

Historical Committee

The Finnish Civil War

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Introduction

Finland was a part of Sweden before it was conquered by the Russian Empire in 1809. It became an autonomous region named the Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. After the Russian Revolution many countries wanted to become an independent state including Finland (Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire). The country was divided into two main parties, the White Finland and the Finnish Socialist Workers Republic (Red Finland). The white bloc consisted of those in the middle and upper classes who had control over the economy while the red bloc consisted of paramilitary units that were made up with those in lower classes and the workers.

The consequences of the aforementioned Russian revolution was evident on the political divide in the country. The dissolution of the police force in 1917 led to the two groups forming their two police forces. This dissolution triggered a series of political moves from both sides that would eventually lead to war, the urban movement of the Reds were triggered in Helsinki, Kutka and Turku. The main ambition was to persuade rural leaders that were stuck in the Grey zone between War and Peace. At the start of the movement the Finnish Whites were led by volunteers in the Finnish Army that were trained by the German Army.

The reason behind these clashes that occurred was to get hold of the government. The Finnish Civil War arose from the class and ideology differences among Finland. Both groups wanted to take control of the system and the government. As it could be understood from the theme of the conference “A World in harmony: Creating a future of mitigated polarization by addressing ongoing crises”, the conference aims to a less polarized and more humanitarian world. The Finnish civil is strongly related to the theme.

Definition of Key Terms

Law of Supreme Power:

The supreme power of a state, all other authorities being subordinate to it. In the case of the Finnish War, this relates to all decisions, affirmations, and decrees regarding the implementation of Finnish laws made solely by the Sejm.

The Russian Grand Duchy of The Russian Empire (Finland):

In the 19th century, the Grand Duchy of Finland or the Russian Empire era began due to the Swedish Empire's defeat in 1808-1809. Tsar Alexander I established the Grand Duchy of Finland to circumvent Finnish opposition to Russia. He pledged to uphold Finland's Lutheran faith, the base of the

Diet and Estate's Swedes, language freedom and such. Even though it was ostensibly independent, it was nevertheless subject to the impulsive decisions of the Tsar, which led to problems in the late 19th century.

The Diet of Finland and Parliament:

In terms of comparative democracy, continuity is the most significant characteristic of Finnish democracy. The Finnish Diet with its four Estates first met in 1863, marking the beginning of the modern parliamentary system. Even though the Russian Emperor ultimately exercised authoritarian power, democratic legislative processes and the party system eventually arose.

The October Revolution

This refers to the Communist revolution in Russia that officially put an end to the regime of Czar Nicholas II and the preceding provisional government regime. This movement was spearheaded by a radical-left faction of the Russian Social Democratic party called "The Bolsheviks". Led by Vladimir Lenin, the revolution sparked a mass wave of migration to non communist countries. The Leninist thought is one of the backbones of the "Finnish Red's" ideologies.

The Jagers

The Jagers hold a critical role in the start of the Finnish Civil war, firstly they were volunteers that were trained by the Imperial German army. Throughout history, It was evident that the Germans were one of the top military forces in the world with each individual that went through its training system becoming highly equipped with the necessary skills to assume commanding positions in the battlefield.

General Overview

Finland was a part of Sweden until 1808 when the Russian Empire invaded Sweden. In the aftermath, Finland became a part of the Russian Empire. Although The Grand Duchy of Finland didn't participate in the First World War it's conflicts were the reasons that led to the Finnish Civil War. On March 15, 1917 by the forced abdication of the Russian Tsar Nicholas II, the Russian Empire turned into the Russian Provisional Government after World War 1. The Russian Provisional Government had a right wing majority. On July 27, 1917 Finland became semi independent with the Law of Supreme Power. In October 1917, the Bolshevik Party took over power in the capital of Russia which eventually led to the formation of the Soviet Union. They overthrew the previous government because a large part of Russians were working class citizens. Hence, this was their reason to support the communist policies of Vladimir Lenin (the leader of the Bolsheviks).

Differing views on the independence of Finland spiraled the country into an ideological conflict. The Finnish nationalists saw the dissolution of the Russian Empire as an opportunity separate from Russian territory, however the socialist supporters still supported the idea of being a part of Russia for ideological reasons. Later on in December 6, 1917 Finland's independence was declared by the parliament. When Finland officially separated from Russia the struggle for power increased. The socialists in Finland were unhappy with this separation so they prepared for a takeover. The government

anticipated the attempt to overthrow them so they got ready for an armed conflict. The Finnish Civil War began on January 27 and ended on May 15, 1918. It was fought in Finland between the social democrats called the “Reds” and the non-socialist “Whites.” The “Reds” were supported by Bolshevik Russia while the “Whites” were supported by the German Empire. Afterwards, issues from political differences surfaced in Finland and they divided into the two groups of “Reds” and “Whites.”

The Outcome

The “Whites” won the Finnish Civil War. There were almost 37,000 casualties at the end of the war. The war ended up causing the country to divide. Tons of individuals lost their civic rights such as the right to vote. After the war 10,000 people fled to Soviet Russia.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

1. The “Reds”

The “Reds” are socialists in Finland. They didn’t want to separate from Russia. They were working, lower class that wanted to remain in a socialist establishment.

2. The “Whites”

The “Whites” are non-socialists in Finland. They identify as nationalists. They wanted to separate from Russia. They consisted of the middle class and aristocrats of Finland. Later on the Finnish government declared independence. When the Finnish Civil War started they had an army and Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim became commander in chief of the government troops. The German Empire supported the “Whites”.

3. Bolshevik Russia

Their leader is a lawyer called Vladimir Lenin. They have a communist regime. They came to power after the October Revolution in 1917. They supported the “Reds” during the Finnish Civil War.

4. Finnish Social Democratic Party

One of the critical Belligerents of the Finnish Civil War, was largely the political party the Red forces backed.

5. German Empire

A united Empire that existed from 1871-1918, towards the end of WWI the stance of the German Empire towards the communists was evident. The Germans also trained and intervened on the side of the Finnish Whites during the war.

Timeline of Events

27 January 1918	<i>Reds proclaim the start of the revolution in Finland</i>
28 January 1918	<i>White troops begin to disarm Russian army units in Ostrobothnia</i>
28 January 1918	<i>Red Guards occupy the Bank of Finland, which is then closed</i>
8 February 1918	<i>A Red Executive Board is appointed at the Bank of Finland, which is then re-opened</i>
25 February 1918	<i>The main body of Finnish jaegers (light infantrymen) trained in Germany lands in Vaasa</i>
3 March 1918	<i>Russia and Germany agree peace terms in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk</i>
3 April 1918	<i>Germany's Baltic Sea Division lands in Hanko</i>
6 April 1918	<i>Tampere surrenders to the Whites</i>
8 April 1918	<i>The Red leaders flee from Helsinki to Viipuri</i>
13 April 1918	<i>German troops take Helsinki</i>
14 April 1918	<i>The legally constituted Executive Board takes control at the Bank of Finland</i>
24 April 1918	<i>Commander-in-Chief Mannerheim orders the establishment of a prison system for captured Red troops</i>
29 April 1918	<i>The Whites take Viipuri</i>
5 May 1918	<i>The last Red troops surrender</i>

16 May 1918	<i>General Mannerheim's victory parade in Helsinki</i>
29 May 1918	<i>Enactment of the Act establishing Courts for Crimes against the State</i>

Treaties and Events

The Parliamentary Reform of 1906

Tsar Nicholas' failed war against Japan and the ensuing international humiliation prompted the Russian public to mutiny against the Tsar and the Nobility. The so-called Russian Revolution of 1905 saw the establishment of the Russian State Duma. The events of 1905 also led to a general strike in Finland. In order to quell the strike, the **Parliamentary Reform of 1906** was introduced, which oversaw the formation of a unicameral Finnish legislature with universal suffrage, which also led to further social and political liberalization of Finland from the central imperial authority and reinforced the prominence of the Finnish social democrats.

Manifesto of the Russian Provisional Government

The Manifesto of the Russian Provisional Government after the October Revolution of 1917 ended the authoritarian oversight over Finland, ended the second Russification Period and gave Finland legitimate de facto political power. A socialist controlled parliament with a diverse range of ideologies assembled.

The Law of the Supreme Power

The above-mentioned Finnish Parliament that formed at the end of the second Russification Period was bicameral, meaning that there existed a Senate and a Parliament. The Parliament had an overwhelming democratic socialist and socialist majority, meanwhile the Senate had 6 democratic socialist and socialist members. The Parliament passed the Law of Supreme Power in order to consolidate popular rule, which enlarged the powers of the Parliament. This was understood as a move to consolidate Socialist rule over Finland by the conservatives.

The Russo-Finnish Treaty of 1917

A treaty between the Bolshevik leaning Finnish reds and Soviet Russia, where Finland was referred to as the Finnish Socialist Workers Republic. The Treaty made the affiliation of the Finnish Reds with the Bolsheviks clear.

Brest-Litovsk Treaty of 1918

This treaty between Soviet Russia and the German Empire restricted the military support of the Soviets to the Finnish Reds among other things.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

As it is the case in many Civil Wars, there were various diplomatic attempts to resolve the issue. Unfortunately, these diplomatic events were the products of multiple violent acts and mainly served as strategic endeavors on paper. Tsar Alexander I establishing the Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire was not in favor of the general public as the Tsar still held power. The Russian Revolution was the point in which the public started to open their eyes and rebel, setting a basis for the change in ruling. The Parliamentary Reform which followed is also considered to be an important step in Finland reaching independence as it transformed the voting procedures. Although, the Manifesto of the Russian Provisional Government was the real onset of a free Finland, since it resulted in the end of the Russification Period.

The Law of Supreme Power being established gave Finland the opportunity to be even more independent. Unlike the revolution or other past treaties, the Law of Supreme Power was completely done through legal procedures and held more ground, which had a great impact.

Possible Solutions

In this section are the ideal outcomes for both the Reds and the Whites discussed.

The Reds

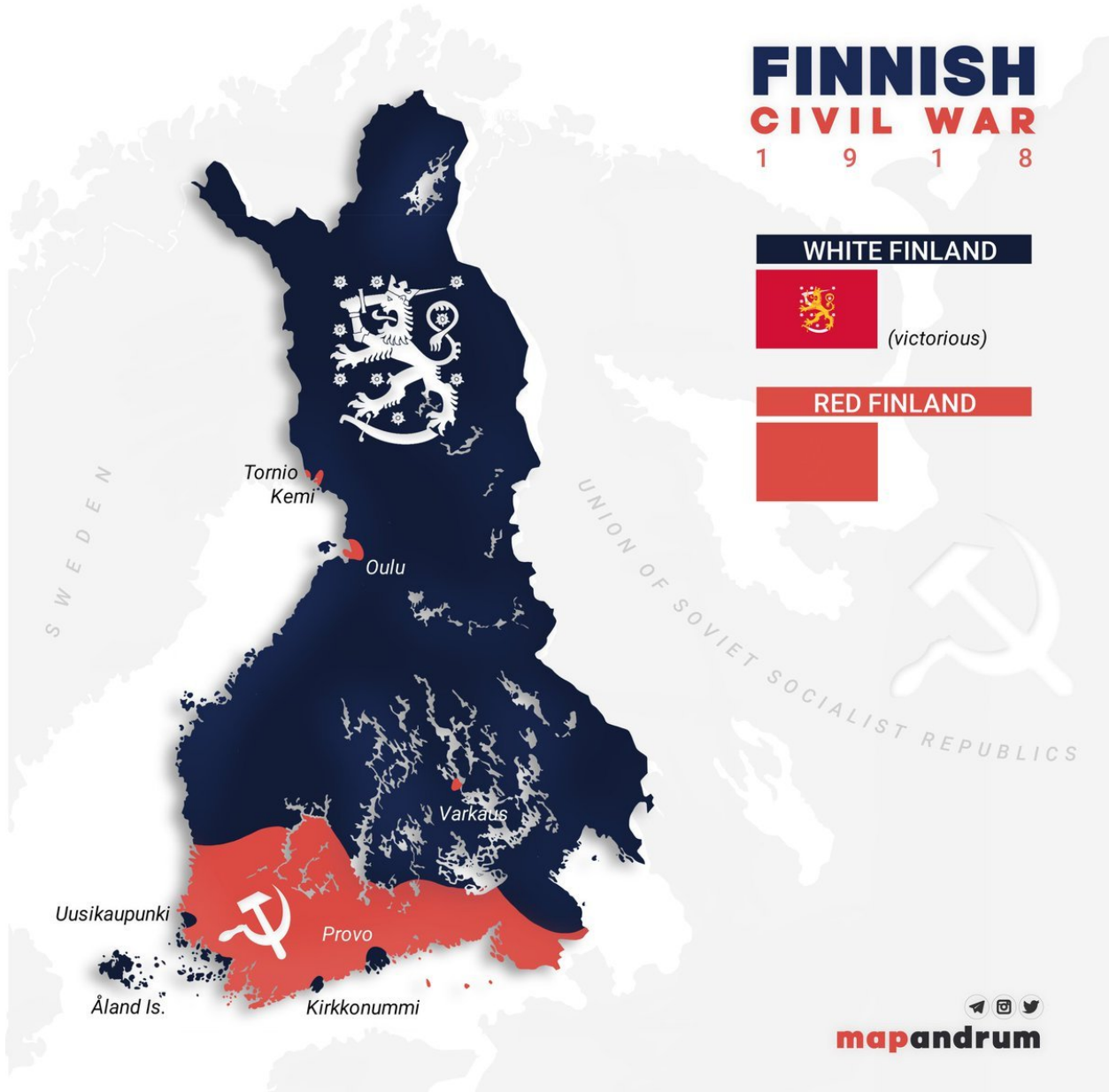
An important thing to remember is that the Finnish Socialist Movement is deeply-rooted in Finnish Nationalism. Finnish Nationalism was born as a resistance movement to subsequent cycles of Russification of Finland. Therefore, joining the Soviet Union or aligning with the Soviet Union in a way that compromises Finnish Sovereignty is not on the table. The Reds are also strongly opposed to the widening of the German sphere of influence into Finland. An ideal ending for the reds is a Bolshevik-aligned yet independent Finland with a socialist economy, strong labor unions and wide powers belonging to the Parliament.

The Whites

It is also intuitive that the Finnish conservatives, also referred to as „The Whites“ have their ideologies deeply rooted in Finnish Nationalism. A popular ideal of a post civil war Finland for the Whites was a Finnish monarchy under the German sphere of influence. The Whites also had strong anti-Bolshevik and anti-Soviet tendencies and wanted to restrict the power of the Parliament, the elected house of the bicameral Finnish Legislature, as the Social Democrats enjoyed an absolute majority. It is also important to note that the Finnish Right was quite diverse, with the liberals and the conservatives being the most prominent schools of thought. The conservatives want to restrict Parliamentarism and advocate for a Monarchy, whereas the Liberals have a more parliamentarian ideal for Finland in mind.

Possible Compromises

In actuality no one side was able to enjoy a clear victory, Finland was an independent Republic, as by the Constitution Act of 1919. Another note is that both sides were nationalistic and had irredentist nationalist ideals with regards to the Karelian Isthmus.



Map 1: The Frontlines of the Finnish Civil War

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