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# An anti-fascist minority? Swedish-speaking Finnish Responses to Fascism in Inter-War Finland

## **Introduction**

Prior to the outbreak of World War II, in large parts of Europe democratic forms of governance had been replaced by authoritarian rule. In many cases, particularly in those states that had been created after World War I, fascist regimes came to power. From a comparative European perspective, Finland stands out as a democratic exception. However, Finland is also exceptional in the Nordic context due to the relative political successes of its domestic fascism as well as its official bilingualism (Finnish and Swedish) and bi-national conception of statehood. This article explores the responses to fascism of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland, which made up approximately 10 per cent of Finland's population in the inter-war period, an overlooked case in the historiography of fascism and anti-fascism as well as in research on European minorities in the inter-war era. Fascism was not, as Núñez Seixas (2016: 617) has highlighted, 'a common enemy for ethnic minorities and nationalities all over Europe', and notes a 'systematic inclusion of fascist and right-wing authoritarian tenets in the programmes promoted by the representatives and political parties of national minorities from Brittany to the Ukraine' after 1933 (Núñez Seixas, 2016: 613). As we will show in this article, the pro-fascist inclination was the reverse for the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland, i.e. the pull of fascism was far greater before, rather than after, 1933.

Empirically, the article will primarily focus on the response of two leading Swedish-speaking antifascists, Karl H. Wiik (1883–1946) and Eirik Hornborg (1879–1965), to – what Silvennoinen, Tikka and Roselius (2016) characterize as the Finnish fascist moment – the Lapua Movement. Wiik, a social democratic ideologue and politician, and Hornborg, a conservative politician and public intellectual who represented the Swedish People's Party (SFP), were both very prominent public figures throughout Finland

and particularly in Swedish-speaking areas of the country. As high-profile opponents of fascism in the only two formally Swedish-speaking parties in Finland, the unilingual SFP and the bilingual SDP, Hornborg and Wiik are representative of both the anti-fascist right as well as the left wing of the Swedish speaking minority.

The article is a contribution to a line of research on anti-fascism in which, with the exception of our own earlier intellectual-biographical examination of Wiik's and Hornborg's conceptualization of fascism (Kaihovirta & Wickström, 2017), prior studies are virtually non-existent e.g. Swedish-speaking anti-fascism in Finland. At the same time, the article will touch upon themes that have received scant attention in Nordic research, particularly questions on the relationship between minorities and fascism, as well as anti-fascism, in the interwar period.

### **Finnish language-politics and the rise of fascism in interwar-era Finland**

The 1920s revival of the so-called language strife over the status of Finnish and Swedish, which had already begun in earnest at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was, in a Nordic context as well, a distinct feature of Finnish social and political life in the interwar era. Finland had since 12<sup>th</sup> century been an integrated part of the Swedish Kingdom but in the turmoil of the Napoleonic war, Sweden lost its Eastern territories to Russia in 1809. The Russian emperor Alexander I gave political, religious and cultural autonomy within the Russian empire to his newly conquered domain Finland – primarily to satisfy the local Swedish-speaking elite. As late as the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Swedish was the only language allowed within the administration of Finland. The division between the two language groups was of not only national and cultural significance but also a socially pivotal distinction as fluency in Swedish was one the attributes of the Finnish elite. However, from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the status of Swedish and the Swedish-speaking elite was challenged by Hegelian and Herderian activists as well as Finnish ethno-nationalists (Fennomans, most of whom were Swedish-speaking). The first solely Finnish-speaking grammar school was established in 1858, and in 1863, Alexander II, the sovereign of the Grand Duchy of Finland, issued a decree stating that Finnish should become equal to Swedish in public life in 20 years' time, however, this decision was only fully implemented in 1902. The rise of the Finnish ethno-nationalist movement also prompted the formation of a Swedish ethno-nationalist

movement (Svecomans) and the start of the first major language strife (ethnic conflict) in Finland.

After universal suffrage was introduced in Finland in 1906, Finnish-speaking Finns gained a vast majority in the new one-chamber parliament. This eroded the political power of the Swedish-speaker who had previously controlled two of the four estates in the Diet of Finland. As a result, the Swedish People's Party (SFP) was founded in 1906 with the aim of mobilizing all categories of Swedish-speaking Finns to defend their ethno-political interests. When Finland declared independence in 1917, the language question was already one of the burning political questions in the newly founded state. The radical Finnish ethno-nationalists demanded that Finnish should be made the only official language. A fraction in the SFP, in turn, argued for regional autonomy for the so-called Swedish nationality in Finland. Both demands were, however, rejected after the somewhat temporary ideological unification of the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking bourgeois as 'Whites' in the civil war against the socialist 'Reds'. Finland officially became a bilingual state through the enactment of the 1919 Constitution and the 1922 Language Act that formally united the two 'nationalities' of Finland into one 'Finnish' people. This constitutional solution did not, however, appease the Finnish ethno-nationalists who rallied under the banner of true Finnishness (*aitosuomalaisuus*). The True Finnishness movement was mirrored in reverse by the East Swedishness (*östsvenskhet*) movement among the Swedish-speaking Finns, which in its most radical form was racist (Nordicist) and irredentist (the Swedish-speaking regions of Finland were viewed as part of Sweden). In this context, the advent of a strong right-wing mass movement carried both the promise of (bi-)nationalist, White, ideological reunification against the socialist threat, as well as the risk of ethno-nationalist Finnish empowerment, for the Swedish-speaking minority.

The interwar period in Finland was marked by the legacy of the Civil War of 1918, fought in the aftermath of independence from (newly Bolshevik) Russia, a cultural trauma on par with the Spanish Civil War. The proportional death toll in the repression of the defeated Reds exceeded that of all other European civil conflicts in the inter-war era. Yet, despite the White victory and the official banning of the Communist Party, some factions on the White side saw the re-emergence and success of the parliamentary Social Democrat Party (SDP) and the rumoured (and de facto) Communist underground agitation as a sign

of Finland going down the road toward becoming a ‘half-red’ country. The divisions caused by the destruction of the civil war continued to run deep both in national politics and everyday life throughout the inter-war period.

The tactical cooperation between the SFP and the SDP in 1920’s, which resulted in a Social-Democratic minority government only 8 years after the Red defeat in the Civil War, faced harsh criticism from both conservatives and the True Finnishness movement. This ‘unholy’ alliance between the Marxist ‘Red’ working class and the old Swedish elite was, from a True Finnish perspective, seen as a threat against the newly independent Finnish nation-state. When the Lapua Movement mobilized in 1929–1930, it first targeted Finnish Communists – but later Social Democrats and progressive liberals also came under attack. The Movement’s leader, often referred to as ‘Finland’s Mussolini’, Finnish-speaking farmer Vihtori Kosola had stated that ‘the fields of our country do not ask what language their ploughmen speak’, a declaration that dissatisfied the True Finnish Lapuamen. It is worth noting that initially, at least, the Lapua Movement gathered both Finnish and Swedish speakers in its crusade against communism (Meinander, 2016: 46–47).

The Lapua Movement enjoyed substantial support among the Swedish-speaking right wing. Several Swedish-speaking Finns were included in the Lapua leadership, notably the industrialist Petter Forsström and the scientist Kai Donner. There was also significant support for the Lapua Movement in the upper echelons of Finnish trade and industry, which had a strong Swedish-Finnish predominance (Meinander, 2016: 176), as well as among the general Swedish-speaking population. About a fifth of the approximately 12 500 participants in the called Peasants’ March to Helsinki on the 7th of June, 1930 (cf. The March on Rome), were Swedish-speakers, a significant overrepresentation relative to the make-up of the Finnish population at that time (Bonäs, 2012: 36).

When the Lapua Movement failed in their coup d’état, the Mäntsälä rebellion of 1932, the radical activists of the Movement formed a clear-cut Finnish National-Socialist party called the Patriotic People’s Movement (*Isänmaallinen Kansanliike*, IKL). The IKL was very distinct in their lingual-politics, supporting the idea of a Greater Finland (‘Suur-Suomi’) and a true mono-ethnic, mono-cultural and mono-linguistic Finnish Finland.

## **The Swedish-speaking minority and the international and domestic rise of fascism**

In order for us to resist the Movement, we must know the Movement, and to ascertain the characteristics of the Movement ourselves (Summary of party secretary Wiik's speech on the Lapua Movement, 1931).

If the inner history of the Lapua Movement will in some instance be truthfully and openly laid bare, it will be the story of one of the most perilous crises Finland has ever endured (Nya Argus, 17/1930).

For K.H. Wiik fascism, as it manifested itself in Italy, was part of the bourgeois reaction to the successes of the labour movement in Europe following World War I. In 1923, as a correspondent for the Sweden-based party newspaper *Social-Demokraten*, Wiik already used the term fascism to describe the reactionary politics of the Finnish right wing, especially in comparison with Italian fascism. The similarity between Finnish and Italian fascism was, according to Wiik, clearly evident in the celebration of the 5-year anniversary of the Finnish Civil War, complete with grandiose White Guard parades and a willingness on the part of the bourgeoisie to redouble their efforts against the 'red menace'. According to Wiik's understanding, the reactionary politics of the Finnish bourgeoisie against the labour movement could be compared to the European conservative reaction that had gained significant ground within right-wing circles in Finland (manuscripts dated 13 February and 23 April 1923). Wiik's understanding of Finnish fascism and its connections to the international threat of fascism was influenced by the Socialist Labour International in the 1920's and 30's, where he represented his party and functioned as member on the executive committee of the organization (*Arbetarbladet*, 12 April 1933).

In his May Day speech in 1926, the newly elected party secretary, K.H Wiik, issued a warning against the 'violent fascist machinations' that threatened the working class:

Dark forces do what they can to hinder us in our struggle. In certain countries, they have thus far succeeded. Our Italian comrades have to endure a grievous and difficult fight against the violent command of the fascists, and in our country as well, the working class has to be vigilant, in order that similar movements do not grow stronger (Speech given on the 1 May 1926).

Despite the fact that Wiik encouraged vigilance among the working class so as not to allow the strengthening of domestic reactionary forces, he adopted a surprisingly passive stance

toward the Lapua Movement. Early on, Wiik was unwilling to define the Lapua Movement as ‘proper fascism’ when *Arbetarbladet*, the newspaper of the Swedish-speaking Social Democrats, inquired about the party leadership’s views about possible means to oppose the Movement in the spring of 1930 (*Arbetarbladet*, 19 March 1930). As opposed to Wiik, the paper had already branded the Lapua Movement as fascist some weeks prior to the interviews with the party leadership, making it perhaps the first newspaper to do so in Finland (*Arbetarbladet*, 12 March and 14 March 1930).

Wiik made a conceptual distinction between ‘proper fascism’ and the Lapua Movement based on his Marxist interpretation of fascism. According to Wiik, proper fascism was a political grouping organized by the big capital interests of employers and large farmers. Wiik defined fascism as an ‘expression of the discontent of the grand bourgeoisie’, and in Italy, the same grand bourgeoisie had succeeded in organizing a concerted effort against the political mobilization of the working class. Unlike in Italy and other European countries, however, the Finnish working class was considerably weaker due to the Civil War. Because of this, Wiik did not see any preconditions for the growth of a fascist movement in Finland, as Finnish workers were not a direct threat to the social positions and power of either the peasant-class or the upper class. However, Wiik argued that the Finnish peasants played a primary in Finnish democracy role that could potentially create conditions for fascism to succeed. According to him, Finnish peasants recognized the benefits of democracy for their class interests, which precluded any real contingencies for fascists to reshape the country into a dictatorship. Nevertheless, the peasants strove to defend their ‘rights of exploitation’ over the working class, which entailed, as Wiik argued, that farmers were on hand to see the positions of the labour movement weaken during times of crisis (Summary of party secretary Wiik’s speech on the Lapua Movement, 1931).

When Hornborg first took a public stand against the Lapua Movement in April 1930, he immediately labelled the Movement as fascistoid in the header of his essay, which stated that the Movement was characterized by ‘Fascist tendencies’. It was the exercise of organized violence in the name of anti-communism that made the similarity apparent between the nascent domestic movement and the fascists of Italy. The question of distinction between just and unjust violence was of central importance in Hornborg’s comparison between ‘the fascist tendencies, which have made their appearance among

some of the citizens of our country', and Italian fascism, the latter of which 'most certainly' had had a role to play as an inspiration for fascist impulses in Finland. The context of fascism's 'great victory' in Italy, consisting of the far-reaching effects of communist terror in the face of a hapless state, was, however, clearly different from the relatively stable state of Finland in 1930 (*Nya Argus*, 8/1930).

Apart from the absence of communist terror and faltering governance, there was, according to Hornborg, another important discrepancy between Italian and Finnish fascism, which favoured the former as opposed to the latter – the disparity in national character. Fascism was not only an emergency solution in a post-war Italy struggling under the yoke of communism; it also suited the docile nature of the Italian people. In Finland, with its 'hard and obstinate fanatics', Hornborg argued, fascism would sow discord rather than unity (*Nya Argus*, 8/1930). Like Wiik, Hornborg argued that the political preconditions necessary for the success of Italian fascism were missing in Finland. While Wiik saw the weakness of the Finnish labour movement, Hornborg pointed to the lack of a revolutionary red threat in Finland, which could facilitate the rise of fascism domestically. Additionally, Hornborg reasoned, the more profound cultural and even socio-biological requirements necessary for what he saw as the essentially laudable Italian fascism movement, were simply not present in Finland.

Hornborg's first analysis and critique of the Lapua Movement was primarily a comparatively contextual one rather than an ideological critique. By comparing the domestic movement to Italian fascism, Hornborg identified fascist traits within the workings of the former, and concluded that the Lapua Movement was influenced by Italian fascism. The decisive factor leading to Hornborg's condemnation of the Lapua Movement and his anti-fascist stance towards domestic fascism was found in the way in which the Finnish fascists were comparable to their Italian counterparts in questions of social necessity and other preconditions. During this time, Hornborg was, like many of his conservative peers, not generally speaking an anti-fascist. Fascism per se, was not something he condemned unconditionally, as it could preserve the social and political order. The original, Italian form of fascism was, therefore, justified, while the Lapua Movement, the poor Finnish interpretation of fascism, was unwarranted in contemporary Finnish society. The violence perpetrated by the fascists in Italy was justified because the



movement had acted in societal self-defence against forces that had constituted a real threat against the Italian social order. For Hornborg, the Lapua Movement was merely a ‘secondary fascism’, which was ‘blind’ to the terms of Italian fascism as well as to what it jeopardised with its unlawful acts of violence (*Nya Argus*, 8/1930).

The Lapua Movement grew more powerful, and the abductions and brutality undertaken during the so-called ‘Summer of Lapua’ in 1930 culminated in the Peasants’ March to Helsinki on 7 June of that year. In his memoirs, Hornborg (1960, 37–38) writes that he too lived ‘under the threat of being snatched away’ and that he always carried a firearm owing to this fact. Wiik, on the other, hand feared that the march of the Lapua Movement to Helsinki could possibly even result in the arrests of Social Democrats. On the night prior to the Peasants’ March, Wiik prepared for the worst, writing farewell letters to both his wife Anna and to his mother, Hanna Wiik (Letters to Hanna Wiik and Anna Wiik, 7 July 1930). During the summer of 1930, the threat of the Lapua Movement appeared in a stark new light for both Wiik and Hornborg. A fascist coup in Finland had suddenly become a real possibility and they resisted it with their lives at stake.

The fascist tendencies that were detected by Hornborg in April, had in his opinion, blossomed into full-blown fascism during the summer of 1930. Prior to the Peasants’ March, the Lapua Movement had been opposed to the fascist label, while it simultaneously claimed that nothing could stop the momentum of the Movement from reaching its intended destination. Hornborg seized upon this contradiction: ‘The accusations of fascism are indignantly rejected in the same breath as one openly declares fascist intentions’. According to Hornborg, it was an ‘apparent and irrefutable fact’ that the Lapua Movement had become openly fascist. Hornborg defined fascism as ‘a violent struggle, perpetrated without due consideration for the rule of law; against the powers-that-be, which threaten the patriotic and national ideals and the prevailing social order’, and he added that when the left acted in the same way, ‘the applicable method is termed bolshevism’ (*Nya Argus*, 12/1930). Fascism and bolshevism also shared the dichotomous separation of the people into friends and foes. In the discourse of the Lapua Movement, the friend-or-foe dichotomy was also, according to Hornborg, greatly influenced by its South-Ostrobothnian pietism: ‘It is established [by the Movement] that this is a contest between Almighty God and the Devil’ (*Nya Argus*, 13/1930).

## **Fascism and the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland**

The neutrality of the Lapua Movement in the question of language was a hotly debated issue in the Swedish-speaking public sphere of Finland as the Movement gained large-scale support among the Swedish-speaking elite as well as at a grass-root level in the Swedish-speaking parts of Finland. In the Swedish-Finnish liberal and Social Democratic press, as well among the constitutionally minded bourgeois in the SFP, criticism was levied against the True Finnish traits of the Movement. In *Arbetarbladet*, the socialist and former independence activist Karl Emil Primus-Nyman exhorted his fellow Finland-Swedes to make a concerted effort against the 'suometarian', i.e. Finnish ethno-nationalist, Lapua Movement:

Despite how reactionary the Swedish upper class of our country has proven itself to be on many occasions – one must, however, give the same acknowledgment: its men acted and suffered as patriots during the time of Russification, and they often fought side by side with the Social Democrats of our country against the gendarmes of Bobrikoff and Seyn and the *suometarian* mercenaries of the latter (*Arbetarbladet*, 4 July 1930).

Primus-Nyman equated 'Lapuaism' with communism, arguing that they both served Russian interests by shattering the patriotic unity of the bourgeois and workers. In the same interjection, he called upon all Finland-Swedes to join forces against the Finnicization that promised to follow in the wake of the Lapua Movement, as well as against communists, the latter of which he gladly saw 'being afforded a free ride to the other side of the border, to the country which feeds them and whose power they wish to expand' (*Arbetarbladet* 4/7 1930).

Prior to the parliamentary elections of October 1930, Hornborg was commissioned by the anti-Lapuan fraction of the SFP to write an anti-Lapua pamphlet, *The Great Question*, directed to Swedish-speaking voters in Finland. In the pamphlet, Hornborg (1930: 10) emphasized that the Lapua Movement had succeeded in splintering the Finland-Swedes into a friend-or-foe dichotomy:

We Swedes have already felt it severely: Never before has the discord between us been so acute. This is a direct consequence of our laws being subjugated.

For this reason, Hornborg (1930: 11) urged all Finns, regardless of language, to unite under a rallying cry that concisely summed up his conservative, White posture, 'to the defence of

society, the fatherland, and the rule of law against intrigues and violence – against Reds and Blacks, against bolshevism and fascism!’

After the election, which was a success for the Lapua Movement in general, and for the Lapua supporting right-wing fraction in the SFP in particular, Hornborg returned his attention to the relationship between the Movement and the Finland-Swedes. He chided the ‘[Finnish] Swedish world of high finance’ for having given the election campaign a ‘rancorous, foreign imprint’ and demanded disclosures from those ‘who had joined under the black and blue banner of the Lapuan’ on how far their loyalty to the Lapuan leadership went? Hornborg maintained that it was a moral and political fallacy to tolerate the capricious crimes of the Lapua Movement in the hope of gaining concessions in the language strife. An active as well as passive support for the Lapua Movement in the name of Swedishness amounted to promoting the plight of Swedish-speaking Finns above the Fatherland, something that the Swedish-speaking Finns, particularly the right-wingers who now backed the Lapua Movement, ‘proudly’ claimed that they ‘never’ did. Hornborg asserted that the time had come for Finland-Swedes to show their patriotism and to renounce the fascist Lapua Movement (*Nya Argus*, 17/1930). Since Hornborg felt that the driving forces behind the Lapua Movement lay in the rapture of the masses, and that self-serving power brokers directed the Movement, there was no reason to put any faith in its political assertions. For Hornborg, negotiating with fascists was an act of fatal vanity. It was not in the interest of the Finland-Swedes to condone the Movement as the status of the Swedish language in Finland rested with the letter of the law, which the fascists did not respect.

For Wiik, the ambition to preserve Swedish language and culture in Finland had been of utmost importance when he joined the Swedish-speaking labour movement in the early 1900s. According to Wiik, social democracy was the only force which could ‘save the Swedish element in Finland’, since the majority of Swedish speakers belonged to those who had been deprived ‘of their fathers’ lands and native tongue’ by capitalism (*Folktribunen*, 1/1907). Throughout his career, Wiik would repeatedly state that capital had no fatherland – for which reason it was deemed preposterous for reactionary circles in Finland, who served the interests of international capitalism, to criticize domestic workers for a lack of patriotism. The worker’s disdain for the patriotism of the bourgeoisie was an

ideological one and was inherent in the class struggle – but the love of one’s own nation, culture and language was equally strong among the working class. It was the nationalist chauvinism of certain bourgeois that Wiik criticized. As an internationalist, Wiik admitted the existence of separate nations and their right to sovereignty, and he valued the unique characters of nations, including the Swedish-speaking nationality in Finland (Speech given in Magdeburg 23 September 1910 at the SPD congress; Letter to Arvid Mörne 14 August 1918; Speech given in Jyväskylä 6 December 1927; *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti*, 9 December 1937).

At the same time, Wiik fully appreciated the ability of the Swedish-speaking bourgeoisie to win the hearts and minds of the Swedish workers: the True Finnish threat against Swedishness, which at times even showed itself in the Finnish labour movement, repelled the Swedish from socialism. In other words, Wiik (1924: 261–272) had an understanding of the importance of language in the creation of a Finland-Swedish minority nation and that lingual solidarity could overpower class solidarity. Wiik also countered critique from the Swedish bourgeois that claimed a lack of loyalty with the Swedish community by reasoning that he differentiated between ‘the Swedish population of Finland and the Swedish-speaking capitalist class of Finland’ (*Hufvudstadsbladet*, 17 December 1935).

In one article, Wiik referred to Hornborg and others Swedish-speaking conservatives, and concluded that indeed there were yet some among the (Swedish-speaking) bourgeoisie who understood the value of democracy and the rule of law as opposed to the fascists prone to brutal violence and dictatorial excess. Wiik argued that the Swedish-speaking conservatives had rallied behind the democratic cause against the fascist threats, despite the fact that they had not always displayed much faith in the masses’ ability to participate in societal decision-making. Still, a temporary alliance between the labour movement and the bourgeois centre was a firm enough foundation to stand guard against the capitalists and their self-centred interests, which were in conflict with the will of the majority (K. H. Wiik, untitled manuscript sent to *Social-Demokraten* 10.12.1931).

An important argument that the Social Democratic Party made under the leadership of Wiik was to show how the Swedish and the Scandinavian Social Democrats were worried by the rise of fascism in Finland. Wiik explained that Swedish and Scandinavian

Social Democrats ‘consider that a fascist dictatorship, if brought to fruition, would cast Finland on a divergent path from the Scandinavian partnership, as a fascist Finland would be nobody’s concern’ (*Åbo Underrättelser* 21 September 1930). This was also an argument used by Hornborg: ‘In the eyes of the cultural world of Northern Europe, our country will be degraded; Finland shall be placed within a lesser category, among the states, which only provisionally could be designated as states that abide by the rule of law’ (*Nya Argus*, 12/1930).

In their opposition to the Movement, Wiik and Hornborg placed strong emphasis on the historic and cultural ties that Finland shared with Nordic and Western civilization, of which fascism was antithetical to both. At the same time, they stressed that Finland’s inclusion in the Nordic and Western world was far from self-evident and demanded constant effort to uphold. The Swedish-speaking minority in Finland constituted a bridge to the Nordic countries and the West, and, therefore, the Finland-Swedes occupied an essential role in the protection of Finnish democracy and the rule of law. Unlike those who had allied themselves with fascism, such as the influential Swedish-speaking Finns who hoped for concessions in the language strife or those who acted in the pure interests of class, Wiik and Hornborg asserted that the Swedish-speaking minority faced severe risk threatened if fascists came to power also in Finland. As Swedish-speaking antifascists, Wiik and Hornborg would therefore unite in their criticism of Finnish-Swedish high finance and its support of fascism.

The cultural difference between Swedish and Finnish attitudes toward fascism was not a question that Wiik directly reflected upon. The relationship between Finnishness and Swedishness was, however, a question that Wiik had contemplated from a cultural-evolutionary civilization perspective, in line with his deterministic Marxism. The Swedish element in Finland tied Finnish society to the Nordic countries and ultimately to Western culture and law, which composed the natural preconditions for the (social) democratic development of society. The Swedish worker had consistently shown himself to be more moderate than his Finnish peers in regard to radicalism and authoritarian movements. Cooperation beyond the boundaries of class within the Swedish-speaking minority in order to preserve democratic rule was, according to Wiik, essential for the safeguarding of the Swedish Language in Finland as well as the preservation of the country within the cultural

sphere of the Nordic countries and the democratic Western world (*Arbetaren*, 26 May 1906; Letter to Arvid Mörne 14 August 1918; Wiik 1924; Speech given on the 20-year anniversary of Elanto, 15 October 1925; *Arbetarbladet*, 7 July 1930). Both Wiik and Hornborg stressed the importance of consolidated Swedish-speaking unity in order to face the fascist threat and to work for a democratic, Western and Nordic Finland.

As the Lapua Movement succeeded in its demand to outlaw communism in Finland through the parliamentary declaration of the so-called ‘communist laws’, Wiik and the Social Democrats could see that their position was all the more precarious and exposed to the influence of the Lapua Movement. During the spring of 1931, Wiik emphasized that the Movement had made statements directed against the ‘Marxist labour movement’ of the country. Wiik referenced a speech that the Movement’s leader Vihtori Kosola had held in the Swedish-speaking town of Ekenäs, where the former had claimed, according to Wiik:

That ‘Marxist socialism is in fact much more dangerous than communism’. Quite true. Social democracy is capable of significantly countering any kind of reactionary politics, whereas communist passions are more likely to further the same by serving up examples in the defence of such politics (*Arbetarbladet*, 15.4.1931).

Wiik claimed that the reason the Lapua Movement attacked ‘Marxism’ and not socialism directly, was that they had been led to be inspired by the example of German National Socialists, an argument which he floated in one of his articles in *Social-Demokraten*:

But why are Kosola and his people discussing Marxism, and not social democracy? Well, because the fascist spawn of Finland are discovering from German fascist brochures the wisdom that they then leave at the disposition of the ‘popular movement’, and the German fascists fight only against Marxism, fashioning themselves as (national) socialists. Socialism too is rooted within the consciousness of the working class in order for them to assail it in broad daylight (Untitled manuscript sent to *Social-Demokraten*, 11 April 1931).

This was consistent with the sentiments of Wiik and the European Social Democrats in which social democracy was the principal target for right-wing reactionaries and fascists, not communism. The progressive ambitions of the Social Democrats were set to become costly and to undermine the societal position of capitalism as the exploiter and oppressor of the working class (Olausson, 1987: 84–85). Wiik and the Social Democratic Party were anxious to challenge the Lapua Movement by demonstrating the latter’s falsehoods,

ranging from their brand of ‘socialism’ and their animosity against the upper class, as all part of a populist rhetoric appropriated from the labour movement by domestic fascists. These methods all being undertaken in order to attract the working class into their fold, which was a common, international pattern used by fascist movements (*Arbetarbladet*, 15.4.1931).

Hornborg, who together with other members of the anti-Lapuan constitutionalist fraction of the SFP, had joined the bilingual and covert bourgeois anti-Lapua organization *Pro Patria et Lege* in the beginning of 1931 (Uino, 1983: 198; also see Karimäki in this volume), also acknowledged the Lapua Movement’s expansion from what was ostensibly an anti-communist struggle, toward a conflict against social democracy. For Hornborg, this was further proof of the truly subversive goals of the Movement. The threat against social democracy was primarily a question that concerned ‘bourgeois liberalism’ and in the end, all who, ‘disregarding political and social viewpoints’ sought to ‘resist anarchy’. The Lapua Movement was a threat ‘directed against society, not against Marxism’, which should have become apparent to all after the uprising in Mäntsälä 1932 (*Nya Argus*, 5/1932). In 1930, Hornborg had already demanded that the state respond to the Movement with armed force (*Nya Argus*, 17/1930), and he did not hesitate to condemn Lapua supporters, ‘those patriots led astray’, during the height of the Mäntsälä rebellion, when the outcome was still far from certain. He demanded that the government ‘crush the Movement once and for all’ (*Nya Argus*, 5/1932). Although the Lapua Movement was, if not crushed, at least dissolved after Mäntsälä it was, however, revived in spirit shortly thereafter.

### **The ethno-nationalist turn of Finnish fascism**

Finland’s largest and most influential fascist party, the IKL, was founded on 5 June 1932. The aim of the IKL was to provide a political basis for pursuing the policies of the Lapua Movement and maintaining the organization that had supported the Movement. The programme of the IKL was essentially based on the following six principles: (1) vehement anti-communism and hostility to the Soviet Union; (2) emphasis on corporatism as a substitute for parliamentarism; (3) intense Finnish ethno-nationalism; (4) Finnification of Finland in a two-step process; (5) the ‘leadership principle’; and (6) emphasis on a

conservative form of Protestantism (clerical fascism). The IKL was unquestionably fascist and openly recognized the influence of foreign fascist models (Larsen, 1990: 241).

The intense Finnish ethno-nationalism of the IKL, especially in regard to the Swedish-speaking minority, was not initially part of the party's program. As a successor to the Lapua Movement, which, as we have seen, presented itself as neutral in the language question, the IKL initially found backing from the same radical-right wing and fascist Swedish-speaking activists who had been committed supporters of the Lapua Movement. One of the instigators of the IKL, the Swedish-speaking historian Herman Gummerus, left the party shortly after it was founded when the advocates of True Finnishness gained a majority in the party leadership (Uola 1982). In the fall of 1933, seven prominent Swedish-speaking extreme-right activists, among them Erik von Frenckell, a leading figure in the right-wing fraction in the SFP, sent the (titular) IKL leader Vihtori Kosola a telegram with the following message:

Deeply worried about the latest writings in *Ajan Suunta* [the newspaper of the IKL], in which Swedish is branded as a foreign language and we, who speak this language, in our precious fatherland, are deviously expounded as aliens, we request that you in the name of our common fate state that the symbol that connects it [the IKL], which was meant to gather all right-thinking citizens against the threat of communism and the east, not be misused in said paper and in a party tactical sense disintegrate by being directed against loyal citizens (quoted in Uola, 1982, 488–489).

Kosola, who had been demoted to more of a figurehead status in the IKL, tried to speak on behalf of the Swedish-speaking Finns, but to no avail. The Finnish ethno-nationalist course of the IKL was set, even though this position, in addition to alienating the ethnically 'alien' Swedish-speaking fascist activists, also deprived the IKL of financial support from the parts of the Swedish-speaking business elite that had previously backed the Lapua Movement (Uola, 1982; Rintala, 1962: 222–223).

The ethno-nationalist turn of the IKL further undermined the right-wing fraction in the SFP, which was already weakened by the Lapua Movement's failed putsch in 1932. At the 1933 party congress of the SFP, an overwhelming majority of the delegates accepted a resolution condemning autocratic ambitions and urging Swedish-speaking Finns to take a stand against revolutionary extremism:



All efforts that seek to facilitate the emergence of a dictatorship in one form or the other, ought to be fought with all legal means, as they are not only aimed at the established order of society, which the Swedish People's Party defends as a constitutional party, but also because these efforts shape themselves as extremely ill-fated in their consequences for the Swedish nationality. The Swedish People's Party urges all Swedish-minded citizens to stay far away from undertakings of this kind and in the interest of the Fatherland and Swedishness, resolutely step up against them, wherever and in whatever way they may appear (Swedish People's Party, protocols of the party congress 1933).

The election of the anti-Lapuan Ernst von Born as chairman of the SFP affirmed the closing of the party ranks against Finnish ethno-nationalist aggression and the defeat of the right wing-faction supporting the Lapua Movement (Karvonen, 2006: 152). The fascist moment in the SFP, and in the Swedish-speaking population of Finland that the party purportedly represented, was cut short due to the ethnic cleavage of Finnish politics. Even though the Swedish-speaking Finns would not mobilize in support of organised fascism anywhere near to the extent in which the minority had supported the Lapua Movement, Swedish-speaking activists were, nonetheless, involved in several bilingual fascist organisations, and in 1940, a small Swedish-Finnish Nazi-organisation, The People's Community Society (*Samfundet Folkgemenskap*), was founded (Ekberg, 1991: 195).

The Swedish-speaking Social Democrats were eager to highlight the True Finnish motives lying behind the Lapua Movement. However, unlike SFP, the Swedish-speaking Social Democrats used ethno-nationalistic arguments from a class-perspective in order to defeat Finnish fascism. *Arbetarbladet* pointed out that SFP did not sincerely support democratic purposes. The Social Democrats pointed out that the bourgeois class had given its silent support to fascism and Nazism elsewhere, and would do so in Finland as well in their attempt to crush the socialist labour movement. Accordingly, SFP was not the true defender of the Swedish minority – it was actually a party of bourgeois and capitalist class-interests (*Arbetarbladet*, 10 February 1933, 17 April 1935).

According to the Social Democrats, the only support the Swedish-speaking minority could rely on was a strong social democracy. ‘Common Swedish-speaking people have no interest in fascist action or fascist politics’, stated *Arbetarbladet*, which attempted to underline that the ‘true’ defender of the Swedish minority was the Social Democratic movement with its support from the Swedish-speaking ‘little-people’ (*Arbetarbladet*, 10 February 1933, 25 September 1933). If the Swedish-speaking capitalists wanted to end the

labour movement, they would attack the strongest supporter that the Swedish minority had in Finland (*Arbetarbladet*, 25 September 1933). *Arbetarbladet* condemned all Swedish-speakers who supported fascist organizations. The Swedish-speaking Social Democrats for example claimed that 'a true patriot and a true Swedish person has nothing to gain from the Kalsta-movement', a small bilingual Nazi-movement founded in 1932 called the 'Finland's People's Organization' (*Finlands folkorganisation*) (Ekberg 1991: 68). Supporting movements that were openly hostile towards national minorities was against the interests of the Finland-Swedish minority (*Arbetarbladet*, 13 October 1933, 23 February 1934, 16 March 1934, 18 January 1936).

After the Nazi take-over and the beginning of persecution of Jews in Germany, *Arbetarbladet's* chief-editor Axel Åhlström had already argued throughout the summer and fall of 1933 and early 1934 that Nazism was 'the end of any minority'. Finnish democracy and national independence could rely on the Swedish-speaking minority and its support of democracy. With the support of the SFP-aligned newspaper *Vasabladet*, Åhlström argued that Swedish-speaking Finns had nothing in common with the Nazis, and instead compared them to the Jews (*Arbetarbladet*, 7 June 1933; *Vasabladet*, 15 August 1933). The ethno-nationalist turn of Finnish fascism was also in line with the argument of Wiik and the Swedish-speaking Social Democrats that international capitalism threatened the nations of Europe through its influence over fascist and Nazi movements, whereas social democracy could further the development of all nations. Fascism and Nazism were existential menaces to both small nations and national minorities (Untitled manuscript sent to *Social-Demokraten* 11 April 1931, *Arbetarbladet*, 25 September 1933; *Arbetarbladet*, 3 October 1938). During the *Kristallnacht*, a disciple of Wiik's, Atos Wirtanen, drew a parallel between anti-Semitic persecution and the True Finnish hatred of Swedish-speaking Finns. In the view of Swedish-Finnish Social Democrats, fascism would be the death knell for the Swedish minority (*Arbetarbladet* 7 December 1938). Hornborg raised a similar point when he, in 1933, described the 'unabashed' Nazi oppression of the Jews in Germany, all the while having no qualms when their 'fascist kinsmen' in Italy perpetrated similar acts against Germans in the South Tyrol, as 'all dictatorships must have someone to persecute' (*Nya Argus*, 12/1933). Fascism, despotic and aggressive in nature, with its existential need

of enemies, was, according to Wiik and Hornborg and their respective reference groups, a grave danger to all of the minorities of Europe and for the whole of European civilization.

### **An anti-fascist minority?**

In this article, we have explored the question of Swedish-speaking Finnish responses to fascism and shown that the diversity in anti-fascist positions highlighted in international research (Copsey & Olechnowicz, 2010) is also evident in interwar Finland. Anti-fascist stances could be borne from the defence of national democracy, anchored both in Marxist internationalism as well as conservative nationalism, a Eurocentric perspective of the cultural supremacy of Western civilization, and, most importantly for the purpose of this study, by belonging to a minority.

The strong Swedish-speaking support for the Lapua Movement divided the Swedish-speaking minority and the SFP in a historically unprecedented way. For Hornborg and the anti-fascists in the SFP, fascism constituted a threat against both the bourgeois social order of Finland and the Finland-Swedes. For the Swedish-speaking Social Democrats represented by K. H. Wiik, fascism was seen as a threat against both the socialist working class and the Swedish-speaking minority. When Social Democracy came to power in other Scandinavian countries (and later also in Finland in 1937), the Swedish-speaking Social Democrats were able to strengthen their position and underline their role as an important link between Scandinavian and Finnish (social) democracy, especially when 'Norden' as a political concept was seen as a constitutive element for those supporting democracy in different Nordic national and political contexts (Österberg, 2017).

Wiik and Hornborg placed strong emphasis on the historic and cultural ties of Finland to the Nordic and Western civilizations in their arguments against the Lapua Movement. Fascism was a crime against them both. At the same time, they stressed that Finland's inclusion in the Nordic and Western world was demanded constant safeguarding. The Swedish element in Finland constituted a bridge to the Nordic countries and the West, and therefore, the Finland-Swedes occupied an essential role in the protection of Finnish democracy and the rule of law. Unlike those who had allied themselves with the fascists, such as the influential Finland-Swedes who hoped for concessions in the language strife (Hornborg) or those who acted in pure interests of class (Wiik), Wiik and Hornborg

asserted that the Swedish minority in Finland would be in peril if the fascists claimed power. As Swedish-speaking antifascists, Wiik and Hornborg would therefore unite in their criticism of Swedish high finance and its support of fascism.

In 1918, Wiik and Hornborg had stood on different sides in the Finnish Civil War, but now they found themselves in the same trench, battling against a common enemy: fascism. Wiik, the ‘man of the rebellion’ (even if he had in principle rejected the revolutionary designs of the Reds) and Hornborg, the ‘reactionary’, came to recognize that they had moved away from being former adversaries in conjunction with the growth of Finnish democracy, and now side by side rallied against the threat that faced them, their political parties and their minority.

In an international comparison, it is these small stories and historical exceptions of historic anti-fascist activity that shed new light on the history of anti-fascism and challenge old grand narratives (Garcia et al., 2016). In conclusion, we want to stress that while our study illustrates Nordic anti-fascism from the perspective of a minority group, it remains the task of future research to further expound on the responses to fascism by the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland, in particular, and the question of the relationship between minorities, fascism and anti-fascism in general. An understanding of Finland-Swedish interactions with interwar fascism can contribute to the wider discourse on how minorities respond to fascism. This is an issue not only of historical interest but also, given the rise of the radical right, one with contemporary resonance.

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