

Lars Ljungmark

## Clifford Sifton + Nikolaj Bobrikoff = Finns in Alberta



The first federal government in Canada started an active immigration policy, first directed toward Great Britain. In 1873 the European continent was included in the campaign and so was also the Scandinavian kingdoms where an agency was in work 1873–1876 when it was withdrawn because of lack of success (Ljungmark 1982, 21–42).

### Finnish emigrants favorites in Canada

In 1881 Prime Minister MacDonald saw Scandinavian emigrants in Liverpool on their way to USA. He thought they would be excellent farmers on the Canadian prairies in Manitoba and the North West. To start a new Scandinavian campaign he sent the Canadian agent in Liverpool, John Dyke, to the Scandinavian countries. During this trip John Dyke learned that Finland probably was the best country for the Canadian emigration promoters. Here USA and Canada were on equal footing in difference to in Sweden, Norway and Denmark where USA after thirty years of emigration to the American Middle West held

the emigration market (Ljungmark 1988, 215–225).

To get nucleus of Finns to Canada was in the centre of Dyke's mind during the following years. He tried, and succeeded, to get Finns as railroad workers at Canadian Pacific's construction areas in Ontario. But to get them, after the construction had finished, to settle to Manitoba's prairies was harder. Most of them went with their earnings to USA. Some went to new railroad work at the Canadian Pacific's construction areas further west in the Rocky Mountains. None went to the prairie land. No Finnish nucleus were formed. In this way Finland disappeared from the Canadian immigration promotion in the 1880s and early 1890s.

With the new liberal regime under Prime Minister Laurier in 1896 came a vigorous immigration policy led by Clifford Sifton, Minister of Interior. He was himself from the Canadian North West and was convinced that what Canada needed above all was farmers. To get immigrants of that kind the department partly focused its activities on the Scandinavians in USA. Sifton also started a state sponsored immigration from Russia, Galizians from Ukraina and the Christian sect, the Doukhobors from Georgia (Troper 1972). As expert on emigration from central and northern Europe professor Wal-

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*Lars Ljungmark, Docent, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, researches the Canadian immigration promotion 1870–1930.*

ton-Jones from Montreal was sent to the Nordic countries to get ideas how to promote emigration from there. In his report he stressed the importance of more immigration literature in the Finnish language (Walton-Jones 1989, 64 ff).

### **Bobrikoff — a scapegoat that could be of use for the immigration promoters**

At the same time, in spring 1899, Finland got in the centre for the Canadian newspapers. Behind was the rising Russian oppression and Russification in Finland manifested in the czar's manifesto of February 15th 1888. According to this manifesto the czar was entitled, without the Finnish Diet's consent, to enact laws enforceable in Finland. One of these laws was to change the rules for the men's military service which up to date had been in Finland's own army but now would be in Russian units at the same time as Finland's own army should be disbanded. The man who was to press this new Russian stamp on Finland was the new Governor — General Nikolaj Bobrikoff.

Against the new anti-Finnish Russian policy the whole western world reacted. In America a Finnish-American committee in New York sent out a manifest in which one asked for support in the fight against the Russian government (An Appeal... 1899). The Canadian press followed this appeal and got also inspiration from the English press reaction. Most papers were united against "the arbitrary suppression of the ancient rights of Finland by the czar's government". Many times the papers' disgust for the czar was united with a hope for an immigration to Canada of dissatisfied Finns (Finnish paper clippings).

This immigration aspect was based on news from London. Here Lord Strathcona, Canada's High Commissioner from 1896,

had always been very interested in the Canadian immigration campaign in Europe. In 1899 a Finnish emigration committee contacted him. Behind the committee were Finnish capitalists interested in the emigration industry and in a rising Finnish emigration. Leading among these men was Lars Krogius, head of the Finnish Steamship Co. which ran a line from Hanko to Hull. He was also agent for almost all Atlantic Steamship lines in Finland. Important was also Arthur Borgström from Helsinki engaged in the Finnish export business. Involved in the emigration project were also people who saw emigration as a fitting protest against the newly started Russian oppression symbolized by the February Manifesto. Leading in this group, with political interest in the emigration, was Konni Zilliacus, author in the staff of the liberal newspaper, the New Press (Nya Pressen) in Helsinki — a paper forbidden by the Russian governor-general the coming year (Letter 1; Kero 1974, 148–160).

### **A colony of Finnish young protest-emigrants**

The goal for the committee was to start a Finnish colony in Canadian North West. The colonists would first of all consist of young men not willing to do Russian military service. Living together in the new country they could keep their Finnish background intact so that a remigration would be easy if the political climate in Finland became better. But above all a protest-emigration to a Finnish colony would morally strengthen the Finns back home in their flight against the Russian oppression (Zilliacus 1899, 292–300). Most of these "political" emigration promoters were from the educated class and far away from those sturdy farmers that Canada wanted. Lord Strathcona was from the

beginning aware of this and also that the colony plans not yet was so stable, but rested on how the Russification of Finland would proceed. He, however, did not make public his doubts but only his contacts with the Finnish emigration committee and its anti-Russian background (Letter 1).

This was the news that got the Canadian papers to combine their anti-Russian campaign with hopes on a great Finnish emigration. Many papers hoped "that the Canadian authorities will act with promptitude and catch the tide of emigration from Finland that is likely to set in" (Daily Examiner 1899). And from London Daily News many of the Canadian papers quoted the statement that the Finnish immigration would be more "farther reaching" than the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers (Ottawa Daily Free Press 1899).

Much of the enthusiasm in the Canadian newspapers derived from the fact that the Finns supposed to be so different from the Galizians and Doukhobors that now filled the emigrant trains going west. For example W. Preston, superintendent of the Canadian emigration campaign on the European continent delivered articles to the Canadian press where he, among other things, asserted that "*The Finlanders rank among the most highly educated people of the age... The common school is very thorough, a strong democratic feeling exists and the high school fees are very low... In agriculture... the Finlanders have adopted modern methods... In their telephone conveniences they are as far ahead as Ontario is ahead of Labrador. These are the people whom the Russians are determined to place under the same autocratic rule that they exercise over a semi-barbaric and uneducated population in other parts of the empire.*" (The Globe 1899). The admiration of the technical progress and also the view on the barbaric Russia, in this case threatening the civilized Finns, is very

typical for the ending 19th century. And, above all, the "semibarbaric" Russian peasants were now in Canada represented by the Galizians and Doukhobors.

This enthusiasm for the more western qualities of the Finns probably also was of importance for Minister Sifton's interest in immigration from Finland. His import of Galizians with their strange cloths and habits had been criticized. He needed the Finns as a western contrast to the farmers imported from eastern Europe. In March 1899 his definite interest was documented in the following telegram to Lord Strathcona: "*Am extremely anxious that everything possible should be done to secure Finnish immigration.*" (The telegram is cited and confirmed in Letter 1.)

#### **In Canada you need not entry a military service**

In London Lord Strathcona acted promptly. He sent to Finland all possible immigration literature and through his secretary Colmer he stressed to the Finnish committee the different advantages Canada could offer, from 160 acres of free land, to the possibilities for fishing industry and jobs at the mines. Above all he underlined the absence of military service. The emigration committee was requested to select and send over delegates who were promised free journey and all possible help (Letter 2).

Minister Sifton sent professor James Mavor from the University of Toronto – the man behind the immigration of the Doukhobors – to Finland. In his report he was rather critical against the Finnish committee. Krogius was the only practical man among aesthetes as Zilliacus, who was more a political antirussian than a promoter of emigration. Mavor also observed that the Finnish authorities were more against the emigration – that would mean

a drain of the Finnish people — than the Russian government was. With this background the great campaign in the Finnish press, that was necessary to get 15 000 emigrants to the Canadian North West would be hard to carry out. Also Krogius had the disadvantage of not having any contact with the desirable emigrants from the countryside as he "rarely leaves Helsinki" as Mavor noted (Letter 3).

**"There is no place in  
the world like Canada"**

In July 1899 the Finnish delegates left Finland to, according to Deputy Minister Smart in Ottawa, "be convinced, as we are, that there is no place in the world like Canada" (Letter 4). There were three delegates: Borgström, Zilliacus and as an expert of agriculture Myhrsten from the Finnish school of agriculture. From Ottawa the group was guided by a man from the department of the Interior. Further west from Winnipeg the guide was the colonization agent in Winnipeg. (Letters 5-9; Zilliacus 1899, 292-300.)

In Alberta the delegates became very impressed of a tract of land north and west of the station Red Deer at the CRP-line between Calgary and Edmonton. Zilliacus after a time left the other two men and went home to Finland where his leadership in the anti-Russian campaign demanded him. Borgström and Myhrsten made a short trip into British Columbia and spent another two weeks out in the selected area in the wet and cold weather together with two men "who could handle compass", a half-breed and eight pack horses. They were after two weeks still convinced that this tract of land would be perfect for a Finnish colony.

On his way back to Finland Zilliacus discussed the terms of the colony project both in Ottawa and in Glasgow where he

met Deputy Minister Smart. The final agreement meant that the government reserved for the Finns even numbered sections of land in eleven townships (expected were school land and land selected by Hudson Bay Co.) The reserve would cover a period of three years and would be further extended two or three years provided that within the first three years at least 16 000 Finns had settled on the lands. In his final letter to Zilliacus Deputy Minister Smart underlined that these terms required aggressive work from the Committee to get a goodly number already during the first year, that is 1900. "If the results of the first year show little or no movement it would hardly be possible to refuse to open the land for general settlement" read the last warning (Letter 10).

Behind these lines one can suspect the negative view from professor Mavor's report of the blue-eyed members of the committee, among those Zilliacus. As a contrast to these men, Mavor had put Krogius. This view now got another man in the centre of the attention of the Canadian immigration promoters in Ottawa and in London; E. Winkelmann, the agent of Krogius in Oulu in Finland. He left Finland on behalf of Krogius and with pecuniary assistance from the Canadian authorities in September 1899. His assignment was to inform Krogius of the proceeding of the colony project and to get an own view of the selected area in Alberta to later be able to publish a leaflet in Finland.

Winkelmann who had practical knowledge of the needs and wants of the ordinary Finnish emigrant was very interested in the possibilities for the Finns to get work in the forests and mines of Alberta during their first time. He got a good impression both of these possibilities and the selected land. In the West he told the immigration people that in few years 50 000 Finns would enter the area. (Letters 11-

13; Mair 1899; Pedley 1899; Winkelmann 1901.)

In Ottawa he told the people in the Department of Interior about the 12 000 Finnish emigrants to USA that Krogius' Steamship Company used to ship to Hull every year. The department officials naturally hoped that through Winkelmann's enthusiasm these people would be won for Canada in the future. They now decided to leave the non-expert Zilliacus for the expert in the emigration field, Krogius, who was offered 6 \$ for every Finn who settled in Manitoba and the North West. That was one dollar more than the other European steamship agents got. (Letters 14-16.)



Five Finnish men in North Ontario. (Photo collections of the Institute of Migration).

### Military reform not yet carried through in Finland

The enquiries the department made among Canadian firms in the lumber, iron, mining industries and among the railroad builders for job opportunities for the Finns were, however, not met with positive answers (Letters 17-18). And positive were not either the emigration prospects in Finland. Here the emigration fever was going down as the Russian authorities not yet had carried through the hated military reform of the February Manifesto. Thus, emigration as a spontaneous protest against the Russian oppression was not any longer of immediate interest. At the same time the Finnish authorities, who all the time had been negative to an emigration that would undermine the Finnish people, now also were afraid that an active emigration propaganda in the papers or through pamphlets would wake up the at present rather calm Russian anti-Finnish policy. That caused Krogius to delay the publishing of Winkelmann's positive report. And when he at last decided to publish it he only was able to spread it among the emigrants already on board his Steamship Company's ships to Hull (Letter 19).

In this way Clifford Sifton's special concentration on Finland to get settlers to the Canadian West failed. The Canadian emigration promotion in Finland returned to the policy of the 1880s. In the coming years printed propaganda was as then spread in secrecy through "peddlers or small merchants travelling through Finland" as Dyke had proposed in 1883 (Letter 20). Later the steamship agents took over the propaganda work. In years to come this propaganda led to results and the Finnish emigration to Canada rose.

But the census figures of 1911 tell the sad story of the outcome of Minister Sifton's attempt to get dissatisfied Finns to

settle in Alberta. In the whole Canadian North West there were 6534 Finns in 1911 (Census of Canada 1911). Only a very small minority of them were farmers. In the Red Deer district of Alberta, which the delegates had selected in 1899, were only a few hundred Finns.

### **Finns to Canada as workers, not as farmers**

Most of the Finns who arrived during the first decade of the 20th century had been dependant on proximity of mining, lumbering or construction industries. So most of the 1588 Alberta Finns of 1911 lived in the mining towns of the Eastern Rockies. It is true that many of them travelled seasonally to farms on the prairie, but they did not start any Finnish farmer communities there.

Thus, to summarize the situation in the North West 1911 in the light of the Finnish plans of 1899: all the Finns in the North West taken together only amounted to 40 % of the number of Finns who had been expected to go to the planned Red Deer colony during the first three years. And only very few of them had helped to cultivate the lands of Alberta.

Neither in 1880s nor 1889–1900 had the Finns behaved as the immigration promoters in Canada had hoped and expected. In 1880s the Finns already in Canada had not followed the rule of behaviour established for them: first work to get money, then settling on prairie land. Their desire for the prairie land had been too weak. In 1889–1900 the discontent against the Russian government had not been strong enough to get the Finns still in

Finland to leave their country. Their love for Finnish earth had been too strong.

But still – the Finnish project in the Canadian immigration policy of 1899 is interesting as it is one of the few examples of an organized Nordic emigration project with a political background. Political push factors behind the emigration from the Nordic countries are very unusual – also behind the spontaneous, individual emigration decisions. Hopes for a better living, that is to earn more money or to get an own farm – not flight for political reasons, were behind the Nordic emigration. Thus, when we here meet political push factors as important ingredients in an organized immigration project it is not surprising that they soon proved to be too weak. The Russian oppression, personalized by Nikolaj Bobrikoff, was not strong enough to get Finns to Alberta.

Bobrikoff was the weak point in the calculation made by Minister Sifton. That calculation had also missed another important factor, the Finns. They did not leave Finland because of a coming Russian oppression. They stayed to fight it. In the years to come another factor caused thousands of Finns to go to Canada: the pull from the job opportunities in the Canadian mines and forests. These opportunities had been made known to the Finns thanks to the Canadian propaganda that from 1880s and on poured into Finland. Without vigorous organized immigration projects as that Minister Sifton started in 1899.

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## Letters

- 1) Lord Strathcona – C. Sifton, March 20, 1899.
- 2) J.E. Colmer – L. Krogius, March 20, 1899.
- 3) J. Mavor – C. Sifton, Jan. 15, 1900.
- 4) J.A. Smart – J.E. Colmer, June 24, 1899.
- 5) C.W. Speer – F. Pedley, Sept. 7, 1899.
- 6) K. Zilliacus – Minister of the Interior, Sept. 8, 1899.
- 7) W.F. McCreary – Minister of the Interior, Sept. 8, 1899.
- 8) W.F. McCreary – F. Pedley, Sept. 12, 1899.
- 9) E.W. Burley – W.F. McCreary, Sept. 16, 1899.
- 10) J.A. Smart – K. Zilliacus, Oct. 18, 1899.
- 11) W.F. McCreary – Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Oct. 5, 1899.
- 12) L. Pereira – W.F. McCreary, Oct. 11, 1899.
- 13) C. Mair – W.F. McCreary, Oct. 27, 1899.
- 14) W. Preston – F. Pedley, Nov. 30, 1899.
- 15) J. Mavor – J.A. Smart, Dec. 12, 1899.
- 16) W. Preston – Lord Strathcona, Dec. 12, 1899.
- 17) W.F. McCreary – F. Pedley, Jan. 5, 1900.
- 18) F. Pedley – Lord Strathcona, Jan. 17, 1900.
- 19) L. Krogius – W. Preston, Aug. 24, 1900.
- 20) J. Dyke, April 18, 1883. Letters received, 38224, RG 17 I:1. NA.

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