

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ANTIKAINEN TRIAL

By HARRY POLLITT

THE tourist, who travels from the complacency of Stockholm, its contented and prosperous streets and its abundance of bourgeois comforts, at first believes he has reached another such enlightened and progressive city when he walks through the streets of Helsingfors. But close inquiry and a careful study of conditions would soon show him that a democratic government, worker's rights and freedom of the press are rapidly disappearing in Finland. It is easier to find similarities between Finland and modern Germany than between Finland and other Scandinavian countries.

The Fascist trend of Finnish politics is well represented by the recent trial of Toivo Antikainen, the Russian general, who has been charged in Finland with roasting a White Finnish prisoner alive during the invasion of Soviet Carelia by the White Finns in 1922. Carelia was a particularly desirable land to the White Guards with their imperialist ambitions, and its river Systerback formed a natural frontier against Russia. The numerous other rivers and cataracts were sources for electric power and there were vast areas of forest and valuable mineral resources. In 1919 an abortive attempt was made by the White Finns to overthrow the newly established autonomous Soviet State in Carelia. In 1921 they attacked again, although the peace treaty of Dorpat between Finland and Russia had been signed the year before. During this campaign, Antikainen was put in charge of special forces who travelled on skis, carrying all their stores on their backs. He crossed the line of battle and surprised the staff of the enemy at Kiimisjarvi, some 35 miles behind the front and completely routed them. This was a decisive battle which ended the war and the White Finns withdrew from Carelia. Antikainen was awarded high military honours and had a great reception in Moscow, and since then he has been a popular hero in Russia and the subject of several adventure books for boys. He is now charged in Finland, fourteen years after the campaign, with committing a terrible atrocity. It is necessary to follow the political development of Finland during recent years to show how it is possible for such a fantastic trial to take place.

After the civil wars in Finland, and the unsuccessful revolution, the workers were condemned in mass trials and shot or imprisoned. The

official figures show that 15,814 workers were shot and over 11,000 died in concentration camps. Although they had suffered such enormous losses, the working class gradually built up their organisation again, and the older people who had lost their sons in the struggle were particularly active. Class consciousness was intensified, and there was a strong revolutionary movement. A group of workers tried to build up an open Communist Party in 1921, but the inaugurating meeting was crowded with political police, and at the moment when it was declared that the Finnish Communist Party was affiliated to the Third International, the police broke up the meeting and arrested the leaders. In 1923, a left wing syndicalist movement was also destroyed by the police. During these years the official Social Democratic Party was represented in the Riksdag, and in 1925 was actually in power, but it had no influence or no apparent desire to stop the persecution of the workers' movement.

The trade union organisations were not seriously molested, until 1930. In 1929 they had about 90,000 members, about 75,000 Left Wing workers and 15,000 orthodox Social Democrats. The smaller group separated from the main body and started their own federation. This was a signal to the capitalists, which came at an opportune moment, to destroy the main strong trade union movement. The depression was approaching and it was essential to lower wages. The big capitalists, who belonged to the Swedish minority in Finland, combined with the extreme Finnish nationalists, with the army officers, who had been trained in Germany, and with the political police to support the growing fascist "Lapua" movement. In 1929-30 there were numerous individual acts of terrorism by the fascists; selected workers were kidnapped, beaten up, driven over the frontier and threatened with death should they return; the workers' printing press was raided and destroyed; the municipal governments were purged of workers' representatives. After considerable fascist agitation in July, 1930, the representatives in the Riksdag of the Workers' and Small Peasants' Party were arrested. Of the 23 members in the party, 14 were imprisoned for two to five years, the rest having fled from the country, while their local and electoral organisations were destroyed.

This violent procedure was followed in September by the dissolution of the entire trade union organisation with the exception of the Social Democratic minority union movement. The government, under fascist pressure, not content with destroying the workers' political life abolished all their sports and cultural associations with the exception of some groups associated with the Social Democratic Party.

In 1931 there was a reaction against the hooligan methods of the Fascists, which had culminated in the kidnapping of the first President of Finland, the prominent Liberal Stollberg and his wife. Among those implicated was the chief of the general staff. The reaction took the form of mild protests in the press.

In 1932 there was a premature coup d'état by the fascist "Lapua" movement, which has since been known as the I.K.L. (Patriotic People's Party). The "Lapua" volunteers came from all parts of Finland and concentrated in a small village preparing to march on Helsingfors. A state of emergency was declared, the army remained loyal to the government, and the Fascists failed. They submitted on very good terms, a universal amnesty was granted, and they returned home fully armed. Since then the fascist movement has used constitutional rather than violent methods to achieve power. The Coalition government, although occasionally protesting against fascist demands, is often sympathetic to their aims. There have recently been a number of laws passed of fascist inspiration. The Sedition Law is aimed at any form of agitation against the present State. The Press laws forbid any serious criticism of the government's actions, and there are numerous anti-Communist laws. The Fascists foster the intense Finnish Nationalist movement which is developing rapidly. They are anxious to remove the Swedish minority, 10 per cent. of the population in Finland, from public life, business, schools and universities, and to abolish the Swedish language. Already, Swedes have been insulted in restaurants in Helsingfors for speaking their own language. "Finland for the Finns!" As the Swedes have been in Finland since the twelfth century, their eradication is even more absurd than Hitler's drive against the Jews.

Not content with their agitation against the Communists and the Swedes, the Fascists are now pressing for the dissolution of the Social Democratic Party, on the formal grounds that it is hostile to the state since it is affiliated to international organisations. Although the Social Democrats gained 78 out of 200 seats in the last election, they are not represented in the reactionary Coalition government. But the government has protected the Social Democrats in return for their support. The combination of both the Social Democrats and the Swedish Peoples Party with the government was supposed to check the growth of extreme Fascism. Now it is not unlikely that the coalition will withdraw their protection to the Social Democrats under fascist pressure.

In the General Election campaign, the Fascists boasted of holding 10,000 election meetings. As a result of their anti-Swedish policy they are no longer supported by the Swedish capitalists in Finland, but it is believed that they have financial support from Germany for their expensive propaganda and election campaigns. The amount of German propaganda in Finland is alarming; every week there are lectures and "distinguished visitors"; the newspapers report Hitler's activities very favourably; tourist traffic between the two countries is encouraged in every way, especially as there is a new service of large tourist steamers. The teaching of German in the schools and universities has increased recently. A

fascist Finland wedged in between the Scandinavian countries and Russia is a desirable and necessary condition for German expansionist policy along the Baltic coast.

This gradual breaking up of the workers' movement and the dangerous fascist advance was viewed with dismay in Russia. In 1934, Toivo Antikainen was sent to Finland in order to attempt to reorganise the illegal Communist Party. His activities were soon discovered and he was sentenced to the maximum penalty for a political offence—imprisonment for eight years. This sentence did not satisfy the reactionary White Finns, among whom the memory of their defeat by Antikainen still rankled bitterly. This personal hatred, combined with their fanatical anti-Communist policy inspired the fascist political police to produce this extraordinary charge against him of roasting the White Finn, Marjoniemi, alive.

Investigations in the home village of Marjoniemi show that he was entered in the parish register as fallen in battle. There were no rumours of his having been burnt until 1934, when the Finnish police began their search for witnesses. His own family certainly did not suspect any such atrocity, since in 1928 his parents accepted an imposter as their son, miraculously returned, until the false identity was proved. However, the political police collected a number of witnesses for the prosecution, chiefly White Carelians, who had been fighting against Antikainen. They are now refugees from Soviet Carelia and have no legal status as Finnish citizens, are subject to deportation, and are entirely dependant on the good-will of the police.

The case against Antikainen was first heard in March, 1935 by the local court of the district where he was arrested. After a short postponement of the case, he was found guilty in April and condemned to lifetime penal servitude. The fascist newspapers appeared with sensational headlines, "Finn Burnt Alive between the Bayonets of Red General."

The same papers agitated for the revival of the death penalty, which had not been put into force for over 100 years. In July, the Court of Appeals confirmed the judgment of the lower court. The case was stated in writing to the Supreme Court in November, and they announced their decision to send it back for re-trial to the original court in the beginning of December. This announcement was made at the time of a conference of the Scandinavian prime ministers in Helsingfors, possibly as a move to conciliate the progressive opinions of these visitors. The lower court met again in December, but there was a further postponement till March, 1936, so that arrangements might be made for the presence of witnesses from Russia. When the Russian witnesses were heard in March, each one gave simple but forceful evidence for the defence, and by testimony as to Antikainen's movements and conduct during the campaign, made a strong case for his innocence.

The procedure of the final hearing was fantastic. The judge directed the trial, asked questions on his own accord and obviously sympathised with the lawyer for the prosecution. He bullied the witnesses, and repeatedly heard two together asking them leading questions until their evidence agreed. Although hearsay evidence is not recognised by Finnish law, the evidence was chiefly third or fourth hand, or strangely irrelevant accounts of Red atrocities during the civil war. The witnesses were allowed to discuss the case freely together in the prison waiting room. The secret police were seen to talk frequently with the correspondent of the chief fascist newspaper, which distinguished itself by publishing the events of the trial several hours before they happened. It was hardly surprising to learn that the jury who came from Swedish speaking Finland could not speak Finnish in which the trial was conducted ! It should be added that in Finland the jury can only overrule the decision of the judge when their verdict is unanimous. In these circumstances it was not surprising that the former verdict of lifetime penal servitude was returned. The foreign journalists and lawyers who attended the trial sympathised with Antikainen's cry of " Legalised murder ! " when he heard his sentence.

There was a sensational development immediately after the trial, when Matvejev, the one Russian witness for the defence, who had changed his evidence during the trial until it constituted an important part of the prosecution's case, admitted he had done so under threats and bribes. The witnesses for the prosecution threatened " to tear him to pieces " while he crouched in the corner of the waiting room " like a frightened bird," unless he altered his evidence. He was taken to see " a gentleman " who told him what to say, gave him money and promised him more. It is not difficult to recognise the " gentleman " as a prominent member of the secret political police by Matvejev's description. He was only able to make these statements after his return to the Soviet Embassy when he had escaped from the custody of his tormentors, who had carried him off. As he had been guaranteed immunity in Finland, this incident aroused great indignation in Russia. There were notes exchanged between the two governments, and full reports were published in *Pravda* and other Russian papers.

There seems little doubt that the whole case has been a first class " frame-up " by the fascist political police in the best Leipzig tradition. The *Times* recently published a supplement intended to illustrate friendly Anglo-Finnish relations and the amenities of Finland for the tourist in search of a pleasant and enlightened country. No doubt there will also soon be tours arranged to the sunny, civilised Italian East Africa Empire ! Meanwhile Finland can offer charming scenery and many fascist delights.