

The Finnish-Canadian community was by and large split into two major ideological halves, the left-wing “Reds” and the right-wing nationalist “Whites,” with labels going back to the Finnish Civil War. Such classifications cannot obviously be very definite, and the intensity of being in the “Red” or “White” denomination certainly had great individual variations. Thus, the borders of those two main groups were fluid, and many Canadian Finns preferred to stay out of the two factions altogether and to live their everyday lives in neutral terms.

By the 1920s, Finnish immigrant communities across the country matured, and cultural and economic activities poured across Canada. According to Varpu Lindström, universally literate Finns became active participants in political debate and strong supporters of the Canadian labour and suffrage movements. During the First World War, many Finnish immigrants showed their loyalty to Canada by volunteering to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces.<sup>3</sup> It also pays to remember that the paths of the Finns in Canada followed to a great extent those of the earlier and more abundant Finnish experiences in the United States. Cross-border connections were often very active, and many Finns crossed the border to find new locations in the neighbouring country, whether North or South.

The newly independent Finland recognized the importance of good relations with Canada and its growing Finnish immigrant population. On January 23, 1923, Akseli Rauanheimo (1871–1932) was appointed Finnish Consul in Canada, and a Finnish Consulate was opened in Montréal that same year. Rauanheimo became influential in Finnish Canadian society, helping his countrymen and women in settling down. He also wrote a popular book *Kanadan-Kirja* (1930) about the everyday lives of Finnish immigrants in Canada.

Canada introduced restrictive immigration policies in 1931. The immigration flow reversed, as many unemployed Finns returned to their homeland. The Depression had struck a heavy blow against all layers and ideological orientations of the Finnish immigrant communities, and

the Canadian government policies grew increasingly strict toward certain immigrant activities. Several hundreds of Finns were deported to their country of origin, mainly because widespread unemployment had made them unable to support themselves or their families. The remaining Finnish left-wing activists in Canada participated in demonstrations, hunger marches, and strikes, all monitored and censored by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Some cases raised a lot of attention, such as that of Arvo Vaara, editor of *Vapaus*. The FOC was banned in 1940, its property confiscated, and its halls closed until the cancellation of the ban in 1943.

Two distinct features emerge from the Finnish-Canadian experience. One was the large re-emigration of Finns from North America to Soviet Karelia, which had called to unemployed-stricken people to come and build a socialist society. In the early years of the 1930s, around 3,000 Finns from both the United States and Canada made their pilgrimage to Soviet Karelia. Some of them were able to return, but many were killed in the Stalinist purges to come. The other distinct feature was the participation of Canadian Finns in the Spanish Civil War in 1936–1939. Inspired by international solidarity to the Spanish Republican cause, hundreds of Finns took part in the war.

The outbreak of the Second World War affected in many ways Finland and Finns overseas. When the Soviet Union attacked Finland on November 30, 1939, the Winter War became headline news. Canadian public opinion supported the “David” in the fight against the “Goliath”, and aid was promised from many Western countries. About 250 Finnish immigrants left Canada to fight for Finland, joining the “American Legion.” Initially the Canadian Foreign Enlistment Act was a hindrance for Canadian citizens who also wished to volunteer in this battle.

Many Finland Aid organizations worked to collect all kinds of material help for Finland. Canada announced on March 1, 1940 that its citizens were free to enlist for service in the Finnish Armed Forces, and Colonel Hunter, Member

<sup>3</sup> Lindström, Varpu, “History of Finland-Canada Relations,” Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Embassy of Finland, Ottawa. Last modified December 18, 2008; accessed August 4, 2016. <http://www.finland.ca/public/default.aspx?nodeid=36033&>