

ARTICLES/СТАТЬИ

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THE ORIGINS OF THE KARELIAN WORKERS' COMMUNE, 1920-1923: NATIONALISM AS THE PATH TO COMMUNISM

The establishment of the Karelian Workers' Commune was much more a consequence of Bolshevik foreign and domestic policy (*Realpolitik*) than a result of Marxist theories or Leninist ideological principles. The Soviet system of the 1920s was not so much a result of ideologically driven decision-making as it has some times been defined. This does not mean that ideology was irrelevant. But its role was rather a sort of matrix or model of decision-making than a decisive source of policy-making. The political need to stabilize the new Soviet state and to pacify the international situation forced the Bolsheviks to carry out a conciliatory policy toward their neighbors as well as toward national minorities and the peasants. In Karelia two decisive factors dominated: the political and military pressure of Finland and the general dissatisfaction of the Karelian population. Under those circumstances the Red Finns, emigrants from Finland in 1918, dominated Karelia during its first fifteen years. Finnish-Karelian nationalism and the weakness of the central government were the two most important reasons why Karelia obtained politically and economically broader autonomy than any other autonomous region in the Soviet Union in the 1920s.¹⁷

The Karelian question acquired a new dimension following the independence of Finland in 1917. In a general way Karelia had been a prominent subject of Finnish nationalism. The *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic, was formed from poems collected in North Karelia (East Karelia from the Finnish point of view),

17. The article is based on my research in a project financed by the Academy of Finland. I have written more about the political history of Karelia, e.g., Markku Kangaspuro, "Russian Patriots and Red Fennomans," in *Rise and Fall of Soviet Karelia*, ed. by Antti Laine and Mikko Ylikangas (Helsinki: Kikumora Publications, 2002), pp. 24-48; Markku Kangaspuro, "Karelian Resistance to Finnish Korenizatsiia Policy in Soviet Karelia in the 1920s and 30s," in *Studia Slavica Finlandensia*, Tomus XVII, Natalia Baschmakoff, Paul Freyer, eds. (Helsinki: Institute for Russian and East European Studies, 2000), pp. 87-103; Markku Kangaspuro, "Finskaia epokha Sovetskoi Karelii," in *V sem'e edinoi. Natsional'naia politika partii bolshevikov i ee osushchestvlenie na Severo-Zapade Rossii v 1920-1950-e gody*, Timo Vihavainen and Irina Takala, eds. (Petrozavodsk: Izdatel'stvo Petrozavodskogo Universiteta, 1998), pp. 123-60; Markku Kangaspuro, *Neuvosto-Karjalan taistelu itsehallinnosta. Nationalismi ja suomalaiset punaiset Neuvostoliiton vallankäytössä*. (Helsinki: SHS, 2000). See also Antti Laine, "Where East Meets West: The Last Stand of Finns and Karelians in Contemporary Karelia?," *Nationalities Papers*, 29, no. 1 (2001): 53-67.

in the early nineteenth century. For Finnish national romantics the *Kalevala* and Karelia were especially significant symbols of ancient Finnish culture. The *Kalevala* made Finnish civilization comparable to other European cultures in its possession of a national epic. The *Kalevala* located the golden age of the Finnish nation mostly in North Karelia. But Karelia had also been the source of ancient Russian epics, the *bylinas*. For this reason it has been in many ways the symbolic as well as physical battleground of Finnish and Russian nationalism.¹⁸

The Red Finns living in Russia after Finland's civil war of 1918 also shared this attitude to national identity. The short-lived socialist government, the Finnish People's Republic, and the new Soviet regime came to an agreement concerning their new relationship in March 1918. The way they sought to settle the border between Finland and Soviet Russia was significant. The Finnish side saw the current line as historically unjust, separating the kindred peoples of Karelia and Finland. The parties agreed that the question could be quickly resolved by allowing the border to follow the national ethnic border of Karelia.¹⁹ The ethnic border of the Karelian and Russian population was, almost exactly, the Murmansk railway line, Karelian to the West and Russian to the East of it. The new boundary was never realized because the Whites and the Germans defeated Red Finland. The White Government had the same demands over Karelia as the Reds, but border changes were not within the interests of the Soviet regime if they entailed concessions to Finnish conservatives.

In the past Karelia had not been of any great importance for Russia until the moment the government built, with the help of Great Britain, the Murmansk railway through the region in 1916. When Russia lost Finland and the Baltic countries, it also lost its main ports on the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland. The Baltic fleet was stationed at the port of Kronstadt without free passage to the sea. After this the Murmansk port was the only secure transport route from St. Petersburg to the open sea. The railway was also the reason for the intervention of Allied Forces in Murmansk. Neither the Soviet regime nor the Allies had a positive attitude to White Finland's demands for Karelia because of the former Grand Duchy's close alliance with Germany.²⁰

In 1918-22 Finnish White activists (a group of former German trained jaegers and right wing militants) attacked Soviet North Karelia three times as well as Olonets (South Karelia) and Estonia. In Karelia their aim was to annex the area and in Estonia to fight the Red Army and secure benefits for Finland. The attack on Estonia in spring 1919 was successful. General Laidoner, Admiral Kolchak, along with Finnish troops forced the Red Army to withdraw from Estonia.

18. Hannes Sihvo, *Karjalan kuva* (Helsinki: SKS, 1973), pp. 354-61; A. William Wilson, *Kalevala ja kansallisuusaate* (Helsinki: Työväen sivistysliitto, 1985), pp. 33-34, 48, 67-70, 108.

19. Edward Gylling, "Ensimmäinen sosialististen tasavaltain välinen sopimus," *Kommunisti*, 1 (1928).

20. Alpo Juntunen, *Valta ja rautatiet* (Helsinki: Suomen historiallinen seura, 1997), pp. 45-47, 54, 147; Mauno Jääskeläinen, *Itä-Karjalan kysymys* (Porvoo-Helsinki: WSOY, 1961), p. 20; Stacy Churchill, *Itä-Karjalan kohtalo 1917-1922* (Porvoo-Helsinki: WS, 1970), pp. 87-88; 94-95; Jouko Vahtola, *Nuorukaisten sota. Suomen sotaretki Aunukseen 1919* (Helsinki: Otava, 1997), p. 41.

At the same time General Charles Maynard attacked the Red Army from the north via the Murmansk railway. The international situation made the time seem ripe for an attack on St. Petersburg and Karelia. On the Finnish side, General C. G. E. Mannerheim and his General Staff drew up plans for the attack and the political arrangements to follow. It was at this time that Lenin realized that Petrograd would be conquered by White troops if the Finnish army joined forces with them. The Finnish activists believed that by conquering Olonets, Petrozavodsk, and Lodeine Pole, they could force the Finnish government, the Entente, and the White Russians to accept the conquests. For this reason, the "Olonets campaign" was also planned as a part of an impending attack on St. Petersburg. The Finns wanted to conquer it before the White Russians, who harbored hostility toward Finland's independence, intervened. Ultimately the Finns were ready to carry out the attack without the support of the Western Powers.²¹

The campaign began in April 1919. The Finnish government supported the volunteer troops, meeting most of the costs and providing political support. But the adverse attitude of the Olonets Karelians towards the Finnish "liberators" proved disappointing. The Red Army along with Red Finnish troops defeated the campaign in the summer of 1919. The failure of the campaign and the severe losses of the White Russians in the summer and autumn of 1919 also changed the international situation. The political circumstances in Finland changed as well. In July 1919 the moderate K. J. Ståhlberg was elected as the first president of Finland rather than General Mannerheim. Ståhlberg favored the Entente and objected to intervention in Russia. At the same time England and France also decided to withdraw troops from Russia. They implied that they were no longer interested in involvement in the internal affairs of Russia and that the Baltic states must arrange their relations with Soviet Russia themselves. Ståhlberg understood that this would also be the fate of Finland.²²

January 1920 marked a decisive turning point. The Entente had dropped its embargo, a fact which initiated a new stage in Soviet relations with the West. By February 1920 the Red Army had taken under its control the whole of Karelia excluding two districts (*volosts*), Repola and Porajärvi.²³

At this stage, in late 1919 or early 1920, Edvard Gylling drafted his proposal for a Karelian Workers' Commune. He was a former member of the Finnish People's Republic and its delegate to the negotiations with Soviet Russia in February 1918. In late 1919 a young Finn, Erkki Veltheim, had visited Gylling in Stockholm and told him about his journey to Vardö in North Norway and to Karelia. The report of this undergraduate philosophy student inspired Gylling. Clearing the Finnish Whites and the Intervention troops from Karelia in order to

21. Vahtola, *Nuorukaisten sota*, pp. 30-31, 36, 41-45, 49-55, 68; Polvinen Tuomo, Heikkilä Hannu, Immonen Hannu. *J. K. Paasikivi. Valtiomiehen elämäntyö 2. 1918-1939* (Juva: Werner Söderström, 1992), pp. 16-20; Timo Vihavainen, "Suomalaisten arvioita Leninistä," in *Lenin ja Suomi, osa III* (Helsinki: Valtion painatuskeskus 1990), pp. 24-25.

22. Polvinen, *J. K. Paasikivi*, pp. 16-19; Vahtola, *Nuorukaisten sota*, pp. 30-33.

23. Churchill, *Itä-Karjalan kohtalo 1917-1922*, pp. 120-26, 132-42, 147; Polvinen, *J. K. Paasikivi*, p. 20.

establish Karelian-Finnish autonomy had long been on Gylling's mind. Now he deemed the international situation ripe for it.²⁴

The idea of a Karelian workers' commune

Edvard Gylling sent his proposal for the autonomy of Karelia to V. I. Lenin through the chairman of the Communist Party of Finland, Yrjö Sirola. There had also been another plan related to Gylling's. It was drawn up by the Commander-in-Chief of the Red Finns in Sweden, Jussi Railo – the so-called Northern War Plan. According to this plan, Red Finnish, Swedish, and Norwegian troops would attack Murmansk through North Finland, operate with the Red Army and Red Finns in clearing Murmansk and Karelia. In this way the idea of the Commune of Karelia would come to fruition, and it would also plant the seed of the Northern Scandinavian revolution. Railo sent two of his trusted aides to Karelia for negotiations with Red Finns and Bolsheviks in mid-January 1920. The plan had no realistic chance of success which Gylling foresaw. The Central Police Bureau (the Finnish secret police) arrested both of the Red couriers in Finland in February 1921. The desperate Commander-in-Chief committed suicide in January. Edvard Gylling and Stockholm's Bureau of the Communist Party of Finland ceased all military activities in Sweden. It was time to start to carry out Gylling's political plan for Karelia.²⁵

After the formation of a new Finnish government on March 15, 1920, it became possible on Finland's part to start peace negotiations with Lenin's government. Peace with Soviet Russia was the central point of the government's foreign policy. On April 8 Narkomindel (the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs) accepted the proposal for negotiations of Foreign Minister Rudolf Holsti. Negotiations started in Rajajoki (Sestra in Russian) four days later. The Western Powers had no interest in supporting the demands of Finland, and Russia had no reason to negotiate the future of Karelia. For the first time the Soviet regime controlled the situation in Karelia. On April 24, 1920 the Russian delegation left Rajajoki, accusing the Finns of demanding too much.²⁶

One central disagreement had been Finland's demand for a neutral demarcation zone between the border of Finland and the Murmansk railway. From the Russian side it was an absolutely unacceptable demand. The statement of the Military Revolutionary Soviet was unambiguous. The defense of the Murmansk railway demanded the presence of the Red Army there. It pointed out that the

24. Tukholman komitea (Stockholm's Committee). Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (hereafter RGASPI), f. 516, op. 2, 1920, d. 15, l. 18-20; Erkki Veltheim, Hmp 1642. Kansallis Arkisto, EK-Valpo I; more about the activities of Veltheim (in Great-Britain, and so on): Tauno Saarela and Kevin Morgan, "Salaperäiset suomalaiset ja Britannian kommunismin synty," in *Aave vai haave*, Tauno Saarela, *et al.*, eds. (Saarijärvi: THPTS, 1998), pp. 7-35.

25. Tukholman komitea (Stockholm's Committee). RGASPI, f. 516, op. 2, 1920, d. 15, l. 18-20; Matti Lackman, *Kommunistien salainen toiminta Tornion laaksossa 1918-1939* (Oulu: Pohjoinen, 1991), pp. 49-54, 118-23.

26. Polvinen, *J. K. Paasaviki*, pp. 22-24.

Finns had attacked the railway twice in recent years. The General Staff did not see any ethnographic or national reason for special arrangements in this area. It maintained that Finland had previously been a part of Russia's strategic defense system, but now it had the capability to threaten the Kola peninsula and the Murmansk railway.²⁷

Only two days after the failed negotiations between Soviet Russia and Finland, on April 26, Polish forces unexpectedly attacked Soviet Ukraine, and in May they captured Kiev. The Russians believed that this was a part of a larger intervention plan against them coordinated by the Foreign Minister of Great Britain, Lord Curzon. They thought that this was also the explanation for the inflexible attitude of Finland in the peace negotiations. In fact, Poland's attack came as a surprise to Finland and Britain, although Russia did not believe this. She was afraid that Finland would join in the attack. Because of this fear, Russia was eager to neutralize Finland by opening negotiations again. Fortune had intervened, and a new negotiation round started on May 11, 1920.²⁸

Gylling's proposal for Karelia was translated for the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs on March 24, 1920.²⁹ He mentioned in his cover letter to Yrjö Sirola that he had worked out the proposal for the purposes of the Rajajoki peace negotiations.³⁰

Gylling's starting point was that the Commune should have national autonomy led by Red Finns, form an integral economic unit, and serve as a base for revolution in Scandinavia. The Commune would consist of Karelia and the Kola Peninsula. It would have self-determination on internal matters, such as economy and education. In the sphere of social order, national economic questions, and defense policy, it would be a part of Soviet Russia like the "Commune of Petrograd." Gylling also mentioned to Sirola the example of the Soviet Ukraine and the Northern Commune as examples of autonomous regions within the Soviet sphere.

The national composition of the Commune should be half Russian and half Karelian. Gylling had noticed the "nationalistic bias" among the Karelian population. For this reason a certain amount of Karelian nationalism and Finnish ideology should be allowed "within permitted limits" in the Commune. He gave assurances that such a policy would eliminate the nationalistic agitation of Finland.

27. Shaposhnikov, *Nachal'nika Polevogo Shtaba Revoliutsionnogo Voennogo Soveta Respubliki* 30.3.1920, Moskva. Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter AVPRF), f. 0135, op. 3, p. 103, d. 2, l. 1; Generalnogo Shtaba, za Voennogo Komissara Shtaba Klin. 4.4.1920 za Nachalnika Polevogo Shtaba Revoliutsionnogo Voennogo Soveta Respubliki. The above dela, l. 8, 8ob.

28. Polvinen, *J. K. Paasaviki*, pp. 24-25.

29. Karelskaia Kommuna. Pismo tov. E. Gyllinga iz Stokgolma tov. Sirola. AVPRF, f. 135, 1920 g., op. 4, p. 6, d. 24, l. 19-24. The original proposal has not been cited before. Arvo Yläräkkö and others have used a different German version of it found in Stockholm. In broad outline it is comparable to the original proposal. But still there are some important differences. Arvo Yläräkkö, *Edward Gylling. Itä-Karjalan suomalainen rakentaja* (Helsinki: Otava 1976), pp. 347-49.

30. Werter Genosse. AVPRF, f. 135, 1920 g., op. 4, p. 6, d. 24, l. 24-25.

The coming revolution in Finland would acquire a particular national color, Gylling wrote. Tolerance for Karelian nationalism would also have a favorable effect on small farmers in Finland. Rural support had particular importance in the reasoning of Red Finns, because the lack of it had been one crucial reason why the Reds had failed in the Finnish civil war in 1918.

For Gylling the establishment of the Commune was also one step towards the Scandinavian revolution. He stressed that in an economic and geographic way the Commune would be a part of Scandinavia. This relationship would encourage both legal and illegal communist work in Scandinavia. In addition, it would be possible to establish a Scandinavian Red Army regiment consisting of two thousand Swedish and Norwegian volunteers. Gylling believed that particularly northern Sweden and northern Norway were fertile ground for revolutionary and military work. The Finns would learn Soviet administrative practices and get military training in the Commune.

Gylling's final aim was to create an independent Soviet Republic of Scandinavia. It would be possible to carry out the Scandinavian revolution separately from the West European revolution, Gylling argued. He believed that Red Scandinavia, which was surrounded by Soviet Russia, had no reason to be afraid of intervention. On the contrary it would have an enormous effect on Western Europe. In addition, it would be able to keep European timber production under its control. Gylling further proposed that the leaders of the Commune should be firm supporters of national autonomy. This was indispensable in order to prevent the growth of Karelian separatism. Events developed in a fruitful direction from Gylling's point of view.

The eve of the Dorpat peace negotiations.

After Poland attacked Ukraine, the Soviet leadership believed that the situation was worse than it really was. To address the situation in Karelia, it invited Gylling to Moscow in late April 1920.³¹ Lenin wanted to talk with him about the Karelian question directly. The reason was evident. Chicherin had alerted the party leader of Petrograd, Grigori Zinoviev, about the situation in Karelia already on March 19, 1920. This was at the time that the Soviet government was preparing for the Rajajoki peace negotiations. "White Finns spread their propaganda among the Karelians, but we cannot do anything." Chicherin warned that an anti-Soviet mood was widespread among the population.

After the Rajajoki negotiations were broken off, Chicherin informed Zinoviev that they were working to make contacts with Finnish politicians who were not aiming at an alliance with Poland. Chicherin connected this task to the solution of the Karelia question. He had noticed that "the idea of the self-determination of Karelia is particularly popular in the circles of well known Finnish politicians." Chicherin reminded Zinoviev that the area was of enormous importance for Russia, and for this reason it was imperative to find a solution which the Karelians would accept. He added that it was necessary to find the

31. Tukholman komitea (Stockholm Committee). RGASPI, f. 516, op. 2, 1920 g., d. 15, l. 20.

same kind of autonomous solution with which they already had good experience in other national areas. Chicherin urged Zinoviev to send some comrades to Karelia who knew local conditions and could examine the situation.³²

The right people for the job could be found in Petrograd: Finnish emigres, among them a former Social Democrat member of parliament and small farmer Jaakko Mäki. Mäki confirmed in his report that the Russians were not able to stabilize the Soviet regime in Northern Karelia. "The Russian propagandists are not able to do their work among the Onega Karelians, and sometimes they say that the attitude of the population is hostile to Soviet power." He recommended that communists be sent to North Karelia who knew the Finnish or Karelian language. Another crucial task was to improve the living conditions of the population. It was especially important to take into account the language question and to establish Finnish newspapers and schools in North Karelia.³³ The political situation was under the control of neither Soviet nor any other authorities, and the Onega Karelians resisted more or less all external attempts to control their areas.

The other agency working in Karelia was the Executive Committee (EC) of Olonets *uezd*. It was a tool of the Petrograd party committee and received its directives from Smolny. The EC of Olonets *uezd* represented official Soviet power in Karelia, but it lacked influence over most of northern Karelia. However limited its control, the EC had elected the organizational committee to prepare for the first assembly of the All-Karelian Congress of Soviets. This organizational committee held its first meeting on April 23, 1920, the day before the Soviet delegation walked out of the Rajajoki negotiations.³⁴

The EC of Olonets then asked the Revolutionary Committee of Petrograd whether it was appropriate to convene an All-Karelian Congress of Soviets in order to express Karelian opinion about the fate of Karelia. A question of particular importance was the appearance of the Uhtua government³⁵ which had declared the willingness of the Karelian people to join with Finland. The Olonets committee pointed out the fact that the majority of Karelians lived in the Olonets *uezd* and less than one third in the area claimed by the Uhtua government. The Olonets Committee got Petrograd's permission to act, and on May 3, it announced that the All-Karelian Congress of Soviets would be held on July 1, 1920.³⁶

32. Chicherin 19.3.1920 Zinovievu; and Chicherin Petrograd, Zinovievu (without date, but it is possible to determine the time from the text) AVPRF, f. 135, 1920 g., op. 4, p. 6, d. 6, l. 6-7.

33. Jaakko Mäki 22.4.1920 Centralnomu Komitety FKP. AVPRF, f. 135, 1920 g., op. 4, p. 6, d. 24, l. 17-18; S Ravich 29.4.1920. The above dela, l. 16.

34. Protokol N:o 1 zasedanie organizatsionnogo Biuro po sozyvu sezda Vsekarelskogo izbrannogo Olonetskim Uezdym Ispolnitelnym Komitetom ot 23. Aprelia 1920. AVPRF, f. 135, 1920 g., op. 4, p. 6, d. 19, l. 11-12.

35. "The Uhtua government" was established by the Onegan Karelians and some Finnish merchants. The Finnish government supported it and its program which matched the foreign policy of Finland.

36. The Telegram of the EC of Olonets *uezd* on May 3, 1920. In *Kokoelma "Punainen Karjala"* (Leningrad: K.A.S.N.T.: n Oikeusasianin K.K., 1925).

Those events proved that the Soviet authorities pursued two different lines concerning the Karelia question. One was the policy of the Commissariat for Internal Affairs. It operated in conjunction with the Olonets EC. Another belonged to Narkomindel and a section of the political leadership. The latter had started preparations to carry out Gylling's plan for autonomy. The decision was made at the beginning of May, probably as part of the process which led to Russia's proposing the Dorpat (Iurevskii, Tartu) peace negotiations on May 11. On May 18 the VKP(b) Politburo assembled in Moscow. The Bolshevik leadership was in attendance: Lenin, Nikolai Krestinsky, Iosif Stalin, Lev Kamenev, and Lev Trotsky. They agreed on the formation of a committee to prepare a proposal on the Commune of Karelia. The convener was to be the Deputy Commissar of Internal Affairs, M. F. Vladimirsk, and the members were to consist of L. M. Karakhan from Narkomindel, representatives from "comrades of Finland and Petrozavodsk," and the representative of the German Workers' Commune.³⁷ The decision regarding the Karelian Commune had been made taking foreign policy into account and after that decisions on the Karelian question were made on the basis of foreign policy. Another important consequence of this decision was that the EC of Olonets and Petrograd were ignored and the seeds of rivalry between Red Finns backed by Moscow and the EC of Olonets backed by Petrograd were sown.

On May 23, 1920 Narkomindel sent a note to the Foreign Ministry of Finland. It stated that the Red Army had occupied North Karelia, the military position was immutable, and that the Soviet authorities had started to set up autonomy for the Karelian people. The Uhtua government had fled to Finland, and the region was under the control of Soviet organs.³⁸

In this situation it was understandable that the NKVD and the Red Army were not very positive about the idea of autonomy. Lev Trotsky's deputy, the People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs I. M. Skliansk, asked for an explanation of the plans for the Karelian Commune on May 24, 1920. Narkomindel assured Skliansk that this solution, by satisfying the demands of the population and calming the situation, was the best way to secure Soviet interests in Karelia.³⁹ Three days later, on May 27, the committee had done its work and Narkomindel and Yrjö Sirola, chairman of the Communist Party of Finland, approved Vladimirsk's resolution. It was ready for presentation to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK).⁴⁰

Finland accepted the Soviet offer of peace negotiations on the same day. The peace negotiations in Dorpat would start on June 10, 1920. Soviet authorities had a busy timetable. They had to sort out the Karelia issue prior to the Dorpat

37. Minutes of the Politburo 18.5.1920. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 79.

38. Churchill, *Itä-Karjalan kohtalo 1917-1922*, p. 182.

39. Narkomindel ot 24.5.1920 Sklianskomu. The above dela, l. 2.

40. Narkomindel 27.5.1920 NKVD Vladimirskomu. AVPRF, f. 135, op. 4, 1920 g., p. 6, d. 28, l. 4.

negotiations. The Politburo accepted Gylling's proposal on Karelia on June 1.⁴¹ But all was not smooth sailing.

In spite of what happened in Moscow, the Petrograd-Olonets party acted on its own. The Provincial Committee of Olonets held a congress on May 25-28. It elected its own committee to sort out the Karelia question. One of its members was Vasili M. Kudzhiev, secretary of the Olonets party organization and member of the Olonets organization committee for the All-Karelian Congress.⁴² As a result two separate Soviet organizations intended to settle the Karelian question in their own way.

On June 2 this new Olonets committee officially convened the All-Karelian Congress of Soviets to be held in Petrozavodsk from July 1-3, 1920. The timing deserves special attention. It is clear that the party organization of Petrograd and at least Zinoviev were aware of the decision of the Politburo (June 1) and the work of Vladimirsk's committee. The committee's resolution had been taken on May 27 and the discussions of the content of the resolution were hardly unknown to Zinoviev. In the resolution the organization to be established was named the Revolutionary Committee of Karelia and five unspecified persons were to be appointed to it: two Finnish communists, one member of the Military Soviet of the 7th Red Army (in Karelia), one from Karelia's Russian population, and one from Karelia's Finnish population.⁴³

The Politburo disagreed with this composition. It gave the task of making a proposal on the Karelian Committee to the administrative bureau of the Central Committee (Orgburo) together with Zinoviev (Petrograd), Chicherin (Narkomindel) and Vladimirsk (NKVD). The result was that only one member of the five – Kudzhiev – from the competing Olonets committee was nominated to the Committee of Karelia one week later. The Finnish members were Gylling and the before mentioned Jaakko Mäki.⁴⁴ The activities of the Olonets committee provide clear evidence that there was disagreement over the composition of the Karelian (Revolutionary) Committee. The clash of the competing institutions and their interests were crystallizing in the nomination process and parallel, but contradictory activities of the Moscow based and Petrograd based organizations.

There were now two competing committees in Karelia, one appointed by the Orgburo and one appointed by the Olonets party leadership. It is evident that the organization committee of Olonets had taken the initiative because it (and/or the leading personnel in Petrograd) knew of the coming resolution and composition of the Karelian Committee. A great deal of evidence supports this conclusion.

At first, on June 7, 1920 VTsIK decided that the convener of the All-Karelian Congress of Soviets should be the Karelian Revkom headed by Gylling.

41. *Ocherki istorii Karelskoi organizatsii KPSS* (Petrozavodsk: Izdatel'stvo "Kareliia," 1974), p. 143; Churchill, *Itä-Karjalan kohtalo 1917-1922*, p. 180.

42. *Ocherki istorii Karelskoi organizatsii KPSS*, pp. 138-39.

43. Doklad o sozdanii Karelskoi Trudovoi Kommuny 1920. AVPRF, f. 135, op. 4, p. 6, d. 24, l. 7; Organizatsionogo Biuro po sozyvu sezda Severa 2.6.1920. The above dela, l. 14; *Ocherki istorii Karelskoi organizatsii KPSS*, p. 142.

44. Minutes of Politburo 1.6.1920. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 85, l. 2.

The two other members at least nominated to the Revkom were Mäki and Kudzhiev.⁴⁵ The situation was unclear after two weeks. The Revkom which had the authorization of Moscow traveled from Petrograd to North Karelia to Kemi in order to look for a suitable capital for the Commune. While the Revkom was on the road, the Olonets organizational committee continued to prepare for the All-Karelian Congress which was actually a matter for the Revkom of Gylling to arrange. The institutional and political struggle within the Soviet leadership was mirrored in Karelia. The Revkom, led by Gylling and nominated by the VKP(b) Ornburo competed with the Olonets organizational committee led by Kudzhiev and supported by the Petrograd party organizations.

Events thus went forward on two tracks. The Olonets EC next named its own leadership for the All-Karelian Congress, disregarding the activities of Gylling's Revkom. Information about the activity of the Olonets EC was wired to Narkomindel by the Olonets Provincial Cheka on June 13, 1920. Narkomindel got nervous. It wired to Vladimirska, deputy head of NKVD, and demanded that he put his employees in order. As a result of this, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs Chicherin himself wired strict orders to the Olonets Cheka on the next day. He announced that only Gylling and his Revkom had the right to assemble the Congress of the Karelian Workers' Commune.⁴⁶ Narkomindel was committed to the "Gylling-Vladimirska" plan for Karelian autonomy and saw that its realization was a key factor in reaching positive results in the ongoing Dorpat peace negotiations with Finland. Moscow did not have the slightest intention of letting locals confuse its diplomatic maneuvers.

After all this, on June 20 Gylling's Revkom published an announcement in which it confirmed the acts of the Olonets organization committee. It was too late to cancel the Congress, but its function was changed. The Revkom announced that the Congress would be the preparatory conference of the forthcoming Congress of the Workers' Commune of Karelia.⁴⁷ In this way the Revkom endeavored to get the situation under its control.

On what basis was it decided to establish the Commune? To find out we have to take the resolution of Vladimirska as our starting point. It was agreed to by the Politburo, it was the basic material for the VTsIK decision, and apart from the proposal of Gylling, it is the only substantial document concerning the establishment of the Karelian Workers' Commune.

The main motive for the formation of the Karelian Workers' Commune was the threat of Finland. Vladimirska's first argument was that the Commune needed

45. Doklad o sozdanií Karelskoi Trudovoi Kommuny 1920. AVPRF, f. 135, op. 4, p. 6, d. 24, l. 7; Yleisvenäläisen Neuvostojen Toimeenpanevan Keskuskomitean Dekreetti Karjalan Työkansan Kommuunin perustamisesta 7.6.1920. In *Punainen Karjala. K.A.S.N.T:n Oikeusasian K.K. Petroskoi 1925*.

46. Narkomindel 13.6.20 Vladimirska. AVPRF, f. 135, 1920 g., op. 4, p. 6, d. 19, l. 23; Narkomindel 13.6.20 v Prezidium VTsK t. Ksenofontovu. The above dela, l. 22; Narkomindel Chicherin 14.6.20 Kapperu Olonetskaia Gubcheka. The above dela, l. 24.

47. Karjalan Vallankumouskomitean määräys edustajakokouksen koollekutsumisesta ja edustajien valitsemisesta. *Olonetsaia Kommuna*, N:o 136, 20.6.1920 and N:o 137, 21.6.1920.

to be established in order to prevent the annexationist endeavors of Finland. It was also needed as a bulwark against Karelian nationalism which Finnish activists had made skillful use of. Vladimirsk pointed to the government of Uhtua in this regard. The second purpose was to improve the living standard of the Karelian people and the economy of the area. The third purpose was to create in Karelia a base for revolutionary propaganda to be disseminated in Finland and Scandinavia.

Gylling's purpose had been, and this was in accord with Vladimirsk's resolution, that the Commune of Karelia would consist of the Finnish Kola peninsula (Aleksandrovsky *uezd*), and the majority of Olonets and Arkhangelsk provinces including Petrozavodsk. But until the Congress of the Karelian Workers' Commune assembled and sorted out the constitution of Karelia, the region would consist of the areas of Olonets and Arkhangelsk provinces. As a result of this arrangement, the majority of the region's population was Karelian (60 percent). The Soviet authorities (VTsIK June 8, 1920) had established real national autonomy a few days before the Dorpat peace negotiations started two days late on June 12, 1920. But as we shall see later, this temporary arrangement was also the source of contradictions.

As a consequence of the area's national character, the Finnish party organizations in Russia (the Central Buro) obtained a leading role parallel to that of the Bolsheviks in Karelia. The role of language in culture and administration was not clearly defined. It was decided that Finnish newspapers would be established. Also Finnish schools, a college of education, libraries and reading-rooms would be opened. Military matters received a great deal of attention. It was planned that a Scandinavian international Red Army unit would be established consisting of about 2,000 men. This was for the coming revolution in Scandinavia, the prospects of which Gylling had outlined in his proposal. The Finnish Central Buro and the Military Soviet of the 7th Red (Finnish) Army were ordered to implement formation of this unit.⁴⁸

The central feature of the arrangement was that the establishment of autonomy was motivated by the coming peace negotiations in Dorpat. Chicherin had reached the conclusion that the negotiations had no possibility of success without resolving the issue of Karelia. The NKVD was not really in favor of autonomy, and Trotsky's Red Army was also suspicious of the matter. There were two main strategies as to how to keep Karelia under Soviet control. The first one was the line of power from the Commissariats to Petrograd and to Olonets. Its efforts were focused on the Soviet organizations in Petrozavodsk headed by Russians.

The second one was much more skillful. Perhaps it is possible to say that it represented a "Leninist nationalities policy," although the initiative was Gylling's. The central agents of this were Narkomindel and at least the majority of the Politburo. The third line was Gylling's which was compatible with Moscow's policy. His idea of autonomy was still wider than that of Narkomindel. The dif-

48. Doklad o sozdanii Karelskoi Trudovoi Kommuny 1920. AVPRF, f. 135, 1920 g., op 4, p. 6, d. 24, l. 1-3, 7, 9.

ferent approaches emerged later at the time that the Karelian Workers' Commune started to organize its economy and administration.

In Dorpat

The Dorpat peace negotiations began on June 12, 1920. The Soviet delegation had gained an advantage after the establishment of the Karelian Workers' Commune. **Following initial discussions the negotiations did not advance until the Red Army defeated Poland in July.** This event, along with the Soviet-Lettish (12.7.1920) and Soviet-Lithuanian (11.8.1920) peace agreements, undermined Finland's position. She gave in ceasing to demand a referendum on the self-determination of East Karelia and finally ceded Repola and Porajärvi, which were still under her control. The only area Finland finally obtained was Petsamo, which had been promised to her by Alexander II in 1864. The Dorpat Peace was signed on October 14, 1920.⁴⁹

Once Finland ceased to put forward the question of independence (in reality the uniting to Finland) of East Karelia, the issue became what would be the legal status of Karelian Autonomy. Finland wanted it to be agreed to by a peace treaty, but Russia was not ready for this. Her position was that Karelia was an internal Russian issue. As a compromise Russia accepted that it would deliver a proclamation on the autonomy of East Karelia, agreeing to include it in the peace treaty. It was the last obstacle in the way of the treaty. Chicherin invited Gylling to draw up the announcement. The final version of it was completed on September 21. There was not a word about the Karelian Workers' Commune, but rather about East Karelia. The Russians' interpretation was that this meant the same thing. Although Finland refused to recognize Gylling's Commune, her interpretation was that she had obtained the right to oversee how self-determination was put into practice.⁵⁰

This stage of the negotiations was decisive for the essence of Karelian autonomy. As a result of Finnish demands for broader autonomy and an international basis for a solution, Russia was forced to specify and expand the sphere of the self-determination of Karelia. This was needed to prevent Finnish demands for calling an international conference to draw up an agreement on the self-determination of Karelia. Chicherin stressed in his letter to the Politburo on September 6 that it was absolutely imperative to prevent Finland's interference over Karelia because of the Murmansk railway. For this reason Chicherin asked the Central Committee to authorize Gylling and Narkomindel together to draw up the text of the declaration on the autonomy of East Karelia.⁵¹

Two principle questions needed to be resolved. The first was the fate of the EC of Olonets Province in Petrozavodsk which was a parallel organ to Gylling's Revkom. The Finnish press criticized the ambiguous situation which was an em-

49. Polvinen, *J. K. Paasikivi*, pp. 26, 38, 45, 57-59.

50. Chicherin 31.8.20 Ravich Petrosovety. AVPRF, f. 135, op. 4 1920 g., p. 6, d. 28, l. 9; Jääskeläinen, 311; Polvinen, 77, 86.

51. Chicherin 6.9.1920 v Politburo TsK RKP. AVPRF, f. 0135, op. 3, p. 103, d. 9, l. 1-2.

barrassment to Narkomindel. The second question concerned the degree to which Karelia would control her own economic development. As a consequence of the objections of the Olonets EC, the Supreme Council of the National Economy (VSNKh) had decided that the rights of the Soviet organs, i.e., those tied to the Center in Karelia, were to parallel the regional ones. Gylling was strictly opposed to this kind of weakening of autonomy. He demanded the establishment of special economic organs in Karelia. Chicherin backed him, reminding that the issue of Karelian autonomy was tied to Soviet-Finnish relations. As a result VTsIK passed a declaration on Karelia on September 22, one day after the Dorpat declaration on Karelia was agreed to. It promised that Karelia would get competent organs for broad and free self-determination. The object of the message was clear which was not a surprise taking into consideration the role of Gylling in the process.⁵²

Although the announcement of the Soviet delegation was a loss from Finland's point of view, it was still more important for Karelian autonomy than has previously been realized.⁵³ Gylling affirmed that it was just that announcement which defined the content and breadth of autonomy. He appreciated its significance. It had guaranteed for Karelia complete self-determination with regard to its economy, language and cultural policy, legislation, and legal system. The optimistic opinion of Gylling was that the breadth of autonomy was sufficient for half a century.⁵⁴ Although Gylling's optimism was not based on firm ground, Karelian autonomy was unique compared to that of other Soviet autonomous regions in the 1920s.

Gylling looked on Karelia mainly as a question of nationality policy, and less a question of class struggle. He compared the Karelian issue to the Bolshevik policy among the "Eastern nations" of Soviet Russia where the first task was national and cultural emancipation of Muslim nations – not a class struggle as in the European part of Russia. It is worth noting that when Gylling described the Commune at the conference of the Finnish Communist Party (FCP) one year later, he used the words "separate from Russia" and "broad self-determination." He thought that in the future Karelia would separate from Russia in order to join its natural economic and national region in the formation of the Scandinavian Soviet Republic.⁵⁵

52. Deklaratsii VTsIK v Karelskomu narodu. 8.9.1920. AVPRF, f. 135, op. 4, 1920 g., p. 6, d. 27, l. 1; Chicherin 6.9.1920 v Politbiuro TsK RKP. AVPRF, f. 0135, op. 3, p. 103, d. 9, p. 1-2; NKID 3.2.1921 Revvoensovetu Respubliki. AVPRF, f. 135, op. 5, 1921 g., p. 9, d. 24, l. 6; See also *Sovety Karelii 1917-1992* (Petrozavodsk: Kareliia, 1993), p. 517.

53. Finnish negotiators J. K. Paasikivi and J. H. Vennola assessed that the result was almost insignificant for Karelian rights. Jääskeläinen, p. 315.

54. The minutes of the 4th Conference of FCP on 25.7-7.8.1921. RGASPI, f. 516, op 2, 1921g., d. 17, l. 199-201.

55. *Ibid.*

True autonomy or a diplomatic maneuver?

After the Dorpat peace agreement, the struggle moved to the local level where it crystallized in a disagreement between Gylling and Kudzhiev. There were two factions in Karelia. They divided over how much Karelia was part of Russia and how broad was its right to national (Karelian-Finnish) self-determination. The pro-Russian faction was concentrated in the party and administrative organs of Olonets. At the head of them stood the Karelian party secretary Kudzhiev.

Gylling was the leader of the national-communists. He declared openly that his policy was nationalistic. The consequences of Russification had to be reversed by a policy of Finnicization. He anticipated being accused of nationalistic tendencies. He stated that “the claim that my policy is nationalistic is correct. However, the point is that this nationalism is useful to the purposes of the revolution.”⁵⁶

Kudzhiev and his supporters held that autonomy had been implemented only because of the peace negotiations at Dorpat. Once they were over there was no need to keep broad autonomy alive. Kudzhiev claimed that the Finnicization policy benefited only the efforts of the White Finns to conquer Karelia. He was sure that it would divide the Karelian population along the line of South (Olonets *guberniia*) and North Karelia (*Onega* Karelians). In fact, he was not totally wrong on this point. The Petrograd Party organization (Grigori Zinoviev) and the majority of the FCP leadership agreed with his position.⁵⁷

In autumn 1920 the Industrial Committee of the Revolutionary Committee of Karelia, which at this stage consisted solely of Finnish red emigres, started to make plans for the implementation of economic self-determination. The issue centered on who would make decisions for Karelia: the EC of Olonets, the central organs, or the Revkom.

In principle, a solution was reached in accordance with the proposal of the Red Finns and the Revkom. In September 1920 the Commune obtained a Council of National Economy headed by Gylling. It was the competent organ for broad and free self-determination that was promised in the declaration of VTsIK on September 22, 1920. In April 1921, as a part of NEP policy, Karelia obtained exceptionally broad economic autonomy with special budgetary rights. This was partly thanks to the activities of Gylling and his direct contacts with Lenin, and partly thanks to changed political circumstances.⁵⁸ Gylling's timing was perfect.

Still, there was a great difference between the decisions made in Moscow and practice as implemented in Karelia. In 1921 political tension increased in Karelia. Kudzhiev and the administration of Olonets were strongly opposed to Gyl-

56. The above document, l. 207.

57. Manner, minutes of the 4th Party Congress of the FCP, 1921. RGASPI, f. 516, op.2, 1921 g., d. 17, l. 212-213; Kudzhiev in Petrozavodsk in a special session of the Finnish collective of the Russian Communist Party (b) on 12.2.1922, RGASPI, f. 516, op.2, 1921 g., d. 113.

58. I Vsekarelskii s'ezd sovetov rabochikh, krestianskikh i krasnoarmeiskikh deputatov 11.-18.2.1921 (Petrozavodsk: Kareliia, 1990), pp. 137, 139-40; *Ocherkii istorii Karelskoi organizatsii KPSS*, pp. 156-58.

ling's policies. In addition there was a famine in North Karelia which was in any case the most pro-Finnish and anti-Soviet region of Karelia. The famine also caused serious problems in Petrozavodsk in the spring and summer of 1921. Even the workers of the Onega Plant joined the citizens demonstrating in the streets demanding bread. They threatened to attack Soviet functionaries if they could not supply bread. Karelia was granted credit from Moscow, bought bread; and the situation was calmed for a while. In the autumn the circumstances again deteriorated. Karelia requested bread from Moscow, but without results. In October Petrozavodsk sent a despairing wire to Moscow. If they could not supply bread and grain immediately, many people in North Karelia would die by next spring.⁵⁹

The insurrection and the attempted revolution

At the same time Finnish White activists organized another insurrection in Viena (North Karelia). The most effective weapon was bread or the lack thereof. Activists promised bread for the villages if they would join Finland and establish a civil guard. In this way the insurgents occupied a broader area in North Karelia than the former Uhtua government had controlled. Their aim was to force the government of Finland to support them; to unite East Karelia, or at least Repola and Porajärvi to Finland; and to open up for international discussion the question of the paragraphs dealing with Karelia in the Dorpat peace treaty. Foreign Minister Holsti made a proposal to Narkomindel suggesting new negotiations on the Karelia issue. Finland also appealed to the League of Nations; this time in order to get international support for her aims in Karelia.⁶⁰

The events acted as a warning bell to Chicherin. On December 2, 1921 he sent a letter to the Politburo proposing immediate and direct action to suppress the rebellion. He also demanded that the Cheka should be mobilized and a show of military strength should be made on the borders of Finland. Chicherin was convinced that the League of Nations would support Finland in the matter. For this reason it was imperative to suppress the insurrection before the League of Nations could intervene. Lenin and Trotsky agreed with him.⁶¹

The Soviet government responded in two ways. By late December the Red Army built up units on the border which made the Finnish Foreign Minister nervous. The Cheka had also begun to move into action. Its own man, the Finn Eino Rahja,⁶² was the head of the military organization of the FCP. He and the

59. Pottoiev 27.5.1921 v Palmfeldtu. AVP RF, f. 135, op. 5, 1921 g., p. 9, d. 26, l. 22; The Representation of Karelia in the collegial body of Narkomnac to Narkomprom in 26.10.21. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter GARF), f. 1318, op. 10, d. 9, p. 394.

60. Jääskeläinen, p. 320-321; The Representation of Finland in Moscow to Minister Holsti. UM 94/2015 KD 1921, 9.12.1921. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (UM) 11 A III.4.a.

61. Chicherin to PB of RKP CC on 2.12.1921. AVPRF, f. 135, op. 4, 1921 g., p. 104, d. 5, l. 36-37; See also *Trotsky papers 1917-1922*, Jan M. Maijer, ed. (Paris: International Institute for Social History. Russian Series, 1971), 2: 637-38.

62. Eino Rahja was a metal worker and one of the so-called St. Petersburg Finns. He had joined the Bolshevik party before the October Revolution. Kondratev Nikolai, Luetettava toveri (Moskova-Petrozavodsk: n.p., n.d.), pp. 8, 23-31, 95-97.

secretary of the Central Committee of the FCP had drawn up a plan for armed revolution in Finland in early December, probably immediately after the meeting of the Politburo.⁶³ The plan was based on an anticipated war between Russia and Finland. The party would start revolutionary agitation in Finland and enlist the former Red army-men (the Murmansk legion) and the unemployed of North Finland. The Finns asked the VKP(b) for weapons, ammunition, other military equipment, and approval for the operation. The secretariat of the VKP(b) and Trotsky accepted the plan on December 16 and the central committee (CC) confirmed it on December 21. In addition, Trotsky ordered about 300 Finnish Red Army officer candidates to fight the rebellion in North Karelia. Rahja was appointed to the Revolutionary Military Council of Petrograd in early 1922. He is the only Finn who received this "honor".⁶⁴

This was the pre-history of the attempted armed revolution, the so-called *Läskikapina* in Finnish Lapland. It started on February 2, 1922; and it was led by Juuso Matero and other Finnish Red Army men from Russia. The commander-in-chief was Eino Rahja, who remained in Petrozavodsk. Before this, Narkomindel had threatened the Foreign Ministry of Finland that if Finland continued the attack it would leave the Karelia issue in the hands of the Red Army. A few days before the *Läskikapina*, the rebel forces in North Karelia were defeated by Finnish Red officer candidates, led by Toivo Antikainen. Some attacks were also made on Finland's side by regular units. The *Läskikapina* lasted five days. After this 283 lumberjacks along with their wives and children fled to Soviet Karelia. As Juuso Matero said one month later, they had to give up for two reasons: there were too few of them taking up arms because the workers did not rise in rebellion; and war did not break out.

It is obvious that the attempted revolution was one of a series which the Communist International (Comintern) and its head Zinoviev backed in Berlin, Hungary, Bulgaria and lastly in Tallinn in 1924. Trotsky and the Cheka were also involved in it. At the same time Narkomindel carried out a different policy. It pursued détente in Europe. Afterwards Chicherin claimed in a letter to Trotsky that with the *Läskikapina* the Finnish communists had posed a threat to Russia's foreign policy and the success of the Genoa Conference⁶⁵

This statement and the evidence that we have from the archives of AVP RF, the Foreign Ministry of Finland and RGASPI indicate that there were at least three agencies carrying out their own policies. The common aim of all of them was to suppress the rebellion as quickly as possible. The main effort of Narko-

63. It was signed by Leo Laukki-Tiura, the secretary of CC and Eino Rahja as a member of the CC.

64. The RGASPI documents are found in fond 1, op. 84, d. 105. I have been the first to use the documents. See the article of Markku Kangaspuro, "Läskikapina – SKP:n vallankumousyritys 1922" [The Revolutionary Attempt of the FCP in 1922], *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja 4/1998* [The Historical Society of Finland - Helsinki 1998], pp. 346-48.

65. Russia had proposed to the Entente a conference which would agree to international economic cooperation.

mindel was to achieve this as diplomatically as possible. For Narkomindel, military force was subordinate to diplomacy.

The second group was Trotsky, Zinoviev, and the hard core of the VKP(b) including Viacheslav Molotov and Maxim Litvinov. They were eager to use the situation to organize an armed revolution in Finland. It is not possible to say how much this was a part of general Soviet policy and to what extent it was their own.

The third group was the Cheka, the Red Army, and the militant leaders of the FCP. The more moderate leaders of the FCP were excluded from the plan. Rahja and his aides believed that war would break out which would offer them the perfect opportunity for armed revolution. This was the only way they thought it was possible for revolution to succeed in Finland. They drew up their last plan for insurrection in January 1924. It was voted down in the CC of the FCP.

The real aim of the Cheka was not clear. Was it using the FCP and Rahja to organize a defensive attack in the rear of the rebels? Or did it really envisage an attempt at armed revolution? The evidence indicates that it probably sought both aims: the minimum aim which was a defensive attack in the rear of the rebels and the maximum aim which was an armed revolution.⁶⁶

The Finnicization of Karelia

After the suppression of the rebellion, it was time to resolve the contradictions in Petrozavodsk. The insurrection had indicated that there was a basis for Gylling's criticisms of the uncertainty surrounding Karelian autonomy. In the autumn of 1921 just before the rebellion, he and Otto Ville Kuusinen had threatened in a letter to the CC of VKP(b) that Finns would leave Karelia if they were not granted undisputed authority to lead the area. They criticized the Russian majority party organization in Karelia that it did not understand and did not want to accept national self-determination.⁶⁷

Three main issues were responsible for the contradictions in Karelia⁶⁸:

1) Did Karelia enjoy true autonomy or was it only a diplomatic maneuver? The Finns demanded that economic self-determination be implemented as well since administrative organization without real economic power was nonsense.

2) Did Karelia have national autonomy? The Finns demanded that the Finnish language be adopted in ethnically Karelian districts for administrative purposes and that it be adopted as the language of instruction in national schools.

3) How much authority to administer Karelia would reside in Petrozavodsk? What was the nature of the decisions concerning the power of the center? Had they been made solely as a diplomatic maneuver or was the intention to implement them?

66. Markku Kangaspuro, "Läskikapina - SKP:n vallankumousyritys 1922," pp. 350-52.

67. Moskva, 29-go avgusta 1921 Chlen Tsentralnogo Komiteta Kommunisticheskoi Partii Finlandii: O. V. Kuusinen, predsedatel' Karispolkoma E. Gylling Centralnomu Komitetu RKP. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 983, l. 39-40.

68. Proekt tov. Gyllinga. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 112, d. 296, p. 46, 46ob; Doklad Centralnogo Buro Finskikh Organizatsii RKP o svoei deiatel'nosti za iiul, avgust i sentiabr 1921 goda. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 983, p. 30-32; Kuusinen to Gylling, 29 Aug 21. The above dela, 39-40.

Gylling demanded that:

- a) the budget for Finnish-language public education had to be increased and had to represent up to one-third of the whole budget
- b) the number of Finnish communists had to be increased and their leading role guaranteed
- c) the Karelian Workers' Commune had to be granted the status of a Soviet Republic

The Orgburo of the CC was summoned to deal with the issue of Karelia. Edvard Gylling gave an account of the political situation. Also present were the Secretary of the Northwest Bureau of CC, Ivan Smirnov, and the Karelian Party Secretary Kudzhiev. Stalin and Molotov were the leading figures in the Orgburo. It was Stalin's view that decided the matter in Gylling's favor. The only proposal Gylling made which was not accepted was to grant Karelia the status of a Soviet Republic. All the other issues mentioned above were resolved according to the position of the Finns.⁶⁹

In the aftermath, Adolf Taimi,⁷⁰ the Finnish member of the Northwest Bureau and the EC of the Comintern, claimed that Gylling had misled Stalin, who was inclined to support Gylling's nationalistic ideas "because of false information . . . because he trusted our capability and judgment too much." Taimi claimed that Gylling represented those powers which sought to establish a "Greater Finland" and separate Karelia from Russia.⁷¹ Here is another example of the disagreement among the Bolsheviks about the essence of the Soviet Union (autonomy vs. a federation of republics) and expectations of revolutionary developments in Europe. Among the Red Finns the disagreement focused on the position of Finno-Ugric nations in Russia after the revolution. From this standpoint the accusations of Adolf Taimi were "right" and disagreement between his and Gylling's political opinion real.

After the session of the Orgburo, it was time to purge the Northwest Bureau which had backed the opponents of Gylling and the Karelian party organization. Ivan Smirnov, secretary of the Northwest Bureau, was replaced by Boris Bozern, an aide of Stalin. Stalin was present at the session of the Bureau in order to secure the right decision. In March, immediately after the session of the Orgburo, the party secretary of Karelia, Vasili Kudzhiev, was replaced by the Finn, Johan Järvisalo, a supporter of Gylling. In Karelia the united Provincial Committee of the Party organization was established to replace the Revkom and the Olonets party organization. The Karelia-Olonets party organization had earlier handed out a party reprimand to Gylling and Mäki for proposing this same solution.⁷²

69. Minutes N:o 150 of the Orgburo on 6.3.1922., RGASPI, f. 17, op. 112, d. 296, l. 18.

70. Taimi was also a St. Petersburg Finn and an old Bolshevik.

71. Minutes of the plenum of the CC of FCP on 9.8.-16.8.1922, 16, 23-24, 30-31.

72. Mäki, minutes of the 4th Party Congress of the FCP, 1921, RGASPI, f. 516, op.2, 1921 g., d. 17, l. 208-210, 214; Aleksei Levkoiev, "Neuvostoliiton Kommunistisen puolueen keskuskomitean Luoteisbyroo ja Karjalan autonomia vuosina 1921-1927," in *Kansallisuus ja valtio*, ed. by Antti Laine (Univeristy of Joensuu. Karelian Institute. Working Papers N:o 5/1995), p. 43; *Ocherkii istorii Karelskoi organizatsii KPSS*, p. 166.

Those decisions constituted an important success for the Finns, who also acquired control of the party organization of Karelia. The remaining question was the area to comprise Karelia and its administrative organs. The final blow against the opponents of the Commune was the decision to liquidate the Olonets *guberniia* and its administrative organs. The VTsIK made this resolution on September 18, 1922.⁷³

The only reversal in autonomy, but still a significant one, was the final decision over Karelia's borders. In 1920 the population of Karelia was 60 percent Karelian and Finnish, but the new arrangements created a different situation. In 1924 Moscow decided to incorporate new Russian majority districts into the region against the will of the Karelian leaders. The titular Karelian nation became a minority as the new districts increased the size of the Russian population to 55.7 percent. Those regional arrangements in Karelia were part of a broader Soviet administrative reform.⁷⁴

The process of creating the borders of the Commune of Karelia was not a consistent one. The general line of Soviet Russia was to create administrative borders on the basis of economics. National autonomies were exceptional cases. The Soviet regime sometimes took into consideration the national configuration of a region. The case of Karelia was itself an exception to these exceptional cases. It was too small (about 100,000 people), too scattered, and too underdeveloped to be a real nation in the sense in which, for example, Stalin had defined the features of a nation. It did not have either a distinct, uniform national character, language, or cultural orientation. On the whole, the arrangements in Karelia followed the general line of Soviet politics based on economics; and Gylling, having a good understanding of economics, understood this. He did not therefore oppose the territorial arrangements as fiercely as some other national minded Red Finns. For Gylling, both a viable economy and the balance between the Russian and non-Russian national populations were essential preconditions for Karelian autonomy.

In sum, we can confirm that the most important reasons for creating the autonomous Karelian Workers' Commune consisted of the following: the existence of the strategic Murmansk railway, the proximity of the region to Finland with its national dimension, and the Dorpat Peace Agreement in 1920. If Russia wanted to preserve a peaceful settlement of the northwest border after the civil war, it

73. "Yleisvenäläisen toimeenpanevan keskuskomitean dekreetti Aunuksen läänin lakkauttamisesta 18.9.1922" [The Resolution of VTsIK on the Dismantlement of the Olonets Gubernii], in *Kokoelma "Punainen Karjala"*, p. 56.

74. Minutes of Karelia's Revolutionary Committee on 11.8.1920. RGASPI, f. 516, op. 2, 1920 g., d. 146, l. 13 ob; Predsedatel' E Gylling v NKID [in spring-autumn 1921]. AVPRF, f. 135, op. 5, p. 9, d. 22, l. 163-164; one of the leading Finnish communists, Lauri Letonmäki, criticized as late as 1929 the inclusion of the Russian areas (Pudozh) in Karelia because of the national content. Protokol Karelo-finskogo otkrytogo raionogo sobrania chlenov VKP(b) 21.3.1929. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv obshchestvenno-politicheskii dvizhenii i formirovaniu Karel'ii (GAOPDFK), f. 3, op. 2, d. 349, l. 97-98; Doklad o raionirovaniu gubernii, tov. Semirikov. GARF, f. 6984, op. 1, d. 4, l. 9; L.A. Sodorova, *Sovety Karel'ii v gody vosstanovleniia narodnovok k khoziastvu i nachala sotsialisticheskoi industrializatsii 1920-1927* (Petrozavodsk: Karelia, 1986), pp. 13, 36.

had to give autonomy to the Karelian people and abide by the decisions of the Treaty of Dorpat on East Karelian autonomy.

The domestic situation was more complicated. Contradictions were sharp both among the central authorities and among the locals in Karelia. Leningrad party leader and Politburo member Grigori Zinoviev represented a common “anti-nationalities” or “internationalist” line which did not pay much attention to the intentions of minority nations whether it was a question of Ukraine or Karelia. His focus was European revolution and enhancement of the world revolutionary movement. Zinoviev was also the head of the Comintern, and his closest contacts with the Red Finns seem to be with the St. Petersburg Finns (the Rahja brothers, Adolf Taimi, and their circle), who had lived a long time there and were members of the Bolshevik party. Karelia belonged in the political sphere of Petrograd as did the Olonets party and Soviet organizations. The first party secretary of Karelia as well as of the Olonets party organization, Vasili Kudzhiev, was a former member of the “SR internationalists” before his career in the Bolshevik party; and his policy followed the Zinoviev line, cold to the national ambitions of minority nations. For them Karelian autonomy was a skilful diplomatic maneuver, no longer necessary after the successful Dorpat peace negotiations. World revolution would resolve all social and national problems.

Gylling’s line resembled Stalin’s and Narkomindel’s *realpolitik*. His idea was feasible, and it offered a prospect for peaceful settlement with Karelians and Finland. His politics were based on the idea of conciliation to the local Karelian population: Gylling saw that the first task was not accelerating a class struggle but national reconciliation and modernization of Karelian society. First of all socialism was for him a way to liberate suppressed nations from Tsarist oppression. This was close to Stalin and Lenin’s nationalities policy of the 1920s. Therefore it was logical that Gylling and Commissar of Nationalities Stalin agreed on how to resolve the Karelian question. It was no less surprising that the Red Army was suspicious of the autonomy of Karelia and Narkomindel was in favor of it. The Red Army had good reasons to be on the alert for Finnish “nationalism” and Finland’s military activities directed towards the Murmansk railway. Narkomindel’s main interest was to stabilize the international situation and secure the position of Soviet Russia. Finland’s role was crucial to Russia’s western border, and therefore Narkomindel agreed that the peace treaty with Finland was a key factor in stabilizing the whole Baltic Sea region. Without an agreement on Karelia between Russia and Finland, there would be no stability in the region. At this stage Russia needed breathing space. There was no other alternative to a political and diplomatic solution in Karelia. Karelia obtained autonomy and a red émigré Gylling the position of prime minister of the Karelian Workers’ Commune instead of imprisonment in Finland or interminable exile in Sweden. The irony of history is that although Gylling and his comrades lost the civil war of 1918, they won Karelia which the victorious White Finns had so furiously fought for.

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to establish Finnish newspapers and schools in North Karelia.¹⁷ The political situation was under the control of neither Soviet nor any other authorities, and the Onega Karelians resisted more or less all external attempts to control their areas.

The other agency working in Karelia was The Executive Committee (EC) of Olonets *uezd*. It was a tool of the Petrograd party committee and received its directive from Smolny. The EC of Olonets *uezd* represented official Soviet power in Karelia, but it lacked influence over most of northern Karelia. However limited its control, the EC had elected the organizational committees to prepare for the first assembly of the All-Karelian Congress of Soviets. This organizational committee held its first meeting on April 23, 1920, the day before the Soviet delegation walked out of the Rajajoki negotiations.¹⁸

The EC of Olonets then asked the Revolutionary Committee of Petrograd whether

zavodsk,” and the representative of the German Workers' Commune.²¹ The decision regarding the Karelian Commune had been made taking foreign policy into account, and after that decisions on the Karelian question were made on the basis of foreign policy. Another important consequence of this decision was that the EC of Olonets and Petrograd were ignored and the seeds of rivalry between Red Finns backed by Moscow and the EC of Olonets backed by Petrograd were sown.

In Karelia.²³ Three days later, on May 27, the committee had done its work and Narkomindel and Yrjö Sirola, chairman of the Communist Party of Finland, approved Vladimirsk's resolution. It was ready for presentation to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK).²⁴

Finland accepted the Soviet offer of peace negotiations on the same day. The peace negotiations in Dorpat would start on June 10, 1920. Soviet authorities had a busy timetable. They had to sort out the Karelia issue prior to the Dorpat negotiations

of the Olonets organization committee for the All-Karelian Congress.²⁶ As a result, two separate Soviet organizations intended to settle the Karelian question in their own way.

mittee of Karelia one week later. The Finnish members were Gylling and the before mentioned Jaakko Mäki.²⁸ The activities of the Olonets committee provide clear evidence that there was disagreement over the composition of the Karelian (Revolutionary) Committee. The clash of the competing institutions and their interests were crystallizing in the nomination process and parallel, but contradictory activities of the Moscow based and Petrograd based organizations.

There were now two competing committees in Karelia, one appointed by the Orgburo and one appointed by the Olonets party leadership. It is evident that the organization

range. The institutional and political struggle within the Soviet leadership was mirrored in Karelia. The Revkom, led by Gylling and nominated by the VKP (b) Orgburo competed with the Olonets organizational committee led by Kudzhiev and supported by the Petrograd party organizations.

Events thus went forward on two tracks. The Olonets EC next named its own leadership for the All-Karelian Congress, disregarding the activities of Gylling's Revkom.

gress of the Karelian Workers' Commune.³⁰ Narkomidel was committed to the "Gylling-Vladimirsk" plan for Karelian autonomy and saw that its realization was a key factor in reaching positive results in the ongoing Dorpat peace negotiations with Finland. Moscow did not have the slightest intention of letting locals confuse its diplomatic maneuvers.

Commune. Following initial discussions the negotiations did not advance until the Red Army defeated Poland in July. This event, along with the Soviet-Lettish

(a question of class struggle. He compared the Karelian issue to the Bolshevik policy among the "Eastern nations" of Soviet Russia where the first task was national and cultural emancipation of Muslim nations – not a class struggle as in the European part of Russia. It is worth noting that when Gylling described the Commune

and separate Karelia from Russia.⁵⁵ Here is another example of the disagreement among the Bolsheviks about the essence of the Soviet Union (autonomy vs. a federation of republics) and expectations of revolutionary developments in Europe. Among the Red Finns the disagreement focused on the position of Finno-Ugric nations in Russia after the revolution. From this standpoint the accusations of Adolf Taimi were "right" and disagreement between his and Gylling's political opinion real.

After the session of the Orgburo, it was time to purge the Northwest Bureau which had backed the opponents of Gylling and the Karelian party organization. Ivan

ter, language, or cultural orientation. On the whole, the arrangements in Karelia followed the general line of Soviet politics based on economics; and Gylling, having a good understanding of economics, understood this. He did not therefore oppose the territorial arrangements as fiercely as some other national minded Red Finns. For Gylling, both a viable economy and the balance between the Russian and non-Russian national populations were essential preconditions for Karelian autonomy.

In sum, we can confirm that the most important reasons for creating the autonomous Karelian Workers' Commune consisted of the following: the existence of the strategic Murmansk railway, the proximity of the region to Finland with its national dimension, and the Dorpat Peace Agreement in 1920. If Russia wanted to preserve a peaceful settlement of the northwest border after the civil war, it

had to give autonomy to the Karelian people and abide by the decisions of the Treaty of Dorpat on East Karelian autonomy.

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