

## ‘Black spots on the map of Europe’: Ireland and Finland as oppressed nationalities, c.1860–1910

ANDREW G. NEWBY\*

*Aarhus University, Denmark*

**ABSTRACT.** *In late 1909, the liberal Russian newspaper Birzhevy Vedomosti expressed the fear that Finland could become ‘Russia’s Ireland’. The implication was that by restricting the autonomy that Finland had enjoyed within the Russian Empire for much of the preceding century, Russian nationalists risked creating a chaotic, discontented eastern province, dangerously close to the imperial capital. The ‘Russia’s Ireland’ motif became so prominent in the following eight years – before Finnish independence in 1917 – as to become an international cliché. The discourse of imperial subjugation that existed in both Ireland and Finland in the first decade of the twentieth century has rather obscured the fact that, despite obvious superficial parallels, the nineteenth-century experiences of these nations differed considerably. Both Finland and Ireland were part of larger imperial systems in the nineteenth century, and national movements emerged in both countries that sought to develop political, economic and cultural autonomy. Finland became a sporadic model for diverse Irish national aspirations, but the analogy was rejected consistently, and often vigorously, by Finns in the nineteenth century. This article charts the development of the Finnish–Irish constitutional analogy from the middle of the nineteenth century to the eve of both nations’ independence. It demonstrates that despite the similarities in overall historical timelines, contemporaries perceived differences between the two cases.*

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**D**uring his visit to Finland in 1910, Jeremiah MacVeagh, the nationalist M.P. for South Down, observed that the Finns ‘hail the Irish as brothers in misfortune’.<sup>1</sup> The discourse of imperial subjugation that existed in both Ireland and Finland in the first decade of the twentieth century has rather obscured the fact that, despite obvious superficial parallels, the nineteenth-century experiences of these nations differed considerably.<sup>2</sup> Both were part of larger imperial systems, and both sought to develop political, economic and cultural autonomy.<sup>3</sup> The recent development of Ireland’s transnational and

\* *Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies, Aarhus University, Denmark, newby@aias.au.dk*

<sup>1</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 22 Sept. 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Kissane, ‘Nineteenth century nationalism in Finland and Ireland: a comparative analysis’ in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, vi, no. 2 (2000), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Kati Nurmi, ‘Imagining the nation in Irish and Finnish popular culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth century’ in Brian Heffernan (ed.), *Life on the fringe? Ireland and Europe, 1800–1922* (Dublin, 2012), pp 39–61.

comparative historiography has added a great deal to our understanding of the transmission and reception of political theory. Róisín Healy has stressed that 'nineteenth-century Ireland provides a good example of the transnational embrace of specific national causes', and Paul Townend has argued that many Irish nationalists traditionally 'looked to Europe for support'.<sup>4</sup> Although Poland and Hungary were the models most frequently presented by Irish nationalists, even before Arthur Griffith's publication of *The resurrection of Hungary* in 1904, Finland was also 'constantly brought by way of example into late discussions on the question of Irish Home Rule'.<sup>5</sup> While Finland became a regularly-employed model for diverse Irish national aspirations, however, the analogy was consistently rejected by Finns in the nineteenth century, as they distanced themselves from what they perceived as the lawless, violent, and uneducated Irish. Only after 1899, when Russia imposed severe restrictions on Finnish autonomy, did Finns start to see themselves as a 'distressed small nation', alongside similar cases such as Bulgaria, Portugal and Ireland.<sup>6</sup>

This article charts the development of the Finnish–Irish constitutional analogy from the middle of the nineteenth century to the eve of the third Home Rule Bill. It demonstrates that despite the similarities in both nations' historical timelines, contemporaries understood and reacted to the considerable differences between the two cases. Therefore, the article's comparative element analyses the diverse perceptions of contemporaries, and its transnational element explores how ideas of nationalism and anti-imperialism were transmitted and adapted in Europe during this period.

## I

Finland became a grand duchy of Russia following Sweden's military defeat to the Russians in 1809. A fundamental difference between the Irish and Finnish cases in the nineteenth century was that, while the Irish parliament had voted itself out of existence in 1800, a national senate was established in Helsinki after Finland's incorporation into the Russian Empire.<sup>7</sup> Tsar Alexander I welcomed Finland to the 'family of nations', but from a constitutional–legal perspective his pronouncements were vague. They presaged a permissive approach from Russia, a period subsequently known as the *Pax Russica*, during which Finns administered their own internal affairs.<sup>8</sup> It was an awareness of this relatively peaceful accommodation, rather than any detailed knowledge of the workings of Finland's state apparatus

<sup>4</sup> Róisín Healy, 'Irish–Polish solidarity: Irish responses to the January Uprising of 1863–4 in Congress Poland' in Niall Whelehan (ed.), *Transnational perspectives on modern Irish history* (Abingdon, 2015), p. 149; Paul Townend, *The road to home rule: anti-imperialism and the Irish national movement* (Madison, WI, 2016), p. 112.

<sup>5</sup> Edward A. Freeman, 'Finland' in *MacMillan's Magazine*, lxx (Mar. 1892), pp 347–8.

<sup>6</sup> Juhani Paasivirta, *Finland and Europe: the period of autonomy and the international crises, 1808–1914* (London, 1981), p. 173. See also Róisín Healy, *Poland in the Irish nationalist imagination, 1772–1922: anti-colonialism within Europe* (London, 2017), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Edward C. Thaden, *Russia's western borderlands* (Princeton, 1984), pp 85–94.

<sup>8</sup> Anssi Halmesvirta, *The British conception of Finnish 'race', nation and culture, 1760–1918* (Helsinki, 1990), pp 18, 130; Paasivirta, *Finland and Europe*, pp 6–24; Henrik Meinander, *A history of Finland* (London, 2011), pp 75–83.

(characterised as a ‘closed hegemony’ by Bill Kissane),<sup>9</sup> that piqued Irish interest during the home rule debates of the 1880s.<sup>10</sup> Finland’s ‘home rule’ thus developed after 1809, and indeed it seemed to suit the Russians to encourage political and economic autonomy, along with the use of the Finnish language, as a way of weakening the centuries-old links with Sweden. In this environment, Finnish cultural, linguistic and ethnological identity flourished. International events, notably the Crimean War (1853–6) and the famines that had troubled Finland in the period 1856–68, had encouraged international interest in the grand duchy, and its relationship with the imperial authorities in St Petersburg.<sup>11</sup>

It was during the Crimean War that Irish nationalist sources provided some of the earliest political comparisons with Finland. In July 1854, *The Nation* made the strong assertion that:

For our own country many a curious parallel and pregnant lesson may be found in the history and condition of this Northern race, whose desire for national independence has so wonderfully survived six centuries of a reluctant union with Sweden, and nearly fifty years of Russian cruelty and intrigue ... Ireland has received no extravagant advantage from her six centuries of ‘union’ with Great Britain, nor can the connection be said to have materially diminished the desire of the great mass of the people for national independence. And if ... some extraordinary vicissitude of the present European war should transfer her from England to some other power – say France or the United States – might not forty years dextrous treatment on the part of our new ally obliterate nearly every trace of our former condition ... as the Finnish Finns in Finland, the IRISH of Ireland, the real nation desiring to be IRISH AND NOTHING ELSE.<sup>12</sup>

*The Nation*’s contention was that an Anglicised Ireland was not inevitable, and just as Russian rulers had consciously weakened Finland’s cultural and economic bonds with Sweden after 1809, so Ireland could be de-Anglicised relatively quickly given appropriate international geopolitical circumstances.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Kissane, ‘Nineteenth century nationalism in Finland and Ireland’, p. 35. As outlined in the 1809 settlement, Finland’s ‘home rule’ was in reality representation in the House of the Estates. In fact, the House of the Estates, which was supposed to ‘advise’ the tsar via the governor general, was not called between 1809 and 1863. This state of affairs led to ambiguity over Finland’s constitutional status, as well as the development of a bureaucratic elite in Helsinki. See Osmo Jussila, Seppo Hentilä and Jukka Nevakivi, *From grand duchy to a modern state* (London, 1995), pp 14–20.

<sup>10</sup> Jussila, Hentilä & Nevakivi, *Grand duchy to a modern state*, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew G. Newby, “‘One Valhalla of the Free!’: Scandinavia, Britain and northern identity in the mid-nineteenth century’ in Peter Stadius and Jonas Harvard (eds), *Communicating the north: media structures and images in the making of the Nordic region* (Farnham, 2013), pp 147–69.

<sup>12</sup> *The Nation*, 22 July 1854.

<sup>13</sup> For a contemporary counterfactual reflection on the possible outcomes for Ireland in the event of a Napoleonic victory, from a Finnish comparative perspective, see Michael C. Coleman, “‘You might all be speaking Swedish today’”: language change in 19th century Finland and Ireland’ in *Scandinavian Journal of History*, xxxv, no. 1 (2010), pp 53–4.

As Matthew Kelly has noted, events such as the 1857–9 rebellion in India, the Italian Risorgimento, and Poland's January Uprising of 1863, 'suggested strong parallels with Irish experiences, reassuring nationalists that their own struggle was part of a historic pan-national effort to bring about the dissolution of the European empires and inaugurate a golden age of fraternal nationality'.<sup>14</sup> Despite the potential for 'pregnant lessons' identified by *The Nation*, Finland's appearances in the nationalist press remained sporadic (if regular) for the remainder of the nineteenth century, supporting Róisín Healy's assertion that the prominence of different international movements within general Irish nationalist discourse 'varied over time, often depending on the vibrancy of their cause'.<sup>15</sup>

Following the Crimean War, language became the key contention in Finnish nationalism, dividing those who believed the Finnish language should be the basis of national identity (Fennomans), and those who promoted Swedish and Scandinavian culture (Svecomans).<sup>16</sup> The increasing dominance of the Fennomans has been described as a 'Nordic type of state-guided popular revolution from above', by a group which was 'highly loyal to the local state administration and the Tsar'.<sup>17</sup> The influential ideas of Fennoman leaders, men such as J. V. Snellman, were far from the physical force tenets of the Young Irelanders or the Fenians.<sup>18</sup> Within the Russian Empire, the Fennomans also eschewed any comparisons with the 'rebellious' Poles.<sup>19</sup> Building on a Finno-Ugric linguistic-ethnic affinity, however, Hungarian and Finnish academics maintained close contacts during this period of intense nation building, and looked to each other for advice and inspiration.<sup>20</sup> Ironically, of course, admiration for the Hungarian Ferenc Deák was a common thread between the Fennomans and, half a century later, Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin movement.<sup>21</sup>

The development of a 'Finnish Finland' seemed to be confirmed in September 1863. A Diet was convened by Alexander II, partly in acknowledgment of Finland's increasing particularism but also a prophylactic response to the Polish revolt earlier in the year.<sup>22</sup> The tsar opened the

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Kelly, 'Nationalisms' in Richard Bourke and Ian McBride (eds), *The Princeton history of modern Ireland* (Princeton, 2016), p. 452.

<sup>15</sup> Healy, *Poland in the Irish nationalist imagination*, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Matti Klinge, 'Finland: from Napoleonic legacy to Nordic cooperation' in Mikuláš Teich and Roy Porter (eds), *The national question in Europe in historical context* (Cambridge, 1993), pp 326–9.

<sup>17</sup> Henrik Stenius, 'A Nordic paradox of openness and consensus?' in Norbert Götz and Carl Marklund (eds), *The paradox of openness: transparency and participation in Nordic cultures of consensus* (Leiden, 2015), p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of Snellman's 'passive resistance' theories in the context of nineteenth-century Ireland, see Steven D. Huxley, *Constitutionalist insurgency in Finland: Finnish 'passive resistance' against Russification as a case of nonmilitary struggle in the European resistance tradition* (Helsinki, 1990), pp 56–9.

<sup>19</sup> Róisín Healy, 'Religion and rebellion: the Catholic church in Ireland and Poland in the turbulent 1860s' in Sabine Egger and John McDonagh (eds), *Polish-Irish encounters* (Berne, 2011), pp 19–36.

<sup>20</sup> Huxley, *Constitutionalist insurgency in Finland*, pp 110–16.

<sup>21</sup> D. George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (3rd ed., London, 1995), p. 297.

<sup>22</sup> Edward C. Thaden, 'The Russian Government' in idem (ed.) *Russification in the Baltic provinces and Finland, 1855–1914* (Princeton, 1981), p. 31.

Diet in Helsinki – the first meeting of the estates in Finland since 1809 – with a speech outlining plans for reform, including official status for the Finnish language. Thus, 1863 has been characterised as ‘the beginning of a new era in Finnish political life’, and the following years saw Finland develop a complete monetary independence from Russia, and the right to keep a separate army.<sup>23</sup> The Fennoman policy of strengthening autonomy within the empire via ‘negotiation, accommodation and compliance’ seemed completely vindicated, and their newspapers trumpeted Finland’s elevation ‘into the society of nations’.<sup>24</sup> Ireland appeared in Finnish nationalist rhetoric at this stage only as an example of the emasculating and demoralising impact of language loss.<sup>25</sup>

International commentators, however, made some equation between the emerging Fennoman movement, and the Fenians who were gaining international notoriety in the early 1860s. It was reported that the Fennomans were perceived in Britain as ‘insurgents akin to the Fenians’, because they were acting as ‘agitators for Russia’s ambitions’ in weakening the coherence of Scandinavia.<sup>26</sup> A disdainful reaction against this notion of ‘Finnish Fenianism’ was presented in *Suometar* (a key mouthpiece of the Fennoman movement). The argument was that, unlike the Irish, the Finns were not rebellious, but promoted nationalism by ‘spreading enlightenment ... and defending the Finnish nation’s rights with words’.<sup>27</sup> This persistent attitude was underpinned by the conscious development of a Finnish national identity that stressed self-improvement and self-sufficiency, and sought to develop a viable Finnish state within the Russian imperial framework.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, many continental radicals felt ambivalence towards Irish nationalism owing to a perception of Britain as a beacon of liberalism.<sup>29</sup> Finnish nationalists seem to have been particularly wedded to this impression, not least as they contrasted British parliamentarism favourably against Russian autocracy. Moreover, much of the Finns’ news from Ireland was syndicated, often uncritically, from the *The Times*, and political events were interpreted through that prism. Entering the 1880s, many Finns were prepared to accept the characterisation, popularised by *The Times* and other popular newspapers, of Ireland as a violent, chaotic land.<sup>30</sup> On the eve of the funeral of Tsar Alexander II, who had been assassinated on 13 March 1881 by the revolutionary *Narodnaya Volya*, the Finnish newspaper *Uusi Suometar* commented that when societal cohesion was in jeopardy, even dictators would ‘tighten their reins’. Indeed, *Uusi Suometar* conceded that even Britain – ‘the cradle of free institutions of state’ – was imposing such

<sup>23</sup> F. Singleton, *A short history of Finland* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1998), p. 90.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth D. McRae, *Conflict and compromise in multilingual societies*, iii: *Finland* (Helsinki, 1999), p. 50.

<sup>25</sup> *Mehiläinen*, 1 Mar. 1863; *Helsingin Uutiset*, 31 Aug. 1863.

<sup>26</sup> *Åbo Underrättelser*, 28 Oct. 1865.

<sup>27</sup> *Suometar*, 23 Oct. 1865.

<sup>28</sup> *Suometar*, 21 Dec. 1860.

<sup>29</sup> Healy, *Poland in the Irish nationalist imagination*, p. 111.

<sup>30</sup> Michael de Nie, *The eternal Paddy: Irish identity and the British press, 1798–1882* (Madison, WI, 2004), pp 76, 112. For research in this area see, for instance, Neal Garnham, ‘How violent was eighteenth-century Ireland?’ in *I.H.S.*, xxx, no. 119 (May 1997), pp 377–92; Richard Mc Mahon, *Homicide in pre-Famine and Famine Ireland* (Liverpool, 2013).

restrictions in 'Unhappy Ireland', a land that the British had not been able to rule by persuasion 'for seven hundred years'.<sup>31</sup>

The Irish themselves were presented by Finnish newspaper correspondents as generally 'unteachable, lazy and careless about their future', although the root of these problems was presented as the deadening social effect of the Catholic church, rather than British misrule.<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to note that an internal dispute between Fennomans and Svecomans in September 1881 saw the former accused of 'using the example of the Irish Land League' in attempting to 'boycott' non-Fennoman businesses. More precisely, the Fennomans were presented as seeking to drive Finland's Swedish-speakers to starvation, in accordance with the 'Irish model'.<sup>33</sup> A retort from the Finnish side argued that where two groups within a nation were divided by 'race hate', the general security of society would be endangered 'just like in Ireland'.<sup>34</sup> These negative images were reinforced by internationally publicised landlord assassinations (such as that of Lord Leitrim in 1879), and the Phoenix Park murders in 1882, variously reported in Finland as a 'Catastrophe' or a 'Bloodbath in Dublin'.<sup>35</sup>

Finnish newspapers carried several long reports on Irish political events during the course of the Land War, including biographies of men such as Charles Stewart Parnell and Michael Davitt.<sup>36</sup> Whether these columns might be construed as some sort of allegory for the Finnish struggles against creeping Russification during a period in which press censorship was in place, or whether they were simply space-fillers, is a moot point. Perhaps more typical was the Finnish condemnation of Russian nationalists who presented an optimistic narrative of Irish popular resistance against Britain. During the Phoenix Park murder trials in April 1883, the *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti* had claimed that because Britain (alongside Germany) was Russia's mortal enemy, the Irish agitation should be welcomed, adding that 'Ireland's struggle and its ... inevitable victory [would be] to Russia's direct and undoubted advantage'. The *Vedomosti* also apparently demanded that Russia should seek to attract Irish emigrants. This led the Helsinki newspaper *Helsingfors Dagblad* to comment that 'it would be madness to try and attract the Irish dymanitards over to Russia', and argued that the *Vedomosti* represented a 'false and sickly idea of nationality', which lent support to 'Irish murderers'.<sup>37</sup>

There are hints of a potential softening of some Finns' attitude towards Ireland after the emergence of a split between radical (Young Finns) and conservative (Old Finns) elements of the Fennomans.<sup>38</sup> The newspaper

<sup>31</sup> *Uusi Suometar*, 26 Mar. 1881. *Uusi Suometar* began operations in 1869 and can be considered a slightly more radical successor to *Suometar*, which had folded in 1866.

<sup>32</sup> *Ilmarinen*, 20 Dec. 1879.

<sup>33</sup> *Morgonbladet*, 13 Sept. 1881; *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 16 Sept. 1881; *Uusi Suometar*, 19 Sept. 1881; *Kaiku*, 1 Oct. 1881. See also Sami Suodenjoki's article in this issue.

<sup>34</sup> *Valvoja*, 1 Oct. 1881.

<sup>35</sup> *Uusi Suometar*, 9 May 1882; *Helsingfors*, 13 May 1882; *Åbo Posten*, 14 May 1882.

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 27 Nov. 1879; *Uusi Suometar*, 1 Feb. 1881; *Morgonbladet*, 7 Feb. 1881; *Oulun Lehti*, 9 Feb. 1881; *Åbo Underrättelser*, 13 Feb. 1881; *Helsingfors*, 17 Mar. 1881.

<sup>37</sup> *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 24 Apr. 1883; *Wasa Tidning*, 1 May 1883.

<sup>38</sup> Vesa Vares, *Varpuset ja Pääskysel: Nuorsuomalaisuus ja Nuorsuomalainen Puolue 1870-luvulta vuoteen 1918* (Helsinki, 2000), pp. 40–3, 49–57.

*Valvoja*, for example, aligned with the Young Finns, seemed to give a more sympathetic presentation of Ireland, while still suggesting that Irish national progress could only be achieved through improvements in education.<sup>39</sup> Thus, a few of the more radical Finnish nationalists started to consider Ireland's cause more sympathetically, although the general narrative remained cautious until the 'Periods of Oppression' (*Sortokaudet*) after 1899.

## II

British attempts to 'solve' social and political problems in nineteenth-century Ireland prompted regular examinations of conditions in different parts of Europe or the British Empire. Framing land legislation in the late 1860s, Gladstone's administration commissioned an exhaustive account of land tenure models in Europe, and plenty of commentary was also given over to India, Russia, and southern Africa.<sup>40</sup> Finland appeared sporadically as a role model for Irish aspirations, with *The Nation* highlighting in 1875 that 'the smallness of the Finnish population, which is about one-third of that of Ireland, is not considered an argument against their right to the status of a nation. Neither has home rule proved inimical to the prosperity of the Finns.'<sup>41</sup> As home rule followed land as the key issue of the 1880s, international models were sought once more, with European and – more commonly – imperial models presented in order to demonstrate the workability of internal self-rule.<sup>42</sup>

Following Gladstone's conversion to home rule, and the success of the Irish Parliamentary Party in the 1885 election, the Irish nationalist and British radical presses also sought to highlight successful examples of the measure. Despite some Finnish unease at attacks being made by nationalist newspapers in St Petersburg, international onlookers in 1885 remained convinced of the harmonious relationship between the grand duchy and the imperial power.<sup>43</sup> It was convenient, and served to highlight the contrasting fortunes of Finland and Ireland, that Tsar Alexander III visited his grand duchy in August 1885 just as Irish home rule was dominating the British news agenda.<sup>44</sup> In this context, the *Freeman's Journal* noted that:

There are many points of resemblance between Finland and Ireland. Its inhabitants are of a different race from their rulers; they have their own history, traditions, and politics; their religion, too, differs from the State creed of Russia. There, as here, the great bulk of the people are agriculturalists. But the Finnish farmer owns the land he ploughs, and the Fins [*sic*] have Home Rule in a very full measure. So far as the internal administration is concerned, their country is autonomous, and is practically an independent State. Russian control extends no further

<sup>39</sup> *Valvoja*, July 1882, Aug. 1882.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew G. Newby, *Ireland, radicalism and the Scottish Highlands, c.1870–1912* (Edinburgh, 2007), pp 18–19.

<sup>41</sup> *The Nation*, 21 Aug. 1875.

<sup>42</sup> Ossi Päärnilä, *Race, religion and history in the One-Ireland and partition arguments, 1833–1932* (Jyväskylä, 1998), p. 56.

<sup>43</sup> *Uusi Suometar*, 15 Sept. 1885.

<sup>44</sup> Alan O'Day, *Irish home rule, 1867–1921* (Manchester, 1998), pp 100–04.

than to matters of foreign policy, and herein, not improbably, is to be found the secret of the Czar's welcome.<sup>45</sup>

This suggested not only that devolution was feasible but also – as Gladstone constantly tried to argue after his conversion to the cause – that the advent of a parliament in Dublin would inevitably lead to Ireland becoming a more contented and loyal imperial partner, dampening any moves towards complete separation. This rhetoric was picked up by Irish nationalist M.P.s, most prominently Thomas Sexton, M.P. for South Sligo, who argued 'that Irish Home Rulers could show that the people of Finland, with their bleak sky and sterile land, are happy and free, even under the domination of the Czar of Russia'.<sup>46</sup>

In the months prior to the British parliamentary vote on home rule in June 1886, Finland became a part of Gladstone's own suite of international comparators.<sup>47</sup> On some occasions, the Grand Old Man was accused of making a volte-face, having previously suggested that Finland 'gave no practical illustration of the matter', but in general his main purpose was to stress that imperial coherence would be strengthened.<sup>48</sup> Thomas Sexton, again, emphasised this point after the failure of the first Home Rule Bill in 1886, noting that despite the general chaos that seemed to prevail in Russia itself, life in Finland remained harmonious because 'the Imperial rulers in St Petersburg have had the wisdom to allow the people of Finland to manage their own affairs'.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, it was noted in the Finnish press that 'Finland in recent times has become better known than ever ... it has been pleasant to read that in speaking of Ireland, the English parliament has mentioned the constitutional relationship between Finland and Russia'.<sup>50</sup>

Gladstone took the opportunity, in a well-publicised speech in Kent in 1888, to counter the charge of instigating imperial disintegration. Although he was careful to refer to a 'local' (rather than 'national') parliament in Dublin, he compared Britain's stance over Ireland unfavourably with Russia, the 'country of despotic government', and wondered why a similar body in Ireland could not be managed within a strong imperial framework.<sup>51</sup> 'Finland', he summarised, 'is an example of the conduct which England ought to pursue towards Ireland'.<sup>52</sup> He also claimed that there was no precedent of a country being allowed internal autonomy seeking full independence, while resisting home rule increased the likelihood of secessionist sentiment.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Aug. 1885. See also *The Nation*, 15 Aug. 1885.

<sup>46</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 23 Sept. 1885.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Shannon, *Gladstone* (2 vols, London, 1999), ii, 373; Healy, *Poland in the Irish nationalist imagination*, p. 206. See also Alvin Jackson's Foreword in this issue.

<sup>48</sup> *Hansard* 3, cccvi, 1227 (7 June 1886); *Irish Times*, 1 July 1886.

<sup>49</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 24 June 1886.

<sup>50</sup> *Hämeen Sanomat*, 11 Jan. 1887. C. J. Cooke's English translation of the Finnish statesman Leo Mechelin's 1886 French-language pamphlet on the legal and historic rights of the Finnish state (*Précis du droit public du Grand-Duché de Finlande*) also facilitated some of this comparative analysis: Leo Mechelin, *A précis of the public law of Finland* (London, 1889).

<sup>51</sup> *The Times*, 9 Feb. 1888; *Wiipurin Uutiset*, 13 Apr. 1888.

<sup>52</sup> 'Mr. Gladstone's Return' in *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, lxxv (11 Feb. 1888), p. 154.

<sup>53</sup> *Kaiku*, 29 June 1889.



Opponents of home rule countered that it was not possible to celebrate Finland's position without also noting the 'disastrous results' of Russian rule in Poland, and that the Gladstonians and nationalists were simply throwing numerous international precedents forward in the hope that one or two might strike a chord with the general British public.<sup>54</sup> In response to the promotion of Leo Mechelin's idea that Finland was a 'constitutional monarchy ... a state in a real union with Russia', Russian nationalists claimed the Finns held merely 'local autonomy'.<sup>55</sup> It was the emphasis on benign imperialism which also highlighted a weakness in the comparison – the idea that Finland's apparent success story was based on the very precarious assumption that Russia would be willing in perpetuity to allow the economic, social, cultural and political autonomy which had developed in the preceding decades.<sup>56</sup> The increasingly centralising designs of the government in St Petersburg, through the process of Russification, did not go unnoticed in Tory and Liberal Unionist circles. In the development of the second home rule crisis, for example, *The Times* warned that the tsar's increasingly repressive tendencies deprived 'advocates of Home Rule of one of their stock examples'.<sup>57</sup>

These threatening noises from Russia prompted a reassessment of the Irish situation in some parts of the Finnish press. *Wasa Tidning*, for example, having condemned Russian support for 'Irish murderers' in 1883, now ran an eight-part historical series over several weeks called 'The Irish Fight for Fatherland and Freedom'.<sup>58</sup> Writing in the Young Finns' *Valvoja*, prior to the introduction of the second Home Rule Bill, Alvar Renqvist looked forward to Ireland joining the 'family of nations'.<sup>59</sup> Gladstone's apparently indefatigable attempts to settle the age-old 'Irish problem' also received widespread praise in Finland, and the possibility of completing a constitutional settlement based on natural justice gradually began to cast the Irish home rule issue in a new light. The carefully constructed Fennoman auto-stereotype of persistence and stoicism endured, however, and seemed diametrically opposed to what Finns had always heard about the Irish. Thus, in 1894, the Turku-based *Aura* conceded that inequitable laws might have exacerbated Ireland's problems. And yet:

The position of the Finnish people cannot be compared with that of 1880s Ireland ... observance of the law and a sense of justice have always been the Finnish people's finest properties ... Even during the great famine [1867–8], when huge quantities of people died from lack of bread, even though they had been very hard-working, they did not become openly violent [or] steal other people's property, and [it was] even less likely that they would plot in secret in order to hurt others.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Albert Venn Dicey, *England's case against home rule* (Lodnon, 1887), p. 49. Justin McCarthy refuted this charge in *The case for home rule* (London, 1887), p. 72.

<sup>55</sup> David Kirby, *A concise history of Finland* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 75.

<sup>56</sup> *The Times*, 30 Oct. 1888.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 Jan. 1892.

<sup>58</sup> *Wasa Tidning*, 12–31 Mar. 1889.

<sup>59</sup> *Valvoja*, 1 Oct. 1893.

<sup>60</sup> *Aura*, 18 Apr. 1894.

As a result of Russification, Finland became something of a cause célèbre in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, and Irish nationalists reacted scornfully to British popular support for the rights of a small nation.

### III

As international attention focused, during the 1890s, on the centralising tendencies of the tsars – first, Alexander III and then, after 1894, Nicholas II – the British were vocal in their advocacy of Finnish rights.<sup>61</sup> Although British Fennophilia was in part a corollary of its deep-held and long-standing Russophobia, its support was not based solely on diplomatic interests.<sup>62</sup> Strong commercial links and a shared northern European Protestant identity strengthened pro-Finnish attitudes.<sup>63</sup> British support became more vigorous after the appointment of the arch-Russifier Nikolay Bobrikov as governor general of Finland in 1898, and subsequently the February Manifesto of 1899, which imposed new restrictions on Finnish state institutions.<sup>64</sup> The manifesto signalled the start of the first 'Period of Oppression', and stipulated the Russification of language, religion, and currency in Finland, press censorship, and the imposition of standardised Russian regulations on the Finnish army.<sup>65</sup> The reaction to the 1901 military service law, which would largely disband the separate Finnish army, demonstrated the potential of passive resistance.<sup>66</sup> Finns refused to be conscripted into the new integrated imperial force, and accelerated emigration to north America underlined the increasing disenchantment.<sup>67</sup>

British sympathy for the Finns prompted a commensurate rise in accusations of hypocrisy from Irish nationalists. There was no acceptance on the part of the mainstream British press, however, that they were employing double standards. Constructions of the Finns as 'peaceable, governable, hard-working [and] loyal' differentiated them in British minds from the Irish, and sustained a theory that Finland's autonomy had created social and economic progress, whereas the Irish had been 'improved' by their union with Great Britain.<sup>68</sup> This argument resurfaced after the publication of the February Manifesto. The *Morning Post* claimed that Gladstone's use of Finland as an analogy for Ireland was flawed, because 'Finland, unlike Ireland, is proportionately much richer than her more powerful neighbour'.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Paasivirta, *Finland and Europe*, pp 169–71.

<sup>62</sup> Therefore differentiating Finland from, for example, Poland. See Healy, 'Irish–Polish solidarity' pp 150–1.

<sup>63</sup> Newby, "'One Valhalla of the Free'" pp 157–62; Halmesvirta, *British conception*, p. 253; 'A member of the Finnish Diet' [Arvid Neovius], *The Finnish question in 1911: a survey of the present position of the Finnish constitutional struggle* (London, 1911), pp 55–63.

<sup>64</sup> C. Leonard Lundin, 'Finland' in Edward C. Thaden (ed.) *Russification in the Baltic provinces and Finland, 1855–1914* (Princeton, 1981), pp 421–4; Tuomo Polvinen, *Imperial borderland: Bobrikov and the attempted Russification of Finland, 1898–1904* (London, 1995), pp 76–102.

<sup>65</sup> Thaden, 'Russian Government', pp 80–1.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>67</sup> Lundin, 'Finland', pp 439–41; Polvinen, *Imperial borderland*, pp 113–30.

<sup>68</sup> *Morning Post*, 31 Dec. 1898. Halmesvirta, *British conception*, pp 158–65.

<sup>69</sup> *Morning Post*, 3 Apr. 1899.

A correspondent in *The Times* reinforced the point, claiming that the parallel between Finland and Ireland was not ‘worth a moment’s argument’, as all of the ‘brains, breeding and money’ in Ireland were unionist, while not a ‘single Finn’ wished to be incorporated into what was portrayed as a failing Russian state.<sup>70</sup> This persistent British attitude was criticised sharply in Ireland:

Britons are friends of liberty, the strenuous supporters of self-government in every country in the world. Just at present their generous hearts are aflame with indignation because the emperor of Russia proposes to invade the Home Rule of Finland. But prejudice is as a bandage binding British eyes when they look westward over Ireland.<sup>71</sup>

No British heart seemed more generous or aflame with indignation at Finland’s plight than that of C. Harold Perrott, whose short-lived anti-Russification journal *Finland: An English Journal Devoted to the Cause of the Finnish People*, argued that the Finns had ‘always’ had a home rule government in place, unlike the Irish, who had lost their independence ‘long ago’. While Perrott accepted the appearance of the British ‘throwing stones in their glass houses’ over the Finnish case, this was rebuffed with the simple assertion that ‘Ireland is asking for what she does not possess, while Finland would keep what is already hers’.<sup>72</sup>

The frustration that the Irish nationalists felt over their inability to promote their cause in other parts of Europe seems to have been particularly pronounced when they set their case against the apparently ever-popular Finns.<sup>73</sup> One of the main issues seems to have related to the circulation of press stories: many stories about Ireland arrived in Finland via British newspapers, which arguably militated against Finns accepting an analogy between the two cases. A vehement condemnation of ‘English hypocrisy’ was presented in an article first published in the Sydney *Freeman’s Journal* in late 1905 but reprinted in Ireland some months later:

Much sympathy goes out to the oppressed people of Finland from those who have none to spare for the people of Ireland ... We examined the French newspapers, and the German newspapers for telegrams recounting these instances of despotism; but our search was vain. The oppression of Finland was chronicled in the Press of those countries, of the oppression of Ireland there was none. How is it done? The answer is simple. The cables are largely in the hands of the English and Anglicized Jews, and the Continental journals keep no representatives in Ireland. The news of Ireland is filtered to them through the English channels, and while every story which may tend to blacken the Irish character in Continental eyes is cabled all over Europe, all allusion to the British persecution of this country is suppressed. If a Finn or a Pole be fined 10s for a political offence the fact is made known by the Press

<sup>70</sup> *The Times*, 26 Apr. 1899.

<sup>71</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 29 May 1899.

<sup>72</sup> [C. Harold Perrott], ‘Ireland and Finland’ in *Finland: An English Journal Devoted to the Cause of the Finnish People*, no. 3 (Sept. 1899), p. 11.

<sup>73</sup> Matthew Kelly, ‘Irish nationalist opinion and the British Empire in the 1850s and 1860s’ in *Past & Present*, no. 204 (Aug. 2009), p. 137.

of Europe – if an Irishman be imprisoned for a political offence the fact remains unknown.<sup>74</sup>

Despite receiving ostentatious British support, the strictures of Russification seem increasingly to have prompted some Finnish nationalists to accept the idea that the Irish had a genuine constitutional grievance.<sup>75</sup> While some of the Old Finns maintained the opinion that the best means of Finland’s national survival would be ‘to strive to be forgotten, so that no-one would notice them, and eat them’, more pro-active parties emerged.<sup>76</sup> These groups demonstrated a greater awareness of international radicalism, nurtured connections with the developing Russian revolutionary movement, with the Polish National League, and indeed with Japanese agents who hoped to destabilise Russia.<sup>77</sup> The underground Kagal movement developed in direct opposition to Russification, and comprised a mixture of constitutional liberals and radicals, including Leo Mechelin, Julio Reuter, Pehr Evind Svinhufvud, Jonas Castrén, Herman Gummerus, and others who would play a significant part in Finnish national life in the coming years and decades.<sup>78</sup> Reprinting arguments from a *Le Figaro* article entitled ‘Unfree people’, the Kagal’s *Vapaita Sanoja* argued that Ireland and Finland, along with Poland and Alsace-Lorraine, were ‘black spots on the map of Europe’, and that whether ‘the oppressors be Russian, English, or German’, these enslaved people could always rely on the inevitability of liberation.<sup>79</sup> Bobrikov identified and exiled many of the Kagal’s leaders, including Mechelin, in 1903, and while their promotion of passive resistance in Finland was maintained from abroad, a more aggressive radical group, the Finnish Party of Active Resistance, emerged under the leadership of Konni Zilliacus.<sup>80</sup> Although passive resistance caused increasing concern in imperial circles, it would be the high-profile activities of the Party of Active Resistance, including assassinations, gun-running and bombings, which captured international attention in 1905–06.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>74</sup> *Freeman’s Journal* (Sydney), 2 Dec. 1905; syndicated in, e.g., *Ulster Herald*, 22 Sept. 1906; *Donegal News*, 22 Sept. 1906; *Fermanagh Herald*, 22 Sept. 1906.

<sup>75</sup> Paasivirta, *Finland and Europe*, p. 173.

<sup>76</sup> Lundin, ‘Finland’, p. 423.

<sup>77</sup> William R. Copeland, *The uneasy alliance: collaboration between the Finnish opposition and the Russian, 1899–1905* (Helsinki, 1973), pp 141–6.

<sup>78</sup> Lundin, ‘Finland’, p. 444; Eino Lyytinen, *Finland in British politics in the First World War* (Helsinki, 1980), p. 39.

<sup>79</sup> *Vapaita Sanoja*, 24 Mar. 1901; taken from *Le Figaro*, 10 Mar. 1901; also presented in Swedish in *Fria Ord*, 24 Mar. 1901.

<sup>80</sup> A. G. Newby, *Éire na Rúise: An Fhionlainn agus Éire ar thóir na saoirse* (Baile Átha Cliath, 2016), pp 35–6, 42, 44–5.

<sup>81</sup> Huxley, *Constitutionalist insurgency in Finland*, p. 51. For the Finnish Party of Active Resistance programme of November 1904, see David Kirby, *Finland and Russia, 1808 to 1920* (London, 1975), pp 99–100. The *John Grafton* Affair, a (failed) collaborative attempt in 1905 by Japanese agents and Finnish radicals to land weapons in Finland, bore certain similarities with Roger Casement’s activities surrounding the *Aud* in 1916. In bolstering resistance movements in both Finland and Russia during the Russo–Japanese War, the Japanese hoped to undermine Russia from within. See A. R. G. Griffiths, ‘Clandestine Japanese activity in the Baltic during the Russo–Japanese War’ in *Journal of Baltic Studies*, xviii, no. 1 (1987), p. 71.

It is important to note that despite the increased acceptance of Ireland's national aspirations in Finland, many Finns remained to be convinced that the Irish case was analogous with their own. This wariness stemmed not only from the ostensibly different legal–constitutional circumstances of the two cases, but also because of a persistent suspicion over the Catholic element of Irish nationalism. Julio Reuter, for example, was a close correspondent of Joseph N. Fisher, author of *Finland and the tsars* (1899), prominent advocate of the Finnish cause, and the editor of Belfast unionist newspaper, the *Northern Whig*.<sup>82</sup> It is clear from their correspondence that Reuter would have received a more nuanced impression of Irish circumstances than could have been gleaned from press reports. This view nevertheless accorded with the idea that Ulster unionists were fighting a rearguard action against a conservative home rule movement, which would create an 'anarchical, clerical ... reactionary, priest-controlled society ... Ireland under "Home Rule" could be an Ireland in which no man could speak the truth except by permission of a Bishop'.<sup>83</sup> It was also through Fisher that Reuter kept abreast of Lord Dunraven's 'devolution' scheme, a limited, conservative form of home rule that was reported with interest in Finland as a potential solution to the Irish question.<sup>84</sup> It is worthy of comment that Reuter called the *Northern Whig* 'the Irish liberals' most influential organ', equating liberalism here with a progressive form of unionism.<sup>85</sup>

If Ireland was only very gradually becoming a more acceptable model of imperial resistance for some Finnish radicals, Irish home rulers maintained an intermittent interest in Finland. The Finns' promotion of their native language became a recurrent motif for the Gaelic League. In 'The language of our sires' (1899), Michael Patrick O'Hickey had asked whether Ireland was 'less patriotic than Finland or Bohemia', nations which had maintained their native languages. The Gaelic League activist W. P. O'Riain (later known better as Liam P. Ryan) also published an influential pamphlet on 'modern language movements' in 1901.<sup>86</sup> O'Riain argued that the protection and promotion of a people's language had a considerable impact on a nation's economic and cultural potential. Irish optimism regarding Finland seemed to prevail, despite the international condemnation of the February Manifesto:

Of all the countries in Europe – of all the countries in the world – Finland is the one that makes the strongest appeal to Irish sympathies and affords the best demonstration of the possibilities of Home Rule. We compare Ireland with Poland and with the Transvaal, and we forget the peaceful land that has flourished under the dominion of Russia, and placed herself in the van of civilisation.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>82</sup> J. N. Fisher, *Finland and the tsars, 1809–1899* (London, 1899).

<sup>83</sup> Fisher to Reuter, 12 Jan. 1907 (Åbo Akademi archives, Turku, J. N. Reuter collection, vol. v (1899–1930)).

<sup>84</sup> Julio N. Reuter, 'Devolutionspolitiken i Irland' in *Politik och Kultur* (28 Mar. 1907), pp 216–34; F. S. L. Lyons, 'The Irish Unionist Party and the devolution crisis of 1904–5' in *I.H.S.*, vi, no. 21 (Mar. 1948), pp 1–22.

<sup>85</sup> My emphasis. Reuter, 'Devolutionspolitiken', p. 228.

<sup>86</sup> Michael Patrick O'Hickey, 'The language of the sires' in *The Gael*, xviii, no. 3 (June 1899), p. 57; W. P. O'Riain, *Lessons from modern language movements: what native speech has achieved for nationality* (Dublin, 1901).

<sup>87</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 17 Feb. 1902.

In comparison with some of the other 'oppressed European nations' in the Irish nationalist repertoire, Finland took a secondary role during the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>88</sup> This was the result of several factors: a lack of motivated local correspondents; suspicion of a strong mutual admiration between the Finnish nationalists and the British; the absence of a charismatic leader in the mould of Kościusko, Kossuth, or Garibaldi; and the ability to construct more rigorous comparative constitutional examples, particularly with Hungary.<sup>89</sup> Occasional eyewitness reports from Irish visitors to Finland, such as those by William Henderson (1904) and Michael Davitt (1905) nevertheless helped to maintain the notion of a comparable cause.<sup>90</sup>

#### IV

Michael Davitt visited Finland twice towards the end of the first 'Period of Oppression', on his return from journalistic assignments in Russia.<sup>91</sup> If he had hoped to experience the palpable political tension in Finland, his timing was perfect. In June 1904, during a boat journey from St Petersburg to Stockholm, he arrived in Helsinki less than a fortnight after Governor General Bobrikov's assassination by Eugen Schauman, a nationalist activist.<sup>92</sup> In February 1905, he made a more comprehensive journalistic visit to Helsinki just as news was breaking of the assassination of Eliel Soisalon-Soininen, the Finnish chancellor of justice.<sup>93</sup> Soisalon-Soininen was himself an 'Old Finn' and part of the state bureaucracy, and therefore his assassination was a stark example of the internal conflicts between radicals and 'compliers'.<sup>94</sup> Between his two trips, he had maintained contacts with un-named Finnish nationalists, from whom he received details of Finland's recent history. It was not the political violence which impressed Davitt, but what he saw as the quietly dignified Finnish resistance to Russification.

<sup>88</sup> Andrew Gibson, *The strong spirit: history, politics and aesthetics in the writing of James Joyce, 1898–1915* (Oxford, 2013), p. 18.

<sup>89</sup> Matthew Kelly, 'The end of Parnellism and the ideological dilemmas of Sinn Féin' in D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day (eds), *Ireland in transition, 1867–1921* (London, 2004), pp 152–4; Matthew Kelly, *The Fenian ideal and Irish nationalism, 1882–1916* (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 162.

<sup>90</sup> *Evening Herald*, 19 Nov. 1904.

<sup>91</sup> Andrew G. Newby, "'The cold, northern land of Suomi': Michael Davitt and Finnish nationalism' in *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies*, vi (2013), pp 73–92. For more background on Davitt's attitudes to Russia, see: Laurence Marley, *Michael Davitt: freelance radical and frondeur* (Dublin, 2007), pp 263–4; Carla King, "'... In a humble way, a supporter of Russia": Michael Davitt in Russia 1903, 1904 and 1905' in Heffernan (ed.) *Life on the fringe?*, pp 135–55; Healy, *Poland in the Irish nationalist imagination*, p. 216.

<sup>92</sup> These assassinations were well-covered internationally. For detailed accounts see *Finland Bulletin*, 30 June 1904 (Bobrikov and Schaumann), 23 Feb. 1905 (Soisalon-Soininen and Hohenthal.) James Joyce immortalised Bobrikov's murder (16 June 1904) in *Ulysses*.

<sup>93</sup> Soisalon-Soininen was also referred to internationally by his Swedish surname, Johnsonson, and this form was used by Davitt and, later, Michael Collins.

<sup>94</sup> Polvinen, *Imperial borderland*, 141.

Davitt reassured his Irish readers that resistance in Finland was largely passive, and that ‘the highest nationalist authority in Helsingfors’ had informed him that extremist groups such as Zilliacus’s ‘Finnish Party of Action’ did not exist. He also downplayed the idea that Zilliacus had been collaborating with international radical groups, because he wished to counter British press and diplomatic reports of unrest within the Russian empire.<sup>95</sup> Despite his pro-Russian sympathies, Davitt dismissed the abolition of the constitution by the February Manifesto as a self-defeating blunder, as it had completely alienated a previously loyal population. He saw strong echoes of the situation in Ireland, especially the ‘conciliation and coercion’ policies which had characterised the 1870s and 1880s, and he feared that the assassinations of Bobrikov and Soisalon-Soininen would simply reinforce Russian intransigence and delay the restoration of Finnish autonomy.<sup>96</sup>

On his return to Ireland, Davitt remained keen to highlight the hypocrisy of the British press, and politicians, but also goaded the Irish to follow the Finnish example. He demanded that his compatriots should ‘learn to emulate the manly spirit of the Finlanders’ by refusing to join the imperial army, and that the British should grant Ireland what it ‘unanimously asks Russia to give to Finland and to Poland’.<sup>97</sup> His conviction that the Finns’ patient determination would be rewarded seemed to be justified by the events of late 1905. Russia’s defeat in the Russo–Japanese War (September 1905), was a huge blow to its international standing, and also had serious internal ramifications. Following a general strike, which spread to Finland, the November Manifesto of 1905 suspended many of the Russifying measures imposed in 1899.<sup>98</sup> Although radical and socialist groups had strengthened, calling in some cases for an independent republic in Finland, they tended to fall behind the constitutional nationalists’ acceptance of the new manifesto, rather than risk a civil war, and it appeared that the ‘Period of Oppression’ was drawing to a close.<sup>99</sup> A new legislative assembly, the Eduskunta, was established in Helsinki, with members elected on a universal franchise.<sup>100</sup>

Davitt’s primary interest in the Finnish case had been the apparently successful example of passive resistance, but with Finnish autonomy seemingly restored after the November Manifesto, Irish commentators now looked for broader societal models, trusting in the imminent arrival of home rule in Ireland. It was also at this time that Arthur Griffith’s National Council was taking the decision in Dublin to create a genuinely national organisation. Although the Sinn Féin movement focused on indigenous cultural and economic development, international comparisons, such as Hungary, Finland,

<sup>95</sup> Copeland, *Uneasy alliance*, pp 147–60. Zilliacus, along with Mechelin and other nationalists, had been one of the returning exiles in January 1905. See, *inter alia*, *Helsingfors Posten*, 23 Jan. 1905; *Helsingin Sanomat*, 24 Jan. 1905. Mechelin received the sobriquet ‘The Finnish Gladstone’ on his return. See David Bell MacGowan, ‘Conflict in Finland’ in *Century Magazine*, lxi (1905), p. 631.

<sup>96</sup> *Aftonbladet*, 6 July 1904.

<sup>97</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 5 Aug. 1905; *Irish Independent*, 1 Aug., 4 Dec. 1905.

<sup>98</sup> Thaden, ‘Russian Government’ p. 84; Lundin, ‘Finland’, p. 444.

<sup>99</sup> Antti Kujala, *Venäjäin hallitus ja Suomen työväenliike, 1899–1905* (Helsinki, 1995), pp 398–405.

<sup>100</sup> Meinander, *History of Finland*, p. 119.

and Poland, were used for inspiration.<sup>101</sup> This intertwined with Gaelic League rhetoric that continued to present Finland as a society to which the Irish people should aspire. O'Riain's writing remained influential and was recycled regularly:

[Finland] had for centuries a ghastly history. In the wild north, poor and thinly populated, and set between two wary and jealous powers, from both of which it experienced brutal treatment ... And as we have pointed out before, this distant land so full of new and great interests since it made its native language a reality, is a physically unpromising country of less than three millions of people. In art, science, and literature, in all the gracious and distinctive things of life, storm-swept Finland seems like a dream of what Ireland ought to be.<sup>102</sup>

A renewed political storm was about to sweep Finland, however. Just as the Eduskunta had increased democratic participation among the Finns, so the establishment of the Duma in St Petersburg had amplified Russian nationalist voices.<sup>103</sup> The appointment of P. A. Stolypin as chair of Russia's council of ministers in 1906 signalled a resurgence of Russian concern over its imperial borderlands, and ensured that the period of 'conciliation' would be short-lived. In May 1908, Stolypin argued in the Duma that Finland was neither a distinct nation nor even a coherent region, and in early June the tsar confirmed that Finland's national assembly was subservient to imperial legislation.<sup>104</sup> Ironically, the stalemate between Duma and Eduskunta representatives led the liberal *Birzhevyje Vedomosti* to fear that Finland could become 'the Ireland of Russia'.<sup>105</sup> Russian nationalists proclaimed the end of Finnish autonomy, the 'Second Period of Oppression' began, and would last until Finland's full independence in 1917. The renewed Russification programme in Finland weakened further the Finns' belief that Ireland's 'resistance' was necessarily less valid than Finnish 'compliance', and the linguistic aspect of the Irish agitation seemed particularly appealing.<sup>106</sup>

Just as the emergence of the Party of Active Resistance seemed to be fragmenting the long-united front of Finnish nationalism, all the emergent threads of Irish nationalism, which would coalesce during the Easter Rising, seem to have had something to learn from the situation in Finland.<sup>107</sup> If Griffith's Sinn Féin policy emphasised economic and political independence,

<sup>101</sup> Francis P. Jones, *History of the Sinn Féin movement and the Irish rebellion of 1916* (New York, 1917), pp 7, 50, 179. See also *Southern Star*, 5 May 1906; Sydney Brooks, *The new Ireland* (Dublin, 1907), pp 1, 26, 97.

<sup>102</sup> *Fermanagh Herald*, 1 June 1907, quoting O'Riain's article 'The commercial values of an Irish-speaking Ireland', published in *The Peasant*.

<sup>103</sup> Edward Acton, *Russia: the tsarist and Soviet legacy* (2nd ed., Abingdon, 2014), p. 120.

<sup>104</sup> Paasivirta, *Finland and Europe*, pp 170–2; Abraham Ascher, *P. A. Stolypin: the search for stability in late imperial Russia* (Stanford, 2001), pp 309–14.

<sup>105</sup> *Suomalainen Kanssa*, 15 Nov. 1909.

<sup>106</sup> Harold W. Williams, 'Den nya nationella rörelsen i Irland', *Politik och Kultur* (31 Aug. 1907), pp 435–43.

<sup>107</sup> L. P. Curtis, Jr., 'Ireland in 1914' in W. E. Vaughan (ed.) *A new history of Ireland*, vi: *Ireland under the union, 1870–1921* (Oxford, 1989), p. 183. See also, e.g., *Sinn Féin*, 22 Feb. 1908. Finland tended to appear in the Griffith newspapers as one of the usual suite of examples of European 'oppressed nations' without specific comment or deep analysis.



the parallel Gaelic League agitation continued to use Finland as an inspiring example of linguistic revival. Patrick Pearse, for example, argued in *An Claidheamh Soluis* (May 1906) that ‘Irish literature gave models to Europe. Is it not high time that it should give models to Ireland?’ Therefore, he thought it was important that Irish nationalists should contact ‘our contemporaries – in France, in Russia, in Norway, in Finland, in Bohemia, in Hungary, wherever, in short, vital literature is being produced on the face of the globe’.<sup>108</sup> Despite the bourgeois background of many of the Finnish nationalist leaders, the connections that the more radical among them developed with Russian revolutionaries interested James Connolly. In October 1907 the Socialist Party of Ireland wrote to the ‘Socialist Parties of Hungary, Poland and Finland’, to gather as much information as possible about the relationship between nationalism and socialism in those countries.<sup>109</sup>

Michael Collins was one of the few Irish radicals to look beyond the narrative of accommodation or passive resistance in Finland, and seek inspiration from the Party of Active Resistance.<sup>110</sup> In notes he made for a speech, in his role as *rúnaí* of London’s Geraldine G.A.A. club, he reflected on the Finnish reaction to the events of 1908:

Another Imperial ukase has been sent to Finland – with the same object as its predecessor in 1899. Again the Finns are by no means taking it lying down. I have headed my remarks – Finland & Ireland. You will perhaps be impatient to see what all this has to do with Ireland.<sup>111</sup>

In particular, Collins claimed that although the Finns were a ‘quiet race’, who did not ‘specialise in talk’, acts of political violence had affected positive political results. He compared the shootings of Bobrikov and Soisalon-Soininen to the Phoenix Park murders, but, in contrast to ‘foolish Irish apologists’ who had disowned the assassinations of Burke and Cavendish in 1882, he believed that the Finns had gained lasting political concessions. Although the November Manifesto proved to be a temporary lull in the Russian attempts to incorporate Finland more fully into its empire, Collins was impressed by a bullish attitude which had, ostensibly, been rewarded: ‘We have seen how the Finns found it advantageous to ally with the Russian revolutionaries – may not we also find it beneficial to allow ourselves to be helped by the English revolutionists?’ Moreover, he noted the way in which the Finnish-speaking Finns had united with Swedish-speaking Finns ‘against the common enemy’, drawing a parallel with Irish Catholics and Protestants. In Finland, Collins discerned a ‘lesson for Irishmen the world over ... I maintain that the analogy between Ireland and Finland is almost

<sup>108</sup> *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 26 May 1906, quoted in O’Leary, *The prose literature of the Gaelic revival, 1881–1921: ideology and innovation* (Pennsylvania, 1994), p 74.

<sup>109</sup> Austen Morgan, *James Connolly: a political biography* (Manchester, 1988), p. 92.

<sup>110</sup> T. Ryle Dwyer, *The squad and the intelligence operations of Michael Collins* (Cork, 2005), pp 64–5. Ryle Dwyer suggests that these undated notes are from 1907. The ukase to which Collins refers, however, seems more likely to be the Stolypin pronouncements of June 1908, which emphasised the authority of the Russian Council of Ministers over Finland and heralded the start of the ‘Second Period of Oppression’.

<sup>111</sup> Michael Collins’ notebook, n.d. (University College Dublin Archives, Papers of Michael Collins, 1890–1922, P123/40).

perfect ... Altogether there are 2,000,000 of them – & they won against the might of the Russia. Cannot we go & do likewise? *En avant*.<sup>112</sup>

London's overt political support for the Finns had become more subdued after 1907 when Britain had joined with France and Russia in the 'Triple Entente', but Finland retained a high profile in European affairs. In 1910, Leo Mechelin instigated an international legal tribunal to investigate Finland's constitutional status.<sup>113</sup> A panel of ostensibly disinterested international judges (albeit led by the known Fennophile John Westlake) was charged with the task of deciding, 'by sheer force of fact and documents and law' whether Finland constituted a nation.<sup>114</sup> The *Freeman's Journal* celebrated the outcome: 'the judicial brain of Europe gives the verdict in favour of Finland in every point – and unanimously', adding that the conclusions were 'thronged with suggestion to all countries whose case resembles that of Finland'.<sup>115</sup> The legal experts generally failed to recognise an analogy with Ireland, however, and their reasoning reflected some persistent attitudes in Finland: 'the comparison between Finland and Ireland is misplaced: the Irish parliament in 1800 gave its approval to the union while the Diet unanimously opposed Duma rule.'<sup>116</sup>

It was in this context that the nationalist M.P. for South Down, Jeremiah MacVeagh, visited Helsinki in the autumn of 1910.<sup>117</sup> Working as a reporter for the *Freeman's Journal* and *New York World*, MacVeagh's presence was noted by several newspapers in Helsinki, which explained that he was making an explicit investigation into Finnish home rule.<sup>118</sup> It appears that a more general Finnish acceptance of the Irish analogy had occurred by this point, as it was reported that MacVeagh had been invited to Finland by the 'National Committee', which was 'grateful for the assistance rendered to its cause by the Irish Party'. Separate letters on behalf of Finland were sent to the Duma by a limited number of Irish and British M.P.s in May 1910. In the Irish letter, the Nationalist members called for the protection of the special rights that Finland had long enjoyed.<sup>119</sup>

In a special despatch to the *Freeman's Journal*, MacVeagh admitted that he had not been 'prepared for the strange parallels which are to be found in the two cases' of Finland and Ireland. Unlike Davitt, MacVeagh had no apparent ambivalence towards the role of Russia, and as far as the Finnish side of the comparison was concerned, he was prepared to present effectively the same narrative as many British commentators: Finland had fought for its rights in 1808–9, received constitutional guarantees from Russia and developed a strong sense of nationhood and state apparatus within the framework of the

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> George Maude, 'Finland in Anglo–Russian diplomatic relations, 1899–1910' in *Slavonic and East European Review*, xlviii (1970), pp 577–9.

<sup>114</sup> *Irish Independent*, 21 Mar. 1910.

<sup>115</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 22 Mar. 1910.

<sup>116</sup> *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 12 Dec. 1910.

<sup>117</sup> *Irish Times*, 18 Apr. 1932. This visit was largely orchestrated by Julio Reuter and the Irish Quaker socialist Samuel Hobson, and was designed to promote Finland's cause internationally. See Samuel G. Hobson, *Pilgrim to the Left: memoirs of a modern revolutionist* (London, 1938), pp 158–70.

<sup>118</sup> *Suomalainen Kansa*, 16 Sept. 1910; *Helsingin Sanomat*, 18 Sept. 1910; *Nya Pressen*, 19 Sept. 1910; *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 5 Oct. 1910.

<sup>119</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 31 Aug. 1910; *Itä Suomen Sanomat*, 14 May 1910. See also Lyytinen, *Finland in British politics*, p. 48.

Russian Empire. In a wide-ranging analysis, MacVeagh noted that ‘Dublin Castle has its equivalent in Finland’, outlining the ways in which Russification had led to restrictions on individual and national liberty. Following Davitt’s line, he praised the Finns for their methods of passive resistance (including the idea of transatlantic emigration as an act of national defiance, depriving the imperial system of ‘human resources’). The land and language questions were also presented in a didactic manner, but in contrast to Michael Collins, MacVeagh did not use Finland as an example of political violence bringing about reform. Rather, his article reads as a morality tale against ultimately self-defeating imperial oppression. Russification had turned Finns from loyal imperial subjects into dogged defenders of their national interest, to the detriment of the Russian Empire as a whole. Enlightened home rule, going back to the Gladstonian argument, would be the solution. MacVeagh spent ‘several weeks’ in Finland, leading him to conclude that:

The story of Ireland is well-known both in Finland and in Russia, for the Finns are proud of the Irish fight for nationhood, and hail the Irish as brothers in misfortune, whilst even the Russians find something in Ireland to encourage them. Englishmen sympathise with freedom in all European countries except Ireland, and their hearts go out to Finland as they did to Poland; but when your educated Russian is spoken to by an Englishman about the tyranny in Finland, he never fails to smile as he retorts, ‘What about Ireland!’ The rebuke is merited, no doubt; but it will take more than a clever retort to reconcile Irishmen to the odious system of tyranny and espionage with which Russia desires to supersede the free institutions of Finland.<sup>120</sup>

On the eve of the third Home Rule Bill, therefore, the Finnish experience continued to provide Irish commentators with material for a plethora of comparative political arguments. The apparent inevitability of Irish home rule, based on parliamentary process, was generally welcomed in Finland, and a sense of optimism pervaded Finnish reports of Ireland during the first years of the First World War. News of the Easter Rising was greeted with some confusion – it was generally perceived as a German-inspired plot to destabilise Britain – but the subsequent growth of Sinn Féin was followed closely in the context of an increasingly revolutionary atmosphere in Finland.<sup>121</sup>

## V

The idea that nationalists in Finland and Ireland would have monitored, and sought inspiration from each other during the ‘long nineteenth century’ would be an oversimplification. Indeed, the surprise that individuals regularly seemed to express upon ‘discovering’ the apparent parallels between the Finnish and Irish cases underlines the absence of a consistent popular narrative in Ireland, especially compared with Poland or Hungary. Moreover, the diversity within national movements in both countries by 1910 prevents generalisations in how the respective populations viewed each other. It is clear that some Irish nationalists promoted an optimistic reading of Finland’s

<sup>120</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 22 Sept. 1910; *The Times*, 19 May 1910.

<sup>121</sup> Newby, *Éire na Rúise*, pp 91–105; Lyytinen, *Finland in British politics*, p. 82.

development, and the Finns' relationship with Russia, before and during the home rule debates of the 1880s. In this construction, benign autocracy permitted the development – and flourishing – of a national political culture, but it also ensured that Finns remained loyal to the idea of the Russian Empire. This was the message promoted by Gladstonians and Irish home rulers in the late nineteenth century, seeking to assuage fears that home rule would prompt the disintegration of Britain, and its empire. Finns, however, did not identify Ireland as a worthy comparator for national development. Rather, they promoted language, learning and lawfulness as cornerstones of their identity, grouping the Irish with other troublesome people such as the Poles. Their close relationship with Britain, and general acceptance of British stereotypes of Ireland, also contributed to the Finnish rejection of an analogy with Ireland.

As national movements in both Finland and Ireland became more diffuse, so different perspectives on the comparison emerged. Initially an example of stable home rule promoting an advanced society, by the early twentieth century Finland was presented as the apogee of solid, anti-imperial passive resistance (Davitt, MacVeagh), as a fine example of linguistic and cultural self-sufficiency (Griffith, O'Riain) or even as a demonstration of the revolutionary potential of political violence (Collins). Russification increased Finnish political radicalism, and this apparent convergence of experience prompted a limited reassessment of the Irish case. This meant, however, that while Finns were prepared to examine the idea of Irish home rule more sympathetically, they did not accept that an *analogy* existed between themselves and the Irish. Finnish nationalists and their international advocates in the early twentieth century promoted the idea that Finland was entitled to a restoration of constitutional rights, based on legal arguments and natural justice. Ireland, on the other hand, was perceived to be seeking an entirely new system of government, which might have been a reasonable request with an outcome potentially beneficial to both Britain and Ireland, but which was not a historic or legal 'right'.

In many respects, therefore, the Finnish case study supports arguments which have been made regarding Ireland's relationship with 'continental radicalism'. As with the Polish case, Finland enjoyed a far greater degree of 'international popularity' overseas than Ireland – not least as a result of international Russophobia.<sup>122</sup> This in turn exposed some of the 'anxiety' within the broad Irish nationalist movement, that their cause was not appreciated by their fellow radicals on the continent.<sup>123</sup> Paul Townend has asserted that 'nationalism in Ireland was not built in a vacuum', an idea linked to Joep Leerssen's description of the nationalist movement being 'inspired by the crisscrossing traffic of ideas all over Europe'.<sup>124</sup> The Finnish case was one component of this traffic, but as with other European nationalisms it was employed at different times to promote different agendas relating to the Irish question.

<sup>122</sup> Healy, *Poland in the Irish nationalist imagination*, p. 6.

<sup>123</sup> Kelly, 'Nationalisms', p. 452.

<sup>124</sup> Paul Townend, 'Between two worlds: Irish nationalists and imperial crisis, 1878–1880', *Past & Present*, no. 194 (Feb. 2007), p. 148; Niall Whelehan, *The dynamiters: Irish nationalism and political violence in the wider world, 1867–1900* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 10; Joep Leerssen, *National thought in Europe: a cultural history* (Amsterdam, 2006), p. 169. The research for this article was funded by the Academy of Finland (grants #1264940 and #1257696).