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DOCUMENT

"The police beat them up just to keep warm": A Finnish-Canadian Communist Comments on Environmental Depredation and Capitalist Exploitation in Early 20th-Century British Columbia

J. Donald Wilson

TWO DECADES AGO two excellent accounts of early 20th century radicalism in Canada appeared one after the other: A. Ross McCormack's *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto, 1977) and David J. Bercuson's *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto, 1978). Both books demonstrated, among other things, that the presence of immigrants from the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe was the main reason for the high degree of militancy and radicalism to be found in Western Canada before 1920. They pointed to the need to understand that these immigrants, whether from the United Kingdom or from the continent, often brought with them their trade union and socialist experiences. In many cases they did not seek to apply this knowledge until they became disenchanted with economic life here with its low wages, long hours, industrial "speed ups," lack of safety in the mines and forests, strike-breaking scabs and militia. Both books also served to underline the fact that Canadian radicalism and socialism became in the 20th century integral parts of Canada's political culture, thus challenging the established mainstream liberal and conservative viewpoints of the day.

J. Donald Wilson, "'The police beat them up just to keep warm': A Finnish-Canadian Communist Comments on Environmental Depredation and Capitalist Exploitation in Early 20th-Century British Columbia," *Labour/Le Travail*, 44 (Fall 1999), 191-204.

This latter point is set forth in greater detail in another book of the same era, Norman Penner's *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis* (Toronto, 1977). Penner is at pains to establish that the role played by radicalism and socialism in this country's political culture ought to be considered more seriously by historians. Likewise, he emphasizes the role played by immigrants of non-British origin, side by side with the Anglo-Celtic majority. Non-Anglo-Celtic immigrants were indeed very prominent in the ranks of the Socialist Party of Canada, the Social Democratic Party of Canada, and the Communist Party of Canada. To take as an example the last named party, for the year 1928, out of a CPC-party-membership of 4,400, fully 2,640 (or 60 per cent) were Finns, 500 were Ukrainians, 200 were Jews, while the remainder were Anglo-Celtic and other nationalities.¹ Looking at the Social Democratic Party of Canada for 1914, Finns made up 55 per cent of its membership and had 64 locals across Canada with 3,047 registered members.² However, the leadership in all three parties was solidly Anglo-Celtic, and these leaders - whether Victor Midgley, W.A. Pritchard, R.B. Russell, or Tim Buck - naturally tended to steal the limelight from the rank-and-file. Consequently, not much has been written about the majority of each party, or about their views, an example of which is presented in the following documents.

A.B. Mäkelä, who spent almost half his life in Canada living mostly at Sointula on Malcolm Island on Canada's west coast 300 kilometres north of Vancouver, was a Finnish Marxist and newspaper editor. Mäkelä can be numbered among the 12,621 Finns who came to Canada in the first decade of the 20th century.³ Most of these Finns were farmers or farm labourers looking to improve their economic lot and some were artisans. They came primarily from Finland's western and northern provinces. As with many Scandinavian immigrants to Canada, some had originally emigrated to the United States and for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the prospect of good, cheap land or jobs in railway construction, decided to move northward. Others came directly from Finland as part of that vast trans-Atlantic traffic in human cargo at the turn of the century. Editor of the Helsinki working-class newspaper *Työmies* (*The Worker*), Mäkelä came in 1901 at the request of his close friend Matti Kurikka, who the previous year had established a utopian socialist settlement at Sointula.⁴

¹ *The Communist International Between the Fifth and Sixth World Congresses, 1924-1928* (London 1928), 359.

² Varpu Lindstrom, "James Lindala," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto 1998), Vol. XIV, 656.

³ Varpu Lindstrom-Best, *The Finns in Canada* (Ottawa 1985), Table 1, 7. For a fuller picture of the migration of Finns to Canada, see Reino Kero, *Suuren länteen: Siirtolaisuus Suomesta Yhdysvaltoihin ja Kanadaan* [To the Great West: Migration from Finland to the United States and Canada], *Suomen siirtolaisuuden historia*, Vol. 1 (Turku 1996).

⁴ J. Donald Wilson, "Matti Kurikka (1863-1915)," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto 1998), Vol. XIV, 363-65.

Born on 12 July 1863 in southwestern Finland near Turku, Augusti Bernhard Mäkelä had established a reputation for himself as a radical and supporter of working-class causes before leaving Finland to join Kurikka in Canada.⁵ Like his friend Kurikka, Mäkelä attended gymnasium and then Helsinki University where he studied history and linguistics. He wanted to become a lawyer, but his studies were interrupted by his father's death in 1887. To support the family he agreed to take his father's place as an elementary school teacher near Kuopio in eastern Finland. Here he became associated with the salon of Minna Canth, an early Finnish feminist and playwright. She had a considerable influence on the young man. One scholar even credits Canth with leading Mäkelä to accept socialism.⁶ There is no denying Canth's early influence, for the same year she arrived in Kuopio, Mäkelä published with her a Tolstoyist magazine entitled *Free Ideas* (*Vapaita Aatteita*).⁷ In 1889 he joined the Kuopio Workers' Association. Three years later he moved to Viipuri in south-eastern Finland near the Russian border (now part of Russia) where he joined Kurikka on the editorial board of *Viipurin Sanomat* (*Viipuri News*). In 1897 he returned briefly to teaching, but finding it lacking in stimulation, he left for Helsinki where he joined forces once again with his friend Kurikka on the staff of *Työmiehen*, the workers' daily. When Kurikka left for Australia in 1899, Mäkelä took over as editor until his departure for Sointula in 1901 at Kurikka's invitation.

Contemporary observers seem to agree that Mäkelä made a major contribution to the success of *Työmiehen* wherein he showed his commitment to the workers' cause. He was, according to one commentator, "much more dangerous to his opposition than the shifting and inconsistent Kurikka."⁸ Already Kurikka had acquired a reputation for chiliasm, a characteristic soon to become obvious both in Australia and Canada. Unlike Kurikka, he was reluctant to promote his own ideas, but rather saw the paper as a vehicle for the expression of workers' views. In 1899 he was present at the founding of the Labour Party of Finland, whose platform followed the Marxian creed formulated by the socialists at the Erfurt Congress in 1891.⁹ In 1901 he was chosen to be a member of the party's leading council.

It was during this time that Mäkelä became an enthusiastic participant in what Michael Futrell has called "the northern underground."¹⁰ Because of its strategic geographical position between Russia and Sweden and its autonomous position within the Russian Empire (the Grand Duchy of Finland was part of the Russian Empire between 1809 and 1917), Finland proved an ideal place for Russian

⁵Some sources in Finland incorrectly give 1862 as Mäkelä's birthdate, but both the *Vapaus* obituary and his gravestone at Sointula make it clear that he was born in 1863.

⁶Erkki Salomaa, "A.B. Mäkelä" in Hannu Soikkanen, ed., *Tiennäyttäjät* (Helsinki 1967), 209.

⁷Arno Nakkala says the principal aim of *Vapaita Aatteita* was to make known the teachings of Tolstoy. Nakkala, *Tolstolaisuus suomessa* (Helsinki 1958), 423.

⁸Salomaa, "Mäkelä," 222.

⁹John H. Wuorinen, *A History of Finland* (New York 1965), 199.

¹⁰Michael H. Futrell, *The Northern Underground* (London 1963).



A.B. Mäkelä as a young man (in the 1880s). Credit: Työväen Arkisto, Helsinki

revolutionaries in hiding or in transit to or from Western Europe. Through his brother-in-law, the Finnish revolutionary Johan Kock, Mäkelä was drawn into this network. Together with a Russian revolutionary, Vladimir Smirnov, who was head of the Russian Department of the Helsinki University Library, he organized shipments of subversive books from Sweden through the Turku archipelago, where he had been born, to Finland and thence to Russia. He also arranged safe passage for Russian dissidents fleeing the Czar's secret police. In his own memoirs Mäkelä states he left Finland in such apparent haste because he got word the Russian secret police were about to nab him for his involvement in the distribution of underground literature.¹¹

At Sointula Mäkelä's more pragmatic outlook complemented well the mercurial

and temperamental Kurikka who was under the influence of utopian socialist thinkers such as Robert Owen, Fourier, and Saint-Simon. Late in 1901 the first settlers began to arrive on Malcolm Island.¹² They formed the vanguard of an eventual 1903 population of 238 inhabitants, including 88 children, living and working communally. Even though most of the settlers were young — in their 20s and 30s — and male (men outnumbered women at least 2 to 1), not all were able to cope with the rugged pioneer conditions of the isolated island. There was a lot of coming and going and a few were even forced to leave the island as *undesirables*. One scholar estimates that over the colony's four year existence more than 2,000 people came,¹³ but that estimate may be a little high. For various reasons, both economic and ideological, the colony experienced difficult days. Its demise may

¹¹Written in 1928. Reprinted at time of death in *Vapaus*, 2 March 1932, 2. A Finnish historian, Erkki Salomaa, offers a further reason for Mäkelä's departure for Canada, namely a too strong liking for alcohol. "It was a weakness already apparent during his student years," says Salomaa. Excessive drinking also forced his resignation from the editorship of *Työmies* in 1900 and led to his split with the Labour Party leadership the next year, according to Salomaa. "Mäkelä," 229.

¹²For details on the utopian settlement of Sointula, see J. Donald Wilson, "'Never Believe What You Have Never Doubted': Matti Kurikka's Dream for a New World Utopia," in Michael G. Karni, ed., *Finnish Diaspora vol. 1* (Toronto 1981), 131-53.

¹³George Woodcock, "Harmony Island: A Canadian Utopia," in R.E. Watters, ed., *British Columbia: A Centennial Anthology* (Toronto 1958), 212.

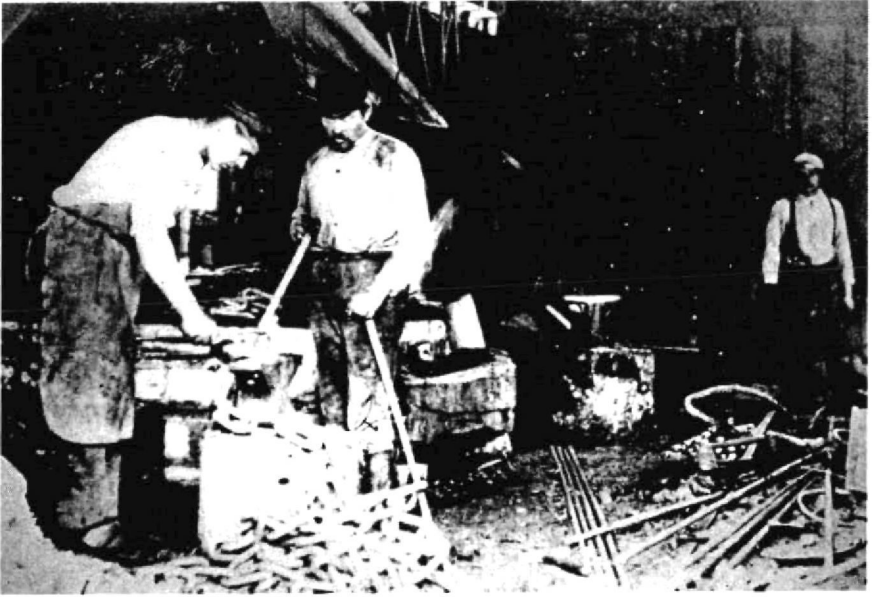


*Viipurin nuoret kapinalliset.
Vasemmalta: K. K. Nord,
Matti Kurikka, J. A. Lyly,
E. J. Roini ja A. B. Mäkelä.*

Literally (from Finnish) "rebellious young men of Vipurii," Finland, 1899. Kurikka is second from left, Mäkelä is at far right. Credit: Kalevi Kalemaa, *Matti Kurikka* (Porvoo, 1978).

be dated from October 1904 when Kurikka and half the members departed for elsewhere in British Columbia.

It was Mäkelä who attempted to rally the remaining population, but the Colonisation Company, *Kalevan Kansa*, held its final meeting on 5 February 1905. Those people who remained purchased land on the island, built their own homes (there had been communal living before), and formed the basis for a settlement



The blacksmith's shop at Sointula, 1904. Credit: Multicultural History Society of Ontario collection, *Ontario Archives*.

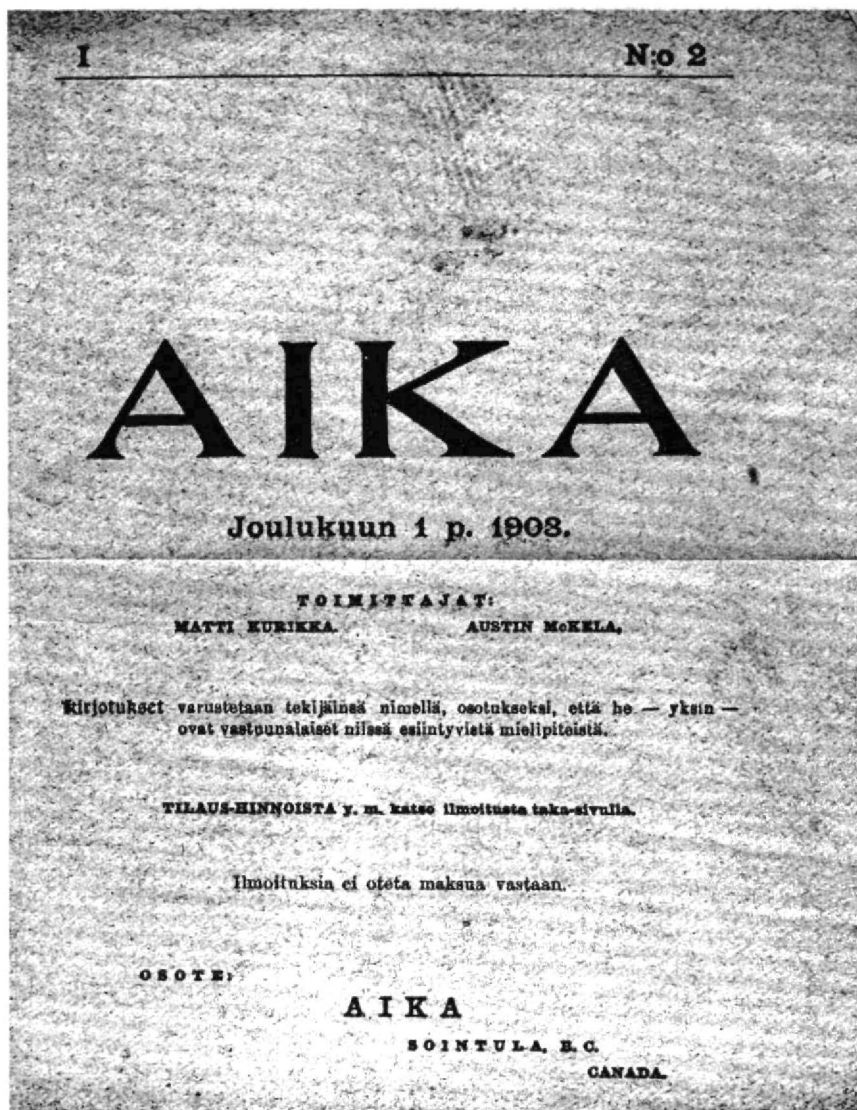
which has continued to this day. Mäkelä remained and became a lighthouse keeper at Pulteney Point. Then at his (second) wife's urgings because of her homesickness, he decided to return to Finland. Being out of money, he stopped off at Fitchburg, Massachusetts where he stayed for eight months as editor of the socialist newspaper *Raivaaja* (*The Pioneer*). In July, 1907 in a speech prior to his departure for Finland, Mäkelä underlined his continued devotion to Marxian socialism.

Socialists in each country must be prepared for armed struggle against the capitalists. This is the same all over. Of course, we do not want armed struggle; on the contrary we would like to avoid civil war. But the only way to avoid it is to be prepared for it. Not a single struggle for existence has yet been won (either in human society or in nature) with spiritual weapons - discussing, debating, voting - and I cannot believe it is possible even today.... We know very well that we cannot expect the slightest mercy from the capitalists; the capitalists have no right to expect us to show mercy either.¹⁴

On his return to Finland, Mäkelä first settled in Turku near his birthplace, expecting to settle into happiness. He later explained, "I felt myself completely estranged from the city."¹⁵ He never found his feet again in the Finnish labour

¹⁴ *Raivaaja kymmenen vuotta* (Fitchburg, Massachusetts 1915), 45-46.

¹⁵ *Vapaus*, 2 March 1932, 2.



Front page from *Aika* (Time), December, 1903. First published at Nanaimo and then at Sointula between 1901 and 1904, *Aika* was Canada's first Finnish-language newspaper in print. Credit: *Lakehead University Archives*.

NB: While in Canada, Mäkelä used the name Austin McKela. Title page shows Kurikka and McKela as co-editors of *Aika*.

movement. It seems events had bypassed him.¹⁶ The Social Democratic Party founded in 1899 just before Mäkelä left for Canada scored a stunning triumph in the 1907 elections. Proclaiming its adherence to Marxist ideology, the party won 80 seats in the first Finnish Parliament. Such success marked the start of a new era for socialism in Finland and seemed eons removed from the first struggling days with which Kurikka and Mäkelä were most familiar. The new Social Democratic leaders were unknown to Mäkelä.¹⁷ At the 1909 party convention in Kotka, he criticized the party for getting bogged down in parliamentarism. He defiantly declared he belonged "to the generation which set its task to overcome obstacles thrown in the way of the workers' movement." He decried the spread of parliamentarism which he predicted would push the party toward revisionism and the making of compromises.¹⁸

Even though elected to the party executive (he finished second behind O.W. Kuusinen who later distinguished himself as the head of the Finnish Communist party in exile, a ranking member of the Comintern, and afterwards in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union itself), Mäkelä again showed his restlessness by returning to Canada the very next year. That marked the end of Mäkelä's career in the Finnish labour movement. He was completely disillusioned with his home-country, which he described as a land of "spies and cordwood dealers."¹⁹ Back on Malcolm Island he took up his former job as a lighthouse keeper, a position that eventually brought him a small government pension. He also became a justice of the peace.

In 1911 Yrjö Sirola, a leading Finnish socialist of the day, founder of the Finnish Communist Party and *émigré* leader in the USSR until his death in 1936, visited Mäkelä at Sointula. He tried to stir him from his political lethargy into action, but to no avail. Mäkelä preferred to confine his efforts on behalf of socialism to the pen, to newspaper articles and tracts, and periodically to the assumption of editorial duties with *Toveri* (*The Comrade*) in Astoria, Oregon²⁰ and *Vapaus* (*Freedom*) in Sudbury, Ontario. In this capacity he acquired a considerable reputation as a political satirist, humorist and biting political commentator, as evidenced in the accompanying document.

¹⁶Both Raoul Palmgren and Esko Häkli underline this point. Palmgren, *Työläiskirjallisuus* (Porvoo 1965), 108-109; Häkli, "Amerikansuomalaisten kaunokirjallisuudesta ja kanstannusoloista," *Bibliophilos*, 3 (1962), 65-66.

¹⁷Salomaa, "Mäkelä," 232.

¹⁸Salomaa, "Mäkelä," 233. Also Palmgren, *Työläiskirjallisuus*, 109.

¹⁹Salomaa, "Mäkelä," 232.

²⁰P. George Hummasti, "Finnish Radicals in Astoria, Oregon, 1904-1940: A Study in Immigrant Socialism," Ph.D. thesis, University of Oregon, 1975; and "'The Working Man's Daily Bread': Finnish-American Working Class Newspapers, 1900-1921," in Michael Karni and Douglas Ollila, eds., *For the Common Good* (Superior, Wisconsin 1977), 167-94.

While Mäkelä was an effective writer, he seemed content to avoid any long-term responsibility or to take any direct action in support of his socialist beliefs. He never, for example, went on speaking trips to promote the cause as Kurikka had done before him. He lent support to the Bolshevik Revolution from the pages of *Toveri* in Astoria, Oregon which he edited from 1917-18 and advocated adoption of Trotsky's position on world communism rather than communism in one state. According to Mäkelä, one could not expect to reform modern society "piece by piece," as Kurikka had advocated. The modern industrial world bound the developed countries more and more into an organic whole. As much as one might wish to escape capitalism, one must always be prepared to relate to the "outside" capitalist world. "Not even a single individual can [do it], not to say anything about larger groups and nations." Important social changes, therefore, were bound to appear first within world-wide industrial production and not within some group of thinkers who try to escape from that very phenomenon.²¹ Such views led Mäkelä to share with the Trotskyist opposition in the Soviet Union doubts about the possibility of bringing about lasting revolution in one single country.²² True socialist society could only be attained and preserved, he maintained, "when the production of the whole country - industry, transportation and trade - is controlled by the society, not only in one country, on one continent, but on the globe as a whole."²³ The "ingeniousness of capitalism" forced him to conclude as late as 1928 that revolution on a worldwide scale was essential.²⁴

In Canada, Mäkelä joined the Social Democratic Party of Canada and later the Communist Party but never became a leading spokesperson even among Finnish party members. Lacking confidence in the English language and Canadian customs generally, Mäkelä may well have preferred to stay out of the limelight. His published writing was all in Finnish. Among Finnish-Canadian communists, A.T. Hill and J.W. Ahlquist were much more prominent.²⁵ On the occasion of his 65th birthday, Mäkelä admitted that his participation in workers' associations including

²¹Mäkelä, "Pois markkinoilta mammonan....," *Airut* (Canadian suomalaisen työväestön kevätjulkaisu 1912), 32-44.

²²Mäkelä, "Muutama muistosana....," *Lehtipaja* (Superior, Wisconsin 1928), 154. In 1924 Mäkelä was brought to Sudbury to edit the Communist newspaper *Vapaus* by Onni Saari who was trying at the time to change the editorial direction of the paper toward a Trotskyist position. *Vapaus*, 2 March 1932, 2.

²³Mäkelä, *Airut*, 40.

²⁴Mäkelä, *Lehtipaja*, 154.

²⁵Regarding Ahlquist's prominence, the story is told of a Finn attempting to cross the border to the United States. He was halted by the U.S. immigration officer and asked if he knew Ahlquist or Karl Marx. "Yes," he answered "I know Ahlquist all right, but I don't know that Karl Marx. If he is anyone of importance, he must be one of the Toronto tailors" [from the "Big Shop"]. Varpu Lindström-Best, "History of Organized Socialism and Communism among the Finnish-Canadians from 1905 to 1929," BA thesis, York University, 1974, 10.

the CPC had not been very active. "I went to meetings, sometimes served on executive boards, but was not really an active participant."²⁶

After periodic sojourns in the "real" world, Mäkelä happily retreated to his hermit life on isolated Malcolm Island. There in peaceful surroundings he found ultimate happiness far removed from the class struggle his Finnish colleagues were waging elsewhere in Canada. To such people as Hill and Ahlquist, Mäkelä must have seemed a disappointment. He never returned to the level of political activity he had reached in Finland at the turn of the century, or at Sointula in its heyday. Mäkelä himself may have unwittingly offered an explanation of his own action in an article he wrote criticizing a group of Finnish-American migrants who had gone to Soviet Karelia in 1922-23. The venture failed miserably and Mäkelä wondered aloud: "The fault I suppose lies in the fact that we American Finns have been Americanized to the point of being spoiled." In his mind the prime motive for migrating to Karelia had been personal gain, not the desire to advance socialism.²⁷ One is reminded of Leon Trotsky's observation during a brief stay in New York: "I smile as I recall the leaders of American socialism. Immigrants who had played some role in Europe in their youth, they very quickly lost the theoretical premise they had brought with them in the confusion of their struggle for success."²⁸

Basically, Mäkelä did not feel himself to be "Canadian." When asked in 1912 to write an article on Canadian affairs for the *Työkansa* annual, he replied cynically:

You could hardly find a less suitable person. What do I know about Canada? What do I care about Canadian affairs?....I get some Canadian papers, and reading them I have followed their affairs to some extent, but while always feeling they do not touch me one bit.²⁹

Many immigrants in fact found themselves *in* but not *of* Canada. Studies of British immigrants abroad, even in English-speaking countries such as the United States and Australia, emphasize the importance of cultural shock and the prevalence of a sense of dislocation among first-generation immigrants.³⁰ It is not surprising, therefore, that a person like Mäkelä who never became fluent in English did not feel fully integrated into Canadian society. He did, however, serve throughout his life in Canada as an effective spokesman for the Marxian socialist position and he

²⁶ *Vapaus*, 2 March 1932.

²⁷ *Toveri*, 5, 6, 7 November 1923.

²⁸ Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (New York 1930), 274.

²⁹ Mäkelä, "Jotakin Kanadasta," *Työkansan kalenteri*, 1913 (Port Arthur 1913), 67. After arriving in this country, Mäkelä admitted we "bastard foreigners hardly knew in which city the government of this country was located. Only later have we learned to know by name some of the people who hold the real power in this country." Mäkelä, "Muistosana," 156.

³⁰ Alan Richardson, *British Immigrants and Australia: A Psycho-Social Inquiry* (Canberra 1974); Charlotte Erickson, *Invisible Immigrants: The Adaptation of English and Scottish Immigrants in Nineteenth Century America* (London 1972).



Funeral procession led by Young Pioneers of Sointula escorting A.B. Mäkelä's body to the Sointula cemetery in March, 1932. Leading the procession and carrying a flag with the hammer and sickle is Albert Maki who disappeared a few years later in Soviet Karelia. Credit: *Tuula Jacobsen*, Thunder Bay.

was hailed by *Vapaus* at his death on 28 February 1932, as "one of the most faithful members of the Communist Party of Canada."³¹

The accompanying article "Something from Canada" was written by Mäkelä in 1912. It constitutes a wide-sweeping denunciation of capitalism as practiced in British Columbia and Canada at the time. Finnish social rhetoric was often directed against the Lutheran Church (the state church of Finland), the *virka-valta* (bureaucracy) and the *herra-valta* (gentry), and Mäkelä was no exception. He spared no scorn for Canadian politicians whom he termed "worse criminals than highway robbers." Like Chomsky today, Mäkelä was critical of the media of his times, that is, the newspapers, which came to the support of politicians and capitalists alike. He was particularly critical of the plundering of natural resources in British Columbia. "I surely see how the bandits around here tear up, damage, and rape nature," he raged. "Only the stumps are left from the valuable primeval forests." "Fish are killed to extinction," a statement that today does not seem so hyperbolic. The whale hunt, also disturbed him. A new railway, the Grand Trunk Pacific, would only serve to speed up these ravages and further "screw the public and the state."

³¹ *Vapaus*, 2 March 1932, 2.

Like many other European immigrants to British Columbia at the time, Mäkelä expresses concern about "the Oriental menace" or "the yellow peril." This piece was, after all, written only five years after the violent anti-Asian riot in downtown Vancouver in 1907.³² Mäkelä shares the perspective that "Oriental" immigration was contributing to unemployment among whites who in their street protests were beaten up by Vancouver police. He concluded by predicting increased "slavery" for "white and yellow" British Columbian workers alike.

Even though Mäkelä may well have represented "a case study in futility,"³³ the fact remains that his observations on the extent of capitalist exploitation of British Columbia in the early 20th century were, although unwelcome, certainly perceptive as we look back on those days with hindsight. In fact, many environmentalists active today, such as Greenpeace, would concur with his conclusions. As E.P. Thompson, in writing of other working people, reminds us

.... they lived through these times of acute social disturbance and we did not. Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience; and if they were casualties of history, they remain condemned in their own lives, as casualties. Our only criterion of judgment should not be whether or not a man's actions are justified in the light of subsequent evolution.³⁴

A word about Mäkelä's use of political satire, for which he was best known.³⁵ There is no doubt that among Finns in North America at this time satire was much more popular than serious literature or *Schönliteratur*. As the Finnish scholar Esko Häkli explains: "After a long working day the workingman was unable to read heavy, ideological explanations... If he read anything, it was easier for him to read light and entertaining literature which very often was strongly socialistic and was used to serve the purpose of ideology."³⁶ The following article provides a strong statement of this type of writing.

³²For details of this riot, see W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal 1978), 67-70; and Patricia E. Roy, *White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver 1989), 185-226.

³³Stephen J. Whitfield, "Autopsy Notes on American Socialism," *Reviews in American History*, 3 (June 1975), 254.

³⁴E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth 1968), 13.

³⁵K.R. [Kalle Rissanen], "A.B. Mäkelä: 60 vuotias," *Työmies 20 vuotta* (Superior, Wisconsin 1923), 112.

³⁶Esko Häkli, *Amerikansuomalaisten kaunokirjallisuudesta ja kustannusoloista* [On Finnish American Literature and Publishing] (Helsinki 1962), Vol. II, 49.

A.B. Mäkelä, "Jotakin Kanadasta" (Something from Canada), *Työkansan Kalenteri, 1913* (Port Arthur: Työkansa Press 1913), 67-98.*

You wanted for this publication to have something *from me* on Canadian affairs! You could hardly have found a less suitable person. What do I know about Canada? What do I care about Canadian affairs?

Even though one has here at the lighthouse [on Pulteney Point] a wider scope than in a bushcamp, one still only sees a tiny bit of Canada.... I get some Canadian papers and reading them I have followed *their* affairs to some extent, but always feeling that they do not touch me a bit. In connection with my or other people's business, I have sometimes got in touch with *their* [Canada's] laws and institutions, and I have thereby had a chance to experience once again what everybody knows from before, namely, that this country has been organized for the most reckless robbery. The governments at all levels, whether that of the Dominion, of the provinces or most important of the cities, are in the hands of the most dangerous bandits you can imagine. The politicians from the smallest to the biggest are worse criminals than highway robbers.

For the most part, the population of the country is completely under the rule of religious darkness, stupid racial pride, and a burning desire to become rich. Moreover, it is ruled by the media [newspapers] which know how to take advantage of these weaknesses. The people are always ready to be robbed by the capitalists, and they rage with patriotic ecstasy the more they get pulled by the leg. It would be a sin to disturb their well-being. And it is impossible for me to try if only because of the language. I surely see how the bandits around here tear up, damage, and rape nature. Only the stumps are left from the valuable primeval forests, and after the fires in the woods there will no longer be stumps either, only naked rocks. Fish are killed to extinction, and cariboo are murdered, just for the fun of it. Not even the corpses of these animals are taken away. And just at the moment they are starting to work on the whales. So, after a while this wild coast will become as empty and barren as the other "civilized" countries.... Many species have been killed to extinction, but new millionaires are replacing them quickly, and by the time the land will be completely empty, there will still be a nice collection of a few really rich people.

[After a diatribe against the Hudson's Bay Company and the C.P.R., Mäkelä continued:] The Grand Trunk Pacific is coming to British Columbia too. But it is hopeless to imagine that these [railway] companies will start to compete against each other. That sort of childishness is over. They seem instead to cooperate in charming agreement, screwing the public and the state. The only competition is over which one is best able to oppress the workers. This is a rich and fast developing country; there is enough room here for one or two robbers and masses of slaves are pouring in from east and west....

There is lots of space in Canada and it is not astonishing that many see the country has a rosy future. Now that the Panama Canal will soon be finished, it is said that the whole west coast will change. The Pacific Ocean will become a British Sea in the same way that the Mediterranean was for the Romans. Vancouver Island will become another Great Britain or at least Japan. There will be a great harbour in every gulf. Likewise the mainland coast will be full of big cities.

The spirit of crystal-ball gazing takes hold of me too. There was a time when I asked the Finns to settle on this coast.... The response was not very good. But those few who came have not regretted [it].... They have lived easier here than workers in many other countries.

But a lot has changed in the meantime. The Chinese, Japanese and Hindus have taken over more and more jobs. Last winter the Vancouver police beat the jobless whites just to keep warm, and the unemployed numbered in the thousands. Even those jobs which the whites still hold have worsened badly. So at the moment I do not ask anybody to come over, Finn or otherwise, who wishes to make a living doing honourable work. When the Panama Canal opens, this coast will become a harbour of hope for all that garbage from Europe which till now has stopped in New York, and this will be the greatest dump in the world for both white and yellow slaves.

At Pulteney Point Lighthouse on Malcolm Island, 1912

A.B. Mäkelä

*Translated from Finnish by Maija Kainulainen, MA, secondary school teacher in Kotka, Finland.