Political Outbreaks against the Liberal Order (1917–1939)

Narratives, Practices and Celebrations

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Revolutionary symbols as emotional figures in 1918

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Tuomas Tepora

The poor Finnish people
breaks its chains
the chalice of suffering is already full.
Against brutal oppression
Raises from the land its army
The best sons of a noble people to fight.
(March of the Red Guards',
lyrics: unknown, 1917–1918)[1]

1. The Finnish Revolution and the Civil War, 1918

Since its annexation to the Russian Empire in the early nineteenth century, the Grand Duchy of Finland had enjoyed extensive autonomy. By the turn of the twentieth century, in line with the Russification policy of the multi-ethnic and administratively loose empire, Finland's privileges began to be weakened. This process occurred at the same time as nationalism, liberal ideas of citizenship and the workers' movement grew stronger and intertwined in Finland. In the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1905, which temporarily halted the centralising policy in the empire, the Grand Duchy of Finland became the first in Europe to introduce universal and equal suffrage in 1906. The autocratic tsar's veto rejected the social reforms proposed in the new Finnish Parliament (*eduskunta*), but the workers' Social Democrats were consolidated as the largest party in the country. This resulted in a situation in which the organised labour movement was by far the most popular political organisation in the country, but the reforms it was pushing for were blocked by the tsarist government and domestic bourgeois parties. At the same time, the non-socialists, consisting of the middle classes and farmers, also sought to defend the vestiges of Finnish autonomy and the national movement.

The revolutionary year of 1917 shattered Finland, which had remained peaceful during the world war. Finns had also been exempted from conscription to the Imperial Russian Army. After the fall of the tsarist regime in the February Revolution, Finns of all social groups joined Russians and other nationalities of the empire in celebrating the end of autocracy to the tune of

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the revolutionary anthem, 'La Marseillaise', but soon Finnish society began to gradually split into two and drifted into a maelstrom of strikes, lockouts and food shortages.[2] At the same time, the political situation changed dramatically, with visions of national liberation and the struggle for social direction overlapping. Domestic social splits and crumbling central power fed the unrest in the country. In the summer of 1917, the Social Democratic-led parliament sought to increase Finland's sovereignty by declaring the parliament as the holder and implementer of supreme power in Finland over the Russian provisional government, which had reigned following the overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II. However, the provisional government headed by Alexander Kerensky dissolved the Finnish parliament and the bourgeois parties were able to win the subsequent elections. The non-socialists were horrified by the ultra-democratic law promoted by the socialists, which would have bypassed the Senate and other potential rulers in favour of parliament in implementing supreme power, in essence violating the principle of the three branches of power. Bitterness grew and the socialists and bourgeoisie began to form armed groups. In the autumn of 1917, the Social Democrats considered their mandate to rule to have been 'stolen' by the bourgeois parties and the provisional government.[3]

Within a few months of the new parliament convening, the October Revolution brought the Bolsheviks to power and intensified the struggle in Finland, near the revolutionary hotspot of Petrograd. The Finnish socialists declared a general strike, and the Finnish government, headed by the middle-class parties, started to seek separation from Russia and declared independence in early December 1917. The Bolshevik government granted independence on the last day of 1917. They expected the Finnish socialists to do their share and perform a Finnish Revolution to free the Bolsheviks to secure the Revolution in Russia.

Many of the reforms that the socialists demanded, such as an eight-hour working day and equal suffrage also in municipal elections, were met after the general strike. Despite the concessions, the erosion of the legitimacy of power had already sent society on a path towards violent domestic conflict, and it was exasperated by hateful rhetoric in the press. The bourgeois Civil Guards began to arm themselves and the government subsequently declared them the state army. The successful Bolshevik coup in Petrograd breathed life into the idea of the Finnish Revolution, and without the Russian Revolution, there would have been no Revolution in Finland either. The collapse of central authority had created a power vacuum in Finland.[4] The conflict began as a socialist revolution at the end of January 1918 in the capital Helsinki and other industrial parts of Southern Finland.

Things moved quickly. Within a year of the February Revolution, the country had declared and gained independence from Russia by a decision of the bourgeois-majority parliament and was plunged into Civil War between factions delineated by social class. Simultaneously as the socialists seized control of Southern Finland, on the west coast the non-socialist Civil Guards

started to disarm Russian garrisons that were still stationed in the country. The bourgeois White government based in Vaasa on the west coast organised resistance against the Reds. The ensuing Finnish Civil War was an extension of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The Reds interpreted the war as a domestic rebellion against the powers-that-be, whereas the Whites wanted to portray it as a war of liberation from Russia despite the internal nature of the conflict. The Reds consisted primarily of industrial workers and rural labourers. The backbone of the Whites were independent farmers, the middle classes and the numerically sparse upper class.

Unlike in Russia, the revolutionaries in Finland suffered a defeat. The short war between the Reds and Whites had a grim outcome. In just over six months, more than 1 percent of the population of 3.2 million people died. Of the more than 37,000 who perished, more than three-quarters were Reds. Most casualties occurred outside battles during the political terror and especially during a few months after the war in POW camps due to malnutrition and disease, notably the Spanish flu pandemic.[5] The White victory, aided by the German military expedition to fill the void left by Russia, tied the Finnish regime first to the German Empire. A monarch of German heritage was initially proposed for the fledgling nation, but after Germany's capitulation in November 1918, Finland was declared a republic in 1919.

However, for about three months in early 1918, Southern Finland was ruled by the socialist Delegation of People's Commissars. Justice was dealt by revolutionary courts. The Red leadership tried to curb the outbreaks of Red terror. During their rule, the Red Finns received armed aid from across the eastern border, and some Russian soldiers joined the Red side. However, with a few notable exceptions, the Finnish revolutionaries did not identify themselves as Bolsheviks; rather, their ideological home was German social democracy. This made them anything but Bolshevik-like professional revolutionaries. Indeed, Anthony F. Upton has described them as the most miserable revolutionaries in the world when he studied the deliberations of the party leaders in the months and weeks before they took the initiative. In his characterisation, the party leadership meetings might well have been accompanied by Lutheran hymns.[6]

Of course, the party, the trade unions and the workers' associations mobilised to the sound of their own marches and battle songs. Compared to the party leadership, the radical Red Guards did not keep their bayonets in their sheaths, but were more prepared than the party ideologues to seize power after the October Revolution. No one could have imagined them singing hymns. From the socialist perspective, the experience of peculiar times became crystallised in revolutionary rhetoric, symbolism, images, and the commemoration of past exemplars, which proliferated following the spring of 1917.[7] They inserted and amplified meaning to the tumultuous events and rallied people around the flag. In late 1917, a marching song of the Red Guards had appeared. Initially known as 'The Revolutionary March', it celebrated the liberation of the 'great people of the East' from the yoke of slavery – that

is, the Bolshevik coup. The Red Guards took over the march in 1918.[8] There were many publications of ad hoc poetry and song pamphlets and even another song of the same name, the lyrics of which were sold in many editions on the streets.[9] However, 'The March of the Red Guards' was not a pompous march in terms of its tune. In fact, it was based on a well-known Swedish drinking song. In January 1918, the lyrics were changed: now the 'small Finnish nation' or 'poor Finnish people' broke their chains.[10] This song by an unknown author became one of the key symbols of the Finnish Revolution that was crafted in 1917–1918. The Whites noted the song, too, as evidence of Red madness.[11] Unlike many other Finnish revolutionary ad hoc songs that mobilised troops, it remained alive long after the war, including in popular culture. Namely, because of the defeat, the Finnish Red song tradition mainly concentrated on songs of sorrow and bitterness versed and sung in POW camps after the war.[12]

2. Emotional figures of the revolution

In this chapter, I will discuss – alongside songs and marches – other symbols of the Finnish Revolution and means of mobilising the troops and Red sympathisers, such as flags and funeral ceremonies, as well as publicly produced ideas for commemorating the martyrs of the Revolution. They were usually called 'heroes of freedom'. The Finnish Revolution was short-lived, with the fall of Red Finland within three and a half months by May 1918. Much of the research on Red symbolism and commemoration concentrates on analysing the mourning, trauma and victimhood of the defeated socialists, who faced extensive political violence and misery in POW camps after the war.[13] Concentrating on the short-lived revolutionary phase of the conflict allows me to look at symbols as emotionally charged figures and vehicles of mass mobilisation, violent propaganda, and the exhilarant expectation of social levelling. It should be noted, though, that the class hate and bitterness-infused revolutionary rhetoric against the ruling powers did not appear from nowhere; they had decades-long roots in the vocabulary of the workers' movement, reflecting the proletariat's sense of powerlessness in a rapidly modernising society.[14]

Revolutionary symbolism was multi-sensory and crystallised collective emotions. The brass-accompanied workers' marches and red flags, often experienced embodiedly, created a special experience of being part of a great change. On the other side, they terrified and frightened the White sympathisers; that was their purpose. Thus, symbolism merged with bodily practices.[15] However, it is worth remembering that much of the symbolism of the Revolution remained rhetorical. Songs were read and rehearsed from pamphlets and the pages of newspapers, and the red flag of the Revolution was not always flown in front of a workers' procession or on the roof of a workers' hall, but as a picture in a newspaper or, even more often, as a rhetorical image. The red flag functioned as an internalised and emotional object, which

I call an 'emotional figure'. Such figures are not just symbols or objects that passively reflect collective emotions, but are symbols, objectified ideas, and images through which people seek to perceive the world around them and give it meaning. Emotional figures guide feelings and may create them. They change over time as their meaning is redefined. They may be consulted for advice. Who should defend the purity of the revolutionary flag? In this way, emotional figures – such as group symbols, personality cults, monuments, geographical sites, or institutions marked by political emotions, like the Revolutionary Court of Justice – interact with the people they affect. Emotional figures act closely with 'figures of memory', which can be characterised as reservoirs of mnemonic meanings and cultural memory.[16] In the Finnish Revolution, the commemoration of the Paris Commune of 1871 formed a key figure of memory that also conveyed a set of exemplary experiences, 'communal' emotions, and an incentive to arm oneself.[17]

Historians of emotions use concepts such as emotional communities or emotional regimes to describe the process by which a community sets and constructs rules, norms and ways of expressing emotions. Emotional communities may be understood as more grassroots-based, loose, and intertwined communities that share an emotional coda. The emotional regime, in turn, is defined in a more political way as institutions that indicate and regulate emotional norms.[18] In this chapter, I see this process as always being an incomplete one, because the relationship between people and the communities they form, and between subordinates and authorities, is based on varying degrees of negotiation. Of course, in a black-and-white situation like a revolution or Civil War, there is less room for dialogue. Initially, ultra-democratic Red Finland was on its way to becoming a dictatorship when the socialist defeat approached, and the initially volunteer Red Guardsmen and women – there were about 2,000 women in the Guards – were supplemented by forced conscription in the final phase of the battles.[19] In this process, emotional figures played an important role not only in mobilising and indoctrinating people but also as symbols through which people sought to position themselves as actors in the vortex of world history. Emotional figures not only embodied and directed emotional responses, but also carried collective memories – particularly those rooted in domestic and international histories of revolution. They served as signposts as Finnish socialists found themselves part of the European revolutionary continuum.

3. Revolutionary exemplars – Red narrative

How did the Reds justify their seizure of power? I will leave aside the practical reasons, which were above all related to both the actual and perceived threat from the bourgeois side. Juha Siltala has argued that the parties to the Civil War 'created each other' in the rhetoric and experiences of social life in 1917–1918. Threats reinforced each other and the adversaries' ruthlessness. Their perceived evil and detachment from humanity seemed at worst

a survival of the fittest. In the logic of warfare, non-combat violence was associated with the pacification of the rear. Political violence served a clear purpose, yet strongly experienced and portrayed images of the enemy provided the justification and opportunity for lawless, reckless violence. From the Reds' perspective, obviously, they were not responsible for starting the war but were defending themselves against an armed bourgeoisie fighting to continue economic exploitation.

However, the enemy images created by the armed confrontation were influenced by a longer rhetorical tradition on the Red side that was based on the confrontation between the poor and the propertied classes. According to Risto Turunen, the language of Finnish socialism had changed from emphasising concepts borrowed from liberal ideas of the late nineteenth century, such as equality and the attainment of equal-rights citizenship, to a more conservative one because of the events of 1905. When the bourgeoisie attacked socialism with religious rhetoric, the socialist press and workers' associations responded by seeking to appropriate 'bourgeois' notions of religion and patriotism. Hate and aggression against the bourgeoisie increased after universal suffrage was introduced.[20] Despite great support in the parliamentary elections, reforms such as eight-hour working day did not progress until late 1917 due to the tsarist decrees and resistance from the Finnish middle-class parties, and the right to vote in local elections remained, until 1918, property-based, that is, in the hands of a few. For the socialists, it further testified to the inequalities in the distribution of power.[21]

The years 1917–1918 did not therefore bring anything fundamentally new to the message conveyed by the Reds, but the revolutionary years strengthened its emotional valence. The politicised concepts of the age-old deprivation, hunger, and oppression of the poor had reached their climax, and the people had risen in a final revolt against the propertied class: 'We have no choice but to win for our Revolution or die.'[22] During the war, the rhetoric of the last stand also and above all meant the mobilisation of the masses, which as the spring progressed felt increasingly urgent and coercive as the Whites advanced and the German Baltic Sea Division landed on the south coast. The 'employer of us all, the Revolution' did not grant guardsmen a holiday in April. The pressurised Red Guards could not 'grant private benefits', declared one of the Red Guard headquarters, thus underlining the collective duty of the revolutionary.[23]

According to the interpretation of international socialism, world history was simplified as a struggle between Labour and Capital. These concepts were not at all alien to the Finnish winter and spring of 1918.[24] The Revolution was justified by rationality and ideological continuity, which was self-fulfilling. The parliamentary system had hitherto not guaranteed real popular power, nor were its institutions sacrosanct; they were the product of the class relations of the time. Therefore, both in Russia and in Finland, a revolution had taken place that was part of the class struggle encompassing 'the whole history of mankind' and would lead to real democracy.[25] The

Finnish Revolution was part of the inevitable development of world history, even at its most advanced peak.

However, it was the declarations of the eradication of want and the pseudo-religiously inspired hope for a better tomorrow that appealed more to the emotions: 'When all is lacking, then the red robes will fly.'[26] The Revolution was about power, about the final reversal of power relations, which may have frightened also many of those in the Red ranks. The political violence carried out by the Red Guards at the beginning of the war disturbed the Red government, who feared that the violence was becoming out of control. In such a situation, visions of future prosperity and the legitimate voice of the workers in society created a better tomorrow. The struggle was for the collective rather than the individual good. Individual deeds were measured against their fruitfulness for the common good. The Revolution was about acting with clean weapons for a clean cause. It was important to create an image of oneself as acting for the good. For those who found themselves deep in the revolutionary whirlwind, being part of the revolutionary whole became an experience that momentarily may have freed them from the burden of individual decision-making and even moral pondering that would have been impossible in mundane life.

The Revolution was, alongside the fight against want and the sacrificial risk of death, romantically mediated. Revolution as a concept and lived experience became an emotional figure that constructed and reinforced the experience of the specificity of the times. People understood that they were living in the midst of historical, even mythical moments.[27] The contemporary example set by Russia was, obviously, the closest and most visible reference point. In Helsinki, the Red Guards took over the official residence of the Governor-General, the tsar's representative, as their headquarters. The guard leaders named it 'Smolna' after the Smolnyi Institute, where the Bolshevik government resided in Petrograd. The significance of the name in cultural memory is demonstrated in its survival after the Civil War. Today, the building houses the Finnish Government's assembly hall, and it is still colloquially known as Smolna.[28]

The Finns continued in the footsteps of the European revolutions. The French Revolution and the Paris Commune in particular stood out as models whose history was told by the workers' press. The history of the Paris Commune was also seen as a contemporary parallel to 'Prussian militarism', since the German invasion had contributed to the fall of the Commune and now it supported the Whites in Finland.[29] Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks valued the memory of the Paris Commune, which may have contributed to its resonance in Finland. There was no other socialist experiment that would have provided the revolutionaries in Russia and Finland a conclusive and tested model with which to work.[30] The historical and revolutionary mythology did so, and the failure of the short Commune in fact provided the revolutionaries with an opportunity to repair the past errors. Despite the past failures, revolutionary symbolism offered a stepping stone from which to leap to power.

History would prove their effort right. The Reds' opponents also realised the value of the Revolution in their propaganda and did not hesitate to put forward extreme conservative interpretations. A newspaper in a small White town equated the Red Revolution with the French Revolution: they were connected by a stream of blood.[31] Another bourgeois newspaper drew a parallel between the revolutions of 1848, the Paris Commune and the current situation in Finland. They resembled modern-day Saturnalia parties, in which slaves unable to rule took the place of their masters.[32] Not surprisingly, the mass cry of the working class to break the 'shackles of slavery' was echoed in a situation where the other side interpreted the situation as a revolt by the slave class.

Domestic history also provided role models. The most important of these was the peasant revolt of the late 1590s against the nobility and the strains of war. The conflict, known as the Cudgel War, was also linked to the struggle for the Swedish throne. Much of what is now Finland belonged to Sweden at the time. Jaakko Ilkka, the peasant leader who rebelled against the nobility, appealed to both sides of the Finnish Civil War. To the Reds, obviously, he represented the people's leader who had revolted against 'upper-class exploitation' and whose example led the guardsmen into battle against a more resourceful enemy, sparing no effort.[33] The body of the White Army, on the other hand, consisted of rural Civil Guards, so Jaakko Ilkka and his peasant warriors were a natural role model for them too. This was especially the case as the historical 'cudgel warriors' came from the most solidly White-supporting region.[34] The words put into the mouth of Jaakko Ilkka, 'no justice in the land is given to those who do not obtain it themselves', can be found as a slogan in the newspapers and speeches of both sides.[35] The Cudgel War had become a key reference point for Finnish nationalism at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the middle classes were searching for a point of identification with popular figures. The workers' movement had claimed Jaakko Ilkka in the early twentieth century.[36] It was therefore not surprising that the Cudgel War also became an object of collective remembrance during the Civil War, as the pre-modern conflict was reminiscent of a Civil War. Domestic history became an explicit theatre of interpretative conflict over historical meanings.

4. The red flag

The revolutionary nature of the colour red stretches back to the French Revolution, but the international workers' movement made it known as the symbol of the proletariat in the nineteenth century. In Finland, the red flag became widespread as a workers' symbol after 1905. Nevertheless, even during the February Revolution, the bourgeoisie could still show the fever of liberation through the colour red. Soon afterwards, red became strongly associated with socialism and, after the 'bloody mockery' of the Civil War, the red colour of the workers was ultimately one of the reasons why, after the end of the Civil War in May 1918, the colours of the Finnish flag became

blue and white, rather than the red-dominated colour of the Finnish coat of arms. Blue and white were the symbols of the conservative Finnish national movement. However, the struggle over the Finnish flag and the group experiences associated with the different flags are a story in their own right and are presented elsewhere.[37]

Imperial power had tightly controlled the public display of flags showing symbols that were not imperial or Russian. After the February Revolution of 1917, red flags and other workers' banners filled the streets of cities in numerous demonstrations. Tens of thousands of Russian soldiers stationed in the country also marched beneath red flags. Through their own banners, the workers reflected and amplified their feelings and their concrete demands for shorter working hours, better wages, unemployment benefits, or the right to land. Workers' halls were decorated with red flags.

In Finland, one could tear not only a blue and white flag but also the red flag from the Russian tricolour. Many of the bourgeoisie, however, used the lion flag of the Finnish coat of arms, which was also primarily red, as a symbol of freedom.[38] In Russia, red flags were made for the February Revolution by tearing the Russian tricolour or, for example, by using red pieces of clothing, but sometimes provinces adopted the national colours for the Revolution as well. However, the red flag was so strong that it became the *de facto* national flag early in 1917. The two-headed eagle was torn from public buildings and the flags of troops and other imperial institutions.[39] This was also the case in Finland.

The different flags as symbols of Finland and the Revolution were not only objects that framed numerous civic celebrations and public events. Flags were also powerful images. They appeared in print in newspapers and on postcards, and the message conveyed by the flags also powerfully put the feelings of the Revolution and national liberation into words.

In the late autumn of 1917, a heated debate spread in the press about what the Finnish flag should look like. The discussion revealed the multiplicity of ideas and identities in the country, which were divided along language split between Finnish and Swedish speakers and intra-middle-class divides concerning political allegiances. The socialists satirised the debate because, from their perspective, the bourgeoisie concentrated in the discussion on secondary matters at a time when society was falling apart and real issues were waiting to be resolved:

> But while the country's bourgeoisie is arguing about a rag on a stick, there is the burning question in the minds of Finland's 100,000 tenant farmers, which those who have had the power and opportunity have not resolved in ten long years, but which has been brewing in the meantime and will resolve itself by its own efforts.[40]

This is why the workers waved the pure red flag, argued the quoted author. Just before the Revolution began, author Algot Untola, one of the most

visible propagandists on the Red side, suggested that the Finnish flag could show a skinny cow being milked by a fat member of the bourgeoisie and a priest.[41]

The beginning of the seizure of power was announced by raising a red lantern on top of the tower of Workers' Hall in Helsinki. During the Revolution, the red flag itself legitimately served as the flag of Red Finland. The Reds would not come second to the Whites in their eagerness to rally around a flag. The flag was an object, a totemic figure of emotion that represented sanctity in the context of the Revolution. It was both a symbol and a transmitter of mass power, for it encapsulated the power of one's group cohesion into a single, charged symbol. At the same time, the flag also intimidated and clearly disgusted the enemy, but also highlighted its own potential for violence. The old military ideals of defending the flag and preserving its purity were also part of the revolutionaries' repertoire. The red flag became a symbol of sacrifice, its power strengthened by the blood spilled for it. At the end of the war, the victors sought to impose all violence and evil on the workers, which is why the use of red flags was controlled, restricted, or completely banned during the interwar period.[42]

The flag was a physical object, but also – and above all – an image, an emotional figure par excellence. As physical objects, the workers' flags were most prominent in funeral processions and on the graves of the 'heroes of freedom' during ceremonies. Funeral processions in the major cities were spectacular events that also demonstrated strength to the non-socialist population. Red Guards, workers' associations, and trade union branches marched behind their own flags. The coffins were not wrapped in flags, but the coffins of some of the fallen Russians were painted red.[43] Red flags accompanied by workers' anthems in Red Guard ceremonies, marches and funeral processions created a powerful and embodied experience that expressed a mixture of shared feelings.

5. Red songs and revolutionary anthems

In the field of revolutionary songs, Finns borrowed much from their Russian comrades, but also drew on other European musical traditions and domestic lyrics. In Russia, the Russian-language 'La Marseillaise' was the signature song of the February Revolution. 'The Internationale' did not break through in Russia until the October Revolution.[44]

In Finland, the equally popular 'La Marseillaise' could be joined by bourgeois-minded citizens during the February Revolution. From the beginning of the Civil War, there is even a story of Civil Guardsmen singing 'La Marseillaise' in northern Finland on their way to battle. In the White narrative, they fought against the Russian Bolsheviks and their Finnish henchmen, calling the war a 'War of Liberation'. 'La Marseillaise' therefore fitted in with the struggle of liberation from Russia.[45] As late as the end of March 1918, a newspaper in a White area cited the lyrics of 'La Marseillaise' in anticipation

of the final victory over 'the foetus of the Red Satan'.[46] While the Whites may have found meaning in 'La Marseillaise', it was more customary in the counter-revolutionary middle-class press to satirise the lyrics of 'La Marseillaise', a classic revolutionary anthem.

Prior to and during the war, however, 'La Marseillaise' became established as the central song of the Reds.[47] It was part of the international revolutionary symbolism and cultural memory that encapsulated the Finnish Revolution. Several Finnish versions of the song appeared. The slogans of 'La Marseillaise' were printed in newspapers and the familiar tune of the song itself was played at celebrations, rallies and funerals. The lyrics of 'La Marseillaise' also inspired the writers of ad hoc battle poetry and slogans: 'March on! When we make the road, the land will drink blood.'[48] The singing of 'La Marseillaise' expressed defiance and mass power. The working-class women of an industrial settlement in Central Finland sang it while they watched their husbands and sons being arrested by the Civil Guards in White-occupied territory.[49] 'La Marseillaise' accompanied manifested sentiments of radical social change. In the first weeks of the Revolution, strengthening Red power and the advancing spring seemed to reinforce each other. It seemed as if 'the whole spring world was flooded with the immortal freedom tunes of "La Marseillaise"'.[50]

'The Internationale' had its origins in the Paris Commune, and by the end of the nineteenth century, it had been established as a symbol of the international workers' movement. Its Finnish lyrics date back to 1905, when, in a period of social upheaval, even some non-socialists sang 'The Internationale'. After this, it soon became one of the central anthems played and sung at the events of the Finnish workers' movement. It was played alongside 'La Marseillaise' most often in various ceremonies in 1917–1918 and at the funerals of Red Guardsmen and women. The opening phrase of 'The Internationale' in Finnish translation reads 'Rise from the night of oppression, slaves of labour', and it became a central printed slogan. The Reds even airdropped a leaflet versed with lines from 'The Internationale' onto a White-controlled area. The aim was to inspire the workers in the area to revolt.[51]

As would be expected, the Finnish workers' movement did have its own established march, 'The Workers' March' (*Työväenmarssi*), which dates to the 1890s. The song remained important during the Revolution as part of the movement's continuity. Its opening line, 'March on! People powerful!', was a widespread slogan.[52] However, its lyrics were timid compared to the battle songs. After the war, in 1919, the workers' movement split into the Social Democrats and Communists. 'The Workers' March' remained – and remains today – a central song of the Social Democrats, but it was no longer part of the repertoire of the more radical left. They started to import and spread Soviet revolutionary songs.[53]

The workers' movement had a lively singing culture even before the tumultuous years of 1917–1918.[54] As a result of the October Revolution and the Finnish General Strike, printed songs began to be vigorously distributed. These often-melodramatic pamphlets or the so-called broadsides (*arkkiveisu*)

had proliferated in the late nineteenth century. The workers' song pamphlets produced in 1917–1918 contained both older workers' anthems and newer lyrics. Most of the new songs were written by amateurs, but there were some well-known journalists in the workers' movement who had earned their spurs as lyricists of workers' songs set to familiar melodies. While many of the songs were intended to entertain in the line of the broadside tradition, the bulk of the songs concerned contemporary events. These songs were intended to mobilise the masses, but also to serve as an aid to choirs and singers. Community singing played a central role in the workers' movement, both in Finland and in revolutionary Russia. The lyrics published in the pamphlets also served as occasional poetry, guiding people to sing and recite the words in their own private occasions at a time before recorded music. Lyrics or excerpts of lyrics were also widely published in newspapers, which were the main medium of information and propaganda.[55]

Most of the Finnish workers' battle songs and marches represented older ideological music or recent Russian imports. Most of their own new production was from 1917. The common features of the lyrics were an emphasis on the bloodthirstiness of the enemy, the desire for victory and the glorification of dying for a noble cause.[56]

Sami Suodenjoki has studied workers' ad hoc songs in 1917–1918 as vehicles of mass sentiment. Their familiar melodies, borrowed from older popular songs and marches, and catchy lyrics evoked and created emotional experiences, making the affections contagious.[57] Accompanied by a brass band and with flags flying, people moving and chanting in unison produced embodied and potentially powerfully sensations and experiences.[58] In this way, they were powerful and multi-sensory emotional figures. They crystallised and multiplied emotions, and they framed the experience of belonging to an oppressed class that had finally revolted against the centuries-old oppressor, the owning class.

The battle songs were intended to inspire courage in the Red Guardsmen who went to the front. The Red Guards are said to have sung the tune of 'The March of the Red Guards', mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, during their pre-war exercises. Other popular Red songs included the Polish-derived 'Varshavianka' (known in English as 'Whirlwinds of Danger') from the late nineteenth century and the Russian 'Barricade March', which was also sung at funerals.[59]

Reds and Whites shared some musical preferences. The workers did not play and sing 'Maamme' ('Our Land', 1848), which had already been established as the national anthem, but at least two other than socialist compositions from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were well-known on the Red side. Both were composed by Jean Sibelius, 'Finlandia' and 'Song of the Athenians'. 'Finlandia', for example, was played as the opening piece at a great workers' meeting at the National Theatre at the end of February 1918, where, in addition to representatives of the Finnish Red government, the People's Commissar for social welfare Alexandra Kollontai

from the neighbouring country spoke about the results of the Soviet government's activities.[60] 'Finlandia' was composed between 1899 and 1900, when the tsarist government began to restrict Finland's autonomy, and it had already achieved the status of a symbol of national resistance. 'Song of the Athenians' was also composed in 1899 and was based on an earlier poem by the Swedish poet Viktor Rydberg. The poem describes the heroic struggle of the ancient Athenians against an apparently overwhelming enemy. 'Song of the Athenians' was a relatively popular funeral song among the Whites but was also known among the Reds.[61] It was particularly known for its lyrics, 'It's beautiful to die when you fall bravely in front of your troops/Fighting for your country, for your tribe.' The romantic call for sacrifice for one's country resonated with White patriotism, but the writers in the Red press did not hesitate to reflect on the significance of its lyrics, either. It seemed that the song's exhortation for selfless sacrifice had now taken on a new revolutionary meaning. Indeed, the lyrics of 'Song of the Athenians' were often rephrased by the Reds. In the obituaries of the fallen, it was 'beautiful to die for the cause' or 'for the oppressed' rather than for the country.[62]

6. Heros' funerals – celebrating the revolution

The Reds declared the Red Guardsmen and women who fell in battle as heroes of freedom or heroes of the Revolution. The more religious term, 'martyr', was not unknown either. Since the Civil War ended in a Red defeat and most of the victims died outside the battlefield, the commemoration of the victims rather than the heroes has been central to the Red remembrance. After the war, the Social Democrats renounced the Revolution and focused on commemorating the disproportionate number of 'innocent' victims. Communists remembered the Red victims with vigour but insisted on the legitimacy of the Revolution. In this way, the fallen were by definition part of the victims of White tyranny.[63]

During the Civil War, however, the Reds designed burial grounds and memorials for the heroes of the Revolution. As mentioned earlier, in the largest cities, the burials of the fallen Red Guardsmen and women became spectacular events, framed by flags and songs, with a march through the city to the designated burial ground. In Helsinki and Tampere, for example, the Reds buried their fallen in places that had already become known as workers' sites of celebration. After the war, the victors moved the remains from these burial grounds to cemeteries. The rationale was to prevent these grounds from becoming sites of pilgrimage.

At their most solemn, the funerals encapsulated the symbolism and message of the Revolution. Battle and revolutionary songs, and spectacular processions with flags and speeches emphasising the selflessness of the revolutionary heroes formed an impressive ensemble in the largest cities. The funerals were thus in themselves multi-sensory emotional figures, the setting for which provided a forum for transforming grief into a form of elevated

determination.[64] They demonstrated the power of the masses, and the processions aroused fear among the bourgeoisie. After the defeat of the socialists, the bourgeois population of Red Finland recalled the funeral processions accompanied with songs and slogans with feelings of disgust. 'La Marseillaise' and 'The Internationale' were played and the Reds marched with their 'hearts and lips full of curses and cries of vengeance'.[65]

The funeral provided an opportunity to ridicule the Lutheran Church, a staunch supporter of the Whites. Workers' leaders and journalists, and Red Guard commanders usually replaced clergymen in the ceremonies. Sometimes the relatives of the Red fallen wanted a priest to be present, especially in more rural areas.[66] Both the Whites and the Reds tended to bury their own fallen in their home parishes. While the socialists preferred their own burial grounds in the biggest cities, the churchyard was the most natural burial place in smaller municipalities in Red-occupied areas.

One of the most impressive funeral orations satirising Christian ceremonies was given by playwright Elvira Willman in Kotka at the end of February 1918. The Red fallen were buried in the churchyard. The local vicar attended the burial, presumably because some of the relatives of the fallen had wished so. At the graveside, Willman proclaimed that the workers did not need prayers. The Bible was henceforth written in a new language. She replaced the blood of Christ with the blood of the heroes of freedom: 'As often as you drink it, you drink the blood of the heroes of freedom.' The event ended with 'The Internationale'. The indignant vicar was heard to announce that such a spectacle was not to be repeated.[67]

More traditional Red funeral and sacrificial rhetoric was represented by speeches and writings emphasising the importance of the sacrifice, and the final rise of the 'slaves of labour'.[68] The grave did not frighten those fighting for the Revolution.[69] The warrior of the Revolution was a harsh but just judge who, when he fell, became a martyr of the Revolution. Every Red Guardsman and woman had to remember that they were a small part of the millennial struggle of the oppressed class and a small part in the inevitable evolution of history. Thus, a revolutionary warrior did not bargain for life like a cheap mercenary.[70]

In the end, only about a tenth of the Red fallen were able to be ceremoniously buried in their home municipalities. Particularly during the retreat at the end of the war, the majority were buried in the field. Victims of the political violence that followed the conflict were usually buried at or near execution sites. Those who died in POW camps were buried in mass graves in the camps.

We are now breaking the chains of the slaves,
That's why we're eager to die too!
And when the Revolution is won,
Finland's freedom is at hand!

('The March of Häme Red Guard',
lyrics: Kaskinikki)[71]

7. Conclusion

We do not know what Red Finland would have been like if the socialists had succeeded in their Revolution. Moreover, it is quite possible, if not probable, that an independent socialist Finland would not have survived for very long in the neighbourhood of Soviet Russia.

What we are able to portray is what the Revolution looked, sounded, and even felt like in Finland in the winter and spring of 1918. In this chapter, I have discussed the symbolism and ceremonies of the Finnish Revolution through the concept of the figure of emotion. Revolutionary, often multi-sensory symbolism and practices gathered and crystallised the Reds' message and formed an integral part of the revolutionary experience.

Central to the Finnish Revolution was the rhetoric that justified it. It was anchored in both international and domestic historical exemplars and revolutionary symbolism. Physical symbols and multi-sensory ceremonies also, and above all, functioned as rhetorical images conveyed by the press.

The Reds justified their seizure of power by framing it as self-defence against an armed and vicious bourgeoisie seeking to crush the working classes. Emphasising the collective good over individual benefit, the revolutionaries sought to overturn power dynamics and create a better future for all, drawing on historical and mythical parallels to bolster their cause.

As emotional figures, the red flags and international and domestic revolutionary and battle songs created the central symbolic landscape of the Revolution. The power of the red flag, wielded at mass rallies and solemn ceremonies alike, encapsulated and amplified the emotions and unity of the revolutionary movement, transcending mere fabric to embody the collective struggle for a better future. The evolution of revolutionary songs in Finland reflected a blend of international influences, imports from the Russian Revolution and domestic ad hoc production. Through their tunes and lyrics, these songs served as powerful conduits of emotion, galvanising the masses and framing the experience of societal upheaval and class struggle.

The commemoration of the fallen Red Guardsmen and women reflects a complex interplay of memory and ideology. While the aftermath of the Civil War saw a shift towards commemorating victims rather than heroes, the funeral rituals during the conflict served as potent symbols of revolutionary intensity. Through funeral processions, speeches and songs, the Reds imbued their fallen comrades with martyrdom and sacrifice, reinforcing the narrative of a struggle against White tyranny.

Notes

1 Jukka Gronow, *Laulukirja: Työväen lauluja kahdeksalta vuosikymmeneltä* (Helsinki: Tammi, 1971), 38. Lyrics translated by the author.

2 Risto Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Pertti Haapala, *Kun yhteiskunta hajosi* (Helsinki: Painatuskeskus, 1995); Juha Siltala, 'Being Absorbed into an Unintended War', in *The Finnish*

Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy, eds. Tuomas Tepora and Aapo Roselius (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 52–56.

3 Siltala, 'Being Absorbed', 52–55.

4 Alapuro, *State and Revolution*, 143–148, 185–189, and passim.

5 *War Victim Sampo 1914–1922 Database* [https://sotasurmat.narc.fi/en/]; Marko Tikka, 'Warfare and Terror in 1918', in *The Finnish Civil War 1918*, 118; Pentti Mäkelä, *Vuosien 1917–1919 kulkutaudit, espanjantauti ja vankileirikatastrofi: Historiallisepidemiologinen näkökulma Suomen väestön korkeaan kuolleisuuteen* (Helsinki: Valtioneuvoston kanslia, 2007), 9–26 and passim.

6 Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution, 1917–1918* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 150.

7 Tuomas Tepora, *Sinun puolestas elää ja kuolla: Suomen liput, nationalismi ja veriuhri 1917–1945* (Helsinki: WSOY, 2011), 37–39.

8 Gronow, *Laulukirja*, 15, 38–39.

9 Jali Joutsen, *Punakaartilaisten marssi* (Helsinki: Työläiskynäilijän kustannusliike, 1917); Sami Suodenjoki, 'Popular Songs as Vehicles for Political Imagination: The Russian Revolutions and the Finnish Civil War in Finnish Song Pamphlets, 1917–1918', *Ab Imperio* 20, no. 2 (2019): 228–250.

10 Gronow, *Laulukirja*, 38.

11 *Helsingin Sanomat*, 15 April 1918, 3.

12 Gronow, *Laulukirja*, 15, 44–51.

13 Anne Heimo and Ulla-Maija Peltonen, 'Memories and Histories, Public and Private: After the Finnish Civil War', in *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, eds. Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (London: Routledge, 2003), 44–48; Tauno Saarela, 'To Commemorate or Not: The Finnish Labor Movement and the Memory of the Civil War in the Interwar Period', in *The Finnish Civil War*, 331–363.

14 Risto Turunen, *Shades of Red: Evolution of the Political Language of Finnish Socialism from the Nineteenth Century until the Civil War of 1918* (Helsinki: Finnish Society for Labour History, 2021), 96–311.

15 Cf. Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012): 193–220.

16 Tuomas Tepora, 'The Image of Marshal Mannerheim, Moral Panic, and the Refashioning of the Nation in the 1990s', in *Lived Nation as the History of Experiences and Emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*, eds. Ville Kivimäki, Sami Suodenjoki and Tanja Vahtikari (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 351, 260, 370; Tuomas Tepora, *Sankari ja antisankari: Mannerheim-kultin pitkä vuosisata* (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2023), 69. On figures of memory and collective remembrance as a cultural reservoir, see Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125–133; Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1–25.

17 *Työmies*, 17 February 1918, 3; *Työmies*, 20 February 1918, 5; *Työ*, 16 March 1918, 1; Siltala, 'Being Absorbed', 78–79.

18 William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 124–129; Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 1–29; Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, transl. Keith Tribe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 67–71, 303–304.

19 Jussi T. Lappalainen, *Punakaartin sota*, vol. 1 (Helsinki: Opetusministeriö, 1981), 158–159, 162–165; Tiina Lintunen, 'Women at War', in *The Finnish Civil War*, 201.

20 Tapio Bergholm, 'Edistysusko ja puolueviha', in *Työväki ja tunteet*, eds. Elina Katainen and Pirkko Kotila (Helsinki: THPTS, 2002), 181–196; Anna Rajavuori, *Esityksen politiikka: Sosialistinen agitaatio keskisuomalaisella maaseudulla 1906–1908* (Helsinki: THPTS, 2017), passim; Turunen, *Shades of Red*, 444–467.
21 Kati Katajisto, *Sodasta sovintoon* (Helsinki: Otava, 2018), 23–27.
22 *Kansan Lehti*, 9 March 1918, 6.
23 *Toveri*, 5 April 1918, 1.
24 *Ajuri*, 1 February 1918, 19–20; *Työmies*, 26 February 1918, 4; *Sosialidemokraatti*, 1 March 1918, 4; *Hämeen Voima*, 2 March 1918, 2; Tuomas Tepora, 'The Mystified War: Regeneration and Sacrifice', in *The Finnish Civil War*, 173.
25 *Suomen Kansanvaltuuskunnan Tiedonantaja*, 5 March 1918, 1.
26 *Kansan Lehti*, 6 February 1918, quoted in Maria-Liisa Kunnas, *Kansalaissodan kirjalliset rintamat eli kirjallista keskustelua vuonna 1918* (Helsinki: SKS, 1976), 76–77.
27 Tepora, *Sinun puolestas*, 62–75; Tepora, 'Mystified War', 169–173.
28 Tepora, 'Mystified War', 163.
29 *Työmies*, 17 February 1918, 3; *Työmies*, 20 February 1918, 5; *Työ*, 16 March 1918, 1.
30 Jay Bergman, 'The Paris Commune in Bolshevik Mythology', *The English Historical Review* 129, no. 541 (2014): 1412–1441.
31 *Kokkola*, 14 February 1918, 1.
32 *Mikkelin Sanomat*, 22 March 1918, 1–2.
33 *Suomen Kansanvaltuuskunnan Tiedonantaja*, 19 March 1918, 2, and 13 April 1918, 4; *Porvoon Työväen Tiedottaja*, 30 March 1918, 3.
34 *Pohjanlahti*, 29 January 1918, 2; *Keskisuomalainen*, 7 February 1918, 4; *Liitto*, 11 April 1918, 2.
35 *Suomen Kansanvaltuuskunnan Tiedonantaja*, 19 March 1918, 2; *Liitto*, 11 April 1918, 2.
36 Ilona Pikkanen, '"Sangen ajankohtainen Nuijasota": Kasimir Leinon Jaakko Ilkka ja Klaus Fleming (1901) vuosisadan vaihteen historiakulttuurissa', *Lähihistoria* 3, no. 1 (2024): 24–53.
37 Tuomas Tepora, 'Redirecting Violence: The Finnish Flag as a Sacrificial Symbol, 1917–1945', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 6, no. 3 (2007): 153–170; Tepora, *Sinun puolestas*, 37–113.
38 Tepora, *Sinun puolestas*, 37.
39 Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), passim., esp. 30–70; Richard Stites, 'Russian Symbols: Nation, People, Ideas', in *National Symbols, Fractured Identities: Contesting the National Narrative*, ed. Michael E. Geisler (Middlebury, VT and Lebanon, NH: Middlebury College Press and University Press of New England, 2005), 101–120.
40 *Työmies*, 30 December 1917, 5.
41 *Työmies*, 24 January 1918, 6.
42 Tepora, 'Redirecting Violence', 159–163; Tepora, *Sinun puolestas*, 93–104.
43 Ulla-Maija Peltonen, *Muistin paikat: Vuoden 1918 sisällissodan muistamisesta ja unohtamisesta* (Helsinki: SKS, 2003), 82; Outi Fingerroos, *Haudatut muistot: Rituaalisen kuoleman merkitykset Kannaksen muistitiedossa* (Helsinki: SKS, 2004), 344–345, 347–349.
44 Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 30–70; Dana L. Cloud and Kathleen Eaton Feyh, 'Reason in Revolt: Emotional Fidelity and Working Class Standpoint in the "Internationale"', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (2015): 309.
45 *Keskipohjanmaa*, 16 February 1918, 2.

46 *Ilkka*, 27 March 1918, 4.
47 *Turun Sanomat*, 3 January 1918, 3; *Eteenpäin*, 5 January 1918, 1.
48 *Työmies*, 17 February 1918, 6.
49 *Suomen Kansanvaltuuskunnan Tiedonantaja*, 1 March 1918, 3.
50 *Sosialisti*, 8 March 1918, 4.
51 *Työmies*, 9 February 1918, 7; Gronow, *Laulukirja*, 28–30.
52 For example, *Sosialisti*, 8 March 1918, 4.
53 Gronow, *Laulukirja*, 16, 23–24.
54 For a contemporary collection of workers' marches and songs, see *Työväen laulukirja* (Helsinki: Työväen sanomalehti, 1917).
55 Suodenjoki, 'Popular Songs', 228–250.
56 Vesa Kurkela, 'Sisällissodan laulut', in *Sisällissodan pikkujättiläinen*, eds. Pertti Haapala and Tuomas Hoppu (Helsinki: WSOY, 2008), 431–433.
57 Sami Suodenjoki, 'Arkkiveisut työväen kumouskokemusten muovaajina', in *Työväen taide ja kulttuuri muutosvoimana: Kirjoituksia työväen musiikista, kirjallisuudesta, teatterista ja muusta kulttuuritoiminnasta*, eds. Saijaleena Rantanen, Susanna Välimäki and Sini Mononen (Helsinki: Tutkimusyhdistys Suoni ry & THPTS, 2020), 54–59; Suodenjoki, 'Popular Songs', 228–250.
58 Cloud and Feyh, 'Reason in Revolt', 303–304.
59 Gronow, *Laulukirja*, 39–41.
60 *Sosialisti*, 20 February 1918, 1.
61 Juha Siltala, *Sisällissodan psykohistoria* (Helsinki: Otava, 2009), 388; Tepora, 'Mystified War', 175.
62 *Kansan Lehti*, 2 March, 2, and 4 March 1918, 4; *Työmies*, 13 March 1918, 1, and 3 April 1918, 1; *Porvoon Työväen Tiedottaja*, 30 March 1918, 3; *Työ*, 6 April 1918, 3.
63 Saarela, 'To Commemorate', 345–360; Tepora, *Sinun puolestas*, 131–134.
64 Cf. Margrit Pernau and Imke Rajamani, 'Emotional Translations: Conceptual History beyond Language', *History and Theory* 55, no. 1 (2016): 46–65. See also Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice', 193–220.
65 *Kotimaa*, 19 April 1918, 4.
66 Lappalainen, *Punakaartin sota*, vol. 1, 201; Tepora, 'Mystified War', 173.
67 *Eteenpäin*, 28 February 1918, 4; *Suomen Kansanvaltuuskunnan Tiedonantaja*, 2 March 1918, 5; *Etelä-Suomi*, 7 May 1918, 3; more on Elvira Willman's satire on 'bourgeois religion', see *Kansan Ääni*, 28 February 1918, 4.
68 *Kansan Lehti*, 13 March 1918, 5.
69 *Työ*, 25 February 1918, 1; *Työmies*, 26 February 1918, 4.
70 *Sosialidemokraatti*, 1 March 1918, 2.
71 *Hämeen Voima*, 5 March 1918, 3. Lyrics translated by the author.

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