UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

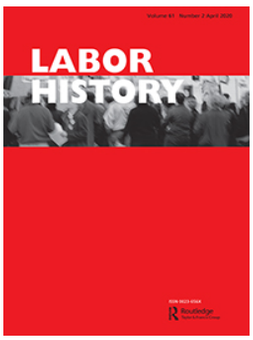
https://helda.helsinki.fi

Minority nationalism and visions of socialist unity in the post-war Finnish labour movement, 1944–1949

Kaihovirta, Matias; Ahlskog, Jonas; Wickström, Mats

2020-03-03
Routledge
http://hdl.handle.net/10138/318275
Kaihovirta, M, Ahlskog, J & Wickström, M 2020, 'Minority nationalism and visions of socialist unity in the post-war Finnish labour movement, 1944–1949', Labor History, vol. 61, no. 2, pp. 186-202. https://doi.org/10.1080/0023656X.2019.1666975

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository. https://helda.helsinki.fi
This is an electronic reprint of the original article.
This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.
Please cite the original version.



Labor History

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/clah20

Minority nationalism and visions of socialist unity in the post-war Finnish labour movement, 1944–1949

Matias Kaihovirta , Jonas Ahlskog & Mats Wickström

To cite this article: Matias Kaihovirta , Jonas Ahlskog & Mats Wickström (2020) Minority nationalism and visions of socialist unity in the post-war Finnish labour movement, 1944–1949, Labor History, 61:2, 186-202, DOI: 10.1080/0023656X.2019.1666975

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/0023656X.2019.1666975

© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 22 Sep 2019.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 430

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=clah20

LABOR HISTORY
2020, VOL. 61, NO. 2, 186–202
https://doi.org/10.1080/0023656X.2019.1666975

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

Minority nationalism and visions of socialist unity in the post-war Finnish labour movement, 1944–1949

Matias Kaihovirta[a], Jonas Ahlskog[b] and Mats Wickström[b]

[a]Political history, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland; [b]Department of Philosophy, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland

ABSTRACT

The interpenetration of nationalism and socialism is a seminal problem for understanding 20th century labour movement history. This article approaches the issue of ideological interpenetration by way of a close examination of the relationship between minority nationalism and socialist unity during a formative phase for the Finnish labour movement in the post-war period. More precisely, the article investigates the Swedish-speaking minority within the Finnish labour movement and its attempt to unify different ideological factions in the labour movement through minority nationalism. The article contributes to the study of the relation between socialism and nationalism by extending the discussion to include national minorities and their relation to the socialist labour movement. The main theoretical innovation of the article is the concept of socialist minority nationalism. This concept will function as a heuristic tool for analysing the intersection of nationalism and socialist class-consciousness within the Finnish labour movement. The Swedish-speaking agents of the Finnish labour movement, and their socialist Finland-Swedish identity-project, has hitherto been neglected in Finnish labour history. Through historical investigations of national or ethnic minorities, or other past and present marginalized groups and individuals in labour history, it is possible to problematize the hegemonic historical narratives of the majority.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 11 June 2019
Accepted 12 August 2019

KEYWORDS
Socialist minority nationalism; historiography; minorities; post-war labour movement; Finland-Swedish

Introduction

The unification of the labour movement was a decisive political issue during Finland's so-called 'Years of Danger'[1]. The Moscow Armistice, signed on 19 September 1944, legalized the Communist Party of Finland (*Suomen Kommunistinen Puolue*, SKP), which operated through the communist-dominated leftist umbrella organization the Finnish People's Democratic League (*Suomen Kansan Demokraattinen Liitto*, SKDL); this at a time, in the immediate post-war years, when popular support for a socialist government was on the rise. If the two major political parties on the left, the SKP/SKDL and the Social Democratic Party of Finland (*Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue*, SDP) had managed to cooperate and pool their resources, they would possibly have enabled the formation of a socialist government holding the powers granted through a simple majority mandate. However, the SKP was a political party unlike any other, essentially a revolutionary organization with very close ties to the Soviet Union. The battle between the SDP and the SKP/SKDL for the future of the labour movement was intimately connected to a high-stakes political game in which the democratic status of Finland was pitted against the geopolitical demands of its Soviet

CONTACT Matias Kaihovirta matias.kaihovirta@helsinki.fi University of Helsinki, Snellmansgatan 14 A, Helsinki 00014, Finland

© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

neighbour. Naturally, this crucial episode in the political history of Finland has attracted plentiful attention from historians and political scientists alike (Beyer-Thoma, 1990; Hyvämäki, 1955; Majander, 2004; Rentola, 1997; Seppinen, 2008).

This article investigates the interpenetration of socialist unity and minority nationalism from the perspective of the Swedish-speaking arm of the bi-national Finnish labour movement in the early post-war years. This minority perspective contributes to the historiography of Finland's Years of Danger in two distinct but complimentary ways. Firstly, the minority perspective will shed further light on the general nature of the conflict between the SDP and the SKP, especially since many leading Finland-Swedish socialists were also prominent throughout the national labour movement. Secondly, by focusing on Finland-Swedish agents we will be able to provide an original and substantive articulation of the role of minority nationalist politics in the planned, but ultimately failed, attempts to unite the Finnish labour movement. Previous research dealing with the issue of socialist unity during the Year of Danger has mostly been carried out from a national or party-centric perspective, omitting the ideas and actions of the autonomous or semi-autonomous Finland-Swedish labour associations and Finland-Swedish actors. More importantly, the minority national underpinning of the aspirations of the Finland-Swedish labour movement in the immediate post-war years has not yet been studied from a perspective that considers the significance of the ideas of both socialist and minority national unity that account for the attitudes and actions of the social democrats as well as the communists/people's democrats.

The sources used in this article consist mainly of committee-, congress- and board-meeting protocols of the Finland-Swedish organizations of the SDP and the SKP/SKDL as well as newspaper articles published in the two Swedish leftist newspapers: the social democratic *Arbetarbladet* and the people's democratic *Folktidningen*. By applying close-readings of the textual source material, our main methodology will be to utilize a contextualist approach to the study of political ideologies (Bevir, 2011). In addition, we are inspired by the recent trend in new political history that analyses the connection of words and deeds in the making of politics. Another source of methodological inspiration for our article is the cultural turn in political history from the recent decades: instead of searching for the underlying social laws of socialism and nationalism in the historical process, we focus on the role of historical agents and the ways in which they employ and create political ideas. In this article, the focus is especially on the use of socialist minority nationalism in specific historical contexts (Berg, 2018; Ihalainen, 2017).

This article will focus on the ideas and actions of the leaders of the Finland-Swedish labour movement. However, the use of socialist minority nationalist ideas and rhetoric among the leaders for the purposes of unifying the labour movement was based on a shared understanding of the importance of minority politics among rank-and-file members and leaders alike. In general, the main catalyst for the plan to create a unified Finland-Swedish labour movement arose from the anti-war sentiment that was particularly widespread among Finland-Swedish socialists (Bondestam & Helsing, 1978, pp. 302–314). This common ground inspired the leaders of the Finland-Swedish arms of the SKP/SKDL and the SDP to explore the practical possibility of a common movement – despite political differences and the enduring conflicts among socialists. The issue of unifying the labour movement was therefore connected to a question about making convincing arguments about the most beneficial future for the Finland-Swedish workers. Hence, our focus on arguments that were made at the time will enable a substantial articulation of the hopes and fears experienced by the Finland-Swedish labour movement during the post-war years in particular, and provide an example of the meaning of minority nationalism in socialist struggles in general.

Challenging the majority nationalist gaze in the history of the labour movement

The Finland-Swedish case is related to a wider historical context and to the international historiography on the relation between socialism and nationalism in labour history. Nationalist manifestations of ethnic minorities in multinational empires and nation-states have been studied extensively,

but the question of minority engagement in the labour movement in ethnically or nationally diverse states such as Finland, where the Finland-Swedish minority made up a tenth of the population in 1940, has received less attention. The concept of minority nationalism denotes an agent's identification with and fidelity to a minority nation, which contrasts with identification and fidelity to the majority ethno-national group of a nation-state: majority nationalism. This conceptual pair has yielded new insights within the field of nationalism research (Gagnon, Lecours, & Nootens, 2011; Keating & McGarry, 2001). In this article, minority nationalism will function as a heuristic tool for overcoming the equation of state and (majority) nation, and for illuminating the interpenetration between (minority) nationalism and socialism in labour movement history.

In previous labour history, it was mainly ideological minorities (e.g. communists or syndicalists) who opposed the majority's hegemonic historiography. However, contemporary research has uncovered ethno-national dimensions in the very foundation of national labour movements in Europe. For example, in Swedish labour history, it has been shown that the labour movement linked ideas about ethnic Swedishness to reformist social democracy (Blomqvist, 2006; Schall, 2016). In American labour history, race and notions on whiteness have been revealed as important identity markers in the labour movement of the United States (Roediger, 1991). However, these deconstructions of historically hegemonic narratives and positions have not focused on the political significance of ethnic minorityhood in the labour movement, nor on the combination of socialist activism with minority nationalism.

National minorities, different ethnic identities and the multinational and multicultural 'challenge' have proved to be obstacles in the pursuit of a universal socialist class identity. In this respect, our case study of minority politics in the Finnish labour movement relates closely to recent studies of how different minority nationalist, or sub-state national movements, have challenged the majority's ideology. In some contexts, minority nationalist movements have had a leftist and radicalized position within the national labour movements. National minorities can also be directly associated with a certain type of socialist ideological orientation or socialist politics that has significantly differentiated from the majority (Béland & Lecours, 2005).

Yet, the ethnic dimension of the majority-minority relationship in labour movement history, and especially the political intervention of minority agents themselves, has received very little attention from researchers. One recent exception is the book-length study by historian Martin Wright (2016) on the intersection of Welsh national identity and the birth of a specific regional socialist political culture in Wales. The Welsh socialist movement emerged in tandem with the birth of Welsh national awareness among working people, but as Wright shows, the Welsh socialist labour movement also contributed significantly to the development of a unionist British labour movement in the 20th century. Wright's study underlines the problems of the majority national gaze in previous labour history, which Wright investigates as the dominating Englishness of British labour history. In other words, Wright's research shows that studying historical cases of minority nationalism, and in correlation also majority nationalism, can provide a deeper understanding of the complex connection between nationalism and socialism.

Minority nationalism in general and the role of Finland-Swedes in particular remains a neglected topic in Finnish labour history. As a remedy, we argue that it is profitable to use examples from the history of the multinational Finnish labour movement in order to appreciate the perspective of national minorities and problematize the majority nationalist gaze of previous labour history. Importantly, our article makes it possible to delineate a clear analytical division between the respective concepts of nation and nation state in the history of the socialist labour movement – a division that until recently has often been neglected in historiography (Beneš, 2017).

For researching nationalism beyond the nation-state paradigm, we introduce the concept of socialist minority nationalism, a concept that partly transcends the dichotomy between class struggle and nation state loyalty. By focusing on the manner in which socialist minority nationalism was used in the Finland-Swedish labour movement in the post-war years in Finland, this article shows the impact of ethno-class identity in the history of the multinational Finnish labour movement. Apart from our

goal of narrating the forgotten history of Finland-Swedish socialist agents, an equally important aim of ours is to develop new historical insights concerning the interpenetration of socialism and nationalism in labour history by showing the heuristic value of the concept of socialist minority nationalism.

Perils and promises in post-war Finland

The Finnish labour movement split in the aftermath of the Finnish Civil War of 1918, which was fought between revolutionary Reds and bourgeois Whites and ended in victory for the Whites. The outcome of the war was disastrous for the Finnish labour movement: the Whites executed around 7400 Reds or suspected Reds and over 10 000 died in prison camps. Most MPs of the SDP were imprisoned. The SDP nevertheless quickly reformed and the majority of the social democrats distanced themselves from revolutionary socialism. The frontline within the Finnish labour movement in the years between the two World Wars follow the international fault line between reformist social democrats and revolutionary communists, who were supressed by the Finnish government. However, the end of the Second World and the Soviet-dictated peace opened the possibility for socialist reconciliation for the first time since the Civil War.

After the September 1944 Armistice, the SKP, which was founded by social democratic revolutionary refugees in Petrograd shortly after the failed Finnish revolution of 1918, emerged from illegality and exile to stake its claim on Finland. The Allied Control Commission for Finland, which was in practice a Soviet body, oversaw the country's adherence to the terms of the armistice. The shadow of Stalin loomed large over Finland and the country's precarious transition to peacetime. On the one hand, the Republic of Finland could conceivably cease to exist along with the SDP; while on the other hand, the new political situation offered opportunities for cleansing Finnish society of right-wing extremism and progressing with comprehensive socialist reforms in collaboration with the communists.

The question of labour movement unity became both ideologically and politically (tactically) pivotal in the first Finnish post-war years. This was particularly important as the communists, as well as former high-profile socialist members of the SDP who had been expelled from the party and imprisoned during the war, founded a new umbrella organization to the left of the SDP at the end of October 1944: the SKDL. The communists planned to use the SKDL to assimilate the SDP, or at least large parts of the party, into the communist fold in order to neutralize Finnish social democracy and unite the labour movement under the SKP (Holmila & Mikkonen, 2015, pp. 127–31).

The SDP usually resisted the overtures of the SKDL, which it considered a front organization of the SKP, with the party leadership following the lead of party strongman Väinö Tanner, who held communism as poison and the primary foe of social democracy. However, there was one notable exception to this position: *Finlands Svenska Arbetarförbund* (FSA, the Swedish Confederation of Workers in Finland), which was nominally a district of the party but one with historical prerogatives not shared by the other districts and that followed its own path. The FSA was established in 1899 as an independent association for all Swedish-speaking workers in Finland. The Finnish Social Democratic Party (SDP) was founded in 1903 and emerged to become one of the fastest growing socialist labour parties in Europe in the early 20th century. The FSA joined the SDP in 1906 as an autonomous organization with the permanent right to a seat in the party executive (Bondestam & Helsing, 1978, pp. 18–36, 46–8).

The SDP's role first in the Winter War of 1939–1940 and then in the Continuation War of 1941–1944 created discord within the party. Tanner and the right-wing social democrats supported Finland's engagement in the war against the USSR on the side of Germany. When the Finnish army advanced into Soviet territories in Eastern Karelia and Germany made demands on Finland to expel Jewish refugees, the FSA's own *Arbetarbladet* was the only Finnish newspaper that openly protested and, by the end of 1943, the FSA had come to form an oppositional nucleus within the SDP. Additionally, the imprisonment of leading left-wing social democratic politicians shortly after the outbreak of the Continuation War divided the SDP (Soikkanen, 1991, pp. 273–329).

This did not end the social democratic war opposition, in which the FSA played a leading role. After the armistice, the opposition warned Tanner and his faction of so-called 'brothers-in-arms' that held power in the party that the legalized communists would overtake the SDP in the coming general elections if the SDP were not rehabilitated. The opposition called for the removal of Tanner and others who were politically compromised by the war as well as the readmission of the expelled left-wing social democrats and the formation of an electoral alliance with the communists. Tanner resigned from parliament in February 1945, but his faction conceded no other ground and departures to the SKDL rocked the SDP before the general elections in March 1945 (Soikkanen, 1991, pp. 43–50).

In the elections, the SKDL won nearly a quarter of the seats and after one of the SDP's MPs defected, the SKDL surpassed the SDP to become the largest group in parliament. Although the SDP joined the new government together with the SKDL and the Agrarian Party, the Party's leadership was reluctant to cooperate with the people's democrats, thus the FSA instigated collaboration talks with the people's democrats on their own accord. However, the Finland-Swedish social democrats did not open discussions with the SKDL proper but rather with the newly established Swedish section of the SDKL (henceforth the section). The reasons for this went beyond linguistic convenience: the opposition was in favour of cooperation with the people's democrats, which the autonomous FSA could pursue with the purpose of setting an example for the rest of the Finnish labour movement.

More importantly, the FSA harboured ambitious aims of bringing together all Swedish-speaking socialists in Finland under one unified Finland-Swedish labour movement. This unified movement would in turn, utilizing the socialist wave, expand and finally challenge the hegemony, among the Finland-Swedes, of the bourgeois Swedish People's Party. This aspiration was fuelled by the political vindication of the confederation's opposition to the war and the influx of new members: the membership of the FSA quintupled between 1943 and the end of 1945, from about 500 to 2597 members (Bondestam & Helsing, 1978, p. 442). At the end of 1945, the members of the FSA made up four per cent of the 62 760 members of the SDP (Soikkanen, 1991, p. 118). However, due to the high profile, general popularity and Nordic networks of the chair and vice chair of the confederation, Karl-August Fagerholm and Atos Wirtanen, the salience of the Finland-Swedish social democrats was far greater than mere numbers indicate. Fagerholm alone received almost 11 000 personal votes in the 1945 parliamentary elections; and the other elected MPs from the FSA, Wirtanen and Gunnar Andersson, also received a great number of personal votes relative to the other elected SDP-candidates (Soikkanen, 1991, p. 58).

The SKDL also gained support from the Swedish-speaking minority as soon as the party was established. This was mainly due to the popularity the former leading social democratic politician Karl H. Wiik, the first chair of the SKDL and a proud Finland-Swede, enjoyed among socialist-minded Finland-Swedes. Before Wiik's death in 1946, a Finland-Swedish People's Democratic movement was established with a communist core (Bondestam & Helsing, 1978, p. 310; Tuomioja, 1982, pp. 353–55). After the Armistice, individual FSA-associations threatened to leave the SDP for the SKDL unless the party ousted politicians that had supported the wartime politics. Other associations went even further and joined the SKDL in protest against the 'fascists' in the SDP, as the party leadership continued to support Tanner and his allies.[2] The section estimated that at the end of 1946, around 3 750 of the SKDL's members were Swedish-speaking, a figure inflated by the fact that the estimate included all members of formally bilingual associations.[3] The section had both internal and external reasons to display a high membership number and the true figure was probably roughly on par with FSA's at the turn of 1947.

A minority nationalist bridge over ideologically troubled waters

At the end of June 1945, the board of the FSA mandated its chair and vice chair, Fagerholm and Wirtanen, to make contact with the leaders of the Finland-Swedish people's democrats to initiate talks on, among other things, establishing a joint newspaper and a Finland-Swedish workers'

educational association.[4] At the next board meeting, Fagerholm reported that he and Wirtanen had successfully made contact and accentuated how minor the differences were between the FSA and its people's democratic counterpart. Fagerholm and Wirtanen had also come to an agreement with the people's democrats on setting up a cooperation committee.[5] For Fagerholm, the advancement towards cooperating with the Swedish people's democrats was followed by an official appeal essentially petitioning the SDP to confront nationalists within the party and commence permanent collaborations with the SKDL. In a September 1945 speech, Fagerholm maintained that the SDP was weaker than ever and that the division of the working class must thus be overcome. However, Fagerholm was heavily criticized and his social democratic loyalties questioned by the party majority (Bondestam & Helsing, 1978, pp. 313–14). Fagerholm and the FSA demonstrated in both words and deeds that the Finland-Swedish social democrats were staunch supporters of cleansing the SDP as well as ensuring labour movement unity in unison with the people's democrats in general and the Finland-Swedish people's democrats in particular.

On 14 September 1945, the agenda for the second meeting of the Swedish section of the SKDL was entirely dedicated to issues concerning the forthcoming cooperation with the FSA.[6] On 27 September 1945, the members of the newly formed joint committee commenced their first official meeting. The most prominent member of the joint committee, Fagerholm, who was also the speaker of the Finnish Parliament, was elected chair and immediately presented the idea of collaboration at the top of the social democratic agenda, namely; the merger of the socialist newspapers *Arbetarbladet* and *Folktidningen*.[7]

The FSA's ambition to merge the newspapers, testifies to the fact that the FSA fully supported the demand by the opposition within the SDP to collaborate with organisations to the left of the SDP. In contrast to the Finnish-language newspapers of the SDP, which were controlled directly by the party and thus by the party majority, the FSA owned *Arbetarbladet* and was apparently willing to relinquish its own newspaper in an effort to unite the Finland-Swedish labour movement and, by extension, the Finnish labour movement as a whole. Already in October of 1944, the SKDL had decided to engage in efforts to entice the social democratic party opposition to join the SKDL. As previously mentioned, the FSA had since 1943, constituted the most solid part of the internal SDP opposition, and this, the communists believed, would make it only natural for them to join the popular front of the SKDL. Accordingly, the first issue of *Folktidningen*, which was the official voice of the section, openly proclaimed on 20 December 1944 that the goal of the SKDL was to 'incorporate all those organizations, associations and individuals that are committed to the principles of international law and popular liberty'.[8] The SDP was to be defeated through division and absorption.

However, in the Finland-Swedish labour movement, it was the FSA that courted the Finland-Swedes in the SKDL to initiate collaboration and not the other way around, which was the case at the national level. An invitation to discuss future collaboration coming from the SDP itself would have surpassed the expectations of most Finnish-speaking communists. However, in the Finland-Swedish context this dream became reality when the social democrats themselves contacted the people's democrats to plan the future merger of each other's newspapers. This was seemingly an offer the communists could not refuse, however, somewhat surprising, the communists did not accept this gesture with open arms. Instead, their response showed a positive wait-and-see attitude. As the records show, the people's democrats did not want to commit without political consideration:

> If also the proposal to found a uniform Swedish workers' newspaper gained support among the committee's people's democrats, Rosenberg emphasized that one should put off the merger and first investigate the success of collaborations in other current issues.[9]

Why did section chair Rosenberg and the communists hesitate? Considering the communist strategy of incorporating and controlling Finnish social democracy through the SKDL, the initiative by the FSA was not only desirable but also beyond the communists' expectations.

In addition, a potential merger of *Arbetarbladet* and *Folktidningen*, would then have entailed the establishment of comprehensive organizational and political ties between the FSA and the section. The newspapers were the official mouthpiece of both respective organisations and thereby crucial for the political identity of their members, which meant that a merger would in effect entail an ideological rapprochement between the Finland-Swedish social democrats and people's democrats. This would have deepened the divide between the FSA and the SDP, which in turn would drastically increase the probability of the FSA all together abandoning the SDP in favour of the SKDL. Wirtanen's later contributions confirm that the importance of the press for political consciousness and struggle was a widely shared idea that had motivated the original motivations for a merger of the newspapers. The Finland-Swedish labour movement needed a large, cogent and widely distributed newspaper rather than two equally small papers that competed with each other for the attention of Finland-Swedish workers. This situation was far from optimal considering that there was also ample competition from the bourgeoisie press that dominated Finland-Swedish public opinion (Meinander, 2016, p. 256).

There is no indication that the section lacked official sanctioning from the SKP to conduct extensive collaborations with the FSA or that the SKP disapproved of the planned newspaper merger. Consequently, it seems that the general indecisiveness prevalent among Finland-Swedish communists in September 1945 was not due to orders from above. The reason why the communists hesitated was probably that their own movement would have been easily overshadowed, both politically and professionally, by such a well-established organization as the FSA and by its leading high-profile politicians. However, the decision at the joint committee meeting of September 1945 to set up a joint civic-educational organization for Finland-Swedish workers was certainly a sign that the communists were willing to create collaborative organizations with the social democrats, at least if the political stakes were not as high as in the party press issue (Wickström & Ahlskog, 2017, p. 259). In any case, it seems plausible that the communists simply did not trust their own ability to take control over a joint newspaper, which, for them, meant that the political risks were higher than the potential rewards.

Awaiting the decision on a joint newspaper, both sides agreed to refrain from criticizing each other publicly. The issues of both papers would also be co-ordinated to avoid overlap. Thus, the Finland-Swedish workers would have access to a Swedish-language paper for socialist workers six days a week. This settlement between socialist comrades and ethnic kinsfolk was to be accompanied by gatherings in the form of joint festivities and meetings before the upcoming local government elections in December 1945.[10]

The agreements of 27 September 1945 were mostly carried into effect. In the municipal elections of December 1945 the SDP and the SKDL formed electoral unions all over Finland. The party majority and the opposition of the SDP suggested the electoral union for different reasons. For the party majority, this was a question of demonstrating that they too supported socialist unity, but the majority also wanted to show in practice that a union with SKDL was detrimental to the electoral results of the SDP. Consequently, the majority was ready to sacrifice local government votes in order to strike a blow against the party's internal opposition – for the opposition, the question at issue was socialist unity and their wish to avoid a laborious election campaign in competition with the SKDL. In the elections, the SKDL and SDP jointly gained 48 per cent of the votes, with the people's democrats becoming the larger party by 10 000 votes. The combined proportional share of the votes for SDP and SKDL was 46 per cent, which was 2,7 per cent less than in the parliamentary elections the same year. What was even worse (or even better for the SDP majority) was the fact that the electoral union was disadvantageous to the results of both parties and that the SKDL became the largest left party (Soikkanen, 1991, pp. 91–2).

The local government elections were a great success for the Finland-Swedish labour movement. For the first time since the Civil War, Finland-Swedish socialists won seats in almost every local council of Swedish-speaking towns and rural districts. There was also substantial support for the SKDL among Finland-Swedes, and it become a factor to take into account also in Finland-Swedish politics (Bondestam & Helsing, 1978, p. 314).

On 21 March 1946, the joint committee convened with a single purpose: the establishment of a workers' educational association for the Finland-Swedish workers. A month later the People's Educational Association (*Folkets Bildingsförbund*, FBF) was established. The foundation of the FBF was carried through with good faith from both parties and embodied Finland-Swedish socialist minority nationalism. The charter of the FBF stipulated that only persons with Swedish as their mother tongue were eligible to be board members, thus excluding ethnic Finns no matter how proficient in Swedish they were. The aim of the association was to gather all Swedish-speaking workers in their own separate educational association (Wickström & Ahlskog, 2017, pp. 260–62).

Working-class comrades and minority-nationalist brothers

The FSA's congress of 1946 looked forward to reconciliation in the SDP. The congress reaffirmed the FSA's unanimous support for the demands of the opposition, which the FSA expected would be met by the SDP leadership at the party's extraordinary congress in June 1946. Even though the congress of the FSA was optimistic about an imminent resolution to the internal conflict within the SDP, it also decided on a contingency plan. In the unlikely event that the SDP congress failed to resolve the conflict to the satisfaction of the opposition, the FSA would convene for an extraordinary congress to deliberate on the confederation's future within the party. However, the SDP's extraordinary congress did not pan out according to the expectations of the opposition and the FSA. The majority and minority factions of the SDP were unable to reach a compromise and the majority stated its intention to confront the people's democrats instead of cooperating with them. The FSA called another extraordinary congress in the fall of 1946 to clarify the relationship of the confederation to the SDP in light of the latest setbacks.[11]

Wirtanen continued to polemicize against the party majority in *Arbetarbladet* after the failure of the unscheduled congress. Wirtanen's line of attack in turn was criticized by the more moderate members of the FSA leadership. Wirtanen rebuffed his critics and wowed to continue his line of action.[12] As chief-editor of *Arbetarbladet*, Wirtanen raised the stakes considerably by encouraging Swedish-speaking socialists to be forerunners in uniting the labour movement. When the Tanner faction criticized this plan as being based on ethnicity rather than on the principles of social democracy, Wirtanen responded caustically that the real reactionaries were to be found at the top of the party: 'Should it really be the case that when a socialist turns nationalist, then in truth he becomes a national socialist?'[13]

At the FSA board meeting held on 12 September 1946, Wirtanen announced that he would leave the parliamentary party group of the SDP but not the party. Fagerholm accused Wirtanen of disloyalty and stated that the FSA had no reason to leave the SDP. The heated exchange prompted Wirtanen to leave the meeting.[14] It is apparent that Fagerholm and his followers were no longer fully committed to the opposition and that Fagerholm was manoeuvring towards reconciliation with the party leadership. The FSA was, however, a democratic confederation and the board had to reckon with the will of the members.

The section timed its congress to coincide with the extraordinary congress of the FSA.[15] The concurrence of the congresses was presented as a happy coincidence, as a 'good omen for the future' and a sign that the 'time when the whole of the Finland-Swedish labour movement will come together in one joint congress is not far off'.[16] In the meantime, the proactive people's democrats put together a plan with the chair of the SKP Aimo Aaltonen to ensure that the envisaged future of unity would come true. The involvement of Aaltonen again shows that the leadership of the SKP attached great weight to the question of the FSA's future. Aaltonen and the section believed that the Finland-Swedish social democratic field was much more oppositional than the leadership of the FSA, which should be exploited. The section wanted to stress Finland-Swedishness in its push on the FSA.[17] The last three aims of the cooperation program that the section presented to the FSA were steeped in a naturalized notion of Finland-Swedishness, but,

more importantly, they were replete with points of socialist minority nationalism directed at the Finland-Swedish bourgeois:

> 1: nationalization according to reasonable lines with consideration of the clear demands of the citizenship justice;
>
> 2: a completely new land reform, based on the realities of our natural conditions;
>
> 3: an objective and morally justified cleansing of forces that continue to do harm to the people and the fatherland;
>
> 4: the consolidation of the Finland-Swedish socialists with a joint front against the assembled Finland-Swedish bourgeois:
>
> 5: a well-managed, effective, economically sound six-day socialist Finland-Swedish newspaper
>
> 6: unified action demonstrated by coming together on a popular Finland-Swedish basis.[18]

The first three points followed the demands the SKDL and the social democratic opposition. These three general calls for socialist reforms were combined with three socialist minority nationalist aims. Finland-Swedishness was presented as a natural basis for socialist cooperation that could rouse the Finland-Swedish people and steer them away from the bourgeois.

At the extraordinary congress of the FSA in October 1946, the delegates wavered between staying in the SDP and withdrawing from the party. The South Ostrobothnians in particular backed an exit since, as the delegate Herbert Kuni put it, 'it was difficult to assert the interests of the Swedish-speaking people [. . .] as the current party executive is partly made up of, if not Nazis, then nevertheless nationalists'. Wirtanen argued that an exit could strengthen the confederation and facilitate closer cooperation with the people's democrats. However, he did agree with Fagerholm that the FSA, as a central part of the opposition, should still seek to reform the SDP from the inside. The united stance of the FSA's leaders swayed the congress to remain in the SDP, at least for the time being. The congress adopted a resolution, which stated that the FSA would postpone its final decision until its next congress in the hope that negotiations between the party's majority and minority would be concluded to the satisfaction of the minority. In the event that the opposition failed, the FSA would have no other option than to leave the SDP.[19]

At the second day of the congress, the Finland-Swedish people's democrats showed up to present their cooperation program and to propose the establishment of a joint committee that could implement 'more intimate cooperation'. The decision to accept the proposal of the people's democrats was unanimous.[20]

Mikael Romberg, the Swedish secretary of the SKP, reported on the congress to the leaders of the SKP and informed them that the delegates had responded very positively to the cooperation proposition and that the radical social democrats had dominated the congress. The SKP leadership upheld its approval for the plans for extensive Finland-Swedish cooperation. The communist leaders were even, in principle, in favour of establishing a Swedish workers' party to facilitate FSA's exit from the SDP.[21] The readiness of the SKP to allow the Finland-Swedish people's democrats, including the communists, to establish a worker's party of their own in cooperation with the Finland-Swedish social democrats on an ethnic basis shows that the SKP was willing to make substantial concessions in order to separate the FSA from the SDP.

Two days after Romberg's report, the section met to deliberate on its strategy. The outcome of the extraordinary congress of the FSA had not been optimal as the Fagerholm faction had managed to keep the confederation in the SDP, but the section was still hopeful of breaking the FSA free from its mother party. The section decided that FSA-associations that left on their own accord should be able to join the SKDL, but that the aim should still be the creation of local organizations of cooperation. All leading organs should push the cooperation agenda through all conceivable means available.[22]

A month later, the section looked forward to the first meeting of the new cooperation committee, for which the section's agenda was clear: the merger of *Arbetarbladet* and *Folktidningen*.[23] The section also decided that the future cooperation committee should publish a manifesto formally approved by both parties. As in the case of the newspaper merger, the section took steps to facilitate this, with Romberg writing an advance draft in anticipation of social democratic approval. The eventuality of a 'joint Swedish workers party' was moreover discussed, however, the details of that discussion were not noted in the protocols.[24] The fact that the possibility of a socialist Finland-Swedish party was on the agenda demonstrates that the Finland-Swedish people's democrats, with the blessing of the SKP, at least contemplated the establishment of a party the like of which had never before existed in Finland. K. H. Wiik's proposal to found a Finland-Swedish social democratic party in 1906 was the only historical precedent to the plans of the people's democrats (Kaihovirta, 2019). The people's democrats prepared thoroughly for the launch of the cooperation committee, which they attached high hopes to.

The cooperation committee took the name the Swedish Cooperation Committee (*Svenska Arbetarrörelsens Samarbetskommitté*, SAS) at its statutory meeting on 12 December 1946. The first proper meeting of the SAS was held four days later and, on this occasion, the SAS commissioned an exploration of a merger of *Arbetarbladet* and *Folktidningen*.[25] The social democrats of the SAS also accepted the publishing of the joint manifesto that the people's democrats had prepared, and when the section met just before Christmas 1946, it assumed that the merger of the papers would be concluded shortly.[26] The section put its trust in Wirtanen and the support for cooperation among the rank-and-file members of the FSA, and at least in the beginning, Wirtanen delivered his side of the bargain.

'To Finland's Swedish working people!'

On Saturday 28 December 1946, *Folktidningen* published the following headline from the SAS on the front page: 'To the Swedish working people of Finland!'[27] Two days later *Arbetarbladet* published the statement on its front page as well.[28] According to the SAS, the Finland-Swedish social democrats and people's democrats had outlined a joint plan of action for the Swedish workers of Finland 'in a spirit of mutual understanding'. This plan of action included the nationalization of 'key industries' and a land reform package that took into account the 'land needs of the Swedish' in particular. The SAS stressed the importance of the unity of the Finland-Swedish labour movement in order to strengthen the influence of Finland-Swedish workers. As one of the first steps towards greater unity, the SAS drew attention to the merger of the two socialist papers in which the statement was published and underscored that the practicalities of this question were now being considered.[29]

According to the SAS, the unity achieved within the Finland-Swedish labour movement should function as a model for the goal of uniting 'the entire labour movement of Finland'. This would in turn clear the path for the 'democratic sanitation of political life in our country and the future societal rebuild under the leadership of the working people'. In the eyes of the SAS, the Finland-Swedish labour movement was to shoulder a historical mission not only for itself but also for the future of the Finnish labour movement and Finland as a whole. The success of this mission was, for the SAS, primarily in the hands of the Finland-Swedish social- and people's democrats. Consequently, they emphasised that each respective local organization and their individual members should show 'good faith, tolerance and understanding' towards each other. In other words, the SAS was reliant on the supposition that Finland-Swedish workers should demonstrate the kind of ideological forbearance that was crucial for the success of the historical mission bestowed on them. This was possible since, in contrast with their Finnish comrades, the Finland-Swedish social- and people's democrats had been 'inspired by a deep and honest will to mutual understanding' since the end of the war.[30]

Wirtanen elaborated the background and political motives of the SAS in an editorial in *Arbetarbladet*. According to Wirtanen, the statement by the SAS might well prove to have great historical significance 'in the annals of our Swedish labour movement'. Wirtanen also alluded to K. H. Wiik, who had died 6 months earlier, as a forerunner for those 'in our Swedish movement' that did not accept the division of the working class as something 'inevitable and final'. Wiik was styled as an orthodox socialist and 'ardent advocate of the unity of the labour movement' – a true people's democrat who had tried to unite the movement in the joint struggle for 'the realization of socialism'. Wiik's leadership had showed the way forward, but since the 'voice of reason and solidarity' had not gained credence among the Finnish-speaking socialists, his vision failed to materialize. However, there was hope still because 'among the Swedish social- and people's democrats of the country' there was a will to collaborate that was growing stronger:

> One has concluded that the worker, no matter if he is a social democrat, people's democrat or communist, still has certain fundamental interests in common. One has also concluded that the Swedish labour movement is not at all furthered by division, which will profit no one but the bourgeoisie.[31]

Most importantly, the Finland-Swedish workers had a shared understanding of major societal questions. In practice this meant that Finland-Swedish workers were unanimous in their dismissal of the wartime politics, which was not an opinion shared by all Finnish workers. After these arguments were fleshed out, Wirtanen posed the rhetorical question: 'Why shouldn't we cooperate?'[32] The answer was obvious for Wirtanen, but he wanted further to elaborate his position as he knew that not all members of the FSA would agree.

Firstly, Wirtanen maintained that the FSA would still be fully independent within a union with the SKDL. However, Wirtanen also added that hopefully there would be such a deep, mutual ideological understanding that an agreement would turn into complete unity, with the implication that, should this be accomplished, a merger would then take place. However, he emphasized that all cooperation, unity and subsequent organizational fusion would be conditional upon ideological rapprochement and that this was still only a vision for the future. Nonetheless, the road from unity to fusion was only putatively conditional. According to Wirtanen, the differences between the political programs of the respective parties were far less significant than 'what one would first be prone to think'. Wirtanen agreed that there were substantial differences between social democrats and communists on basic issues but claimed that those differences did not have the same importance for the Finland-Swedish labour movement that they had for the Finnish. The reason was that 'communists do not have a large role to play in the Swedish parts of our country'.[33] Wirtanen did not deny that it was the views of the communists that were problematic for the prospect of socialist unity, but he tried to reduce the weight of this problem by highlighting the relative insignificance of communist influence among Finland-Swedish people's democrats. However, Wirtanen's argument, based on the idea of downplaying the role of communism among Finland-Swedes, was in direct conflict with the general line of the party leadership of the SDP. In contrast, the strategy of the SDP leadership was to emphasize the communist component of the SKDL by negotiating only and exclusively with the SKP. The goal of this strategy was to expose the SKDL as a communist-front organization.

The sharp distinction between the people's democrats and communists made by Wirtanen, in tandem with downplaying the importance of the latter in Swedish-speaking Finland, shows that it was the view of communism within the FSA that the supporters of unification considered decisive. Alluding to the notion that communism was comparatively less powerful in Swedish-speaking Finland, was yet another ethnocentric attempt to stress the special conditions and abilities of Finland-Swedish workers in their historical mission to unite the labour movement. One drawback in Wirtanen's argument was, of course, that it tacitly assumed the truth of the proposition that most Finland-Swedish social democrats were deeply unsure about. This was the fundamental claim that the political views of the people's democrats of Swedish-Finland were, in fact, essentially different from (Finnish) communists.

The social democratic limits of ethno-class solidarity

The resolution of the extraordinary congress of the FSA in October 1946 to remain in the SDP on the condition that the leadership of the party conceded to the demands of the opposition did not dampen the intensive debate on the future of the confederation. The ultimatum as well as the unanimous decision to engage in far reaching cooperation with the Finland-Swedish people's democrats only added fuel to the fiery debate on FSA's future. The board of the FSA followed the commitment of the congress to cooperate with the people's democrats but with certain reservations, in particular concerning the proposed newspaper merger. The board underlined that FSA's representatives in the SAS were free to discuss all matters related to cooperation, but all decisions taken by the SAS needed to be approved by the board.[34]

The stance of the board of the FSA made Wirtanen's, as well as the people's democrats', plans for a united Finland-Swedish labour movement all the more precarious before the congress was held. Wirtanen's vision of a unified Finland-Swedish, and by extension Finnish, labour movement was furthermore compounded by the SDP's 'fighting social democracy' turn. At the beginning of March 1947, the SDP began a massive propaganda campaign against the SKDL/SKP under the slogan 'Enough is Enough' (*Jo riittää*). The closing of social democratic ranks and the uncompromising stance against the 'forced democracy' and 'opinion terrorism' of the SKDL/SKP strengthened the position of the anti-communists in the FSA (Soikkanen, 1991, pp. 191–93).

The main issue under scrutiny at the 1947 congress of the FSA was nothing less than the future of the FSA: continued co-existence with Finnish-speaking social democrats in the SDP, or an unproven path on the grounds of Finland-Swedish workers unity with the Swedish-speaking people's democrats? The South Ostrobothnians espoused an exit from the SDP, whereas most of the traditionally strong associations of industrial workers in the south of Finland wanted to remain in the SDP. The importance of the congress not only for the FSA but also for Finnish and Nordic social democracy was underlined by the attendance of the social democratic Prime Minister of Sweden, Tage Erlander. The presence of his friend Erlander had been planned by Fagerholm to sway the congress his way.[35] Emil Skog, chair of the SDP, and party secretary of the SDP Väinö Leskinen were also in attendance. In his address, Erlander stressed the need of cohesion if social democracy was to be successful, as did Leskinen, who also spoke in Swedish.[36]

After the addresses appealing to social democratic unity, the talk turned to Finland-Swedish unity as the people's democrats, represented by Georg Backlund, pleaded to the congress:

> We are convinced that the congress […] is aware of the crucial importance its decision will have for the future of the whole of the Finland-Swedish labour movement. We also believe that the congress shall take its standpoint with consideration of the whole of the Finland-Swedish labour movement and above all think about its future and strengthening, that is to say think on the possibilities of greater Swedish assembly and unity. The Swedish labour movement in Finland has for the first time in history reached such a scope that, if it can join its forces, can become of substantial significance, a factor to be reckoned with. An FSA that is under the influence of and cooperates with forces for which the Swedish labour movement in Finland is only of subordinate importance, which have shown evident marks of true Finnish nationalism, can in our opinion have far from the same opportunities to position itself freely and take an interest in promoting this Swedish movement in its entirety as a freestanding confederation would have.[37]

Backlund openly backed the FSA's exit for the sake of a burgeoning Finland-Swedish labour movement, a movement that could not fulfil its potential as long as the FSA was repressed by an SDP maintaining strong Finnish ethno-nationalist tendencies. Backlund's appeal to the congress was primarily centred on ethnic solidarity between the Finland-Swedish social democrats and people's democrats. Following this line of particularism, Backlund consequently denounced the SDP as indifferent or even hostile to the minority nationalist interests of the FSA but not as undemocratic, reactionary or antisocialist.

Backlund expressed his sincere hope that the congress would finally decide to make 'the dream of a strong and influential Finland-Swedish labour movement that we all surely share' a reality. He likened the vision of a Finland-Swedish socialist union to a 'strong stream which goes through the

sea with its own waves'[38], a famous quote from the verse epic *Frithiofs saga* (1825) about a Viking hero by the Scandinavianist Swedish poet Esaias Tegnér. By quoting Tegnér's romantic words of Viking wisdom, Backlund strongly alluded to the symbolism of the sea and coast in the (minority) national identity of the Finland-Swedes, as well as their distinctive ethnic character. Backlund then framed his vision in terms that were more tangible. He emphasized the historical possibility of launching a daily newspaper for all Finland-Swedish workers and claimed that the first issue of a united paper could be published on Mayday, depending on the outcome of the congress. Backlund's minority nationalist call for the FSA to forsake its majority nationalist mother party in favour of Finland-Swedish workers unity was countered by Fagerholm, who claimed that the FSA was willing to continue cooperation on the condition of mutual loyalty.[39]

Fagerholm then attacked the people's democrats, who according to him had spread false rumours about his role in the party opposition. It was, however, Wirtanen and his followers who were the main target of Fagerholm, who he accused of disloyalty and of facilitating the efforts of the communists to split the SDP. Wirtanen did not directly respond to the indictments of Fagerholm in his reply. Instead, Wirtanen maintained his stance that the FSA should continue its mission to rescue the SDP from its ruling right-wing majority faction. Wirtanen, echoing Backlund, stressed the significance of Finland-Swedish defiance in the face of the ethno-nationalist Finns, such as Unto Varjonen, who held sway in the SDP:

> For us Swedes, however, the issue is rather serious. We can therefore establish that we are members of a party that provides unlimited freedom of expression and a leading position to a Varjonen, even though he has been exposed as a contributor to a true Finnish semi-fascist paper, *Suomalainen Suomi* [A Finnish Finland] […] He does not run the risk of losing his membership [in the party], on the contrary he dictates the demands to us other old social democrats. The weight of the true Finns in the party is greater than the entire Swedish Confederation of Workers in Finland.[40]

Wirtanen juxtaposed the Finland-Swedes of the FSA with the Finnish ethno-nationalists of the SDP and made a point similar to that of Backlund: the conflict between the SDP and the FSA was also an ethnic majority-minority struggle. Wirtanen continued to call for increased cooperation with the people's democrats, as 'almost all of us' agreed with the people's democrats on the problems related to the Continuation War and foreign policy. Cooperation was also essential because the Finland-Swedish socialists needed to pool their resources against the wealthy and mighty Swedish People's Party, beginning with the merger of *Arbetarbladet* and *Folkbladet*. The replies that followed from Fagerholm's supporters slated Wirtanen in line with Fagerholm's opening address.[41]

The following day, the question to remain or exit came to a head and was put to a vote: remain won with 90 votes to 31. The majority of delegates were, however, unwilling to drop their opposition to the leadership of the SDP or fall in line with the Fagerholm faction, which the outcome of the chair election shows. The wavering Wirtanen, who in the end did not support an exit, declined to put himself forward as a candidate for, as he argued, the sake of the unity of the FSA and urged Fagerholm to do the same. Fagerholm however ignored Wirtanen's plea to abstain from running, but perhaps surprisingly to himself and most certainly to his followers, he lost to the Wirtanen backed compromise candidate Gunnar Andersson 54–64.[42]

The outcome of the chair election appeased most of the exiteers, who let it be known that they were now willing to remain. The congress was however immediately followed by the general shareholders' meeting of *Arbetarbladet*, where a successful coup to oust Wirtanen from the paper was carried out by the Fagerholm faction. Andersson feared that the Fagerholm faction's action, which had been in the works well before the Congress, would split the FSA. His fears came true when a large number of associations, mostly from South-Ostrobothnia, left the FSA and joined the SKDL together with Wirtanen (Bondestam & Helsing, 1978, pp. 325–27). Wirtanen became the chief editor of *Ny Tid*, which replaced *Folktidningen* as a purportedly joint newspaper for all Finland-Swedish socialists. On the pages of *Ny Tid* and *Arbetarbladet* the current and former social democrats engaged in incensed mudslinging through the spring of 1947.[43]

In August 1947, the section approached the FSA with a proposal for an electoral alliance in the upcoming municipal elections. The FSA published its rebuff on the front-page of *Arbetarbladet*, stating that an alliance would not benefit the cause of Finland-Swedish workers.[44] The people's democrats responded by claiming that the FSA valued unity with the reactionary forces in the SDP over cooperation within the Finland-Swedish labour movement.[45] Fagerholm reclaimed the chair of FSA at the 1948 congress, where he denounced Wirtanen as an anti-democratic errand boy for the communists that had to be purged 'to preserve our Swedish labour movement as social democratic'.[46] The parliamentary election in 1948 was a failure for the SKDL, who lost 11 seats and the communist take-over in Finnish politics seemed to be halted when the SKDL was excluded from government (and remained so for 18 years). Fagerholm was by now riding high in Finnish politics and became Finland's first Finland-Swedish Prime Minister, forming a social democratic minority government in July 1948.

By 1948, the vision of a united Finland-Swedish labour movement was thoroughly exhausted, but the joint venture FBF was still active. However, the FBF was based on mutual power sharing in the pursuit of a common goal. The FBF was not set-up to contain two opposing factions, and when the struggle between the social democrats and the people's democrats spilled over into the FBF, it was torn asunder. At the annual meeting in 1949, the social democratic delegates, to the dismay of the people's democrats, left the meeting never to return (Wickström & Ahlskog, 2017, pp. 277–79). Backlund, the chair of FBF that day and a communist veteran of many fierce struggles, later called the split 'one of the most trying ordeals I have ever experienced in the labour movement'.[47] The break-up of the FBF, the tangible symbol of the struggle towards a united and expansive Finland-Swedish labour movement, was even lamented by the social democrats:

> Here ended the last form of Finland-Swedish cooperation between social democrats and people's democrats that still existed. [–] One assuredly does not state this with joy [. . .] A Swedish workers' educational association on the same broad base as this will not likely be hastily built up again.[48]

Neither a Finland-Swedish workers' educational association nor collaboration even approximating the extent of 1945–1947 was ever again attempted. At first, the Finland-Swedish identity of the agents was an aspect that united them in a shared socialist struggle – a few years later it was the same aspect of familiarity and personal relations that fed suspicion among them and sealed the final and lasting rift.

Conclusion: a minority perspective on socialist unity

In this article, we have investigated the question of socialist unity from the perspective of the Finland-Swedish part of labour movement in Finland. This minority perspective has allowed us to pinpoint and elaborate two decisive features for the prospects of a unified socialist labour movement during the Years of Danger in Finnish history. Firstly, the minority perspective sheds light on the role of minority politics, within both the SKP/SKDL and the SDP, in the plans for labour movement cooperation. As we have shown, the issue of unifying the Finland-Swedish labour movement links directly with both the divide and conquer strategy of the SKP/SKDL and with ethnic political tensions in the SDP. Thus, the minority perspective has provided a way of substantiating the general nature of the conflict between the SDP and the SKP/SKDL during the immediate post-war years.

Secondly, the minority perspective has allowed us to investigate the ways in which post-war attempts to create a unified labour movement interrelates with minority nationalism. We examined in detail the moves and counter-moves that ultimately torpedoed the attempt to form a unified socialist labour movement for the Finland-Swedish minority nation of Finland. The purpose of this planned, but failed, united movement was to provide Finland-Swedish workers with a credible alternative to the bourgeoisie political hegemony in Swedish-speaking Finland and to the ethno-

nationalism of the ruling right-wing faction within the SDP. The mobilizing factor was the experience of Finnish ethno-nationalism working in tandem with reactionary politics during the war. This dynamic was considered as a continued threat not only against the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland but also against the labour movement as a whole and its aspiration of transforming post-war Finland.

This article makes evident that the attempt to unify the Finland-Swedish labour movement connects directly with the power struggle between the SDP and the SKP/SKDL at the national level. In other words, an historical agent's position on the minority issue of unifying the Finland-Swedish labour movement translated, inevitably, into positions on the future of the socialist movement in Finland as a whole. For the communists, the unification of the Finland-Swedish labour movement would have served both their tactical goal of dividing the SDP, while simultaneously increasing their influence in Finland-Swedish and Finnish politics. On the other side of the political fence, the prospect of unification became a tool for the fight against ethno-Finnish nationalism by the SDP party opposition. However, in the end the very idea of communism was anathema even among the majority of the socialist-minded Finland-Swedes. An open call to communism was therefore downplayed in favour of forging an independent Finland-Swedish labour movement.

Given the role of high-level political tactics involved, was the rhetoric of unity only pretence by communist conspirators? The agents and contexts investigated in this article speaks against that conclusion. As we have shown, there was a strong minority nationalist belief among social democrats such as Atos Wirtanen and his supporters, a view shared by at least some of the Finland-Swedish communists, which predicated that Swedishness would act as the glue in a unified Finland-Swedish labour movement. Finland-Swedish workers were, allegedly, in possession of a special kind of character needed for the historical mission of unifying the socialist labour movement. This Finland-Swedish avant-garde would eventually show the socialist way forward for the unification of the Finnish labour movement at large. In the end, the spectre of communism overtrumped the advantages of the spirit supposedly inherent in the Finland-Swedish labour movement. For a time, however, socialist minority nationalism united Finland-Swedish social democrats and communists, which demonstrates the contingent salience of national minorityhood in socialist struggles.

Notes

1. The traditional (bourgeois and social democratic) label for the period from the end of 1944 until the summer of 1948, when the SKP/SKDL suffered a heavy loss in the parliamentary elections and was forced out of government, in Finnish historiography (Holmila & Mikkonen, 2015, pp. 14–9).
2. TYARK, Finland-Swedish social democrats archive, Fb:16 Incoming letters 1945–48, Letter from Dalsbruk sv. worker's association undated 1945; Letter from Hangö 19 February 1946, Letter from Oravais 8 April 1946, Letter from the Swedish cooperation committee in Northern Ostrobotnia 10 September 1946, Letter from Pernå 1 November 1946.; *Arbetarbladet*, 16 January 2023 January 1946.
3. KA, SKDL's Swedish Section Archives, Annual Reports, Annual Report 1946.
4. TYARK, Finland-Swedish social democrats archive, CC:CC2 Confederations Board's Protocols 30 June 1945.
5. TYARK, Finland-Swedish social democrats archive, CC:CC2 Confederations Board's Protocols 27 August 1945.
6. KA, SKDL's Swedish Section Archives, Protocols, minutes of meeting 2 April 1945.
7. KA, FBF Archives, Protocols, minutes of meeting 27 September 1945.
8. *Folktidningen*, 20 December 1944.
9. KA, FBF Archives, Protocols, minutes of meeting 27 September 1945.
10. KA, FBF Archives, Protocols, minutes of meeting 27 September 1945.
11. TYARK, Finland-Swedish social democrats archive, CC:CC2 Confederations Board's Protocols 12 July 1946.
12. TYARK, Finland-Swedish social democrats archive, CC:CC2 Confederations Board's Protocols 12 July 1946.
13. *Arbetarbladet*, 2 September 1946.
14. TYARK, Finland-Swedish social democrats archive, CC:CC2 Confederations Board's Protocols 13 September 1946.
15. KA, SKDL's Swedish Section Archives, Protocols, minutes of meeting 5 September 1946.
16. *Folktidningen*, 19 October 1946.

17. KA, SKDL's Swedish Section Archives, Protocols, minutes of meeting 4 October 1946.
18. *Folktidningen*, 29 October 1946.
19. TYARK, Finland-Swedish social democrats archive, CA:CA1 Confederations Congress protocols (printed), "FSA:s extraordinarie kongress 26–27 oktober 1946", pp. 7–10, 13–15.
20. TYARK, Finland-Swedish social democrats archive, CA:CA1 Confederations Congress protocols (printed), "FSA:s extraordinarie kongress 26–27 oktober 1946", pp. 10–11.
21. KA, SKP Archives, Protocols of SKP's Party Directorate, minutes of meeting 28 October 1946.
22. KA, SKDL's Swedish Section Archives, Protocols, minutes of meeting 30 October 1946.
23. KA, SKDL's Swedish Section Archives, Protocols, minutes of meeting 29 November 1946.
24. Ibid.
25. *Arbetarbladet*, 17 December 1946.
26. KA, SKDL's Swedish Section Archives, Protocols, minutes of meeting 20.12.1946.
27. *Folktidningen*, 28 December 1946.
28. *Arbetarbladet*, 30 December 1946.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. TYARK, Finland-Swedish social democrats archive, CC:CC2 Confederations Board's Protocols 21 November 1946.
35. ARAB, Tage Erlander Archives, Correspondence, letters from Väinö Leskinen to Tage Erlander 2 January and 7 January 1946.
36. TYARK, Finland-Swedish social democrats archive, CA:CA1 Confederations Congress protocols (printed), "FSA:s trettionde ordinarie kongress hållen i Helsingfors den 24–25 mars 1947", p. 17.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid, p. 27.
41. Ibid, p. 28–30.
42. Ibid, p. 36–38.
43. Se for example *Ny Tid* 29 April 1947; 12 May 1947 and *Arbetarbladet* 28 April 1947; 14 May 1947.
44. *Arbetarbladet*, 25 August 1947.
45. *Ny Tid*, 27 August 1947.
46. TYARK, Finland-Swedish social democrats archive, CA:CA1 Confederations Congress protocols (printed), "FSA:s trettioförsta ordinarie kongress hållen i Helsingfors den 26–27 mars 1948", p. 42.
47. *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 20 November 1976.
48. *Svenska Demokraten*, 26 April 1949.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the Kone Foundation and the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland. Koneen Säätiö; Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland.

Notes on contributors

Jonas Ahlskog earned his PhD in philosophy from Åbo Akademi University in 2017. He is currently a postdoctoral grant researcher within a Kone Foundationen funded interdisciplinary research project on concepts of class and nation in the Finnish labour movement during the 20th century.

Matias Kaihovirta earned his PhD in Nordic history from Åbo Akademi University in 2015 and he is currently (8/2019) appointed as a postdoctoral researcher in political history at University of Helsinki. His research interests deals with the history of the Swedish-speaking working class and labour movement in Finland.

Mats Wickström earned his PhD in General history from Åbo Akademi University in 2015. He is currently a postdoctoral researcher in minority studies at Åbo Akademi University.

References

Béland, D., & Lecours, A. (2005). The politics of territorial solidarity: Nationalism and social policy reform in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Belgium. *Comparative Political Studies*, *38*(6), 676–703.

Beneš, J. S. (2017). *Workers and nationalism: Czech and German social democracy in Habsburg Austria, 1890–1918*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Berg, A. (2018). Nationen i historien. *Historisk Tidskrift*, *138*(3), 383–390.

Bevir, M. (2011). The contextual approach. In G. Klosko (Ed.), *The oxford handbook of the history of political philosophy* (pp. 11–23). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Beyer-Thoma, H. (1990). *Kommunisten und Sozialdemokraten in Finland 1944–1948*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

Blomqvist, H. (2006). *Nation, ras och civilisation i svensk arbetarrörelse före nazismen*. Stockholm: Carlsson.

Bondestam, A., & Helsing, A. (1978). *Som en stubbe i en stubbåker: Finlands svenska arbetarförbund 1899–1974*. Helsingfors: Finlands svenska arbetarförbund.

Gagnon, A. G., Lecours, A., & Nootens, G. (Eds.). (2011). *Contemporary majority nationalism*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Holmila, A., & Mikkonen, S. (2015). *Suomi sodan jälkeen: Pelon, katkeruuden ja toivon vuodet 1944–1949*. Jyväskylä: Atena.

Hyvämäki, L. (1955). *Vaaran vuodet 1944–48*. Helsinki: Otava.

Ihalainen, P. (2017). *The springs of democracy: National and transnational debates on constitutional reform in the British, German, Swedish and Finnish parliaments, 1917–1919*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

Kaihovirta, M. (2019). Vähemmistönationalistisen sosialismin tulo Suomeen: Karl H. Wiik ja ruotsinkielisen sosialistisen vähemmistön kokemusten politisointi. In J. Annola, V. Kivimäki, & A. Malinen (Eds.), *Eletty historia: Kokemus näkökulmana menneisyyteen* (pp. 277–304). Tampere: Vastapaino.

Keating, M., & McGarry, J. (Eds.). (2001). *Minority nationalism and the changing international order*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Majander, M. (2004). *Pohjoismaa vai kansandemokratia? Sosiaalidemokraatit, kommunistit ja Suomen kansainvälinen asema 1944–51*. Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto.

Meinander, H. (2016). *Nationalstaten: Finlands svenskhet 1922–2015*. Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland.

Rentola, K. (1997). *Niin kylmää että polttaa. Kommunistit, Kekkonen ja Kreml 1947–1958*. Helsinki: Otava.

Roediger, D. R. (1991). *The wages of whiteness: Race and the making of the American working class*. London: Verso.

Schall, C. E. (2016). *The rise and fall of the miraculous welfare machine: Immigration and social democracy in twentieth-century Sweden*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.

Seppinen, J. (2008). *Vaaran vuodet? Suomen selviytymisstrategia 1944–1950*. *Jyväskylär*. Minerva.

Soikkanen, H. (1991). *Kohti kansanvaltaa 3: 1944–1952*. Helsinki: Suomen sosialidemokraattinen puolue.

Tegnér, E. (1825). *Frithiofs saga*. Stockholm: Direct. H. A. Nordström.

Tuomioja, E. (1982). *K. H. Wiik 2: Puoluesihteeri ja oppositiososialisti, elämäkerta 1918–1946*. Helsinki: Tammi.

Wickström, M., & Ahlskog, J. (2017). Socialt och kulturellt vakna medborgare: Socialistisk finlandssvensk folkbildning från samarbete till splittring i Folkets Bildningsförbund r.f., 1945–1949. *Historisk Tidskrift För Finland*, *102*(2), 255–285.

Wright, M. (2016). *Wales and socialism: Political culture and national identity before the great war*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.