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# Reluctant Revolutionaries: Finnish Iron Miners and the Failure of Radical Labor and Socialism on the Marquette iron Range, 1900-1914

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# FIRST DRAFT

Reluctant Revolutionaries:  
Finnish Iron Miners and the Failure of Radical Labor and Socialism on the Marquette  
Iron Range, 1900-1914

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On January, 20, 1900, Martin Hendrickson, a Finnish immigrant, editor of the *American Worker*, and a prominent leader of the socialist movement in New York State arrived in Ishpeming, Michigan, with the intention of forming a socialist organization. Despite his renown as a vocal advocate of radical, class-conscious Marxism, the citizens of Ishpeming gave Hendrickson a cold reception worthy of that winter day.<sup>1</sup> No Finnish family offered him lodging, and the local Finnish temperance hall closed its doors to him. After a couple of days in limbo, Hendrickson was finally allowed to use the local miners' union hall for a Sunday evening lecture. A large crowd came to listen and a ruckus ensued with several participants calling Hendrickson an "atheist, anti-church and horned devil."<sup>2</sup> The following day, K. Tolonen, the local Lutheran Synod Pastor, circulated a written statement throughout the community stating that the church did not approve of the anarchy and godlessness of Hendrickson's brand of socialism.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, Hendrickson failed to establish a socialist organization in Ishpeming.

Hendrickson's abortive effort set the tone for the next two decades of radical politics and labor organizing on the Marquette Iron Range. Despite dramatic labor wars

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas J. Ollila, *The emergence of Radical Industrial Unionism in the Finnish Socialist Movement* (Institute of General History, University of Turku, Finland, 1971, 27.

<sup>2</sup> "Hendrickson Visit," *The Ishpeming Iron Ore*, January 20, 1900.

<sup>3</sup> Edwin Arthur Puotinen, *Finnish Radicals and Religion in Midwestern Mining Towns, 1865-1914*, Unpublished Dissertation, The University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill, 1973, 181-182.

on Northern Minnesota's iron ranges and in the copper mines of upper Michigan during this same period, the Socialist Party of America, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) managed to garner only a modicum of support on the Marquette Iron Range. Previous scholarship argues that this failure was entirely due to the Cleveland-Cliffs Iron Mining Company's program of corporate paternalism and labor's defeat during the confrontational mining strikes of the 1890s. These two factors alone, however, are not enough to explain why the Marquette Iron Range drifted through the first two decades of the twentieth century as an oasis of calm and industrial peace amidst a turbulent sea of labor strife and socialist activism. In many ways, the region appeared much like the land that time forgot.

A complete understanding of the failure of socialism and radical labor on the Marquette Iron Range must include an analysis of the character and nature of the Finnish immigrant community. Throughout the Upper Great Lakes region, the Finns formed the core and backbone of the Socialist Party, of the WFM, and of the IWW. Simply put, they were the motive force behind the cataclysmic labor strikes of 1907 and 1916 on Minnesota's Mesabi Iron Range and the 1913 copper mining strike on Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula. On the Marquette Iron Range, however, the Finns were reluctant revolutionaries, unwilling to support socialism or radical labor in numbers large enough to challenge the prerogatives and dominance of the region's iron mining companies.

This study will argue that the Finns on the Marquette Iron Range rejected socialism and radical labor because of their unique conservative character, and because of the Socialist Party's inability to provide coherent and effective leadership or a stable infrastructure to sustain a viable left-wing political movement that would have attracted

more Finnish immigrants. This study will demonstrate that the majority of Finns immigrated to the Marquette Iron Range from areas in Finland unschooled and inexperienced in the social democratic movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These immigrants came from agrarian, rural backgrounds and were much more attracted to religious organizations than radical politics; consequently, this study will also consider the Suomi Synod's role in steering Finns away from Socialism. Similarly, the overwhelming dominance of the Republican Party in Marquette County politics along with evidence of significant Finnish support for the party suggests a greater affinity for conservative politics. Finally, the study will examine the complete collapse of the Finnish Socialist Association following the battle for control of the Negaunee Labor Temple. This act of fratricide ended the group's leadership role and active participation in local politics.

#### Ishpeming and Negaunee

Ishpeming and Negaunee were the two principle urban areas on the Marquette Iron Range. By the turn of the century, both communities were well established and settled towns. In 1910, Negaunee's population and geographical size had more than doubled since its founding.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the ratio of men to women in the town was 1.9 and this number drop to 1.3 by 1930. The number of foreign born reached a peak in 1910 of 47.6 and then began a decline to 33 percent by 1930. The introduction of power driven machinery in the mining process had created enough labor efficiency to reduce total employment levels 30 percent from 1900 levels. As a result, foreign born numbers dropped as many left the range for the expanding mines of Minnesota's Mesabi Range. This demographic change tended to discourage the employment of younger, more inexperienced miners, forcing the "more adventurous men to seek

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<sup>4</sup> Joe R. Whitaker, *Negaunee, Michigan: An Urban Center Dominated by Iron Mining*, unpublished dissertation, University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill, 1931, 28.

employment elsewhere, and so has steadied and sobered the life of the community, thereby intensifying the characteristics which tend to dominate the social life of a mature mining town.”<sup>5</sup>

Residential life for the iron miners in Negaunee was organized around a series of “locations.” Two principle types of locations existed in the town: locations dependant on nearby mines; and locations associated with abandoned or idled mines. Homes leased or rented by the iron mining companies made up the majority of homes in the locations. For the most part, “practically all of the houses are built of wood, and most of them are well painted, in fair to good repair, and set in well-kept lawns. . . nowhere are the buildings packed so closely together that they touch each other.”<sup>6</sup> Residents of the locations tended to be of the same nationality, such as Finnish, Italian, or Cornish.<sup>7</sup>

Many miners in Negaunee supplemented their income with farming or home gardening. The Cleveland Cliffs Iron Mining Company (CCI) encouraged this practice by distributing unused company land to miners as truck gardens. At the Negaunee Mine, the superintendent noted that all “employees who desired garden plots were given pieces of land by the Company same as a year ago. These patches were large enough to provide their families with plenty of vegetables for their winter supply.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, at the Lloyd-Morris Mine near Ishpeming, miners were given plots of 15,000 square feet.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, three to six percent of miners farmed land within one mile of the city or the mine they worked, and the majority of these miners were Finnish.

As the larger of the two towns, Ishpeming developed in much the same way as Negaunee. Population dropped from a high of 13,255 in 1900 to 9,238 in 1930. Between 1900 and 1930, the town lost a third of its population. Astoundingly, the total foreign-born population decreased 53

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<sup>5</sup> Whitaker, p. 51

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

<sup>8</sup> Cleveland Cliffs Iron Mining Company, records, Annual Report of the Mining Superintendent, 1918, Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives, MS 86-100, Vol. 1989, 108.

<sup>9</sup> Cleveland Cliffs Iron Mining Company, records, Annual Report of the Mining Superintendent, 1920, Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives, MS 86-100, Vol. 1991, 393.

percent during this period, with the Finnish born population dropping 29.2 percent (1129 to 799) between 1910 and 1920.<sup>10</sup> Along with the Mesabi Range, the industrial centers of southern Michigan may have also been a destination for much of this out migration. Despite the population loss, Ishpeming enjoyed a more diversified economy than Negaunee that provided a measure of stability during economic downturns. For example, the Gossard Company located in Ishpeming after World War I partly because of the town's large pool of unemployed miners' wives and partly because the city gave the company an abandoned building purchased with funds raised in a public subscription.

Residential patterns in Ishpeming were not as dependent on the existence of locations as in Negaunee. Nine-tenths of the city's residences were in the central, downtown area with about 1,000 homes and at least 50 percent of the population.<sup>11</sup> General laborers occupied half of all homes, with this number evenly divided between miners or some group. An analysis of payroll records for the Cliffs Shaft Mine near downtown Ishpeming shows miners evenly distributed throughout the core area.<sup>12</sup> Homes occupied by miners on land owned by the mining companies were rather spacious with lots generally sixty by hundred feet in size, "here most of the residents own the dwellings which they occupy, but the land is leased on a short-term basis."<sup>13</sup> At the same time, single family units formed four-fifths of the city's total number while multiple dwellings accounted for only two percent of the total.<sup>14</sup> These dwellings were either in good or excellent condition. A study of Ishpeming in this period found this situation "paradoxical" and noted that "mining communities, as a rule, are not models of neatness. They are composed, commonly, of migratory people who care little for the homes they occupy."<sup>15</sup> Since residents did not pay property tax on land owned by the mining companies, it's possible that they reinvested the extra

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Goodman, *Ishpeming, Michigan: A Functional Study of a Mining Community*, unpublished Dissertation, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill, 1948, 22-25.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 96

<sup>12</sup> Cleveland Cliffs Iron Mining Company, records, *Cliffs Shaft payroll records*.

<sup>13</sup> Goodman, 98

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 103

<sup>15</sup> Goodman, 108

income toward property beautification. CCI's annual beautification award was also undoubtedly a motivating factor.

Sociologist Martin Bulmer coined the phrase "Occupational communities" to describe towns like Negaunee and Ishpeming. He argued that any sociological model of development and change must include the "endogenous influence of local collectivities upon general social processes." In essence, what are the internal processes of the community that mold and shape the community? How do people respond to industrial processes that "shape their lives?" Past experiences, traditional ideas, comparisons with previous work experiences, "and particularly agitation on behalf of local social movements" all have a role in shaping the development of the community. Moreover, occupational communities tend to be isolated from the rest of the world and dependant on one industry. Such communities tended to "be the reference group for those who belong, setting standards of behavior and providing its own system of internal differentiation." Bulmer believed that mining conditions make development of such communities likely: "Mining work carried out in solidarity, relatively autonomous, groups requiring a high degree of involvement, but miners commonly live in physically isolated settlements which reduce the opportunities for contact with other occupations."<sup>16</sup>

On the Marquette Iron Range, community cohesiveness transcended ethnic differences and the artificial boundaries of the locations. The very nature of dependence on mining in an isolated, rural environment forced groups to coexist harmoniously. "We were just like one big happy family," remembers Hugo Korpinen of his neighborhood in North Lake (near Ishpeming) before World War I. As a Finn, Korpinen lived side-by-side with Cornish and Italian immigrant families, trading jobs and helping each other. He describes how common tasks, such as wood cutting or snow shoveling were shared equally as families went from house to house to do the

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Bulmer, *Sociological Models of a Mining Community*, p. 80.

work.<sup>17</sup> The Reverend David Spellgatti also remembered his Negaunee home of the 1920s as a place where people “that lived on the other side of our house were English, and then across the street from us they were French, and across the alley they were French and kitty corner to us were Swede and French, next door to us were Finnish and French. So it was all mixed up and everybody got along.”<sup>18</sup> According to Frank Matthews, “there were the Swedes, the Cornish, the English, the Irish, the Scotch, the Welsh, you name it - they were all intermingled. . .when somebody was hurt or sick in the family everybody come to help. they helped you with the garden they helped you with cutting wood, cutting hay, build your house, build your barn . . . Sunday everybody go to their church of their choice the family was gone and right after dinner they’d go visiting the sick no matter who they were you don’t see that any more its such a big change.”<sup>19</sup>

Another common theme found in residents’ memories of the time was the high degree of camaraderie that existed among miners in the mines. Again, ethnic differences appeared to mean very little among the men who shared the trials and travails of underground mining. For example, after arriving on the Marquette Range from the Mesabi Iron Range in 1912, Wayne Talus unexpectedly encountered “very nice fellows the nicest fellers I found was when I came to Ishpeming and there they called each other pard. Everybody was pard. Hey pard want some help pard. Would you like to come over here and so on. So they were very, very friendly people to work with.” Similarly, Les Kallionen remembers that “most of my co-workers were people that were raised in this area and we had a lot in common, so it wasn’t difficult to work with them. Family members that worked for the same company were my father two brothers, several uncles, two sons, and many cousins.”

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<sup>17</sup> Hugo Korpinen, Oral History Interview, December 12, 1984, *The Red Dust Oral History Collection*, MSS-113, 2/135, Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives, Marquette, Michigan.

<sup>18</sup> David Spelgatti, Oral History Interview, January 4, 1984, *The Red Dust Oral History Collection*, MSS-113, 1/140, Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives, Marquette, Michigan.

<sup>19</sup> Frank Matthews, Oral History Interview, July 29, 1973, Oral History Collection, Finnish - American Archives, Finlandia University, Hancock, Michigan.



The Character of Finnish Immigration to the Marquette Iron Range

Finns began arriving in large numbers to the Lake Superior iron ore region by the 1880s.<sup>20</sup> By 1920, Finns formed the largest foreign born group in all the major mining counties in Michigan, except for Dickinson County on the Menominee Iron Range, and the Mesabi Iron Range of Minnesota. These early immigrants tended to be more rural and conservative in their political orientation. Twenty-five years later, political and social upheaval in Russia brought about a period of political repression in Finland that changed the essential character of the average Finnish immigrant and ushered in a second wave of immigration to the United States.<sup>21</sup> These new Finns came predominately from urban the provinces of Turu-Pori and Uusimma, areas of Finland that were hotbeds of unionism and socialism. Scholars argue that these Finns had become radicalized because of their “first-hand impressions of national mobilization, protest and advancement in political reform,” creating a more politically educated and aware Finnish immigrant from their earlier brethren.<sup>22</sup> These immigrants were more proactive and sought to “modify their voiceless and powerless position with industrial society.”

In his study of the coal mining industry, John Laslett argued that rural concentration and geographically limited areas aided in the development of a “special

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<sup>20</sup> William A. Høglund, “No Land for Finns: Critics and Reformers View the Rural Exodus from Finland to America Between the 1880’s and World War I,” in *The Finnish Experience in the Western Great Lake Region: New Perspectives*, 37-38 (Institute for Migration, Turku, Finland, 1975). Between 1815 and 1875 number of landowners remained constant in Finland, but the number of landless tenants grew rapidly. In 1901, farm laborers represented 43 percent of all rural households. At the same time most farms were small and the landless had little hope of obtaining land. “In 1901, almost seventy percent of them each had less than twenty-two acres of cultivated land.” “over sixty percent were agricultural dependents. The rest included rural migrants who had worked in Finnish cities. Most were unmarried and between the ages of sixteen and thirty years.”

<sup>21</sup> Puotinen, p. 24-25. The Russification upon Finland that led to a nation-wide strike that “created momentum for social reform, and in 1907 a newly constituted Finnish Parliament took the place of the old diet. Eighty of the 200 seats in the new legislature were occupied by Social Democrats who were rapidly gaining power since their organization in 1903. During this period of political pressure and resistance, thousands of emigrants left for America.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

bond among miners” that was different than among workers in other industries. He found that the unique dangers of mining enhanced the miners’ militant nature. Laslett cites studies that identify miners as an “isolated mass . . . whose unity, homogeneity, and strength of purpose predisposed them to frequent strikes, to class-conscious militancy, and to political radicalism.”<sup>23</sup>

No where in the Lake Superior iron mining region did Finnish left-wing radicalism manifest itself more than on the Mesabi Iron Range of Minnesota. Finnish miners on the Mesabi not only embraced radical political ideologies and unionism but were proactive leaders at the forefront of the major strikes of 1907 and 1916. For the most part, they strongly supported the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and provide the leadership infrastructure for the movement and Socialist Party chapters in the region.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, despite the failure of the 1907 and 1916 strikes, Finns on the Mesabi did not abandon the IWW and continued to increase the union’s membership. By 1917, the IWW had added 5,000 new members – most of them Finnish.<sup>25</sup>

These radical Finnish leaders took advantage of the difficult and challenging living and working conditions on the Mesabi. The iron mining industry on the Mesabi had a fatality rate nearly as high as that in bituminous coal mining industry. 7.5 workers on the Range died each year for every 1000.<sup>26</sup> Not only unsure as to whether or not they would come home each day, the miners also lived with a great deal of uncertainty about

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<sup>23</sup> John Laslett, “Introduction: “A Model of Industrial Solidarity?” Interpreting the UMWA’s First Hundred Years, 1890-1990,” in *The United Mine Workers of America, A Model of Industrial Solidarity?*, 4-5 (University Park, Penn, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Gerald Ronning, *Jackpine Savages: Discourses of Conquest in the 1916 Mesabi Iron Range Strike*, *Labor History*, 44 (2003): 366. Ronning concluded that “Finnish immigrants formed a distinct and visible ethnic presence at the forefront of most organized radical agitations on the Range from the 1907 strike forward.”

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 378.

<sup>26</sup> Ronning, 348.

their income and working hours. In 1894, the average daily wage was \$1. By 1919, this amount rose to \$7 but did not take in to account pay according to skill level. Mining companies used a contract system that paid “a work team according to output using both amount and quality of ore as standards.” This system suffered “the vagaries of favoritism and the changing rates of pay that prevailed across the range.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, workers often had to bribe foremen to work in more lucrative, soft ore shafts, while the mining companies deducted money for basic equipment. In the end, the miner was never sure of his net wage each period day. Poor and uncertain wages made the high cost of living on the Mesabi Range more difficult and unbearable. Because of shipping costs and lack of local farming produce, food cost 50 - 100 percent higher than in areas of southern Minnesota. Living conditions were deplorable on the Mesabi Range where residential locations were often described “crowed and filthy.”<sup>28</sup>

Unlike CCI’s experience with corporate welfare programs on the Marquette Iron Range, Mesabi Range ironing mining companies’ attempts to correct, or at least ameliorate, the difficult living and working conditions on the Mesabi Range failed miserably and, not surprisingly, contributed to the radicalization of Finnish miners. These programs ultimately failed because they alienated Mesabi Finns and “failed to address the unique requirements of immigrants and single males.” Unlike their fellows on the Marquette Range, the Finns on the Mesabi found social amenities such as libraries, sanitation, and some health care “demeaning.” Moreover, corporate welfare programs did not provide miners with common justice and representation in the work place. The iron mining companies expected their employees to give up their democratic rights in

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<sup>27</sup> Ronning, 365.

<sup>28</sup> Neil Betten, *The Origins of Ethnic Radicalism in Northern Minnesota, 1900-1920*, *International Immigration Review*, 4 (Spring, 1970): 50-54.

exchange for a few services and amenities. In response, many Finns developed their own range of social institutions to counter corporate welfare systems, such as community halls, survivor benefits, and food co-ops.<sup>29</sup> In the end, these programs served to empower Finnish immigrant communities and only added to their militant radicalism.

The nature of Finnish immigration and the character of the Finnish community on the Marquette Iron Range were quite different from that on the Mesabi. The Finns that arrived on the Marquette Iron Range in the 1880s tended to be “conservative, family and rural-oriented, and concerned about maintaining their cultural, linguistic and religious identity within a foreign land.” As a result of the seemingly endless labor strife of the 1890s, many English, Scandinavians, and Irish had left the Range by 1900.<sup>30</sup> Because Finnish miners played a prominent role in the strike of 1895, they suffered employer backlash in the form of blacklists and were the first to be laid off in the recession 1907-08. “This was done chiefly,” a government immigration report of 1911 concluded, “because of the fact that they are inclined, or a large number of them are, to work up strikes . . . it is considered better policy to have several races employed all the time, as it naturally prevents the formation of strong and well-organized labor unions.”<sup>31</sup>

Although Finnish immigrants constituted the largest foreign born group on the Marquette Iron Range, the group began to experience a decline in numbers after the turn of the century. In 1900, Finns accounted for 39.8 percent of the total foreign born population of 14,923. Ten years later, this number dropped to 5,020 Finnish born

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<sup>29</sup> Alanen, “Finns and the Corporate Mining Environment”, 54-55

<sup>30</sup> *The Iron Ore Mining Industry in Michigan*, 392-393

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 395

immigrants or 28 percent of the total foreign born population of 17,934.<sup>32</sup> Still, Finns outnumbered other immigrant groups three to one.<sup>33</sup> Although the total number of Finnish born immigrants dropped again to 4,620 in 1920, the total population of foreign born also dropped to 13,887, making the percentage of Finns to foreign born actually increase to 33 percent.<sup>34</sup>

Finnish immigrants worked primarily as iron ore miners or in some capacity related to mining. Forty-seven percent (518) of the total number of Finnish residents of Ishpeming (1093) identified themselves as miners in the 1910 census. Fifty-five percent (944) of the total number of Negaunee Finns (1713) worked as miners in 1910. By contrast, the next largest immigrant group, the English, identified themselves as miners 37 percent (390) in Ishpeming and 44 percent (326) in Negaunee.<sup>35</sup>

Finnish immigrants on the Mesabi Iron Range were more radical than their brethren on the Marquette Iron Range partly because they brought with them from Finland their socialist political experience. Mesabi Range may also have served as a “safety valve” on the Marquette Range by siphoning off discontent with the mining environment of northern Michigan. A large number of the early immigrants went to the Mesabi Range from northern Michigan “whence they brought the immigrant institutions

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<sup>32</sup> Thirteenth Census of the United States, Population, Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1913.

<sup>33</sup> Arnold R. Alanen, “Companies as Caretakers: Paternalism, Welfare Capitalism, and Immigrants in the Lake Superior Mining Region,” in *Century of European Immigrants, 1830-1930*, 371-372 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991): 371-372.

<sup>34</sup> Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population, Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1922.

<sup>35</sup> Thirteenth Census of the United States, Population, Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1913.

to Minnesota.”<sup>36</sup> As exiles after 1905, Socialist leaders “emigrated to the Mesabi Iron Range of Minnesota where there already existed a large Finnish immigrant population.”<sup>37</sup> They by-passed the far older and more settled communities on the Marquette Iron Range for the far newer and politically more fertile Mesabi. Upon arrival, these agitators lectured and published periodicals supporting the socialist movement among Finnish immigrants, reinforcing an inclination toward radical politics learned and experienced in the homeland. At the same time, the mainstream union movement represented by the American Federation of Labor failed to provide a viable alternative to the ideology of socialist and the dynamic activism of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Essentially, the socialist Finns on the Mesabi Range “moved into an area where radical political traditions of their native land could play an important role.”<sup>38</sup>

The social composition of Finnish immigration to the United States changed over the period 1873-1913. In the early years, the majority of adult male immigrants were farmers 15.7 percent in 1873 as compared to 8.7 percent for adult male urban workers. Over the years, the number of urban workers among the immigrant population increased and the number of farmers decreased. By 1913, farmers represented only 4 percent and urban workers 24 percent. Immigration during this period also started predominantly from the north and central regions of Finland in the early years and then moved south from Oulu and Vaasa provinces to the southern and eastern parts of Finland. Urban

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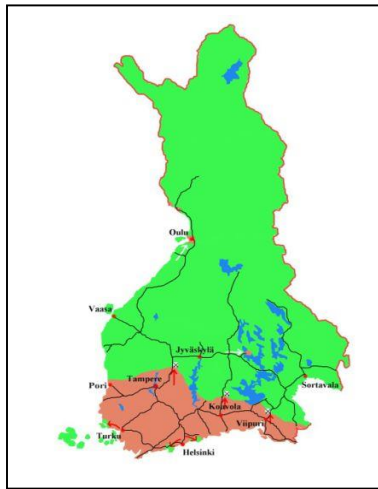
<sup>36</sup> Matti E. Kaups, “The Finns in the Copper and Iron Ore Mines of the Western Great Lakes Region, 1864-1905: Some Preliminary Observations,” in *The Finnish Experience in the Western Great Lakes Region: New Perspectives*, 72 (Turku, Finland: Institute for Immigration Studies, 1975): 72

<sup>37</sup> Betten, 46

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

workers did not become a significant proportion of the immigrant population until after 1900.<sup>39</sup>

Analysis of naturalization records for Marquette County suggests that immigration between 1905 and 1920 came predominately from the rural central and northern regions of Finland. Finnish born immigrants who came to Marquette County between 1905-1920 shows that 80 percent (550) originated in the area highlighted



in green.<sup>40</sup> Only 20 percent (138) arrived from southern Finland, highlighted in red. Of those from central and northern Finland, 43 percent (237) came from the province of Vaasa and 30 percent (160) from the province of Oulu. Of those from southern Finland, 51 percent (71) came from the city of Turku and 7 percent (10) came from the city of Hameenlinna; the remainder arrived from scattered towns and villages throughout the south. None are shown to have immigrated from Helsinki, Finland's capital and largest city.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Reino Kero, "Migration from Finland to North America in the Years Between the United States Civil War and the First World War," in *Migration Studies*, 84-86 (Turku, Finland: Institute for Migration Studies, 1974): 84-86.

<sup>40</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:FinnishCivilWarMapBegin.jpg>

<sup>41</sup> State of Michigan, Local Government Records Depository, *Immigration and Naturalization Records, 1905-1920*, RG 89-467, Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives.

Region of origin is significant to our understanding of the character of the Finnish immigrant community on the Marquette Iron Range. Records of naturalization clearly demonstrate that the majority of Finnish immigrants to the Marquette Iron Range after 1905 were from the rural areas of Finland and were most likely farmers or tenant farmers. As a result, we would expect them to be more conservative and religious in their background. The major industrial, urban areas of Finland were in Turku, Pori, and Helsinki in the south where one would expect to find immigrants well versed in Marxist politics and union organizing. The southern part of Finland was also the region that supported the Red Guards, or Bolshevik faction, during the Finish Civil War; whereas, the central and northern parts of the country was the stronghold of the conservative, counter-revolutionaries. Indeed, prominent Marquette County Socialist Party leader Frank Aaltonen was born, grew-up in Hameenlinna, and immigrated to the United States in 1905.

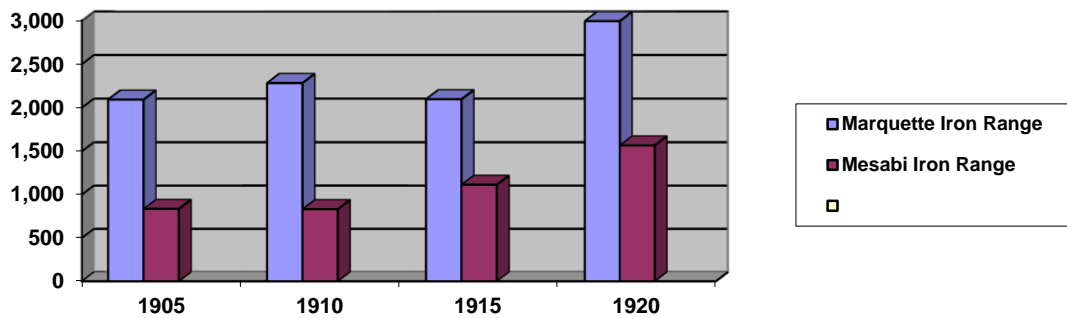
#### The Role of the Suomi Synod Church

Membership in the Suomi Synod Lutheran Church on the Marquette Iron Range was consistently twice as high as the membership on the Mesabi Iron Range. The only towns on the Mesabi to consistently report church membership were Chisholm, Duluth, Ely, Eveleth, and Mountain Iron. The towns on the Marquette Iron Range with the highest church membership were Ishpeming, Negaunee, Republic, and Champion. Church membership in these communities was 2,284 in 1910 or 45 percent of the Finnish born population (5,020) in Marquette County. Ten years later membership rose 31 percent to 2,994 or 65 percent of the Finnish born population.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Kirkollinen Kalenteri*, Hancock, Michigan: Suomalais-Luterilainen kustannusliike, 1905-1920.





Finnish Lutherans were divided between followers of the Suomi Synod and the Laestadian – Apostolic Church. Suomi and Apostolic traditions grew out of revivalism in nineteenth century Finland. The Suomi Synod sought to replicate much of the Church of Finland in the Lake Superior country. The Synod stressed attendance at church services and meetings and financial support. Not spiritual awakening but preservation of a heritage was their primary concern.<sup>43</sup> These Lutherans were content with regular church attendance as “an end in itself” and constituted the great majority of Finnish Lutherans. Conversely, the Apostolic Lutherans “sought to reproduce on the American continent a church of true believers, meaning by that people who had entered through the door of personal absolution administered by a fellow believer.”<sup>44</sup> The constitution of the Suomi Synod was initially Episcopalian and authoritarian in nature. However, most parishioners in Michigan rejected this approach and wanted a less “clergy centered” organization. Consequently, the Synod modified its constitution but retained the power of the clergy through the consistory, an executive authority with a direct voice in the

<sup>43</sup> Walter Kukkonen, *Process and Product: Problems Encountered by the Finnish Immigrants in the Transmission of a Spiritual Heritage*, in *The Finnish Experience in the Western Great Lakes Region: New Perspectives*, 141 (Turku, Finland: Institute for Migration Studies, 1975).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 139

administration of church institutions, the power to adjudicate disputes, and approval of candidates for the ministry.<sup>45</sup>

Laestadians were not a cohesive group and doctrinal differences often blocked efforts at unity within the group. These differences also made reconciliation with Synod Lutherans nearly impossible. Laestadians tended to emphasize conviction of sin under the law, while the Synod found redemption through the gospel of Christ. On the Marquette Iron Range, Laestadians were known as “holy-jumpers” because of their charismatic preaching and spirit-filled worship services.<sup>46</sup> The Synod followed a much more conservative and moderate approach to the gospel, sustained by a learned clergy and committed to a lifetime of growth Christian doctrine: “Laestadians envisioned the Body of Christ to be composed of regenerate believers whereas Synod Lutherans, most notably Nikander, allowed for gradations of commitment in the gathered community of faith.”<sup>47</sup>

The Suomi Synod was well-established and dominated Finnish religious life on the Marquette Iron Range. Indeed, Finns on the Range played a prominent role in the formation of the Synod. In 1889, Ishpeming was one of three communities in the Lake Superior district to host a series of Suomi Synod mission festivals.<sup>48</sup> Kaarlo Tolonen, the pastor of the Ishpeming congregation, participated in the formation of the Consistory in Hancock, Michigan, on December 17, 1889. John Jasberg of Ishpeming was a prominent businessman who participated in the first constituting convention on Mar 25, 1890. He was also an organizer of the Finnish Lutheran Book Concern and business manager of

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<sup>45</sup> Ollila, 163

<sup>46</sup> Martha Stott, interview by Marcus C. Robyns, tape recording, October 11, 2006, Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives, Marquette, Michigan.

<sup>47</sup> Puotinen, 175

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 161

Suomi College. Other prominent business leaders from the Marquette Iron Range included Karl Sillberg of Republic, and Niilo Majhannu of Ishpeming. These delegates “represented a traditionalist, conservative element in the immigrant population, and were inclined to favor a paternalistic church and clergy.”<sup>49</sup> In effect, the convention was dominated by the clergy, the businessmen, and the conservative journalists and editors.<sup>50</sup>

At issue was the belief by some Finns that they were victims of unjust labor practices and wage slaves to an autocratic industrial system. Conservative churchmen in Michigan and Minnesota primarily adopted a strategy of accommodation, maintaining that future employment for American Finns and their economic well being dictated such a prudent response. Radical socialists, on the other hand, called for major overhaul of the lake superior mining industry whose management effectively blocked the successful entry of labor unionism and collective bargaining until the new deal era in the latter 1930s.<sup>51</sup>

The failure of the Mesabi strike of 1907 and the subsequent recession “served yet to bring on a bitter conflict between Finnish socialists and churchman.” Finns began meeting in various communities and drawing up resolutions “of support for the American government and economic system, as well as to condemn the actions of Finnish socialists.” Finnish socialists referred to these as “Judas resolutions” Duluth Suomi Synod pastor, John Wargelin, organized the first of such meetings in Duluth where 240 people signed on to the resolution. 218 the resolution said, in part, “They (socialists) have blasphemed the entire Christian and cultural world and have tried to trample underfoot all moral purity in the home and society by their emphasis on atheism and anarchy.”

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<sup>49</sup> Ollila, 159-160

<sup>50</sup> Puotinen, 164

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 83

These resolutions offered the church an opportunity to mount an offensive against the socialists.<sup>52</sup>

On the Marquette Iron Range, the Synod exercised widespread anti-socialist influence with its members. W. Sarkala's parents, for example, were members of the Negaunee Church. They were very anti-communist, and Sarkala remembers being alienated from the next door neighbors because they subscribed to the Tyomies, the socialist newspaper published in Hancock, Michigan. "Never would you see the Tyomies in our house," he remembers, "never that was taboo."<sup>53</sup> Many Finns simply opposed the socialists because they were atheist. It was not uncommon for people to react violently to known "pinks," as socialists were called. Martha Stott remembers that Cousin Jacks in particular "would kick the people who were socialists."<sup>54</sup> Stott also remembers admonitions from Synod ministers not "to make waves" and to "always thankful for CCI."<sup>55</sup>

#### Socialists on the Marquette Iron Range and the Negaunee "Schism"

For much of its early history, the Socialist Party of America was embroiled over an ideological dispute that would have serious ramifications for the movement on the Marquette Iron Range. Ever since Hendrikson's ill-fated visit to Ishpeming in 1900, socialists on the Range wrestled with the question of whether or not the Party should pursue a strategy of participation in the electoral process and reform of the American Federation of Labor, or if it should embrace the militant philosophy of anarcho-syndicalism. Anarcho-syndicalism took on many forms and definitions in the United

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<sup>52</sup> Puotinen, 217

<sup>53</sup> W. Sarkala, Oral History Transcript, 1997.6.1, Marquette County Historical Society, Marquette, Michigan.

<sup>54</sup> Stott interview.

<sup>55</sup> Stott Interview

States. Fundamentally, the philosophy rejected participation in the electoral process in favor of direct, militant action, such as sabotage, violent direct action, and industrial unionism. Syndicalists rejected any action designed to reform the capitalist system and called for the organization of workers into one giant industrial union that would call a general strike and violently overthrow capitalism. These radical socialists derisively referred to reformism as “slowcialism.” The debate within the Party heated up after the formation of the International Workers of the World in 1905, and Eugene V. Debs’ withdrawal from the IWW in 1908 after syndicalists took control of the union.<sup>56</sup>

In general, Midwest socialists tended to lean toward anarcho-syndicalism. However, the majority of Midwest socialists did not completely reject political action and tended to strike a position somewhere between the radical anarcho-syndicalists and moderate reformism. Debate within the Party over which road to take began with the formation of the International Workers of the World (IWW) in 1905.

In 1906, Finnish socialists organized the Finnish Socialist Federation in Hibbing, Minnesota, and affiliated with the Socialist Party of the United States. The Federation was a Marxian, class-conscious national organization and by 1912 boasted 225 locals with over 11,000 members, including 4 newspapers, the Work People’s College with 123 students, seventy-six club houses, eighty libraries, and combined income of \$184,128.83.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the Federation became the Socialist Party’s largest foreign language federation. In Minnesota, Finns represented 5 percent of the state’s total population in 1910 and 6 percent in 1920, yet they provided the Socialist Party of America support disproportionate to their numbers. 1912 the Socialist Party in

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<sup>56</sup> David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1955), 16.

<sup>57</sup> Ollila, “From Socialism” pp 156-157

Minnesota received significantly higher percentage of the vote in counties with large Finnish populations than on Michigan's Marquette Iron Range: Lake, 36.8 percent; Beltrami, 28.7 percent; Koochiching, 24.3 percent.<sup>58</sup>

1912 was the big year for the Socialist Party in the United States. Voters elected 642 members of the party to various public offices, the majority in state and municipal office.<sup>59</sup> Sixty-two percent of newly elected officers came from Pennsylvania and Ohio, while Michigan posted one the smallest gains for the Socialist Party. Overall, in the 137 towns nationally where socialist candidates succeeded, 37 occurred in populations over 10,000 and 78 in populations under 5,000. Voters in only 36 townships or towns under 1,000 in population elected socialist candidates to office.<sup>60</sup> Socialists experienced their greatest success in heavily industrial communities with 67 percent of the total elective office. This led one commentator at the time to note that "it is much more apparent than before that the bulk of the party's strength is in the industrial and urban centers."<sup>61</sup> Historians have concluded that Finns were one of the most socialist oriented of immigrants to the United States in proportion to their numbers.<sup>62</sup>

On the Marquette Iron Range, the Socialist Party was, at best, a marginal political organization and did not reflect the Party's national or regional strength, particularly in urban areas with populations over 10,000. Unlike elsewhere in the country between 1905 and 1920, the Party consistently polled poorly in every presidential and county-wide

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 187

<sup>59</sup> Hoxie, Robert F., "The Socialist Party in the November Elections," *The Journal of Political Economy*, 20 (March, 1912): 205. Outside of Wisconsin, socialists were largely elected to municipal office: 27 mayors and village presidents, 211 councilmen, 4 city commissioners, 49 assessors, 79 school officers, and 60 in positions of justice and the police.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>62</sup> Gary Marks and Matthew Burbank, "Immigrant Support for the American Socialist Party, 1912 and 1920," *Social Science History*, 14 (Summer, 1990): 175.

election and never succeeded in electing a party member to local office. In its best election showing, the Marquette County Socialist Party mirrored the nation when Socialist Party candidate Eugene V. Debs polled 6.3 percent, or 462 of the total votes cast. Despite running a candidate for every partisan county office between 1908 and 1914, the Socialists were never able to poll more than 600 votes. The only exception occurred in 1912 when Thomas Clayton, Socialist Party candidate for Inspector of Mines, received 1,216 votes, or 19 percent of the total. Martin Skauge, Socialist Party candidate for Register of Deeds, received the next highest vote tally with 583, or 9 percent of the total votes cast. And William Ronback, candidate for Michigan First District state representative, garnered the fewest votes with only 195, or 6 percent of the total. In 1914, the Marquette County Socialist Party entered its last full slate of candidates for county-wide elections and first district state representative. The results were dismal, as no candidate received more than 250 votes, with Frank Vivian, candidate for County Coroner, receiving the most at 237 or a paltry 1.7 percent of the total. Never again would the Marquette County Socialist Party run a candidate for county-wide elected office.<sup>63</sup>

During this period, the Republican Party completely dominated local politics on the Marquette Iron Range, consistently winning between 60 and 70 percent of the popular vote in every local and presidential election, except 1912. In that year, the Republican vote split evenly between the Republican Party and the National Progressive (Bull Moose) Party headed by former President Theodore Roosevelt. Republicans took control of Marquette County, the City of Ishpeming, and the City of Negaunee. In the election of

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<sup>63</sup> Count of Marquette, Office of the County Clerk, *Report of Election Canvassers, 1908-1920*, Marquette, Michigan.

1908, in every county elected position, from judge probate to register of deeds, republicans won overwhelming victories. In fact, republican candidates never polled below 5,300 votes or 72 percent of the total. The same result held true for each subsequent election through 1920.

All three major newspapers on the Range were staunchly republican and relentlessly hounded their readers with admonitions against support for the Democratic Party or the Socialist Party. Moreover, the paper claimed that “miners are mostly republican” and they “have always voted the republican ticket.”<sup>64</sup> These newspapers characterized the Party as one of business, public order, and often as the vanguard against socialist radicals. “In order to protect yourself,” warned *The Iron Ore*, “and make certain that you are not voting for a red flag, vote the straight Republican ticket on Monday.”<sup>65</sup>

The Republican Party enjoyed significant support among Finnish immigrants, so much so that the *Iron Ore* made a special effort to acknowledge Finnish support during the 1916 election:

The *Iron Ore* desires to compliment the Finnish-American voters of Marquette County on their good judgment and their loyalty to the industry with which they are associated, they voting the republican ticket solidly. Dr. Henry Holm, president of the Finnish republican club, with his many earnest helpers, did effective work in posting their people on the issues. Dr. Holm, A.W. Jurma, Jake Neimi, J. B. Hendrickson, Matt Lofberg, Jake Lofberg, and several others spent much time and made many excellent speeches to the people<sup>66</sup>

Holm, Jurma, Neimi, Hendrickson, and the Lofberg’s were all Republican ward officers in Ishpeming. Only one member of the group, Jake Neimi, was a miner.<sup>67</sup> The others were professionals or businessmen: A.W. Jurma was the city attorney; J.B. Hendrikson

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<sup>64</sup> *The Ishpeming Iron Ore*, 10/31/08, p. 1

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 3/30/12, p. 4

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*. 11/11/16, p. 4

<sup>67</sup> Thirteenth Census of the United States, Population, Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1913.



was a business manager, Matt Lofberg ran a clothing shop; and Jake Lofberg was a policeman.<sup>68</sup> Three years later, Jurma became president of the burgeoning Marquette County Finnish Republican Club which boasted a membership of 350 and met in Kaleva Hall.<sup>69</sup> Of the 15 officers and board members of the Finnish Republican Club, 6 were miners, one a lumberjack, 2 were businessmen (a grocer and a butcher), 4 were clerks, and one had no occupation.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, none arrived in the United States after 1905.

Eight years after Hendrickson's visit, the Ishpeming Finnish Brothers Temperance Society secured 800 signatures on an anti-Socialist Party resolution. This effort was in response to an attempt by socialist agitators to take control of a Temperance Society meeting. Meeting organizers called in the police and the socialists were rounded up and arrested. The resolution condemned the action of the socialists and "sought to express the Finnish community's opposition to Socialism." The resolution also claimed that area socialist agitators were "an extremely small and wholly irresponsible minority of recently arrived fellow countrymen."<sup>71</sup>

The Ishpeming *Iron Ore* routinely published disparaging and derogatory comments about socialists or anyone associated with the Negaunee Labor Temple. The following is a classic example for newspapers' diatribes:

The Socialistic Finn . . . He's against the government and its laws, and he defies game wardens. He dynamites fish; he sets nets in the streams he goes against good sportsmanship and waves a red flag. With all the many privileges America freely extends him, as against not a single one in the land of his nativity, he needs must set himself up in opposition to law and order. Is it any wonder his employers have grown tired of his mutterings, his actions, his temples, and his red rag? The socialistic Finn had better stop long enough in his foolishness to take a clear look

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<sup>68</sup> *Polk's Marquette City and County Directory, 1912*. Detroit, Michigan: R.L. Polk & Co., 1912.

<sup>69</sup> *The Ishpeming Iron Ore*, 2/15/19, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population, Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1922. *Polk's Marquette City and County Directory, 1912 and 1920*.

<sup>71</sup> *The Ishpeming Iron Ore*, 7/4/08, p. 1

about him. He is manufacturing a lot of ammunition that is soon to be turned against himself.<sup>72</sup>

The target of these rants was always the Finnish immigrant. German, English, Italian, or Swedish immigrants were never identified or singled out to be members of the Socialist Party, Western Federation of Miners, or the IWW. *The Iron Ore* noted the failure of the Socialist Party to garner much support among the Finnish population on the Marquette Iron Range. Unlike their unfortunate brethren recently “duped” by the socialists and wobblies on the Mesabi Iron Range Strike of 1907, the Marquette Range Finns, “are thrifty and are after the dollars . . . They are learning about the fellows whose occupation is dispensing talk of the street corners. They have noted that several very fat pocketbooks have been filched from them by these fellows seeking an easy living. The Finn isn’t foolish. He is after the dollar as is all humanity.”<sup>73</sup>

On the Marquette Iron Range factionalism engulfed the socialist movement between parliamentarians and anarcho-syndicalists. Unlike the Mesabi Range, however, the parliamentarian faction gained the upper hand and eventually gained control of the party organization. The Finnish Branch of the Socialist Party in Negaunee was also known as the Suomalainen Sosialisti Osasto. Chartered by the Socialist Party of Michigan, the Finnish Branch formed in 1905. The group made a failed attempt in 1906 to launch a socialist newspaper on the Range, with the mayor of Ishpeming and a local judge volunteering as solicitors.<sup>74</sup> The Branch grew slowly, and by 1913 the group could only claim a membership of 160.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 11/1/13, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 2/22/08, p. 3

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 10/06/06, p 4

Despite its small membership, the Finnish Branch organized to build a major labor hall in Negaunee. The Branch established and incorporated the Workers' Hall Company to construct and own the temple, and they then leased the facility from the Company.<sup>75</sup> The Labor Temple opened on July 31, 1910 and was demolished May, 1946. The Temple was an impressive Victorian style structure and boasted plush seats and a large stage. In fact, the local residents considered the Temple to be the best theatre facility in Marquette County.<sup>76</sup> The Labor Temple was an important recreational and social meeting place for the Finnish community. Meetings provided fellowship and pleasant conversation with countrymen/women. In fact, the Temple was better known for its dancing and live music than for its political education programs.

Throughout the Lake Superior region, socialist halls offered an important social and culture function for the Finnish immigrant community life. With their grand ballrooms, these halls drew young people to dances and live music often found nowhere else.<sup>77</sup> Miners frequented the socialist halls as a way to escape the drudgery of their work and to find a modicum of home with their fellow Finns.

At the halls the miner was able, for a while, to forget his back-breaking toil and his problems of loneliness in what to him seemed a hostile world. He met with his own people, reminisced about the homeland, spoke of aspirations, and vented his hostility against a system which he through prematurely robbed him of his manhood.<sup>78</sup> Some historians have argued that this community function had the negative effect of isolating the immigrant from dominant American culture and the socialist and radical labor movements. In fact, radical Finns derisively referred to these institutions as “hall

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<sup>75</sup> County of Marquette, Office of the County Clerk, *Complaint – Finnish Branch of the Socialist Party*, Court Papers, March 20, 1913, Marquette, Michigan.

<sup>76</sup> Sarkala interview.

<sup>77</sup> Stott interview. Martha describes how she and her friends went to the Labor Temple weekly for dances. The Temple's political purpose was irrelevant to her.

<sup>78</sup> Hyman Berman, *Education for Work and Labor Solidarity: the Immigrant Miners and Radicalism on the Mesabi Range*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1963, 23.

socialism.” Indeed, an important goal behind the formation of the Finnish Socialist Association “was to link up with the larger movement, forging a class consciousness that would transcend the parochialisms of ethnic identity.”<sup>79</sup>

Social activities provided the financial resources to support the socialist hall’s primary function as an ideological education center. Without these activities, socialism, communism, and the IWW would hardly have gained so many supporters among American Finns. All three causes derived great strength from Finnish hall socialism.<sup>80</sup> Halls on the Mesabi Range educated new Finnish immigrants to socialism through nightly lectures, dramatic presentations, and discussions.<sup>81</sup> Finns also received training on the naturalization process and American history.

Three different public halls operated specifically for the Finnish community in Neganee. The Kaleva Hall had a distinctly social, communal focus where Finns gathered to listen to traveling lectures, travelogues, and Finnish music; while the Opera House was provided non-partisan entertainment. The Labor Temple, however, was “clearly an ideological Communist-kind of based program.”<sup>82</sup> The Temple was a grand and imposing structure. The building measured 115 feet in length by 44 feet wide and offered facilities for athletics, baths, reading rooms, a small assembly room, and a restaurant. The theatre auditorium boasted modern equipment and plush décor. It measured 42 feet wide, 36 feet deep and 40 feet in height and sat 500 people on the main floor and another 100 in the gallery. Large windows on the second floor provided wide

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<sup>79</sup> Peter Kivisto, *Immigrant Socialists in the United States: The Case of Finns and the Left*, (Madison: Associated University Presses, 1984), 122-123.

<sup>80</sup> Auvo Kostiaine, “For or Against Americanization? The Case of the Finnish Immigrant Radicals,” in *American Labor and Immigration History, 1877-1920s: Recent European Research*, 266 (Chicago, University of Illinois, 1983).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 27

<sup>82</sup> Sarkelo interview.

views of the city and sunlight for the library and several reading rooms. Finally, the Labor Temple boasted a polished dance floor that was a major attraction to young and old.<sup>83</sup>

The battle over control of the Negaunee Labor Temple mirrored the division and conflict within the Socialist Party of America and the Finnish Socialist Association. The group that identified themselves as parliamentary socialists advocated working within the establish electoral system to gain representation in all units of government. On the Marquette Iron Range, Frank Aaltonen led this group. Aaltonen was born in Hameenlinna, Finland, in 1884 and immigrated to the United States in 1905. He arrived in New York City on January 18 and declared his intention to naturalize as a citizen on December 23. By 1910, Aaltonen had married and was the father of a baby girl and became a naturalized citizen on September 12, 1911.<sup>84</sup> Aaltonen worked as an organizer for the Negaunee Miners Union, Local 128, a local affiliated with the Western Federation of Miners. He was one of the WFM's principle organizers during the catastrophic 1913 Copper Country strike. Finns on the Copper range, however, disliked Aaltonen and resented his reluctance to pursue more militant tactics during the strike.<sup>85</sup> In the 1914 general elections, Aaltonen ran as the Socialist Party candidate for Michigan's First District State Representative in Marquette County. He received only 119 votes out of a total of 3,433, or 3 percent.

Aaltonen's nemesis and the focal point of dissent in the Marquette Iron Range socialist movement was William Nilssen Risto, a Finnish immigrant of Swedish origin

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<sup>83</sup> Cookie Johnson, *An Obituary: The Negaunee Labor Temple*, Unpublished undergraduate research paper, Marquette County Historical Society, Longyear Research Library, Marquette, Michigan.

<sup>84</sup> State of Michigan, Local Government Records Depository, *Immigration and Naturalization Records, 1905-1920*, RG 89-467, Vol. 26, Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives.

<sup>85</sup> Ollila, *The Emergence of Radical Industrial Unionism*, p. 53

and the leader of the anarcho-syndicalist wing of the Socialist Party on the Marquette Iron Range. Risto was an avowed syndicalist and hardcore socialist agitator. He was born in Karl Gustaf, Sweden, on September 16, 1882 and immigrated to the United States in 1903. Soon after arriving in Boston, Massachusetts, Risto immediately made his way to Houghton, Michigan, to work as a miner in the copper mines. On June 20, 1904, he declared his intention to naturalize as a citizen, but his petition was rejected since he had only lived in the state 11 months. No record exists of Risto ever having naturalized as citizen, and he never ran for elected office in Marquette County. Risto went on to settle in Negaunee, where he raised a family and worked for the City of Negaunee until his death in 1962.

William Risto was the personification of anarcho-syndicalism and summarized his philosophy in an article that appeared in 1911 in *Tyomies*, the radical Finnish socialist newspaper published in Houghton, Michigan. He referred to the act of industrial sabotage as a “Doctrine of Struggle” and likened it to a “strike on the job” and argued that workers should reach a collective agreement to systematically slow down and “to do all work TOO STRICTLY, which naturally results injury to the company,” because what would normally take hours would now take days, if not weeks, to accomplish. The company, in effect, would have no alternative but to comply with the workers demands or face continued “sabotage and boycott.” Risto called this methodology “intelligent sabotage” and thought it to be far more effective than an actual strike. At the same time, he declared that political action within the electoral process was pointless, because “the Bourgeoisie class control the political process and representation in Congress and state legislatures. Laws passed support and protect the interest of the capitalist class and are

made to appear to be the will of the people. For this reason, workers are forced out of the political process and have no other recourse but to turn to sabotage, along with the strike, as their only method to advance and protect their interests.”<sup>86</sup>

Risto put his syndicalist philosophy to work. In 1905, he left Houghton and traveled east to work as an organizer and lecturer for the eastern district of the Socialist Party. Risto quickly got into trouble with the Party because of his inflammatory rhetoric. For example, in Weirton, Pennsylvania, he told a group of coal miners that “you know that those rolls in the sheet iron mills cost about \$500 a pair. You work them. If for one reason or another you are not satisfied with your working conditions, you need only put “something” – accidentally of course -- between the rapidly revolving rolls, when the rolls will break. That will result in damage to the steel trust.” And again in Fitchburg, Mass, Risto admonished his audience to accept direct sabotage in the work place as “beneficial to the workers.”<sup>87</sup> Indeed, Risto was so radical that the Socialist Party expelled him in 1911 and even the IWW disavowed him after the schism in the Federation in 1914.<sup>88</sup>

Risto had similar bad luck with the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), one of the formative unions of the IWW. In 1912, the WFM expelled Risto for “traitorous conduct,” probably because of his anarcho-syndicalism and for insisting that the union had “clearly proved to be rotten, broken and ragged.”<sup>89</sup> Risto had accused the WFM’s leadership of believing that Michigan iron miners were cowards and unwilling to stand-

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<sup>86</sup> County of Marquette, Office of the County Clerk, *Complaint – Finnish Branch of the Socialist Party*, Court Papers, March 20, 1913.

<sup>87</sup> County of Marquette, Office of the County Clerk, *Complaint – Finnish Branch of the Socialist Party*, Court Papers, March 20, 1913.

<sup>88</sup> Ollila, *The Emergence of Radical Industrial Unionism in the Finnish Socialist Movement*, p. 35.

<sup>89</sup> *The Facts in the Negaunee Controversy as Given by the New Negaunee Local*, Rock Maple Ridge Workers Association, records, Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives, MSS-12, 1/3, 5-1-1-1.

up against the iron mining companies. On the contrary, he insisted, “I have already in previous writing clearly shown,” Risto insisted, “that the men working in the mines are not sheep and not least the kind of sheep that the organizers of the WFM portrays them to be.”<sup>90</sup> In his writings, Risto depicted the WFM leadership on the Marquette Iron Range arrogant, unimaginative, and unwilling to make the sacrifices in resources necessary to organize the iron miners.

When the men of the mine have asked for encouraging words you have composed pictures of market place theories. When the union men have increased your secretaries’ wages as for Negaunee’s J.F. Maki so that he can use all of his time working to grow the union membership, he peacefully gives in to sell stock and be a lotto agent and lawyer Driscoll’s jobber. Do you really think that the mine workers of Upper Michigan are such round heads that they do not notice anything?<sup>91</sup>

In contrast, Risto claimed that socialist agitators had conducted 30 public speeches a month and worked diligently to educate the iron miners. In contrast, “the Western Federation of Miners most prominent organizers in Upper Michigan have appeared as idle gentlemen in showing the all powerful name calling forth into words the Western Federation of Miners shining halo.” For their part, the leadership of the WFM on the detested Risto with equal venom. While secretary of the Negaunee Finish Branch, they observed Risto “carrying on a damnable agitation” against the WFM. Henry Oates, president of the Negaunee Local 128, accused him of working to keep miners out of the union, thereby “aiding the mining companies to keep the wages down.”<sup>92</sup>

In 1909, the Finnish Socialist Federation began a four year debate on the competing ideologies of parliamentarianism and anarcho-syndicalism. At its national

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<sup>90</sup> William Risto, papers, Marquette County Historical Society, John M. Longyear Library, 1997.6.1

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> *The Facts in the Negaunee Controversy*, p. 3.



convention in Hancock, Michigan, on August 1-7, 1909, the Federation voted to condemn anarcho-syndicalism and voted to disassociate itself from the IWW. This action, however, did not stop the raise of radicalism within the Federation. From 1910 to 1913, radicals became the majority in the Federation's central district and took control of the Work Peoples' College in Duluth, Minnesota. At the same time, the Socialist Party of the United States, at its national convention in 1912, approved an amendment to its constitution rejecting anarcho-syndicalism and requiring the "expulsion from the party of those who opposed political action or advocated crime, sabotage, or other methods of violence." Following the convention, the Finnish Socialist Federation accepted the amendments as "binding."<sup>93</sup>

Because of his syndicalism, the Eastern District of the Federation banished Risto in, and he returned to Negaunee and became the manager of the Negaunee Labor Temple. Risto immediately began proselytizing idle workers on anarcho-syndicalism, enjoining enough followers to become a serious threat to the parliamentary faction. The issue came to a head when Risto allegedly withheld some votes cast during the state Socialist Party election. He claimed that the ballots had become lost and that replacement ballots from Ishpeming would have arrived too late to send on to state headquarters for consideration.<sup>94</sup> The Aaltonen faction immediately ceased upon this failure and accused Risto of criminal intent. Aaltonen submitted an official complaint to the Michigan State Party and also filed for a court injunction against the Risto faction in Marquette County Court.

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<sup>93</sup> Ollila, *The Emergence of Radical Industrial Unionism*, p. 34.

<sup>94</sup> County of Marquette, Office of the County Clerk, *Complaint – Finnish Branch of the Socialist Party*, Court Papers, March 20, 1913.

In response to Aaltonen's complaint, the state party executive board sent James Hoogerhyde, state secretary, to investigate the crisis. Almost immediately upon arrival, Hoogerhyde revoked the local's charter on March 16, 1913. However, the manner in which Hoogerhyde went about the business led to a great deal of consternation and misunderstanding. He could not speak or understand the Finnish language and most of those present, particularly members of the Risto faction, could not speak or understand the English. Without an interpreter present, those present at the meeting claimed not to have known what Hoogerhyde was doing until he was in the very act of revoking their charter. They subsequently demanded the presence of a translator to explain why Hoogerhyde had found them guilty of violating the constitution. According to the Risto faction, Hoogerhyde refused to wait for an interpreter and immediately revoked their charter and left the Temple.

Naturally, Aaltonen's faction reported quite a different chain of events during the sordid affair. Oscar Kuoppala claimed he had attempted to translate for Hoogerhyde during the meeting, "but certain persons in the meeting continually interrupted and created considerable noise and disorder. It was impossible for me at that time to make myself heard, as I could not have a fair and orderly hearing." Later that evening, but not during the meeting, Aaltonen correctly translated what Hoogerhyde had to say and apparently made the translation available. Kuoppala also claimed that many of the defendants were being disingenuous in claiming not to understand English and were using the lack of a translator as an excuse. Finally, Kuoppala asserted that he saw Risto

advance from the rear of the meeting room “upon Aaltonen in a very threatening manner.”<sup>95</sup>

The state party then presented a new charter to the group led by Aaltonen, and they immediately formed a new organization. Risto’s faction subsequently locked the Aaltonen group out of the temple, forcing them to secure a court injunction against the Risto faction, kicking them out of the temple and forcing them to turn over all records, funds, and property to the Aaltonen faction.<sup>96</sup>

Risto’s group immediately responded with a legal challenge demanding that the Marquette County Court overturn the injunction.<sup>97</sup> On May 8, 1913, Judge Richard C. Flannigan ruled in favor of the Aaltonen faction by upholding the original injunction. However, he also ruled that the Risto party had the right to attend the meetings and vote as members of the newly constituted Finnish Branch of the Socialist Party of Negaunee. The deal also forbade the Risto faction from holding separate meetings in the Labor Temple “as members of any other party or organization,” and could not interfere with the officers of the Finnish Branch (Aaltonen faction).<sup>98</sup> The judge accepted Aaltonen’s argument and ruled in his favor, because the Risto faction were “supporters of sabotage, methods of violence and all kinds of lawlessness.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> County of Marquette, Office of the County Clerk, *Complaint – Finnish Branch of the Socialist Party*, Court Papers, March 20, 1913.

<sup>96</sup> County of Marquette, Office of the County Clerk, *Complaint – Finnish Branch of the Socialist Party*, Court Papers, March 20, 1913. See also Ollila, *The Emergence of Radical Industrial Unionism in the Finnish Socialist Movement*, p. 45.

<sup>97</sup> The complainants were K.O. Saaristo, Anton Ware, John Karkkainen, Fred Maarala, and Frank Aaltonen, and the defendants were J.E. Joutsen, J.H. Fallstrom, Victor Fallstrom, Jalmar Lammi, Antti Luttinen, Oscar Kultalahti, Adi Salo, William Risto, Gust Kinnunen, Kalle Finska, John Steckman, and Otto Akola.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

Although the catalyst for the conflict was the botched ballot issue, court papers, depositions, and newspaper accounts focused almost entirely on Risto's anarcho-syndicalism. Aaltonen's faction claimed Risto and his group were guilty of violating the Socialist Party constitution and of mismanaging Temple affairs. They further accused defendants of being supporters of the doctrine of sabotage, and that they

advocated and taught among other things, the destruction of property and the disregard of personal and property rights and personal violence, and that said defendants believed and taught that the employees should take and use unlawfully measures extending from sulking and neglecting their work to the destruction of property owned by their employers, and among other things, the said defendants believed in and advocated the nonpayment of bills owing by them and others and generally advocated and believed in the overthrow of existing systems and governments by revolution and violence.<sup>100</sup>

The court complaint filed by Aaltonen also enumerated accusations of mismanagement, abuse of authority, and criminal behavior. They claimed that William Risto had led a significant faction of the membership in resisting or opposing all resolutions adopted by the Socialist Party. Risto and his group, they claimed, regularly disrupted official meetings by raising "disturbances" and assaulting members of the Aaltonen faction. They also claimed that the defendants were preventing Aaltonen's group from accessing personal property, continually harassing them, and of making personal use of Temple property. In the end, Aaltonen implored the judge "that your orators fear that the said defendants unless restrained by the injunction of this honorable court will interfere with and destroy the said property above described and that they will

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

interfere with and prevent the members from holding their lawful meetings in a an orderly way in their hall.”<sup>101</sup>

For their part, the Risto faction vigorously denied all the allocations. They even refused to acknowledge the Aaltonen faction as the state party sanctioned “Finnish Branch of the Socialist Party of Negaunee” or that the group was a “trustee committee” appointed by the state socialist party to oversee the affairs of the Branch and Temple. Risto insisted that his faction remained the only “legal, duly authorized and chartered Society by that name (Finnish Branch),” representing the “160 members in good standing.” Risto accused Frank Aaltonen of being the ring-leader and principle author of the complaint, having brought the other complainants together on the basis of fraud and misrepresentation. As a cynical manipulator bent on his own power grab, Aaltonen, Risto claimed, “being the principal instigator in the said fraudulent and illegal movement, had no authority whatever, and he still has no authority for his act and doings in said matter.” Most importantly, Risto denied that his group advocated “the doctrine of sabotage, or that they are guilty of disturbing meetings, personal violence, non-payment of bills, or any other charges made against them.”

It is unclear whether either faction enjoyed majority support among the Finnish socialist community on the Marquette Iron Range. Newspaper accounts suggested that they were “divided in their opinion as to which side should be upheld by the officers of the state organization.”<sup>102</sup> Of course, both factions claimed to represent the majority. Aaltonen’s faction claimed that “the great majority of the members of said party, the Finnish Branch of the Socialist Party of Negaunee, are desirous of continuing said Party .

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<sup>101</sup> County of Marquette, Office of the County Clerk, *Complaint – Finnish Branch of the Socialist Party*, Court Papers, March 20, 1913.

<sup>102</sup> *The Marquette Mining Journal*, March 23, 1913, p. 11.

. . . the defendants herein named are discontented members who have abandoned the principles of the socialist party and who are now advocating unlawful measures.” For his part, Risto declared they are the only “legal, duly authorized and chartered Society by that name (Finnish Branch) in Negaunee. They are the legal and original branch of the Finnish socialist party with 160 members in good standing.”

Regardless of which side enjoyed the most support among the radical Finnish community, the factional conflict succeeded in destroying any possibility of success for Socialist Party on the Marquette Iron Range. Immediately after the Labor Temple debacle, the Aaltonen faction fielded a complete slate of candidates for Negaunee mayor and city council and lost decisively in each position.<sup>103</sup>

This study has demonstrated that the Finns on the Marquette Iron Range rejected socialism and radical labor because of their unique conservative character, and because of the Socialist Party’s inability to provide coherent and effective leadership or a stable infrastructure to sustain a viable left-wing political movement that would have attracted more Finnish immigrants. The majority of Finns immigrated to the Marquette Iron Range from areas in Finland unschooled and inexperienced in the social democratic movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These immigrants came from agrarian, rural backgrounds and were much more attracted to religious organizations than radical politics. The principle Finnish Christian church in the United States was the Suomi Synod. The Synod was implacably hostile to socialism and actively admonished its members to stay clear of the ideology. On the Marquette Iron Range, the majority of Finnish immigrants were active in the Synod. Similarly, the overwhelming dominance of the Republican Party in Marquette County politics along with evidence of significant

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<sup>103</sup> *The Marquette Mining Journal*, April 3, 1914, p. 7

Finnish support for the party suggests a greater affinity for conservative politics. Finally, the complete collapse of the Finnish Socialist Association following the battle for control of the Negaunee Labor Temple ended the group's leadership role and active participation in local politics.