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# Report of the Finnish Translator to the Convention of the Socialist Party of America, May 10, 1908. †

by Victor Watia

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Today the movement among the Finnish population in this country is not the same trembling, weak organization that it was a short time ago. Prior to the year 1904, there were two different leagues of Finnish workingmen, each supported by several branches in different localities and states.

The two organizations, however, did not satisfy even their own members, who found that they were not on the right track, and that the opportunities for the work in hand were thereby limited; at least with two organizations there was no hope of accomplishing the best results. The sentiment rapidly grew for one organization and direct affiliation with the Socialist Party of America. However, this proposition raised a considerable discussion when it was learned that the Finnish organization as a whole could not join the party. It was claimed that each Finnish branch or local connected with its respective county or state organization would disperse and abandon the lines of nationality, which some advocated, and it was recognized and acknowledged by both societies that not understanding the language of the country and inability to express themselves in the tongue would disfranchise the Finns of their privileges as party members and prevent them from taking a part in the party affairs. But the

issue “Workers of the World, Unite,” became as a principal matter, and with this as a basis all objections were considered and weighed so as to be overcome by some way or other, and in the year 1904, at the first Finnish Socialist Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, a resolution was adopted calling for the affiliation of each and every local with their respective country and state organization. The activity in the year 1905 showed much progress. New branches were organized and those already in existence filed their applications with their respective party organization. The necessity of improving the methods and laying the plans for carrying on the propaganda work was realized by the members, and in spite of the financial difficulties the Second Convention was called together at Hibbing, Minn., in August 1906. This convention was well attended and the basis of our present organization was founded and suggestions relating to the ways and means of the organization set forth by that convention.

The activity of the Finnish comrades and the difficulties in the language compelled them to hire someone to do the translating. This was tried in the states of Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin, and on this practical knowledge was brought up the idea of establishing a National Finnish Translator’s office

†- The report of Finnish Translator Victor Watia was not brought to the floor until the closing minutes of the final session of the 1908 Convention. It was presented by Watia in written form, and adopted by motion from the floor without being read. Shortly thereafter, Victor Berger — throughout his life a consistent supporter of the right of the working class to bear beer — noticed the Finnish Federation’s prohibition resolution inside Watia’s report and spouted, “I cannot go back to Milwaukee with that!” Berger moved to refer the matter to the National Executive Committee of the SPA (on which he sat). A flurry of motions and countermotions were rapidly made, as the Chairman for the day Carl Thompson abandoned all effort to maintain control. Ultimately, a motion of Henry Slobodin to receive the report and refer the matter to the NEC was seconded and carried. Thereafter the convention moved to adjourn sine die, and with the singing of the “Marseillaise,” ceased to be. [Stenographic report, pg. 319.]

for the benefit of every Finnish branch in the country, and locating the same at the National Headquarters of the Socialist Party. A committee was elected at the convention to make arrangements with the National Executive Committee and with its permission the National Finnish Translator's office was started at the National Headquarters on the first of January, 1907.

The Finnish organization then contained 53 locals or branches, representing a membership of over 2,000, and during the year 1907 the number of branches increased nearly 93%, and at the end of the same year showed an increase in the membership of 75%. At present there are 115 locals or branches in the organization, and the active Finnish locals throughout the country number 136. I might say that the exact number of members is not known, for the actual membership should be based upon the purchase of dues stamps, and as there are some states where the branches are compelled to buy their dues stamps directly from their respective county or state organization, therefore the translator's office lacks the real account of the membership of the organization. The closest estimate I could make is about 4,000.

The organization is conducted by an Executive Committee of five members, who are elected yearly by a referendum vote; a general committee, in which each state is represented according to the number of locals, and by referendum of the membership. All the propositions regarding the Finnish organizations only are transacted through the Translator's office, which also serves the purpose of the central office of the organization, but in compliance with the rules of the Socialist Party, all party affairs are conducted systematically by the various county and state offices. By this manner the Finnish party organizations are conducted in accordance to the constitution and the work done separately, each organization working in its proper sphere. For agitation and organization purposes the country has been divided into three organization districts, and a steady organizer is kept in the field in each district. A number of books and leaflets have been distributed through the Translator's office, and the party constitution, platforms, and all national, state, and county matters have been translated from English to Finnish and propositions from the locals for county, state, or national office formed into English.

The office is maintained and all expenses of the

organization paid from the general fund [of the Federation], which is gathered from three main sources: First is the 5 cent assessment; special stamps are issued for that purpose and bought monthly by each local; you will therefore discover that the Finnish comrades voluntarily pay 5 cents per month in excess of the regular party dues. Second is the rebate allowed by the following states on dues stamps sold through the Translator's office: Colorado, Idaho, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington, West Virginia, Wyoming. The said rebates of the first year [1907] amounted to \$558.23, and from January 1 to May 1 [1908], \$240.79 — total, \$779.02. Third comes the contributions, which have been very liberal.

Total receipts for the year 1907 were as follows:

<i>Balance from 1906</i> .....	\$	17.94
Dues [regular stamps] .....		4,128.36
Finnish dues [special 5¢ stamps] ....		1,652.10
Literature and supplies .....		922.66
Miscellaneous .....		608.26
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>\$</b>	<b>7,329.52</b>

Total expenses for the same period:

Dues to National Office .....	\$	1,686.35
Dues to State Committees .....		1,883.78
Literature and supplies .....		1,199.23
Miscellaneous .....		1,776.09
<i>Balance to hand</i> .....		784.07
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>\$</b>	<b>7,329.52</b>

Receipts from January 1 to May 1, 1908:

Dues [regular stamps] .....		1,701.10
Finnish dues [special 5¢ stamps] ....		817.65
Literature and supplies .....		231.41
Miscellaneous .....		482.90
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>\$</b>	<b>3,233.06</b>

Total expenses for the same period:

Dues to National Office .....	\$ 695.40
Dues to State Committees .....	764.91
Literature and supplies .....	318.15
Miscellaneous .....	997.69

*Balance to hand* ..... 456.91

**Total** ..... **\$ 3,233.06**

*Balance January 1* ..... \$ 784.07

*Balance from Jan. 1 to May 1* ..... 456.91

***Cash on hand May 1, 1908*** ..... **\$ 1,240.98**

There is no doubt that the recent progress in the party movement in Finland has largely affected the success of the Finnish organization in the United States. Although the conditions are different here to those in the old country, the comrades whose veins are filled with the same blood can not be quiet and listen while the others are doing something. While the Finnish comrades have maintained their own organization, supported the National Party, and responded to many calls for funds to aid the unions during the strikes, and for other purposes of general importance for the working class in this country, they have gladly and joyfully helped the movements in Finland and Russia, reaching their hands deeply into their pockets to meet the financial needs of the comrades on the other side of the ocean. The keen fight for this principle waged within the lines of the Finnish population in this country has sharpened the class issue and cleared the road for Socialism, so that it now is easy to reach the unorganized with our propaganda.

Knowing that the Socialist Party of America stands firmly for the complete emancipation of the wage workers and for the greatest benefit to the working class, and realizing the intellectual and personal misery of those members of the working class who are using the intoxicating liquors as a beverage and understanding the policy of the old parties in trying to maintain the system of manufacturing and distributing the liquors and using the method as one of the strongest weapons against the awakening of the proletariat, therefore the sympathy among the Finnish comrades generally is favorable to the temperance and pro-

hibition movement, and for this reason the executive board of the Finnish organization by instruction of the general committee, prepared the following suggestion to the National Convention [of the SPA], which is herewith submitted for consideration:

“Whereas, it is self-evident to all class conscious members that the using of intoxicating liquors is dangerous for humanity; that it weakens the thinking ability, enfeebles enthusiasm, is a check to activity, and its every influence is debasing rather than ennobling.

Further, its victims, lacking the power of determination, are an easy prey to politicians pursuing self-interest.

Whereas, it is a fact that the capitalist parties pick up all possible reforms just for the mere purpose of catching votes, and using the reforms for bait; for instance, the Hearst party in New York and Dunne in Chicago, in past municipal elections.

And, Whereas, it is known that the program of the Prohibition Party as a whole actually is included in the program of the Socialist Party, so it can be assured that the Socialist Party, accepting the prohibition law, and inserting the plank into the party program, would cut out every chance for the existence of the Prohibition Party, in which many otherwise possessing the Socialist principles are now enrolled. The illustration can be taken from the Socialist Party of Finland, where this plank has been inserted into the party platform, its adoption has been a great factor in the advance and increase of the party in Finland.

Immediately after the adoption the public supporting the prohibition law was ready to join with the party and willing to help the Socialists in elections by all their might. The Socialists representatives in the Finnish Parliament must be credited for the bill recently passed, which prohibits manufacturing, selling, and importation of all kinds of intoxicating liquors in Finland.

A majority of the Finnish population of America are energetic in the temperance movement, and so occupied thereby as to exclude them from participation in the class contest. The tendency of the prohibition movement is for the welfare and uplift of the human race, and in this sense is it in accord with the ideals and purposes of the Socialist Party.

We, therefore, recommend that a plank prohibiting the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors be inserted in the Party Platform.”

The necessity of establishing and maintaining a translator’s office for every nationality should be apparent to everyone. As far as the Finns are concerned, there is no doubt that both the National and Finnish organizations are greatly benefited by the office, and I think the same result could be reached among other nationalities. My opinion, however, is that the main thing is, first, to get good organizers of different nationalities, the kind who are well acquainted with the tactics of the party, and set them on the field to ex-

plain the importance of trying to get posted with the party affairs and into closer touch with the party organization. I therefore suggest that the National Convention consider that proposition most seriously from the standpoint not of trying to establish translators' offices and offering to any nationality something which is not wanted or called for, but making all efforts to create the sentiment among the members that everyone ought to take an active part in the movement and the vital importance of securing a general knowledge of the movement of all the Socialist forces. This kind of work will require not agitators, but organizers who themselves are interested in the propaganda of forming one solid, unbreakable organization, and as long as there is a large number of persons in the party membership who are unable to speak and understand the prevailing language it can not be done without establishing and maintaining national translators' offices. These offices should be located at the National Headquarters and maintained under the direction of the National Executive Committee.

Fraternally submitted,

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National Finnish Translator.

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