

# The Story of Migration and Betrayal: Finnish-Americans Coming Down with Karelian Fever

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## Abstract

*This article examines a historical migration phenomenon called Karelian Fever that refers to migration experiences of thousands of Finnish-Americans who emigrated from North-America to the Republic of Karelia of the Soviet Union in 1920–1933 to build the “Proletarian Paradise.” Studying the Karelian Fever experience from the perspective of betrayal trauma theory, Text World Theory, and frame analysis, linked with political, ideological, and national themes, the research interest focuses on Finnish-American radical newspapers and their role in creating Karelian Fever in the Finnish-American communities. How did the newspapers set the agenda and parameters of information that started to produce dislocations in their readers’ daily routine, rupture, and reshape their patterns of thinking and acting that finally caused the mass migration?*

*Keywords:* betrayal, utopia, trauma, the radical press

“Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The Wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”  
Statue of Liberty

Victory Day Already Approaching  
With their power, with their might  
The Proletarian are able to show their domination.  
So, the former tyrants, the advocates of slavery,  
You will bend your knee and worship the Giants of Labor!  
Helmi Mattson (*Mutinous Spirits*)

Trapped between two dreams—the American dream of the Land of Opportunity and the dream of the Proletarian Paradise in Soviet Karelia—Karelian Fever conveys a traumatic account of thousands of American and Canadian Finns, who in the late 1920s and early 1930s emigrated from North-America to the Karelian region of the Soviet Union to build the ideal communist society. Karelia, a region divided by the nation-state border between the Soviet Union/Russia and Finland, has always been a border region and its inhabitants the border people, who throughout their long history

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have shared a fate of dislocation, dispossession, and savagery. Vacillating first in the possession between Russia and Sweden's domination and later between the Soviet Union/Russia and Finland's possession, Karelia has been a subject of many wars, multiple shifts of the state borders, and often a target of forced political, cultural, and linguistic adaptation. However, as Karelian Fever phenomenon shows, Karelia has also been the place of dreams for a "good life," the frontline of experimentation where, for example, North-American Finns yearned for an opportunity to create a new political system, the Proletarian Paradise. They envisioned their Paradise as a place in which social and cultural arrangements and its institutions aimed at collective security and prosperity in the Soviet communist system rather than in competitive, self-interest based on the North-American capitalist system. (Golubev & Takala 2014, viii; Bealieu and Ratz 2017, 40). However, the fruition of their dream of the Proletarian Paradise in the Soviet Karelia ended with Stalin's Great Terror that left North-American Finns disillusioned, almost annihilated in the ruins of betrayed promises of the Soviet Communism.

Karelian Fever in itself is difficult to define. It is a complex historical, ideological, transnational, and psychological story of migration. Described as Finnish Exodus to the Soviet Union, it represents in the history of the United State the first large-scale migration flow from west to east rather than other way around (Golubev & Takala 2014, xi). Although Karelian Fever has generally been understood as the North American Finns escaping from poor working conditions, severe unemployment, labor surplus, and finally, Great Depression and subsequent fears of economic ruin (Hannula 1979, 155; Golubev & Takala 2014, 33; Efremkin 2016, 546; Lindström 2004,17), it can also be understood as a phenomenon emerging from the Roaring Twenties—a decade of massive social, political, and cultural transformations in the United States. Radical political movements, such as labor union movements, Socialism, Communism (the First Red Scare), women's rights movement, racial conflicts, together with Prohibition and the rise of religious fundamentalism challenged the normative social order and status quo relationships. It was the time of agitation, fierce accusations, hard attitudes, mobilization of masses, and great passions that created a fertile ground for radicalism that advocated or demanded a thorough or complete political and social reform. Admits this tumultuous time, the North American Finns started to become more and more disillusioned about North America as "a land of equal opportunity," and from their discontent, Karelian Fever started to become more and more infectious.

This article grows out of the general interest in North-American Finns and their evolving utopian vision of the radical political force of Soviet Communism and its hope raising, alternative world view. The aim of this paper is to study the phenomenon of Karelian Fever from the perspective of Betrayal Trauma and Institutional Betrayal Trauma Theory in relation to North-American Finnish-language leftist newspapers. The purpose is to understand to what extent the Finnish-language press did serve as a risk factor of the Finns contracting Karelian Fever. Were the newspapers inadvertently or even purposefully guilty of betrayal that consequently led to the Finns' decision to emigrate to Soviet Karelia (see Beken 1988,104). To what extent, if any, were their sense of reality influenced, their political behavior impacted, and their common sense

challenged by the radical Finnish-language newspapers? The basic premise of this paper claims that Finnish-language newspapers had a central role in causing Karelian Fever.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, newspapers had become the major media form. Serving as the major information source, they brought into the Finns' awareness not only their own Finnish national, political, and cultural news but also diverse local, regional, national, and international issues of the day and world politics. Consequently, the North-American Finnish-language newspapers started permeating the Finnish households and become a part of their everyday experiences. The Finnish-language newspapers became a "life-line" or "daily bread," especially, to the first-generation North-American immigrant Finns, who without adequate English language skills, would have been entirely isolated from the mainstream American society as well cut off from the news regarding Finland (Hummasti 1977, 180). As a proof of this need, North-American Finns—both conservative Finns (the Church Finns) as well as socialist and communist Finns (the Red Finns) established the long-lasting and diverse Finnish-language press (Hummasti 1979, 36; Kostiainen 1987, 206).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The first theoretical approach in this study draws on Betrayal Trauma Theory that is coined to Jennifer Freyd (Freyd 1996). The core issue in the Betrayal Trauma is trust. Freyd defines Betrayal Trauma as a social dimension of psychological trauma that occurs in safe, trustworthy relationships or in relationship where the default is trust. Trauma occurs when a trusted, care giving person (such as parents, spouses, siblings, and relatives) becomes a perpetrator by violating this fundamental trust (e.g. child molestation, domestic violence, rape, alcoholism, or drug abusing). The closer the relationship is between the perpetrator and a survivor, the more traumatic and damaging is betrayal (Freyd 1996, 76; Parikh 2009, 2). In 2014, Freyd and Carly Smith extended this social dimension of betrayal trauma perpetrated by generally trusted, valued, and often powerful institutions such as churches, schools, political entities, businesses, military, police, law, health care, media, and government. Institutional betrayal trauma, as it is called, occurs when institutions through their actions or inaction become perpetrators and, consequently, cause harm to those who are dependent on them for safety, wellbeing, employment, information, or even for their survival (Smith and Freyd 2014, 575). Within institutional betrayal trauma theory, the relational focus shifts from personal, private, and intimate to a more shared, relational, and societal level. This does not mean that personal trauma is forgotten, but rather that trauma is examined from a multilayered perspective, where social and political, personal, and interpersonal come together.

In both betrayal traumas, the question of the set of relationships and the social context where betrayal occurs is paramount (Freyd 1999, 5). In this paper, the radical Finnish-language newspapers are considered as an institution. Founded for social, ideological, and educational purposes, the radical newspapers formed a major source of information for the Finnish audience, thus, creating a mediated relationship with their readership that portrayed both dependency and trust.

Another theory employed in this study is the Text World Theory (TWT) that is fundamentally a reader response theory. TWT does not just concentrate on a particular text, the type of language used in the text or its composition but also acknowledges the context where the text is embedded. Text worlds that people build through reading are not constructed only through language but through contextual factors that surround and influence the language. These contextual factors are, for example, political, social, historical, and psychological issues that are connected to the readers' previous knowledge and experiences that in turn, influence the text's production and reception (Werth 1999, 103; Gavins 2007, 3; Canning 2017, 173). Text worlds are mental representations, human reasoning blocks, through which people understand the world around them and their experiences in that world. Sometimes, text-worlds are able to create such strong emotional experiences and even physical responses that they "can even start revolutions" (Gavins 2007, 10).

In this study, the premise is that the Finnish language newspapers were able to forge such a relevant relationship between the text and the reader that in the reader's mind, the text worlds started to parallel with the actual world. The reader's personal knowledge of culture and society, ideological beliefs, and everyday experiences found a springboard in the Finnish language newspapers that corroborated the reader's understanding of the world in which they lived.

If the Text-World Theory focuses on contextual questions around the text, the Frame Analysis more specifically focuses on the content of the information that the text conveys. Frame analysis examines agenda forming-setting decisions that determine the tone, scope, and parameters of information that is communicated to wider public (Barkho 2013, 3; D'Angelo & Kuypers 2010, 2–4). Frames function as an organizing tool to help readers understand the issue in hand by organizing information into issue frames. Furthermore, the Frame Analysis is about deciding on what issues make news. What pieces of empirical information are either included or excluded, what beliefs or viewpoints are emphasized or diminished, and whether any emotive or loaded words and expressions are used to guarantee a reaction in a reader are. These decisions influence knowledge formation, because news framing creates a space of the pre-organized thought that both directs or even shapes the readers' interpretation of the issues (Iyengar 1991, 3; Price & Tewksbury 1997, 173). In association with Karelian Fever, Frame Analysis raises questions about the ways the leftist Finnish-language newspapers used selective news framing that could have affected the rising of Karelian Fever. To what degree were the Karelian Fever Finns the objects of manipulative discourse, and to what extent was this discourse intentionally or unintentionally manipulative? What were the specific mechanisms through which betrayal was conducted, and what were the specific characteristics of constructing the idea and an image of America and Soviet Karelia that led to Karelian Fever? Were the North-American Finns' attitudes toward America and expectations of Soviet Karelia manufactured by the Finnish-language radical newspapers?

These questions might be a futile undertaking if the main concern is to evaluate the impartiality or objectivity of the news in the radical North-American Finnish-language newspapers. These newspapers were openly propagandist, living up to their

ideological ideals rather than journalistic ideals. They announced themselves to be the ardent, official, and main organs of socialist or communist ideology. They saw themselves as champions not only wanting to record and reflect their times (Downie 2001, 1) but to set out to make a case for a more just and safer world (Kaunonen 2010, 18). Being radical, they became a tool for resistance, rebellion, and social criticism and, thus, instrumental in creating radical movements (Lumsden 2014, 5): “The best weapons in the Workers’ class struggle are their own organizations and the word press” (Toveri: August 11, 1920; Vapaus July 29, 1922). However, their open propagandist nature raises the question of the reader expectations regarding the criteria of rationality, truthfulness, and the ethics of journalism. Were the readers willingly unaware of how propaganda distorted not only the informational value of these newspapers but also the perception of social and discursive reality

### *Materials*

The radical leftist newspapers and their special supplements served as a primary source material for this study. The Finnish language leftist press concentrated in New York, Fitchburg (MA), Astoria (OR), Hancock (MI), and Superior (WI) where the largest numbers of Finnish-Americans were settled (Kaunonen and Goings 2013, 20; Kivisto 1984, 72–73). Divided roughly, Toveri (The Comrade 1907–1931) and Toveritar (The Female Comrade 1911–1930) located on the West Coast, while Työläisnainen (The Workingwoman 1930–1936) in the Midwest, and Raivaaja (The Pioneer 1905–2009) in the East Coast. In Canada (Sudbury, Ontario) the most influential leftist newspaper was Vapaus (Freedom 1917–1974). These newspapers were selected based on their leftist political orientation. Their political stance became more distinctive in 1914–1915 when the Finnish Socialist Federation split between Socialist and the more radical IWW. After 1919 the battle line between Social Democrats and Communist was drawn.

The material was gathered from microfilmed runs of these newspapers from the Finnish-American Historical Archive (Finlandia College) and Immigration History Research Center (University of Minnesota). A total of three thousand pages between 1913–1936 was read for extracting news frames that were further categorized into issues frames. The issue frames in turn were selected by the salience of the themes that repeatedly appeared in news frames. The repeated themes captured the information and the core concepts that were analyzed in order to identify the elements of institutional betrayal. The institutions that are part of betrayal in this study are the political states—America, Finland, and the Soviet Union; ideological apparatuses—The Finnish-language newspapers and North-American Finns.

This kind of inquiry is not without difficulties. Difficulties lie in the nature of seeking to reach a better understanding of the inner workings of historical texts in their contemporary, “real-time” context and propagandist production. The newspaper articles themselves serve as circumstantial evidence and interpreting them leaves naturally much room for conjecture and supposition. Another challenge is the Finnish language itself. Leftist newspapers developed their own distinctive vocabulary for Socialism and Communism as well as for Capitalism that were greatly entwined with

the contemporary cultural political conventions and political history. Much is lost in a translation process, but the gist of the meaning of the specific words, metaphors, and expressions are given in separate explanations.

## Analysis

### *Issue Frame: Staging Betrayal*

The meaning of Karelian Fever in North America cannot be spoken in the absence of the context, both historical and political. Although North-American Finns shared the same ethnic background, it did not mean that they were a united group that lived and cooperated harmoniously. As any minority ethnic group, the Finns were divided along political, religious, and economic lines. However, it is reasonable to assume that they had a common national and cultural consciousness. Staging betrayal in Karelian Fever starts exactly in Finnish national consciousness that was deeply rooted in Karelia. Karelia is the birthplace of Kalevala, a Finnish national epic. Since its completion by Elias Lönnrot in 1835, Kalevala has had a distinctive mythic dimension in Finnish imagination and has strongly influenced the Finnish national consciousness. Empowering Finland to discover its unique nation-identifying elements, such as their own distinct cultural identity based on their own vernacular language and prevalent traditions, Kalevala became to represent primeval Finn and Finnishness—a national myth of origin—that strengthened the Finns' claim for their national independency from Russia. Consequently, it is plausible to argue that Karelia denoted a common, national consciousness and a construct of common cultural heritage (Pimiä 2012, 395) to which the majority of North-American Finns had already been predisposed.

By the time when the borders of independent Finland were ratified by the Peace Treaty of Tartu in 1920, Karelia had been divided into Finnish and the Soviet Eastern Karelia (Fingerroos 2012, 482). Soviet Russia was fighting on a three-front war: the Civil War between the Bolsheviks and internal, anti-Bolsheviks forces; the Liberation War involving multiple, separatist national uprisings of the minority nationalities (Karelia region included) fighting for their autonomy; the Defence War in the middle of the First World War repelling the intervention of the foreign armed forces (Kirkinen 1986, 341; Vituhnovskaya-Kauppalä 2012, 86–108). Finland had just experienced its own class-based civil war between the Whites and the Reds in 1918 that ended with the victory of the Whites. An immediate escape of six-thousand Red Finns to the Soviet Eastern Karelia (Golubev & Takala 2014, 8), and the foundation of the Communist Party of Finland in Moscow in 1918 (Rentola 1998) reenforced Soviet Russia and Karelian's role as the leaders of the Proletarian.

In these years of turmoil (1918–1922), Soviet Karelia suffered tremendously because the wars and famine. However, the cruellest betrayer emerged from the colonial fantasy of Greater Finland—the grand narrative of the White Finns—that felt entitled to incorporate Eastern Soviet Karelia and its “Kindred people” into Finland. This ideology intensified into irredentist wars that engaged over 10,000 voluntary semi-military Finns (Kangaspuro 2000, 69; Engman 2005, 391; Roselius 2014, 119). In America,

the leftist press was outraged. The reason of Finland's participation in tearing Karelia apart like a "rabid dog" was understood as the Finnish capitalist greediness, anti-Soviet bacchanal, and White Fascism; an excuse that allows to continue the White's political terror against Karelians who "struggle to fight for their political and social emancipation" as the Reds did during the Finnish Civil War. It was a violation of a presumptive contract between the Finnish government and the defeated Reds, and as a result, it produced a psychological conflict that can be seen in a letter published in *Toveritar*. A young sister writes from the USA to his brother in Finland beseeching him not to participate in 'the White Butchers' war: "If you get conscripted, please, rather shoot a bullet through your head, but don't help overthrow the worker's kingdom. That would be the worst betrayal ever" ("Letter", June 24, 1922). It seemed as if the North American Leftist newspapers were reconstructing the war trauma of the Finnish Civil War through their numerous reports of inhumane treatment of Karelians. They created present-conflict/post-conflict settings on which the North-American Finns projected their anger, disappointment, and a sense of betrayal they had experienced during the Finnish Civil War.

However, Finland's expansionist aspirations failed, and Karelia proudly declared the following proclamation published in *Toveri*:

Let the motto of all Karelian workers and peasants be: We will not join Finland to become an area to be exploited by the Finns once we have been freed from slavery. We will never want to become the slaves for the Finnish capitalists, but what we want to do is to take care of our territories, live together with other workers and peasants in Soviet Russia, and build a new communist world. (*Toveri* August 25, 1920)

The stage for betrayal of Karelian Fever was set.

The dream of Greater Finland was replaced with Edward Gylling's vision of establishing Great Red Finland in Karelia. Gylling envisioned Karelia as the Soviet autonomous region that eventually would develop into an exemplary autonomous Soviet federation. The negotiations with the government of Soviet Russia had already started in 1918, and Lenin authorized Gylling's plan to transform Karelia into an autonomous Karelian Labour Commune in 1920 and in 1923 the name was changed to Karelian Autonomous Soviet Republic. The news of the Soviet's recognition of Karelia was received with enthusiasm in North America.

Soviet Russia has become a promised country to the world's poor. The migrant who, decades before the war [WWI], had turned their gaze to America, which shimmered in their thoughts as a country of freedom and prosperity, are now turning their gaze and travel to Soviet Russia. In Soviet Russia will they find that paradise that they once thought to find in America. ("Going to Go and Build the Soviet -Karelia" *Toveritar*, May 30, 1920)

Gylling was nominated as a new head of Karelian government (Elmgren 2015, 287; Golubev & Takala 2014, 18; Gelb 1993, 1). Relying on Karelian vast timber supply,

Gylling's plan was to build an independent economic power region with full self-governing rights, unite Finnish nationalities,<sup>1</sup> ensure the predominance of the Finnish language and ethnic prestige (Kangaspuro 2000, 130; Golubev & Takala 2014, 33; Kurki 2018, 70). Gylling's ambitions also included to increase Soviet Karelia's political intervention in Finland by supporting socialist radicals and their revolutionary activities that would eventually lead to a revolution first in Finland and then expand to other Scandinavian countries until a new Scandinavian Soviet Republic, was born (Elmgren 2015, 305; Golubev & Takala 2014, 13; Kangaspuro 2000, 126). To fulfill his vision, Gylling needed more Finns to increase Finnish population; he needed skillful workers to fulfill acute labor shortage and to meet the quotas in production plans determined by Moscow; he also needed Finnish "ethnic proletariat" (Golubev & Takala 2014, 22) who knew the tenets of Socialism and were committed to the cause. As a result, in December 1930, Moscow gave Gylling permission to proceed with his plan, and a few months later the following advertisements were launched in the leftist, Finnish-language newspapers in North-America.

A Battle Greetings to the Comrades Who are Emigrating to Soviet Karelia: "Emigrating to the country where a heroic giant of labor is standing with a dreadful sword in his hand, and with which he has beaten numerous enemies and will continue to beat them in the future; and in the other hand, he has a trowel with which he is creating a society, unprecedented in the history of mankind, radiating heroism and energy, a new and happier society in which each and every one feels that he is a human being among people. Side by side with them we all promise that we will give our best to the glorious cause" (Työmies: January 23, 1931).

Establishing the autonomous Karelia was an act of restorative justice, or even an indirect, post-victory for the Red Finns. Perhaps, it can be argued even further that establishing Karelia started a recovery process in the midst of the difficult migrant life in North America and after the betrayal of the American dream.

#### *Issue Frame: State, Newspapers and Betrayal*

In considering the role betrayal plays in the experiences of Karelian Fever, it is important to try to determine what was the state's ultimate betrayal, and, especially, an ultimate institutional betrayal that penetrated many levels of political and social life in the USA and Canada. As it is often confirmed in political research literature, the relationship between the state and its subjects is symbiotic (Busch, 2022). The relationship is based on mutual trust that is relational and conditional (Levi & Stoker 2000, 476). The oldest and simplest legal obligation of the state is to guarantee social protection and ensure human rights. The people in return are expected to show loyalty to the state, protect the nation's sovereignty, abide the laws, and pay fair taxes. Although it is not possible to reach consensus on every political, social, or moral issues, the government's failure to take appropriate action to protect its subjects from violence, discrimination, and illegalities of its institutions that have a capacity to harm amounts to institutional betrayal.



The first type of institutional betrayal entails the question of institutional power and authority at the state level, and the ways in which the state's ability and efficiency to ensure the correctness of their policy decisions. Epitomized in Raivaaja's supplement issue, Raivaaja Callender, the recurrent theme bluntly states that "The US Congress represents only the Capitalists" (Raivaaja Calendar 1914, 114). This statement reveals the core betrayal in American society that is the government itself. The government's betrayal stems from its ignorance and *willingness to ignore* the suffering that Social Darwinism with its doctrine of "survival of fittest" causes in people's everyday life. Raivaaja, Työläisnainen, and Toveri repeatedly accused the US government of Social Darwinism that not only formed the core of American Capitalism but was embedded in American Constitution: "The fathers of this country so skillfully adjusted the Constitution that it became to safeguard the continual concentration of wealth, land, and natural resources on fewer hands" (Toveri August 22, 1922). Capitalism and its central administration and social institutions carry mechanisms of betrayal and deceit. The core of the state institutional betrayal is its inability to govern and being indifferent to the consequences:

In today's capitalist society, there are the most efficient means to improve and assist people's life. And, yet the deprivation is greater than ever before. On the other hand, there is every day the fiercest battle for bread, while at the same time there is the most deplorable struggle for making yet millions of dollars. This increases injustice and crude materialism in society that leads to the escalation of devastating fights between people for basic daily necessities (Toveritar, October 5, 1920).

The ultimate betrayal of Capitalism, endorsed by the government, is a gradual erosion of humanity itself.

Education is another state regulated institution that frequently becomes under the attack of the leftist press.

In the United States, children are taught that they live in a republic where everybody is guaranteed the same opportunities, and that is up to them to become whatever they want to become. Our children are constantly told that they are equal. The aim of all this claptrap is to deceive and cover up the class differences and inequalities that form the backbone of the current system. The cunning skills of every teacher, journalist, and priest are put into practice in guiding, teaching, and influencing our youth to adapt to the capitalist system. (Toveritar July 18, 1920)

Toveritar clearly blames the school's institutional authority to create "false hope" or empty dreams which cannot come true for working class children. In addition, Työläisnainen and Toveritar often criticize education being too expensive and too time consuming for the working class children who start working at early age. The severest betrayal the education system commits against the working class is, however, that it imposes capitalist values on children. This does not only confuse the children but also lead to divided loyalties in a family.

The theme of capitalist betrayal in education haunted the leftist newspapers throughout the Roaring Twenties. For example, in 1930 *Työläisnainen* continues denouncing education to be nothing but “bourgeois pastime” aiming at teaching the students to hate the Proletariat. Warnings are distributed repeatedly about “bourgeois poisoning” in education, and parents are seriously recommended to become active in their children’s education. The parents’ obligation is to subscribe “New Pioneer”, the socialist children’s newspaper: “New Pioneer addresses class struggle issues in “a child-friendly” way. In addition, New Pioneer is not only easily understandable but makes reading enjoyable” (*Työläisnainen* May 17, 1930). Numerous articles in the leftist press repeatedly delivered the message that education cannot be trusted because it is but one form of power structure in the capitalist system.

The state betrayal in the Finnish radical newspapers was consistently connected with the state policies or state related institutions, organizations, and private businesses which often were in interdependent relationship with the state. One of the most complex interdependent relationships existed between the state, its preferential migration policies, businesses, and labor force. The leftist Finnish language newspapers brought into a sharp focus the relations between the state’s disputes over immigration and the working class, between the working class and employers, and their impact on Finns. In 1920s, when America had a labor surplus, the federal government issued the Immigration Act of 1924 that placed a strict quota system for different nationalities. Finland was one of these nationalities. Only a few hundred Finns were allowed to enter the USA each year, and their acquisition of citizenship was often denied. These “new” Finnish immigrants were considered as “distinct other” or “distinct race” (Kaunonen & Goings 2013, 46) whose taciturn, clannish nature and lack of language skills prevented them from adapting to the new culture. Conspicuous in protests, strikes, organized unions, and socialist clubs, the Finns started to find their names on the “blacklist” and were singled out as anarchist, nihilist, and the Jackpine Savages (Ross 1977, 117; Alanen 1981, 45; Ronning 2003, 359; Huhta 2014, 170). In its news article “Persecution of Foreigners”, Toveri describes how the status of immigrants started to change: “Foreigners are in a sad position in this country. Their rights are minor, next to none, and downright arbitrary despotism is in rife against foreigners.” (Toveri, 1920). Advocating a strict immigration policy, the American mainstream press was also identified as a betrayer of the immigrants: “This country’s press has systematically increased hatred against foreigners [...] by using lies and all kinds of dirty tricks (Toveri August 10, 1920). Ten years later, Toveri sarcastically lamented the predicament of America: “If there were not so many foreigners, and especially, those radical foreigners, things would be very good in this country (Toveri, October 21, 1931). Becoming publicly discredited, feared, or stigmatized is a form of emotional abuse that leads to more discrimination, belittlement, isolation, and questioning one’s whole social existence in North America. It seemed as if the time had come to radical Finns to answer the questions posed by *Työläisnainen*: “Needless to ask: Who represents brutality and who civilization? Who is promoting justice and who is not? Who protects the workers and who threatens to destroy it (*Työläisnainen* April 12, 1933).

Against this backdrop, it seems that trust between the Finns, America, its institu-

tions, and even American themselves had started to erode (Handlin 1961, 9). People's political cynicism, disaffection, and alienation frequently result in people resigning from being part of the social contract (Berdufi & Dushi 2015, 396). Under these circumstances people do not have to obey and can even chose another form of social system. An American system where "money prevails, few rules, and people are oppressed and persecuted" (Toveritar: August 21, 1917) was rotten. However, a suitable replacement is available in the Soviet Union:

While here, in America, where the Capitalist braggarts are boasting about their riches, the working class are forced to succumb to misery; many are forced to live next to rubbish heaps while in the Soviet Union, the Proletariat have created the foundations of the socialist system and have taken a giant step toward developing their own cultivation. (Työnainen: April 19, 1933)

*Issue Frame: Newspapers and Society and Institutional Betrayal*

Distrust motivates monitoring the relationships for any misdeeds or for any signs that convey the idea that might severe the relationship even further (Levi & Stoker 2000, 476). Distrust also awakens a latent awareness of political consciousness that raises the questions of the issues of equality, justice, and alternative ways to organize society. While the Finns' trust continued to diminish toward American state and its government, their trust started to diminish also toward incumbent authorities. The Finnish-language leftist newspapers repeatedly reported various occasions in 1920–1930 that showed the government's inability to govern without having to resort to coercion or deceit that often was sanctioned by the judiciary, the key institution to build trust between people and the state (Knack & Zak 2003). Police brutality, unlawful arrests, and deportations were but a few examples of legalized abuse whose purpose was to secure the freedom of the "captains of industry" and "mining and timber barons" to pursue their laissez-faire capitalism and satisfy their personal greed. This was best accomplished by supporting and implementing anti-workers policies and oppressive actions against them (Työläisnainen April 5, 1933). The leftist newspapers repeatedly accused the government of allowing "shady deals" in legal matters and deploying the Law against the working class and the opponents of the government.

How lawlessness flourishes by law because corruption is so strong. The law worships and allows the lawlessness. But you've another thing coming when this police and judges, bought by Al Capon, get their fangs on the unemployed! Then the gavels rap, gas bombs fly, and random judgments are delivered. Then and there these officials of law are bursting with their legitimacy and, consequently, unwelcomed citizens are found and arrested, and foreign immigrants deported. (March 3, 1931 TN)

The law had become "criminal" and thus a force of betrayal. "Corrupted" Law became a popular theme in leftist newspapers, and they eagerly covered legal abuses occurring all over North America and the rest of the world. In America as well as in Canada, the case that caught much of attention from the Finnish radical papers was

the “Scottsboro Juttu” (Scottsboro Story). In this story, eight negro youngsters were accused for “raping” two white female prostitutes. The case became an epitome of social as well as institutional betrayal against the principles of working class fighting for the rights of the poor. The newspapers fiercely argued that the poor, just as these boys, do not receive justice because they simply did not matter, and because the poor, as these boys, no money for the defense (Finnish leftist newspapers furiously campaigned to raise money for the legal fees). In addition, the court needed a scapegoat. The Scottsboro case challenged the workers to show their solidarity which they did by protesting in front of the courthouse and fighting physically against the Ku Klux Klan lynching mob that had threatened to hang the accused boys. “Scottsboro Juttu” emphasized the socialist tenet to abolish racism (“a greatest betrayal in American Democracy”), “because class struggle does not know race or nationality boundaries”. Although “the Capitalist class has always tried to keep the black and white worker as far apart as possible” the white and negroes alike should present a united front to “Alabama’s bloodthirsty police and judges” and show that people refuse to be betrayed by their “rotten murder conspiracy” (Työläisnainen April 12, 1933). The reaction of the Finnish radical newspapers revealed deep political mistrust and racial tensions that furthermore divided the nation. The Scottsboro’s case also revealed the institutional betrayal trauma when the allegedly trusted institution, the judiciary, fails to uphold the promise to treat everybody the same.

Other salient issues that carried the accusations of betrayal between 1920-1933 were the First World War (IWW), Prohibition, religion, and gender politics. The IWW became to be the most deceptive governmental force that could severely betray the Socialist cause. Participating in the war would be betrayal to American Socialists because entering the war is against Marxist ideology (Hummasti 1981,181; Shannon 1955, 7). However, the major bulk of the army consisted of the working-class men, and therefore, they would be fighting against their comrades at war, and this would seriously damage the international working-class solidarity. Moreover, the war was utterly dishonorable, caused by the imperialist aspirations of capitalist nations by the “capitalist-mongers, and any Socialist or Communist who supported the war (as they ended up doing in Europe as well as in North America) was considered supporting the Capitalists and “their butchering armies” (Toveri 1916), thus betraying their Comrades.

Regardless the Socialists’ fierce, anti-war rhetoric, the betrayal emerged from the reverent spirit of their patriotism. A significant majority of the world Socialists become to support their country’s war efforts, and as a result the Socialist Party split into two in 1914: Social Democrats and Communists. (Kostiainen 2014, 140). The radical newspapers tried to patch the division by assuring their readers that “We Are All Socialists”, and that the split was nothing but a “family quarrel” (Vapaus Jan.1. 1920). The split was not supposed to affect any important principal issues of Socialism, but the rift between the Socialists and Communists grew. The core issue of the dispute was a disagreement of deciding the most efficient procedure to make a transition to Socialism in America. Whether Socialism was to be attained through a direct action of revolution or through parliamentary reforms caused great friction. What started as “family quarrel” escalated into a full-blown conflict when the action procedures of

“newly baptized Communists” and “weakling noskets” were tested in severe labor disputes such as organizing strikes. Action procedures became to represent “correct social consciousness” (Hummasti 1981, 186) that was to become represented either in Socialist inactivity or Communist activity. The Communist saw the Socialist’s inactivity as a betrayal both in America as well as in Europe. A serious display of the Socialist’s ineptitude occurred when the German Social Democrats did not accept the Communist Party’s proposal to hold a joint Big Strike against rising fascism. Työläisnainen bitterly comments on the Socialists’ betrayal that resulted in Hitler’s takeover: “As if all those “gutless wonders in the Social Democrat Party who refused to fight together with the Communist were not treacherous enough, no, they had to go and betray the workers” (Työläisnainen April 5, 1933). To a large sense, the Socialists broke the worker’s collectivism and failed to commit to their common cause, and thus, betrayed their political fidelity to the Proletariat.

Perhaps the only area of life where the Red Finns and the Church Finns were able to identify “the common enemy” was the issue of excessive alcohol use amongst the Finns (Karni 1981, 170). However, in newspapers their official stance divided their ranks. The Church Finns (the Conservatives) were judgmental and considered alcohol abuse as a moral weakness and a character flaw, while the Red Finns recognized alcohol as yet another way to exploit workers. Although alcohol was a salient theme both in Toveritar and Työläisnainen (not as frequently addressed in Raivaaja and Toveri) the rhetoric, used in the articles regarding alcohol was considerably milder compared to the newspapers’ usual style: “We have to fight hard against the evil of drink that is only one of the curses that the capitalists have created. We have to fight hard [...] against any kinds of secretive parties, debauchers, who lower the morale of our class and paralyze organized political activity in the ranks of the united Proletariat (Työläisnainen June 2, 1931). The reason for the mild language and tone might be that the alcohol abuse was not only a “capitalist curse” but a personal problem that many wanted to hide. The side effects of alcohol abuse such as, public brawling, gambling, prostitution, and loss of reputation as a reliable worker, carried over into people’s homes in the forms of domestic violence, loss of income, and shame (Hummasti 2014: 96). Another reason for “tempered” rhetoric might be that “the capitalist curse” served as an entrepreneurial opportunity also for Socialist Finns (ibid., 93). In a sense, the Proletariat was in pact with the “Capitalist curse” both as consumers as well as its producers. Therefore alcohol as a betrayal mechanism was ambiguous because it involved the idea of self-betrayal that makes one a victim but also a perpetrator.

Prostitution as a vice was treated entirely as an outcome of exploitation. Prostitution was generally seen as a vice within a common social framework rooted in institutional and political power structures and in the traditions of “polite society.” Women’s radical newspapers, especially, frequently distanced themselves from the topic by situating prostitution in other countries. The articles concerning prostitution were written as a kind of counterattack against the Capitalists’ propaganda about women’s position in communist system. Työläisnainen reveals the Capitalists’ fear toward Communism that destroys the “sacredness of home and feminine purity” by making women “a common property” [equivalent to prostitution] and by “socializing women

they [the Communists] destroy the moral sense women have inherited from their fathers." As Työläisnainen mockingly concludes, from the capitalist point of view the betrayal mechanism is not as much within prostitution itself or its power to damage both gender and sexual relations, as it is within a woman who allows herself to be turned into a communist female subject, and who with this action alone destroys the family nucleus - "the cornerstone of social structure" (Työläisnainen May 17, 1931). In radical newspapers, Japan was frequently used as an example of the double-standard capitalist morality that the Capitalists America considered as a highly developed civilization, a forefront of highest ethical principles and moral discipline that "proudly stands as a bulwark against Communism." Women's radical newspapers run several feature stories about Japan's horrible tradition of "legalized" prostitution. "If this kind of social action is approved in a highly regarded capitalist country, we would recommend the Capitalists think carefully how sacred women's position as legalized prostitutes under the Capitalist system really is (Työläisnainen May 17, 1931).

Työläisnainen as well as Toveritar acknowledge women's own responsibility to awaken to and recognize the state of their own specific exploitation: "During the good times, we dreamed, and we read the novels. No more serious questions aroused interest in us. We thought that politics belonged to men. But if years ago [women] had gone deeper into acquiring information, at such critical times as we have now, women would have things different (April 15, 1931).

The last betrayal mechanism that emerged from the capitalist system was the church: "There is hardly any other movement in world history that would have been so shamelessly false, pursued so immense injustice, or committed so horrible crimes, shown so much brutality, and a vile betrayal (Toveritar December 20, 1921). The radical newspapers all determined religion as "opium" according to Marxist decree. Religion is "capitalist propaganda" that the priests, "capitalist agents", preach. They "force you [the working class] to worship a non-existing god so that you would remain obedient to capitalist classes; that you wouldn't start rebelling against the misery that the Capitalists are guilty of "(Raivaaja May 11, 1928). The Church is guilty of many betrayals, but the greatest betrayal is when the priests stands beside "the worker's open grave promising salvation and eternal peace while he in his life has never done an honest day's work" (Työläisnainen March 23, 1932). The church has oppressed people for centuries and has slaved women by creating an image of women that emphasizes women's inferiority and evilness. The newspapers unanimously agree that the church is an enemy of the working class, and women. The anti-dote is scientific atheism that was made a compulsory subject in curriculum in Soviet Union.

The First World war, Prohibition and alcohol, prostitution and religion were often identified as betrayal mechanisms whose aim is to destroy working class consciousness and replace it with false consciousness (Pines 1993, 4). False consciousness forces the workers believe that they have common interests they could share or a common goal they could reach together with the ruling capitalist class. False consciousness simply aims at deceiving, dulling, conditioning, and controlling the Proletariat's class consciousness resulting in the confusion of the mind that prevents them from seeing the reality of their strenuous circumstances and from remembering who their real

enemy is: Capitalism. In real life, as Työläisnainen warns its readers, the capitalists do not want to have anything to do with the working class:

The writer who worked as a maid had heard how her employer, the lady of the house, had described to her little child who and what kind of a person is an unemployed proletarian: "This type [unemployed] of a proletarian is a 'bomb.' They are dirty and they smell, and furthermore, they are brutal people. (April 5, 1933)

This quote alleges that the Proletariat, as a class, is alienated from presumed capitalist norms of civility, self-control, and the ability for personal self-sustaining. Stereotyping the unemployed workers as sub-humans, who, on top of everything are dangerous, create an unbridgeable gap between the classes. The Capitalist refuse to recognize an unemployed worker as a kin – a fellow human being and instead engages in creating a protective barrier between them. Therefore, the separate worlds of the community and the mode of class-consciousness with their respective attitudes of suspicion and bitterness to each other is unbridgeable, and the only solution is abolishing capitalism with its artificial and fixed power structures.

*Issue Frame: Betrayal, Propaganda, and Newspapers*

The text worlds created in the issue frames painted a very dark view about the United States or future prospects to continue living in the USA. Approaching the era of Great Depression, propaganda machinery—the Finnish-language leftist press – started to receive additional potent aid from the Finnish communist agitators and Soviet-Karelian recruiters. One of the most high-profile speakers and agitators was John (Jussi) Latva whose recruitment speech in Vancouver 1930 aroused great enthusiasm in Finnish communities both in Canada and in the United States. Being one of the main organizers of Karelian Fever, the head of Toronto office of the Karelian Technical Aid Committee,<sup>2</sup> and the editor of the Communist newspaper *Vapaus* (Freedom), his affect-induced propaganda speech electrified all that information of the benefits of Communism that had already been repeated and forged in the radical newspapers. His speech is a rhetorical performance that builds up "feelings of we-ness" (Appadurai 2006, 59) and belonging. He is able to construct a sense of home that restores the sense of security:

But I will give you a message of joy and hope. There is room in the Soviet Union for all of you and your families. In the sunny, warm Soviet Union, the world's largest imperium, where the sun never sets. In Soviet-Karelia there is now a great shortage of labor. And just for you, the Finns, tens of thousands of cozy jobs are offered in the immediate vicinity of old homeland, in beautiful Eastern Karelia, where the deep coniferous forests seem to hum our mother country's beautiful hymns. There, modern, bright, warm factories invite you to start your work. And remember, you come to a country that speaks your language and knows your culture. Lenin himself has promised that Eastern Karelia will always remain an autonomous Soviet republic where Finnish will remain the main language. And what Lenin has promised Stalin will keep.

It is easy to dismiss such blandishments as simple deceit but stating a fact that over six to twelve thousand North-American Finns put their trust on Communist ideology and the promise of the Soviet Communist regime, raises the question of what made these Finns so susceptible to Latva's oratory. One theory of what is happening is that Latva reinvents Finnish ethnicity and ethnic identity that had been weakened due the acute sense of social vulnerability in the middle of Great Depression and unemployment. He offers certainty that is purged of all insecurities and cruelties of the capitalist society. In his speech, Latva relentlessly uses feelings. They can influence both thoughts and actions (Berkowitz 2000, 3), and therefore, they are one of the most powerful tools of propaganda. In Latva's speech, the feelings operate as a betrayal mechanism that evoke ultra-positive mental images that fired the Finnish audience's imagination. Latva's speech can be understood as a kind of "delivery speech" that conveys almost a Biblical like message that Finns now have an opportunity to leave their "wage slavery" to which they have been submitted in the Capitalist America. He conjures up a mental landscape that leads Finns back to the old familiar solidarities of ethnically defined national community. In Latva's speech, the core stimulus "Karelia" operates as an emotion related to the stimulus that represents not only a familiar phenomenon of Finland's geography, but also carries the spiritual notion synonymous to home.

In North American context, the Finns had portrayed solidarity in the forms of national belonging, ideological partisanship, and party politics. However, solidarity is not immune to betrayal but can become a tool for betrayal when the idea of solidarity is politicized (Arden 1995, 16). Combining political ideology and solidarity forms "narrowness" that cause a distortion of reality by "giving a rise to a definite world view which, once adopted, is immune to further experiences in the world because it has hitched itself firmly to one perspective" (Arden 1995, 7-8). In Latva's speech, the Finns' ideological and national solidarity created the notion of "special peoplehood" evoking their own sense of national self-worth that in America had been become tarnished. Latva showed them the possibility for agency, and transformation. Socialism that they had been reading about in newspapers had now a human face that looked like a Finn. The betrayal emerges not only from Latva's enhancement of ideas and promises of Communism but its capacity to alter the perception of reality that, in turn was enhanced by the Finns' own idealization of the Proletarians as a superior group with superior ideals.

In an effort to represent a new socialist reality in Soviet Karelia that was still in the process of emerging, the newspapers adopted a strictly anti-capitalistic stance and idealization of Karelia. If Karelia was not able to compete with American material wealth it did so with Karelian spirit. Even the news of poverty, griminess, and occasional hunger was reported in such a way that they became to represent privileges not hardships. The ultra-positive attitude was not self-deception but true faith in what had been promised. Battle cries from Karelia were reported regularly in different radical newspapers. They all followed the same style and content as illustrated in Hannes Järvimäki's correspondence from 'Little Karjala:' "There has been a big change in our little Karelia. The change that has made the Capitalists nervous. They have now a dangerous competitor who has already made a big cut in their purses, and in the future, it seems to be becoming even more threatening (Toveri November 16, 1930).



## Conclusion

Studying the Karelian Fever experience from the perspective of Betrayal Trauma Theory, Frame Analysis, and the Text World Theory, the research interest focused on Finnish-American radical communist newspapers and their role in creating Karelian Fever in the Finnish-American community. Alleged institutional betrayal perpetrated by the radical Finnish language newspapers is embedded in their narrowness. The newspapers explicitly produced by and for the working class, and, thus, they indulged in their own political preferences. They did this openly, but at the same time hid the fact that their framing policies will narrow the readers' access to any alternative information. This raises a question of who had the real the power: the readers or radical newspapers? It can be argued that newspapers had the power, but right away this answer raises another question: Did the radical Finnish language newspapers betray their reading audience. The answer to that question is ambiguous. On the other hand, being ethnic, the leftist Finnish-American newspapers were on the side of the Finns in a strange and often hostile environment but at the same time they themselves created hostility toward North American; they voiced the real grievances of the Finnish immigrant community but at the same time perpetuated hate speech and blame; they vowed to strengthen the Finns' resolve and belief in the universal Proletarian cause (Hummasti 1981, 182), but at the same time required unflinching loyalty to Communism. They identified betrayers everywhere, but because of their unwillingness not to engage in any critical dialogue, they did become betrayers.

From the vantage point of 2021, it is hard to conceive of a period in the USA's history when immigrant Finns were considered dangerous and unwanted radicals. Notwithstanding, the Finns caught in Karelian Fever were people who imagined it possible to become their own masters of workers' emancipation; agents who could reconstruct their society in new, more egalitarian, and just ways. They were not mindless zealots whose devotion was a form of false consciousness caused by relentless propaganda. They became a tool for the Soviet Communist agendas through their faith in collective struggle and solidarity. In the framework of the current world, where the rise of radical ideas and movements (ISIS, Brexit, Yellow Vest movement, the resurgent right-wing nationalism, hybrid war, false news), increasingly punitive anti-immigrant policies (detention, an increasing number of denial of refugee status, and deportation), and generally more restrictive attitudes toward immigrants have a disturbing parallel to Karelian Fever that suddenly does not seem such a historically distant or politically and socially irrelevant event. Millions of peoples around the world are on the move, looking for social change that could improve their living standards. It is sobering to reflect that Finns' vision of the better life and future in the Proletarian Paradise in the Soviet Karelia is still utopian for so many living in the contemporary world. To quote Arendt, it was then as it is now "to do something, heroic or criminal, which was unpredictable and undetermined by anybody else."

### Notes

- 1 Gylling wanted at least 50 per cent of the population to consist of Finns and Karelians (Elmgren 2015, 305).
- 2 Headquartered in New York, the Karelian Technical Aid Committee was the main office responsible for the recruitment and emigration of Finns to Soviet Karelia; it had several local offices in the areas with large Finnish population (see Golubev & Takala 2014, 29).

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