

**THE FINNISH PARTY IN FINLAND  
AND THEIR PRESENT  
PROGRAMME TOGETHER WITH A  
SHORT INTRODUCTION. PP. 3 - 45**

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The Finnish Party in Finland and Their Present Programme together with a short introduction.  
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TOGETHER WITH

A SHORT INTRODUCTION.



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Finland, almost unknown in former times, has latterly attracted a good deal of attention abroad. But in as much as Swedish alone of the two languages spoken in Finland, is widely known, the notices that have appeared in the foreign press have been exclusively derived from Swedish sources. Thus the Continent has remained ignorant of all that the native Finnish press has had to tell of the external and internal situation of the country, of the leading ideas of the different political parties, and of the aims for which they work.

As regards the external situation, it is well-known, that Finland for centuries formed a part of the Swedish kingdom, and that it was afterwards ceded to Russia. It is probably less generally known that the autocrat of Russia, while the war was still continuing, summoned the estates of the country to a legal diet at Borgå in 1809 — in accordance with the constitution common to Sweden and Finland then in force. There the Emperor Alexander I notified by proclamation the religion and constitution of the country and guaranteed to it a fairly extensive autonomy for internal affairs. Of the subsequent development of events and internal situation of the country, foreigners have learnt next to nothing, nor have they found it worth while to obtain any intimate acquaintance of the matter. Latterly however, as before said, circumstances have to a certain extent changed. Now we find various notices about our country in the foreign press and in political brochures, but they are, for the afore-mentioned reasons, one-sided and consequently misleading.

A retrospective glance at the political vicissitudes of Finland is necessary to render the present internal position of the country to a certain degree intelligible.

The Finnish people received Christianity from Sweden and also shared in Sweden's national laws and institutions. But honestly and dearly did they have to pay for those precious gifts. For six hundred years, Finland was Sweden's bulwark against Russia, and the real battle-ground for the wars between those countries. Our people were seldom granted a peace of ten years, and the great Northern War from 1700 to 1721 turned the land — then little cultivated — almost into a desert. Moreover, the country was dismembered at the treaties of 1721 and 1723 when the districts east of the river Kymmene were ceded to Russia. It is self-evident that under such circumstances it could not become prosperous.

We have mentioned „the Finnish people“, the people who spoke Finnish exclusively. What benefit did this people derive from the liberal laws and institutions of Sweden? It may be mentioned at the outset that serfdom has never gained a foothold in Finland. But on the other hand, the history of Finland is full of proofs of the excessive oppression that the people were obliged to suffer from the officials and the nobility. The Swedish language, foreign to the people of Finland, prevailed in all the departments of public life. All instruction was given in that language. Those who spoke Finnish were excluded from all sources of education, unless they could master the foreign language. Those who succeeded in doing so became alien to the people from whom they had sprung, became, as was considered, Swedes, and thus passed into an upper class, superior to the mass of the Finnish population. All administration and judicial proceedings were conducted in Swedish. Before a judge, more or less imperfectly acquainted with the language of the defendant, the latter stood wondering at what his „aristocratic“ legal adviser might be saying to the „aristocratic“ judge. Seldom did he understand what sentence the judge actually passed

upon him, and still less knowledge did he obtain from the Swedish documents which he was obliged to pay for, and by a further payment have translated for him — if he could hit upon a tolerably well-informed and willing interpreter. Diffident proposals were now and then made in the Swedish Diet, to appoint officials in Finland acquainted with the Finnish language; well-meaning promises were given, but were never kept. Such was the situation of the Finnish-speaking people in Finland, far into the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Special parts of the Finnish sea-board are inhabited by a small Swedish-speaking population. The date of their settlement is of no consequence. They have been no hindrance to the development of the Finnish-speaking people. To a very limited extent have they availed themselves of the privileged position they have enjoyed on account of their language. From their ranks very few have pushed their way up through the schools. The real and greatest obstacle to the elevation of the Finnish people has been, and still is, the officials and manufacturers, who came over from Sweden in former times, their descendants, and the Finlanders, who in spite of all difficulties tried in large numbers to gain admittance to the Swedish schools, gave up their language, and declared themselves to be Swedes, and moreover „gentlemen“.

It is by including these Finlanders that the Swedish-speaking population of Finland is now calculated at  $\frac{1}{8}$  of the whole population of the country. It is for the descendants of these Finlanders that the Finnish people must maintain Swedish schools in districts where not a single person of true Swedish nationality is to be found. It is these Finlanders who most zealously fight against the natural rights of the Finnish people. For their sake the country's only university and technical college are still obliged to use Swedish as their chief language.

Finland was severed from Sweden by the power of the sword. „What will be the fate of the country“? thinking people uneasily asked themselves during the decades that followed. Upon what foundation shall its defence be



based to insure the future existence of Finland as an autonomy? On the one side it was said: „It is our higher, our western culture, it is the Swedish language, that is to be our stronghold.“ Others again saw how weak, nay how impossible that statement was. The so called western culture was represented almost exclusively by the official class, by a few aristocrats having no root among the people themselves, and receiving no support from them. How slight was the defence which these could hold out to the people was clearly seen in the provinces earlier ceded to Russia, where the educated people after the separation from Sweden became partly germanized, partly russianized, but adopted Swedish as their mother tongue when these provinces were again united to Finland during the 19:th century. The future of Finland therefore could only be built up on an awakened national consciousness. This must be roused in the Finnish-speaking majority; they also must feel themselves members of a common fatherland, they also must be partakers of the western culture. Their language must be developed, and in proportion to its development it must take its natural place in the school, in the administration and in the law-court. Within ten years after the Diet at Borgå, this idea already had its eager advocates in a group of young university teachers in Åbo.

These words frightened the predominant bureaucracy, and it used its power. A. I. Arvidsson, a lecturer at the university of Åbo, who was looked upon as the most dangerous among the proclaimers of the new doctrine, was forced to quit the country, and the censorship put the others to silence. The bureaucracy had prevailed; everything that was Finnish seemed to be dead.

But however long the night, morning comes at last, and ere anyone dreamt of morning, a mighty awakening cry was heard in the middle of „the forties“ from one of the remotest provincial towns of Finland. It came once again from an honorary lecturer at the university, J. W. Snellman, a philosopher of European fame, who could find no other livelihood in

his own country but the head-mastership of a secondary school in Kuopio. He resolved to publish a small weekly newspaper, the „Saima“. — „What though the Finnish nation is dead“, he exclaimed. „One may fall with one's people, but it is beneath a man to die the death of a slave. The people of Finland must be roused, if Finland is to have a future.“

Even when the voice sounded from a cemetery, the bureaucracy had a presentiment of the danger. Brilliant genius, and indomitable will were his, and against these spiritual weapons the bureaucracy now raised its heavy sword. The censorship was made more stringent but it availed nothing. At its wit's end the bureaucracy could think of nothing better, than to kill the little newspaper. Then foreign universities offered positions of honour to the eminent scientist. He hesitated an instant, but soon found it his duty to remain where Providence had placed him, among the despised people one of whom he felt himself to be. They tried to starve him out, to close every means of support to him and his family, and succeeded so far that he was for a time engaged as a clerk in a tobacco-manufactory. But they could not put him to silence. During the worst period of European reaction, after the risings of 1848, he published „Litteraturblad för allmän medborgerlig bildning“, a literary newspaper for popular secondary education, a journal, which did pioneer work in a higher sense, than perhaps is the case with any periodical among more advanced nations.

However desperate the struggle for the Finnish nationality seemed, it had found a solid basis in the collections of old Finnish folk-songs, which Elias Lönnrot had succeeded in bringing to light from the backwoods of Finland, more especially in „Kalevala“ a magnificent national epic, a product of the true Finnish spirit, which has attracted the lively attention of the literary world abroad. Elias Lönnrot's discovery inspired the champions of the Finnish people with new confidence. They had indeed a giant's task to perform. First they had to create a Finnish literary language, flexible

enough for all the needs of civilisation. It was a slow process, but one or two little newspapers, attempting to speak Finnish to an educated public, were published, for example in the capital „Suometar“ (the daughter of Finland). A Finnish literature showed signs of germination. It was little enough, but it was sufficient to arouse all the efforts of those in power to crush it. They went to the extent of promulgating a press-law in 1850 which enacted that no treatises or works save those dealing with religious and economical matters were to be printed in Finnish. But even this death-blow could not put an end to the Finnish national movement. Her young champions went on working enthusiastically at great financial and intellectual cost. In spite of all opposition and prohibition, a Finnish literature began to grow up.

When Alexander II ascended the throne, a period of greater freedom and enlightenment began for the whole empire, and also for the Finnish people. Snellman became professor at the university, and finally member of the government; only for a short time, however, as he proved too inconvenient to the bureaucracy. Nevertheless he succeeded in 1863 in securing an edict that Finnish should be used in the courts of justice and in the government offices and that this reform should be carried out within 20 years.

The bureaucracy however hoped that it would remain a dead letter or at least that the language-reform might be put off to an indefinite future. When the 20 years were gone, no preparations worth speaking of had been made, and it was the Russian governor-general's interference alone which led to the edict of 1863, with certain qualifications, becoming an actuality, and to further steps being taken about 1880 for the use of Finnish side by side with Swedish as the official language.

At the Diet, which, unconvened for half a century, assembled from 1860 onwards every fifth, and later every third year, and which consisted, as formerly in Sweden, of four estates (nobility, clergy, burghers and peasants), the Swedish bureaucracy could rely on the nobility and on the