Kornilov affair in Russia.[101] Kuusinen, reflecting on the desiderata of the two classes at the time, wrote that: "For one party as for the other, the dictatorship was now alone to be desired—for the bourgeoisie the White Dictatorship, for the workers the Red Dictatorship."[102]

If this was how Kuusinen saw the situation in his retrospective account, he and the other members of the orthodox FSDP leadership singularly devoted themselves in the spring and

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[100] V. I. Lenin, "Third Letter: Concerning a Proletarian Militia."
[101] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 48-49. 57-59. 66-68. 101-104. 108-122.
[102] Otto Kuusinen, "The Finnish Revolution: A Self-Criticism."

summer of 1917 to finding another, legal-democratic resolution. Their immediate challenge—the task of forming a new senate government—was presented on March 20th at the Party Congress. The parliamentary delegation, along with the conciliatory, centrist members of the Executive, made their first significant, albeit incredibly controversial, step in a "pure revisionist" direction by agreeing to the request of the bourgeois party representatives and forming a coalition senate government. It was a blatant violation of their hitherto principled independence from capitalist politics, but was justified as a product of exceptional circumstances.[103] Initially, as mentioned above, it appeared that an open contest of "special bodies of armed men" was a possibility that might be circumvented or arrived at by legal-constitutional means.[104] To that end, the party focused all its efforts on enshrining Finnish autonomy into the constitution, that is, transferring all sovereign prerogatives to the constituent assembly. They drafted this demand into a law, known as the *valtalaki*, which after having been approved by the Russian Soviets, they prepared to ratify without the intervention of the Provisional Government.[105] Owing to their absolute majority in the assembly, the FSDP leadership thought any serious step towards independence would advance their cause against their own bourgeoisie: Firstly, it would be an overwhelmingly popular achievement and would shore up future victories for the party, and secondly, it would marginalize the bourgeois parties who might seize on this same political move or who might try to block it in the event of a counterrevolution in league with the Russian bourgeoisie.[106]

What they did not count on was the resistance of the Provisional Government and of other Russian socialists to the *valtalaki*. The Mensheviks and SRs reasoned in the other direction; they argued that if Russian wartime control over Finland was weakened, the German Imperialists would invade, abetted by the Activists. Additionally frustrating to the FSDP, in the

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[103] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 28-36.
[104] V. I. Lenin, "The State and Revolution," *Marxist Archive*, 1917, https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch01.htm#s2
[105] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 86-90.
[106] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 93-95.

early months of the revolution, the Helsinki Soviet was staffed with soldiers aligned with the former parties and who supported the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks, and their steadily increasing following among the Russian garrisons, were the sole exception.[107] Under orders from Lenin, their Left-wing delegation sent from Zimmerwald informed the FSDP leaders at their Party Congress from June 15-18 that overthrowing the Kerensky government in Russia was the next task of the international revolution; this was the only socialist guarantee of Finnish national self-determination.[108] The FSDP agreed to join Zimmerwald against the Provisional Government, despite having already committed themselves in the senate to recognizing its authority. Valpas-Hänninen protested the party's ever having entered into this government, and made a motion to reverse their decision, endorsed by the Bolshevik emissary Alexandra Kollontai. His motion was voted down. Kuusinen proclaimed, "Our Bolsheviks and Mensheviks still fit within a single framework … we are the first revisionist party in the Zimmerwald international." Isolationist, total opposition was no longer possible, and the orthodox leadership had opportunistically compromised their principles for unity with the Right-wing section of the party, while promising revolution to the Left; without furthering the question of the struggle for political power, without planning for the suppression of the bourgeoisie or putting the workers in control of the state, the notion of ambiguous, qualified participation in the Finnish government compounded their evident disarray and indecisiveness. The FSDP was in the wavering and risky position of becoming simultaneously the opposition and the leading party. Kollontai notified the Bolsheviks that the majority in the FSDP were revisionist, but this did not at all end their collaboration—Lenin believed there was still an opportunity for the party to play its revolutionary part and met with its leadership while in Helsinki. Evidence of his later, November appeal to the FSDP for revolution suggests he thought its Left-wing would be made up of men from the orthodox leadership who had more direct influence over the party. The Bolsheviks could already

[107] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 43-44.
[108] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 194-196.

count on radicals like Adolf Taimi, the Rahja brothers, Eero Haapalainen, and their organizers among the soldiers who were far closer to the rebellious, self-confident, and ungovernable attitude of the rank and file in the Guard, Councils, Soviets, and SAJ.[109]

By late July and August, the FSDP's parliamentary road had reached its climatic impasse. Shortly after being passed on July 18th in defiance of its detractors, the *valtalaki* was annulled by the Provisional Government. The Mensheviks and SRs accused the FSDP of having succumbed to petit bourgeois nationalism and endangering the revolution. The assembly was ordered to close its doors by Kerensky and the Governor General; the bourgeois parties exploited the weakness of the overreaching FSDP to convince the Kerensky government of the need for another round of elections—in which the socialists agreed to participate. On the ballot would be a unified bloc of the Young Finn and Old Finn parties against the Agrarians, and the FSDP.[110] Almost a month before the elections were held, on September 5th, the Party Congress' optimism about their potential returns was beset by the admission on the part of Kuusinen that this was likely their final chance of winning or losing an electoral majority in the foreseeable future:

> What is going to happen if we are defeated in the elections? It could perhaps cause a revolution among the people. But we do not know how such a revolution would end. It would be a misfortune for the whole working class movement, and that is one reason to exert effort to see that success is achieved in the elections.[111]

Campaigning was vigorous, and turnout was higher than in 1916. On October 11th, the results were made public. The votes cast for the FSDP exceeded those of the previous election, but the Agrarian party made large gains in the rural, northern districts and the bourgeois parties made inroads in the urban south; these votes combined were significant enough to overturn the socialist majority in the assembly. It was a setback which threw the previous months' strategy into serious doubt. The party's loss of seats both galvanized the assembled workers and

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[109] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 53-55. 125-128. 146.
[110] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 94-101.
[111] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 123.

entrenched the parliamentary moderates. The orthodox leadership were now above all trying to hold the party together.[112] It was the attitude produced by this widening fissure which Oskari Tokoi recalled decades later when he said that the "great tragedy, it seems to me, was that the workers failed to support their own Government at a time when it tried desperately to govern democratically."[113] In the autumn of 1917, however, even the furthest Right-wing of the FSDP did not believe that the workers yet had "their own Government". After the Bolshevik-led November (October) revolution had overthrown the Provisional Government for one based on the Soviets, the Finnish workers endeavored to follow their example.[114]

Restlessness and assertiveness in the workers' movement, and Bolshevik control over the Soviets in Finland had spread rapidly throughout October. The Bolsheviks decided on a policy of armed insurrection at their October 11th-12th Congress.[115] The scale was tipping towards a mass rising. The FSDP leadership in the Executive and parliamentary delegation was deadlocked between an orthodox-center and overtly Right-wing faction, at the same time they were splitting from the trade union leadership in the SAJ Executive and the Red Guard Council who were moving further to the Left. Neither of these groupings were prepared to accept the results of the elections, and the FSDP leadership decided at their Party Congress on the 28th of October to give the bourgeois parties an ultimatum in the *me vaadimme*—'We demand'—which, published on November 1st, called for the passage of *valtalaki*, for the invalidation of the illegally and fraudulently elected parliament, and for new elections.[116] Yet by the time that the Provisional Government renounced its sovereign prerogatives over Finland's internal affairs on November 6th, it was clear that the bourgeois parties were prepared to form a government without the socialists, and would not compromise. One day later, the Bolsheviks took power, and by their

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[112] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 236-260.
Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 129-137.
[113] Oskari Tokoi, "Finland's Tragic Past," *Great Speeches of the Day* 25, no. 5, (1958): 133.
[114] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 155.
[115] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 128-129.
[116] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 130-134.

revolution had rendered Finland's constitutional struggles a moot point. Again on orders from Lenin, their representatives met with FSDP leaders Karl Wiik and Kuusinen on November 8th and urged them to seize power at once. Kuusinen told the Bolsheviks, not untruthfully, that such was the party's plan—indeed they had only hours before selected a Revolutionary Council at their Congress—but he didn't mention that this plan "to take power into the hands of the organized workers" was a last resort if the bourgeois parties refused to accept the need for new elections; the influence of the party's Right-wing on the leaders had pushed them to find an irresolute compromise. Over the next few days, no coalition of Agrarians and socialists could be formed in parliament to oppose the bourgeois parties. The party's Revolutionary Council still carried the motion to continue "pressure" rather than take power on November 12th. But a different kind of political will prevailed at the SAJ Congress, where Haapalainen vowed, to much applause, that the "ruling power in the land must be suppressed…we have no other means but to prepare for battle…"[117]

The bourgeois parties, giving no quarter, refused to submit the socialist ultimatum for debate in parliament, and on November 13th, despite their fears of the imminent collapse of the Bolsheviks' revolution and of possible German intervention, the Revolutionary Council went with the decision of the SAJ Congress and issued a strike call the following day. Shops closed, trains stopped, armed workers carried out unsanctioned arrests, a handful of street battles were fought, but the Red Guard had military supremacy and the Home Guard was relatively unorganized and outnumbered: The workers were prepared to risk everything. A majority in the FSDP leadership responded to this situation by doubting their skills in administration. Veteran leaders Sirola and Salin saw the opportunity; the former reportedly "expressed confidence the workers could master the country."[118] But it was the Siltasaari group and the parliamentary delegation who were convinced the revolution would end in desertion by the international

[117] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 138-147. 148.
[118] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 150-156.
D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 279-286.

proletariat and disaster.[119] In twilight hours of November 16th, the party's Revolutionary Council deferred to its members from the SAJ Executive and the Red Guard, the latter of whom were adamant that power must be taken. Wiik explained, on behalf of the Revolutionary Council, that they could not "take part in something of which they did not believe any good would come." It was the closest the party organs came to an official split or to any sure grip on power. Devastatingly, but unsurprisingly, the SAJ and Red Guard leadership replied that they could not proceed without the support of their political party. Upton writes, in concurrence with 'Old' Bolshevik Victor Serge, that "the Finnish revolution aborted at 7:00 A.M. on 16 November."[120] Two days later, the strike was officially brought to a close, but this was not in fact the end of the revolutionary period, rather, it was the beginning of the rout of the workers' movement. The party had given over their impetus to the counterrevolution.[121] The crippling, chilling, and disorienting effect of the evasiveness of the leadership—of whom Kuusinen could perhaps be considered the premier example—was captured well in his self-criticism of his actions at this crucial turning point:

> We prevented the formation of these eddies by countermanding the general strike … This caused discontent and even exasperation amongst the working masses … dangerous for the future class struggles of the workers: confidence in the party leaders was to a great extent lost. … The awakened mistrust and hostility made themselves felt in the sequel as a nightmare during the whole course of the Revolution. In this way there was sown in November the seed of the April débacle. The Party Congress, which met a few weeks after the general strike, felt that already the crest of the revolutionary wave was beginning to fall under the influence of various cross winds. … We Centrists wanted, above everything, to keep the party together, and we "succeeded." In the joint resolution there was no statement either for or against Revolution … but for the defense that had become necessary.[122]

Though the FSDP was never wholly abandoned by the Bolsheviks, nor the incensed and militant Finnish working class, their conduct during and after the November general strike was enough to earn them Lenin's judgment that "the Finnish social democrats are traitors. They do

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[119] D. G. Kirby, "The Finnish Social Democratic Party 1903-1918," 277-279.
[120] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 157.
Victor Serge, "Year One of the Russian Revolution," *Marxist Archive*, 1930, https://www.marxists.org/archive/serge/1930/year-one/ch06.htm.
[121] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 160-162. 177-178.
[122] Otto Kuusinen, "The Finnish Revolution: A Self-Criticism."

not want a revolution, though it is their duty."[123] Lenin and his comrades' position remained one true to internationalism and independence—not merely to national self-determination—to the need for the FSDP to voluntarily lead their own proletarian revolution. If the Finnish leadership thought the moment was unripe in November, within a few months it was very likely rotten. The German Imperial Army pushed deeper into the territory of the former Russian empire at the beginning of 1918, and the SPD, along with their splinter, anti-war Zimmerwald faction, remained inert. Under these conditions, the Bolsheviks could not long afford to stall the withdrawal of their forces at the Brest-Litovsk negotiations, despite the bulk of their Finland-stationed soldiers having already departed in December. The Finnish bourgeoisie went on the offensive by nationalizing their German-trained army of Jägers on January 25th—an official declaration of war on their socialists. When the party at last, defensively, reactively challenged them, it turned out less like revolution, and more like a poorly executed, and tragic, military campaign. It ended in holocaust.[124] From November 1917 onwards, the FSDP leadership proved to be faithful traitors of a kind with those who voted with the SPD on August 4th, 1914; orthodox Marxist (counter)revolutionaries who betrayed themselves for the idea of a revolution which could be won in advance.

When the Attempt to Change the World Miscarried[125]

Finnish socialists founded a party on the model of Second International Social Democracy. To the Second International Socialist Parties, Marxism meant two things. Or, more precisely, its critique of previous attempts to achieve socialism had produced two major historical lessons or laws. To achieve socialism, Marxists thought, the indispensable conditions were: 1) The need, worldwide, for independent, unified organizations of the working class and

[123] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 186-187.
[124] Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918,* 193-305. 335-351. 392-395. 478-514. 522-523.
[125] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, (New York: Continuum, 1973), 3.

socialist intellectuals, or their duty to form their own parties—mass socialist parties—and 2) the need for these parties to facilitate the working class' capture of political power by a fundamental, revolutionary transformation of the preponderance of democratic-liberal, capitalist states into an international, radically democratic, radically liberal workers' state—the dictatorship of the proletariat. By joining the International, the FSDP became part of the living history of these Marxist postulates.

The two comprehensive, English language, mid-twentieth histories which this thesis draws upon are not ignorant of Marxism, nor even particularly hostile to it. In fact, again and again, they come up against its problems. But to greatly oversimplify the enormity of the question they pose: In the work of Anthony Upton, he basically denies that the FSDP was willing to be revolutionary—its leadership did not want revolution, they were indecisive, and they used the theory of Marxism against their cause. David Kirby, on the other hand, argues that it was revolutionary pressure from below, from inside the party which forced the party's leadership to become revolutionists in circumstances where they could not succeed. In these works, one finds the two sides of revolution's aporia: it came too soon and too late. This antinomy was formulated by Second International radical Rosa Luxemburg in her critique of the German revolution when she asked: "Was it a case of raging, uncontrollable revolutionary energy colliding with an insufficiently ripe situation, or was it a case of weak and indecisive action?"[126]

This thesis cannot answer this question, except by providing Luxemburg's own: it was both. By practicing strict abstention from governing or reforming through the capitalist state while participating in its institutions, the party was preparing the workers to smash and replace this state with their own. Yet isolation bred in the leadership an allergy to risk and a climate of self-deception. By remaining steadfast in legal opposition until the calamitous revolutionary period swept over the world, the party was gathering strength to take power in concert with the

[126] Rosa Luxemburg, "Order Prevails in Berlin," *Marxist Archive,* 1919, https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1919/01/14.htm.

whole International, the workers of the world. Yet such parallel growth made the reverse image of the worldwide collapse of capitalist society into one of the destruction of the socialist movement itself. In short: the parties which were to become the training ground of the revolutionary, for whom the relationship of the movement to the goal is everything, also created the conditions for the opportunist, for whom the movement makes the goal impossible and unnecessary. Of these two tendencies, at the conclusion of the revisionist dispute, it was assumed that the latter was external to the Marxist leadership of the socialist movement. However, as was only fully revealed in the struggles at the outbreak of, and over the course of World War I, they proved themselves deeply intertwined. Understanding the history of the FSDP and other Second International parties requires opportunists and revolutionaries be taken together—for Marxists, they were symptomatic of the same *progress* of the socialist movement. In the Finnish case, it was precisely the developed, intellectual center of the revolutionary Marxist leadership that became counterrevolutionary in the unfolding crisis of the politics of the Second International.

Reconsideration of this history may never fail to give rise to the criticisms that these parties did not mean what they said or that they never had a chance—at least so long as Marxism remains a dead letter. Living as one does today, in a world without mass socialist parties and without Marxist politicians, it is difficult to imagine that there ever was a real possibility of world revolution; and even more difficult still, that for these revolutionary Marxists—Finnish or otherwise—everything was hanging on its trajectory and outcome. Compounding this problem, one finds that in the FSDP the controlling fraction of its leadership, at the “crest of the revolutionary wave,” had ceased to act like the midwife in the birth of a new world, and instead became convinced their society wasn’t due, their party wasn’t ready, and the workers were unable to take power. How could it be that, despite themselves and the proximity to their goal, the Finnish socialist leaders became reluctant defenders of the old world? From the revisionist dispute until the splits of 1914 to 1917, the Marxist socialists of the Second

International built parties and struggled within them on the premise that guarding against opportunism was their historical duty. This was no more or less true of the Center and Right-wing of the FSDP, who thought by forestalling an unprepared, anarchic revolution they worked to ensure a victorious, Marxist one. In light of the tragic arc of this history, the Marxist Left's critique stands out for its recognition of another, unrealized possibility:

> For the revolutionary, conditions have always been ripe. What in retrospect appears as a preliminary stage or a premature situation was once for a revolutionary a last chance for change. A revolutionary is with the desperate people for whom everything is on the line, not with those who have time. … mankind was not betrayed by the untimely attempts of the revolutionaries but by the timely attempts of the realists.[127]

It's not for this thesis to decide whether or not they were wrongheaded in their reasoning about the prospects of world revolution. Political judgment is never free from error, but the FSDP leadership refused the opportunity to take the leap. By halting their advance in a revolutionary period they had largely brought into existence—in the eyes of their followers and the Marxist Left—they were traitors to their cause; their abandonment of the revolutionary elements in Finland had done more damage than any counterrevolutionary army. "For a revolutionary movement," wrote Rosa Luxemburg, "to not move forward means — to move back."[128]

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[127] Max Horkheimer, "The Authoritarian State," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato & Eike Gebhardt, (New York: Continuum, 1982), 106.
[128] Peter Nettl, "The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a Political Model," 87.

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