

THE TURNING-POINT IN FINNISH EMIGRATION POLICY IN THE 1970s

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Upon the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the founding of the **Siirtolaisuusinstituutti**/Institute of Migration, there is reason to congratulate its founders upon their energetic and farsighted action. A new institute of science, but one also serving practical purposes, had been established on private initiative expeditiously. The undertaking gained wide support in both scientific circles and various branches of social life. During the first ten years of its existence, the Institute of Migration has in many ways lived up to the hopes raised by it and gained for itself a secure place in its own scientific and social sectors.

What made possible speedy action and rapid progress was a generally felt need to pay careful attention to questions relating to migration. Although Finland has for centuries been a country that has given her sons and daughters to the world as emigrants, the mass exodus of migrants in the 1960s and early 1970s, mainly to neighboring Sweden, was of an exceptional magnitude and provoked serious discussion about the demographic and economic consequences of emigration to Finland.

During the historical era, the population of Finland has decreased only in extremely hard and exceptional times, such as the period of the Finnish War between 1806 and 1810, the years of the Great Famine of 1866-1870, the period following the Civil War of 1918 and the one following the Winter War in 1940. Belonging to the series of periods during which the Finnish population underwent a decline are also the years 1969 and 1970, when it decreased by some 35,000 souls.

The government began to pay systematic attention to the matter of emigration by setting up a Emigration Commission in 1970, first under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later under the Ministry of Labor. The government also increased its efforts to maintain and strengthen cultural relations between Finnish emigrants and the Old Country. Such measures were considered to be a natural part of Finland's international cultural policy and they remained mostly the responsibility of the Ministry of Education in conjunction with civic organizations active in this sphere.

The mass migration to Sweden created a host of problems, of which the toughest proved to involve language, education and culture. On the initiative of the Nordic Council, the governments of Finland and Sweden in 1967 appointed an intergovernmental mixed body, a Finnish-Swedish Educational Commission, to deal with the educational problems of the Finnish emigrants living in Sweden. The magnitude of the problem is illustrated by the fact that in the 1982-1983 scholastic year some 37,000 Finnish-speaking children were attending classes in the Swedish comprehensive school system, in addition to which over 6,000 Finnish-speaking pupils were enrolled in upper secondary schools in Sweden. Educational and cultural questions have long loomed large in the discussions involving Finnish-Swedish collaboration.

Interest in Finnish culture has cropped up elsewhere besides the close emigrant community in Sweden. Finns by the hundreds have moved to major business centers abroad, mainly in the line of their work or through the circumstances of mixed marriages. The children from such families in most cases attend school in the countries where they reside; but the families have ever more frequently wanted their children to have instruction in Finnish too - which is mostly the mother tongue, quite literally -, in speaking, reading and writing it as well as in Finnish history, social studies and culture. The activity started in the 1970s by the Finnish Sailors' Mission Church in London toward the organization of Finnish-language study circles managed on a voluntary basis has spread to an increasing number of countries on several continents. It helps in keeping up cultural and linguistic contacts with the native land of the parents - or one of them - and the relatives living there. The State has been able to support this activity ever more signifi-

cantly with the passing years. The initiators have in most instances been Finnish societies or other organizations or, then, faculty members of foreign universities in charge of courses in the Finnish language and culture.

In certain cases, it has been considered necessary to establish abroad Finnish schools corresponding to the comprehensive school in the mother country for the children of families living in foreign countries more or less temporarily for reasons of employment. Examples of such employment can be cited from the spheres of trade and industry, project export, diplomacy, joint development endeavors, missionary work, etc. Parliament in 1981 passed a law which private schools in this category have been made eligible for Finnish State subsidies.

It is also possible for the children of Finnish families residing abroad to take the comprehensive school course, or part of it, by correspondence in situations where, on account of a shortage of pupils, no regular school instruction can be arranged. The institution in charge is the Correspondence School of the Kansanvalistusseura (= Society for the Advancement of Public Education).

In addition to these official measures, action has been taken independently in many fields by the emigrants' own associations as well as civic organizations in Finland maintaining contact with them, not least of all for the sake of fostering cultural relations. Every kind of Finnish educational endeavor, no matter how distantly removed from the national boundaries of Finland, is part of our national culture.

It is gratifying to see that Finnish emigrants are showing an interest to an ever increasing extent in the affairs of their former homeland and in keeping in touch. This interest draws strength from the wave of ethnic pride to be observed everywhere in the melting pot of nations. It is a wave that has swept over the Finnish emigrant population too.

The connections between Finns living abroad and their old homeland are now stronger than ever - and mutual relations better perhaps too. Great credit for this goes to President Urho Kekkonen, who during his very long tenure as chief executive always gave studious attention to issues involving emigrant Finns and frequently honored their functions with his presence. One high point in the development of emigrant relations was reached when, at a festival put on by Finns in Canada, President Kekkonen wound up his speech by striking up the song **Kotimaani ompe Suomi** (My homeland is Suomi) and the audience composed of first-, second- and even third-generation Canadian Finns, who filled the hall, joined lustily in the singing.