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# VÄINÖ TANNER IN FINNISH POLITICS

MARVIN RINTALA

THE LATE SUMMER OF 1914 demonstrated that for most European Social Democrats nationalism was far more powerful than Marxism in the event of a conflict between these ideologies. Some Social Democratic parties did not participate in this demonstration, however. Not until the late autumn of 1939 did it become apparent to all that Finnish Social Democrats, for example, were nationalists before they were Marxists. The fact that Finland was not a belligerent in World War I left this question open. Until the demands made by the Soviet Union in October-November, 1939, and the beginning of the Winter War (which included the abortive proclamation of a Soviet-sponsored Finnish Democratic Government), bourgeois Finns were uncertain about the response of Social Democrats to any serious Soviet challenge to continued Finnish independence. In view of the tragic Finnish Civil War of 1918, this uncertainty seemed grounded in historical fact. As the largest party in Finland (representing forty percent of the electorate in 1939), the Social Democrats' attitude would prove decisive in determining the strength of Finnish resistance to Soviet diplomatic and military pressure. Like other Finns, Social Democrats fought, sacrificed, and died to defend their nation. The visible symbol of the unity of this nation in the Winter War was the Social Democratic Foreign Minister, Väinö Tanner. It was at this point that Tanner stepped into world politics. A Finnish scholar has concluded that in the Moscow negotiations of 1939 the two Finnish delegates, Tanner and J. K. Paasikivi, "... held the fate of Finland in their hands."<sup>1</sup>

The significance of Väinö Tanner in Finnish politics has been much more than merely symbolic, and of much greater duration than a hundred days' war. For more than a quarter-century he was the most powerful Finnish Social Democrat. In times of internal and external struggle and in more tranquil times as well Tanner held a firm grip on his party. Because of this fact, he was probably the most powerful single leader in twentieth-century Finnish politics. Recognizing this, an American newspaper went so far as to state that Tanner "... is to [Finland's] politics what Sibelius has been to Finland's music."<sup>2</sup> In 1943 the editor of Sweden's most important Social Democratic news-

<sup>1</sup> L. A. Puntila, *Väinö Tanner itsenäisyyden lujittajana ja puolustajana* (Helsinki: KKn kirjapaino, 1956), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> "Stubborn Foe of Soviet: Väinö Alfred Tanner," *The New York Times*, April 18, 1960.

paper argued that “Finland and Tanner are one and the same.”<sup>3</sup> Finns of several successive political generations would probably agree with this exaggerated evaluation in at least one respect: it is difficult to imagine Finnish politics without Väinö Tanner. Gustaf Mannerheim, who led bourgeois Finns in the Civil War of 1918, and whose general attitude was that “. . . socialists are incapable of defending democracy,”<sup>4</sup> nevertheless ended his life convinced that Tanner was a “great man.”<sup>5</sup> Shortly before becoming President of the Republic in 1944, Mannerheim hoped that Tanner would become Prime Minister; even though this expectation was not fulfilled, the former still relied heavily on the latter for political advice.<sup>6</sup> This favorable verdict has been far from unanimous, especially among Finnish Communists. No less a personage than Otto Kuusinen publicly stated that Tanner was the devil in human form.<sup>7</sup> Communist newspapers in Finland labeled Tanner “Finland’s Quisling”<sup>8</sup> and even questioned his sanity.<sup>9</sup> Yrjö Sirola, one of the most important emigrant leaders of Finnish Communism, considered Tanner a “thick-skinned hoodlum.”<sup>10</sup>

Whatever one may think of Tanner as a person, one must agree with an American scholar that “. . . it is, of course, impossible to deal with Finland’s recent history without coming to grips with him.”<sup>11</sup> To this one can add that it is impossible to understand the problem of leadership in European Social Democracy without coming to grips with men like Väinö Tanner. The crisis of Social Democracy is not only an ideological crisis, but a crisis of leadership as well. The trans-

<sup>3</sup> Richard Lindström, quoted in *Sanat ja teot—sotasylliset asiakirjojen valossa* (Helsinki: Suomen Kansan Demokraattinen Liitto, 1945), p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> *The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim*, Eric Lewenhaupt, trans. (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1954), p. 128.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>6</sup> Väinö Tanner, *Suomen tie rauhaan 1943-44* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Tammi, 1952), pp. 338-39, 391-92, 395-96. The divergence of this judgment from Mannerheim’s lifetime political attitudes can be seen in my article on “The Politics of Gustaf Mannerheim” in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Central European Affairs*. Tanner’s attitude towards Mannerheim also underwent a radical transformation from open hostility to ardent admiration. Tanner, *Suomen tie*, p. 327; Tanner, *Kuinka se oikein tapahtui—Vuosi 1918 esivaiheineen ja jälkiselvittelyineen* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Tammi, 1957), p. 346; Tanner, *Itsenäisen Suomen arkea—Valikoima puheita* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Tammi, 1956), p. 272; Sir Walter Citrine, *My Finnish Diary* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1940), p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> Yrjö Soini, *Kuin Pietari hiilivalkealla—Sotasyllisyyssasian vaiheet 1944-49* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 1956), p. 334; Arvo Tuominen, “Poliittinen vastustaja,” in Olli Laitinen and Matti Nieminen, eds., *Kuin kalliioon hakattu—Väinö Tanner 75 vuotta 12. 3. 1956* (Helsinki: Sosialistinen aikakauslehti, 1956), p. 128.

<sup>8</sup> Soini, *Kuin*, p. 232.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>10</sup> Tanner, *Kuinka*, p. 273.

<sup>11</sup> John I. Kolehmainen, in a review of Tanner’s *Itsenäisen Suomen arkea*, in the *Journal of Central European Affairs*, Volume XVIII, Number 3 (October, 1958), p. 352.

formation which has taken place within the *Weltanschauung* of rank-and-file Social Democrats throughout Europe is in a large measure an expression of changed attitudes among their leaders. Perhaps because recent Social Democratic leaders in many nations have lacked the colorful personalities of their predecessors—or perhaps because many students of politics are no longer interested in understanding individual leaders—relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to men like Tanner. Scientific generalizations must be the goal of the student of politics, but these generalizations are valid only insofar as they are based on a real knowledge of the political thought and action of individual human beings.

The political career of Väinö Tanner, like that of many other Finns, has been characterized by remarkable longevity. It spans the entire history of not only an independent Finland but the unicameral Parliament and universal suffrage as well. Tanner was elected to the first unicameral Parliament in 1907; he was last elected in 1958. Among the eighty Social Democrats elected to the first Parliament Tanner was one of no less than eight twenty-six-year-olds;<sup>12</sup> in 1910, at the tender age of twenty-nine, he became First Vice-Speaker of Parliament. In 1958 Tanner became the oldest member of a parliamentary bloc which can only be termed over-age. The youngest Social Democrat elected in 1958 was thirty-five years old, and only two other of the thirty-eight members of this bloc were born after 1918.<sup>13</sup> This aging of the Social Democratic leadership is both a symptom and a cause of the increasing difficulty which the Social Democratic Party is encountering in integrating younger members of the working class into the party.<sup>14</sup>

It is not only in Parliament that Tanner's services have been long-lasting. Throughout the period 1915-46 he was Managing Director of Elanto, the immense consumers' cooperative in Helsinki. From 1927

<sup>12</sup> Other members of the first parliamentary bloc of the party who were born in 1881 included Matti Airola, Ivar Hörhammer, Kalle Hämäläinen, Alma Jokinen, Santeri Nuorteva, Armas Paasonen, and Sulo Wuolijoki. In the second election two other youthful Finns, destined to become world-famous, also born in 1881, were added to this bloc: Edvard Gylling and Otto Kuusinen. Väinö Tanner, *Nuorukainen etsii sijaansa yhteiskunnassa* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Tammi, 1951), p. 318.

<sup>13</sup> Based on information obtained from official biographies of members of Parliament contained in *Suomen eduskunta 1958-61* (Helsinki: Valtioneuvoston kirjapaino, 1958).

<sup>14</sup> That its chief rival, the Finnish People's Democratic League (Communist), is having similar difficulties is argued in my article on "The Problem of Generations in Finnish Communism," *The American Slavic and East European Review*, Volume XVII, Number 2 (April, 1958), pp. 190-202. Of the fifty members elected on the Communist ticket in 1958, however, thirteen were born after 1918. Furthermore, the youth activity of the Social Democratic Party suffered from the split within the party organization in the late 1950's, while the Communist youth groups are integrated and forever active.

to 1945 he served as President of the International Cooperative Alliance. Between 1919 and 1945 and again since 1951 Tanner has been a member of the Executive Board of the Bank of Finland. He first became Minister of Finance in 1917, returning to that post in 1937-39 and 1942-44; he has been a Cabinet member several other times, including a year (1926-27) as Prime Minister. Even though his leadership was by this time purely nominal, his re-election as party leader in 1960 indicates Tanner's remarkable staying power. In all these posts the source of his strength has been the same: Tanner was the first leading Social Democrat to gain power and prestige in Finland largely as a result of his administrative skills, within the party organization as well as within the cooperative movement and the government. His ability to control a large bureaucracy distinguishes him from his predecessors in the party leadership. The first generation of Finnish Social Democratic leaders, men like Yrjö Mäkelin, Eetu Salin, Taavi Tainio, and Edvard Walpas-Hänninen, were primarily passionate publicists and orators.<sup>15</sup> These master propagandists have been replaced by expert organizers like Väinö Leskinen and Kaarlo Pitsinki. For this new type of Social Democratic party leader Väinö Tanner has been the model. Careful planning in advance, equally careful devotion to detail in practice—these were the keys to political success for Tanner. Nothing was left to chance or improvisation.<sup>16</sup> Since the Social Democratic Party was the first democratic party in Finland to achieve a high degree of organization,<sup>17</sup> Tanner has served as a model for the entire Finnish party system in this respect.

There has been very little of the emotional or irrational about Tanner's behavior as a party leader. He seems as far from charismatic leadership as possible. Certainly Finnish voters have not decided to vote for or against the Social Democratic Party on the basis of their reaction to Tanner's personality. According to the latter's own statements, he has preferred cold calculation to emotion in politics.<sup>18</sup> He bitterly criticized party meetings which appealed to instinct rather than reason.<sup>19</sup> Tanner's dry, factual style of speaking and writing has been sympathetically described as appealing more to older than to

<sup>15</sup> Salin, who brought the young Tanner into the party leadership, did not want to run for the first Parliament. After Salin had finally been persuaded to run for election, serving in Parliament "... was for him like being in a penal institution. He was not made for parliamentary work." Tanner, *Nuorukainen*, p. 275. Walpas-Hänninen's desire to avoid the responsibility of taking part in party decisions is legendary among Finnish politicians.

<sup>16</sup> Untamo Utrio, "Miehen muotokuva," in Laitinen, *Kuin kalliioon*, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Jaakko Nousiainen, *Puolueet puntarissa* (Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä, 1959), p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, pp. 76, 296.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 267-68.

younger people.<sup>20</sup> Väinö Leskinen, typical of the bureaucratic organizer in Finnish politics, has characterized his master's approach to party leadership as that of a businessman.<sup>21</sup> This is perhaps not surprising, since after graduation from secondary school (and before conversion to cooperation and Social Democracy) Tanner enrolled as a student in a business school. During the Winter War he impressed the visiting Chairman of the British Trades Union Congress as "... a very solid matter-of-fact sort of fellow."<sup>22</sup> When first elected to Parliament Tanner chose assignment to the Finance Committee in preference to more exotic tasks.<sup>23</sup> Never did he have any use for what he considered the utopian bustle of most social reformers.<sup>24</sup> Rather, he was, to use his own apt phrase, "a parliamentarian who stayed on terra firma."<sup>25</sup> Tanner never attempted to sketch the coming Socialist society. For him Socialism as well as the cooperative movement has been an instrument for concrete social and economic reforms rather than a goal in itself.<sup>26</sup> In his own view, he has had no tendency to theorize; all abstract and philosophical notions are foreign to his nature.<sup>27</sup> In short, Tanner has been a professional politician. Unlike many other Finns of his profession, he openly acknowledged this fact.<sup>28</sup>

As a professional politician, Väinö Tanner found it necessary to take a stand on virtually every question of significance in twentieth-century Finnish politics. Any brief analysis is therefore bound to commit some injustice to the richness and variety of his political thought and action. It seems justifiable, nevertheless, to seek understanding of his political thought and action in terms of his conception of the relationship between national consciousness and class consciousness. The struggle between these two allegiances has been the crucial element in the history of European Social Democracy, and it is to this question which the student of comparative politics is entitled to—indeed, must—address himself. It is Tanner's answer to this question which has given meaning and direction to his political career, and which has made him so intensely loved and hated by other Finns.

There can be no doubt that Tanner has placed the Finnish nation

<sup>20</sup> Utrio, "Miehen muotokuva," p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Väinö Leskinen, "Puolueen johtaja," in Laitinen, *Kuin kalliioon*, p. 94. In an earlier parliamentary debate Tanner referred to himself as a businessman. 1932 *Valtiopäivät*, *Pöytäkirjat I*, p. 461.

<sup>22</sup> Citrine, *My Finnish Diary*, p. 63.

<sup>23</sup> Tanner, *Nuorukainen*, p. 334.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>25</sup> 1931 *Valtiopäivät*, *Pöytäkirjat I*, p. 251.

<sup>26</sup> R. H. Oittinen, "Aatteen mies," in Laitinen, *Kuin kalliioon*, p. 81.

<sup>27</sup> Utrio, "Miehen muotokuva," pp. 17, 35; Tanner, *Nuorukainen*, pp. 21, 69; Tanner, *Näin Helsingin kasvavan* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Tammi, 1949), p. 279.

<sup>28</sup> Tanner, *Nuorukainen*, p. 288.

far above the international working class in his personal scale of political values. This fact has been of substantial significance for Finnish Social Democracy because of his power position. During the Winter War several of Tanner's friends jokingly referred to him as a "White." The instantaneous, sincere, and revealing response of the Foreign Minister was: "No, not white but *blue* and *white*."<sup>29</sup> Before the Winter War he had correctly predicted that if war came, the Finnish working class, contrary to bourgeois expectations (or at least arguments), would defend its fatherland.<sup>30</sup> After the Winter War he noted with considerable pride that this prediction had proved correct.<sup>31</sup> Later in World War II Tanner stressed in a meeting of the Social Democratic Party leadership that the ultimate standard for judging all policy alternatives was the cause of continued national independence.<sup>32</sup> The importance of Finnish national independence in Tanner's politics has been recognized by both fellow Social Democrats<sup>33</sup> and scholars.<sup>34</sup>

That Tanner was a Finnish nationalist does not mean that he went to extremes in this, more than any other, matter. He differed from many bourgeois Finnish nationalists in that he did not desire to reduce the rights of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. Tanner, together with his party, recognized that Finnish should be the dominant language of Finnish politics, since more than nine-tenths of the population was Finnish-speaking. At the same time, he considered it both possible and desirable to preserve the cultural autonomy of the minority.<sup>35</sup> In his nationalism he by no means entirely abandoned the concept of class. He argued that Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking workers had more in common with each other than with the upper-class members of their respective language groups.<sup>36</sup> During a special session of Parliament held to consider the relation of Finnish-language to Swedish-language teaching at Helsinki University, Tanner created a political sensation by proclaiming that this was "a sixth-rate question" over which the working class could not get

<sup>29</sup> Citrine, *My Finnish Diary*, p. 59. Blue and white, of course, are the colors of the Finnish flag. Later, in his memoirs, Tanner related this story with obvious approval. Väinö Tanner, *Olin ulkoministerinä talvisodan aikana* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Tammi, 1950), pp. 224-25.

<sup>30</sup> *1936 Valtiopäivät, Pöytäkirjat I*, pp. 852-53; Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 212.

<sup>31</sup> Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, pp. 305-06.

<sup>32</sup> Tanner, *Suomen tie*, p. 236.

<sup>33</sup> Oittinen, "Aatteen mies," p. 83.

<sup>34</sup> Punttila, *Väinö Tanner*.

<sup>35</sup> Tanner's conception of culture was clearly national in nature. Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 119.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 198-99; *1935 Ylimääräiset Valtiopäivät, Pöytäkirjat*, pp. 57-58.

excited.<sup>37</sup> This characterization Tanner refused to withdraw.<sup>38</sup> In his judgment, social reform was far more pressing, far more important than the language question. The only reason the latter was raised was to arouse the “primitive instincts” of the electorate.<sup>39</sup> The fact that the Social Democratic Party was partially dependent on the electoral support of Swedish-speaking workers no doubt contributed to Tanner’s moderation on the language question. The caution of the professional politician was buttressed by the linguistic facts of Tanner’s own background. As a child he used Finnish and he later went to a Finnish-language secondary school—under whose influence he abandoned his Swedish surname, Thomasson<sup>40</sup>—but his father was Swedish-speaking and his mother Finnish-speaking.<sup>41</sup>

The basic reason for Tanner’s moderation on the language question was his realization that a Finland divided against itself on linguistic grounds would be weakened in its dealings with the Soviet Union. It was because he was so ardent a Finnish nationalist in his attitude towards Russia that he wished to avoid the language question. For Tanner nothing good had ever come out of Russia, except for the chaotic conditions of 1917 which had made possible Finnish independence. He realized that Finland was part of Eastern Europe politically—that since the decline of Sweden as a great power the position of Finland in world politics has depended largely upon Russian policy. In describing the crucial events of 1917 within Finland, for example, he recalled: “Everything depended on developments in Russia, just as so many times before. . . .”<sup>42</sup> The October Revolution “. . . had, of course, a completely decisive influence on Finnish affairs as well.”<sup>43</sup> Tanner recognized that because of its geographical position Finland had to live *next* to Russia; furthermore, Finland had to live *with* Russia. It was necessary to maintain as good relations as possible with Russia.<sup>44</sup>

In spite of this realization, Tanner was unable to adjust his politics—as did J. K. Paasikivi and Urho Kekkonen, for instance—to serve the end of good relations with Russia. Although Tanner was at home

<sup>37</sup> 1935 *Ylimääräiset Valtiopäivät, Pöytäkirjat*, p. 59; Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 201. Tanner failed to see that any question which led to a special session of Parliament and immense public agitation was obviously important. This was one of the few instances in which he confused what *was* with what *should have been*.

<sup>38</sup> Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 261.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205; 1934 *Valtiopäivät, Pöytäkirjat, III* p. 3101; 1935 *Ylimääräiset Valtiopäivät, Pöytäkirjat*, p. 61.

<sup>40</sup> Tanner, *Näin*, pp. 287-88.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 41, 94, 134; Puntila, *Väinö Tanner*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>42</sup> Tanner, *Kuinka*, p. 42.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>44</sup> 1936 *Valtiopäivät, Pöytäkirjat I*, p. 854; Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 214.



in several major European languages and nations,<sup>45</sup> he never fully mastered the Russian language.<sup>46</sup> This deficiency, of course, hindered him considerably in negotiating with Stalin and Molotov in 1939.<sup>47</sup> Before the latter year, the only Russian city which Tanner had visited was Leningrad. He had not even been there for twenty-two years.<sup>48</sup> This was no accident. For Tanner Russia always remained “the unscrupulous enemy.”<sup>49</sup> In a major speech in 1958 he warned that Finnish independence was in danger. The possibility that Finland might become a satellite could not be ignored. The reason for Finland’s perilous position was clear: Russia has always been a dangerous neighbor to Finland.<sup>50</sup> This statement, as might be expected, touched off a bitter denunciation in the Soviet press.<sup>51</sup>

This speech, however much comment it aroused, was hardly a surprise. It merely reflected a long lifetime of political opposition to Russian policy. This opposition began during Tanner’s formative political years, which occurred during the period of intensive Russification measures in Finland from 1899 to 1914. His first political act was to sign the great address of the Finnish nation to the Russian Emperor, protesting Russification.<sup>52</sup> At this time Tanner was eighteen years old, just beginning to emerge from his apolitical home background to the larger world that awaited him. Further Russification measures aroused the same response in him.<sup>53</sup> Tanner’s political generation, in contrast to other generations of Finns, had no experience during its formative years (approximately seventeen to twenty-five) of peaceful relations with Russia.<sup>54</sup> It was Tanner’s generation of political leaders which was lost to Finland as a result of the war responsibility trials after World War II.<sup>55</sup> All eight major leaders

<sup>45</sup> It was in Germany that the young Tanner was first converted to Social Democracy; he remained loyal to his master, Heinrich Kaufmann, until the latter’s death. Tanner also maintained extremely close personal relations, not only with Social Democratic leaders throughout Western and Northern Europe, but also with cooperative leaders, especially in Scandinavia and Great Britain.

<sup>46</sup> Tanner, *Kuinka*, p. 53.

<sup>47</sup> Tanner, *Olin*, pp. 68-69, 183-84.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>49</sup> Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 304.

<sup>50</sup> *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti*, August 27, 1958.

<sup>51</sup> *Izvestia*, August 29, 1958. I am indebted to John H. Hodgson for this reference.

<sup>52</sup> Tanner, *Näin*, p. 164.

<sup>53</sup> Tanner, *Nuorukainen*, p. 19.

<sup>54</sup> This point, as well as the significance of the concept of political generation, is amplified in my forthcoming book, *Three Generations: The Extreme Right Wing in Finnish Politics*.

<sup>55</sup> The impact upon post-1944 Finnish politics of this loss was analyzed in an editorial in Finland’s largest newspaper, dealing specifically with the problem of political generations. “Sukupolvien vaihdos,” *Helsingin Sanomat*, December 16, 1956.

convicted at these trials belonged to the political generations formed by the period of intensive Russification. In view of the fact that their party affiliations ranged from Social Democratic to National Coalitionist, the key to their undeniably strong anti-Russian views<sup>56</sup> may well be the anti-Russian milieu in which they experienced their formative years. All these convicted leaders were university students in their youth, and thus it is relatively easy to establish a date for the beginning of their formative years: the year in which they became university students. Given the difference between Finnish secondary-school and university studies, Finnish family structure at the turn of the century, and the rise in social status which many of them—including Tanner—experienced when they became university students, this is much more than an arbitrary choice for the time at which they first began to think as individuals in the fullest sense of the term. The years in which they became university students were: Väinö Tanner, 1900; Henrik Ramsay, 1903; T. M. Kivimäki, 1905; Risto Ryti, 1906; T. H. Reinikka, 1908; Antti Kukkonen, 1910; Edwin Linkomies, 1911; J. W. Rangell, 1913.<sup>57</sup>

True to his generation, Tanner opposed Russian policy even after Finland gained its independence. The October Revolution failed to change his evaluation of Russia. If anything, that event strengthened his distrust of all things Russian. In the autumn of 1918 he anticipated the fall of the Bolshevik Government.<sup>58</sup> In 1935 he publicly hoped for democratic winds to blow over Russia.<sup>59</sup> In other words, he looked forward to the collapse of the Soviet regime. In view of this attitude, it was hardly surprising that Tanner approved the hard policy of the Finnish Cabinet in resisting the demands of the Soviet Government in 1938 and early 1939.<sup>60</sup> It was even less surprising in view of the fact that Tanner was the most powerful member of the coalition Cabinet in power at the time. The Prime Minister, A. K. Cajander, was a member of the small and dwindling (liberal) Progressive Party, and did not even possess the united support of his own party.<sup>61</sup> In the

<sup>56</sup> That they were anti-Russian, of course, does not mean that they were responsible for Finland's participation in World War II. Their conviction was part of the price paid by the Finnish nation for continued independence of the Soviet Union. The price these men paid must be weighed against the price the Finnish nation would have paid if they had not been convicted.

<sup>57</sup> These dates are taken from H. R. Söderström and J. O. Tallqvist, eds., *Vem och Vad? Biografisk handbok 1941* (Helsingfors: Holger Schildts Förlag, 1941).

<sup>58</sup> Tanner, *Kuinka*, p. 280.

<sup>59</sup> Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 237.

<sup>60</sup> Tanner, *Olin*, p. 28.

<sup>61</sup> Tanner was correctly considered the "strong man" of the Cabinet, even by foreign observers. E. D. Simon, "Finland: A Democracy in the Making," in his *The Smaller Democracies* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), p. 158.

autumn of 1939 Tanner felt that the chief demand of the Soviet Union, a lease to the latter power of a naval base at Hanko, should not even be discussed.<sup>62</sup> Even after the hard policy of the Finnish Cabinet had failed to prevent war, he vigorously defended what he considered to have been the only possible policy.<sup>63</sup> During the Winter War Foreign Minister Tanner viewed Soviet military defeats as the precondition for peace negotiations.<sup>64</sup> Tanner's optimism concerning Finnish military successes led him to oppose J. K. Paasikivi's insistence on immediate concessions before the inevitable military defeat occurred.<sup>65</sup> Just as he had done in the autumn of 1939, Tanner held firm on Hanko in February, 1940.<sup>66</sup> This rigid opposition to Soviet policy aims continued throughout and after World War II. It is, however, Tanner's policy before and during the Winter War which has met with the most serious criticism among his fellow Finns.

It is difficult for even a sympathetic observer to avoid the conclusion that before and during the Winter War the wisdom of Finnish foreign policy did not match the courage of the Finnish Army. Insofar as he influenced Finnish foreign policy during these months—and that was decisively—the responsibility for this failure of foreign policy falls to Väinö Tanner. Part of this failure can be explained by his lifetime inability to grasp the essentials of foreign policy as well as he understood domestic politics. There is widespread agreement among Tanner's supporters and opponents that his weak point has been foreign policy. This conclusion has been reached by his fellow Social Democrats<sup>67</sup> as well as by Tanner himself.<sup>68</sup> The testimony of J. K. Paasikivi, Finland's greatest diplomat and his close personal friend, is significant in this matter.<sup>69</sup> In a radio speech to the American people during the Winter War Foreign Minister Tanner acknowledged that the uncertainties of international politics seemed strange to a realist like himself.<sup>70</sup> This had been amply demonstrated when Tanner met Stalin in the crucial negotiations in the autumn of 1939. Tanner greeted the Soviet dictator with the proud confession: "I am a

<sup>62</sup> Tanner, *Olin*, p. 54.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153; Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 322.

<sup>64</sup> Tanner, *Olin*, p. 187.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207, 270, 301-02.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 234, 248.

<sup>67</sup> C. O. Frietsch, *Suomen kohtalonvuodet* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Tammi, 1945), pp. 99-100.

<sup>68</sup> Tanner, *Nuorukainen*, p. 213.

<sup>69</sup> J. K. Paasikivi, *Toimintani Moskovassa ja Suomessa 1939-41—I. Talvisota* (Porvoo: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö, 1958), pp. 11, 13, 57, 64, 118, 134.

<sup>70</sup> Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 296.

Menshevik.”<sup>71</sup> It does not require an excessively lively imagination to conceive of the impression this made on Stalin.

To say that Soviet leaders, both before and after Stalin’s death, have reciprocated this antagonism would be an understatement. In the view of the Soviet leaders, as well as of the Finnish Communist Party, Tanner has been Public Enemy Number One in Finland. Crude language and insulting invective attacking him have flowed incessantly from the Soviet press and radio.<sup>72</sup> Tanner was forced to leave the Cabinet in August, 1940, when the Soviet Union stated that his resignation was the precondition for amicable Soviet-Finnish relations.<sup>73</sup> Later in the same year Soviet leaders made it equally clear that Tanner’s election to the vacant presidency would be interpreted to mean that Finland would not carry out the terms of the peace treaty of March, 1940.<sup>74</sup> During 1943 and 1944 Tanner’s presence in the Cabinet was stated by the Soviet Union to be an obstacle to initiation of armistice negotiations.<sup>75</sup> The Soviet attack on Tanner continued even after 1944 for internal consumption within the Soviet Union.<sup>76</sup> It rose to a new pitch in 1957 when Tanner was asked (however reluctantly) by President Urho Kekkonen to try to form a new Cabinet.<sup>77</sup> The day after Tanner began this abortive attempt the Soviet Union announced that Soviet-Finnish commercial negotiations would be postponed indefinitely.<sup>78</sup> In 1959 Khrushchev took the occasion of the Finnish President’s visit to Russia to publicly attack—in the presence of his visitor—Tanner as anti-Soviet.<sup>79</sup>

Soviet leaders had good reason to fear Tanner, for he never placed class above nation. His Marxism was very moderate indeed. In his own judgment he was always a revisionist.<sup>80</sup> Tanner saw Marx as a great

<sup>71</sup> Paasikivi, *Toimintani*, p. 64.

<sup>72</sup> This fact has led to the remarkable phenomenon of postwar years, when Tanner the Social Democrat has become the favorite of the Finnish right wing, especially the National Coalition Party. This affair reached its peak in the 1956 presidential election when he was the dark horse candidate (although unused) of the National Coalitionists, but not of Social Democrats.

<sup>73</sup> J. K. Paasikivi, *Toimintani Moskovassa ja Suomessa 1939-41—II. Väli rauhan aika* (Porvoo: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö, 1958), pp. 66-68, 70, 75-76; Lauri Hyvämäki, *Vaaran vuodet 1944-48* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 1957), p. 27.

<sup>74</sup> Paasikivi, *Toimintani—II*, p. 127; Paavo Hirvikallio, *Tasavallan presidentin vaalit Suomessa 1919-50* (Helsinki: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö, 1958), pp. 89-90.

<sup>75</sup> Tanner, *Suomen tie*, pp. 145, 327; Arvi Korhonen, “Valtiomies,” in Laitinen, *Kuin kalliioon*, p. 43.

<sup>76</sup> Unto Parvilahti, *Berijan tarhat—Havaintoja ja muistikuivia Neuvostoliitosta vuosilta 1945-54* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 1958), p. 181.

<sup>77</sup> *Uusi Suomi*, October 27, 1957.

<sup>78</sup> *The New York Times*, October 25, 1957.

<sup>79</sup> *Helsingin Sanomat*, January 25, 1959.

<sup>80</sup> Tanner, *Nuorukainen*, p. 316; Leskinen, “Puolueen johtaja,” p. 95.

scholar and founder of the international working class movement. It would, however, be wrong to assume that the Social Democratic Party should hold fast to every detail of Marx's teaching. Circumstances change from one decade to another, and someone who lived in the middle of the nineteenth century could not foresee the events a century later. The dead should not be able to determine the course of contemporary politics. Every generation must understand and resolve its own problems. For this reason, in Tanner's view, it was just as wrong to call on Marx in day-to-day politics as to call on Snellman, the leading nineteenth-century Finnish nationalist.<sup>81</sup> Marxism had lost its justification when the first law for the protection of workers was enacted.<sup>82</sup>

The most important aspect of Tanner's rejection of Marxism was his acceptance of the goal of class peace rather than class struggle.<sup>83</sup> Unlike many other Finnish politicians, Tanner accepted the positive, British, rather than the negative, German, understanding of the concept of compromise. For him compromise was cooperative action towards a common goal rather than betrayal of one's principles. Constant compromise among the parliamentary parties was the natural order of things.<sup>84</sup> Throughout his long political career Tanner's words and actions reiterated his belief in parliamentary government.<sup>85</sup> The source of this attachment to parliamentary government, just as in the case of his anti-Russian attitude, was the political climate of his formative years. The unicameral Parliament and universal suffrage were the concrete embodiment of Finland's gains in its own General Strike of 1905, in opposition to Russification measures. Tanner's generation became the Finnish parliamentary generation par excellence. Its members, upon being elected to Parliament, made a life's career of political leadership. During the interwar decades the composition of Parliament changed less and less after every election. Of two hundred members of Parliament elected in 1922, eighty-nine had never before been members.<sup>86</sup> Of those elected in 1930, fifty-two were new members, and of those elected in 1939, only thirty-four were new members.<sup>87</sup> It was this generation of leaders, committed both to

<sup>81</sup> Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 263; Oittinen, "Aatteen mies," pp. 79-80.

<sup>82</sup> Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 276.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 209-10, 221, 240-41, 270.

<sup>84</sup> Tanner, *Kuinka*, p. 329.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82; Tanner, *Nuorukainen*, p. 351; Tanner, *Suomen tie*, p. 382; Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 227; *1920 Valtiopäivät, Pöytäkirjat III*, p. 2178.

<sup>86</sup> Based on information obtained from official biographies of members of Parliament contained in *Suomen eduskunta 1922-24* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 1923).

<sup>87</sup> Arvid Enckell, *Democratic Finland* (London: Herbert Joseph, no date), p. 129.

parliamentary government and opposition to Russian policy, which was lost to Finland after 1944.

Considering Tanner's commitment to parliamentary government, it is not surprising that he refused to participate in, or even support, the abortive attempt of revolutionary Finnish Social Democrats to create a workers' republic in early 1918. Disgusted by the trend towards revolution within his party, he withdrew from active politics in late 1917. Tanner declined to be a candidate for Parliament. Indeed, for the only time in his life, he chose to stay away from the polls.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, he tried to use his personal influence to bring his party back to parliamentarism during the months preceding the Civil War.<sup>89</sup> Tanner was ignorant of Social Democratic plans to revolt in January, 1918.<sup>90</sup> After the Civil War began, he flatly refused to become Minister of Finance in the revolutionary government.<sup>91</sup> Expecting the Civil Guards to defeat the Red Guards, Tanner stayed completely out of the limelight during the Civil War. Although he opposed the revolt, as a prudent man he kept quiet after it began.<sup>92</sup> The most he did was to contact privately some of his more moderate bourgeois friends to investigate the possibility of an armistice.<sup>93</sup> Tanner's public silence was not broken until April, 1918, when he was one of the signers of a proclamation in a Social Democratic newspaper unsuccessfully urging an armistice.<sup>94</sup> By this time it was apparent to all that the Red Guards would be defeated. Tanner was already looking forward to the reconstruction of a strictly parliamentary Social Democratic Party in a bourgeois Finland. There can be little doubt that he already then conceived of himself as the leader of such a reconstructed party, and that this expectation encouraged his refusal to support the revolt.

As soon as Helsinki had been captured by German troops in April, 1918, Tanner led a group of local Social Democrats who, like him, had not supported the revolt, in an attempt to revive party activity. This attempt was not immediately successful. A major reason for this failure was the repressive policy of the victorious bourgeois leadership. Tanner, for instance, was arrested three times for political offenses during the remainder of 1918.<sup>95</sup> In reviving his party on a parliamentary basis Tanner performed his greatest service to Finnish democracy.

<sup>88</sup> Tanner, *Kuinka*, p. 124; Leskinen, "Puolueen johtaja," p. 96.

<sup>89</sup> Tanner, *Kuinka*, p. 155; Leskinen, "Puolueen johtaja," pp. 96-97.

<sup>90</sup> Tanner, *Kuinka*, p. 191.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193; Leskinen, "Puolueen johtaja," p. 97.

<sup>92</sup> Tanner, *Kuinka*, p. 195. It is inaccurate to state that Tanner was "a reluctant supporter of the Red insurrection of 1918," as does C. Jay Smith, Jr., *Finland and the Russian Revolution 1917-22* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1958), p. 90.

<sup>93</sup> Tanner, *Kuinka*, p. 200.

<sup>94</sup> *Työmies*, April 10, 1918.

<sup>95</sup> Tanner, *Kuinka*, p. 285.

Together with K. J. Ståhlberg, the liberal first President (1919-25) of the Republic, he was one of the two party leaders most responsible for the fact that Finland was able to maintain parliamentary democracy in a chaotic world.<sup>96</sup> This did not make Tanner popular with all Finns, however. The extreme right wing hated Tanner because it had expected Finnish workers not to recover politically from the disaster of 1918 for a long time—some estimated fifty years would pass before the working class would again be a significant political force. This hope was frustrated in 1919, when, under Tanner's skillful leadership, and with many Social Democrats still disenfranchised, the Social Democratic Party won eighty of two hundred seats in Parliament. The militant defeated hated Tanner because he completely disavowed the revolt. A major theme of his speeches and writings after 1918 was that the revolt had been a serious mistake. This judgment was expressed in clear and unmistakable terms, "... cursing that absurd policy of adventure . . ." which led to the Civil War.<sup>97</sup>

After 1918 the Finnish Communist Party became the spokesman of the militant defeated of 1918, especially the younger Red Guards. The latter worshipped at the shrine of 1918, which was for them the peak as well as the beginning of their political lives. Together with other Social Democratic leaders who had experienced their formative years before 1918, Tanner wanted only to forget the Civil War. For him it was a nightmare rather than a vision of tomorrow. Several decades later, he declared that one did not willingly remember the events of 1918.<sup>98</sup> Tanner repeatedly expressed the hope that 1918 would not need to be discussed in Parliament.<sup>99</sup> When this hope was not fulfilled, he attacked a leader of the extreme right wing as a man who "does not remember anything but the events of 1918, he lives so far in the past."<sup>100</sup> Tanner proudly stated that Social Democratic activity did not aim to remind Finns of 1918, but instead to create a better future for the whole nation.<sup>101</sup>

It was in this attempt to create a better life for all Finns that Tanner encountered his most dangerous and well as his most determined domestic political enemy: the Finnish Communist Party. In 1919, shortly after the latter was organized, Tanner told a Social Democratic Party Congress that all Communists should be expelled from the party: "We must declare war against them . . ."<sup>102</sup> Tanner fought hard

<sup>96</sup> Matti Leppo, "Valtiotalousmies," in Laitinen, *Kuin kalliioon*, p. 130.

<sup>97</sup> Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 10; see also *ibid.*, pp. 9, 13-14, 72-73, 271.

<sup>98</sup> Tanner, *Kuinka*, p. 194.

<sup>99</sup> 1926 *Valtiopäivät*, *Pöytäkirjat III*, 3184; Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 117; 1931 *Valtiopäivät*, *Pöytäkirjat I*, 265.

<sup>100</sup> 1935 *Ylimääräiset Valtiopäivät*, *Pöytäkirjat*, p. 57; Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 198.

<sup>101</sup> Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 270.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76; Leskinen, "Puolueen johtaja," p. 101.

and sometimes literally against the younger generation of Finnish Communists, especially Arvo Tuominen, to prevent them from capturing the Social Democratic Party.<sup>103</sup> Tanner saw nothing positive in Communism.<sup>104</sup> In 1930, when they were effectively outlawed, he could not forgive Finnish Communists for having placed the interests of Bolshevik Russia above those of an independent Finland in 1918. Their “treasonous activity” had harmed every Finnish citizen.<sup>105</sup> In 1944, when the Finnish Communist Party was finally legalized, Tanner warned: “Its strategy and aims are poison to our nation, and we cannot even trust it to defend Finland’s independence.”<sup>106</sup> In his view, Communist activity had given birth to extreme right wing movements in the interwar decades in Southern and Central Europe as well as in Finland.<sup>107</sup> It was typical of Tanner’s attitude towards the Finnish Communist Party that he privately urged conservative politicians to use all the force of the Finnish state, including the police establishment, against this party.<sup>108</sup> This advice was an expression of his belief that democracy could not afford to grant free expression to Communists and Fascists.<sup>109</sup> As he graphically stated, a democratic government threatened by shirt movements of one kind or another cannot receive them in its nightshirt.<sup>110</sup> Whether such a policy towards mass movements can work seems doubtful. In 1937, seven years after it had been outlawed, Tanner thought the Finnish Communist Party had come to the end of its road.<sup>111</sup> Today, however, the Communist bloc is the largest in the Finnish Parliament. Just as Tanner thought that Finnish Communism was a passing thing, he thought that modern dictatorships were a transitory phenomenon.<sup>112</sup> When faced with lasting totalitarian movements and governments, Tanner did not quite know what to do. The achievement of Finnish national independence and parliamentary government had given meaning to his political career, and he found it difficult to grasp the possibility that this achievement might not be permanent. It remains to be seen whether his optimism concerning the future of Finnish politics was justified.

<sup>103</sup> Tanner, *Kuinka*, pp. 302-03; Tuominen, “Poliittinen vastustaja,” pp. 118-19.

<sup>104</sup> Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 347.

<sup>107</sup> Tanner, *Kuinka*, p. 338.

<sup>108</sup> Tanner, *Suomen tie*, pp. 370-71.

<sup>109</sup> 1931 *Valtiöpäivät*, *Pöytäkirjat II*, 1927-28; 1932 *Valtiöpäivät*, *Pöytäkirjat I*, 288; Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, p. 314.

<sup>110</sup> 1934 *Valtiöpäivät*, *Pöytäkirjat I*, 857.

<sup>111</sup> Tanner, *Itsenäisen*, 267.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.