

# **In Centenary of the Sveaborg uprising 30<sup>th</sup> of July – 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 1906**

**Lessons for Anarchists**

Antti Rautiainen

December 3, 2006

# Contents

Activist movement in Finland . . . . .	4
Buildup of the Sveaborg uprising . . . . .	5
Beginning of the uprising . . . . .	6
Katajanokka joins the insurrection . . . . .	7
Support by Finnish workers movement . . . . .	8
Second day of the rebellion . . . . .	11
Hakaniemi riot . . . . .	12
Aftermath of the uprising . . . . .	13
Conclusions . . . . .	14
Sources . . . . .	15

Turn of the century was time of extraordinary rapid changes in the Finnish society. Feudalism in its full form, serfdom, was never implemented in Finland, but still the social tensions were rapidly increasing. World trade volumes rapidly increasing due to imperialism demanded huge amounts of timber for building ships, which provided an influx of capital to agrarian Finnish economy, which before had been hardly more advanced than empire in general. This growth in material well-being together with end of a 300 year period of a colder climate which caused a series of famines (last one in 1869) and other developments in agriculture and trade resulted a rapid growth of the rural population, which quickly aggravated land problem and created urban proletariat (although Finland remained an agrarian country until 1950's-1960's).

Parallel to class conflict, political conflict on status of the autonomy was escalating. Ever since Russian takeover in 1809, Tsars were beloved in Finland and as a rule they considered Finland more loyal than any other part of the empire. This was due to wide autonomy originally granted by Alexander I and widened by Alexander II to include features such as independent military force and own currency. Nothing like this existed under previous Swedish rule, continuation of which would have meant a total assimilation of Finnish in a few hundred years if not decades. General loyalty of the Finnish stands as a stark contrast to rebellious Poles, and is nowadays seldom remembered, because today the whole construction of the Finnish nationhood is founded on anti-Russian sentiments. But until beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, any efforts of Russian revolutionaries to gain allies among Finnish nationalists such as Bakunin's "letter to Finnish patriots" in 1861 were all in vain.

However, Nicholas II began to consider autonomy as a hindrance, since it offered bad example to other parts of his empire, which was quickly approaching a boiling state. In February of 1899 he issued a manifesto, where first steps to curtail autonomy were introduced – Tsar took himself powers to directly influence legislative process, first goal of the reforms was to integrate Finnish army to armed forces of the empire. Wide protests followed. A petition of more than half million names in a sparsely inhabited country of 3 millions was gathered in 10 days, but Tsar refused audience for the delegation. New law on army was opposed with widespread draft objection, in Helsinki situation escalated to first riot ever in April of 1902, eventually governor general of Finland N.I. Bobrikov was granted special powers which made him dictator of Finland. 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1904 Eugen Schauman shot Bobrikov and himself, an assassination which was not to be the last one.

Peak of the resistance was general strike of October-November 1905, one of the first ones in the world history, which was a grand political debut of the proletariat in general and Finnish Social-Democratic Party in particular. Worker's Party had been founded 1899, but it had adopted socialist program and Social-Democrat label only two years before the general strike. During few previous decades, political debate had mostly centered to conflict between Swedish- and Finnish speaking bourgeoisie (gentry mainly siding with the first and clergy with the second), and if not rising danger from side of the workers, it is possible that conflict would have turned violent. During general strike united national guard was formed, but it quickly splintered to fractions of workers and bourgeois students – former became "Red Guards" of the workers, and latter (white) "Protection Guard" – their relation was troublesome already during the general strike, and in less than a year they were to violently clash in Helsinki.

This coincided with revolutionary upheaval with all around the empire, which forced Tsar to drastic reforms. He backed up in Finland as well, revoking the special laws and decrees. Finland was also granted one-chamber parliamentary system with a general right to vote (women

included), to replace ancient assembly of four estates – thus Finland switched directly from most ancient to most modern system of elections in Europe.

## **Activist movement in Finland**

“Active Resistance Party of Finland” was founded 17<sup>th</sup> of November 1904, to unite tendencies supporting armed resistance that had first appeared in 1903. It mainly consisted of upper middle class and upper class, some members of wider “activist” movement were later to become leading industrialists. There was no split according to language line, but in general Swedish bourgeoisie was more supportive of armed resistance than the Finnish one (although for sure in both groups radicals were a small minority).

Word “activist” became to mean those supporting armed resistance, whereas “passivist” meant those standing for legal measures, more often called “suomettarelaiset” according to their daily “Uusi Suometar” (New maiden of Finland). There was a general consensus on unacceptability of Tsar’s special decrees. Regaining lost extent of autonomy was the general aim, independence was considered as a very distant goal by almost everybody. Social democrat party was spreading like a wildfire and in first general elections of 1907 it was to gain 37% of the votes, making it most influential in the world. Many demands of the social democrats were common with those of the activists, but party refrained from armed struggle and did not organized underground cells. Thus those among the working class willing to raise arms were at first part of the bourgeois activist movement, and bourgeois activists only gradually realized workers as an enemy not less dangerous than the Tsar.

During mere 4 first years of “repression era” since 1899, Finland developed from most loyal corner of the Empire to one of its most troubled regions in terms of the underground resistance. This because besides governor general and very few other officials, almost all administrative apparatus considered of locals, who were cooperating a little with Okhrana what came to persecution of Russian revolutionaries. And total autonomy of Finnish police force would have been a hindrance even if and when it was more cooperative. Thus Finland quickly become base of all major Russian revolutionary parties, where secret meetings were organized, press printed, connections to abroad maintained, dynamite, guns and money expropriated. Significant part of this activity was covered with partially sympathetic Finnish officials, who were even among ranks of the police and prison guards.

Important meetings of Russian revolutionaries in Finland this era include first general meeting of Party of Social Revolutionaries (PSR, they were called “Eser” from letters “S” and “R”) in Imatra from 29<sup>th</sup> of December 1905 to 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1906, founding conference of the Union of Social-Revolutionaries – Maximalists (SSRM, “Maximalists”, considered by some as the closest analogy of present-day anarchist and anti-party communism in pre-revolutionary Russia) in Turku in October 1906 and first general conference of soldier organisation of Bolsheviks, “Soldier and Fighting Groups of Russian Social Democratic Worker’s Party” in turn of December 1906 in Tampere.

Whereas Bolsheviks worked closely together with Finnish Social Democrats (although in reality latter had more in common with more moderate Mensheviks), Eser had a somewhat peculiar alliance with the Finnish activist movement. Eser were offspring of the Narodniks of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and by far the biggest tendency of the workers movement until 1918, when Bolsheviks

moved to crush first the right, then the left wing of the Esers. Land question was the most central in program of Esers, thus it was essentially movement for the peasants and landless although most of the armed wing came from other classes.

Although land question was also central in Finland, there was nothing similar to Esers in Finland. This may be partly because situation in countryside was so vastly different — unlike Finland, in Russia feudalism was still pretty much the reality even after abolition of serfdom 1861. Also, in Finland there was not anything much like ancient Russian village self-governance “*obstchina*” which 19<sup>th</sup> century theorists like Herzen considered as foundations of the coming up “agrarian socialism” in Russia. Perhaps the main difference was the moderate political culture, which was established during calm years of autonomy — peasants and industrial workers were attracted to idea of one common mass party, which had also much better opportunities to work openly in Finland than in despotic Russia. Thus eventually peasants became main constituent of the Social Democratic Party of Finland. This did not cause any friction among ranks of the industrial workers, since most of them were recent immigrants from the countryside as well, and took just as often jobs as farm hands or lumberjacks as in factories. Perhaps Russian revolutionary movement was more fractured because it was forced to work in more repressive conditions.

## **Buildup of the Sveaborg uprising**

Sea castle of Sveaborg was renamed “Suomenlinna” during nationalist fervor of the first years of the independence gained in 1917 — from “Castle of Sweden” to “Castle of Finland”, but in this article we call it “Sveaborg” as in 1906. It was built in front of Helsinki during 18<sup>th</sup> of century, to be the strongest fortress in whole Baltic Sea, as an effort of decaying Swedish empire to stop Russian ambitions to gain a wider security zone around city of St. Petersburg. But its military history is that of a continuous failure — in Finnish war of 1808–1809 it surrendered to Russian siege relatively quickly, which resulted leadership to face court martial in Stockholm. During Crimean war its cannons had too short range to respond to heavy bombing by British and French navies in 1855. Thus 60 hours of revolution in 1906 were to become heaviest fighting ever in history of the fortress.

All Russian major Russian revolutionary organizations had operations in Finland, and one of the main directions of the work was agitation among Russian soldiers. In spring of 1906, both Esers and Bolsheviks took conscious aim to stage a simultaneous military revolt in main bases of whole Baltic navy, Kronstadt and Sveaborg. Other bases and Sevastopol were also supposed to join the uprising.

Esers, Bolsheviks and Finnish Red Guard leadership had been drawing plans for uprising during months, although cooperation between first two was not the smoothest. Weeks before uprising Evno Asev and Tsernov, leaders of underground Eser fighting organization had arrived to Helsinki. Most notable Finnish history of the uprising, Erkki Salomaa’s “*Viaporin kapina*” follows Bolshevik version, according to which Esers leaders were treacherous, leaking plans. This is possible as Asev was indeed an agent of Okhrana, secret service of Tsar, but Salomaa brings no any concrete proof. But from between the lines one may read, that Esers were dominating the preparations and Bolsheviks had to submit to their plans.

21<sup>st</sup> of July 1906 tsar Nikolai II gave a decree of disbanding first Russian Duma, which had only gathered since 10<sup>th</sup> of May. 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, there was a national celebration of Red Guards

in Hesperia park of Helsinki, a crowd of 20 000 included 400 Russian soldiers. In middle of the celebration, a telegram came announcing disbanding of Duma – atmosphere became very tense, but eventually there were no rioting. 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, day after police had occupied Duma building, there were riots in St. Petersburg. 185 members of disbanded Duma crossed border of Grand Duchy of Finland in order to make future plans in Vyborg. They called people to evade taxes as a protest and soldiers to desert their units, but no calls for a general uprising were made. Some deputies of disbanded Duma, such as Mikhailichenko moved from Vyborg to Helsinki, which resulted growing popularity of underground soldier's committees. In 1906 Bolsheviks were in a minority position inside their party, critical of parliamentarism – thus their historians also consider that disbanding Duma had no role in inspiring the uprising.

Sveaborg fortress area consisted of many islands, most important of which were Kustaanmiekka, Susisaari, Iso-Mustasaari, Länsi-Mustasaari, Pikku-Mustasaari, Harakka, Lonna, Särkkä, Vallisaari, Kuninkaansaari and Santahamina. Three latter are a closed military area even today. Before rebellion there were some 3500 men in the fortress, of whom 1800 were gunners, 1500 infantry and 250 miners. Including navy and soldiers in greater Helsinki area, Russian forces were altogether up to 7000 men. These were under direct command of Tsar, autonomy had nothing to say about army issues and Sveaborg was not even included in area of Helsinki or any other Finnish municipality.

Main architects of the rebellion in the fortress were captain Sergei Tsion, lieutenant Arkadi Emelyanov and lieutenant Evgeniy Kokhanskiy. Jewish Sergei Tsion had been in Bolshevik party, and treasurer of “Vestnik Kazarmiy”, paper which Bolshevik soldiers' organization was publishing with help of Finnish social democrats for Russian soldiers in Finland. But he switched to Esers, thus Bolshevik history writing plays down his role and labels him with any negative qualities they may think of. He survived rebellion, and fought in side of Esers after 1917. Bolshevik historians have given more credit for leading the rebellion to Emelyanov and Kokhanskiy, at least former worked closely with Bolshevik soldiers' organization but it is unclear if either was a party member. Red flag, which Emelyanov passed to be raised in Kuninkaansaari, had demands of the uprising printed on it – “Land and freedom” and “Constitutional assembly” (a demand more radical than just reassembly of the disbanded Duma). These were main demands of the Eser party, but back then these demands were also included in Bolshevik program – latter only turned against the constitutional assembly after the October revolution. Both Emelyanov and Kokhanskiy were executed in aftermath of the rebellion.

In Finnish side, most important planner of the rebellion was leader of the Red Guard, captain Johan Kock. His promises of support from side of Finnish Red Guard turned out to be way too optimistic – estimations of size of Finnish Red Guard in summer of 1906 vary from 6000 to 25 000, but just a small fraction of it had any arms and although drilling had taken place during previous half a year, it was still not much of an army of any kind. Eventually Red Guard could do little to help the rebellion. No army regiments of Finnish nationality were located to Finland, all of the army in Finland came from other parts of the empire.

## **Beginning of the uprising**

Simultaneous rebellion in all main military bases was planned to start around 10<sup>th</sup> of August. But situation in Sveaborg escalated more quickly. Okhrana had passed information about planned

rebellion to leadership of the fortress, and commander, general Laiming ordered to mine waters around fortress in order to stop landings expected from rebelling ships. But soon miners understood why mines were put, and 28<sup>th</sup> of July they refused to continue works. There were also other reasons for mutiny – two weeks in prior spoiled meat was served to miners. 28<sup>th</sup> of July new commander of the company, captain Ilyin had discontinued an extra cash payment called “vodka dose”. Day before a sailor who had died after being mishandled by the officers had been buried, so tensions were high.

General Laiming ordered all miners to be arrested and disarmed. He tore off insignia of officers with his own hands, and threatened them with shooting. Mutineers were put to a camp in Santahamina Island, and not given any food for one and half days.

Some of the guards from ranks of infantry were supportive of rebels, and passed the word to gunners. Gunners were gathering the next day, when officers figured this out they decided to imprison gunners as well. As information that gunners were to be disarmed in night between 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of July, they decided to make the first strike.

In evening of 30<sup>th</sup>, a rebellion broke out in Santahamina, gunners moved to free miners, but infantry loyal to government managed to keep hold and miners remained imprisoned. Gunners decided to pass narrow channel from Santahamina to Kuninkaansaari. While retreating they took all the boats, plenty of rifles, machine guns and even cannons.

Earlier the day, Tsion had appealed to gunners in Kuninkaansaari not to rebel until more information was received from Kronstadt, but now it was too late to stop the events. 10:30 PM a cannon is shot three times from Kuninkaansaari to invite all other islands to join rebellion, and Vallisaari, Susisaari and Kustaanmiekka are occupied by rebels. Iso-Mustasaari, Pikku-Mustasaari and Santahamina remained in hands of forces loyal to government, Harakka and Länsi-Mustasaari were yet neutral. Seven of ten gunners companies, 1500 from 1800 men joined the uprising, and most important batteries were under their control. Altogether rebels had up to 2000 men, ground forces of general Laiming grew from 1500 to 2800 during the rebellion as rebels failed to control the seaways, but they had much less firepower until arrival of the navy. Fighting between Susisaari and Iso-Mustasaari began early in the morning of 31<sup>st</sup>, and during next 60 hours the narrow channel between islands was riddled with machinegun fire. Volleys of cannon fire were shot from Kuninkaanmiekka, huge 11-inch guns of Kuninkaansaari were also turned towards Iso-Mustasaari and their first devastating shots landed there 2 PM of July 31<sup>st</sup>. At this point, Laiming’s position was grim, it was later told that he was panicked enough to hide in a church cellar and to move in Iso-Mustasaari under a cover of a red flag from a place to another.

## **Katajanokka joins the insurrection**

300 strong navy in Katajanokka peninsula in East side of the city center was expected to join the rebellion, but only around 6 AM they figured out that fighting had began. But mine ships Finn, Turkmen and Emir Bookmarks located in harbor of the peninsula did not joined the rebellion – when officers figured out that sailors were having a meeting on the deck, they locked sailors to hold and opened fire to the barracks. Later on they released sailors to do the shooting, but were keeping them on a gunpoint.

Sailors in Katajanokka peninsula had neither cannons nor machine guns, and thus they could do little to answer the fire. They had to leave barracks, and around 2 PM they tried to cross bridge,

which separates Katajanokka from city center, but Cossacks and infantry loyal to government stopped them. As breakthrough failed, some of them attempted to rush to city unarmed, rest took boats to escape to islands under rebel control. 110 sailors were arrested by loyal troops, those who managed to make it to the city were taken to worker' hall in Yrjönkatu where they were given civilian clothes and they joined Red Guard in Vesilinnanmäki hill. Some accounts state that Finnish Red Guards were participating to fighting in Katajanokka, but most likely they just visited there before siege to pick up arms. Around 5 PM Cossacks and Infantry occupied Katajanokka barracks, which they found empty. Now whole city coast was under control of forces loyal to government, there were no supply routes for rebels, nor means for the rebels to contact supportive sections amongst the Russian troops in the city.

Beginning of the rebellion caught its planners by surprise, many of them were in the city and Tsion attempted to move to islands by night with Filemon Tiderman from Active Resistance Party of Finland and two Esers. But due to bad visibility they ended up to Iso-Mustasaari under government control, they were almost arrested but managed to escape by claiming that they were journalists.

## **Support by Finnish workers movement**

In the morning, commander of Finnish Red Guard Johan Kock made a declaration of a general strike to support the uprising, signed by himself only. This was way beyond what leadership of the Finnish Social Democrat party considered his powers to be, but during the months of preparations, Finnish Social Democrat party had not adopted any final decision on its position in case of an uprising. When Yrjö Sirola noticed Kock's declaration in the morning of 31<sup>st</sup>, he gathered executive committee of administration of Finnish Social Democrat Party, and they visited headquarters of Kock in Villa number 14 of Eläintarha area to ask Kock why he had declared a general strike without consulting the party. John Boldt was with Kock in the villa, and he answered to party committee that "Kock has taken a responsibility and declared a general strike, and you have an opportunity to join it". John Boldt was one of the most important persons of the Swedish-speaking workers movement in pre-independence Finland, and without a doubt most important person known as an anarchist – he was also owner of Villa number 14. Executive committee went to have their meeting, and decided not to do anything, as "Party administration is not in course of the events". They invited a meeting of party administration for Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, at which point rebellion was almost over already.

Huge party apparatus of the Finnish Social Democrat Party proved to be utterly useless during the days of the uprising, and not only because there was no any proper plan for case of uprising which had been prepared for months, nor Red Guards were given powers to act on their own in case of an outbreak. Many social democrats shared the mood of bourgeois activists, according to which Russian revolutionaries were to be given moral support and asylum in Finland, but Finnish should not join the actual fighting to maintain remaining autonomy, and to avoid suffering that had faced Poland. Activists were opportunistic pragmatists. Although it was clear that Finnish independence and even regaining lost autonomy were only possible in case of a social revolution in Russia, they wanted to get involved in it as little as possible. After independence, this opportunistic attitude towards regimes in Russia was inherited by ruling class of the Finland,



and has characterized Finnish foreign politics for 100 years already. Bulk of Social Democrats who shared this mood were sham internationalists.

This was not the case with Red Guards. Armed wing of any party always gathers its more radical elements, and Finnish Social Democrat party was not an exception. Kock's declaration of a general strike on his own name was hardly an example of a democratic procedure, but only meaningful thing to do in a situation, a move that should have been agreed a long time before uprising. General mood in the Finnish society was supportive, even Estates declared "Our nation to be supportive of the struggle among Russians for their legal freedom" in first day of the rebellion, but called Finnish not to join it. Red Guards were the only force amongst the Finnish society to give substantial support to rebellion. Bourgeois activists were varying – they had provided much support during the preparations, even a ship for Tsion to move between islands and the city. Some members of the Voimaliitto (Power League), armed wing of the activist movement disguised as a sporting club, were even drawing ambitious plans of marching to St. Petersburg. But vast majority of the bourgeois activists were staying out from active participation to "internal quarrels of Russians". They were also against the general strike as they were from bourgeois class themselves, and during the Sveaborg rebellion the row between socialist and bourgeois activists became unbridgeable, a development which eventually led to civil war of 1918.

Even today, main trade unions and leftwing parties of Finland have their headquarters in Hakaniemi separated from city center by Pitkäsilta (Long bridge), but the working class neighborhood that used to surround them has been in a process of gentrification for few decades already. 100 years ago, worker's neighborhoods of Hakaniemi, Kallio and Sörnäinen north of Pitkäsilta were under control of the Red Brigades, who were camping in Eläintarhanpuisto Park in Western side of the workers' districts. Kock's headquarters were on top of a hill over the park. Hundreds of Red Guards were gathering in the park in the evening of 31<sup>st</sup>, eager to join the action. Groups of guards left the park to destroy railways to stop loyalist enforcements to be sent to suppress the uprising, tracks of Helsinki-St. Petersburg railway were destroyed in Tikkurila and around Riihimäki, another group destroyed tracks of coastal railway to Western direction in Kauklahti. Sabotage against railways was also done in Kotka and Vainikkala. Anarchist Kustaa Liukonen returned to dynamite stock in Mäkkylä he had expropriated few weeks before to have some more for needs of diversion with twenty other men, but this time guards were ready and after a gun-fight he had to return to city without loot. During rest of the rebellion, Liukonen was guarding villa number 14. One night he was sleeping under rose bushes, sharing a raincoat with Eero Haapalainen who was later to become commander in chief of Finnish Red Army during civil war of 1918, and to be dismissed from that post due to boozing. Haapalainen disappeared in putches of Stalin in 1930's with countless of other Finnish exiles.

But wording of Kock's general strike declaration was dubious: "Because army in Sveaborg has taken up arms last night, in order to start a freedom fight for its rights, and because bloody fighting may be a result of this struggle, I will declare a general strike to avoid bloodbath and to restore peace, and the strike must be began immediately". Kock was afraid to play with open cards, but intrigue of declaring a general strike under pretext of "maintaining order" was indeed short sighted. Kock used even more dubious means when attempting to win administration of the social democrat party and general strike committee to side of the strike, claiming that rebels had threatened to bomb the city if a general strike was not declared. Nowadays even bourgeois historians tend to agree that such threats were never made, and Kock was lacking a judgment.

During course of the events, Kock's was losing hold even more and during third day of the uprising 2<sup>nd</sup> of August he was already a nervous wreck, totally incapable of any leadership.

Besides administration of the social democrat party and Red Guard leadership, there was also a third power center in the workers' movement – general strike committee of 1905, which had not been disbanded after the general strike but kept having regular meetings. Meetings of the committee were not secret, but it had secret working groups that made plans for taking over police stations and railroad in case of an uprising. It had a meeting in Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> at noon, and it decided to support the general strike, although chairman Jussi Tuominen pointed out that even he did not have any prior information about Kock's general strike declaration. It could be support decision was due to Eero Haapalainen giving wrong information about position of the party leadership, which in fact had not yet endorsed the strike. General strike committee was working around the clock during the general strike and distributed declarations, but in the 1<sup>st</sup> of August it adopted a position that "highest command on the strike belongs to those who had declared it", that means, Kock and Red Guard. Strike spread to all main working places in Helsinki, thousands of workers joined it. Core of the strike was 3000 metal workers who had already been locked out in a dispute since 7<sup>th</sup> of July. Print workers of the bourgeois press refused to print any information except about events of the uprising. Although bourgeois activists were sympathetic with the uprising, they detested the general strike and leader of the Active Resistance Party Konni Zilliacus called for a general lockout, as "no other might except hunger may put down the workers".

In early morning of 1<sup>st</sup>, 150 of the Red Guards moved from Eläintarhanpuisto to port of Hieta-lahti in Eastern side of the center, to join the rebellion in islands. Ten Russian sailors, who had managed to escape from Katajanokka during the previous days joined – these were only armed men in the group. During their march through the city center group encountered a small group of Cossacks, but these did not interfere, as men were unarmed. Men were loaded to "Vystrel", only ship in control of the rebels. Emelyanov, who had been in the city for meeting people in the secret Eser headquarters and for getting foodstuffs, was also in the ship. Tsion had been in Kuninkaansaari shortly during the earlier day after first failed attempt, but had returned to city – however he missed the ship because he considered it could not carry everyone and he went to look for another one. Both Finnish activists and Bolsheviks later claimed that Tsion missed the ship intentionally, and that he was an agent of Okhrana.

There was some machine gun fire from Santahamina towards Vystrel on the way, but eventually Finnish Red Guard volunteers arrived to Kuninkaansaari without losses. But as untrained and unarmed, they were of little practical use there. Kock may have made much more generous promises to provide help for the rebellion, apparently he got nervous and backed off in front of pressure by moderate social democrats, activists and about any political force in Finland who discouraged Finnish participation. Moderate social democrats actively discouraged Red Guard units from other parts of the country to arrive to Helsinki, and it is true that Red Guard was badly armed and not much of a fighting unit, and could not have done a lot in a serious combat with Cossacks and loyal infantry.

## Second day of the rebellion

During night between 31<sup>st</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup>, rebels discussed of blowing up huge explosives stock in the small island of Lonna. This would have destroyed loyalist positions in Iso-Mustasaari, but as Vallisaari under rebel control would have suffered as well and there could have been huge destruction in the city as well, thus idea was given up although Kokhanskiy supported it.

1<sup>st</sup> of August a huge barrage of cannon fire were raining down to Iso-Mustasaari, and more than 15 000 square meters of roofs were destroyed. Rebels called Laiming to surrender, message was signed by rebel leadership and general mayor A.P. Agayev, who was under arrest by rebels in Kustaanmiekka. White flag appeared in Iso-Mustasaari several times during the day, but each time it is taken down during a lull in the barrage.

During the day, loyal troops received enforcements, and in Santahamina two cannons were set up to Kuperkeikka hill of Santahamina – before this, Santahamina could only return fire with machine guns. After mere six shots, an explosive store in Kuninkaansaari was hit, and dozens of tons of gunpowder were blown up with a devastating effect to rebel positions. Windows were broken even in the city center, and explosion was felt from a distance of 30 kilometers. 60–70 rebels died in the explosion, among them many Finnish Red Guards who were located in Kuninkaansaari. Emelyanov was wounded. This was a huge blow to moral of the rebels.

In the afternoon, gunships Tsesarevitch, Slava and mine cruiser Bogatir anchored close to Harmaja lighthouse, 12–14 kilometers south, out from range of cannons in the islands. They shot four times, a sign agreed in prior to show that they were in side of the rebellion. But this was bluff – in reality sailors had been changed to cadets loyal to Tsar in Tallinn. Rebels had not figured out importance of destruction of telegraphic center in Kaivopuisto, with which loyal forces could call help from Tallinn.

At 6 PM, warships began to shoot a barrage to Kuninkaansaari. Rebels thought that this was a mistake, and Kokhanskiy took Vystrel ship and 150 rebels to negotiate with gunships under a white flag. Kokhanskiy was certain, that even if there was a disagreement among sailors about joining the rebellion, he and his 150 men could change the balance. But Kokhanskiy and his men were arrested, rebels lost their only ship and soon all islands under rebel control were targeted with a deadly fire, which they could not respond. Although previously neutral Länsi-Mustasaari returned fire towards gunships, this was not enough to change the balance, which was becoming hopeless against the rebels.

In a hopeless situation, rebels gathered for an attempt to take Iso-Mustasaari by storm. But when troops were gathered, a shell hit a wagon loaded with shells, again many people died and wounded in an explosion and rebel troops felt into final disarray. Many attempted to escape from island, but now troops in Harakka, which had previously been neutral, turned against rebels, and all the boats approaching the city were shot down. Only some of those who headed to North-East direction to island of Laajasalo managed to escape.

Last meeting of the rebel war council took place 9 PM in Wednesday the 1<sup>st</sup>, under Emelyanov who was wounded to his throat. They could not know, that during the same night there was finally an uprising in Kronstadt as well – first sailors and workers managed to loot a gunstock, and then took over main castle of the Kronstadt. But as officers were aware of the plan, loyal troops managed to curb the resistance during the same night. There were 80 000 workers in a strike in St. Petersburg, but strike movement failed to spread to biggest factories. There was also an uprising in cruiser Pamyat Azov, it had been anchored in Papinlahti in Southern coast

of Finland but had arrived around 4 AM to proximity of Tallinn. Ship was not sent to put down rebellion in Sveaborg because there were doubts about loyalty of its crew. Commander of the ship and five officers died during the fighting, but until 9 PM 2<sup>nd</sup> of August loyal troops gained control over the ship. 172 sailors were arrested.

In Sveaborg, war council of the rebels made a decision to surrender. No guns were left for loyal troops, cannons and machine guns were thrown to sea. Captain Vlasov, arrested by rebels in beginning of the uprising, was sent to Iso-Mustasaari to pass a message of surrender to Laiming. Soon loyal infantry rushed Kuninkaansaari, and red flag, which was up during 62 hours, was again replaced with flag of San Andreas. 900 gunners and 100 civilians were arrested from the islands, 600 are lost, among them perhaps 400 are dead and 200 managed to escape. Government claimed that it had only lost 3 officers and 4 soldiers. Of 150 Finnish Red Guard that joined the uprising in islands, 79 were arrested; it is not known how many of them could escape.

## **Hakaniemi riot**

But although all islands were occupied by loyal troops during morning hours, general strike still went on. Protection Guards had their headquarters in fire station of Helsinki. Adopting the position of most bourgeois activists of non-engagement to “internal affairs between Russians”, and as anti-worker in general, they organized to stop the general strike.

Many tram workers had been sacked the previous year after a strike, and replaced with scabs, so bosses could have many trams in operation even during the general strike. In Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup>, there had already been clashes by workers attempting to stop trams, and thus in Thursday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August Protection Guards organized an armed patrol to each tram. There were 2–8 Protection Guards, with blue and white bands and mostly armed with handguns in each trams. A patrol also manned electricity works, which supplied electricity for trams, located in Hakaniementori in heart of the workers district of the city.

Around 11 AM, first escorted trams arrived to Hakaniementori square. Rails were blocked, but Protection Guards left the trams and moved off the blockades. But there was a crowd in the square, and soon workers became to throw rocks and windows of the trams got broken. Offspring of the elite families, Swedish-speaking snobbish students with guns were not welcome in the worker’s district. Soon there were shots from both sides; Protection Guards were also shooting to crowd from the electricity works.

When a message on escalation of the situation reached headquarters of the Protection Guard, 31<sup>st</sup> company of the guard marched to Hakaniementori with 80–100 men, and formed a line to Siltasaarenkatu street. When Finnish Red Guards in Eläintarha heard about this show-off of the Protection Guard, a small group of 10–13 men was set up, consisting mostly of Russian sailors that had succeeded to escape from Katajanokka but some Finnish were also involved. This group arrived to square, asked crowd of people to leave and opened fire to Protection Guards. Protection Guards quickly escaped in disarray to different directions – although they had superior numbers, they had little training and were armed mostly with handguns whereas many of the Red Guards and sailors were armed with rifles. Seven Protection Guards and one policeman died on the spot or from their wounds, Red Guards lost only 2 or 3 men.

When Max Alfthan, governor of the Uusimaa region, learned the situation he asked General Governor of Finland Gerard to send Russian army to put down the riot. Cossacks and Russian

infantry regrouped in Unioninkatu, opposite side of the Pitkäsilta Bridge, and were joined by remnants of the “nationalist” Protection Guard. However this alliance of tsarist and nationalist forces against the working class was not totally smooth, as some Cossacks attempted to disarm some Protection Guards, who got whipped but managed to escape. In the evening, a mass of angered workers surrounded Protection Guard headquarters in the fire station, and after negotiations Protection Guard agreed to disband itself. It was only reorganized in 1917, worked as a paramilitary organization during first decades of the independence and it was finally banned according to Paris peace treaty of 1948.

When Cossacks attacked Hakaniementori, crowd of workers dispersed hastily. Kustaa Liukonen participated to events shooting with his Mauser towards Protection Guard men shooting to crowd from the electricity works. When crowd was dispersed, he headed quickly to office of the Red Guard at Saariniemenkatu 6 to destroy all the documents. He had to force someone he met in the banks of the bay to ship women employed in the office to other side of the Hakaniemi bay at a gunpoint. He also managed to sneak away to Eläintarha, where close to villa of Boldt he saw Kock the last time in his life. Last words Kock said to him were “We have lost this time, but there is no way to stop a revolution in Russia”.

The same day, Social Democrat party administration was finally having its meeting. Hesitating, they finally endorsed the general strike for Helsinki, cause of which was lost already. Delegates from Red Guards who included Leo Laukki attempted to use heavy pressure to have a nationwide general strike endorsed, but without results. After rebellion, Laukki had to escape to USA, where he became one of the most known Finnish wobblies.

## **Aftermath of the uprising**

In Friday 3<sup>rd</sup>, there was a heated “general meeting of workers” in workers hall, called by party administration and general strike committee. Thousands of people participated; they were in yard of the hall and in the street. Eetu Salin and Taavi Tainio attempted to have a resolution to call off the general strike passed, but angry people booed them. As party administration could not to have it their way, Jussi Tuominen announced “general strike committee will ask unions to decide on their own about the strike, and to elect a new strike committee if they so desire”. Eventually he and Aatu Halme had to escape enraged crowd through window of the worker’s hall.

When it was announced that Kock has given up leadership of the Red Guard, anarchist Kaarlo Luoto announced that he would take the position. However he and handful of militants failed to keep the Red Guard together, and Red Guard dispersed for the next 11 years. General strike committee decided not to care about opinion of the general meeting of the workers, and announced general strike finished 8 PM in Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> of August. They had to print declaration to end strike in print of Association for Finnish Literature, as radicals of Luoto were in control of the Workers’ Printing House.

Last attempt to turn the tide was made by Matti Kurikka, who called a meeting to Kaisaniemi park 6<sup>th</sup> of August to dismiss party leadership of the Social Democrats for betrayal. But at this point moment was lost already, in 1906 he was forced to leave the Social Democrat party, he moved to USA where he was involved in commune experiments and died in 1915.

Emelyanov, Kokhanskiy and 26 other rebels were given death sentences. First group of sentenced including Emelyanov and Kokhanskiy was executed in Santahamina 11<sup>th</sup> of August, remaining were executed in 22<sup>nd</sup> of September. They were buried to island without memorial. Some rebel sailors had plans to help Emelyanov and Kokhanskiy to escape from prison, but they refused, announcing that their place is in side of other sentenced.

967 other rebels faced court martial, most got a 5–6 year sentence in a prison or discipline company, 127 were given more than 10 year sentences and sent to famous Butyrka prison of Moscow. 70% of those 127 only left prison for the graveyard. Only 77 persons among the arrested Russians were spared from a sentence. Among Kronstadt rebels, 19 were executed, 32 to prison for “undefined” time or 20 years, and 522 got other sentences. From rebels of “Pamyat Azov”, 18 were executed 5<sup>th</sup> of August. All around the Russia, court Martials passed 450 death sentences during 1906, and after special law on temporary field courts was passed in August of 1906, there were more than 1000 executed until April of 1907.

Finnish Red Guard volunteers were sentenced in courts of Grand Duchy of Finland, 81 got sentences of 4–8 years to be served in Finnish prisons. Those accused of sabotaging railroads got short prison sentences of few months. Eventually only one Red Guard member was imprisoned for participation to clash in Hakaniemi.

Up to 200 survivors of the rebellion were hiding in Helsinki during the following weeks. Worker’s movement but to great extent also by bourgeois activists hosted them. Bourgeois activists smuggled Kock and Tsion to Stockholm, they did not want Kock to become a martyr of the worker’s movement they had become to detest during the event. Kock moved further to London, from where Grand Duchy attempted to extradict him without a success. Soon Kock moved to USA, where he was involved in Social Democrat Raivaaja-journal, but he was excluded from it when he attempted to raise funds for an armed uprising in Finland. He died in 1914.

## Conclusions

Centenary of the Sveaborg rebellion has seen few commemorations in Finland. This because Tsarist regime has been long gone, and there are no strong feelings involved as few would now deny justification of taking up the arms against the ancient and despotic feudal system that was about to crumble in Russia. Even conservative party of Finland, a direct heir of submissive “Suomettarelaiset”, would today rather claim to inherit from Active Resistance Party and its follower Jääkäriiliike (Jäger movement) which collaborated with Germans during First World War. But few ask why most of the Finnish society betrayed rebels, and those few who supported it could offer only badly organized and symbolic aid.

Before 1917, strategy of Esers and Bolsheviks was insurrectionary, that is, they were not just waiting until “time is ripe”, but they attempted to influence to conditions by active means, to seize the moment by raising tension. They were always to pick up the fight, even against all odds. They had understood, that nothing else was possible in the repressive Russian conditions. And this tactics was to bear fruit, actually this strategy was later on legitimized even in parliamentary terms as after revolution these parties combined won more than 80% of the seats in elections of the constituent assembly of 1917.

Although Sveaborg uprising broke out untimely, it almost managed to seize control of the fortress. Later on Okhrana claimed it had consciously provoked uprising to begin too early,

perhaps to cover how little they had control over the country those times. Finnish bourgeois activists spread claim about Okhrana's provocation as well, in order to justify lack of solidarity with the rebellion. But Laiming was about to surrender during the second day of the uprising, and if Iso-Mustasaari was to fall, Santahamina would have been likely to fall as well as there was no heavy artillery there. This would have made way for the whole city to fall under rebel control, and Helsinki would have become a commune comparable to that of Paris for days or for weeks. Any tip to other side in the balance of power would have changed the course of events, such as successful rebellion in the ships in Katajanokka harbor.

It was the Finnish Red Guard which was the weakest link in the rebel plan. Finnish Social Democrat Party was a bureaucratic mass organization, one of the widest in the world at time, and it attempted to organize all workers according to lowest common denominator. Hesitation and incapability to go for a revolution in 1906 were repeated with even more sorry results in November of 1917, when Finnish Social Democrat Party failed to turn a general strike into a revolution when bourgeois class was utterly unprepared. Their next try in January of 1918 was already after time was lost, it ended with a bloodbath in which more than 30 000 workers perished.

Concentration of the Finnish Red Guard leadership under control of one man, Johan Kock, contributed to incapacity of the Red Guard as he was not fit of his task and eventually lost his nerves. But he should not be judged for decision to declare the general strike in an authoritarian manner in a situation in which all the rest of the party organization was incapable of acting. Finnish proletariat was far more willing to rebel than the Social Democrat Party leadership could have ever believed, until two of the party leaders had to run for their lives from thousands of people angered by the betrayal of the general strike in Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> of August.

Anarchist praxis is not just "widest extension of the democracy", but a skill to seize the moment and to always push for more. Thus final lesson of the Sveaborg rebellion for anarchists should be that revolutionary solidarity is always more important than short-time benefits for any "nation".

## Sources

- Eino I. Parmanen. Taistelujen kirja – kuvauksia itsenäisyystaistelumme vaiheista sortovuosina. Osat II – IV. WSOY Porvoo Helsinki 1937–1941 (History of Finnish resistance 1899–1906 from a right-wing perspective).
- Erkki Salomaa: Viaporin Kapina – 60 tuntia vallankumousta. Kansankulttuuri Oy Helsinki 1965 (Most comprehensive account of the rebellion published in Finnish language, written according to Bolshevik interpretation of the events)
- Toim. Ilpo Suhonen: Ere Kolu: Aktivistin. Salaista sotaa Venäjän varjossa. Kustannusosakeyhtiö Tammi Helsinki 2005 (Autobiography of anarchist Kustaa Liukonen)

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Antti Rautiainen  
In Centenary of the Sveaborg uprising 30<sup>th</sup> of July – 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 1906  
Lessons for Anarchists  
December 3, 2006

Retrieved on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021 from [anttirautiainen.livejournal.com](http://anttirautiainen.livejournal.com) and  
[anttirautiainen.livejournal.com](http://anttirautiainen.livejournal.com)

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**