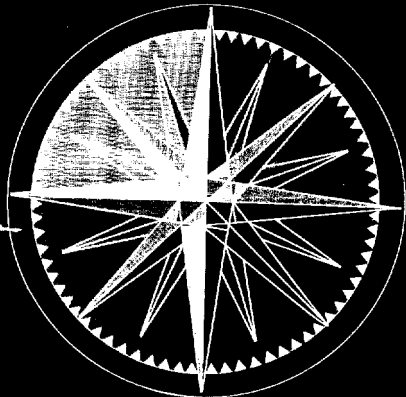


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THE COMMUNIST-FRONT PARTY IN FINLAND'S GOVERNMENT

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THE COMMUNIST-FRONT PARTY IN FINLAND'S GOVERNMENT

The Finnish People's Democratic League (SKDL), a Communist-front electoral organization, has scored a major breakthrough by gaining representation in the new coalition cabinet. The return of the SKDL to cabinet responsibility--for the first time since 1948--makes Finland the only West European country to have Communist representation in its government since the cold war began.

Under the watchful eyes of its non-Communist coalition partners and controlling only three relatively minor cabinet posts, the SKDL's opportunities to take advantage of its improved position will be limited, at least for the time being. This development, however, may have an impact elsewhere in Europe, particularly in Denmark and Sweden, where minority Social Democratic governments will be increasingly tempted to cooperate with Communists and radical Socialists in order to prevent further erosion of their electoral strength.

Origins

The Finnish People's Democratic League (SKDL) was founded in 1944 barely a month after Finland had sued for an armistice terminating its involvement in World War II. The league has since gradually evolved from a tactical alliance of Communists and left-wing Socialists, whose objective was to prepare the way for a Communist seizure of power, into an electoral front organization in which Communist domination is being increasingly questioned and challenged by both its leaders and the rank and file.

The initiative to form the SKDL came from the Finnish Communist Party (FCP), outlawed

in 1930 but recognized as a bona fide "democratic" party under the terms of the armistice of September 1944. The FCP's newly won legal status was subsequently formalized by the 1947 peace treaty between Finland and the Soviet Union, but throughout the postwar period the party, as such, has never chosen to appear on the ballot and has presented its candidates under the SKDL label.

The Immediate Postwar Years

In organizing the SKDL as a collaborative movement bringing together Communists, left-wing Socialists, and assorted like-minded elements the FCP had as its immediate objective a working alliance of these

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groups under its guidance and control. From the beginning, the SKDL's principal target has been the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Finland's most effective non-Communist political grouping and traditionally the FCP's bitter rival for the allegiance of labor. In the immediate postwar years, the Communists felt they had a psychological advantage in being identified with the victorious Soviet Union, while the Social Democrats were to some extent discredited for having participated in Finland's wartime coalition governments. The Communists thus had reason to hope that the Social Democrats could be effectively neutralized by consolidating labor within a united front opposed to "fascism and militarism"--a slogan with considerable appeal.

In retrospect it appears that the Communists at first envisaged the SKDL essentially as a temporary instrument for obtaining quick control of the government. This seems to be borne out by the fact that it was not until 1949 that the SKDL formulated an official program. During these years, however, the political situation stabilized to a degree, and the likelihood of Soviet military action in support of a Communist take-over diminished considerably. As the prospect of riding into power via a popular-front organization receded, the Communists were compelled to revamp their strategy toward a more extended period of struggle. Some Communists, however, had still not

COMPONENTS OF FINNISH
PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC LEAGUE (SKDL)

Claimed total membership in 1966	145,000*
Finnish Communist Party	54,000
Finnish Women's Democratic League	30,000
Academic Socialist Society	1,000
Other SKDL members	60,000

* Total figure includes some multiple counting of members belonging to more than one of the affiliated organizations.

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entirely given up hope of attracting large numbers of non-Communists to the SKDL, and out of deference to this group, the 1949 program was nonideological and made no reference to "socialism."

The Organization of the SKDL

In addition to its own membership, the SKDL includes the FCP, the Finnish Women's Democratic League, and the Academic Socialist Society. Even though almost two thirds of the SKDL's 145,000 members are estimated to be non-Communists, the FCP has dominated the organization and key posts within the SKDL have traditionally been filled by Communists. Recently, however, in order to appease restive nonparty members in the SKDL, the leadership has sought to play down or camouflage the role of the Communists.

The SKDL's organizational network presently comprises over 2,000 local groups embracing some 60,000 members, in addition to its affiliated organizations. The SKDL's electoral appeal, however, is

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substantially greater than these figures suggest.

The SKDL in Postwar Government

In the first postwar elections in 1945, the SKDL polled almost one fourth of the vote and gained 49 of the 200 seats in parliament. Under these circumstances the SKDL could not be denied a voice in the government, and was given one cabinet position. A coalition was formed of the three leading parties--the Center (Agrarians), the Social Democrats, and the SKDL--with the respected conservative leader and banker, Juho Paasikivi, as prime minister. Paasikivi's tenure was brief. Elected president in March 1946, he was succeeded as prime minister by the SKDL leader, Mauno Pekkala. Although not himself a Communist, Pekkala proceeded to appoint loyal party members to head such sensitive ministries as interior, which controlled the police, and communications, which controlled radio.

During the next two years, the Communists deliberately encouraged uncertainty and tension throughout the country by organizing civil disorders and labor unrest. They infiltrated into both the security and regular police apparatus as the first step toward achieving control. However, despite the advantageous position from which the Communists were able to operate and the initially favorable psychological climate, they became increasingly aware that they could not realistically expect to be able

to take over the government by parliamentary means.

It is still not entirely clear how far planning for a coup had proceeded, nor is it known to what extent Moscow was privy to and approved such plans. In March 1948, shortly after the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia, the Communist minister of interior, Yrjo Leino--who apparently was motivated by strong nationalist feelings--indicated, probably deliberately, to Finnish military authorities that "disturbances" might be pending that could develop into something even more serious. The regular police and the military acted immediately by disarming the security police and bringing in troops. Shortly thereafter parliament undertook an examination of Leino's conduct while in office, which culminated in a vote withdrawing confidence from the interior minister and the ouster of Leino and the other Communists from the government. In the elections later in 1948, the SKDL's parliamentary strength dropped from 49 to 38 seats.

The SKDL in Opposition

The SKDL began its opposition role by bitterly attacking the new Social Democratic government. The Communists actively encouraged, and probably instigated, many illegal strikes which contributed to labor unrest. They also strongly opposed the stabilization program worked out between the Social Democrats and the Agrarians to combat the deteriorating economic situation.

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Despite what seemed destined to be the SKDL's permanent exclusion from the government, the party retained considerable political influence through its consistently demonstrated electoral strength, and even gained seven seats in the 1958 elections.

The Finnish Communists now joined with the Soviet Union in an unrelenting attack on the government of veteran Social Democratic leader Fagerholm. Their accusations of "rightist" leanings and insincere protestations of friendship with the Soviet Union eventually compelled Fagerholm to resign in late 1958 after the Soviets withdrew their ambassador and threatened to cut off trade. Moscow's action was a crude attempt to isolate the Social Democrats and discredit them in the eyes of the voters, thus hopefully forcing cabinet cooperation between the SKDL and President Kekkonen's Center Party.

This strategy was only partially successful, for instead of cooperating with the SKDL, Center leaders such as President Kekkonen proceeded to strengthen their ties with the USSR and annoyed the Finnish Communists by portraying the Center as the only political group in Finland enjoying Moscow's favor. Riding the wave of Finno-Soviet friendship, the Center came to dominate Finland's political life, surviving such setbacks as the crisis in Soviet-Finnish relations in late 1961 when Moscow invoked the 1948 Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance

and sought defense consultations with Finland. The elections in early 1962 were a victory for the Center at the expense of the badly divided Social Democrats and the SKDL.

During the ensuing four years, both the SKDL and the Social Democrats remained in a kind of political limbo, a situation that did not change until 1964, when Social Democratic gains in the municipal elections foreshadowed their re-emergence as a political power. This and stirrings within these two parties portended new alignments and relationships on the Finnish political scene.

FCP Dissension--Early Years

From the end of World War II until 1956 the Finnish Communist Party was a disciplined and monolithic party presided over by harshly intolerant Stalinist leaders, many of whom had lived and trained in the Soviet Union. The FCP was long one of Moscow's most faithful supporters, accepting without question every twist in the Soviet Communist line. The "sheep-like about-face turns of the party leadership in the past 17 years" became, in fact, one of the main subjects of criticism within the party.

Khrushchev's 1956 debunking of Stalin shook both the FCP and the SKDL. While a majority fell into line and accepted a ban on discussion of pre-1956 activity, a small group criticized the dictatorial methods of the party leadership. These differences

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were further sharpened during the Hungarian uprising later that year.

The ferment within the party again surfaced in 1961, when the Finnish non-Communist press reported the existence of an "opposition" element within the party that supposedly had sympathizers in the SKDL parliamentary group. Although the Communists flatly denied the reports, the opposition element apparently did exist and dissident members from all sections of the country had reportedly held a secret meeting and discussed future activities. However, there was still little public criticism of the party line by this group, which continued to accept party discipline. The top leadership, under the tight control of authoritarian, old-guard chairman Aimo Aaltonen and Secretary General Ville Pessi, appeared to ignore the rising discontent.

Although the dissidents were not effectively organized, they were nevertheless agreed that the "leadership dominance" of the party must be changed, as well as the party program which they saw as clinging to outmoded dogma. They pointed to the outcome of the 1964 municipal elections in which the SKDL lost ground to the Social Democrats in the urban centers where both were competing for the working-class vote. This outcome definitely confirmed to the young progressives in the "liberal" group that the FCP leadership and its policies were responsible for the lack of electoral gains

and for keeping the SKDL on the sidelines of government.

Dissension Increases

Khrushchev's ouster in November 1964 and the passive and unquestioning acceptance of Moscow's version of the episode by the FCP leadership brought the controversy into the open again. In an unprecedented move, the principal press organ of both the FCP and the SKDL, Kansan Uutiset, printed a series of articles debating party policies on various topics, including a criticism of FCP Secretary General Pessi for his support of Khrushchev's removal.

Chairman Aaltonen took strong measures to discourage pressure from FCP's younger elements to liberalize the party. Widespread interest in the press discussion nevertheless enabled the liberals to force a special session of the central committee in October 1965. A manifesto was issued somewhat modifying party doctrine to conciliate the liberals.

The concessions by the old-guard Stalinists were probably due in part to the influence brought to bear by the deputy chairman of the CPSU who visited Finland at this time. At a closed meeting of the politburo, the CPSU official supported modernization of the FCP and said he hoped that younger talent would be brought into the leadership. Without some gestures to the liberals, the CPSU apparently feared that the increasingly divisive conflict between the

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two factions of the FCP might lead to a permanent split in the party and weaken the Soviet Union's ability to influence political developments in Finland.

Party Congress

The manifesto only partially met the demands of the growing number of critics who prepared to press their cause at the party's 14th Congress in January 1966. A concerted effort to oust the Stalinist leaders at this time assumed more urgency in view of the need to adopt a platform on which the SKDL could more successfully challenge the Social Democrats with upcoming parliamentary elections.

The outcome was a compromise between the two factions. The liberals were successful in replacing the chairman and vice chairman by Aarne Saarinen and Erkki Salomaa, both trade unionists, and in getting committees established to reconsider party programs. Although the old guard retained the important secretary generalship and maintained its control over the party administration, the liberals increased their representation on the important central committee and politburo. Saarinen so far has not clearly identified himself with either faction. He is, however, reported to be completely independent of CPSU influence.

The party thus appears to have entered a period of transi-

tion during which control can be expected to shift gradually to younger hands. With seasoned trade unionists in leadership posts, the party is expected to place even greater emphasis on activities directed to the trade union movement.

Current SKDL-FCP Relations

The question of the role of the SKDL and its relationship to the FCP has been controversial in both organizations. Because the FCP insisted on complete control, SKDL members who did not belong to the FCP felt they were shunted aside and given a subordinate role. The more liberally inclined FCP leaders, with an eye to possible future cooperation with the Social Democrats and perhaps even the Center Party, felt the FCP should build up SKDL prestige and power to a point where it could lead the whole leftist workers' movement. The pro-Stalinists argued that the SKDL lacked the ability to be the vanguard of the working class, a role they claimed should be exclusive to the FCP. The old guard probably feared that SKDL - Social Democratic cooperation might weaken Communist control of the SKDL as well as undermine the conservative wing in the FCP dispute.

Some SKDL parliamentary members were among the early sympathizers with the burgeoning liberal opposition group in the FCP. In an apparent attempt

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to mollify the malcontents, the FCP leaders in February 1965 appointed a nonparty member, Ele Alenius, former second vice chairman of the SKDL, to be SKDL's secretary general, a position formerly held only by FCP members. It is Alenius' view that the SKDL, whose majority membership is non-Communist, must evolve toward genuine autonomy, asserting its own principles of working for "modern socialism" independently of FCP decisions.

Despite the concession of Alenius' appointment, little actual progress has been made toward freeing the SKDL from FCP domination. The SKDL remains financially dependent on the FCP. Communist representation on its executive board and in its parliamentary group remains large. The long-standing practice persists of having the SKDL parliamentary delegation

take guidance from the FCP instead of from its own organization.

However, the outlook for the liberals appears fairly promising. Although all but two or three of the 41 SKDL members of parliament returned in the elections last March are Communist Party members, the majority of these are identified with the liberals. Furthermore, liberals have taken over almost all of the functionary posts in the SKDL, and perhaps up to 80 percent of the SKDL rank and file and its affiliates are opposed to the old-line faction of the FCP. For the foreseeable future, there is likely to be continued friction between the FCP and the SKDL, as the latter becomes more unwilling to accept FCP guidance in either party or government affairs.

The March 1966 Elections

The Communists had reason to view the quadrennial national elections in March with some apprehension, even though a semblance of harmony had been restored as a result of the party congress. The SKDL's performance in the 1964 local elections offered little hope for major gains in 1966. In addition, the "election alliance" between the SKDL and a dissident left-wing Social Democratic splinter party displeased many Communists who regarded this as a tactic that would weaken their own parliamentary position for the sake of gains by an ally of dubious reliability.

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In the election campaigning, party spokesmen focused primarily on domestic economic problems such as inflation, unemployment, and the housing shortage, but they found it difficult to exploit these issues effectively at a time when Finland was enjoying a period of unprecedented prosperity. Moreover, their uninspired technique of using old complaints and pat solutions had little appeal for the new, young voters. Foreign policy was not a major issue but both the SKDL and the Center sought to exploit it by suggesting that they enjoyed a special relationship with Moscow and by reminding the electorate of the long history of hostility between the Social Democrats and Moscow.

The election outcome proved to be a landslide victory for the Social Democrats, who emerged as the single largest party in parliament, and a setback for the SKDL, which polled fewer votes than in 1962 and lost six of the 47 seats it had held in parliament.

Negotiations for the New Government

In the discussions between Social Democratic chairman Paasio and President Kekkonen about the composition of the new government, Kekkonen made it clear that he favored a government that was as broadly based as possible. This was interpreted by the Social Democrats to mean that he expected the SKDL to be included.

Paasio, faced with the Center's disinterest in cooperating

with the Social Democrats in a two-party coalition, and recalling Moscow's reaction in 1958 when a Social Democratic - dominated cabinet was formed, apparently concluded that it would be advisable to try for a "big three" coalition. Furthermore, Soviet officials in Helsinki had let it be known that they too favored a coalition of the "workers" parties and the Center.

Despite strong opposition among their rank and file, the leadership of the non-Communist parties began negotiations with the SKDL over the new government's program and the apportionment of cabinet posts. At an early stage in the talks, the Social Democratic and the Center representatives had decided that the Communists would in any case be denied such sensitive posts as the foreign ministry, defense, interior, and education, and were determined to allot to them the most politically disadvantageous portfolios. This objective was facilitated by the Communists themselves, who were extremely eager to enter the cabinet and accepted three relatively minor posts, associate minister of finance, minister of transport and public works, and minister of social affairs.

Social Democratic and Center leaders are inclined to minimize the possible dangers their solution may entail. However, by gaining entry into the cabinet the Communists have achieved one of their primary objectives--cooperation on the governmental level with "all constructive forces" except the Conservatives.

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Current SKDL Strategy
And Prospects

The SKDL will probably concentrate on consolidating its renewed respectability as a government party. As representatives of a party that has only recently emerged from some 18 years of political isolation, it would not be in their interests at this time to take any actions that would risk the fall of the government and lead to new cabinet negotiations from which the SKDL might be excluded.

For this reason, party strategists are likely to continue to concentrate their energies on the two goals that have consistently eluded them during the postwar period: persuading the Social Democrats to cooperate in a program of joint political action and achieving a more equally shared control of organized labor.

Since the formation of the new government, there have been renewed efforts to reunite the labor movement. An important step was taken at the June congress of the larger, leftist-controlled federation. A Social Democratic faction cooperated with the Communists in ousting the dissident Social Democratic groups from the leadership of the federation. This resulted in an even more influential role for the Communists in the top leadership and policy-making bodies of the organization. The Communists also succeeded in achieving increased possibilities for independent action by the important unions they control.

Non-Communist observers in Finland have expressed some dismay over these developments, since they will give the Communists an even more influential voice in formulating labor's programs and policies.

The other Communist goal-- united political action with the Social Democrats--remains more elusive because of the persistent historical animosity and suspicion between the two groups. The Communists may derive some encouragement, however, from recent indications that a growing number of Social Democrats seem prepared to consider limited cooperation. A more immediate result could be a drift of the Social Democratic left wing toward closer cooperation with the Communists and the existing dissident Socialist group, thereby creating further tensions among the already disunited Social Democrats. In addition, the breakthrough scored by the SKDL in gaining government representation is having an impact outside Finland--particularly on Communist and SKDL relations with the CPSU, and on the prospects of other Scandinavian Communist or neo-Marxist parties.

The relationship between the CPSU and its Finnish counterpart has traditionally been an extremely close one, reflecting both Finland's geographic proximity to the Soviet Union and the party's heavy subsidization by the CPSU. However, part of the trend toward modernization in the FCP consists of refurbishing its public image as an independent group whose first

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allegiance is to Finland. With Moscow's consent, the present leaders of the Finnish party seem to recognize that in regard to internal party matters and domestic politics they are on their own to a much larger extent than formerly.

Since Soviet officials have indicated that they are reasonably satisfied with the existing political situation in Finland--and have stated as much to local Communists--the party leaders appear to have resigned themselves to the long pull of trying to reach their goals by working through parliament and the trade union movement. If necessary, Moscow is probably prepared to continue to assist the local Communists only to the extent of its ability to influence political developments in Finland. There already have been indications, however, that it will be done in more subtle ways than the crude pressures and veiled threats at the governmental level which sometimes characterized Moscow's efforts in years past.

Repercussions in Scandinavia

The SKDL breakthrough is being watched by many Western European Socialist parties whose leaders are faced with increasing defections by their left-wing elements. A more immediate impact is being felt in Sweden and Denmark, where long-entrenched Social Democratic governments have seen the slow erosion of their parliamentary strength. In Sweden, Prime Minister Erlander is under pressure from his party's extreme left-wing to cooperate with the newly revitalized Swedish Communist Party, which has made a strong comeback under its new,

independent-minded leader, Carl-Henrik Hermansson. The left-wing faction maintains that during the Social Democrats' long tenure the party has become increasingly bourgeois and conservative in outlook, thereby abandoning to the Communists the large segment of the population that favors a more radical domestic economic program and a more active and "neutralist" foreign policy. This restiveness among the younger party members will be a decisive factor in the outcome of the 1968 elections and will determine whether the older, more conservatively inclined Social Democratic leadership will be pushed toward closer cooperation with the Communists.

In Denmark, Prime Minister Krag's Social Democratic minority government is under similar pressures. He faces the choice of turning leftward to the Marxist, anti-NATO, Socialist People's Party for parliamentary support --and perhaps even cabinet cooperation--or risk defections by the Social Democratic left wing if he moves toward accommodation with the "bourgeois" parties. Krag has so far spurned the far left, but domestic political considerations may eventually compel him to accept some form of cooperation.

Domestic political developments in both countries would determine the price the Communists ask for such cooperation, but initially at least, their demands would be made to appear reasonable. Over the long term, however, the Social Democrats run the risk of further blurring the lines dividing Socialists from Communists and thereby granting the latter an increased measure of acceptance and respectability.

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